THE JOURNAL
of the
UNITED REFORMED CHURCH HISTORY SOCIETY

(incorporating the Congregational Historical Society
founded in 1899, the Presbyterian Historical Society of
England, founded in 1913, and the Churches of Christ
Historical Society, founded in 1979)

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Volume 9 No. 2 May 2013

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Please note

Temporary Reduction of Archives Services at Westminster College, Cambridge.

Westminster College is about to embark on a major re-development programme. As part of the programme, a new, high-quality repository is to be built for archival material and to provide invigilated space for readers to use the archives. It is hoped to maintain some archives services, but many of the collections held at the College – including those owned by Westminster College, the Cheshunt Foundation and the URC History Society – will only be partially available for consultation during the period from May 2013 to May 2014, and some enquiries may take longer to answer.

If you know of any researchers who are hoping to visit or are planning to use the archives collections, please pass this message on, and ask them to contact Mrs Helen Weller on hw374@cam.ac.uk for more information.

The hope is that the end result will make all the disruption worthwhile.

EDITORIAL

Although it is sometimes convenient to speak of "Nonconformity" or "Dissent" in ways that suggest these were homogeneous phenomena, the truth is that these terms encompass movements of great diversity in theology, polity and practice. Nonconformists were Calvinist, Arminian and even (dare it be said?) Unitarian. They were Presbyterian, Congregational and Connexional. They have been at times both rigidly liturgical and committed to an almost absolute freedom in worship. Yet they have also displayed common characteristics. The sermon has featured prominently. Their contribution to hymnody has been immense. They have undoubtedly responded to the social, political and economic contexts in which they found themselves, sometimes constructively and occasionally in ways which brought them into disrepute. While this latter aspect is at best unfortunate, it also reminds us that the church on earth is always what Luther described as *simul iustus et peccator* – at one and the same time both justified by God and also, because it is all so human, prone to sin. This is one aspect of the tradition which the United Reformed Church has inherited and which our Society and *Journal* seeks to understand and also – quite rightly – to celebrate. The articles in this issue, in varying degrees, highlight all of this.

Alan Argent's article demonstrates the importance, and inter-changeability of hymnody and, specifically, how the Arminian Charles Wesley's theological insights, expressed at times so sublimely in verse, were subsequently appreciated by those who belonged to the Reformed and Dissenting traditions. To say that hymnody provided popular theology might well constitute a cliché, but it cannot be denied that hymns, at their best, have enabled people to understand and articulate their faith, even if they would not necessarily analyse them as eruditely as did Bernard Lord Manning and Geoffrey Nuttall. Gerard Charmley's article takes us to the heart of the tension experienced in the nineteenth century by those who sought to uphold the status gained by Nonconformists in that period, while trying also to cope with social standards of respectability which were both imposed upon them and the subject of their own aspirations. Of all Christian traditions, ours should be least concerned with such a "warts and all" account of our history. Anthony Tucker's contribution completes his study of the addresses to the annual assembly of the Congregational Union of (and later Church in) England and Wales. Once again, it is remarkable to note how some of these contributions resonate with our current situation, while others remain inevitably, and understandably, bound to their context. I am grateful to each of these contributors for their insightful analyses and their contribution to our knowledge of our multi-faceted tradition.

We welcome John Hargreaves, Donald Norwood and Julian Templeton as reviewers.

As this issue went to press, we learned of the death of Mrs Jeanne Armour, a former Council member and Society treasurer.

GENTLEMEN AND SCHOLARS: SOME CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS ON CHARLES WESLEY'S "WRESTLING JACOB"

In 1929 the literary critic, Percy Lubbock (1879-1965), who had been "raised in splendour" and gained a first class in the classical tripos in 1901 at King's College, Cambridge, described his former headmaster at Eton, Edmond Warre (1837-1920), as a dignified and "splendid figure" but a conventional and poor preacher whose sermons "stirred nobody". Yet Warre's love for "a noble hymn of Charles Wesley", often sung in the college chapel on Sunday evenings, did release the boys' imaginations. Lubbock recounted the "strange and baffling mystery of the hymn, the darkness of night in which a spirit wrestles till the dawn, struggling, straining to compel the unknown to declare his name – the mystery, the secret that is fought for in the night, we cheerfully proclaimed it to the roof, high above the flaring lights". The hymn sung by that "young army" of gentlemen, as Lubbock called them, was

> Come, O thou Traveller unknown,
> Whom still I hold, but cannot see,
> My company before is gone,
> And I am left alone with thee;
> With thee all night I mean to stay,
> And wrestle till the break of day.

In retrospect Lubbock grasped the personal relevance of the hymn, recalling, "across the crowded chapel", the humility and diffidence of his headmaster.

> He is all alone in the crowd, intent as we are upon our hymn . . . in his solitude his dominance breaks and melts into his humility . . . This is a man, great in other eyes, who has had no thought of himself at all. And presently the hymn is at its climax; the organ gathers itself for a crash, resounding upon the word that resolves the mystery. The wrestler has triumphed, the strange antagonist is revealed; the shout goes forth upon his name.

Warre the headmaster "swept down from his stall at the end of the service and marched out . . . strong and handsome". Yet, from his fondness for that hymn and his demeanour while singing it, Lubbock knew him to be "self-mistrustful in the depth of his heart", his character echoing that of the apostle Paul – "When I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor.12:10). Just as the apostle's "infirmity vibrated in his resolution like a pulse of vigour", so also the headmaster, "for all his martial robustness", had a "tremor" and "reverberation", which signifies "that a man's strength is vivid and sensitive, not dull".[1] Charles Wesley's poetry drew all this from the faithful Eton master.

Charles Wesley's feelings are as "vehement" in "Wrestling Jacob" as in all his hymns. If he was "obsessed with one theme: God and the Soul", however, and was "always at Calvary",[2] the "heart of his religion" was neither "personal experience" nor "personal feeling". Rather, in one critic's view, it was "sound doctrine", reflecting his orthodox education.[3] Although his hymns differ in their emotional intensity from the coolness of early eighteenth century English worship, exemplified in the "austere" Isaac Watts,[4] he adhered, as a natural conservative, to the prevailing standards of his day and, having been educated at Westminster School and Christ Church, Oxford, he remained "always a gentleman and a scholar".[5]

The particular gentlemen and scholars to whom I refer in this paper are Charles Wesley, of course, Bernard Lord Manning, a Congregational layman with strong Methodist links, who loved Wesley's hymns, and who found in them the aforesaid "sound doctrine", and the Congregational minister and historian, Geoffrey Nuttall, whose teenage hero was William E. Sangster (1900-60). At Sangster's church in Colwyn Bay, north Wales, from an early age, Nuttall regularly sang from the Wesleyan Methodist Hymn Book.[6] That the influence of Charles Wesley, therefore, informed the faith and the sense of the divine presence in both Manning and Nuttall is irrefutable. Yet these three, Wesley, Manning and Nuttall, are an unlikely trio. Neither Manning nor Nuttall shared Charles Wesley's regard for the Established Church, nor was the younger Nuttall, unlike several contemporary Congregationalists, ever tempted to ally himself with the orthodox dissent which Manning promoted, though he respected Manning's independence of mind. Rather what unites them is a deep love of holiness, as expressed most powerfully in this exquisite hymn. For them faith was "warm and expansive". They were never mere "formalists" and, one may claim, in Nuttall's words in describing some representatives of Old Dissent on the eve of the Methodist revival, that faith provided "the mainspring of their living".[7]

In 1964 John A. Newton pointed out the link between early Methodism and the Puritan tradition; the tradition which attracted Manning and which Nuttall

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1 An earlier version of this paper was delivered as a talk to the London Branch of the Wesley Historical Society at Wesley's Chapel, City Road, on 23 October 2010. P. Lubbock, *Shades of Eton* (New York: Scribner, 1929), pp. 12-13, 30-33. For Lubbock and Warre, see *ODNB*.

2 B. L. Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts: Five Informal Papers* (London: Epworth, 1942), p. 43.

3 Ibid., p. 75.

4 D. Davie, *The Eighteenth-Century Hymn in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 57.

5 K. L. Parry, *Companion to Congregational Praise* (London: Independent Press, 1953), p. xxi; *ODNB*.

6 C. Binfield, "Profile: Geoffrey Nuttall. The Formation of an Independent Historian", in *Epworth Review,* vol. 25, no. 1 (January 1998), pp. 82, 86-7.

7 G. F. Nuttall, "Methodism and the Older Dissent: Some Perspectives", in *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, vol. 2, no. 8 (October 1981), p. 261.

studied and came to embody, so much that academics studying the Puritan saints whom he had written about so well also studied him. Newton wrote that early Methodism "bears the imprint of the Puritan tradition, in its theology, worship, pastoral oversight, and its rigorist ethical outlook". He found that the common factor between Methodism and Puritanism lay in "their concern for genuinely personal religion, for practical godliness and Christianity in earnest", that is for "all that Wesley understood by that pregnant text, 'Faith working by love'".[8]

I: Religious Verse

In the preface to *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists* (1780) John Wesley wrote, "When Poetry . . . keeps its place, as the handmaid of Piety, it shall attain, not a poor perishable wreath, but a crown that fadeth not away". This view of poetry as "the handmaid" of piety would not serve the editor of *The Oxford Book of Christian Verse* seventy years ago. In 1940 the literary critic, Lord David Cecil (1902-86), a fellow of New College, Oxford, condemned with faint praise, when writing of Christian verse that "Religious emotion is the most sublime known to man", although "it has not proved the most fertile soil for poetry". He continued, "the average hymn is a by-word for forced feeble sentiment" and "flat conventional expression". By falling back "on the traditional symbols of the orthodox liturgy", most Christian poets lose all freshness and originality for it is "a poet's essential quality that he speaks with his own voice".[9]

However, Lord David spoke well of Isaac Watts – "he had a spontaneous sentiment, a gift of song which raised his best hymns to the level of the true lyric" – and he was positive about Charles Wesley, Augustus Montagu Toplady and John Newton. He acknowledged that

> Evangelicalism, with its emphasis on the mysterious and awful doctrines of the Christian faith, on original sin, redemption by Christ's blood, final perdition, represents a violent reaction against the cool, unenthusiastic common sense of orthodox eighteenth-century devotion. And it imbues their hymns with a passion, a murky thunder-light, that makes them stirring out of all proportion to their strictly literary merits.

We too may discover passion aplenty in Charles Wesley, although I am unsure if I have been stirred by "a murky thunder-light". Given his reservations, Cecil still included thirteen verses of "Wrestling Jacob" in *The Oxford Book of Christian Verse*.[10]

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8 J. A. Newton, *Methodism and the Puritans* (London: Dr Williams's Trust, 1964), p. 19.

9 Lord David Cecil (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Christian Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), pp. xi, xii. For Cecil, see *ODNB*.

10 Ibid., pp. xxiv, 329-32. He omitted verse five.

Forty years later another critic, the blunt Yorkshire poet, Donald Davie (1922-95), appreciated that "Watts and Wesley and Cowper . . . were . . . subtle and sophisticated men who applied themselves to perfect for their hymns a style that should not be subtle but plain – and this for the good reason that they wanted to speak plainly to plain men and women, to the unlettered but devout worshippers in the pews". Davie, seeking to restore hymns to their pristine form, included all fourteen verses of "Wrestling Jacob" in his selection.[11]

"Wrestling Jacob" was described by the historian of the Restoration-ejected clergy, A. G. Matthews, who had close Methodist links and was also a Congregational minister, as "the high-watermark" of Charles Wesley's verse. Matthews commented that, unlike Watts and Doddridge, whose hymns were for "staid travellers on the beaten track" of Old Dissent, Charles Wesley wrote for "a new religious public" of "poor and middling people" who had experienced "for the first time the saving knowledge of the Gospel". Matthews, "in gentlemanly retirement" in the stockbroker belt at Oxted,[12] was fascinated not by the craftsmanship of Wesley's verse but by his catching "the eager accents of the Revival, aglow with the fervour of its early youth". As stated, Davie also recognised the fervour and freedom of Charles Wesley's poetry. In his anthology, he placed Wesley chronologically after Watts and, in so doing, was immediately struck by the higher "emotional temperature" of the younger man's writing.[13]

II: "Wrestling Jacob" and Artistry

"Wrestling Jacob" explores the theme of holiness as revealed in Jacob's encounter with the angel in Genesis 32:24-32. Wesley returned again and again to this text in his preaching, and found inspiration from it, not only for this hymn, but for several others. Indeed the passage has proved enormously stimulating for artists of all kinds. Lucas Cranach the elder depicted Jacob wrestling with the angel in a wood block in 1532 for Luther's Bible, as did Lemberger after him, and the Dutch Protestant Rembrandt painted the scene in 1659-60, drawing on both Genesis 32:32 and Hosea 12. In 1720 the Bolognese artist Donato Creti saw the bout almost as a dance. Other representations of the passage came later with Gustave Dore (1855), Eugene Delacroix (1861), Alexander Louis Leloir (1865), Gustave Moreau (1878), Paul Gauguin (1888), Maurice Denis (1893), William Strang (1894, 1904) and Marc Chagall (1970); Sir Jacob Epstein, playing on his own name, sculpted the scene in 1940, a time of particular struggle for Jacob's descendants. In addition, Herman Hesse has a chapter in his novel *Demian* (1919) on Jacob's wrestling bout, Dodie Smith alludes to it in *I Capture*

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11 D. Davie (ed.), *The New Oxford Book of Christian Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. xix, 167-9. For Davie, see *ODNB*. Davie became an Anglican, but his formation was Baptist.

12 A. G. Matthews, "General Introduction", in Parry, *Companion to Congregational Praise*, pp. xxi-xxii; C. Binfield, "Profile: Geoffrey Nuttall", p. 93.

13 Matthews, "General Introduction"; Davie, *The Eighteenth-Century Hymn in England*, p. 57.

the Castle (1948), and the modern writer, Zadie Smith, has made use of Wesley's hymn in her novel, *On Beauty* (2005).

III: The Hymn

Charles Wesley's "Wrestling Jacob" was first published in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742) under this title. It had 14 verses, although since 1780, verses 5 and 7 have often been omitted, and the remaining 12 verses retained by all the Methodist hymn books. *Hymns and Psalms* of 1983 is no exception to this rule; it also includes 12 verses and offers two tunes – the first by Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810-76), entitled "Wrestling Jacob", and the second by Robert King (1676-1713), entitled "David's Harp", which incorporates unfortunately named "mean parts" by John Wilson.

Just as Jacob wrestles, refusing to submit, giving his name and demanding to know his opponent angel's name, so the seeker after God, through the dark night of the soul, persists until he/she discovers the name of him whom he/she seeks, which is "Love" (1 John 4:8, 16). The rhetorical structure reinforces the central idea with tremendous force: in every verse, the rhythms move inexorably towards the final line, through which the great message is stated and re-stated. That force and relentless movement impressed Manning and Nuttall.

The modern scholar Richard Watson has written, following William Blake, that the bible is "the code-book" enabling us to read Charles Wesley's hymns which are "dense with allusion and image", as also Geoffrey Nuttall revealed. Watson believes that Wesley's use of the image of physical struggle is most powerful in "Wrestling Jacob" where the poem's energy comes from the wrestling match. Watson too rates this as his "finest poetic achievement … It moves, like many of his hymns, from an awareness of sin to a contemplation of divine love; and in the process, it has, like Jacob's prayer, 'power with God'".[14]

IV: Other references

Charles Wesley often consulted Matthew Henry's (1662-1714) exposition of scripture, popularly called his commentary. He liked the "sound practical piety, and large measure of good sense" of the evangelical Presbyterian Henry's work, which in the eighteenth century was fast growing in popularity, signifying an appetite for biblical instruction which, although already present, simply grew with the coming of Methodism. Henry had devoted two columns of print to Genesis 32:24-32 and, at least, verse 5 of the hymn seems to owe much to this. Henry wrote, "Jacob prevailed, and yet had his thigh put out". He felt that he must caution his readers. "Note, Wrestling believers may obtain glorious victories, and yet come off with broken bones; for 'when they are weak, then are they strong', weak in themselves, but strong in Christ" – a reference to 2

14 J. R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 230-1, 264.

Corinthians 12:10. Wesley wrote,

> When I am weak, then I am strong:
> And when my all of strength shall fail,
> I shall with the God-Man prevail.

Again "echoes" of Matthew Henry's "lovely comment" appear in verse 10. Henry wrote: "Notice is taken of the sun's rising upon him when he passed over Penuel; for it is sunrise with that soul that has communion with God".

Wesley wrote:

> The Sun of Righteousness on me
> Hath rose, with healing in his wings.[15]

V: Responses to "Wrestling Jacob"

This Wesley hymn was recognised immediately as a work of distinction, being praised by Watts, according to John Wesley, as well as by James Montgomery in the early nineteenth and by Dean A. P. Stanley of Westminster in the later nineteenth century.[16] Stanley quoted lines from this hymn (the same two lines which led John Wesley to hesitate, overcome with emotion, after Charles's death) soon after the death of his wife, when he was unveiling the memorial tablet to the Wesleys in Westminster Abbey in 1876.

The writers of *The New History of Methodism* saw this hymn, which they too rate as Charles's "greatest hymn", as illustrating "the constant verification of practical experience even in apparently the most hopeless cases". That is God does not give up on his people, however errant they may be, and he will fight for them.[17] In *The Companion to Congregational Praise* (1953), Kenneth Parry described "Wrestling Jacob" as "if not his greatest hymn, unquestionably his finest poem". He alluded to John Wesley's tears at Bolton on 19 April 1788, a fortnight after Charles's death, when reading out the lines:

> My company before is gone,
> And I am left alone with thee.

There John Wesley was preaching "in the evening in one of the most elegant houses in the kingdom, and to one of the liveliest congregations". The editor of his journal, Nehemiah Curnock, noted the "touching scene" when John tried to announce the hymn "Come, O thou traveller unknown" but sank down under

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15 M. Henry, *An Exposition on the Old and New Testament* (first edition 1707-14, fourth edition 1737), I. For Matthew Henry, see *ODNB*.

16 J. Montgomery, *The Christian Psalmist* (Glasgow: William Collins, 1825), pp. xxiii-xxiv.

17 W. J. Townsend, H. B. Workman and G. Eayrs (eds.), *A New History of Methodism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), vol. I, pp. 32-33, 243; vol. II, p. 435.

uncontrollable grief. He "burst into a flood of tears, sat down in the pulpit, and hid his face with his hands". The packed congregation understood what was happening and "the singing ceased". At length John Wesley rose and carried on, but the service and its drama were "never forgotten".[18]

VI: Bernard Lord Manning (1892-1941)

Manning, who wrote so well of Charles Wesley, was a Congregationalist with Methodist roots. Both his parents came from Methodist stock and his father, George, trained at Westminster College, London, and became a teacher at a Wesleyan school in Staffordshire before moving to another Methodist school at Caistor, Lincolnshire. There George met and married Mary Ann Lord at the Wesleyan chapel. When Bernard as a child was bored with the sermons in the chapel, which happened often, he found distraction not in the Bible but in *Wesley's Hymns*, *Wesley's Hymns with a Supplement*, and *Wesley's Hymns with New Supplement* which he fell eagerly upon week after week. At that Wesleyan chapel in Caistor, in his grandfather's pew, began "an unregulated, passionate, random reading" which lasted Manning's whole life.[19] His father was to be the Congregational minister of High Chapel, Ravenstonedale, in Westmorland, serving two separate pastorates there and this village became Bernard's ideal, his spiritual haven, as well as his physical home.

