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EDITORIAL

Most of this issue’s contributions concern individual ministers and their exercise of pastoral ministry. They explore the tensions between personality, pastoral need, ecclesiology and theology. John Gibbs, Nathaniel Pugsley, Benjamin Parsons, and Nathaniel and Caryl Micklem are closer to each other in experience than the obvious differences in period and setting might suggest.

There are other themes, notably polity and politics. Dr. Hancock’s paper, like Dr. Kaye’s, reminds us of the radicalism implicit in a Dissenting stance, and also of the ambivalence with which many Dissenters viewed it. Mr. Tucker’s paper, like Mrs. Lewis’s, reminds us of the boundaries, both blurred and pronounced, and often where least expected, which mark out a Dissenting churchmanship.

We welcome as contributors Robert Glen, who is Professor of History at the University of New Haven (Conn.), Anthony Tucker, who is a retired United Reformed minister, most recently Associate Director of Education and Training at Mansfield College, Oxford, and Caryl Micklem, who is also a retired United Reformed minister, most recently at St. Columba's, Oxford. His paper and Marilyn Lewis's were originally given at the Society's Weekend School held in Northampton in September 2000.

Friends of the Congregational Library were launched at Dr. Williams's Library on Saturday 30 June 2001. Details of membership and activities can be obtained from: Dr. David Wykes, Librarian, The Congregational Library, and Director, Dr. Williams's Library, 14 Gordon Square, London, WC1H OAG.

**“THE ANABAPTIST WASHT AND WASHT,
AND SHRUNK IN THE WASHING”:
JOHN GIBBS'S BAPTISMAL CONTROVERSIES WITH
RICHARD CARPENTER AND RICHARD DAVIS,
c.1652 AND 1691-2¹**

John Gibbs,² the founding minister of both Newport Pagnell Independent Church and the Olney congregation which eventually became Sutcliff Baptist Church, seems to have been an advocate of an open baptismal policy and may not have administered the ordinance of baptism to either infants or adult believers at all. In this paper, I explore the fragmentary evidence for Gibbs's baptismal theology and practice as seen in two controversies in which he engaged with other Independent ministers who advocated paedobaptism, one at the beginning of his

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1. ABBREVIATIONS: AWW – R.Carpenter, *The Anabaptist Washt and washt* [1653]. BN – T.P. Bull, *A Brief Narrative of the Rise and Progress of the Independent Church at Newport-Pagnell* (1811). Bull, JG – F.W. Bull, “The Rev. John Gibbs”, *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, vol. 10 (1927-9), reprinted as a pamphlet (1927), my references are to page numbers in the pamphlet. Bunyan – *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, R. Sharrock, gen. ed., 13 vols. (1976-94). CR – A.G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised* (1934), s.v. Gibbs, John. Hewett, JG – M.F. Hewett, “John Gibbs 1627-99”, *The Baptist Quarterly*, n.s. vol. 3 (July 1927), reprinted as a pamphlet (undated), my references are to page numbers in the pamphlet. HICNP – F.W. Bull, *A History of the Independent Church at Newport Pagnell* (1910). HNP – F.W. Bull, *A History of Newport Pagnell* (1900). HOBM – M.F. Hewett, *History of Olney Baptist Meeting* [c.1930], carbon copy of unpublished typescript, Sutcliff Baptist Church vestry. Tibbutt – *The Minutes of the First Independent Church (now Bunyan Meeting) at Bedford 1656-1766*, ed. H.G. Tibbutt (1976).
 2. For John Gibbs see: Bull, JG; CR; Hewett, JG; E. Calamy, *An Account of the Ministers, &c., who were Ejected or Silenced after the Restoration of King Charles II*, vol. 2 (1713), p. 108; E. Calamy, *A Continuation of the Account*, vol. 2 (1727), p. 144; M. Lewis, *John Gibbs A Newport Pagnell Puritan, 1627-1699* (1995), (this article is based mainly on chapters 5 and 15).

ministry with Richard Carpenter and the other during the last decade of his life with Richard Davis. John Gibbs was presented to the Vicarage of Newport Pagnell under the Parliamentary Great Seal on 13 July 1652.³ The son of a Bedford cooper,⁴ Gibbs came from a family closely associated with both the religious Independency of the Bedford gathered church and the democratizing politics of the Bedford town corporation during the Interregnum.⁵ A Cambridge graduate who had prepared for the ministry at Sidney Sussex College, Gibbs may already have been ministering in Newport Pagnell for as long as four years before becoming vicar, although there is no specific evidence for the date of his arrival in the town.⁶ Whether he came to Newport at the invitation of a gathered church or called the elect out of the parish to form a gathered church is unclear, but he seems to have ministered to the saints who first formed Newport Pagnell Independent Church while simultaneously performing the functions of “publique minister” in the parish.⁷ It was his refusal to administer Holy Communion promiscuously to the whole parish, while presumably celebrating the Lord’s Supper for his gathered congregation, which led to his ejection from the vicarage in late 1659 or early 1660, even before the restoration of Charles II.⁸ Accompanied by his saints, Gibbs moved about a quarter of a mile west of the parish church, down Newport Pagnell High Street, to a barn owned by William Smyth, on the site occupied today by the Newport Pagnell URC Sunday School rooms.⁹ Despite several periods of imprisonment, he continued to minister both in Newport Pagnell and in Olney.¹⁰ A close associate of John Bunyan, Gibbs may have helped his famous friend to become theologically knowledgeable and

3. CR.

4. Bull, JG, p. 2; CR; Hewett, JG, p. 1.

5. Tibbutt, p. 214. Faith Gibbs, Susanna Gibbs and Sister Gibbs were early members; for John Gibbs see pp. 12, 31, 34-7, 85-6, 104, 110, 113, 119; *The Minute Book of Bedford Corporation 1647-1664*, ed. G. Parslow, (1949), see index, pp. 195-6, for numerous references to Samuel Gibbs, senior and junior, and Thomas Gibbs (John Gibbs’s father and elder brothers).

6. BN, p. 2; Bull, JG, p. 3; CR; Hewett, JG, p. 2; HICNP, p. 3.

7. BN, pp. 3-4; Bull, JG, p. 5; CR; Hewett, JG, p. 2; *Buckinghamshire Dissent and Parish Life 1669-1712*, ed. J. Broad (1993), p. 52; memorial tablet to John Gibbs in Newport Pagnell United Reformed Church.

8. BN, p. 3; Bull, JG, p. 5; Calamy, *Account*, *loc. cit.*; Hewett, JG, pp. 3-4; HICNP, p. 4; memorial tablet in NP URC.

9. BN, pp. 3-4; Bull, JG, pp. 5-6; CR; Hewett, JG, p. 4; HICNP, p. 4.

10. Bull, JG, p. 6; CR; Hewett, JG, pp. 5-6; memorial tablet in NP URC; [Anonymous], *An Elegy on the Death of that Famous Minister of the Gospel Mr. John Gibbs* [after 1745], printed copy in the vestry of NP URC. My thanks are due to the Revd Keith Spence for allowing me to see the records stored there; *County of Buckingham, Calendar to the Sessions Records*, ed. W. Le Hardy, vol. 1 (1933), pp. 126, 132, 144, 166, 173, 186, 198, 209.

articulate.¹¹ Gibbs lived until June 1699,¹² and his long career is of considerable significance within the development of Dissent in north Buckinghamshire.

Probably in late 1652 or early 1653, John Gibbs was involved in a public disputation concerning infant baptism with Richard Carpenter, who published an account of the proceedings under the title *The Anabaptist Washt and washt, and shrunk in the washing; Or, a Scholastical Discussion of the much-agitated Controversie concerning Infant-Baptism; Occasioned by a Publike Disputation, Before a great Assembly of Ministers, and other Persons of worth, in the Church of Newport-Pagnell, Betwixt Mr. Gibs Minister there, and the Author, Rich. Carpenter, Independent*.¹³ Carpenter was a native of Newport Pagnell with a chequered ecclesiastical history. Born in 1609, he had been educated at Eton and won a scholarship to King's College, Cambridge, in 1622, but he left suddenly without taking his degree to avoid receiving Communion in the college chapel on Christmas Day. He was converted to Roman Catholicism by an English monk in London and studied theology on the continent before being ordained priest in Rome. Although he spent some time at the Jesuit College at Valladolid and lived for a while as a Benedictine monk at Douai, he seems not to have taken vows in either order. About 1633-4, Carpenter returned to England as a Catholic missionary, but he soon became an Anglican again, was re-ordained, and was presented to the vicarage of Poling, near Arundel, in 1635. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he left his living to become an itinerant Independent preacher, and it must have been during this phase of his career that he returned to his birthplace to challenge John Gibbs's baptismal theology. He later rejoined the Catholic church

11. Bunyan, vol. 2 (1976), p. xx.

12. BN, p. 9; Bull, JG, pp. 6-7; CR; Hewett, JG, pp. 7-8; HICNP, pp. 4-5; memorial tablet in NP URC; John Gibbs's gravestone in Newport Pagnell parish churchyard.

13. F.W. Bull (Bull, JG, pp. 3-4 & HICNP, p. 3) dated this disputation in 1647 or 1648, before Gibbs became vicar of Newport Pagnell, because a Latin letter dated 1648 is bound up with the undated edition, published by William Hunt, of Carpenter's book (Wing C618), although he realized that both Gibbs's youth and William Hunt's addition of publishing to his bookselling business in 1651 made such an early date unlikely. The Thomason Collection copy of this edition is dated "May 23 1653" in MS. There are two copies at Regent's Park College, Oxford: the Angus Library copy is dated "1650" and the Gould Collection copy is dated "about 1649", both in MS. Dr. Geoffrey F. Nuttall comments, in a letter to the present writer 28/5/00, that "Thomason's date is generally accepted as reliable for the date when he received an item, very close to the date of publication ... it is much better evidence than the other manuscript dates, which are likely to be only glosses." Another edition of Carpenter's book, published by W:H., is dated 1653 (Wing C617). The Baptist Union Library copy, which should now be at Regent's Park College, has disappeared. The Union Theological Seminary Library copy in New York is a reproduction of this copy. My thanks are due to Mrs. Susan J. Mills, Librarian/Archivist at Regent's Park College, for expert assistance with this matter. Cf. CR, "c.1647" & Hewett, JG, p. 2, "about 1652".

twice, with another Independent interlude in Aylesbury separating his reconversions. Carpenter seems to have died about 1670 in communion with the Church of Rome.¹⁴

The Anabaptist Washt and washt was published by William Hunt, a printer and bookseller at Pye Corner in London, probably in May 1653,¹⁵ when Gibbs had been vicar of Newport Pagnell for almost a year. At the beginning of his book, Carpenter explains how the disputation came about. He had come to Newport Pagnell to preach in the parish church “before a very numerous Auditory, congealed and consisting of the more solid and sapid part of the Town and Country”. After his sermon, he baptized a child, whereupon Gibbs was “suddenly rapted with a *vertiginous Motion*” and interrupted Carpenter, challenging him to a public disputation on the subject of infant baptism; the event was fixed for twelve days later.¹⁶ The Grenville Library copy of *The Anabaptist Washt and washt* has a frontispiece depicting the disputation.¹⁷ In a slightly crooked and ill-proportioned view of Newport Pagnell Parish Church from the north aisle, a man stands in the pulpit waving his hat in his right hand triumphantly. Presumably he is Richard Carpenter, and the figure below him raising his right hand in feeble objection must be Gibbs. Behind Gibbs, a congregation of men, standing and wearing hats and cloaks, listen to the proceedings.

Far from being a fair account of the disputation with Gibbs, Carpenter’s book is a vitriolic attack on his opponent and a semi-hysterical vindication of himself personally and of his theological views. Although Carpenter was an itinerant preacher who had failed to take his Cambridge degree, and Gibbs was a graduate incumbent, Carpenter tries to cast Gibbs in the mould of an opponent almost too ignorant to be taken seriously. He claims that Gibbs has publicly repented of the time he spent at Cambridge, “for the which he did evaporate his grieffe, and cry out the pangs of his inward remorsement before the Country”.¹⁸ Carpenter also says that he writes in English “against thought, and wide of desire” because Gibbs and his friends cannot understand Latin.¹⁹ While Gibbs certainly believed that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were more important than education in a preacher,²⁰ his mature works show that he valued the classical reading he had done at Cambridge to the last years of his life.²¹ Not content with these intellectual insults, Carpenter also casts aspersions on Gibbs socially and spiritually. Carpenter’s family seems to have been minor gentry,²² and he frequently reminds his readers that Gibbs is

14. For Richard Carpenter see BN, pp. 6-8; HNP, pp. 282-4; *Dictionary of National Biography*.

15. See note 13 above.

16. AWW, unpaginated preface.

17. British Library shelf mark G. 19545, reproduced in Bull, JG, facing p. 1.

18. AWW, preface, p. 114.

19. AWW, preface.

20. Bunyan, vol. 1 (1980), pp. 242, 244.

21. J. Gibbs, *Several Divine Treatises*, 3rd ed. (1704), Greek and Latin references *passim*, especially in “A Discourse Against Fears of Death”, pp. 1-64.

22. HNP, p. 282.

the son of a cooper, unpleasantly calling him "the child of the Hoop" and "our young Hoop-Master". Obviously pleased with his own wit, Carpenter remarks, "I despise no man whose Father is a Cooper; but if such a one shall undertake to Hoop-binde his Hogshheads, or Bucking-Tubs, and not perform it strongly; I shall merrily tell him of it."²³ More seriously, Carpenter implies that Gibbs is possessed by the devil, saying "the Soule of this Minister I beheld in the wildfire of his eyes: wherein also, I saw some strange and occult Thing beyond a Disease, beyond Man, and beyond God's way of working."²⁴

The Anabaptist Washt and washt tells us much more about Carpenter than about Gibbs, and it proves quite difficult to extract a coherent picture of Gibbs's baptismal theology from it. While Carpenter claims to offer the reader "The marrow part of our Disputation, with the bones; and of Sermons preached afterwards by him and by me",²⁵ he never gives a clear account of what Gibbs said. Carpenter defends paedobaptism at great length, supporting his arguments by references to both Scripture and the Fathers of the early church. Only by looking carefully at some of Gibbs's objections answered by Carpenter can we glean any idea of Gibbs's position. According to Carpenter's rather garbled account, Gibbs seems to have objected to both infant baptism and adult believer's baptism. Against infant baptism, he argued that since grace is "an improvement and heightening of the *Faculties of Nature*", the grace of baptism cannot have any "influence or Efficacy" on little children "who cannot reasonably perform the natural Acts of Understanding."²⁶ Anyway, if children were "infallibly Sanctified in Baptism", then there would be no "falling from Grace" in later life.²⁷ Against baptism in general, Gibbs objected that, if it were really efficacious, then "all the Baptized shall enter into the Kingdome of God".²⁸ He went on to say that "Christ and his Apostles, in their discoursing and preaching, never pressed Baptism . . . but either faith or repentance, or these together."²⁹ According to Carpenter, Gibbs maintained that "Baptism is not commended or intended in the Text [of the New Testament]: Because the Baptism only now in force, was *John's Baptism*; and Christ should here transforme himself into a *Minister of Johns Baptism*, which would be *incongruous*."³⁰ Gibbs apparently resolved his difficulties by explaining that "water" in New Testament references to Christian baptism is an allegorical expression for the Spirit-filled Word of preaching. Carpenter records Gibbs's contention that "Word agrees and contracts with water". Gibbs amplified this statement in three points: "1: Water is of a purifying

23. AWW, pp. 35, 45, 48, 71, 112.

24. AWW, preface.

25. AWW, preface.

26. AWW, p. 69.

27. AWW, pp. 82-3.

28. AWW, p. 70.

29. AWW, pp. 100-1.

30. AWW, p. 109.

nature, and so is the Word: 2: Water is weak of itself, except it be compounded, and made comfortable with comfortable *Ingredients*, and so the word is a *dead letter*; and the comfortable Spirit and Life of the Word, is the true sense thereof: 3: Water hath a cooling and refreshing quality, and so the Word."³¹

Carpenter calls Gibbs an Anabaptist, but this description is perhaps inaccurate if we take it to mean one who favoured adult believer's baptism over infant baptism. Writing in 1811, Thomas Palmer Bull reported that Gibbs is referred to as a "Catabaptist" in the minute book of the Bedford gathered church, although I have failed to find the reference.³² The Greek prefix "ana" means "up" or, in the case of Anabaptist, "again", while "cata" means "down" and may imply disparagement or abuse.³³ Anabaptists held a high doctrine of baptism and repeated baptism when adults who had been baptized as infants came to mature faith, but Catabaptists held a low doctrine of baptism. Like "Anabaptist", "Catabaptist" was used as an inaccurate term of abuse,³⁴ but it could mean, more precisely, a person who thought that baptism was appropriate only for converted Jews and pagans and not for the children of Christian parents.³⁵ Three scholars – Maurice Hewett, Christopher Hill, and Richard Greaves – suggest that Gibbs's baptismal theory can be further explained by looking at John Bunyan's writings on baptism and the open baptismal policy of the Bedford gathered church.³⁶ Bunyan probably received adult believer's baptism in the Great Ouse when he became a member of the Bedford gathered church in 1653.³⁷ The policy of that congregation, however, was to admit to membership those whose lives showed evidence of election, conversion, and sanctification, whether or not they had been baptized. Shortly before his death, John Gifford, the founding pastor of the Bedford gathered church, urged his congregation not to let divisions arise

31. AWW, p. 48.

32. BN, p. 5; Bull, JG, p. 4; Hewett, JG, p. 6; I cannot find the reference in Tibbutt. T.P. Bull's parents were both members of the Bedford Independent Church; perhaps he was repeating a piece of family oral tradition without checking the source.

33. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (1989), s.v. ana, Anabaptist, cata, Catabaptist.

34. BN, pp. 5-6; Bull, JG, p. 4; Hewett, JG, p. 6; R. Greaves, *John Bunyan and English Nonconformity* (1992), p. 84.

35. BN, pp. 5-6; Bull, JG, p. 4; *Oxford English Dictionary, op. cit.*, cites *Mem. W. Bull* (1865), p. 27, for this usage, which quotes BN, p. 5-6.

36. Greaves, *loc. cit.*; Hewett, JG, pp. 2, 6-7; C. Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious and Factious People: John Bunyan and his Church 1628-1688* (1989), p. 293.

37. Bunyan, vol. 4 (1989), p. xxvii; Hill, pp. 90, 294, dates Bunyan's baptism 1655 -error for 1653?; Tibbutt, p. 21, Bunyan's baptism is not recorded in the Church Book, but no other baptisms are recorded there either. A leaflet produced by the North Bedfordshire Tourist Association locates the pool in which John Gifford baptized John Bunyan "in a little backwater which runs off the River Great Ouse. The actual site is on the south bank of the river between Duck Mill Lane car park and the weir bridge".

amongst them over “externalls” such as baptism.³⁸ Although Bunyan is usually counted as a Baptist, he engaged in pamphlet warfare with other Baptists who insisted that believer’s baptism should be a prerequisite for church membership.³⁹ As a strict believer in double predestination, he was fearful that those who had been baptized might become complacent in their assurance of salvation because they had fulfilled the outward form of baptism. Rather, he argued, the elect are saved by a baptism of the Holy Spirit, which allows them to apply the benefits of Christ’s death to themselves personally as they respond to inspired preaching of the gospel. After conversion, believer’s baptism may be a sign of regeneration, but it is not strictly necessary.⁴⁰ This theology of baptism would seem to be compatible with Gibbs’s equation of “water” in New Testament references to Christian baptism with the saving quality of the Spirit-filled Word. There is no evidence of Gibbs having undergone adult believer’s baptism, but his friendship and close cooperation with Bunyan over many years may well point to an agreement in their theology and practice regarding baptism.

The parish registers of Newport Pagnell contain no records of adult believers’ baptism while Gibbs was vicar, but eleven infant baptisms were recorded between 13 July 1652 and the end of 1659.⁴¹ There are brief, possibly incomplete, records for 1652 and the first part of 1653, showing mainly births but including two baptisms after Gibbs’s presentation to the vicarage. A new register was begun in late 1653, when an ordinance of the Barebone’s Parliament allowed the legal registration of births rather than baptisms.⁴² In the first five years of that register, there were 310 entries, of which 303 recorded births only and seven recorded baptisms. In 1659, when Gibbs’s relationship with the parish was breaking down, there were only six entries, of which two were baptisms. There is no indication of who administered the eleven infant baptisms between 1652 and 1659, but, given his objections to infant baptism as reported by Richard Carpenter, it seems unlikely that it was Gibbs. In 1660, when Gibbs had probably already been ejected from the living, there was a mixture of births and baptisms recorded, even before Robert Marshall was instituted to the vicarage on 24 March 1660-1.⁴³ Because

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38. Bunyan, vol. 4 (1989), p. xxvii; Hill, *op. cit.*, pp. 293-4; Tibbutt, p. 19, cf. pp. 22, 80, 94, 101-2; G.F. Nuttall, *Visible Saints: the Congregational Way 1640-1660* (1957), pp. 36-37. C.E. Whiting, *Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution, 1660-1688* (1931), p. 118.
39. Bunyan, vol. 4 (1989), pp. xxvi-xxvii; Whiting, *loc. cit.*
40. Bunyan, vol. 2 (1976), pp. 74-5 & vol. 4 (1989), pp. xxix-xxx.
41. Newport Pagnell Parish Registers, Milton Keynes Reference Library, microfilm reel 88, PR. 153/1/2, Baptisms, 1653-1671, checked against transcript made by W.R. Dawson, Buckinghamshire County Record Office, Aylesbury. This corrects Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
42. *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*, ed. C.H. Firth & R.S. Rait, vol. 2 (1911), pp. 715-18.
43. BN, p. 3; Bull, JG, p. 5; Hewett, JG, p. 4; HICNP, p. 4.

the church book of Newport Pagnell Independent Church does not begin until 1709, it is impossible to say exactly what that congregation's baptismal policy was while Gibbs was pastor.⁴⁴ F.W. Bull said that Gibbs became an advocate of infant baptism later in his life.⁴⁵ but I have found no evidence to support this assertion. Gibbs was certainly still opposed to infant baptism when he was sixty-two years old; his name appeared amongst those who "scruple[d] the baptizing of infants" when he took the oaths of allegiance and supremacy and subscribed to the Thirty-nine Articles at the Midsummer Quarter Sessions held in Newport Pagnell in July 1689.⁴⁶ However, soon after his death Newport Pagnell Independent Church did become a paedobaptist congregation. William Bull started a list of infants he had baptized immediately after his ordination in October 1764.⁴⁷ These are the first infant baptisms recorded in the church book, but it is possible that Bull was following a tradition already established in the church.

There is a little further evidence of Gibbs's baptismal theology and practice during the last decade of his life, the 1690s. Richard Davis's tour of evangelization brought him to Olney in 1691, and he founded a congregation there which today lives on as Cowper Memorial United Reformed Church. The new congregation was a branch of the Wellingborough West End Independent Church founded by Davis on 22 October 1691, and it grew up in rivalry to the older gathered church where John Gibbs was still ministering.⁴⁸ Gibbs's Olney congregation seems to have practised an open policy on baptism, allowing believer's baptism to those who desired it but not requiring it for church membership, but the new congregation was paedobaptist.⁴⁹ There must have been friction between the two congregations, because the 1694 Trust Deed of the older meeting states that "no person... shall...be admitted or permitted to preach, pray, or perform any other Religious Worship or Service...but such as shall...concur, agree, and be of the same persuasion and judgment in respect of Doctrine, Discipline, and Worship with John Gibbs".⁵⁰ Nevertheless, between 1694 and Gibbs's death in 1699, he shared his Olney ministry with William Bere, a close

44. *Newport Pagnell Independent Church Record of Members from 1709 to 1844*, MS book, unpaginated. When I used this book, it was still in the possession of NP URC, but it has since been deposited in the Buckinghamshire County Record Office, Aylesbury.

45. Bull, JG, p. 4.

46. *County of Buckingham, Calendar to the Sessions Records*, *op. cit.*, pp. 296-7.

47. *Newport Pagnell Independent Church Record of Members from 1709 to 1844*.

48. HOBM, pp. 227, 241-2. My thanks are due to Miss Jean Minard for allowing me to see the records stored in the Sutcliffe Baptist Church vestry.

49. Hewett, JG, 7; P.B. Gravett, *Over Three Hundred Years of God's Grace: A Short History of Sutcliff Baptist Church*, (undated), appendix by E.A. Payne, "Newport Pagnell and Olney", p. 30.

50. 1694 Trust Deed, MS, Sutcliffe Baptist Church vestry, checked against typed transcript in HOBM, facing p. 22; CR; Hewett, JG, 7; Payne in Gravett, *loc. cit.*

friend of Richard Davis. Bere then ministered to the congregation on his own until 1710, and perhaps a split began to develop within the church during those years.⁵¹ Joseph Palmer, a Baptist, ministered briefly in 1711,⁵² but the Trust Deed was clearly contravened when Matthias Maurice became pastor in 1712. Recommended by Bere, he was another close friend of Richard Davis and a paedobaptist. He soon left to join the new paedobaptist congregation and took a large proportion of the older church's members with him; in 1714, he left Olney to succeed Davis as pastor of Rothwell Congregation Church.⁵³ In Olney, the greatly reduced older congregation bravely carried on, but by 1763 they, too, had dropped their open baptismal policy and become members of the Particular Baptist denomination which required believer's baptism for church membership.⁵⁴

In Newport Pagnell, Richard Davis's followers also caused discord within Gibbs's congregation. In early 1692, the Wellingborough West End Church Meeting resolved to send out messengers in pairs "to visit the Brethren in every place and bring us an account of their faith and love". They strongly disapproved of the "disorders" they found in Newport Pagnell Independent Church, which may be a reference to an open baptismal policy there, and both churches resolved not to hold communion with each other. Before shaking the dust from their feet, however, the Wellingborough messengers succeeded in alienating several Newport church members, who "declared against" Gibbs's congregation and left.⁵⁵ F.W. Bull suggested that the Newport rebels may have been responsible for the formation of the old Baptist church there, but this seems unlikely.⁵⁶ As Bull himself reports elsewhere, a Baptist congregation had already been in existence for some time in Newport, and Gibbs had maintained cordial relations with them. He had tried to settle his friend Mr. Bennet, a good preacher and a man of exemplary behaviour, as their pastor, but they had failed to agree on whether or not to accept him.⁵⁷ It seems more likely that the Newport church members who

51. HOBM, pp. 56-7; A card in Sutcliff Baptist Church vestry listing "Pastors and Preachers" shows John Gibbs 1660-1699 and [William] Bere 1694-1710
52. Card in Sutcliff vestry; E.A. Payne, *Roade Baptist Church 1688-1938* (1938), list of ministers at end of pamphlet identifies Joseph Palmer as a Baptist ministering there c.1715.
53. Gravett, *op. cit.*, p. 7; Hewett, JG, p. 7; HOBM, p. 62; Thompson MSS, Dr. Williams's Library MS 35:7-11, vol. 1, p. 130.
54. Gravett, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-5; Hewett, JG, p. 7.
55. HNP, pp. 140-1.
56. NHP, p. 141.
57. Hewett, JG, p. 7; HNP, p. 150 (quoting Thomason MSS, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-30); F.W. Bull, "Newport Pagnell Baptists", *The Baptist Quarterly*, n.s. vol. 5 (July 1930), p. 137; The old Baptist Church in Newport Pagnell did not survive the nineteenth century; the present Baptist Church was founded in 1972 – information from the Revd. Paul Rosier, pastor.

agreed with the Wellingborough messengers might have joined Richard Davis's paedobaptist congregation in Olney, although no documentary evidence supports this suggestion. The oldest extant record book of Olney Independent Church is a register of infant baptisms beginning in 1788.⁵⁸

From this survey of the fragmentary evidence for John Gibbs's baptismal theology and practice, gleaned from his controversies with Richard Carpenter and Richard Davis, we can draw several tentative conclusions. Gibbs was almost certainly opposed to infant baptism, but our knowledge of his attitude towards adult believer's baptism remains incomplete. From his friendship with John Bunyan and his association with the Bedford gathered church, as well as from the negative reaction of the Wellingborough messengers who visited Newport, we can probably safely infer that an open baptismal policy was practised in Gibbs's time at both the Newport Pagnell and the Olney gathered churches. Both of these churches may, then, tentatively be bracketed with the gathered churches at Bedford and at Broadmead, Bristol, and the Southwark congregation ministered to by Henry Jessey, where an open baptismal policy is known to have been the case.⁵⁹ John Gibbs appears to have been at odds with both the Savoy Declaration, which allowed infant baptism if one or both of the parents was a believer,⁶⁰ and with most Baptist congregations, both Particular and General, which required adult believer's baptism for church membership.⁶¹ He was truly an Independent in a period of great ecclesiastical ferment when denominational boundaries were only beginning to be firmly drawn.

