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### EDITORIAL and NOTES

We welcome as contributors Dr. McNaughton, who ministers at Kirkcaldy, Mr. Lemon, who ministered at Wrexham and Hoole and is now retired at Penwortham, Mr. Cross of Broadstairs, and Mr. Amey, who is a Baptist minister, and we welcome a further contribution from Dr. Hale, who has been teaching in Cape Town prior to sabbatical leave in Cambridge. Two contributions were first given at meetings of the Society. Dr. McNaughton's was delivered while Assembly was meeting at St. Andrews, 6 July 2002, and Mr. Amey's was delivered in London, 21 September 2002, at a joint meeting of the Baptist and United Reformed Church Historical Societies. Together the papers provide a miscellany whose thread is loosely Congregational, literally so in the cases of St. Andrews and Barton, born of personal conviction in the case of Frederick Bennett, generally and atmospherically so in Frederick Hale's paper. That leaves Basil Amey's paper. As Mr. Amey reminds us, the Free Church Federal Council lasted from September 1940 to April 2001. It survives in attenuated form as the Free Churches Group in association with Churches Together in England. Congregationalists and, in due course, the United Reformed Church, played their part in the council and bear due responsibility for its achievements and its limitations. Basil Amey's retrospective

view whets our appetite for his forthcoming history of the Council.

It is important to chart the Free Church contribution to larger issues, and that gives a particular value to the papers by Basil Amey and Frederick Hale. It is equally important to recognise the essence of congregationalism (big and small C) as it is found in journeyman ministers (none of whom turns out to be run of the mill) and unremarkable churches (none of which in fact turns out to be unremarkable). Church life at St. Andrews could not fail to have suggestive moments, but neither did church life at Broadstairs and as for Barton, that now vanished cause has an exemplary memorial in this issue's "History Restored".

NOTE The Chapels Society plans a visit to the Waldensian Valleys in October 2004. From 1-3 October the visit will be based at Torre Pellice, but there should be flexible opportunities to visit Milan and Turin before and after this. Members of the URCHS are invited to register an interest and seek further details (please enclose stamped and addressed envelope) from Dr. Mary Ede, 12 Springfield Place, Lansdown, Bath BA1 5RA. Because members are limited to thirty-five, places will be allocated on a first come, first served, basis.

## EARLY CONGREGATIONALISM IN ST. ANDREWS

Scottish Congregationalism is an indigenous movement whose roots are to be found among those who, at the close of the eighteenth-century, were aware of a need to revitalise the spiritual life of Scotland. An evangelical force from across the border, associated with the names of Whitefield, Bogue, Bennett, Fuller, Simeon, Newton and Hill had already influenced some of these individuals. The force, compared with that in the Scottish Church, where "Evangelism was rather venerable than robust",<sup>1</sup> was still in the bloom of youth, and events such as the founding of the London Missionary Society in 1794, served to heighten the conviction in Scotland that missionary endeavour was a necessary part of the Church's life and missionary societies were established in Scotland from around 1795 onwards. However, not everyone shared the new-found enthusiasm. The General Assembly of 1796 was unwilling to entertain a proposal that the Church should "contribute to the diffusion of the Gospel over the world".<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the cause of missions continued to enthuse many and July 1796 brought with it the publication of the *Missionary Magazine*, originally to advocate foreign missions.<sup>3</sup> This monthly publication soon became the means of communication between earnest Christians as to the best ways of disseminating the Gospel, not only abroad, but at home. The discussion contained within it, concerning how best to promote the Gospel at home, and the information given by correspondents regarding the low state of religion in Scotland, helped fuel the conviction that the existing agencies connected with the churches were quite inadequate to meet the spiritual needs of the people. The Moderates' charge that the supporters of missionary societies neglected the need for the Gospel at home<sup>4</sup> did not square with the energy and enthusiasm reflected on the pages of the *Missionary Magazine*.

The Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home came into being at the beginning of 1798 and Joseph Rate<sup>5</sup> "from England, whose character was well known to the Society,...agreed to itinerate in Fifeshire". Thereafter, between 2 May and 31 July, Rate preached in most of the towns and villages of Fife.<sup>6</sup> From

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1. William Law Matherson, *Church and Reform in Scotland, A History from 1797-1843*, Glasgow, 1916, p.50, as quoted by Nelson Gray in his Ph.D Thesis. "Greville Ewing Architect of Scottish Congregationalism," (Edinburgh, 1961).
  2. Andrew L. Drummond & James Bulloch, *The Scottish Church, 1688-1843*, (Edinburgh, 1793), p.152.
  3. *Missionary Magazine*, Edinburgh, 18 July 1796, Title page.
  4. (Robert Heron.) *An Account of the Proceedings and Debate in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 27th May 1796, on the Overture from the Provincial Synods of Fife and Moray, Respecting the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Heathen*, (Edinburgh, 1790).
  5. Joseph Rate (d.1846), cf. William D. McNaughton, *The Scottish Congregational Ministry 1794-1993*, (Glasgow, 1993), p.131.
  6. *An Account of the Proceedings of the Society for Propagating The Gospel at Home, from their Commencement, Dec. 28, 1797, to May 16. 1799*, Edinburgh, pp.41-59.

his Journal we learn that he arrived in St. Andrews on 3 June 1798:

Sabbath, June 3,...Just before the time appointed to preach, a very heavy fall of rain came on, and there was no appearance of it abating. I asked if they could think of any place of shelter, where we could assemble? They replied they could think of none. Observing to the people that it would be disagreeable for them to stand in the wet, and they might be in danger of catching cold, they answered they would stay, and seemed perfectly willing to bear the rain. We then went to the old cathedral yard, and I preached to about 500 or 600 people, who were astonishingly attentive. Though it rained incessantly, I did not observe above two persons go away. One or two of the magistrates were present. ...

Sabbath, June 10. ...went to St. Andrew's, ... I had altered the place of preaching this evening for the links at the end of the town, which happened very fortunately, for a great crowd of people had gathered, nearly 3000. Having taken my station at the top of a hill, where the intense rays of the sun shone directly upon me, ...<sup>7</sup>

Joseph Rate was relatively well received in Fife, despite the fact that in Kinghorn he had to allay the magistrate's concern<sup>8</sup> and in St. Andrews his preaching and distribution of small tracts, all relating solely to religion, caused no small alarm.<sup>9</sup> About two months later, Rowland Hill<sup>10</sup> and James Haldane<sup>11</sup> visited St. Andrews. Hill states, "I was afraid I should be treated like an apostle, with persecution, at St. Andrew's; ... [but] We had no mob to interrupt us, and we left the place as peaceable as we found it".<sup>12</sup>

The town so closely associated with John Knox was not overlooked by the S.P.G.H., but it was several years after Hill's visit before an agent of the S.P.G.H. remained in St. Andrews for any length of time. Immediately before this, two itinerants, John Watson<sup>13</sup> and William Walker<sup>14</sup> visited the town in 1804.<sup>15</sup> Watson speaks of great difficulty in informing the populace of his intention to preach "as the authorities would not allow the bell to go round, ... At length about 100 assembled, ... One man regretted much that he could not get the [Missionary] Magazine; he said copies once came to the town, but the clergy prevailed upon the

7. *Ibid.*, pp.51-53.

8. *Ibid.*, p.44.

9. *Missionary Magazine*, 1798, pp.332-334.

10. Rowland Hill (1744-1833).

11. James Alexander Haldane (1768-1851), cf. *McNaughton, op.cit.*, p.60.

12. Rowland Hill, *Journal of a Tour through the North of Engalnd and Parts of Scotland*, (London, 1799), pp.40-43.

13. John Watson (1777-1844), cf. *McNaughton, op.cit.*, p.167

14. William Walker, cf. *McNaughton, op.cit.*, 165.

15. William Lindsay Alexander, *Memoir of the Rev. John Watson*, (Edinburgh, 1845), p.33

bookseller to give it up".<sup>16</sup>

The welcome St. Andrews accorded Independents was far from warm. Nevertheless, there were a few earnest souls who were glad to see them and, nine days later, news of Watson's return provoked considerable interest. He records that he "walked to St. Andrews, and preached in the evening to about 2500 people, - by far the largest congregation I ever addressed".<sup>17</sup> Others visited the town and by the end of 1804 a temporary place of worship had been procured on the south side of the town, known as "the factory".

During his visit to St. Andrews, Joseph Rate had encouraged his listeners to found a Sabbath school. When Thomas Paton<sup>18</sup> commenced his labours in the town in May 1805, there was still no Sabbath school. Paton immediately founded one. Then, in "the month of July 1805, about a dozen individuals, having full confidence in each other, formed themselves into a church".<sup>19</sup> Shortly after the church's formation, Thomas Paton was called to the pastoral office and ordained on 3rd October, 1805, with two of the brethren being set apart as deacons on the same day.<sup>20</sup>

A few years earlier, the preaching of Rate and his distribution of small tracts, all of which related solely to religion, had caused no small alarm in St. Andrews. The authorities commanded Rate to speak no more, nor preach in the name of Jesus - an injunction he could not comply with. Rowland Hill, aware of the hostility directed at Rate, was wary of preaching in the town: "I was afraid I should be treated like an apostle, with persecution, ... because some had tasted it before me". He chose a text, Romans 14:17, which he believed he could preach on without giving offence to "students or ministers, should they condescend to listen at a distance".<sup>21</sup> Later, the local authorities denied Watson the services of the town-crier and the clergy prevailed upon the local bookseller not to supply the *Missionary Magazine*. Things were no better when Paton commenced his ministry and this is hardly surprising when we remember that St. Andrews was noted for its High Church principles and aristocratic prejudices.<sup>22</sup>

It took a considerable amount of commitment to be a Congregational minister in St. Andrews in the early 1800s. It also required no small measure of courage on the part of individuals in the town to separate from the Established Church and unite themselves with the new and unpopular sect. It was not uncommon for those attending Independent meetings in the town to be insulted in the streets and attempts were even made to interrupt the worship of the new body. These petty

16. *Ibid.*, 36-37.

17. *Ibid.*, p.37.

18. Thomas Paton (1776-1818), cf. *McNaughton, op.cit.*, p.123.

19. Robert Kinniburgh, [Editor], *Fathers of Independency in Scotland: or, Biographical Sketches of Early Congregational Ministers. A.D. 1798-1851*, (Edinburgh, 1851). p.56.

20. *Scottish Congregational Magazine*, 1874, p.110.

21. Hill, *op.cit.*

22. William Hanna, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Chalmers, D.D., LL.D. By His son-in-Law*, (London, 1849-1852), [4vols.] vol.III, p.97.

annoyances were carried on to such an extent that the members were forced to appeal for the protection of the Law and a proclamation was consequently issued by the Magistrates prohibiting any person from disturbing the members of the church while engaged in religious exercises. The most absurd and unfounded stories were also propagated with a view to maligning the Independents. No doubt Paton's "uncompromising denunciation of the errors and corruptions which he discovered in the Established Church" merely aggravated the situation.<sup>23</sup> Eventually the persecution subsided and, towards the end of his ministry, Paton "studied a more practical and conciliatory mode of address".<sup>24</sup> By 1848 it could be asserted that "for many years past, the members of the Church generally as well as the Pastor, have enjoyed a considerable share of the public confidence, and though occasional hindrances have been thrown in the way of our efforts for the spiritual welfare of the people at the instance of the clergy, these attempts have generally met with little sympathy from the community".<sup>25</sup>

The young church in St. Andrews had also to contend with unpleasant internal forces. Soon after Paton's ordination, some of the church's members embraced Baptist sentiments and separated. This separation, coupled with some painful cases of discipline which occurred about the same time, proved very discouraging to those who remained, "but ... both pastor and people were encouraged to persevere".<sup>26</sup> The cause advanced slowly. Their place of meeting being small and uncomfortable, a piece of ground was purchased in Market Street, around where number 105 stands today, and a place of worship erected in 1807.<sup>27</sup>

The stipend that the church was able to pay was too small to support Paton's family; therefore he opened a shop chiefly selling soft goods. The business prospered, but the strain of trying to run a business and fulfil his pastoral duties began to tell on his health. Thankfully, a Mrs. Puget, from Totteridge near London, arrived in St. Andrews around 1817 and remained for some months. Although a member of the Church of England, she found her way to the Independent Chapel and began to attend its services regularly. Mrs. Puget continued in fellowship while she remained in the town and before leaving she granted Paton an annuity of £50, to enable him to retire from business and devote his time to the ministry.<sup>28</sup> Paton died the following year, in his forty-third year, "much esteemed by the inhabitants of St. Andrews for his moral worth, and his faithfulness in the cause of Christ. His death was consequently much regretted. His funeral was attended by most of the Professors, the ministers, and principal inhabitants of the town, in token of their respect for his private worth".<sup>29</sup> Thus ended a chapter in the little

23. *General Account of Congregationalism in Scotland from 1798 to 1848 and Particular Accounts Referring to Separate Counties*, Section 4, p.14.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, p.15.

26. Kinniburgh, *op.cit.*, p.56.

27. *Plan of the City of St. Andrews. Surveyed by John Wood*, (Edinburgh, 1820).

28. *General Account, op.cit.*, Section 4, pp. 12-13.

29. Kinniburgh, *op.cit.*, p.59.

church's history in which the church had become a centre of spiritual life and activity with "preaching stations at Leuchars, Denhead, Boarhills, Kincapple, Strathkinness, and other places in the neighbourhood".<sup>30</sup>

About the end of October 1818, William Lothian,<sup>31</sup> who studied at Hoxton Academy, London was sent to supply the pulpit. He found the cause very low, the number of communicants being only twenty-five. There were few regular hearers. The church could merely contribute around £20 towards the support of a pastor, but the Congregational Union indicated it was prepared to supplement that sum.<sup>32</sup> Hence, on 17 June, 1819, William Lothian was ordained pastor of St. Andrews church.<sup>33</sup>

The cause in St. Andrews began to rally under Lothian and the chapel was greatly improved shortly after his ordination. A wooden floor was laid, brass chandeliers took the place of wooden candlesticks and comfortable pews replaced uncomfortable forms. Eventually, the increase in attendance at the chapel was such that the decision was taken to raise the roof and install a gallery.<sup>34</sup> Lothian's ministry was having an effect on St. Andrews, the evangelically minded finding a kindred spirit in Lothian.

In November, 1823, Thomas Chalmers,<sup>35</sup> the most celebrated preacher in Scotland, became professor of Moral Philosophy at the University and here he immediately experienced a feeling of isolation, the spirit of Moderatism being dominant in both University and town.<sup>36</sup> Later, in 1825, we find entries in his diary such as, "I feel colded to St. Andrews by the high church spirit which pervades it".<sup>37</sup> However, we also find the following entry in 1826: "Attended Mr. Lothian's week-night service, and mean to continue it"<sup>38</sup> Chalmers found his way to the week-night service in the little Congregational Church. Indeed, according to Lothian, "during the greater part of the time he resided in the city, Mrs Chalmers and his three eldest daughters regularly attended the Congregational Chapel ... he was a frequent hearer at our weekly prayer meetings, and used to observe that on such occasions one generally meets with the *elite* of the religious people of the town ..."<sup>39</sup> For Thomas Chalmers, the weekly prayer meetings in the little Congregational chapel were spiritually refreshing.

On the other hand, William Lothian's eloquence was such that it drew people of any class, even university professors such as Chalmers and Duncan, Professor of

30. *Scottish Congregational Magazine*, 1901, p.125.

31. William Lothian (1795-1875), cf, McNaughton, *op.cit.*, p.84.

32. *General Account, op.cit.*, Section 4, p.14.

*Scottish Congregational Magazine*, 1874, pp.110-111.

33. *Christian Herald*, 1819, pp.310-311.

34. *Scottish Congregational Magazine*, 1874, p.111.

35. Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847).

36. Hanna, *op.cit.*, Vol.III, p.80.

37. *Ibid.*, pp.95 & 97.

38. *Ibid.*, p.100.

39. *Scottish Congregational Magazine*, 1867, p.267.

Mathematics.<sup>40</sup> A man of considerable talent, Lothian was as much a scholar as a divine. His ministry was a source of blessing to many and played an important part in the lives of many students pursuing their studies at the University.<sup>41</sup> William Carmichael McIntosh, who later played a key role in the development of the study of marine biology and occupied a chair at the University, was among those Lothian helped with their Greek exercises.<sup>42</sup>

Two students in particular, John Urquhart<sup>43</sup> and John Adam,<sup>44</sup> who ranked amongst the most talented in the University at the time, came under Lothian's influence. Urquhart was received into the St. Andrews Church in April, 1824, despite the fact that Lothian had thought it his duty to remind him that, "by casting in his lot with us, he would be deprived of that patronage which might otherwise have held out to him prospects of temporal advancement".<sup>45</sup> Adam came from an English Congregational background.<sup>46</sup>

John Urquhart and John Adam along with four other students, Robert Nesbit, Alexander Duff, William Sinclair Mackay and David Ewart, were deeply influenced by Thomas Chalmers, and in turn greatly influenced one another. Urquhart in particular presented others with the missionary challenge<sup>47</sup> and led many to believe that "only one thing seemed to matter: to discover God's will and to do it".<sup>48</sup> The St. Andrews University Missionary Association was born; flourished and furnished some of the first and noblest missionaries that the Church of Scotland sent into the foreign field. Nesbit,<sup>49</sup> Duff,<sup>50</sup> Mackay,<sup>51</sup> Ewart<sup>52</sup> and Adam all served in India. Urquhart, who influenced the destiny of all the above, died before he could fulfil his great ambition to serve on the mission field. He died in the home of Greville Ewing in 1827.<sup>53</sup>

A few months after the death of John Adam, James Paterson, a native of St. Andrews who had belonged to the Congregational Church there, was designated by the London Missionary Society to succeed Adam. Paterson who had studied at

40. A.E. Gunther, *The Life of William Carmichael McIntosh, M.D., F.R.S., of St. Andrews, 1838-1931. A Pioneer of Marine Biology*, (St. Andrews, 1977), p.10.
41. *Scottish Congregational Magazine*, 1863, pp.50-51.
42. Gunther, *op.cit.*, p.10.
43. John Urquhart (1808-1827), cf. McNaughton, *op.cit.*, p.164.
44. *Memoir of John Adam, Late Missionary at Calcutta*, (London, 1833).
45. William Orme, *Memoirs, including Letters and Select Remains, of John Urquhart, late University of St. Andrew's*, (2 Vols.) (London, 1827), Vol. I, p.52.
46. *Memoir of John Adam, Late Missionary at Calcutta*, (London, 1833).
47. John Urquhart, *Address to the St. Andrew's University Missionary Society, on the Duty of Personal Engagement in the Work of Missions*, [Orme, *op.cit.*, Vol II, pp.68-98].
48. Stuart Piggin & John Roxborough, *The St. Andrews Seven*, (Edinburgh, 1985), p.77.
49. Robert Nesbit (1803-1855), cf. Hew Scott, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanæ*, (Edinburgh, 1928), Vol. VII, pp. 703-704.
50. Alexander Duff (1806-1878, cf. *Fasti, op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.690-692.
51. William Sinclair Mackay (1807-1865), cf. *Fasti, op.cit.*, Vol. VII, p.699.
52. David Ewart (1806-1860), cf. *Fasti, op.cit.*, Vol. II, p.693.
53. Orme, vol. II, p.261.

St. Andrews University and Highbury College, was set apart for this task in 1831.<sup>54</sup>

William Lothian and others had formed a town missionary society in 1822, prior to the formation of the students' association. This body was to provide a public platform for Thomas Chalmers to advocate the missionary cause at a time when many derided it.<sup>55</sup>

Everyone in St. Andrews, however, did not appreciate the warm evangelical fellowship of the Congregational Church. In those days attendance at the services of the College Chapel was obligatory for students, unless their parents were members of some dissenting community, and attempts to procure exemption for young men connected with the evangelical party within the Church of Scotland from the frigid ministrations of the College Chapel failed.<sup>56</sup> In this connection, we find Lothian sending a strongly worded letter to the Editor of *The Fife Herald*, feeling he had been portrayed as ignorant and fanatical and the dissenting churches of St. Andrews as "hot-beds of debate and fanaticism, ... that it was dangerous to allow any young person to enter [their] walls".<sup>57</sup>

The Commissioners of Religious Instruction visited St. Andrews in 1837, and the evidence submitted to them by Lothian gives us a unique insight into the St. Andrews church at the time. Public worship was conducted three times every Sunday and once every Thursday evening. The average day-time attendance in the summer was two hundred, slightly less in winter; the evening attendance from October to April averaged two hundred and fifty and in June, July and August upwards of three hundred and twenty. Not infrequently the whole of the sittings were occupied in the evenings.

