

J. H. Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century*, Baptist Historical Society, Didcot 1994, 432pp. £16-00, ISBN 0 903166 18 6 (pb); £20-00, 0 903166 19 4 (hb).

With the publication of this volume on the nineteenth century we now await with anticipation Dr West's concluding volume in the series on the twentieth century. This survey, both in range and detail, replaces all previous studies, save that Ernest Payne's history of the Baptist Union will remain indispensable for study of the Union itself. The nineteenth century was a period of decisive change for Baptists, and this work chronicles most of the ways in which those changes were significant.

Fundamental to the whole story is the steady growth in numbers. From an estimated 20,000 members in the mid-eighteenth century, Baptists in England and Wales had grown to some 410,000 in 1906, the peak year. Even allowing for problems in deciding who should be included, this is an impressive increase by any standards. By the end of the nineteenth century Baptists had nearly caught up the Congregationalists, who had traditionally been larger. In the twentieth century they were to overtake them.

The clue to this growth was the evangelical revival. Towards the end of the eighteenth century this had produced a completely new group of Baptists, the New Connexion of General Baptists, arising from a Midlands-based revival movement. In one sense they acted as a catalyst for the new trends among Baptists as a whole. Their emphasis on evangelism and revivalism, their connexional polity which was prepared to sustain itinerant evangelism and to place less emphasis on the necessity for every congregation to have its own minister, and their greater theological openness encouraged the erosion of the characteristic theological and ecclesiological emphases of the older Particular Baptists. Eventually in 1891 the New Connexion merged with the Baptist Union.

Particular Baptists, however, were already developing in similar directions. The Baptist Missionary Society of 1792 was one sign of this. John Briggs does not say a great deal about this in view of Brian Stanley's bicentenary history. The Baptist Home Missionary Society traces its origin back to 1797 and reflects the same concern for village preaching that characterized the New Connexion. An important point is made in stressing the significance of societies as a means for addressing new concerns. It was the typical Georgian response to so many problems. But its ethos as a body of voluntary subscribers to support a particular cause was to pose continuing problems for an understanding of the nature of the church. At one level the society served to bolster an ecclesiological independency that denied legitimacy to other expressions of the church beyond the local congregation; though even at the local level, as Robert Hall noted, it became necessary to distinguish between church and congregation, where the latter included subscribers for pews who were not members of the church. But with personal evangelism at the top of the ecclesiastical agenda, the sense of the covenanted fellowship derived from the seventeenth century could be almost completely lost.

This is one reason why Briggs refers to John Clifford as having a 'diminished ecclesiology'. I would not go so far. Clifford's emphasis on the individual was balanced by his social concern: indeed, he regarded ecclesiology as a branch of sociology, and he saw the individual Christian life fulfilled by active participation in the wider society, which led to his political activity. However, Clifford did regard baptism as a matter of personal conscience; hence the way in which he wrote the constitution of Westbourne Park church which did not make believer's baptism obligatory for membership but rather a matter of personal conscience. If it sometimes seems odd to non-Baptists that they are the only mainline church in which baptism is not a requirement for membership in many congregations, this development helps to explain the constant emphasis on the rights of individual conscience in relation to baptism in Baptists' ecumenical relations. This reached its climax in the 1873 constitution of the Baptist Union which abandoned any confessional basis by removing the 1832 reference to 'evangelical sentiments' (itself a less specific statement than the 1813 constitution), and instead recognized the liberty of each church 'to interpret and administer the laws of Christ', subject to the statement that 'the immersion of believers is the only Christian baptism'.

The path trodden by Clifford had in effect been prepared some eighty years earlier when Robert Hall emphasized faith, rather than baptism, as the prerequisite for fellowship at the Lord's Table. Although from one point of view this was ecumenically open in that it was intended to overcome the baptist/paedobaptist divide, it also opened the way to regarding the sacraments as no more than symbols, a tendency accelerated by the reaction against the tractarian movement in the Church of England.

At various points Briggs uses Clifford and Spurgeon as representatives of opposite poles among nineteenth-century Baptists. He does not see Clifford as one of Spurgeon's targets in the Down Grade controversy; but he does argue interestingly that Spurgeon was prompted by fears of the possible theological implications of a union between the Baptist Union and the General Baptists on the one hand and the Congregational Union on the other. Certainly the General Baptists had developed a freer theological tradition in the nineteenth century, though it needs to be remembered that they formed a New Connexion in 1770 precisely to avoid links with the increasingly unitarian old General Baptists. On the other hand, since the New Connexion was already a member association of the Baptist Union, and since many New Connexion ministers were members of local Baptist Associations as well, Spurgeon's position looks rather strange. The fear of possible closer links with the Congregational Union is more plausible, and perhaps requires the joint meetings of 1886 and 1901 to be taken more seriously. Briggs's analysis of this well-known controversy stimulates alternative ways of looking at it.