MARILYN LEWIS

58. *The Church Book for Births and Baptisms 1837-1869* contains entries back to 7 May 1788, MS book in Cowper Memorial United Reformed Church vestry. My thanks are due to Mrs. Nora Dugdale, church secretary, for allowing me to see the record books in the church's possession. Further enquiries at the Buckinghamshire County Record Office, the Cowper and Newton Museum, Olney, and the Northamptonshire County Record Office have not turned up any earlier records.

59. Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 293-4; Nuttall, *loc. cit.*

60. *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658*, ed. A.G. Matthews (1959), p. 115.

61. M. Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. 1 (1992), pp. 318-9.

**LAUNCHING A CLERICAL CAREER
IN LATE GEORGIAN ENGLAND:
NATHANIEL K. PUGSLEY – FROM HOXTON ACADEMY
TO INDUSTRIAL STOCKPORT**

Is this the Region, this the Soil, the Clime,
Said then the lost Arch-Angel, this the seat
That we must change for Heav'n, this mournful gloom
For that celestial light?

The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less than he
Whom Thunder hath made greater?

Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Book 1)

The enormous population increases and movements that accompanied the Industrial Revolution had a profound impact on religion in Britain. Among other things, existing churches and chapels could no longer contain the population of the burgeoning industrial districts, while unorthodox religious creeds and even anti-religious ideas spread easily in Manchester, Birmingham and the other mushrooming urban centres of the Midlands and the North. Nathaniel Knight Pugsley, a young ministerial student from Hoxton Academy, had an opportunity to observe this changing cultural frontier in the summer of 1815 when Stockport's Orchard Street Congregational Chapel invited him to preach for two Sundays. He was the latest in a long list of "supplies" who had occupied the chapel's pulpit since the retirement of William Evans a year and half before. Pugsley ended up staying for a month, and by the end of the year he had been asked by the congregation to become its permanent minister. His transition from student to minister (and from south to north) can be traced in various primary sources, above all in revealing but hitherto neglected manuscript letters in Dr. Williams's Library. Of greatest interest is a long and informative account that Pugsley wrote from Stockport in late July 1815, a document that will be examined in detail.

These sources show a young man who was insecure about his abilities and astonished by the scenes of the Industrial Revolution. He quickly adapted, however, and managed to take advantage of the wide-ranging opportunities that were available to clerics, as well as entrepreneurs, on the banks of the Mersey. His experience provides fresh insights into the Congregational revival of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (a period in which the number of

congregations was increasing tenfold) and into the obstacles that the revival had to overcome.¹

I

Pugsley was born into the family of a small farmer in north Devon on 15 July 1787. One of his obituary notices states that because he was “compelled to work the farm, his education was very imperfect.”² Nominally an Anglican, he neglected religion until he was in his early twenties. Then, probably at some point in 1811, he heard a sermon preached at Ilfracombe on the Devon coast by Daniel Gunn, a young Congregational minister. Pugsley was transformed by the experience.³ Although Gunn defended the reading of sermons from the pulpit (a technique he presumably practised himself) and has been described as an “unemotional” preacher,⁴ his strong commitment to evangelicalism won him immense popularity during his long career. Some sense of his impact can be gauged from the response to his announcement that he was leaving Ilfracombe in 1813: “There were huge sailors so overwhelmed with crying, that they could not sit upright in the pews. One says, ‘I quite unmanned myself.’ Another, ‘I love him like an only sister.’”⁵ Pugsley was probably also impressed by the fact that Gunn had achieved clerical success in England despite his humble origins in the remote Scottish Highlands.

Soon, the influential preacher befriended Pugsley and began preparing him for entry into the Dissenting academy at Hoxton and a career in the ministry, a favour he accorded to many promising young men over the years. Gunn must have been convinced that Pugsley fulfilled the Academy’s requirements for a candidate to have “good natural abilities”, a commitment to evangelical doctrines, and a desire

1. Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England 1688-1791* (Oxford, 1986), ch. 23; D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), ch. 4; Richard J. Helmstadter, “Orthodox Nonconformity,” in *Nineteenth-Century English Religious Traditions: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. D.G. Paz (Westport, Conn., 1995), pp. 57-84; and for northwest perspectives, Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1978-95), I, pp. 453-4. Watts states that there were around 300 congregations in 1773, a number that grew to 3,244 in 1851 (*Ibid.*, II, p. 29).
2. Obituary of N.K. Pugsley, *Congregational Year Book* (London, 1869), p. 269.
3. At that time, Pugsley would have been about twenty-three or twenty-four years old. By contrast, over ninety per cent of the Congregational ministers of this period were converted before the age of twenty-two, many of them in their mid-teens or even earlier; Kenneth D. Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales 1800-1930* (Oxford, 1988), p. 54.
4. E[dwin] C[anna]n, “Gunn, Daniel (1774-1848),” *Dictionary of National Biography* [hereafter *DNB*].
5. Josiah Gilbert, ed. *Autobiography and other Memorials of Mrs Gilbert, (Formerly Ann Taylor)*, 2 vols. (London, 1874), I, p. 258. Ann Taylor resided in Ilfracombe during the winter of 1812-13. She refers to Gunn as “the King of the Crocodiles” and “the noble Highlander,” among other things: *Ibid.*, I, pp. 251, 259.

to enter the ministry based on “scriptural motives.”⁶ Gunn’s instruction included not only the study of theology but also lessons in deportment. At around the same time that he was tutoring Pugsley, he spent six months training a local shoemaker for entry into Hoxton. The minister later spoke of the time he spent with the craftsman: “you might have seen us marching backwards and forwards in my study, handing the chairs from one side to the other, and opening the door and entering forty times in a morning, in order to give him a little ease and propriety.”⁷ For provincial artisans and farmers, success at Hoxton (and in the ministry) clearly required more than just religious commitment and knowledge of theological doctrines.

At the end of 1811, after a number of months of instruction in Devon, Pugsley submitted his application to Hoxton Academy along with a recommendation from the celebrated William Thorp of Bristol. He gained an interview with Thomas Wilson, the wealthy treasurer of Hoxton, and the other members of Hoxton’s Committee of Examination.⁸ The encounter probably differed little from that undergone a few months later by William Urwick, a Shropshire lad who recorded his experiences in a letter to his mother:

On Saturday evening I went before the committee, till this was over I was not very comfortable; being very anxious I first prayed, and then spoke from ‘Ye must be born again.’ I was next asked a few questions, and desired to withdraw, but was quickly called in again, and informed by Mr. Wilson that the committee were unanimous in receiving me into the Academy...⁹

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6. *An Account of the Hoxton Academy, Instituted for the Education of Young Men for the Ministry* (London, 1804), p. 7. Only single men were admitted to the Academy (*Ibid.*, p. 8).
 7. Quoted in Gilbert, ed., *Autobiography*, I, pp. 259-60. Other early nineteenth-century ministerial students benefited from a more formal course of preparation; on this, see Geoffrey Nuttall, “Training for Hoxton and Highbury: Walter Scott of Rothwell and His Pupils,” *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society* [hereafter *JURCHS*], 5 (1992-97), pp. 477-83. Only small numbers from artisanal backgrounds were admitted to Hoxton: Brown, *Nonconformist Ministry*, p. 25.
 8. On Wilson, see [Joshua Wilson], *A Memoir of the Life and Character of Thomas Wilson, Esq., Treasurer of Highbury College* (London, 1846); A[lexander] G[ordon], “Wilson, Thomas (1764-1843),” *DNB*. Hoxton Academy moved to Highbury in 1826.
 9. Quoted in John Waddington, *Congregational History*, 5 vols. (London, 1869-80), IV, p. 213. On Urwick, see W[illiam] U[rwick, Jr.], “Urwick, William [Sr.] (1791-1868),” *DNB*. This procedure remained unchanged nearly a decade later when Alexander Stewart was interviewed. His dramatic account is quoted in M.D. Stephens and G.W. Roderick, “Education and the Dissenting Academies,” *History Today*, 27:1 (1977), p. 52.

Pugsley's prayer, little sermon, and responses to questions were likewise acceptable to the Hoxton Committee, and he consequently began his four-year course of study in the Metropolis early in 1812.¹⁰

Pugsley was entering one of Britain's foremost Dissenting academies. Launched in 1778, it was enlarged three times after the turn of the century (in 1803, 1809, and 1814).¹¹ During the 1810s it had between thirty and forty students in residence at a time. By all accounts, its three tutors were conscientious, its curriculum comprehensive, and its impact, through its graduates, far-reaching. One historian states categorically that "Hoxton established the pace for the leading seminaries," and another concludes that "the evangelical zeal of the students and their valuable contribution to the revival of Independent congregations far and wide are unquestioned." By 1846, about thirty per cent of the trained Congregational ministers in England had either attended Hoxton or its successor, Highbury College.¹²

In order to achieve this record, Hoxton had to be able to train ministerial students of widely varying educational backgrounds. With only a few years of formal education followed by an apprenticeship as a last and boot-tree maker, Robert Morrison entered Hoxton in 1803 and went on to achieve success as the first Protestant missionary to China. John Leifchild was able to make up for his deficient early schooling through intense study at Hoxton in 1804-8, and he became one of the leading Dissenting preachers of the day.¹³ Alexander Stewart had a similarly weak educational background, and his reaction to the theology class in the early 1820s may have been similar to Pugsley's. Among other things, students had to write sermons, read them to the class, and then respond to

10. Dr. Williams's Library, New College Archives [hereafter NCA] 125/1, Hoxton Academy Committee Minute Book (1801-21), entries for 13 Dec. 1811, 13 March 1812. For permission to consult and quote from this collection, I am most grateful to the librarian, Dr. David L. Wykes, and the trustees of Dr. Williams's Library. Pugsley and Urwick were among the ten students admitted in 1812, and an annual average of eleven students were admitted in 1810-13. By contrast, only five on average had been admitted each year in 1807-9. See *An Account of the Hoxton Academy* (London, 1814), pp. 12-14.
11. For useful general surveys, see *ibid.* (1804), pp. 3-6; "Hoxton Academy and Chapel," *Congregational Magazine*, 8 (1825), pp. 524-7, 581-4; Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *New College, London, and its Library* (London, 1977), pp. 12-19.
12. Deryck W. Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People: Itinerancy and the transformation of English Dissent, 1780-1830* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 76; H. McLachlan, *English Education under the Test Acts: Being the History of the Nonconformist Academies 1662-1820* (Manchester, 1931), pp. 240-41; Kenneth D. Brown, "The Congregational Ministry in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century: A Preliminary Survey," *JURCHS*, 3 (1983-87), p. 4. Brown indicates that in 1846, 544 out of 1,447 Congregational ministers lacked formal training. This fraction (three-eighths) was probably higher in the earlier decades of the century.
13. Waddington, *Congregational History*, IV, pp. 145-48, 154-58.

criticisms both from fellow students and the tutor. "This was sometimes a sharp ordeal, yet it was a salutary one," recalled Stewart; "each man got his angular points rounded in his turn. This process is of vast moment to a young man, especially to one who had not had the advantage of regular school training. How nicely it brings each one to his proper level!!"¹⁴

At the other end of the spectrum, Hoxton attracted students who had received years of excellent (or at least expensive) schooling.¹⁵ Such was the case with William Urwick of Shropshire and two notable students who were already at the Academy when he arrived, Richard Winter Hamilton and John Ely. In his memoir of Ely, written nearly four decades later, Hamilton probably expressed the sentiments of many students with similar backgrounds about the educational standards at Hoxton.

It was then too little stringent. The well-prepared youth was soon placed in the highest class of Humane Letters. He might learn much, but his lectures were too easy for him. They, who had not enjoyed previous advantages, were sufficiently tasked. Hebrew, Intellectual and Moral Philosophy, Divinity studies and transcripts, and examination of authorities, were, however, new to most. Mathematics were not wholly excluded, but they were taught in a very limited and desultory way, — scarcely worthy of the name.

His final verdict was that the course of study lacked sufficient "mental analysis" and was "very far from perfect,"¹⁶ sentiments that Pugsley eventually echoed. There is no evidence, however, that Pugsley had the time or inclination to join Hamilton, Ely, and other members of the "Beef Steak Club" (or "Rum and Water Club") when they ate, drank, and sang late into the night and used "indecent and obscene" language. A number of the more serious students complained about

14. Alexander Stewart, "Life at Hoxton College 1820-1823," *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, 15 (1945-48), p. 77. William Harris was Stewart's theology tutor, but Robert Simpson (1764-1817) would have taught the class during Pugsley's years at Hoxton. The other tutors for Pugsley (and for Stewart) were John Hooper and Henry Forster Burder. For a detailed list of the subjects covered by the tutors, see Wilson, *Memoir of Thomas Wilson*, pp. 282-83.
15. About one-half of Hoxton students were in this category: Brown, "Congregational Ministry," p. 9.
16. [Richard Winter Hamilton], "Introductory Memoir of the Rev. John Ely," in *Posthumous Works of the late Rev. John Ely*, ed. Hamilton (London, 1848), pp. xv-xvi. Here and elsewhere, however, Hamilton had nothing but praise for the three Hoxton tutors. For criticisms of other Dissenting academies, including one where tutors allegedly gave students the examination questions *and* the answers in advance, see Watts, *Dissenters*, II, pp. 274-75.

these nocturnal celebrations, and as a result, Hamilton and Ely and two others were reprimanded by Academy authorities.¹⁷

One of the leaders in this censure movement was John Blackburn (1792-1855). A young man who was five years Pugsley's junior, Blackburn was a well-educated native of London who had completed one year of study at Hoxton when Pugsley arrived.¹⁸ The serious young Londoner became the adviser, confidant, and by all indications, the best friend of the newly-arrived West Country farmer's son. Among other things, Blackburn could help Pugsley with Hoxton's regime of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and other subjects that were included on the annual examinations held in June 1812, just six months after Pugsley's arrival. The examiners' general report for that year was not altogether positive: "As might naturally be expected, there exists an obvious diversity of talent and attainment among the students; but all appeared to have availed themselves of the advantages which the establishment provides..."¹⁹ By the end of the year, however, the tutors had furnished a favourable report on Pugsley to the Hoxton Committee.²⁰ He was probably conscientious in his studies from the beginning of his stay at Hoxton, and this commitment eventually enabled Pugsley, like his friend Blackburn, to excel.

There was also much to be learned informally at Hoxton. Students could observe the various types of activities that occupied the time of committed evangelical ministers. These included not only charitable endeavours close to home but also the support of missionary activities overseas. Students likewise received informal advice on the basics of evangelicalism. While not one of the tutors, Thomas Wilson, the Hoxton treasurer, took an active interest in the training

17. NCA, L 52/3/31, Student Resolutions (5 March 1814); *ibid.*, 125/1, Committee Minute Book, entries for 29-30 March 1814. There is also no evidence that Pugsley emulated the extracurricular behaviour of James Rawson, a student mentioned in these same Minute Book entries. Accused by three students of being infected with venereal disease, Rawson confessed to the Hoxton Committee that the allegation was "but too true." The following day, Committee expelled him.
18. On his life, see Obituary of John Blackburn, *Congregational Year Book* (London, 1856), p. 208; and Frederic Boase, *Modern English Biography*, 6 vols. (Truro, Netherton and Worth, 1892-1921), I, p. 296. His success at Hoxton is indicated by the fact that he was chosen to deliver one of the annual orations in 1814 (see *Evangelical Magazine*, 22 [1814], p. 326). About one-third of the Hoxtonians came from the Home Counties (like Blackburn), while about one-half came from the remaining counties of England (like Pugsley); see Brown, "Congregational Ministry," p. 6.
19. *Evangelical Magazine*, 20 (1812), p. 287. First-year students were "examined" in part by being asked to read passages in the ancient languages; cf. *Congregational Magazine*, 5 (1822), pp. 443-44.
20. NCA 125/1, Committee Minute Book, entry for 13 Nov. 1812; see also entry for 10 April 1812, which indicates that the tutors also reported on Pugsley and other new students at that time, but the conclusions of that report are not given.

of the ministerial candidates. One Hoxton student in the 1790s long remembered the advice Wilson offered “with the characteristic rubbing of his hands.”

Never forget the three R’s – Ruin, Redemption, and Regeneration. Keep to these and you will never fail. They will always supply you with plenty of matter for the whole course of your ministry.²¹

The “lively and energetic” preaching style of the theology tutor, Robert Simpson, undoubtedly also had an impact. His normal procedure was to write out his sermons and then commit them to memory. As a result, he “enjoyed much liberty in the pulpit.”²²

This provides a clue to the issues later raised by Pugsley in his correspondence. Hoxton students had considerable practice writing sermons and reading them aloud in class, but that was little more than a rehearsal of what might be termed the “old style” of preaching. According to Michael Watts, the “new style” for evangelical Dissenters was “extempore, emotional, passionate, dramatic, designed to bring the hearer to a pitch of excitement at which he would respond to the call to confess that he was a sinner and that he was in need of salvation.”²³ Hoxton students had to try to move away from the old style towards the new, and this probably occurred not so much in the classroom as in their early preaching forays outside the Academy. The practical question facing them was how far they should, or could, proceed in the new direction. When Pugsley discussed “extemporising,” he was probably not referring to completely extemporaneous orations. Instead, he was almost certainly talking about the extent to which extemporaneous remarks ought to be included in the delivery of a written sermon text that might have been partially or wholly memorized (as Simpson was wont to do). One can easily imagine that this seemingly minor point could be a major issue with students who were still uncertain about their oratorical skills and who, in some cases, might be preaching to congregations considering them for permanent positions.

In addition to formal course work and informal learning at Hoxton, Pugsley, Blackburn, and the other students sharpened their homiletic skills by observing preachers in the numerous pulpits of the Metropolis. They saw a wide range of

21. Wilson, *Memoir of Thomas Wilson*, pp.195-96.

22. “Memoir of the late Rev. Robert Simpson, D.D. Resident and Theological Tutor at Hoxton Academy,” *Congregational Magazine*, 2 (1819), p. 65.

23. Watts, *Dissenters*, II, pp. 177-80. Watts discusses many variations on this theme, including the practice of memorizing written sermons in order to make it appear as if they were being delivered extemporaneously. This technique was practised not only by Robert Simpson at Hoxton but also, according to Watts, by the celebrated Thomas Raffles.

preaching styles on display. Despite mounting criticisms, the practice of reading sermons still persisted in the Metropolis as well as in the provinces.²⁴ At the other end of the spectrum, some London ministers could be counted among the greatest extemporaneous preachers of the day. A few immensely popular men in this category had chapels especially built for their congregations. Among the most respectable during Pugsley's early years at Hoxton was Rowland Hill, whose "earnest, eloquent, eccentric" preaching had long since resulted in the construction of his large Surrey Chapel. Among the most notorious of the unattached London ministers was William Huntington, who styled himself "S.S." ("Sinner Saved") because of his admitted sexual transgressions. When his Providence Chapel burnt down, he was quickly able to build New Providence Chapel in 1811 at a cost of £10,000.²⁵ While Hoxton students could analyse diverse preaching styles, they could also note that success might be obtained both by "Independents" who were associated with the Congregationalists (like Hill) and by those who were not (like Huntington). In either case, the generosity of wealthy members of their congregation was a crucial factor in their success.

Education at the Academy and observation of Metropolitan preachers soon had to be supplemented by practical application. Early in their educational careers at the Academy, students for the ministry were assigned by the Hoxton Committee to serve as "supplies," that is, to take the pulpits of sick, absent or deceased ministers. This of course gave them invaluable training not only in delivering sermons but also in interacting with the members of various types of congregation. To say that Pugsley's early efforts were less than noble is an understatement.

Somewhat diffident, and distrusting his powers, his success in preaching was slow. The first place of any consequence he was sent to preach at while a student was Henley, where he fairly broke down; and did not attempt any other public engagement till he had for some time been accustomed to preach in workhouses, rooms, and cottages.²⁶

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24. [James Grant], *The Metropolitan Pulpit; or Sketches of the Most Popular Preachers in London* (New York, 1839), pp. 14-15, relates an anecdote featuring an encounter between a minister who writes out his sermons and one who delivers his sermons completely extempore. The latter is portrayed as a trickster.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-99, provides a long account of Hill. In the *DNB*, see T[homas] H[amilton], "Hill, Rowland (1774-1833)"; J[ames] M[cMullen] R[igg], "Huntington, William S.S. (1745-1813)."
26. Obituary of Pugsley, *Congregational Year Book*, p. 270. Since first-year Hoxton students were only supposed to preach in local workhouses and similar venues, Pugsley's setback at Henley may have occurred at the beginning of 1813. On this point, see Lovegrove, *Established Church*, p. 82.

Additional practice, careful observation of experienced preachers, and the friendship of Blackburn were undoubtedly among the things that helped Pugsley to get over his early "break down."

II

In July 1813, when the extant correspondence from Pugsley to Blackburn began, both men were acting as supplies. Blackburn was at Colchester in Essex, and the fact that Pugsley had been sent to his home county of Devon suggests that this may have been his first major assignment since the Henley débacle. He told Blackburn that he had preached nine times in less than two weeks, and, he continued, "(to tell you the truth) I am almost exhausted." He then asked his friend: "How do you get on in preaching? As popular as ever I suppose? Do you know that I think with you *now*, that there is nothing like the warm extemporaneous [*sic*] effusions of a heart deeply interested in the salvations of sinners." The subject of preaching had obviously been one of frequent discussion between the two students. Pugsley said that Blackburn extemporized well and that was the reason he recommended the technique so highly. At one point Pugsley claimed, "I cannot extemporise....," but he probably meant that he could not do it with ease. A contradictory statement made this clear: "I tell you that I have extemporised more since I came here then [*sic*] I ventured to do before, and I think I never preached with so much pleasure." As one indication of his impact, he noted that the Dissenters in Dartmouth were affectionate (as well as respectable) and that his final service attracted a congregation of at least five hundred people.²⁷ This insecurity about his abilities expressed in indecisive, even contradictory, statements was a characteristic feature of most of Pugsley's early correspondence.

In the first part of 1814, both men were on the move again. Now in his last year at Hoxton, Blackburn was supplying Finchingfield in Essex. A local Congregational leader was impressed and wrote to Thomas Wilson that the congregation would probably invite Blackburn to become its permanent minister.²⁸ Pugsley was on a visit with "Mrs. W." and "Miss W." and wrote in a jocular manner to Blackburn: "*I am become quite a politician!* Look out for severe conflicts when I return to Hoxton. I am a *flaming democrat!*"²⁹ What caused this comment is unclear, but perhaps he had come under the spell of Miss W. and her political ideas. This was, nevertheless, a rare early indication that Pugsley had any concern for the political rights of the lower orders, that is, the people in the

27. NCA, L 52/3/27, Pugsley to Blackburn, Dartmouth, 25 July 1813. In this and subsequent quotations from Pugsley's letters in the NCA manuscripts, punctuation and capitalization have been modernized, but the idiosyncracies of Pugsley's spellings have been left intact.

28. *Ibid.*, L 52/3/30, Thomas Stock to Thomas Wilson, Wethersfield, 3 Feb. 1814.

29. *Ibid.*, L 52/3/28, Pugsley to Blackburn, Tindale Place, 9[?] Jan. 1814. Were these ladies Wedds, radical Dissenters in Islington and Essex?

social stratum from which he sprang. Miss W. is never mentioned again in his extant correspondence, and neither is a commitment to democracy, flaming or otherwise.

Finchingfield may have offered Blackburn the pulpit in 1814, but he accepted no offers of an English ministry at that time. Instead, he went off to Ireland to work for the new Irish Evangelical Society in its campaign to promote Protestantism among the Catholics.³⁰ By the beginning of 1815, he was at Sligo, where he received the news that Pugsley had been offered a co-pastorship by a congregation at Chelmsford. Pugsley wrote that he would not make a decision until Blackburn returned but that he already had certain reservations. He did not like the idea of a co-pastorship, and he did not want to end his studies early because of "the deficiency of my classical, and intellectual attainments." At the same time, the offer had obviously made Pugsley think deeply about his future ministerial career, the attitudes of many of his fellow students, and perhaps also the choice Blackburn had just made.³¹

Some students *cannot think* of exposing themselves to the public eye for many years after they leave the Academy. Oh no! they are anticipating a destination of twenty or thirty years in the Hebrides, or the Welsh mountains, or (as that would be too public!) in one of the uninhabited isles of the archipelago.

This was a result of "modesty," which was appropriate for women, Pugsley thought, but not for men. A minister of the gospel cannot be a recluse. "He must be a public man, or he cannot be a useful man." And not merely public: "Every man, *now*, must be great, or think himself so, and it matters not which, for vanity is satisfied with the latter, as well as by the former." Pugsley was also thinking about other aspects of his future and once again offered contradictory statements. "I shall never marry!" he wrote at one point. "My anticipations of domestic happiness are too sanguine ever to be realized!" He immediately qualified this statement and wrote that he would marry if he could find "a pious, intelligent, and elegant female."³² Presumably she had to display considerable modesty, too. Pugsley never found such a woman and remained a lifelong bachelor.

30. *The Evangelical Magazine*, 24 (1816), p. 70, indicates that a second Hoxton student was sent to proselytize in Dublin. Wilson, *Memoir of Thomas Wilson*, p. 224, states that Wilson was one of the founders of the Irish Evangelical Society in 1814 and also one of its patrons and committee members. On this occasion and later, Blackburn would discover that friendship with Hoxton's wealthy treasurer could be of great help in advancing his clerical career.

31. Pugsley had probably also heard that six months before his arrival at Hoxton, a senior student was ordained for work in St. John's, Newfoundland: *Evangelical Magazine*, 19 (1811), pp. 326-27. Henry Townley, a student who had entered Hoxton in the same year as Pugsley, indicated his desire to go to the East Indies at least by 1815: *An Account of Hoxton Academy* (London, 1815), p. 7.

32. NCA, L 52/3/40, Pugsley to Blackburn, Hoxton Academy, 28 Jan. 1815.

Pugsley's remarks on "twenty or thirty years in the Hebrides" may have had an impact on Blackburn, since he left Ireland after only three months and returned temporarily to Hoxton to prepare for the next step in his career.³³ By May 1815, Pugsley was again writing to him while supplying Wattisfield in Suffolk for two weeks at the behest of Thomas Wilson. He had given up on Chelmsford by that time and did not seem too enthusiastic about Wattisfield either. In a sentence in which he jumbles talk about locations and sermonizing, he wrote to Blackburn: "I am all for bustle, noise, spouting, exertion, illustration, &c."³⁴ One month later, after Blackburn had left Hoxton to accept a permanent appointment at Finchingfield, Pugsley could report that he was extremely busy. Among other things, he had preached three times on the previous Sunday and had been able to devote much more time to his studies since Blackburn's departure. Yet with Blackburn gone, Pugsley's negative thoughts about Hoxton, and especially his fellow students, grew without restraint. His biggest criticism was that Hoxton's educational standards were not rigorous enough. Kenneth Brown has shown that an astounding ninety-four per cent of those admitted to Hoxton completed their studies, suggesting that once a student had matriculated it was almost impossible for him to fail. Pugsley probably did not have access to such statistics, but he perceived the problem and its consequences: "I am exceedingly humbled and distressed when I consider how many students have gone from this House [i.e., Hoxton] – a disgrace both to the institution and the church."³⁵

Pugsley's critical attitude can be explained in part by the fact that, as a student in his fourth and final year at Hoxton, his hard work and accomplishments were setting him apart from the average Hoxtonian. In the first half of 1815, he had a number of preaching assignments and at least one offer of a permanent appointment. Another indication of his high standing occurred immediately after the annual examinations in June. At that time, three of the best Hoxton students traditionally delivered an "oration" before a public audience. Like Blackburn in 1814 and Hamilton the year before, Pugsley was one of the orators in 1815. The title of his address, "The Adaptation of the Gospel, to Answer the Ends Proposed", suggests that his text (now lost) dealt with the practical applications of Scriptural teachings.³⁶

III

It was at this point that Pugsley was appointed to supply Stockport's Orchard Street Chapel. Despite his record of achievement, there were reasons for him to

33. Blackburn was followed in Sligo by William Urwick.

34. NCA, L 52/3/53, Pugsley to Blackburn, Stanton, Suffolk, 2 May 1815.

35. *Ibid.*, L 52/3/54, Pugsley to Blackburn, Hoxton Academy, 5 June 1815; Brown, *Nonconformist Ministry*, p. 72. Hoxton's low dropout rate was probably related, at least in part, to its relatively stringent admissions standards. Approximately one-third of those who applied for admission were rejected (*ibid.*, p. 68).