William Lothian regularly visited his congregation and was in the habit of preaching on weekday evenings in the villages of Boarhills, Denhead, Blebo Craigs, Kincapple and Leuchars, and also in houses in various parts of the town, the attendance at which varied from twenty to eighty.<sup>58</sup>

In 1839 there was a remarkable revival of religion among many of the Congregational churches in Scotland. Protracted meetings, as they were then called, were held in churches [all over Scotland] ... Many conversions were reported, new churches were planted in places where none had existed before, and the membership of all churches in places where meetings had been held was largely increased.<sup>59</sup>

54. *The Christian Herald*, 1832, pp.25-26.

55. Piggin, *op.cit.*, p.45.

56. Thomas Chalmers, *Letter to the Royal Commissioners for the Visitation of Colleges in Scotland*, (Glasgow, 1832), pp.54-56.

57. *The Fife Herald, and Kinross, Strathearn, and Clackmannan Advertiser*, No. 523 (15 March), 1832, pp.8-9.

58. *Reports from Commissioners: Religious Instruction (Scotland)*, *Parliamentary Papers*, (Edinburgh, 1838), pp.506-509.

59. James Ross, *A History of Congregational Independency in Scotland*, (Glasgow, 1900), p.125.

The revival did not fail to touch St. Andrews and at the end of the day about forty were added to the church.<sup>60</sup> Another series of meetings were held in 1842/1843 and again good work was done, but the converts for the most part joined the Free Church.<sup>61</sup> That most converts decided to join the Free Church is understandable. The spiritual witness of Scottish Congregationalists cannot be separated from the Disruption of the Established Church of Scotland in 1843. Up until 1843, many of those who desired a more evangelical form of preaching than that offered in the Established Church found it in a Congregational Church. Now those amongst such individuals, who had never given up either their nominal connection with the Established Church or their Presbyterian views of church order, could find their needs satisfied in the newborn Free Church which was fired with evangelical zeal.

On the whole, the years 1839 to 1843 were a time of growth for the St. Andrews church, despite the fact that about twenty individuals holding Baptist views left in 1841. The Baptist Church in St. Andrews was formed in June 1841, with eight members.<sup>62</sup>

In 1852, steps were taken towards the erection of a new chapel, which was opened in Bell Street on 17 December, 1854.<sup>63</sup> Lothian, however, resigned in 1853. His call, from St. Andrews to Yorkshire, coincided with criticism of his proposed second marriage.<sup>64</sup>

W.D. McNaughton

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60. *The Scottish Congregational Magazine*, 1874, p.112.

61. *ibid.*

62. *The Scottish Congregational Magazine*, 1874, p.157-159, 1874, p.112 & George Yuille, *History of the Baptists in Scotland*, (Glasgow, 1926), p.157.

63. *The Scottish Congregational Magazine*, 1855, pp.60-61.

64. Gunther, p.10.

## BARTON, CHESHIRE: A HISTORY RESTORED

“Congregationalism is distinguished from the various systems of hierarchical and connectional government by its principle, that every Christian society is under Christ, a complete and independent church”: John Allison Macfadyen thus states the full significance of any such church, whatever and wherever its setting<sup>1</sup>. The history of each church similarly has its own integrity and so takes its place within that of the wider church, whether or not an original Covenant or detailed Church Book exists to tell the whole life of that cause. Applicable though this is to all churches, it may be necessary today to undertake a significant reappraisal of our rural churches, those which are perhaps the most easily forgotten. Their probable contrast with the architect-designed Congregational cathedrals in large towns or cities does not diminish the more modest building as a place for worship: their frequent lack of nationally-known preachers need not isolate them from those same pastors, their colleges or their County Unions. For a significant part of a denomination’s story still emerges through such churches and, however apparent a problem of records may seem, it remains surprising how much can be gleaned from both religious and secular sources: this, indeed, the history of Barton suggests.

In the Preface to his Centenary history of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, Albert Peel describes as miscreants and vandals those whose thoughtless destruction of early records prevented the fullest description of the Union’s story<sup>2</sup>. On a more modest scale, Barton United Reformed (formerly Congregational) Church, a rural cause nine miles south of Chester, experienced its own act of avoidable vandalism in the 1970s. Following the death of a Church Secretary, the Church’s papers were treated as unwelcome personal possessions: entirely destroyed were Minutes Books, records of Accounts, Membership Lists, newsletters and other items. Evidence of all decisions and meetings before c1980 can now be sought only externally, through denominational Year Books, Church Books of other congregations, local newspapers and varied ephemera: these haphazard accidents of survival provide little more than the opportunity to float across whatever diverse, and frequently differing, surfaces remain in oral or other tradition<sup>3</sup>.

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1. A. Mackennal, *Life of John Allison Macfadyen* (London 1891), p. 179. Macfadyen was delivering his Chairman’s address to the Lancashire Congregational Union at Bolton on 9 April 1879.
  2. A. Peel, *These Hundred Years: a History of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1831-1931* (London 1931), unpaginated preface.
  3. I am greatly indebted to the following individuals and institutions for help provided towards this attempted reconstruction: Mrs I. Boffey, Revd Brian Holroyd, Miss J.M. Hughes, Revd Alan Johnston, Revd Philip Kennerley, Mr E.J. Moon, Mr D. Reynolds, Revd Brian Slater, the late Revd Harold Swindells, Mrs F. Sykes, Mrs M. White; Archives, Argyll and Bute Council, Lochgilphead; Cheshire County Record Office, Chester; Luther King House Library, Manchester; and Dr Williams’s Library, London. Professor J.C.G. Binfield also made helpful suggestions in relation to an earlier draft of this paper.

Barton Chapel, a term describing the varied Nonconformist work, worship and buildings from before 1810 until 1992, seems for only seven of its years to have been thoroughly independent of any adjacent church. All within a four mile radius, its three nearest Congregational neighbours were Tattenhall, Malpas and Farnon: each, directly or indirectly, furnishes information about Barton. One, involved in early missioning, spoke as eloquently by omissions from its Church Book as from detailed content; another, home of Barton's builder, yielded the tangential provision of a newspaper's obituary of this leading patron; the third, with almost a century of ministerial sharing, lost its own Minutes in a 1957 fire and proved elusive in its later records. Even Barton's date as carved in sandstone above the Chapel door, origin of an understandable 1977 Centenary, required careful interpretation. Lying within the Parish of Coddington but lacking a separate Anglican Church, most of its scattered population - 169 in 1850, eighty-eight in 1891 and seventy-two in 1961 - worked in agriculture until the second half of the twentieth century. Neighbouring villages and hamlets mostly boasted a Methodist or Congregational chapel, although Malpas spawned nineteenth-century buildings by Independents and two Methodist Connexions. For ninety years, the old salt route from Nantwich to North Wales passed between Barton's Chapel and Farm: whilst single-family ownership held that farm for some centuries, other social groups experienced instability through the frequent removal of the farm labourers and domestic servants more likely to comprise the chapel's regular congregation<sup>4</sup>. The farmyard later provided a parking place for preachers' cars: only in the 1960s did a small by-pass leave this part of the village, though still without public transport, on a quiet by-way.

Barton's earliest Nonconformist activity remains undiscovered. One possible antecedent may be found in Isaac Nicholson, curate at Coddington from 1784 to 1792: a personal memoir<sup>5</sup> records his regular preaching in a neighbouring village, perhaps Tattenhall which was later instrumental in Barton's development. Nicholson, known to preach justification without works and to associate with Methodists, left the Established Church to serve from 1792 to 1808 as President of Lady Huntingdon's College at Cheshunt. His gathered Cheshire converts continued to worship together, perhaps although not conclusively becoming Tattenhall's first Independent congregation<sup>6</sup>. Cottage services in Barton had commenced by c1808, when a Coddington family named Meredith regularly

4. F. J. Powicke, *A History of the Cheshire County Union of Congregational Churches* (Manchester 1907), p. 118. The formal title of the Union was changed in 1909 from "The Cheshire Union of Congregational Churches" to "The Cheshire Congregational Union" (hereafter CUCC and CCU respectively).
5. See W. G. Robinson, "Tattenhall Congregational Church, Cheshire" in *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* (hereafter *TCHS*), Vol. XV, No. 3 (1947), pp. 112-127, for reference to *Evangelical Magazine* 1808, pp. 233 ff.
6. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

entertained visiting preachers<sup>7</sup>: some reportedly came on horseback from the Academy at Wrexham<sup>8</sup> led from 1791 to 1811 by Jenkin Lewis, Pastor of that town's Pen-y-Bryn Independent Church. This academy had had previous homes at Abergavenny and Oswestry and would later remove successively to Llanfyllin and Newtown before finally settling at Brecon<sup>9</sup>. Lewis (1760-1831) was from 1811 to 1813 President of the short-lived Leaf Square Academy, Manchester<sup>10</sup>. Perhaps the first denominational input came from Tattenhall where the four-year-old Cheshire County Union of Congregational Churches, pursuing its prime aim of evangelism and probably in April 1810, "engaged the services of a Mr Thomas Hitchin<sup>11</sup> who laboured abundantly both in Tattenhall and in the neighbouring villages of Barton, Tilston, Bickerton and others"<sup>12</sup>. Tattenhall, first established in a thatched cottage superseded by an 1808 chapel, hosted Hitchin's itinerant ministry until his removal in 1818 to Towcester ("a larger sphere near London" according to an 1870 appeal leaflet still pinned in the earliest Tattenhall Church Book): his evangelistic work had certainly reached Barton by 1816. John Morris<sup>13</sup>, educated at the Rotherham Academy, was ordained at Tattenhall in November 1819, eighteen months after arrival: his ministry there lasted forty-three years until his resignation in 1862<sup>14</sup>. Successor again without interval, William Currie continued Barton's Sabbath preaching throughout 1862: that frequency would reduce in the following year, perhaps through pressure to concentrate on Tattenhall itself<sup>15</sup>. The County Union Reports of 1869 note of Barton that "Services are chiefly conducted by Mr Harris, a gentleman who, whilst engaged in business in Liverpool, devotes himself to Christian work in this village": both

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7. W. Urwick, *Historical Sketches of Nonconformity in the County Palatine of Chester* (Manchester 1864), p. 106, describes a family link between Nicholson and the Merediths: he cites the 1811 Cheshire Union Report for Tattenhall which "contains brief but interesting obituaries of Mr S. Meredith of Coddington, brother-in-law to Rev Isaac Nicholson".
  8. This detail, among others in the present paper, is in a manuscript account kept by Rock United Reformed (formerly Congregational) Church, Farndon: dated 1928 and headed "Fifty Years", it was written by Alfred Sinclair, latterly Senior Deacon at Farndon, and has the appearance of a Jubilee address delivered at Barton.
  9. A. N. Palmer, *A History of the Older Nonconformity of Wrexham and its Neighbourhood* (Wrexham 1888), pp. 115-118. I owe this reference to Miss J.M. Hughes.
  10. Elaine Kaye, *For the Work of Ministry* (Edinburgh 1999), p. 50. See also C.E. Surman, "Leaf Square Academy, Pendleton 1811-13" in *TCHS*, Vol. 13, (1937-39), pp. 107-117.
  11. For Thomas Hitchin (1772-1858), see *Congregational Year Book*, 1859, pp. 200-1.
  12. Urwick, *op. cit.*, p. 106.
  13. For John Morris (1787-1883), see *CYB*, 1885, p. 216.
  14. Cheshire Record Office (hereafter CRO), ECU/3151/58/4, where Morris's resignation letter is pasted into the Tattenhall Church Book (hereafter TCB) Vol. 1, p. 21. TCB Vol. 1 records the years 1822-1921: Vol. 2, ECU/3151/58/5, covers 1921-1962.
  15. CRO, ECU/3151/58/4, TCB Vol. 1, p. 24.

William Herbert Harris, a cotton broker originating in Barton, and Andrew Craig Todd, succeeding Currie at Tattenhall in 1865, would later appear in central roles at Barton<sup>16</sup>.

The impetus to build found expression in a public meeting held at Barton on Friday 27 October 1876: those present included Congregational ministers from Tattenhall and Malpas, two Barton residents and Harris. With promises received already totalling more than £100, it was determined to build but any use for worship would be delayed “so long as any pecuniary liabilities rest on it”<sup>17</sup>. On 18 July 1877, a “conveyance for land on which to build a Chapel was signed”<sup>18</sup>, the signatures including farmers, builders and a shoemaker, variously from Tattenhall, Barton, Malpas and Whitchurch, as well as Harris and Thomas Huxley<sup>19</sup>. Huxley (c1821-1903), a wheelwright turned successful builder and contractor, spent almost all his life in Malpas of whose Congregational Church he became senior deacon. His wider vision however with considerable generosity both built and part-financed chapels at Norbury, Threapwood, Lavister and Barton among many others<sup>20</sup>: Farndon was an outright gift in 1889 and Bradley another in 1891. Whilst south-west Cheshire’s late nineteenth-century rural Congregationalism seems centrally dependent on these tireless benefactions, the broader denominationalism of the County Union would later honour him as its Chairman in 1900: shortly before his death, he held a like position in the North Wales English Congregational Union until declining health caused his premature resignation<sup>21</sup>.

The stonelaying took place on 7 September 1877. Reporting this event, where a Mr. Joseph Spencer of Manchester officiated, a Chester newspaper<sup>22</sup> described the Congregationalists’ earlier building as “by courtesy called a chapel” although

16. Andrew Craig Todd appears to have left Congregationalism shortly after his resignation from Tattenhall in 1890 and following financial failure. There is no *CYB* Obituary, neither is there for William Currie whom Powicke, *op. cit.*, p. 141, notes as removing to Ireland.

17. A memo of this meeting is attached to CRO, ECU/3151/58/4, TCB Vol. 1, p. 110.

18. This date, with other details in the present paper, is taken from a brief undated typescript by Sydney Boffey compiled about the time of the 1977 Centenary celebrations: it probably drew on Barton papers then still extant.

19. 11 names and occupations were listed in papers now lost but probably dependent on a source destroyed in the 1970s. Meanwhile, CCU *Executive Committee Minutes* for 6 October 1913 (CRO, ECU/3151/1/5) record the absence of any proper Trust Deed, “but only a ‘lease’ of the land (and) only one of the lessees was surviving. The lease is for 75 years and is dated March 25 1878 (*sic*)”. Named local Trustees were appointed in October 1955, but 1961 legal correspondence when Barton appointed the Union as sole Trustee states: “Incidentally, the only religious Trusts are those contained in an old Lease of 18th July, 1877, and they are not only out of date, but entirely inadequate”.

20. *CYB*’s first name Church Secretaries in 1895: Huxley is recorded as serving in this capacity for Barton until 1899.

21. *The Chester Chronicle*, 15 August 1903.

22. *The Chester Chronicle*, 15 September 1877.

hardly more than a barn: this “small room” nonetheless had in 1850 housed not only divine service but also a day school<sup>23</sup>. The new structure would accommodate 130 people ordinarily, and possibly twenty or thirty more, “all the seats free and unappropriated”. £200 of the estimated cost of about £400 remained to be raised. The report openly criticised an authoritarian influence against Dissenting places of worship throughout the district<sup>24</sup> and voiced specific and outspoken opposition to the Established Church seen in “that tyrannical and despotic spirit of bigotry and persecution, alas, too often manifested by landed proprietors towards nonconformists”: the generous contributions of such as the Anglican Duke of Westminster and a neighbouring Presbyterian landowner Robert Barbour<sup>25</sup> then seemed an irenic diversion. The obligatory proclamation of the principles of Nonconformist Congregational Churches was made by the Revd P.W. Darnton of Queen Street, Chester: he stressed personal responsibility; a Christian Church composed of Christian people; spiritual completeness in each church; and unsacerdotal Christian ministry. Disingenuously, neighbouring Aldford’s chapel choir (Methodist New Connexion but wrongly described as Congregational) sang “Give, O Give” whilst free-will offerings were being laid on the stone, and a final benediction preceded the necessary excellent tea served in a tent where ten named ladies presided over the tables.

The opening celebrations, spread across ten days from Friday 17 May 1878, linked the local with the wider church. Whilst the initial Sundays’ preachers included ministers from Malpas and Tattenhall, the opening services heard Alexander Mackennal: then recently arrived at Bowdon Downs, he would officiate at many similar Cheshire occasions and also in 1887 be called to the Chair of the Congregational Union. If nothing else, Mackennal’s presence showed Barton’s builder-patron, Thomas Huxley, to be considerably involved in the affairs of the County Union. A Chester newspaper fully reported Mackennal’s sermon from Hebrews 12: 22-24 in terms which echoed the earlier criticisms of the established church: whatever attempts there may have been to forestall the building of the new chapel, the faith it proclaimed depended not on ceremony, nor was there need of symbols, Temple, priesthood or altar; the Christian religion reigned in the conscience and heart<sup>26</sup>. 1877 and 1878 both pass at Tattenhall without written reference to stonelaying or opening at Barton. No members transfer from Tattenhall to Barton during the years of Barton’s developing

23. S. Gagshaw, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of the County Palatine of Cheshire* (Sheffield 1850), p. 130.

24. Farndon URC has a further manuscript, undated but written by Thomas Huxley about his activity at Farndon, Penley and Threapwood. Internal evidence supports the view that this is Huxley’s address to the 1890 County Union Annual Meeting about “the formation of several churches in the south of the County” (see CRO, ECU/3151/1/22: CUCC *Annual Reports*): it instances clerical influence, indignation and opposition against Nonconformity in these three named villages.

25. I owe this latter denominational detail to Prof. Clyde Binfield.

26. *The Chester Chronicle*, 25 May 1878.

independence, but some leave for North Wales churches and also Virginia (1882) and France (1886).

An immense variety of dates is claimed for the various stages of Barton's development. Its first listing under "Independent Chapels" is in *CYB* 1855; "Barton Chapel" is an outstation of Tattenhall in *CYB* 1863, County Union Reports keeping this description until 1886<sup>27</sup>; in 1868 "Tattenhall and Barton" in Chester District are where Todd ministers; following stonelaying and opening, *CYB* 1879 then lists Barton under "New Chapels and Chapels Re-built" with the description "Barton. Supplied" in the County lists. The following year's entry reads "Barton. Lay Agency", this remaining in 1887 for its first appearance alone rather than beneath Tattenhall in the general alphabetical order: in turn, neighbouring Farndon emerges in *CYB* 1890 following its 1889 formation but stands in 1892 as subsidiary to Barton. Dates of formation are recorded first in *CYBs* in 1895: Barton's is given as 1858 until 1949; as 1883 until 1956; and as 1877, the year when building commenced, until the closure<sup>28</sup>. 1886 apparently marks the start of six years of complete independence: gone was the link with Tattenhall, which would support its own minister from 1891, whilst that with Farndon would start only in 1892, to last for the greater part of Barton's remaining life.

Recognised ministry followed a varied and changing pattern, representative of most types known in Congregationalism and its successor URC save that Barton never had its own full-scope minister. Support came first from the Cheshire Union, through both the evangelising village ministry based at Tattenhall (Thomas Hitchin 1810-18), grants for Barton as part of Tattenhall's ministerial stipend between 1865 and 1872 (Andrew Todd 1865-90), and at Farndon from 1892 when the County suggested a shared minister. Later, the denomination's Central Fund and its successor Home Churches Fund became involved: for some decades until 1932, when workers became daily travellers rather than temporarily resident, support was specifically intended for the seasonal Strawberry Pickers' Mission on Farndon's large fruit farms. Shared ministry with one other church involved Tattenhall (c1862-86) or Farndon (1892-1933): after considerable hesitancy in the mid-1930s when the Chester District sought to persuade Farndon and Barton to work with Tattenhall<sup>29</sup>, a wider grouping of village churches served many of Barton's later years (1938-68), Tattenhall included again until closure in 1962 with Malpas then as replacement which Barton willingly accepted. The minister's house, not always a church manse, likewise changed - Farndon (from c1898, 1954 and 1971), Tattenhall (1938), Malpas (1962) - variously affected by the perceived

27. Powicke, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

28. Boffey's 1977 Centenary typescript claims that six members first formed a church in 1865. Dates in *CYBs*, however, at times disagree with County Union Reports: in the latter, Farndon's formation is given as 1858 from 1940-1953, only from 1955 corrected to 1889; and Barton's is 1883 in 1940, but in 1955 becomes 1877.

29. CRO, ECU/3151/3/2, CCU: *Chester District Minute Book. February 1924* - (no final date stated, but to 1961), 16 January 1934 and 16 January 1935.

suitability of the manse, group finances, a layman's own home, convenience as a base for pastoral visiting or, perhaps, the noise from a Farndon public house.

