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EDITORIAL

This issue covers the whole of our history and - given the title of Professor Collinson's paper and the thrust of Mrs Rowe's - more besides. It ranges from Dissent's prehistory to its indubitable if nonetheless problematic future. It embraces polity (and its emergence), mentality (and its evolution), and doctrine (and its dilution?). Each of its papers sheds fresh light on what has been traditionally accepted, taken for granted, or piously ignored. Three of them were first delivered elsewhere. Patrick Collinson's paper was the Society's Annual Lecture for 2003, delivered at the Week-end School held at Ditchingham, near Bungay, 19-21 September 2003. Joy Rowe's paper was delivered at the same school and Alan Sell's was the Annual Lecture of the Association of Denominational Historical Societies and Cognate Libraries, delivered at Dr Williams's Library, London, 30 October 2003.

We welcome as contributors Joy Rowe, who edits the publications of the Chapels Society, and Keith Forecast, formerly Moderator of the North Western Province (now Synod) of the United Reformed Church.

The index to volume 6 of the *Journal* has been distributed. Once again we are grateful to E. Alan Rose, editor of the Wesley Historical Society's *Proceedings*, for compiling it.

DISSENTERS BEFORE DISSENT

This is an East Anglian story, although for the purpose of this paper I shall do what I do not permit anyone else to do and extend "East Anglia" to include parts of Essex to the south of my native Suffolk, although not too far to the south: no farther than John Constable's Stour Valley, running down through Stratford St Mary (Suffolk) and Dedham (Essex) to East Bergholt (Suffolk) and Flatford with its mill and Willie Lot's cottage, where many a childhood picnic was ruined by unusually large swarms of wasps. Robert Reyce wrote in the early seventeenth century of the "continent" of Suffolk, defined by those two notable rivers, the Waveney, which separates Suffolk from Norfolk, and the Stour.¹ The Vale of Dedham, with its borders extending up towards Sudbury and Hadleigh in Suffolk and down to Wethersfield and Coggeshall in Essex, was what the French call a "pays" and the Italians a "contado", for which we seem to have no word in English: a space you could cover in a day on horseback, on your way to and from market, or the sermon, and a stage for human interaction often more significant than either the microcosm of the parish or the macrocosm of the county.

The frontier between Suffolk and Essex, and the diocese of Norwich and the diocese of London, which ran along the Stour and bisected our contado was not irrelevant to our story. On the contrary, it was one of the reasons for the dissent before Dissent which flourished there in the last quarter of the sixteenth century and on into the early Stuart age. In the perception of the religious authorities in the two dioceses, this was indeed frontier territory, so far as Norwich was concerned a far away country of which they knew and cared little, and so a helpful environment for dissent. And for those who lived either side of the line it was not meaningless. An Essex minister, one Philip Gilgate, who found himself in trouble in the church court for failing to wear the mandatory surplice, said in his own defence that some that came out of Suffolk side would have thought the worse of him if he had worn it.² But the little religious world I shall be trying to bring back to life otherwise knew little of the difference between south-west Suffolk and north-east Essex. It was homogenised by the clothing industry which flourished, or not, as the terms of the trade determined, in most of the townships of the contado, and by an increasingly prevalent godly, evangelical religion, our dissent before Dissent.³

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1. *Suffolk in the Seventeenth Century: The Breviary of Suffolk* by Robert Reyce, 1618, ed. Lord Francis Hervey, (London, 1902), p.7
 2. London Metropolitan Archives, Consistory Court of London Records, DL/C/213.
 3. A.R. Pennie, "The Evolution of Puritan Mentality in an Essex Cloth Town: Dedham and the Stour Valley 1560-1640", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Sheffield, 1990. On the religious culture of our contado, two books appeared, fortuitously, in 2003: in addition to the volume noted below, Francis J. Bremer, *John Winthrop: America's Forgotten Founding Father* (New York, 2003). See Parts One and Two.

This paper will not confine itself to the Vale of Dedham. It will sometimes travel as far north as Norwich. But Dedham will be at the heart of it, for reasons not unrelated to a substantial volume published for the Church of England Record Society; which is mostly about the dissent before Dissent which was centred on the town of Dedham and its surrounding parishes and townships, on both sides of the river.⁴

When I speak about “dissent”, or “dissenters”, before Dissent, you must understand me to be expressing the first “dissent”, or “dissenters”, in lower case and the second with a capital letter. Capital D Dissent refers to a formalised, institutionalised, ultimately denominational thing, with its own established structures, known eventually to the laws of the land in legislation tolerating but otherwise regulating its existence and activity. Lower case dissent before Dissent refers to something more informal, unregulated and inchoate, although reaching for formality and regulation. It is however important, and the beginning of wisdom, not to read this piece of religious history backwards and to assume that the future was necessarily the denominational future which we know. All history is a story of unintended consequences.⁵

It is hard to say when this dissent before Dissent began. These dissenters could even be like the poor, whom Jesus said you have ever with you. I believe that a great deal of religious history, perhaps most of it, can be written in terms of the interaction of majorities and minorities. To suppose that there was once a time when there were no minorities which is to say no lower case dissenters, or to write them out of the story, may be to perpetrate a false, two-dimensional religious sociology, almost a false anthropology.

The first dissenting minority in this part of the world that we know anything about were followers of some of the teachings of the fourteenth-century Oxford philosopher and deviant theologian, John Wycliffe, the people called, not of course by themselves, “Lollards”. One remarkable individual often accused of being a Lollard was Margery Kempe of King’s Lynn. Margery was not a Lollard in the Wycliffite sense, but she does represent minority religion, in her case it seems a minority of one, in the prodigious fervour of her religious practice, which offended her neighbours and many of the clergy. When she alternately wept, very noisily, in church and then said that it was full merry in Heaven, people said: How does she know about Heaven? She hasn’t been there any more than we have. Margery got one of the priests who supported her to write

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4. *Conferences and Combination Lectures in the Elizabethan Church: Dedham and Bury St Edmunds 1582-1590*, ed. Patrick Collinson, John Craig, Brett Usher, Church of England Record Society 10, (Woodbridge, 2003).
 5. Patrick Collinson, “Towards a Broader Understanding of the Early Dissenting Tradition”, in Collinson, *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London, 1982), pp. 527-62.

the remarkable autobiographical narrative we know as the Book of Margery Kempe, the purpose of which was to establish, for the record, that she was indeed someone special.⁶ There were, of course, more orthodox and conventional ways of being special, like using your money to fund a chantry or some other religious foundation which perpetuated your name. But that was majority religion. When Dom David Knowles compared the religiosity of Margery Kempe with the mystical devotion of Dame Julian of Norwich, to the credit of the latter and discredit of the former, he was comparing orthodox, copper-bottomed, majority religion with a more spurious minority thing, not necessarily heretical, but not quite right.⁷

The Wycliffite heresy seems to have been brought to Norfolk, a cluster of parishes to the south and east of Norwich, by a renegade Kentish priest called William Whyte, who was burned at Norwich in 1428, and who was posthumously revered by his followers as a great saint. The trial of some sixty Norfolk Lollards, conducted under the auspices of Bishop William Alnwick between 1428 and 1431, preserves precious evidence of the beliefs, activities, and especially the language, the argot, used by members of this religious minority. Particularly striking, and evocative, is the confession of Hawisia Mone, the wife of a prosperous yeoman of Loddon, twelve miles to the south-east of Norwich. (These trials suggest that Lollardy was mainly located among yeoman families in east Norfolk.) Hawisia confessed that she had been “right homely and privy with many heretics”, whom she had received and harboured in her house, and to have “concealed, comforted, supported, maintained and favoured” them “with all my power”, naming four priests, Whyte first of all, and fifteen others, with “many others” unnamed, with whom she had kept “schools of heresy in privy chambers and privy places of ours”.⁸ Women like Mrs Mone were always to play a key role in dissenting religion, not least in the domestic and spiritual economy of post-Reformation English Catholics.⁹

We can assume a continuity of Lollard dissent from the days of those Norwich trials into the age of the Reformation itself, with some cross-fertilisation back from East Anglia into the Kentish Weald, where an

6. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. S.B. Meech, Early English Text Society O.S. 212 (1940).

7. David Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition*, (London, 1961), pp.119-50.

8. *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-31*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, Camden Fourth Series 20 (1977), Hawisia Mone's case, pp.138-44. For “schools of heresy”, see Patrick Collinson, “Night schools, conventicles and churches: continuities and discontinuities in early Protestant ecclesiology”, in *The Beginnings of English Protestantism*, ed. Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie, (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 209-35.

9. However, Shannon McSheffrey has cast doubt on the conventional wisdom that women were particularly prominent in Lollard circles: *Gender & Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities 1420-1530*, (Philadelphia, 1995).

extensive investigation into heresy was conducted in 1511-12.¹⁰ The great learning of Anne Hudson has persuaded us that, contrary to the impression given by some earlier historians of Lollardy, this dissenting movement was characterised not by maverick eclecticism but by a remarkable fidelity, in both the content and the formulation of the heresy, to the bare bones of Wycliffe's teaching, sustained as it was by a literature mostly dating from the early days of the movement, including salient portions of the Wycliffite translation of the Bible, understood and applied according to Wycliffite principles.¹¹

Some of the best evidence for the creative interaction of this old dissent and an emergent Protestantism is East Anglian. The Cambridge scholar and urgent evangelist, Thomas Bilney, who was not a Protestant in a confessional sense but whose evangelicalism prefigured Protestantism, is known to have frequented the household conventicles of East Anglian Lollards. When he preached in Ipswich and denounced religious imagery as idolatry, he was probably preaching to the converted. Bilney was burned in the Lollards' Pit in Norwich in 1531.¹² Not long after this event, three men from Dedham and a fourth from neighbouring East Bergholt walked ten miles through the night to Dovercourt, where they put to the torch the famous rood of Dovercourt, finding their way home by the light of the flames. This is thought to have been an act of revenge for the death of Bilney. Three of the four were hanged.¹³ In Mary's reign there were conventicles and "schismatic sermons and preachings" in Dedham.¹⁴

This is where the old Lollardy for some began to transmute into the new Protestantism. But not for all. There continued to be a dissent before Dissent which was never persuaded by or reconciled to what we consider to be orthodox, or mainstream, Protestantism, and which rejected its confessional core, the doctrine of predestination. These were the so-called "Free-willers" of the mid-sixteenth century, soon to be followed by the cryptic dissenting underground, the Family of Love, which was to have a

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10. *Kent Heresy Proceedings, 1511-12*, ed. Norman Tanner, Kent Records, (Maidstone, 1997).
 11. Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History*, (Oxford, 1988). However, further light is shed on these matters by Shannon McSheffrey and Norman Tanner, eds; *Lollards of Coventry 1486-1522* Camden 5th Ser. 23 (2003)
 12. John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, (London, 1583), pp. 999-1013; J.F. Davis, "Lollardy and the Reformation in England", *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 73 (1982), pp.227-32; J.F. Davis, *Heresy and Reformation in the South East of England*, (London, 1983); J.F. Davis, "The trials of Thomas Bylney and the English Reformation", *Historical Journal*, 24 (1981), pp.775-90; G. Walker, "Saint or schemer? The 1527 heresy trial of Thomas Bilney reconsidered", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 40 (1989), pp.219-38.
 13. John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments* pp. 1030-1.
 14. *Conferences and Combination Lectures* p. liii.

shelf-life of two or three generations, preceding and in some respects anticipating the Quakers of the later seventeenth century.¹⁵

These groups, which have left no trace in the borderlands of Suffolk and Essex, except for the books written against them, lie outside the scope of this lecture. But they allow us to make the important point that if not all old Lollards became new Protestants, not all early Protestants were the blood descendants of Lollards. It is a perception of East Anglian Puritanism which I owed many years ago to the late Professor Wallace Notestein, in conversation, that it was the sons and grandsons of the wealthy clothiers who built and enriched the great churches of East Anglia, Lavenham, Clare, Dedham, who turned them, somewhat incongruously and inappropriately, into sermon houses. And that, unlike the lineal descent of dissent for which the late Christopher Hill and Margaret Spufford, for different reasons,¹⁶ have argued, can be demonstrated genealogically. For example, in the early sixteenth century the Morse family of Stratford St Mary, hard by Dedham, were notable benefactors of their parish church. One Morse built the south aisle of the church and his son, Edward Morse, a few years later, the north aisle. But Edward's sons, Edward the younger and John Morse, were deeply affected by the protestant apostolate in nearby Hadleigh of preachers like Thomas Rose, Nicholas Shaxton and Rowland Taylor, and they were linked with the Dedham conventicles of Mary's reign. Presently the next generation of this prosperous family were at the heart of the godly religion of Elizabethan Dedham and its vicinity, both patrons and participants.¹⁷

I have argued in a recent essay¹⁸ that the conversion of those who do belong in the trajectory of this lecture, those whom we can begin to label Protestants, consisted crucially of taking on board the conviction, which we do not find with the Lollards, that they and they alone constituted the true Church. Ecclesiology, and a certain brand or strand of ecclesiology, became central to their self-perception; that and the touchstone of Protestantism itself, the doctrine of justification by only faith, unknown to the Lollards, which underwrote their ecclesiology. As Rowland Taylor

15. Thomas Freeman, "Dissenters from a dissenting Church: the challenge of the Freewillers 1550-1558", in *The Beginnings of English Protestantism*, pp. 129-56; J.W. Martin, *Religious Radicals in Tudor England*, (London, 1989); Christopher Marsh, *The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1630*, (Cambridge, 1994).
16. *The World of Rural Dissenters 1520-1725*, ed. Margaret Spufford (Cambridge, 1995); Christopher Hill, "From Lollards to Levellers", in *The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill*, vol. 2: *Religion and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England*, (Brighton, 1986), pp. 86-116.
17. *Conferences and Combination Lectures*, pp. lix-lxii, 229-31. On Hadleigh, see John Craig, *Reformation, Politics and Polemics: The Growth of Protestantism in East Anglian Market Towns 1500-1610*, (Aldershot, 2001), pp. 152-75.
18. Collinson, "Night schools, conventicles and churches".

prepared for martyrdom in his parish of Hadleigh, he wrote to his wife: "We have undoubtedly seen the true trace of the prophetic, apostolic, primitive Catholic church."¹⁹

"True" requires "false" to offset it, and this was a strongly dualistic ecclesiology. In Marian Cornwall, a poor, illiterate woman told her judges: "God give me grace to go to the true church." "The true church: what doest thou mean?" demanded the bishop. "Not your popish church, full of idols and abominations, but where three or four are gathered together in the name of God, to that church I will go as long as I live."²⁰ I believe that this was a lesson not so much taught to poor women in Cornwall by learned protestant theologians, or by poor women to the theologians, but a conviction which arose from the interaction between them. In 1536, William Barlow, one of the first protestant bishops and a doctor of theology who had taught in both universities, was quoted as affirming in a public sermon that "wheresoever two or three simple persons as two cobblers or weavers were in company and elected in the name of God, that there was the true church of God."²¹

The biblical trope of "two or three gathered together" recurs again and again in the confessional utterances of these primitive Protestants. And the somewhat paranoiac sense of being part of an underestimated and even persecuted minority would remain a psychological motif of Protestantism for a long time to come, even in circumstances when Protestantism was, politically at least, on top, as it was in the brief reign of Edward VI.²² It was a necessary motif, and inner conviction, for had not Jesus taught that the way to salvation was narrow, and few there were that found it? The doctrine of predestination, and its application in what has been called "experimental Calvinism", certainly accentuated the conviction, always laced with gnawing doubt whether one was one of the elect or not, which William Perkins called the greatest case of conscience that ever was. I have suggested, and I think that it is not the least perceptive of my historical observations, that when most people became Protestants, which was legally the case when the Elizabethan religious settlement was hammered home, Protestants, real Protestants, became Puritans. For Puritanism kept alive and even gave some concrete shape to the principle that the true Church would always be the "little flock" which Jesus told to be of good comfort, since it was his Father's good pleasure to give them

19. Foxe, *Actes and Monuments* (1583 edn.), p. 1528.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 2050.

21. British Library, Cotton MS Cleopatra E.v., 415.

22. Catharine Davies, "'Poor Persecuted Little Flock' or 'Commonwealth of Christians': Edwardian Protestant Concepts of the Church", in *Protestantism and the National Church in Sixteenth Century England*, ed. Peter Lake and Maria Dowling, (London, 1987), pp. 78-102; Catharine Davies, *A Religion of the Word: The Defence of the Reformation in the Reign of Edward VI*, (Manchester, 2002).

the kingdom.

But this is where our neat dichotomy of majority and minority religion begins to fall apart, or to become confused. William Barlow, who had defined the true church of God in those grossly reductionist terms, “two or three simple persons”, was a bishop, who shared in the consecration of Matthew Parker, Queen Elizabeth’s first archbishop of Canterbury, and for Parker the true Church was not so much two or three simple persons as the sixty-nine archbishops of Canterbury who had preceded him.²³ One of Barlow’s daughters married Parker’s son, and all his other daughters became the wives of bishops, one of them, Frances, the wife of an archbishop, Tobie Matthew of York.²⁴ So the Church of England not as a small flock but as a powerful and privileged establishment was in the very loins of Bishop Barlow.

This was a paradox which became apparent with the Elizabethan religious settlement. For as long as Mary lived, Protestants were without any question a minority religious group, even if we add what must have been a “Nicodemite” semi-conformist majority within the protestant ranks to the minority who chose the hard option of exile, and the even harder choice of martyrdom. The paradox became glaringly obvious when John Foxe began (in 1563) to publish his great book *Actes and Monuments*, soon universally known as “The Book of Martyrs”. For Foxe airbrushed out of his story those compromising and compromised Nicodemites, turning the greatest Nicodemite of all, Elizabeth herself, into a near-martyr.²⁵

This was almost to reduce the Church which witnessed to the truth under the iron heel of the Marian regime to the 300 or so martyrs, a little flock indeed, although Foxe included those who had sustained and protected the martyrs. This was a myth, an invented tradition, with which English Protestantism lived for two or three centuries to come. How was this myth to be reconciled with the reality which was an established protestant Church, in possession of the high ground, a Constantinian Church, as Foxe reminded his readers when, in the 1563 edition, he dedicated the book to the queen, in a preface which opened on a great “C”, C for Constantine, embracing an image of the queen treading the pope underfoot (an idea on which Foxe had second thoughts, for in the 1570 edition the capital C became the first letter of “Christ”). Eusebius of Caesarea, the father of church history and Foxe’s inspiration and model,

23. Matthew Parker, *De antiquitate Britannicae ecclesiae & privilegiis ecclesiae Cantuariensis, cum archiepiscopis eiusdem* 70, (London, 1572 [-1574]).

24. Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: the Church in English Society 1559-1625*, (Oxford, 1982), pp. 45-6.

25. Thomas S. Freeman, “Providence and Prescription: The Account of Elizabeth in Foxe’s ‘Book of Martyrs’”, in *The Myth of Elizabeth*, ed. Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman, (Basingstoke, 2003), pp. 27-55.

had faced the same dilemma in the fourth century A.D. His pioneering *Ecclesiastical History* was the story of a Church under the cross, a persecuted minority Church, but, like Foxe's history, its publication celebrated a new era, the peace of the Church under a benevolent emperor, even while it encouraged its readers to remember, and reenact in their own mentality and experience, the cruel years of persecution: a distortion written into the existential history of the Church for generations to come.²⁶

II

We are now in a position to investigate our subject, dissent before Dissent in Elizabethan and post-Elizabethan East Anglia. First we have to rid our minds of the primitive notion, broad-brushed into the conventional, traditional history of the English Reformation, that East Anglia, with its commercial links to the Netherlands and proximity to Cambridge University, was uniformly, prodigiously and exceptionally Protestant, in advance of much of the rest of England.

This is another myth. Authentic rather than nominal or merely conformist Protestantism was the fruit of what was called "a godly, learned, preaching ministry", and in the early Elizabethan Church preaching was everywhere, even in East Anglia, in very short supply. Down the whole east coast of Suffolk the only sermons to be heard were preached by a layman called John Lawrence, a Wesley-like figure who passed into legendary folklore, whom the unreconstructed parish clergy were forced by the very protestant bishop, John Parkhurst, to admit into their pulpits, presumably covering Lawrence's expenses. In the extreme north-east of the county, the half-hundred of Lothingland, the hinterland of Lowestoft, was a notorious catholic enclave, more like Lancashire than East Anglia, a cause of anxiety for the government as late as the 1580s.²⁷ Things were more advanced in west Suffolk, but even in Bury St Edmunds, which was a little Geneva by the end of the century, John Craig has recently demonstrated that the card-carrying protestant element was outnumbered by conservative conformists and the kind of people dismissed as "church papists", well into the 1570s.²⁸

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26. R.A. Markus, "Church History and Early Church Historians", in *The Materials Sources and Methods of Ecclesiastical History*, *Studies in Church History* 11, ed. D. Baker, (Oxford, 1975), pp.1-17; Thomas S. Freeman, "'Great searching out of bookes and autors': John Foxe as an Ecclesiastical Historian", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Rutgers University, 1995. I am grateful to Dr Freeman for allowing me to consult and cite his dissertation, which is largely concerned with the influence on Foxe of Eusebius.
27. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors: politics and religion in an English county 1500-1600*, (Oxford, 1986), pp. 189-90, 212-15.
28. Craig, *Reformation, Politics and Polemics*, Chapter 4 "Politics: Bury St Edmunds, 1500-1610".

In Norfolk, with its almost a thousand parishes, Protestants in a meaningful sense existed in pockets. One of those pockets was the Norwich parish of St Andrew's, where the singularity of the worshippers was noted into the seventeenth century by the nickname of "St Andrew's birds".²⁹ Another was on the north Norfolk coast, around the house which the godly Nathaniel Bacon, younger son of Lord Keeper Bacon and half-brother of Francis, built at Stiffkey.³⁰ But catholic, or near-catholic pockets must have predominated. When the Elizabethan government first began to identify the harder-line Catholics as "recusants", Norfolk was found to contain more recusant households than anywhere else in the province of Canterbury, London only excepted.³¹ Norfolk was religiously polarised. Someone said that "the state could not long stand thus; it would either to Papistry or to Puritanisme."³² Here were two confronting minorities. Where and what was majority religion? It was presumably the queen's religion, mere conformity, which, as Margaret Spufford has observed, is something which tends to have no history.

The prevalent conservatism was passively, and perhaps even actively, fostered by those entrenched in the administrative hierarchy of the early Elizabethan Church in the diocese of Norwich, who were part of the backlog of the recent past. Dr Miles Spencer, once chancellor to the vigorously catholic Bishop Richard Nix and now archdeacon of Sudbury, has been called "a monstrous pre-Reformation anachronism"³³ and Spencer went on until 1570. Bishop Parkhurst himself complained that all his archdeacons were "popish lawyers or unlearned papists."³⁴ The conservatism of much of Norfolk and Suffolk was accentuated by gentry who as patrons of livings had no interest in appointing and promoting protestant evangelists.³⁵ But in the 1570s things began to change. This was partly a generational factor, as protestant sons inherited from catholic fathers, and began to bring in preachers from the more evangelical of Cambridge colleges.³⁶ It was also

29. Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants*, pp. 141-2.

