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CONTENTS

Editorial	596
A Century of Worship at Egremont by <i>Peter S. Richards</i>	599
“The Dust and Joy of Human Life”: Geoffrey Hoyland and some Congregational Links by <i>Nigel Lemon</i>	610
Is Geoffrey also among the Theologians? Part II by <i>Alan P.F. Sell</i>	624
Review Article: Remembering Pennar Davies (1911-1996) by <i>Robert Pope</i>	640
Reviews by <i>Jean Silvan Evans</i> and <i>Keith Forecast</i>	646

EDITORIAL

Historians have a love-hate relationship with anniversaries. Anniversaries provide fine opportunities for historians to parade their wares, demonstrate their skills and proselytise. They allow for lectures, conferences, and publications. They also allow for cultural, professional, and political propaganda, and this should be alien to the scepticism which is as much a part of the historian's composition as insatiable curiosity and a commitment to communicate the essence of what is being discovered about the past. No historian can find any anniversary wholly satisfactory. Historians from the Christian tradition of which the United Reformed Church is part are particularly conscious of the challenge which it is their responsibility to confront. They belong to a tradition for which time is a defining aspect. At each communion service they share in a commemoration. Their profession of history is an extension of this.

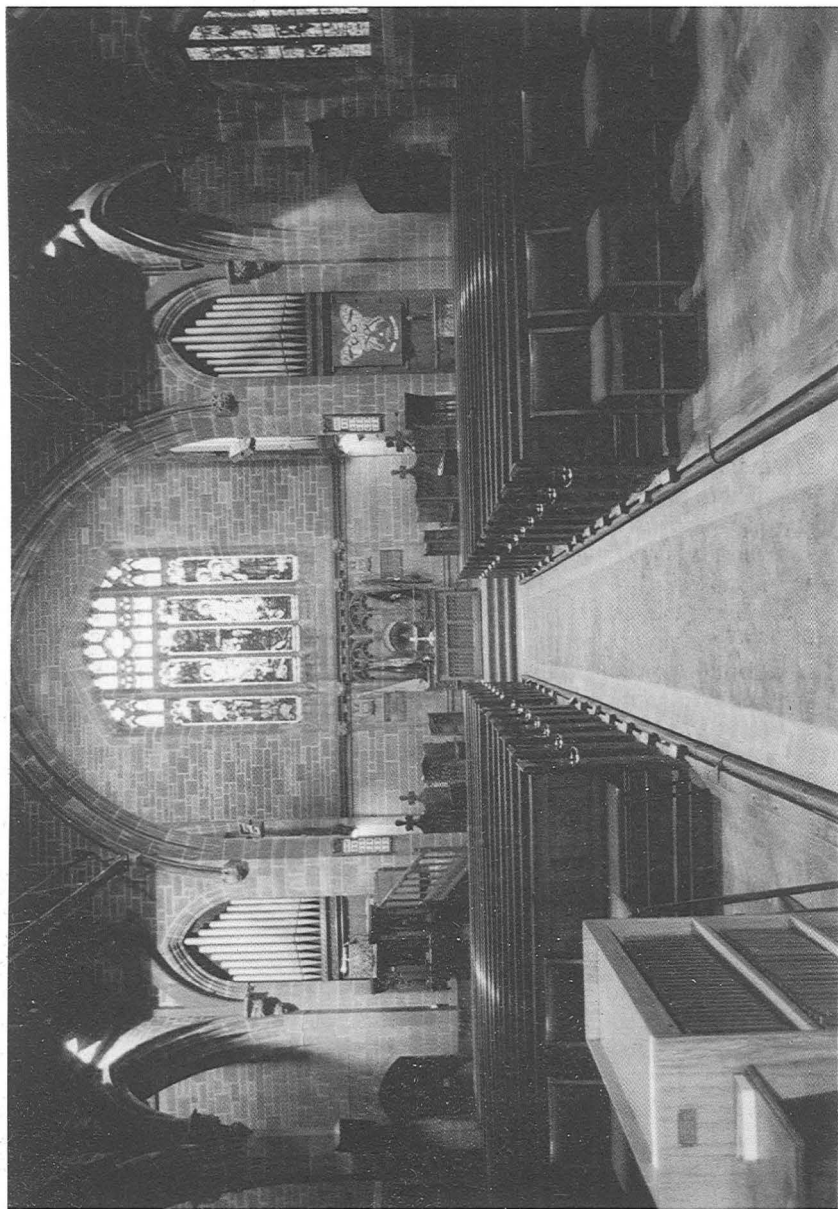
The year 2012 offers two particular anniversaries. One is the fortieth anniversary of the United Reformed Church, the other is the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Great Ejectment. The latter is to be celebrated in lectures, study days, conferences and church services. There has already been a service in Westminster Abbey, and some cathedrals have followed suit in suggestive remembrance. Their tone has differed significantly from those which prevailed in 1962, 1912, or 1862. The tercentenary in 1962 occurred in ecumenism's brief high noon; in 1912 the Liberal dawn, by then perhaps more of an increasingly stormy afternoon, was still a cause for optimism; in 1862 the self-proclaimed descendants of the ejected were at the forefront of urban and industrial advance and tantalisingly close to the civil equality of which their spiritual forebears had been deprived. And 2012? Will it feed on history-making myths of past anniversaries? Or will it be more reflective, dwelling perhaps on the unintended but undoubtedly nation-forming consequences of Black Bartholomew's Day, 24 August 1662?

This issue offers no direct guidance on any of this. Jean Silvan Evans's review of a history of the church at Llanvaches and Robert Pope's review article, remembering Pennar Davies, alert us to the fact that Welsh Congregationalism ran as much parallel to, as in consequence of, the English variety. Peter Richards's account of Egremont, Wallasey, in its hey-day one of Presbyterianism's English cathedrals, might alert us to the fact that Scottish (and Irish) Dissent, whether Presbyterian or Congregational, was the product of quite different conditions, however close the interaction of English, Scottish (and Irish) Dissent has been since the seventeenth century.

We come closer, though still indirectly, to current commemorations with the papers by Alan Sell and Nigel Lemon on Geoffrey Nuttall, theologian, and Geoffrey Hoyland, educationist and hymnwriter. Geoffrey Nuttall's living theology was inescapably formed by his understanding of the Puritan spirit and its seventeenth-century essence. Geoffrey Hoyland's Quakerism, which

Geoffrey Nuttall would have appreciated, criss-crossed with a fellow-travelling Congregationalism, both strands picking up, in a curiously establishment way, on a radical Protestant tradition.

We welcome as a contributor Peter Richards, a Leicester graduate with a Greenwich doctorate and Lambeth diploma, who was one of the Methodists who united with Egremont to form Manor Church Centre, now St Andrew's, New Brighton. Robert Pope, our reviews editor, becomes the *Journal's* editor with the appearance of the first issue of Volume 9, in Autumn 2012. That will make for another sort of anniversary.



A CENTURY OF WORSHIP AT EGREMONT

I

Worship in the impressive building on the corner of Seabank Road and Manor Road, Wallasey, ceased at the end of September 2010. Originally known as Egremont Presbyterian Church of England, in 1972 it became Egremont United Reformed Church. In 1994 about forty Methodists from nearby Trinity Methodist Church, Manor Road, joined Egremont URC when their church closed. Trinity was demolished and a nursing home was built on that site. Egremont, changing its name and status, became a Local Ecumenical Project: Manor Church Centre.

The church has not closed, however. The worshippers have transferred, more or less *en bloc*, to St Andrew's Church in New Brighton, already a combined URC/Methodist Church. A co-ordinating group has been set up, new notice boards planned and a breakfast communion inaugurated. Worship group services have been arranged; ideas for a church magazine, and a website are under discussion. A small group is looking at the possibility of a youth/children's worker. A new constitution is in hand, so much of the necessary hard work of integration has been done.

II

What then of the past? The first record of Presbyterian worship in Wallasey goes back to 1639 under the leadership of George Snell, rector of Wallasey and Waverton, and also archdeacon of Chester, who nevertheless suffered the loss of his livings.¹ There are no further records until the nineteenth century when a Presbyterian service was held on 1 May 1859, in a room in Egremont Ferry Hotel, Tobin Street, later the Egremont Institute (since demolished). The first minister was Robert Cameron. The congregation grew and it was agreed that a building of their own was required for the hundred or so attenders. The foundation stone was laid by Samuel Stitt, chairman of the Home Mission Board of the United Presbyterian Church, for a church on the corner of King Street and Trafalgar Road; it opened for worship on 9 July 1863.² The total cost was about £4,000 and with seating for 650. The congregation grew and when the space proved too small, side galleries were added. By 1896 membership had grown to almost 400.³

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- 1 E. Cuthbert Woods and P. Culverwell Brown, *The Rise and Progress of Wallasey: A History of the Borough*, (Wallasey, 2nd edn., 1960), 94. Snell may not have been sufficiently zealous, once the Presbyterians gained the upper hand in Cheshire. See W.Fergusson Irvine, *The Cheshire Sheaf*, May 1894, 42, and A.G. Matthews, *Walker Revised*, (Oxford, 1988), 93-94.
 - 2 Woods and Brown, *op. cit.*, 94.
 - 3 Anon., *Egremont Presbyterian Church of England 1859-1896*, (Liverpool, 1896), 7-17. This is an invaluable compilation, not least for its listing of the congregational committees at 45-48, and communion roll at 49-55 from which this figure is calculated.

Robert Cameron was highly respected for his preaching and pastoral ministry. A letter of 1862, now lost, recorded the gratitude of Giuseppe Garibaldi, the Italian revolutionary, for Cameron's pastoral care of his son, while a pupil at Dr Poggi's school in New Brighton.⁴ A stained glass window in the later 1908 building commemorated Cameron. His son, Sir D.Y. Cameron (1865-1945), was a noted artist. He, along with other family members, agreed to provide a memorial window, entrusting the work to the Artificers' Guild of London, a company of artists bound together, not for pecuniary profit, but their love of art. The themes were Moses surveying the promised land, Solomon contemplating the temple and John's vision on Patmos.

In 1865 James Muir began a long and distinguished ministry. Further preaching stations at Wallasey were formed. In 1871 Union Street Mission, which eventually became a church in its own right, was founded under lay leadership. Later in the decade Wallasey Mission in Wallasey Village was set up, with Edward Billington, an elder at Egremont, as leader. Presbyterians in the Village had been meeting in a room behind the Black Horse Inn since at least 1863. This became Wallasey Village Church (now URC) in 1896.⁵ In 1881 Oakdale Mission, Salcombe, was founded with a lay leader, Francis Johnson, in charge. Until a permanent building was put up in 1891, two cottages were used for worship.⁶

Muir was highly respected at Egremont and in the church at large. He was described as a "model pastor", and not only bore the burden of a large congregation – albeit with a succession of assistants – but played an exceptionally prominent part in the public work of the national church. He took a lively interest in promoting union between the congregations of the United Presbyterian Church south of the Tweed, and those of the Presbyterian Church in England, and when it was accomplished, "he strove with single hearted endeavour to consolidate it." His contribution was recognised when the University of New York conferred on him the degree of D.D.⁷ As Dr Muir, he was Moderator of the Synod in 1894-95, at which point Armstrong Black was called to assist, temporarily, at Egremont.⁸ Black's appointment became permanent from 1896. He, in turn, was followed in 1899 by James G. Goold, who succeeded Muir when the latter resigned in 1907. An assistant was now a necessity, and James Fraser was appointed.⁹

4 The writer remembers seeing this letter, framed, hanging in the Session Room. He made a copy and suggested that it be deposited in the local archives, but this was not done.

5 Alberta J. Doodson, *The Presbyterians in Liverpool: A Social and Religious Survey up to 1973*, (London, 2004), 209-10.

6 *Jubilee Brochure 1881-1931*, (privately published, 1931), 6.

7 This paragraph is based on *Minutes*, Presbytery of Newcastle, 1908, 34-35.

8 The assistant minister had a recognised role in Presbyterianism. See Doodson, *op.cit.*, 383. One of Muir's assistants had been James Moffatt, later known for his translations of the scriptures. For Moffatt (1870-1944) see *ODNB*.

9 [Egremont PCE] *Year Book*, 1909, front cover.

Membership continued to increase. In 1900 it was 712,¹⁰ and had reached 954 by 1904.¹¹ Population and settlement were growing fast in Wallasey, especially in the neighbourhood of Egremont. It was decided to build on a spacious new site, given by a leading member of the congregation, Alderman James Smith J.P., who had been ordained as elder in 1875, and held several church offices: chairman of the Committee of Management, trustee of the properties of Egremont, Union Street and Oakdale Mission.¹² The foundation stone was laid on 16 April 1907 by Lord Balfour of Burleigh, a former Secretary of State for Scotland. He was accompanied by the Lord Mayor of Liverpool (John Japp), the Lady Mayoress, James Smith and a number of prominent Presbyterian ministers, among them Dr Muir, as well as most of the local Nonconformist ministers in Wallasey.¹³ The opening followed on 1 October 1908, Goad presiding; and well-known Presbyterians preached at a series of services. The original church building was sold and became an Electric Cinema (silent films accompanied by a pianist), later an Odeon, and then the "Unit Four" before its demolition to make way for a block of flats, opened in 2009.

There had been considerable opposition (names and numbers have not come to light) to the new church building, largely on grounds of expense. Those against the decision referred to those in favour as "men of Ephesus", erecting a temple to Diana.¹⁴ At the same time it was claimed that the building would seat nearly 1000, and be the largest Presbyterian church in England. It was one of the finest in the district:

especially conspicuous in as much as it varies in some aspects from the simple, unpretentious architecture and interior fittings generally associated with the sanctuary of this denomination. Centrally and charmingly situated, the edifice is of attractive design, being in the perpendicular gothic style of red Runcorn stone throughout. The opened timbered roof of Baltic pine has a span of 43 ft. and is one of the features of the building. The distance from the ridge of the roof to the floor is 49 ft. Other interesting measurements are from chancel to entrance of 66 ft. and the transept is 34 ft. by 27 ft.¹⁵

10 Doodson, *op. cit.*, 100.

11 *Official Hand-Book of the Presbyterian Church of England 1904-05*, 167. This total included 283 at the congregation's Mission.

12 *Year Book, op.cit.*, 2, 8. James Smith (1841-1907), cotton broker and merchant, was as prominent in Wallasey life, Presbyterianism and politics as his better known brother Samuel (1836-1906), was in Liverpool. Samuel was a Liberal M.P. for Liverpool (1882-85) and Flintshire (1886-1906).

13 *Wallasey News*, 20 April 1907. Wallasey did not become a County Borough, with its own mayor until 1910.

14 C.R.B. McGilchrist, *About Egremont Presbyterian Church*, (1916), 9-10. McGilchrist had been an elder since 1885.

15 *Wallasey News*, 3 October 1908; the builders were George Parker and Sons.

The architects, Briggs, Wolstenholme & Thornely, were already Liverpool's most prominent architectural practice, with churches, schools, offices, and public buildings in their growing portfolio. Arnold Thornely (b. 1870), had been responsible for the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board Offices (1904), and would go on to design Wallasey Town Hall (1914) and, grandest of all, the Parliament buildings at Stormont, Belfast (1921-32). Nikolaus Pevsner describes their Egremont church as "Large. Arts and Crafts Gothic with a big NW tower. Good inside as well as out, and excellently composed with the hall at r. angles and in a Tudor style with mullioned and transomed windows."¹⁶ It was planned so that everyone could see the preacher in the pulpit. With £7,000 in hand and another £7,000 needed, the debt was cleared in 1915, thanks to a legacy from a "lady member."

The building was noted for its stained glass windows, all based on Biblical scenes. Cameron's memorial has been mentioned already. Muir's, known as the Resurrection window, was executed by a local man, Gustave Hiller of Liverpool. The Crucifixion window was given as a war memorial to the thirty men of the church who died in the Great War, with their names inscribed on a brass plaque beneath. This was the first of the windows in the church made by the firm of Morris & Co from a design by Sir Edward Burne-Jones. The others were the Transfiguration window – a memorial to James Smith – and in the centre vestibule three small windows, with representations of Jesus with Martha and Mary, dedicated to Andrew Lusk, session clerk and editor of the magazine among other offices.¹⁷ The Ascension window by Percy Bacon and Brother of London was above the gallery; it was given by six families in memory of their respective parents, who had been amongst the first members of the congregation. The Bacon firm was also responsible for a window commemorating Samuel Smith. Other memorials included a wall plaque paying tribute to a captain who ensured the survival of his crew after his ship was torpedoed, and, in so doing, gave his own life. Three brass plaques recorded that the font was the gift of the children, that the pulpit, choir stalls and arcading were from the women of the congregation, and that the organ was from the young men.