36. *Evangelical Magazine*, 23 (1815), p. 337. NCA 125/1, Committee Minute Book, entries for 14 April, 28 June 1815.

be anxious. He would be travelling a considerable distance (nearly two hundred miles, which took at least two days by coach) just to act as a supply. He must have wondered if this journey would finally enable him to secure a suitable, permanent position and thereby allow him to emulate his friend Blackburn and other successful Hoxton students.³⁷ Pugsley may already have learnt that one of the supplies who preceded him at Orchard Street had been treated in a cavalier manner. This hapless student had been kept in Stockport for a number of weeks and led to believe that he had a chance to become the permanent minister. He eventually learned otherwise, but not from the local people. A Macclesfield minister and sometime Hoxtonian, Robert Stephens McAll, broke the news to him at the end of March: "It seems they do not wish your services otherwise than those of an acceptable supply, if so, do not let them trifle with you in this manner." Pugsley, moreover, knew that he was not the first choice to supply Orchard Street that summer. McAll had written to the earlier supply that the Stockport people had invited "the 'sublime' Mr. Davis to supply them for ten weeks. I suppose the same 'sublime preacher' is also the sublime translator of an ode of Horace you and I laughed at when I saw you here."³⁸ For their part, the Orchard Street people must have been curious to meet – and hear – the outstanding Hoxtonian who had been chosen as a replacement for the "sublime" David Davis.

Much like Pugsley, Orchard Street Chapel had achieved considerable distinction in a relatively short period of time. Its congregation had been formed under obscure circumstances at the time Pugsley was born. In 1786 a schism within Stockport's venerable Tabernacle Independent Chapel resulted in the establishment of a congregation at Water Lane. The Orchard Street Chapel resulted from a further schism, but it is not clear if the Orchard Street people seceded from the Tabernacle or the Water Lane Chapel.³⁹ The doctrinal and liturgical issues that distinguished the three congregations are likewise unknown.⁴⁰ It seems possible, however, that they were related to the same evangelical resurgence that gave birth to the regional Congregational Association

37. In the first half of 1815 Richard Hamilton accepted an appointment to become the permanent minister at Albion Independent Chapel in Leeds. See G. B[arrett] S[mith], "Hamilton, Richard Winter (1794-1848)," *DNB*. Many outstanding Hoxtonians likewise had successful academic careers at the Academy that were crowned by selection as annual orators and then by appointments to prominent Dissenting chapels, a fact surely not lost on Pugsley.
38. Quoted in Waddington, *Congregational History*, IV, pp. 244-5. McAll was admitted to Hoxton in 1808 but was asked to leave at the end of 1809 for various infractions, among them uttering "sentiments disrespectful to the manner in which the studies in this Academy are conducted..."; see *ibid.*, 185-6. On "Mr. Davis," see n. 56 below.
39. Henry Heginbotham, *Stockport: Ancient and Modern*, 2 vols. (London, 1882-92), II, pp. 35-36, presents virtually all the facts known about these confusing events; see also S.H. Mayor, *Cheshire Congregationalism: A Brief History* (Chester, [1956?]), p. 15.
40. However, Derek Robson in *Some Aspects of Education in Cheshire in the Eighteenth Century*, *Chetham Society*, 13 (1996), p.70, errs in supposing that Orchard Street Chapel was Unitarian.

in 1786 and led to the ensuing campaign to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts. The Orchard Street people were prominent in various evangelical activities and in the repeal campaign. When Orchard Street Chapel was built in 1788, its size (582 sittings) was impressive for a provincial town.⁴¹ The evangelical commitment of its congregation was probably one factor that helped it to survive through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. By contrast, the Water Lane group, which was by all indications less evangelical in its views, faded from sight in the mid-1790s.

Three full-time ministers had served at Orchard Street by the time Pugsley arrived: William Maurice (1788-92), Robert Anlezark (1793-1801), and William Evans (1803-14). At least two of the three were active in regional Congregational affairs.⁴² When Cheshire Congregationalists established their own association in 1806, for instance, Evans was among its founding ministers and one of its most prominent early supporters. In the first year of the Cheshire Union, contributions from Orchard Street Chapel comprised the largest single source of revenues in the whole county (over forty per cent of the total).⁴³ As secretary to the Union, Evans wrote the first four annual reports, and he personally tried to spread Congregationalism into new areas, as when he preached at the industrial village of Heaton Mersey in 1810.⁴⁴ After Old and New Dissent came under attack by Lord Sidmouth in 1811, Evans attended at least one meeting on the subject in London, and he wrote a spirited defence of Dissent, which he published in Stockport. Among other things, he stressed that Dissenters had "no disaffection to the civil Constitution of our country, or to the present reigning Family. The Constitution we are sincerely attached to, and the House of Hanover has our best wishes." However, Dissenters opposed the hierarchy and courts of the Church of England and its emphasis on wealth. According to Evans, freedom of religion was one of the most important precepts that Dissenters favoured.⁴⁵ By the early

41. "Statistical View of Dissenters in England and Wales. Cheshire", *Congregational Magazine*, 4 (1821), p. 50.
42. On Maurice and Anlezark, see Heginbotham, *Stockport II*, pp. 36-37; W[illiam] Maurice, *The Following short account of the meeting of Dissenters at Warrington...* ([Stockport?, 1790]), pr. s.sh. Anlezark's ministry at Stockport was uneventful, and after his departure, he entered the Church of England.
43. Fred[erick] James Powicke, *A History of the Cheshire County Union of Congregational Churches* (Manchester, 1907), p. 306; Heginbotham, *Stockport, II*, pp. 25, 37-38; R[ichard] Slate, *A Brief History of the Rise and Progress of the Lancashire Congregational Union* (London, 1840), p. 11; B[enjamin] Nightingale, *The Story of the Lancashire Congregational Union 1800-1906* (Manchester, [1906]), p. 23.
44. Mayor, *Cheshire Congregationalism*, p. 20; B[enjamin] Nightingale, *Lancashire Nonconformity; or Sketches, Historical & Descriptive, of the Congregational and Old Presbyterian Churches in the County*, 6 vols. (Manchester, 1890-93), V, p. 68.
45. *At a numerous and Respectable Meeting of Protestant Dissenters...* (London, 1811), p. 3; W[illiam] Evans, *A Few Reasons for Dissenting from the Established Church* (Stockport, 1811), pp. 9-12, 14-17.

Regency period, in other words, Orchard Street Chapel and its pastor had acquired a growing and well-deserved reputation for their commitment to the evangelical cause.

Evans preached in London on only one occasion, probably in late 1813 or 1814. This was just a short time before failing health ("spasmodic asthma" developing into dropsy) ended his pastorate in Stockport.⁴⁶ As fate would have it, Pugsley heard Evans preach on that occasion. In an account written eight years later, Pugsley was exceptionally generous in his praise of Evans's learning and his pastoral achievements. He also described his perceptions of the Stopfordian in his London debut: "The composition was very beautiful, and his appearance in the pulpit uncommonly interesting; but he was labouring under such severe indisposition, that his elocution was difficult, and it was quite painful to hear him." In other words, Evans's sole Metropolitan appearance was a qualified failure. Yet perhaps as a result of his own disastrous experience at Henley, Pugsley refused to render a negative verdict on a provincial minister based solely on the evidence of one sermon. Instead, he wrote in the following vein: "As a preacher, Mr. Evans was not so popular as he deserved to be..." And again: "His talents were far above his situation in Stockport...." This echoes Pugsley's effusive tribute to Evans in the annual report of the Cheshire Union for 1816 which claims, among other things, that Evans's "...occasional visits to distant villages were welcomed by the inhabitants with as much rapture as the ancient Romans felt in witnessing a procession, and excited in the heart an infinitely purer joy."⁴⁷

A pastor, in sum, is more than just a preacher. Although Evans was unsuccessful in London and inadequately appreciated in Stockport, he had intelligence, talent, and deep religious commitment and deserved more recognition than he had received in his short life (he died at forty-one). One cannot help speculating that Pugsley's praise for Evans may have reflected his views about himself and his own situation in his early years at Stockport, especially after the novelty wore off. But all of this, of course, lay in the future.

IV

Pugsley's initial visit to Stockport resulted in a long and intriguing letter to Blackburn dated 29 July 1815. This was quite different from the letters he had written from Devon or Suffolk. It runs to over one thousand words, and even then Pugsley writes toward the end: "My paper is done, but I have a thousand things to say." It deserves to be quoted at length as a reflection of his thinking at this crucial juncture in his career and also for its suggestive descriptions of Stockport and its people in the year of Waterloo.⁴⁸

46. "Memoir of the Rev. William Evans, Late of Stockport, Cheshire," *Evangelical Magazine*, 24 (1816), pp. 41-42.

47. Quoted in Powicke, *Cheshire Union*, p. 220.

48. NCA, L 52/3/55, Nathaniel [Pugsley] to Rev. J. Blackburn, Stockport, 29 July 1815. Paul T. Phillips, *The Sectarian Spirit: Sectarianism, Society and Politics in Victorian Cotton Towns* (Toronto, 1982), twice quotes this letter inaccurately (pp. 75, 79) and then incorrectly gives the recipient as "W.H. Cooper" (pp. 169 n. 20, 169 n. 27).

As in most of his letters to Blackburn, Pugsley could not forbear discussing their friendship and his own emotional state. He had delayed writing, he said, so that his letter would not be too negative.

I could have written with almost infinite pleasure and much feeling the first week I came here; for I was low, miserable, romantic – in fact nothing would have gratified me so much as to have sat down with Jeremiah at the brook Kedran and and written a second edition of his lamentations. But I was determined not to make my letters a vehicle of sorrow, though I have sometimes converted your study into an ‘house of mourning.’

Pugsley perceived the problem to be a result not only of his psychological state, that is, his inability to adjust to new surroundings, but also the unusual, even surreal, scenes that presented themselves in Stockport.

Strange places have a singular effect on my mind; I am almost angry with every person I see – I could even quarrel with the stones on the street. This was peculiarly the case at Stockport. The sensation I felt in entering this town was the most ludicrous. I saw immense steam-engines pouring forth fire & smoke, which being assisted by women at ever[y] door with a pipe in their mouths, enveloped the whole town in ‘darkness visible.’ Women were quarrelling – children were crying – carts were drawing horses instead of horses carts & the whole scene indicated that we were getting pretty near the place where Milton makes a certain individual exclaim ‘Is this reigon [*sic*] – this the soil?’ &c. [see epigraph above]. I was absolutely unwilling to get off the coach when they told me it was Stockport, at any rate I think I should have rode on to Manchester had not a venerable old man asked me whether I came from Hoxton.

Stockport’s street life astounded Pugsley. His coach almost certainly came down Hillgate toward the old bridge across the Mersey which separates Cheshire from Lancashire. Hillgate was notorious for the steepness of the descent and the narrowness of the roadway. Thus, the quarrelling women, crying children, and bustle of the carts and horses would have been audible and visible for a considerable time as Pugsley’s coach made its way slowly down the town centre.

So, too, would the “women at ever[y] door with a pipe in their mouths,” which though no doubt exaggerated, probably reflected the actual scene. Many North Country women smoked pipes. Thomas Bewick illustrated the phenomenon in his woodcuts, and there is Stockport evidence to the same effect. For the Royal Jubilee of 1809, various local competitions were held. One of them was a tobacco smoking contest for old women, the prize (“One Pound of best Tobacco”) to the woman who could smoke half an ounce of tobacco in the shortest amount of

time.⁴⁹ Smoke had been the subject of a letter by Hoxton students in the spring of 1815 in which they complained about “the great inconvenience and nuisance” resulting from the emissions of a single nearby steam engine. One can only imagine the extent of the gloom (atmospheric and psychological) now confronting Pugsley, the result of fifty or so steam engines “pouring forth fire & smoke” into the Stockport skies. This situation only became worse. Steam engines continued to be installed at a prodigious rate in the following years, often to provide the motive force for the powerlooms whose introduction caused prolonged distress among the handloom weavers.⁵⁰

Pugsley showed little interest in the suffering handloom weavers, however. The rich and prominent (that is, the “respectable”) people continued to occupy centre stage of his epistolary discussions as they had dominated his reports from earlier preaching places. Their presence in Stockport helped to modify Pugsley’s views.

...Stockport is quite altered or rather my opinion is quite changed. The town to be sure is filled with the confusions of Babel, but the adjacent scenery is delightful. The Dissenters here are exceedingly respectable. They are the most wealthy people in the Town. They are the most benevolent people I ever saw. Many are pious, but real piety is chiefly confined to the poor. The rich will build chapels – support schools – in fact do anything to promote the general interest of religion, but it does not seem to be a *personal thing*.

His comments on the “adjacent scenery” could have been based on vistas observable from the hills in Stockport itself. In addition, however, he met William Bennet, a retired minister at Chapel-en-le-Frith, Derbyshire, and possibly visited Bennet’s home in the scenic Peak District.⁵¹ Pugsley’s sentiments were echoed half a century later by a Methodist New Connexion minister: “It is sometimes said that *‘the best part of the town is the country:’* and, barring the contradiction, it is

49. *Jubilee. Amusements Extraordinary! At Stockport* (Stockport, 1809), pr. s.sh. In Cornwall around 1820, Loveday Henwood was smoking a pipe after she left the Wesleyan Methodists but before she joined the Quakers; see *Extracts from the Memoir and Letters of the late Loveday Henwood* (Falmouth, 1845), p. 20. This suggests the possibility that Pugsley may have been familiar with pipe-smoking by women in the West Country.

50. Robert Glen, *Urban Workers in the Early Industrial Revolution* (London, 1984), pp. 35-39; NCA, 125/1, Committee Minute Book, entry for 14 April 1815.

51. N.K. Pugsley, “A Short Account of the Life and Writings of the Late Rev. William Bennet, of Chapel-en-le-Frith” [separately paginated], in William Bennet, *A Treatise on the Gospel Constitution* (London, 1822), p. 49: “... I shall never forget the welcome I received, both from him and Mrs. Bennet, on my first visit.”

just so here [in Stockport]. Fortunately, with us, 'town and country' are closely connected, and a transition from one to the other is both easy and natural,"⁵² These comments serve as a reminder of how inappropriate it is to suggest that workers in the early Factory Age lived out their lives as virtual prisoners in dark industrial ghettos. For Stopfordians, the verdant, if not always sunny, countryside was never far away.⁵³

Stockport presented Pugsley with greater opportunities than he had encountered in the other towns in which he had served as a supply. He was quick to grasp the scope of these possibilities.

The population of this place is immense. It is estimated at twenty five thousand, twenty thousand of which never attend any place of worship! O what a sphere is this for exertion! An intelligent and zealous minister might even get a congregation of sixteen hundred or two thousand people! Our chapel will hold seven or eight hundred people. The first sabbath I preached it was not half-full! I must tell you (I don't write *my* letters *with a view* of their being inspected *hereafter* by an ungodly world) I must tell *you*, my dear friend, that it is already full.

The rate of growth of Stockport and other industrial towns was indeed one of the wonders of the age. Pugsley's estimate of the population for the town and its suburbs was approximately correct, and additional rapid growth, especially in adjacent townships like Heaton Norris, would follow.⁵⁴ It is less easy to verify his estimate that eighty per cent of the population belonged to the category of the "unchurched," although such a figure is plausible. This is suggested by frequent laments about "the habit of neglecting public worship" in Stockport and its district in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries. The curate of Heaton Norris, the large township just across the Mersey, was complaining in 1804 as follows:

There are more who stay away from public worship than attend... Some have not a respectable dress to appear in, others make the day of rest a day of labor [*sic*], and a third sort of the most dissipated idleness... It has already been stated that the population of Heaton Norris is estimated at near 4000 souls, and the established house of worship will hardly contain 300. This is certainly a great injury to our good cause.

52. W[illia]m Baggaly, "Stockport, and Its Chapels," *Methodist New Connexion Magazine*, 68 (1868), p. 648.

53. This phenomenon is clearly portrayed in Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton* (London, 1848), ch. 1.

54. Glen, *Urban Workers*, pp. 18-19.

In 1811, his successor thought that the number of people “who *profess* to absent themselves from all places of public-worship” was increasing, and ten years later, he reported that on an average Sunday, only about a third of the seats in his chapel were occupied.⁵⁵

Pugsley saw much that he liked, but what were the odds that he would be offered a permanent position? By his own reckoning, they were excellent.

You will see by the date of my letter that I stopt here one sabbath longer than my appointment by the Committee. It is much against my inclination, but the people *insist* on it. Davi[e]s the ‘second Spenser’⁵⁶ is not coming – he was appointed by the [Hoxton] Committee – but the people have written to him *not* to come, & I was informed by a gentleman last night that at the last church meeting (last Sunday) they resolved not to have any more supplies *as candidates*. I place no dependence on this – people are fickle & ‘given to change.’ But I must confess that their kindness & attention to me have been remarkable. My preaching I believe has been acceptable, but it has not been attended with that emotion that I could wish. The church & congregation have been split abroad a good deal by a variety of supplies & have never as yet been unanimous. If they present a call to me I am told it will secure unanimity. I say again I place no confidence in these desultory remarks. I am not indifferent to their decisions, but experience teaches me not to take every thing for gospel, & I shall not be disappointed if I hear nothing about Stockport after I leave the Town. I could not expect to make a ‘great stir’ in such a place as S[tockport]. They are as familiar with the names of Hall, Thorpe [*sic*], Jay, Collyer, Raffles &c. as we are. To maintain a *standup* therefore is as much as could be expected.

Late in life, Pugsley wrote “A Brief History of Hanover Chapel,” in which he stated that he had been invited to preach for only two Sundays but was then asked to stay for three more.⁵⁷ He ended up staying virtually the whole month of July. He thus celebrated his twenty-eighth birthday (on 15 July) among strangers, this

55. *A Solemn and Affectionate Address from a Minister to His People who are in the Habit of Neglecting Public Worship* (2nd ed.; Stockport, 1806); Cheshire Record Office, Bishops’ Visitation Returns, EDV 7/3/232, 7/4/116, 7/6/344.

56. This is undoubtedly the “D. Davis [*sic*]” who was chosen to deliver one of the annual orations at Hoxton in 1816; see *Evangelical Magazine*, 24 (1816), p. 318. The original “Spenser” was presumably Thomas Spencer (1791-1811), a fellow Hoxtonian, drowned in the Mersey months after he had taken the congregation of Liverpool’s Newington Chapel by storm.

57. Stockport Central Library [hereafter SCL], Hanover Chapel Papers, B/W/7/29, Nathaniel K. Pugsley, “A Brief History of Hanover Chapel” (1859); subsequent citations and quotations will be to the printed transcription of his “Brief History” found in Heginbotham, *Stockport*, II, pp. 42-46.

perhaps contributing to the “low, miserable, romantic” feelings he had early in his stay.

Presumably the conflicts in the “church” and the “congregation,” that is, between the members and the attenders, had lasted since William Evans’s resignation in January 1814. Pugsley does not specify the issues being debated and neither does he state on this occasion (as he would later claim) that controversies were primarily between the trustees and the deacons. The breach is of some interest, nevertheless, in view of the schismatic origins of the chapel and the fact that another schism involving Pugsley would occur just a few years later. However “ludicrous” Pugsley thought the town to be, he probably was “quite a Politician” (as he had written from Miss W.’s), and he consequently concealed his true feelings. His tact, along with his provincial roots, Metropolitan education, and practical evangelicalism struck the right chords with the Orchard Street people; he won their affection from the start. The chapel filled up, his stay was extended, and there was every indication that he would receive an offer to occupy the Orchard Street pulpit on a permanent basis. In short, whether or not his preaching was “attended with that emotion that I could wish,” he appears to have succeeded in making a considerable “stir.”

Among the leading British preachers whom he saw as his rivals for the acclaim of Stopfordians, three delivered the prestigious annual sermon at the Stockport Sunday School. The collection after William Bengo Collyer’s sermon in 1810 amounted to £449, and Thomas Raffles’s appearance in 1815 (after Pugsley’s visit but before he accepted the Orchard Street pulpit) brought in £468. The man whose recommendation had helped Pugsley get into Hoxton, William Thorp, delivered the annual sermon in 1813, and the result was a collection of £521.⁵⁸ These must have seemed like dazzling sums to a ministerial student. Even though the proceeds went to the school and not to the guest preacher, Pugsley would have been fully justified in concluding that cotton manufacturing was not the only lucrative enterprise in Stockport.

The final major subject in Pugsley’s first letter from Stockport was the nondenominational Stockport Sunday School. It had moved into an imposing new building in 1806 (coincidentally, the same year that the Cheshire Union had been established), and it was reputedly the largest Sunday school in the world. Many Methodists sent their children there despite the fact that there were separate Wesleyan Methodist and Methodist New Connexion schools. Many Dissenting congregations likewise relied on the Stockport Sunday School and thereby saved

58. It is possible that Pugsley could have read about Collyer’s Stockport appearance while still on his Devon farm; see *Times* (7 Nov. 1810), p. 3d. SCL, B/II/6/25, Stockport Sunday School Lecturers (1811-14), gives the names of ministers who delivered the “monthly lectures” from June 1811 to May 1814. Collyer, Raffles and Thorp appear on this list, too. The other two ministers Pugsley mentioned were Robert Hall and William Jay. It is unclear when or where they appeared in Stockport, but perhaps they preached at one of the Congregational chapels.

the expense and time it would have taken to operate their own educational institutions. Orchard Street Chapel belonged to this group. As with countless nineteenth-century visitors, Pugsley found the scene at the Stockport Sunday School truly awe-inspiring. He was humbled by taking the pulpit there, although the experience was marred by one detail.

The first sabbath evening I preached a Jubilee Lecture in the immense school-room here before a congregation of two thousand. This place has been favoured with the finest specimens of pulpit eloquence ever heard. They published my name in hand bills about the town before I came unknown to me. I was rather displeased at the liberty they took with my 'excellent name' – especially being the first student that ever made his *entré* into this Temple of knowledge & piety. It is the glory of Stockport. It educates more than three thousand children.

Handbills for the school's annual sermons have been preserved. A hymn sheet for the one preceding Pugsley's visit, for example, indicates that the sermon had been delivered by Rowland Hill of London.⁵⁹ Pugsley was probably preaching a sermon to commemorate the laying of the foundation stone of the new building, an event that had occurred in June 1805, but if there were handbills announcing these early anniversaries, they do not seem to have survived.⁶⁰ The directors of the Stockport Sunday School must have made the decision to invite him based either on his reputation alone or on the testimony of someone who had heard him preach. In either case, the directors took an unprecedented step by having a student for the ministry preach in the school's "Large Room." It provides another indication that Pugsley's hearers regarded his homiletic abilities much more highly than did the anxious young preacher himself.

V

Pugsley returned to Hoxton Academy by way of Devon in August, and as expected, he soon received an invitation from Orchard Street Chapel to become its permanent minister. In his "Brief History" he said that he consulted with his Hoxton tutors and "some friends" about the decision. Presumably Simpson,

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59. *Selection of Music, to be performed in the Stockport Sunday School, On Sunday the 28th of August, 1814...* (Stockport, 1814), pr. s.sh.
60. A few miscellaneous items relating to the anniversaries are extant, however. The two earliest examples are: *An Address to the Children of the Stockport Sunday School, on the Anniversary, Held June 14, 1812, In Commemoration of Laying the Foundation Stone of that Building* (Stockport, 1812); and *Hymn, in Commemoration of the Twelfth Anniversary of the Stockport Sunday School, June 1817* (Stockport, 1817), pr. s.sh.

Blackburn and the others were positive in their responses,⁶¹ and before the end of the year, the appointment was confirmed. On Christmas Day 1815, he wrote to Blackburn about leaving his educational Eden: "To morrow morning I leave Hoxton – for ever! Never did I know until this hour the strength of my attachment to Hoxton. ...I am *now* a complete *Hoxtonian*. The four years I have spent here are the most interesting part of my life..." His psychological state, however, had apparently changed little from what it had been in July when he was quoting from *Paradise Lost* on his first trip to the North: "O do pray for me! I am despairing every moment! ...You will be concerned to find that my spirits are still very low." Yet also as before, there was a disparity between his depressed mental state and his growing public reputation. He had received an invitation to preach at a Stafford Sunday school, and he planned to stop there on his journey to Stockport.⁶²

Pugsley's letters to Blackburn present an unusually detailed picture of a minister's first year in the pulpit at Stockport. The first hurdle, of course, was the inaugural sermon, which he preached on 7 January 1816. For Pugsley, writing a month afterwards, it had been "a trying time."

The idea of taking charge of such a congregation completely overwhelmed me. It was with difficulty I commenced the services of the day, but after I 'got into it' I preached with more energy & feeling perhaps than I ever did before. It was indeed a 'refreshing season.' I regard it as one of the most important, & interesting days in this history of my existence.

Pugsley then witnessed a happy repetition of what had happened the previous summer: the morning congregation proceeded to grow in size with each passing Sunday. There were other indicators of both numerical and spiritual growth. Sunday evening services, which had been conducted in the vestry room before Pugsley's arrival, now attracted so many hundreds of people that the chapel was "crammed full." The vestry room, in fact, had become too small even to hold the weekly prayer meeting. Pugsley specifically mentioned that there were twenty or thirty members who, he thought, were particularly notable for their piety. These were presumably among those who asked him to publish his first sermon: "I have

61. Robert Simpson had served as an Independent minister in Bolton before becoming a tutor at Hoxton. Thus, he could have given specific advice to Pugsley on the advantages of a clerical career in one of Manchester's satellite towns (see the engraving *Rev. Robt. Simpson, Minister of the Gospel in Bolton near Manchester* [1 Aug. 1790], in *Christian's Magazine* 1 [1790], facing p. 303). Pugsley may also have written for advice to his former classmate, John Ely, who had been preaching in Rochdale since the summer of 1814 (Hamilton, "Memoir of Ely," pp. xxi-xxiv).

62. NCA, L 52/3/63, Pugsley to Blackburn, Hoxton Academy, 25 Dec. 1815.

returned a respectful, but positive negative..."⁶³ Indeed, Pugsley's modesty prevented him from publishing any of his sermons during a long and successful career. Members were also beginning to talk about enlarging the chapel. Pugsley likewise opposed that step, but admitted: "At the same time I hope, & believe it will be necessary on some future occasion."