30. Four volumes of *The Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey*, covering the years 1559 to 1602, have been edited by A. Hassell Smith *et al.*, Norfolk Record Society, 46, 49, 53, 64, (Norwich, 1979, 1983, 1990, 2000).

31. A. Hassell Smith, *County and Court. Government and Politics in Norfolk 1558-1603*, (Oxford, 1974), pp. 201-2.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

33. MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors*, p. 164.

34. *The Letter Book of John Parkhurst, Bishop of Norwich, Compiled During the Years 1571-5*, ed. R.A. Houlbrooke, Norfolk Record Society, 43, (Norwich, 1974-5), pp. 27.

35. Patrick Collinson, "The Puritan Classical Movement in the Reign of Elizabeth I", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1957, pp. 658-9.

36. *Ibid.*, Chapter 9 "Puritanism and the Gentry in Suffolk, 1575-1585: A Case-study"; MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors*, Chapter 6, "A New World: Recusant and Puritan 1572-1603".

political, the fallout from the downfall of East Anglia's greatest magnate, the Duke of Norfolk, executed for treasonable conspiracy in 1572. The many books which describe the duke as a Catholic are only half-right, but the Howard family generally leant that way. And then in the summer of 1578 the Elizabethan government, in the shape of the Privy Council, took advantage of a royal visitation which passed through East Anglia to discredit and even imprison catholic and crypto-catholic survivors of the Howard regime, such as Sir Thomas Cornwallis, and to replace them on the Commission of the Peace with assured Protestants like, in west Suffolk, Sir Robert Jermyn of Rushbrooke and Sir John Higham of Barrow.³⁷ The ascendancy in Suffolk of their kind of Protestantism, and you can call it Puritanism if you like, was now more or less assured for a century to come.

So had minority religion become majority religion, and is this where our story of dissent before Dissent ends? No, it is closer to where it begins. To discover why we have to go back to Norwich. Bishop Parkhurst was himself part of the beleaguered protestant minority. In trying to convert the fifteen hundred parishes of his densely populated diocese he was not helped by an almost total lack of political and administrative skills, which meant that he was surrounded by unprincipled rogues and quite unable to do anything about Catholicism in the ranks of the gentry. The real bishop of Norwich in the perception of our protestant minority was John More, the "Apostle of Norwich", officially no more than preacher at that small Norwich parish of St Andrew's, but the author of a catechism with which godly householders taught their families, the standard of orthodoxy for protestant Norfolk.³⁸ More was a tireless evangelist, according to the Suffolk minister Nicholas Bound, who later married his widow, responsible for "many hundred sermons, or rather certain thousands". But there was only so much that even More could achieve. In one of those sermons, delivered to the Norfolk bench, he protested "I cannot preach to the whole land", and he urged his hearers "so many of you as have any voices in place and Parliament" to procure more preachers. "Bestow your labour, cost and travail to get them. Ride for them, run for them, stretch your purses to maintain them. We shall begin to be rich in the Lord Jesus."³⁹

Bishop Parkhurst's strategy was different. He seems to have decided that the way forward was to convert his own cathedral, hitherto "a cosy nest for neuters",⁴⁰ into an evangelical powerhouse. As vacancies

37. Zillah Dovey, *An Elizabethan Progress: The Queen's Journey into East Anglia, 1578*, (Stroud, 1996); MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors*, pp. 195-7; Diarmaid MacCulloch, "'Catholic and Puritan in Elizabethan Suffolk", *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 72 (1981), pp.269-78.

38. Collinson, *Godly People*, p. 298.

39. John More, *Three godly and fruitful sermons*, (Cambridge, 1594), Epistle and pp. 66-9.

40. *The letter Book of John Parkhurst*, p. 44.

occurred the cathedral chapter was filled with hot Protestants. Towards the end of Parkhurst's time Norwich was well on its way to reconstruction on the model of one of the great cities of the Reformation. Zurich comes to mind. An idealised account set down by a Norwich preacher who later moved to Bristol speaks of a harmonious and constructive alliance between the ministers and magistrates of the city. No important decisions for the welfare of the city were taken before consultation with the "grave and godly preachers". The governors went daily to sermons in the cathedral and had the preachers home with them to dinner. There was systematic preaching along the lines of the 'prophesyings', which had indeed originated in Zurich. This was not dissenting religion surely? The Gospel was on top, at least politically.⁴¹

But William Burton glossed over what, borrowing a Marxist phrase, we might call the internal contradictions in the Elizabethan Church in general, and in Norwich Cathedral in particular. These contradictions were between evangelical Protestantism and crypto-Catholicism and they split the cathedral chapter. They were also contradictions between the religion of the queen and that of many of her leading ministers and counsellors.⁴² It was only Elizabeth's religious conservatism which accounts for the fact that to this day we still have our cathedrals, and the never more popular institution of choral evensong.⁴³ It was not her intention that these great buildings should be turned into preaching halls. The conflicts arising from these contradictions fostered and festered the growth of the dissent before Dissent which is properly my subject.

The protestant canons of Norwich did not share the queen's view of the function of cathedrals, and their reforms were getting out of hand. Some of the dignitaries, including George Gardiner, who would shortly be made dean of Norwich, conducted what might be called an internal act of iconoclasm when they demolished the organ. This "outrage" earned stinging rebukes from the queen and her favourite, the Earl of Leicester, who more privately was sympathetic to the religious values which the outrage expressed.⁴⁴ Gardiner, Leicester's choice as the new dean, made haste to redeem his reputation. When one of the iconoclasts, Edmund Chapman, whom we shall shortly encounter at Dedham, "inveighed against the manner of singing" in the cathedral, Gardiner put him on a charge.⁴⁵

41. Desiderius Erasmus, tr. William Burton, *Seven dialogues*, (London, 1601), Epistle.

42. Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, (London, 1967; Oxford, 1990), pp. 202-4; Smith, *County and Court*, pp. 211-23.

43. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700*, (London, 2003), pp. 510-11.

44. Ralph Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People During the English Reformation 1520-1570*, (Oxford, 1979), p. 252; Magdalene College, Cambridge, MS "Papers of State", II, 633-40.

45. *Letter Book of John Parkhurst*, pp. 254-5.

And then Bishop Parkhurst went on to a better place. No sooner was he dead than the Norwich preachers revealed the latent presbyterianism which they shared with the Cambridge theologian Thomas Cartwright, and the young London ministers who in 1572 had published the inflammatory presbyterian tract, *An admonition to the Parliament*. The prophesying in Norwich cathedral was given a new constitution, as if the preachers themselves were wholly in charge. Now it was "judged meet by the brethren" that the exercise should happen every Monday, the speakers to be "such as shall be judged by the brethren meet to speak", the orders governing proceedings to be drawn up "by the consent of the brethren only, and not by one man's authority".⁴⁶ Presently 175 citizens of Norwich, "with infinite more in this shire of Norfolk", petitioned the queen to establish presbyterian church government. "It might seem good to your highness to fulfil up your happy work by removing the government of Antichrist also, with all his archprelates, and all his court keepers, which keep not the Lord's courts, by planting that holy eldership, the very sinew of Christ's Church."⁴⁷

If precocious presbyterianism was one part of a gathering anti-establishment dissent, another was more radical, as alien to the kind of presbyterianism represented by the Norwich ministers as it was to episcopal hierarchy. In the later 1570s Robert Browne and Robert Harrison, both of the same county, pulled themselves and their followers out of a Church which they now rejected as a false Babylon, announcing a reformation "without tarrying for the magistrate", to be carried out by the godly "be they never so few". Although the gestation of their movement is obscure and poorly documented, it appears that these early Separatists were disillusioned with the ranking preaching ministers, men like John More, who in the last resort were bound to obey the law in the shape of the bishops and their officers.⁴⁸ For their part non-separated Puritans repeatedly warned the bishops that, in effect, they were the greatest sect-makers, their repressive policies driving the poorly instructed godly into schismatic separation.

Although Browne did not remain a Separatist for very much of a long life, he lent his name to "Brownists" for a century to come. A third pioneer of separation in Norfolk is a much more shadowy figure, one Thomas Wolsey, who was to spend thirty years in a Norwich prison, but with a key which enabled him to come and go more or less as he pleased. It was

46. Dr Williams's Library, MS Morrice B 1, pp. 268-70; printed, John Browne, *History of Congregationalism in Norfolk and Suffolk*, (London, 1877), pp. 18-20.

47. *The Seconde Parte of a Register*, ed. Albert Peel, (Cambridge, 1915), ii. pp.157-60.

48. *The Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne*, Elizabethan Nonconformist Texts 2, ed. Albert Peel and Leland H. Carlson, (London, 1953); B.R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition*, (Oxford, 1971), pp. 44-66; Craig, *Reformation, Politics and Polemics*, pp.103-10.

apparently Wolsey who converted to the principles of separation Henry Barrow.⁴⁹ Barrow passed on the torch to Francis Johnson, and so on through a genealogy enshrined in the annals of denominational Congregational history. But, once again, one must insist that this history is not to be read backwards. This too was dissent before the capital D Dissent of the later seventeenth century.

Nemesis was now at hand. It must have irked Archbishop Parker that his native county was notorious for religious disorders and indiscipline, and he cast around for the toughest replacement for Parkhurst he could find, drawing up a short list which included the future Archbishop John Whitgift.⁵⁰ But in the event (and we can suspect the kind of court intrigue which was driving Parker to despair) the choice fell, incongruously, on Edmund Freke, the bishop of Rochester, a moderate and as weak a character as Parkhurst but perhaps in different ways, entirely ruled by his Mrs Proudie of a wife.⁵¹ But Freke had his orders, which resembled those handed down at about the same time to John Aylmer in the diocese of London: to suppress both catholic and puritan dissent with equal and impartial rigour.⁵²

But if it was beyond the capacity of Bishop Aylmer to invent Anglicanism through the machinery of his courts and visitations, it was certainly more than Bishop Freke could manage. With the protestant gentry alienated, he had no choice but to build some kind of affinity among those of the opposite, crypto-catholic tendency. When he suspended the Norwich preachers and silenced most of the pulpits in the city he had not only the Puritans but the Privy Council against him. One counsellor, Sir Thomas Heneage, by no means a Puritan, spoke of "the foolish bishop", who had made enemies of "divers most zealous and loyal gentlemen of Suffolk and Norfolk".⁵³ It was this which precipitated the revolution from on top of 1578, when the Privy Council saw to it that the tables were turned and those zealous and loyal gentlemen put in charge.

But it was as yet far from clear that zealous Protestantism was, as it were, the government rather than the dissenting opposition. The eye of the

49. Stephen Offwood, *Advertisement to John Delecluse and Henry May the elder*, (Amsterdam? 1633?) (unique copy in Marsh's Library Dublin). I am grateful to Dr Michael Moody for this reference. Joy Rowe is able to tell us more about the forgotten Wolsey.

50. *Correspondence of Matthew Parker*, ed. John Bruce and T.T. Perowne, Parker Society, (Cambridge, 1853), pp. 360, 473, 476, 477; Julia Merritt, "Westminster Abbey, 1558-1630", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 52 (2001), pp.627-8.

51. Smith, *County and Court*, pp. 208-13. Smith tells the story of Freke's battle royal with his chancellor, John Becon, which is interwoven with his campaign against the Puritans, a tale too convoluted to be repeated here.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 213-23; Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, pp. 201-2.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

storm now moved to Bury St Edmunds and the parishes surrounding Bury. What history knows as "the Bury stirs" make a long and complicated story, recounted by several historians, most recently and authoritatively by John Craig⁵⁴, and too much of a bundle to be unpacked on this occasion. Craig has explained how divided in religion Bury St Edmunds was, although the two factions had for some time rubbed along satisfactorily in the management of a town which was not yet a corporation, and where the institutions of government were relatively informal. Among the factors which set the cat among the pigeons were the personalities of the leading protestant of the town, Thomas Badby, who was living in the remains of the abbey, where he entertained the queen in 1578; and the leading conservative, Thomas Andrews; together with the presence in Bury of a number of Brownists, who gathered to the number of a hundred in conventicles to hear Browne declaim his radical views. In 1583, two Brownists, a shoemaker and a tailor, were hanged at the assizes for a gross and public libel perpetrated against the religious integrity of the queen herself. Freke and his conservative allies found it convenient to bracket the more orthodox preachers of the town and its surroundings with the Separatists, and the lines between these two tendencies were indeed blurred. Some of the preachers were not only silenced but hauled up before the assize and imprisoned along with the Brownists. There was also a complex conflict of jurisdiction, with many lines crossed and entangled: the bishop and his local officers versus the Justices of the Peace, who held their court at the Angel in Bury, where they trespassed into the regulation of religion and morals; the J.P.s versus the Assize judges, who were anti-puritan; the Privy Council for the J.P.s, and against the judges and the bishop. Soon Bishop Freke successfully negotiated a transfer to the quieter diocese of Worcester, and with his absence things in Bury quietened down to a state of affairs in which a prevalent Puritanism was not often challenged, and which by the end of the century looked more like a politico-social-religious establishment than dissent.

III

Edmund Chapman, the Norwich prebendary with an aversion to choral music, can take us back to the Vale of Dedham where we began. The Privy Council spent several years trying to patch up some kind of *modus vivendi* between Bishop Freke and the Norwich preachers, but some of them, including Chapman, decided to shake the dust of Norwich off their feet

54. Craig, *Reformation, Politics and Polemics*, pp. 88-132. But see also Collinson, "The Puritan Classical Movement", pp. 860-930; Elliot Rose, *Cases of Conscience*, (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 158-69; and Paul Seaver, "Community Control and Puritan Politics in Elizabethan Suffolk", *Albion*, 9 (1977), pp.269-315.

and to head south.⁵⁵ Chapman had friends who counted, and he had somewhere to go. The Earl of Leicester, as chancellor of Oxford, had helped to secure him a doctorate of divinity, and he had an exceedingly wealthy and influential brother-in-law, a gentleman clothier called William Cardinal, a native of Dedham, whose cloths were so famous that in eastern Europe they were known as "Cardinals".⁵⁶ Chapman was now set up in a privately funded lectureship in Dedham. There can be no doubt that this was part of a concerted strategy. Three more Norwich ministers came south with Chapman: Richard Crick, who also gained an Oxford doctorate at this time, who was settled in Constable's native East Bergholt, a town which the Cardinals virtually owned, John Tilney, who also found a berth at East Bergholt, and Richard Dowe, who was placed at Stratford St Mary, where he and his wife Susan raised eleven children.⁵⁷

The Norwich experiment was now to be repeated, in the relative security of the extremes of the two dioceses. The Norwich brotherhood was replicated in the experiment of a ministerial conference, in some ways resembling and anticipating the classes of the presbyterian church order, and, unlike the Norwich prophesying, a secret affair whose very existence was at first concealed from the authorities. Other, similar conferences were taking shape elsewhere in Suffolk and Essex, and farther afield in the midlands, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire. There can be no doubt that this was dissent before Dissent, a concerted strategy to take over the Elizabethan Church by stealth, by means of a whole stable of Trojan horses.⁵⁸ Although Dowe eventually became vicar at Stratford St Mary, that was at least eight years after he first settled in the village, and Chapman and Crick were never beneficed. Their ministry was conducted on the very edge of the established Church, or rather in an informal church within the Church whose very rationale was to ignore and if necessary sidestep, even flaunt, the laws and protocols of the established Church.

To explain Chapman's somewhat ambivalent position in Dedham it is necessary to draw attention to another internal contradiction. Dedham was a substantial place and a prosperous centre of the cloth trade, linked to far-flung markets. As any church-crawler to the Constable Country can see to this day, Dedham church was and is one of the glories of the immediately pre-Reformation Church, its fabric totally rebuilt in the 1490s and in 1519 crowned with the impressive and crenellated tower which still pokes its head above the water meadows as you speed along the A12 towards Ipswich. Even later, in the 1530s, came the kind of richly decorated porch

55. Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, pp.203-4; Collinson, "The Puritan Classical Movement", pp. 313-19.

56. Pennie, "The Evolution of Puritan Mentality", pp. 32-3.

57. *Conferences and Combination Lectures*, pp. lxxxiii, 192-9, 203-4, 260-2.

58. Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, pp. 208-39.

used for weddings. But as a living Dedham was worth very little, too little to make it easy or even possible to fill. For most of Mary's reign and the first three or four years of Elizabeth's the vicarage remained vacant, with the early Elizabethan parish served by readers; and in 1562 the Exchequer appointed a commission to investigate the impoverished state of its revenues, which were put at £6.7s., leading to some creative steps in tax avoidance which raised the value to £8.3s.10d. Not surprisingly, it continued to be hard to find the kind of vicar who was sufficiently qualified and likely to stay the course, and that remained a problem for many years to come.⁵⁹

There was a vicar of Dedham from 1564 until 1575, John Worth, who seems to have been the same John Worth who as a married Protestant had fled from the parish in Mary's reign. If we knew more about Worth we should probably credit him with helping to establish Dedham's radical protestant credentials. The evidence is that he baptised many girls with names like Patience, Grace, Prudence, Constance, Faith, and Charity, and boys with some of the more robust Old Testament names.⁶⁰ But by the time John Aylmer became bishop of London, Worth had resigned, to become rector of William Cardinal's home parish of Great Bromley, and Aylmer must have seen an opportunity to put Dedham into a safer pair of hands. It took time, for it was not all up to Aylmer, the rights of presentation being confused. But in the summer of 1577 John Keltridge, a graduate of Trinity College Cambridge, was instituted to the living. All should have been well. Keltridge was Aylmer's protégé. Aylmer had ordained him and had appointed him to preach at his first ordination ceremony, although Keltridge was only twenty-four at the time; and he had made sure that Keltridge would use the occasion to blacken the reputation of his predecessor as bishop of London and now his enemy, Edwin Sandys, who had been promoted to York.⁶¹

But in the event things went very badly wrong, and to find out why takes us some way into the intricacies of majority-minority religion in Elizabethan England. Keltridge was no crypto-papist, but a committed evangelical Calvinist, who in one of his publications launched into one of the most vitriolic attacks on Catholicism ever perpetrated.⁶² In his ordination sermon he urged his hearers to scatter through every angle and quarter of the realm, "that all countries may hear your voice, and every

59. Brett Usher, "Ecclesiastical Dedham", in *Conferences and Combination Lectures*, pp. lix-lxxviii.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. lxx-lxxvi.

61. *Ibid.*, pp. lxxvi-lxxi.

62. John Keltridge, *Two godlie and learned sermons appointed and preached before the Jesuites, Seminaries, and other adversaries to the Gospell of Christ in the Tower of London*, (London, 1581). Keltridge, unusually, repeatedly lambasts the papists as "heretics".

part thereof glorify the Lord.”⁶³ So what went wrong at Dedham? Within a year Keltridge was complaining, in print: “A more troublesome and perilous time never happened ... than hath done unto me; either else less fruit and smaller commodity gleaned by the hands of any one labourer, or greater sorrow.” He wrote of “tossings and tumbings” in which he had been “sweltered” and “overcome”.

Reading on, and paying attention particularly to a series of bitter marginal notes, we find that Keltridge’s troubles had been visited upon him by what he calls “vain glorious men”, “schismatics”, “precise men”, “such as presume to appoint the elect of the Lord at their several judgments”. Puritan nonconformists had ruined his ministry, those that “put so great religion in a surplice, and a cap, or in orders.” Such, he suggested, are “aptly” called Puritans. Against these schismatics he was not afraid to use the “A” word. They were virtually Anabaptists.⁶⁴

I think that we come closest to an understanding of what was going on when Keltridge complains that “the people is as the priest, the priest must give place to the people, and that man that cometh not to please them is thought unworthy to speak among them.”⁶⁵ Edmund Chapman had arrived in Dedham in the same year as Keltridge, and Crick and Tilney and Dowe had come down from Norwich to East Bergholt and Stratford St Mary at about the same time. If Aylmer and Keltridge had one strategy, William Cardinal had another. It was Cardinal who had moved John Wroth to Great Bromley, Cardinal who had settled Chapman in Dedham, and, no doubt, Cardinal who introduced Crick and Tilney to East Bergholt. When Keltridge complains of “the people”, whom the priest has to please if he is to succeed, he may be understood to mean Cardinal. Keltridge was an irrelevance to the plan for the Dedham contado which was now on foot, and he soon left for a Suffolk living, within less than a year of his arrival in Dedham.⁶⁶ And, yes, he was probably justified in his complaint against puritan divisiveness and sectarianism. He had had his nose thoroughly rubbed in our dissent before Dissent.

IV

No surviving record tells us more about the ways and workings of that church within the Church than the minutes and other papers of the conference which Chapman, Crick and Dowe set up in and around Dedham in 1582, enrolling members from Colchester and Coggeshall in

63. John Keltridge, *A sermon, made before the reverend father in God, John, Bishop of London*, appended to *The exposition, and readynge of Iohn Keltridge*, (London, 1578), pp. 249-50.

64. *Conferences and Combination Lectures*, pp. lxx-lxxi.

65. *Ibid.*, p. lxx.

66. *Ibid.*, p. lxxi.

one direction, and Boxford and even Ipswich in the other.⁶⁷ This has been conventionally called the Dedham “classis”, as if it already constituted one of the building blocks of an alternative, presbyterian Church. The word classis was not used by the members, who when invited to do so declined to put their names to a “book of discipline” which would have formalised their presbyterian aspirations and credentials.⁶⁸ Perhaps they were too cautious to do anything so provocative and risky. And perhaps constitutional questions about the relative powers of classes and higher synods and of particular congregations, questions which much later would crystallise as Presbyterianism versus Independency, remained unresolved.

There is some evidence of this in the Dedham papers. When the “people” of East Bergholt, and perhaps, once again, “people” meant William Cardinal, dismissed their pastor, John Tilney, and chose Richard Crick in his place (and neither Tilney nor Crick was the beneficed incumbent of the parish), the conference disapproved and at first declined to depute any of its members to preach at Crick’s “election” to the pastoral charge, disliking “the people’s course in rejecting and receiving their pastors without counsel of others”. Crick was angry, too angry to confront his brethren ministers face to face, and instead wrote a letter in which he said that he was as “jealous” for the honour of his church as any of them were for their own; and that in future his church would seek advice from as far beyond London as London was from East Bergholt, rather than from Dedham, “though ye would beg to be of counsel with them.”⁶⁹ This was surely embryonic Independency rather than Presbyterianism. And so with the conference as a whole. When a general conference in London proposed that Dedham should release one of its members, Lawrence Newman of Coggeshall, to boost the membership of a conference meeting at Braintree, closer to his parish, Dedham replied that it revered “our faithful brethren at London with their gracious advices”; but “being best privy” to their own interests, the advice was politely rejected. “We cannot be induced to depart with any, who having joined themselves are willing still to cleave unto us.”⁷⁰

67. The minutes and other papers recording what was transacted in the Dedham Conference, preserved by the vicar of Dedham, Richard Parker, and partly transcribed by him in a later incarnation as vicar of Ketteringham, Norfolk, were located at Keswick Hall, Norwich, from 1820 to 1936, when they were purchased by the John Rylands Library, Manchester, now the John Rylands University Library. In 1905 R.G. Usher published for the Camden Series of the Royal Historical Society (3rd ser. 8) an incomplete and in places faulty version of this material: *The Presbyterian Movement in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, as Illustrated by the Minute Book of the Dedham Classis*. This has now been superseded by the more complete edition contained in *Conferences and Combination Lectures*.