Laymen were called here to ministry four times. Alfred Bayley (1915-27) had first studied at Dunoon's Independent College, was received as a lay-pastor by the County Congregational Union in 1916, placed on List B (Evangelist) in 1923, progressed to List A and ordination whilst at Sandbach and Wheelock before returning for a second term in an enlarged Farndon Group (1938-53). Albert Kennerley (1930-33) was another Dunoon student of about 1913, contemporaneously with Bayley whom we may surmise he already knew<sup>30</sup>: he came from secure administrative work at a Chester garage and a Primitive Methodist background (he was a Local Preacher) to be "admitted to the Union as Pastor-Evangelist"<sup>31</sup>, included on List B after two years at Barton and Farndon and on List A some twenty-five years later when in Ashton-under-Lyne<sup>32</sup>. The County Union was precise in its 1916 and 1931 designation of titles for Bayley and Kennerley, but newspaper accounts of Recognition Services at Farndon referred to both throughout as "Rev." and "Minister"<sup>33</sup>. Such styling led to a late-1920s voicing of concern at the County Union Executive: the Moderator, however, accepted this usage as having positive local value, no move was made to ban the practice and indeed a Chester District Annual Meeting gave a "cordial welcome to the Rev. Albert Kennerley"<sup>34</sup>. Derek Laxton (1969-70) worked in Insurance in Chester, but remained in post and local residence at Malpas for very little time. Sydney Boffey (1971-81), butcher in Farndon and another Methodist Local Preacher, became Local rather than Lay Pastor in 1972, and was ordained to the URC Ministry following the 1978 General Assembly resolution concerning Local Pastors<sup>35</sup>. These last two retained their secular employment. Finally came Non-Stipendiary Ministry, although with Barton now separated from Farndon.

30. Dunoon Baptist minister Duncan MacGregor founded the Gospel Training College in 1893: described also as Dunoon Baptist College and the Independent College, it closed on MacGregor's death in 1915. It particularly attracted students with revivalist and Holiness movement leanings: Kennerley attended Keswick Conventions, an interest which may be the link that led two Chester lay contemporaries to study there. I am indebted to Murdo MacDonald, Archivist to Argyll and Bute Council, for pointing me to the entry about Macgregor in the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (1993).
31. CRO, ECU/3151/1/28, CCU *Minutes 1930-1939*, 1931 AGM, p. 12.
32. The Surman Index notes that CYBs 1933 to 1957 consistently misnamed Albert Kennerley as Arthur. I am grateful to Dr David Wykes of Dr Williams's Library for making available a copy of the appropriate Surman entry and so drawing my attention to this.
33. *The Chester Chronicle*, 12 February 1916 and 26 July 1930; *The Cheshire Observer*, 2 August 1930.
34. CRO, ECU/3151/3/2, CCU *Minutes: Chester District*, 16 September 1930.
35. For Alfred Bayley (1886-1967), see *CYB*, 1967/8, pp. 431-2; for Albert Kennerley (1891-1965), see *CYB*, 1966/7, p. 459; for Sydney Boffey (1909-91), see *United Reformed Church Year Book*, 1993, p. 262.

Peter Wright (1985-86), train driver and a former Churches of Christ Elder, was able to serve Barton only briefly for health reasons: Barton was then re-connected with Farndon whose own Non-Stipendiary Minister, Alan Johnston, acted as the final Interim Moderator (1986-1992).

Most of the pastorate's ministers had previous experience of either rural or northern work, or both: thus William Thomas (1892-96) from Bishop's Castle; Morgan Davies (1896-1915) from Anglesey and Montgomeryshire; Kibworth, Leicestershire provided Gwilym Thomas (1927-29)<sup>36</sup>; nearly local were Cheshire-resident Alfred Bayley<sup>37</sup>, Albert Kennerley and Sydney Boffey; Harold Swindells (1954-60) came from Glossop<sup>38</sup> and unusually if not uniquely requested three Inductions. His ordination in August 1954, a first for Farndon, was described also as Induction to the Farndon Group<sup>39</sup>; there was a September Induction to Tattenhall Congregational Church<sup>40</sup>; and Professor R.R. Turner, Swindells's tutor at Paton College and participant at his ordination, later described a third, Barton service<sup>41</sup>. Charles Wright (1965-68) ministered mostly in Devon and Shropshire, with an aberrant interlude in Chester's exponentially growing council estate at Blacon. An exception was Brian Slater (1961-65), from New College, London and rural Essex near Braintree: strong moderatorial pressure preceded his arrival at this westerly outpost of Congregationalism's East Midlands Province<sup>42</sup>. Barton's rural traditionalism, frequently dependent on individual domineering personalities, suddenly seemed challenged just when

36. For William Thomas (1858-1928), see *CYB*, 1929, pp. 233-4; for Lewis Morgan Davies (1855-1925), see *CYB*, 1926, p. 162. Gwilym Thomas last appears in *CYB*, 1957 as a retired minister in List C (Wales): the Farndon Rebuilding Pamphlet of c1959 records him, then in his ninetieth year, living in Penmaenmawr.
37. Bayley appears to have origins at Queen Street, Chester's senior Congregational Church: its 1897-1932 Minutes Book (CRO, CR 151/17) records first a Master Alfred Bayley received into membership on 31 December 1903 and later a Mr Alfred Bayley who occupies the pulpit on 27 June 1914 during the then minister's holiday period. Strangely, Bayley's studies and ministry receive no Queen Street Minutes mention: a near contemporary, Miss Winifred Barton, is however commended in 1913 on her call "to the work of the Foreign Field". Her Church Secretary father assisted in Bayley's 1916 Recognition Service whilst she later served as a lay assistant to Leslie Weatherhead at the City Temple.
38. For Harold Swindells (1929-95), see *URCYB*, 1996, p. 270.
39. *Cheshire Observer*, 4 September 1954.
40. *Cheshire Observer*, 18 September 1954: a printed Service Sheet remains pinned into TCB 2, p.189.
41. Report by a former Barton member of a conversation in Nottingham with Professor Turner.
42. See S.H. Mayor, *Cheshire Congregationalism. A Brief History* (n.d. but 1956), pp.55f., for an explanation of Cheshire's 1924 placing in the East Midlands Province; and W G. Robinson, *A History of the Lancashire Congregational Union 1806-1956* (Manchester 1955), p. 119, for Lancashire's rejection of Cheshire's 1936 desire for union between the two County Congregational bodies.

some 1960s group and denominational changes had also to be faced.

Pulpit supplies brought a wide range of men and women from different churches and various denominations, long-standing friends able to preach knowingly and sensitively. Over one eight-year period (1975-1982), a total of twenty-eight lay preachers from both the Chester and Whitchurch areas of the URC, a Methodism three circuits distant in Ellesmere Port, the Salvation Army and the Presbyterian Church of Wales helped supply the pulpit: seven visiting URC ministers mostly came once each for Cheshire District's annual pulpit exchange Sunday. Such breadth might bring both benefits and drawbacks, with little likelihood of planned preaching or nurture or even any certainty that the accepted doctrines of Protestant Dissent would be proclaimed. A 1960s memory remains of a Chester Congregational preacher, long in service to the village churches but a strongly committed British-Israelite, offering prayerful thanks that a nuclear dust-cloud from the Pacific tests was drifting not towards Europe but over Communist China. His preaching and praying terrified one member and both scandalised and infuriated another. On the other hand, the Chester District's co-operative concern for vacant village churches ensured that "an elaborate and effective Preaching Plan (supplied) the pulpits of four churches ... simultaneously for a period of at least twelve months"<sup>43</sup>. This was the brainchild in both 1950s and 1960s of Arthur Ward Jones, Church Secretary at Hoole (Chester): Barton figured on each occasion. In retrospect, this might seem prophetic of the URC's now necessary twenty-first century "clustering" of churches: at the time, it included novice lay-preaching teams whilst three future URC ministers, again from Hoole, cut some of their preaching teeth at Barton.

Examples of the ordinary and the special life of the church express both unmodified tradition and also innovation according to circumstances, ministers and congregational response. Thus, William Thomas confidently arranged both an early-February week of Special Services in 1895 and for weekly sermon distribution to some sixty families. Rather later, as many as forty Sunday School children attended in the 1930s/40s, some from neighbouring Clutton, with the traditional Anniversary staging around the modest pulpit featuring into the 1960s: a 1930s memory recalls a budding child vocalist from the Farndon manse singing "There were ninety-and-nine". And the Annual Treat, normally to Rhyl or some other North Wales resort, welcomed everyone linked to the chapel regardless of age, the tolerant Salopia of Whitchurch frequently modifying its coach provision right up to the last minute.

The two successive mid-twentieth-century first ministries of Harold Swindells and Brian Slater brought contrasting changes. Whilst Morning Sunday School, Evening Worship and a Friday Junior Fellowship continued, Swindells's years saw worship now using *Congregational Praise*, replacing the 1887 *Congregational Church Hymnal* by then unique in Cheshire<sup>44</sup>, although *Sankey's*

43. CRO, ECU/3151/1/29, CCU, Annual Report 1954; see also ECU/3151/3/2, CCU *Minutes: Chester District*, 10 September 1953.

44. Mayor, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

1200 also remained available. Chapel changes included new or revised furniture for Hymn Numbers and Communion Plate, together with a slightly raised pulpit desk: 1955 brought the Registration of the Chapel for the Solemnization of Marriages, a facility exercised occasionally during the subsequent thirty years. The following ministry saw the purchase of a small electronic organ and also a regularly meeting diaconate actively involved in guiding Church decisions: specific external emphases included both Slater conducting Evensong on behalf of Barton at Coddington and Handley and the chapel's representation at Congregationalism's county and district councils. Additionally, an advance in faith came through an alternative churchmanship to the earlier evangelicalism: with people encouraged to voice and discuss doubts or questions, Barton could be a lively community and not always conservative.

Whether denominational or local, Barton faced its share of 1960s problems. The speed at which a rural church was asked, for example, to transfer the Trusteeship of its buildings from named individuals to the County Union provoked delaying dissent by a leading deacon: rural and denominational matters were not necessarily perceived in parallel manner. Further, the closure of Tattenhall in June 1962, which seemed to surprise both Barton and Farndon although Tattenhall members were already in 1953 expressing anxiety about their future<sup>45</sup>, was in fact an act of pastoral courage: its few people were becoming crushed by the heavy burden which continuance required. Barton received nothing material from its one-time helper church although Farndon welcomed some items with more going to Blacon, a 1940s Chester church-plant then planning its first permanent building. Barton generally welcomed the replacement inclusion of Malpas which brought greater financial stability to the Group: but Farndon, its members never entirely separated from Barton, partly perceived its lead position in the Group threatened both by Malpas's stability and by the November 1962 manse issue. Whilst the Slaters' removal from the Farndon manse improved that church's financial position through the rent payments which were now received, some members felt abandoned and unhappy. Such perceptions perhaps precipitated the subsequent numerical loss at both Barton and Farndon. No one church in the Group had ever been numerically dominant, each indeed alternating in returning the highest membership figures during the two decades from 1938. Farndon led on fewest occasions: but Barton's early and historical importance had now been eclipsed, not least perhaps because no minister ever lived there. Denominationally, Barton chose to become part of the URC in 1972: by then it shared the ministry of Pastor Boffey with both Farndon and Lavister & Trevalyn, this latter in Wales but always part of Cheshire Congregationalism or the URC<sup>46</sup>. Four Chester District Congregational churches elected initially not to join the new

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45. CRO, ECU/3151/58/5, TCB Vol. 2, p. 178.

46. For the links between these four congregations, see N. Lemon, "Pastor Boffey's Congregational Circuit", *Magazine of the Congregational History Circle* (hereafter *CHC*), Vol. 4, No. 4 (2002), pp. 244-250.

church: two, Malpas and Threapwood<sup>47</sup>, were Barton's near neighbours with the former within the Farndon Group from 1962 to 1970. Perhaps Barton's now growing and effective experience of shared leadership helped them select a conciliar view of the church, one which Malpas would later accept for itself.

Membership peaked at thirty-two in *CYB* 1910<sup>48</sup>, a figure almost repeated with thirty-one in 1965 after some Tattenhall members had joined Barton: but most periods show almost constantly fluctuating numbers, whether marginally or as when an 1895 four-family emigration totalled thirty attenders. New members rarely came from far outside the local community: but some 1960s arrivals helped introduce new patterns for electing deacons. Noticeably steep declines occur in the 1967 and 1970 *CYBs*, from the 1965 high to only fourteen in 1970: these years immediately surrounded the disappearance of full-time ministry.

Joint work within the Farndon Group was informal and occasional rather than structured and regular. Seven months after fire destroyed Farndon Congregational Church, the group's three churches combined for a 1957 Christmas Market in the village Memorial Hall to aid the Rebuilding Fund: a similar 1960 event brought cohesion and activity during a vacancy, raising £145 towards a car for the next minister, but the 1961 Bazaar was joint in place yet separate in financial distribution. Encouragingly, some people expressed more positive inspiration gained through a Joint Communion Service at Barton on Christmas Eve 1961 than from a later three-church social. Whilst some Barton members attended London Missionary Society meetings held at Malpas, other links derived from normal country village neighbourliness, through family relationships whether Welsh Presbyterian at Holt or Congregationalist at Trevalyn (both into Denbighshire beyond Farndon), or in united services with Methodists at Crewe-by-Farndon or Brown Knowl. Each chapel would invite others to special occasions. Harvest Thanksgiving Services were planned with particular care so that peripatetic worshippers could sample the occasion at Shocklach, Malpas, Holt, Barton, and Threapwood: at this last, "Harvest" was delayed until the final Sunday of October still to draw the determined itinerant. Key to these separate Harvests were the collections and traditional Auctions which might, as at Barton in the 1980s, total over £100, a significant proportion of the annual budget. But individual generosity included the 1970s "cup of tea" offered at an Elder's home to the present writer between afternoon and evening Harvest services: this materialised as the groaning board of country hospitality, challenging the preacher's ability to deliver the evening sermon with comfort, enthusiasm and strength.

Barton had opened in 1878 without debt. Despite dependence on Huxley who annually remedied any deficiency in income<sup>49</sup>, its later financial history repeated

47. For Threapwood, see I. Sellers, "The Threapwood Story", *CHC*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1994), pp. 6-9.

48. Membership had risen since *CYB* 1909 by 18, children's figures falling by the same amount. Combined numbers from 1908 to 1915 are in any event consistently high.

49. CRO, ECU/3151/1/25, CUCC Annual Report for 1904 records Malpas, Barton and Farndon each voicing concern for their financial future: Thomas Huxley had died on 11 August 1903.

the earlier astuteness: Christian integrity and generosity united with idiosyncratic behaviour, often without an audit or the separation of Church monies from other funds. In the early 1960s, Barton's annual Bazaar held independently at Clutton Primary School, a mile to the east, realised a balance of somewhere over £60 after expenses: this was never banked, not through any impropriety but because the Treasurer would no more open a bank account for the Chapel than he would for himself. He kept metaphorically and perhaps literally to the tradition of the "Treasurer's under-the-bed tin". The chapel did not suffer: whether or not there were sufficient official funds, bills were appropriately and swiftly met, the deacon responsible without question paying for work done as though it were his own. Later, 1970s and 1980s generosity would support external bodies including the Salvation Army and Help the Aged.

The Centenary celebrated in 1977 found all office holders now in their eighties: foreseeing any different pattern to provide for future renewal seemed impossible. A Provincial Moderator's suggestion to "Pray with the Community", visiting surrounding cottages less in expectation of attendance than to share people's problems and hopes, proved too demanding a challenge. Following a Cheshire URC District property report requiring essential expenditure approaching £15,000, a January 1992 Church Meeting decision to close led to the final service of 28 June 1992. A cause initially supported by a County Union ended when a successor body's stewardship responsibilities urged realism with the hope of continued work elsewhere.

Three brief observations about ministry, records and remains conclude this attempted recreation. First, a wheel turns full circle as coincidence links the chapel's origins, its first ministerial settlement and its almost final years. The Wrexham Academy which provided occasional evening cottage preaching before 1810 would later become the Brecon Independent College: here both William Thomas (1892-96) and J. Islwyn Evans (Interim Moderator, 1981-85) trained for the Congregational ministry. Then, dependence on an interesting mix of both ecclesiastical records and less committed though more public commentary is a helpful but not necessarily simple matter: Year Books are sometimes in internal conflict and may disagree with Minutes Books or popular memory; dates of recognition by wider councils of the church may appear to delay commissioning or induction; the formal recognition of Lay Pastors, or even their titles, remains a particularly inexact science. Finally, surviving physical evidence extends hardly beyond the Chapel itself, not unsympathetically converted into a dwelling, and some treasured pieces of crockery whose dignified scroll encloses the name of the Congregational Church, Barton. But although a whole people may seem ecclesiastically disenfranchised when a Church Book is lost, this variety of sources, mediated through the memories of a declining number of preachers, neighbours and friends, has helped reclaim at least some of the history of a chapel never notable for any great contribution to the wider church, mostly linked with some other congregation but frequently strongly independent in its attitudes and actions.

NIGEL LEMON

## THE SOMEWHAT EXTRAORDINARY CAREER OF FREDERICK BENNETT (1826-94)

Frederick Bennett served Congregational pastorates at Therfield in Hertfordshire (1851-55), Fulbourn near Cambridge (1861-68) and Broadstairs in Kent (1869-86), but he was not a typical nineteenth-century Nonconformist minister. He came from an Anglican background and was named after his godfather Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex. He spent some of his childhood in France, some of his teenage years in Turkey and served in the Indian Naval Service as a midshipman. At the age of sixteen he could speak French, Italian, Greek and Turkish. He became chaplain for a time to Lord Ducie at Tortworth Park in Gloucestershire. He worked for three years as a missionary to Turkish Navy seaman at Plymouth under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society.

In this unusual career Bennett never served any prestigious congregation, but his life is full of incident. For example, in Broadstairs he and his wife fostered the six year-old Herbert Hensley Henson after the death of Henson's mother. In retirement Bennett wrote an entertaining autobiography entitled "The Life Story of a Christian Minister", published by the *Cambridgeshire Congregational Magazine*.<sup>1</sup> In the preface to this book he refers to his "somewhat extraordinary career", a claim he is fully entitled to make.

Embarrassed by his first name, Bennett preferred to be known as Frederick. His father, Dr Samuel Bennett, was the Evangelical rector of Walton-on-the-Hill in Surrey. The rector decided to christen this eleventh child Augustus Frederick. This came about because Dr Bennett was an honorary chaplain to the Duke of Sussex.

Dr Bennett was an energetic and enterprising cleric. When the young Frederick was three years old the family went off to spend three years in France where Dr Bennett acted as British chaplain at Caen. Several years later they went abroad again, this time in 1836 to the Ottoman capital of Constantinople. Dr Bennett was to spend the remainder of his life there as chaplain to the British Embassy.

Frederick Bennett was not quite ten years old when they went to Turkey. His education was disrupted by the family's mobility, but he showed an aptitude for languages that proved helpful to him in later life.

He was an adventurous young man. At Constantinople Frederick acted as an interpreter and amateur pilot for ships passing through the Bosphorus. He can have been no more than fifteen years old.

In the autobiography Bennett traces his conversion to this time at Constantinople. He got on well with his father and did not rebel against the Evangelical faith of his parents. Dipping into his father's library Bennett was influenced by Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* into taking his religion more seriously. However, the real turning point came on a boat trip in Turkey during which he occupied his time with a book of sermons. He says that it was a sermon by Hervey on the words "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" that made a deep impression on him:

1. A.F. Bennett, *The Life Story of a Christian Minister*, (Sawston, 1890).

I discovered what I had never clearly seen before, that it was Christ's finished work that was the sole ground of our acceptance in the sight of God. Apprehending this grand doctrine of Scripture - Justification by faith alone - I at once experienced a peace and joy which were unspeakable.....like Luther on a similar occasion I felt as if the gates of heaven were open wide before me.<sup>2</sup>

Bennett says that throughout his ministry he gave "suitable prominence" to the doctrine of justification.<sup>3</sup> His conversion took place in 1842 when he was sixteen. That year he returned to England with his mother who was keen to start him on a suitable career. Determined to help her son she wrote to the Duke of Sussex for help. The Duke kindly used his influence to obtain Bennett a position as a midshipman in the Indian Naval Service.