Pugsley summed up his career after one month by saying that Stockport "has presented to me a *dark* side as well as a *bright*." The negative factors ("many trials, much suffering, & uncommon labor") were nevertheless "connected with a source of consolation which outweighs them all – a *probability of great success*."⁶⁴

In that same letter, he comments that "... there are some charming young Ladies in Stockport!!!" In his next extant communication to Blackburn, Pugsley writes that he has established a missionary society consisting of young ladies in the congregation. He may have been influenced by reports in the *Evangelical Magazine* about contributions to the London Missionary Society. Various groups in Manchester had sent a total of over £100, and other towns in Lancashire had also made substantial contributions.⁶⁵ By contrast, Pugsley wrote, "Stockport has been disgracefully behind with regard to this important object." Not more than fifty shillings a year had been collected at Orchard Street Chapel for the missions in previous years,⁶⁶ but the new missionary society, he thought would be able to raise fifty pounds. It was presumably in connection with mission collections that he was honoured one evening "with the society of two or three delightful *Nymphs* whom, you may be sure, I treated 'with all purity.'"⁶⁷

Pugsley wrote this letter in May at a time when the conditions for the handloom weavers were rapidly worsening. It is revealing that Pugsley makes no mention of these suffering workers and instead laments that some of the wealthy people in his congregation had sustained business reversals in the preceding weeks. One man had lost £10,000 and setbacks by others brought the total business losses in his flock to £20,000. The "liberality" of his congregation remained the same,

63. Pugsley may have heard about the fate of his former classmate, Richard Hamilton, during the latter's first year at Leeds (1815). No doubt flattered by requests to publish a sermon he had delivered extemporaneously, Hamilton wrote it out in a rather academic style and rushed it off to the printer. When his new congregation read the result, "he was denounced as a vain, pompous, and pedantic declaimer." William Hendry Stowell, *Memoir of the Life of Richard Winter Hamilton, LL.D., D.D.* (London, 1850), p. 104.

64. NCA, L 52/3/66, Pugsley to Blackburn, Stockport, 6 Feb. 1816.

65. *Evangelical Magazine*, 24 (1816), pp. 79, 159, 198.

66. This may have simply reflected the fact that Orchard Street did not have a permanent minister for most of 1814 and 1815. Collecting for the missions continued to be carried on outside the chapel during that time with some success. One Orchard Street member, John Brown, supervised the collection of over £18 for the missions, mostly contributed by workers in his cotton factory: *ibid.*, 22 (1814), pp. 162, 140.

67. NCA, L 52/3/69, Pugsley to Blackburn, Stockport, 25 May 1816.

however, and in particular, the renting of pews proceeded at a rapid pace. Only three were still left to be let. As a result, Pugsley's mood had changed dramatically from what it had been at Hoxton on Christmas Day: "They are a most excellent people. I knew not half their worth by my summer's visit. Their uncommon benevolence & affection make my work pleasant though it be hard." Whatever his feelings had been in his last days at the Academy, he could now state that "there are not four congregations in London with whom I would exchange."

Pugsley's next big hurdle was his ordination, which took place on 8 August 1816.⁶⁸ By the end of August, he was writing to Blackburn with details of the day's proceedings. The service lasted five hours and was attended by thirty or forty ministers, including Methodists and Unitarians. Among them was William Thorp of Bristol who delivered a pathos-filled charge that, according to Pugsley, "rendered it extremely difficult for me to maintain any thing like *collectedness*, and dignity of behaviour. There was hardly a *dry eye* in the place. Church people who had never been in a chapel before wept as well as others, and some of the *very highest* of them have declared that they could not sleep the night after."⁶⁹ The ceremony undoubtedly brought him into close contact with the ministers of the Cheshire Union. Following in William Evans's footsteps, he became secretary to the Union and wrote its annual report for 1816.⁷⁰

Pugsley's second full year at Stockport opened with further positive signs. He wrote to Blackburn from Bolton, where he had been invited to preach, about his success at Stockport: "Our Chapel is not only full of hearers, but our Church is encreasing [*sic*] very fast, & though the utmost strictness is maintained in our discipline, nearly forty members have been admitted since I commenced my ministry." In other aspects of his life, however, Pugsley was meeting with less success. Blackburn had recently married, but Pugsley writes laconically, "Of my *domestic* felicity I can say nothing." And he had further concerns: "... I am not without fear that, amidst the more active scenes of pastoral engagements, personal piety often suffers a depression." He immediately follows this comment with a reference to his state of mind when he first visited Stockport, a condition less akin to a decline in personal piety than to true psychological depression.⁷¹

Pugsley's last extant letter to Blackburn, dated 16 June 1817, likewise offers a hint, but only a hint, that not all was well: "My health has never been better – except a slight pain sometimes in my stomach, arising solely I believe from close confinement – but else my *ministerial life* especially contains nothing but a continual record of prosperity, felicity, and success."⁷² The close confinement, at

68. *Ibid.*, L 52/3/71, same to same, Stockport, 15 July 1816.

69. *Ibid.*, L 52/3/72, same to same, Stockport, 26 Aug. 1816.

70. Powicke, *Cheshire Union*, p. 29 n.

71. NCA, L 52/3/74, Pugsley to Blackburn, Stockport, 10 March 1817.

72. *Ibid.*, L 52/3/85, same to same, Stockport, 16 June 1817.

least, would soon be ended, if only temporarily, since Pugsley planned to visit the West Country and London. In this letter, Pugsley noted that he had saved all of Blackburn's letters starting with the first that he wrote when supplying Chelmsford. Pugsley's collection of Blackburn correspondence has disappeared, presumably destroyed by Pugsley or his heirs. The fact that Blackburn likewise appears to have saved all of Pugsley's letters suggests that their exchange of letters ended in 1817, and there is no indication that their friendship outlasted their correspondence. Perhaps Pugsley was able to visit Blackburn and his bride in the summer of 1817, and the visit did not go well. Perhaps Pugsley's depression (at least in "personal piety") and stomach pains were early indicators of trouble with his Stockport congregation, which in turn strained his relationship with Blackburn. Or perhaps the two men simply became inundated with pastoral work and drifted apart. Unless or until new evidence turns up, one can only speculate.

VI

Nevertheless, Pugsley may have learned from mutual friends or other sources about changes in Blackburn's situation linked to his friendship with Thomas Wilson. Wilson had been repairing and building chapels at his own expense for many years. In 1813, for instance, he built Paddington Chapel at a cost of over £7000. Blackburn preached there on at least one occasion, probably in 1818 when the congregation was searching for a new minister. In 1819, Wilson built Claremont Chapel, Pentonville, also at a cost of over £7000. Wilson invited Blackburn to preach there in the following year, and over the next two years Blackburn often participated in the religious life of the Claremont congregation. Finally in 1822, he left Finchfield to accept an appointment as Claremont's first permanent minister. Just eight years after leaving Hoxton, in other words, Blackburn took charge of an expensive, new metropolitan chapel, and he remained there until his death in 1855.⁷³ Like the Rowland Hills and the William Huntingtons, he had achieved great success, or so it must have appeared. Was his move from Essex to a metropolitan pulpit in the offing before 1822? If so, did Pugsley hear news or rumours of Blackburn's imminent promotion? Or did news flow in the other direction, that is, did Blackburn follow in the footsteps of his erstwhile friend in the North?

All of this, too, must remain a subject of conjecture, but there are striking parallels in the fortunes of the two men around the end of the Regency period. Like Blackburn, Pugsley left his first congregation after only a few years. The explanation Pugsley presents in his rather self-serving "Brief History" is vague on details except to imply that he was not a party to the disputes: "Unfortunately there had never been a very harmonious feeling between the trustees and the deacons, and the disagreements at length became so painful to me, that seeing no

73. Wilson, *Memoir of Thomas Wilson*, pp. 308-18; Waddington, *Congregational History*, V, pp. 198-200.

prospect of peace or usefulness, I resigned my charge in December 1819."⁷⁴ There appears to be no contemporary evidence that confirms Pugsley's statement about trustee-deacon conflicts during his pastorate. To be sure, he encountered such squabbles at his new chapel much later in the 1840s.⁷⁵ Perhaps Pugsley, writing in 1859, misremembered – or willfully misrepresented – the events of 1819 and conflated them with later disputes.

Both of Pugsley's obituaries, moreover, point in other directions. The account in the *Stockport Advertiser* states simply that "some differences arose between him and a portion of his congregation, which induced him to resign..." This sketch also refers to Pugsley's "sensitiveness."⁷⁶ The anonymous obituary in the *Congregational Year Book* was undoubtedly written by someone who knew him well (among other things, it is the only source to mention his early breakdown at Henley). The writer blames the lack of harmony at Orchard Street on the politics of the day. "Having no desire to mingle in the fray, or take side with either party," the notice continues, Pugsley "found his usefulness was interfered with, and his comfort impaired..." In such circumstances, his resignation was inevitable.⁷⁷ The reference to the politics of the day is easily explained. Stockport, like much of the nation, was transfixed in 1818-19 by the tumultuous campaign for radical political reform. The agitations climaxed in the Peterloo Massacre at Manchester in August 1819, but Stockport had its share of excitement too, including visits by the charismatic orator Henry Hunt, numerous public disorders, and the shooting of a local constable by a supporter of the radicals.⁷⁸ Despite his youthful effusions to the contrary, Pugsley was not a "flaming democrat" and that fact may have limited his "usefulness" with at least part of his congregation. It will probably never be known for certain how far Pugsley was able to remain aloof from the acrimonious disputes (the two obituaries contradict one another on this point) or the degree to which the antagonisms between the radical sympathizers and the anti-radicals in his congregation corresponded to alleged divisions between the deacons and trustees at Orchard Street.

It is clear, however, that disputes were taking their toll. An account written by Pugsley fairly close to the events hints that he himself was having doubts about

74. Heginbotham, *Stockport*, II, p. 46.

75. "Trusteeship Extraordinary," and "Orchard-Street Chapel Stockport," *Christian Witness*, 2 (1845), pp. 170-72, 257-61.

76. "The Late Rev. N.K. Pugsley," *Stockport Advertiser* (12 June 1868), p. 3d.

77. Obituary of Pugsley, p. 270. Pugsley's fellow Hoxtonian, William Urwick, spoke at the funeral in Stockport and may have been the author of his obituary or may have contributed some of the material used in its composition. Mayor, *Cheshire Congregationalism*, p. 26, claims that "Pugsley resigned as a result of a dispute with the trustees," but he provides no evidence for this interpretation. A discussion of the secession and its aftermath (but not its causes) can be found in Absalom Clark, "Stockport," in *Historical Sketches of Nonconformity in The County Palatime of Chester*, ed. William Urwick [Jr.] (London, 1864), pp. 305-6.

78. Glen, *Urban Workers*, ch. 10 ("The Peterloo Era").

the impact of his ministry. When he visited William Bennet in the Peak District in the summer of 1819, he meditated on his belief that the spirits of people who were saved could have direct communication with people on earth: "A minister, for instance, might look down and behold many on whom his instructions had produced no effect while he was on earth..."⁷⁹ Statistics of new members indicate that initial enthusiasms had indeed cooled after 1817.

| | | | |
|------|----|------|----|
| 1814 | 1 | 1817 | 26 |
| 1815 | 5 | 1818 | 6 |
| 1816 | 20 | 1819 | 6 |

Obviously, since Pugsley was talking about hundreds of new people attending his services in 1816-17, these membership figures have to be multiplied considerably (perhaps by as much as ten) in order to gauge his true impact.⁸⁰

One additional insight into Pugsley's resignation can be gained by comparing his "Brief History" with another primary source. Pugsley claims that for a short time after his resignation he was undecided as to his future course. He admired the Anglican liturgy, and almost went into the Church of England (like Robert Anlezark, a lacklustre predecessor at Orchard Street). Yet Pugsley asserted that he did not agree with certain parts of the Book of Common Prayer, and there was a further difficulty: "I had received my first religious impressions under a Nonconformist ministry, which, to me, was a personal conviction of its apostolic character." Late in life, in brief, he claimed that he had consciously chosen to remain a Dissenter in the 1820s as a matter of principle.

Yet during January 1820, barely a month after Pugsley's departure from Orchard Street, a London correspondent wrote to Blackburn with a much different viewpoint:

Have you heard of the sad circumstances in which our quondam friend Pugsley has involved himself? He is endeavoring to tread in the steps of D[avid] Davies, and is as fast as possible travelling to the steeple. If he does not succeed in obtaining episcopal ordination from the Bishop of Chester, he hopes to get a chapel built [for] him in Stockport where the church services may be rendered....What shall we say of the principle of such men? Or rather is it not questionable whether they have any principle at all?⁸¹

79. Pugsley, "Account of Bennet," p. 51.

80. SCD, D 1361/1, Orchard Street Church Book (1789-1832), ff. 62-69.

81. NCA, L 52/4/1, Thomas James to Blackburn, Little Moorfields, 20 Jan. 1820. James served with Thomas Wilson on the Hoxton Committee.

According to this account, Pugsley's first choice was a position in the Church of England, and failing that, he would try to get a chapel built for himself. The correspondent gives no hint that Pugsley retained a commitment to organised Dissent. If that were true in January 1820, Pugsley was probably being coy when he wrote nearly four decades later in the "Brief History" about his indecision at that point in his life and his surprise when leading Stockport industrialists had a dinner at which the construction of a new chapel for him was announced. Several wealthy members of Orchard Street Chapel (mostly cotton manufacturers) had seceded with Pugsley.⁸² It seems plausible to suggest that their support and the possibility of having his own house of worship were factors in his original decision to resign from Orchard Street and then to abandon his plans for an Anglican career. Denominational commitments, it can be surmised, were less important to Pugsley than his desire (or psychological need) for "great success."

It was a difficult transition for Pugsley. He claimed that he received no salary between the time of his resignation in December 1819 and the opening of the new chapel in September 1821. During most of the intervening period, he continued his clerical vocation in premises known as St. George's Chapel on Lancashire Hill in Heaton Norris.⁸³ The cost of the new chapel, approximately £3000, was partly met by contributions of wealthy members of the congregation at the time of its construction, but the remaining chapel debt was not extinguished for another quarter century. It is not surprising that Pugsley expanded his career as a guest preacher (presumably for a fee) during the transition period. He preached the Hatherlow Independent Sunday School sermon every year from 1820 to 1826, for instance, many times walking in his clerical gown from Stockport to nearby Bredbury. Pugsley named his new house of worship "Hanover Chapel" at the suggestion of William Bengo Collyer "in loyal recognition of the reigning dynasty of this country."⁸⁴

For over a decade, Pugsley's idiosyncratic path alienated him from official Congregationalism. The January 1820 letter that questioned his principles was private, but similar criticisms soon made their way into the *Congregational Magazine*. Referring to Pugsley exactly one year later, the magazine reported that "...this gentleman, although educated at the expense of dissenters, has resigned his

82. SCL, B/W/7/25, Hanover Chapel Account Book (1821-69), unpaginated prefatory material containing a list of early trustees, almost all of whom were connected with the cotton industry.

83. On St. George's, see SCL, B/W/7/29A, "Account of money received from the treasurer of St. George's Church in Heaton Norris by James Richardson," an account book whose entries begin in June 1820; *ibid.*, copy of the registration of a Dissenters' place of worship in Heaton Norris (6 Oct. 1820); and Cheshire Record Office [hereafter CRO], ECU 3152/56/1, Hanover Chapel Baptismal Register (1816-85), pp. 5-6, which contains baptismal records for both 1820 and 1821.

84. "The Late Rev. N.K. Pugsley," p. 3d. The new chapel could hold about 850 persons. Hanover was also the name of Collyer's own celebrated chapel in Peckham.

charge, with the view, as is generally understood, of conforming to the national church. A spacious chapel is erecting for him in the town, in which it is expected that the Liturgy of the Church of England will be used.” By the end of 1821, the magazine quoted an account of the opening services at Hanover Chapel that confirmed Congregationalists’ worst fears about Pugsley’s liturgical propensities: “... the performance, or exhibition, as a whole, was extremely disgusting to all serious persons, and to none more than the worthy ministers who preached on the occasion.”⁸⁵

Pugsley’s 1822 publication of a posthumous work by William Bennet triggered further attacks. The main point of contention was Pugsley’s introductory memoir of Bennet where Pugsley suggests that his principles were similar to those of Bennet and William Evans, Pugsley’s immediate predecessor at Orchard Street. To some, Pugsley appeared to be guilty of using the views of two deceased Congregational ministers to justify his break with Congregationalism. A splenetic *Congregational Magazine* reviewer stated that he had experienced “extremely unpleasant feelings excited by Mr. Pugsley’s meagre, unsatisfactory, and unjustifiable memoir.” He hoped that Pugsley would “lay aside his offensive peculiarities of composition, and make himself acquainted with his subject before he undertakes to enlighten the public...” It is surely no coincidence that the December 1822 issue of the magazine included a letter written by Evans in 1812 in which he urges an unnamed Cheshire minister not to leave his position. Among other things, Evans states: “I hope you have not fallen into the hands of any of those *robbers of churches* who unhinge the minds of ministers, by holding forth the delusive lure of more splendid offers, and of a more brilliant station.”⁸⁶ Then, the January 1823 issue of the *Congregational Magazine* opened with a newly-written account of Bennet’s life which, among other things, disputes Pugsley’s memoir and its conclusion that Bennet was sympathetic towards “The Church of England, and the use of her Liturgy.”⁸⁷

VII

Despite barbs from the Congregationalists, Pugsley, like his erstwhile friend Blackburn, was clearly on the road to success by the early 1820s. Hanover Chapel revenues appear to have been substantial from the outset, and this allowed

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85. “Statistical View,” p.50; “List of Meeting Houses Opened,” *Congregational Magazine*, 4 (1821), p. 718. The official Congregational cause at Stockport was undoubtedly hurt by Pugsley’s secession. When the Revd. G.F. Ryan took over at Orchard Street in 1822, he compiled a new list of members, and it included fewer than half the members who had joined under Pugsley in 1816-19. In SCL, Orchard Street Church Book, see the list of new members under Pugsley (ff. 62-69) and Ryan’s list (ff. 78-87).
86. Review of Bennet, *A Treatise on the Gospel Constitution*, in *Congregational Magazine*, 5 (1822), pp. 307, 311. The Evans letter is in *ibid.*, pp. 635-6.
87. J.T., “Memoir of the Rev. William Bennet, Late of Chapel-en-le-Frith,” *ibid.*, 6 (1823), pp. 3n.-4n. This onslaught from the Congregationalists may explain why a collection was taken at Hanover Chapel for the *Baptist Missionary Society* at this time: *The Annual Report of the Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society* (London, 1823), p. 60.

Pugsley to be paid an annual salary of about £200 during his early pastorate.⁸⁸ Such a generous income enabled the one-time West Country rustic to settle with apparent ease into the ranks of the urban middle class. Some years later, a local diarist portrayed him as an amiable man who joined with friends who were playing billiards on one occasion and who always seemed to have time to smoke a cigar with visitors.⁸⁹

Pugsley proceeded to have a highly respectable, thirty-seven-year ministry at Hanover Chapel. It goes beyond the scope of this article to trace his subsequent career in detail, but a few important themes can be mentioned. "Preaching was his *forte*" at Hanover Chapel according to his obituary in the *Stockport Advertiser*, "and to this he directed all his energies and made all his acquisitions subservient."⁹⁰ At the same time, he managed to retain the support of several wealthy Stockport businessmen. As before, this local élite served him well. According to Frederick Powicke, the chapel's indebtedness "so preyed upon Mr. Pugsley's mind that the anxiety (in 1844) broke down his health."⁹¹ Yet at a single fund-raising "tea party" later in the year, the remaining £700 debt on the chapel was paid off, most of it by well-to-do members.⁹² His early commitment to foreign missionary activities likewise persisted. By the late 1830s, Hanover was typically contributing £100 or more each year to the London Missionary Society, an amount that often exceeded the contributions of Orchard Street and Tabernacle chapels combined.⁹³ Pugsley also became increasingly involved with institutions established to aid the lower orders closer to home. *The Stockport Advertiser* obituary states that he "took a part in originating or sustaining most of the institutions of the town, such as the Mechanics' Institution, the Ragged School, the Stockport Sunday School, the Town Mission, the Dorcas Society, the Bible Society, and especially the Infirmary."⁹⁴ While his formal political views

88. SCL, B/W/7/25, Hanover Chapel Account Book (1821-69), pp. 2-3, reveals that the revenue from pew rents alone was bringing in nearly £250 per year in the 1820s. SCL, B/W/7/26, Minutes of Hanover Chapel Trustees Meetings (1822-58), meeting of 1 Dec. 1834, indicate that Pugsley's salary was raised from £210 to £230 on that occasion but these minutes do not give earlier salary figures. It is possible that his salary had been £210 from the beginning.
89. SCL, Diary of John A. Hunt, entries of 29 March and 19 April 1859; and various entries for 1860 (e.g., 14 June, 29 Oct. and 5 Nov., the latter featuring a game of billiards). I am grateful to David Reid of the Stockport Central Library for drawing my attention to this recently acquired manuscript diary and for offering perceptive comments on an earlier draft of this article.
90. "The Late Rev. N.K. Pugsley," p. 3d.
91. Powicke, *Cheshire Union*, p. 223.
92. Phillips, *Sectarian Spirit*, p. 79.
93. See *The Report of the Directors to the Forty-Fourth General Meeting of the... London Missionary Society* (London, 1838), "Contributions," p. xxiv; and the *Reports* for subsequent years.
94. "The Late Rev. N.K. Pugsley," p. 3d; see also Heginbotham, *Stockport*, II, pp. 47, 398.

remained obscure, his activities from the 1830s onward came to resemble those being advocated by the Tory paternalists.

Even Pugsley's break with the Congregationalists was repaired. He appears on lists of "Congregational Ministers" in the *Congregational Magazine* from 1826 onward, and in 1828 he joined with two Congregational ministers to deliver sermons at the opening of an Independent chapel near Stockport.⁹⁵ By 1830, small contributions from Hanover Chapel began appearing in the account book of the Cheshire Union. The amount unexpectedly rose to £15 in September 1833, perhaps indicating that Hanover had been accepted into the organization. Formal membership must have been conferred before April 1834, when the Cheshire Union held its semi-annual meeting in Hanover Chapel.⁹⁶ Pugsley was no doubt glad to have this additional source of prestige and legitimation. For its part, the Cheshire Union was surely pleased to restore its access to the financial resources of numerous wealthy Dissenters in a thriving industrial district.

The background and early events of Pugsley's clerical career provide numerous insights into the Congregational revival of the late Georgian period. Among other things, the need to recruit increasing numbers of young men for the ministry remained a perennial problem. Pugsley's case appears to be fairly typical in that the first step in his recruitment was accomplished by a Congregational minister in the provinces. The subsequent training of recruits, both formally and informally, was often expensive and time-consuming. At the outset, many of the students had to be provided with a basic liberal education. In addition, they had to be given courses that would provide them with a detailed knowledge of Christian doctrines as well as the fundamentals of Congregational beliefs. They also had to learn a number of practical skills, perhaps most importantly how to deliver an effective sermon. Either as part of this process or later, as working Congregational ministers, these men had to become adept at dealing with people from different social backgrounds, with problems involving chapel finances and administration, and with contentious issues arising within their congregations, issues that might require substantial, and at times, superhuman skills in conflict resolution.

In addition, there remained many imponderables. A few clerical students might be unwilling or unable to complete their formal education. Those who graduated from Hoxton or one of the other theological institutions might not be able to find a suitable position or might be attracted to clerical venues overseas. Emigration

95 *Congregational Magazine*, 9 (1826), p. 708; *ibid.*, 11 (1828), p. 223. Pugsley had not broken all of his ties with the Congregationalists. For example, his regular annual contribution of one guinea to Hoxton/Highbury, which was begun in 1818, continued without interruption. For the first contribution, see *Report of the Committee of the Hoxton Academy* (London, 1818), p. 64.

96. CRO, ECU 3151/1/1, Cheshire Congregational Union, Minutes of Annual Meetings (1843-93), unpaginated prefatory material listing sites of semi-annual meetings 1814-47. *Ibid.*, 3151/1/9, Cheshire Congregational Union Accounts (1815-44), entries for 30 Sept. 1830, 15 Sept 1831, 27 Sept 1832, 26 Sept. 1833, etc. Cf. SCL, B/W/7/25,

was the major reason why nearly one out of six Hoxtonians was lost to the Congregational ministry within five years after graduating.⁹⁷ Others, like Pugsley, bolted from the ranks of Congregationalism after only a few years, the time and money invested in them lost to the organized Congregational movement. The growth of free enterprise clearly affected the religious arena as well as the market place. Acquiring fame and fortune outside the confines of established institutions seemed increasingly possible amidst the bustle and change of the Industrial Revolution. The temptation proved irresistible for many ministers. Pugsley was probably different from other seceders in one respect, however. After leaving Congregationalism and achieving success, not many clerics imitated Pugsley and retraced their steps into the Congregational fold.

Pugsley died in 1868,⁹⁸ but he had retired ten years earlier for reasons that he explains in his "Brief History": "Finding my memory beginning to fail, in the seventy-second year of my age, and having a great dislike to the reading of sermons, I resigned my pastorate over a most kind, united, and *forbearing* people in July, 1858..."⁹⁹ At the conclusion of his clerical career, as at the beginning, we find him opposed to mere sermon reading and probably committed to delivering memorized sermons enlivened by extemporaneous comments. His reputation was so considerable that John Evans included him in his 1850 collection of biographical sketches of Lancashire authors and "orators."

Whether we take Mr. Pugsley as a preacher in the pulpit, as an orator on the platform, or as a pastor in the homes of his people, we shall most assuredly find a man of high intellect, of considerable attainments, strong judgment, humane heart, and powerful application to everything that comes before his notice... No minister in Stockport or its neighbourhood demands the esteem of the people, both for his talent as a preacher, and his excellencies as a pastor, more than the reverend gentleman before us.¹⁰⁰

In other words, Pugsley had been acclaimed as one of the best ministers in the region at the beginning of the 1850s, but before the close of the decade he was expressing gratitude to his congregation for being so "forbearing." The reason for this particular indication of modesty is unclear, and it may have simply been a reference to his declining pulpit skills. There is also another possibility. Although this farm lad from Devon had found a paradise of sorts in industrial Stockport, perhaps the "celestial light" had never entirely succeeded in vanquishing the "mournful gloom." As a consequence, some of the nagging insecurities that he had struggled with since his youth (and discussed in candid letters at the outset of his clerical career) may have bedevilled him to the end.

ROBERT GLEN

97. Brown, "Congregational Ministry," p. 12.

98. His death is noticed in the *Manchester Guardian* (8 June 1868), p. 4f.

99. Heginbotham, *Stockport*, II, p. 46 (emphasis added).

100. John Evans, *Lancashire Authors and Orators: A Series of Literary Sketches of Some of the Principal Authors, Divines, Members of Parliament, &c., Connected with the County of Lancaster* (London, 1850), p. 213.

BENJAMIN PARSONS OF EBLEY CHAPEL

Benjamin Parsons was a minister of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. During the earliest years of his ministry he used the Anglican Prayer Book and wore a surplice, but in later years adopted the practice of the Independents and identified himself with them. He spent the whole of his life, apart from travelling and speaking tours, in Gloucestershire, a county which, as Geoffrey Nuttall has noted, has always been hospitable to radical Christianity. Contemporaries called him "the Oberlin of Gloucestershire", comparing his influence in the county to that of the French Lutheran pastor, educationalist and philanthropist in Ban de la Roche in the Vosges valley.¹ Tudur Jones has called him "one of the earliest pioneers of what was later to be called 'the Social Gospel'."² An older contemporary who outlived him remembered him not only as a faithful minister but as one who "prominently filled the public eye and ear, with his agitation of nearly all the social, political and economical questions of the day."³

There is a lengthy record of his life, with selections from published and unpublished writings, by a younger contemporary whose first ministry was in Parsons's birthplace, North Nibley, during the last years of Parsons's life. Paxton Hood entitled his work, *The Earnest Minister* (London 1856). Parsons published several books and pamphlets during his lifetime, and most of these are available either in Gloucester (the Record Office and Public Library) or the British Library, though it is unfortunate that the Ebley Chapel records for the period of Parsons's ministry are scant. He was considered worthy of an entry in the first *Dictionary of National Biography*. Subsequently he has been mentioned in histories of the anti-slavery movement, education, temperance, and the anti-corn law movement; his contribution to what was later known as the feminist movement has not yet been fully recognized, with the notable exception of Clyde Binfield's *Belmont's Portias: Victorian Nonconformists and Middle-Class Education for Girls* (London 1981).⁴ An article in the *URCHS Journal*, "The Public Face of Dissent: Stroud 1830-52" by Philip Walmsley, gave considerable space to Parsons's role as local radical.⁵

In 1998 the chapel celebrated its bicentenary and a history was written to mark the occasion.⁶ The chapel continues as a member of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion in the building which was erected as a school during Parsons's

1. Jean Frédéric Oberlin (1740-1825).
2. R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England 1662-1962* (London, 1962), p. 210.
3. P.H. Fisher, *Notes and Recollections of Stroud* (Stroud 1871, reissued 1986), p. 52.
4. There is an extract from Parsons's *The Mental and Moral Dignity of Woman* in John Wolfe (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain*, vol. V, pp. 271-3 in the section on "Men, women and the question of gender".
5. *JURCHS*, IV/10 May 1992. In 1997 a former minister of Ebley Chapel, Norman Lloyd, wrote a dissertation on Benjamin Parsons, and I am indebted to him for information on archive sources.
6. Crystal Harrison, *Ebley Chapel 1798-1998*, privately printed (1998).

lifetime. A granite obelisk in the graveyard (at present unkempt) behind the chapel marks the grave of Benjamin Parsons.