68. *Conferences and Combination Lectures*, pp. xciii-ic.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. ic-c, 147-9, 196-9, 260-2.

70. *Ibid.*, pp. c-ci, 107-8.

Yet, classis or no classis, the Dedham Conference conducted its business as if it had a kind of jurisdiction over the churches which it represented. It "placed" ministers in parishes, deciding, for example, whether or not Richard Dowe should accept of his calling at Stratford⁷¹; respecting the interests of the patrons and if necessary negotiating with them⁷², but acting almost as if bishops and archdeacons and their administrations did not exist. It assumed that it had the say as to whether one of its members, Bartimaeus Andrewes, should remain pastor of the Suffolk parish of Great Wenham, or move to Yarmouth where he had been offered the post of town preacher (in the technicalities of presbyterian ecclesiology the lower office of "doctor") at a much higher salary. Yarmouth so far respected the right of Dedham to decide this matter that one of its bailiffs waited, cap in hand, on a special meeting of the Conference. It matters not that Andrewes ignored the advice of his brethren and went to Yarmouth anyway, and that William Negus, having opposed Andrewes's move to Yarmouth, then himself went against the wishes of the Conference in deserting his post in Ipswich, where he was having a hard time, for a living in the south of Essex.⁷³ The Conference had no power to impose its decisions, but its aspirations were what mattered, and they were to act as what we might call a group of line managers in the affairs of a non-hierarchical, in the loosest sense presbyterian, Church.

In many lesser matters, the Conference took decisions which lay somewhat between resolving by casuistry the kinds of questions, pastoral and moral, which were often put to individual ministers of authority and standing,⁷⁴ and quasi-judicial rulings which more properly belonged to the ecclesiastical courts. Was the second marriage of a man who had divorced his wife for a just cause valid? (We are still living with that one.) What about the marriage of cousins? and the marriage of a young man of twenty-four to a woman over fifty?⁷⁵ Several of the questions raised in the Conference implied what we might call the twenty-four thousand dollar question. Were its members ministering to the whole parochial population within their charge, or was their ministry one of sectarian discrimination? Which children should be, which should not be, baptised? Who should have access to the sacraments?⁷⁶ Was the vicar of Dedham bound to visit

71. *Ibid.*, pp. xciii, 5.

72. *Ibid.*, pp. xciv, 27, 28, 32, 37, 45, 252.

73. *Ibid.*, pp. xciii-xciv, 15, 18-22, 184-5, 235-6.

74. Sargent Bush, Jr., "Epistolary Counselling in the Puritan Movement: The Example of John Cotton", in *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith*, ed. F.J. Bremer (Boston, 1994), pp. 127-46; *The Correspondence of John Cotton*, ed. Sargent Bush Jr., (Chapel Hill and London, 2001).

75. *Conferences and Combination Lectures*, pp. lxxxvii-lxxxix, 6, 14, 18.

76. *Ibid.*, pp. lxxxviii.

all the households in his parish?⁷⁷ On some issues a surprisingly hard line was taken. Several members were opposed to catechising in church, since catechisms were man-made things, and “no man’s writings are to be expounded in the church”.⁷⁸ Never, ever, did anyone suggest that it might be helpful to obtain a ruling from the bishop on any of these tricky issues. The Conference was interested in doing business with the two archdeacons with authority over their parishes, John Still in Sudbury and George Withers in Colchester, for both, Withers especially, can be described as fellow-travellers; but only on the Conference’s own terms, and in practice it was the archdeacons’ officials and courts with which the members had to do business, or which, rather, had business with them, a form of discipline which they rejected as antichristian.

So if the bishops thought that they were in command of the Church at grassroots level in those parts of Suffolk and Essex, they were living in cloud cuckoo land. The Church, in the form of patrons, “people”, and ministers, was to a very considerable extent running itself. So we come back to the same question which this lecture has been chewing at, like a dog with a bone. Was this dissent before Dissent, or was it already a kind of informal and alternative religious establishment? Was the godly puritan ministry in charge, or was it a dissident opposition?

Well it was both things. But to be sure it was a dissident opposition, and on two fronts. In the first place, the Dedham papers disclose that most if not all of the members of the Conference had very great pastoral difficulties, to put it no more strongly than that. Their ministry was resisted, even rejected, by some of their people. Dowe of Stratford St Mary complained about “such as would not come to hear him nor receive the sacraments from him.” Crick of East Bergholt was constantly plagued with such problems, caused by “disordered persons”. Chapman of Dedham wanted to know what to do with “some careless persons that had no regard of the word or sacraments”.⁷⁹ Unfortunately, since such evidence rarely occurs with this degree of density, we cannot say whether the Dedham ministers were experiencing what you might expect to find almost anywhere in the Elizabethan Church; or whether, with what we may call their prejudicial pastoral style, they were encountering special and unusual problems. We cannot even deduce from the minutes of the Conference whether those who, for example, made life difficult for Crick at East Bergholt, were separatists or near-separatists who had religious reasons for rejecting his ministry, or were simply, on his terms, irreligious, and living by a code of social practice different from that promoted by a Puritan like Crick. Probably the latter. When on one occasion he came back from a visit to his father at Hadleigh, he found a kind of

77. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

78. *Ibid.*, pp. xciv, 6, 10, 83-5.

79. *Ibid.*, pp. lxxxvii, 16-17, 22.

“skimmington”, or “rough riding” going on, a case of husband-beating which had provoked a demonstration involving some cross-dressing. Crick called this an “outrage”. “His credit was greatly touched in it.”⁸⁰

What is certain is that the nonconformity of the ministers, their refusal, for example, to wear the hated surplice, or what contemporaries would have called their “singularity”, their “preciseness”, either offended their conformable parishioners, or, more probably, gave those who had it in for them for any other reason a handy weapon to use against them. The troubles of Richard Parker, the vicar of Dedham in the lifetime of the Conference and the scribe whom we have to thank for the minutes and other papers, began when he refused communion to an adulteress, even though she had done penance in church, and who brought a suit against him in the Court of High Commission. He described her as “this lewd woman who is the ground of my troubles.” (There were more lewd women to come, and Parker himself behaved so lewdly as soon to be forced to resign his living in a welter of scandal which today would make the front page of *The Sun*, but that is another story.)⁸¹

So much for the nether millstone. The upper was represented by the bishops, Aylmer, and Archbishop Whitgift, who came on the scene less than a year after the Conference began its meetings, and who launched his campaign to secure total conformity by means of imposing subscription to three articles, acknowledging the lawfulness of the royal supremacy, the Thirty-Nine Articles and, most controversially, of the Book of Common Prayer as containing nothing contrary to the Word of God.⁸² It would stretch the evidence and even falsify history to say that the Dedham ministers experienced persecution in the years which followed, although they would no doubt like you to think that they did. “Harrassment” would be a better word. They were often in court, sometimes suspended, never, any of them, actually deprived of their livings: and of course more than half of the members had no livings of which they could be deprived but were stipendiary lecturers whose only tenuous link with authority was their licence to preach, which was sometimes withdrawn, with no very dramatic consequences. It was a never-ending cat-and-mouse game. And always there were questions. How far should I make use of the Prayer Book? If I am summoned to court, should I go? Should I subscribe, with limitations and conditions? If I am suspended from my ministry, should I respect the suspension, or carry on regardless?

These questions served to identify two tendencies within the Conference itself, moderate and radical, and even two opinions as to whether the ministers and the bishops could be said to inhabit the same church. Chapman, the most moderate of the members, reacted to Whitgift’s

80. *Ibid.*, pp. lxxxvii, 36, 198.

81. *Ibid.*, pp. lxxii-lxxiv, 242-4.

82. Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, Part 5 “1584”.

onslaught by moving that “a reconciliation should be offered to the bishops, that since we profess one God and preach one doctrine we may join together with better consent to build up the Church.” But it was not thought good to do so, “lest we should seem to yield in our cause, and sought to be of their company”.⁸³ A few years on, William Tey, who represented what we may call a more militant tendency, asked whether the bishops were “any longer to be tolerated or no”(and, interestingly, Tey seems to have put that question when Aylmer had played a particularly dirty trick on Chapman); while another hardliner, Henry Sandes of Boxford, asked “whether the course of the bishops were such and of such moment, that they were not to be thought of as brethren”.⁸⁴

The problem is that our subject rolls on and on and has no tidy conclusion. They say that it is not all over until the fat lady sings, and the fat lady, in the shape of Archbishop William Laud, did not sing until the 1630s. And even that was a beginning rather than an end. England being England, even upper case Dissent was included rather than excluded from the nation, for generations to come.

There should have been an end towards 1590, when the naughty vicar troubles of Richard Parker caused the screws to be tightened, until he sang like a canary and told the authorities all that they needed to know about the conferences in Essex.⁸⁵ And soon after that an inconclusive test case in Star Chamber against a number of puritan ministers from the Midlands, including Thomas Cartwright, produced, if little else, an undertaking not in the future to get up to what they had been getting up to.⁸⁶ But of course that was not the end of the story, not a closure on our tale of dissent before Dissent. I can only leave these loose ends flapping in the breeze; and point you to Tom Webster’s excellent account of what happened to dissent before Dissent in the next generation, in his *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England*, which is mostly about Essex; and, more recently, Frank Bremer’s excellent biography of *John Winthrop: America’s Forgotten Founding Father*, which has a great deal to tell us about that same contado of the Stour Valley which Winthrop left for Massachusetts in 1629.⁸⁷

For the first twenty years or so of the seventeenth century, East Anglian Puritanism, carefully moderated by its more responsible representatives, does look more like majority establishment than minority dissent. So I argued a good many years ago in a book called *The Religion of Protestants*. Puritanism was not so much opposition to the Jacobean Church as the most vigorous and successful tendency within it. But more

83. *Conferences and Combination Lectures*, pp. xc-xcii, 15, 194, and *passim*.

84. *Ibid.*, pop. xcii, 42, 43, 194, 255-60.

85. *Ibid.*, pp. ci-cii, 242-4; Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, pp. 438-9.

86. *Ibid.*, Part 8 “Discovery, Prosecution and Dissolution”.

87. Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England: The Caroline Puritan Movement c.1620-1643*, (Cambridge, 1997); Bremer, *John Winthrop*.

recently two important books by Peter Lake have suggested that to attribute sedate stability to the puritan religious scene is to come close to a contradiction in terms.⁸⁸ And soon Archbishop Laud and the Laudian episcopate were doing their best to turn establishment Puritanism back into a reactive nonconformist opposition. The word Bremer uses, constantly, of Winthrop, before his migration, is “embattled”. Let another emigrant to New England, the Essex minister Thomas Weld, have the last word. Believe it or not, he wrote back to England, here in America the greater part are the better part. The minority had become the majority.⁸⁹ And now they would have to cope with their own dissenters.

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88. Peter Lake, *The boxmaker's revenge: 'Orthodoxy', 'heterodoxy' and the politics of the parish in early Stuart London*, (Manchester, 2001); Peter Lake with Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England*, (New Haven & London, 2002).

89. Weld quoted by Webster, *Godly Clergy*, p. 284.

PROTESTANT SECTARIES AND SEPARATISTS IN SUFFOLK 1594 – 1630

Having allwayes held it for a certeine rule since I had any knowledge that the Papiste was carried on the left hand with superstitious blyndnes, that the Puritanse (as your Lordship terms them) was transported on the right with the unaduised zeale and outre-cuidance; the first punishable for matters essential, the second necessary to be corrected for disobedience to the lawfull ceremonies of the Churche But that whatsoever shall behold the Papists with Puritan spectacles or the Puritans with Papisticall shall see no other certainty than the multiplication of false images;

Thus in 1604 Lord Cranborne to the Archbishop of York.¹ With that warning in mind I attempt an overview of a part of the religious community in the diocese of Norwich, in the county of Suffolk, in the last decade of Elizabeth's reign and the first sixteen years of James I. This study deals with sectaries, semi-separatists and separatists, seen through the spectacles of the established church in the instruments of ecclesiastical governance, questmen and churchwardens' presentments to the Archdeacons' courts, the consistory court officers acting as the secretariat for the Ecclesiastical Commission, the presentment certificates forwarded to the Assize Judges, and the final handing down of certificates of signification of penalties. In addition, there is further material to be garnered from parochial registers, testamentary records, and literary sources.

The movements of protest against the Establishment embodied in the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, were in some cases a carry-over from the Marian persecuted communities. More seriously, Protestant sectaries in particular found themselves increasingly under threat with the passing of the Statute of 1592, designed to curb any challenge to the Queen's religion. Although it is dangerous to trace an unbroken genealogy for later Dissenting bodies, the places where separatism had flourished in the mid-sixteenth century were often found again in late Elizabethan and early Stuart Suffolk, when authority was exercised by an alliance of godly ministers and godly magistrates. Visitation records particularise offences: ministers were presented by their churchwardens for refusing to wear gowns, caps, hoods and above all "that rag of popery", the surplice, for omitting significant words and actions in the reading of the service and in administering Baptism; for exercising without authority the right to exclude from Holy Communion

1. Norfolk Record Society XXXII 1961 ed. T. F. Barton *The Registrum Vagum of Anthony Harison* p.149

parishioners who did not come up to the standards of the righteous; and for refusing to continue the traditional activities of Churching, and beating the parish boundaries, the perambulations. Parishioners were as frequently presented for the ecclesiastical offences of absenting themselves from weekly divine service and from Holy Communion as they were for the sins against community life, gossiping, scandalmongering, sexual misdemeanours and drunkenness. One particular failing often singled out by the churchwardens was that of leaving the parish church to attend another church where the minister provided a sermon. This occurred not only in individual cases but on occasions a high proportion of the parishioners, as at Lawshall where the Catholic squire's chaplain was also the minister, left their parish church where they were not offered the spiritual stimulation they sought and gadded off to neighbouring Cockfield. There the puritan minister, John Knewstubb, or his curate, provided substantial material that could be chewed over and repeated at home and in unofficial gatherings. The wife of John Snelling of Brampton was presented in 1597 in the course of Bishop Redman's Visitation for leaving her parish church and gadding off to Holton, where the minister, John Tilney, formerly pastor of Boxfield, had a distinctly racy style: "there are some ministers have greate plenty and forty men waytinge at their table, and ride upon their Cock horses with their wooden daggards and smyte the godlye out of their places, but I hope the godly shalbe playced again and those set beside their Cockhorses."²

Although the gadding was contrary to law and although it had the disadvantage of dividing the parish at worship, it also acted as a social cement, binding together those whose eyes were set on the building of an exclusive and godly community with those sights were set lower, who enjoyed a good day out in the congenial company of neighbours. It was only when these withdrawals became permanent and inspiration came through unorthodox channels and manifested itself in doctrines which deviated from the plainly understood words of Scripture, that these individuals could be categorised as sectary recusants, refusers of the Queen's supremacy and of the scriptural authenticity of the Book of Common Prayer. When in 1596 William Hunt, vicar of Chattisham, was deprived of his living for Brownism and left Suffolk with a number of his flock to join the like-minded in Norwich, they joined a well-rooted separatist body that traced its history back to the underground Protestant churches of London in Mary's reign. From Norwich some members had already left for Francis Johnson's church in Amsterdam but a remnant continued to meet. By 1602 they were well known to the authorities who imprisoned the leaders and showed some apprehension over the possible influence of such an articulate band of dissidents.

2. Norfolk Record Office, DN/VIS/3/1/3

'The Sectary Recusantes part of them kepte a private conventicler within the county...and were taken there expounding the Scriptures and their defence That there is no Lawfull ministry of the Word of God within the Church of England That the said Church is a synagogue of prophane persons and a Cage of Fowle and uncleane birdes That the Sacraments be not rightly administered in the same Church alsoe that there is no true sacraments therin That the trewe Church of Christ is the church of the said sectaries and that no other church within this realme is to be accounted and taken for Christes Church. They being persuaded have been seduced and withdrawn from the profession of the trewth and from resorting to the Church in Tyme of prayer by the preachings and persuasion of William Hunt now Imprisoned in the prison for the Citty and county of Norwich' ³

Robert Browne's fiery preaching and reform-centred writings had spread rapidly in the late 1570s and early 1580s, resonating with the already uneasy consciences of a gathering of people in Bury St Edmunds who questioned the wholehearted support of the Supreme Governor for a radically reformed church. The magistracies were obliged to hand over the most active proponents of Brownism to the Justices of Assize and to witness in 1582 the martyrdom of John Copping and Elias Thacker who had been condemned for circulating Brownist writings. After the so-called Bury Stirs, the town and immediate surroundings settled down under the firm governance of the godly magistrates.

High Suffolk differed from West Suffolk in geological make up, in land tenure, and in social composition. This was wood-pasture country, with prosperous farms made up of a high proportion of freehold land and a scattering of small market towns, home to clothiers of middling prosperity. In the absence of major gentry families and a preponderance of well-to-do yeomen and husbandmen, there was a strongly developed network of family relationships and of intermarriages that protected the landholdings. In this context sectary recusancy flourished and even popish recusancy maintained its position among conservatives and ritualists. One of the largest clusters of sectary families was to be found in and around Framsdon, Debenham and Mendlesham, small market towns to its north and east, Winston and Helmingham to the south. Mendlesham had long been a thorn in the side of the diocesan and secular authorities as the centre of a movement, the Christian Brethren, free thinking and highly conscious of their separation as a Christian commonality from the indifferent majority. Members of the Wyth family of Framsdon were

3. NRO DN/DL9/1a fo. 36v.

presented at church courts up to the Consistory Court from 1597 for three generations, having migrated into the parish from Woodbridge.⁴ The colour of their sectarianism is not specified, but with their relatives by marriage, members of the Jaquis, Cowper and Luffe families, all indicated as sectary recusants in the contiguous parishes of Winston, Cretingham and Debenham, and several designating themselves in their wills as linen weavers, it is tempting to see some connection with the clothworking Strangers of Norwich. These French and Walloon immigrant families did not form a recognisable entity in Suffolk as they did in Norwich but one wonders if the persistence of the names of Mirabel and Isabelle in succeeding generations of girls, particularly in the Jaquis family, points to an origin outside East Anglia. However that may be the will of Robert Wyth, 1589, has a certain exotic flavour in the preamble:

Considering that deathe is thende of all creatures livinge, and that this lyfe ys verie joncerten, shorte and transitorie as dailie experience teacheth- fyrste in memorie of my salvation which after this life I asseweredly beleve and hope for, by the meryttes, medyatorie deathe and passion of Jesus Christ my only Saviour and Redemer, beseeching Almighty God my creator, of his infinite mercye to pardon and forgyve me my manifold synns and offences and to make me one of the joiefull partakers and inheritors of his heavenly kingdome, comending my sowle into his moste mercifull handes...

The inventory of his possessions annexed to the will included a book of singing Psalms, valued at 6d.⁵

After the death of Robert Wyth, his wife Mirabel (nee Cowper) married George Jaquis, also indicted in the Consistory Court as a sectary recusant. His will of 1620 commended "my sowle into the handes of Allmighte God my creator, nothing doubtinge but for his infinite mercies set forth in the precious blood of his dearly beloved son Jesus Christ our only saviour and redeemer to receive my soule into his glory and place yt in the company of heavenly angels and blessed souls." In addition to generous bequests to his poor neighbours in the contiguous parishes of Pettaugh and Framsdon as well as his native Winston he left amongst his other goods "my best hat" to John Butter, the son of his executor George Butter, distant connections of the Butter family, clothiers of Dedham who had played a part in supporting the Dedham classis and lectureship.⁶ The last member of this group to whom attention should be given is another sectary Wyth,

4. NRO DN/DL9/1a fo.22V

5. Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich, IC/AAI/31/188

6. SROI IC/AAI/56/9

Lyonel of Cretingham, grandson of Robert and Mirabel, like all his family notably generous to the poor in the villages of Debenham, Framsdon and Cretingham, whose wife Rose was also his cousin from Framsdon and like him often presented as a sectary. The preamble to his will of 1624 indicates a close acquaintance with orthodox Trinitarian theology:

I commit my soule into the hands of that holy and inseparable Trinity of Heaven, God the Father that gave me life, God the Son that hath redemed me from death and God the Hollye Spirit that hath sanctified me with an everlastinge and never dyinge lyfe, trustinge assuredly in the faith of a regenerate Christian that all my synns (though infinite for ther number and deadly for ther measure) are in the most precious blood and sufferinge of that holly and imaculate lambe of righteousnesse Christ Jesus the just, absolutely pardoned and freely done away.⁷

The will, made fourteen months before probate, is written in the same firm hand as that of the testator's signature and it is surely his own confession of faith. The theological orthodoxy of these will preambles sits uneasily with the indictments for sectary recusancy in the Consistory Court. The sole offence must have consisted of a refusal to attend the parish church and so of denying the Queen's supremacy in matters of religion. It stands in sharp contrast with the outspoken denunciation of the Church of England and all its works made at the Archdeacon's court in 1606 by Clemence, wife of Robert Talmage of Hintlesham: "denying the church of England to be the true church of Christ" and "speaking against the rites and ceremonies of the church of England saying they be not lawful. She refuseth to come to church being taken to be a Brownist."⁸

In south Suffolk, on the north bank of the Stour and opposite the town of Dedham, were a number of parishes running north-east from East Bergholt towards Ipswich. Even to their contemporaries they were notable for the number of sectaries presented by their godly neighbours at the Archdeacon's Visitation. As in High Suffolk these sectary recusants formed a close knit community, united by kinship as well as by a common resistance. Endogamous marriage was normal reinforced by the spiritual relationship of godparents. At the centre lay Chettisham which although a tiny village, had been sufficiently involved in the loose organisation of the Dedham classis to have played host to its meeting in June 1584.⁹

7. SROI IC/AAI/65/78

8. NRO DN/VIS/3/1/3

9. Church of England Record Society 10.2.003. ed P. Collinson, J. Craig, B. Usher, *Conferences and Combination Lectures in the Elizabethan Church 1582-1590* pp.LXii n.178, 13n. 37

By May 1586 the vicar, William Hunt, had been deprived for Brownism and with his wife Elizabeth had joined the separatist congregation in Norwich where he was rapidly chosen to be minister and almost as rapidly imprisoned for his unorthodoxy in Norwich Castle. He left behind in Suffolk a number of families firmly committed to Brownism; Barker, Bloss, Alderton, Dewe and Doe, Howerd, Bedell, Nelson, Rivett, Peverell, Cannon, Chaundler, Gosling, Silvester: yeomen, clothiers, weavers, a miller, carpenter, a glover, and a number of faithful widows and their daughters, people of a middling sort who were to remain committed to Brownism and its derivatives. By 1606 Elizabeth Barker was leading a conventicle in Chattisham: "there be often meeting at her home to confer about religion and she, the said Elizabeth is a Brownist."¹⁰

In the sectary communities the practice of infant baptism and its attendant ceremonies was a perennial matter for debate. John Copping, the Bury martyr, had been imprisoned in 1578 for refusing baptism for his child and, tried with him, Tyler, a weaver, was imprisoned on a similar charge and released only by death. Ipswich was also a centre of protest and in 1606 a conventicler was presented as meeting in an unlawful assembly at William Gravener's house in St Clement's parish. His wife Bridget was presented for refusing to have some children baptised "being as she will not have them signed with the sign of the cross." One of Gravener's daughters, Frances, was married at Bentley, one of the south Suffolk parishes, to Robert Silvester, clearly a case of endogamous marriage. In addition, in Ipswich, there were Thomas Starling, "a notorious Brownist" who "doth withdraw others to assemble in companies at the house of William Gravener" where "Johnson he preacheth usually in the church." The churchwardens of St Margaret's and St Helen's also presented half a dozen Brownists, including John Annes who was fined 7/- at the Archdeacon's court and Hayward "a prisoner who goeth at liberty without warrant and doth much hurt by seducing the people."¹¹

The work of accusing their erring neighbours devolved on the churchwardens and was evidently more trouble than they had considered worthwhile. An endnote to a list of recusancy presentments from both counties adds a poignant plea:

The churchwardens and other officers by whose inquisition these persons of dangerous note be made known and certified have humbly desired and still do intreat that either they may be eased of their labour to detect them or that some exemplary punishment may be used to let and hinder the increase of these recusants that they may not continue in

10. NRO DN/VIS/3/1/3

11. NRO DN/VIS 3/1/3

their boldness to the great offence of such as be Christianly and religiously affected.¹²

Certainly, in the case of sectary recusants who made no great show of their convictions other than the refusal to turn up at church, presentment at the lower court was generally the limit to the punishment imposed, although the obstinate and those who had the means to pay the statutory fine sometimes felt the heavy hand of the law and were cited to appear at the assize court.