James Goold was a brilliant scholar, an outstanding preacher, who attracted large congregations, and was much in demand elsewhere. His booklet, *First Communion: A Book of Preparation* sold widely among many denominations,¹⁸ but the range of activities had repercussions for his health, and in July 1910 he moved to Eastbourne. His successor, Patrick Carnegie Simpson (1865-1947) was not inducted until February 1911. For a short time he had an assistant who supervised the mission causes at Oakdale and

16 N. Pevsner and E. Hubbard, *The Buildings of England: Cheshire*, (Harmondsworth, 1971), 371. The hall was built in 1910.

17 L.E. Sewter, *Stained Glass of William Morris and his Circle*, (London, 1974), 192; oral contributions.

18 The book is still in print, St Andrew's Press, *Catalogue 2010-11*, 25.

Union Street, both in the poorer parts of town, in conjunction with lay helpers. Simpson was highly regarded as pastor and preacher; his sermons were readily understood and to the point. The building had become a recognised preaching centre and was increasingly seen as ideal for inter-denominational services, such as the one for the Free Churches to mark the coronation of George V in 1911. The Presbyterian General Assembly met at Egremont in 1919 and 1933. A service was broadcast from the church in 1931,¹⁹ and in 1946 Hewlett Johnson (1874-1966), the so-called “Red Dean” of Canterbury, addressed a crowded church on a recent visit to Russia.²⁰

The congregation was very disappointed when Simpson left in 1914 to take up the Chair of Church History at Westminster College, Cambridge, where he helped to train some of Egremont’s future ministers.²¹ His successor from Bangor, Co. Down, was John Waddell. He too had an impressive academic career. Six hundred and five members signed his call and, like his predecessors, he enjoyed a generous supplement to his basic stipend. His ministry at Egremont encompassed the Great War, a uniquely testing time. Waddell wrote regularly, and by hand, to members who were in the armed forces; and he ministered effectively to the families of those who were killed. He was respected as a speaker outside the pulpit, while his sermons, often topical, were published in the national *Presbyterian Messenger*, for example “The Power of Resurrection: An Easter Message”,²² and elsewhere. These were subsequently collected into *The Life Here and the Life Hereafter: studies in the problems of this life and the life to come* (London, 1919), which earned him a Master’s degree from Queen’s University, Belfast in 1920. What has not surfaced from congregational records or personal reminiscences, is the extent – if any – of conscientious objectors in the congregation. When Waddell was called to the influential Fisherwick Presbyterian church in Belfast in 1920, every effort was made to persuade him to stay, but to no avail. He was Moderator of the Irish General Assembly (1937), and was awarded a D.D. by Queen’s in 1939.²³

Early in 1919 an interesting and suggestive analysis of church attendance was submitted to the Session. The point had been raised – not unnaturally – whether, with a membership in excess of one thousand, there should not be

19 *Egremont Presbyterian Messenger*, December 1931. The then minister, W. Erskine Blackburn, published his sermon as *Inevitable Horizons*, with permission from the BBC, at sixpence, one shilling and half a crown, the cost depending on the binding.

20 For Johnson see *Who Was Who*, 1961-1970, 499; *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

21 Simpson remained at Westminster until his retirement in 1938. See entry in Clyde Binfield and John Taylor (eds.), *Who They Were in the Reformed Churches of England and Wales*, (Donington, 2007), 204-5, and David Cornick, *Under God’s Good Hand*, (London, 1998), 162, 165, 166, 206.

22 *PM*, 19 April 1918, 75.

23 H. C. Waddell, *John Waddell*, (Belfast Newsletter Ltd, 1949), 61, 160.

larger numbers at Sunday services. The results can be summarised as follows:

(1) Members attending either morning or evening with sufficient regularity to be missed if absent	430
(2) Members attending occasionally	250
(3) Members seldom or never present	130
(4) Members temporarily absent from the district	94
(5) Members still absent on war service	86
(6) Members left or removed in 1918	26
(7) Members deceased in 1918	9 ²⁴

This was regarded as a situation which admitted of improvement. It was hoped that members in categories (2), (3) and indeed (6), would examine themselves and come into category (1); those in (4) and (5) could hardly be criticised for not attending worship regularly. Already a good start had been made in the new year Communion, with 545 communicants. During the war years 160 members had joined Egremont on profession of faith, of whom 140 were the children of members: a community was consolidating but perhaps not recruiting.

John Waddell's successor, Mathew Urie Baird, came from Scotland, called by seventy per cent of the congregation. He was inducted on 14 April 1921. The church was now very prosperous at a time of relatively short-lived economic boom. Its minister automatically had a position in the Merseyside community. From 1922 Baird was chaplain to the Liverpool Scottish Regiment and to Naval Forces in the area. In January 1930 there were 1034 on the communion roll, but the total was down to 990 within twelve months. This raises questions: was there a pruning of the roll or did the economic depression affect the mobility of members, even though the census returns for 1921, and 1931 indicated that the population of Wallasey had increased from 90,809 to 98,361?²⁵ Or, were there changes in social habits? Income, too, was down by £51 to £919 from seat rents and collections. Although efforts were made to increase this, there was a limit to people's giving at a time of high unemployment and low wages. Nevertheless, the premises were well maintained, and indeed improved.

In February 1930 a new minister, W. Erskine Blackburn, was inducted; members on the communion roll began to rise, once more, if briefly, exceeding 1000. More young men and women were attending the evening services. By 1936 the communion roll stood at 937. In 1937 Blackburn left for Aberdeen. Like his predecessors, he had played a large part in the life of Wallasey.

F. P. Copland Simmons was at Egremont from 1938 to 1946, essentially a war-time ministry. The church "carried on" as it needs must. Minor damage was done to the building by incendiary bombs – Simmons often spent the night on the premises as fire-watcher, assisted by his wife. There was little for the

²⁴ *Egremont Presbyterian Messenger*, February 1919, 15. It is not clear how many of the regular attenders were at both morning and evening services.

²⁵ Woods and Brown, *op. cit.*, 7.

young, and the blackout did not encourage people to turn out on winter evenings. Regular contact was maintained with those in the Forces and in 1946 the minister's letter to those still on active service contained a photograph of the Muir memorial window as a reminder of their church.²⁶ A good many had already returned, and special services and social gatherings were held to welcome them back. At the end of 1945 108 had been added to the roll, thirty-seven by profession of faith. The rest were certificated transfers from other congregations. There had been a net gain of fifty-nine for the year as a whole. It was noted that giving had increased; this was welcomed as prices had risen during the war.²⁷

In February 1946 Simmons received a call from First Congregational Church, Montclair in New Jersey. He had preached there in the summer of 1939, and had accepted an invitation to visit again. The office bearers and congregation urged him to stay in Wallasey at Egremont; there was work to do and he was highly regarded. His energy, initiative, and sympathy had kept the church going during the dark wartime days; he had given courage and faith in testing times to a wide variety of people by his preaching and pastoral work. He was also a fine musician with a remarkable tenor voice²⁸, while his wife was an accomplished pianist. Much relief ensued when he declined the attractive American offer. Yet by September Simmons had gone. Out of the blue, unsolicited and unexpected, an invitation had arrived from Egremont's London counterpart, St Andrew's, Frogna.

The post-war years were ones of disillusionment. Many saw Christianity as irrelevant. At Egremont, in one year, 1949, the communion roll dropped from 845 to 780, possibly a consequence of fewer arrivals from Scotland and Northern Ireland, but also a reminder of mortality in an ageing congregation. By the 1960s the numbers on the roll hovered around the 400 mark. Fifty years later attendance had declined to forty.

Missionary work at home, especially at Oakdale and Union Street, had its counterpart in support for overseas work, notably in South China. Egremont had a particular interest in the Swatow Boys Brigade, set up by the Revd. Guthrie Gamble soon after his arrival at the English Presbyterian Mission in 1915. On furlough in the mid-1920s, Gamble visited Wallasey, conducted worship several times, and supplied reports for the church's *Messenger*. A presentation was made to him when he retired through ill health and was inducted to a London church.²⁹ Dr S.L. Strange's work at Swatow Hospital was

26 *Egremont Presbyterian Messenger*, January 1946, 41.

27 *Ibid.*, 4.

28 The Christmas number of the *British Weekly* for 1945 carried a tune he had composed for a carol by G.A. Studdert Kennedy.

29 J. Springhall, B. Fraser, and M. Hoare (eds.), *Sure and Stedfast: A History of the Boys' Brigade 1883-1983*, (London, 1983), 148-51; *Egremont Presbyterian Messenger*, *passim*. Civil unrest meant that Gamble had to operate under a grace and favour system instituted by the local Communist administration.

also supported by the congregation, and in a contribution to the magazine of November 1946, he wrote of his hopes of returning there after demobilisation.³⁰

In the 1940s, while Simmons was in post, the Wallasey Council of Churches was an active one. In 1945 it organised a Victory Thanksgiving Service, opposed (successfully) a betting licence for a proposed dog track at New Brighton Tower grounds, supported the Citizens' Advice Bureau, and provided clothing for suffering people in Europe. After Simmons departed, J. Cecil Armstrong came to Egremont. He and his successors reflected the changing pace of Presbyterian ministry, and of manse life. "Welfare State" legislation had to be recognised and absorbed. For example, Joyce Macarthur, whose husband Donald was minister from 1955 to 1964, formed a pre-school playgroup in the late 'fifties, the first organised by a church in the district. There was a salaried supervisor, paid by the Local Authority, but all other help was voluntary and provided by church members.³¹ The group flourished and was commended by the Health and Social Services departments, and continues as Manor Child Care Centre, run by salaried staff in accommodation at the nearby Christ Church Free Church of England building, and now with an after-school facility.

Following Donald Macarthur's death Michael J. Davies was called in 1965. One of his important projects was setting up "The People Next Door" programme in 1967. This had been devised the previous year by Robert Latham of the Congregational Church's Training and Mission Department. Local churches provided details of their mid-week meetings and people were encouraged to sample another one in addition to their own, to find out what went on, and to make new contacts. This proved valuable, leading eventually to the formation of the Manor Group of churches.

From 1971 to 1985 ministry was in the hands of Nelson W. Bainbridge. It proved to be a seminal time as the Presbyterian Church of England became part of the United Reformed Church and wider ecumenical relationships continued to grow locally. Several meetings were held, particularly with Trinity Methodist Church, in Manor Road nearby, with a view to union. A visitation asked each church to consider where it might be, say in 1990. Discussions were accompanied by considerable co-operation: joint evening services, more than occasional joint morning worship, pulpit exchanges and combined social events. The union itself came in 1994 towards the end of Howard Starr's ministry at Egremont (1986-1995)³². Trinity closed its buildings and forty members migrated to Egremont, but with a change of name to Manor Church Centre, and designation as a Methodist/URC Local Ecumenical Project. It should be explained that the decision had not been without its difficulties. Donald Burgess, Methodist minister from 1979 to 1988 was only too aware of

30 *Egremont Presbyterian Messenger*, November 1946, 90.

31 D.Nesbitt, *Egremont Church 1908-1983*, (Wallasey, 1983), no pagination [7-8].

32 Howard Starr died 18 May 2011.

the poor state of Trinity's premises,³³ but when a vote was taken in the Church Council opinion was almost equally divided, a reflection of the wider congregation. Burgess moved on and it was his successor, Peter Hudson, faced by difficulties in meeting Trinity's assessment, who effected the union. He served as associate minister for one year. (Perhaps fortuitously Hudson and Starr had met earlier in their ministerial careers).

None of the twenty or so Trinity members who did not migrate, "ceased to meet", in the old Methodist phrase, as their decisions were influenced by geography and proximity to other churches. The new members brought two Sunday School teachers, a chorister, an editor for the *Newsletter*, two class leaders, a local preacher, who became a URC lay preacher, and a relief pianist, who occasionally played the organ. A problem emerged over the frequency with which Communion was to be celebrated, as Methodist practice was monthly, the URC having retained the Presbyterian pattern of quarterly. The solution was to hold quarterly services in the morning, monthly in the evening, and to introduce monthly breakfast-time communion services.

Brian Acty followed Howard Starr, and the decision was taken to dispense with the manse of five bedrooms (and staff accommodation to match). The newly formed congregation awaited the verdict of the Manchester Committee of the Methodist Church over how the proceeds of the Trinity sale might be used. The Church secretary, Roy Myers, remarked at a consultation meeting that, "the Methodists had brought themselves and that was more important than any money they might bring with them". In the event £20,000 was released for refurbishment of toilets and a kitchen.³⁴

Three events marked out Brian Acty's ministry. The first was a personal achievement when he raised £1,000 for Childline and church funds after running in the London Marathon – he admitted that he needed three days to recover, but had thoroughly enjoyed the experience.³⁵ The second was church-based when local churches in Wallasey recorded a service for Radio Merseyside's religious "slot" at the Church Centre. The third was a confirmation of the union, when a Methodist ordination service, coinciding with the Methodist Conference at Southport in 1999, was held in the building, ideal for a large congregation.

Egremont had a strong musical tradition. There was a fine organ (Rushworth & Draper, three manuals and a pedal board, with piston combinations and a long row of "tab" stops), and over the years the contributions of organists and choir masters were outstanding. Latterly Gordon Watson and Mrs Sue Acty were responsible for much music making. When the Actys moved to North Wales,

33 For details of the architecture see Peter S. Richards, "Methodism in Wallasey", unpublished PhD thesis, Greenwich School of Theology, 1999, 65; Pevsner and Hubbard, *op. cit.*, 371.

34 The money came from the sale of the site; there was no cost for demolition as the contractor recouped his expenses from the sale of the stonework. The organ was returned to the Willis firm, which had a maintenance contract, in lieu of tuning costs.

35 *Wirral Globe*, 23 April 1997.

Seacombe URC and MCC made the decision to call Ian Smith and his wife, Liz Byrne. Their ministry was to prove an interesting one. They made it clear that they were to minister to both churches, so their labours would be united, not divided, and on the whole this worked until Ian became Ecumenical Officer for Churches Together in Merseyside (2007) and Liz retired (2008). Lay preachers from both traditions, and pastoral and pulpit contributions from Arnold Dixon, Methodist minister at St Andrew's, New Brighton, another joint URC/Methodist church,³⁶ were appreciated, together with assistance from Anne Bedford, an ordinand at Luther King House in Manchester, and Heather MacLeod from Marlowe Road URC. Faced with a vacancy, the signs of the time needed to be read: membership and income were declining, and the maintenance of the property was costly, as treatment of dry rot had shown. A quinquennial report revealed the necessity for substantial repairs. In addition the Sunday School was a shadow of its former self, (a national trend), and the uniformed organisations had also declined, partly because of the shortage of trained and willing leaders.

The Synod appointed an Interim Moderator³⁷, Nigel Adkinson, a layman with the ordained ministry in view. He gave excellent help and advice, far and above the minimum expectations of the role. Three Core Groups, designated Mission, Pastoral, and Resources, were set up, so that responsibility for running the church rested with their chairmen, three secretaries, the treasurer and the property manager. The decision to close was taken, the final service being a harvest festival on the morning of 26 September 2010, at which Heather MacLeod preached. It was essentially a family occasion.

III

For just over a century Egremont Church had stood as a beacon – it was on top of a hill – as witness to the Christian faith. In latter days, bells recorded on a cassette tape had summoned people to worship. Over the period, as the *Year Books* indicate, many worshipped here from all over Wallasey, and a few from beyond the boundaries. Ministers came mainly from Scotland where Presbyterianism was strong, and where members often had links. The congregation nurtured many who carried their faith into their working lives. Three might be taken as representing the influence of Egremont.

Thomas Samuel (1868-1940) was born in Wallasey, educated at the local Grammar School (as an early scholarship boy), and Liverpool University. In 1897 he was appointed secretary of the Technical and Manual Instruction Committee of Wallasey from 400 applications. As a result he directed the shape of educational affairs for the next thirty-six years. On becoming Director of Education in 1911, his old university awarded him an honorary M.A. In the

36 Peter S. Richards, "Some Ecumenical Developments in Wallasey, Merseyside", *Journal of the Lambeth Diploma Association*, 2001-2002, 9-13.

37 See Doodson, *op. cit.*, 385 for an explanation of the responsibilities of an Interim Moderator.

church he held a number of offices as trustee, session clerk, and was a choir member.³⁸ Kenneth Slack (1917-1987) followed the same educational track before training for the ministry at Westminster College, Cambridge. His pastorates included one at Shrewsbury, St James, where he served as R.A.F.V.R. chaplain for which he was appointed M.B.E. At the City Temple in London (1967-75) he helped the church to develop a stronger community life, while maintaining its reputation as a preaching centre. As Director of Christian Aid he steered the organisation through a difficult period, but it is probable that his time as General Secretary of the British Council of Churches (1955-65) was the most influential in seeking to make ecumenism an integral part of British church life. The congregation which had been moulded by Carnegie Simpson and Copland Simmons produced in Slack a man who might be counted their equal.³⁹ Katherine Georgescu (b. 1971), a daughter of one of Egremont's ministers, Nelson Bainbridge, was educated at Oldershaw Grammar School before she began working for Romanian children, many of them AIDS/HIV sufferers. For this, she was appointed M.B.E. Egremont supported her by allotting a proportion of money raised at congregational events.