Bennett set off for India that same year. It is astonishing to read his account of the difficult journey to India he made as a teenager. He wished to go via Constantinople to see his father. The journey began in a schooner belonging to his brother-in-law that left London to sail to Cardiff. It remained there two weeks to take in a cargo of iron and then proceeded through the Mediterranean to Smyrna. There he disembarked and took steamer to Constantinople. Returning to Smyrna he travelled in a French steamer to Alexandria, then on a barge down the Atfeh canal to the banks of the Nile. From Atfeh he went on a river steamer to Cairo, going on to Suez by a horse-drawn vehicle. A wait of six days for the Indian steamer was necessary before he sailed for Bombay, calling at Aden on the way.

Bennett served in the Indian Navy for only eighteen months. He did not find the life congenial, and the lack of privacy was a great trial to him. Accordingly he resigned from the service and returned to Constantinople to stay with his father. He earned a living there by teaching English to diplomats and local people.

Dr Samuel Bennett died 1847, but Frederick stayed on until the following year. Before leaving Constantinople he came into close contact with American Presbyterian and Congregational missionaries. He worshipped with them now that there was no English chaplain, and this involvement was perhaps the beginning of his secession from the Church of England.

He was by now thinking of entering the Christian ministry and preparing for this by studying in one of the American colleges recommended by the missionaries. Returning to England he went to live with his mother at Woolwich and considered his next move. He did not go to America, primarily because he could not afford to. How then could he train for the ministry and which denomination should he serve? He had difficulties in regard to some doctrines of the Prayer Book, but had not completely rejected the idea of Anglican ordination. He considered going to the Free Church of Scotland College in Edinburgh, but again the shortage of money put a stop to this idea. He approached Cheshunt College but could not raise the necessary funds. He comments in the

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2. *Ibid*, p.31.

3. *Ibid*, p.32.

autobiography:

I had indeed some rich relatives, but they were all members of the Church of England, and not likely to afford me assistance in respect of studying at a college so undenominational as that at Cheshunt...I never for a moment doubted that I had a call to the ministry, but no effectual door seemed opened.<sup>4</sup>

Bennett never did train at a theological college. He spent a year studying on his own at Woolwich before taking up an appointment as a Scripture reader with the Town Missionary Society at Hitchin in 1850. He was determined to enter the Christian ministry but had to do it the hard way. The door-to-door evangelism in Hitchin was demanding physically, and he also regularly conducted services at the infirmary and the workhouse. In his third year there Bennett's health broke down and he had to look for alternative employment "where the calls upon one's time and energies would be less exacting".<sup>5</sup> Therfield Congregational Church, twelve miles from Hitchin, was soon to lose its minister and Bennett was invited to preach for two or three Sundays. The members liked what they heard and invited him to be their minister. Accordingly he began his pastorate there in October 1851.

It was probably during his time in Hertfordshire that Bennett got to know Robert Forsaith who was then minister of Kneesworth Street, Royston. Forsaith became an enthusiastic sponsor of the younger man whose orthodox Scriptural beliefs were similar to his own. Forsaith retained an interest in Bennett's career until his own death in 1891.

Bennett sums up his time in Therfield with the comment: "I continued to labour in this village with varying success for about four years, and then circumstances led me to seek a change of sphere".<sup>6</sup>

It was in the Therfield congregation that Bennett found a wife. He tells how he was attracted to a Miss Albon without revealing her first name. There are frequent references to "my dear wife" in the autobiography but we do not learn much about her personality. To judge by what Bennett says the marriage was a happy one, but it seems that Miss Albon was a bossy woman. Certainly Hensley Henson did not like her. Recalling his time as a boy living with the Bennetts Henson says: "For his wife, a lady of strong governing instincts, I formed a deep and persistent dislike".<sup>7</sup>

Bennett's next move was prompted by Robert Forsaith. Forsaith's wife came from Wotton-under-Edge in Gloucestershire, and the couple were on a visit there when Forsaith was asked if he could recommend an Evangelical minister to Lord Ducie. Ducie's estate was at Tortworth Park and he had a private chapel for which he needed a Nonconformist chaplain. Forsaith recommended Bennett.<sup>8</sup> As a result

4 *Ibid.*, p.64.

5 *Ibid.*, p.71.

6 *Ibid.*, p.74.

7. H.H Henson, *Retrospect of an Unimportant life*, Vol 3, (Oxford, 1950), p.355.

8. Forsaith recounted this to a meeting at the Broadstairs church reported by *Keble's Margate and Ramsgate Gazette*, 26 August 1882.

Bennett resigned his pastorate and moved to Gloucestershire, but not before he had married Miss Albon in the Therfield chapel.

The Bennetts enjoyed their time at Tortworth. They lived in a house that offered a good view of the estate, and were frequently invited to the big house. Congregations at the estate chapel grew and Bennett taught French at one of the local schools. This congenial pastorate was brought to an end when Lord Ducie decided to make his chapel Church of England following the appointment of an Evangelical as Bishop of Bath and Wells. The Earl gave Bennett the required three months' notice. Reflecting on this turn of events Bennett tells in his autobiography that Lord Ducie assured him: "It was not on personal grounds he made the change, and that at any time he would be most happy to bear testimony to my ministerial efficiency."<sup>9</sup>

This is most unlikely to be a boast on Bennett's part, but he seems to have lacked confidence and always welcomed assurance that he was doing a good job in the ministry. He found it difficult to accept this sudden termination of his pastorate there:

Now whilst compelled to acquiesce in the new arrangement, I must confess it was at the cost of much painful feeling. There were so many indications of prosperity in connection with my ministry that to have it cut short after this fashion was a great trial of faith".<sup>10</sup>

Whilst Bennett was understandably unsettled by being given notice, he subsequently came to see that God had another job for him. Before Bennett left Gloucestershire Lord Ducie received a letter from Henry Venn, secretary of the Church Missionary Society. This Anglican mission agency wanted a Turkish speaker to evangelise large crews of Ottoman Turkish seamen who were staying near Plymouth while their warships were modernised in the Devonport dockyard. Venn had heard that Bennett could speak the language and that his chaplaincy was coming to an end. Bennett jumped at the opportunity to promote his Saviour among the Turks. He declined Venn's other suggestion of proceeding to Constantinople when the seamen eventually went home. In a meeting with Lord Ducie he told the aristocrat: "I did not see my way to become a missionary of the Society in the East, as it would involve acceptance of all the teaching of the prayer book, which I could not accept."<sup>11</sup>

Bennett's experience in dealing with all types of people was an asset to him in Plymouth. He conducted low-key activities to involve both the officers and the men in discussions about religion and in English classes using the New Testament. He comments wryly that the Turks spoke up vigorously for Islam:

The preacher [to English audiences] has it all his own way, but the missionary is liable to interruption and contradiction every

9. *The Life Story*, p.79.

10. *Ibid*, p.79.

11. *Ibid*, p.82.

moment whilst endeavouring to set forth the truth as it is in Jesus. Our work at Plymouth was one of testimony rather than direct evangelisation; had any of the sailors openly embraced Christianity they would have been immediately put in irons.<sup>12</sup>

Bennett and his family stayed at Plymouth for three years. Henry Venn must have been pleased with the courteous yet persistent approach Bennett had adopted. The suggestion of a missionary posting to Constantinople was renewed. Both Bennett and his wife were happy to go, but only if he did not have to be episcopally ordained. The CMS insisted on re-ordination and the proposal was dropped. Bennett found himself out of work again.

This seems to have happened in 1860, but it is sometimes difficult to date the main events in Bennett's life because he is not too careful about dotting the i's and crossing the t's. The Bennetts seem to have spent the winter of 1860-61 in Hertfordshire. He was invited to preach in the church at Fulbourn near Cambridge. He was a competent preacher and teacher, and the Fulbourn congregation asked him to stay as their pastor.

Bennett was encouraged by growth in the church and notes that the membership increased from thirty-five to seventy in two or three years. Fulbourn was an established church. It had been formed in 1813, and one of the deacons was Joseph Chaplin, a prominent figure in the Cambridgeshire Congregational Union in later years. Bennett's final years there were not so successful. He resigned in 1868, commenting on this period: "For the last two years I had not seen that fruit to my ministry that I desired."<sup>13</sup>

There was, however, another reason for his departure from Fulbourn. The Bennetts needed affordable education for their two eldest sons, and this was not to be had in the area. However it does seem that he ran out of steam in the longest pastorate of his career so far.

Bennett spent the next year or so "resting". He visited Kent during this period, and attended the annual meeting of the Kent Congregational Association early in 1869. He does not explain how he came to be there, but it may have been his sponsor Robert Forsaith who invited him. Forsaith was by that time minister at St Mary Cray. The Association invited Bennett to lead their work in the Kent seaside resort of Broadstairs. As the *Kent Congregational Magazine* reported, "Rev A.F. Bennett, lately of Fulbourn Cambridgeshire has accepted the invitation of the Kent Congregational Association to occupy the pulpit in this interesting watering place for 12 months".<sup>14</sup>

He started work there on the first Sunday in September 1869. Bennett came to Broadstairs essentially to plant a church. This was some years after Charles Dickens spent his final holiday at the small seaside village on the north-east tip of Kent. Dickens wrote an affectionate tribute to Broadstairs in 1851 that included a

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12. *Ibid.*, p.89.

13. *Ibid.*, p.96.

14. *Kent Congregational Magazine*, October 1869.

brief reference to the Nonconformist churches there: "There are two dissenting chapels in our small watering place; being in about the proportion of a hundred and twenty guns to a yacht".<sup>15</sup>

The large chapel was the Strict Baptist building in the High Street, while the small one was in Harbour Street and occupied by Wesleyans. Bennett arrived in 1869 to establish a congregation at the historic St Mary's Chapel in Albion Street. At the time Dickens wrote his tribute the chapel was not being used as a place of worship. St Mary's Chapel is thought to have been built in 1601 by local landowner Sir John Culmer and used as a Puritan meeting house. More than one attempt had been made to establish an Independent congregation there, and one such attempt came to an end in 1848. The building was then used as a reading room.

It was re-opened by the County Association in 1867 and visiting preachers conducted services. Bennett agreed to spend a year in Broadstairs to see what could be done at St Mary's. In the event he stayed eighteen years and Broadstairs became his final and major pastorate.

St Mary's Chapel was hardly the kind of church building that Victorian Nonconformists expected. It is said that the pulpit was so high that tall preachers had difficulty in standing erect. It was small, seating only sixty people, and it was not in the best part of town.

Broadstairs was at that time little more than a village with a population of less than two thousand. It is sandwiched between the two larger resorts of Margate and Ramsgate, both of which had well-established Congregational churches. The Margate church had a new and imposing chapel and Sunday School building.<sup>16</sup> The congregation was established in the nineteenth century as a breakaway from the local Countess of Huntingdon church. In Ramsgate the church could claim a continuous history back to the Ejection of 1662.

In later years Bennett recalled that when he arrived in 1869 there were just three Congregationalists in Broadstairs. He summed up the situation in the following way: "We had only a small Chapel in the town; no suitable sanctuary; no Christian fellowship; no regular Sunday School, a small class only being taught by a lady".<sup>17</sup>

Bennett's colleagues in the other two towns were very different from each other. The veteran Henry Bevis had been in Ramsgate since 1837 and was a popular preacher. Bennett does not mention Bevis in his autobiography and it is unlikely that the two men were close. Bevis did not share Bennett's Evangelical beliefs and seems to have welcomed the liberal theology then emerging in Nonconformist circles. It was to Henry Butcher in Margate that Bennett turned for advice. Butcher was more orthodox than Bevis and would have been in sympathy with Bennett's views. Furthermore it seems that Bennett liked and respected Butcher as a man. It was Butcher who had preached at the re-opening of St Mary's Chapel in 1867.

15. Charles Dickens, *Our English Watering Place*, (Broadstairs. 1973), p.13.

16. Margate URC now worships in the Sunday School building. The church itself has been used for some years as gymnasium, but is likely to become the first mosque in the Isle of Thanet.

17. *The Life Story*, p.104.

Bennett was rather discouraged by the situation he was in, and commented: "Both the situation of the Chapel and the limited accommodation rendered it desirable that another place of worship should be secured".<sup>18</sup>

Then follows a remarkable account of the way in which his desires were fulfilled:

I walked out one Monday morning in the direction of St Peters, (a village near Broadstairs) and as I passed a particular garden I was asked by a lady and gentleman to take a look around. Mr and Mrs Henson, although members of the Church of England, had been in the habit for some little time of attending my ministry. 'Do you know,' said they to me, on the occasion referred to, 'what we have been talking about? You said yesterday that you felt discouraged at St Mary's. Now, Mr Bennett, we do not think there is sufficient scope for you in that small Chapel, and if you deem it desirable, I and Mrs Henson are quite prepared to give up the garden as site for a new church. Do you think (inquired they) it would be an eligible spot for the erection of a new place of worship?'<sup>19</sup>

Bennett was delighted with the offer and took Henson off to confer with Henry Butcher at Margate. Thomas Henson was a outspoken Evangelical who retired to Broadstairs with his family in 1865. Initially he worshipped at Holy Trinity parish church, but was dismayed when an Anglo-Catholic incumbent was appointed the next year. The family promptly stopped attending Holy Trinity and went elsewhere. The Hensons were the parents of Bishop Hensley Henson who heartily disliked his father's Evangelical piety. In his memoirs Hensley Henson remarks rather sourly that his father: "Sometimes attended the Dissenting chapels; and even went so far in that direction as to present a site for the erection of a Congregational Church"<sup>20</sup>

It was in fact a remarkable sacrifice by Thomas Henson. He was a keen gardener but was still prepared to give up the garden if his Lord and Saviour needed it. Henson would undoubtedly have regarded himself as a steward not the owner of his possessions.

The Vale Congregational Church was therefore built in the quiet Vale residential road next to the Hensons' property, "Vale Villa". Much of the money was raised by Bennett in appeals to the Chapel Building Society and to wealthy Congregationalists in Kent and elsewhere. Little of the cash came from Broadstairs itself.

The Vale URC therefore owes its building to two decided Evangelicals, even though few of the ministers who succeeded Bennett over the years have been Evangelicals. The new building was opened in 1871 when a memorial stone was laid by the Hackney MP Charles Reed, a Congregationalist and regular visitor to

18. *Ibid*, p.98.

19. *Ibid*, p.98.

20. H.H. Henson, *op.cit.*, Vol 1., p.3.

Broadstairs. However, no picture of the new church appeared in the Congregational *Year Book*, perhaps because priority was given to more prominent buildings in larger towns.

Surprisingly the inscription on the stone does not refer to Reed or any other worthies. It consists of the amazing statement by Jesus Christ about himself: "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6), and reflects the way in which Bennett and Henson would think: the Lord Jesus Christ should be the centre of attention. Reed made a lengthy speech at the stone-laying.<sup>21</sup> The memorial stone is still in place although now showing considerable signs of deterioration.

When the new chapel opened in 1871 there was at last enough room for the holidaymakers in the summer months. The congregations were much smaller in the winter months when there were few visitors.

Activities at the Vale Church were regularly reported by the Margate local paper *Keble's Margate and Ramsgate Gazette*. Things went well during the 1870s, and a church of thirty members was established. Reading the newspaper's reports in 1880s it seems as if Bennett then had a harder time. Throughout his pastorate at Broadstairs the church was supported financially by the Kent Congregational Association. The church committee was partly appointed by the Association. It was not until some years after Bennett's retirement in 1886 that they were able to dispense with KCA assistance and elect their own deacons.

Towards the end of his pastorates in both Fulbourn and Broadstairs Bennett appeared to have difficulty in maintaining the initial momentum he had achieved. He may not have had a strong enough personality to deal with awkward situations and difficult people. He may have allowed problems to fester too long before taking action. There is evidence that when he did take action he was inclined to overreact. The obituary for Bennett in the Congregational *Year Book* commented that "He shrank from everything that was rough and coarse, and perhaps sometimes felt slights and rebuffs when they were not intended."<sup>22</sup>

The photograph of Bennett in the Vale Church archives shows a mild-looking, balding man with pince-nez spectacles and sideburns. At first glance he looks like a clerk or a school teacher.

Bennett had plenty of good points. He was honest and sincere. He believed God had called him into the ministry to preach the gospel. This he did on every possible occasion, in and out of a pulpit. He was not in the ministry for the status or the money, or because he had failed in a secular career.

Bennett liked people and had a good sense of humour. His autobiography contains many pen pictures of people he had met over the years. He enjoyed meeting people and talking with them. He could tell a good joke and had little difficulty raising a laugh from an audience. Hensley Henson recalled Bennett as "a mild, kindly and scholarly man, whom we liked well enough."<sup>23</sup>

He was a good preacher and could hold the attention of his listeners. It is a pity

21. *Keble's Margate and Ramsgate Gazette*, April 1871.

22. *Congregational Year Book*, 1895.

23. H.H. Henson, *op.cit.*, Vol. 3, (Oxford, 1950), p.355.

that nobody thought it worthwhile to publish a book of his sermons. One sermon survives in the Congregational Library.<sup>24</sup> It was preached in 1870 at St Mary's Chapel on the Sunday following the death of a lady in his congregation. This was probably Martha Henson, the mother of Herbert Hensley Henson, but the printed copy of the sermon does not say so.

This sermon is warm in tone and sympathetic to the bereaved family but Bennett does not descend into sugary sentimentality. His text was Job 37:2 from the Authorised Version. "And now men see not the bright light in the cloud". Referring to the experience of Job Bennett made three main points:

1. That clouds not unfrequently overshadow the path of the Christian.
2. That in those clouds there is invariably a bright light.
3. That through the operation of various causes he often fails to discern that light.

The sermon is both instructive and encouraging for any believer experiencing bereavement. Bennett concludes by urging the children of the family to follow Christ as their mother had done.

With all his strengths why then did Bennett have difficulties towards the end of his ministries at Fulbourn and Broadstairs? It may be that he became bored and wanted a fresh challenge. His ministries started well partly because he enjoyed a new situation and a new task. Broadstairs was a backwater and it would be understandable if he found this small resort a very small pond. During the 1880s Bennett made private trips to Belgium twice and he also made a lengthy visit to the United States. This would have made the Isle of Thanet seem even more parochial. Henry Butcher had a similar view of his years at Margate. In 1876, after thirteen years there, he wrote to his friend Rev J. B. French of Hampstead: "I am still in this old place; very weary of it, feeling that I can make no futher progress; thinking still that a change would be for the good of the people and myself."<sup>25</sup>

However, it seems likely that in a long pastorate Bennett experienced difficulties because his man-management skills were weak. He did not shine at sorting out difficult situations, but tended to overreact when under pressure. Two examples of this tendency are apparent. In 1871 he unwisely took his neighbour to court, accusing the man's dog of having killed two of the Bennetts' family chickens. Neither Bennett nor any of his family had seen the chickens killed and the magistrates dismissed the case which was reported in *Keble's Margate and Ramsgate Gazette*. It makes Bennett look rather foolish.<sup>26</sup>

It is likely that Bennett missed the advice and friendship of Henry Butcher who had died in 1878. Preaching at the graveside in St John's Cemetary at Margate, Bennett told the mourners: "To many of us he manifested unmistakable friendship on many trying occasions."<sup>27</sup>

The other example of Bennett's lack of judgement could have been one cause

24. A.F. Bennett, *Sermon Preached in St Mary's Chapel, Broadstairs*, (Broadstairs, 1870).

25. Memoir in H.W. Butcher, *Sermons Preached at Margate*, (London 1879), p.8.

26. *Keble's Margate and Ramsgate Gazette*, 9th September 1871.

27. In Memoriam - Rev. H.W. Butcher, (Margate 1878), p.15.

of his retirement from the Broadstairs church. The Kent Congregational Association made an annual grant of £50 to the Broadstairs church. In November 1885 a shortage of funds led the Association to reduce its grants to all the supported churches in the county. Broadstairs was told its grant in 1886 would be £40. It seems from the minutes of the KCA Executive Committee that Bennett objected to this reduction, regarding it as a reflection on his ministerial efficiency. At its April 1886 meeting the Executive Committee agreed to consider the grant to Broadstairs: "It was agreed that an intimation should be given to the present pastor that the Committee would not be able to recommend a renewal of the grant after this year."<sup>28</sup>

It is difficult to avoid the impression that the Executive Committee were unhappy with Bennett's attitude. They had not treated Broadstairs any differently from other supported churches. It is also a fact that in eighteen years at Broadstairs Bennett had not succeeded in making the church self-supporting. The Executive could be forgiven if they considered they were subsidising Bennett's globetrotting activities. After Bennett's retirement the KCA resumed its payments to the Broadstairs church when a new minister was appointed.

It would not be surprising if this dispute with the KCA was the catalyst that led to Bennett's retirement in 1886, but he had been thinking for some time about resigning to go to Australia where two of his sons lived.