As indicated above, Briggs says relatively little about the Baptist Union as such. This is partly because he wants rightly to direct attention to the Baptist world beyond it. It is also because he raises a very interesting question about the significance of

denominationalism as a nineteenth-century creation. The driving force behind the Union's growth in influence in the third quarter of the century was the consolidation of the Augmentation of Pastors' Incomes Fund, the Annuity Fund and the Evangelization Fund under its control. The development of local Associations was also linked crucially to their roles as custodian trustees for new church buildings and providers of financial support for church extension and ministry. Throughout the period it remained natural for local churches to co-operate with any other church sharing a broadly evangelical outlook, regardless of formal denominational links. The significance of wider Baptist institutions was therefore more financial than ecclesiological.

Sunday school work and evangelization were the key to the development of philanthropy and work in specifically working-class areas. Briggs refers to the well-known work of ministers like William Brock at Bloomsbury, John Clifford in Paddington and William Cuff in Shoreditch. Outside the capital F.B. Meyer, who was the first minister to welcome Moody's British mission in 1872, left Victoria Road, Leicester, in 1881 to found Melbourne Hall in a poorer part of the town. With its Sunday School of 2500 children, it soon became the centre for a wide-ranging ministry including released prisoners, those in danger of unemployment and others on hard times. Meyer was the leader in founding the Baptist deaconess order, and also deeply involved in the Keswick movement. For him, if not for a later generation, social action and evangelical spirituality were closely tied together. The problem was that working-class Baptists tended to be upwardly socially mobile, so that identification with working-class culture remained a perennial issue.

The deaconess order is also a reminder of the difficulty Baptists, like other Victorian churchmen, had in finding an appropriate place for women in the Church. The evidence seems to suggest that women always outnumbered men in the membership of many congregations, but it was only towards the end of the century that women began to be elected as deacons. Missionary service was acceptable from the mid-century, partly because of an increasing emphasis on medical and educational work. Similarly women were active in philanthropic activities connected with local churches for most of the century. Only in the last decade or so of the century did women begin to appear at the Baptist Union assembly as delegates or speakers. Ordination to the ministry had to wait until the twentieth century.

John Briggs has offered a new interpretation of Baptist life in the nineteenth century. He draws on a wide range of knowledge, particularly among the secondary sources, aided by his long editorship of this *Quarterly*. He takes note of new emphases in religious history, particularly in relation to gender and the place of religion in people's lives. Above all, his book is a stimulus to new ideas in an area in which it has often seemed difficult to get beyond the traditional agenda of political dissent and the Liberation Society.

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Something to Declare: A Study of the Declaration of Principle, jointly by Paul Fiddes, Brian Haymes, Richard Kidd and Michael Quicke, the Principals of the four English Colleges in membership with the Baptist Union of Great Britain, edited by Richard L. Kidd, Whitley Publications 1996, 57 pages, ISBN 0-9528150-0-1, £1-50.

The consciousness of the approaching end of the second millennium characterizes almost all the elements of society today. Part of the programme of the Baptist Union in preparation for the third millennium is to set before the churches which belong to it a study of its Declaration of Principle.

A history of the development of the Declaration is provided. Its roots were in the decision to found a society to support the foreign mission for which William Carey had pleaded and on which he embarked. That led to the formation of the Baptist Union in 1813 and the framing of its first constitution. The latter was frequently revised, and in 1904 at the suggestion of J. H. Shakespeare the Declaration of Principle assumed the threefold structure of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. Its present form took place in the assembly of 1936. It was consciously worded as a Basis of Union, not a confession of faith, but the four principals in the course of their study of it were increasingly delighted to realize that the Declaration is 'notably theological' and provides 'an authoritative expression of Baptist ecclesiology'.