Parsons began his ministry at Ebley on 16 July 1827.⁷ His radicalism had been formed early, during the harsh years of agricultural distress through the Napoleonic wars. Two days before he was born on 16 February 1797 in North Nibley his father, already over sixty, was given notice to leave his farm by the landlord and his animals and equipment were sold. For the remaining years of his life, Thomas Parsons had to eke out a living as a toll-gate keeper, and died when his son was six. In later life Benjamin Parsons said, perhaps in a depressed moment, that "when I entered the world my friends prayed for my death" because the future was so bleak.⁸ These early experiences meant that he grew up with a strong sense of the injustice suffered by the working classes.

Both his parents, Thomas and Anna, had been influenced by George Whitefield's circle of preachers, particularly through attending Dursley Tabernacle, which stood in an area much visited by both George Whitefield and John Wesley. According to the local folklore the Parsons family was distantly related to William Tyndale. Before Benjamin's birth, their farm was a meeting place for itinerant preachers. After Thomas Parsons's death, Rowland Hill sometimes preached in Anna Parsons's cottage, and took an interest in the boy, whom he introduced to the grammar school at Wotton-under-Edge. After leaving school, and a period of private tuition with the curate of Wotton, Parsons spent nine years apprenticed to a tailor, a Mr. Reynolds who was also deacon at the Independent Chapel at Frampton-on-Severn. It was during this time that he learnt Latin. In later years he valued that period of his life among the working classes; "I became acquainted with their manners and habits, and learnt to take an interest in everything that concerns their welfare in both worlds, and hence originated the few efforts I have made for their benefit."⁹

Gradually he was drawn into the life of the surrounding chapels. Three local ministers in particular were an influence: John Burder at Old Chapel, Stroud,¹⁰ John Rees at Rodborough Tabernacle,¹¹ and William Winterbotham, the Baptist minister at Shortwood, near Nailsworth.¹² It was as a member of Rodborough Tabernacle that he became conscious of a call to ministry. His mother however thought that he did not have the qualities required for a minister, and if she included tact and eloquent speech amongst these qualities she was right. His

7. Rowland Hill took part in his ordination.

8. Quoted *CYB 1856*, p. 228.

9. Quoted in E. Paxton Hood, *The Earnest Minister* (London, 1856), p. 20.

10. John Burder (1785-1867) was the son of George Burder, secretary of the London Missionary Society, and brother of H.F. Burder, a tutor at Hoxton Academy. He was an excellent scholar, and like Parsons supported the temperance movement.

11. John Rees (c. 1771-1833) was originally ordained in the Calvinistic Methodist Church in South Wales. He left Rodborough for Crown Street, London in 1823.

12. William Winterbotham had served a four-year prison sentence in Newgate Gaol for his attacks on the Plymouth Corporation.

biographer noted that "eloquence was no property of the character of Mr. Parsons" and that "he had no conciliatory arts," remarks echoed by his supporters as well as his opponents. "He was always plain, pungent and argumentative, and never toned down or weakened his harangues by elegance of refinement. In opposing persons or things obnoxious to him, his manner was bold, undaunted, scornful and derisive," wrote Fisher.¹³ He could on occasion be bitingly sarcastic, and easily provoked hostile reactions. It is not surprising that he was so frequently at the centre of controversy.

He entered Cheshunt College in 1821, remaining there for four years. It is not easy to trace any particular personal influences during that time. His chief tutor must have been William Kemp, of whom he wrote after leaving the College that his classical attainments were good, but that he was "not competent" for the theological tutorship.¹⁴ He seems, however, to have acquired a great love of Hebrew which remained with him during his ministry. It was also at this stage that he read a life of Jean Frédéric Oberlin, and was inspired to try to follow Oberlin's example. We know that he valued an educated ministry. "With those who are afraid of *over*-education, we have no sympathy," he wrote.¹⁵ "Since the days of the apostles, the Jesuits have been the only body of religious teachers who have exhibited to the world the true idea of what the ministry might be made by a proper education. The gospel requires nothing more for the triumph of its principles than a race of Jesuits without their Jesuitism."¹⁶ He never regretted that he had not attended one of the two ancient English universities, for "there is hardly a man goes to Oxford and Cambridge, but comes away with a mind of smaller dimensions than he had when he entered."¹⁷

By the time he reached Ebley, after a short period of preaching at Swansea, he was already convinced that education was the key to the improvement of all aspects of life for the poor, who formed the major part both of his congregation and of the community as a whole in Ebley. He had taught in the Sunday School at Frampton during the years of his apprenticeship at a time when Nonconformist Sunday Schools in Gloucestershire were rapidly increasing.¹⁸ Ebley was not a parish in itself, but a hamlet within the parish of Stonehouse and Runswick, though by the time Parsons died a new parish of Cainscross had been created to include Ebley. The hamlet lay in a valley across the Gloucestershire hills, two miles from Stroud, one mile from Rodborough. The main occupations were agriculture and cloth making, and the area had recently expanded in population because of the building of a new mill. Parsons was unusual in being both the

13. Fisher, pp. 52-3.

14. Cheshunt College Archive C9/6/27, letter 15 April 1826.

15. Quoted Hood p.182.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 184-5.

17. Benjamin Parsons, *A Letter to Richard Cobden* (London 1852), 20.

18. Between 1818 and 1833 the number of Nonconformist Sunday Schools in Gloucestershire increased threefold, from 40 to 120. See A. Platts and G.H. Hainton, *Education in Gloucestershire: A Short History* (Gloucester, 1954), p. 51.

minister of a poor congregation, and a nationally-known figure. – a rare voice among Congregationalists.

The chapel, founded in 1789, had been without a minister for thirteen years when Parsons arrived. It was in a low state, with a small congregation and a heavy debt on the building. "The tiles on the roof had decomposed, the timber had partly given way, and the rain frequently fell in the Chapel during divine service."¹⁹ From the first, and throughout his ministry, Parsons put into practice his educational ideas. He began to hold evening lectures, based on his current reading, and started a Sunday School. He found an eager response. After thirteen years he felt the time had come to put into practice his more ambitious scheme of establishing a day school. With characteristic energy he set about raising funds. A combination of local effort and wider appeals raised sufficient to build a school large enough to hold between 300 and 400 children, opened in 1840. It was a hive of activity from morning until late at night, accommodating a library, a mechanics' institute, a benefit society and a literary society as well as a day school. He believed strongly that religious and secular education should not be separated: "To sever scriptural from secular learning is one of the most crafty devices of the prince of darkness to destroy souls, and its advocacy by religious men occasions more exultations among demons than all the writings of Gibbon and Voltaire."²⁰ By the time Parsons had reached the end of his ministry there were regular congregations of between 400 and 500 every Sunday.²¹

Like many of his contemporaries he took in a few private pupils to his own home to help make ends meet, though not all were fee-paying. He held a class in Greek New Testament which included factory workers of both sexes.²² He once expressed a wish that the time would come when "all persons of all ranks, and of each sex will resolve to read the Scriptures in the very words in which they were written."²³

The Ebley school was not unique, though it was a strikingly successful and energetic example of the kind of voluntary school now springing up in other parts of Gloucestershire associated with Nonconformist chapels. At first the school accepted a government grant, though Parsons was later to regret this. It cannot be said that the methods were innovative. William Webb, who was appointed schoolmaster and who outlived Parsons, had trained at Borough Road and used the monitorial system.

Parsons was an ally of Edward Miall and Edward Baines in advocating voluntary rather than state provision of education, and he proved that the system could work in his own community, albeit at considerable sacrifice. "There has not

19. *Ebley Chapel and Schools*, Appeal leaflet 1848, Gloucester Record Office D2538/7/1.

20. *Countess of Huntingdon's New Magazine*, February, 1850.

21. *Victoria County History of Gloucestershire X*, (1972), p. 270.

22. Hood p. 131.

23. *Countess of Huntingdon's New Magazine*, April 1851.

been a year but I might have trebled my salary by leaving my present charge; but the prospect of raising up an enlightened and moral population in this manufacturing and agricultural community has been to me more imposing than the largest incomes which have been offered me.”²⁴ On many issues he was a supporter of Richard Cobden, but not on that of education. In 1852 he published a “Letter to Richard Cobden Esq. on the Impolicy and Tyranny of any System of State Education.” “You cannot devise any system of national education which will not be tyrannical, irreligious and immoral; and which will not debase rather than benefit the nation” was the essence of his argument.²⁵ This theme was pursued in his *Education, the Birthright of Every Human Being* (London, 1845),²⁶ which also pleaded for education for girls as much as for boys, reinforcing the argument of his major work three years earlier, *The Mental and Moral Dignity of Woman*.

The most remarkable aspect of Parsons’s educational theory and practice was his interest in and enthusiasm for the education of girls. In 1842, the year in which Sarah Ellis, the wife of a Congregational minister, published her book on *The Daughters of England*, in which she reminded women how important it was that they should always be content to be inferior to men, Benjamin Parsons published his *The Mental and Moral Dignity of Woman*. According to Paxton Hood, Parsons was much influenced as a young man by a book called *The Test of Truth* (London, 1831) by Mary Jane Graham,²⁷ a book which remained a favourite of his in later years; he seems to have been impressed by the intellectual qualities of the author. He was an admirer of both the personal and intellectual qualities of the Countess of Huntingdon. His thinking on the position of women was stimulated by preparing a series of sermons on both male and female biblical characters during the earlier years of his ministry, and later through preaching an anniversary sermon which drew the attention of parents to the importance of the education of their daughters. The response to these encouraged him to develop his arguments in a book. His thinking was given a further spur by reading a review article in the *Westminster Review* for January 1841 on “Woman and her social position” and finding himself in agreement with the reviewer’s sympathies.

His aim was “to prove satisfactorily that the minds of women are equal to those of man.”²⁸ He wrote partly from his own experience that girls learn as well as boys, sometimes better. In a memoir of his daughter who died three years later in 1845 he wrote that Lizzie “most fully confirmed him in the belief that what he has said concerning the ‘Mental and Moral Dignity of Woman’ is most fully borne out

24. Parsons, *Letter to Richard Cobden*, p. 4.

25. *Letter*, p. 38.

26. Reissued as *Education the Natural Want and Birthright of Every Human Being* (London, 1850).

27. Mary Jane Graham (1803-30). Charles Bridge wrote a biography of her, *A Memoir of Miss Jane Mary Jane Graham, Late of Stoke Fleming, Devon* (London, 1833).

28. *The Mental and Moral Dignity of Woman*, p. iv.

by fact,” adding that “the supposed inferiority of the intellect of the softer sex must be traced to education, and not to nature.”²⁹ The branding of women who cultivated their intellects as “blue stockings” or “petticoated philosophers,” which indicated a failure to appreciate their contribution, was, he claimed, a deprivation of men as well as women. In the main section of the book he argued from a detailed categorisation of nine operations of the mind or thought that in each women’s powers were equal to those of men. Like all clerical writers on the subject he quoted Scripture, but came to different conclusions from others. He used his knowledge of Hebrew to demonstrate that the word employed in the Authorized Version to translate the description of woman in Genesis 2: 18, “help meet”, actually placed woman on an equality with man, but had been debased by the current attribution of inferiority to women; “... nothing has tended more to degrade women than those low and vulgar interpretations which have been given to the text in question.”³⁰ When he quoted from Paul, it was from Galatians (3:28), rather than from the more usually-quoted passages in Corinthians admonishing women to be silent. “We shall, perhaps, by and by discover that in natural mental power, as in Christianity, there is neither ‘male or female, barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free.’ ”³¹

It is difficult to assess the influence of this book. It went through three editions (1842, 1849, 1856). On its first appearance, the *Evangelical Magazine* noted its originality, but criticised the author for not giving sufficient attention to “the peculiarities which distinguish the mental and moral powers of women,” thereby perhaps missing the point.³² But the same magazine welcomed its reissue in 1856 and wished it an extensive sale.³³

In 1830 Parsons had married Amelia Fry of Devonport. We are told very little about her except that she took a class of young women in the chapel. They had at least two sons and three daughters. The eldest son, Richard, went to Mill Hill, while the daughters were educated in Parsons’s own school. It is clear from the letters to his children quoted by Hood that Parsons was deeply concerned about their education. We know that his third daughter Anna, together with her husband, Thomas Lloyd,³⁴ minister of St Ives Free Church from 1861 until 1885, were sufficiently enthusiastic about the education of girls to raise the money to purchase a local Anglican school whose owner was leaving and to run it themselves. Slepe Hall educated many of the daughters of local Nonconformists, though it was not as much of a pioneering enterprise as one might have hoped.

29. Benjamin Parsons, *A Short Memoir of Elizabeth P. Parsons* (Stroud, 1845), pp. 21-22.

30. *The Mental and Moral Dignity of Woman*, p. 19.

31. *Education, the Natural Want and Birthright of Every Human Being* (London, 1850), p. 35. In his biography of Parsons, Paxton Hood provided in an appendix a series of 165 questions and answers on “Female Characters in Scripture”.

32. *Evangelical Magazine* 1842, pp. 274-5.

33. *Evangelical Magazine* 1856, p. 711.

34. Thomas Lloyd was Parsons’s successor at Ebley before moving to St. Ives.

Although education was Parsons's dominating interest throughout his ministry, many other causes claimed his interest. He was often attacked for being a political preacher. This did not deter him for he perceived his role as including the prophetic:

A crafty aristocracy and a hireling priesthood have wished to impress on the public mind that Moses and the prophets were only *spiritual* instructors, and thus have laboured to frighten religious men from engaging in the political renovation of the world. The Almighty intends that all his *real* disciples shall be *political* as well as *religious agitators*.³⁵

He told readers of the *Tracts for Fustian Jackets and Smock Frocks*, which he wrote between 1847 and 1849, that to be a politician was one of their "most solemn Christian duties."³⁶ By this he meant in effect that employees should not be cowed into automatically voting for the candidate favoured by their employers, but should form their own judgment after reading and discussion. In a lecture he once reminded his audience that "the prophets are never more severe than when they denounce those who trample upon the rights of mankind."³⁷

The causes in which he was involved usually related to justice for the poor, rather than the abolition of social or political restrictions on Dissenters. Early in his ministry, in 1832, he took a public stand in Stroud against Peter Borthwick, the defender of the slave trade. Three years later he became a temperance advocate, travelling all over the country speaking for the cause. When he heard of a prize of £100 being offered for the best essay on temperance, he entered, vowing that if he were awarded the prize he would give half towards the new school building in Ebley. One of the three judges³⁸ favoured his essay, but the other two did not. However, his essay was published as *Anti-Bacchus: An essay on the crimes, diseases and other evils connected with the use of intoxicating drink* (London, 1840) and earned the author £50, which he gave to the school. The pamphlet was published and distributed in America as well as in Britain. In characteristically thorough fashion he examined every text in Scripture in which wine is mentioned, and came to the original conclusion that few actually referred to alcohol. In Ebley he founded a Juvenile Total Abstinence Society which held quarterly meetings.

On 16 August 1841 Parsons was one of five Dissenting ministers in the Stroud area who attended the ministerial anti-corn law conference in Manchester.³⁹ He made his mark by speaking for more than an hour. *The Nonconformist* claimed

35. *Tracts for Fustian Jackets and Smock Frocks VIII* p. 8 or IX p. 1.

36. *Tracts I* p. 6.

37. *The Greatness of the British Empire* (London, 1851), p. iv.

38. John Howard Hinton, Baptist minister of Devonshire Square Chapel.

39. See R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England 1662-1962* (London, 1962), pp.208-9.

that his speech was one of the most effective of all;⁴⁰ on the other hand Robert Halley wrote to John Blackburn that as he entered the conference people were trying to cough down “a Mr Parsons... who trespassed for more than an hour and said little to the purpose.”⁴¹

His support for the Chartists, at least in the years of their campaign, was even more controversial. His views on the points of the Charter were widely disseminated, not only through his speeches throughout the country, but through his *Tracts for Fustian Jackets and Smock Frocks*. Tract II took as its theme “The Bible and the Six Points of the Charter.” He vigorously defended universal suffrage: “... is there a dissenting minister in the country who will confess that he has any man in his congregation beyond the age of twenty-one who is unfit to vote for a Member of Parliament? To be a professed enlightener of a congregation, and to have so far neglected his duty as to have men under his charge who are too ignorant or wicked to be trusted with the franchise is a reproach which few men will be ready to avow.”⁴² He pointed out that the only qualification for wisdom recognized by the Bible was moral excellence. There were precedents for the use of the ballot in the Acts of the Apostles. The payment of MPs would enable many hitherto excluded worthy men to enter parliament. His faith in the inherent good sense of the working classes contrasted with his condemnation of those who held power as agents of corruption and despotism. Consciously echoing what Thomas Binney was supposed to have said in 1834, he wrote, “My firm belief is that the Church of England is the bulwark of *tyranny, infidelity and irreligion*.”⁴³

Following the failure of the Charter Parsons delivered a series of lectures on “The Greatness of the British Empire,” endeavouring to reinforce his argument that the six points of the Charter had their basis in the British Constitution. The lectures were given not only in Ebley, but in Stroud’s Athenaeum, in Cheltenham’s Philosophical Institution, in London (location unknown) and in some other unspecified places, and then published in two volumes.

Both in this work and in the tracts, Parsons claimed that the freedom pioneered by the religious sects which were founded in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was responsible for England’s escape from the kind of

40. Quoted Hood p. 340.

41. Quoted Waddington, *1800-50* (1878), p. 562.

42. *Tracts* II p. 17. Though he never explicitly mentioned female suffrage, it is notable that he usually used non-gender language when discussing universal suffrage.

43. *Tracts* XI p. 11. At the laying of the foundation stone of the new building for the King’s Weigh House in October 1833, Thomas Binney had preached a sermon which in its published version included an appendix referring to the Established Church as a “great national evil” and “an obstacle to the progress of truth and godliness”. Despite his views, Parsons was on good terms with the Vicar of Cainscross.

revolutions experienced in France and Germany.⁴⁴ Though Paxton Hood never explicitly mentions Parsons's visits to the continent, it is clear from occasional references that he had visited Paris, Frankfurt and Brussels.

His visit to Brussels was as one of the delegates to the Convention of the Friends of Universal Peace. However argumentative or belligerent he was with his tongue or pen, he never advocated physical violence. He constantly urged the Chartists to use lawful and peaceful means of protest, and viewed war and violence as the resort of oppressors. He urged the readers of the *Tracts* "to expose the injustice, the cruelty, and the avarice, of war, and let the government and the world know that you are the SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF PEACE."⁴⁵ "The truth is, the nations and especially the masses, are nowhere bloodthirsty, unless they are made so by the princes, the nobles, or the priests."⁴⁶

In his final Tract in 1849 he regretted that he had been unable to bring out as fully as he had hoped

... the Radicalism of Job, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and those other unflinching reformers, the minor prophets. The radicalism of the Virgin Mary, and of all the New Testament writers could afford material for volumes, and prove that the religion of the Scriptures contains in the fullest sense of the word 'the People's Charter.'⁴⁷

When he resigned in 1854 because of ill health, the *Nonconformist* wrote that "in him a man may see exemplified 'the Dissidence of Dissent and the Protestantism of the Protestant Religion.'"⁴⁸ He died three months later in January 1855.

Parsons's voice was not a lone one in his part of Gloucestershire. But his ardour, his rootedness in the prophetic and puritan traditions, and the range of his activities, make him outstanding even in such a Dissenting stronghold as Stroud. His advocacy of women's equality included much original and striking thinking. In his suspicion of state power and in his view of the working classes as the lovers of peace and concord as against the corruption and authoritarianism of the upper classes he stood with many of his radical contemporaries, but in his appeal to the prophetic tradition he foreshadowed reformers of a later age.

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44. He believed that the early Methodists restored "the equality of apostolic days." "Lady Huntingdon forgot her ancestry, her coronet, and her jewels, as she sat on the bench of the society-meeting, with the poor brethren and sisters of her Lord. Here, in a sense of which the French have never dreamt, were 'Liberty, Equality Fraternity'." Quoted in Hood p. 453.

45. *Tracts* VI, p. 11.

46. *Tracts* XIV, p. 11.

47. *Tracts* XVIII, p. 10.

48. Quoted Hood, p. 340

ENGLISH NONCONFORMITY AND THE RISE OF LABOUR POLITICS 1893 – 1914

“Of all the issues which divided Nonconformists, it was socialism which had the most fateful influence on Nonconformity as a political and religious force.”¹ The decades that closed the nineteenth century and opened the twentieth saw Nonconformity coming to grips with theories of socialism. This paper examines significant aspects of the debate, and notes some Nonconformist replies to socialist claims. The appearance of the Independent Labour Party in January 1893 intensified the dialogue, and revealed some shared interests, but more sharp differences.

I

The Chapels Challenged: Some Nonconformist Replies

The socialist advocacy of collectivism drew a mixed response from Nonconformists. Many remained loyal to the Gladstonian Liberal rejection of an interventionist state. Theologically, the Dissenting view of salvation emphasized the need for a personal response in faith leading to individual conversion. Ecclesiastically, Nonconformity had protested “...against the state religion on behalf of the rights of the individual conscience.”² By the some token the state was the secular counterpart of the established church, and should be kept at bay. Yet as early as 1893, R.F. Horton, the prominent Congregationalist, asserted that collectivism was “...precisely in harmony with our Free Church life and principles.”³ The following year saw a debate on the matter at the Baptist Social Union, where one speaker declared that “...many things could be better done by a number of men combined, or by the state, than by one man singly.”⁴ The Baptist Liberal Member of Parliament for North-West Norfolk, Alderman George White, commended municipal socialism and argued for a collectivist approach to railways and insurance, though not public houses.⁵ Not surprisingly, the Independent Labour Party member and minister of the City Temple in London, R.J. Campbell, uncompromisingly demanded “...we want collectivism in the place of competition: we want the Kingdom of God.”⁶ The Revd. J.T. Forbes affirmed that theological students were interested in the concept of collectivism and regarded individualism as alien to the gospels. By 1908, John Clifford, speaking in Berlin at a European Baptist Congress declared that the state,

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1. J.F. Glaser, “English Nonconformity and the decline of Liberalism”, *The American Historical Review*, vol. lxiii (1957-8), p. 357.
 2. *The Freeman*, 16 Oct. 1894.
 3. R.F. Horton, letter to *The Spectator*, cited *British Weekly*, 30 Mar. 1893.
 4. *The Freeman*, 16 Oct. 1894.
 5. *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 8 Nov. 1901.
 6. R.J. Campbell, *The New Theology*, (London, 1907), p. 254.

representing all, considers the needs and conditions of all; of the poor and infirm, of the crippled in body and feeble in mind: of the blind and dumb, the hungry and the sick, of the aged and the orphaned or neglected child. It rescues the perishing and cares for the dying...⁷

All this he understood as the state seeking moral ends and in his view such action was commensurate with the teaching of Jesus as recorded in *Matt.* xxv.

Another point of debate was the relationship of individual and societal regeneration. Well placed to comment on this was the Methodist, Philip Snowden, who joined the Independent Labour Party in 1894. Prominent among the ethical socialists, he firmly believed in personal salvation, but regarded it as only half the truth. He challenged the assumption held by many Nonconformists, "We must...get the individual heart all right and then I suppose a perfect society will be spontaneously added unto it."⁸ It was necessary to preach social salvation also, and Snowden went on to claim that an improvement in social conditions would increase the likelihood of individual responses from the poor and ignorant upon whom poverty acted as an opiate, numbing the powers of self-reliance and producing a resigned indifference to the claims of religion. A Labour Church convert claimed that it "...preaches the whole gospel but other churches keep part of it back."⁹ Tom Mann, secretary of the Independent Labour Party, also stressed a wider doctrine of regeneration. "...the unworthiness of the followers of Jesus being primarily concerned about their poor little souls. He who seeks to save his soul on these lines will lose it; but he that will lose his life by working for the salvation of the community – all such must be saved."¹⁰ Clifford claimed that his Baptist forefathers "...saw the Redemption as not only Personal but Collective. They did not, they could not, limit the range of their teaching to personal salvation..."¹¹

Perhaps the most serious socialist claim with which Nonconformists had to deal, was the assertion that socialism was an expression of religious belief. Socialism, according to its proponents, did not replace Christianity, but was its only valid modern expression. A Wesleyan socialist thus claimed, "A purified socialism is simply an industrially applied Christianity."¹² R.J. Campbell identified socialism as Christianity in its modern form. Philip Snowden, adept at applying biblical language, regarded socialism as the

7. *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 11 Sept. 1908.

8.-10. *Labour Prophet*, Apr. 1898, Jan. 1893, June 1897.

11. *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 11 Oct. 1901.

12. S. Keeble, *Industrial Day-dreams*, (1896), cited K. Inglis, "English Nonconformity and Social Reform 1880-1900", *Past and Present*, vol. xiii (1958), p.75.

Spirit of Truth come to lead us into all Truth and under the spell of its power the old men are dreaming dreams and the young men seeing visions...for it will still go forward conquering and to conquer until it has brought down the New Jerusalem on the cities of the earth.¹³

Fenner Brockway argued that the current economic system was "...conducted not to meet the needs of Humanity, but to supply profits to those who control it."¹⁴ The religion of socialism, on the other hand, was dedicated to the enthronement of human life over the industrial machine. Brockway developed this by claiming that the evolutionary process would usher in an awareness of "...a wider, bigger life, making us one with all Nature and all Humanity."¹⁵ Socialism's mission was nothing less than the preparation of humanity for the birth of this deeper consciousness. Keir Hardie was convinced that what the Christ message was to the earlier Christian, "...socialism is to socialists today. The early Christians were given the promise of a more abundant life; socialism gives the same hope and promise."¹⁶

Nonconformist objections to these claims may be summarised as pointing to the inadequacy of socialism to provide what religion alone could supply. Socialist claims were refuted on the grounds of the movement's dependence on environmental change to accomplish individual reformation. "The removal of poverty" wrote J.C. Carlile, a Baptist leader sympathetic to socialism, "...does not involve the disappearance of sin." Even assuming that socialist aims were achieved and that all were well fed, paid, and comfortably housed, "...the heart will still know its own bitterness and hunger for the sense of Divine forgiveness..."¹⁷ Human nature, it was asserted, would remain the same under collectivist or individualistic structures. Further, Nonconformists alleged that socialism was, despite its ethical overtones, basically a matter of economics. It might possibly usher in a reformed commercial system, but it could not create a new spirit in human beings. Again, it was held that all theories of social well-being broke down before the fact of temptation. Such co-operation as socialists demanded did not take seriously enough the tragedy of human wickedness. Finally, Nonconformists objected to the exclusivism of socialists. The movement was regarded as sectarian and bigoted with its supporters declaring anathema all who refused to join them.

Most socialists had little good to say about theology. It distorted and complicated the simple teaching of Jesus which expounded the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God. Many Nonconformist ministers acknowledged that the concept of brotherhood was not prominent enough in the chapels. "Brotherhood is the most dominant word in the religious life and language of our

13. *Labour Prophet*, Apr. 1898.

14.-16. *Labour Leader*, 30 Apr. 1914, 7 May 1914, 26 Dec. 1912.