He returned to Broadstairs in February 1887 for his retirement presentation at which he was given a handsome gift of £64. Bennett records his speech on that occasion in the autobiography. When writing it he may have recalled sitting on the platform in Ramsgate at a meeting in 1880 to mark the retirement of Henry Bevis. Bevis had welcomed the changes in theology since he commenced his ministry in Ramsgate and said

The majority of preachers are getting clearer views of the truth than ever their fathers did, for it does appear that men are not now tied so much to the laws and traditions of the elders, but are encouraged in their searches after truth.<sup>29</sup>

Bennett would not have agreed with such assessment to theological trends. In his own retirement speech that February evening in 1887 Bennett made his position clear:

With regard to the truths preached within these walls, I am thankful to say that the testimony has been a uniform one, and one that still commends itself to my matured judgement. Believing that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable, I have

28. Minutes of the Executive Committee of Kent Congregational Association, April 1886, Kent County Records, Maidstone.

29. *Keble's Margate and Ramsgate Gazette*, 7th February 1880.

endeavoured to give suitable prominence to all the great truths of Holy Writ.<sup>30</sup>

He then went on:

To the great truths of the evangelical system I have ever firmly adhered: I mean such truths as the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, his vicarious sacrifice, his intercession in heaven for us, the mission and work of the Holy Ghost in the renewal of the soul of man, the coming of the Lord Jesus in his glory to judge the quick and the dead, and to reign over a regenerated earth at the time of the restitution of all things.<sup>31</sup>

Bennett had a retirement lasting eight years, during which the family moved frequently. Apart from writing his autobiography he spent some time helping the cause at Therfield which had fallen on hard times. He recounts how “things began shortly to improve”. Subsequently the family moved to Cambridge where Bennett attended Canon Westcott’s lectures on the New Testament. They then had an address in Bayswater.

Bennett died in 1894 at St Leonards after a long illness, and he received a brief obituary in *Keble’s Margate and Ramsgate Gazette*.<sup>32</sup>

A memorial plaque was erected in the Vale Church. It is still there and reads: In loving Memory of Rev A.F. Bennett, the first pastor of this church, who fell asleep in Jesus at St Leonards July 11th 1894, aged 68 years. 1 Thes 4:14.

Bennett would have had mixed views about this plaque. He would not have liked to be the centre of attention because the credit should be given to his Lord and Saviour. At the time he would be pleased that the congregation thought well of him. This would have reassured a man who lacked confidence in his own ability. The verse from Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians was an appropriate one in view of Bennett’s own ministry and clear beliefs:

We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. (NIV)<sup>33</sup>

E.T. Cross

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30. *The Life Story*, p.104.

31. *Ibid*, p.105.

32. *Keble’s Margate and Ramsgate Gazette*, 21st July 1894.

33. Copies of Frederick Bennett’s autobiography are to be found in the Congregational Library, London and in the East Kent Archives at Dover. I am grateful for assistance in the research for this article to the Vale URC, Broadstairs, Jonathon Morgan of Dr. Williams’s Library, Margaret Thompson of the URC History Society, Margate Library, and the Record Offices at Maidstone, Dover and Cambridge.

## ENGLISH CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSES TO THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR, 1936-1939

Scholarly enquiry into British responses to the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939 has advanced on an uneven front. Lagging far behind studies of the literary response, or of the official British policy of non-intervention, or of the volunteers who fought on the Republican side, are investigations of specifically religious reactions to what many British Christians perceived as a crisis which only indirectly touched them.

As Tom Buchanan remarked in *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, the religious dimensions were "the least-researched aspect of the British response to the Civil War".<sup>1</sup> Those ecclesiastical waters remain largely uncharted.

This is surprising, because at the time the conflict in Spain was internationally perceived as much more than a violent dispute between left-wing and right-wing factions which happened to have the military support of, respectively, the governments of the Soviet Union and both Italy and Germany. Many Christians, especially Roman Catholics, regarded the war as a critical historical juncture for the future of both Spanish Christianity and Western civilisation. The prospect, less than two decades after the Bolshevik Revolution, of a victory by the Second Republic, which had enjoyed a very shaky existence since its birth in 1931, threatened (or promised) the geographical bracketing of Europe by communism. Anticlerical violence, which had cropped up several times in Spain, not least in 1931 and again in March 1936, alarmed large numbers of Roman Catholics in the United Kingdom, and reports of the murders of religious personnel when war erupted in July filled the pages of the British Catholic press. Its editors tended to respond by supporting Francisco Franco's Nationalist insurgency, for it promised to rescue the Church and restore it to the perch of privilege from which it had been removed in 1931. Protestants, on the other hand, were generally less concerned about anticlericalism in Spain, but they feared that the defeat of the Republic would spell the end of religious freedom there. These issues occupied prominent places in the debate which raged in both the daily and the religious press and involved large numbers of Christians across most of the denominational spectrum.

Here I analyse several aspects of Congregational commentary on the war as part of the multid denominational response to it and also as an integral component of the extended debate about British foreign policy *vis-à-vis* Spain in the late 1930s. Given the public nature of the controversy, the primary focus will be on the editors of two religious weeklies, Ernest H. Jeffs, a layman who edited *The Christian World* from 1936, and John Hutton, Presbyterian who became a Congregationalist in 1923 and served as minister of Westminster Chapel for two years before succeeding J.M.E. Ross at the helm of *The British Weekly*, another interdenominational periodical which had also long served as a public voice of English Congregationalism.<sup>2</sup> The views of Arthur Porritt, a Congregational layman who preceded Jeffs as editor of *The Christian World* but who was serving

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1. Tom Buchanan *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge, 1997), p.228.

as the foreign affairs commentator at *The Baptist Times* during the Spanish Civil War, will also be noted.<sup>3</sup> The positions of these Congregationalists will be considered in the context of the more general set of Christian responses, especially Roman Catholic and Anglican, to diverse aspects of the conflict. The juxtaposition of their stories with those of their counterparts in other denominations will highlight and explain both common ground and differences.

### **The Prelude of Support for Spanish Protestantism and the Second Republic**

Generally speaking, British Protestants, and especially Free Churchmen, were predisposed to favour the survival of the Second Republic because it was seen as a guarantee of religious freedom in a land where the Roman Catholic Church had held a near-monopoly on religious life until its disestablishment in 1931. In the late nineteenth century Protestants had succeeded in gaining footholds on the inhospitable ecclesiastical terrain, and this germ of denominational pluralism had grown on a small scale both before and after the abdication of King Alfonso XIII paved the way for Republican government. The interdenominational World's Evangelical Alliance, with its headquarters in London, had tirelessly supported Spanish Protestant churches and schools, and its widely circulated, bi-monthly periodical, *Evangelical Christendom*, kept this cause before the eyes of large numbers of Protestants in the United Kingdom. The long serving General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance, Henry Martyn Gooch, had played a key role in publicising the evolving situation of Spanish Protestantism for decades.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the nondenominational Spanish Gospel Mission, headed by Percy J. Buffard, had been established in 1914 both to evangelise in Spain and support affiliated Protestant churches there. Its organ, *Tidings from Spain*, also lauded the Second Republic as the guarantor of hard-won religious freedom during the first half of the 1930s. These and other channels of information helped keep alive a popular British rhetorical tradition linking Spanish political authoritarianism, the domination of the Roman Catholic Church in Spain, and religious intolerance in that country which can be traced back at least as far as the repeatedly republished works of George Borrow from the 1840s reporting the difficulties he had experienced there as a colporteur of the British and Foreign Bible Society.<sup>5</sup>

The ending of the Spanish monarchy in 1931 with attendant riots as well as assaults on Roman Catholic property and ecclesiastical personnel in several cities was extensively covered in the British daily press and, to a lesser degree, in the

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2. "Dr. Jowett's Successor", *The Times* (London), 3 April 1923, p.3; "Dr. Jowett's Successor", *The Times*, 4 April 1924, p.4; "News in Brief", *The Times*, 26 September 1925 p.9; "Editorship of the 'British Weekly'", *The Times*, 7 October 1925, p.16.
  3. "Mr. Arthur Porritt", *The Times*, 3 February 1947, p.9.
  4. Frederick Hale, "The World's Evangelical Alliance and the Spanish Civil War," *Acta Theologica*, XX, no. 2 (December 2000), pp.70-87.
  5. See especially George Borrow, *The Bible in Spain; or, the Journeys, Adventures, and Imprisonments of an Englishman, in an Attempt to Circulate the Scriptures in the Peninsula* (London, 1843).

country's numerous religious weeklies. Such commentators as Joseph Keating, editor of the Jesuit review *The Month*, were incensed and predicted dire consequences for the Church of Rome if the Republican government severed its ties with the state and especially if religious instruction were expunged from the Spanish schools.

Generally speaking, recorded Nonconformist reactions to the anticlerical violence of May 1931 were less sympathetic to the victims than those which appeared in the Anglican or Roman Catholic press, and some of them were decidedly more critical, quite in accordance with the nineteenth-and twentieth-century hostility of English Christians to the historic alliance of church and state in Spain. In one typical utterance, Jeffs excused the Republican government as "tolerant and conciliatory" and blamed monarchists for provoking a mob in Madrid. He further accused Spanish communists of making common cause with royalists and the "natural allies, the Jesuits" of the latter to destabilise the Republic.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, *The British Weekly's* editorial comment on the violence in May 1931 focussed on indigenous Spanish anticlericalism and did not broach the possibility that external agitators might have had a hand in the unrest. "The Spanish mob, when roused to fury, shows iconoclastic tendencies, as was seen in the destruction during the Carlist wars of the mighty Abbey of Poblet, near Tarragona," Hutton argued. He expressed hope that "for the little band of Spanish Protestants a better day is dawning" but was concerned that "the heads of the Church" were conspiring to restore the monarchy and frustrate efforts to implement full religious freedom. "Last week's pastoral letter from the Cardinal-Archbishop of Toledo contains expressions well calculated to alarm Republicans who desire a free Church in a free State," Hutton cautioned. "This prelate expects a long conflict between the Church and the revolutionary parties."<sup>7</sup>

### Reactions to Franco's Insurgency in 1936

When the Spanish Civil War broke out in July 1936, the British daily press gave it extensive and sustained coverage, and most of the religious weeklies followed suit. The four principal Roman Catholic ones—*The Catholic Times*, *The Catholic Herald*, *The Universe*, and *The Tablet*—led the way. Their primary focus in 1936 was on the paroxysm of violence which took the lives of thousands of priests, nuns, and other personnel and devastated a great deal of ecclesiastical property. In *The Universe*, for example, coverage began on 31 July with articles under the following headlines: "Barcelona under Red Terror", "Many Priests Shot: Every Church in City Burned", and "Bodies of Nuns Dug up and Destroyed". It continued a week later with "Demonic Fury in Spain" and "Blessed Sacrament Thrown into Streets", and on 14 August readers were treated to news under the

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6. "Topics of the Week. Terror in Spain", *The Christian World*, LXXIV, no. 3867 (14 May 1931), p.2.
  7. "Notes of the Week. More Trouble in Spain", *The British Weekly*, XC, no. 2,324 (14 May 1931), p.123.

rubrics "Holy See Protests to Spain. But Reds and Anarchists Continue the Slaughter", "Priests Shot at Sight: Mass Banished", and "If Anti-Reds Fail 'The End Will Be Unspeakable'". In *The Catholic Times*, meanwhile, the opening sentences of the initial article about the war, published under the headlines "Massacre of Priest in Spain" in the issue of 31 July, told that "Spain's Left Government has opened the Gates of Hell in its attempt to terrorise the nation into submission. Ever since it has been in power, it has tacitly encouraged its communist followers in their burning of churches and convents, and the murder of members of Right political parties." *The Catholic Times* thereby explicitly attributed anticlerical violence to the government in Madrid, linked it to extreme socialist ideology, and created an eschatological framework for its own interpretation of events in Spain. Augmenting words with visual imagery to underscore the point, the front page featured a photograph of a burning church with approximately thirty men in front of it, with the caption, "Communists with clenched fists upraised before a church they set on fire in a village near Madrid."<sup>8</sup> Inevitably, the editors in question endorsed the Nationalist cause, and before the end of the summer they were touting Franco as the potential saviour of Catholicism in Spain.

In the main, the Anglican weekly press took a position diametrically opposed to this. At *The Church Times*, for example, Sidney Dark initially condemned both sides, acknowledging that the Republican forces were "fiercely anti-clerical" and declaring that accounts of devastation and of extensive murders of priests and nuns were "no doubt true". At the same time, however, he called the Nationalist side "equally ruthless" and reported that "the legionaries and Moorish troops" operating in southern Spain were "shooting every prisoner that they capture". Dark found especially repugnant a quotation from Franco that he had gleaned from the *News Chronicle* that he was prepared to rescue Spain from Marxism even if it meant having to shoot one-half of the population. What this politically liberal Anglican layman apparently feared most, however, were the potential international repercussions of the civil war. Noting that the insurgents were adamantly opposed to allowing Spain to turn permanently to the Left, he predicted that they would soon invoke military assistance from Germany and Italy. If that were to happen, Dark thought that "the Spanish civil war may be the first act of the struggle between the Fascist and the democratic nations."<sup>9</sup>

Nonconformist coverage of the insurgency also contrasted with that in the Catholic media and richly illustrates the point that specifically religious loyalties and concerns were primary determinants in the ways in which Christians perceived and reacted to the outbreak of the war. In one of his first editorials in *The Christian World*, Jeffs sought on 23 July to maintain a dispassionate position while clearly revealing that his sympathies were not those of his Catholic counterparts. This young Congregationalist conceded that Republican Spain had "not yet learned the self-control and give-and-take which are essential to the

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8. "Massacre of Priests in Spain", *The Catholic Times*, no. 3492 (31 July 1936), p.1.

9. "Summary", *The Church Times*, CXVI, no. 3,836 (July 1936), p.115.

success of a free Government"; moreover, with no mean understatement he granted that "Spain has not, perhaps, been too well governed by successive Republican Ministries," but his cognisance of this crucial flaw in the national mentality and of the ineffectiveness of the authorities in Madrid did not prevent him from condemning the incipient *coup* as fundamentally "an Army movement" inspired by "disaffected leaders of the garrisons." Obviously seeking to influence compatriots on the home front, Jeffs declared that "the sympathy of most English people will be with the existing régime as against any possible return of the old bad system of government by an intolerant Church and an intriguing Army."<sup>10</sup>

At the end of July Jeffs elaborated on the causes of the civil war, noting that it had been a recurrent theme in Spain for a century. Rather than identifying contemporary political factors, which he believed "probably form a very small part in the motives of the rebel leaders", he played amateur historian by asserting, against the backdrop of his belief that internal rebellion was endemic in the national mentality, that "they have revolted because they are Spanish generals, brought up in a bad old tradition of disloyalty and self-seeking." Jeffs dismissed as inherently absurd the "attempt to dignify the rising by calling it a patriotic Fascist movement against a Government moving dangerously towards Bolshevism." He feared that such a political interpretation would have international political implications by drawing other European countries which would identify with one ideology or the other into the fray. Jeffs also cautioned that if Spain were to become a "Fascist Power" it would hang yet another dark cloud of potential warfare on the ominous sky of international relations in Europe.<sup>11</sup>

Notwithstanding his denigration of such political categorising, Jeffs continued to pigeonhole the Nationalists by using the "Fascist" label while departing from his earlier position and stating on 6 August that the war was becoming a "desperate struggle between Left and Right" in which the polar opposites of "extreme Socialism or Communism versus a species of Fascism" were fighting for supremacy. He reiterated his fear that other countries might choose to exploit the microcosmic battle of these ideologies by extending them internationally and thereby threatening the peace elsewhere in Europe.<sup>12</sup>

In *The British Weekly*, the war was initially also presented as a "Fascist" uprising. To Hutton, it appeared particularly vicious, in that "the uprising of rebel Fascist generals against the Government of the Republic" had surpassed in confusion and cruelty the Carlist struggles of the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Hutton's sympathies were clearly with the Republicans, and he mourned the passing of their experiment in democracy. At one time, he recalled, such names as Unamuno, Azaña, Madariaga, and Ortega y Gasset were supposedly "as familiar to British and American readers as those of their own politicians and essayists" and they had

10. "Revolt in Spain" (editorial), *The Christian World*, LXXIX, no. 4138 (23 1936), p.10.

11. "Spain's Ordeal" (editorial) *The Christian World*, LXXIX, no. 4139 (30 July 1936) p.8.

12. "Spain" (editorial), *The Christian World*, LXXIX, no. 4140 (6 August 1936), p.18.

13. "Adrift in Spain" (editorial), *The British Weekly*, C, no. 2597 (6 August 1936), p.363.

given British Liberals reason to hope that Spain had a bright future. Now, however, Spanish Liberalism had been silenced, yet another victim of war and authoritarianism. Hutton found it particularly regrettable that commentary on Spain had in some quarters degenerated into a dualistic and utterly partisan notion of "Reds" and "Blacks". If the most articulate Republican leaders could be heard, he believed, they would provide great insight into the real causes of Spain's tribulation and particularly relate how "the povety in which millions live has been the chief cause of class warfare." Hutton carefully avoided a blanket condemnation of the Catholic priesthood, explaining that "the humbler priests, dragging out life on starvation incomes, share the miseries of the workers."<sup>14</sup> Like Jeffs at *The Christian World*, Hutton feared that if seen in these simplistic ideological categories, the war could easily mushroom into an international conflict. Indeed, by August it was already becoming that. "The danger would seem to come from the Fascist Powers-Italy and Germany," reasoned this foe of fascism. "Italian aeroplanes have attempted to join the insurgents in Morocco, while German sailors have been received by General Franco, chief of the rebels. The vital interest of our own country is to prevent any extension of the conflict." Neutrality thus seemed both prudent and necessary if the United Kingdom were to avoid being dragged into another major European war.<sup>15</sup>

Reactions in the Protestant denominational press were almost uniformly hostile to the Francoites from the outset, hardly surprising when one considers their favourable editorial attitudes towards the Republic. This general position did not, however, invariably mean categorical partisan support of the Republican actions in the war. In *The Baptist Times*, for which Porritt regularly wrote opinion columns, he expressed in late July his view that one "very sinister" aspect of the hostilities was the wanton destruction of churches and other religious buildings. Seeking to explain rationally the "fiendish ferocity" with which the Republicans had attacked them, he noted that in one case, in Barcelona, "Fascist rebels" had ensconced themselves in a church tower and from there "sniped at large with machine guns." Spanish Republicans, Porritt observed, tended to "suspect that the Roman Catholic Church's sympathies are with the Fascist rebels", a belief in harmony with the international European Leftist conviction that churches were "citadels of reaction". He found slight consolation in the belief that in the United Kingdom the Free Churches had never sided with the economically privileged classes.<sup>16</sup>

Porritt's sympathy for the beleaguered Catholic institutions of Spain and awareness of widespread Republican hostility to them did not prevent him from maintaining a pro-Republican stance. In early August he expressed dismay that certain unnamed Englishmen and newspapers were sympathetic to the "Fascist rebels in the belief that they are fighting to save Spain from Bolshevism." It was a specious argument, Porritt thought, because the Madrid government was not Bolshevik. No friend of extremism on either political flank, he feared that if the

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14. "Events in Spain" (editorial), *The British Weekly*, C, no. 2598 (13 August 1936), p.379.

15. "Neutrality" (editorial), *The British Weekly*, C, no. 2597 (30 July 1936), p.363.

16. "Rebellion in Spain" (editorial), *The Baptist Times*, LXXXII, no. 4249 (30 July 1936), p.591.

Republicans prevailed in the war, the far Left would become dominant, whereas a Nationalist victory would result in a "Fascist and militarist" regime. "In either event, Spain will see more tyranny and persecution," Porritt predicted. In harmony with what was emerging as a *Leitmotiv* in Free Church commentary on the war, he warned that a continuation of the hostilities increased the danger that Spain could become the flash point for a general European war, not least because "both Hitler and Mussolini are quite ready to fish in the troubled waters, evidently counting on another European State coming under a military dictatorship which will deal one more blow to democracy."<sup>17</sup>

Before the end of August Porritt, relying largely on reports in *The Times*, was suggesting that the hostilities had multiple causes. He pointed to the "ugliest passions stirred by religious, political and class hatreds" underlying the war and judged that both the Republican and Fascist belligerents had been guilty of equal atrocities, for "we read of cold-blooded slaughter by both sides," and he could give horrific examples of ghoulish killing all around. Porritt also thought that the Spanish character had contributed its mite. "Historically the Spaniards have never shrunk from a blood-bath, and they are having one now," he declared.<sup>18</sup>

### The Destruction of Guernica

Perhaps no incident in the Spanish Civil War revealed more lucidly the mental rigidity and unflinching loyalties of many English Christian commentators than the devastation of Guernica, the ancient Basque capital city, in April 1937. It was immediately reported in *The Times* and elsewhere in the British daily press that German bombers had released explosives and incendiary devices for hours and caused vast structural damage and a great loss of human life.<sup>19</sup> To many British advocates of the Nationalist cause, it was unacceptable that Franco, whose heroic image had been burnished in the Catholic press during the preceding eight months, or his allies could perpetrate the wanton destruction of a civilian target.