Another group was to be found on the Suffolk/Norfolk border, south of Diss. The area was bounded on the west by Sir Nicholas Bacon's estate at Redgrave and on the east by Sir Thomas Cornwallis's at Brome. This was largely popish recusant territory with livings in the gift of Cornwallis filled by conservative clergy and a network of patronage at all levels controlled by the officers of the Cornwallis estate. The fact that the Spurdance family of Palgrave were regularly presented as a unit as sectary recusants caused no offence to their popish recusant employers. Thomas the elder and Thomas the younger Spurdance and Edward Spurdance of Palgrave, were presented repeatedly from 1600 for not coming to church or receiving Holy Communion for five years. They appeared on the lists from 1600 to the end of 1613. Thomas the elder died in 1612, having been presented since 1592, first as a sectary recusant and then as a Brownist leaving a spiritual legacy to his heirs and to those of his neighbours who witnessed his will.

By the Merciful Goodness of God in Christ Jesus my lord by whome I had a good hope and assurance of full pardon for my sinns that he hath given himselve for me to be an offeringe and sacrifice of a swete smelling savor unto God and that I dooe not reioyce in anything but in his crosse and that by his crosse, through obedience and sprinkling of the blud of Jesus, grace and peace is multiplied unto me, not by any merit or good worke or such fantisy, nor observing of daies and times, hering of servis and such like after the traditions and customes of men, the wich sum and all other my sinns I hope, compurged by the blud, the blud of Jesus Crist who hath redemed me to an inheritance immortal and undefiled and that fadeth not awaye, assured in the heaven...I bequeathe my spirit sowle and bodye unto the hand of the Lord to the glorifying of him through Crist Jesus our Lord to whome be praise for ever. Amen.¹³

12. NRO DN/DIS/911a fo.40r

13. NRO Wills proved in Consistory Court of Norwich in Probate Registry at Norwich 261 Stywarde

In the neighbouring parish of Thrandeston Thomas Scase and his wife Elizabeth, widow of William Hunt, the ejected minister of Chattisham who had died in Norwich in 1603, were presented in 1604 along with Abigail Hunt her daughter who was to marry John Wyth, of Sotterley, a cousin of the Wyths of Framsdon. Thomas and Elizabeth's marriage was short-lived, for in 1606 Thomas and Margaret Scase of Thrandeston were presented at the Archdeacon's Visitation because "they do refuse to have their children baptised being five or six weeks old and not yet baptised"¹⁴ Edward Scase, Thomas's younger brother had already left Suffolk to find soul freedom and a likeminded wife in Francis Johnson's church in Amsterdam and on 28 July 1607 "Edward Scheys of Suffolkshire aged 25 was married to Anna Trevirayd of Berkshire aged 29 yeares."¹⁵ Stuston and Thornham Magna also contained a number of staunch sectaries, including a Thornham Stephen Oftwood, later the polemicist, his wife and children, who had moved across the border from Banham in Norfolk where previously he had been presented as a single man, a yeoman and a householder.

In late Elizabethan and early Jacobean Suffolk conventicles, whether formally covenanted or consisting of groups of friends and kin, tended to stay together only as long as the members retained a common mind. The groups in High Suffolk and the Stour valley soon merged into the parishes from which they had withdrawn in the early enthusiastic days, and proved themselves the leaven that worked effectively in the milieu of the less committed. The hiatus between prototype Elizabethan Independency and the gathered congregations of Jacobean and Stuart England is exemplified in Suffolk by the changing character of parishes, by the increasing number that under ministers better trained than many of their predecessors, adopted the outward marks of Puritanism and the inner discipline of the weekly Lecture. The hunger for soul-freedom had largely been assuaged. Only where parishes failed in this provision, where the surrounding countryside had remained hostile or the major landowner exercised his right of presentation to institute an incumbent willing to conform to conservative ecclesiastical use, did conventicles continue to draw in separatists. The extensive bloc of "popish recusant" owned land from Havers and Cornwallis territory, running east from Scole, to Gardiner and Bedingfield, south and east of Eye, to Sulyard, joining these estates to the Catholic holdings in West Suffolk, provided a safe haven for separatists of various theological colours. In 1627 Joan Marsh, widow, of Redgrave, was presented "for resorting to a private conventicle in Thrandeston at the

14. NRO DN/VIS/3/1/3.

15. J.G. de Hoop Scheffer, trans. J.A. Couke "The Brownists in Amsterdam." *Transactions of the Congregational History Society*, ii(1915) The original version of this article appeared in the *Transactions of the Royal Academy of Science*, (Amsterdam, 1881.)

house of Thomas Scase.” Another attender there was Richard Twitchett of Stuston who had damaged himself in the Archdeacon’s court by declaring “that the minister wearinge his surplice in time of divine service standes as yf he did penaunce in white sheete” and also that “it is not fitt for children to be baptised until they be able to answer for themselves.” and “for leavinge his owne parish church haveinge a preachinge Minister to goe to others.”¹⁶ Fifteen years later the gathered church at Wortham, some five miles away from Trandeston, was formally constituted with a regular covenant binding its members together in fellowship, possibly subsuming Thomas Scase’s earlier conventicle.¹⁷

Thus the religious character of the Archdeaconry of Suffolk, that is of East Suffolk, differed considerably from that of West Suffolk which comprised the ancient Liberty of St Edmund, formerly the property of the Abbey of St Edmundsbury. If one excepts the town of Bury St Edmunds with its strong Puritan element, West Suffolk was conspicuous for the number of extensive estates held by generations of conservative gentry, many of whom retained their Roman Catholic allegiance. Drury, Kitson, Rookwood of Euston and Stanningfield, and the junior branch of Jermyn of Rushbrooke, could all show persistently popish recusant members. Their influence was not great except that it witnessed to a tradition that was slowly being eroded in the parishes where the ministers were grounding their congregations in the use of the Book of Common Prayer and in some cases providing an effective catechesis. By the 1640s most of these conservative gentry stood aloof from the political divide. In the east however, the high proportion of inappropriate benefices and the different character of land-holdings with many absentee landlords and fewer large-gentry-dominated estates, allowed a greater flexibility to ministers as well as to individuals to explore less traditional ways. Ipswich was a stronghold of orthodox Puritanism, a godly town, strongly influenced by the series of Town Preachers employed by the Portmen and Burgesses. At the other extreme, the Hundred of Lothingland in the coastal north-east of the country was a by-word for piracy, open popish recusancy, and disregard of shrieval and episcopal authority, side by side with strong separatist links to the Calvinist English churches in Amsterdam and Leyden. The mean between these two extremes, typical of the Suffolk tradition of creative compromise, was to be found in High Suffolk where the Catholic-owned estates gave a degree of protection to the yeomen and tradesmen who were ministered to by priest-chaplains resident with the Bedingfield, Havers and Sulyard families and who remained largely untroubled by the ecclesiastical and civil authorities. Similarly, Protestant sectarianism had a blind eye turned to the coming together of covenanted

16. NRO DN/VIS/5/3/3.

17. J. Browne, *History of Congregationalism in Norfolk and Suffolk*, (1877) p.404

communities, of which Wattisfield has the longest pedigree.¹⁸ The neighbourliness between those necessarily on the fringes of the parish community was exemplified in the will of John Goodrich of Bacton, 1631, in which open adherence to a proscribed religion also bore witness to the importance of Scripture reading in the domestic church, surely a lesson learned from his Protestant friends. He bequeathed an annuity of £10 to the husband of his deceased niece provided that "he shall read every day two chapters of the sacred word of God and that he shall bring up his son to learning and both his son and his daughter in the Catholic religion...if the children die without issue then my land shall return to the nearest of my blood and name that is of the Catholic religion."¹⁹

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18. Browne, *Congregationalism* p.466

19. SRO Bury St Edmunds IC/AAI/87/112

**DODDRIDGE'S "MOST CONSIDERABLE WORK" :
THE FAMILY EXPOSITOR**

Geoffrey Nuttall in his "Philip Doddridge, John Guyse and their Expositors" says. "No one reading Doddridge's letters... can be left in any doubt that his paraphrase of the NT, *The Family Expositor*, was in his own eyes his most important literary production."¹ "The most considerable work of my life," he called it. "Considerable" it certainly is: six volumes covering *The New Testament*, each one close upon 500 pages. The first volume was published in 1739 but, despite working at it for some time every day, it was ten years before the task was completed.

In the Preface Doddridge explains that

The original design was chiefly to promote Family Religion, and to render the reading of the New Testament more pleasant and improving to those that wanted the benefit of learned Education, and had not Opportunity or Inclination to consult a Variety of Commentators.

What he had seen of family prayers, practised in those days not only by Dissenters but Protestants in general, disturbed him. Could something be done to halt the decline? However, when he consulted friends about his project, they persuaded him to "make some alteration to the Plan" by adding explanatory, scholarly notes. This changed the character of the work. It became more attractive to preachers, but grew by about a third.

What *The Family Expositor* provided was :-

- (1) A new translation of the *New Testament*.
- (2) A paraphrase.
- (3) The *Authorised Version* in a margin.
- (4) A harmony of the four Gospels.
- (5) "Improvements" (devotional lessons) concluding each section.
- (6) Footnotes, chiefly referring to scholarly works.
- (7) Articles on special subjects (eg. chronology, biblical authority).
- (8) A subject index (in two parts).
- (9) Lists of Greek words mentioned in the Notes.
- (10) Lists of authors referred to in the Notes.

Doddridge's work bears little resemblance to modern popular aids to daily Bible reading.

1. In *Kerkhistorische Opsteller. Essays on Church History presented to Professor dr. J. van der Berg*, Kampen, 1987, p.102.

It is not surprising that Doddridge decided to make a new translation. The English language had undergone great changes. What a contrast there is between the *AV* and *The Spectator*. So we find him replacing "Holy Ghost" with "Holy Spirit" and "take no thought for" with "be not anxious for." "Happy" is substituted for "blessed" in the Beatitudes while "oughtest" becomes "must" and "mayest", "might." The language, however, was still in transition: the formal pronoun "you" was replacing the colloquial "thou" and "thee" and Doddridge followed the trend, but not always. Again it was fashionable to sound sophisticated; simple words were left to simple people. Thus we find for example that Doddridge preferred to say that Paul's birthplace, Tarsus, was "no inconsiderable city" rather than "no mean city." In the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus warns us against "vain repetitions" in prayer we find "a vain multiplicity of words." Tyndale's wise rule about simplicity in translation had no appeal in Doddridge's time.

The impact of the translation is severely diminished by its dispersal in fragments throughout the paraphrase. It is distinguished by being in italics. To pick out and read half a dozen words in one place and carry on to one or two a few lines further on proves to be a difficult and unrewarding exercise. Yet Doddridge expected it to be followed. Nor is the paraphrase what we would call a paraphrase today. It incorporates commentary. Here is the story of the paralytic being let down through a roof (*Luke 5: 19*):-

(His friends) carried him round to a back passage, by which *they went up to the top of the house* (compare Mark xiii. 15) which, according to the Jewish custom, was made flat, (Deut. xxii. 8) *and uncovered the roof* of the apartment *where (Jesus) was*, (which was a room that had no chamber over it) opening a way into the house by lifting up a kind of lattice, or trapdoor, (compare 2 Kings 1:2) or had removed the frame of it to make the passage wider, *they let down (the paralytic) with his couch through the tiles.*

In a footnote Doddridge remarks that no one in his senses can suppose that the evangelist meant to say that the friends tore up the beams and rafters of the house. The author was doing his best without knowledge of Palestinian building. Sometimes he goes too far. It puzzles him that the doors were shut when the risen Jesus appeared to the disciples in the upper room (*John 20: 19 and 26*) and so he inserts, "*the doors being shut and fastened...suddenly throwing them open, and in a moment shutting them again, he stood in the midst of them.*" Nevertheless, Doddridge never tampers with miracles.

The paraphrase seems to have pleased most readers. William Roffey, a distiller and good friend of Doddridge, wrote saying how much he was

looking forward to the paraphrase of *The Acts*.² Good friends may also be critical. Sir George Lyttelton, Lord of the Treasury, wished the paraphrase were less florid and begged him to avoid phrases which Anglicans "will call *cant*."³

Harmonies of the gospels - resolving the four accounts into one - arouse as much excitement among NT scholars nowadays as under-arm bowling does among cricketers. How quaint such activities seem. Yet from the fifteenth century until the eighteenth scholars were absorbed by it. Isaac Newton could move happily into it from mathematics and optics. When Doddridge set about his version he had no less than nine to hand, including Newton's, which he much favoured. As the experience of under-arm bowling led to the more exciting over-arm action, so the exploration of the gospels with a view to harmonisation seems to have been a necessary phase on the way to modern NT criticism.⁴ Doddridge took Matthew as his basis but was often attracted by Mark, who was "so much more circumstantial." He rejected the current view that Mark was simply an abridgment of Matthew.⁵

Harmonisers had to face difficult questions. Were Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and Luke's on the Plain versions of the same event? Were 4,000 fed (Matthew and Mark) as well as 5,000 (the other gospels)? Did Jesus cleanse the Temple at the beginning of his ministry (John) *and* at the end (the others)? Was Jesus anointed twice at Bethany: at Simon's house (Matthew and Mark) and at Martha's (John)? Doddridge proves himself a determined conservative, arguing for, and retaining Luke's sermon as a separate event from Matthew's; he holds to the feeding of the 4,000 as well as the 5,000 and had Jesus cleanse the Temple at the beginning and end of his ministry, but that Jesus should have been anointed twice at the same place, so similarly, he found unbelievable. When he reached the resurrection stories he nearly gave up. "How different it is to form the evangelists into one coherent story and to reconcile some seeming contrarities in their accounts." Yet it had to be done; readers, who knew nothing of the difficulties, expected it. It is hardly surprising that the quest for harmonisation went into decline in the course of the century.

The Improvements following each section of Scripture, are the least interesting part of the work. They are pious reflections, elegantly and

2. *Calendar of the Correspondence of Philip Doddridge*, by Geoffrey F. Nuttall (1979), Letter 923.
3. Sir George Lyttelton, Lord of the Treasury: CCPD, Letter 1601.
4. *The Family Expositor*, Matt 8: 28ff. Jesus and Legion. (Biblical references are given in preference to volume and page numbers because of varying editions.)
5. I am particularly indebted to the late John O'Neill for his assistance with regard to harmonies. It seems that next to no research has been done on this stage in the development of New Testament scholarship.

elaborately expressed, giving what we might term today “a spiritual spin” to the text. For example, on *John 6: 32* (the bread from heaven) he reflects, “How gratefully should we acknowledge the Divine goodness in giving us this true bread from heaven.” In the Preface to vol.IV Doddridge suggests that those who lead Family Prayers might find it helpful to turn passages in the Improvements into prayers. Yet, from time to time one finds something timeless. Such is the conclusion to *I Cor:13* (Church divisions):

Love is the first and the greatest of his commands; and after all the clamour that has been made about notions and forms, he who practises and teaches love best, shall be greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Doddridge’s method for using the *Expositor* at Family (or Household) Prayers is complex. First, we are to read the AV, then the new translation, followed by the combined new translation and paraphrase, and finally the Improvement. It would have occupied between twenty and thirty minutes, for the sections vary in length. We must also bear in mind that time for prayers had to be added to the reading time. No doubt householders devised their own methods to fit their circumstances. One correspondent, in thanking the doctor for the *Expositor*, mentioned how much he and his wife loved reading it every Sunday.⁶

The foot-notes, in very small type, in two columns, crowding the lower parts of the pages, are of far more interest to us; they tell us about the author and his times. (How skilfully the eighteenth-century printers dealt with Greek and Hebrew words.) Here we see Doddridge’s scholarship on display in all its magnificence and modesty. He neatly discusses the merits and demerits of contemporaries’ opinions, though seldom quoting. He explains vast numbers of Greek words, yet, curiously, words of prime importance, such as *logos* and *agape*, receive no attention. Probably he thought that his readers, with their classical education, would have felt insulted to have such words explained. Now and again he has an endearing way of sharing with us how he came to use a particular word in the translation. *Epistata*, one of Luke’s favourite modes of addressing Christ, appeared in the AV as “Master.” This did not carry enough authority for Doddridge. Nor did he like “Teacher” or “Doctor;” finally he settled for “Sir.”

The notes reflect pre-industrial England. Both author and readers love the land. Year by year Doddridge rode hundreds of miles, picking his way along rough tracks or happily cantering on the new turnpike roads. Many notes answer the questions country folk liked to ask. What was meant by

6. Lyttelton, *CCPD*, Letter 1673.

a wilderness in Jesus's time? Answer: "Ground used merely as common pasture was called 'wilderness or desert' by the Jews, in distinction from arable or inclosed land." Land enclosure was beginning to revolutionise the countryside. A farm-hand might ask what kind of beans the prodigal son fed to the swine. Answer: probably the Carob. And in case any botanists read the note, he added that it came from the *Ceratonia siliqua*.⁷ Neither piece of information happens to be correct but he did his best.

To his credit, Doddridge was never afraid to admit when he was perplexed or knew he was ignorant. He could not explain the cursing of the barren fig tree, nor did he understand why Greek actors wore masks - "an unnatural custom."⁸ He sometimes raised an issue without reaching any conclusion: *John 9: 2* and *Matt. 14:2*, for instance, made him wonder whether the doctrine of the transmigration of souls was current in Palestine. He had a passion for detail. We have an elaborate description of the constitution of the Sanhedrin and a medical explanation of the flow of blood and water which poured from Christ's side when he was crucified.⁹ He cannot resist the temptation to digress. Paul's shipwreck in Malta opens the door to a history of the Knights of St John and another about punishments in the ancient world.¹⁰ His note about the Potter's Field which was purchased with the money Judas threw back at the Jewish authorities is as long as the one on the Transfiguration.¹¹ What a lot we owe, sometimes grudgingly, to the modern publishing house and its editors who oversee our work and exert some discipline upon us: nothing of the kind existed in Doddridge's time.

While there are many notes on antiquity, there are few relating to the classics, which seems strange in an age of classical education. Maybe readers had had enough of them. Those there are are interesting. The stirring verses at the end of *Romans 8* strike him as resembling the manner of Demosthenes, while the inner conflict Paul describes in chapter 7 makes him wonder if Paul was acquainted with Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, where a man struggles with two souls in himself.

Finally, there are some notes that touch our spirits. Commenting on *Romans 16*, he remarks, "Though this section be a mere catalogue of names, it is not without moral and religious instruction. We see in it the good heart of the apostle." Doddridge himself was loved for his amiability and friendliness.

Appended to vol.III is a list of the authors already referred to: 140 in all. Most heavily relied upon was the Dutch scholar, Hugo Grotius (1583-

7. *FE, Luke 15: 16* - note d.

8. *FE, Matt. 23: 13* - note l.

9. *FE, John. 19* - note f.

10. *FE, Acts 28:1* - notes a & d.

11. *FE, Matt. 27: 7-10* - note c (87 lines); *Matt. 17: 1-7* - notes h & i (42 lines).

1645), especially his *Annotationes in Vetus et Novum Testamentum* (1642). Not that Doddridge always agreed with him. Grotius thought the man Paul saw in a vision at Troas was the guardian angel of Macedonia; Doddridge believed Paul recognised the man by his regional dress.¹² Jacob Elsner, a German scholar's *Observationes Sacrae* (1720-28) he used frequently, as also Theodore Beza's *NT* and L'Enfant's *Prussian Testament*. At times, although he did not want to become controversial, he felt he had to record his disagreement with certain scholars and Daniel Whitby (1638-1726) was often taken to task. Authors referred to more than twenty times, besides those already mentioned in the first three volumes, are: Martin Benson, Samuel Clarke, Robert Fleming, Henry Hammond, Nathaniel Lardner and John Lightfoot. Well-known persons appearing a few times include Joseph Addison, Desiderius Erasmus, John Locke, Isaac Newton, John Tillotson and Isaac Watts. The last-mentioned was a close friend; Doddridge was his literary executor. One is gratified to see how interested Doddridge was in the Early Church: Clement of Alexandria, Cyril, Jerome, Eusebius, Chrysostom and others appear. Few Puritans, however, come to light, save for Richard Baxter. Speaking of John Owen and Thomas Goodwin, he remarked, "I am not fond of such mysterious men," though he commended Owen on the Holy Spirit. John Calvin's *Institutes* has a few mentions but Luther none at all. Why does *The Family Expositor* take so little notice of the Reformation? Had his readers lost interest in it?