Manning wrote of Charles Wesley as using "precise verse and . . . simple, unaffected language" which had behind them the "conscious orthodoxy of a scholar trained and humbled as he contemplates the holy, catholic, and evangelical faith in its historic glory and strength". That is Wesley's hymns are "charged with dogma" and set forth "the peculiar and pungent doctrines of uncompromising Christianity", as only a scholar can. However he did not merely sing out the classic Christian doctrines but he went on to tell of his own experiences, of the effects of this faith in his own life. Wesley's "common sense and scholarly taste", wrote Manning, "kept him from mawkish excesses without crushing his spirit". As a consequence he succeeded "in speaking at once with passion and with decency about God's work" in his own life, as a Christian gentleman might do. Charles Wesley was, therefore, scholarly and passionately honest but also inspiring. Manning wrote that this "transfigures history and experience. This puts past and present into the timeless eternal NOW. This brings together God and man until Wesley talks with God as a man talks with his friend", just as Jacob in "Wrestling Jacob" talks to "Love".

Manning found Charles's "mystical quality" in 'Wrestling Jacob', for in it Wesley saw Jacob's "prevailing over the mysterious Wrestler" as "a mystical

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18 N. Curnock, *The Journal of the Rev John Wesley* (London: Robert Culley, 1909) standard edition, vol. VII, pp. 376-377; L. Tyerman, *Life of Wesley* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1871), vol. III, p. 527.

19 B. L. Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts*, p. 8; F. Brittain, *Bernard Lord Manning: A Memoir* (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1942), pp. 1-2, 4.

revelation of the humiliation of the Word; and he argues, commands, and hectors as if the Word of God were already wearing our Flesh".[20]

VII: Manning's sermon on "Wrestling Jacob"[21]

Taking as his text, "And he blessed him there" (Genesis 32:29), Manning, who died in December 1941, preached on this passage in a sermon earlier in the Second World War. He began by alluding to the "memorable times" in which they were living, although he expected that his congregation was "probably as tired" as he was of hearing that. Nevertheless, he continued, "you are all living through a great, a terrible, a glorious part of our country's history" and, although you "went into the years of war on September 3, 1939, one person: you will not come out of the years of war the same". From this unchallengeable truth, he moved to consider Jacob who also had "a great, a horrible, a glorious experience" and Jacob, he declared, was "a suitable person" for them to think about because "he was like us: not a nice person, not a generous person: a man built on mean and selfish and squalid lines; a man who was sure to have difficulty with himself if he ever tried to make a good job of anything, because he was made of such poor material". Jacob was not then a plaster cast saint but, if God could use him, then "you need not give up", declared Manning.

He recounted Jacob's story – how he had deceived his father and robbed his brother, how he had escaped far away, made money but now was returning to his own country, to his own people in order to face his brother who was also prosperous and who might choose to exact revenge. In preparation, he had tried to pacify his brother but, after all that, he could only wait and wonder if his precautions had been adequate. In such uncertainty, Jacob fell asleep "by the stormy river in the savage gorge". Although Jacob, said Manning, was "not an attractive man" he had good qualities, among which was his intent not to give in easily to anyone. "He will go down fighting whether his enemy be Esau or his fears". Consequently "when in the blackness of the night a mysterious, unknown enemy attacks him, he struggles and wrestles and will not give in". His opponent only prevailed when he used extraordinary powers to put Jacob's thigh out of joint.

By first light on the next day, Jacob had been blessed with a new name and had in fact become a new man. "His bad old name, the supplanter, the trickster" was "changed to a Prince of God: one who has persevered and has power with God". As men and women thought over Jacob's experience, "they saw that the wrestler in the night" who would not give his name but blessed Jacob, even as he wounded him, who seemed to be "a horror and an enemy was God's angel or God himself". God therefore had "visited Jacob on the blackest, most critical night of his life" and, just when Jacob could do no more for himself, he received a blessing that altered him permanently.

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20 B. L. Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts*, pp. 26-30. For Manning, also see *ODNB*.

21 B. L. Manning, *More Sermons of a Layman* (London: Independent Press, 1944), pp. 55-61.

Manning admitted that, in his view, Charles Wesley had already said "the best things" that ever had been said to explain this reading. Yet the story would remain, according to Manning, always apposite, "as long as there are mean people like Jacob in the world, and as long as they face troubles". Of course, Manning drew the obvious parallels in his preaching between the dark night, brought about by the Second World War, and the blackness of Jacob's experience. Yet Jacob had survived to be blessed and in like fashion, said Manning, God would bless them too. However, he cautioned, his hearers should not "lie still in the dark", waiting for the war to end. Rather they must rise to the challenge and see in the dark their old sins trying to find them out, their own adversary ready to wrestle till dawn with them. Indeed, Manning wrote, they must "never dream of ending the fight until" the enemy had blessed them. Only when they were certain that they would emerge from the fight a better person would Manning allow that they could let go of their enemy. So perseverance was his first point.

The second was drawn from Jacob's being blessed only when he was made to limp. That is "when we are on the verge of despair . . . we triumph". "The nearer you are to giving up", said Manning, "if you don't give up you are sure to prevail". As we wrestle in the dark we learn who is struggling with us, and this is God. Indeed our faith tells us that, just as we wrestle with "public or private trouble", so also Jesus on Good Friday wrestled in "the darkest of all dark nights", receiving wounds "which are our life". The Christian life is not easy. "We struggle with our murky past. We struggle with our fears for the future. We are at times knocked out. But when we know ourselves to be weak, then we are strong; and as we limp we receive the blessing, and prevail. For in the darkness we see the face of God made Man; and we live. May He bless you there."[22]

It is clear that Manning sought to relate the story of Jacob to the fears of his congregation at a critical time. Yet it is also hard to escape the conclusion that he was as much inspired by Wesley's hymn, which, in their worship, they were to sing right after the sermon, as by these immediate pressures. From Manning's sermon on Jacob's nocturnal struggle, we turn to Geoffrey Nuttall and his treatment of Wesley's hymn, rather than to the biblical story.

VIII: Geoffrey F. Nuttall (1911-2007)

Sangster's preaching in Rhos-on-Sea, and Conwy, in north Wales, 1926-9, in the same circuit as Nuttall's childhood home, so entranced the growing youth, on the eve of his undergraduate career at Balliol, that he followed the Wesleyan preacher from chapel to chapel, often hearing the same sermon more than once.[23] Although keen Congregationalists, with a strong Congregational pedigree on

22 Ibid.

23 Author's personal knowledge. For Sangster, see *ODNB*.

both sides in which he took great pride, Nuttall's family attended St John's Wesleyan Church in Colwyn Bay where his father was a general practitioner. His "incorrigible love of hymns", and of "Come, O thou traveller unknown" in particular, developed from this but, as with other aspects of Nuttall's interests, his integrated life enabled him to return to this subject in old age.[24]

Clyde Binfield, in his profile of Nuttall for the *Epworth Review* in 1998, wrote of Geoffrey's lifelong habit of keeping a diary. In this, since 1933, he began each year with an "envoy", written at the front of his diary for "direction or correction or comfort or reassurance, as appropriate". These envoys were "usually devotional, usually biblical, sometimes repeated but never contrived". Some few years had no envoy but, when they appeared, they might be in Greek, Hebrew, Latin, French, Italian, German, or Welsh, as well as English. Binfield considered that the envoys capped "the totality of scholarship and devotion" of Nuttall's life. In 1933 the envoy was a quotation from George Fox, a constant influence on Nuttall from schooldays, and that from 1997 was in two parts, the second of which was in Hebrew. The first, however, was two lines of Charles Wesley's hymn, "Come, O thou traveller unknown", and Binfield chose to close his profile with this.

> Nor wilt thou with the night depart
> But stay and love me to the end.[25]

"Peniel", Nuttall's favoured tune, was composed for this Wesley hymn by Josiah Booth (1852-1930) and was intended for the collection, edited by George Barrett, which was published as *Congregational Church Hymnal* (1887).[26] Nuttall's choice of tune suggests his preference for the tunes of the hymn book of his youth. *Congregational Church Hymnal* was superseded in 1916 by *Congregational Hymnary*, edited by Sir John McClure, who had Josiah Booth as the musical adviser, and its eventual replacement, *Congregational Praise*, only appeared in 1953 when Nuttall was 42 years old.[27] This latter book relegated Peniel to an appendix.[28]

Geoffrey Nuttall, like Charles Wesley, took the theme of holiness to heart (as Gordon Rupp made clear in writing of "devotion to Christ: a religion of the heart: happy delight in God" in his contribution to Nuttall's *festschrift* entitled "A devotion of rapture in English Puritanism"[29]). This may also help to explain Nuttall's fondness for this hymn.

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24 C. Binfield, "Profile: Geoffrey Nuttall", pp. 82, 86-7.
25 Ibid., pp. 82, 106.
26 Parry, *Companion to Congregational Praise*, p. 325. See also A. Peel, *These Hundred Years* (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1931), p. 288.
27 Parry, *Companion to Congregational Praise*, p. xxxvi.
28 Ibid., p. 325.
29 R. Buick Knox (ed.), *Reformation, Conformity and Dissent: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Nuttall* (London: Epworth, 1977), p. 128.

IX: Nuttall's Reflections on "Come, O thou traveller unknown"

In his later years, Nuttall often attended the annual Old Students' Reunion meetings of New College, London, and in September 1998 he spoke to the group, at Barnes Close, near Birmingham, of his reflections upon Wesley's hymn, "Wrestling Jacob". These were later published.[30] At that meeting, with his eyesight failing, the bony, slightly bent figure peered at his former students and said teasingly, "You all look a bit dim to me", mischievously adding, "but then you always did". The scene was set. By asking Nuttall to speak to them, the former students, some of them retired or close to it, had put themselves back into the lecture hall where the still formidably erudite teacher would perhaps again make them feel inadequate.

Nuttall made no reference to Manning's sermon in his paper but began by examining the Hebrew word which is translated as wrestling and spoke of it as literally meaning twist and turn, a personal term which "gives the colouring to Wesley's poem". The hymn itself Nuttall recognised as "fine poetry and a notable expression of Christian experience" which throughout "hinges on Scripture". He knew the twelve verses of the *Methodist Hymnbook* but expected his audience to be familiar only with the seven verses included in *Congregational Praise*. He betrayed no knowledge that Charles Wesley had written fourteen in all. Nuttall chose to concentrate on five verses (1, 2, 7, 8 and 9) but accepted that he had to refer to the other verses at least in passing.

He regarded the first line "Come, O thou traveller unknown" as "a wonderful opening" which takes the readers and singers "straight into the action" and is "instinct with expectancy, yet with uncertainty". He observed that the Romantic Movement was beginning, as well as that of Methodism, and asked, "Who might the traveller be?", although he knew that the question of identity is "the driving force" of the whole poem. Pausing over the word "traveller", he noted that it is not found in the story of Jacob, and hardly in the Authorised Version at all, but Jacob was on a journey. The "traveller unknown" he related to the unknown companion (or companions) on the Emmaus Road but hesitated to explore that allusion further so early in his talk. Jacob cannot see because it is night and only late in the poem does the sun rise upon him. Indeed the action takes place in the dark which is in keeping with our earthly condition, for on earth "at best, we walk by faith, not by sight" (a favourite text – 2 Cor. 5:7). Like Watson, he found that most immediately Wesley's poem is about "the dark night of the soul; the darkness of depression, of despair; the darkness of sin; the darkness of death".

> My company before is gone
> And I am left alone with thee . . .

30 First published in the New College Old Students' Association magazine, *The Link*, (1999). Republished in R. Bocking (ed.), *Geoffrey Fillingham Nuttall 1911-2007* (Prestatyn, 2008), pp. 45-55.

Indeed Jacob was left alone in the scriptures and we, in our experience, know that "Others may sustain us by their love and faith, but they cannot believe for us"; and when our friends have gone "we know our solitariness, we feel alone". In his twenty years of widowhood, Nuttall frequently felt alone. And yet, he wrote, we are not alone for instead we are "alone with thee".

> With thee all night I mean to stay
> And wrestle till the break of day.

This, then, is "a poem about wrestling, about wrestling in the dark, about sticking it when you're 'thrown', when you're down under". But, observed Nuttall, "daybreak will come; and if you're wrestling you're not alone. Someone, someone else is there. But who is he?"

Nuttall found Wesley's answer to this insistent question "indirect, circuitous, even circular" but "true to psychology" and to theology.

> I need not tell Thee who I am.

Like others, Nuttall saw the poem as "autobiographical" but as containing a message "for Everyman", just as Lubbock had perceived its effect on his headmaster and, by extension, to himself.

> I need not tell Thee who I am,
> My misery and sin declare.

During the Evangelical Revival, wrote Nuttall, the fact of sin was not merely assumed but was "felt, bitterly, with tears and strong cries that were an accepted stage in conversion". Charles Wesley therefore meant what he said.

> I need not tell Thee who I am,
> My misery and sin declare,
> Thyself hast called me by my name,
> Look on Thy hands and read it there.

The last lines necessarily convey readers to doubting Thomas and his declaration of faith, on seeing and thrusting his own fingers into the hands of the risen Lord. But, wrote Nuttall, God knows the names of the stars in the firmament, and Jesus somehow also knew the names of Zacchaeus, Martha, Mary, Simon, and Simon, son of Jonas.

In Wesley's text, Jacob asks his antagonist his name and he wants the answer now. His urgency derives from the fact that daybreak is coming soon when, as Nuttall points out, "ghosts, spirits, commonly depart". The poet then must wrestle and must not let go.

> In vain thou strugglest to get free,
> I never will release my hold.

Art thou the Man that died for me?
The secret of Thy love unfold
Wrestling I will not let Thee go
Till I thy name, Thy nature know.

Nuttall ponders the Authorised Version's reference to the story of Manoah (Judges 13) in which Manoah asks the angel, "What is thy name?" only to receive the reply "It is a secret". The AV margin glosses secret with "or wonderful", noted Nuttall, pointing out also that wonderful is the name familiar from Isaiah 6 and used by Handel of Christ in "The Messiah". Nuttall assumed his hearers would think he was "getting fanciful" at this allusion, but nevertheless argued that Wesley probably read the Bible in this way and used the marginal references provided. Jacob's insistence on knowing the name of his wrestling opponent is also a pointer.

Wilt Thou not yet to me reveal
Thy new, unutterable name?
Tell me, I still beseech Thee, tell,
To know it now resolved I am
Wrestling I will not let Thee go,
Till I Thy name, Thy nature know.

The Hebrew importance placed upon the name of things, and of the new name, is clear. Wesley wrote,

Write Thy new name upon my heart,
Thy new, best name of love.

Indeed, said Nuttall, like "all good preachers, Wesley often repeats himself".

What though my shrinking flesh complain
And murmur to contend so long?
I rise superior to my pain
When I am weak, then I am strong
And when my all of strength shall fail,
I shall with the God-man prevail.

Nuttall pointed out that the term "God-man" is not scriptural but it signifies movement because first Wesley spoke of "the Traveller unknown", and then "the Man that died for me" but now he has arrived at "the God-man". Nuttall speculated whether Wesley had been reading Novatian who, in the third century, had thought the phrase was in scripture and noted how "mysteriously, confusingly, the one Jacob wrestles with is called both man and God, and takes him to be a type of the God-man, Christ".

Nuttall then interrupted his examination of Wesley's composition to read a poem

by the Jesuit Gerard Manley Hopkins, another favourite of his. Although Hopkins's prosody is admittedly dense, Nuttall found his feeling not obscure. He read,

> Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;

which ends

> That night, that year
> Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God.

He returned to Wesley and found in verse 6 of Wrestling Jacob,

> Yield to me now, for I am weak
> But confident in self-despair
> Speak to my heart, in blessings speak,
> Be conquered by my instant prayer
> Speak, or thou never hence shall move,
> And tell me if Thy name is love.

Nuttall noted the "If" in that last line but the secret is out and no ifs could stop the realisation that the name is love. "'Tis love! 'Tis love!" And now the excitement mounts and "the words begin to dance". "Thou diedst for me!" At this, Nutall made reference to another famous Wesley hymn "And can it be". He quoted,

> 'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies
> Who can explore His strange design? . . .
>
> . . . Died He for me, who caused His pain?
> For me, who Him to death pursued?
> Amazing love! How can it be,
> That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

Returning again to "Wrestling Jacob", we read

> 'Tis love! 'Tis love! Thou diedst for me!
> I hear Thy whisper in my heart.

Nuttall then referred to the seventeenth century Independent minister, John Goodwin (*c.*1594-1665), who had written, "The voice of the Spirit is but very soft and low, at least ordinarily". But it is dawn.

> The morning breaks, the shadows flee,
> Pure universal love Thou art.

To me, to all Thy mercies move,
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

At this, Nuttall asked, should this be considered "Methodist individualism? Arminian universalism? Revivalist sensationalism?" He replied, "Maybe, but with this verse, in which the poem reaches its climax, and the question is (virtually) answered, the Evangelical Revival is born, and the world has never been the same again".

Yet the "name Love is still an abstraction". Who is this?

My prayer hath power with God.
The grace Unspeakable I now receive.
Through faith I see Thee face to face,
I see Thee face to face, and live.
In vain I have not wept and strove,
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

"And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (Gen. 32:30). This is the end of the story for Jacob, although for Charles Wesley it marked "a new beginning".

In Jacob's story, the wrestler does not give his name, although the place is named Peniel in Hebrew, or "The Face of God" where I have seen God face to face which no living man may do. Just as Moses spoke to God who said, "I know thee by name" and spoke "face to face as a man speaketh to his friend". Indeed "there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses whom the Lord knew face to face".

Until the new dispensation is realised, we are to walk by faith and not by sight.

Through faith I see Thee face to face,
I see Thee face to face, and live.

Yet, said Nuttall, in the new dispensation there is something more because God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor.4:6). Now the name is fully known.

I know Thee, Saviour, who thou art,
Jesus the feeble sinner's Friend.
Nor wilt Thou with the night depart
But stay and love me to the end.

If the human wrestler was to stay until "the break of day", the divine wrestler will "stay and love me to the end". Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them until the end.

Thy mercies never shall remove,
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

X: Nuttall's Later Years

Eighteen months after delivering this paper, in 2000, Nuttall suffered the stroke which precipitated his removal from his retirement flat in Selly Wood Road, Birmingham, to the nursing home, Burcot Grange, where he was to spend the rest of his life. Having collapsed in his study and too weak to stand, he sang hymns to himself in his thin, reedy, rasping voice, throughout that long night, among them old favourites by Watts and Wesley. In hospital the next day, the first nurse at his bedside wanted to know how much the stroke had affected him and asked if he could recite any poetry. His reply was to sing a hymn as best he could. I think it was "Love divine" but could not swear to it. Continuing to recover fairly speedily, when the duty doctor arrived, Geoffrey detected his accent and replied not in English but, to the physician's surprise, in the doctor's own German.[31] He lived seven more productive years to write more history and sing more hymns to the glory of God, dying at the age of ninety-five.

XI: Conclusion

Charles Wesley gave of his best in "Wrestling Jacob" and his best has enhanced the worship of churches of all descriptions and provided countless singers and readers with stimulation and education in the faith. That his words have touched and moved, not only sinners ready to come into the household of God, but also scholars like Manning and Nuttall, testifies to their enduring power and the truth of the spiritual experience they describe. Manning found the hymn and the scriptural story fitting for his wartime sermon, to inspire courage, defiance, humility and faith. It was, as it turned out, and perhaps Manning suspected that it might be, towards the end of his own life. Geoffrey Nuttall, having lived a very long and fruitful life, then amid his former students, several of whom had become his friends, almost his wider family, made his confession of faith through this detailed examination of "Wrestling Jacob". It is a strange choice, at one level, for Nuttall was a most unathletic figure and always had been, though he admired athletic strength and grace, and Manning too with one lung had never been a sportsman. So a wrestling bout would not seem a natural image for either to sum up his spiritual encounter with Christ. Yet, towards the end of their lives both these gentlemanly scholars naturally turned and returned to this hymn.