Yet the Roman Catholic press could not ignore this potentially embarrassing issue which, although it hardly dominated the British media at the end of April, was clearly a current and emotionally charged topic. Contradictions in the coverage of Guernica in the secular newspapers provided a temporary face-saving means of coping with the matter. Writing anonymously in the front-page interpretative summary of the week's news in *The Tablet*, one defender of the Nationalist cause acknowledged that Guernica had been "of no military importance." He nevertheless took to task the editorial in *The Times* asserting that the unquestionable motive for its destruction had been to terrorise the population

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17. "The Issues in Spain" (editorial), *The Baptist Times*, LXXXII, no. 4250 (6 August 1936), p.607.

18. "The Spanish Blood-Bath" (editorial), *The Baptist Times*, LXXXII, no. 4251 (13 August 1936), p.623.

19. See, for example, "Town Wiped out by Rebel Raid", *The Evening Standard*, 27 April 1937, p.13, and "The Tragedy of Guernica Town Destroyed in Air Attack. An Eye-Witness's Account", *The Times*, 28 April 1937, p.17.

of neighbouring Bilbao into surrendering without further resistance. He juxtaposed this with the categorical denials from Franco's headquarters of Nationalist involvement in the raid. Furthermore, this editor pointed out that German forces had similarly countered the Basque allegation that they had levelled Guernica. Noting that the Basque separatists were "a fiery minority" with anarchist and communist allies, he broached the possibility that the destruction of Guernica had been orchestrated by that faction, "who know that their best chance now is, at all costs, to rouse outside public opinion in order to secure not less, but more intervention." Under the circumstances, he cautioned, it was prudent to reserve judgement until more facts were known.<sup>20</sup>

At *The Church Times*, Sidney Dark, relying on accounts in *The Times*, promptly condemned the bombing of Guernica as the dastardly work of "insurgent aeroplanes." He sarcastically called it "the latest achievement of General Franco" and used this opportunity to lambast an unidentified "English Roman Catholic apologist" (who was revealed in subsequent correspondence to be Arnold Lunn, a prominent Francoite who had converted from Methodism) for referring to the leader of the insurgency as "the Spanish General Gordon" who was "fighting the battle of Christian civilization."<sup>21</sup>

Dark's counterpart at *The Church of England Newspaper*, Herbert Upward, devoted more space the following week to the raid on Guernica and added further dimensions to his interpretation of the incident. That raid was a "monstrous crime" involving "wholesale and cold-blooded slaughter of civilians—men, women and children." Taking a more cautious position than Dark, Upward cautioned that it was still impossible to ascribe guilt for the deadly havoc that had been wreaked upon the citizenry of Guernica. Quoting a leading article in *The Times*, however, he agreed that "the identity and nationality of the pilots are not known; but they can hardly remain a secret very long." Regardless of the precise location of responsibility for the raid, Upward saw in it a horrifically graphic illustration of a new military age. "This is modern war!" he cried. "Let us pray and work as never before to create the will to peace so that this madness may cease."<sup>22</sup>

The Nonconformist press paid the Guernica incident relatively little attention, although it did receive comment in several of these denominational and nondenominational periodicals. Generally speaking, commentary relating to the incident was confined to the opinion columns as editors sought to place the outrage into a broader interpretative context.

Hutton got his news about Guernica from a Reuters dispatch which highlighted the fact that the attack had been made when the streets were crowded with shoppers and he commented briefly in theological and political terms which were echoed in other Christian periodicals. For "sheer devilry", he thought, the raid "would be hard to beat." Hutton found it grimly ironic that Franco, "who claims to be 'saving' Spain from the grip of the Communists", had allegedly ordered the

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20. "The World Week by Week", *The Tablet*, CLXIX, no. 5060 (1 May 1937), p.621.

21. Sidney Dark, "Summary", *The Church Times*, CXVII, no. 3,875 (30 1937), p.515.

22. Herbert Upward, "The Monstrous Crime", *Church of England Newspaper*, XLIV, no. 2,255 (7 May 1937), p.8.

raid. "Could Communist rule, even its worst form, produce horrors half as great?" he asked. Seeking to extract a lesson from the savage event, Hutton thought that possibly God was using the Spanish Civil War to issue a warning about the danger of even more dire events ahead "if the present militant spirit now abroad in Europe is allowed to continue." He feared a chain of incidents: "First Abyssinia, now Spain. Who will be next?"<sup>23</sup>

At *The Christian World* Jeffs did not question that the bombing of Guernica had been the work of forces in support of the insurgency. "Even the extreme partisans of General Franco have been glad to seize upon the excuse that the bombing was the work of his German auxiliaries, and must not be set to the account of the 'patriotic' insurgents," he reasoned. But to Jeffs the question of specific guilt was secondary when interpreting the broader significance of "an act of mere brutal terrorism inflicted upon an utterly defenceless people." The greater issue, he thought, had been incisively stated by Canon Peter Green in a letter to *The Manchester Guardian*: "This is modern war." Jeffs agreed wholeheartedly and explained that there were two major dimensions to this succinct indictment. He concurred with Green that warfare, especially as practised in the 1930s with increasing use of aerial bombardment, "cannot be humanised." Secondly, Jeffs believed that responses to Guernica illustrated that whatever rationality might have tempered the violence of previous armed conflicts, in its modern form "its extreme physical horrors immediately arouse a fury of resentment in which reprisals begin to seem right and justifiable, and in which the last shreds of self-control and cool judgement are easily discarded." Rather than expending time and effort seeking to ascertain who had bombed Guernica, Jeffs argued in a pacifist vein, "our efforts must be directed to destroying the roots of war. Every moment is wasted which is spent in framing rules to mitigate the horrors of a war in being."<sup>24</sup>

In the editorial columns of *The Baptist Times* Porritt, relying explicitly on the reports in *The Times*, did not mince words in calling "the murderous attack" and the strategy which it reflected "War's Worst Devilry." He noted that with the exception of Germany and Italy, where censorship of the press had prevented appropriate commentary, "the whole civilised world...has been shocked beyond measure by the cold-blooded atrocity." Porritt feared that a similar fate awaited the larger Basque city of Bilbao and lauded the British evacuation of children from that port as a means of sparing human lives.<sup>25</sup>

### Debating the Morality of Aerial Bombardment

The extensive deployment of aircraft in the Spanish Civil War, particularly in the bombardment of cities, added another dimension to the debates amongst

23. John Hutton, "Spain", *The British Weekly*, CII, no. 2635 (29 April 1937), p.83.

24. Ernest Harry Jeffs, "The Moral of Guernica", *The Christian World*, LXXX, no. 4179 (6 May 1937), p.10.

25. Arthur Porritt, "War's Worst Devilry", *The Baptist Times*, LXXXIII, no. 4289 (6 May 1937), p.347.

English Christians about the morality of that conflagration. The multi-pronged Nationalist assault on Madrid in the autumn of 1936 was an alarm which precipitated the early phase of the war-time debate, chiefly in the form of Protestant, anti-Franco critiques. As the politically liberal, anti-Nationalist Anglican Sidney Dark wrote in *The Church Times* in November of that year, "The attack has been violent and ruthless. The city has been attacked from the air and by long-range guns. Hospitals have been set on fire. Historic buildings have been destroyed. Women and children have been killed in hundreds." It was all a terrifying omen of worse things to come, he feared, for in the event of an international war in Europe "the super-planes and the super-bombs" deployed in it would wreak even greater havoc on London, Paris and Berlin.<sup>26</sup>

At *The British Weekly*, meanwhile, John Hutton similarly condemned this departure in strategy which indicated that "the wheels of Franco's chariot are driving heavily." In Madrid, he noted, the bombardment had destroyed famous churches, museums, and other edifices, and "every other day the air is invaded and swept by bombing planes which shower death more or less indiscriminately." It was amazing, Hutton thought, that when the smoke cleared the defenders of the city could still occupy their positions.<sup>27</sup>

The destruction of Guernica quickened the debate, and the bombing of Barcelona in January 1938 brought the matter to the forefront of discussion once again in some of the Christian newspapers, as it did in the secular press. On 20 January *The Times* reported that at noon the previous day Barcelona had suffered its worst raid of the war when two small squadrons of Nationalist aircraft dropped both explosive and incendiary bombs on the city, "catching unawares workers going to their homes, children at play, and women at work in their kitchens." Approximately 160 people had lost their lives.<sup>28</sup> Eleven days later the news was even worse; new aerial bombardments had killed at least 300 people in the Catalan capital, approximately 120 of whom were children from Bilbao and Madrid.<sup>29</sup> The matter caused considerable debate in British religious circles, not least those in which support of Franco had been strongest, including the Catholic press, some of whose editors and many of whose readers questioned the morality of this aspect of his campaign.

To the extent that Nonconformist editors and other commentators reacted in public to the bombing of Barcelona, they viewed it as an unmitigated atrocity. Quite typical was an editorial by Jeffs of *The Christian World*, who found in Franco's "ghastly slaughter of non-combatants" a most disappointing response to the Spanish government's appeal for a "humane agreement for the cessation of this murderous form of warfare." He thought the government's threatened reprisals in order to neutralise the advantage which aerial bombardment had given

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26. Sidney Dark, "Summary", *The Church Times*, CXVI, no. 3,852 (20 November 1936), p.579.

27. "Spain", *The British Weekly*, CI, no. 2613 (26 November 1936), p.215.

28. "160 Killed at Barcelona. Worst Raid of War", *The Times*, 20 January 1938, p.12.

29. "Barcelona Air Raids. Heavy Death Roll. 120 Children Buried", *The Times*, 31 January 1938, p.12.

the Nationalists were understandable enough from a worldly viewpoint but hoped that the Republicans would “take the risk of being more humane than the insurgent party” towards the people whom it desired to rule in a reunified Spain. This idealistic Englishman hoped that even though its lines had been weakened in places the Republican government would not retaliate in kind and could still emerge victorious because it could now show more cogently than ever that it stood for “decency and for civilization against the unscrupulous brutality of Fascism.”<sup>30</sup> Jeffs approved wholeheartedly of a note couched in “the sternest terms” that the British government had sent Franco a few weeks later protesting against the “ghastly bombing” which contravened international law “as recognized by civilized peoples and Governments.” He also commended repeated calls from various quarters that the Vatican be “invited to tell Franco’s ‘good Catholics’ what bad Catholics they are.”<sup>31</sup>

Porritt joined him in echoing Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin’s characterisation of the British reaction to the bombing of Barcelona as “horror and disgust.” He accused Franco, smelling victory, of resorting to terror in his effort to cow the Catalan population into surrendering and saw “no military object[ive]” in the bombardment of a city like Barcelona. Porritt feared that it was a prelude to what London might expect if the United Kingdom became involved in another European war.<sup>32</sup>

### Resignation: Reactions to Franco’s Victory

The inevitable but delayed fall of Madrid in 1939 precipitated varying reactions among British Christian commentators. Even many staunch supporters of the Republic had resigned themselves to its defeat well before then and could only hope that Spain under Franco would prove less authoritarian than they feared, while acolytes of *el Caudillo* expressed their joy that the demon of socialism had been trampled underfoot and the survival of European Christian civilisation thus ensured.

Most reactions in the Roman Catholic press were predictably unrestrained. In *The Catholic Herald*, for example, Michael de la Bedoyère gloated over Franco’s victory and surmised that the pride of the pro-Republicans had been spared only by the shifting of public attention to other troubled areas of Europe. Adopting an “I told you so” attitude, he thought it particularly important for Britons “to learn their lesson” from Spain if they were to contribute to international peacekeeping efforts rather than war-mongering. Precisely what that lesson was de la Bedoyère did not spell out, but given his staunchly anti-communist stance and repeated characterisation of the Republican forces as the “Reds” it is most plausible that he was referring to the necessity of taking a firm and timely stance against Marxism

30. “Spanish Barbarities” (editorial), *The Christian World*, LXXXI, no. 4218 (3 February 1938), p.10.

31. “Horror and Disgust” (editorial), *The Christian World*, LXXXI, no. 4225 (24 March 1938), p.8.

32. “Horrors at Barcelona” (editorial), *The Baptist Times*, LXXXIV, no. 4335 (24 March 1938), p.227.

before it became entrenched in any additional European countries. To this self-assured editor, it seemed self-evident that "the great majority" of his compatriots would have supported the Nationalist cause had they only "understood the true nature of the situation"; by doing so, he asserted without explanation, they could have "greatly hastened" the end of the conflict in Spain. His consolation lay in his perception that the majority of his Catholic fellow Englishmen had remained true to Franco but even chided them slightly by suggesting that this was "perhaps blindly, because of the religious issue" which had been "central" throughout the course of the war. Moreover, in contrast to people like Douglas Jerrold who expressed their disgust with the unwillingness of many Britons to take a firm stand on issues, de la Bedoyère saw in this unflinching British Catholic loyalty to Franco "the centre of a whole way of thinking and acting which appeals to the ordinary Englishman."<sup>33</sup>

The Anglican weeklies never wavered from their anti-Nationalist sentiments, but they had to accept the demise of the Republic. When the British government "resigned themselves to the inevitable" and recognised Franco's régime in late February, this was described in the editorial columns of *The Guardian* as a sensible move on the grounds that delay would not have served any purpose. Furthermore, its editor Wilbraham Villiers Cooper hoped an acknowledgment of Franco's position might allow the United Kingdom to exert some influence on him to exercise mercy towards his vanquished foes. In a spirit of optimism which was never vindicated, Cooper further hoped that *el Caudillo* might actually "appreciate the advice and help of a nation which has tried honestly to be neutral and not to interfere with internal affairs of his country..."<sup>34</sup>

Like several other Nonconformist newspapers, *The British Weekly* expressed a spirit of resignation by the beginning of 1939, realising that Franco's victory was inevitable. Other concerns occupied centre stage in that periodical. Nevertheless, one finds a limited amount of commentary about the closing stages of the war and expressions of hope for the future of Spain. Writing in March 1939, for instance, the chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, R.W. Thompson, expressed this disgust, notwithstanding the fact that he also professed to have become largely inured to the "Chamber of Horrors" which news of the war had long been, that since the fall of Barcelona some 5,000 people there had been executed. It was no consolation to him of course, that he had read of numerous tortures inflicted on prisoners in the Catalan capital while it was still in Republican hands. This, Thompson believed, went beyond the general repulsiveness of war, because there was something "particularly revolting in the execution and torture of men in thousands, marked down in cold blood for slaughter, in a civilised Christian land." Such gruesome behaviour, this disillusioned commentator had previously thought, "belonged to primitive savagery or pagan ferocity." Disabused of his liberal optimism about human

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33. "Spain: the End and the Beginning" (editorial), *The Catholic Herald*, no. 2770 (31 March 1939), p.8.

34. "Spain" (editorial), *The Guardian*, no. 4865 (3 March 1939), p.137.

nature, Thompson feared that the potential for revenge was enormous in post-war Spain, but he nevertheless clung to the hope that some factors, such as the intervention of the newly enthroned pontiff, Pius XII, would forestall such vengeance.<sup>35</sup> In an age when anti-Catholic, and particularly anti-papal, sentiment still ran strong in many Nonconformist circles, this was noteworthy comment which illustrated a willingness to put aside entrenched attitudes in favour of recognising the potential which a respected person of authority might have in intervening for the sake of enduring peace and reconciliation.

At the *Christian World*, in January 1939, Jeffs found consolation in his conviction that post-war Spain could be a land of civility. Calling the Spaniards "the most fervently nationalistic race in Europe", he revealed his ignorance of regional ethno-political realities by declaring that Spain would "speedily recover her national unity when the war is over" but, in contrast to some of his counterparts at other newspapers who feared German and Italian domination of Franco's government, predicted that by "firmly rejecting foreign domination" Spain would find its footing in twentieth-century modernity. This, Jeffs believed, would include the political sphere of life: "Democracy will not finally perish among that independent and individualistic people."<sup>36</sup> Less than a month later, however, this Congregationalist was hedging his bets. In another leading article he wrote with considerably more restraint that "time alone can show whether Franco is more of a Fascist ideologue than a Spanish reactionary-in other words, whether his (possibly) impending victory is an unmixed disaster or only a temporary setback to Spain's long struggle for liberty."<sup>37</sup> In early March, along with other erstwhile opponents of the Nationalists, Jeffs endorsed the British decision to recognise their government because he hoped that this would help to reduce the suffering of the Spanish people after more than two and a half years of internecine strife. He continued to defend the non-intervention policy of his own government and those of other European countries as prudent, because British intervention could have led to an escalation of hostilities into a general continental war. Jeffs repeated his belief that it was too early to know whether Franco's victory would prove to be "disastrously bad."<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

On this spectrum of English Christian responses to the Spanish Civil War, those of the Congregationalist stood unambiguously at the Republican pole. Virtually all the material published about that conflict in *The Christian World* and *The British Weekly*, chiefly in the form of letters to the editors was in accord with this

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35. R.W. Thompson (London) to *The British Weekly*, undated, in the *British Weekly*, CV, no. 2733 (16 March 1939), p.434.
  36. "Spain" (editorial), *The Christian World*, LXXXII, no. 4269 (26 January 1939), p.10.
  37. "Hoping for a Truce" (editorial), *The Christian World*, LXXXII, no. 4272 (16 February 1939), p.10.
  38. "The Recognition of Franco" (editorial), *The Christian World*, LXXXII, no. 4274 (2 March 1939), p.10.

position. It is impossible, of course, to know whether this accurately reflected popular opinion within the denomination, and it is conceivable that, at a time when anti-communism ran strong in British middle-class circles and Stalin's iron-fisted rule of the Soviet Union was increasingly exposed internationally, some Congregationalists supported the Nationalist cause as bulwark against "the Reds." But scholarly enquiry cannot rest on such conjecture.

In his study *Britain Divided: The Effect of the Spanish Civil War on British Public Opinion*, K.W. Watkins presented a framework which, had it been meticulously developed, could have served as a means of analysing the religious dimensions of this topic.<sup>39</sup> In some respects Watkins's book undoubtedly merited the attention it received when published in 1963. Watkins called attention to the tendency on the part of Britons of various types to support the positions which were perceived as those taken by corresponding groups in Spain. Hence, working-class Englishmen aligned themselves with the Republicans who were known to be favoured by considerable numbers of Spanish urban labourers, whereas British military officers were advocates of Franco's insurgency. Unfortunately, much of Watkins's research was superficial, and his generalisations papered over numerous inconsistencies. Moreover, Watkins had little to say about the religious dimensions of the debate. They are virtually a blank page in his study. Had he explored these carefully rather than merely asserting that Catholics tended to support the Nationalists and Protestants the Republic, he would certainly have found much evidence to bolster that claim but he would also have found numerous exceptions to it. In the latter camp were men like the Methodist Sir Henry Lunn, who founded a "United Christian Front", an interdenominational Protestant body which publicised the Nationalist cause, and the retired Dean of St. Paul's, William Ralph Inge, who took an active part in that organisation. But Congregationalists were conspicuously absent from that and other British pro-Franco bodies.

When one analyses the responses of Roman Catholic commentators in the United Kingdom to the war, the influence of denominational loyalty, the captivity to ideological leanings, and other factors shaping their perceptions become obvious. But it is arguable that such factors were only marginally less influential in the minds of Jeffs, Porritt, and Hutton. They were heirs of a long-standing tradition of anti-Catholicism, and of prejudices against Spanish monarchism, which was seen as an atavistic remnant of an authoritarian, intolerant, and backward age. Distinguishing them from their Catholic counterparts, of course, who were appalled at the butchering of thousands of their co-religionists because of their faith and at the closure of Catholic churches in Republican Spain, was the fact that only a small number of Spanish Protestants were known to have been put to death or otherwise penalised during the war. Thus cooler heads could prevail among Congregationalists, though they were by no means wholly objective or disinterested observers. In retrospect, of course, their fears were vindicated when Franco's régime brought the curtain down on Spain's short-lived experiment with religious freedom.