17. *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 10 Jan. 1908.

time.”¹⁸ Charles Silvester Horne, the Congregationalist, believed that the purpose of the Institutional Churches, one of which he led at Whitefield’s Tabernacle in London’s Tottenham Court Road, was “...to reconstruct society on the basis of brotherhood...it was more urgent to reconstruct society than to reconstruct theology.”¹⁹ Horne was president of the Brotherhood movement which, before 1914, was a powerful influence on Nonconformity. It succeeded the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon format, and by 1909 the Baptist Leader, F.B. Meyer, could claim, “...nearly every Sunday afternoon in some part...I address a gathering of a thousand men.”²⁰ During 1911, a huge demonstration at the Albert Hall heard the Labour politician Arthur Henderson claim that Brotherhood was an indispensable part of the nation’s religious life.²¹ A more theologically sophisticated rejoinder to the movement came from P.T. Forsyth who regarded brotherhood as a relationship of shared faith. Its essence was forgiveness, and the fundamental truth of Christianity was not brotherhood but sonship.²² A sceptical view of Brotherhood saw the effort as “...merely the latest agent in the secularization of Nonconformity...the social gospel which it presented masked at best the baptism of the Labour movement into the Christian spirit.”²³ Certainly some Nonconformists were nervous. There was “...clearly some anxiety among the churches sympathetic with the...Brotherhood movement lest the centre of gravity within the Church be changed to a point outside it.”²⁴ Others raised objections to the content of Brotherhood meetings: “...sometimes I hear operatic overtures and selections, dance pieces and the like, which jar upon me and do not help to make the right atmosphere of a Brotherhood meeting.”²⁵ The Great War “...had...a cataclysmic effect on the hopes and plans of the Movement and decimated its membership.”²⁶ We may conclude, however, that Nonconformists were influenced by socialist arguments on this issue, and went some way, albeit at risk, to meet complaints emanating from their critics.

II

Christianity and Socialism: Nonconformist Views of the Relationship

“This movement is essentially anti-Christian. The rise of socialism involves the fall of religion.”²⁷ For some Nonconformists, Christianity and socialism were incompatible. There could be no relationship save one of antagonism. Yet few

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18. *British Congregationalist*, 5 Sept. 1912.
 19. Cited H. Guntrip, *Smith and Wrigley of Leeds*, (1944), pp. 96-7.
 - 20.-21. *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 5 Oct. 1906, 22 Oct. 1911.
 22. P.T. Forsyth, *Socialism, The Church and The Poor*, (London, 1908), pp. 7 and 25.
 23. S. Mayor, *The Church and the Labour Movement*, (London, 1967), pp. 71-2.
 24. *British Congregationalist*, 21 July 1910.
 25. *Methodist Times*, 25 Jan. 1912.
 26. A. Gregory, *Romance and Revolution, The Story of the Brotherhood Movement 1875-1975*, (published privately, 1975), p. 26.
 27. *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 18 Oct. 1907.

would have gone so far as Father Keating when, in an anti-socialist harangue at a Roman Catholic reunion, he declared his surprise that Christians "...should regard poverty with anger and hatred. The poor were the blessed; they were the very children of God. Poverty was their birthright; labour and privation their proper portion."²⁸ A fellow Roman Catholic spoke for more Nonconformists when he asserted "Socialism and religion are fundamentally opposed. Between them there can be no peace: no reconciliation; no compromise."²⁹ The Moderator of the Church of Scotland was equally forthright. Socialism was "...an anti-Christian force...statesmen will be powerless alone to grapple with it." It was "...a sinister Movement."³⁰ Most Nonconformist opponents took the view that socialism was either unnecessary or impossible. If human beings were good enough to share, then socialism was not needed. If, despite everything, they persisted in competing for personal gain, then socialism was impossible. There was also fear of an enormous increase in officialdom and bureaucracy leading to coercion and control. "Prompt obedience to the orders of a central authority, a drill almost military without possibility of escape."³¹

Many Nonconformists censured socialism as supportive of free love and destructive of family virtues. Socialists were sensitive about such charges and constantly denied them. Thus G.S. Lancaster, recognizing that "...to many people Socialist and Atheist are synonymous terms...", objected to those who spent their lives in selfish gratification yet applied the term Atheist, "...to those who are striving to realise the prayer of Christ, 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'³² Keir Hardie rejected the allegation that socialism was inimical to either family or religion. "There are Socialists who are anti-Christian just as there are nominal Christians who are anti-Socialist."³³ A Nonconformist contributor to the *Labour Leader* admitted that he found it "...very difficult to get some people to believe that Socialism and Atheism are two different things."³⁴ Immediately following its formation, the Independent Labour Party was reported as having been captured by continental-style socialism. "The continental Socialist as a rule has a violent and quite fanatical hatred of Christianity."³⁵ In 1908, the same journal (the *Methodist Times*) advertised "Six Sermons on Social Subjects" by the socialist J.E. Rattenbury. They were presented "...as an answer to the unworthy attack of the press on Socialism as atheistic and immoral."³⁶ A leader of the Nottingham Labour church, writing to Tom Mann, informed him that the church objected to the term "Social Democratic". "Rightly or wrongly the term has become associated with free love and other forms of anarchism."³⁷ The prominent socialist J. Bruce Glasier, blamed Blatchford's *Clarion* for giving the impression

28.-30. *Labour Leader*, 5 Dec. 1896, 14 May 1914, 20 June 1898.

31. *British Weekly*, 25 January 1894.

32.-34. *Labour Leader*, 10 Aug. 1895, 15 June 1895, 23 Nov. 1906.

35.-36. *Methodist Times*, 19 Jan. 1893, 23 Apr. 1908.

37. F. Keating, letter to Tom Mann, 9 Sept. 1905, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics.

that socialism was "...entirely anti-Church."³⁸ Later, he wrote eight articles in the *Labour Leader* proving that historically both Liberal and Tory parties counted atheists and advocates of free love among their supporters. J. Ramsay Macdonald repudiated a *Spectator* assertion that the triumph of socialism would mean the advent of free love and promiscuity. He described the charges as "...the meanest, most dishonest, the most snivelling and the most canting contribution to the anti-Socialist campaign."³⁹ The time and energy spent by socialists in rejecting charges of this nature shows how harmful they could prove if believed by Nonconformists. Yet many Nonconformist voices were raised in favour of co-operation with socialism. Describing socialist theory as "...only an attempt to give shape to the teachings of such men as Sir Thomas More and John Ruskin..." the Revd. J. Bailey declared "...we shall be led forward in some such direction in the days to come." John Clifford, President of the Baptist Union, in 1899, claimed that Labour's intent was to unite and not to divide. "We must then, as disciples of Christ, enter into fellowship with these forces."⁴¹ In April 1908 J.T. Forbes told a Nonconformist audience that the current economic system conflicted with the Christian conception of mankind. Serious consideration should be given to Labour's demands. "The only question a Christian man need trouble about is: is it just?"⁴² J.H. Shakespeare, General Secretary of the Baptist Union stated, "...the modern conscience has forever repudiated the hard and fast individualism...man is also part of a social order."⁴³ Another Baptist, R. Rowntree Clifford, exclaimed "...the great wrong of collective poverty and suffering must be placed upon the scaffold. We must...boldly array ourselves alongside those who are fighting the cause of the workless and the submerged tenth."⁴⁴ The *British Congregationalist*, welcoming Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, described it as "...a book to read and ponder over. It was terrible because it was true. Every minister should have a copy."⁴⁵

Yet advocates of co-operation were often opposed by people in both camps. "...Christians are in danger of throwing themselves into Socialism as the ark of safety, in prospect of a new deluge..."⁴⁶ A Nonconformist minister, writing to the *Daily Telegraph* indicted his tradition as "...the purveyor of a sort of half-baked Socialism." Its pulpits, Pleasant Sunday Afternoons and Christian Endeavour groups were socialist agencies.⁴⁷ It was alleged that Nonconformist speakers received applause for sprinkling speeches with "...bons mots from the social articles of the *Clarion*."⁴⁸ Conversely, some socialists were sceptical. "To me, the Institutional Church...in which I include the whole of the sects...is the real anti-

38. J.B. Glasier, letter to his sister, 1 Sept. 1905, Sydney Jones Library, Liverpool University.

39. *Labour Leader*, 25 Oct. 1907.

40. *British Weekly*, 7 June 1895.

41.-44. *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 29 Sept. 1899, 7 May 1908, 30 Apr. 1908, 2 Feb. 1906.

45. *British Congregationalist*, 30 Apr. 1914.

46. *British Weekly*, 25 Jan. 1894.

47.-48. Cited *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 18 Oct. 1907, 1 June 1906.

Christ and it behoves us to be more suspicious of its getting on kissing terms with our Movement.”⁴⁹ A *Labour Leader* contributor warned his readers that the churches were seeking, not to co-operate with socialism but to utilise it for their own ends. “Socialists beware. Let nothing blind you to the significance of the deep-laid schemes...lest we be deluded by the advances made to us by bodies which are in reality in league against us.”⁵⁰

The major response of Nonconformists to socialism was neither antagonism nor co-operation. It was rather that Christianity subsumed socialism. “Consciously or unconsciously, Socialists have sat at the feet of Jesus and have learned of Him.”⁵¹ It had all been said before, pre-eminently in the Bible. The gospel would ultimately achieve socialist objectives and more besides. The Christian “...has the secret of the power which alone can effect what every Socialist desires.”⁵² “There is, in the gospel of Christ,” asserted P.T. Forsyth, “...that which must produce such a change in Society as will leave the Socialist programme far behind...”⁵³ Any success achieved by socialism would thereby be ascribed to religious concepts inherent, if not always recognised by socialists. F.B. Meyer claimed that Christianity alone held the key to current problems. He aimed “...to change the Socialism which is based on the assumption of clashing interests, into a Socialism which is based on the sense of spiritual union.”⁵⁴ The Christian ideal not only includes, but surpasses, the aims of socialism. “The Christian Church”, claimed the *British Congregationalist* “...has far more to offer than any Socialist system.”⁵⁵ The Faith extends beyond the amelioration of social injustice. Christianity “...perceives the deep spiritual wounds of a fallen world.”⁵⁶

In summary, the onset of socialism provoked the Free Churches into a reaction wherein four features can be discerned. First, the moral purity emphasis, so long, though not exclusively, a Nonconformist hallmark, was brought to bear against a socialism which was regarded by many chapel people as anarchical and ethically repulsive. This, despite pleas to criticise socialism at its best, and vigorous socialist denials. Secondly, and more seriously, Nonconformists had to counter the religious claims made by socialists. Broadly, their response took two forms. There was a determination to defend and re-state the evangelical imperatives of Christianity. Thus, “Christ and Him crucified”, (1 *Cor.ii.2*) was often quoted to illustrate the difference between gospel dependence and social engineering to accomplish societal reformation. Further, arguments in favour of individualism

49. R. Gilliard, letter to J.B. Glasier, 30 Sept. 1911, Sydney Jones Library, Liverpool University.

50. *Labour Leader*, 30 June 1896.

51. *The Freeman*, 13 Oct. 1893.

52. *British Congregationalist*, 23 Jan. 1908.

53. P.T. Forsyth, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

54. *Baptist Times and Freeman*, n.d., 1906.

55. *British Congregationalist*, 7 May 1908.

56. *British Weekly*, 7 June 1894.

and competition, not always theological, were nevertheless woven into Nonconformist emphases on personal salvation and defiance of the established church. Thirdly, the glaring evidence of social and economic deprivation could not be gainsaid. Poverty, poor housing and unemployment stared city ministers in the face and compelled them to advocate co-operation with socialist organizations. Those who openly identified with formal parties were few, but a large number supported socialist principles whilst, often for their own good, they refrained from becoming card-carrying members. Finally, Nonconformity persisted in maintaining that evangelistic preaching, awakening personal faith, would, in the long run, bring about a renewed society. Quite apart from the fact that such preaching drew the crowds, most preachers would have considered themselves less than faithful if such an emphasis were not uppermost in their ministries.

III

Nonconformity and the Independent Labour Party

"The appearance of the Independent Labour Party in 1893 posed a dilemma which neither Nonconformity nor Liberalism was ultimately able to solve."⁵⁷ The founding of the party was not mentioned by the Baptist *Freeman*, was briefly noted by the *British Weekly*, and was reported dismissively by the *Methodist Times*. "The whole thing had a Socialist flavour, I do not expect much to come out of it."⁵⁸ Presumably after examining the programme of the fledgling party, the *Christian World* complained that it was "...trying to persuade the British workman to forget that he is a British citizen."⁵⁹

Three of the most influential leaders of the party were Nonconformists. The religious beliefs of Hardie, Snowden and Macdonald profoundly shaped their political views. James Keir Hardie (1856-1915) was converted to Christianity at the age of twenty-one. A decade was to elapse before his full commitment to socialism and "It was the religious conversion of 1877...that remained the dominant experience of his life..."⁶⁰ His first loyalty was to the Evangelical Union, a body founded in 1841 which united with the Congregational Union of Scotland in 1896-7. Hardie signed the pledge and became a district organizer for the Good Templars in Ayrshire. In 1881 he joined the Congregational church at Cumnock but resigned after three years in sympathy with the minister who was regarded by some as being too evangelical. He never resumed church membership, and thereafter did not worship regularly with one denomination. There is evidence to indicate that he joined the Band of Hope, and when, in 1892, he was elected to Parliament for West Ham South he received support from the United Kingdom Alliance. Here, he bid successfully for the Nonconformist vote,

57. J. Glaser, *art. cit.*, p. 358.

58. *Methodist Times*, 19 Jan. 1893.

59. *The Christian World*, 19 Jan. 1893.

60. K.O. Morgan, *Keir Hardie, Radical and Socialist*, (London, 1975), p. 22.

and in October 1892 was invited to address the autumn meeting of the Congregational Union. His speech caused an uproar. He claimed that Labour was turning its back upon the churches because they had turned their back upon Christ. Formal Christianity was dead, and only the Labour movement could resurrect the true gospel of Christ. He later claimed that he had spoken "...following the dictates...of Him Whom I claim as my Lord and Master..." but conceding that he "...fairly lost control...and what I said or did...remains to this day unknown to me save insofar as the newspapers have revealed it."⁶¹ For Hardie, socialism was the only valid expression of Christianity, and he frequently appealed to the New Testament in support of his position. He was regarded by many within socialism as having a puritanical ethic, and his interpretation of the relationship between Christianity and socialism was undoubtedly simplistic. Yet "...it fired the imagination of thousands of working men of Nonconformist background caught up in the economic depression and class warfare of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras."⁶²

Philip Snowden (1864-1937) was brought up amidst "...the vigour of Nonconformity; its radical position, its temperance zeal; its emphasis on self-improvement."⁶³ His father, John Snowden was superintendent of the Methodist Sunday School at Cowling near Keighley, but restrained his son from responding to a gospel appeal by telling young Philip that it was time he went home.⁶⁴ Like Hardie, Snowden joined the Band of Hope but did not embrace church membership. He became a lifelong teetotaler, and was in great demand as a speaker for the Independent Labour Party. He employed gospel rally methods to gain converts for the party, and maintained this style for five years. He made his mark on national politics with a brilliant campaign at Blackburn in the general election of 1900. Entering Parliament in 1906, he was appointed spokesman for Labour on financial and economic affairs. Snowden's stock usually stood high with Nonconformity. Following an argument with J. Bruce Glasier, he refused to write for the *Labour Leader*, but contributed regularly to R.J. Campbell's *Christian Commonwealth*. He was regarded within Nonconformity as an acute thinker and a shrewd observer whose "...bitter tone in public utterance...is quite foreign to his private conversation."⁶⁵ After writing a series on socialism in the *Methodist Times*, to which Snowden replied, Sir Thomas Whittaker, a Methodist Liberal Member of Parliament, acknowledged "...no more able defender of the Socialistic propaganda could be found..."⁶⁶ Snowden's socialism was forged by "...a mixture of the Bible, the Temperance Movement, the Northern

61. *Labour Prophet*, Nov. 1892.

62. K.O. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

63. T. Tholfson, *Working-Class Radicalism in mid-Victorian England*, (London, 1976), p. 4.

64. P. Snowden, *An Autobiography*, 2 vols. (London, 1934), i, p. 29.

65. *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 9 May 1913.

66. *Methodist Times*, 2 Jan. 1908.

Nonconformist chapel and Gladstonian Liberalism.”⁶⁷

James Ramsay Macdonald (1866-1937) was reared in the intensely religious life of Lossiemouth. Crowded weeknight prayer meetings and Sunday worship were supplemented by periodic “salvation drives.” Before arriving in London, Macdonald worked among boys and young men at St. Stephen’s church in Bristol. He was a member of the Free Church of Scotland which had seceded from the national Church in 1843. Macdonald was an essentially religious man with an almost mystical reverence for life, and a deep respect for churches of all traditions. His Presbyterianism was less other-worldly than evangelicalism and more akin to moral philosophy. He acknowledged, however, that “...the individualist morality of evangelicalism is the basis of the social morality of Socialism.”⁶⁸ Well aware of the impact made on Christian doctrine by Darwin and by biblical criticism, he sought a foundation for morality which took these developments into account. Thus both the Bible and popular science were read in the Macdonald home on Sundays. He attempted to translate the moral purposes of evangelicalism “...in a manner which freed them from a Christianity which was unacceptable without losing the respectability which was essential.”⁶⁹ His appeal was not primarily to the Bible, although he quoted it in support of his political beliefs. For him, religion could never be encapsulated in creed or theology, and the ongoing sweep of history was revealing religious truths in a new guise. He regarded the Independent Labour Party as “...in the true line of apostolic succession. It alone is able to interpret the spirit of the time.”⁷⁰ Religious concepts as traditionally expressed were not intrinsic to the historical process, and Macdonald welcomed the secular expression of truths hitherto regarded as the preserve of organized religion: “...in great secular movements,...independent of what we would call organized Christianity, there is a life of hope, of aspiration, of belief, of faith that holds up...the flag of Christian fellowship and Christian belief.”⁷¹ He was anxious for a satisfactory relationship between the churches and Labour.

...[I]f the Church cannot retain the confidence of active spirits in the Labour...movement it will cut itself off more and more from the spiritual life of the people...outside its walls and in places not blessed by it the

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67. Philip Snowden. *The first Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer*, K. Laybourn and D. James (eds.), (Bradford, 1987), p. 55.
68. *Ramsay Macdonald's Political Writings*, B. Barker (ed.), (London, 1972) pp. 20-1.
69. R. Barker, “Socialism and Progressivism, Ramsay Macdonald”, in A. Morris (ed.), *Edwardian Radicalism*, (London, 1974), p. 127.
70. J.R. Macdonald and J.K. Hardie, “The Liberal Collapse III; The Independent Labour Party’s Programme”, *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. xlv, (1899), passim and pp. 24-5 and 31. Cited R. Barker, op. cit., p. 120.
71. J.R. Macdonald, *Adult Schools and Democracy*, (London, 1913), p. 8.

Gospel will be preached. On the other hand, should anything happen which will alienate the Labour movement from religious faith...it will fall into the hands of old men who will use it for their own ends...Let the Church and Labour understand each other and the future will belong to both.⁷²

Macdonald, replying to the criticism that socialists refused to face up to the intractability of human nature, argued that such nature was still evolving, and that it was unwise to assume future behaviour. His vision was of a society where, "...life alone will be valued as treasure and the tyranny of the economic machine will no longer hold spiritual things in subjection. That State I call Socialism."⁷³

IV

Party and Pulpit: Shared Values

The influence of Nonconformity on the Independent Labour Party was much more pervasive than that exerted by prominent individuals. "The Socialist Movement took its rise from several originally separate sources...there was the Nonconformist and Radical revolt against the hegemony of squire and parson in the country districts."⁷⁴ The early gospel ethos of the party, appealing to some, derisory to others, indicates a movement more intent on making converts than on gaining power. "Sometimes in summer the joint forces of Leeds and Bradford Socialism tramped together to spread the gospel by printed and spoken word...and at eventide...we sang."⁷⁵ As in the chapels, bands, choirs, cycling clubs, study groups and the distribution of tracts characterized the party at this stage. With the prospect of electoral success this pristine socialism declined, but early zeal resembled "...the characteristic blend of the Nonconformist chapel."⁷⁶ Naive but deeply held beliefs envisaged "...a common brotherhood...the accepted relationship...brotherly love...shall grind competition to its real place."⁷⁷ The party appealed primarily to the emotions rather than to the intellect of its audiences. Katherine Glasier, daughter of the Congregational manse, caught up in the excitement of mission writes to her husband, "Together...we can do and dare all things, brave prison or hunger if need be. Ceaselessly we can serve – Oh the glory of it – the glory."⁷⁸ Glasier himself, when editor of the *Labour Leader*, was

72. *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 9 Jan. 1914.

73. J.R. Macdonald, *Socialism and Society* (London, 1905), p. 151.

74. "Ephesian", (C.E.B. Roberts), *Philip Snowden*, (London, 1929), p. 31.

75. D. Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party*, (Manchester, 1983), p. 33.

76. D. Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party*, (Manchester, 1983), p. 358.

77. *Labour Leader*, 2 May 1894.

78. K. Glasier, letter to J.B. Glasier, 5 June 1893. Special Collections Department, Liverpool University.

urged not to be too erudite. "...get in more stuff of an emotional nature...Not a main prop...but a leaven of it reaches the heart of some who can't digest reason and who will never know economics."⁷⁹ In his first report as general secretary of the party, Tom Mann wrote "...men and women have been hard at work carrying their gospel of good tidings to the heathen Britishers..."⁸⁰

Other aspects of Nonconformity followed by the party were "Self-denial" Sundays and Missions. A Self-denial effort in 1894, raised £80.4.2., especially welcome with a total indebtedness of £222.8.9. In 1909 it was noticed that the Salvation Army had raised £80,000 through Self-denial. "...we ought to manage £20,000-£30,000."⁸¹ In 1901 the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches embarked on a series of "Simultaneous Missions". The party held its own missions. They usually lasted for three or four days. Philip Snowden was the missionary at efforts in London and Leicester, and he and John Penny shared a South Wales mission during September 1902. Jowett, Hardie, Brocklehurst and Curran spoke at a Bradford mission, with three to four thousand attending the final Sunday night rally at St. George's Hall. Eric Hobsbawm sets all this in context by remarking of the early stages of social or political movements "...we often observe a sort of nostalgia for the old religion, or perhaps more accurately an inability to conceive of new ideologies which do not follow the patterns of the old..."⁸² It took some time to disappear. Twenty years after the formation of the party Keir Hardie's message was called "The Chairman's Pastoral Letter."⁸³

"The importance of the Temperance Movement... in the early history of British Socialism has never been appreciated at its true value."⁸⁴ The party claimed to be addressing the issue at a deeper level than the Nonconformists. Drunkenness was caused partly by the bad example "...of the upper classes – of royalty, aristocracy and clergy..."⁸⁵ and partly by adverse social conditions. Temperance workers needed organization and cohesion, and this the party claimed to supply. Both Fred Brocklehurst and Keir Hardie wrote against drink in Labour clubs. The latter asked each member to "...consider whether his duty to the Movement does not demand that he shall give up his personal indulgence. The moral force of the Movement would be perceptibly increased."⁸⁶ The National Administrative Council of the party came out against alcohol in the clubs which were "...for the purpose of political work...the sale of drink seriously hinders such work."⁸⁷ Both

79. G. Barnes, letter to J.B. Glasier, 29 Nov. 1907. Special Collections Department, Liverpool University.
80. *Annual Report: Independent Labour Party*, May 1894.
81. *Labour Leader*, 19 March 1909.
82. E. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (Manchester, 1959), p. 126.
83. *Labour Leader*, 3 Apr. 1913.
84. "Ephesian", (C.E.B. Roberts), *op. cit.*, p. 31.
85. P. Snowden, *Socialism and the Drink Question*, (London, 1908), p. 19.
86. *Labour Leader*, 15 June 1895.
87. *Minutes of the National Administrative Council: Independent Labour Party*, 1 Oct. 1898.

Glasier and Snowden claimed that very few clubs sold liquor. Glasier thought it less than a dozen, and Snowden claimed a higher percentage of total abstainers than in any other political organization. "Drink is sold in less than 3 per cent of its clubs."⁸⁸ Pete Curran caused acute embarrassment when he was convicted at Mansion House Police Court for being drunk. He was reminded that all Labour Members of Parliament "...are standard bearers of our principles."⁸⁹

Gambling was another issue where many socialists and Nonconformists shared a common antipathy. Both condemned it, albeit for different reasons. The Anti-Gambling League received support from the Baptist *Freeman*, which indicated the "...immoral influence of winning money without work."⁹⁰ The secretary of the League, John Hawke, found his work commended by the *Labour Prophet*, journal of the Labour Church movement. It estimated that £50,000 each week went out of working-class pockets to capitalist bookmakers. Readers were urged to help "...divert this enormous leakage of blood-earned treasure from the Horserace Leech."⁹¹ Labour leaders, it was claimed, are beginning "...to recognise the awful waste of power attributable to this drain upon the purse of the Labour Giant."⁹²

To a lesser extent, some common ground can be discerned on the vexed question of education. The Nonconformist opposition to Balfour's 1902 Act is well documented, and the passionate crusade developed into widespread passive resistance to the payment of part of the rates. This caused anxiety to some party members. "There is some danger that they may drag down the Labour Party into the very deep pit whence they have dug for themselves."⁹³ Brocklehurst, however, argued for a non-sectarian system. Board schools, beloved of Nonconformists, taught religion just as well as denominational schools and "...apart from the wishes of the sectarians and sacerdotalists there is now no need whatever for the maintenance of a dual system of education...the clergy want the public to pay for it entirely."⁹⁴ When, in 1895, the government signalled its intention of endowing sectarian schools, the *Labour Leader* protested that such a move should be bitterly resisted to the end.⁹⁵ The Trades Union Congress condemned Balfour's bill as it passed through parliament, and many socialists argued that public control of education should follow the spending of public money. J. Ramsay Macdonald wanted the Labour Representative Committee to protest against the 1902 proposals, but Fabian opposition (Sidney Webb had participated in its formation) won the day. Yet one reason for the electoral pact between Macdonald and Herbert Gladstone, so effective in 1906, was "...the essential agreement of the strongly Nonconformist Labour Representation Committee...on the education question."⁹⁶

88. P. Snowden, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

89. *Labour Leader*, 26 Feb. 1909.

90. *The Freeman*, 6 July 1894.

91. *Labour Prophet*, May 1897.

92. *Ibid.*

93.-95. *Labour Leader*, 28 Sept. 1895, 2 Nov. 1895, 14 Dec. 1895.

96. P.P. Poirier, *The Advent of the Labour Party*, (London, 1958), p. 175.

Support for the Nonconformist position was, however, qualified. Keir Hardie voiced the opinion of many socialists in 1902 when he wrote "...most of us prefer education for its own sake and not as an adjunct to some paralysing creed."⁹⁷ Some socialists were more concerned with the provision of free school meals.

Until the outbreak of the Great War, the party and the chapels had much in common with respect to international peace. Social reform, urged the *Baptist Times and Freeman*, should come before the building of Dreadnoughts. The Liberal administration was accused of playing up to the jingoist section of the press, and the churches were urged to counteract the devilish spirit of accusation and suspicion by promoting international peace.⁹⁸ A British and German churches league was formed in 1911, with some Nonconformist leaders playing a prominent role. When, in 1913, the *Guardian* came out in favour of conscription, it became clear to some Nonconformists that "...in the fight against militarism we shall have an influential section of the Church of England against us, as well as the soldiers, the financiers and the armament makers."⁹⁹ This was a rollcall of enemies not unlike that drawn up by the Independent Labour Party. There was also hope in Free Church circles that universal disarmament might be achieved through the international influence of the Trade Union movement. Both Nonconformists and Labour thus shared a naive and hopeful belief in the power of religion and of organized labour to prevent war. When the conflict came, the majority of Nonconformists and the party went their different ways.