It is understandable that until closure there remained a number who sighed for the days when the congregation was much larger and the church was flourishing. During the final ten years numbers dropped considerably. Very few lived close to the church; only ten were in paid employment. Shortly before Brian Acty left, a radio "mast" for mobile telephones was installed in the tower, adding usefully to the church's income, but arousing local opposition.⁴⁰

The first joint service at St Andrew's after the closure of MCC was on 3 October 2010, marked notably by the display of welcoming cards prepared by the Junior Church children of St Andrew's. A month later Manor/Egremont's war memorials and Communion table had been transferred. Responsibility for disposing of the building passed to the Mersey Synod, which has concluded a sale.⁴¹

PETER S. RICHARDS

38 Peter S. Richards, "Further Education in Wallasey 1895-1978", unpublished M.Ed. thesis, University of Liverpool 1983, 49-50.

39 Binfield and Taylor, *op. cit.*, 207-08; Cornick, *op. cit.*, 175; *Who Was Who*, 1981-1990, 698.

40 Radiation signals emitted from the masts on the police station, some two hundred yards away, were almost certainly at higher levels.

41 I am indebted for assistance in preparing this account to the following people: Brian Acty, Adrian Allan (Liverpool University Archivist), Edwine Ashie-Nikoi (New York University Archives), Nelson Bainbridge, Clyde Binfield, Donald Bullen, Helen Burton (Special Collection and Archives, Keele University), David Cornick, Michael Davies, Steve Eaves, Sheila Fidler, Margaret Gray, Peter Guyan, Beryl Hazlitt, C.D. Kewley, Roy Kewley, Joanne McGibbon (Queen's University, Belfast), Ruth Mobbs, Norah Murphy, John Penketh, Anne Pinder (Archive Secretary, Houses of Parliament), Diana Rae, Staff of Wallasey Reference Library, the late Howard Starr, Kathleen Tanner, Margaret Thompson, Helen Weller (both of Westminster College, Cambridge), Dorothy Williams, and David Wykes (Dr Williams's Library, London).

“THE DUST AND JOY OF HUMAN LIFE” GEOFFREY HOYLAND AND SOME CONGREGATIONAL LINKS

I

For approaching sixty years, Congregational and subsequently United Reformed Church worshippers have enjoyed Geoffrey Hoyland's hymn, "Lord of good life". Some may have thought it strange to be singing words written by a Quaker: but that would not only overlook a perhaps unexpected history of Quaker hymn-singing, it would ignore Hoyland's own Congregational links. In seeking to address these two areas, this paper focuses on Geoffrey himself, and in smaller measure on his brother John ("Jack") Somervell Hoyland, and their father John William Hoyland.¹

II: Biography

Geoffrey Hoyland was born on 15 December 1889 in the Edgbaston area of Birmingham. He was the second son of John William Hoyland (1855-1927) and Rachel Anna Somervell (1853-1893). Following Rachel's early death, John William remarried, his second wife being Josephine Taylor, a Quaker missionary in Armenia and India. The Hoylands' Quaker roots were in Sheffield: but after an initial career running his own businesses, John William was appointed the first principal of Kingsmead College, Selly Oak. This settlement prepared Friends for missionary work abroad: but John William's vision combined with that of George Cadbury to ensure a developing ecumenical nature for what became, at Selly Oak, a federation of like-minded colleges. Geoffrey was educated at King Edward's School, Birmingham; at the University of Birmingham where for two years he studied physics; and at St. John's College, Cambridge where, after first reading mathematics, he graduated in History: a skilled oarsman, he had rowed for the Lady Margaret Boat Club. Following his Birmingham student years he spent several months teaching at The Downs School Colwall, near Malvern, an apparently therapeutic recuperation from quite severe illness. After Cambridge, he taught from 1915 to 1918 in the Lower School at Uppingham: the educational ideas of Edward Thring, Uppingham's nineteenth-century headmaster, exerted a lifelong influence on him. In 1919, the year of his marriage to (Elsie) Dorothea Cadbury (1892-1971), Geoffrey moved back to The Downs, a preparatory

1 The present writer is particularly indebted to Dr H.J. Hoyland, Geoffrey Hoyland's son, through whose informative and encouraging conversations this paper's potential has been considerably enhanced: many personal details concerning Geoffrey and The Downs School derive from such contacts, these hereinafter referenced *HJH*. Gratitude is also expressed to the staff of Friends House Library, London; of Kendal Record Office and Kendal Local Studies Library; and to Margaret Thompson and Prof. Clyde Binfield.

school founded in 1900 by Herbert Jones, the Head of Leighton Park School, Reading. After an initial joint headship and then Jones's retirement in 1920, Geoffrey became proprietor and Headmaster of The Downs until ill-health precipitated his own retirement in 1940: his years as a "fine teacher" were followed by his continuing to be "skilled at Quaker ministry. [His son] could hardly remember a Meeting for Worship at which he did not minister".² On leaving The Downs, Geoffrey lived in Painswick, Gloucestershire: he served from 1942 to 1947 on the Sidcot (School) Committee; and died, by now physically disabled, on 17 June 1965.

Geoffrey Hoyland was a lifelong Quaker, staunch in upholding the pacifist tradition. His elder brother Jack as School Captain had faced harsh criticism from both boys and staff on refusing to join the Cadet Corps at King Edward's School:³ Geoffrey followed his brother's example and was perhaps exposed to similar treatment. After the European War's manpower needs ordered National Registration in July 1915, this prompting considerable conscientious objection, Hoyland became a member of the Joint Advisory Council, a monitoring body formed from the No-Conscription Fellowship, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the Friends' Service Committee.⁴ He was personally affected by the Second World War, writing obituaries for many boys who had passed through The Downs in the preceding years.

III: Quaker Hymnwriters and Hymnsinging

Geoffrey Hoyland's hymnwriting was not unique among Quakers: nor was his family alone in their domestic and communal usage of hymns. Furthermore, Quaker hymnwriters were published across approaching two centuries in the hymnbooks of Congregationalists and their denominational relatives. The following paragraphs explore some of this history of Quaker hymnody.

The largely-Quaker Adult School Movement, and many individual Friends, had a tradition of singing hymns. One example was the family of the tenor Wilfred Brown (1922-1971) which had changed from Baptist to Quaker allegiance: Brown's sister Kathleen Sainsbury told of Sunday evening hymns *en famille* round the little organ, all led by their Sussex railway guard father.⁵ Organised hymn singing was a First Day activity of Geoffrey Hoyland's earliest childhood: his father wrote how after the early evening Bible lesson, "we tried to find a hymn applicable to each . . . Jack would choose first, generally 'Rock of Ages' or 'Brightest and best'. Then Bunch [Geoffrey]

2 *HJH*, 15 October 2009.

3 Reginald Reynolds, *John Somervell Hoyland*, (London: Friends Home Service Committee, 1958), 11-12.

4 John W. Graham, *Conscription and Conscience: a History 1916-1919*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1922), 161. This reference extracted from a website version.

5 "The gift doth me inflame", a portrait of Wilfred Brown, (BBC Radio 3 broadcast, date currently unknown but pre-1991).

invariably chose 'Ninety and Nine' and we always ended with 'Jesus tender Shepherd, hear me'.⁶ This Quaker household sounded no different from a contemporary devout home in a singing denomination.

Far later when Warden at Woodbrooke, Jack Hoyland instituted a Friday evening "Silent Fellowship", remembering in prayer any who had previously resided there. They frequently sang "Lead, kindly light" as an act of unity with M.K. Gandhi, a 1931 visitor and long a correspondent of Jack's. And Jack Hoyland's Memorial Meeting in November 1957 started with Isaac Watts and finished with John Henry Newman.

Perhaps the nearest approach there could be to a Quaker hymnbook was *The Fellowship Hymn Book*, first published in 1909 by a joint committee representing the National Adult School Union and the Brotherhood Movement:⁷ it was used widely by PSAs, in Sunday evening Quaker meetings, at Quaker Schools, and in other- or non-denominational settings. Its contents, as represented by author background, demonstrated a thoroughgoing eclecticism commensurate with its sponsors' search for "a basis of Christian fellowship which transcends denominational barriers":⁸ among Friends with five or more contributions each were Whittier, Geoffrey Hoyland, Frederick Gillman and Ernest Dodgshun, the latter two both members of the book's committee. Gillman published widely on hymnology: Dodgshun had a Congregational background; he earlier showed great interest in the Smith and Wrigley pastorate at Salem, Leeds; and was a Board member of the London Missionary Society.⁹

Hoyland takes his place with five other writing Quakers included from the 1850s onwards in five Hymnbooks authorized by the Congregational Union of England and Wales or the United Reformed Church:¹⁰ Bernard Barton (1784-1849) frequently known as "the Quaker poet"; Jane Crewdson *née* Fox (1808-1863), Cornish-born but married at Exeter Meeting to a Manchester manufacturer;¹¹ the American John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892), selected verses from his often long poems recast by hymnbook editors; Sydney Carter

6 H.G. Wood, *John William Hoyland of Kingsmead*, (London: SPCK, 1931), 76f.

7 The *FHB* was extended with a *Supplement* in 1920 and re-issued in a *Revised Edition* in 1933.

8 Frederick John Gillman, *The torch of praise: an historical companion to the Fellowship Hymn Book [Revised Edition]*, (London: National Adult School Union, 1934), 78.

9 *The Friend* Vol. 102 (1944), 582; and *Dictionary of Quaker Biography*, (Unpaginated loose-leaf typescript volumes at Friends House Library, London), hereinafter *DQB*.

10 *The New Congregational Hymnbook*, (1858), with *Supplement*, (1874); *Congregational Church Hymnal*, (1887); *Congregational Hymnary*, (1916); *Congregational Praise*, (1951); *Rejoice and Sing*, (1991). The independently produced *Worship Song with Accompanying Tunes*, (1905), edited by Congregational minister W. Garrett Horder, contained at least 28 hymns by Quakers: this followed his earlier *Congregational Hymns*, (1884), and *Hymns Supplemental to Existing Collections*, (1894).

11 J. Crewdson's married surname was well-known in northern Quakerism, not least through the Beaconite controversy. *ODNB* dates her birth as 1809; *DQB* states that she later left Friends. Some later Crewdsons became Congregationalists, active at Wilmslow.

(1915-2004), an English songwriter, folk musician and lyricist for Donald Swann's 1950s/60s reviews and musicals; and John Ferguson (1921-1989), an academic passionate for education in Africa and, with his wife Elnora (1929-2008), involved in helping establish the ground-breaking Department of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford. The Fergusons were Congregationalists who latterly combined membership of Weoley Hill United Reformed Church (John Ferguson was President of the Selly Oak Colleges), with the Society of Friends. Three others variously began or ended their lives amongst Friends: Anna Laetitia Waring (1820-1910) and John Cennick (1718-55) each had Quaker backgrounds but found their respective spiritual homes in the Church of England and, ultimately, the Moravians; the one-time Anglican Laurence Housman (1865-1959) was long sympathetic to Friends, but became a member only in 1952.¹² More recently, two URC minister-hymnwriters expressed a very close sympathy with Quakerism: Ian Page Alexander (1916-1998), increasingly attracted by a "Quaker universalist point of view";¹³ and Fred Kaan (1929-2009), many of whose hymns reflected a long-standing unity with Quaker ideals.

IV: Geoffrey's Hoyland's Published Works – Hymns, Books and Articles

Hoyland's first two published hymns appeared in the 1920 *Supplement* to the *Fellowship Hymn Book*. "Praise be to him / who calls us comrades" may well reflect an Uppingham background:¹⁴ the third verse beginning "O Christ, who here / hast taught us of Thy passion to partake, / And giv'st Thy body in the bread we break . . ." comfortably permits an Anglican communion interpretation. Three more hymns were published in the 1933 edition, including "Lord of good life": this had first been seen in *Inner Light*, a Quaker-inspired book of prose and verse quotations "compiled primarily for reading in the family circle".¹⁵ Subsequent hymnbook appearances of "Lord of good life" were in only *Congregational Praise* and *Rejoice and Sing*: in the latter, two separate lines were altered to conform to editorial policy concerning exclusive language.¹⁶

Hoyland's hymn soon achieved considerable popularity among Congregationalists. *Companion to Rejoice and Sing* suggests this was at least partly due to Eric Shave's "Eastwood", its set tune in *Congregational Praise*: this was composed for a 1930s youth service at the eponymous Congregational

12 ODNB; and K.L. Parry, (ed.), *Companion to Congregational Praise*, (London: Independent Press, 1953), 428.

13 *The Rejoice & Sing Enchiridion* website version adds this to the entry in the printed *Companion to Rejoice and Sing*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1999).

14 *Fellowship Hymn Book*, No. 418 (1920 Appendix to 1909 edition).

15 M. Catharine Albright *et al* (Compilers), *Inner Light: a devotional anthology*, 1st Series, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931), misnamed in *Companion to Rejoice and Sing* as "Inner Life".

16 *CP*, (1951), No. 466; *R&S*, (1991), No. 533.

Church, but remained unpublished until 1951.¹⁷ A further decade later, the hymn was a pronounced favourite of the Cambridge University Congsoc, regularly chosen at going-down and other services.¹⁸ *Companion to Congregational Praise*, frequently quite specific about a writer's denominational background, makes no mention of Hoyland's Quakerism.

Despite his pacifism, Geoffrey Hoyland's published hymns not infrequently contain potentially military imagery and, more than once, the term "comrades": note "Captain, deliverer... true comrades all" (*FHB* 1933, 118), as well as "Tread them to dust beneath thy conquering feet", when "His strife" has been shared (*FHB* 1933, 393). The quite martial manner found in "Lord of good life" is closely complemented by Shave's tune: but a "reading of the words will show that the writer was as fully aware of the weaknesses as of the strengths of human nature and aspirations".¹⁹ As to how Eric Shave came to compose "Eastwood" for "Lord of good life", Hoyland's son is certain that Geoffrey and Shave never met: he rather ascribes the composition's genesis to some such accident as Shave's finding Geoffrey's words in the then newly-published *Inner Light*. H.J. Hoyland considers that the hymn *had* to be sung to the tune "Oakham" by J. Barham Johnson:²⁰ a teaching contemporary and close friend with Geoffrey at Uppingham, Johnson became Musical Director at Shrewsbury School (1933-1950) where he was remembered for his skill and enthusiasm in leading whole-school hymn- and psalm-singing.²¹ H.J. Hoyland meanwhile considers that his father would have felt quite uncomfortable at his hymn being sung to *Eastwood*.²²

Unlike the hymns, Geoffrey Hoyland's books, articles and broadcasts all dated from his retirement years: they include educational, devotional and narrative works, many drawing on his experience as a schoolmaster. His earliest published work seems to be the 1940 article "The Religion of the preparatory schoolboy", subtitled "The Place of Laughter".²³ He regretted the Christian Church's loss of a once natural sense of joy, comfortably intermingled with reverence; a lively laughing religion was the child's instinctive expression, with song-like hymns rather than formal liturgies. In some ways, this short piece serves as a prelude to his picture of Jesus's Kingdom of Life, the "Vision of Sherwood", which is central to *The Great*

17 *Companion to Rejoice and Sing*, (1999), 647/8. *Companion to Congregational Praise*, however, had linked the tune's origin to Crosby, Shave's second pastorate following three years at Eastwood, Notts.

18 Clyde Binfield to author, letter dated 27 August 2010.

19 *Companion to Rejoice and Sing*, 647.

20 *Fellowship Hymn Book* No. 232 (1933). Johnson's tune "Captain" is set to Hoyland's hymn "Captain, Deliverer" at *FHB* No. 118: his First World War military commission in the Uppingham School OTC suggests he did not share all of his Quaker friend's views.

21 I am indebted here to archivists and former staff of Uppingham and Shrewsbury Schools.

22 *HJH*, 29 July 2009.

23 *Religion in Education* Vol.7, 4, (1940), 210-213.