We must attribute to Charles Wesley the artistic and scriptural adroitness to engage them both, intellectually and imaginatively for, as we have seen, the poem offers a series of challenging bible studies, if we have the patience and occasion to trace the references. In this hymn Wesley surpassed himself but, if today we pay tribute to him, we note that, as a modest poet, and also a Christian scholar and gentleman, his verse properly points away from him to the scriptures and to Christ.

ALAN ARGENT

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31 Author's personal knowledge.

BEER, BANKRUPTCY AND BAPTISTS: THE WELSH MINISTERIAL SLANDER CASE OF 1894

By the close of the nineteenth century it was almost considered axiomatic that the Welsh were "a nation of Nonconformists". Nonconformity had managed to penetrate every sphere of national life, leading R. Tudur Jones to describe late nineteenth-century Wales as a "Nonconformist Civilisation".[1] In this civilisation the role of the chapel was central; serving as nurseries of democracy, where church members might play a role they were denied in the life of the nation.[2] They were also places where members' lives came under scrutiny, discipline being administered for behaviour which was seen to fall short of the standards expected of Christians. As microcosms of society, or at least a section of society, the chapels did battle with changing views of "right behaviour". Nowhere were these more challenging than in the areas of alcohol and business affairs, as traditional morality came into conflict with the mores of a changing society. The issues this conflict involved were brought sharply into focus in 1894, when Griffith James Williams, Congregational minister at Brynteg, Wrexham, brought an action for libel and slander against William Isaac Morris, Minister of Sardis Congregational Chapel, Pontypridd, a case the *Western Mail* called "a striking illustration of the inner life of chapeldom".[3] As late as 1925 the case was being described as "the Welsh *cause célèbre* of the period".[4]

The extent to which the case was followed in the local and national press suggests that it was seen to possess significance wider than a simple quarrel between individuals, touching on the lifestyle of ministers, denominational rivalries, and the role expected of the minister as a central figure in the community.[5] When one newspaper spoke of the result "… being awaited with some eagerness throughout the Principality",[6] this was because the case possessed not only a significant element of human interest but also a wider significance for Congregationalism.

Griffith James Williams's ministry at Brynteg began on 22 April 1894, the local paper reporting that he "preached in the morning and evening to large congregations".[7] Williams had been called in the usual manner, by a majority vote of the church members after "preaching with a view" on several occasions. Among the testimonials the church received was a glowing reference from John

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1 R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in Wales*, ed. Robert Pope, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 172.
2 Kenneth Young, *Chapel* (London: Methuen, 1972), p. 21.
3 *Western Mail* (16 May 1895).
4 *Tenby Observer* (14 August 1925).
5 E. T. Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1965), pp. 64-5.
6 *Pontypridd Chronicle* (19 October 1894).
7 *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News* (5 May 1894).

Vyrnwy Morgan, minister of the English Congregational Church in Pontypridd, of which Williams had been a member.[8] There was no suggestion that Williams was anything other than a Congregationalist, in good standing with his church, who felt a call to the Christian ministry. While the fact that he had trained for the ministry at Llangollen Baptist College indicated that Williams's denominational loyalties once lay elsewhere this constituted no bar to Williams's holding a Congregational pastorate, since the Baptists agreed with the Congregationalists on every major doctrine save that of the subjects and mode of baptism.

However, all was not well behind the façade of welcome and unity. There had been serious disagreement among church members over calling Williams as pastor. One deacon, Noah Edwards, feeling that Williams's references were too glowing and perceiving gaps in his story, wrote to Isaac Morris, minister of Sardis Welsh Congregational church in Pontypridd since May 1868, and the leading Congregational minister in the town, on 6 March, asking whether he knew anything of Williams.[9] The reply was disturbing:

> I well know the person that you inquire about. He is not recognised as a preacher by the church of which he is a member. He applied for admission into the English Association of East Glamorgan, and was refused. He had charge of two Baptist churches, one after the other in this neighbourhood. He was in business as a grocer after that, and at the same time sold beer in small casks. He at last failed in business. I could have written much more, but the above ought to suffice to help you protect the honour of your pulpit. I cannot on any account recommend him to be your pastor. The first and second points ought to be sufficient for your guidance. Trusting you will not fall into the temptation he has laid for you, I remain, yours faithfully, W. Morris.[10]

Noah Edwards shared the letter and a further statement to the same effect with church and pastor.[11] A copy was also sent to the Denbighshire and Flintshire Welsh Congregational Union, which passed a resolution on 12 April refusing to recognise the pastor of Brynteg, and warning churches against inviting him to preach.[12] This had no effect on the Brynteg church's decision to call Williams, who angrily denied Morris's statements and on 7 June issued a writ against him for libel and slander, claiming the substantial sum of £500 in damages.[13] Explaining the demand, Williams told the press "although he got the

8 *Western Mail* (22 December 1894).
9 Ibid., (21 July 1894).
10 *Cheshire Observer* (20 October 1894).
11 *Western Mail* (12 October 1894).
12 *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News* (15 June 1895).
13 *Liverpool Mercury* (21 July 1894).

appointment [as pastor], he had suffered much annoyance and much injury in consequence of the letter".[14] After a preliminary hearing, the case was sent to be heard at the Liverpool Assizes in August. Morris lodged an appeal with the Queen's Bench Division of the High Court of Justice, at which the case was made public for the first time. In answer to Morris's allegations Williams's lawyer, Horatio Lloyd, replied that he was recognised as a preacher by the Pontypridd English Congregational Church, the churches in which Williams had exercised his ministry were Congregational, and he had not sold beer in casks of any size. Indeed, Williams's counsel declared: "[t]he whole letter . . . constituted a serious libel on the plaintiff".[15]

The defence replied that Morris's letter, written in reply to a direct request in his role as a minister, constituted "privileged communication", so could not be considered libel. Further, Morris's counsel argued that the case ought to be heard in a lower court, observing that Williams was an undischarged bankrupt with liabilities of more than a thousand pounds. Accordingly, he could bring the case secure in the knowledge that he "had no means of paying the defendant's costs if he were directed to do so". He added in conclusion that Williams had timed the issuing of his writ to avoid the case being heard in Glamorgan.[16] The appeal was dismissed, and the case referred to the Liverpool Assizes, one presiding judge implying that there were valid reasons why the case should not be heard in Glamorgan.[17] The passage of a resolution supporting Morris by the Pontypridd and District Temperance Union soon afterwards suggests that this belief had a basis in fact.[18]

The action came before Mr Justice Bruce at the Liverpool Assizes on Wednesday 8 August. Almost at once, the judge expressed his disquiet:

> His Lordship observed that it was an ecclesiastical matter affecting the interests of a denomination. Was there no tribunal that could decide with reference to matters affecting the character of a minister, for that was really what it came to in that case as far as he could gather?[19]

The plain answer to Justice Bruce's question was that no such tribunal existed among the Congregationalists; every church having complete control of its church order and freedom in the matter of calling a minister.[20] Although the Trust Deeds of individual churches might provide a mechanism for resolving

14 *Hampshire Advertiser* (13 October 1894).
15 *Western Mail* (21 July 1894).
16 *Liverpool Mercury* (21 July 1894).
17 *Western Mail* (21 July 1894).
18 *Pontypridd Chronicle* (10 August 1894).
19 *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News* (11 August 1894).
20 T. Rhondda Williams, *How I Found My Faith: A Religious Pilgrimage* (London: Methuen, 1938), pp. 42-3.

disputes within congregations, investigation of the character of an individual minister was more problematic. While a Presbyterian minister would have been able to take such allegations to the relevant presbytery or monthly meeting, no such apparatus existed among the Congregational churches. Although national and local Congregational Unions had existed since 1832, these bodies provided financial assistance to struggling churches, funded church extension, and provided forums for discussion, rather than exercising pastoral oversight, a privilege guarded jealously by individual churches.[21] A system of centralised control over ministerial settlements and removals was not agreed until 1938.[22] All the Congregational Union could do was to condemn a minister or congregation, and expel them from the Union, actions which affected neither the settlement of the minister, nor the right of the church to exist, although they might make the lives of both inconvenient by denying them a part in Congregationalism's wider life.[23] However, Justice Bruce's declaration that the prospect of a legal action between two ministers being discussed in open court was inappropriate went home. The next day it was announced that the two ministers had reached an agreement, and the action would be dropped, since "[t]here were many matters which would have to be gone into which were much better not heard in public".[24]

The arrangement reached by the ministers via their legal representatives was that the matter would be submitted to independent arbitration, a mechanism provided for by a number of church trust deeds for the discipline of errant ministers. Abel Thomas, a Welsh barrister, and MP for East Carmarthenshire, was appointed arbitrator. The son of a Baptist Minister, Abel Thomas had joined the Church of England, and so was considered suitably impartial.[25] Samuel Thomas, MP for Mid-Glamorgan, and future Solicitor-General, represented Isaac Morris, and J. P. Cartwright of Chester represented Williams.[26] Abel Thomas began to hear evidence in the case at Shrewsbury on 11 October,[27] and the hearing lasted five days, evidence being taken at Shrewsbury and Cardiff. In spite of the hopes expressed at the Liverpool Assizes, the proceedings were public, proving an object of interest to many newspapers. This was not simply due to what one paper called "the morbid curiosity of the public".[28] The case

21 W. B. Selbie, *Congregationalism* (London: Methuen, 1927), pp. 139-40; Albert Peel, *These Hundred Years: A History of the Congregational Union of England and Wales 1831-1931* (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1931), pp. 263-6.
22 R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England 1662-1962* (London: Independent Press, 1962), pp. 396-7.
23 W. E. Orchard, *From Faith to Faith: An Autobiography of Religious Development* (London: Harper, 1933), pp.155.
24 *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News* (11 August 1894).
25 *Pontypridd Chronicle* (17 August 1894).
26 *Cheshire Observer* (13 October 1894).
27 *Pontypridd Chronicle* (12 October 1894).
28 Ibid., (17 August 1894).

touched the question of "…whether ministerial recommendations are privileged or not".[29] If Williams had a case, then ministers asked to supply character references for church members would in future have to consider possible legal consequences, if the reference was not to the member's liking.

Williams's case was again stated, albeit with significant modification: it was admitted that the two pastorates in question, at Hebron, Caeharris from 1879 to 1889,[30] then Hafod, in the Rhondda, were of Baptist churches.[31] He had entered business in 1892, and failed, although "[t]here was nothing dishonourable about the bankruptcy", and he was in the process of paying off his creditors.[32] His decision to enter the Congregational ministry was outlined in detail:

> In 1893, in consequence mainly of communications which the plaintiff had with a number of Congregational ministers, and particularly with the Rev. Vyrnwy Morgan, Pontypridd, he seceded from the Baptist Church and joined the Congregational Church.[33]

Having begun to preach in Congregational churches, Williams had applied for the Brynteg pastorate, and was successful. The letter was again referred to, Cartwright arguing that the reference to Williams selling beer implied that he "promoted intemperance, although professing to be a total abstainer".[34] In defence, Morris:

> …admitted that he wrote and published the letters complained of, but he denied that construction which plaintiff put upon them. The letters were written without any malice in a sense of duty, defendant believing what he stated, and further claiming that the letters were privileged communication.[35]

A further element was introduced when Williams declared that Morris had accused him of returning to the Baptist Church "with great repentance".[36] This last point referred to an incident in January 1894, when he had allegedly entered Tabernacle Baptist Church, Pontypridd, "with the intention of rejoining it", staying for the "second meeting" after the evening service, a gathering normally

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29 Ibid., (19 October 1894).
30 *Baptist Handbook* (1890).
31 *Western Mail* (12 October 1894). In fact, the pastorate identified as Hafod seems to have been a short one of less than a year, after which Williams was called to Ainon Welsh Baptist Chapel, Tongwynlais, a rural settlement about three miles from Cardiff. *Baptist Handbook* (1892).
32 *Cheshire Observer* (13 October 1894).
33 *Birmingham Daily Post* (12 October 1894).
34 *Western Mail*, (12 October 1894).
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.

restricted to church members or applicants for membership.[37] Williams denied that he had sought to return to the Baptists, but admitted attending the meeting in question, believing that he had been invited by the minister. A series of special services were taking place, and Williams had gone to lend his support.[38]

Williams's counsel complained at the commencement of the second day's proceedings that "…the plaintiff was much annoyed and inconvenienced by a lot of sneering, smiling, and talking" from Isaac Morris's supporters.[39] Williams appeared emotional when summoned for cross-examination, his answers to the defence's questions evasive. Many of these concerned the question of selling beer, which he had hitherto denied absolutely. In the course of S. T. Evans's cross-examination, it emerged that Williams's wife had conducted a business selling beer from a house adjacent to the family home in Pontypridd, although Williams insisted that he had not approved of this, and took no interest in it,[40] to the extent that he was unaware of the cost of a small barrel of beer.[41] The suggestion was made that his wife had made an attempt to become landlady of a small public house, and Williams had solicited help for her, something he denied, stating that she was not the "lady of prepossessing appearance" on whose behalf he had written supporting an application to take over a public house.[42] He refused to name the lady, later admitting that his wife had agreed to take over a public house and been successfully sued for breaking this agreement. Moreover, the licence allowing his wife to sell beer had been signed by Williams in the presence of witnesses, and the proceeds of the business went into his bank account.[43]

When the cross-examination moved on to Williams's business affairs, the scene became more emotionally fraught. Evans asked whether Williams had made the church aware that he was an undischarged bankrupt. Williams replied he had not, since the matter was "well known". Asked whether he knew of any other undischarged bankrupt who was a minister in Wales, the minister of Brynteg replied, speaking indistinctly, that he knew of one such minister in the south of England, before becoming agitated:

> …rising from his seat at the table, [Williams] said, "I can stand this no longer". He picked up his hat and overcoat, when
>
> The Arbitrator addressed him: Just think what you are doing, Mr. Williams. You have come here to clear your character. Sit down, Mr. Williams.

37 *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News* (20 October 1894).
38 *Western Mail* (13 October 1894).
39 Ibid.
40 *North Wales Chronicle* (20 October 1894).
41 *Cheshire Observer* (13 October 1894).
42 *Western Mail* (13 October 1894).
43 *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News* (20 October 1894).

> Mr. Williams deposited his hat and coat on a stand, re-took his seat, and burst into tears. Rising again, he took up his hat again and left the room.[44]

His counsel left to comfort his client, and soon returned with G. J. Williams, who remained upset, and was unable to speak for some time. Once cross-examination resumed, the question of whether Williams had attempted to rejoin the Baptist church was dealt with, as were the circumstances of his leaving the Baptist ministry. Although this had taken place in 1892, the year of his bankruptcy, Williams attributed the decision to ill-health, rather than his finances. It was revealed, however, that he had not received a letter of transfer from his last church, Ainon, Tongwynlais, a church not initially mentioned by Williams's counsel. This Williams attributed to the fact that he had delayed requesting one for over three months.[45]

Although letters of transfer or dismissal from a church were not legal documents they were important in regulating the conduct of church members, indicating that the holder had left the church while "in good standing", and had not been expelled for a breach of church discipline, or left prior to punishment. This process was considered necessary in order to avoid church discipline becoming a dead letter, members expelled from one church for misconduct simply changing their affiliation, rather than submitting to whatever punishment the elders and deacons of their church might prescribe.[46] In the case of G. J. Williams, the implication was that the letter of transfer/dismissal had been withheld because of a breach of church discipline, and the former minister had transferred his allegiance to the Congregationalists in order to return to the ministry when he would have been debarred from doing so among the Baptists. In support of this contention, it was revealed that Williams had engaged in heated correspondence with Ainon Baptist Church in an attempt to secure letters of dismissal, accusing them of "…trying to get my moral character under your feet". Questioned about the correspondence by S. T. Evans, Williams replied that he could not remember it.[47]

The arbitrator moved on to the question of whether Williams had been recognised as a preacher by the Congregational church of which he was a member. Morris's counsel alleged that Williams was not, observing that he was identified as "Mr. G. J. Williams", rather than "Rev. G. J. Williams" in the church membership lists for 1893.[48] After the hearings moved to Cardiff, for the convenience of witnesses from south Wales,[49] John Vyrnwy Morgan, the

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44 *Western Mail* (13 October 1894).
45 Ibid.
46 Faith Bowers, *A Bold Experiment: The Story of Bloomsbury Chapel and Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church 1848-1999* (London: Bloomsbury Chapel, 1999), pp. 77-8.
47 *Western Mail* (6 November 1894).
48 Ibid., (13 October 1894).
49 *Pontypridd Chronicle* (26 October 1894).

minister who had received Williams into the Congregational church, now at York Road Chapel in Lambeth, was called to testify on behalf of the plaintiff.[50] Morgan informed the arbitrator that Williams had approached him in January 1893 to apply for membership:

> Witness mentioned it to Mr. Davies, the secretary of the church, and others, and the result was that the plaintiff was received into the church … Witness announced Mr. Williams's wish at the nomination meeting, and expressed the hope that he would have a speedy and prosperous settlement among the Congregationalists, by which he meant that he hoped Mr. Williams would soon succeed in getting a Church. After that he assisted Mr. Williams in getting to preach where a minister was needed. He received applications for Mr. Williams to preach and handed them over to him. Witness quite believed that what took place entitled Mr. Williams to preach in Congregational Churches.[51]

Although Vyrnwy Morgan's evidence suggested that Isaac Morris was mistaken in stating that Williams had not been authorised as a preacher, it raised troubling questions. Morgan admitted under cross-examination that Williams had falsified a reference purporting to come from him, using stationery purloined for the purpose.[52] Morgan was admonished by Abel Thomas for having written "a very improper letter… in which certain statements were made in regard to the proceedings", the implication being that he had tried to influence the case.[53] It was also admitted that the East Glamorgan Congregational Association had refused to admit Williams.[54] This latter action, however, was prompted not by questions of character, but the belief that Williams had returned to the Baptist Church.[55] Even if Vyrnwy Morgan had admitted the former Baptist minister to the English Congregational Church as a preacher, Morris's contention that Williams was not recognised to preach was not wholly without foundation.