V

Party and Pulpit: Sharp Differences

Before identifying the areas of contention, it should be pointed out that both party and pulpit were competing for the allegiance of the same group of people. The Independent Labour Party did not provide socialism with a genuine working-class movement, and J. Ramsay Macdonald in particular was keen to enlist the support of those on whose loyalty the chapels also depended. "They are to be the constructive agents of the next stage in our industrial revolution."¹⁰⁰ Nonconformity feared, often with good reason, the defection of such people to socialism, whilst the party was often frustrated by the fact that so many potential recruits remained within the Nonconformist/Liberal fold. Keir Hardie's attacks on the middle class got short shrift from T.D. Benson, the party treasurer. "They want to know if you mean them to clear out and form a separate Party..."¹⁰¹ Benson, making strenuous efforts to raise funds for the perennially poverty-stricken *Labour Leader*, reminded Hardie that "The number of middle-class men now connected with us is so great that we could easily get what we want."¹⁰²

97. *Labour Leader*, 7 June 1902.

98.-99. *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 2 Mar. 1909, 14 Mar. 1913.

100. J.R. Macdonald, *Socialism*, cited B. Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

101.-102. T.D. Benson, letters to J. Keir Hardie, 12 May 1909, 19 July 1909, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics.

Criticism by socialists of Nonconformity contained little by way of attacks upon religion as such. Wrath was rather directed toward Nonconformist leaders. Their attention was drawn to social issues beyond the usual Nonconformist concerns. Thus Hardie, whilst supporting Nonconformist protests against the Armenian atrocities in 1894, quoted two extreme cases of poverty, one of which led to suicide. "What of these ye eloquent orators...rather than teaching other nations how to live you should teach England how not to let her sons and daughters die..."¹⁰³ The *Labour Leader* attacked Joseph Parker, Campbell's predecessor at the City Temple, on the same issue. He had advocated a war of extermination. Describing him as "A clerical jingo", it was noted that he had not been known to argue for the extermination "...of the species of Englishmen who prey upon the suffering and degradation of their own fellow countrymen."¹⁰⁴ The *Bradford Pioneer* had a tilt at F.B. Meyer who had suggested that suffragettes in prison should be chained to female warders. "...is it any wonder we regard the Church as being a stumbling-block to progress?"¹⁰⁵ John Clifford was berated when, after the 1895 General Election, he regarded the Liberal defeat as a defeat for the Free Churches. If Liberalism embodied such religious principles, argued the *Labour Leader* "...then their virtue has indeed departed."¹⁰⁶

Overseas missions were heavily censured. "What is the use of trying to save souls thousands of miles away when human beings were starving in England?"¹⁰⁷ The questioner, G.A. Glyde, had earlier made the same point as spokesman for a deputation of unemployed which met Baptist leaders at Bradford in 1908. "If the heathen, to whom the missionaries were being sent could see the starving people they would say 'Keep your missionaries at home until they have converted their own people.'"¹⁰⁸ The raising of funds towards Bibles for Africa drew the comment that Africans "...stand in more need of a Bible than those twelve million people who are constantly on the verge of starvation in England."¹⁰⁹ A cartoon in the *Labour Leader* showed a missionary bringing English morality to darkest Africa assisted by gunboats and bribery. An accompanying poem joined "The Preacher and explorer, the soldier's bloody blade..." 'Tis thus a special Providence keeps watch on English trade."¹¹⁰

Socialists often condemned Nonconformists for their stance during strikes. The usual role of the chapels was to bewail the situation, plead for a settlement and provide help for the families of strikers. In almost every issue of the *British Weekly* during the 1893 coal strike, "...a better way must be found. Let us hope for better things..."¹¹¹ might be a typical comment. Letters from Nonconformist

103.-104. *Labour Leader*, 22 Sept. 1894, 1 June 1895.

105. *Bradford Pioneer*, 30 May 1913.

106. *Labour Leader*, 1 June 1895.

107. *Bradford Pioneer*, 7 Mar. 1913.

108. *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 9 Oct. 1908.

109. *Bradford Pioneer*, 30 May 1913.

110. *Labour Leader*, 5 May 1894.

111. *British Weekly*, 28 Sept. 1893.

ministers requested money and clothing. Meals were provided. During the 1898 South Wales coal strike, the Assembly of Welsh Calvinistic Methodists expressed "...deep sympathy with the suffering that prevails..." It urged "...the leaders of both parties...to bring the dispute to a speedy and satisfactory termination."¹¹² The miners interpreted this as "...a sleeping draught for the consciences of those who adopted it."¹¹³ The Methodist Hugh Price Hughes tried to improve on the usual approach when, in 1893, he persuaded the London Methodist Council to urge the establishment of courts for conciliation and arbitration. The pre-Great War industrial unrest produced more criticism of employers in the Nonconformist press. Coal owners were guilty of "...a singular want of tact..." They were urged to keep "...God-fearing sections of the mining community on their side. As it is these men have been driven by the thousands into Socialism."¹¹⁴ "...[M]any men drift from the Church..." stated Councillor F. Manning, a Wesleyan railwayman, "...because she refuses to take sides at a time of labour unrest...though she takes sides on Temperance."¹¹⁵ During the 1912 coal dispute, the *British Weekly* admitted, "The Churches have no clear and direct message for this crisis."¹¹⁶

Theology and theologians came in for denunciation. The simplicity of the gospel had been distorted and made into a complex cult far removed from the lives of the common people. "Christ proclaimed the Brotherhood of Man; the theologians have distorted His gospel and have justified inequality."¹¹⁷ Keir Hardie claimed that Jesus laid down no elaborate theological system. Rather, His "...heart beat in sympathy with the great heart of the human race."¹¹⁸ Christian dogmatics were thus unfavourably contrasted with the noble ideals of struggling humanity. Many socialists rejected the teaching on fall, sinfulness and redemption. They commended socialist commandments (often displayed on the walls of socialist Sunday schools) which were "...practical and full of love and

112. *Labour Leader*, 5 July 1898.

113. *Ibid.*

114. *Baptist Times and Freeman*, 8 Mar. 1912.

115. *Methodist Times*, 17 Oct. 1912.

116. *British Weekly*, 1 Apr. 1912.

117. *Labour Leader*, 8 Jan. 1914.

118. J.K. Hardie, "What is the Kingdom of God?", *Pamphlet ILP Platform Series*, xi., 14 Sept. 1901.

justice to all mankind."¹¹⁹ Socialists made frequent reference to *Acts*. iv. 32-5, which was regarded as the lifestyle adopted by the early believers in Jesus. Theology had displaced this primitive communist ethic.

Socialists charged the chapels with having an insensitive social conscience. The *Bradford Pioneer*, quoting from the report of the Chief Inspector of factories, noticed that though wealth in the Potteries was enormous, workers were being poisoned daily. Conditions in the brickfields were also cited. "Oh members of Christian churches, on this side the grave is there any nearer approach to hell? The Black Country has been studded with Christian churches..."¹²⁰ The religious were also reminded that "...the folding of Bibles and Prayer Books is paid for at the rate of 1d. per hundred sheets."¹²¹ Keir Hardie complained that the churches, instead of initiating social reform "...have generally waited until the problem...made itself popular with the people."¹²² The *Labour Leader*, referring in 1902 to the building of Westminster Cathedral and the Methodist Central Hall, asked how either could feel comfortable in their magnificence with the drunkenness and prostitution rife in Westminster. The same journal advised the Congregational Union, which had included an address on "The Church and Poverty" at its October 1912 Assembly, "...that the most effective course it can pursue is to associate...with the demands of the ILP in the war against poverty."¹²³

The Salvation Army was frequently the object of socialist polemic. It was viewed as a combine or monopoly for trading. Accused of employing underpaid non-union printers, the Army was described as "...another name for a gigantic trading concern conducted on the worst sweating system imaginable."¹²⁴ The Army replied to the effect that it sought to employ men who were leading Christian lives. The London Trades Council supported the Salvationists in this dispute, but this did not prevent a demonstration of two thousand in Hyde Park protesting against the Army and its methods of trading. A more general charge brought against William Booth was that he "...had no grip whatsoever of the Labour problems of the world..."¹²⁵ Reviewing *The Prophet of the Poor*, Booth's life story, the writer ascribed his success to his personality, and further because "...he is an adherent of the present social order...an ally of the powers that be and his work is a buttress of the present system."¹²⁶ Regretting the defection from the Salvation Army to the Independent Labour Party of the former head of Army trading operations, W. Brindley Boon, a Salvationist, explained that General Booth, in his zeal for saving souls, had not yet found time to master the basics of socialism. Even so, "...the General of the Salvation Army will be a Socialist before the President of the Wesleyan Conference."¹²⁷ In his early days, Booth paid little heed to social iniquities, but later "...turned to social reform because he

119.-121. *Bradford Pioneer*, 7 Mar. 1913, 20 June 1913, 13 June 1913.

122.-127. *Labour Leader*, 23 June 1894, 17 Oct. 1912, 1 June 1895, 29 Feb. 1896, 31 Aug. 1906, 28 June 1894.

became convinced that poverty itself was a grave impediment to salvation."¹²⁸ Booth's book *Darkest England and the Way Out* excited much attention. In the preface he states that his results "...have been mainly attained by spiritual means." Yet he has "...keenly felt the remedial measures enunciated in Christian programmes...lamentably inadequate for any effectual dealing with the despairing misery of these outcast classes."¹²⁹ Booth's plan to alleviate unemployment by founding colonies at home and overseas was opposed by Keir Hardie. The General's attempt to raise funds for this project met with only a moderate response, due, he claimed, to public apathy. Hardie, complaining that the report of an interview he gave the Army contained no reference to his disagreement with Booth's ideas on emigrant colonisation, demanded that publicity be given to this "...in the strongest language possible."¹³⁰

Although much of the criticism noted here was directed towards the Church in general, there was a particularly acute grievance felt by socialists against Nonconformists. The Church of England was, despite the efforts of the Christian Socialists and many faithful priests, distanced from the shared ethos of radicalism hitherto the province of Dissent and socialism. Nonconformists were the erstwhile champions of the disadvantaged, yet they turned out to be cool toward the injustices suffered by the masses. They had struggled successfully against disabling legislation which penalised their own prospects, but failed to show a similar passion towards others, thwarted not by oppressive religious legislation, but by abject poverty and social deprivation. Perhaps the *Methodist Times* spoke for most Nonconformists when it pointed out that "Methodists do not readily run into politics unless it be politics, which, like the Education Question threaten their own members and their own duties."¹³¹

W.C.R. HANCOCK

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128. K. Inglis, *The Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*, (London, 1963), p. 195.
129. W. Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, (London, 1890), Preface.
130. J.K. Hardie, letter to F. Moss, 24 May 1909, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics.
131. *Methodist Times*, 24 Sept. 1903

NATHANIEL MICKLEM AND THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

Nathaniel Micklem was born 10 April 1888 at Brondesbury in north London and died 26 December 1976 at Sheepstead House, his home near Abingdon where his son, also Nathaniel Micklem, still lives. His father, again Nathaniel Micklem, was a well-known Chancery lawyer who entered the House of Commons in 1906 at the time of the famous Liberal landslide. This Nathaniel Micklem was a QC in the reign of Queen Victoria, became KC in the subsequent reigns of Edward VII, George V, Edward VIII and George VI, and became QC for the second time on the accession of the present Queen in 1952. Nath (as he was commonly known) had therefore a shining political and legal lineage. Though he is remembered primarily as a theologian and church leader (and for "services to theology" was created Companion of Honour in his later years), Nath took a deep interest in law and politics. Of all his honorary doctorates he valued most that of Laws conferred upon him by Queen's University, Ontario. His portrait by Archie Utin in the dining hall of Mansfield College, which was commissioned in 1953 by former members of the College to mark his retirement from the Principalship, shows him in those doctoral robes. One of his later books, *Law and the Laws*, published in 1952 and based on the Wilde Lectures which he had given in the University of Oxford, examines the relations between theology, moral philosophy and law. In retirement Nath was elected President of the Liberal Party, a considerable mark of esteem, though Liberalism was then an emasculated force in British politics.

The public facts of Nathaniel Micklem's career are accessible in various sources including his autobiography, *The Box and the Puppets*,¹ Donald Sykes's entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Elaine Kaye's history of Mansfield College,² the obituary in *The Times*,³ and Norman Goodall's appreciation in this *Journal*.⁴ He was educated at Rugby, New College, Oxford, and Mansfield College. A witty and persuasive speaker he was President of the Union in 1912 and briefly considered a career in politics. Influenced by R.F. Horton, the celebrated minister of Lyndhurst Road Congregational Church, Hampstead, he received and responded to a call to the ministry. He was ordained in 1914, the year when Europe descended into the Great War, and served as assistant minister to Arnold Thomas at Highbury Chapel, Bristol. After two years he was called to the pastorate at Withington, Manchester, where his pacifism quickly brought him into conflict with the deacons and church members. He left Withington to serve with the YMCA behind Dieppe, accompanied by his wife Agatha Frances whom he had married in 1916.

1 London, 1957.

2 *Mansfield College, Oxford, Its Origin, History and Significance*, (OUP, 1996).

3 29 December 1976.

4 *JURCHS* Vol. 1, No. 10, 1977.

At the end of the War he came to Mansfield as chaplain for three years (1918-21), thence to Selly Oak, Birmingham as Professor of Old Testament, then from 1927 to 1931 to Queen's University, Ontario, as Professor of New Testament. In 1931 he returned to England and Mansfield to be Professor of Dogmatic Theology with the expectation of succeeding W.B. Selbie as Principal. "I cannot remember any particular relish for the prospect", he wrote, "but as my colleagues regretfully agreed, this was not an invitation I could well refuse." There is a flash of Micklem's wit in his wry comment: "we returned to England in 1931, and I began the life sentence which was only remitted in 1954 and not even then for exceptionally good conduct."⁵ He was appointed Principal in 1932, combining the Principalship with teaching dogmatic and systematic theology and philosophy of religion until his retirement.

This brief overview shows a person of astonishing academic versatility. Nath not only taught widely but achieved admired competence in every field. But he was not a dry academic. For over thirty years he wrote a weekly column for the *British Weekly* under the pseudonym of "Ilico". He wrote poetry, some light-hearted but often with a rapier thrust exposing hypocrisy and pretension, other poetry into which he poured his theological understanding, and within which we meet one of the spiritual leaders of the twentieth century. Within his own denomination, of which he was both a loyal son and its sharpest critic, he metamorphosed from one who was most deeply distrusted to one who was admired, respected and, by many, deeply revered.

But what of Nathaniel Micklem and the ecumenical movement? Though a committed Congregationalist, he was too large a person to be contained within the confines of his own denomination.⁶ As an undergraduate at New College, one of his great interests was the Student Christian Movement (then the Intercollegiate Christian Union) which was a powerful force among Oxford students. It was at an SCM conference that he met his future wife, Agatha Frances Silcock.⁷ On one occasion he attended the conference of the World Student Christian Federation. Another memorable experience was accompanying R.F. Horton to the All India Conference of missionaries in Calcutta. Micklem was a founder member of a group of younger ministers who in 1911 formed the Free Church Fellowship at a conference at Mansfield. Nathaniel Micklem drafted its covenant which included the words: "Our desire is to cultivate a new spiritual fellowship and communion with all branches of the Christian Church; our hope is of a Free Church so steeped

5. *The Box and the Puppets*, p.70.

6. Adrian Hastings, in *A History of English Christianity 1920-1985*, (London, 1986) implies that, except for the Establishment, Micklem might have been an Anglican, and that "socially and intellectually he was only too clearly an Anglican." (p. 271). The judgment underestimates his deep attachment to his Congregational roots.

7. Agatha Frances Silcock (1895-1961), daughter of Thomas Ball Silcock, twice Mayor of Bath, and Liberal MP for the Wells Division of Somerset, 1906-1910. Their marriage took place at Argyle Chapel, Bath, on 12 June 1916.

in the spirit and traditions of the entire Church Catholic as to be ready in due time for the reunion of Christendom." The Free Church Fellowship continued to the 1960s and over the years included most of those who were to become Free Church leaders.⁸

Micklem's enthusiasm for the healing of the Church's divisions was deepened by his experiences in Canada where, in 1925, the United Church of Canada had been formed by the union of Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians. It did not include the Anglicans, but it showed what might be the potential for the Free Churches on this side of the Atlantic.

Nathaniel Micklem was an ecumenist but not an "ecumaniac" as we have come to use the term to describe total immersion in the conference circuit and committee structure of the ecumenical movement. He held no office in the hierarchy of the World Council of Churches; most of his work was done before the British Council of Churches and the WCC came into existence. To his great surprise he was called to the Chair by the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1944-45, but was never Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council. One feels he would have found tiresome the duties of such an office. His considerable ecumenical influence as a significant church leader was rooted in the Principalship of Mansfield College. He was a Congregationalist by upbringing and conviction, yet one who was sensitive and welcoming to the traditions of the wider church. He was free of that narrowness of spirit which could characterise Nonconformity. He was also free of that feeling of social inferiority which afflicted many Free Church Leaders. He could speak to Anglicans in terms which they understood and respected. On 24 April 1934, for example, he was invited to the pulpit of Westminster Abbey to give an address on the theme of "Theological Co-operation". By the standards of the time that was a remarkable event.

The areas in which Nathaniel Micklem particularly influenced church relations in England were in Free Church attitudes towards episcopacy, relationships between Catholics and Protestants, and developments among Congregationalists in their understanding of ecclesiology which led to the formation of the United Reformed Church. The first of these takes us to a report entitled *Church Relations in England* which was produced in 1950. In his autobiography Micklem revealed that one of the reasons which had made him most unwilling to leave Canada and return to England had been the thought that he would be coming back to the divisions and frustrations of English denominational life. Elsewhere he wrote "Having been for some happy years a minister of the United Church of Canada in the early days of Union...in my heart I feel I am a Methodist and a Presbyterian still, though I remain a Congregationalist by upbringing, duty and conviction."⁹ Much of his time in subsequent years was to be given to the attempt to draw the churches nearer to each other. The Second World War (1939-45) had brought a halt to conversations about reunion which had taken place in the 1920s and 1930s.

8. D.J. Harris, *The Free Church Fellowship, 1911-1965, An Ecumenical Pioneer*, (1967).

9. *The Church Catholic*, (1935), p. 6.

Those conversations had run into the ground. It was not known whether or in what form they might be renewed. The possibility of union between Congregationalists and Presbyterians had begun to receive attention but remained remote. The ecumenical uncertainty of the post-war period was suddenly broken by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, who on 3 November 1946 preached a notable sermon before the University of Cambridge entitled *A Step Forward in Church Relations*. He recognised that the pre-war conversations had reached an impasse. The Free Churches had been unable to accept the idea of rejoining the Church of England if this involved the re-ordination of their ministers with the implication that their ministries had been invalid or irregular. Fisher sensed that it would be fruitless to initiate further conversations on these lines, and admitted that there was reluctance to begin at all.

What he proposed was that, instead of seeking organic or constitutional union, for which the churches were not ready, they should enter a process of growing alike. In earlier discussions the Free Churches had accepted the principle that episcopacy should exist with other elements in a reunited church. Could the Free Churches, as a first step, take episcopacy into their own systems and try it out on their own ground? "In such a giving and receiving of episcopacy", said Fisher, "there would be a mutual removal of a barrier between the folds."¹⁰

That sermon aroused widespread interest. It led to the establishment of a Joint Conference of representatives of the Church of England and the Free Churches. These representatives were drawn from the highest levels of the Churches and denominations. The Joint Chairmen were the Bishop of Derby¹¹ and the Principal of Mansfield College, Nathaniel Micklem. Their Report, *Church Relations in England*, encouraged each of the Free Churches separately to "take episcopacy into its system" by the acceptance of an episcopate which would be consecrated in the first instance through bishops of one or more of the historic episcopal churches and a commitment also to adopt episcopal ordination as its rule for the future. The Report foresaw that for Free Church ministers, who had not been episcopally ordained, there would be grave difficulties in having two types of ministry, the non-episcopally ordained and the episcopally ordained co-existing within a single church or denomination. It would be a major step, but as the Report concluded in words which have an authentic Micklem ring, the goal is no less than visible unity in Christ, "and this we believe will come not by the victory of one church polity over another, but of God over us all."

In a special pamphlet, *Congregationalism and Episcopacy*,¹² Micklem addressed his fellow-Congregationalists. He recognised how difficult it would be

10. Archbishop Fisher's sermon is printed in *Church Relations in England: Being the Report of Conversations between Representatives of the Archbishop of Canterbury and Representatives of the Evangelical Free Churches in England*, (London, SPCK 1950).

11. A.E.J. Rawlinson (1884-1960), Bishop of Derby 1936-1959, and a firm supporter of the formation of the Church of South India in 1947. He came from a Congregational background.

12. London, Independent Press, 1951.

for Congregationalists to accept episcopacy but pointed out that through the ministry of Moderators and County Union Secretaries, they already had *episcopate*. These moderators and county union secretaries did not have jurisdiction over local churches, and, if translated into bishops, did not gain any greater powers than they already held. Their power was already spiritual or ministerial, not legalistic or magisterial. Congregational bishops would have responsibility for the oversight of ministers and congregations and would exercise their responsibility within the ethos of the Congregational system.

The Apostolic Succession, Micklem argued, need not in itself be a ground of difficulty. Free Church scholars had no wish to deny that the gradual development of the episcopate in the early centuries of the church had taken place under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Free Church people could, he hoped, come to value the spiritual link which the historic episcopate provided between the church of the apostles and the present day church. That would not require agreement with the more extreme Anglo-Catholic claims for apostolic succession.

Micklem foresaw greater problems in the place of women in the ministry for a church which took episcopacy into its system. Congregationalists had ordained women since 1917, though as a college principal with the responsibility of placing ordinands in pastorates, he had discovered that "there is in our churches little demand for women ministers, and it is only with the utmost difficulty that they can come to receive a call."¹³ He was clear that Congregationalists could not go back on their principle, but recognised the obstacle which this must present at a time when the vast majority of Anglicans were opposed to the ordination of women.

A further difficulty would arise in respect of the administration of the sacraments. Micklem's principle here is that "we should not flaunt our liberty without thought for the consciences of others."¹⁴ Congregationalists did not claim that only ministers may preach and administer the sacraments. "A congregation is not to be deprived of preaching or of the sacraments because there is no minister available."¹⁵ In such circumstances the local congregation may call upon one of their number to preach or preside. Micklem was clear that Congregationalists could not go back on that principle, and his preferred solution was one which District Councils in the United Reformed Church routinely adopt: "lay administration of the sacraments is exceptional, and only in cases of necessity, and then only by duly authorised persons."¹⁶

In a "Postscript" Micklem strongly encouraged Congregationalists to try out episcopacy for themselves. The Congregational system had in the past thrown up many informal "bishops", often leading ministers in pastorates like Sherwell, Plymouth, Highbury Chapel, Bristol, and Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, ministers

13. *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

who had acted as “unofficial and yet real bishops.” “Could we have official bishops?” he asked. “Can we know till we have tried?” “It is open”, he wrote, “at once to any great town or County Union to set aside one minister to do officially that which traditionally a bishop does, as far as this should be found consistent with the spiritual responsibility of each congregation and our conception of spiritual authority in the church of Christ.” Such unofficial “bishops” would not stand in the apostolic succession, as understood in Anglican terms. Micklem’s proposal did not go as far as Archbishop Fisher had suggested in his Cambridge Sermon. Even so it was a step too far for English Congregationalists in the 1950s. Perhaps it was too maverick a proposal yet it is difficult not to believe that the Churches’ failure to rise to the challenge of the Archbishop’s sermon and the Report, “Church Relations in England”, was an opportunity missed.

The second area is Micklem’s influence on relations between Roman Catholics and Protestants. An obituary in the *Oxford Times* said that Nathaniel Micklem had the confidence of everyone from Romans to Salvationists. It is surprising then to read a small pamphlet which he wrote for the Congregational Union under the title of *The Pope’s Men*.¹⁷ It was written at a time when the Roman Church was in triumphant mode. “The Roman Church”, he wrote, “with the possible exception of the Comintern, is the most powerful pressure group in the world...a noisy church always calling attention to itself and asserting its claims.”¹⁸ Many felt that the Roman Church was a menace to the country. Micklem expressed his concern, for example, at Roman infiltration into the Foreign Office with effects upon foreign policy and designed to increase Roman power and influence. “As a general rule, it is on its best behaviour where it is a minority in a Protestant country, and shows its least attractive expression where it holds political power.”¹⁹

He recognised the attraction of Rome. “We have lost young people to the Roman Church because they have found religion as they have not found it in our services.”²⁰ Rome offered “shelter” and “authority.” In a rapidly changing world the Doctrine of Papal Infallibility invited blind obedience. “In these days of appalling uncertainty when men can find neither in themselves nor in the teachers of their youth any final and compelling answers to their questions, they are apt to accept any institution, whether it be Marxism or Roman, that claims to know the truth and to be firmly anchored.”²¹

The lure of Rome reflected the failure of Protestantism. “We have been far too little aware of the degree to which we have interpreted the Gospel in terms of the prejudices, conventions, standards and respectabilities of the middle classes.”²² Protestantism was in his view rightly judged by the Roman Church. Too often the

17. London Independent Press, 1953.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Protestant churches offered “a partial or mutilated version of the religion we profess.” In many instances it had become too individualistic (as opposed to personal) and the sacraments had been either marginalised or abandoned altogether.

The Pope's Men was written in the aftermath of a terrible war which had been fought for freedom, yet at its end the two powers left in Europe, Marxism and Roman Catholicism, were united in their denial of freedom. Micklem wrote of the Communist Party as a “kind of inverted and secularised Jesuit Order.” In common with totalitarian states under the Communist banner, the Roman Church at that time also insisted on a monopoly of truth. Similarly both were dominated by the craving for power and privilege. If the Roman Church could have its way, “All education would be in the Church's hands; it alone would decide all marriage laws; the canon law of the Church would be recognised as binding by the State; not only would the Roman Church be ‘established’ but no public propaganda for ‘error’ (including Protestantism) would be permitted: there would be strict censorship of the Press, and, although there might be no direct alteration of democratic procedures, the voice of the hierarchy would be obeyed in all matters deemed to concern the church or morals.”²³

It was painful for Micklem to write in these terms. “I have never written a dissertation with such distaste and unwillingness as I have written the foregoing pages.”²⁴ More positively Micklem knew something of the Roman Church from within. In the years leading up to the Second World War, when the German churches were under increasing pressures from Nazism, the Royal Institute for International affairs had asked him to visit Germany and write an authoritative account of the Roman Catholic Church under Nazi oppression. It was a delicate and dangerous mission. Because of the omnipresent Gestapo it would be unsafe for him to stay in hotels where his luggage might be searched. It was essential to travel as inconspicuously as possible. Micklem knew the Dominicans in Oxford and through their intervention he was invited to stay at their monastic houses in Germany. “With the Dominicans”, he wrote, “I enjoyed unshadowed fellowship in Christ.” “Rome still has its saints, its scholars, its martyrs...Roman Catholic piety at its best is a very beautiful form of Christianity.”²⁵

The Pope's Men was critical of Rome, yet when even at his most critical Micklem sought rapprochement. He insisted there is no dispute between Roman Catholics and Protestants on the fundamentals of the faith. “The faith that unites us is far deeper than the differences that divide us.”²⁶ Differences existed and were real, but it was very important to keep them in proportion. *The Pope's Men* was written to explain the differences. But it was also an invitation to Protestants to be more effective exponents and exemplars of the Protestant faith.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

In the third area we look at Micklem's contribution towards Congregational and Presbyterian union. The origins of the formation in 1972 of the United Reformed Church lie in overtures made by the 1932 Presbyterian Assembly, which led to a series of joint conversations until they were halted by the Second World War.²⁷ New conversations led to a joint conference in 1945. A Scheme of Union was issued for consideration in 1947 but met with discouraging responses on both sides. The discussions however led to an acceptance of the need for greater co-operation between the two denominations and to an Act of Covenant which was celebrated in a communion service at Westminster Chapel, London, in 1951 at which Nathaniel Micklem was present.