Outlaw.²⁴ Here, in a Life of Jesus freely acknowledged to be an imaginative reconstruction, Geoffrey Hoyland used "Sherwood" as a euphemism for what Jesus saw and felt in his Galilean hillside vigils and visions, the coming heaven on earth. Behind the attractive narrative style of a skilled and practised storyteller who loved the flows and balances of the English language lies an historian at work, almost surreptitiously introducing intricate social and geographical detail, some doubtless recalled from a sabbatical visit to the Holy Land; the author's use of imagination reflects his belief that even so does God communicate with humankind; and through it all runs the experience of a deep personal encounter, for Geoffrey Hoyland loved Christ.²⁵

In a short book intriguingly titled "The Tyranny of Mathematics", first delivered as lectures for a 1944 Woodbrooke Summer School, Geoffrey Hoyland argued that the limited understanding and expression imposed by scientific method and analysis must be supplemented by the more imaginative insights and language of poetry, experience and metaphor: this is as necessary in religion, to avoid the straightjacket of defined creeds, as in the observable and tangible world.²⁶

The SCM Press, Hoyland's usual publishers, invited him to produce a short new biography of Edward Thring, aimed at an adolescent readership:²⁷ the completed manuscript was sent in April 1945 to the then Headmaster of Uppingham, for scrutiny and comment. Geoffrey wrote how when teaching thirty-five years previously at the Lower School, his "youthful enthusiasm was kindled by Thring, and ever since I have regarded him as by far the greatest schoolmaster we have produced".²⁸

V: Geoffrey Hoyland and Education

Geoffrey's first educational mentor was his own father: John William Hoyland had brought up his sons through the discipline of freedom, stressing a conscience enlightened by self-control. His second, Edward Thring, had learned first and most about teaching children from experience as a curate in a working-class parish in Gloucester: he repudiated the Victorian view of childhood as flawed and devil-filled until beaten out, and saw the school as a family, a true and good society. The fifth Headmaster at Colwall, E.J. Brown, found this in what he called Geoffrey's confession of faith for his own school,

24 Geoffrey Hoyland, *The Great Outlaw*, (London: SCM Press, 1944).

25 Roland Neville Pepper in *The Friend* (1965), Vol. 123, 904. Some other phrases found in this obituary are used elsewhere in the present piece.

26 Geoffrey Hoyland, *The Tyranny of Mathematics: an essay in the Symbiosis of Science, Poetry and Religion*, (London: SCM Press, 1945).

27 G. Hoyland, *The Man who made a School: Thring of Uppingham*, (London: SCM Press, 1946).

28 Geoffrey Hoyland letter to Uppingham Headmaster, 26 March 1945, *Uppingham School Archives*, cited here with permission.

The Downs: "There is only one code for everybody, young and old, in everything, and that is the code of the true life, which Thring equated with Christianity, the religion of love".

The school at worship expressed its faith both silently and in word or song: Geoffrey's brief addresses, "memorable (for their) impressive presence (and) the gift of story telling", were followed by awed silence; his hymns written specifically for The Downs were often sung at the evening service. Educationally, Hoyland's timetabled "Hobby", brought first by Jones from Leighton Park, included the innovative construction and operation of The Downs School Light Railway: years afterwards, one of its "Engineers" dedicated a now highly regarded railway history "To Geoffrey Hoyland. (His) love of the railway, his description of locomotive cylinders and valve events, remain as vivid today as they were to me in my thirteenth year".²⁹ Participation in a railway engaged the boys' friendship and teamwork, and almost without their knowing facilitated a grasp of essential physics, geometry and mathematics. The importance of physical labour paralleled Jack Hoyland's methods in Quaker Work Camps and Friends' School postings in India: the "sacramental quality of the work, the camp life" was also present in Geoffrey Hoyland's outward-bound "Leaders' Weeks" before each new school year at Colwall.³⁰

Among imaginative staff appointments were W.H. Auden, remembered also as the possessor of a fine singing voice, and the then rising artist Maurice Feild; distinguished pupils included Michael Yates (television designer) and Professor Alan Hodgkin (Nobel Prizewinner in Medicine).

Shy and a dreamer in the eyes of some with "his head... in the clouds or beyond",³¹ Geoffrey attracted others by his strong practical bias and an engaging, extrovert capacity. "Glory to God, who bids us fight for Heaven / Here in the dust and joy of human life" (verse 4, lines 3/4 from "Lord of good life") states a realism about any child's mixed circumstances and activities; and he imitated Thring with his obviously good society and good school. Often described as a Quaker School, The Downs was neither a "Committee School" like Ackworth, nor a "Meeting School" of some local foundation, but a "Private School" resulting from Herbert Jones's individual founding actions: he and two successor Quaker headmasters taught mostly Quaker pupils for its first fifty-two years. Today's larger, combined and co-educational "The Downs, Malvern College Preparatory School" may contain none.

29 J.I.C. Boyd, *The Ffestiniog Railway, Vol. 1 1800-1889*, (Lingfield: The Oakwood Press, 1956), Title Page.

30 These two paragraphs depend greatly on E.J. Brown, *Aedificandum Est. The First Five, The Story of a School*, (private publication, n.d. but 1987); G. Hoyland, *Thring*, (1946); R. Reynolds, *op. cit.*, 64ff.; H.G. Wood, *op. cit.*; and on *HJH*, 29 July 2009 and 16 February 2010.

31 R.N. Pepper, *op. cit.*

VI: Geoffrey Hoyland's Ecumenicalism

Geoffrey Hoyland was deeply ecumenical. An inherited family involvement combined with a history of evangelical Quakerism to mould his life in similar directions. His paternal grandparents had enjoyed the overt evangelism of the 1875 Moody and Sankey campaign in Birmingham, preparing with regular family prayer occasions; Elizabeth Taylor, his future Cadbury mother-in-law, was similarly and musically involved in the 1884 London meetings.³² Thirty years later in John William's Kingsmead days, local Quakers felt the influence of the Welsh Revival in their Sunday evening Mission Meetings and early Sunday morning Adult School gatherings.³³ But the Selly Oak vision also embraced the Wesleyans who shared in Kingsmead's work, and even High Church Anglicans whose Society for the Propagation of the Gospel founded the College of the Ascension in October 1923; three years later at the opening of the new YWCA College, Leyton Richards (Congregational minister at Carrs Lane who would become a Quaker in 1946),³⁴ Dr Rendel Harris (Quaker, of Congregational origins) and Bishop Ernest William Barnes of Birmingham (Anglican) together shared in the dedication.³⁵

Hoyland's personal ecumenism, seen early at Cambridge where he was President of the University's Student Christian Movement branch, developed further following his retirement to Painswick: he frequently read from the Bible in both Meeting and the Parish Church, and shared friendship with the monks at Prinknash.³⁶ A local Council of Churches was formed in Autumn 1949: the Congregationalists, (who, as the URC, closed in 2010), were among the founder members, and there were hopes of including both Roman Catholics and Plymouth Brethren. Geoffrey was invited into its membership, despite the Quakers' own Meeting being then in abeyance: he was however "instrumental in reviving the meeting for worship (in 1953)... was an elder and appeared frequently in the ministry during the last years of his life".³⁷

The Council's Minutes record his many innovative suggestions regarding, for example, young people, "Sunday Clubs" meeting in private houses, joint Christian welcomes to new-comers to the village, and for a lay rather than ordained chairman: both Geoffrey and Dorothea Hoyland were committee members into the 1960s. A special memorial minute of 14 July 1965 "remembered with gratitude Geoffrey Hoyland of the Society of Friends... He was a scholar and teacher who... could inspire others with his profound

32 Richenda Scott, *Elizabeth Cadbury: 1858-1951*, (London: Harrap, 1955), 32.

33 H.G. Wood, *op. cit.*, 49-63 *passim*.

34 Edith Richards, *Private View of a Public Man: The Life of Leyton Richards*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950), 117; and *CYB* 1949, 503. Richards was nonetheless permitted to remain on the list of Congregational ministers.

35 This paragraph owes much to H.G. Wood, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

36 *HJH*, 16 February 2010.

37 *DQB*, second sheet about Geoffrey Hoyland.

Christian knowledge, experience and vision. He saw in true perspective the things that divide the branches of the Christian Church and he saw beyond them to the place where divisions vanish".³⁸

VII: The Congregational Somervells, and other Family

A Congregational past and present surrounded Geoffrey Hoyland through his Somervell ancestry in Kendal: that family had also known Quaker, Presbyterian and Anglican forbears. His mother, Rachel Anna Somervell, came from a family prominent in the life of Zion Congregational Chapel, Kendal, whose 1843 origins in a secession from the local United Presbyterian church³⁹ perhaps explain the presence of Elders rather than Deacons, even into the twentieth century: Rachel's father, John Somervell (1814-1887), was a Trustee by 1846 and elected an Elder two years later. After her 1869 baptism there, when aged sixteen, Rachel was soon a Sunday School teacher, and appeared regularly on the Communion attendance register from December 1872 until her marriage in 1886 when she "left town", the usual entry for someone moving away from Kendal. The breadth of her religious and cultural influences and activities included Moody and Sankey through the Keswick Convention; some personal wide-ranging studies from Physical Geography and Electricity to Browning; and a particular concern in Birmingham for the condition of the working-classes.⁴⁰

Rachel's uncle and Zion elder, Robert Miller Somervell (1821-1899), was instrumental in the founding of Troutbeck Bridge Congregational Church. From 1856, he largely financed its initial cottage meetings by a Liverpool evangelist: the 1958 service marking the centenary of the Chapel building would renew the family link, being led by a nephew, Dr Howard Somervell. Meanwhile, William Carver of Manchester and Windermere had also been an early generous supporter.

John Somervell's younger son William Miller Somervell (1860-1934) was, like his father, central to the life of Zion and Kendal Congregationalism for many years. He was educated successively at two privately run but basically Quaker establishments, Kendal's Stramongate School and, from 1874 until its

38 I am indebted to Rita Bishop, Secretary of Churches Together in Painswick, for information about the early years of the Painswick Council of Churches and for excerpts from its Minutes. The final sentence quoted above then appeared, immediately afterwards and slightly modified, in R.N. Pepper, *op. cit.*: Pepper, a member of Painswick Friends Meeting, presumably also wrote the Council of Churches' minute.

39 B. Nightingale, *A History of Lancashire Nonconformity*, (Manchester, 1890 *et seq.*), i, 290.

40 This paragraph draws particularly on H.G. Wood, *op. cit.*, 73f, and on Zion Congregational Church, *Minutes Book of Elders meetings 1844-1849 and church meetings 1847-1848, 1856, 1863 continued as register of Church Members' attendances at Lord's Supper 1848-1894*, (Kendal Record Office hereinafter KRO, WDFC/C1/3).

1878 closure, Grove House School, Tottenham: Alfred Waterhouse, another Tottenham *alumnus* but a birthright Quaker, designed the eponymous 1894 premises at Reading, financed by the residual Grove House trustees for the 1890-founded Leighton Park School.⁴¹ Locally, W.H. Somervell was Senior Elder, Trustee, Trustees' Treasurer, and generous provider of house or grounds for meetings and garden parties; he led worship at both Zion and Stainton, had been Sunday School Superintendent as a young man, led a Bible Class for decades, and when at his most prominent in church and business was still happy to be listed as a Sunday doorkeeper: nationally, he was for many years a Director and from 1918 to 1930 the Treasurer of the London Missionary Society, and a member of its Deputations to India appointed in 1913 and 1922. Norman Goodall lists him among many prominent and influential Congregationalists whose commitment was equally to global mission and to local church, and only shortly before his death, W.H. Somervell dictated a biographical note about Revd. Frank Lenwood, his colleague in much LMS work, who had recently died in a climbing accident in the Alps.⁴² A wider involvement was as Director and Company Chairman of Somervell Brothers; Liberal MP for Keighley for eight months in 1918; and, skilled in water-colours, an active member of the Society of Modern Artists and of the Lake Artists Society. The W.H. Somervell Trust Fund for Kendal continues to provide for the welfare of appropriately qualified local persons.

Of John's elder brother Robert Miller Somervell's family, sons Colin (1855-1929) and the Revd Clifton Somervell (1857-1937) – with their composer brother Sir Arthur Somervell, first cousins once removed to Geoffrey Hoyland – had Kendal Congregational connections: the Church's monthly *Record* notes the former addressing the Sunday School in 1908, the latter in active membership in his retirement. Clifton initially joined the family firm as a leather merchant; he studied late at King's College Cambridge; and then from 1889 until 1923 exercised a Congregational pastoral ministry in Cambridge, Rainhill, Nottingham, and finally Hessle where his health broke down. He had married a Somervell first cousin, Rachel Anna's sister Helen, in 1891: following their retirement to Kendal, she died in 1925; he, both a supply preacher and from 1932 an Elder at Zion, lived until June 1937.⁴³ Zion's *Record* noted Leslie, younger son of W.H. Somervell, as concerned in 1940 about its apparently depressed spirituality: at his death in 1958, it acknowledged his time as Sunday School Treasurer and a forty-year involvement with the YMCA.⁴⁴

41 Websites of *Victoria County History, Middlesex* (Vol. 5), and of Leighton Park School; *The Times*, 27 September 1934; and Sidney W. Brown, *Leighton Park: a history of the school*, (Reading, 1952), 58.

42 Norman Goodall, *A History of the London Missionary Society 1895-1945*, (London: OUP 1954), 462f; and *Westmorland Gazette*, 29 September 1934.

43 *CYB* 1939, 687 & 713 date his death as 1 June 1938, exactly one year after it occurred.

44 *Zion Congregational Church Record*, May-June 1958.

Best known denominationally of the Kendal Somervells was Dr. (Theodore) Howard Somervell (1890-1975), elder son of W.H. Somervell and his wife Florence Howard (1865-1938). He was first cousin to Geoffrey Hoyland and best man at his wedding: his accomplishments included mountaineering, painting and composing as well as medicine. A wartime surgeon in the R.A.M.C. in France, Howard was selected for the 1922 and 1924 British Everest expeditions: in the latter, his achievement with Edward Norton of 28,000 feet was tempered by the deaths of George Mallory and "Sandy" Irvine.

But immediately after the 1922 attempt on Everest, he visited the LMS hospital of the South Travancore Medical Mission at Neyyoor, India: here, he assisted the sole medical missionary Dr. S.H. Pugh with urgent surgical work, experiences which precipitated his own offer for service with the London Missionary Society. Howard would later tell friends that if he "had not then gone to India at the call of suffering I should never have dared to look God in the face, nor to say prayers to Him, again".⁴⁵ Appointed in 1923 and dedicated to LMS work on 26 September 1923 at Zion, Kendal, he was by far the longest serving doctor during Neyyoor's century as a medical mission: his skills brought substantial advances in the surgery undertaken there. Official retirement from the Society in 1945 was followed by reappointment in 1948 until 1954, this including the position of Associate Professor of Surgery at Vellore Christian Medical College.⁴⁶ He was in 1938 the recipient of the highest order of the Kaiser-i-Hind medal.

Perhaps surprisingly given his family background and that he was married in 1923 by Dr Horton to Margaret Hope Simpson at Hampstead's Lyndhurst Road Congregational Church, another Waterhouse design, Howard Somervell's autobiographical account of mountains and missionary activity makes no mention of Congregationalism nor of personal denominational allegiance: he offers straightforward descriptions of his military medical experiences, his mountaineering, and the work at Neyyoor; the London Missionary Society features but six times, quite incidentally and never about himself; he speaks only broadly of "*the Mission . . . the Medical Mission . . . Christians . . . being Christian*".⁴⁷ He was thus both part of, but also semi-detached from, Congregationalism. It had provided the denominational home of his upbringing; it was where his undergraduate years were spent, once his anti-religious phase had been overcome; it named and treated him as its medical-missionary hero because of his years in India. But despite these Congregationalist claims on him, Howard Somervell was never the member of any local church. Specifically, Somervell's own history and attitude are best seen through replies written in his candidate papers when seeking acceptance

45 T. Howard Somervell, *After Everest*, (London, 1936), 82.

46 ODNB; *The Times* (25 Jan 1975); Norman Goodall, *op. cit.*, 50; and *Who They Were* (Donington: Shaun Tyas and URCHS, 2007), 211f., *Who Was Who* notes his final retirement as 1961.

47 T. Howard Somervell, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

by the London Missionary Society: he there notes his confirmation in the Church of England when at Rugby School, and his association with Congregational Churches in Kendal (Zion), Cambridge (Emmanuel), and London (Westminster Chapel), this last presumably when first at University College Hospital. But most revealingly, he disowns continuing membership of the established church or "in fact (of) any denomination. I hate all denominationalism and consider it to be one of the greatest hindrances to the Kingdom of God. I have... never formally become a church member."⁴⁸

The Cambridge period is particularly instructive. Whilst at Gonville and Caius from 1909 to 1913, he was involved in university Nonconformist circles: he signed the register of the Nonconformist Union in November 1909, later being a committee member contemporaneously with his cousin John Somervell Hoyland's Presidency; was for some two years deliberately anti-religious; underwent a deep conversion experience and became notably evangelical; and from time to time was involved in services at the Victoria Road and Castle End Mission churches of Cambridge's Congregationalism. Intriguingly, given his later calling, he gave a paper to the Nonconformist Union on 23 February 1913 on the "Missionary possibilities of Nonconformity". He may have been an associate member at Emmanuel Congregational Church or included on some "distance list", a connection which remained through and beyond his years of missionary service.⁴⁹ This inter-denominational journey ended when his funeral service was held in Ambleside Parish Church.⁵⁰

Successive Somervell wives brought their own background history of active evangelicalism, whether Congregational or otherwise. Florence Howard of Bickley, Kent, married W.H. Somervell in 1889: her father Theodore Howard (1837-1913/4) whose names were given to their first son shared the same evangelical and philanthropic attitude of many business or professional contemporaries, being Treasurer of the China Inland Mission and actively supportive of the Regions Beyond Mission and Dr Barnardo's Homes. That medical missionary grandson married Margaret Hope Simpson, daughter of Sir James Hope Simpson (1864-1924): one time general manager of the Bank of Liverpool & Martins Limited, Sir James was prominent in leadership of Hoylake Congregational Church, Cheshire, and a great supporter of the YMCA movement.⁵¹

48 SOAS Special Collections Library, L.M.S. Archives (CWM/LMS/Home/Candidate Papers/Second Series/Box 36). I am indebted to the Library staff at SOAS for abstracting these details for me from the L.M.S. Archives in their care.