The opening paragraph of the Declaration affirms that 'our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters relating to faith and practice as revealed in the Holy Scriptures'. That is in accord with the first clause of Matthew 28:18; it affirms the priority of Jesus in his authority and to him the Bible bears witness. This priority of Christ is followed by an affirmation of the liberty of each church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer his laws. That is an unusual way of referring to the teaching of Jesus, but we are reminded of the 'new commandment' that we should love one another as he loved us (John 13:34), and the utterances of Jesus in Matthew 5:21ff, 'It was said to them of ancient times . . . but I say to you'. We further recall I Corinthians 9:21, where Paul states that he was not under the (Mosaic) law but under 'the law of Christ', i.e. his *authoritative* Messianic exposition of the Old Testament laws.

To the relief of the four principals, the definition of baptism is the second item in the Declaration of Principle, not the first - despite the name of Baptists that we bear! The exposition of this element of the Declaration is weighty. Attention is called to the description of baptism as immersion in water 'into the *Name* of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost', not 'in the *name* of . . .'. This is taken as an indication that baptism is 'a total immersion of new believers into an entirely new life in relationship within the Name'. The interpretation is surely correct, but is not dependent on the translation 'into the Name', for alike in Greek and Hebrew 'in the name of' is a frequent formula meaning 'with reference to', but commonly denoting

relationship; in the context of Matthew 28:19 it signifies 'belonging to, appropriation by the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost'. The Declaration associates repentance and faith with baptism, echoing Acts 2:38, but also I Corinthians 15:3, which is interpreted Christologically, i.e. redemption through the *whole* work of Christ. The frequent view of baptism as 'only a symbol' is repudiated by the principals, for in the Bible symbols are taken seriously; baptism with faith is a 'symbol which enables us to participate in the spiritual reality to which it points'.

The third paragraph of the Declaration speaks of the duty of every disciple to participate in the Great Commission. It is to be viewed as not only a 'duty' but 'a participation in the energy and life of the missionary God'. A new paradigm shift has occurred in mission, in that it is about partnership, interactive, not simply one-way. 'In mission we are all "receivers" as well as "senders"'. Mission is also diverse in expression, and corporate, not just individual.

This is a highly perceptive exposition of the Declaration of Principle of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, and should be read by us all. The four Principals are to be congratulated on their achievement.

GEORGE BEASLEY-MURRAY

D. I. Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 C.E.*, J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen., 1992, DM198.

Baptists have produced an amazing succession of Old Testament scholars during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Now it looks as if we may have produced a scholar who will be a specialist in post-Biblical, rabbinic Hebrew. Dr David Instone Brewer is a Baptist minister now on the staff of Tyndale House, Cambridge, and his PhD thesis, supervised by Dr William Horbury at Cambridge, has now been published by J. C. B. Mohr (Tübingen) in the series *Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum*, edited by Martin Hengel and Peter Schafer. The bulk of the work consists of an examination of all passages exegeting Old Testament texts which Brewer considers may be safely dated to before 70CE, from (1) scribes and (2) non-scribal writers. Brewer then sets out the assumptions that underlie the exegesis from the two groups. His conclusion is that for the scribes, scripture is like a legal document drawn up by God, a perfect legislator, and that therefore they were concerned for the plain meaning of the text in its own context, with every detail significant but not possessing a hidden secondary meaning: Brewer calls this the *Nomological* approach. For the non-scribal writers, however, scripture could 'be interpreted contrary to or without regard to its context; it has secondary meanings independent of the plain meaning; while textual variants and translations were valid forms of Scripture: this Brewer calls *Inspirational Exegesis*. Later Rabbis in the post-70 period tended to be more akin to the 'Inspirational Exegesis' approach and

increasingly use allegory (though never as much as Philo).

Such a study as this is inevitably technical and is certainly not easy reading. Dr Brewer has undoubtedly made an important contribution with this study, and there is little doubt that future discussions of the use of the Old Testament by the New Testament writers will have to take account of his more nuanced description of Jewish exegetical techniques and assumptions before 70CE. In his preface Dr Brewer gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance from the Baptist Union Scholarship Fund to carry out his study.

J. E. Morgan-Wynne, *Minister, Ilkley Baptist Church*

CHAPEL HISTORIES

George T. Streater, *Memorials of the Independent Chapel at Rothwell*, 1994, 248pp, £12-25 inc. p&p, from the author, 90 Greening Road, Rothwell, Kettering, NN14 6JA (tel: 01536 710855), cheques payable to 'Rothwell United Reformed Church'. ISBN 0 952451 90 5.