The final day of hearings was no more propitious for Williams. J. R. Jones, minister of Tabernacle Baptist church, Pontypridd, confirmed that Williams had been received into membership of the church in January 1894, after expressing "great repentance", producing the chapel's membership register as proof. He added that Williams had threatened him with legal action in an attempt to suppress this information.[56] Several deacons of the English Congregational church, Pontypridd, testified that they had not understood Williams to be

50 *Birmingham Daily Post* (6 November 1894).
51 *Western Mail* (6 November 1894).
52 Ibid.
53 *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News* (9 November 1894).
54 *Western Mail* (6 November 1894).
55 *Birmingham Daily Post* (8 November 1894).
56 *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News* (9 November 1894).
57 *Western Mail* (9 November 1894).

authorised to preach.[57] A Dowlais haulier accused Williams of exaggerating the cost of his move from Dowlais to Pontypridd, adding to the impression that Williams's finances were not in order.[58] Summing up for the defence, S. T. Evans poured scorn on Williams and his case, stating:

> . . . he had proved to the hilt all the allegations he had made against plaintiff as to his unfitness to act as the pastor of any Congregational Church. He characterised the plaintiff's evidence as an inartistic patchwork of the grossest misrepresentations and palpable falsehoods, and said that plaintiff was lucky the case was not tried before a judge, otherwise orders might have been made other than striking the case out. Plaintiff had brought the action to clear his character, and had achieved a very different result.[59]

Williams's counsel accused Morris of pursing a personal feud against the former Baptist minister, having "…done all he could to encompass the plaintiff's ruin". Having heard the evidence, Abel Thomas retired to consider his decision, expected a fortnight later.[60]

The verdict was delayed due to difficulties in settling the arbitrator's fee, but was made public on 22 December.[61] Abel Thomas found for Morris on all counts. The decision emphasised that the statements made in respect of G. J. Williams "…were written and published bona fide and without malice under circumstances which rendered the said writing and words privileged communication".[62] Therefore, no libel had taken place, and the case was dismissed.[63]

For Isaac Morris, the decision of the arbitrator was the end of the affair, and he continued to exercise an influential ministry at Sardis until his death in 1902.[64] This was not the case for G. J. Williams, now declared to be an undischarged bankrupt, and a man who had falsified his credentials. Furthermore, the revelations of J. R. Jones showed that at the time Williams had accepted the pastorate of the Congregational church at Brynteg, he was a member of a Baptist church. It was this last difficulty which the Brynteg Church first sought to remedy. At the end of the first Sunday of 1895, Williams was dismissed as a member and the minister of the church. The pulpit remained vacant for six weeks while Williams's future was considered.[65] The February 1895 meeting of the Flintshire and Denbighshire Welsh Congregational Union, at the prompting of four members of the church, appointed a committee of eight

58 *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News* (9 November 1894).
59 *Birmingham Daily Post* (9 November 1894).
60 Ibid.
61 *Western Mail* (22 December 1894).
62 *Pontypridd Chronicle* (28 December 1894).
63 *Western Mail* (22 December 1894).
64 Dr Williams's Library: Surman Index, Card 1947.
65 *Western Mail* (16 May 1895).

to consider the situation.[66] As the six week period drew to a close, the church members met again; the order of business being the reinstatement of G. J. Williams as pastor. Almost half the church members present objected, but Williams's supporters carried the meeting, and on 17 February 1895 J. Vyrnwy Morgan confirmed the church's charge to Williams, who was announced to preach the following Sunday.[67] Several members seceded to form a new church, worshipping at the Board School.[68]

Williams and his supporters refused to meet the Congregational Union's committee of investigation. At their next meeting, in May, the Denbighshire and Flintshire Congregational Union expelled the Brynteg church, passing a vote of censure on Vyrnwy Morgan for taking part in the induction of Williams to the pastorate.[69] This action had no effect on Williams's ability to retain his pastorate, as he explained to the local newspaper:

> The Welsh Congregational Union of Denbighshire and Flintshire had no jurisdiction whatever over me or the church at Brynteg, as I was never a member of the Union, and the church has exercised its independence as a Congregational Church in all its action in this matter.[70]

Williams continued to minister to the congregation which remained at Brynteg, reporting that the church remained in a healthy state even after the withdrawal of several members, and that weekly collections were greatly improved since his induction.[71] A lively correspondence took place between Williams and several pastors attached to the Congregational Union in the local press,[72] and newspaper reports indicate that the church flourished under Williams's charge.[73] However, the strain had begun to tell on the controversial minister, and in December 1895 he announced he would be resigning the pastorate at Brynteg with effect from the end of March 1896.[74] Thereafter, he disappeared from public view. Today, he is a shadowy figure, his former chapel of Hebron, Dowlais unable even to identify him.[75]

The affair left its mark, too, on Vyrnwy Morgan. His obituarists attributed his departure from Pontypridd to his involvement in the libel action, given Morris's

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66 *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News* (11 May 1895).
67 *Western Mail* (16 May 1895).
68 *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News* (11 May 1895).
69 *Western Mail* (10 May 1895).
70 *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News* (18 May 1895).
71 Ibid., (1 June 1895).
72 Ibid., (18 May; 1, 8, 15 June 1895).
73 Ibid., (9 November 1895).
74 Ibid., (21 December 1895).
75 Correspondence with the Church Secretary, Hebron, Dowlais. Williams's other chapels have closed, and their records cannot be located.

standing as a leader of local Congregationalism.[76] Shortly after the Wrexham and Denbighshire Congregational Union's censure vote, Morgan's ministry at York Road, which had begun positively, turned sour, and he joined the Baptist Church in September 1895.[77] After a "brief and chequered" ministry in Swansea,[78] Morgan pastored several churches in the United States. He returned to Wales in 1903, where he was received into the Anglican Church, although he was not re-ordained, but became a professional author, publishing numerous books. He died in reduced circumstances at Tenby in 1925.[79]

Is the story of the Welsh ministerial libel case of 1894 anything more than a diverting tale? The *Western Mail* argued at the time that the case gave an insight into the inner life of Nonconformity.[80] Although the Tory and Anglican character of the paper suggests that this comment was not without bias, the case does not show Nonconformity at its best. It does illustrate certain tendencies within Welsh Nonconformity of the period, as the question is raised why Williams should decide to bring a lawsuit against Isaac Morris for making statements which, although damaging to his character, were substantially true, a course described by S. T. Evans as "insane".[81] He is by no means the only person to have employed a libel suit in an attempt to suppress unpleasant rumours which happen to be true; the case of former Cabinet Minister Jonathan Aitken comes at once to mind.

Central to understanding Williams's motives in bringing his lawsuit is the concept of respectability. This is no new thing with respect to Christian ministry, the Apostle Paul having informed Timothy that "a bishop must be blameless . . ." (1 Tim.3:2, KJV). The Calvinistic Methodists insisted that a candidate for ordination should ". . . have given satisfactory evidence of their faithfulness, sobriety, earnestness, godliness . . ."[82] Morris's letter to Noah Edwards was challenged precisely because it indicated that Williams, judged by the standards of late nineteenth-century Nonconformity, was not respectable. He was involved in the sale of alcohol; he had been declared bankrupt; and his claim to ministerial status in the denomination was irregular.

The first charge is illustrative of changing attitudes to alcohol within Nonconformity. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the consumption of alcohol in moderate quantities was not viewed with any disfavour, although

76 *Western Mail* (11 August 1925); *Tenby Observer* (14 August 1925).
77 Edward E. Cleal, *The Story of Congregationalism in Surrey* (London: J. Clarke, 1908), p.285; *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* (24 September 1895).
78 Tabernacle, Waun Wen, 75th Anniversary Souvenir (Swansea, 1951), p. 3.
79 *Tenby Observer* (14 August 1925).
80 *Western Mail* (16 May 1895).
81 *Birmingham Daily Post* (9 November 1894).
82 *The History, Constitution, Rules of Discipline and Confession of Faith of the Calvinistic Methodists or Presbyterians of Wales* (Caernarfon: Llyfrfa'r Methodistiaid Calfinaidd, 1900), p. 18.

drunkenness had always been punishable by exclusion from membership.[83] Many chapels served ale to visiting preachers, in order to refresh them, and meetings of church officers could be held in public houses without adverse comment. Welcoming a new minister to Capel Als, Llanelli, in 1829, the deacons assembled at the Mansel Arms, "each with his pint before him".[84] The Revd James Buckley, pioneer of Wesleyan Methodism in Llanelli at the end of the eighteenth century, established Buckley's Brewery in the town,[85] running it after retiring from the itinerant ministry in 1832.[86] The Deer family, prominent in the same denomination, owned the lease of a public house.[87] In case it should be thought that Llanelli was a special case, the Three Cranes public house at Pontypool was owned by a Calvinistic Methodist elder, and as late as the 1860s many London Welsh went from chapel to the public house on Sunday evenings.[88] In 1892, the Baptists at Dowlais rented the long-room of a public house for services, although by that time such action had become a matter for surprised comment.[89]

From 1831, attitudes towards alcohol had begun to change with the formation of the first Welsh Temperance Association. At first, these organisations merely encouraged members to exercise moderation in drinking, but advocacy of total abstention from alcoholic drinks soon took its place.[90] "Signing the pledge" to abstain from intoxicating liquor became a feature of chapel life, in many cases going hand in hand with full-hearted Christian commitment.[91] Increasingly, regulation of the sale of alcohol became one of the political aims of Nonconformity, the Welsh Sunday Closing Act of 1881 being the first fruits of this movement.[92] Since one of the means of circumventing the Act was the illegal drinking den, or shebeen, "where beer is taken in casks from a wholesale dealer

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83 Arthur H. Driver, *Carrs Lane 1748-1948* (Birmingham: Carrs Lane Church, 1948), p. 43; A. G. Matthews, *The Congregational Churches of Staffordshire* (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1924), pp. 175-6.

84 Jones, *Congregationalism in Wales*, p. 168.

85 Huw Edwards, *Capeli Llanelli: Our Rich Heritage* (Carmarthen: Cyngor Sir Gaerfyrddin, 2009), p. 471.

86 Donald G. Knighton, 'English Speaking Methodism', in Lionel Madden (ed.), *Methodism in Wales: A Short History of the Wesleyan Tradition* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 2003), p. 6.

87 J. Wyn Evans, Noel Gibbard and Maurice Loader, *Footprints of Faith* (Llanelli: Llanelli Borough Council, no date [1991]), p. 40.

88 W. R. Lambert, *Drink and Sobriety in Victorian Wales: c.1820-c.1895* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982), pp. 120-1.

89 *Western Mail* (17 May 1892).

90 Jones, *Congregationalism in Wales*, pp. 168-9. These developments were not confined to Wales; England also saw greater separation between Nonconformity and alcohol. See e.g. K. W. Wadsworth, *Yorkshire United Independent College: Two Hundred Years of Training for the Christian Ministry by the Congregational Churches of Yorkshire* (London: Independent Press, 1954), pp. 67-8.

91 T. Mardy Rees, *Seth Joshua and Frank Joshua: The Renowned Evangelists* (Wrexham: Principality Press, 1926), pp. 7-11.

92 Lambert, *Drink and Sobriety in Victorian Wales*, p. 123.

and consumed upon premises which are unlicensed",[93] the accusation that Williams was selling beer "in small casks" carried with it the implication that he might have been supplying such illegal establishments. Morris, a noted temperance crusader whose zeal had brought him into court after charging Pontypridd magistrates "… with having wilfully and knowingly done all in their power to make the [Sunday Closing] Act a dead letter", could not have been expected to ignore Williams's selling of alcohol.[94]

Furthermore, Williams having indicated that he was a teetotaler when applying to the church at Brynteg laid himself open to the charge of hypocrisy or deception.[95] Ministers were increasingly expected to set an example to their congregations, even evangelical Anglicans, such as John Griffiths of Neath, signed the pledge in an effort to curb drunkenness.[96] Williams's argument that it was not he, but his wife, who had been responsible for the sale of beer appeared disingenuous, since he admitted receiving the proceeds of the business and had signed the application for her licence. His evident discomfort with discussion of the beer business indicates that Williams accepted the belief that the sale of alcoholic drinks was an unsuitable occupation for a minister.[97]

It was not only beer but bankruptcy which Williams had concealed in his past. Although this did not form part of the slander accusation, when S. T. Evans asked Williams about his finances, the minister broke down in tears. He had vacated his previous pastorate at the same time as his bankruptcy, although he insisted this had been for health reasons. The reason for this is clear; bankrupts were subject to church discipline, although the circumstances leading to the bankruptcy were normally analysed before any punishment was imposed.[98] The most celebrated example is the action of Bloomsbury Chapel, London, towards its founder, Sir Morton Peto, on his bankruptcy in 1866, when Peto had been strongly criticised by the church meeting in spite of being cleared of deliberate wrongdoing.[99] This reflected a long tradition of Nonconformist disapproval of business failure, discipline for which could extend to temporary excommunication and even expulsion from membership.[100] In 1879 the Sunday School Superintendent at Newton Park Congregational Chapel, Leeds, had resigned when facing financial embarrassment, believing this would be better

93 Ibid., p. 226.
94 *Western Mail* (4 February 1884).
95 Ibid., (21 July 1894).
96 Roger Lee Brown, *Ten Clerical Lives: Essays Relating to the Victorian Church in Wales* (Welshpool: Tair Eglwys Press, 2005), pp. 111-2.
97 *Wrexham Advertiser and North Wales News* (20 October 1894).
98 Jane Garnett, 'Nonconformists, economic ethics and the consumer society in mid-Victorian Britain', in Jane Shaw and Alan Kreider (eds.), *Culture and the Nonconformist Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), pp. 108-9.
99 Bowers, *A Bold Experiment*, pp. 175-82.
100 Elaine Kaye, *The History of the King's Weigh House Church: A Chapter in the History of London* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), p. 53; Driver, *Carrs Lane*, p. 44.

for the church than its being associated with his business difficulties.[101] For a minister, in keeping with the biblical injunction that he should be "above reproach", financial mismanagement short of bankruptcy could also lead to dismissal; witness the removal of Thomas Handford, second minister of Bloomsbury Chapel, when he became financially embarrassed and refused church attempts to reduce his expenditure.[102] Williams's supporters were anxious to establish that there had been "nothing dishonourable" about the bankruptcy, but the sum owed suggests that Williams had been, at the very least, guilty of serious imprudence. Similarly, Williams's attempts to prove that he had paid off most of his debts were not supported by firm evidence, allowing S. T. Evans to argue that he had done nothing of the sort.[103] Understandably, Williams was ashamed of his bankruptcy but concealing this from the church at Brynteg added to the impression that he was not a suitable minister, and had been aware of this fact when applying to the church.

Probably the least shocking of Morris's suggestions was the statement that Williams had been pastor of two Baptist churches, and was still a Baptist. There is good reason for this; Nonconformist denominations have rarely had difficulty accepting each other's orders. For example, Baptist minister David Davies was offered a pastorate in the Presbyterian Church of England shortly after leaving college.[104] Vyrnwy Morgan, as already noted, moved to the Baptists in 1895, an action which although requiring baptism on profession of faith in this instance did not necessitate re-ordination.[105] However, this does not mean that relations between the denominations were wholly amicable. While Dissenters might present a united front against Anglicanism and Tory politics, the division between denominations was still great enough for a dispute between Baptists and other Nonconformists to have threatened to split the Liberal Party in the East Glamorgan constituency, which included Pontypridd, at the 1885 General Election.[106] Although relations between the Nonconformist denominations had

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101 Clyde Binfield, 'The Story of Button Hill', in Alistair Mason (ed.), *Religion in Leeds* (Stroud: A Sutton, 1994), p. 88. In Yorkshire, the discipline of church members for bankruptcy only ceased with the slump which followed the Great War, when distress was so widespread that "... all knew only too well that the responsibility no longer lay with a single individual". K. W. Wadsworth, *Yorkshire United Independent College*, pp. 176-7.

102 Bowers, *A Bold Experiment*, pp. 185-9. It must be noted that Handford's case was aggravated by the subsequent revelation of adultery (idem, p. 188).

103 *Birmingham Daily Post* (9 November 1894).

104 David Davies, *Reminiscences of My Country and People* (Cardiff: Simkin Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1925), p. 90. The Presbyterian Church of England, organised in 1876 from the Presbyterian Church in England and the English Synod of the United Presbyterian Church, should not be confused with the Presbyterian Church of Wales (Calvinistic Methodists).

105 In the case of a Baptist Church, the nature of the minister's baptism would depend on the constitution of the specific church.

106 National Library of Wales: Letters to Lord Pontypridd 117, B. D. Johns to Alfred Thomas, 31 December 1910.

begun to thaw by 1893, they were not yet wholly amicable, and the question of the mode and subjects of baptism remained a contentious issue.[107] That Williams had professed to secede from the Baptists to join the Congregationalists, while simultaneously attempting to be reconciled to his former denomination, like his concealment of his involvement in the sale and beer and his bankruptcy, only added to the impression of deliberate deception.

The question of Williams's claim to have been a recognised preacher among the Congregationalists is more complicated. Vyrnwy Morgan, the minister who received Williams into the English Congregational church at Pontypridd clearly believed that he had accepted Williams as a preacher, while some of the deacons in that fellowship felt no such recognition had been granted. Morris based his statement that Williams was not an accredited Congregational preacher on the fact that he had not been recognised by the East Glamorgan Congregational Union, a fact which was not disputed in the hearing before the arbitrator, although, since the Congregational Unions were merely voluntary associations of churches, rather than denominational courts, the meaning of such a refusal was open to question. Morris, the leading Congregational minister in Pontypridd, seems to have been disposed to treat the Union as a quasi-official body, while Morgan and Williams emphasised the independence of the local church in recognising preachers. This represents a local instance of a question which would continue to bedevil the Free Churches into the twentieth century, proposals to introduce central ministerial recognition stirring up fierce passions on both sides, famous preachers such as Joseph Parker arguing against anything which tended towards a "Free Church of England".[108]

Given what was revealed about Williams in Isaac Morris's letter to the chapel at Brynteg, a further question presents itself – why did the church call Williams, and why, having called him, did a majority of the congregation stand by him once his libel action against Morris had been dismissed? Although he remains a shadowy figure, it is clear from contemporary newspaper reports that Williams was possessed of considerable charisma. At Caeharris and Hafod, he had ministered to large congregations,[109] and the congregation at Brynteg increased under his ministry, despite the split caused by his re-appointment. The Baptists of Pontypridd seem to have been encouraged by his apparent return to their ranks in January 1894, a reminder that, in an age when preachers possessed an aura of celebrity, some were able to maintain a following even after embarrassments or difficulties. The example of Vyrnwy Morgan, who continued to show support for Williams even after it was revealed that Williams had made unauthorised use of his name and stationery, indicates that Williams was able to inspire confidence among personal acquaintances, even in the face of evidence to the

107 R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation: Wales 1890-1914*, ed. Robert Pope (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), pp. 54-7.

108 Albert Peel, *These Hundred Years*, pp. 263-5.

109 *Western Mail* (20 December 1884).

contrary. The same may be said of the large debts which Williams had been able to incur before his bankruptcy; few men with only £15 in assets were able to secure credit for amounts totalling more than a thousand pounds. On a similar note, William Spurgeon, minister of Wood Street Congregational Church, Cardiff, a great preacher who did much for his church, was able to draw away sufficient members to form a new church after he was dismissed for immoral conduct in 1900.[110]

The Williams case also illustrates the difficulties attending independent churches. Without an agreed mechanism for settling disputes between ministers, or investigating alleged irregularities in the orders or call of ministers, there was sometimes a necessity to appeal to the law courts over religious issues, when voluntary mechanisms broke down. Although the Gorham case of 1849 (in which the Bishop of Exeter's refusal to institute Charles Gorham to a parish because of his baptismal theology was overturned by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council) was frequently appealed to by Nonconformists to show that the Church of England was a creature of the state,[111] the Welsh ministerial libel case of 1894 indicated that Nonconformity could also be driven to appeal to Caesar in order to resolve difficulties which the machinery of the church proved incapable of addressing. Although the ministers concerned agreed to submit the dispute to independent arbitration, this was only after the case had gone to court, attracting the attention of the local and national press.

The libel case brought little credit on Congregationalism. After Williams's case was dismissed, the impotence of the Congregation Union to discipline an erring minister was exposed. As long as a majority of his congregation supported him, and Williams was able to endure ostracism, he could not be removed. The Union could only expel the miscreants, and since they had never recognised Williams as a minister, they could only expel his church. This act was little more than a gesture, since the church had full control over its buildings and finances, and collections were healthy. In light of Williams's eventual resignation, however, ostracism seems to have proved almost as effective as formal disciplinary action.

The Welsh ministerial libel case of 1894 cannot be described as Congregationalism's finest hour. It provides, however, both an illustration of the inner workings of Welsh Congregationalism, and of changing attitudes towards ministerial respectability; attitudes shared by all the players in this drama, with the possible exception of Vyrnwy Morgan. Williams's concealment of his involvement with beer, bankruptcy, and Baptists, and his attempt to suppress Isaac Morris's revelation of them show a shared recognition of correct

110 Dr Williams's Library, Surman Index, card 1830.

111 L. E. Elliott-Binns, *Religion in the Victorian Era* (London: Lutterworth, 1936), pp. 227-9; Owen Chadwick, *Hensley Henson: A Study in the Friction Between Church and State* (Norwich: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 3.

behaviour. There was one key difference in their attitudes. Morris contended that the important thing was the avoidance of such entanglements, while for Williams the misconduct apparently consisted in being found out, hence his attempt to employ the law to silence Morris. In acting thus, however, G. J. Williams moved beyond the bounds of respectable behaviour, rendering himself, and those connected with him, beyond the pale to most Congregationalists. The chief casualty of the affair was not Williams, who had enjoyed a long career in the Baptists before his difficulties had begun, but Vyrnwy Morgan, whose involvement in the case ended his once promising career in Congregationalism.