FREDERICK HALE

## THE FREE CHURCH FEDERAL COUNCIL - A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW

My title implies that we go back no further than the inaugural meetings of the Free Church Federal Council in 1940. In his Inaugural Address the Moderator, the Revd. Walter Armstrong, also at that time President Elect of the Methodist Conference, said two councils "have gone out of existence." The two Councils were the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches and the Federal Council of the Evangelical Free Churches. Before we recall their fusion and what followed our retrospective view needs to go back further to discover the purpose for which they were formed, how far they fulfilled that purpose and whether they passed it on to their successor. We look first, therefore, at Birth and Growth and then move on to Work and Life.

### 1. Birth and Growth

As with all creation stories there are several versions of the genesis of the National Council of Free Churches. In his life of George Cadbury, A.G. Gardiner claims, "It was largely due to his [Cadbury's] efforts that the National Free Church Council came into existence. The movement had its origins in the Midlands, the first local council of Free Churches being formed in Worcester in 1881."<sup>1</sup>

Another version has Dr Henry Lunn as the instigator. He invited church leaders to Grindelwald, Switzerland as his guests and W.B. Selbie says the outcome was the foundation of the National Free Church Council. A circular drawn up by Dr J.B. Paton and sent to every Nonconformist minister in the country and a dinner party at the home of Mr Percy Bunting in Euston Square, London are also credited with creative powers.<sup>2</sup>

A minute book in Dr Williams's Library labelled "Free Church Congress 1892 - Minutes etc" provides information that links some of the stories. It contains a circular headed, *Proposed Free Church Congress*, which begins, "You have probably seen references lately in the press to a proposal to hold a Congress of representatives of the Free Churches for the discussion of questions bearing on the state of religion in England which have common interest for them." Then comes a reference to Bunting, "Some gentlemen, among whom are Percy W. Bunting Esq and Rev J. G. Rogers, will come from London on Monday and will be glad to meet representatives of the Free Churches of Manchester at the Central Hall, Oldham Street at 3.30pm that afternoon, the 11th inst for the purpose of ascertaining their opinion whether such a Congress is desirable and whether it could be held in Manchester this year." The circular is over the signature of Alex Mackennal and dated 6 January 1892. Dr Alexander Mackennal, Congregationalist, and Percy Bunting, Wesleyan, had

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1. A.G.Gardiner, *The Life Of George Cadbury*, (London 1923), p.164.  
2. E.K.H. Jordan, *Free Church Unity*, (Lutterworth, 1956), p.22f.

both been at Grindelwald.

The eighty-two who attended the meeting on 11 January, agreed to call a Congress and appointed a group to plan for it. The Congress was held 7-11 November 1892 in Manchester, 370 attended, it cost £290 6s. 3d and through subscriptions, sale of tickets and collections made a profit of £3.13s.3d. A second Congress was held at Leeds in 1894 and the next in 1895 in Birmingham. A new organisation was rapidly developing and there was need for finance. It was at this point that George Cadbury helped in the birth of the National Council. He agreed to contribute £600 a year for five years and his brother, Richard, agreed to do the same. This made possible the appointment of Thomas Law of the United Methodist Free Churches as full time secretary with an office in Memorial Hall, London. The fourth Congress, held in Nottingham in 1896, became the first National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches.

At the January 11th meeting it had been agreed "That the Congress be constituted by the personal and individual adhesion of members of the Free Evangelical Churches and not by delegation from the different church bodies." This decision was confirmed at the Leeds Congress. The basis of representation would remain a cause of controversy through almost all the life of the FCFC.

The number of creation stories show that in the last decade of the nineteenth century different people and groups of people recognised the need for Free Churches to come together. This means there are also a variety of reasons given for that coming together. Silvester Home was for self defence. It was necessary to have a united and effective protest against the Romanising of the Anglican Church.<sup>4</sup> George Cadbury was concerned with their duty as churches. The waste resulting from the separation of the Free Churches was purposeless. If they came together there would be increased efficiency and a better spirit.<sup>5</sup> Self defence and duty are brought together in a booklet published by the National Council of Free Churches:

The growing predominance of the Sacerdotal party in the Anglican Church makes common action imperative even from the mere instinct of self defence; at the same time the growing power of the Free Churches, who now embrace a clear-majority of the worshipping population of England and Wales, imposes upon them the duty of consolidating their forces in the interests of the Kingdom of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

The negative spirit in church relations is illustrated in an exchange of letters between F.B. Meyer, minister of Christ Church, Westminster Bridge Road, and E. S. Talbot, High Churchman, Bishop of Rochester and Southwark, and friend and

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3. Gardiner, *op cit.*

4. C.Silvester Home, *A Popular History of the Free Churches*, (London 1903), p.424.

5. Gardiner, *op cit.*

6. Howard Evans, *The Free Churches in the Victorian Era*, (London 1897), p.45.

cousin of the High Church Prime Minister Salisbury. Here are snippets from their letters:

Meyer to Talbot – 1 June 1899

On Sept. 29 we celebrate the centenary of our great Sunday School Society. Would it be quite impossible for you to look in at a special gathering we would convene for you on that day? I know that it is asking a great deal; but there are many, many pleas I could advance. We are some of your other sheep and of your diocese. It would be a noble act of Catholicity, and would strike a keynote which would ring through your diocese. And even though some might murmur that you had come to be guest with a man that was a sinner, still we are children of the same family. Forgive me if I ask you to do more than you can.

In his reply the Bishop wrote:

I feel that I should not only be doing harm in order to do good; but I should be inconsistent with my own practice and principles. It has always seemed to me to be a matter of clear principle not to support by my own doing your organizations. For in one aspect their *raison d'être* is the fault and error as they deem it of the Church, and therefore opposition to her on points of doctrine and practice. Only this could justify their existence as organisations, and the breach of unity which is so colossal an evil. And so, as organizations (to harp on the word), I cannot rightly set them forward. I wonder if I might *write* you a few lines before the time? That I could do; and they would be friendly! God be with you.<sup>7</sup>

When speaking in support of the Congress at the January 11th meeting, Percy Bunting had said, "The object of the Congress was the extension of the Kingdom of Christ. Antagonism to the Church of England, or to any other Church was not the spirit of the promoters." By 1897 a publication of the National Council saw the need for the instinct of self defence and by 5 February 1900 it agreed the resolution, "This Council renews its protest against the sacerdotal teaching, ceremonies and practice now pervading to so alarming an extent in the church established by law in England and is of the opinion that neither the doctrine nor the discipline of the Anglican Church will be satisfactorily safeguarded until it is disestablished." Disestablishment was on the agenda of the Council.

The subjects chosen for the 1892 Congress show what concerned the Free Churches and brought them together. Fellowship, the Christian Ministry, the Sacraments and the Church Catholic (that was later changed to the Church of Christ), mission to the lapsed populations in large towns, rural districts, foreign missions, temperance, peace, arbitration and international questions, and gambling. Here is a programme spelling out self defence and duty. Unity does

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7. Gwendolen Stephenson, *Edward Stuart Talbot 1844-1934*, (London 1936), p.114.

not appear.

Most of these items would be inherited by the FCFC. The one surprising entrant is "arbitration" It shows that the Free Church leaders were aware of contemporary issues and it became poignant when the FCFC was formed at a crucial point during the 1939-45 war. The Venezuelan claim to much of British Guiana had gained support from the United States whose ambassador in London reminded Salisbury of the Monroe Doctrine and demanded that the dispute be submitted to impartial arbitration.<sup>8</sup> The war of words continued until Salisbury agreed an arbitration treaty and a tribunal finally sat in Paris in 1899. Evans wrote that "The Free Churches have repeatedly urged upon statesmen the desirability of substituting an appeal to the arbitrament of reason for that of the sword", and continued, "A direct appeal was made from the National Council of the Free Churches to the Churches of the United States in support of a General Treaty of Arbitration."<sup>9</sup>

If we are surprised at the inclusion of "arbitration" then we may feel equal surprise at the exclusion of education. It would soon take centre stage. The battle stories linked with the 1902 Education Bill have been well told and I do not intend to add to them, but a retrospective review should see if there are lessons to be learnt. I draw attention to two. Some prominent Free Churchmen gave support to the non-payment of the education rate but the National Council could not take the lead in a no-rate movement because other equally respected leaders considered that the rate should be paid. The first lesson is that the ability of any Free Church Council to give leadership will always be controlled by the strength of agreement reached.

After the 1902 Education Act came into force the National Council became increasingly involved in party politics, committed itself to the Liberal Party and launched a Free Church Council Election Fund Appeal for £50,000. This is where we return to F.B. Meyer. He was one of the Free Church leaders who shared in the election campaign of 1906. He toured the West counties. Ostensibly it was to ask voters to vote for those candidates who gave support to a manifesto on education issued by the National Council. In effect it was to call for a Liberal victory. We also return to Cadbury for he again made a financial contribution, this time £2,500 to the Election Fund.

Although Cadbury contributed to the Fund his biographer maintains that, "With characteristic tenacity he refused to alter his view in regard to the duty of the Council to keep aloof from politics, however urgent the case might be."<sup>10</sup> It was to Meyer that Cadbury wrote expressing this view and saying that he was considering if he could continue his connexion with the Council. However all was resolved by the untimely and tragic death of Thomas Law. Law was the first full time secretary of the Council and it was under his guidance that it had grown. He

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8. Andrew Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian Titan*, (London 1999), p.633.

9. Evans, *op cit*.

10. Gardiner, *op cit.*, p.177.

had his critics, who complained that he used the Council's organisation to support the Liberal Party. Eventually he found the strain too much and took his own life. F.B. Meyer took over as secretary, first temporarily and then on a permanent appointment. Cadbury, noting a spirit of detachment from the political struggle, continued his connexion with the Council.

Here were Meyer and Cadbury both involved in party politics yet able to advocate, and almost require, a non-political stance for the National Council. The Constitution of the Council encouraged such ambiguity. Five Objects are listed, the fifth being, "To promote the application of the law of Christ in every relation of human life." Does "every relation" include the political? By the process of deduction the second lesson is that we will not always get clarity; we live with untidiness and confusion. There is an unresolved ambiguity in the life of the Free Church Council.

There was no ambiguity in the Council's determination to produce a network of councils so that churches could share in mission. This was supported in 1897 by the appointment of Gipsy Smith as full-time missionary. By the beginning of the new century the Council was ready to launch the Free Church Council Simultaneous Mission to London. This began with a service at Guildhall on 28 January 1901 and when the London campaign closed the Mission to the Provinces began.

Now is the time to reintroduce Bishop Talbot, who had snubbed F.B. Meyer. J.H. Oldham had the main responsibility to encourage people to serve on the eight preparatory commissions for the 1910 World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh. High Church figures were required. Talbot's son, Neville, later to be Bishop of Pretoria, was a member of the SCM at Oxford. On the strength of that link Tissington Tatlow and Oldham called on Bishop Talbot and invited him to serve. He accepted the invitation.<sup>11</sup> At Edinburgh he agreed to serve on the Continuation Committee and Keith Clements notes, "The British slate of names included both E.S. Talbot, the Anglo-Catholic bishop of Southwark, and the Baptist layman Sir George Macalpine. At that time of continuing and often bitter Anglican-Nonconformist rivalry, in how many other bodies could such figures have willingly sat together?"<sup>12</sup>

At Edinburgh Talbot formed a friendship with Principal Cairns and it is possible to record an exchange of letters between the two ten years later, at the time of the Lambeth Conference of 1924 to set alongside that with Meyer in 1899. Cairns to Talbot (who had been appointed Bishop of Winchester in 1911): "I feel that to you, more than to any other man, we owe the spirit which has made this Lambeth report possible." Talbot to Cairns: "In the Lambeth Conference we have had a most constraining sense of guidance and unity. How the results will strike outsiders I find it difficult to guess. But you will, I think see the spirit of it, and at least be a kindly critic. You will write to me about it, won't you? And with

11. Stephenson, *op cit.*, p.188.

12. Keith Clements, *Faith on the Frontier. A Life of J.H. Oldham*, (Edinburgh, 1999), p.101.

transparent candour.”<sup>13</sup> The influence of friendship is a significant factor in building the trust which is needed to foster unity.

It was hoped by some that the Federal Council of Evangelical Free Churches, formed in 1919 to bring together official representatives of the Free Church denominations, would foster unity in a way that the National Council based on territorial representation could not. We have to ask, therefore, what is to be understood by “federalism” J.H. Shakespeare knew what he meant when he urged the setting up of the Federal Council: “Federation would mean one united Free Church in each village in England. He looked for the creation of Free Church parishes countrywide.”<sup>14</sup> The constitution accepted by the Free Church Federal Council in 1940 gave a very different understanding, “It is an essential element in the proposals for federation that each of the federating churches should preserve its own autonomy as regards faith and practice.”

There were a number of calls for unity during the first decades of the twentieth century, including the Lambeth Appeal. There is little, if anything, to show as a result of all the meetings and conversations that followed them. The Free Church Unity Group, in its leaflet *A Plan for Unity*, assesses the situation in the mid-thirties “It is, of course, aware that several honoured leaders of each denomination are opposed to reunion and also that the mass of membership has never really thought about it. The conditions for real unity do not at the moment exist.” Would the Free Church Federal Council be able to create those conditions for real unity? Would the Council see it as its responsibility to do so?

The main news in September 1940 was of the German air attacks on England. In a radio broadcast on 11 September 1940, Churchill spoke of the effort the Germans were making to secure daylight mastery of the air. This led him to say, “Therefore we must regard the next week or so as a very important period in our history.”<sup>15</sup> On Sunday 15 September, the German Luftwaffe launched one of its heaviest raids on London. The losses he suffered as a result of that action convinced Hitler that Operation Sealion, his plan for the invasion of England, had no hope of success and on Tuesday 17 September he ordered its indefinite postponement.<sup>16</sup> On the day between those two events, Monday 16 September 1940, the Inaugural Meetings of the Free Church Federal Council began at Baptist Church House, London. The event fell within the period designated by Churchill “as a very important period in our history” but how significant was it in the life of the nation?

It did not make front page news but it was noted. *The Times* had “Fusion of Free Church Councils”; *The Manchester Guardian*, “To speak for all Free Churches -

13. Stephenson, *op. cit.*, p.254.

14. Keith Clements (Ed), *Baptists in the Twentieth Century*, Baptist Historical Society 1983, p.37.

15. Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War Vol. 2 Their Finest Hour*, (London 1954), p.271.

16. Chester Wilmot, *The Struggle for Europe*, (London, 1954), p.54.

a New Council” and *Daily Telegraph*, “Free Church Unites” and then quoting the figure given by the FCFC, - “7,000,000 members in Britain”. The article following this begins, “Some 7,000,000 Free Churchman in all parts of Great Britain can now speak with a united voice”. The FCFC report of the inaugural meetings conveys a sense of achievement and hope and, perhaps, a growing realisation that the Council, in its new dual representative capacity, denominational and territorial, did have new power. The secretary, S.W. Hughes expressed his belief in this, “United in Christian fellowship and all-powerful in the spirit of the Saviour, the Free Churches of this wonderful land can help God to robe the nation’s life with his righteousness and power.”<sup>17</sup> Hughes believed that the way to do this was to “cover the whole land with Free Church Federal Councils” and the Council gave support to this by appointing a sub committee “to consider the areas of existing local Councils and the formation of new Councils.”<sup>18</sup>

It was the Moderator’s reference, in his Inaugural Address, to the two Councils that had gone out of existence that led us to recall the history of those Councils. Walter Armstrong then had one sentence on unity, “The seed of unity may develop into the fruit of union,” and we might have expected him to continue by explaining the potential for unity and how the new Council would exploit this. He did not. He moved immediately to ask for serious thinking concerning the relation between the Church, the Community and the State. A call for unity would have been a new departure. The challenge to think about the relation between the Church, the Community and the State was the logical sequence to the history of the earlier Councils.

When he reached that point the Moderator had still given only about 20% of his address. In the remaining 80% he issued a call to Free Churchmen to support the war against Hitler and Mussolini, distanced the Free Church Denominations from the pacifist position and, somewhat grudgingly, acknowledged the rights of conscientious objectors. No hint here of the desirability of substituting an appeal to the arbitrament of reason for that of the sword. But England in 1940 was different from England in 1899 and Hitler and Mussolini were different from Venezuela. Which raises the question as to how far doctrine can change with the passage of time and the change of circumstance. If there was a change in regard to arbitration then there was consistency on other items from the 1892 agenda. As mentioned earlier, soon after its birth the National Council strengthened its network of local councils to share in mission and appointed Gipsy Smith as missionary. At its birth the FCFC took steps to strengthen its network of local councils and pledged its support for the Forward Movement developing from the July 1940 Methodist Conference and committed to the task of Christian evangelism.

As we move into the post-1940 period we need to recognise that the FCFC did

17. FCFC *Annual Report 1940-1941*, p.18.

18. FCFC *Annual Report 1940-1941*, p.12.

not have a clean slate. It had an agenda that had been developing from the 1890s. There were the unresolved ambiguities caused by the hairbreadth boundaries between the spiritual, religious, social and political. Experience seemed to show that it was more interested in and better able to deal with life and work than with faith and order. But whatever the Council attempted to do was always controlled by the strength of agreement that could be reached. This was controlled by how far denominations were ready to let go of decision making.

## 2. Work and Life

A retrospective view has to be selective and there will be omissions. The first moves towards a Women's Council to run parallel with the work of the National Council of Evangelical Churches were taken in 1899 and the National Free Church Women's Council dates from 1907. It has a long history of its own which could not be compressed into this survey. The Council's work for the nurture of children and young people in the churches, with all its organisational relationships, is in a similar category. For these reasons the Council's work in regard to women and children does not form part of this account. There are different reasons for other omissions. The Council gave much time to evangelism and matters of social concern. These were significant, some still are, but some are of less significance and the responsibility for others has passed to different groups and organisations. I have chosen those aspects of the work and life of the Council from which I believe there are lessons to be learnt as we continue our ecumenical pilgrimage.

## Education

Evacuation revealed the defects in education. During the 1939-45 war 3.75 million people were evacuated from areas considered vulnerable to air attack to those considered safe. "It was, too, a story of the underclass and the middle (sometime even the upper) classes discovering each other and their variations in diet, clothing, hygiene and the use of English. Never before had Disraeli's 'two nations' been forced into such intimate and enduring proximity."<sup>19</sup> That proximity caused questions to be asked, "Who were these boys and girls - half fed, half clothed, less than half taught, complete strangers to the most elementary social discipline and the ordinary decencies of a civilized home?"<sup>20</sup>

It was the urgent need for educational reform that convinced R.A. Butler, appointed President of the Board of Education in July 1941, that action was needed immediately. Within that reform it would be necessary to find a settlement with the churches. Churchill responded to Butler's suggestion in a letter dated 13 September 1941, "It would be the greatest mistake to raise the 1902 controversy during the war, and I certainly cannot contemplate a new Education

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19. Peter Hennessy: *Never Again: Britain 1945-51*, (London, 1993), p.12.

20. F.A. Iremonger *William Temple - His Life and Letters*, (London, 1992), p.569.

Bill". Butler decided to disregard Churchill's advice.<sup>21</sup> But he had no shortage of advice. Within weeks of his appointment he had received a deputation on 15 August 1941, which was led by Archbishop Lang. The accounts of Butler and Lang show different points of view. Butler noted the absence of the Roman Catholics which he wrote "made it essential for me to say as little as possible at this stage, though I provided some innocent diversion and surprise by asking Cosmo Gordon Lang, the Archbishop of Canterbury, to conclude the interview with prayer."<sup>22</sup> Lang noted, "For the first time in the history of English education the deputation, instead of representing division among Christian Churches in England and Wales, represented their unity; for it consisted of not Anglicans only, but of the leading Free Churchmen. As the President was new to his office and had to consider other interests, he was guarded in his reply ... I ought to add another quite unprecedented fact: at the end the President asked me to offer prayers for guidance."<sup>23</sup>

Butler had other guidance. The advice from the Trades Union Congress and the National Union of Teachers was to put all schools under local authority control. The FCFC made known its demands. It wanted a completely national system, with adequate provision for worship and religious instruction and for a provided school within reach of each child, to end the single-school areas. Butler recognised that the dual system was the most difficult issue and consequently gave more time to it than to anything else. He decided to offer Church Schools the alternative of being controlled or aided. For the controlled, control would pass to the local authority which would meet all expenses, appoint most of the staff, arrange for the appointment of Managers or Governors and the religious instruction would be in accordance with an agreed syllabus. If the school was aided, the local authority would pay salaries and running expenses but the Managers or Governors would be responsible for maintaining the buildings at a suitable standard towards the cost of which they would receive a 50% treasury grant. The Church would have a majority on the Board of Managers or Governors and be responsible for the appointment of teachers and deciding the form of religious teaching. By sticking at 50% Butler made clear his intention that the majority of Church Schools would move into the controlled category. In January 1944 Butler spoke to the second reading of the Bill. It had 122 Clauses and eight schedules. By August 1944 the Bill was law and the Prime Minister, who had written in 1941 that he could not contemplate a new Education Bill sent Butler a telegram, "Pray accept my congratulations. You have added a notable Act to the Statute Book and won a lasting place in the history of British education. Winston S. Churchill."<sup>24</sup>

Butler had won his place but what place in the history of British Education had the FCFC won? The minutes of the meetings of the FCFC from 1941 onwards

21. R.A. Butler, *The Art of the Possible*, (London 1971), p.95.

22. *Ibid.*, p.101.