49 This and the following paragraphs draw on T. Howard Somervell, *op. cit.*, 33ff.; Clyde Binfield to present writer, letters dated 27 August 2010 and 8 October 2010; and digest of records of Emmanuel Congregational Church and the University Nonconformist Union, these kindly provided by Margaret Thompson.

50 *Westmorland Gazette*, 14 February 1975.

51 *The Times*, 7 October 1924.

Space allows only passing mention of some others of Geoffrey Hoyland's Somervell, Cadbury or Hoyland relatives, variously achieving significance in business, politics, mountaineering, education, social or cultural matters. A "Somervell Brothers" partnership of 1848 became the internationally known K's Shoes; Hoyland's first cousins once removed included the politician Baron Somervell of Harrow (1889-1960); nephew John Doncaster Hoyland and the last-named's half-brother Michael's son Graham Hoyland were also attracted by mountains, the former killed on Mont Blanc in August 1934,⁵² the latter among today's conquerors of Everest; John Hoyland (1752-1831), a Sheffield factor, published the first book to call seriously for better treatment for Gypsies in England;⁵³ Dame Elizabeth Cadbury *née* Taylor (1858-1951), mother of Dorothea Hoyland and sister of J.W. Hoyland's second wife, was from her twenties a progressive activist in social, Quaker, educational and feminist matters, and deeply committed to Free Church co-operation being elected in 1925 the first woman President of the National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches (widely known as the Free Church Council);⁵⁴ Geoffrey Hoyland's half-brother (William) Frazer Hoyland, who taught first at Bryanston, served as Headmaster at The Downs, his own old school; and in the world of aesthetics, nephew Francis Hoyland (born 1930), an artist particularly of Christian subjects, wrote in 1963, "I continue to paint as an act of worship and faith".⁵⁵ Service, adventure and creativity were the hallmarks of this extended group: the missionary parallels between Hoylands and Somervells, especially regarding India, are particularly instructive.

VIII: Wider Observations

Geoffrey Hoyland was primarily a teacher of young boys during their most formative years: but his gifts for spoken ministry and the written word extended his influence far beyond a school or even denominational environment. His own nature and practice contained some apparent opposites: a traditionalism of the Quaker sort made him "devout, precocious, a lover of the Authorised Version of the Bible, [for] he considered children could cope with its language"; and he used domestically the equally traditional Quakerly "thee/thy" pattern of speech.⁵⁶ Yet his feeling that joyful, attractive, song-like

52 Obituaries: *re* David Cox, *Climbers Club Journal*, 1994, 115f.; *re* Robin Hodgkin, *Daily Telegraph*, 27 Aug 2003.

53 *A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits & Present State of the Gypsies; designed to develop the Origin on this singular People, and to promote the Amelioration of their Condition*, (1816). *DQB* dates his birth as December 1752, *ODNB* as 1750.

54 Richenda Scott, *op. cit.*, 156f.; E.K.H. Jordan, *Free Church Unity*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), 247.

55 Letter quoted in Roger Wollen, *The Church and the Artist*, (London: Methodist Church, 1993), 21.

56 *HJH*, 15 October 2009 and 14 July 2010; and Richenda Scott, *op. cit.*, 182.

hymns were more appropriate than existing serious hymnody suggested an alternative manner.

The earliest of Geoffrey Hoyland's family and domestic years seem to anticipate many important attitudes and practices of his own developed life. His desire to see young boys gain a full Christian knowledge reflects his own upbringing; the spoken and written story-telling in which he excelled perhaps draws on the latent memory of his mother's skills; the practical constructional joys experienced together by father and sons may prefigure Geoffrey's enthusiasm for his school's Hobby afternoons; and the family at hymns or earlier enjoyment of shared evangelical singing might be pre-echoes of his own writing of good verse for Sunday evening services at The Downs. The passionate concern about children shared by the Hoyland brothers latterly found Jack making thousands of teddy bears in aid of UNICEF, "an extension of his love for his own family",⁵⁷ whilst Geoffrey was a trustee of Painswick's Gyde Orphanage Charity, maintained in Gyde House where a varied succession of agencies provided residential childcare until its closure in 1998.⁵⁸

The short biography of John Somervell Hoyland concludes: "And in the Kingdom of Heaven, which is here and now within each one of us, it will be true for those who remember Jack and recall how he lived and taught, that he will still be with us, 'rooting for us'... not on the touch-line or the tow-path of life, but right there in the midst of it, with the Master he loved and served".⁵⁹ This may simply be good Quakerism: it surely also echoes the thoughts and words of his brother Geoffrey's hymn, "Lord of Good Life". And that hymn by which Geoffrey Hoyland remains known today might also consciously parallel Edward Thring's "True Life" which Geoffrey had learned whilst teaching at Uppingham, and which he sought to place at the centre of his own school at Colwall.

NIGEL LEMON

57 This paragraph draws on R. Reynolds, *op. cit., passim.*, and on H.G. Wood, *op. cit., passim.*

58 Gyde House was designed c.1913 by Percy Morley Horder, son of the Revd. W. Garrett Horder.

59 R. Reynolds, *op. cit.*, 98.

Is Geoffrey also among the Theologians?¹

PART II

I

An important feature of Geoffrey Nuttall's theology is that it is a practical theology. Nuttall was in no doubt that while the saints were called out and separated unto the Lord, they were not called to quietism, but rather to witness in the world around. As he put it, "it would be difficult to deny that the Church is called out of the world: called out, it is true, that, back in the world, it may be the means of the world's redemption, but still called out first, to become, and in a sense perpetually to remain, different from the world, different from what the world, in its un-Christian state, can ever be."² It is unfortunately the case that the saints can be different in quite obnoxious ways, and Nuttall illustrated the point when discussing the early Congregationalists:

Their separation . . . in obedience to Christ, was with an evangelical purpose. They came out, that they might no longer touch anything unclean; but they were also separated unto the gospel, for the work whereunto the Holy Spirit had called them. If, after reading their Bibles, they saw that work clearly in terms of the practice and demonstration of holiness, they were, surely, not wrong. Yet one wishes they might have seen it with equal clearness in terms of love; for they often seemed hard and unloving; and, while this does not require us to impugn the sincerity of their purpose, it is bound to affect our judgment of them, just as it undoubtedly impeded their achievement.³

It is not surprising that a theology that turns on the presence in Church and believer of the risen Christ by the Spirit should give due place to the claims of others for, as Baxter declared, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is "a most

1 The following abbreviations are used:

(a) The works of G. F. Nuttall

BTL: *Better Than Life. The Lovingkindness of God*, London: Independent Press, 1962.

CPH: *Christian Pacifism in History*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1958.

PS: *The Puritan Spirit. Essays and Addresses*, London: Epworth Press, 1967.

RB: *Richard Baxter*, London: Nelson, 1965.

HSO: *The Holy Spirit and Ourselves*, London: Epworth Press, 1947.

HSPFE: *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1946.

RH: *The Reality of Heaven*, London: Independent Press, 1951.

VS: *Visible Saints. The Congregational Way 1640-1660*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1957.

(b) Journals

CHST: *Congregational Historical Society Transactions*.

CQ: *The Congregational Quarterly*.

JURCHS: *The Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*.

2 *CPH*, 13.

3 *VS*, 162.

practical article of our belief.”⁴ We might say that witnessing in the world marks the point at which the Spirit’s challenge and guidance press home most urgently upon the saint’s free will, demanding an obedient response:

When the Spirit of the Risen Christ comes among us... *He sharpens* our perception of the difference between truth and falsehood, and between right and wrong... and He insists on our judging: first in the intellectual sense of deciding *what* is true or right and *what* is false or wrong, and then in the moral sense of deciding *where we stand*. He demands, as always, a free decision... [W]e have enough light... We are to acknowledge that we may be mistaken. We are to remember our finiteness and creatureliness, and to see the spirit of true humbleness. But still a decision is called for.⁵

There are certain things that God wishes to have done, and others that he forbids. As with Jesus, so with the saints: “when Jesus spoke of God as Father and of Himself as God’s Son, an essential part of his meaning... was that God had a will to be done and that it was for himself to be obedient and to do it.”⁶ If we truly love God we shall wish to follow the promptings of his Spirit, notwithstanding that “Seeking, doing, not his own will but the will of the Father who sent him brought Jesus to the Cross.”⁷ The call to suffering for the Gospel’s sake was often in Nuttall’s mind, and in this connection he thought that there was

no better advice than that offered in a letter written in 1653 from Appleby Gaol by the early Quaker, James Nayler: ‘Dear hearts, you make your own troubles by being unwilling and disobedient to that which would lead you. I see there is no way but to go hand in hand with him in all things, running after him without fear or considering, leaving the whole work to him. If he seem to smile, follow him in fear and love. And if he seem to frown, follow him, and fall into his will, and you shall see he is yours still.’⁸

Those who take this advice find that the Spirit comes to their aid, as the Puritan Morgan Llwyd well knew:

When the true shepherd speaks, and a man hears him, the heart burns within, and the flesh quakes, and the mind lights up like a candle, and the conscience ferments like wine in a vessel, and the will bends to the truth: and that thin, heavenly, mighty voice raises the dead to life, from the grave of himself, to wear the crown, and wondrously renews the whole like to live like a lamb of God.⁹

4 *HSPFE*, 7, quoting R. Baxter, *Works*, II, 189.

5 *PS*, 343.

6 *BTL*, 42.

7 *Ibid.*, 45.

8 *HSGO*, 41, quoting Swarthmore MSS. (Friends House, London) 3.66.

9 *HSPFE*, 140, quoting M. Llwyd, *Gweithiau*, ed. T. E. Ellis and J. H. Davies, 1899 and 1908, I, 219.

Persons thus possessed by the Spirit come to have a view of the world in which commonly-held values are turned on their heads. Nuttall quoted the former Master of his old College, Balliol, Oxford, thus: "In politics, government by consent is strictly a contradiction in terms. But because the Puritan tradition started with the experience of a society which rested on consent and abjured the use of force, it tended to conceive the state on the analogy of such a society."¹⁰ In commenting upon these words, Nuttall made it clear that he stood for the abjuring of force, "and its replacement by a more excellent way; by consent, by respect for minorities, by tolerance, by humanity, by tenderness towards sufferers, by the redemption of the wrongdoer: all of them expressions, manifestations, of Christian love."¹¹ He upheld the radical Puritans as an example of those who "not only claimed liberty for themselves, they granted it to one another, and on positive Christian grounds." They knew that "Compulsion in religion not only makes hypocrites of the unwilling, it bruises and insults the willing mind."¹² Concerning religious toleration in particular, he more than once recalled Cromwell's remark, "I had rather that Mahomedanism were permitted amongst us than that one of God's children should be persecuted,"¹³ though this was a step too far for Jeremiah Burroughes and John Owen.¹⁴

Nuttall recognized that freedom and rights were closely related concepts:

We work for human freedom because, as we say, men have a right to be free. I wonder, however, whether we can be altogether happy about saying this? On what grounds can we argue as Christians that men have a right to anything? If we ought to be grateful for the least that comes to us, as more than we deserve, does it not follow that we have no right to it? In any case, what an unchristian and intellectual thing it is to stand on your rights. . . . [We ought] not to be thinking of our rights at all.

Does this mean that we ought not to work for *others'* rights and for *others'* liberties? No, that does not follow. But we shall be more effective workers for others' rights if they are not rights for which we are concerned for ourselves.¹⁵

10 G. F. Nuttall, *Christian Love Manifested in History*, pamphlet, repr. from *Reconciliation Quarterly*, 1960, 4, quoting A. D. Lindsay, *The Modern Democratic State*, (London: OUP, 1943), 117f.

11 *Ibid.*, 4.

12 *Ibid.*, 5.

13 See, for example, "Cromwell's toleration," *CHST*, XI no. 6, September 1932, 285.

14 See G. F. Nuttall, "The Lord Protector," *CQ*, xxxiii no.3, July 1955, 253.

15 *Idem*, "Our freedom and Christians: its ground and limits," *Reconciliation Quarterly*, 1963, 372.

To advocate toleration and a concern for the rights of others was not, however, for Nuttall, to adopt a policy of *laissez-faire* tolerance. On the contrary and above all, he staunchly upheld the position that war was not to be tolerated – a lesson he had learned during his schooldays at Bootham from the Quaker, A. Neave Brayshaw.¹⁶ Accordingly, he endorsed the view of his teacher, C. J. Cadoux, that “acclimatization of the Christian conscience... to the use of the sword” was part of “the general Christian surrender to the spirit of the world”,¹⁷ and he noted that the Socinians were probably the first in Christian history, in their *Racovian Catechism* of 1605, officially to declare war unlawful.¹⁸ By contrast, he noted with dismay that the trinitarian World Council of Churches at its Amsterdam Assembly could on the one hand declare that “war is contrary to the will of God” whilst at the same time “be (seemingly) content to rest in permission for Christians to take part in a known sin, some writers even defending this very formula.”¹⁹ “Those who meet as brothers in Christ from many countries for common consultation”, he went on, “cannot easily return home to prepare in measures of war against one another.”²⁰ He ruefully concluded that “the Church’s ministry of suffering has never been practised on the national level... because it is a ministry which none will dare to attempt save Christians in the power of their Lord, and no nation, as a nation, is, or has been, Christian.”²¹ Hence the paucity of persons willing to stand with the early Quaker, Isaac Penington, who wrote respecting the opponents Friends faced,

[W]e come not forth against you in our own wills, or in any enmity against your persons or government, or in any stubbornness or refractoriness of spirit; but with the Lamb-like nature which the Lord our God hath begotten in us, which is taught and enabled by Him, both to do His will and to suffer for His namesake. And if we cannot thus overcome you (even in patience of spirit, and in love to you), and if the Lord our God please not to appear for us, we are content to be overcome by you.²²

Nuttall was not perplexed only by the reluctance of some Christians to make the pacifist witness; in an address to The General Body of the Three

16 G. F. Nuttall, “The logic of discipleship,” *Friends’ Quarterly*, xvi, 1967, 298.

17 *CPH*, 7, quoting C. J. Cadoux, *The Early Church and the World*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1925), 613, 625.

18 *Ibid.*, 59. He was not so pleased with the same *Catechism’s* definition of the Church as “the company of those who hold and profess saving doctrine.” See *Congregationalists and Creeds*, (London: Epworth Press, 1967) 10-11. This formula does seem to privilege intellectual assent over existential commitment, and assertions of this kind have been read as if the doctrines did the saving.

19 *Ibid.*, 69.

20 *Ibid.*, 71.

21 *PS*, 302.

22 *Ibid.*, 303, quoting I. Penington, *Works*, (1681), I, 406.

Denominations (Baptist, Congregational, Presbyterian) he also regretted the general dilution of the Nonconformist Conscience:

It will be sad if, along with the good old name of meeting-house and other things once common to us all, the Quakers are left the sole inheritors, by default, of what was known . . . as the Nonconformist Conscience. In a word, it is that for which we stand, if we stand for anything. If we no longer believe in it, then the General Body has had its day; but for many of us, thank God! it is still near our central life-stream.²³

However it may have been with the Three Denominations, nothing could dim Nuttall's admiration of the Quakers where moral and social issues were concerned:

The Quakers printed constant appeals to Parliament for legal reforms of social grievances: for the reduction of poverty, the care of beggars and debtors, for penal reform and the abolition of capital punishment, for the suppression of tithes, and so on. . . . Early Quakerism is remarkable for this combination of a deep and inward piety with a keen interest in social, political, and economic affairs. The latter is always a natural overflow. The piety remains primary, as in this passage from one described as 'perhaps the sweetest and wisest of the early Friends', William Dewsbury:

Will you then live as the Quakers? Then you must live contemptibly: the mistress and man are hail-fellow well met. . . . Here is now a new world; and the fashions of the old world are gone, all pride, haughtiness, grossness and trampling upon one another are gone; all slain, through the operation of Christ.²⁴

Moreover from Fox through Nayler to Penn there ran the consistent message that when injuries were sustained, it was not enough to refrain from revengefulness; forgiveness must follow.²⁵

23 *Idem*, *The General Body of the Three Denominations. A Historical Sketch*, privately printed for the General Body, (London, 1955), 8.

24 *Idem*, "The first Quakers" in *History of the English Speaking Peoples*, no. 51, 1970, 1638.