GERARD CHARMLEY

FATHERS AND BRETHREN[1] ADDRESSESS BY CHAIRMEN OF THE CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF ENGLAND AND WALES (1940-1965) AND PRESIDENTS OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN ENGLAND AND WALES (1966-1972)

Part II
III: 1960s: Winds of Change

This decade has been defined as the "Swinging Sixties". It saw years of growing affluence. Average weekly earnings rose by a staggering 130 per cent between 1955 and 1969. Home ownership rose to 50 per cent, car ownership from 2.3 million to 11.5 million. Affluence led to changing social patterns. The traditional British seaside holiday declined as a result of competition from holidays abroad, especially in the rapidly expanding tourist destination resorts in Spain. The motor car changed shopping habits from a daily visit to local shops to a single weekly shop at the supermarket. Television sets, now owned by nine in ten households, became the focus of the home-centred society. The churches quickly noted the adverse impact of television on Sunday evening congregations and church activities on weekday evenings.

The 1960s heralded the passing of the age of deference. The Establishment which had held sway through the 1950s became the target of satire. The satirical magazine *Private Eye* first appeared on the magazine racks in 1961. There were massive changes in education with the introduction of comprehensive schools, abolishing the Eleven Plus examination which had divided secondary education into grammar and secondary modern schools, and the expansion of Higher Education through the founding of new universities.

There were also wide-ranging social changes. Capital punishment was abolished; abortion, homosexual acts between consenting adults, and suicide were decriminalised; divorce became easier and lost some of its stigma. Theatrical performances were no longer censored by the Lord Chamberlain, reflecting a greater measure of sexual freedom, and what came to be described as the "permissive society". In pop culture, music replaced the spoken word as the vehicle of communication.

Abroad, Britain lost her empire with the progressive granting of independence to most of her former colonies. Social historian, Dominic Sandbrook, sums up the 1960s as a time of national optimism. "Britain was a country not of grey skies and wet weekends, but of bikinis and mini-skirts, boutiques and bistros, dolly birds and pop stars."[2] Not least of the triumphs of

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1 This was the traditional opening salutation. It gradually fell out of use during the period under review.

2 D. Sandbrook, *White Heat* (London: Abacus, 2006), p. 305.

the decade was England's football team winning the World Cup in 1966.

For the churches in this decade the winds of change were adverse. "The period between 1956 and 1973 witnessed unprecedented rapidity in the fall of Christian religiosity among the British people."[3] There was a rapid decline in the number of church marriages and baptisms. Callum Brown attributes this to a sudden collapse in female piety which had remained strong in the 1940s and 1950s. British women secularised their identity and deserted the churches. Femininity was de-pietised and piety was de-feminised. The decline was immediately apparent in the dramatic fall in the number of scholars in the Sunday Schools. "An institution which had once catered for the bulk of the child population had become almost exclusively the preserve of children from church-going families."[4] The cause of the decline was variously attributed to the effect of the 1944 Education Act that made Christian worship and religious instruction compulsory in State schools, and also to the growth in car ownership providing opportunities for family outings. Whatever the reasons attendance at Sunday School ceased to be normative for children. The theological waters were stirred by the then Bishop of Woolwich, John Robinson, whose book *Honest to God* (1963) and a prominent article in *The Observer* under the title "Our Image of God must go", openly expressed what many church-going people were thinking. If, as Robinson argued, man had come of age, and Christianity, in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words, was now to be "religionless", was it necessary to belong to the Church?

On the positive side, the New English Bible project, under the chairmanship of the Congregationalist C. H. Dodd, came to fruition with the publication of the New Testament version in 1961, bringing the Bible to a new and wider readership. The opening of the Second Vatican Council, convened by Pope John XXIII in 1962, brought the promise of change and a warmer relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the "separated brethren". The decade was notable for a growing sense of urgency for the reunion of the separated churches. The Faith and Order Conference of the British churches, meeting at Nottingham in 1964, boldly resolved to covenant together to work and pray for the inauguration of their union by an agreed date, not later than Easter Day 1980. Described by Norman Goodall as a "splendidly irrational symbol", given the fervent atmosphere of the conference it did not seem an impossible dream. It certainly spurred on the Congregationalists and Presbyterians, in a covenant relationship since 1951, to make progress in their slow journey towards union.

The year 1960 brought to the chair the minister of Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dr John Trevor Davies. His election recognised his varied and distinguished services to Congregationalism over many years in local pastoral

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3 Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 188.

4 Doreen Rosman, "Sunday Schools and Social Change in the Twentieth Century", in S. C. Orchard and J. H. Y. Briggs (eds.), *The Sunday School Movement: Studies in the Growth and Decline of Sunday Schools* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), p. 157.

charge and on the teaching staff of New College, London, where he had held the Chair of Philosophy and Psychology of Religion. Trevor Davies's preaching gifts – he was one of the last of the "princes of the pulpit" – were reflected in his address, which was an extended sermon on the theme of "Christ Pre-eminent", based on a text from Paul's letter to the Colossians, "that in all things he might have the pre-eminence" (Col.1:18). He posed a number of questions: What are we here for? What's the meaning and purpose of life? What do we mean when we use the word God? What hope is there for the future? Is there anything to expect beyond the present life? The answer to all these questions lies in Jesus Christ. The way of life shown to us in him is the highest and most rewarding man has ever conceived. In him are all the resources of grace we need for full and abundant life. The address was an eloquent appeal not just to give Christ *a place* in our lives, as many do, or even *prominence*, as many do, but to give him the *pre-eminence.* "This must we do if we would know what he can and will do for us."

Herbert Alfred ("Bert") Hamilton had long been influential in English Congregationalism as a former Youth and Education Secretary, and in educational circles as Principal of Westfield Training College, Birmingham. His book, *The Family Church in Principle,* published in 1941, had set out a new vision for Christian Education and Youth Leadership in the local churches. Such a vision was urgently needed since it had become apparent that Sunday Schools were failing in their task of growing children and young people into committed membership of the Church. At the time of his chairmanship Hamilton was seeking to fulfil his vision as minister at Union Church, Brighton.

In his address to the 1961 Assembly, "Communication and the Christian Community", Hamilton addressed the issue of a mass culture in which religious practice now had little place and the Christian ethic had a diminished authority. He explored three themes. First, the Gospel of the Incarnation needs a community or it has no living language. Next, this community must be exposed to the world of contemporary need and opportunity, or it cannot speak so as to be heard. Third, there were lively ways in which Congregational churches, larger or smaller, could learn how to become such communities. There was no uniform blueprint which all churches might adopt. Experiment and variety were needed to draw church members into the kind of relationship in which they could explore the Gospel together and discover its power for themselves and their "neighbours". But the small group, perhaps meeting informally in a home, "may well be the occasion for drawing in folk on the fringe, the parent with a problem, the outsider with a grievance, the unbeliever with his doubts". Preaching would have its place in these newly structured communities but would not necessarily be the primary means of communication. The large congregation had its place but as "the inspiring setting for the life of small companies, not as a substitute for them". It is meaningless to talk about the function of a worshipping community if it is not a community at all. Our task is "how to create such a Christian company in the local church that the children and young people in our care are nourished by the Gospel, and those outside feel the living impact of it".

He stressed the importance for ministers and laymen of training for this new vision. "To make another aware," he said, "that he is accepted as he is, wholly, in his dumbness or his doubts, in his need of body or mind, be he teenager or adult, this is an art which is not easily learned [but] is the communication of the Gospel indeed." This was an address which went to the heart of the nature of the Church and how a local church should seek to structure itself for mission. It was an address which showed what evangelism should mean in practice.

The Tercentary of the Great Ejectment fell in 1962 which had led to the creation of Dissent and modern Nonconformity. The chairman for that year was John Huxtable, Principal of New College, London. He had been chosen without a ballot on account of his established place in Congregationalism and his commitment to church reunion. The challenge he faced was to celebrate the ejectment, which had caused such hurt and pain, but to do so without rancour and in an ecumenical spirit.

Huxtable took as his title, "The Tradition of our Fathers". Those who had dissented from the Established Church in the seventeenth century had not been willingly sectarian or divisive. They had derived their theological and ecclesiastical principles from Scripture, believing that to follow the Word of God was to be obedient to Christ. The Act of Uniformity of 1662 and other legislation at the time had presented them with four issues: first, the form in which Christians ought to conduct the public worship of God – the Book of Common Prayer; second, the right of the State to dictate how the people of God should order its worship; third, the requirement that only episcopal ordination was valid; fourth, that the Bible was the one and only supreme standard for the Church in all matters of Faith and Order. The question they asked was not "Is it ancient?" but "Is it scriptural?" Assessing the relevance of those concerns today was not so easy. Nor should we assume that we must seek rigidly to reproduce in our own day the exact fabric of their thought and the precise pattern of their church life. Two further important principles guiding our Dissenting fathers were that the Church should be continually reformed according to the Word of God, and that the hearts and minds of Christ's people should at all times be open to the work of the Holy Spirit. Many changes had taken place in the last three hundred years. The atmosphere of religious awareness in which those of the seventeenth century lived was utterly different from that of our times. A vast improvement in church relations had taken place. A variety of factors, biblical, missionary, ecclesiastical and sociological had brought to the fore the supreme importance of the Church's unity. "We are in the piquant position of celebrating the tercentenary of a schism in an ecumenical atmosphere." Together we have to face the pagan or semi-pagan atmosphere of our times and not to do in separation what we should do in concert. "Whatever justification there was for division in the past, and there was much, does not permit us to evade the challenge of God's will to unity." The principle held by our fathers in the seventeenth century, that all they did should be agreeable to the Word of God, remained valid, but had to be interpreted for a new age. Today's Church cannot avoid its responsibilities in the twentieth century by retreating into some seventeenth century museum. Faithfulness to the tradition of our fathers meant

seeking the light and truth that is still breaking forth from the Word. Three hundred years after the Great Ejectment of 1662, the basic issue facing Congregationalists was whether they were ready to will the means towards a united church, with a true episcopate functioning within it. This was an irenic address which provided a model for future commemorations of the Great Ejectment.

The following year brought another college Principal to the chair of the Union, Dr John Marsh, Principal of Mansfield since 1953. On becoming Principal, Marsh had immediately recognised that the college could not survive indefinitely as a small and inadequately endowed theological college on the fringe of the University. Financial constraints and a deep conviction that ordinands should interact during their training for the ministry with students preparing for a wide variety of future careers led to Mansfield becoming a Permanent Private Hall of the University of Oxford and admitting students to read for degrees other than theology.

Marsh based his chairman's address on the *Gloria* which he developed in three themes – evangelical, educational and ecumenical. It was not too difficult for the church to sing a *Gloria* for the evangelism of the past, but the Church was uncertain how to evangelise in a secular, religionless age. To do this required entering into a new dialogue with contemporary men and women, and listening more carefully to the questions modern man was asking. Christian action would also speak louder than words. Turning to education, he reminded the Assembly that from its beginnings Congregationalism had always valued education which in the Dissenting Academies of the eighteenth century had educated lay students as well as candidates for the ministry. He pleaded for more generous support of the colleges by the churches and that the Maintenance of the Ministry Fund should be extended to provide financial support for ordinands during their training. He suggested that ordinands (now no longer required for National Service) should spend a year in secular employment before beginning ordination training and that a further year should be spent in supervised training and practice. Most of these recommendations were to be implemented in later years. On the ecumenical front he urged that Congregationalists and Presbyterians should resolve the confusion in their present covenant relationship and pass from duality into unity. In the wider ecumenical context he called for a new crusade for unity – with the Nottingham Faith and Order Conference due to take place in 1964 – and that Congregationalists should recognise there was no hope of attaining any comprehensive church unity unless the united body be an episcopal church. He supported the plea of his immediate predecessor in the Chair that Congregationalists should not oppose the word episcopacy "but to share with our fellow Christians in the search for its true meaning, and for the full and rich reality of a true episcopacy to be embodied in a united church".

The chairman for 1964, Joseph Arthur Figures, touched on similar issues. Figures was Secretary and Moderator of the North-West Province, having previously served as Secretary of the Yorkshire Congregational Union. He had been instrumental in effecting the union of the Yorkshire and Lancashire Colleges to form the Northern Congregational College. He brought to the chair

wide experience of Congregationalism, both at home, through membership of many of its committees, and abroad, through his participation in meetings of the International Congregational Council.

In his address, "The Challenge of Change", he outlined some uncomfortable facts. A century earlier in a population of eighteen million, one in thirty-eight of the population had had some definite connection with a Congregational Church. Now with a population of forty-seven million, only about one person in 130 claimed a connection. Of the Union's 2,760 churches, only 662 had more than 100 members, and only 169 had more than 200 members. Small churches with less than fifty members (nearly 50 per cent of the total) were finding increasing difficulty in producing capable leadership. The only hope for many of them lay in co-operation with other neighbouring churches. Issues of redundancy or shared ministry needed to be faced. Questions needed to be asked about the life of the denomination and whether it was necessary for the work of denominational committees to be done thirty-five times over in the County Unions. There was a great deal of wasteful administration that could be done by fewer people in larger units. Did the denomination need seven theological colleges, all in some kind of financial difficulty, and housing only 185 students compared with nine colleges at the turn of the century with 300 students? "We need a common strategy that will take into account the new ecumenical situation and the exciting possibility of training Protestant ministers in a united theological institute." A further area of great change and opportunity lay in the field of inter-church relationships which had so greatly developed since the Ecumenical Movement began fifty years earlier. The World Council of Churches, the British Council of Churches, and the recent invitation by the Roman Catholic Church to send Protestant observers to the Vatican Council were steps on the path to fulfilling God's will that the Church should be visibly and organically one.

The most urgent challenge however remained that of evangelism. In reality the Church had never fully come to terms with the facts of an industrial society and had never had any close contact with the mass of the population. Churches had assumed they had a larger place in society than was in fact the case, and while having some successes in suburban areas, had mostly suffered defeat elsewhere. This presented a challenge to every local church. "The Church cannot be His Church without being irresistibly compelled always to move out in genuine concern towards all men everywhere. Evangelism springs out of the Gospel."

In 1965 the last Chairman of the Congregational Union in England and Wales was again a minister in local pastoral charge, Alfred Ernest Gould, minister of London Road, Chelmsford, having had earlier pastorates at Ramsgate and Robertson Street, Hastings. Chelmsford was then one of the fastest growing towns in the country and London Road had significantly increased its membership during his ministry. His address, "For the Facing of this Hour" posed three questions: What kind of churches does God require to continue his redeeming purpose in Christ in the vastly altered conditions of our time? What quality of discipleship is needed in these churches if the Gospel is to be

proclaimed and Christ lifted up so that men may be drawn to him? What changes are called for if we, in Congregationalism, are to be made fit for the facing of this hour? New technology, computers and automation were creating a new world with bewildering speed. Young people would no longer accept the religious dogmatism or the sexual ethics of their elders. He caught the changed mood of the decade. "We have to preach the glorious Gospel of the blessed God in a world from which all the accepted authorities and established institutions have already gone or are sliding into the melting-pot of change and revolution." There were however no slick answers or remedies for the churches in this situation. Churches needed to recapture the strength and value of the Church Meeting and develop it as the training-ground for the witnessing ministry of the whole church, including ministers, deacons and members. All members of the church should be equipped for the apostolate of the laity so that they could take the Gospel into factories, works canteens, schools, shops and offices as spearheads of evangelism. He suggested that the denomination should develop a residential training centre for weekend or week long special training courses where the laity might be trained to be evangelists in their own circles. This would later bear fruit in the Windermere Centre of the United Reformed Church. He added a warning not to expect immediate or spectacular results. In the past there had been both times of advance and retreat in the Church's story. The present generation was entrusted with one of the most important holding operations in all Christian history. "God has entrusted to us this holding operation: we are fighting to hold the line while God prepares the next forward surge." Time alone would tell whether that prophecy would be fulfilled and, if the surge which Gould expected took place, whether it would be on the European continent or in other parts of the world.

The Assembly in 1966 was important because it saw the disappearance of the Congregational Union of England and Wales and its rebirth as the Congregational Church in England and Wales (CCEW). In making this change Congregationalism had relinquished its insistence that the word "church" applied only to a local grouping of Christ's people or to the one Universal Church. It recognised that a denomination might now be a Church. A number of Congregational churches which had been members of the national Union, including London's Westminster Chapel, refused to be part of the new Church, but for the most part the new Church was comprised of churches of the former Union.

This was also the year when the London Missionary Society, which since 1795 had been a voluntary association largely supported by the Congregational churches, merged with other agencies to form the Congregational Council for World Mission (CCWM). Church and mission were now to be integrated. From this Assembly onward the Church would be responsible through the CCWM for its overseas enterprise. The Church's share in the Council's work would be reported on and discussed on the floor of the Assembly and not as hitherto in the separate meetings of the Missionary Society.

The first President of the new Congregational Church was Maxwell Osborne Janes. He had served for many years as General Secretary of the London

Missionary Society and had been appointed to serve the new CCWM as its consultant secretary. He began his address – "As Fire . . . by Burning" – with a reference to the newly constituted Papua Ekalesia where at its inauguration one of the Papuan representatives had declared: "now we are a Church, we must have a mission". The CCEW was now a Church and this would accelerate the process of developing the new relationship between local congregations that had been apparent for some time. The Assembly had already become more like a big Church Meeting than had previously been the case. "Its decisions and judgments are to be given a similar weight and authority to those of the local church, and are to be accepted by those churches unless there are conscientious grounds for refusal." This new oneness would hopefully facilitate the process of the CCEW uniting with other Churches.

As a Church the CCEW must have a mission. Emil Brunner had said: "the Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning". Its mission was to enable people to cross the frontier from unbelief to belief. The mission field was not some distant place but here at home where there were many practical unbelievers. "There is a battle for belief to be won in the minds of our fellow countrymen." A particular concern was the fall in the number of young people and children in the churches. "We have lost tens of thousands of children in the last ten years." The churches must learn to see themselves as the spearhead of the love of God, not cosy coteries of the comfortable.

Responsibility for mission overseas would be integral to the new Church. Church members should now be able to see that to belong to a Congregational church involved them in spreading the Gospel to the ends of the earth. The Church's total resources – of money and people – would need to be allocated to fulfil the mission of the whole Church. It would now be the direct responsibility of the CCEW to seek out, encourage and put forward likely young people for overseas mission. This applied not only to those offering full time services to the Church overseas; he commended the Associates scheme whereby church members going abroad to fill secular posts were encouraged to offer a Christian witness in their work overseas. "God is giving us new tools with which to get on with the job. Let us bend our wills and dedicate our service to it."