Also added to vol.III is Doddridge's *Dissertation on the Inspiration of the New Testament*. As Geoffrey Nuttall and others have observed, Doddridge was a zealous ecumenist, and in this article he tried to draw together a variety of views on divine inspiration. He begins by acknowledging that all Christians believe the Bible to be divinely inspired; otherwise, we would be "left to make the voyage of life in sad uncertainty, amidst a thousand rocks, shelves and quicksands." However, he discerns different kinds of divine inspiration. First, there is the "inspiration of superintendency," where God watches over the speakers or writers, guarding them from error, though their choice of words and their styles remain their own. He turns to the medieval rabbi, Moses Maimonides, who said that defects in logic, oratory or poetry were no reasons for rejecting the authority of a book. To this Doddridge adds that allowances must be made for textual errors, probably due to "the negligence of transcribers." Secondly, there is "full" (plenary) inspiration. It has no "mixture of error;" it is "as if every single word had been immediately dictated by (God) himself." This kind of inspiration the "penmen" of the *NT*, such as John, Paul and Peter, enjoyed: "it was not as much they who wrote, as the Spirit of the Father...(who) dictated to them." John, when he wrote to the seven churches in *Revelation*, was God's "secretary," God "dictating the very words." It is thus rather sad that Doddridge admits not being able to comprehend John's apocalyptic

chapters; he wishes he could pass over them. He next mentions two further kinds of divine inspiration and here we are moving some way from the old, medieval view. One he calls "elevation" and this accounts for sublime writing outside the Bible; it would be "presumptuous absolutely to deny, that God might act in some extraordinary degree on some of the heathen writers who have produced glorious works." And lastly, he concludes that some deeds and words in the NT are so moving that they bear an authority of their own. So we range from the objective to the subjective.

Readers who shared Doddridge's tolerance would have been gratified: he was robust and he was fair. The article is not, however, Doddridge at his best. It is not thorough enough. He lists the varieties of divine inspiration but does not relate them to one another and he provides no illustrations to help us understand one from another or how to apply his principles. There is a lack of depth. Possibly the problem was lack of space. However, it is noticeable that Doddridge displays no interest in the subject in the course of the commentary.

As to the dating of the Gospels, in an article in vol.III Doddridge expresses caution but believes, along with Irenaeus, Eusebius and Jerome, that Matthew was probably written first somewhere between nine and fifteen years after the Ascension and Mark two years after that when Peter was in Rome. Luke followed while John was written near the end of the century when he was "in extreme old age."

The subject index, in two parts, must have been invaluable to preachers and teachers. It is vast and detailed. It was compiled by Edward Godwin (the father of better known William), pastor of Little St Helens, London, who had been a student at Northampton; he also undertook the burdensome task of reading and correcting Doddridge's manuscripts.¹³ Credit must be given to Doddridge's students (called pupils in his day) for preparing the lists of Greek words and authors. As we can imagine, Doddridge was very relieved when he reached *Revelation 22: 21* in 1749, yet when he died two years later, the work was still far from ready for the press. The last two volumes were edited by his friend, Job Orton, and did not appear until 1753 and 1756.¹⁴

The vast apparatus attached to the main text, which friends had persuaded Doddridge to furnish, was planned for ministers and clergy. Indeed, about a third of the subscribers to *The Family Expositor* proved to be preachers and pastors. There is a multitude of notes to assist the preacher in sermon preparation. However, there are also hundreds

12. *FE Acts 16:9* – note c.

13. *CCPD*, Letter 1400; Doddridge's life-long mentor and friend, Samuel Clark of St Albans, where Doddridge had been at school, also read sheets for the author.

14. *CCPD*, Letter 1400.

pertaining to their duties and example. He reminds them that they are “ambassadors and agents for Christ,” with the commission to make “friendship between earth and heaven.”¹⁵ Example is crucial:

let those who are employed to guard others, be especially solicitous to know and pursue the right way themselves; lest instead of saving themselves and those that hear them, they both of them at last perish together.¹⁶

Behaviour in controversy has to be watched: “cavillers and hypocrites” must be answered yet “with the meekness of wisdom, and to join sagacity with the gentleness and innocence of a dove.”¹⁷ Some preachers tyrannise their people “under the pretence of divine mission.”¹⁸ Doddridge, as a young man had suffered prosecution by a local cleric for failing to apply for a teacher’s licence, and on a rare occasion he strikes out at latitudinarian clergy, “who abandon themselves to a life of idleness and luxury” and resort to “the secular arm to smite their fellow-servants, perhaps more faithful than themselves.”¹⁹ Sometimes he calls for action; ministers should learn from Paul and “promote charitable collections” and organise benevolent work on Sundays.²⁰ Prayer is important: “to administer the word with comfort and success” it must be “watered with prayer.” “To speak in his (God’s) name” with “dignity, tenderness and authority” there must be “the constant exercise of lively devotion in secret.” He is also an encourager and when commenting on *Mark 4: 27* (seed taking time to sprout and grow) he says:

Let not ministers therefore too confidently conclude, they have laboured in vain, and spent their strength for nought, because the fields are not immediately white to the harvest.

The state of knowledge in Doddridge’s day left him with many texts which puzzled him whereas they do not puzzle us. It did not dawn upon him that just as many people in NT times wore clothes different from us, so they spoke with an idiom alien to us. Therefore he felt obliged to offer explanations of many of Jesus’s sayings which readers would find plausible. For example, the hypocrite with a beam in his eye, who offers to remove a

15. *FE, II Cor. 5: 20* – Improvement.

16. *FE, Matt. 15: 14* – Improvement.

17. *FE, Section 151* – Improvement.

18. *FE, I Thess, 2: 8* – Improvement.

19. *FE, Luke 12: 45* – Improvement.

20. *FE, I Cor. 16:1* – Improvement.

21. *FE, Matt. 7: 3* – note b.

speck from his brother's, was in fact suffering from an eye disease.²¹ Again, where Jesus criticises the scribes and Pharisees for their vigilance over tithes but carelessness over justice and mercy - "blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel" - he thought the word for camel might well refer to a beetle. He went on to ask if anyone could produce evidence for it.²² Matthew Henry got nearer the mark when he said that Jesus was using a proverb. Some of the metaphors for Christ in *John* troubled him. It would be "impertinent" to refer to Christ as a door or a way; what was meant was his teaching, not his person.²³ Sensitivities have changed.

In interpreting the Scriptures we are bound to see them through the spectacles of our own age. Nowhere is this more vividly seen than in Doddridge's handling of the parable of the Talents.²⁴ To us they mean, in Theodore Robinson's words, that "opportunities, of every kind...are sacred trusts."²⁵ In the eighteenth century they took things as literally as possible and Doddridge interpreted the talents in terms of wealth; a few people are very wealthy, more are moderately so but most are poor. Without being specific, it is obvious that he is identifying the three servants in the parable with the main strata in eighteenth-century society: (i) the nobility and the gentry, (ii) the professional and mercantile orders and (iii) the remainder of the population. This interpretation was probably what one would have heard from the pulpits generally; John Guyse hints at the same interpretation.

The parable of the Prodigal Son (*Luke 15: 11-32*) had difficulties for his age which we do not share. Knowing nothing about the practice of emigration and division of the inheritance in Jesus's day, commentators were at a loss. "No significant sense," admitted Doddridge, "can be put on this circumstance in the parable." This was disconcerting for preachers. But it was not all. The father's emotional response to the son's homecoming, running and embracing him, was unimaginable. It offended people's concept of God, the unmoved mover, and was counter to propriety. So the doctor hastened to reassure his readers that the father's feelings should not be taken too seriously for Jesus was only speaking "in a figurative sense" (ie. Metaphorically). The father's actions arose from "our animal nature" and should not be ascribed to the deity. Today Christians do not share this problem though the agnostic carries the argument further and says that the force behind all things cannot have personal characteristics.

Two strong impressions are left on one's mind after studying the life and work of Doddridge: the harshness of life in his day and people's

22. *FE, Matt. 23: 24* - note b.

23. *FE, John 10: 7* - note d.

24. *FE, Matt. 25: 15ff.*

25. *The Gospel of Matthew*, (1928) p.204.

conception of God matching it. The Academy had to be closed from time to time because of epidemics and Doddridge would evacuate his family for safety. Death among the students was not uncommon and all families had to accept that the loss of children was normal. Many young women died in childbirth. Doddridge and his wife, Mercy, had nine children; only four survived.

The story of Jesus raising the son of the widow of Nain from his bier (*Luke 7: 11ff*) is one of the opportunities Doddridge takes to commiserate with grieving parents. He knew their weeping and tried to move their thoughts forward:

Oh that thou hadst been near us when the darlings of our hearts were snatched away from us, and we left them in the dust! But thou indeed wast near: for thou hast the keys of death and the unseen world! And this we know, that if our beloved children are sleeping in thee, thy voice shall at last awaken them; and thou wilt deliver them to us.

Doddridge was known for his grace and kindness – some thought him too indulgent with his students – and these gentle qualities shine through the pages of his commentary. When suffering has to be addressed, the thought of life after death is never far distant. “How mysterious was that providence which left the life of so holy a man in such infamous hands,” he comments on *Mark 6: 27*, (John the Baptist is beheaded). He continues,

The ways of God are unsearchable! But we are sure, he can never be at a loss to repay his servants in another world, for the great sufferings they endure in this.

However, this grim scene Doddridge attempts to lighten by telling us that one, Nicephorus, recounts that Salome fell through some ice one day “which closing suddenly, cut off her head,” and thus justice was done. Doddridge published a sermon entitled *Submission to Divine Providence* when he lost his daughter, Tetsy, as a young girl, written he said in tears, not ink, and in the *Expositor* he impresses on us the necessity of submission. He repeats the traditional teaching on *Mark 8: 34*: Christians must deny themselves “the dearest pleasures and interests of this present life” and “habituate (themselves) daily to take up the cross” and “submit to whatever trial Providence may lay before them.” His teaching encouraged fortitude and resolution in people. In the story of Jairus’s daughter (*Mark 5: 39*) he addresses mourners: “Let us restrain from immoderate sorrow (and)...much ado...even for children” and resign ourselves with “submissive though mournful silence.” God’s will became identified with suffering and the grace of God lay hidden behind a belt of sad, dark cloud, one day to burst into glory.

That the Son of God came, lived and died so humbly, the subject of many hymns and songs we love today, was something that baffled those living comfortably in the eighteenth century. Social order depended on people knowing their station in life and paying proper respect to their superiors.²⁶ Did not their hierarchy reflect God's creation? Inevitably the exaltation of humility in the NT perplexed them; indeed, the danger was that it might sow seeds of unrest unless handled carefully in the pulpit. Doddridge was very careful. He displays none of the joy in Christ's humble birth which we delight in at Christmas. Jesus was a carpenter, but which of us would dare to say, as he did, that Jesus "once wrought that mean employment?"²⁷ He would have offended nobody. At the Triumphal Entry, though acknowledging Jesus's humility, he finds it necessary to defend his riding on a donkey which some people considered mean and ridiculous. Important people often rode on donkeys: he produces no fewer than eight instances from the OT to prove it. When he comes to the feet-washing incident in John he dismisses the Moravian practice of it as "an inconvenience": he simply bids Christians "to serve each other in love." No mention of humility.²⁸ The crucial test is to be found in *Phil 2: 1-11* and especially vv. 3-5 where Paul calls us to copy Christ's humility. All Doddridge draws from it is that we should avoid "everything that may grieve and injure others" and "shine with a bright steady flame." He seems to draw a curtain over Christ's humility and ours. Eighteenth-century preachers found this aspect of theology difficult; we do not. We find it difficult to discourse on the future life; they did not.

Erik Routley contributed to *Philip Doddridge. 1702-51 – His Contribution to English Religion*, edited by Geoffrey F Nuttall (1951) and he wrote that "you will search the hymns of Doddridge in vain for any clue to the minutiae of this theology," and this is true also of *The Family Expositor*. Both have Calvinism as "an overarching principle."²⁹ He fixes our attention upon God's sovereignty, his providence and promises, his judgement and grace, and the goal, the Kingdom of Heaven, but the doctrines of Calvinism which have fired controversy are deliberately set aside. Parts of *Romans* have "divided commentators and laid the foundations of many unhappy contentions,"³⁰ Isabel Rivers says that Doddridge warned his students against preaching on "the highest points of Calvinism" (eg. The imputation of Adam's sin to Christ, reprobation and irresistible grace) because too often they set people against what was valuable in Calvinism. On the other hand, he lamented that preachers

26. Cf. Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People – England: 1727 – 1783*, (1989).

27. *FE, Matt. 13: 55 – Improvement*.

28. *FE, John 13: 13ff*.

29. *Op. cit.* ed. G F Nuttall, (1951) p.68.

30. *FE*, Introduction to *Romans*.

relied so much on “carnal reasonings.”³¹ His prayer was that “the pride of falsely pretended reason be subdued to the authority of faith.” *Romans 5:12*, the hottest points of debate, he glides through, stating in a pithy note that he rejects the unorthodox views of John Taylor of Norwich on original sin while gratefully adopting his translation.³² Again, where in *John* Jesus is called “bread” he rebukes Taylor for denying that this had any reference to the atonement. Doddridge’s priority was always the biblical text, something he had absorbed at Kibworth under John Jennings. He admired Baxter’s *Reformed Pastor* and was “charmed with the devotion, good sense and pathos” it revealed.³³

Protestants then were reluctant sacramentalists and there is a coldness about Doddridge’s approach to the subject. Rome cast fear in people’s hearts and the invasion of ’45 shows that their fears were not groundless. Like milestones along the way stand condemnations of Rome. Symbolism aroused suspicion. For Doddridge, the Lord’s Supper is the memorial of Christ’s sacrifice, when he substituted himself for us. We might be tempted to call him Zwinglian but this would be unfair because he never mentions the Swiss Reformer. Yes, the act is symbolic, but ministers must protect their people against the doctrine of Transubstantiation, a “wild and mischievous notion.” Doddridge, however, is not afraid of the word “eucharist” but “covenant”, beloved by many Puritan ancestors, he passes by.³⁴ He has not the depth and breadth of Matthew Henry of an earlier generation. Regarding Baptism he is content to insist upon its necessity: “Let those who firmly believe in him (*Christ*) as the Son of God, enter themselves into his church, by those distinguishing solemnities which he has appointed.”³⁵ Protestants of the time did not treasure the Sacraments.

Doddridge was above all else evangelistic. In his Preface he states that he was

well aware that this manner is not much in the present taste,
and I think it at once a sad instance and cause of our
degeneracy that it is not.

His association with John Wesley and George Whitefield caused him much trouble amongst fellow dissenters though this never surfaces in his *Family Expositor*. His aim was to present Jesus Christ as “an ever-living and ever-present friend, with whom we are to maintain a daily commerce by faith and prayer.”³⁶ Such a faith required rebirth; neither infant nor

31. Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment* (1991) p.181.

32. cf. G T Eddy, *Dr Taylor of Norwich*, (Epworth Press 2003), Appendix II.

33. G F Nuttall, *Richard Baxter and Philip Doddridge: a Study in a Tradition*, (1951).

34. *FE* Matt. 26: 20ff.; I Cor. 11: 23ff.

35. *FE* Acts 8: 36-38.

36. *FE* Preface, v.

adult baptism would suffice. "There must be a new nature implanted, a new creation formed in our own souls, by the almighty energy of the eternal Spirit."³⁷ Doddridge had the evangelical way of turning biblical incidents to strike home to readers. It even emerges in prayer in his Improvement on the call of Peter (*Luke 5: 8*):

Blessed Jesus, we would humbly bow ourselves before thee as the Lord of nature and grace; and instead of saying with Peter, Depart from us, for we are sinful men, we would rather say...Come unto me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man, and if thou stand at a distance from me, I perish! Come and recover my heart from the tyranny of sin; come and possess, and fix it for thyself.

When preaching Doddridge was not averse to stirring the hearer's imagination and emotions. In his sermon commending the opening of the Infirmary at Northampton, which he had helped to found, he paints a most lurid picture of sickness, patients uttering "piercing Groans," "doleful Cries" and "Panting for Breath." When committing himself to paper, however, he exercises restraint.

Many of us have found ourselves thrown into a discussion on the relative merits of faith and works. No one disputes that faith without works is dead but the evangelical also maintains that works without faith are equally futile. Martin Luther put the case forcibly in his commentary on *Galatians*. It may surprise us, then, to find Doddridge explaining *Galatians* simply in terms of the repudiation of Pharisaism, a lesson for backward-looking Jewish Christians, but with no application relevant for Christians. Moreover, he applauds *James*; otherwise he does not mention the faith-works issue. Surely he was not ignorant of Luther's teaching? However, at that time, Calvinists valued the OT as a covenant of works and judged the Lutheran view a form of antinomianism.³⁸

Isabel Rivers quotes Andrew Kippis, another of his pupils, who said that Doddridge, while maintaining his own opinions, was no dogmatist. His "students were left to judge for themselves." She comments, "This aspect of his method was to become increasingly significant posthumously."³⁹ In *The Family Expositor*, Doddridge adopts the same approach. Firmly Protestant and evangelical, he leaves his readers, very many of whom were ministers, considerable doctrinal latitude. However, one wonders whether he took much delight in theology. His notes on Greek words and

37. *FE John 3: 3-7* – note.

38. I am indebted to Prof. J W Rogerson of Sheffield University for guidance in this matter.

39. Isabel Rivers, *The Defence of Truth through the Knowledge of Error: Philip Doddridge's Academy Lectures*, (DWT, 2003) p.18.

antiquity are profuse, detailed and often fascinating; in contrast the theological ones fade into the background.

Is it fantasy to think that it required a faith akin to Abraham's to venture on publishing a work of such immensity as *The Family Expositor*? To faith, Philip Doddridge added works: he became an industrious and successful man of business. He advertised the work, entitled "Proposals" in local papers, listing several agents (booksellers): two in London and Edinburgh, and one in Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol, Bath, York, Glasgow and Dublin. Leaflets were circulated, incorporating application forms for subscribers, who had to send two guineas in advance. Anyone who ordered six sets would be given a seventh free of charge. A number of subscribers availed themselves of the offer; some may have been booksellers but not all. Thomas Blackwell, Professor of Greek at Aberdeen, bought several copies and John Eames of the evangelical Hoxton Academy twelve. Some friends such as Sir Harry Houghton and William Roffey ordered large numbers.

The first editions were octavo, the leather bindings beautifully tooled, the print and layout luxurious; later editions, especially those of Victorian times, are poor relations and to read the notes one may require a magnifying-glass.

Alan Everitt has made an analysis of the list of subscribers.⁴⁰ These are to be found early on in vol. I in the early editions. 1,600 appear in the first volume but 2,800 subscribed by the time the last volume was published. Everitt categorises them as follows:

Ministers and Clergy	52%
Aristocrats and gentry	17%
Women	11%
Booksellers	8%
Professionals	7%
Merchants	5%

There are subscribers we would expect to see such as Sir Thomas and Lady Abney and their long-standing guest, Isaac Watts. Dr Calamy, William Coward, Daniel Neale, Timothy Jollie and John Guyse are also there. One notes Thomas Gainsborough of Sudbury. Academics at Oxford, Cambridge and St Andrews subscribe; seven copies went to Massachusetts and a few to Holland. Many Anglicans are listed; Henry Venn, Curate at Clapham, among them and also Frederick Michael Ziegenhagan, Chaplain of the Royal German Chapel of St James. Among professional people we have Col. Joseph Bell, Comptroller of the Post Office, Thomas Brand, gentleman usher, Daniel Burgess, secretary to the

40. *Landscape and Community in England*, (1985) pp.229f.

late Queen Caroline, Arthur Onslow, Speaker of the House of Commons and Sir George Lyttelton, at the time the Prince of Wales's secretary. The Mayor and Aldermen of Coventry invested in a number of copies; Doddridge received an invitation supported by the Council, to minister there early in his career, but declined to do so. Mercy came from the vicinity. On the other hand, Nottingham is conspicuously absent from the list. Doddridge had also been invited there but things went wrong and some people were upset. It is gratifying to find that John Guyse and Philip Doddridge subscribed to each other's works.

Subscribers are distributed all over England, several in Scotland but few in Wales or Ireland. London, however, is not well represented; there was a core of old-fashioned high Calvinists there. Everitt estimates only 2% but we have to bear in mind that by London only a small area was meant in those days (Hackney, for example, is outside London) and many wealthy people who had houses in London would have preferred to be known by their country address. The South too was cool, while Devonshire (especially Tiverton) vied with Birmingham for the highest interest, save of course, for the County of Northamptonshire which far excelled everywhere else.

How are we to account for the stupendous list? No doubt, it is in part due to the author's reputation as a scholar and teacher but it is also the harvest of his industrious field work, travelling around from one acquaintance to another, canvassing for subscriptions. No wonder he thought *The Family Expositor* his greatest work: it not only took up many hours each week but miles on horseback and weeks away from home as well. Was the soil fertile? It would be interesting to discover (but impossible) how many subscribers also purchased Hogarth's witty, moral prints. There was an undercurrent of moral reform which was open to a fresh, evangelical approach to religion; perhaps reason was not enough.

The list of subscribers, containing so many people from the upper levels of society, shows us how successfully Doddridge, the evangelist, brought influence to bear on the nation as a whole. He respected the aristocracy and gentry yet had no fear of them. His early upbringing, spending holidays from school at his uncle's home on the Woburn estate and playing with the Bedford children – the Duchess wanted him to go to university but he declined because it would have meant entering the Church of England – facilitated his mixing in high society without embarrassment. Had he not a coat of arms? It was originally granted to Pentecost Doddridge of Barnstaple in 1639 and confirmed to his brother, Philip of Isleworth, Doddridge's grandfather in 1634; he must have felt that he was indeed born a gentleman.⁴¹

41. Information provided by D V White, Rouge Croix Pursuivant, of The College of Arms.

In his early days in Northampton he incurred the displeasure of the local incumbent for not applying for a licence to have an academy. He maintained that he had a legal right to do it and, aided by an energetic politician, the Earl of Halifax (who also appears on the list of subscribers)⁴², an appeal was launched. The services of Sir Robert Walpole and the Attorney General were enlisted and Doddridge was summoned to stand trial at Westminster Hall. However, the case was dismissed on 31 January 1734 through the intervention of George II who would not allow such intolerance to mar his reign.⁴³ This unhappy event in Doddridge's life nevertheless brought his name before people and may well have contributed to his success in selling his commentary. Other writings which brought him fame later in the century had not been published when *The Family Expositor* began to appear.

As we open the first volume our eye is immediately attracted by the splendid royal coat of arms which heads the Dedication. This is to none less than the Princess of Wales. Whose idea was it to seek so high a patron? We do not know but Doddridge was encouraged to pursue it. Augusta was the daughter of Frederick II of Saxe-Gotha and married Frederick, Prince of Wales, in 1736; she was but seventeen, observed playing still with a doll.⁴⁴ However, not long before *The Family Expositor* was published she gave birth in 1738 to a son, who was to be George III, but as there is no word of congratulation upon this in Doddridge's Dedication, it seems reasonable to suppose that it was written and at the printer's before the happy event. The Princess's patronage did not end in 1739. Four years later she granted him permission to present her with his *Verses for Children* and still later his *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* was also dedicated to her.⁴⁵ Mercy Doddridge must have been thrilled to receive from the Princess one of her ball gowns made of white damask, embroidered in silk, gold and silver thread. Today it is the proud possession of Castle Hill URC; Malcolm Deacon describes and illustrates it in his biography.⁴⁶ Doubtless, the Dedication helped to launch the publication of the *Expositor* but Doddridge had greater aspirations as he confessed to Samuel Clark: his "Secret Hope" was that God would bless *The Family Expositor* "as a means of awakening and confirming religious sentiments in her mind."⁴⁷ Though wording the Dedication in the courtly style of the age, Doddridge did not shrink from warning her of the

42. Halifax was to rise to be President of the Board of Trade, determined to put down smuggling. In 1757 he was in the Cabinet.