25 *Idem*, "Reflections on William Penn's Preface to George Fox's *Journal*," *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society*, LVII no. 2, 1955, 117. I should not wish to leave the impression that Nuttall's view of the Quakers was starry-eyed. On the contrary, he had challenging words to say to present-day Friends, some of whom, he thought, were in danger of losing the pearl of price. See, for example, "The logic of discipleship," 299-300: "[W]hen Friends exalt Meeting for Worship because its silence is acceptable to those of other religions or of none, and welcome as members those unwilling to commit themselves (in any sense) to Christ, what becomes of Friends' witness? Message, witness, discipleship, the way of the cross – all these go to the heart of things . . . [I]f in their work for reconciliation and peace [Friends] cease to point clearly and unashamedly to the suffering love of Christ on the cross and in their own lives as the source of their inspiration, they may still be pacifists but they will have no peace testimony."

I end this section with Nuttall's testimony to the saving practicality of it all:

We cannot hope to redeem men, to be used by God in redeeming them, unless with the early Christians we first know to what, distinctively, and for whom, unreservedly, we would do so; unless with the mediaeval sects we keep close to the Bible, the New Testament, the Sermon on the Mount, where we find our promise and pattern of redemption, and our orders for our own part in it; unless with Grebel and Menno we are willing to spend and be spent, though the more we love the less we be loved, grateful for even a small share in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings; unless with the early Quakers we think of men, simply as men, as both worth redeeming and as never past hope of redeeming. In every case, I believe, we may learn from these earlier pacifists. We may see all their varying sanctions taken up into our own prevailing view of that which we are vowed to as inseparable from the means of redemption.²⁶

II

Turning finally to eschatology, we find that Nuttall brought ethics and heaven into the closest possible relationship. In *quasi*-Kantian fashion he argued that "Just as the sense of duty implies not only freedom in which to do it but the Taskmaster to whom it is due, so the sense of justice demands a sphere in which justice may be realized, as it is not realized on earth. In a word, ethics demands the reality of heaven." Moreover, "Apart from the faith that God's will *is* done in heaven, much of the nerve of our faltering attempts to do it on earth would be cut."²⁷ Again,

God is someone who has a will to be done: who has a kingdom, a dominion, a rule. This, in fact, is what heaven means: not a place where we are happy, but where God's will is done; and where the source and security of our joy is that his will is done. The only treasure in heaven that we can lay up will be as we treasure his will and seek to do it and *want* that it should be done.²⁸

Although he did not pursue this aspect in any detail in his writings, Nuttall was clearly in sympathy with Charles Gore's remark that "what any society is to become will depend on what it believes, or disbelieves, about the eternal things."²⁹

What prevented Nuttall's claims concerning the ethics-heaven relation from

26 *CPH*, 75-6.

27 *RH*, 29.

28 *BTL*, 38. Happily, the strong disjunction in the first half of the second sentence is corrected in the second half of it.

29 G. F. Nuttall, "Charles Gore and the solidarity of the Faith", *The Church Quarterly*, no. 1 July 1968, 55.

becoming academic in the abstracted sense was that they were derived from his strong sense of the risen Christ's presence:

The text on my nursery mantelpiece, and the text from which I preached my first sermon, was "Lo, I am with you always"; and as far back as I can remember, the reality of the Divine Companionship, as I came to call it, meant that Heaven was real too.³⁰

Precisely because of the Divine Companionship here and now, Nuttall could not think of heaven as concerning only the future, and we may justifiably suppose that on this matter he associated himself with Baxter:

It is not Heaven that I am begging for . . . but that I may see it from Mount Nebo, and have the bunch of Grapes; the Pledge, and the first-Fruits; that Faith and Hope which may kindle Love and Desire, and make me run my Race in Patience, and live, and die in the Joy which beseemeth an Heir of heaven!

On this Nuttall commented: "The *straining* here is forward-looking, but the *strain* is present, and is a consequence of *so much* 'Heaven on Earth' *already* that to *wait* is well nigh intolerable."³¹

Nuttall was far from thinking that heaven, immortality, was a natural right, the prerogative of all. He was quite blunt about it: "to assume immortality as man's natural right is not a Christian position", adding (perhaps with the memory of a certain kind of funeral service in mind), "to speak of someone who has shown no seriousness in his allegiance to Christ as now rejoicing in Christ's fuller presence must be accounted little short of blasphemy. It is unreal, too, as blasphemy always is."³² Elsewhere he explained himself more fully:

The Christian's faith . . . does not . . . primarily depend upon feeling at all, however naturally it may be accompanied by and give rise to feeling, and however rightly it may control his interpretation of feeling. Nor is there in his faith as such any sense of deathlessness directly and *per se*, such as is present in mystical feeling. Life after death, as the Christian conceives it, is not an indestructible implicate of his being, a right to which he is born . . . it is, rather, the gift of God, the outcome of an encounter between God and each soul, in which God takes the initiative as He did when he 'raised' Christ: theologically, the transitive reference of 'resurrection' is prior to the intransitive. The Christian's assurance of life after death is thus never a sheer *datum*, it is always consequent upon his faith, an inference from it we may say, albeit a necessary inference.³³

30 *RH*, 9.

31 G. F. Nuttall, "Puritan and Quaker mysticism", *Theology*, LXXXVIII, October 1975, 526, quoting R. Baxter, *Dying Thoughts*, (1683), 188. Cf. *RH*, 41, 84-5.

32 *Ibid.*, 16.

33 *Idem*, "The heirs of heaven," *CQ*, xxxv no. 1 January 1957, 17.

What are the implications of heaven as entailing a relationship with the risen Christ for people of other faiths? Nuttall contended that the Christian's experience of being at one with God would differ from any such experience as may be found in other religions, because Christians entertain different beliefs about God, humanity and their relationship. In particular, Christians think in terms of the personal nature of the relationship, and of their unworthiness to enter into it. In his Drew Lecture on Immortality he twice quoted lines from the tombstone of his great-great-grandmother, Mary Smeaton, and from them he took the title of his lecture:

They, alone, who Jesus love,
They are whose hearts are fixed above,
To Him entirely given -
Whose only trust is in His blood,
Who live by faith, and live to God,
They are the heirs of heaven.³⁴

He could appreciate that "Friends' discomfort at the thought that any may be 'shut out' has something noble about it and reflects the Christian compassion which has placed Friends so often in the forefront of the relief of suffering",³⁵ but he insisted that any who argued that to deny universalism was to deny God's character were profoundly mistaken, for

the universality it . . . wishes to attribute to God's love, a relationship undifferentiated and unconditioned, has no foundation either in the Bible or in our experience of any kind of love, divine or human, nor yet in any honest observation of the world in general. Its foundation, if it has one, is rather in that human craving for 'fair shares' which Professor Farmer rightly insists is, while one of the most difficult, one of the most necessary things for Christians to grow out of. . . . A religion which saved (!) the character of God at the expense of the Incarnation [many of the conditions of which were 'not fair'] might be highly moral but would no longer be Christianity.³⁶

Indeed, apart from the relationship with the one who overcame "the sharpness of death" – a relationship which implied "all the starkness of exclusivity", "any gospel . . . must soon evaporate."³⁷

Nuttall did not rule out the possibility that "To life after death there may be many paths; but not to the being in paradise with Christ which alone is heaven."³⁸ The Separatist ecclesiology is here transposed into the eschatological key. Noting that the New Testament writers were "so absorbed

34 *Ibid.*, 9, 18.

35 *Idem*, *To the Refreshing of the Children of Light*, (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1959), 16.

36 *Idem*, "The heirs of heaven," 18.

37 *Ibid.*, 18-19.

38 *Ibid.*, 19.

in the shattering newness of the experience which has come to themselves that they are not much concerned with its exclusiveness", he advised that "Our concern should be less to speculate upon the lot after death of those not Christians, and more to seek to bring them while they are still on earth, to share the living faith which to us is precious."³⁹ Not, indeed, that people are to be terrified into faith by the threat of hell as in days of yore, "For we no longer think it right to try to dragoon people into belief."⁴⁰ On the other hand we may not extrude the concept of judgment from the New Testament or the teaching of Jesus:

No one was either more responsible, or more responsive, to God than was Jesus. Equally, no one believed more implicitly in the divine judgment as part of the heavenly world.

Only, the motive-power in Jesus' life was not fear; it was fidelity and devotion, born of love. So it must be for those who seek to live in the way to which Jesus calls them. . . . [Moreover] we know the quality of the Judge, that He is ever ready to have mercy and to forgive. . . .⁴¹

Nuttall confessed that he much preferred to think of Jesus as the one who seeks the lost until he finds, but he could not overlook the fact that "there is much in scripture in favour of the concept of a chosen people", and he judged that "Both history and present experience suggest that Christianity has never been, is not, and is perhaps never likely to be, the religion of more than a few."⁴² However few, Christians must "guard against pride and self-satisfiedness. . . . 'Ye did not choose me, but I chose you'. I still want to hold on to these words of Jesus."⁴³

And hold on to them he did. As the old divines might have said, a tincture of heaven pervaded Nuttall's life and writings, just as it did the hymns of his friend, Philip Doddridge, their ostensive subject-matter notwithstanding. Of his other great friend, Richard Baxter, it was said that he "was conversant in the invisible world."⁴⁴ So was Geoffrey Nuttall.

III

At the outset I said that Nuttall did not construct a theological system in the sense of a tour through the several *loci* of systematic theology, and that there was no reason why he, as a Church historian, should have done such a thing.

39 *RH*, 81, 82.

40 *RH*, 19.

41 *Ibid.*, 25.

42 G. F. Nuttall, "The concept of the chosen people in Christianity," *Common Ground*, xxii, 1968, 12, 13.

43 *Ibid.*, 13.

44 *RB*, 128, quoting William Bates, *A Funeral-Sermon for the Reverend, Holy and Excellent Divine, Mr. Richard Baxter, Who deceased Decemb. 8. 1691. With some Account of His Life*, (London, 1692), Epistle Dedicatory.

What he wrote of the Puritans might be said of his own writings: "The interest is primarily not dogmatic, at least not in any theoretic sense, it is experimental."⁴⁵ In another sense, however, his thought was theologically systematic. It flowed from a consistent and firmly-rooted view of the world at the heart of which was the experience of the God made known by the risen Christ through the Spirit. This stance is of more than ephemeral significance, it has the kind of permanence that Nuttall described in relation to Charles Gore:

In the 1920s Streeter probably influenced more growing minds than Gore did; but to turn to Streeter now, after reading Gore, is like turning to Peter Sterry, say, after reading Richard Baxter. Both types of mind are needed: one is not 'better' than the other; but the *Reality* and *Adventure* of the moment, which means much precisely because it is a tract for the times and has immediate appeal and assimilability, by the same token also dates; while a discussion which, as less contemporary, is originally less telling, may have staying power and, in the long run, more significance.⁴⁶

Nuttall's theology is one which appeals, time and again, to the Bible, but not to Tradition. It is, however, born out of the marriage of Scripture with a complex of Separatist, Dissenting and Nonconforming traditions. In a deep sense it is a theology of the people, and the central people in Nuttall's writings are the saints. One might almost say that in his works they are as visible as they were in their churches, and Nuttall knew that this set him apart from other historians – even from historians of Dissent:

By training, historians are warned to avoid being unduly biographical. By temperament they are also often shy of the deeper religious issues. The approach academics prefer is intellectual rather than devotional and institutional rather than personal. To chart and assess developments in devotion is not easy, especially when underlying sympathy is scant or even absent.⁴⁷

As already indicated, Nuttall's vocation as Church historian was subsidiary to his vocation as a Christian and as a Christian minister. He urged members of the United Reformed Church History Society to be "eager, above all else, even as historians and students of history, to be disciples of Him who makes all things new."⁴⁸ To say that as well as being a fine historian he lived and breathed theology is simply to say that he lived in the presence of the God who claimed him and addressed him by the Spirit through the Word in the fellowship of saints. He was not, professionally, a systematic theologian, but nor was he merely incidentally theological.

45 *HSPFE*, 7.

46 G. F. Nuttall, "Charles Gore and the solidarity of the Faith," 54.

47 *Idem*, "Methodism and the Older Dissent," *JURCHS*, 2, no. 8, October 1981, 170.

48 *Idem*, "Chandler, Doddridge and the Archbishop," *ibid.*, 1, no. 2, November 1973, 56.

What are we to make of his theological contribution? I shall offer a few reflections which arise directly from the account rendered. First, I feel I must qualify Nuttall's bald assertion that "For Calvin the Holy Spirit is a necessity of thought rather than something known in experience."⁴⁹ Admittedly, this is a remark in a footnote, but since Calvin has suffered a bad press both because of some of his disciples and because of uncomprehending foes something must be said. I suspect that in making this remark Nuttall may have been unduly influenced by those scholars and ministers of the preceding generation – the Congregationalists Robert Mackintosh and W. F. Adeney among them⁵⁰ – who had been burned by Calvinistic scholasticism and were more than a little relieved to be rid of it. For balancing remarks we need look no further than Calvin's *Institutes*. By his "secret testimony" the Spirit brings home to us the word God speaks in Scripture (I.vii.4); apart from the Spirit the letter is dead and the heart untouched, "But if through the Spirit it is really branded upon hearts, if it shows forth Christ, it is the word of life..." (I.ix.3); the Spirit impels us to aspire after eternal blessedness (II.ii.6); unless we participate in the Spirit we cannot "taste either the fatherly favour of God or the beneficence of Christ" (III.i.2); by the Holy Spirit we are brought "into the light of faith in [Christ's] gospel" and we are regenerated (III.i.4); and the Holy Spirit teaches us how to pray aright, and tempers our emotions (III.xx.5). So one might go on, but enough has been said to show that to Calvin the Spirit is more than a necessity of thought, and that he is known in – indeed, is critical to, experience. If a clinching text were needed it is *Institutes* III.ii.7, where Calvin states that faith is "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (my italics). When Nuttall writes, "the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is a doctrine of a personal God, revealed in a Person and present in personal relationships with persons",⁵¹ I can almost hear Calvin's "Amen!" Be that as it may, Nuttall, again following Paul, cannot think of the Spirit without thinking of Christ: "It is to Jesus that we must turn" in order to "seek further understanding of 'The character of the Spirit'."⁵²

Secondly, I have already expressed my agreement with Nuttall that the Church is constituted by the call of Christ by the Spirit, and by the presence of the risen Lord within it; though I should myself couch the claim in trinitarian-cum-soteriological terms by saying that the Father constitutes the Church by the Spirit through the Word on the ground of the Son's once-for-all saving work at the Cross. I noted his abhorrence of the Anglican-Reformed dialogue report, *God's Reign and Our Unity*, in which connection an autobiographical observation may not be inappropriate. The beginning of my period of service

49 HSPFE, 6, n. 5.

50 For Mackintosh see Alan P. F. Sell, *Robert Mackintosh: Theologian of Integrity*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 1977); for Adeney see *idem*, *Hinterland Theology*, ch. 9.

51 HSPFE, 171.

52 *Ibid.*, 21; cf. 25.

as Theological Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches coincided with the concluding session of this dialogue, whose co-secretary I thus became. By that time the final report, largely written by Leslie Newbigin, was in draft form and, try as I might, I could not persuade Newbigin to say that the Church is constituted by God's gracious call in the Gospel to which the sacraments bear witness. I remain convinced not only that it is incorrect to speak of the sacraments as constituting the Church, but also that it is ill-advised to use such language in the presence of Roman Catholics and of those Anglicans who are tempted to wander down sacerdotalist paths. Those paths lead to the situation in which the Church as such no longer keeps the sacraments; rather, religion is "done to" the people by members of a priestly caste, and a sectarian boulder is hurled into the ecumenical stream.⁵³

The negative implication of the above position, namely, that since the Church is constituted by the call of the Christ and by his presence through the Spirit in its midst the sacraments as such are not constitutive of the Church, is of some ecumenical importance, as Nuttall knew full well; but I think that his Congregational heroes tempt him into making his point in a problematic way by conflating the marks, or notes, of the Church with its constituting factor. With regard to the Congregational view of the church's constitution he wrote, "It should be evident . . . that we are in another universe of discourse from the church whose marks are the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments. John Robinson explicitly states that these are not its marks. John Cook . . . also argues that they are not its constitution."⁵⁴ My point is that it is possible to hold that the Church is constituted as Nuttall says it is, whilst at the same time holding that the marks of the Church are the Word rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered and (as some Reformed confessions add) discipline rightly exercised; for by "mark" is not meant the constituting factor or, for that matter, the formal definition of "Church", but the ostensive definition of the term: that is, where you see these two (or three) phenomena, there you see the Church. Thus, in the Scottish Confession of Faith of 1560, "The notes by which the true Kirk shall be determined from the false . . ." are "first the true preaching of the Word of God . . . secondly, the right administration of the sacraments of Jesus Christ . . . and lastly, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly administered."⁵⁵

53 See further, Alan P. F. Sell, *A Reformed, Evangelical, Catholic Theology. The Contribution of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches 1875-1982*, [1990], (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 142.