In his address Maxwell Janes had called for the Church to use the ideas of the foremost thinkers to help it find ways of speaking with modern people. Aubrey Russell Vine, who followed him in 1967, brought to the Presidency of the Church exceptional gifts of scholarship, preaching, pastoral care, administration and ecumenical experience. For twenty four years he had been minister of the influential Broad Street Congregational Church in Reading. This had been followed by six years as a professor at the Yorkshire United Independent College, and since 1957 the General Secretaryship of the Free Church Federal Council. His scholarly gifts and his sensitivity to the times were reflected in his address: "The Word and the Church". Everything, he said, was in a state of flux. The questions of the day were "Will the atom bomb pulverise us?" and "Is God really dead?" The latter question was the one that mattered. "The Christian Faith has never been attacked on so wide a front nor so sedulously and insidiously

undermined." Within the limits of time imposed by the address, he set out what really mattered to him and why. There could be no rigid proofs of God's existence but, he said, "I cannot make sense of the universe in which I find myself, logically, scientifically, or philosophically, without belief in God". This includes the belief that *God has spoken* and that "In the beginning was the Word" (Jn1:1). The Word has found expression through Zoroaster, Socrates, Philo, Elijah, Isaiah, Hosea – "through all these the Word found expression, limited by the circumstances of humanity but evidencing a divine drive giving meaning and purpose to this our life". Supremely God has spoken by his Son. He made the bold statement that the details of the Gospel narrative were not important. We may not be able to recover the actual words of Christ, but what is important is that the words we have express something that is eternally true. It did not matter whether Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" but whether he is in fact that. God is still speaking his Word through the Holy Spirit. "We are privileged to live in the final state of God's unfolding purpose for the world in which we live." This is the dispensation of the Spirit whereby God continues to evidence himself in the world. The challenge facing the Church is to realise that we are Christ's successors in the working out of God's purpose in a world which is at present the scene of grim conflict. The important question then becomes "Who is on the Lord's side?" But separated denominations cannot face this challenge alone. Members of the Church cannot escape being one family if they claim God as Father. The sense of guilt about our divisions and a new readiness to work together wherever possible were joyful signs of our generation. There were converging ways to the City of God – "each sees one colour of thy rainbow light" – but we can move toward the end of this twentieth century secure with a Word that is utterly sure.

The theme of church unity came to dominate the later years of the decade as Congregationalists and Presbyterians continued their negotiations for union, and as hopes for wider union were given impetus by the 1964 Nottingham Conference. In 1968 Charles Aneurin Haig made a powerful plea for church unity in his presidential address to the Assembly – "Pathways to Unity – which way shall we go?"

Haig had become Moderator of the South West Province after serving in large pastorates at Abertillery, Heaton Moor, St James's, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and Robertson Street, Hastings. He began his address by confessing that in the early days of his ministry he had known little and cared less about other denominations. Gradually however the conviction had grown that denominationalism was dying and that the unity of the Church must be made visible. Denominationalism, which included Christian communions such as the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches as well as such bodies as the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, had divided the People of God into separate bodies. All the churches had to examine their past and their present to find a new way forward. Congregationalism must be part of this process. In the nineteenth century it had been in tune with the radical and democratic elements in a rapidly industrialising society. It had become

powerful as it reached out to the world in founding numerous town and country missions, and developing education for the poorest children. But in the twentieth century Congregationalism had been struggling to find a new role and to overcome the tendency of local churches to isolationism which had been the dark side of Independency. In some situations the will of the Church Meeting had been erected into the most rigid dogma of all. "We are in danger of putting an infallible Church Meeting in place of an infallible Bible or Pope." There were no denominational answers to the questions which disturbed people of the present day but only Christian ones. "It is now the vocation of Congregationalism to die in order that it may be reborn in a new form."

Haig set out three paths which faced not only Congregationalism but the whole Church. One was to ignore divisions and to continue as separate denominations. The second was the way of federation which retained separate denominational structures while seeking links with other Christian bodies. The third was for denominations to conform to some existing pattern of church order – to return to "Mother Church" (whether Canterbury or Rome) – but this was a blind alley which demanded no painful adjustments to the truths which other denominations emphasised. The only possible way was to go forward in faith "to meet our separated brethren bearing as gifts the insights which God gave our fathers". Denominationalism was dying and we should not seek to prolong its struggles. Its death need not be grieved over, but should be the prelude to the birth of the One, Holy Church, Catholic, Apostolic, Evangelical and Reformed.

Robert William Hugh Jones, President in 1969, brought wide pastoral and preaching experience to his office. As minister of Warwick Road, Coventry, from 1949 to 1961, he had had remarkable success in the development of Family Church, and had become well-known in radio broadcasting and television. His preaching gifts had taken him to all parts of the country and abroad. At the time of his Presidency he was minister of Petts Wood, a large and growing suburban church in Kent. During his year as President he was to become Moderator of the West Midlands Province.

His address, "Heartland of Belief", was an extended sermon which reflected the issues facing the Church in the second half of the twentieth century. He had begun his ministry just before history's most devastating war and had continued it into history's most devastating climate of doubt. "Across our life the wind blows chill with the ice of men's scepticism", and this is the context in which the Church has to sustain its ministry. His address was a personal testimony to the Church's faith that in Jesus we see the face of God, and hear the voice of God. Jesus shows us what God is – one who in his heart bears the pain of the world's sin. Jesus shows us what the Church must be – not an institution whose numerical strength must be propped up by any means but the company of the Cross and the fellowship of love. Above all Jesus shows us that to be a human being is to be a child of God, committed in the obedience of love to Christ and his fellows. All Christ's followers are called to live under the holy orders of the love of Christ. "The call of his love is the only call worth answering, this battle

for the life of man the only battle worth fighting, this sacrifice the only sacrifice worth making."

The President for 1970 was another minister in pastoral charge, Dr Erik Routley, minister of St James's, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Routley was widely known in Congregational circles as the editor of the denomination's hymnbook, *Congregational Praise*, to which he had contributed many of its best tunes. As chaplain, director of music and Mackennal Lecturer in Church History at Mansfield College, he had influenced generations of ministers-in-training and Congregational students in the University. He had edited the former LMS *Chronicle* and also the *Congregational Monthly*. As a celebrated authority on church music he was the first non-Anglican to be elected in 1965 as a Fellow of the Royal School of Church Music. Of all those who held office as President of the Congregational Church in England and Wales, his address to the Assembly – "Into a Broad Land" – caught the mood of the decade which had recently ended. He based his address on Psalm 119:96: "I see that all things come to an end: but thy commandment is exceeding broad" (or in the translation of the Book of Common Prayer: "I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad"). The decade of the 1960s had witnessed the end of empire, the end of traditional Congregationalism, and the end of venerated institutions. The effect of so many changes, and the sense that the Church was declining in strength and influence, had been to create a mood of dispiritedness. The temptation was to cling on to what remained and to hope that it would last our time. The sight of so much coming to an end, and of so much scheduled for demolition, had nearly driven us away from the Gospel altogether. Christians were tempted moreover to focus on the mood of dispiritedness and to ignore the second part of the Psalmist's cry of faith – "but thy commandment is exceeding broad". This age had its own splendour and opportunity. Within the last few generations, for example, an immense load of pain, due to death and disease, had been lifted from the shoulders of Western man. "Scientific enquiry (and progress) enable us to walk as sons in our father's house, not as prisoners kept in by an electric fence." Also the end of cherished patterns of church life should not lead to despair. "Let the end come! For what may emerge is a purified Church – not a repainted or redecorated Church, still less a destroyed Church, but a purified Church." Routley recognised that much of what had survived from the past would be swept away in the coming years. Twenty years earlier the Chairman of the Congregational Union, Dr Lovell Cocks, had warned of the tyranny of our redundant buildings. Many of these "anachronistic and repulsive tabernacles" still remained, proclaiming a way of worship that would never come to an end. In typical Routleian style he declared: "they are so full of furniture that you cannot walk three feet, you can hardly baptise a baby, without stumbling over some intrusive monument of unbending religious rectitude". In a similar way, assumptions about ministry in which a minister in pastoral charge was seen as a personal chaplain to that local congregation would be revised. In worship new patterns would emerge, giving expression to dance and drama and a more personal interaction with the minister

than was possible from a distance of thirty feet. Much would come to an end, but this did not mean the abolition of the preaching of the Gospel, the meeting of the faithful for worship, or the Church's sacraments. Rather God "is calling us to transformation of our liturgies and our economics, our preaching and our praying, our notions of mission and our notions of holiness. And that transformation is, in the design of God, a death and a resurrection." So the Church must renounce anything that will last our time, and cleave only to that which in God's promises will outlast our time. His closing words were: "I would not see the Church of the next generation an amiable Church, or a repressive Church, but I do hope to see it a vessel of delight in whose presence all that falls short of the standards of grace judges itself into joy or terror". All things come to an end, but love never fails.

The penultimate President of the Congregational Church in England and Wales in 1971 was Dr Charles Duthie, Principal of New College, London, and formerly Principal of the Scottish Congregational College. Taking as his theme, "Faith in a Time of Doubt", he asked how faith was still possible when confronted with the impact of scientific thought, the resurgence of other religions, the growth of humanism, the diminishing authority of the Bible and the Church, and the omnipresent and vexing problem of evil. "How can we believe and go on believing in a time of doubt?" On the other hand there were encouraging signs that those in the west were "shopping for a religion" and that the life of faith was continuing to find expression in the succession of believers. "There is much unheralded faithfulness in the church which we need to cherish." But there was hesitation about whether the Church was now an adequate agent for Christian mission and also the Church's uncertainty about evangelism. "Unless we are content simply to criticise evangelical extremists … we must find a positive form of evangelism which is relevant and effective for today." Such a positive evangelism must begin with the acknowledgement that Christians have often to earn the right to speak to others by the quality of their practical caring. The approach to the individual must show the respect that is due to human personality. Men and women cannot be bludgeoned into the service of Christ. Evangelism requires sensitivity blended with a loving Christian boldness. It must aim to achieve that junction with Christ which is the essence of faith.

Faith had also its larger background. "If we are to make faith viable in a time of doubt, we must affirm it in its larger context, in other words against its eternal background." There was a danger of becoming so engaged in the battles of the time that the horizon of faith is restricted to the present life and to lose the eternal dimension. The Christian perspective on time and eternity was determined by the assurance that Christ had "broken the power of death and brought life and immortality to life through the Gospel" (2 Tim.1:10). In a time of doubt and of a historic crisis of faith, the Church must rediscover the things that cannot be shaken. It is still the agent and servant of a Gospel that is to be shared with the whole world.

The last President in the short life of the Congregational Church in England and Wales was Clifford John Buckingham, who for twenty years had been

Moderator of the Eastern Province. His term of office was also to be the shortest, lasting a mere five months from the Assembly in May 1972 to the inauguration of the United Reformed Church in October of that year.

Choosing a theme at such a sensitive time must have presented the President with a difficult decision. A significant minority of the constituent churches had opted not to join the new Church, and many must have felt they were being cut adrift from cherished companions on the Congregational way. A triumphal address which warmly welcomed the demise of Congregationalism in its familiar form, or which implied criticism of those who had decided not to take the particular path which had been chosen towards achieving church unity, would have been hurtful. The President instead based his closing address on the opening words of the children's hymn, "It is a thing most wonderful", composed by Bishop W. W. How (1823-97).

His theme was service, often looked upon as the fulfilment of all that ethics or religion can require. Religion means service but service undefined is not the whole of religion. Young people walk their feet to blisters and work their fingers to the bone for the sake of Oxfam or Shelter and all manner of worthy charities. But "the service religion offers is not directed solely to man's physical repletion or his psychological comfort but is a mission to him as a being aware, or to be aware, of God". Jesus went about doing good, but he also said "I have come that men may have life and may have it in all its fullness". Riches and technology cannot by themselves bring such fullness. The task of the Church is to be so near to Christ that its fellowship is able to help men and women to see and recognise and know God.

At the close of his address the President referred to the United Reformed Church that would soon come into being. For some it would mean parting. He greeted those not joining the new Church with the words: "Go with God". To those with whom the Assembly would be uniting, he said: "Let us go together with God". His prayer was that by God's providence and man's obedience these churches in their new union might be better able to bear their witness and pursue their purpose.

John Buckingham's address brought to an end a long tradition of addresses by Chairmen of the Congregational Union and Presidents of the Congregational Church in England and Wales stretching back to the 1830s. It has not been the intention of this paper to pass judgment on those that have been reviewed, but rather that we should gain a greater appreciation of their contribution to the life of the denomination and the churches in the critical decades of the mid-twentieth century. These addresses provide ample evidence that Congregationalism was served by leaders of outstanding quality whose gifts were recognised far beyond its boundaries. The denomination conferred honour upon them in calling them to serve as chairmen or presidents, but this was richly repaid. For what shines through every address is a deep conviction that the riches of Congregational church order, embedded in the principles of the gathered church, the priesthood of all believers, and the central importance of the Church Meeting, were held in trust for the universal Church. Every address reflects the speaker's great love for

the churches and a desire to provide them with support and encouragement. And if this required them on occasion to challenge inertia, complacency or obtuseness, they spoke the truth in love. These addresses were practical theology in action. Whether those who delivered them were ministers in local pastoral charge, laymen, scholars, administrators in missionary or ecumenical bodies, or working in the media, they were all pastoral theologians crafting their addresses to assist the members of the churches and their ministers in their ministry and mission.

ANTHONY TUCKER

APPENDIX TO PART II

Chairmen of the Congregational Union of England and Wales (1960-65) and Presidents of the Congregational Church in England and Wales (1966-72)

1960-61: Revd John Trevor Davies MA, BD, PhD (1907-74), Richmond Hill Congregational Church, Bournemouth. Address: "Christ Pre-Eminent", Westminster Chapel, 16 May 1960. (London: Independent Press, 1960). See *Congregational Year Book* (CYB) (1960); *United Reformed Church Year Book* (URCYB) (1975).

1961-62: Revd Herbert Alfred Hamilton BA (1897-1977), Union Church, Brighton. Address: "Communication and the Christian Community", Westminster Chapel, 15 May 1961. (London: Independent Press, 1961). See CYB (1961); URCYB (1979); John Taylor and Clyde Binfield (eds.), *Who They Were in the Reformed Churches of England and Wales, 1901-2000* (Donnington: Shaun Tyas, 2007).

1962-63: Revd William John Fairchild Huxtable BA, MA, DD (1912-90), Principal, New College, London. Address: "The Tradition of our Fathers", Westminster Chapel, 14 May 1962. (London: Independent Press, 1962). See CYB (1962); *ODNB;* URCYB (1991); Taylor and Binfield (eds.), *Who They Were*; *Mansfield College Magazine* (1990-91); W. John F. Huxtable, *As It Seemed to Me* (London: United Reformed Church, 1991).

1963-64: Revd John Marsh CBE, MA, DPhil, DD (1904-1994), Principal, Mansfield College, Oxford. Address: "Theme with Variations", Westminster Chapel, 13 May 1963. (London: Independent Press, 1963). See CYB (1963); URCYB (1995); *Mansfield College Magazine* (1994); Taylor and Binfield (eds.), *Who They Were.*

1964-65: Revd Joseph Arthur Figures MA (1905-1973), Moderator, Yorkshire Province. Address: "The Challenge of Change", Westminster Chapel, 11 May 1964. (London: Independent Press, 1964). See CYB (1964); URCYB (1973-74).

1965-66: Revd Alfred Ernest Gould BA, BD (1909-1972), London Road Congregational Church, Chelmsford. Address: "For the Facing of this Hour", Westminster Chapel, 17 May 1965. (London: Independent Press, 1965). See CYB (1965); URCYB (1973-74).

1966-67: Revd Maxwell Osborne Janes BA, BD (1902-1981), General Secretary, London Missionary Society. Address: "As Fire ... by Burning", Westminster Chapel, 16 May 1966. (London: Congregational Church in England and Wales, 1966). See CYB (1966); URCYB (1982).

1967-68: Revd Aubrey Russell Vine BSc, MA, DD (1900-1978), General Secretary, The Free Church Federal Council. Address "The Word and the Church", Westminster Chapel, 15 May 1967. (London: CCEW, 1967). See CYB (1967).
1968-69: Revd Charles Aneurin Haig LLB (1900-1986), Moderator of the Western Province. Address: "Pathways to Unity – which way shall we go?", Westminster Chapel, 20 May 1968. (London: CCEW, 1968). See CYB (1968); URCYB (1986-87).
1969-70: Revd Robert William Hugh Jones BA (1911-1993), Petts Wood Congregational Church and Moderator-elect of the West Midland Province. Address: "Heartland of Belief", Westminster Chapel, 19 May 1969. (London: CCEW, 1969). See CYB (1969); URCYB (1995).
1970-71: Revd Erik Reginald Routley MA, BD, DPhil, FRSCM (1917-1982), St James's Congregational Church, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Address: "Into a Broad Land", Westminster Chapel, 4 May 1970. (London: CCEW, 1970). See CYB (1970); Taylor and Binfield (eds.), *Who They Were*; *Mansfield College Magazine* (1983-84).
1971-72: Revd Charles Sim Duthie MA, BD, DD (1911-1981), Principal, New College, London. Address: "Faith in a Time of Doubt", Westminster Chapel, 10 May 1971. (London: CCEW, 1971). See CYB (1971); *Congregational Union of Scotland Year Book* (1982).
1972: Revd Clifford John Buckingham MA (1907-1995), Moderator, Eastern Province. Address: "It is a thing most wonderful …", Westminster Chapel, 15 May 1972. (London: CCEW, 1972). See CYB (1972); URCYB (1996).

REVIEW ARTICLE
REFORMED THEOLOGY AND WORSHIP: A REVISION COURSE FROM MERCERSBURG

John Williamson Nevin, *The Mystical Presence*, and *The Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper*. Edited by Linden J. DeBie. The Mercersburg Theology Study Series, vol. I. General Editor W. Bradford Littlejohn. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012. Pp. xlii + 339. £26.00. ISBN 978-1-61097-169-0.

It is sometimes said that although Kierkegaard's writings were written in the mid-nineteenth century, his message could not be widely assimilated until the crises of the twentieth. The American John Williamson Nevin, the erstwhile Presbyterian turned German Reformed, was publishing significant works concurrently with Kierkegaard, but he has had to wait even longer to gain anything approaching a widespread hearing. The Mercersburg lamp was kept burning in some of the German Reformed churches, especially in their Pennsylvania heartland. In the wake of the pioneering work, *Romanticism in American Theology: Nevin and Schaff at Mercersburg* (1961, 2006) by James Hastings Nichol, a number of books and articles have appeared. The Mercersburg cause has further been stimulated by the enthusiasm of Gabriel Fackre, John Payne and Lee Barrett, all of whom taught, or teach, at Lancaster Theological Seminary, into which the Mercersburg heritage flowed; and by the formation in 1983 of the Mercersburg Society with its *New Mercersburg Review* and its conferences.

Those who embrace the Mercersburg theology are nowadays largely to be found within the theologically diverse United Church of Christ. Has their time come? With the decline of the mainline Protestant denominations on both sides of the Atlantic, and with signs that many in the churches are being starved or deafened, or both, by much that goes on in the name of worship, it may be that Mercersburg thought, though not to be swallowed whole, will provide some Reformed ballast which will enable us to adjust our sights, lead to a fuller grasp of the gospel, fill our worship with reverent joy, and revitalize our witness and service in the world.

This new series of thirteen projected volumes (of which the first is handsomely produced and very reasonably priced) is greatly to be welcomed as a stimulus towards this happy outcome, and nothing but good might ensue if all our ministerial candidates, and all our ministers, were to work their way carefully through each volume as it appears, using it as a dialogue partner, and not as if it provided patterns of thought and activity to be slavishly followed (that would be entirely against the Mercersburg notion of organic development). Readers of this volume will be greatly helped by the scholarly editorial notes which accompany Nevin's texts, including as they do, contextual explanations, brief biographies of notables referred to by Nevin (Coleridge, F. D. Maurice, Reformation divines, Enlightenment and nineteenth-century German and

American philosophers and theologians), and Latin quotations in the original and in translation.