43. Malcolm Deacon, *ibid.* p.101.

44. G C Trench, *George II*, (1973) pp.179-184.

45. *CCPD*, Letters 924 and 1035.

46. Malcolm Deacon, *ibid.* p.101.

47. *CCFD*, Letter 527.

“shining dangers inseparable from so high a rank.” He hoped she would be an example to the nation. And he signed off as “Your Royal Highness’s most faithful, most dutiful, and most obedient, humble servant, Philip Doddridge.”

Perhaps a tender-hearted man like Doddridge felt sorry for the young Princess, for her husband was despised, ridiculed, and treated despicably by his volcanic father, George II. There had been long months of wrangling about the Prince’s allowance and politicians took to the field with ferocity. Frederick was used “as a stalking horse for attacks on ministers or even his parents,” says Basil Williams. In 1737 the king lost control of himself (not for the first time) and evicted the Prince from his apartment at St James’s and sent him to Kew; he deprived him of his proper privileges, tried to seize some of his belongings and even forbade Handel to play for him. As might be expected, this scandalous treatment excited popular sympathy and the opposition gathered round him. The bitter quarrel only ended when Frederick died in 1751.⁴⁸ Doddridge must have been informed of these affairs and in seeking the patronage of the Princess he manifested determination as well as his sympathy for her. He risked sailing in dangerous political waters but Doddridge never lacked courage and resolution.

The Family Expositor went through several editions in the eighteenth century, including a four-volume edition in German (1750-56) by Friedrich Ederhand Rambach of Halle and Magdeburg. Its good reputation continued well into the next century, William Baynes publishing a “compressed” edition in five volumes in 1810. George Redford, an important figure in the early years of the Congregational Union, published one of the last in 1833. We still find Charles Spurgeon commending it, particularly the Improvements, long after that. But its useful life was over. Its language and scholarship were out-of-date. That some of his hymns would outlast his great work would have surprised him for he considered himself no hymn-writer in comparison with Dr Watts. *The Family Expositor* was put to bed in old libraries. The volumes presented to the Princess are untraceable and those in George III’s Library, now at the British Library, never belonged to her.⁴⁹

In recent time people have begun to value Doddridge. It was gratifying one day to see some of his letters and his lantern being lovingly conserved by local people at Castle Hill. Scholars, following the example of Geoffrey Nuttall, have brought to life much of his life and work which had been hidden. Tributes have been made to his achievements and character;

48. DNB; Basil Williams, *The Whig Supremacy – 1740 – 1760*, (Oxford, 2nd ed. 1962) p.339.

49. I am indebted to the Librarian of the Royal Library, Windsor Castle, for this information.

this study underlines what has been said. He was not an original thinker and perhaps he tried to do too many things but he was more remarkable: scholar, teacher, head of an academy, author, preacher and evangelist, ecumenist before his time, pastor of a church and the inspiration of charitable work, a Dissenter of national standing, with friends and correspondents at home and abroad. He was probably the last all-rounder before specialisation took over. Let the last word be that of the obituarist (probably his old pupil and colleague, Job Orton) in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, November 1751:

He was a man of fine genius, rich in stores of learning, and of unexampled activity and diligence. His piety was without disguise, his love without jealousy, his benevolence without bounds. His candour was so uncommonly extensive and unaffected as to gain him the general esteem of the clergy, and the particular friendship of some very eminent men. In the several characters of a friend, a writer, a preacher, a tutor, he had few superiors: In all united, he had no equal.

JOHN H. TAYLOR

FROM WORMS TO SUNBEAMS: THE DILUTION OF CALVINISM IN ENGLISH CONGREGATIONALISM

Let us begin with hymn 67 from Isaac Watts's collection:

Great God! How infinite art thou!
What worthless worms are we!
Let the whole race of creatures bow,
And pay their praise to thee.

Lest the saints are suffering from short-term memory loss, and have forgotten their lowly status by the end of the hymn, Watts repeats the verse without alteration there. Again, in his paraphrase of Psalm 8 we find the following words in verse three:

When I survey the stars,
And all their shining forms,
Lord, what is man, that worthless thing,
Akin to dust and worms.¹

There they are again: worms - even though, be it gently said in deference to our greatest hymn writer, that Watts himself has slithered them in; they are not in Psalm 8.

By the time Isaac Watts was in full flow worms were conventional not only in hymns but elsewhere too. If you were being received as a Congregational church member in Cockermouth from 1651 onwards, you would have been invited to sign, or place your cross under, the covenant of 2 October of that year which begins,

We poor worms, lost in Adam, being by the grace of God through the Spirit, called to be saints, conceiving it to be our duty to observe gospel ordinances, for the future do agree together to walk as a people whom the Lord hath chosen.²

You would also have been expected to "give in your experience"; that is, to come before Church Meeting and tell the saints what God had done for your soul. This exercise typically entailed the rehearsal of one's sinful state

1. The hymn and the paraphrase are in *The Psalms and Hymns of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D.*, new edn., (London: Caxton Press, n.d.) The hymn is in Book Two.
2. See W. Lewis, *History of the Congregational Church, Cockermouth, 1870*, p.6. In *The Ejected of 1662 in Cumberland & Westmorland*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1911), I, p.686, Benjamin Nightingale quotes the circumstances of the founding of the church from the *Church Book*, but does not reproduce the covenant into which "the seven poor unworthy ones" entered.

before the intervention of saving grace, and it frequently included an account of a harrowing and protracted period of soul-searching seasoned with fears as to one's eternal destination should one fail to wake one morning. As Samuel Rix told the Church Meeting at Denton, Norfolk, on 3 June 1709:

I had such apprehensions of the Wrath of God due for Sin,
and of the Continual danger I was in, as I have often, in the
evening, Pray'd that I might not be in Hell the next morning.
That I might be spar'd, at least one night more. Now I Saw
the Hypocrisie and Wickedness of my Heart more than ever
before. Now I was under the Spirit of Bondage, and Walked
in Darkness and Saw no light for many Months more.³

True, Mr. Rix stops short of calling himself a worm, but he manifests all the characteristics of others who did not hesitate to apply the label to themselves.

It would be churlish to overlook the fact that those of us in the Reformed tradition do not have all the worminess to ourselves. It was perfectly possible for a person to be an Arminian worm, as witness Henry Alline, the American Congregationalist who did so much to stir the Atlantic Baptists into revival. At the beginning of 1781 he writes a long poem in his diary, in the course of which he entreats God thus:

Take me O God into thy heavenly care
And lead a worm thy goodness to declare.⁴

By the middle of the nineteenth century the liturgical days of the lowly worm were numbered as far as the larger Nonconformist bodies were concerned, though it continued its burrowings in the more introspective soil tilled by some Strict Baptists, some of whom used William Wileman's *Hymns for the Sunday School*, the eleventh edition of which appeared in 1900. Ominously, the collection contains thirteen hymns on death, one of which begins,

Death, in a thousand dreadful forms,
Sweeps down our mortal, sinful race;
The grave, corruption, earth, and worms,
Shortly must be our dwelling place.⁵

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3. "Mr. Samll. Rix his experience given in to the church June the 3d 1709," *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, XIV no. 2, November 1941, p.96.
 4. James Beverley and Barry Moody, eds., *The Journal of Henry Alline*, (Hantsport, Nova Scotia: Lancelot Press for Acadia Divinity College, 1982), p.138. Cf. George Edward Levy, *The Baptists of the Maritime Provinces 1753-1946*, (Saint John, New Brunswick: Barnes-Hopkins, 1946), pp.22-25.
 5. W. Wileman, *Hymns for the Sunday School*, (London: W. Wileman, 1900), no. 313.

But by 1889 R. W. Dale had already felt entitled to say of the evangelicals at large that perhaps most of them

would shrink from the severer statements of the Calvinistic and Augustinian theology concerning the corruption of human nature. They would probably shrink from saying with the great bishop of Hippo, that even the virtues of the unregenerate are only splendid sins. Nor am I quite sure that their real conception of human nature, apart from the life of God given in the new birth, would find its most natural expression in the words of Paul: 'In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.' But they hold firmly the substance of the great truth that, 'Except a man be born anew he cannot see the kingdom of God.'⁶

Not surprisingly, as we move into the twentieth century we find ourselves in an almost entirely worm-free zone. The hymns sung by most children are distinctly jollier than those collected by Mr. Wileman. Three hundred years on from the Cocker mouth covenant the children at Worplesdon Congregational Church, like thousands of others, were not regretting that they were worms, but resolving that they would be sunbeams. In the immortal words of Nellie Talbot, set to the lilting music of Edwin Othello Excell (1851-1921), the son of a German Reformed pastor who died whilst accompanying Gypsy Smith on an evangelistic tour, and whose singing prowess prompted the awe-filled compliment, "That man has swallowed a brass band", the children sang,

Jesus wants me for a sunbeam....
I'll be a sunbeam for him.

It would seem at first sight that, psychologically, we have here two very different mindsets: one humble, sometimes to the point of morbidity; the other cheerful, sometimes to the point of presumptuous. And so it is. But there is more to it than that. In either case the primary motivation is doctrinal. My suggestion in this paper is that especially during the hundred years to 1930 a significant dilution of Calvinism occurred within English Congregationalism which explains the widespread transition, at least in that tradition, from worms to sunbeams. On the face of it, it is a transition which turns upon the doctrine of humanity. I shall argue that in fact it reaches to the heart of the doctrine of the triune God.

6. R. W. Dale, *The Old Evangelicalism and the New*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), p.42.

But let us go step by step. What was it that was diluted? In two words the answer is “scholastic Calvinism”.⁷ This term has been so wantonly bandied about that it is necessary to unpack it at the outset. Historically, “scholasticism” refers to the method of argument employed by the medieval Schoolmen from Anselm to William of Ockham. Typically, according to this method, a thesis would be stated, objections to it would be discussed, and these would be answered by appeal, variously, to Scripture, Church tradition and the deliverances of reason. Clarity of definition and precision of argument were the goals, and these are worthy goals indeed.⁸ However, the process could be, and frequently was, strung out to encompass ever more refined deductions, until Erasmus was moved to protest that the whole enterprise of multiplying distinctions was boring and useless. For his part, while Calvin welcomed the scholastics’ desire to achieve precise statement and clear thinking, he too protested against what he perceived as their undue commitment to intellectual subtleties: “I abhor contentions about words, with which the church is harassed to no purpose,”⁹ he declared. Notwithstanding the hesitations of Calvin and others, scholastic methods, especially as modified by Peter Ramus, flowed into English Puritanism, and were adopted in the universities and in the earliest Dissenting academies. By now Calvinism itself was beginning to be subjected to codification and to ever more refined systematization. To the charge of undue logic-chopping was added opposition to perceived attempts to impose particular interpretations of doctrine upon the saints. This was the complaint of such eighteenth-century Presbyterian “Arian” divines as John Taylor and Samuel Bourn. As if echoing Milton’s remark that “New Presbyter is but old Priest writ large,” they feared that having rid themselves of Roman popery, a Protestant popery was now being advocated by those who wished to impose their confessions of faith or their doctrinal systems upon others. In the interest of the principle of the sufficiency of Scripture and the right of all to bring their consciences to bear upon it, Taylor expostulated,

Who were the first Reformers? Or who were any Synods or Assemblies of Divines, that they DARED to model Christian Faith into their own invented Forms, and impose it upon the Minds of Men, in their own devised Terms and Expressions?

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7. For a variety of views on scholasticism see Willem J. Van Asselt and Eef Dekker, eds., *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, (Grand Rapids: Baker), 2001.
 8. It is difficult to suppress the unsanctified thought that we would have been spared some of the more turgid tracts of present-day theology had their authors caught a dose of scholasticism in this sense.
 9. J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. and indexed, Ford Lewis Battles, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press), 1960, II.ii.p.7.

Hath Christ given Authority to *all* his Ministers, to the End of the World, to new-mould his Doctrines by the rules of *Human Learning*, whenever they think fit?¹⁰

Samuel Bourn of Coseley and Birmingham¹¹ was likewise convinced that to impose Trinitarianism

Is to give up Scripture-sufficiency, it is to return back to the tenets of Popery...If we pay that Regard to any Body of Men, tho' the most learned Assembly in the World, which is due to Christ only, we make a Christ of these Men; they are our Rabbi.¹²

It comes as no surprise to realise that what Taylor and Bourn had especially clearly within their sights was the *Westminster Confession* of 1647, in which federal, or covenant, theology took one of its classical shapes. Whereas Bullinger, Calvin and others accorded primacy to the covenant of grace, this is a Calvinism informed by that federal theology which was taught (in various permutations) by such theologians as Ursinus, Gomarus, Witsius and Cocceius on the continent, by the Scot, Robert Rollock, and by the Englishmen, William Perkins and William Ames.¹³ As received at Westminster the teaching is that

The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his

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10. J. Taylor, *A Further Defence of the Common Rights of Christians, and of the Sufficiency of Scripture, without the Aid of Human Schemes, Creeds, Confessions &c.*, (1738), p.33. See further, Alan P. F. Sell, *Dissenting Thought and the Life of the Churches. Studies in an English Tradition*, (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), ch. 7; G. T. Eddy, *Dr. Taylor of Norwich: Wesley's Arch-heretic*, (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2003).
 11. Thus described in order not to confuse him with his father and son, both Samuel and both ministers.
 12. S. Bourn, *The True Christian Way of Striving for the Faith of the Gospel*, (1738), p.23. See further, Alan P. F. Sell, *Dissenting Thought*, ch. 7.
 13. While agreeing and, in view of differing intellectual environments, finding it not at all surprising, that there are points of development/divergence as between Calvin and later Calvinists, I do not side with those who wish to drive too firm a wedge between Calvin and his successors. For the latter position see, for example, Holmes Rolston III, *John Calvin Versus the Westminster Confession*, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1972); R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, (1979), (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997). For adverse criticisms of these see, for example, Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982); G. Michael Thomas, 'Calvin and English Calvinism: a review article,' *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, XVI no. 2, Autumn 1998, pp.111-127.

posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience. Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace: whereby he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved; and promising to give unto *those that are ordained unto life* his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.¹⁴

The phrase “those that are ordained unto life” refers directly to the doctrine of God’s eternal decree. According to this, before the foundation of the world God predestined some who are fallen in Adam to be elect in Christ; others “for the glory of his sovereign power” he passes by, having ordained them “to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.”¹⁵

That the Congregationalists and Particular Baptists rested largely upon the *Westminster Confession* in preparing their *Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order* (1658) and *London Confession* (1677) is well known. But the former introduced a number of significant modifications, among them a completely new chapter XX, “Of the Gospel, and of the extent of the

14. *Westminster Confession*, VII, ii, iii, my italics; cf. *Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order*, VII, ii, iii. On federal theology see further, Alan P. F. Sell, *The Great Debate. Calvinism, Arminianism and Salvation*, (1982), (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998), pp. 35-42. 111-13. James B. Torrance is among a number of theologians who have argued that federal theologians abused the concept of covenant and lost the Gospel by construing covenant in contractual terms. See his papers, “Covenant or contract? A study of the theological background of worship in seventeenth-century Scotland,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, XXIII no. 1, February 1970, pp.51-76; “Calvin and Puritanism in England and Scotland - some basic concepts in the development of ‘federal theology’”, in *Calvinus Reformator. His Contribution to Theology, Church and Society*, (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1982), pp.264-286; “Strengths and weaknesses of the Westminster theology,” in Alasdair I. C. Heron, ed., *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today*, (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1982), pp.40-53. Criticisms of Torrance’s position have been advanced by David B. McWilliams, “The covenant theology of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and recent criticism”, *Westminster Theological Journal*, LIII, 1991, pp.109-124; Donald MacLeod, “Covenant theology”, in Nigel M. de S. Cameron, et al., *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), pp.217-18; Richard A. Muller, “The covenant of works and the stability of divine law in seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy: a study in the theology of Herman Witsius and Wilhelmus à Brakel”, *Calvin Theological Journal*, XXIX no. 1, April 1994, pp.75-101. For a Reformed Old Testament scholar’s argument that Reformed theologians have “fastened upon a secondary biblical theme and elevated it to pre-eminence,” see John H. Stek, “‘Covenant’ overload in Reformed theology,” *ibid.*, pp.12-41.

15. *Westminster* and *Savoy*, ch. III.

Grace thereof." Though still federal in tone, it declares that in all ages the preaching of the Gospel has been heard, and that under it people have, by the Spirit, been quickened into newness of life. We seem to have here an evangelical note missing from *Westminster*, and a caution against that hyper-Calvinism which was already on the horizon, which would restrict the Gospel offer to the elect, since they alone could respond to it: this in opposition to what was perceived as Arminian synergism (in our own time lambasted as decisionism).

Among Congregationalists who adopted the hyper-Calvinist position was Joseph Hussey (1659-1726) the erstwhile Presbyterian, who followed the Congregational polity during his Cambridge pastorate. In 1707 he published what has become a classic statement of this position, *God's Operations of Grace but no Offers of Grace*. However, hyper-Calvinism never became characteristic of Congregationalism as a whole. None was more critical of it than its erstwhile supporter, Matthias Maurice (1684-1738), who published *The Modern Question* in 1737. He here argued that it was the duty of hearers of the Word to receive the promises of the Gospel and believe in Christ. A year after his death his tract, *The Modern Question Affirm'd and Prov'd* was published. His position was restated, and a Preface by the well-known London minister, Thomas Bradbury helped to ensure that the controversy spread to London, where the Baptists John Gill and John Brine came out for the opposition, while in 1735 the Congregationalist Abraham Taylor published a work in support: *The Modern Question concerning Repentance and Faith Examined*. Taylor's book was later to make a favourable impression upon the Baptist Andrew Fuller, the "ropeholder" of the Baptist Missionary Society.¹⁶

A central position was similarly adopted by Thomas Ridgley (1677?-1734), tutor at Moorfields Academy and a heavyweight systematician in both senses of the word. In 1731 he published his *Body of Divinity*, an exposition of the *Westminster Larger Catechism*. According to his nineteenth-century editor, John M. Wilson, although Ridgley exceeds other comparable writers in "freedom from the trappings of system and technicality and metaphysics," he "still wears, if not the full uniform, at least the badge and the collar of scholasticism".¹⁷ Be that as it may, Ridgley shows himself fully aware of the hostages to fortune offered by some versions of Calvinism, and he earnestly seeks to limit the damage at a number of crucial points. Thus, for example, while upholding the doctrine of double predestination, he makes it clear that

I cannot approve of any thing advanced by [supralapsarians],
which seems to represent God as purposing to create man,

16. See further Alan P. F. Sell, *The Great Debate*, pp.78-9, 128 n. 80.

17. J. M. Wilson, "Editor's Introduction" to T. Ridgley, *A Body of Divinity*, (New York: Robert Carter, 1855), I, xiv.

and then to suffer him, as a means by which he designed to demonstrate the glory of his vindictive justice. This notion has given occasion to many to entertain rooted prejudices against the doctrine of predestination, as though that doctrine necessarily involved in it the supposition, that God made man to damn him.¹⁸

As to those who are passed by, Ridgley expostulates,

God forbid that any one should think that there is a positive act affirmed in these words, as though God infused hardness into the hearts of any. The meaning only is this, that he determined to deny heart-softening grace to that part of mankind whom he had not foreordained to eternal life.¹⁹

Some of us may feel that that in itself is a sufficient deprivation; but my point is that Ridgeley was aware of the bad press which scholastic Calvinism could attract, and he strove to draw the sting of criticism. This in itself entailed a softening of the hardest of Calvinistic lines.

When we come to our next landmark, Edward Williams (1750-1813), we are in a significantly different world. We are on our side of the Evangelical Revival. *The Modern Question* had done its work. As early as 1747 Philip Doddridge, a supporter of Matthias Maurice, was putting the case for world mission at a meeting in Norfolk. It would take us too far afield to describe the difficulties which High Calvinists placed in the path of those who sought to go into all the world with the Gospel, or to document the influence on the wider tribe of Dissenters of the Baptist Andrew Fuller's book, *The Gospel Worthy of all Acceptation* (1785). Suffice it to say that the evangelical Calvinists were generally united in the view that Jesus commanded his followers to go to the ends of the earth with the Good News, and that hyper-Calvinism simply would not preach. This, of course, was more than a matter of homiletic pragmatism; it entailed a moral protest against the kind of God scholastic Calvinism was deemed to portray. As we shall see, nothing did more to modify the doctrine than this moral protest; nothing did more to modify - even in some instances to swamp - the Congregational polity than the influx of the newly converted.

It fell to Edward Williams, successively minister at Ross on Wye, minister and tutor at Oswestry, minister at Carrs Lane, Birmingham, and principal at Rotherham whilst pastoring the Masboro' church, to articulate a form of Calvinism which accommodated both the doctrinal heritage and

18. T. Ridgley, *A Body of Divinity*, I, p.269.

19. *Ibid.*, p.296.

the evangelistic and missionary vocation. This he did in two influential works: *An Essay on the Equity of Divine Government and the Sovereignty of Divine Grace* (1809) and *A Defence of Modern Calvinism* (1812). Greatly influenced by Hugo Grotius's emphasis upon God as moral governor, Williams stoutly opposed the hyper-Calvinistic distortion that the non-elect acted sinfully because they were predestined so to do; this, he insisted, was a slight upon the goodness of the creator-God. In the wake of Jonathan Edwards he contended that human beings are free agents accountable to God for their actions; hence the reprobate have none but themselves to blame for their final state. Worst of all is any "endeavour to set up our own obedience instead of the righteousness of Christ." This "is rebellion against the authority of God and undervaluing his wisdom and grace. None deserve condemnation more than those who reject the only remedy..."²⁰ On the other hand, those who respond to the call of the Gospel are those who were foreordained to do so. The call, however, is universal:

In a word, Jesus Christ, in the plan of DIVINE GOVERNMENT, is the appointed 'Saviour of all men'; but, in the plan of DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY, with an infallible and further specialty of intention, 'of those that believe' through gracious influence, in virtue of Christ's suretyship as well as His merits.²¹

A number of other Congregationalists followed in Williams's wake, among the most significant of whom was Ralph Wardlaw. In *The Extent of the Atonement* (1830), he reiterated the view that Christ's atonement was sufficient for all, but efficient only in the case of the elect. In this somewhat unstable way Williams and others sought to uphold the sovereignty of electing grace, human responsibility for sin, and the legitimacy of evangelism and mission. As ever, there were time-lags in the reception of newer, more moderate ideas. Of John Pye Smith, for example, John Stoughton wrote that he was "a studious maintainer of Augustinianism, after the Calvinistic type, walking in the steps of Owen and Thomas Goodwin rather than those of John Howe or Richard Baxter."²² But what came to be known as Moderate Calvinism soon prevailed among Congregationalists, as witness the Declaration of Faith which they promulgated on establishing the Congregational Union of England and Wales.