Edward W. Burrows, *Change at Springburn: A Centenary History of Springburn Baptist Church*, 1992, 159pp, £6 + p&p from the author, 91 Balmuildy Road, Bishopbriggs Road, Glasgow G64 3AP (tel: 0141 772 3957), cheques payable to 'Springburn Baptist Church'.

Joan Lees, *Yesterday, Today and Forever*, 1995, 108pp, £5-99 + £1 p&p, from author, 17 Ribble Avenue, Chadderton, near Oldham OL9 0PN (0161 284 2896).

George Streater, who has had a lifelong connection with the church, has written an excellent history, tracing Rothwell United Reformed Church from its foundation as an Independent Chapel in 1655 until the present day. Of the early pastorates, the most significant was that of Richard Davis, 1689-1714. People were drawn from a wide area to hear his preaching. Since he was unable to visit all the places from which his converts came, he trained lay preachers, some of whom went on to become pastors of churches. During his ministry five other Independent churches were formed: of these the church at Kimbolton, founded 1693, later became a Union Church and then a Baptist Church, closing in the 1960s, while the church at Ringstead, founded 1714, became Baptist and remains a flourishing cause. Sadly, the success of Davis stirred up opposition, which was led by the United Ministers, a society of most of the Presbyterian and Independent ministers in London. In 1691 he was summoned to a meeting of the United Ministers to answer charges of Antinomianism, his use of itinerant preachers who had no formal training, apart from that which he had given them, and with evangelizing in places close to other ministers' pastorates, along with other ill-defined irregularities of Church Order. At first Davis refused to attend such a summons but when he finally went he was

rebuffed. The ministers said they did not have time to deal with it! In this unedifying controversy Davis was not without supporters, including Dr John Gill. One of the pamphlets written during the dispute, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Mr Richard Davis*, published anonymously in 1700, uses the name 'Strict Baptist', indicating that the term must have been in use at Rothwell before that date.

Davis was a pioneer in the use of hymns in worship and first published his *Hymns composed on Several Subjects* in 1694. The seventh edition, in 1748, had a preface by John Gill. The eighth and final edition was published in 1832.

The Rothwell church was very early in appointing women officers - two deaconesses in 1691 - but there appear to have been no others until 1893 when the church appointed three lady deacons (mistakenly called deaconesses in the church book). Once again the practice lapsed, but since 1951 women have served as deacons and then United Reformed Church elders. In 1983 the Revd Sheila Dickson, already minister at Desborough, was called, along with a male minister, to the joint pastorate of four URC churches, including Desborough and Rothwell.

A number of Rothwell members subsequently joined Baptist churches. John Henry Sturman, who died in China in 1887 while serving with the China Inland Mission, transferred to the Baptist Church, Carley Street, Leicester in 1882. Charles Andrew, after training at Hulme Cliff College, went to Iowa for pastoral work. Returning to Rothwell after his health broke down, he married Ellen Sturman, sister of John Henry, and went back to Iowa. Forced to return again to England, he became pastor of Latchford Baptist Church, near Warrington, but died at Rothwell in 1896, aged thirty-one. John Clow left the Rothwell church to join the Salvation Army. He became an Officer and was eventually posted to the United States where he adopted Baptist views and pastored several churches in New England. He died in 1928.

Change at Springburn is an appropriate title for this centenary history, for during the life of this Baptist church the area has changed from a thriving industrial community to a mainly residential area - dramatic changes which have had a profound influence on the church. Its Blenheim Street building, opened in 1904, was required for redevelopment and the church suffered the trauma of a move from the centre of Springburn to a site three-quarters of a mile north on the main road to Bishopbriggs. The church was established by members of Glasgow churches living at Springburn, but the initiative was taken by the Evangelistic Committee of the Baptist Union of Scotland, which asked the Revd John Horne of Ayr Baptist Church to take charge of the work. The church, formed on 16 May 1892, agreed at Horne's suggestion 'that membership be close', although the communion service was open to all Christians. The following January the church resolved 'that its membership shall be composed only of those who abstain from intoxicating liquor, unless when medically prescribed by a doctor', but this requirement was dropped in 1904. The work prospered and the Evangelistic Committee sent a deputation to the church, suggesting Horne should cease to be the Committee's agent on 31

October 1893 and the church should call him as pastor and apply to the General Committee of the Union for assistance, which they did. Horne served as pastor until 1899, when he resigned on medical grounds. He later served Kirkintilloch Church, 1903-9, and then had a distinguished career in business. Subsequent Springburn ministries included those of Revd Hugh Ross Mackenzie, who served there twice, Revd James Heron who was President of the Baptist Union of Scotland 1976-76, and Revd David Black who was to become founder and Director of Scottish Churches Renewal.