Mark Noll extends a warm and informed welcome to Volume I in his Foreword, and the series as a whole is introduced by the enterprising General Editor, W. Bradford Littlejohn. There follows Linden J. DeBie's "Editor's Introduction". He first provides an account of the life and work of Nevin (1803-86). We learn that while a student at Union College, Schenectady, New York, he was influenced by the revivalism of Asahel Nettleton, from which he subsequently recoiled; and that at Princeton Seminary he studied under Charles Hodge, whose understanding of the Lord's Supper he later stoutly opposed. In 1830 he was appointed to the chair of Biblical Literature at Western Seminary, Allegheny, and while there he crusaded against slavery and advocated temperance. He was also reading widely and was especially influenced by the German scholar, Neander. The Scottish common sense realism in which he had been reared increasingly gave way to Romantic thought and idealist philosophy, and his newly acquired intellectual emphases did not find favour with Old School Western Seminary. Accordingly, in 1840 Nevin accepted the chair of Theology at the seminary of the German Reformed Church in the village of Mercersburg, Pennsylvania. Here he joined Frederick Rauch, who was well versed in German philosophy and in the writings of the Mediating theologians. On Rauch's death Nevin took charge, and was soon joined by Philip Schaff, who was brought over from Switzerland to teach church history. Between them Nevin and Schaff gave birth to the Mercersburg theology, with its catholic intentions, its objective on the one hand of recovering the sacraments and, on the other, of opposing the methods, deemed instrumentalist, of revivalists such as Charles Grandison Finney: "If… the anxious bench, revival machinery, solemn tricks for effect, decision displays at the bidding of the preacher, extravagance and rant… have no connection in fact with the serious religion and the cause of revivals, but tend only to bring them into discredit, let the fact be openly proclaimed".[1] Nevin wished to recover Reformed themes and emphases whose then current neglect greatly concerned him. With some of these the two works here reprinted – *The Mystical Presence* and *The Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper* – are concerned, and in what follows I treat these texts together.

"We are under no obligation," Nevin declares, "to follow slavishly and blindly the authority of the Past. But we do owe it to ourselves certainly, as well as to the cause of truth, not to swerve from it so great a case [i.e. sacramental doctrine], with blindfolded eyes, nor yet to pretend that we follow it when we have gone aside from it in fact" (p. 225).

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1 J. W. Nevin, *The Anxious Bench* (1843), in C. Yrigoyen, Jr., and G. H. Bricker (eds.), *Catholic and Reformed: Selected Theological Writings of John Williamson Nevin*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick [now Wipf and Stock], 1978), p. 30.

In a manner characteristic of those under the influence of Romanticism and philosophical idealism, Nevin's theology has a decidedly incarnational cast, but this does not prevent him (as sometimes happens) from emphasising soteriological considerations. Thus, where the Lord's Supper is concerned he brings capital letters to bear upon his insistence that the sacrament "has reference directly and primarily to the ATONEMENT wrought out by Christ's death on the cross" (p. 159). Firmly in his polemical sights are those Lutherans who subscribe to the doctrine of the ubiquity of Christ's body which, Nevin is convinced, has ascended to the right hand of God and is glorified in heaven (pp. 154-5, 258, 304); and those whom he regards as indebted to what, with a certain injustice to Zwingli, is deemed Zwinglian memorialism. These he brands "modern Puritans" though, unfortunately, he sometimes omits the adjective and thus appears to tar the original Puritans with an heretical brush. These modern Puritans are miscellaneous indeed, for the term embraces New England Congregationalists – especially those turned Unitarian – the generality of Baptists, and such doughty Presbyterians as his former professor, Charles Hodge. His problem with Hodge is that while sixteenth-century Reformed teaching on the Lord's Supper takes "its complexion sometimes from the atoning efficacy of Christ's death and at other times from the vivific power of his life" (p. 244), Hodge breaks the underlying unity of the two emphases and demotes the latter (*cf.* p. 318). Against Hodge's view Nevin pits that of a range of Reformed confessions and catechisms, clearly revealing a particular fondness for the Heidelberg Catechism, in which "All looks to the sacrifice once offered on Calvary . . . but all is made to turn immediately again on the power of a real union with [Christ's] present *life*, now glorified in heaven, as the only stream by which it is possible for such a vast grace to be conveyed into our souls" (p. 304).

Here we should note the phrase, "once offered", and Nevin's view that it is "Not as though the sacrament were itself a sacrifice or included in its own nature any expiatory force in the way dreamed of by the Church of Rome" (p. 159). Along this line he countered the accusation levelled by some of the German Reformed family that he indulged in Romish habits of thought and flirted with Anglo-Catholicism. In fact, in general terms, he thought that the "Puseyites", while to be applauded for recovering patristic authors, were temperamentally backward-looking; and, more particularly, he was resolutely opposed to transubstantiation: "The Reformed doctrine admits no change whatever in the elements. Bread remains bread and wine remains wine… [T]he participation of Christ's flesh and blood in the Lord's Supper is spiritual only and in no sense corporeal" (pp. 48, 49).

To be spiritually united with the whole Christ, human and divine (p. 151), by the power of the Holy Spirit (pp. 155, 260), is to live a new life – albeit not yet a perfect one (p. 149) – as those who are branches of Christ, the Vine, and hence it is a corporate, churchly life, and not simply an individualistic one. Moreover, "The whole morality of the gospel is made to root itself in the presence and power of the new life" (p. 191). This is the life that is both signed *and* (*pace* Hodge and the modern Puritans) *sealed* by the Lord's Supper. In this connection

an important question arises: is the sacrament instrumental in originating the life, or does it only importantly witness to the regenerating grace of God in the gospel, whereby, on the ground of the Son's saving work, the Christian is brought to the table in the first place? Nevin is ambivalent here. Sometimes he affirms, unexceptionally, that the sacrament represents, seals and applies the benefits of the covenant to the believer (p. 158); and he insists that the Lord's Supper "serves simply to ratify and advance the interest which believers have already, by their union with Christ, in the new covenant established through his blood" (p. 159); but he can also be interpreted (as by Dr DeBie on p. 94, n. 87) as holding that "the unifying power of the sacrament… brings the believer into real and substantial union with Christ". In other words, the sacrament as such effects the union between Christ and believers, and Nevin himself quotes F. D. Maurice with approval to this effect (p. 42, n. 7). I prefer to think that the Lord's Supper witnesses to, and confirms, the union established by God's grace in the gospel as preached by the minister and brought home to the needy by the Holy Spirit. This is one way of implying that Nevin, perhaps too easily, discusses the sacrament with scant reference to its relationship to the word preached, yet apart from the preaching (as Calvin well knew) the sacraments are dumb. Nevin can say that his final authority for his sacramental views is the Bible, "the ultimate standard of truth" (p. 164). However, I suggest that since both the church and the New Testament arose out of the gospel of saving grace and resurrection as proclaimed by the apostles and communicated by the Holy Spirit, the saving and supremely revealing act at the cross/resurrection takes precedence over the indispensable witnesses to it, whether institution or book, both of which are to be judged in its light.

I note in passing Nevin's ignorant judgment regarding John Owen, who is said, anachronistically and disparagingly, to have been the "indefatigable champion of all that is included in the idea of religious *freedom* and *individual* responsibility" (p. 87, his italics): had Nevin never heard of the covenanted community of visible saints with their church meeting? As embracing the entire membership, could any church polity be stronger on communal responsibility? Furthermore, "Owen was a Puritan with low views of the Church" (p. 87): the one holy, catholic and apostolic church visibly gathered by the Holy Spirit under Christ its only Head and Lord – "low"?

Nevin's texts raise important questions regarding the development of doctrine. He is by no means opposed to the idea, with the proviso that "All true development is the unfolding of the same substance into a higher form; not the casting away of it altogether, to make room for what is wholly of another nature" (p. 321). On the one hand, this is consistent with his philosophy of organism, and it confirms his dislike of doctrinal or ecclesiastical backwardness and his unwillingness to imprison the faith within past expressions of it. But he can also say that in the writings of Calvin, Melanchthon and Ursinus, the principal author of the Heidelberg Catechism, reformed teaching on the Lord's Supper reached its "full and final expression" (pp. 247, 304-6). This would appear, *prima facie*,

to exclude further development of the subject – on what grounds? How does Nevin know that the final expression has been articulated – are we simply to take his word for it? On the other hand, his strictures against Lutheranism, "modern Puritanism" and Romanism clearly reveal his ability to pronounce with great conviction that some doctrinal developments have been disastrous. Not even Calvin is exempted from blame: his doctrine of predestination is trounced as being "a truly terrible view which is in plain contradiction to the entire idea of Christianity" (p. 301). If it be true that in all of this we are seeking to handle mysteries, and that we see but puzzling reflections in a mirror, in accordance with which criteria may we judge that doctrinal development (a) is to be applauded, while doctrinal development (b) is to be repudiated? It is manifestly the case that the considerations here, merely indicated in bald outline, bear significantly upon ecumenical dialogue.[2]

I conclude with three observations on Dr DeBie's thorough and informative notes. First, he states that Schleiermacher "is famous for his teaching that religion was based on feeling and intuition" (p. 20, n. 12). At a time when being made to "feel good" has, here and there, become a – even the – criterion of worship acceptable to its participants, it is perhaps necessary to observe that in the eighteenth century "feeling" had an important cognitive connotation, and that Schleiermacher's religious writings rest more than is sometimes remembered, upon the epistemology found in his philosophical works. Secondly, Dr DeBie correctly says that the Congregational divine, Thomas Ridgley, "strenuously upheld the deity of Christ against Arian tendencies" (p. 96, n. 6), but that his doctrine of the Trinity was unorthodox in that he denied the eternal generation of the Son. Ridgley was certainly in receipt of adverse criticism on this point during his lifetime, but in explaining that he did not use the term "eternal generation" lest Arians should fasten upon it as implying that the one generated is subordinate to the generator, he revealed his orthodox intention.[3] Thirdly, I am pleased to see that on p. 74 n. 76 Dr DeBie refers to the work of one Clemens: "Foundations of German Reformed Worship in the Sixteenth Century Palatinate". This doctoral thesis was successfully submitted in Drew University in 1995 by the scholar-pastor, Deborah Rahn Clemens, who is none other than the esteemed President of the Mercersburg Society.

The remaining dozen volumes of this ambitious series are eagerly awaited.

ALAN P. F. SELL

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2 See further, Alan P. F. Sell, *Enlightenment, Ecumenism, Evangel: Theological Themes and Thinkers 1550-2000* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), chapter 6.

3 See T. Ridgley (1667-1734), *A Body of Divinity: Wherein the Doctrines of the Christian Religion are Explained and Defended, Being the Substance of Several Lectures on the Assembly's Larger Catechism*, (1731), 2 vols (New York: Robert Carter, 1855), I, pp. 158, 159. See further Alan P. F. Sell, *Hinterland Theology: A Stimulus to Theological Construction* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008 and Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), pp. 24-6.

REVIEWS

***The Passing of Protestant England: Secularization and Social Change c.1920-1960*. By S. J. D. Green. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. 342. £23.00. ISBN 978-1-10740-765-7 (Paberback edition; originally published in hardback in 2010).** (Chapter 7 was the History Society's annual lecture in 2005 and published in the *Journal* in 2006).

Secularization theory is one of the classic meta-narratives of the sociology of religion and originates with one of the founding fathers of sociology, Max Weber, and his interpretation of modernity. Its meaning was well expressed by Bryan Wilson, who defined secularization in his *Religion in a Secular Society* as a process by which "Religion – seen as a way of thinking, as the performance of particular practices, and the institutionalisation and organization of these patterns of thought and action – has lost influence … in western societies" (p. 11). Today it is a decidedly contested concept with options ranging from Steve Bruce's conviction that "God is Dead" to John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge's belief that "God is Back".

This is a hugely important contribution to the debate. Green argues that the long held link between the English people and the Protestant faith (which in practice means the Christian faith) was lost in the period 1920 to 1960. He charts the decline of Church attendance, the collapse of the Sunday schools, the abandoning of Sunday observance and the widening gulf between the churches and the general culture. For Green, the breaking point was occasioned neither by the intellectual changes of the nineteenth century (Darwin *et al.*) nor the sociological effects of industrial urbanization or societal bureaucratization (Wilson etc.) but specifically by the political effects of the First World War upon the political integrity of the United Kingdom and the demise of the Liberal Party. This, he believes, broke the hold of Protestant England. Personally I find this implausible – while it may have affected the timing of some legislative secularization, the underlying demise of Christian England would independently have led to the same results – the Nonconformist political lobby, for example, was dying anyway.

This is a powerfully argued case, and is particularly interesting for the prominence it gives to two people often neglected in the secularization debate, Dean Inge, who early warned of the declining influence of the churches, and Seebohm Rowntree, the inventor of the poverty line. Of these Rowntree is by far the more important. Green argues that it was his studies of religious behaviour and attitudes in York and High Wycombe which provided an empirical basis for the secularization debate which had been lacking from all previous work. In *English Life and Leisure* (1951) he showed "a massive reduction in adult attendance at places of worship in York between 1901 and 1948, from 17,060 in 1901 to 12,270 by 1935, and finally down to 10,220 by 1948" (Green, p. 194). When increased population is taken into account attendance had fallen from 35

per cent in 1901 to 13 per cent in 1948. The only sign of increased attendance was among Roman Catholics, which could largely be linked to immigration. Also significant was how people viewed the churches. The clergy were often disliked, Sunday schools seen as "outmoded institutions from which 'no good is to be expected' except for their traditional function of keeping the children quiet on Sunday afternoons while working class fathers slept". Children were largely no longer being taught religious faith in the home because "it isn't fair to treat as a fact something I am (myself) far from sure about" (p. 202). Green points to Rowntree's conclusion that "a majority of the population had either explicitly . . . or . . . instinctively rejected so much of the Christian story as related in the New Testament that no Church could recognise them as Christian at all" (p. 186).

Green exaggerates the shocked reaction which Rowntree's work received. He claims that while the reality of a post-protestant people is accepted as fact in the twenty-first century, "no one did then" (p. 187). In fact many people accepted exactly that. In 1909 C. F. G. Masterman, in *The Condition of England* wrote: "It is the middle class which is losing its religion, which is slowly or suddenly discovering that it no longer believes in the existence of the God of its fathers . . . Among the middle classes – the centre and historical support of England's protestant creed – the drift away is acknowledged by all to be conspicuous" (p. 14).

It is true, for example, that Crockford's did find *English Life and Leisure* "a disturbing book", but the article suggests it is disturbing more for demonstrating the unfortunate state of things than for making unfounded claims. They judged that "the general picture survives the criticisms of . . . some items of information [and] certain conclusions". None of this diminishes the importance however of Rowntree's empirical demonstration of deep and growing secularization.

The secularization debate will go on. The rise of inter-religious diversity and cultural hybridity is altering the English religious culture and producing new church growth. It may be, as Grace Davie has argued, that Europe is a special case when it comes to secularization, or that, as Linda Woodhead has argued, we are at the beginning of a new spiritual revolution in which religion is giving way to spirituality (though the evidence for the last is so far pretty thin). But there are some important conclusions to draw from Green.

First, one of the most influential books in the secularization debate recently has been Callum Brown's *The Death of Christian Britain*. Brown argues that, rather than secularization being a long-term trend in British society, "quite suddenly in 1963, something very profound ruptured the character of the nation, and its people, sending organised Christianity on a down-ward spiral to the margins of social significance" (p. 1). He sees the effects of second-wave feminism as a key factor in this. Changing attitudes expressed in, for example, pop music destroyed the concept of the traditional woman committed to a home-based culture and so led to the death of pious femininity. Since religion centred upon a feminine culture this was disastrous for the church. By demonstrating the extent that secularization long predated 1963, Green has now effectively questioned this thesis.

Secondly the argument of Harvey Cox that secularization is "the myth of the Twentieth Century" is simply manifest nonsense, at least as far as Britain is concerned. Green demonstrates conclusively both a marginalization of religion in England and an undermining of the Christian meta-narrative. Anyone who has ministered in the United Reformed Church in the last forty years will probably not need any convincing of this.

MARTIN CAMROUX

***T & T Clark Companion to Methodism*. Edited by Charles Yrigoyen Jr. London: T & T Clark / Continuum, 2010. Pp. x + 602. £85.00. ISBN 978-0-56703-293-5.**

The President of the Methodist Conference for 2012-13, the Revd Dr Mark Wakelin, who preached at St Paul's Cathedral as part of the 350th anniversary commemorations of the Great Ejection, has lamented the exclusion of Methodists from an Anglican-United Reformed Church service of reconciliation, even though the emergence of Methodism lay well into the future in 1662. His comments probably derive from his own perceptions and those of many others of the warm relationships which have developed in the second half of the twentieth century between Methodists and members of the United Reformed Church as ecumenical partners in Local Ecumenical Projects, where of all the inter-denominational permutations in which Methodism is represented Methodist-URC schemes predominate. Indeed, my own faith journey brought me into contact with Congregational participants in ecumenical partnerships in Skelmersdale in Lancashire in 1969 and later in Marsden in West Yorkshire and I have continued to receive the magazine of the Group for Evangelism and Renewal in the United Reformed Church, whose fortieth anniversary celebratory number includes a feature on shared Methodist-URC engagement with the community in Heaton Moor. Notwithstanding obvious historical divergences between Calvinist and Arminian theology and congregational and connexional ecclesiology, Reformed and Evangelical collaboration at grass-roots level remains one of the more encouraging features of Christian renewal in the late twentieth century, and as Professor Clyde Binfield has observed in a society increasingly dominated by secular liberalism, "all churches are dissenters now".

Despite this twentieth-century rapprochement, and notwithstanding the *Methodist Recorder*'s detection of "an uncertainty about future directions in Methodist-URC relationships" at the beginning of 2013, it is curious that there is relatively little cognisance in this monumental 602-page companion of Methodism's appreciable engagement in ministry and mission with its older dissenting partner. True, Professor Randy Maddox in an illuminating survey of the reception and transmission of the theology and ecclesiology of John and Charles Wesley recognises the genesis of the historic "model deed" of 1763 as a response to Calvinistic Methodist preachers using preaching houses built by Wesley to turn congregations against Arminian theology, which ultimately

became the formalised basis on which the Methodist Episcopal Church was established in the United States of America in 1784. However, in practice he notes that after John Wesley's death, whereas Methodists in England tentatively began to align with the dissenting traditions, in North America there was an even more pronounced level of assimilation between Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Baptists where theological standards were "generally conceived on the model of Calvin's *Institutes*". However, the Revd Dr Martin Wellings in a succinct and candid assessment of Methodism's "steady marginalisation" in Great Britain, despite it being by far the largest Free Church denomination in 1900, acknowledges that Methodist ecumenism after 1960 was "usually focused on re-union with the Church of England". Others, by contrast, emphasize the importance of emerging links between the Methodist and Reformed traditions. Thomas R. Albin, in his study of Methodist spirituality recognises that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the ecumenical movement drew together diverse members of the Christian tradition including Independents. Geoffrey Wainwright in a chapter on Methodism and the ecumenical movement includes a succinct and lucid discussion on dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches citing the 1987 report *Together in God's Grace* which noted that "in many places in the world", including Canada, Australia, Zambia and Belgium, "churches in our two traditions have already entered into close relationship, including both federal and organic unions". This convergence derived from a focus on soteriology and the "mystery of God's electing grace and of human response" recognising that while "Wesley and Calvin advocated conflicting ways of holding together what they affirm in common" their differences "should not constitute a barrier between our traditions" but rather be viewed as "mutually corrective and enriching" and an imperative "to the Lord's call to unity for the sake of mission". A brief article on ecumenism in the appended glossary by John G. McEllhenney, a retired UM pastor, recognises that in the first half of the twentieth century Methodists in both Britain and the USA were helping to create councils of churches at local, regional and national levels which paved the way for more formalised ecumenical partnerships in the future. More attention might perhaps have been given to other notable synergies. While references are made in more than one article to Dr Leslie Weatherhead, no one notices here the way that John Travell has covered, in the excellent millennial URC twentieth century collective biography, the remarkable trajectory of his ministry from a succession of Methodist appointments, culminating in an outstanding ministry at Leeds Brunswick from 1925-36 to his longest period of ministry at London's Congregational City Temple from 1936-60, during which he retained his Methodist membership throughout, serving as President of the Methodist Conference in 1955-56.