20. *The Works of the Rev. Edward Williams*, ed. Evan Davies, (London: James Nisbet, 1862), IV, p.216.

21. *Ibid.*, I, p.133.

22. J. Stoughton, *Reminiscences of Congregationalism Fifty Years Ago*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1881), p.12.

On 8 May 1832 a meeting of Congregationalists in London resolved to form the Congregational Union of England and Wales. At the same meeting the draft of a *Declaration of Faith*, prepared by George Redford of Angel Street, Worcester, was read and sent to the churches for their consideration. Joseph Turnbull, the Union's secretary, sent an accompanying letter of 4 June 1832, in which he made it clear that the *Declaration* had not been drawn up so much for the benefit of Congregationalists, as for the information of those who were accusing them of being Socinians or Methodists. He further pointed out that since the *Savoy Declaration* was scarce and obsolete a new initiative was needed. A very slightly revised version of the *Declaration* was unanimously adopted on 10 May 1833, and it was printed in every edition of *The Congregational Year Book* from 1858 to 1918.²³

Clearly by now nervous of any imputation of scholasticism, the "Preliminary Notes" to the document explain that "It is not intended to present a scholastic or critical confession of faith, but merely such a statement as any intelligent member of the body might offer, as containing its leading principles." It is also underlined that subscription is not in view, and that "the most perfect liberty of conscience" is upheld. Under the heading "Principles of Religion" there is a reference to the covenant of grace, but not to that of works. We are informed that the Congregationalists believe that "before the foundation of the world [God] designed to redeem fallen man", and that "all who will be saved were the objects of God's eternal and electing love, and were given by an act of Divine sovereignty to the Son of God"; but there is no reference to preterition, and the term "predestination" is conspicuous by its absence. They do, however believe that at the final judgment God will "send away the wicked into 'everlasting punishment'." In the list of "Principles of Church Order and Discipline" *Savoy* is closely followed in that the Church is said to be a voluntary society of true believers, meeting under its only Head, Jesus Christ, untrammelled by the state. But they add the important phrase the Church is obliged "to perpetuate and propagate the Gospel in the world." We are in the period of modern missionary advance.

But we are also in the period of increasing unease with Calvinism as traditionally received. While some viewed the modifications of Calvinism with real concern - among them Richard Winter Hamilton, who demanded of the Union secretary, Algernon Wells, that "The full-blooded dogma of the

23. See further, Albert Peel, *These Hundred Years. A History of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1831-1931*, (London: CUEW, 1931); Alan P. F. Sell, *Dissenting Thought*, pp.51-3; *idem*, *Saints: Visible, Orderly and Catholic. The Congregational Idea of the Church*, (Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1986), pp.67-70.

old school must be revived”²⁴ - the majority were content that, in the interests of propagating the Gospel, the more angular features of Calvinism were rapidly being smoothed away, and they would have accepted the verdict of the American Congregationalist, Williston Walker, that the *Declaration* was “a sweet spirited statement of which the English churches have no cause to be ashamed.”²⁵ When, at the centenary of the Congregational Union, Robert Mackintosh reviewed the *Declaration* he noted what he called “A most staggering statement” in it, namely, the opinion of the framers that “there is no minister or church among them that would deny any one” of the doctrinal or ecclesiastical principles expressed in it. “How unlike present-day conditions!” exclaims Mackintosh.²⁶ Certainly, if the *Declaration* marked a softening of Calvinism, the general Congregational mind-set a century on represented a significant dilution of it.

At this point it will be helpful to enumerate some of the causes of the dilution. First, confidence in lingering scholasticism quickly declined. This decline was by no means confined to England. Of Solomon Stoddard, Perry Miller declared that

His sermons were outstanding in his day for the decision with which he swept away the paraphernalia of theology and logic...and he was the first minister in New England openly to advocate the preaching of Hell-fire and brimstone in order to frighten men into conversion.²⁷

We may feel it to be less than an altogether preferable transition to go from the frying pan of scholastic logic into the fire of hell. In England some managed the situation in a less inflammatory way: they simply accentuated the positive and were silent on the less palatable aspects of their inherited tradition. Thus, for example, although James Matthews, the first minister of the Congregational church at Totteridge/Whetstone was

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24. Quoted by J. Stoughton, *Reminiscences*, p.53. Stoughton says of him that “His thoughts gulped out like liquid from a large full bottle with a tiny neck”, *ibid.*, p.55. Lest it be thought that ministers alone could set the doctrinal clock back, we should note, for example, that in the very year, 1831, in which the *Declaration* was promulgated, James Davies left his Totteridge/Whetstone pastorate for Haverhill because of “the introduction of Antinomianism amongst some of the leading and most influential members of the Congregation.” Believing this to be “a perpetual and pernicious heresy”, Davies resigned. See Harry E. Hill, *The History of Christ Church at Whetstone*, privately published, [1988], p.8.
25. W. Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, (1893), Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1960, p.546.
26. R. Mackintosh, “The genius of Congregationalism,” in A. Peel, ed., *Essays Congregational and Catholic*, (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, [1931]), p.111.
27. P. Miller, “Solomon Stoddard” *Harvard Theological Review*, XXXIV, 1941, p.317.

“a rigid Calvinist”, he was at the same time “The sincerest of the sincere, the mildest of preachers, himself an example to the wholesale dealers in brimstone.”²⁸ Of William Jay of Bath it was written that in his opinion “the Calvinistic system...was a thing to be held, not formally preached.”²⁹ Even better known is John Angell James of Carrs Lane, Birmingham, whose colleague and eventual successor, R. W. Dale, writes as follows:

He said to me one day, with great energy - raising his arm and clenching his hand as he said it - ‘I hold the doctrines of Calvinism with a firm grasp!’ ‘But,’ said I, ‘you never preach about them.’ ‘Well,’ he replied - with the *naïveté* which was one of the chief charms of his character - ‘you know that there is not much about them in the Bible.’...Bees are said to have a very ingenious way of dealing with a fellow-citizen who happens to die in the hive; they leave the dead body where it lies, but seal up the cell with wax. Our modern Calvinists treat Calvinistic doctrine very much in the same way. The doctrine is allowed to remain in their creed undisturbed; but, to keep their creed quite sweet and wholesome, the cell in which their Calvinism lies is hermetically sealed.³⁰

Others, however, were still trying to repair what they could of the old paths. Prominent among these was George Payne, who in 1836 sought to draw the sting of doctrinal criticisms of Calvinism. This he did as a Moderate Calvinist in the line of Edward Williams and his friend Ralph Wardlaw. Bolstering his comment with a quotation from Williams he asks

Why...should a positive determination, on the part of God, to save some of the human family, be supposed to imply of necessity a counter and positive determination not to save the other members of the family? Not to save men, is not to act - it is just doing nothing.³¹

Increasingly, however, many came to believe that a God deemed omniscient could hardly fail to foresee that if he positively elected some,

28. H. E. Hill quoting Charles Matthews, minister’s son and comedian, in *The History of Christ Church at Whetstone*, p.2.

29. Letter of Henry V. D. Johns to the Revd. R. Bolton, quoted in George Redford and John Angell James, eds., *The Autobiography of William Jay*, (1854), (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1954), p.221.

30. R. W. Dale, “On some present aspects of theological thought among Congregationalists,” *The Congregationalist*, VI, January 1877, pp.5-6.

31. G. Payne, *Lectures on Divine Sovereignty, Election, the Atonement, Justification, and Regeneration*, 3rd edn., (London: John Gladding, 1846), p.41. Note the echo of Ridgley’s explanation of a century earlier.

others would be passed by, and that to do nothing about them seemed more than a little un-grace-ful. It must also be said that Payne and others were clearly struggling to make the best of a bad job, for there is surely a distinction between doing nothing and, to recall Calvin's own words, determining to devote some to destruction.³² Small wonder that D. W. Simon called Moderate Calvinism "Calvinism with its teeth filed but not drawn."³³ There was particular concern among many in the nineteenth century over the fate of deceased infants. At the same time we must heed the testimony of Robert Halley, that in Payne "we have an instance of one of the straitest sect of our religion among the most free and evangelical in the application of the truth to the wants, the responsibilities, and the consciences of all men."³⁴

In all of this what is happening is that a moral critique of scholasticism is winning the day.³⁵ The contrast is easily drawn. In 1741 the Congregationalist Joseph Hart inveighed against the "old Arminian errors" of John Wesley. Hart agrees with Wesley that "Many things that happen are inconsistent with one's natural notions of justice and mercy," but he turns the words against his Arminian rival: "How", he asks, "can any man presume to say that the doctrine of predestination cannot be true, only because it disagrees with our reason, and contradicts our natural conceptions of justice and mercy?"³⁶ Here Hart seems concerned above all else to guard God's omnipotence - a besetting sin of Calvinists thought another Congregationalist, Robert Mackintosh who, in 1908 declared,

The eternal odium of Calvinism - I had almost said the eternal infamy of Calvinism - is...its determination that whatever comes of morality, or of God's character, it shall make sure of God's omnipotence. Now - if we must choose - is not that the less true and less Christian alternative?³⁷

32. J. Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxi. p.7.

33. Quoted by F. J. Powicke, *David Worthington Simon*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), p.264.

34. R. Halley, "Opening Address" to the Congregational Union, *Congregational Year Book*, 1856, p.12. In this connection we may note that Payne was by no means as hostile as some to the American revivalist Charles G. Finney's *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 1835.

35. For the philosophical roots of this critique among Dissenters see Alan P. F. Sell, *Philosophy, Dissent and Nonconformity, 1689-1920*, (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2003), ch. 3.

36. Quoted in Thomas Wright, *Joseph Hart*, (London: Farncombe, 1910), p.10. Hart's tract is *The Unreasonableness of Religion. Being Remarks and Animadversions on Mr. John Wesley's Sermon on Romans viii. 32*, 1741.

37. R. Mackintosh, "Recent philosophy and Christian doctrine," *Proceedings of the Third International Congregational Council*, (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1908), p.82.

But, secondly, it is not only that scholastic Calvinism suffered erosion from within because of its unreachability and its perceived slighting of God's character; it was undermined from without by what the Methodist John Scott Lidgett called in his book of that title, *The Victorian Transformation of Theology*. The transformation consisted in the turn to the concept of the Fatherhood of God. I cannot pursue this theme further, except to say that in some hands this became an unduly sentimentalized idea, to the extent that Dale lamented that "God's authority does not impress us as it should. We find it hard to make men feel - whatever they may say - that sin is an awful offence, because committed against him."³⁸ In a word, the need of the corrective ultimately supplied by P. T. Forsyth was becoming urgent, namely, that God's love is holy love.

Thirdly, the onset of Social Gospel ideas created a climate inimical to hyper-Calvinism at least, but it also fostered a humanitarian-cum-Pelagian attitude in some which failed to hold together grace and works as the fruit of grace, and even encouraged them to think that by their efforts they were bringing in the Kingdom of God - as if the Kingdom is not always God's gift.

Fourthly, sizeable tracts of nineteenth-century thought became increasingly individualistic. One might gently suggest that from one point of view the Evangelical Revival was Enlightenment individualism gone pious. With which observation I return to the hint dropped earlier that the Revival promoted among Congregationalists at least the view that the way into the Church is by the route of conversion. The new birth is necessary. One of the results of this was that from about 1830 the covenant ecclesiology of traditional Congregationalism tailed off, and with it attendance at Church Meeting and, in many instances, commitment to baptism. Hence Robert Mackintosh's wry protest: "the Church's tradition is anti-individualist. Infant baptism is the great rock of offence to the triumphant revival."³⁹ Hence also Dale's remark that evangelicalism was "satisfied with fellowship of an accidental and precarious kind. It cared

38. R. W. Dale, "On some present aspects of theological thought among Congregationalists," p.7.

39. R. Mackintosh, *The Insufficiency of Revivalism as a Religious System, bound with Essays Towards a New Theology*, (Glasgow: Maclehose, 1889), p.27. Cf. *idem*, "The genius of Congregationalism," p.118. For this sadly neglected theologian see Alan P. F. Sell, *Robert Mackintosh, Theologian of Integrity*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 1977). On the converted influx to Dissent see A. Peel, *These Hundred Years*, pp.22-3. For an interesting parallel from another part of the Reformed family, we may note that it was not liberal theology but revivalism which so tempered the "Dortness" of the eastern branch of the Dutch Reformed Church in America as to lead it into the American denominational mainstream. See Firth Haring Fabend, *Zion on the Hudson: Dutch New York and New Jersey in the Age of Revivals*, (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000).

nothing for the idea of the Church as the august society of saints. It was the ally of Individualism."⁴⁰ Not, indeed, that those on the liberal wing of theology were deprived of ways of being individualists. The *Rivulet* controversy surrounding the hymns of T. T. Lynch, and attitudes expressed at the Leicester Conference of 1877 from which the Congregational Union felt overwhelmingly bound to distance itself in the interests of its stance as genuinely evangelical, amply demonstrate the point,⁴¹ as does Julie Jephson's pride in the fact that Congregationalism was the most democratic and undoctrinal of all Christian Churches, in which believing in the spirit of such doctrines as the Incarnation and the Atonement sufficed.⁴²

Coupled with this exaltation of freedom of thought was a pronounced hostility to the doctrine of predestination construed as deterministic. There is, as ever, no smoke without fire, and it is not difficult to find examples of Calvinistic teaching which bear a markedly deterministic stamp, and this not only in popular writing and sermons. Augustus Toplady, for example, whose *Works* were published in 1825, rhetorically asked, "what is Calvinism, but a scriptural expansion of the philosophic principle of necessity?" He welcomed the fact that this was so, and even teased the Unitarian Joseph Priestley for being on the way to Calvinism because of his commitment to philosophical necessity: "I think," said Toplady, "you have admitted a Trojan horse into your gates."⁴³ From the other side, Dale protested that Calvinism denied the freedom of the human will and branded necessarian philosophy "Calvinism without God."⁴⁴ Although I cannot develop the point in detail here, I am bound to point out that both Toplady and Dale are misguided on this matter. Predestination is a religious doctrine. It arises when Paul, retrospectively, realises that he has not come to his new life under his own steam, as it were. Undoubtedly confusion arises when predestination is equated with philosophical necessity; undoubtedly when that happens human freedom is under threat. But neither of these circumstances need arise, and neither represents genuine Calvinism. The fact is that while most Calvinists have been

40. R. W. Dale, *The Old Evangelicalism and the New*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), p.17; cf. p.31; also *idem*, *A Manual of Congregational Principles*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1884, 177; *idem*, *Essays and Addresses*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1899), p.209. For a later argument to the same effect see H. F. Lovell Cocks, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, (London: Independent Press, 1943), pp.84-7.
41. On these matters see further Mark D. Johnson, *The Dissolution of Dissent*, 1850-1918, (New York: Garland, 1987).
42. See Julie Jephson, *Christian Democracy*, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1902).
43. A. M. Toplady, *The Works of Augustus M. Toplady*, (London, 1825), VI, pp.240-42, 291.
44. R. W. Dale, "On some present aspects of theological thought among Congregationalists," p.6.

determinists in philosophy, a significant number have been libertarians; yet all could affirm predestination.⁴⁵

I do not overlook the fact that sociological factors also played a part in diluting scholastic Calvinism. I have already implied that this was one consequence of the sweeping in to the fold of the "saved" under the influence of the Revival. But, as Dale noted as early as 1877, the ministry and theological leadership were affected, too, as men, some of them Arminians, entered the ministry from Wales, Scotland and Ireland, and from Presbyterianism and Methodism.⁴⁶ But my main point is that to a large extent scholastic Calvinism was diluted from within as the moral protest against untoward doctrine took hold, and as a result, too, of the accession of the newly-converted. Moreover, all of this was set in train before the higher criticism and evolutionary thought, or such alien doctrines as agnosticism and positivism, hove into view to any significant degree.

Eustace Rogers Conder described the upshot as concisely as anyone: "The old theology did not perish under the assault of a rival system...It expired because an atmosphere had been created in which it could not breathe."⁴⁷ Or, as Dale put it,

‘Moderate Calvinism’ was Calvinism in decay. The old Calvinistic phrases, the old Calvinistic definitions, were still on the lips of the Independents when George III died; but in the spirit and tendency of their theology they were Calvinists no longer.⁴⁸

By 1879 Dale felt able to report that "Mr. Spurgeon stands alone among the modern leaders of Evangelical Nonconformists in his fidelity to the older Calvinistic creed;"⁴⁹ and, speaking for himself, he declared "Like the rest of the world, I have given up Calvinism."⁵⁰

But I have already noted Dale's concern at the loss of a sense of what H. H. Farmer later called "the Godness of God." Conder had similar qualms:

45. For a classic discussion of this point see William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, (1862), (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), pp.471-524; Alan P. F. Sell, *The Great Debate*, ch. 1.

46. *Ibid.*, 3.

47. E. R. Conder, "What have the churches gained and lost in spiritual influence through the changes which have taken place in recent years in doctrinal beliefs?" *Proceedings of the International Congregational Council, London 1891*, (London: James Clarke, 1891), p.196.

48. R. W. Dale, *History of English Congregationalism*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), p.588.

49. *Idem*, *The Evangelical Revival and Other Sermons*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1880), p.21.

50. *Ibid.*, p.195.

Grant that our forefathers were too apt to substitute anatomical preparations of truth for its living presence. They loved to dangle before you the skeleton of the Gospel till all its joints rattled, when what you needed was the tone of her comforting voice, a Divine smile on her countenance, the warm grasp of her helping hand. But let us not forget that the anatomist's knife lays bare nothing but what is essential to life, health, and beauty. And the higher the life, the more complex the system in which it is embodied. Creatures which can be cut to bits or turned inside out, and live on all the same, are of a very low type. To the highest, the loss of a single vertebra would be death. The 'plan of salvation' is not the 'Glad Tidings'; the philosophy of religion is not religion; the most logical scheme of doctrine which Theology will ever frame will not take the place of the living word, by which souls are born again, and purified in obeying truth. No! But nevertheless, a religious life strong in feeling and action, but intellectually feeble; a faith which is firm and simple as Trust, but as Belief is unintelligent, hazy, unable to distinguish doctrine from doctrine or truth from error; - these are not worthy of the disciples of [Christ]...Nor is it in such characteristics that we can trace the features of the Church of the Future.⁵¹

Conder went on to argue that "The old Theology was not overthrown by argument" but "by the expansive force of love. The breaking point of the strain was the restriction it laid on an honest offer of salvation to all." He further surmised that Calvinists had got hold of the wrong end of "the great problem of human salvation, in beginning with the eternal decrees of God, and the eternal covenant between the Father and the Son, instead of busying themselves with the end put into their hands by the Saviour's command - 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature'."⁵²

One generation on, Walter F. Adeney, principal of Lancashire Independent College, was disinclined to concede any advantage to Calvinism. In a manner which is suggestive of heat rather than light, or even of scholarly accuracy and fairness, he, in typical liberal-evangelical fashion, attributes the demise of Calvinism to the new humanitarian temper flowing down from Rousseau and the French Revolution. By contrast, Calvinism, "While prostrating itself before the awful Majesty of

51. E. R. Conder, "The decay of theology," *The Congregational Year Book*, 1874, pp.70-71.

52. *Ibid.*, 72.

God...had no pity for man"⁵³ - a statement, surely, requiring qualification. Robert Burns, John McLeod Campbell, and Thomas Erskine of Linlathen all contributed to the idea of redemption as spiritual rather than as mere deliverance from punishment; while F. D. Maurice, Robertson of Brighton and the Congregationalist Baldwin Brown made the doctrine of God's Fatherhood central to theology, displacing that of his sovereignty. Utterly repudiated, Adeney declares, is any idea that God's sovereignty is independent of morality, as if God were "a sort of Sultan acting with pure caprice in choosing one for everlasting bliss, and relegating another to everlasting torment, on the Turk's plea that 'he has a right to do as he will with his own'."⁵⁴

Here, once again, is the equation of predestination with determinism and, as I have suggested, it is an unscholarly if understandable union: understandable because Calvinists like Toplady and others made the link themselves; and many had been spiritually wounded by such teaching, among them three of Congregationalism's most distinguished theologians of the early years of the twentieth century: A. M. Fairbairn (who found a "larger and nobler" theology on the continent than that in which he had been nurtured in Scotland); Robert Mackintosh (who regarded himself as a refugee who fled from the Calvinism of the Free Church of Scotland to the freer air of Congregationalism); and A. E. Garvie (who, when asked why in *The Christian Belief in God* he had not taken notice of Karl Barth replied, "Having given so much toil of mind and travail of soul to escape from Calvinism, I have no mind to return to its bondage").⁵⁵ Garvie further declared,

I do not envy the man who to-day can avow himself as a Calvinist, since it was this type of theology which not only turned my mind for a time away from the ministry, but almost drove me into entire unbelief. Does God elect some to salvation and predestinate others to damnation? Does He give His Spirit only to the elect, and withhold His Spirit from others? Does he use the devil as His agent to secure their damnation? Does He, to ensure the salvation of the elect, and them alone, make His grace irresistible, and provide for the perseverance of the saints? Did God decree

53. W. F. Adeney, *A Century's Progress in Religious Life and Thought*, (London: James Clarke, 1901), p.122.

54. *Ibid.*, p.130.