54 G. F. Nuttall, "The early Congregational conception of the Church," *TCHS*, xiv, 1940, 200, citing J. Robinson, *Works*, III, 428 and J. Cook, *What the Independents would have*, (1647), 4f.

55 Arthur C. Cochrane, (ed.), *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 176-7. Cf. John Craig's *Catechism* of 1581, in T. F. Torrance, (ed.), *The School of Faith. The Catechisms of the Reformed Church*, (London: James Clarke, 1959), 160.

Thirdly, we recall that Nuttall roundly declared that in the Congregational tradition “it is a church without a covenant which is the monstrosity, not a church without a minister.”⁵⁶ At the same time, however, he was generous to the Trevecca evangelists who roamed far and wide in pursuit of souls. How are these positions to be reconciled? There can be no doubt that once the Evangelical Revival took hold, conversion rather than baptism followed by nurture within the covenant family became for many the way into the Church – “the birthday of a Christian was . . . shifted from his baptism to his conversion”;⁵⁷ and, moreover, from about 1830 onwards the number of new local covenants declined dramatically,⁵⁸ despite denominational growth, and Congregationalists established mission halls in many parts – the status of these in Congregational polity being somewhat less than crystal clear. It is, of course, preferable that people hear and respond to the Gospel than that they do not; but it cannot be denied that with the changing attitude towards membership the Church Meeting, that credal assembly related to worship in which the Lordship of Christ is confessed and his will sought, declined, and sacramental discipline became lax, until today laxity is sometimes blessed in the name of the god Inclusivity.⁵⁹ The underlying question is, Do we still believe in the called, covenanted, separated, visible, saints of God (to Nuttall’s adjectives I would add the term “catholic”, since it is in the Church catholic in heaven and on earth into which we are called, of which the local church is a manifestation)? Of the Separatist tradition Nuttall wrote that it is “a strand in our heritage which the United Reformed Church may not value but cannot discard.”⁶⁰ It seems to me that if the United Reformed Church were to discard the biblical idea of the calling out of the saints into covenant fellowship its entire polity would be undermined, as would its necessary witness over against the Anglican establishment in the interests of the sole Lordship of Christ over his Church.⁶¹ If it were to recover the idea of the saints as a people separated unto the Lord, we might hear more than we currently do about the obligation to seek after holiness (and not just justice, peace and ecological propriety – important as these are).

Fourthly, it was only to be expected that one who devoted the larger part of his life to the training of ministers should have had some pertinent thoughts on that vocation. In the first place he took it for granted that it was a vocation, and

56 G. F. Nuttall, *Congregationalists and Creeds*, 11.

57 *VS*, 118, quoting John Stoughton’s quotation from an unnamed source in his *History of Religion in England*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1881 edn., VI), 136.

58 See Alan P. F. Sell, *Dissenting Thought and the Life of the Churches*, *Studies in an English Tradition*, (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1990), ch. 1.

59 See further, *idem*, *Saints: Visible, Orderly and Catholic. The Congregational Idea of the Church*, [1986], available from Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock; *idem*, *Enlightenment, Ecumenism, Evangel*, 238-42, 325-75;

60 G. F. Nuttall, “The Speldhurst Church Book,” *JURCHS*, 6, no. 8, 557.

61 See further, Alan P. F. Sell, *Testimony and Tradition. Studies in Reformed and Dissenting Thought*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), ch. 11.

talk of “ministerial job-hunting”, “career patterns” and “hours per week worked” wounded him as much as it wounds me. Secondly, he knew that ministry was the concern of “gifted brethren [and now sisters]”, and that without the gift of the Spirit no ministry would be effective (no matter how much technology surrounded it). God calls, and the congregation (presumably he had the “congregation of the saints” in mind here) ordains. Finally, at ordination the candidate makes his or her confession of faith, something which used to be required but in the most recent service books of the United Reformed Church is, sadly, optional. Whereas answers to formal questions may be sincere, and may also inform those visiting from other communions of the general doctrinal soundness of The United Reformed Church, the ordinand’s own confession of faith is of great importance to the calling pastor as announcing, in personal terms, the convictions on which the new ministry will be built.

Fifthly, Nuttall’s ethical reflections stimulate thought. His remarks on the quest of one’s rights are of particular interest. He exhorts us not to seek rights for ourselves, but for others. On occasion, however, the rights of others coincide with our own. When the Separatists claimed the right to worship according to their consciences they were claiming it for themselves as well as for others. Again, there is the question of the analysis of “right” in relation to “responsibility”, and this in a culture which in some of its parts is characterized by an individualistic “I do as I please” mentality. Yet again, sometimes what are claimed as rights are really, according to Christians, for example, gifts. Thus if a woman says that she has a right to bear a child *via* AID whilst having no personal relationship with a man, a Christian may wish to retort, “But nobody has a right to a child – a child is always a gift.” Then the discussion might well veer off into the distinction between moral rights and legal rights. So one could go on. The point is that with his remarks upon rights Nuttall started a hare of some practical theologico-ethical significance.

The pacifist witness, it is clear, was deemed by Nuttall to be a clear implicate of the Gospel, and he was a convinced pacifist from teenage years onwards. More generally, as we have seen, he lamented the almost complete evaporation of the Nonconformist Conscience – a clutch of concerns which, temptations to a hard legalism notwithstanding, are by no means remote from the call to holy living. One traditional aspect of the conscientious platform was the advocacy of temperance and even of teetotalism. Nuttall was as lifelong a teetotaler as he was a pacifist, but whereas he wrote much on the latter, I do not find that he published a case for the former, and I find this surprising. Was this silence owing to the fact that the culture in New Testament times no more thought of repudiating alcohol than it did of repudiating slavery, and hence Jesus did not pronounce upon these matters, whereas he did enjoin pacific attitudes and was himself the Prince of Peace? We shall never know. But since many of the ethical issues which today confront us were not within the purview of first-century people it would be a strangely restorationist ethical position which restricted its attention to the specific ethical content of New Testament

texts. It occurs to me that a strong, cumulative case might be made in favour of teetotalism, which would turn upon appropriate answers to such questions as these: How consonant with holy living is it to introduce non-medically prescribed drugs of addiction into the temple of the Holy Spirit? How does drinking alcohol assist our witness, especially to the "weaker brethren"? Might there not be less crime, fewer accidents on the roads and at work, fewer days lost at work – with all the attendant costs involved – if the consumption of alcohol became as socially unacceptable as the imbibing of nicotine has become in many quarters? To the restorationist, selectively fundamentalist, retort that in I Timothy 5: 23 Timothy is exhorted to "use a little wine for thy stomach's sake" it would be necessary only to issue the challenge: "I shall take your argument more seriously if you forgo the ministrations of the National Health Service in favour of all the other aspects of first-century medicine." A footnote: in the back of Nuttall's copy of Charles Stanford's book, *Philip Doddridge*, which is now in my possession, there is a pamphlet by Stanford, published under the auspices of the Pledge-Signing Crusade, entitled, *Total Abstinence – A Privilege*. "God helping me", Stanford concludes, "I will not drink wine while the world stands." Exactly Nuttall's attitude!

Finally, to Nuttall, ethics implied, even demanded, heaven, as a sphere in which justice may be realized as it is not realized as earth. This, though not an argument for heaven capable of convincing a sceptic, is the hope and conviction of many a saint, and one for which there is much encouragement in the New Testament, as its words are brought home to saints by the Spirit.

IV

There I might have left it, but there is one thing more. We have considered Nuttall's historical and devotional writings, and it will have become apparent that one who was famous for stringent criticism and reviews ranging from the generous to the devastating (he could have made the words of Baxter his own: "I have a strong natural inclination to speak of every Subject just *as it is*, and to call a Spade a Spade"⁶²) could also exude tender affection. But in addition to the historical and devotional, he also ventured into at least one other literary territory: fantasy. In December 1965 *The Methodist Magazine* published "The keeper of the gate: a Christmas fantasy." The story is told in the first person. Nuttall says that he had been reading I Corinthians 13, when he dropped asleep. He dreamed that he had come to the gates of a palace where a crowd had gathered. Members of the crowd told him that the King's son had been born that day, and they had all come in the hope of seeing the new baby. Nuttall commented on the fine gates, and a man told him that they were the gates of heaven. At midnight the Lord Chamberlain appeared and began to select those who could go in to see the baby. A grand-looking lady rushed up to him,

62 G. F. Nuttall, *Richard Baxter and Philip Doddridge*, Friends of Dr Williams's Library Lecture, (London: O.U.P., 1951) 13, quoting *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, i.213.40, 137.

scolded him for keeping her waiting, and demanded to be let in first. He replied, "Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up," and barred her. At this a poor woman crowded over the fate of the excluded one and denigrated her. She was told, "Love thinketh no evil", and likewise barred. Then a man came forward, but as he did so another ran up and the two began to fight for a place. The Lord Chamberlain barred both. To the first he said, "Love doth not behave itself unseemly"; to the second, "Love is not easily provoked." Then a poor woman with a child came up. She did not ask to go in herself, but said that her boy had so hoped to see the baby prince. They were both admitted: the boy because "love hopeth all things", the mother because "love seeketh not her own." Another boy protested his right to enter too, and was told, "Love envieth not", and barred. Then a donkey came along, obviously eager to pass through the gates, and an old hard-working man volunteered to take the animal in. They were let in on the ground that "love beareth all things", and "love suffereth long and is kind." By now Nuttall was wondering what response he would receive to a request to enter the palace. He began, "I'm only a stranger, sir", but the Chamberlain said, "Then certainly you may go in. Him that is a stranger, love asks in." Inside the gates was quite a small house, and in there was the new baby prince, together with those from the crowd who had been granted access. As Nuttall stood there he mused on the excluded ones and wondered whether there was really a place for him there: "Have I never been proud or spiteful or angry or irritable or envious?... I'm glad they're so kind to strangers here. But then love is."

As I mused the scene began to grow dim . . . I was waking up; yet before I woke, I could hear what they were singing, for their voices were very distinct; and this is what I heard – or I think it was:

God from on high hath heard! Let sighs and sorrow cease;
The skies unfold, and lo! Descends the gift of peace.
Fill us with heavenly love, heal Thou our earthly pride;
Be born within our hearts; and ever there abide.⁶³

It is fantasy (denuded of its poetry by compression); but it is fantasy of the most theological sort – and intensely practical too.

ALAN P. F. SELL

63 G. F. Nuttall, "The keeper of the gate. A Christmas fantasy," *The Methodist Magazine*, December 1965, 463-5. This story is not recorded in the bibliographies of Nuttall's writings.

REVIEW ARTICLE: REMEMBERING PENNAR DAVIES (1911-1996)

Saintly Enigma: A Biography of Pennar Davies. By Ivor Thomas Rees. Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2011. Pp. 160. £9.95. ISBN 978-1-84771-370-4. Illustrated.

Diary of a Soul. By Pennar Davies. Translated by Herbert Hughes. Talybont: Y Lolfa, 2011. Pp. 249. £9.95. ISBN 978-1-84771-376-6.

November 2011 marked the centenary of the birth of Pennar Davies, for over forty years professor of church history and principal of the Congregationalists' Memorial College in Brecon and then in Swansea. These two volumes were published both to commemorate his birth and to offer an appreciation of his life and contribution to an English-speaking readership, who might know of his lack of pretension and apparent guilelessness, who might have grasped the complexities and conflicts of his character, and yet might understand little about him and his work. (A full Welsh-language biography was published in 2003.)

Pennar Davies was by any measure a remarkable man. His work combined creative writing in prose and poetry with literary criticism, an exploration of church history and an attempt at theological construction and he was, in many respects, an expert in each field, though the world of the imagination seems to have suited him better than any other. His theology was at best dissenting and at worst heterodox, while his published historical writings, though showing both knowledge and perception, are few and far between (Geoffrey Nuttall referred to "Episodes in the History of Brecknockshire Dissent" as "a little masterpiece", but lamented "who will find it, hidden in Vol. III pp.11-65 of *Brycheiniog* (1957)?" in *JURCHS*, 5/10 [June 1997], while some of his work, it must be admitted, is fanciful if not obscure (one thinks immediately of his *Rhwng Chwedl a Chredo* [Between Legend and Belief] published in 1966, in which he claimed to be exploring "the synthesis which occurred between Brythonic paganism and the Christianity of the Early Welsh"). The story of his life demonstrates that his appreciation of the connection between faith and practice, between religion and culture, was profound, though it left him prone to a degree of introversion and periods of introspection, factors which helped to ensure that he remained an enigma even to those who, to all appearances, knew him best. Nevertheless, he considered this connection to be so close and penetrating that at great personal cost he placed himself at the service of the gospel and the Welsh nation in a way that deserves respect and admiration even from those who might find it difficult to understand some of his activity and much of his motivation.

Saintly Enigma has been written by one who studied theology and was trained (and in those days ministers were "trained") for Christian ministry at the Memorial College during the 1950s, when Pennar was, perhaps, at the

height of his powers (if, indeed, that is an appropriate term). All the major points are included, and it might be as well to rehearse them here. The story begins poignantly with the ordinary miner's family in Mountain Ash in the Cynon Valley in the heart of what was the South Wales coalfield. There is no evidence to suggest that his upbringing there was in any sense unfulfilled, though he later confessed that his parents quarrelled, largely about money – or the lack of it – for he and his family suffered abject poverty (he later recalled that a boiled egg shared between him and his three sisters was considered a treat). Despite the context, the signs of a deep-rooted sensitivity and an intellect of unusual quality were seen at an early age and William Thomas – for that was his given name – proceeded from grammar school to the University College at Cardiff where he graduated with First Class Honours in Latin and in English. He clearly had the potential to progress to further academic honours, but lacked the resources to finance such a move. His dilemma was resolved, the biography recounts, by the providential arrival of a patron who enabled further study at Balliol College, Oxford – John Bale (“Bilious Bale”), the sixteenth-century bishop of Ossory, author and controversialist, was the subject of a BLitt thesis which was examined by C. S. Lewis – and then at Yale in the United States where he was resident for two years (having “the time of his life”) and from which he was awarded a PhD four years later for a 900-page, two-volume dissertation on “The Comedies of George Chapman, 1559-1634”.

At this time he professed agnosticism if not atheism, despite experiencing an evangelical “conversion” at the age of twelve and conforming to the expectation of the day through attendance at Providence Congregational Church in his home town. Furthermore, his interests were in *English* literature. Although both parents’ families hailed from Pembrokeshire, his father’s was from the north of the county and was Welsh-speaking, while his mother’s came from the Anglicised south and she demonstrated a degree of animosity towards the language (he recalled: “Later on, after hearing that I spoke Welsh and had begun publishing books in that strange tongue, they [his family] came to the conclusion that there was more than one kind of madness”). William Thomas thus grew up familiar with the language but not speaking it until he was in his late teens and early twenties. While learning to speak Welsh, he developed a mastery of the English tongue and his early writings display such a command of it that to read his work is not merely informative but to experience the wonder that a truly skilful use of language can evoke. It is said that his command of Welsh was not so great (indeed, when seeking a pastorate he opted to serve an English-speaking congregation because, even aged thirty-one, “his spoken Welsh was stiff and unnatural”), yet it is probably more remarkable, given his background and education, that he became proficient in the ancient tongue at all.

By the late 1930s and early 1940s there had been two significant changes in his life which helped to decide how his future career would be mapped out. First, the Nazi threat on the European continent caused a personal crisis and an

awakened national conscience for he believed that the advent of National Socialism posed a direct threat to the future of the Welsh nation. This led him to embrace Christian faith and to offer himself for the Congregational ministry, a decision which was motivated by his uncompromising pacifism as well as a profound sense of conscience and duty, two aspects which would emerge again and again in his life in subsequent years. Although he later regretted not pursuing his ministerial calling at one of the Welsh colleges (at that time there were three colleges in Wales training ministers for the Congregational churches – Bala-Bangor College in Bangor, the Memorial College in Brecon, and the Presbyterian College in Carmarthen), it was to Oxford and Mansfield that he went in 1941. Mansfield was established precisely to give graduates a place for advanced study with the aim of providing future leaders and teachers and Pennar Davies joined a junior common room which was also graced by Basil Sims (in later years the principal of the Western College in Bristol), Erik Routley (a scholar of church music who later took up a teaching post at Westminster Choir College, Princeton, New Jersey), Horton Davies (who became a renowned historian of worship and was for many years on the staff of Princeton University), and George Caird (later principal of Mansfield College and then Dean Ireland's Professor of the Exegesis of Holy Scripture in Oxford University). While Pennar was a student there, Mansfield's principal was Nathaniel Micklem (who said of "Bill Davies" that he "was the quickest learner ever to go through my hands"), though Micklem's neo-orthodoxy and Genevan churchmanship was less appealing to the Welshman than the liberal and traditionally dissenting C. J. Cadoux. Though still completing his Yale PhD, Pennar also registered for Oxford's postgraduate BD degree; he passed the preliminary exams, but never submitted his dissertation (entitled "The Elizabethan drama in its relationship to Christian doctrine and Christian controversy"), despite the fact that a rather full and erudite draft exists among his personal papers. While at Mansfield he married Rosmarie Wolff, a refugee from Nazi Germany whose family, though Lutheran, had Jewish ancestry, and he was ordained at Minster Road English Congregational Church, Cardiff, in 1943. It is testimony to the broadmindedness of that church that while twelve of its ninety members were away serving in the forces it still unanimously called a pacifist minister who had a German wife. It is worth mentioning, too, that he had reached this point apparently without anyone checking his initiation into Christian faith; he had in fact not been baptised.