The strengths of this volume are not only its accessible and authoritative review of the seminal Wesleyan foundation themes as might be expected from such acknowledged experts as Heitzenrater, Maddox, Kimbrough and Campbell but also the balanced coverage of Methodism as a global phenomenon, where

in many locations the momentum and pattern of Methodism's early growth have been replicated and indeed surpassed as Methodism has secured a presence in every continent and a global membership of around forty million. The complex evolution of European Methodism is carefully analysed by Professor Ulrike Schuler and Professor Rudiger R. Minor. Helpful overviews are also provided of the development of Methodism in Africa by Professor John Wesley Z. Kurewa; Asia and the Pacific by the Revd Luther J. Oconer; North America by Professor Russell E. Richey and Latin America by Professor Paulo Ayres Mattos. The volume also provides clear guidance upon methodology and research techniques targeted particularly at postgraduates, including a useful chapter by Gareth Lloyd on Methodist printed and archival collections on both sides of the Atlantic and an exploratory foray into the significance of the material culture of Methodism, albeit exclusively in Britain, by Peter Forsaith. An appended "Methodism A to Z" provides a reasonably comprehensive glossary of relevant terminology, but tends to have rather more prolific biographical entries on early figures associated with the development of Methodism in the eighteenth century such as the Calvinistic Selina Countess of Huntingdon, than later figures such as the trailblazing Methodist woman minister of the twentieth century, the Revd Dr Kathleen Richardson, who became the first ordained woman life peer in the House of Lords in 1998. Similarly more recent historiography figures rather less prominently in some sections of the bibliography than older secondary texts.

JOHN HARGREAVES

***A Question of Faith: A History of Religious Dissent in Farnham*. By Pat Heather. Farnham: Farnham and District Museum Society, 2010. Pp. 126. £10.00. ISBN 978-0-90163-817-5.**

This book is written by a local historian and sets the various Dissenting groups in Farnham in context. Unlike the standard chapel history it begins before the English Reformation and establishes Farnham's importance as a seat of the Bishop of Winchester. Although Stephen Gardiner was bishop in this diocese he seems to have been less rigorous in his persecution of Protestants here than in London. Pat Heather draws on evidence from local wills to estimate the extent of Protestant reform in the sixteenth century in Farnham, but with the usual qualification that they may have been shaped by the local incumbent. She also notes a Farnham man driven to his death at Christ Church, Oxford, for his Lutheranism. There is also a summary of the puritan influences in Farnham after 1558.

Once we approach the seventeenth century and classic Nonconformity the picture becomes more complex, involving Presbyterians, Baptists and Quakers. A fuller exploration of the differences between Calvinists and Arminians and how they played out locally would add to the usefulness of this section. She rightly notes the continuing church attendance of Presbyterians and their preference for monarchy over the regime of the Major Generals. The early

eighteenth century gets less attention and there is the usual problem of distinguishing different forms of Methodism.

The chapel building of the nineteenth century is accounted for in detail and some prominent local characters described. As throughout, Pat Heather gives us the national context of the people and events in the church life of Farnham. Readers with a wider interest in denominational life will be able to plot some of these characters in a bigger church picture. It is particularly interesting to note that members of the Church of England who took exception to Oxford Movement reforms in Farnham did not all gravitate to other denominations but that some formed what is now an active congregation of the Free Church of England.

The book is well illustrated, with portraits, maps, architectural drawings and photographs. The economic and social history of Farnham is always present but perhaps deserves to be more in focus. It would be interesting, for instance, to know more about the growth of the temperance movement in the nineteenth century and its impact on local hop-growing. William Cobbett is a famous local son and his views are explored but we learn very little about local interest in the Anti-Corn Law League, or the emergence of Liberalism among Dissenters. On the other hand, this book gives an account of Roman Catholicism in Farnham, rightly seeing it as part of the tradition of religious dissent.

One can only hope that Pat Heather will go on adding to her impressive knowledge of local history and that the book will serve as an example to other church historians to broaden the canvas on which they paint the picture of Dissent and its chapels.

STEPHEN ORCHARD

***The Hope in Hope Street: 200 Years in Hanley*. By Gervase Charmley. Hanley: Bethel Evangelical Free Church, Newhall Street, Hanley, Stoke on Trent, 2012. Pp. 270. £7.50. ISBN 978-1-47926-112-3.**

Hope Congregational Church in Hanley, in the Potteries, was inaugurated in 1802, just as the city was embarking upon its rapid industrial expansion and Nonconformist church life was also expanding in an effort to keep pace with new opportunities. For decades the church flourished. In the inter-war years, however, came a period of inexorable decline, both denominationally and locally. Hope Church suffered considerably and the wider fellowship of Congregationalism seemed unable to offer the support that was required. In 1930, however, the charismatic evangelist Edward Jeffreys took the city by storm and approached the deacons of Hope Church with an offer to draw them into the Bethel Evangelistic Society of which he was the principal organiser. The church agreed and experienced for a while an inrush of new converts. They remained a member church of the Bethel Society through the Second World War, at first renting the chapel from the Congregational Union. When the Bethel Society was suddenly wound up in the 1950s, however, the church resolved to continue

as an independent evangelical church, linking with the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, purchasing the building but retaining the name of Bethel. Latterly, through a complicated programme of redevelopment, the church has a fine new building and continues its independent life.

This book, written by the present pastor, presumably to celebrate the 200th anniversary, tells a fascinating story. It is thoroughly researched (390 footnotes!) and is told with commendable objectivity, though the text is marred at times by tiresome repetition and a few typographical errors. As so often is the case, the narrative diverts from time to time into many off-shoots and by-ways, giving insights not only into the life of the local church but also into movements and situations in the life of the wider church and the secular world of the time. It is thus of much wider interest than the title or the declared aim would suggest.

My query would be: who is likely to read the book? I personally found it very interesting, not least because of family links with both the Potteries and Congregationalism. But I have a tenuous connection. I wonder how many others not connected with the church are likely to pick it up and benefit from its story and the many interesting diversions and insights.

KEITH FORECAST

***The Nature of the Household of Faith: Some Principles of Congregationalism*. By Alan Argent. Nottingham: The Congregational Federation, 2012. Pp. 86. £5.00. ISBN 978-1-90408-001-5.**

The cover describes this book as a Primer for the Congregational Federation, which in no way diminishes its usefulness to others. Alan Argent has put his experience and knowledge at the disposal of his denomination in such a way as to serve as a marker for others of where it stands at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Defining Congregationalism is fraught with the perils of trying to tell a denomination which resists exercise of external authority just what it is about. This is a graceful and nuanced account of guiding principles to remind those old in Congregationalism what they believe and to guide those coming fresh to it.

The book is necessarily about organisation and ethos, with reference to underlying theological principles and scriptural guidance, but with no attempt to express a Congregational creed, since that would violate the assumptions which govern it. The essential history of early Congregationalism is explained, culminating in the moderate Calvinism of the Savoy Declaration, to which are added the further observations of Isaac Watts and R. W. Dale. This exposes a recurring dilemma for Congregationalists; what weight can we give to historic authority against the leading of the Holy Spirit? Much of the pragmatic description of how a local Congregational church functions could be equally applied to new independent Christian congregations. They are in a similar place to the Independent congregations which sprang up in the early nineteenth century

and then formed county associations for the purpose of evangelism and the support of overseas mission. This produced the Congregationalism of Dale, which built on the past, but reinterpreted it. Will the same happen in the present age?

Neither the early Separatists nor the early Congregational Union of England and Wales would have embraced the sentiments that contemporary Congregationalists are urged to adopt towards other world faiths. The principle of being open to new ideas may be invoked at this point, but there is a fine line between Christian charity and syncretism. The sensitive pastoral guidance given on the position of ministers not in pastoral charge but belonging to a congregation with its own minister is very much of its time. Earlier generations of Congregational ministers were less mobile and had no retirement plans. The resistance to hierarchical authority is not confined to Congregationalists; many of the tensions within the Church of England arise from a latent congregationalism. The section on baptism comes nearer to being a ruling than any other.

Just as Quaker sacramental ideas can only be understood by reference to the observance of sacraments in other denominations, so the creeds of early Congregationalists are defined by the context in which they professed their distinctions. Members of all Christian churches in Western democratic societies today accept the disciplines of their denomination voluntarily. Early Congregationalists were articulating a position which is now accepted, that the state has no role in defining religious belief. The ramifications of this for charity law have yet to be explored. This Primer explains how Congregationalism works within the *status quo*. Its principles may be a starting point for all denominations if the climate of secularism becomes even more dominant.

The voluntary acceptance of discipline applies to Congregationalists as much as to any-one else. Alan Argent touches on the nub of this with his remarks about Church Meeting. Involving all church members in waiting on the Holy Spirit is the desideratum of Congregationalism. In practice, like other denominations which urge members to participate in decision making, the majority prefer an informal system of delegation to coming to meetings. Were we to apply earlier standards of discipline in our own day church rolls in Baptist, Congregational and United Reformed Churches would be decimated. The Primer offers no answers to this situation, apart from exhortation. If this were politics we would complain about the democratic deficit; in church life it is a spiritual deficit which is hard to overcome.

I am not sure at what point Congregationalists began to regard ordination as unnecessary and the laying on of hands at ordinations optional. These seem to me to be relatively modern developments, especially when we consider the earlier period's reverence for scripture. The willingness to sanction the local congregation's freedom in this area also sits uneasily with the principle of a well-educated ministry. I would have liked an expansion of the section on catholicity, linked with the ecumenical passages, since Congregationalism has much to offer, once denominations start pooling their insights, instead of relying on tradition alone. The cover illustration of a pair of hands cradling a simple cross would have been anathema to the Puritans, but illustrates how far the

tradition has travelled. One or two of the scriptural references urged in support of a particular view are tendentious. Minor criticisms can be set aside when we have a succinct account of modern Congregationalism, a Primer which will serve as a reference point for years to come.

STEPHEN ORCHARD

***John Oman: New Perspectives*. Edited by Adam Hood. Studies in Christian History and Thought. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012. Pp. 241. £24.99. ISBN 978-1-84227-731-7.**

Most of the eleven essays that comprise this collection are adaptations of papers given to a conference on the theology of John Oman at Westminster College, Cambridge, in 2009. John Oman (1860-1939) was native of Orkney who studied in Edinburgh and Germany. He was for 17 years Presbyterian Minister in Alnwick before being appointed Professor of Systematic Theology, and later Principal, of Westminster College, Cambridge. Adam Hood's introduction indicates the United Presbyterian Church emphases that would be formative for Oman: a moderate Calvinism, a liberal approach to the creeds, and the responsibility of the individual for her/his faith. Oman was a champion of the individual Christian's freedom and responsibility, which he claimed God never overrides but always works with. He was therefore a critic of those who posited an infallible authority, (whether in Roman claims for Papal pronouncements *ex cathedra* or in Protestant claims for scriptural inerrancy), because he believed that behind such a conception was an idea of mechanically irresistible grace. In perhaps his most memorable metaphor, Oman argues that the human desire for infallibility is like the arrow-straight canal; whereas God prefers the winding circumambulancy of the river "which swerves at a pebble or a firmer clay". This comes from his book *Grace and Personality*, published in 1917 during the Great War, and revised soon after. Oman's first-hand experience with soldiers in the camps and hospitals of France and Britain, where fundamental religious questions were constantly being discussed, was the crucible in which his theology was tested. Sentimental beliefs in a beneficent Deity, or confidence in either absolute Divine Sovereignty or absolute Reason, did not stand the test.

As a reaction to the Great War, at least, Oman's theology may be compared to Barth's. However, Oman, the translator into English of Schleiermacher's *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, reacted very differently to Barth. Barth forsook liberalism for a dialectical orthodoxy "from above"; Oman developed a theological liberalism "from below", always making human experience central. Alan Sell's essay traces not only this important distinction but also the subtle differences in Oman's theology from that of his contemporaries. Sell gives an appreciative assessment of Oman's life and thought but also offers this theological critique: "Oman's starting-point seems almost entirely confined

to the 'horizontal' human-to-human relationship to the exclusion of the Father who approaches in the Son by the Spirit". This critique accords with my main source of puzzlement at Oman: that a professor of systematic theology should in his published works make so little reference to the nature of God as Trinity. However, my puzzlement may merely reveal how much mainstream theology after Oman swung away from Schleiermacher towards Barth.

Fleur Houston's essay describes Oman as "thralled to truth" and traces the way he conceives God's truth as impinging upon human thinking and action. Oman's wartime experience seems to have alerted him to the danger of coercive power. Thus he believed that God's providential grace does not come as irresistible might but as the love of a divine Father. David Thompson's essay examines the relationship between John Oman and the University of Cambridge. Oman was the first Westminster College Professor to hold a University Post, that of University Lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion. Thompson also notes that many of Oman's published works were published first by Cambridge University Press; which was unusual for a Nonconformist author. The first of these was *The War and its Issues*, published by CUP in 1915. In this book, Oman makes the surprising (for a Protestant) but perceptive criticism that "this death struggle of the nations" was marked by the conspicuous "absence of true Catholicism" that transcends national boundaries.

Eric McKimmon locates Oman within Scottish philosophical traditions. Oman's roots were in the philosophical tradition of Scottish Realism, but his thought developed into Personal Idealism. However, Oman seemed unwilling to go in the direction of the personalism of Pringle Pattison, who argued that as the Divine persons exist "in and through the other" so God's grace could be experienced *in* the human person; not having to stop at the boundary of the "self-directing, self-legislating, self-conscious" human person, as described by Oman. This rather individualistic conception of personhood may account for Oman's lack of published work on God the Holy Trinity; for whatever one tries to say about the Divine persons, it is surely *not* wishing to imply that they are separate individuals. The contribution of Steven Bevans to the collection is notable, not only because he is one of the few scholars to have published work on Oman in recent times, but also because he is a Roman Catholic Priest. Bevans focuses on Oman's experiential method. Oman believed that God, as heavenly Father, always relates to our personal experience in the same way that Jesus often appealed (especially in parables) to the personal experience of his hearers, expecting them to come to their own conclusions and see the truth for themselves. This means that theology should be persuasive and attentive to lived experience.

Adam Hood's essay on Oman's preaching style and content is, for this reviewer, the highlight of the collection. Two collections of Oman's sermons were published: *A Dialogue with God* and *The Paradox of the World*. Some of Oman's pithy sayings found in his sermons bear repeating: "there is more in life than enjoyment . . . more in suffering than sorrow"; meekness is often misunderstood as "the virtue of a jellyfish… a standing apology for having the misfortune to exist"; the Christian life "is no journey to heaven by the primrose

path… some days you smell the earth and see the worm". Oman strove to make his sermons realistic and practical. He understood faith as "trust in the loving purposes of God through the vicissitudes of life"; and sin as "avoiding the truth in the service of self-interest". One feels that such an approach would have rung true to his hearers. The (now) late John Hick also contributes an essay entitled: "A Voyage Round John Oman" in which he acknowledges how much he learned from Oman as a Philosopher of Religion. Hick argues that Oman's approach of sitting light to Christian doctrine and instead focusing on the approach of Jesus makes him one of the few theologians of the past who remain relevant to radicals of today. This reviewer reflects that the problem with such radicalism is its tendency to drift into Unitarianism and eventually into agnosticism. Adam Hood and Steven Bevans contribute one further essay each, as do John Nightingale and Ashok Chaudhari. This collection is a worthwhile reminder of a neglected theologian and philosopher of religion who, even though his approach may be out of fashion, has much to teach us.

JULIAN TEMPLETON

***Ecumenical and Eclectic, the Unity of the Church in the Contemporary World. Essays in Honour of Alan P. F. Sell*. Edited by Anna M. Robbins. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007. Pp. xiv + 313. £10.00. ISBN 978-1-84227-432-3.**

Readers attracted by such a title are entitled to ask: Does the book do what it says it does? Yes it does. First it honours Alan Sell who will be known by a great variety of readers as a scholar who, in the words of the editor, once one of his students "knew more about things historical, theological and philosophical than anyone" we may have previously encountered, but who, despite such daunting erudition and a vast bibliography to demonstrate it, has a gentle touch and delightful sense of humour. He once commented at a seminar that X had so brought the good lady, the Countess of Huntingdon, to life that he was glad he never met her!

The range of authors, but for the fact that only one is a woman, illustrates the breadth of Sell's engagement as a Congregational, and United Reformed Church Minister, lecturer in philosophy and promoter of ecumenical dialogues through the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. And because of his continuous support for bodies like the Society for the Study of Theology, one could easily draw into the conversation leading theologians in all our universities and from many different traditions. All hold Alan in loving respect.

Second, we ask: Will we learn anything from the various essays about being ecumenical today and from being eclectic in acknowledging and valuing Alan's Reformed convictions? Given their calibre, how can we fail to be informed? Alan Falconer, once Director of the WCC Faith and Order Commission is best placed to analyse some difficulties in dialogue. Keith Clements, as Secretary of the Conference of European Churches can remind us how great it was to be

alive in 1989 when great assemblies like Basle set the tone for massive changes in Europe that very year, but he is also acutely aware that for the majority of the world's Christians who now live in the global south, Europe needs to be more modest about its own importance. Two authors refer to Alan Sell's "penetrating work", *Confessing and Commending the Faith*, and Gabriel Fackre of Andover Newton points out how that much discussed film, *The Passion of the Christ*, for a time got everyone talking about the Cross and offered us ministers the challenge to commend and interpret the faith.

Given Alan's distinguished service as a Professor in Aberystwyth it is good to hear about two of our best known New Testament scholars, C. H. Dodd and W. D. Davies, both products of Welsh chapels and both ecumenically committed and very influential. We are reminded how their deep knowledge of the New Testament made them convinced there can only be one Church but prevented Congregationalists or Welsh Independents or anyone else from assuming that our polity and only ours is exactly what the good Lord wills. And even if you have read most of Dodd's books and those by Davies you will learn something new from John Williams's essay – like the interesting little fact that one of the great Anglican leaders in the ecumenical movement, Oliver Tomkins, was the son of a Congregational minister in a church W. D. Davies once attended. We also learn that reassessing our Jewish roots is vital not only for Christian Jewish relations but also for our dialogue with churches we once accused of being "Pharisaical" or legalistic.

It is good to read people like David Peel who are prepared to challenge his own tradition when it almost beatified one of its own bishops, Bishop Lesslie Newbigin. We ought to be able to appreciate all Newbigin achieved in his pioneering role in the formation of the Church of South India and in writing one of the most far sighted appeals for Pentecostal inclusion in the ecumenical movement in *The Household of God* (1953) without turning him into the guru on Western culture, let alone the expert on human sexuality that many made him. Peel is often blunt but well informed and if you disagree there are plenty of eulogies, like Geoffrey Wainwright's, you can read elsewhere. All agree, Newbigin's is a voice we have to reckon with.

Too many ecumenical studies ignore the Church of Rome to which half the world's Christians belong. Some contributors ignore Vatican II but most do not. MacRae goes into some detail about Pentecostalism, Evangelicalism and Charismatic Renewal and includes helpful insights from William Temple but how can one write about "The Power of Christian Unity" and ignore good Pope John *et al*? Other writers are aware that we are all tempted to isolationism or just being over defensive of our own tradition without genuine encounters with those we assume we disagree with. But dare I ask? Does Alan Sell understand Rome?

It would be a bonus in this sort of symposium to have an essay by a Roman Catholic, especially one about Sell! Or an Orthodox voice, given strong Orthodox input in the World Council of Churches.

Only two authors make no mention of Alan Sell even though we know they are great friends! This is a pity because what one would welcome is real

engagement with Alan's thinking. As a young minister, Alan once dared to argue with John Huxtable about the wisdom of turning the Congregational Union into the Congregational Church. Now that he has become one of our great authorities we should pluck up courage to argue with him. Alan would love this but we would not win. Does that matter? We can all become wiser through sincere debate. We can also, like these distinguished contributors be numbered among his many friends. I warmly commend this book.

DONALD W. NORWOOD