55. See A. M. Fairbairn, "Experience in theology: a chapter of autobiography," *The Contemporary Review*, XCI, January-June 1907, p.567; Robert Mackintosh, "The genius of Congregationalism," p.105; A. E. Garvie, *Revelation Through History and Experience. A Study of the Historical Basis of the Revelation of the Godhead*, (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934), xii.

the Fall? Unless a man accepts these propositions, he is mistaken in calling himself a Calvinist.⁵⁶

But by the time - 1934 - that Garvie wrote those words changes were afoot in English Congregationalism. The emphases of P. T. Forsyth,⁵⁷ the sometimes cordial but frequently muted reception given to Karl Barth,⁵⁸ and a general feeling that the First World War had shattered the optimism of a liberal theology which had led to a sentimentalized understanding of God which could not sustain the saints in the evil hour⁵⁹ - all of these factors and others explain the letter of 12 March 1939 which was sent to all Congregational ministers. It was drafted by Bernard Lord Manning, revised by Nathaniel Micklem and John Whale, and signed in addition by H. F. Lovell Cocks, John Marsh, Hubert Cunliffe-Jones, W. A. Whitehouse, Daniel Jenkins, J. D. Jones, E. J. Price and John Short. It was a call to a deeper understanding of the Church as utterly dependent upon the Gospel of God's free grace, and this as transmitted especially through the Reformed tradition. Some of the signatories and their associates were labelled the "Genevan" Congregationalists. Not the least sign of the influence of this group was the formation of the Church Order Group and a renewed concern for worship marked by freedom within order. Reverence before the holy God, realism concerning human sinfulness, and a joyous celebration of God's eternal, redeeming, love - these were the notes now being sounded.⁶⁰

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56. A. E. Garvie, *Revelation Through History*, p.161. It is interesting to note in passing the eagerness with which some liberal theologians strove to palliate the so-called "hard sayings" of the Gospels, and their disinclination to accord the benefit of the doubt to, or even in some cases to bring careful exegesis to bear upon, the "harder sayings" of Calvinism.
57. For a discussion of these see Alan P. F. Sell, "P. T. Forsyth as unsystematic systematician," in Trevor Hart, ed., *Justice the True and Only Mercy. Essays on the Life and Theology of Peter Taylor Forsyth*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), ch. 8, reprinted in *idem*, *Testimony and Tradition. Studies in Reformed and Dissenting Thought*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, forthcoming); *idem*, "P. T. Forsyth: theologian for a new millennium?" in *idem*, ed., *P. T. Forsyth. Theologian for a New Millennium*, (London: The United Reformed Church, 2000), ch. 9.
58. See further, Alan P. F. Sell, "The theological contribution of Protestant Nonconformists in the twentieth century: some soundings," in Alan P. F. Sell and Anthony R. Cross, eds., *Protestant Nonconformity in the Twentieth Century*, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), p.42 ff.
59. See further, Alan P. F. Sell, *Theology in Turmoil. The Roots, Course and Significance of the Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology*, (1986), (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998), chs. 5, 6.
60. See further, Alan P. F. Sell, "The worship of English Congregationalism," in Lukas Vischer, ed., *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp.83-106, reprinted in *idem*, *Testimony and Tradition. Studies in Reformed and Dissenting Thought*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, forthcoming 2004).

A coupling, one might almost say, of the worm with the sunbeam.

There I might have left it. But I should like to pose two questions. First, can it be that the worm is turning? A few weeks ago I came across a hymn in *Celebration Hymnal*, one of the books in use at The Church of Christ the Cornerstone, Milton Keynes, which contains a stanza beginning thus:

If I were a wiggly worm
I'd thank you, Lord, that I could squirm.

This worm, be it noted, is significantly different from his hymnological ancestors. He is not a lowly creature struggling against the miry clay; he is a feel-good worm who cheerfully wiggles across the golden sands of a package holiday. To be like him is not to be humbled, but to be ever so happy. The moral is, As your doctrine is, so will your worship be.

But this raises the second question: how is it with our doctrine? I have been concerned throughout with the dilution of Calvinism as it received scholastic shape in the *Westminster Confession* and the derivative but amended *Savoy Declaration*. The discussion of election and predestination from John Owen, through Thomas Ridgley, Edward Williams, Ralph Wardlaw, George Payne, and on into the early decades of the twentieth century all took place within that context. But what if the context were not the most helpful? Understandably enough, creeds and confessions are always creatures of their age.⁶¹ It is not difficult to see why, in face of what they took to be untenable views of Church authority, our forebears opened their confessions with strong statements on the authority of Scripture. We can understand how, under the impress of Enlightenment rationalism, this later emerged as the biblical inerrancy doctrine of Old Princeton as represented by the Hodges, Warfield and Machen. But the more immediate effect of this way of opening the *Confession* was to inculcate the view that the first affirmations to be made concern a book rather than the triune God. Indeed, the eight lines on the triune God are shelved until we have been through ten paragraphs upon the Bible and two on the general attributes of God. The work of Christ is delayed until chapter 8, and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit to chapter 10, where it is treated rather inadequately, because the Spirit is conceived largely as the one who applies the things of Christ to us, and not, for example, as our intercessor or the bond of our union with Christ.⁶² The charge is not that the authors and most of their theological heirs were not

61. For further discussion of this point see Alan P. F. Sell, *Aspects of Christian Integrity*, (Calgary: University of Calgary Press and Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), ch. 4; *idem*, *Confessing and Commending the Faith. Historic Witness and Apologetic Method*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002), pp. 27-29.

62. See the strictures of J. B. Torrance, "Strengths and weaknesses of Westminster theology," p.53.

trinitarian: the proliferation of tracts against Socinians and Unitarians testifies to the strength of trinitarian conviction if not always to the graciousness of the elect. The point is that in what one might call their in-house teaching and catechetical instruction the *Westminster Confession* and its Congregational and Baptist successors fostered a pattern of study and reflection in which the grace of God the holy Trinity did not assume primacy, and in which convictions concerning God's sovereign power were inadequately balanced by those concerning his grace and mercy.

Despite this, however, the Congregationalists of the eighteenth century, largely because of their polity in which the giving in of experience had a conserving effect, and their hymns, remained orthodox while most Presbyterians took another direction.⁶³ But by the nineteenth century, in preaching and theological writing, the Trinity had slipped into the background. This fact was deeply regretted by Principal David Worthington Simon in his address to the friends of Yorkshire United Theological College, Bradford, in September 1897. He spoke of the general doctrinal downgrade, and in particular of the fate which had befallen the Trinity, "the foundation doctrine of the Christian doctrinal system." Whenever this doctrine has been forgotten, ignored or denied, he continued, "the system of Christian truth has crumbled to pieces."⁶⁴

It seems to me that Simon here issues a challenge of perennial importance to trinitarian churches,⁶⁵ and what he says has to do with more than systematic theology. I believe that in the claim that on the ground of the Son's finished work the Father calls out by the Spirit a people for his praise and service, we have the heart of our Gospel, the trinitarian foundation of our doctrine, the root of our church polity, and the source of our abiding hope. If this is so, then if we do not continually and openly rehearse the Good News of the sovereign grace of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we shall lose our grip on Gospel, doctrine and ecclesiology. Were that to happen, even the most arid tracts of Calvinist scholasticism would seem like oases as compared with the theological and liturgical desert we should by then have entered.

I conclude with a word from E. R. Conder, uttered in 1891, which is as cautionary as it is challenging:

Our churches have gained in breadth, catholicity, elasticity, activity, sympathy with the temporal as well as the spiritual need and woe of our neighbours, of our nation, of the world.

63. See further Alan P. F. Sell, *Dissenting Thought*, chs. 1, 5.

64. Quoted by F. J. Powicke, *David Worthington Simon*, p.219. Cf. Simon's paper, "The present direction of theological thought in the Congregational churches of Great Britain," *Proceedings of the International Congregational Council, London 1891*, pp.76-80; J. Stoughton, *Reminiscences*, pp.76-7.

65. Thus no aspersions are here cast against those who are Unitarian by conviction.

But in personal spiritual life - *q.d.*, in faith, prayer, fervour, unworldly simplicity, intense religious conviction, stern loyalty to truth and conscience, self-denial, the life of conscious relation to things unseen and eternal, and living communion with our Saviour and our Father by the mighty indwelling Spirit; glad as I should be to believe it, I dare not assert that we surpass - I doubt if we equal - the Christians whose characters were shaped and toughened by a severer creed in a more wintry social, civil, moral, and religious climate.⁶⁶

ALAN P.F. SELL

66. E. R. Conder, "What have the churches gained and lost...?" p.198.

REVIEWS

Reasonable enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism. By Henry D. Rack. 3rd edition. Pp. xxi, 662. London: Epworth Press, 2002. £19.95.

A Brand from the Burning: The Life of John Wesley. By Roy Hattersley. Pp. vii, 451. London: Little, Brown, 2002. £20.

The first edition of Henry Rack's book appeared in 1989 and was reviewed in this journal in 1990 (vol. 4, no. 6) by A.N. Cass, who described it, with every justification, as "a masterpiece of historical scholarship, informed by sustained and subtle theological reflection". The second edition in 1992, contained few changes – "Alterations have mostly been confined to corrections of factual errors, typographical slips and uncouth sentences. A few references have been added to the notes together with a brief supplementary bibliography." – but Dr Rack acknowledged that "more should have been said about the role of women in early Methodism, and the rather severe view of Wesley's character could be tempered with more reference to the charm he exhibited especially in his mellow old age". The third edition offers further changes and additions, the most important of which, contained in five pages of "Second Thoughts (2001)", provide a framework for a comparison with Roy Hattersley's book.

First, however, one major similarity should be stressed: both authors are reacting from the uncritical adulation which characterises much previous writing about Wesley. But their attempted objectivity has different roots. For Dr Rack is a Methodist minister and a professional church historian, whereas Lord Hattersley is an agnostic and a politician. When dealing, therefore, with John Wesley's escape from the fire at Epworth rectory, Henry Rack explains in what sense it was felt by early Methodists to be "providential", whereas Roy Hattersley describes their interpretation as the result of "exaggerating the importance of coincidence".

There are, moreover, differences in the character of the two books and therefore in the methods which they employ. For while Roy Hattersley has produced a "biography" – hence the "life" of his subtitle – Henry Rack has written a "historical biography". In other words, the former concentrates on John Wesley and his achievements, while the latter tries, in addition, to give a detailed account of the historical and cultural context of his life and work. As a result, Hattersley produces a narrative of eighteen chapters, tracing the sequence of events but focusing, when appropriate, on specific topics. For example, chapter 11, "Along the flowery way" contrasts John Wesley's marriage with that of his brother Charles and deals with Charles's successful efforts to obstruct John's earlier relationship with Grace Murray. By contrast, Rack divides the narrative of John Wesley's

life and work into three sections, covering the years 1703-38; 1738-60 and 1760-91, and provides a prelude on religion and society in eighteenth-century England and two interludes on the origins of the Evangelical Revival and Methodism's relationship to it at the end of the eighteenth century, before adding a postlude on Wesley's character and achievement.

Not surprisingly, there are also stylistic differences. Both books are eminently readable, but while Rack's text proceeds smoothly and reflectively, Hattersley reveals the technique of an experienced journalist, not least by his ability to produce a sparkling sentence at the end of a paragraph. I offer two examples. The first concerns John Burton's commendation of the Wesley brothers to the Georgia Trustees: "Burton thought that he [i.e. John Wesley] was called to save the souls of Native Americans. Wesley himself was seeking personal salvation. The letter of appointment stipulated simple preaching. Wesley accepted the appointment, but ignored the advice". The second relates to Wesley's marriage to Mrs Vazeille. "According to the *Gentleman's Magazine* the marriage took place on 18 February. The *London Magazine* dated the wedding as 19 February. Whatever the date, they lived unhappily ever after."

Rack's "Second Thoughts (2001)" contains material of two kinds: on the one hand, he provides information about topics on which, though important research has been done since 1989, further work is still required; on the other hand, he offers reflections on major themes in his own book. Thus we learn of the need for more research on rank-and-file Methodism and not least on women, on the strengths of church life and the fluid character of early revivalism, on the relation of the origins of the revival in England to the European situation as depicted by Professor Ward, and on the relations of Methodism and Dissent. At the same time, Rack indicates that, on reflection, he sees no reason to modify his original line of interpretation, though small adjustments of detail may be appropriate. Thus, he re-affirms his description of Wesley as a "reasonable enthusiast", meaning "an untypical evangelical still partly conditioned by the more 'Catholic' side of his inheritance, who clothed his faith in some of the values of what some of us still dare to call the 'English Enlightenment'". Moreover, he is as convinced as ever of Wesley's iron will, but wonders whether he may have "dwelt too heavily on some of the less attractive aspects of Wesley's character".

Rack goes on to reflect on the difficulties in using Wesley's Journal as a source and on the problems in fathoming Wesley's personal spirituality. He also wonders how long Wesleyan Methodism took to establish its dominance and how far Wesley was in charge of Methodism in his later years. And he suggests that, even after his break with Moravianism, Wesley continued to be attracted by it and obscured the extent of his borrowings from it. Finally, after a *mot juste* about the roots of Methodist

theology – “I would repeat the caution that Wesley never borrowed without change, omission and development and that he read his sources with eighteenth-century eyes and an ‘experimental’ concern.” – he recapitulates his assessment of Charles Wesley, whom he aptly describes in the books as “sweet singer and uneasy colleague”.

The contrast between the central concerns of Rack and Hattersley can be illustrated by the ways their books end. Rack writes: “The paradox of a ‘reasonable enthusiast’, of a precise clergyman reaching and organising the submerged frustrations of his time, remains... Wesley’s achievement, and it was not a small one, was to bring some parts of those two sides of Georgian England together. Few, if any of his successors, have achieved as much.” Hattersley writes: “Not in his own lifetime, but certainly by proxy during the hundred years which followed his death, Wesley was one of the architects of modern England. John Wesley’s Second Reformation created a new church which helped to build a new nation.”

Hattersley, in other words, is convinced of the impact of all that Wesley stood for on the moral values of the English people. This, he insists, is what made John Wesley a social as well as a religious revolutionary:... “instead of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, he proclaimed Piety, Probity and Respectability”. Granted, however, Rack’s wider concerns, there is considerable agreement between the two writers – notably, about Wesley’s iron will and his ability to rationalise his decisions, and about the character of Charles Wesley and his relationship to his brother.

Hattersley has struggled hard to understand the theological debates in which Wesley was involved, but, as another reviewer has pointed out, “he is not always at ease with technical theological terms” – as when, for example, he mistakenly describes Wesley’s breaches of Anglican Church order as “heresy” and “apostasy”.

If, therefore, Hattersley’s book needs to be supplemented from other sources – and here Rack’s masterpiece comes into its own – it provides, on the Tercentenary of Wesley’s birth, a stimulating reminder, from an unusual perspective, of the impact of John Wesley on British life.

GRAHAM SLATER

Modern Christianity and Cultural Aspirations: eds. David Bebbington and Timothy Larsen. Pp. XVI, 359. London: Sheffield Academic Press (Continuum), 2003. £95.00. ISBN 0 8264 6262 6.

These essays were originally read as papers at a conference held in 2001 to mark the retirement of Professor Clyde Binfield, editor of this *Journal*. Like the *Journal* and like any paper by Clyde Binfield himself, they look out upon a broad landscape. The papers are grouped in five sections, Popular Culture, Architecture, Education, Politics and Ecclesiology. They are preceded by an autobiographical paper and by a critical appreciation of Clyde Binfield by Reg Ward. For those of us who heard the papers the echoes of a rich conference are evoked. For those who come to them fresh there are delights in store. Sometimes a *festschrift* is an opportunity for a scholar to unload a paper of tangential connection to the honoured recipient. In this case the fourteen papers all have a relation to one or other aspect of Clyde Binfield's own work and still there could have been more. The papers span the Atlantic, the denominations and the centuries, yet we have nothing on the visual arts or literature, Binfield topics both, nor ecumenism as such, in which he has played a full part.

However, let us commend what is to be found. The Popular Culture section gives us Hugh McLeod on Sport and John Briggs on Nonconformity and the Pottery Industry. The paper on sport is an acknowledgement of Clyde Binfield's service to the YMCA. Never a hearty sportsman himself he has a wistful admiration for those who could cajole young men into chapel and Sunday School with muscular Christianity. What price today the prospect of scoring goals for the football team or a ton of runs for the eleven, without cursing or drinking? Beyond the sport lay the prospect of Guilds and Literary Societies and greater cultural aspirations. On that middle-class mantelpiece which lay in the future might rest a chaste pot, or even a bust of Wesley or Spurgeon. John Briggs poses a Binfieldian question, why were Nonconformists dominant in this figurine market?

Architecture we have long known as a Binfield passion. John Thompson delivers the Nonconformist view of the matter, drawing on Highgate papers, and Sheridan Gilley reminds us that Pugin comes within the Binfield compass as much as Cubitt. The handsome Education section gives us Frances Knight on the Welsh clergy, throwing light on both the Establishment and Dissent in the question of ministerial formation in Wales. Timothy Larsen exposes the self-importance of some Nonconformist preachers when it came to acquiring doctorates for themselves, with a consoling reminder that others were only prepared to assume the degrees they had earned. The founding students of Mansfield College are brought to life by Elaine Kaye, evoking some Binfield heroes and leaving him and all of us to ponder whether we can ever learn more

about J.A. Robinson of Portugal. David Thompson counters with Nonconformists at Cambridge, feeling their way into new liberties and finding their champion in Bernard Manning. John Hargreaves meticulously chronicles Methodist work with children in Halifax over 200 years.

Politics gives us David Bebbington himself with a fresh look at events in 1833-34, which he pinpoints as critical in the shift from the old Dissenting deference to the new Nonconformist aggression. That self-conscious challenge to the Established Church reached its conclusion in the education battles of 1902-6. John Wigley looks at the politics of the struggle to resist "Rome on the Rates". Richard Carwardine examines the faith of Abraham Lincoln and in so doing brings out another Binfield theme, self-improvement. The final section on Ecclesiology offers two pieces of what is now the history of the United Reformed Church. David Cornick offers an analysis of the Disruption in the Church of Scotland as it affected the London Presbytery. Alan Sell writes about the developments in Congregationalism which led to the formation of the Congregational Church in England and Wales and the United Reformed Church. Those who come from either tradition will find much to inform them about the other here. The increasing number of those who have had no experience of either will gain new insight into why the Presbyterian and Congregational denominations developed the way they did and what core values were at stake when the United Reformed Church was planned.

If Clyde Binfield has taught us anything it is not to be ashamed of our Congregational and Presbyterian past but to embrace it and learn lessons from it. This collection of papers, like so much of his own work, teaches us that we have lost nothing in the past when we have been generous and imaginative but that narrowness and the search for party advantage often precede decline. The generous tribute to Clyde Binfield by Sheridan Gilley, and by others who do not share his ecclesiology, reminds us that if there is a Reformed tradition and if it has value within the Church it needs to be aspirational at the very least. Perhaps one should also add that it needs to be cultured. The gracious Binfield spirit can live with Gospel choruses but it would rather have Handel. To that his friends and fellow scholars bear ample testimony in this volume.

STEPHEN ORCHARD

"Where two or three are gathered together..." The History of the Congregational Churches in the Cornish Villages of Grampound, Tregony, Portscatho and St Mawes. By John K. Lander. Pp. iii, 78. 2003. N.p. From the author at The Old Farmhouse, Chycoose, Devoran, Truro, Cornwall, TR3 6NU. ISBN 0-9545584-0-5.

In October 2002 John Lander contributed to *The Journal* a substantial and interesting article on "The Cornwall Congregational Association". He now assumes the role of pathologist and examines four cases: two deceased churches, Grampound (c.1781-1940) and St Mawes (1809-1893), and two that survive, Portscatho (1822), united with the Methodists, and Tregony (1776), which joined the Congregational Federation and has charismatic tendencies. While the details of each church's story and character are interestingly different, the description of their slow, painful decline over the last 150 years would apply to innumerable churches spread all over England and Wales.

What is very interesting is the crucial part played by lay people in founding churches, encouraged by visiting ministers – the Wildbores of Falmouth, for example, delighted to nurse pioneering congregations. These small churches, throughout their existence, depended on a few families, many loyal generation after generation. But social changes left the churches without anchorage in the community. With lack of leadership, little money, dependent on County grants, they became disorganised and depressed, blaming the County for not offering them ministers. Nevertheless, remarkable ministers and lay people shine out of Lander's pages – even the portraits tell us much, William Billing, for example, in the footsteps of Peter, both fisherman and pastor, and Leonard Croggan, who shouldered Grampound for nearly half a century.

Here we have the stories of four little churches and their stalwart families but we have much more: questions to ponder concerning mission and the structures of the church.

JOHN H. TAYLOR

Reformed Ministry: Traditions of Ministry and Ordination in the United Reformed Church. By Tony Tucker, London: United Reformed Church: 2003. ISBN 0-85346-217-8.

I picked this book up with interest and enthusiasm. Having been involved in ministry in the United Reformed Church and one of its predecessors for forty-three years, and having been directly involved in ministerial oversight and central ministerial policy-making for more than a decade, I thought it would be good to understand what I had been doing. I was not disappointed.

Tony Tucker has brought to this work his characteristic thoroughness and expertise. His style is clear, easy and flowing and his history meticulous. I am not aware that anyone has addressed precisely this task in precisely this way before, so this makes his book all the more important.

He approaches his subject historically. He begins with a chapter on the Reformation roots of the three traditions that make up the United Reformed Church. He goes on to describe most helpfully the twentieth-century ecumenical movement, commenting in detail on the importance of the Lambeth Conference declaration of 1920 and reactions to it within the Reformed Churches. There are then three chapters, one each on Congregational, Presbyterian and Churches of Christ traditions, describing each in much detail, comparing and contrasting their different, sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory, characteristics. A vital chapter on the movement that led to the establishment of the United Reformed Church in 1972 and its further expansion in 1981 follows, including a useful section on the development of what we now call the non-stipendiary ministry. Chapter 7 contains an interesting analysis of the various ordination rites that have been published in all three traditions, as well as subsequently by the United Reformed Church, and indicates how they have reflected both the variety and the convergence of the different streams of Reformed theology and ecclesiology. Finally there are two chapters setting out the progress, and lack of it, towards Christian Unity since 1972 and the hopes for further organic unity in the new millennium, all slanted in the direction of the different concepts of ministry in the different Churches and the frustrations of trying to bring them together in a coherent united body. There is an enormous bibliography.

If I have a complaint it is that I might have expected fuller treatment of the ministry of the Ordained Elder within the United Reformed Church. My experience suggests that too many elders understand their ministry in terms of diaconate rather than presbyterate, and that this understanding is hampering our development of the meaning of ordination. No other tradition, so far as I am aware, has quite the same concept of what we are now pleased to call "team ministry", a concept which has much to offer

both to ourselves and in the context of ecumenical dialogue.

I found the earlier chapters more interesting than the later ones. This might be because the later chapters address that slice of history through which I have lived, and I knew more of it from personal experience. It might also be because the earlier material is more interesting. But a more ominous reason might be because the book moves towards a sombre ending as we are reminded of ecumenical failure after failure and introduced to a bleak future. If only we could aspire again to that glorious aim embedded within the United Reformed Church's Basis of Union, which Tony Tucker quotes at the end: to "work for such visible unity of the whole Church as Christ wills and in the way he wills, in order that people and nations may be led more and more to glorify the Father in heaven".

A book like this is valuable for its own sake, but is even more valuable if it appears at an opportune time. And this has happened. Together with almost all Churches, certainly the more traditionally based ones, we are reconsidering our practice of deploying and using our ordained ministers. It is not always clear that we are basing this reconsideration on theology and an understanding of tradition rather than on the pragmatism of an urgent situation. If pragmatism is not based in theology we are likely to sell the past and go badly astray. This book is therefore timely for those of us who are trying to make sense of the contraction of our Church. By the same token, I would hope there would be a market for it in other Churches. It cannot but help mutual understanding. It might even contribute towards progress towards that united Church of the future, of which most people seem to have lost sight. I hope that it will be widely read. If it is not, will that be another sign that our state is more parlous than we think?

C. KEITH FORECAST