Many churches have to face the question of whether to permit ball games on their premises. In the church hall at Blenheim Street, the type of ball had to be approved by the diaconate and was not to be kicked higher than the knee. When the church moved to new premises, the Boys' Brigade began to use the main building for games. The sanctuary was intended to be dual purpose, serving also as a large hall, but it became apparent that the concept of a dual-purpose building had not been sufficiently thought through. Diaconate and Church Meeting decided by majority votes that the part normally used as the sanctuary could not be used for sport, games and other physical activities. This meant the Boys' Brigade Company eventually transferred to another church and Springburn lost contact with many boys.

The church has adopted a conservative attitude to women's ministry. In 1985 the Church Meeting recommended its Assembly delegates to vote against women's acceptance as ministers. In 1991 the Church Rules were altered to permit women deacons and the first were elected that year.

Happily the church minute books were rescued when there was a fire at the Blenheim Street premises. Without them the author could not have written so complete a history of the church.

Yesterday, Today and Forever traces the history of Mills Hill Baptist Church, Middleton, from the time when members from the Manchester Street Baptist Church, Oldham (now King Street), moved to Mills Hill to work in a mill owned by a deacon of that church, James Cheetham. Difficulties in travelling to Oldham meant that they began to worship in a barn. A building for use as a place of worship and Sunday School work was opened in 1849 on land originally owned by James Cheetham. Part of the building cost was met with loans from a group of men, including John Cheetham, who in 1867 formed Oldham Mill and House Society which became in due course the Lancastrian and then the Northern Rock Building Society. By 1853 it was decided that the work should become independent of the parent church. The first pastor, called in 1854, served for nine years. During the next nine years, difficult ones for the whole area as the American Civil War brought disaster to the cotton trade, the church was served by lay pastors.

Church members used the building for teaching English and arithmetic on separate evenings to boys and girls. In 1854 permission was given for a Day School on the premises. Responsibility for this was handed over to the local School Board in 1893, but the church retained an interest in education. It was decided to build a

separate school building so the church obtained land opposite. The cost of the school building became a drain on the church's finances; at one point the deacons had insufficient money to continue building work. The minister, no doubt realizing that the church would find it a financial struggle, resigned in 1902 before building began. The new building was used as a school until 1939.

The church was not able to call another minister until 1912 and financial difficulties caused by World War I led to his resignation in 1916. In 1917 a student from Manchester Baptist College was called to the pastorate: the college was requisitioned for war use and students were given placements in churches on the understanding that they were exempt from military duty. The Lancashire Tribunal, however, turned down the church's request that he be given work of national importance so that he might continue with the pastorate. Ordered to report for military service he refused as a pacifist and was imprisoned. On his release the church unanimously offered to pay his salary while he continued his studies, but such was the feeling against conscientious objectors, even at the college, that they would not accept him back. He resigned in 1919.

The church buildings avoided destruction during both wars, even though in World War II the nearby aerospace factory of A. V. Roe was an obvious target. Once two men had to shelter in a grave they were digging when the factory was bombed. The chapel was, however, badly damaged by arson in 1981, and was subsequently redesigned to make it more appropriate for present-day worship.

Two ministers, Revd Richard Garrett (1953-60) and Revd David Pountain (1961-67), have contributed to the book. In the final chapter members have described what the church fellowship has meant to them. Jean Lees has shown how the Mills Hill Church has had a significant impact on the local community.

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SOCIETY NEWS

Baptist Assembly Meeting: This will be on Wednesday, 30 April 1997 at 4 p.m. at Westminster Central Hall. The Revd Bernard Green will speak about J.H. Rushbrooke, the subject of his newly published biography, *Tomorrow's Man*. The President, the Revd Dr Morris West, will also speak.

Annual General Meeting: 1030 to 1600, Saturday, 28 June at St Andrew's, Selly Oak. The Revd Dr Nigel Wright will give his Whitley Lecture, 'Power and Discipleship: Towards a Baptist theology of the State', and Mr J.H.Y. Briggs will speak on 'The Life and Growth of Baptists in Birmingham in the Nineteenth Century'. The cost will be £10, including buffet lunch. If you are able to attend, kindly book with the Secretary, Revd Stephen Copson, 19 Cedar Grove, Amersham, Bucks HP7 9BG.