The problem was that, although both the Presbyterian Church of England and the Congregational Union of England and Wales sprang from the sixteenth-century Reformation and the struggles of the seventeenth century, Congregationalism in the nineteenth century had moved strongly in the direction of Independency, stressing the inviolate independence of the local congregation, whereas the Presbyterian Church operated as a conciliar church with its ascending courts of Elders' Session, Presbytery and General Assembly. The logical consequence of these two understandings of polity demonstrated that when it came to a vote for or against constitutional union, such a vote on the Presbyterian side would be taken in the General Assembly, while the decision of the Congregational Assembly would have to be ratified by an agreed majority of the local churches voting in their church meetings. There appeared to be a huge, and possibly unbridgeable, gulf between the principles and practices of the two systems. Nathaniel Micklem was instrumental in helping bridge this gulf. He was not a member of the joint committee which produced the Basis of Union, but had exercised a formative influence on many of those who represented the Congregationalists on the committee.²⁸

A significant piece of the jigsaw was the Church Order Group which had been formed in response to an "Open Letter" which Micklem and seven other Congregational theologians had addressed in 1938 "To the Ministers of Christ's Holy Gospel in the Churches of the Congregational Order". The Open Letter was a call to "repent of our wavering faith, our lukewarm love of Christ, our unworthy churchmanship".²⁹ The Church Order Group, which continued until the 1960s, comprised a number of mainly younger ministers who began under Micklem's influence to explore the roots of Congregationalism. Prominent among these was

27. A.L. Macarthur, "The Background to the Formation of the United Reformed Church (Presbyterian and Congregational) in England and Wales in 1972". *JURCHS* Vol. 4, No. 1, October 1987. See also A.L. Macarthur, "The Presbyterian Road to 1972", and Ronald Bocking, "The United Reformed Church: Background, Formation and After", *JURCHS* Vol. 5 (Supp No. 2), September 1997.

28. These included Micklem's former students, John Huxtable (1912-1990), John Marsh (1904-1994), and John Wilding (1910-1989).

29. The text of the Open Letter is printed in *The Box and the Puppets* (London, 1957), pp. 93-99.

John Huxtable, who was to become the Minister Secretary of the Congregational Church in England and Wales and the first Assembly Moderator of the United Reformed Church. There were also Daniel Jenkins, Alec Whitehouse and John Marsh, all from Mansfield. Under John Marsh's editorship the Church Order Group produced a series of books.— *The Forward Books* — aimed at a decisive shift in the understanding of church order among Congregationalists. One of these was *Congregationalism and the Church Catholic* by Nathaniel Micklem.³⁰ He argued that Congregationalists were people with a profound belief in church order. Because they lacked the historic episcopate, Dissenters were unfairly caricatured as caring little about church order, but the opposite was in fact the case. Church order was essential to their life. In the local church were to be found the minister of word and sacraments, the elders or deacons who shared pastoral oversight and attended to the business of the congregation, and at its heart was the church meeting where the members gathered in the presence of their risen Lord to take counsel for the needs of the church and its mission, and to be obedient to their Lord's command. This local church, called into being and sustained by Christ, is an outcrop of the great Church. It manifests the marks of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church and acts on its behalf.

Such was the ideal. In practice the right of the local church to guard its independence had become more important than its responsibilities to and for the wider church. If a local church were wealthy, could pay its minister, and maintain its premises, there was no power that could exercise any external control. Even worse, such a church could live to itself alone. If, on the other hand, a small, struggling fellowship in a deprived urban or rural area could not pay its minister, help was forthcoming from funds generously contributed by the larger and wealthier churches. The aid often came with strings attached; the church might have to be content with a less qualified minister (one from List B rather than List A on the roll of ministers) and its finances would have to be openly scrutinised by officers of the denomination outside the local church.

In *Congregationalism and the Church Catholic* Micklem argued that Congregationalism was operating with a defective ecclesiology. The local church had a faith structure (and a lively sense of church order) but the denomination had an "expediency structure".³¹ The Assembly of the Congregational Union of England and Wales could pass resolutions but was powerless to implement them. Power was often wielded by committees who were not responsible to any court of the church. Men and women appointed to the annual Assembly had no authority to act or speak for their sending churches. For the most part, they paid their own expenses and representation was personal rather than ecclesial. The denomination was run by a relatively small number of people who did the best they could, but who were obliged to operate without any authority beyond the consent they could obtain.

30. *Congregationalism and the Church Catholic*, (The Forward Books, London 1943).

31. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Ecclesiologically Congregationalism was in a mess. Micklem argued that true Congregationalism rested upon a mutual interdependence of all the churches, strong and weak, based upon church principle and not expediency or financial status. He returned Congregationalists to what he believed were their seventeenth-century roots and showed that church synods rested upon the solid doctrine and principles of Congregational church order. In the seventeenth century, John Owen, who had been vice-chancellor of Oxford University and Dean of Christ Church during the Protectorate, had shown in his treatise on the *True Nature of a Gospel Church and its Government*³² that the whole church is prior to particular churches, and all the particular churches are “obliged unto mutual communion”. This mutual communion of particular churches in spiritual synods is not an optional extra, but the answer of the Reformed Church to Rome and Canterbury. Micklem agreed that the authority of synods was spiritual and not legal. “No synod has any legal control or legislative authority over any congregation, but the spiritual authority of synods is very great, for it is to be believed that the same Holy Spirit who guides the local church meeting in its particular and local concerns will likewise guard the synods representing the churches in matters of their common concern. Thus the organisation of the whole church catholic is given a religious and theological foundation.”³³ Following the seventeenth-century Independent, Thomas Goodwin, sometime President of Magdalen College, Oxford, he drew a distinction between “ministerial” and “magisterial” authority. The first works by persuasion and consent, while the second uses legal or coercive power. He was clear that Christ rules in the church as the good shepherd, and that whatever is done in his name should reflect his servant role.

Congregationalism and the Church Catholic was published in 1943. Changes in attitude do not happen overnight, but over the next thirty years a very great change came over Congregationalism in England and English-speaking Wales. The British Council of Churches was created in 1942 to promote the cause of unity among the churches of Great Britain and Ireland. This was a great step forward for those who like Micklem had worked for church unity through the Friends of Reunion. The World Council of Churches was formed in 1948. Individual Congregationalists, many of whom had helped to bring the British and the World Councils of Churches into being, took a prominent part in the ecumenical movement, and the denomination was proud of their contribution to the wider church. Micklem had asked questions which could not be shelved. In 1966, while conversations were taking place between the Congregational Union and the Presbyterian Church of England, the Congregational Union of England and Wales became the Congregational Church in England and Wales. Not all Congregationalists approved the change, but it smoothed the way for the union of Presbyterians and Congregationalists in the United Reformed Church six years

32. London, 1689.

33. N. Micklem, *Congregationalism and the Church Catholic*, (London, 1943), p. 47.

later. There is no doubt that Micklem's influence was decisive in preparing Congregationalists for the changes which led eventually to this union. By then Nathaniel Micklem was well into his eighth decade and no longer an active participant in events. As a former Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales he was present at the Service of Thanksgiving for the inauguration of the United Reformed Church which took place in Westminster Abbey on 5 October 1972. On the following Sunday afternoon, 8 October 1972, he gave the Blessing at a service of thanksgiving held in Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. Attended by the Bishop of Oxford this was the first service to be held by Dissenters in the Cathedral for over three hundred years. Nearly forty years earlier Micklem had written that: "The unity of the Church is not something to be created or achieved, but something to be expressed."³⁴ His blessing of the congregation at such an historic service fittingly embodied his lifelong search for the unity of all Christ's people.

ANTHONY TUCKER

A CORNER OF RURAL NORTHAMPTONSHIRE FIFTY YEARS AGO

On 23 May, 1949, I was inducted to the Congregational pastorate of Oundle, King's Cliffe and Nassington – a newly and unwillingly formed group, persuaded by the East Midlands Moderator that only together could they hope for a minister; and each convinced, once they had one, that he should feel something like full-time responsibility for their own congregation.

It should have been my father, Romilly. He had received a unanimous call there, and wanted to go: but the Home Churches Fund insisted that his extra earnings, mostly from examining, should be deducted from the stipend. My brother was still at school. My father had already been looking elsewhere for some time. This seemed the end of the road.

At which point I was moved to give voice to an improbable "Here am I: send me". I was in my first year as a theolog. at Mansfield, having under my belt Classical Mods. and a degree in English. My uncle Nathaniel, Principal of Mansfield, was aware of his brother's predicament, and secured the surprised but benevolent agreement of his staff to my continuing my Theology degree by post, it being understood that if I went to Oundle my parents would be living with me and I should have access to my father's library and counsel. The three churches, realizing that if they called me they would get my father too, were complacent. Hovering in the wings there seemed to be something like the Holy Spirit.

So the beginning of my forty-one years' full-time ministry had to be called "induction", and I was placed on List B (Evangelists). In practice the only things this deprived me of in relation to my fellow-ministers were the laying on of hands

34. *What is the Faith?* (London, 1936), p. 211.

(not in any case obligatory at ordinations in those days) and a full ministerial stipend.

Oundle is an attractive, largely seventeenth-century, stone-built town on the Nene, a river beautiful in its water-meadows, but now for ever odious to me because it drowned two members of the congregation – one older man by suicide, and one, accidentally, an only child of eighteen whose parents had nearly given up hope of offspring after nine years of marriage. He was, from Day One, a paragon of beauty and accomplishment, and at the time of his death a strong swimmer. My return to Oundle for his funeral was one of those moments in life which seem almost like unreality.

The town bridge over the river bore, as I recall, this inscription: “In the yeere of our Lord 1571 these arches were borne down by the waters’ extremitie. In the yeere of our Lord 1572 they were builded again with lime and mortar. Thanks be to God.” The final sentence was below pavement-level and often obscured by leaves and litter. These my father would remove with his stick or umbrella whenever he passed. He tried in vain to persuade one of our deacons, a senior signalman who crossed the bridge twice daily, to carry out this work of piety.

Oundle is dominated by its Public School and by a tall and slender church spire, added to the medieval tower in 1634, and crocketed. It was the perilous aim of a schoolboy in most years to place a chamber pot on the weather-cock at the top. The shops depended upon the patronage of the school and of the Duke of Gloucester at Barnwell, down the road; but if there were any social contacts between town and gown they did not touch the Nonconformist community.

After the Parish Church, built, like nearby Fotheringhay, in the Perpendicular style of Gothic, the most notable ecclesiastical building in the town was the School Chapel – in the same style but Victorian. Sanderson, the founding Headmaster, had intended it as a “Temple of Light”, but it soon sank into ordinary Anglicanism. The School Chaplain and I studied Hebrew together under my father’s tutelage. At that time the most notable features of the chapel were, on the sward outside, Kathleen Scott’s sculpture of her naked son, Peter, the naturalist, aged eight or so, and a series of small war-memorial windows in the ambulatory by Hugh Easton, entitled, and depicting, the Seven Ages of Man. Recently I took my wife to see these. I told a man who was just locking up that we should like to see the glass; and he kindly let us in and stayed to let us out again. I thought he looked a bit surprised when I headed straight for the ambulatory, and when we emerged I saw why. Since I had last seen the chapel it had acquired a breath-taking John Piper glass and wrought-iron reredos – six apparently identical Christ-figures, whose different aspects – as Healer, Sufferer, Ruler, – are made clear by tiny details in the ironwork and the blazing colour-contrasts in the glass. What an education for the boys!

The equally Victorian building which housed the Congregationalists, now a theatre belonging to the school, was the fellowship’s least attractive feature. The latter descended from a 1662 foundation. Richard Resbury, Lecturer installed at the Parish Church during the Commonwealth, was, to judge by his tomb-stone,

popular with everyone, and is buried near the South door. Whether he lived at what became the manse is not clear: the house is not later than Jacobean. Daniel Goodrich, who ministered to the Independents after the Ejectment, appears to have made alterations substantial enough to warrant an inscription over the front door of his initials and the date (admittedly "DG" is ambiguous), but he kept the fine oak linenfold panelling in all the principal rooms, and the wide-oak floorboards. It was a privilege, albeit rather a damp one, to live there.

Other records from those early days might have included a Church Covenant, but there remained no documentation earlier than 1833. The minister then was the father of the eminent musician Ebenezer Prout, who was born in the manse. What Prout senior did with everything up till then, and why, cannot be known. The temper of the times is revealed by an entry in the Minute Book begun in 1833, recording an anxious debate among the deacons, who eventually decided to send two of their number to London to try and reclaim a young lady of the congregation who had gone to the metropolis "to marry a man that is ungodly". Nothing more, so one must doubt if they persuaded her out of it.

There survived from the mid-eighteenth century two great (and loved) double-handled solid silver chalices, one "the gift of the brethren", the other of the "sisters", to "Oundle Great Meeting". These were still regularly put out on the Table at Communion services, and for some of my time there one of them was actually used, with fermented wine, by a group within the congregation.

They were remarkable people. The Church Secretary was a builder and undertaker, a wise and saintly patriarch, kind and courteous to his young minister, never letting anniversaries pass uncelebrated – a true friend. I am still in touch with his daughters, now in their nineties but no longer in Oundle. Then there were two farmers, brothers-in-law, one a dairy-farmer on the edge of the town itself and its chief if not only milk-supplier, the other having 300 acres mixed arable and dairy a few miles out – the latter universally looked up to and never referred to except as "Uncle John". An extraordinary augmentation of this good man's faith and understanding resulted from my explaining to him one day (Oh, the presumption of the young! – but it was after much heart-searching) that the annual auction of harvest produce, which he always conducted, was illegal. (Now, of course, the law has been changed.) Greatly distressed, he left the tea-table and walked to the white entrance-gate to his drive, a hundred yards away. Greatly tremulous, but urged by the family, I joined him there, and we talked long of witting and unwitting transgressions. An elderly man, he had been on the point of collapse when I reached him, but was walking tall by the time we returned. He looked back on that day as a milestone in his pilgrimage, and would often whisper to me, "The white gate!"

Besides these three there were the signalman, already mentioned, an irrepressible gas-fitter, one of the postmen, and numerous widows and maiden ladies of no particular occupation. Any who were *not* related in some way to all the others were the exception. One especially ubiquitous network of relatives, of whom perhaps three out of ten or a dozen were members of mine, occasioned

some grief. One of them became sufficiently scatty for the doctor to consider her unfit to continue to live alone for the time being. Would any of her relations take her under their wing till she was better? Several of them could easily have done so, but I visited every one and was refused. I do not recall a single expression of regret. So she had to go to the mental hospital in Northampton, thirty miles away. In those days all the wards at St. Crispin's were locked. I did not enjoy that aspect of my visits to her – although it did mean that prisons held few terrors for me when in later life I had to visit them from time to time as part of my training as a magistrate.

I suppose the membership at Oundle was between forty and fifty with twenty-five to thirty at morning service and ten to fifteen in the evening. (Even as I write this, a doubt seizes me as to whether it was not the other way round, with the evening attendance the larger.) One old boy regularly wandered down from the "spike" – once hospital-cum-workhouse, now the town's geriatric facility. "B.A.", he would begin to say as he passed the notice-board outside the church. "B.A." with great satisfaction. Then, at Communion, when the deacons approached him, he always called out "I'm not good enough", and refused the elements. How hard I tried to convince him – but even the authority of the "B.A." was not enough for that.

Taking my monthly turn at conducting the service up at the "spike" was an early challenge to my *savoir faire*: but their touching gratitude made it possible to face the next time. Another early challenge was the funeral of one of the town's leading figures, whom all knew to be a rascal. How would the new minister deal with that? The whole town turned out, and at least thereafter the new minister was known.

The villages, one eight miles and the other six miles from Oundle, had evening services only (or afternoon, depending on the availability of preachers). My undertaking, as I remember it, was to take one service a month at each. Sometimes I was at one in the afternoon and the other in the evening. On those days I was offered tea between the two. Wherever this welcome refreshment was, the buns were always full of coconut, and I had to choose between going hungry (and offending my hostess) and losing much of my voice for the evening service. When I was at a village, my father would take the evening service at Oundle.

My transport, for the first couple of years or so, consisted of an Autocycle – a true moped, with emphasis on the "ped" when going uphill. My father had bought this machine when he thought he might himself be the group minister, but it was not a senior man's (or any man's) delight, and I am thankful he never had to use it. (I, already a seasoned car-driver, had to take a test on the thing. No pillion, of course, so the tester simply stood at the main cross-roads in Slough and watched me execute four right turns and four U-turns.) Its typically two-stroke fault was the sparking-plug oiling up; and although I learnt to carry a spare, changing them on a wet night in the dark was not the best preparation for taking a service – especially Communion, when hands must not only be clean but must be seen to be clean. Toilet facilities at the chapels were rudimentary, and if Swarfega had been invented I had not discovered it

King's Cliffe, the further of the two villages from Oundle, had been the home of William Law, the Non-Juror and author of *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. I guessed, but never confirmed, that the "King" in the village name was a Stuart. (He was usually omitted in conversation, anyway.) The Congregational Chapel had been founded in 1836 by a group who rejected altogether the Sacrament of Baptism. Their heirs were similarly minded. I was inclined to blame much on this liturgical foible, but had to admit to myself that the people in Nassington, paedo-baptists all, were just as awkward.

Visiting Cliffe had its irritating and intriguing moments. I used to begin at the hither end of the village, at the house of a woman whose only apparent interest in my presence was in knowing "whether I had been to see Mrs So-and-so yet". I never quite dared to ask, "Never mind that. Now it is you I have come to see." At the far end lived the elderly organist, a delightful and capable widow who really loved music and called an orchestra an "orguestry." With her lived her fifties-ish niece, also widowed and also delightful and capable. The latter attended services regularly but, like old "B.A." at Oundle, would not take Communion. When gently questioned, she said, "Well, I can't, because I don't believe in the Resurrection. I did once, but I stopped believing in the Resurrection when I saw behind the scenes at church". A word to the wise, indeed. "Church" in this instance was not the Cliffe chapel, though it might have been, but a much more numerous company somewhere in the Home Counties.

Responding, unlike those adamant kinsfolk in Oundle, to a family call for help, this woman sold up, giving away her special treasures to her friends, and emigrated to Australia. It did not pan out, and she was back within eighteen months; but would not accept the return of any of her precious things. I confess to thinking, "Who needs the Resurrection with a disposition like that?"

Very different was a man living near those two, whose business conduct was well known to be not all it should have been. I once tackled him about a particular transaction. "What?" he said. "You don't think I allow my religion to have anything to do with my work, do you?"

The Cliffe Church Secretary, another great one, was a master-slater, who knew the stone slates of Collyweston as intimately as those who built the Oxford colleges knew those of Stonesfield. He had two children, the only youngsters in the congregation. He also had an uncle, married, who was a member. The two families sat as far as possible from each other in church. The nephew I came to know well and kept in touch with for many years until his death. The uncle favoured a quiet life, spoke little, and then usually in dislike of something. On being asked to stand for election as a deacon, since the church's constitution required that there be two, he reluctantly agreed on condition that he would "not be asked to do anything." He it was, too, who, at the end of six week-night talks from me to a little group about the history of the Reformation and of Dissent, said to me, "I don't understand it. Jesus Christ was a Christian. [Help! But let it pass.] He was a member of the Church of England. [!:] So why are we Nonconformists?" Somewhat mortified not to have got through, I went home to

chew over this unfamiliar line of thought. Eventually the penny dropped. The Parish Church in Cliffe is of great antiquity and looks as if it had stood there since creation-day. So it had been there when Jesus was about, and he would have been a Christian like everybody else. It was Church of England, so obviously he must have been Church of England too.

For topographical reasons, in Cliffe we were “top chapel” and the Methodists “bottom chapel”, while in Nassington it was the other way round. No Romans in the villages, so it was just top chapel, bottom chapel and church. Little mutual notice was taken, except at harvest time, when it became imperative to arrange dates so that everyone could go to everyone else’s festival and compare the displays.

My Church Secretary at Nassington lived almost next door to “church”, and was the sort of man one might have expected to conform, but that he and his daughter virtually *were* bottom chapel. He bank-rolled it, and she was its resident “enthusiast”. A minister was hardly necessary. Being nearer to Peterborough than was Cliffe, they had easier access to the numerous good souls from that city who supplied the village pulpits around about with zeal and very variable doctrine. (Perhaps a minister was needed after all.) I cannot say that father and daughter became intimates of mine. I was too staid for her, and he was too bossy for me. Besides, he had a habit of breaking a raw egg into his cupful of tea which made sitting at his table difficult. This trait was more than offset, however, by the hospitality of the two women who lived nearest the chapel. Coconut was a small price to pay for their lavish kindness. It was from them that I learnt that one must never enter a house by one door and leave by another. Only Old Nick does that.

With such homespun theology to imbibe, and essays to write for Mansfield, I found it hard to keep up with sermons and visiting. Of course I used material more than once, but was uncomfortable with preaching the same sermon twice on the same day. Transfers were not made easier by the fact that after 1951 the congregations used three different hymn books – *Congregational Praise* at Oundle, *The Congregational Hymnary* at one village, and “Barrett” at the other. Since it has always taken me ages to choose my hymns anyway, the constant re-choosing, and trying to remember what was in which, was a time-taking preoccupation.

But such niggles were as nothing compared with the joy and freedom of ministering to such a rich diversity of devoted and receptive people, and of “learning the trade” under the reticent but always-supportive supervision of my father. We sat at opposite sides of the same study table, typewriters competing. It was a good time for him as well: the Oundle folk (he did not much go to the villages) revered him.

That group of churches did not survive our leaving. Others took its place. I had strong views about what should happen: so, to a different end, had the Moderator. He came to a Church Meeting and presided, not by invitation. I spoke and was ruled out of order, then told to leave the meeting. Then came almost the best moment in the whole of the four years I was there. A forceful woman in the

congregation, who always had some objection to raise and some cutting things to say, and with whom I had been, as I supposed, in a state of acrimonious contention all the time, stood up in that meeting (as I was afterwards told), made to the Moderator that stubborn little shake of the head which I knew so well to presage trouble, and said, "We are not going on with this meeting without our minister present". As usual, she won the point; but the Moderator, of course, won the game and set. The three churches continued in their new alliances – Oundle through two more resident ministries: but none of them is now extant.

CARYL MICKLEM

REVIEWS

Richard Greenham: The Portrait of an Elizabethan Pastor. By John H. Primus
Macon: Mercer University Press 1998. Pp. x, 223. £24.99. ISBN 0-86554-578-2.

Professor John Primus taught at Calvin College in the USA for thirty-four years and is the author of other works on Puritanism. Some of the research for the present book was carried out at Westminster College, Cambridge.

The book contains "a description of Greenham's ministry and an analysis of his thought" and usefully combines history with theology: it is both an historical and theological interpretation of Richard Greenham, using him "as the lens through which to view the Protestantism of the Elizabethan Church". Thus we move from Greenham's early years, about which next to nothing is known, through his time at Pembroke College, Cambridge, again sparsely documented, to the celebrated ministry at Dry Drayton and the brief interlude in London, at Christ Church on Newgate Street. Again, the move to London after twenty-one years teaching and pastoring in rural Cambridgeshire is shrouded in mystery.

Greenham was the Elizabethan preacher and pastor *par excellence* giving his life to the daily round of the ministry, rather than to involvement in more public, ecclesiastical affairs. His was a co-operative Puritanism, religiously radical but outwardly conformist. His thought is well documented since, in an act of great devotion, his works were collected and published early on by Henry Holland, a Cambridgeshire neighbour of Greenham's.

There were two focal points to the ministry at Dry Drayton: preaching, and dealing with afflicted consciences. Greenham loved to preach (interestingly his sermons were topical rather than expository), but he found particular satisfaction in his personal pastoral care. He regularly catechised on Thursday and Sunday afternoons; many catechisms appeared during the reign of Elizabeth I. More reference could have been made to Peter Jensen's important thesis on this subject – admittedly, Primus notes it in his Bibliography.

Greenham's theology was essentially practical, not systematic. However, certain theological themes dominate: God and His Word, Law and Gospel. Greenham was concerned to promote godliness and to this end he gives the doctrine of means pre-eminence: the Word read and preached; prayer; the

sacraments; discipline; affliction; meditation and, the jewel in crown, the Sabbath in that the Sabbath is the focal point of the use of the other means. *Contra* Kenneth L. Parker, who in his ground-breaking work *The English Sabbath* (CUP 1988), argued that there was a broad consensus in support of Sabbatarianism in the Elizabethan and Jacobean Churches, Primus sees Greenham as a strong Sabbatarian who led a Puritan move in this direction; the Sabbath to Greenham was the Means of the Means.

The presentation of Greenham's thought is generally persuasive: his whole approach is characterised as moderate – moderately puritan, moderately predestinarian (perhaps his emphasis on the Sabbath was an exception to this?). What is not so convincing is the spiritual context in which he is placed. Is it true to say that the key notes of puritan theology are to be found in the doctrine of creation, the Sabbath and sanctification (p. 186)? And was Greenham's kind of Protestantism so pervasive in the Elizabethan Church? Rather, the situation appears to have been a complex one as Primus at times acknowledges. Moreover, if Greenham was, in matter of principle, such a co-operative puritan why did he concede that the lack of controversy in the Church would be a possible symptom of evil (p. 56)?

It is worth noting that in the same year that Professor Primus's work was published there also appeared another significant work on Greenham, namely, Kenneth L. Parker and Eric J. Carlson, *'Practical Divinity' The Works and Life of Revd. Richard Greenham* (Ashgate 1998), which contains a lengthy biographical introduction and a selection of manuscripts and early published sources. The last major work on Greenham was Marshall M. Knappen's Cornell University Ph.D. thesis of 1927, "Richard Greenham and the Practical Puritans under Elizabeth", which is still available.

Greenham's ministry touched radical dissent in that Robert Browne (Primus usually spells it "Brown") assisted Greenham at Dry Drayton early in Browne's career as a participant in Greenham's rectory seminary. Also, Greenham was a member of a delegation which interrogated John Penry ("That militant separatist", p. 205) though Primus gives the wrong date for Penry's birth (which has been shown to be 1563 not 1559), and is too much influenced by Donald J. McGinn.

However, Primus has provided us with an excellent book. There is an extensive Bibliography.

ALAN TOVEY

Revelation and Religion: Studies in the Theological Interpretation of Religious Types. By H.H. Farmer. Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999. Pp. xxvi, 246. £49.95

In 1950-51, H.H. Farmer, newly established in the Norris-Hulse chair of Divinity in the University of Cambridge as successor to C.H. Dodd, delivered two sets of Gifford Lectures in the University of Glasgow. The second series remained

unpublished until 1998 when it appeared, edited and introduced by Christopher H. Partridge, as *Reconciliation and Religion: Some Aspects of the Uniqueness of Christianity as a Reconciling Faith*. It was reviewed in the *Journal* (November 1999). The first set of lectures was initially published by Nisbet in 1954, but has been reissued by the Edwin Mellen Press thus completing a trilogy of work by or on Farmer, all under the guiding editorship or authorship of Dr. Partridge. This, too, has a shorter but nonetheless illuminating introduction which addresses the question of Farmer's relevance to theologies of religion in the present day. Dr. Partridge's assessment is guarded and comparative, but basically positive.

Farmer's basic thesis was that Christianity belonged to a general category of religion and also to a category all of its own. In this way he maintained the uniqueness of Christianity as the way in which the "normative concept" in religion, namely the personal encounter of God with man, reaches its "sole perfect manifestation" (p. 34). In other words, where man encounters God, whatever his religious allegiance, there living religion can be found. But living religion finds its consummation in the incarnation of God in Christ. There is, then, a place for other religions with their degrees of incompleteness, fragmentariness, distortion and perversion, while Christianity is retained as the unique salvific religion. Alongside this, Farmer argued for a differentiation between "sustantival religion", namely the one in which normative religion is present as the awareness of the divine, and "adjectival religion" which concentrates on meeting human need for relaxation and security. Farmer's warning is one we would do well to heed today: the meeting of human need is not in itself the essence of living religion. But living religion is bound up with the meeting of need.

Farmer's work is clearly dated. His use of categories such as "essence", "type" and "ideal" places him squarely in a tradition which finds its roots in nineteenth-century theological liberalism and this shows his work to be the product of a time before theology's real engagement with the question of the religions. Nevertheless, this book demonstrates in a way that demands notice that religions are organised totalities and, consequently, that Christianity must stand for a privileging of its uniqueness and totality even when it recognises some degree of living religion in other places. And it reminds us once again about Farmer, a theologian long-neglected but worthy of memory both within his own Reformed tradition and by British theology in general.

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