The second significant change came as he gave up the study of English literature in favour of Welsh. This was undoubtedly a difficult decision, for his initial ambition had been to occupy a lectureship in English at one of the universities. The final turning point came in 1946. In that year he applied for a professorship in English at Aberystwyth. At the same time, the principal's post became vacant at Bala-Bangor theological college and Pennar allowed his name to be put forward for that position too. He was offered the former, but was turned down for the latter in favour of Gwilym Bowyer, minister of Ebenezer Welsh Congregational Church in the city, who was considered a safer

option because he was better known both in north-east Wales and in Welsh-speaking Congregationalism. However the Bala-Bangor committee offered Pennar the post of professor of Church History and he decided to make the move north in the belief that this was the best way to serve both the gospel and the nation. A year later, Cadoux died and Pennar (along with Geoffrey Nuttall and Aubrey Vine) was invited to interview for the post of professor of Church History at his theological *alma mater*. Pennar did not attend: Elaine Kaye comments in her history of the college that he “declined the invitation on the grounds that his vocation lay in Wales” (quoted in *Saintly Enigma*). That he had made up his mind regarding the direction of his life was clear by a change in the way he referred to himself. He had previously been known as Bill Davies, or W. T. Davies, and he published under the name Davies Aberpennar (the Welsh name for Mountain Ash). From the late 1940s he adopted the name “Pennar Davies” in order to save himself “from the foreign and dull ordinariness of my English name, my three names lacking in charm.”

That his decision to work in a theological college and in Wales was a costly one is clear on every page of this biography. In 1950, he moved to the Memorial College in Brecon and became its principal two years later. He remained in that post for the rest of his working life, with the college relocating to Swansea in 1959 and then to Aberystwyth at the end of the 1970s. However, the financial reward was minimal: he could provide the essentials for his family, but there was little left over and, when he retired, he needed the College’s assistance to provide a home. He was never bitter about this, but it caused him anxiety that he had put his family through such hardship. Despite such concern, there remains something heroic about his personal sacrifice, even if it is tinged with the idealism of the romantic, willing to eschew personal ambition and endure hardship in the pursuit of a worthy cause. Alongside this, Pennar’s story implicitly indicts both a religious system which relied more on someone’s sense of vocation than on providing an adequate stipend, and the sections of Nonconformity which left its theological colleges dangerously vulnerable to the whims of local churches and their congregations when it came to offering financial support for ministerial education. Such support was withdrawn by those who could not understand Pennar’s stance over the campaign to save the Welsh language, with the grand façade of the Memorial College in Brecon hiding a crumbling and dilapidated interior as a result.

Saintly Enigma outlines Pennar Davies’s life, his fulfilment of his ministerial calling and his contribution to Wales’s intellectual and cultural life, including his – possibly surprising – outspoken, radical, if not also militant, commitment to Welsh nationalism and the Welsh language. Alongside this the author gives an account of theological college life in the 1950s when he was a student at Brecon. This underlines the fact that much of what is recorded in this volume recalls a world that has long gone, including the imposition of “sacred hours” on the students which lasted from 5.30 p.m. to 7.00 a.m. when they were not permitted to leave the building. This pattern was only interrupted on weekends when they were able to leave in order to fulfil preaching

engagements. There is also an account of the student “strike” in 1955 in which Pennar was seen to side with the students even though it cost him the respect – even friendship – of his colleagues. It would have been good to have had more personal reflection on the part of the author (there is a section at the end of the biography which includes short recollections by a number of people, including the author) and the reader might be left intrigued by his admission that he “had become particularly interested in the reformed ministry and worship and was influenced by the writings of former Mansfield students.” In many ways such churchmanship was a world away from Brecon and the staff of the Memorial College and some further detail about how Geneva had made its appeal in rural Brecknockshire would no doubt have been fascinating, even if it would have been self-indulgent to be too personal when assessing another’s life and work. It is clear that Pennar did not, at this time, reflect the sensibilities of Genevan churchmanship, or the convictions of the “New Genevans” (largely, though not exclusively, students of Micklem) who were making an impact on the English Congregationalism of the period, despite the fact that he was persuaded to wear robes at the author’s ordination service at Wern Congregational Church, Aberavon, in the late 1950s.

The biography is lively, immensely readable, and highly sympathetic towards one who was able to arouse the affection as well as the admiration and respect of his students. It highlights that, as a historian, Pennar was “more an interpreter than researcher”, something which perhaps demonstrates that he was a spokesman primarily for the imagination, not in the sense that he lived in a world of fantasy, but that he saw the imagination as a means of communing with the divine as well as understanding both the world around and the profundities of the gospel. As a theologian he was undoubtedly Pelagian. The human struggle to be good against a nature that would pull in the opposite direction but was ultimately able to overcome all temptation, alongside the value of good works, were both important in his thinking, a fact which offers an insight into some of the decisions he made regarding his own career. He was clearly driven by the desire to make the “right” decision, to deny the self and to strive to express a goodness which he confessed that he did not always feel in his heart. Nowhere is this seen as fully as in his remarkable diary *Cudd Fy Meiau*, now published in English translation as *Diary of a Soul*.

From 20 January 1955 to 16 February 1956 Pennar published a diary in *Y Tyst* (the weekly newspaper of the Welsh Independents) under the pseudonym “The brother of low degree” (James 1:9). The diary was published in full in 1957 under the title *Cudd Fy Meiau* (Hide my Sins), a title inspired by a hymn by Williams Pantycelyn, and it was republished with an introduction by R. Tudur Jones in 1998. This is the first time that the diary has appeared in English, the work of translation being undertaken by Herbert Hughes, a former student of Pennar Davies who died while the process of publication was under way. The volume also contains an introduction by the translator, endnotes which include a number of valuable references which will help the reader to understand some of the less obvious allusions, and a brief but penetrating foreword by Rowan Williams.

This is a remarkably honest piece of writing which is more a record of the joys and agonies of the spirit than an account of daily events. One example, from 11 September (the Lord's Day), will suffice: "I dared to preach, with the imperfection and impropriety of my life and the relationship [with Christ] like lead in my heart. I supposed at first that the diary would help me to grow in grace; but until now it has only lifted the lid on the cauldron of my devilish nature." Although Pennar refers to his wife and children throughout, and to other acquaintances (all hidden under pseudonyms), the main subject is his own, very personal struggle to overcome his faults and failings as he sought to live the life of a faithful disciple of Jesus. The person of Jesus is the main focus of his spirituality, and in light of his goodness Pennar seeks to confess his "sins" with candour and with a profound sense of the need to see the self crucified with its Lord. His Pelagian sensibilities are manifest throughout, for the diary entries meditate constantly on human weakness and the innate capacity to overcome it in pursuit of goodness. The awareness of his own inadequacy is painfully clear, mitigated only by an emphasis on the need both for humility and to nurture appreciation for the whole of creation. It is, nevertheless, a work of the imagination, not in the sense that it is a dishonest, fictional construction, but because it seeks to describe this very real, personal, inner struggle. Indeed, he asserted on 19 February, "it is through my own imagination that the Spirit can best work." Intriguingly, there are a small number of days for which he did not provide an entry at all, while on some days he offers a prayer rather than a reflection. These prayers reveal the breadth of his personal spirituality but are offered to his readers as a means to enable them to commune with the divine.

This, perhaps, is the genius of the work. It is deeply personal, occasionally embarrassingly honest, sometimes even mystical, but for all that it is *addressed to an audience*. The diary is not merely personal confession, but a means to appeal to others to demonstrate that the Christian life is one of constant struggle, occasional hardship even disappointment, but also one subject to continual grace and blessing. Pennar shared his inmost and private thoughts in order to help others with their own pilgrimage, coming to terms with his own foibles in the same way as he believed others should come to terms with theirs. Within the literature produced by Welsh Nonconformity, this is almost certainly a unique work representing a theological standpoint and a spiritual enquiry not usually associated with the chapel and perhaps it is only equalled elsewhere in poetry such as that of the Methodist hymn-writer Ann Griffiths (1776-1805). Furthermore, it is unlikely that it has a parallel in English Nonconformity, though there are similarities with the diaries of the early "Puritans" of the sixteenth century which show an equivalent introspection and also exalt personal experience as the realm in which God is made known. Nevertheless, the volume speaks to the human condition at the deepest level. For this, far more than insight into the man himself (who remains enigmatic throughout) or to the events of the time (which are alluded to, but usually ambiguously), its publication in English is to be welcomed. For while it does bear some infelicities which almost inevitably result from the difficulties of translation, it

retains an ability to speak to the human condition, while as an enquiry into the state of “the soul”, it is as relevant today as it was in the 1950s. Not all will agree with Pennar’s interpretation of the gospel as the remedy to his spiritual woe, but that does not mean that his meditations should be dismissed without consideration. Those who read with an open mind will recognise the sincerity of his personal quest as well as the pastoral desire to assist others in their spiritual struggle. Such readers will reap the reward.

There can be little doubt that Pennar Davies was a remarkably gifted scholar who opted to live a life of self-sacrificial service according to his understanding of the Christian gospel in the place he believed Providence to have placed him. There are lessons to be gained from his life, both through affirming what he believed and did and by subjecting his thought and activity to a rigorous critique. Those who read these volumes will surely see this, as well as gain an insight into a world where chapel was socially significant and faith was public, a world, moreover, which seems now to have all but disappeared.

ROBERT POPE

REVIEWS

***Tabernacle United Reformed Church, Llanvaches.* By Shem H. Morgan. Llanvaches: Tabernacle URC, 2011. £3.50. Pp. 67. No ISBN. Illustrated. In order to obtain a copy, contact Mr Roger George on 01633 400 511.**

The year 2012 sees the 350th anniversary of The Great Ejection and the spread of Nonconformist Churches but this book is about a little Nonconformist church that celebrated its own 350th anniversary almost a quarter century ago. Llanvaches URC, formed in 1639, was the first Independent Church to be established in Wales – before 1662, before the Commonwealth, before the Civil War.

In the words of its author, the birth of the church was associated with “men of power and conviction, who stood steadfast to their beliefs”. Chief among them was William Wroth, Rector of Llanvaches. Already a zealous Puritan and a “noted schismatic”, Wroth was one of those who refused to read the King’s Book of Sports, reissued by Charles I in 1633, thus allowing games and dancing on a Sunday. In an absorbing narrative, the book traces the turbulent period that followed through Wroth’s appearance at the High Commission Court in London and his ejection from the parish, his founding of the historic “Conventicle” in his Parish in 1639, to his death in 1641. He foresaw the Civil War, but prayed that he “might never hear a drum beat in order thereto”. His prayer was granted. He died more than a year before war began.

But the gathering at Llanvaches did not fall out of history. When Parliament celebrated the surrender of the Royalists at Oxford, it was the church’s second minister, Walter Cradock, who was invited to conduct the Service of

Thanksgiving. Even during the persecution that followed 1662, Tabernacle flourished. It ignored the Conventicle Act and regular secret services were held all over the area.

Shem Morgan, now aged ninety, has long been closely associated with the church and was in pastoral charge between 1983 and 1997, so he writes with a passion for the church as well as a detailed knowledge of its life and history. He is also a Bard, a member of the Gorsedd of the National Eisteddfod of Wales, and he tells the story with charm and grace. He takes the story from the early days to joining the Congregational Association in 1832, so that “the spread of the Gospel could be more effective”, the three-day celebration of its Tercentenary in 1939, and voting to join the United Reformed Church in 1971.

The book was originally published to mark Tabernacle’s own 350th anniversary in 1989 and is republished now in a smarter format with an extra section to bring it up to date, including some fascinating extracts from the Minutes of the church from 1873, a happy collection of colour pictures, and a delightful poem by William Wroth.

Today soon slips into tomorrow and becomes history, so in the new edition it is good to have a detailed account of the anniversary celebrations of 1989 and the work of the church up to the induction of its present minister in March 2010.

Seen as the “Mother Church” of Welsh Nonconformity – a role Tabernacle is glad to share with other Nonconformist traditions – the church is a regular site for pilgrimages, more intense at some periods than others. Featured on radio and television, this old church has even found a new life on the web – often, Morgan points out, a highly inaccurate one. He takes the opportunity to right some of these wrongs and, in particular, makes it clear the present church is not on the site of the original building, which was in the neighbouring hamlet of Carrow Hill. The church moved to Llanvaches in 1802, when it wanted to have its own burial ground, something not possible on the original site, and a supporter gave some land for 999 years at one peppercorn a year “if ever it were requested”.

Tabernacle remains conscious of its place in Welsh Nonconformity and its pride in its founder. When a hall was added in 1924, it was called The Wroth Memorial Hall and today’s minister at Tabernacle URC lives in Wroth Manse.

JEAN SILVAN EVANS

Spires and Meeting Houses: A History of the Origins, Growth and Development of Congregationalism in and around Oxford. By Michael Hopkins. Farnham: John Owen Press, 2011. Pp. 227. £12.60 (including p & p). ISBN 978-0-9568312-0-0.

To ask a Cambridge man to review a book about Congregationalism in Oxford is to take a risk. However, my misgivings disappeared as I began to enjoy Michael Hopkins’s account of the development of Congregational witness in Oxford and district.

Hopkins begins from the premise that Oxford is unique and that therefore the story of its Congregationalism is likely to be unique too: "Congregationalism in Oxford is a distinctive story, that has never before been told in one work." This justifies the book. The author traces the story from the earliest days in New Road Chapel in the seventeenth century, through the establishment of the first overtly Congregational Church in George Street in 1832, through the arrival of Mansfield College in 1886 and its influence on the Congregational witness in the university, through to the establishment of half a dozen daughter churches within the city and another half dozen in the hinterland around, giving an astonishing amount of detail resulting from meticulous research. History comes alive in Hopkins's hands.

Intriguing is the assertion that town-and-gown relationships developed differently in Oxford from Cambridge as far as Congregationalism was concerned. In Cambridge, once the University Tests were largely abolished, the prominent, even triumphalist, Emmanuel Congregational Church was built and has succeeded in catering for the spiritual needs of both academics and artisans together. In Oxford, the even more impressive Mansfield College Chapel, offering public worship of a superb quality each Sunday from 1889 until 1970, provided for the spiritual needs of a large congregation of people orientated to the university, leaving George Street Chapel and other local churches to cater for the needs of townspeople. This separate development, as a result of which town and gown seem to have had little influence on each other, contributed to the closure of George Street Church, the mother of so many other churches, as early as 1935.

This phenomenon and much, much more is carefully documented in the book. I thought I detected evidence of a certain amount of ecclesiastical snobbery. Did Summertown, once George Street closed, really see "itself as the leading Congregational Church in Oxford"? Was George Street, in 1914, when a particular minister was appointed, "more successful in attracting a minister of higher calibre and standing than it had been in its previous endeavours in this area... eventually, perhaps too late, being recognised with the esteem that it thought it merited"? Perhaps, but it is an interesting sidelight on the priorities of churches in those days.

The book, like most now published, would have benefited from more proof-reading. Some photographs would have enhanced it. But it is to be commended to all who are interested in the history of Congregationalism. There are four appendices comprising local documents, no fewer than seventeen pages of bibliography and a meticulous index.

KEITH FORECAST

***The Beginnings of the Windermere Centre – four stories by Stephen Thornton, Norman Charlton, Graham Cook and Susan Wilkinson.* Edited by Graham Cook. Windermere: The Windermere Centre, 2011 on the occasion of the Centre's 25th anniversary. Pp. 30. £4.00. No ISBN. Available from the Windermere Centre or from the Revd Graham Cook, 3 Barley Castle Close, Appleton Thorn, Warrington, WA4 4SA.**

This is a story that needs to be told – one of the success stories of which the United Reformed Church can justly be proud. I was particularly pleased to read Stephen Thornton's story, for we have been in danger of forgetting that it was his vision that started the project and his persistence that ensured its inauguration. It was also good to read the posthumously published chapter by Norman Charlton. But the contribution of others is gladly acknowledged. Where would the Centre have been without Graham Cook and Sue Wilkinson, and all others who have played their part over the years, many of whose contributions are recorded in these pages? Photographs of the authors of the stories would have enhanced the text, and a rigorous copy-editing would have helped too. Even so, this publication serves the Centre well and sets it in context, as it forges trails for the Church and its members to follow and thus enhances their discipleship.

KEITH FORECAST