23. J.G. Lockhart, *Cosmo Gordon Lang*, (London 1949), p.368.

24. Butler, *op. cit.* p.124.

show the amount of time and energy that went into trying to influence the developing debate on education. The Annual Report of 1944 spoke of the action taken and the uncertainty of effect:

The Education Committee of the Council has been in close touch with the President of the Board of Education throughout the year. The Council has passed a series of resolutions on the subject, which have been published. Before the end of the year a Committee of MPs was arranged to watch the Education Bill in Committee in the House of Commons. These endeavours have been carried out with vigour and unanimity. Only the discussions on the Education Bill in Parliament can show how far they have been effective in regard to the Free Church principles and interests. Something has been gained, but its exact amount cannot yet be stated.

The exact amount was stated in the 1945 Annual Report. It was that in the schools that became controlled, "the situation of the Free Church children is made much more tolerable." The FCFC had played no part in that particular aspect of the Bill. Do we, therefore, have to say that the immediate results of all the FCFC's efforts were at best minimal and, at worst, a failure? This will lead us to ask the question as to whether the Council chose the right course of action. The question becomes more insistent when the Act is judged by those who are able to look back and see some of the results. In 1984 the Christian Education Movement organised a conference to mark forty years of the 1944 Education Act. In the preface to the programme John Trillo, then Bishop of Chelmsford and President of CEM wrote, "The 1944 Education Act was a watershed in education in England and Wales. It was appropriate that its 40th anniversary should be celebrated by people from all parts of the country. The vision, values and sense of opportunity and purpose enshrined in the Act continue to challenge us."

Two contemporary historians give their assessments. Kenneth Morgan: "The 1944 Butler Act, as is well known, divided the secondary school population between grammar schools for an educated elite, secondary moderns for the unskilled majority and a small fringe of technical schools for the residue. Such an outcome could have been foreseen."<sup>25</sup> Arthur Marwick comes to the same conclusion: "Thus, although the potential for mobility through the educational system was greater than it had been in the 1930s - rather more working-class children did now get through the eleven-plus into grammar schools - the whole system still very much replicated the division of the social structure into working, lower-middle, upper-middle and upper class."<sup>26</sup>

The assessment of the Act in these terms may well begin to sow doubts in the minds of some Free Church members of later generations about the correctness of the single-mindedness with which their predecessors opposed what they

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25. Kenneth Morgan, *Britain since 1945: The People's Peace*, (Oxford 1992), p.19.

26. Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, (London, 1990), p.56.

perceived as religious discrimination. Is it now so clear that they chose the right course of action? Could there be the haunting doubt that in defending what they saw as their rights for their children they failed to observe that the rights of many other children to education and training suited to their needs were not being met? They therefore missed "The vision, values and sense of opportunity and purpose enshrined in the Act", to which John Trillo referred.

During 1950 the Council became aware of problems that Free Church parents were facing. At a Conference on Rural Evangelism, held in London in February 1950 under the auspices of the British Council of Churches, the problem of single school areas was again raised. The vicar who invited children of suitable age to join his confirmation class could achieve a clean sweep of that age group from the village Chapel. The consequence could be, "Free Church parents may then find that their own children are being warned against 'the sin' of attending a Nonconformist Chapel, and that their own children have become 'out of communion' with them."<sup>27</sup> The FCFC's Education Committee was not concerned only with righting wrongs. It was continually stressing the positive aspects of the Act and urging Free Churches, for example, to encourage young people to train as teachers so that they would be able to take full advantage of the opportunity for daily corporate worship and agreed syllabus teaching that, for the first time, were required by statute.

In 1958 there was pressure from both the Roman Catholics and the Church of England for revision of the 1944 Education Act with a view to obtaining increased grants for the erection, repair and maintenance of school buildings. It is significant that before preparing a statement the FCFC invited Canon G.D. Leonard, Secretary of the Church of England Schools Council, later Bishop of London, to put the Church of England case to them. This he did at a meeting of the Council on 1 October 1958. The Council still decided, however, that it would oppose any increase in grants. In December 1958 the Minister of Education presented a White Paper which included the sentence, "The Government recognise that the Churches may need some further help if they are to play their full part." That spurred the FCFC into action. Local councils were urged to write to their MP and to Government ministers, meetings were held and each month the *Free Church Chronicle* published articles supporting the Free Church position. Out of sixteen pages, fourteen were given to education in the March 1959 *Chronicle*. It included an article by Ernest Payne "DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS, are the Free Churches being Unreasonable?" The article was produced as a pamphlet and thousands were distributed. When Ernest Payne, who had taken the lead in this battle, came to report at the September 1959 Council he said, "Not for many years has there been so swift, united and vigorous an expression of Free Church feeling".

The amount of success claimed by the FCFC as a result of all this effort is noted in the 1959 Annual Report, "This Act almost satisfies the Anglicans but only concedes about one quarter of the Roman Catholic's original claim. The extent to

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27. *The Free Church Chronicle*, March 1950, p.9.

which the Roman claim has been reduced is the measure of the success of our protests." Payne did not talk in terms of success. "He felt that Free Church opinion was not heeded as at one time it would have been, and that those in authority, shrewdly assessing the pressures brought to bear upon them paid less attention to our representations than would have been the case not many decades ago."

There was, however, one positive development. In the House of Commons on 22 June 1959 the Minister of Education said, "If there were a central committee of the FCFC, like the Church of England Schools Council, I should be very willing to make myself accessible to it, to examine with it questions of joint concern and, more generally, to establish regular means of dealing with any difficulty that might arise." The Education Policy Committee was officially constituted by the FCFC on 1 October 1959.<sup>28</sup> In 1963, as the Roman Catholics began to press for an extension of grants, the Bishop of London invited the FCFC to hold informal conversations with the Anglicans and Roman Catholics. The invitation was accepted and the group thus formed was known as the Group of Nine. When the Labour Government moved forward with its policy for comprehensive schools the Department of Education and Science discussed plans with this Group as representative of the Churches.

When the Anglicans and Roman Catholics appealed to Government for increased support for their schools relations with them could be frosty but increasingly there were consultations and in 1984 a formal constitution was drawn up for the Churches Joint Education Policy Committee. There were eight representatives each from the FCFC, the Anglicans and the Roman Catholics. The Committee was to represent church interests to the Department of Education and Science and other national bodies, to consider matters of concern to the Churches within the school field or related to it and in other matters in which churches have a significant interest in the statutory system of education, and to take agreed action when required.

The FCFC developed its work in education at three levels. There was the work of the Council's own Education Committee, then the Churches Joint Education Policy Committee and, third, the responsibility to encourage local representation on Local Education Authorities and Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACRES). This third task proved the most difficult because the local representatives did not communicate with the Council. The work of the Education Committee has grown, partly as the result of the number of documents coming from Government and the two-day-a-week post for Education Consultant in 1986 became a full time appointment in 1994.

### **The National Health Service**

We move from one Act to another. Peter Hennessy suggests that the National Health Service Act of 1946 could have justifiably been called the Bevan Act to

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28. *The Free Church Chronicle*, March 1960, p.3.

match the 1944 Education Act, always referred to as the Butler Act.<sup>29</sup> Nye Bevan had entered Parliament in 1929, the same year as R.A. Butler. Just as Butler was aware of the resistance he would face as he proceeded with his Education Bill so Bevan knew he would face opposition. The main opposition came from Tavistock Square – not the FCFC this time but the British Medical Association. Michael Foot gives over a hundred pages to the battle in his biography of Bevan. But the National Health Bill received the Royal Assent on 6 November 1946, to become effective from 5 July 1948.

Under the Act fourteen regional hospital boards were established. These appointed hospital management committees, with special autonomy for teaching hospitals. This gives the background to the note in the 1949 FCFC Annual report, “From all over the country we have received requests from Regional Boards, Boards of Governors of Teaching Hospitals and Hospital Management Committees regarding their chaplaincy requirements.”

The FCFC which had begun preparing for this new role through the existing London Chaplaincy Board, now established a Chaplaincy department and appointed a Chaplaincy Board, which met for the first time on 16 March 1950. At its last meeting on 14 September 1949 the London Chaplaincy Board was told that the Ministry of Health would pay a grant-in-aid of 75% of the total cost of a Chaplaincy Department. The two items of unfinished business were the remuneration of chaplains and the use of hospital chapels. It had been understood that after 5 July 1948 there would be no consecration of hospital chapels and those already consecrated could be used by all. The Church of England Chaplaincy Commission, under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Ely, then asked that chapels could be dedicated. Finally at a meeting of the Chaplaincy Board on 6 October 1950, a clause already agreed with others was accepted. “The Bishop of the Diocese and/or the responsible authority of the other denominations may conduct such ceremony of dedication of the chapel or room for this purpose as they may respectively desire.”

In July 1948 there were 550 chaplains and this number had risen to 1850 by 1958. This meant that over two thirds of the hospitals administered by the National Health scheme had Free Church chaplains, most of them part time. The Hospital Chaplaincy Board represented Free Churches in relations with the Ministry of Health. It also acted as the consultative body, nominating suitable ministers to Boards of Governors of Teaching Hospitals and Hospital Management Committees. This required close links with local Free Church Councils. Ministerial movements could mean that well over 400 chaplaincy appointments were made annually.

As with education, so with health, the 1960s saw a growing together of the relevant church committees. It was reported in 1961 that “Several meetings have seen a developing relationship between the Anglican and the Free Churches in the field of hospital chaplaincy work.” The “developing relationship” led to marriage

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29. Hennessy, *op. cit.*, p.145.

in 1963 with the setting up of a Joint Standing Committee. The marriage was blessed by the Ministry of Health when it agreed to the reimbursement of expenses for five training courses for up to a combined total of two hundred Anglican and Free Church chaplains. The Ministry of Health was continually supportive of the chaplaincy service and in 1966 sent out a letter to Regional Hospital Boards dealing with the building and furnishing of new hospital chapels. Consultations on this included not only the Anglicans and FCFC but the Roman Catholics and the Visitation Committee of the United Synagogue. The next year a Joint Group was set up representing the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Free Churches. This Group has continued and in 1988 was described in the Annual report, "The Joint Committee consists of four representatives from each of the three main Christian traditions, i.e., Church of England, Roman Catholic and Free Church, plus an observer from the Church of Scotland."

In 1994 the name of the Board was changed from Hospital to Health Care. This reflected the wider concerns of the Board and showed that the ministry is to the health caring community as a whole rather than the patients only. In many hospitals now the emphasis is on ecumenical co-operation through sharing in chaplaincy teams and more Free Church chaplains are now appointed full time.

### **Church Relations**

In his first General Secretary's Report, Geoffrey Roper wrote of the indispensable role of the Council in regard to public education and chaplaincy in the Health Service. He continued, "Other aspects may wax and wane, the worlds of education and health are ever-changing, but through the decades this Council has been looked to for its important representative function in these fields." I think that is a justifiable claim. It should cause us to ask if there is any significant difference between the aspects that waxed and waned and the work the FCFC did in education and health. The significant difference is that in education and health there was increasing co-operation with the Church of England and the Roman Catholics. This, therefore is probably the point when we need to look at church relations.

A National Council minute of 5 February 1900 called for the Anglican Church to be disestablished. I am not going to follow the call. The FCFC was never of one mind on disestablishment. A resolution of Council in 1956 argued against pushing for disestablishment on the grounds that, "It would disturb the welcome and growing spirit of fellowship and co-operation between the Church of England and the Free Churches."<sup>30</sup> It is that welcome and growing spirit of fellowship and co-operation which we now trace. The trail begins at Cambridge on Sunday 3 November 1946. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, preached his sermon based on John 10:9-10 and with the picture of one flock and one shepherd spoke about the unity of the church. The sermon was published with the title, *A Step Forward in Church Relations* and the words which became the key phrase

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30. FCFC *Annual Report 1956*, p.8.

were, "taking episcopacy into their own systems." This was the Archbishop's invitation to "my brethren of other denominations." Hensley Henson, sometime Bishop of Durham, asked, "Was the episcopal polity which Free Churchmen were invited to incorporate into their systems that of Charles Gore who held that episcopacy was 'an essential part of the economy of redemption' or that of Lightfoot who did not?"<sup>31</sup>

The FCFC also wished to know the answer and the General Purpose Committee convened a group to meet with the Archbishop to seek an elucidation of his University Sermon. A meeting was held at Lambeth on 16 January 1947 when the Archbishop responded to questions and it was agreed that if formal discussions were to take place then they would not be between the Church of England and the FCFC but between the Church of England and the representatives of the individual Free Churches. A Joint Conference of delegates was set up with the Bishop of Derby and Nathaniel Micklem as the alternating Chairmen. Its Report *Church Relations in England* was published in September 1950. The FCFC gave much time to discussion but "As this is an issue which primarily concerns the Free Church denominations themselves no judgment or resolution was recorded on this matter."<sup>32</sup>

It may not have been a resolution but the final words of an address by the incoming vice-Moderator at the 1952 Congress closed the discussion, "We must say sorrowfully but firmly that we cannot go forward on the basis of this Report."<sup>33</sup> It is worth noting that the address, "The Free Churches and Episcopacy", was given by Hugh Martin. Elizabeth Templeton in her biography of Archie Craig lists the significant number of Scots in key positions in the ecumenical movement and she describes Martin as "powerfully influential at SCM Press". Martin created the SCM Press in 1929 and was editor for over twenty years, so that he served the Student Christian Movement for nearly forty years. In 1941 he wrote *Christian Reunion - a plea for action*, and he was for many years the Chairman of the BCC Administrative Committee. With ecumenical credentials beyond dispute he could not accept the Archbishop's invitation to "my brethren of other denominations."

It is not always easy to distinguish between when the FCFC was relating to the State and when it was relating to the State Church. Increasingly through the 1950s the FCFC, usually through the Moderator, was included in State occasions. So, W.E. Fardale reported on his "participation in a pre-election service of Prayer and Dedication in St Paul's Cathedral on Thursday 2 February 1950, when the leaders of all the political parties assembled and knelt together in prayer."<sup>34</sup>

In planning for the Festival of Britain the BCC was responsible for the religious activities and set up an Advisory Committee with the Dean of Westminster as

31. E. Carpenter, *Archbishop Fisher - His Life and His Times*, (Norwich 1991), p.312.

32. *FCFC Annual Report 1952*, p.4.

33. *The Free Church Chronicle*, June 1952, p.13.

34. *The Free Church Chronicle*, April 1950, p.3.

Chairman and the Moderator Elect of the FCFC as vice Chairman. The Church of England and the Free Churches opposed the Sunday opening of the Amusement Park in the Festival Gardens. This necessitated Parliamentary discussion at a crucial point in the Korean war. The United Nations troops were under pressure and on 27 November 1950 it was reported that between "100,000 and 200,000 Chinese" had unexpectedly intervened in North Korea. Macmillan notes, "Meanwhile with typically British escapism, the House of Commons is thoroughly enjoying itself discussing whether the Festival of Britain amusement park should or should not be open on Sunday afternoons."<sup>35</sup>

Moderatorial recognition continued in 1952 when the Moderator was at St George's Chapel, Windsor for the funeral service of King George VI and in 1955 when the Moderator was invited for the first time to take an official part in the annual Festival of Remembrance at the Albert Hall. All these, and other acts of recognition, are noted as significant in the FCFC records of the 1950s. Acts of recognition did not hide differences and as the influence of the BCC, which was formed in 1942, grew it became involved in these differences. A paragraph in the FCFC 1948 Report reads, "Our greatest single hindrance has been the attitude of those who say that the British Council of Churches has made the Free Church Federal Council unnecessary. Our reply to this assertion is that in many places there cannot be a British Council of Churches because the local clergy refuse to co-operate, and even where there is a British Council of Churches, we still need the work and witness of the Free Church Federal Council because not only in some theological issues but also in certain social issues, such as drink, gambling and the Sunday question, our approach is different from that of our Anglican friends." We will need to pursue this Church of England, BCC, FCFC triangular relationship but before we do so we need to recognise a third church group alongside the Free Churches and the Church of England.

The Roman Catholics were not always recognised. The Rev J. Guinness Rogers was mentioned earlier as one of those who went with Percy Bunting from London to Manchester for the meeting in January 1892. In 1881 Rogers had given the Congregational Union Lecture on church systems. He gave extensive treatment to the Church of England and the Free Churches but noted that he had not treated Ultramontaniam (or indeed the Roman Catholic Church) because it was "so distinctly a foreign system that I do not feel that its omission interferes with the completeness of the present survey."<sup>36</sup> The Roman Catholic Church did become an increasingly recognised part of the British scene but often as a Church to be attacked rather than welcomed. When on 1 November 1950 the Pope declared the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary to be a dogma of the faith the FCFC were quick to respond through a letter to *The Times* over the signature of the Moderator, "We are unable to keep silence but must emphatically protest that this is a

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35. Alistair Horne, *Macmillan 1894-1956*, (London 1988), p.328.

36. *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (Edinburgh 2001), p.3.

departure from the purity of the faith laid down once for all in Holy Writ.”

At Congress in 1954 the Roman Catholic Church was again criticised, this time by F.G. Healey, the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in England. In arguing the case for the Free Churches he questioned the ability of the State Church to meet the religious needs of the day and said that, “The Roman Catholic Church as an institution is alien to the Gospel as I understand it and as a political power is alien to the main stream of our British social and political insights.”<sup>37</sup> On a positive note when the FCFC learnt about the Roman Catholic Total Abstinence Movement it gave a whole page in support of it in the *Free Church Chronicle*, with the conclusion: “Is there not something splendid in speaking of the privilege of voluntary total abstinence for the sake of Christ and the weaker brethren, as the leaders of this Movement do?”<sup>38</sup>

In 1978 the BCC published a booklet, *Moving into Unity*. The author, John Nicholson, gave four stages on the way to unity, from competition to co-existence, to co-operation to commitment. Later a fifth stage was added, communion. Gradually movement from one stage to another with different churches and councils involved at different speeds became discernible. This led to the Swanwick Declaration of 1987 and the new ecumenical instruments of 1990. This process does not come within my present scope although the General Secretary of the FCFC took an active part in the discussions. The FCFC/BCC relationship does require some comment. During the 1950s four FCFC Moderators were vice-Presidents of the BCC, with Benson Perkins holding both offices together in 1954. Those first steps in co-existence led to co-operation following the Agreement on Collaboration finally accepted in 1969. The Agreement was based on the Lund principle interpreted as, “To take joint action wherever possible, and only to take separate action in those cases where joint action is found to be impracticable.” Another step was taken with the BCC Structure Report in which paragraph 32 relating to the FCFC reads, “The Committee would express the hope that it may not be long before the member Churches of both Councils may find it possible to accept a common membership of one Council.” The Structure Report is dated March 1973. Twenty-five years later, the FCFC meeting in March 1998 decided to recommend that local Free Church activity should not be through Free Church Councils but through Churches Together in the locality. Three years later, on 1 April 2001, the Council itself became the Free Churches Group in association with Churches Together in England.

### **The life of the Council**

We can give precise dates for the life of the Free Church Federal Council, 16 September 1940 to 1 April 2001. We lack precision when we come to describe what it was or what it was meant to be. When tracing the beginnings of the Council I said that the basis of representation remained a cause of controversy.

37. *The Free Church Chronicle*, May 1954, p.11.

38. *The Free Church Chronicle*, July 1951, p.8.

The evidence is seen in the uneasy relationship between Congress and Council which developed after 1940. Congress was the last obvious link with the First National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches in 1896. Through the years it was a gathering of territorial representatives. In Cardiff in 1952 Sangster had a congregation of 2500, only to be surpassed the next evening when 3000 gathered to listen to Emil Brunner speak for seventy minutes on church and state. To include a personal experience: I was in the packed Colston Hall, Bristol in 1957 to hear and see Martin Niemöller and the following year at Folkestone to listen to Visser't Hooft. On both occasions I was present not as a Baptist minister but as Chairman of the Wisbech Free Church Council.

But what authority did all the thousands have? The 1940 Constitution was open to different interpretations. At the 1950 Congress in Birmingham, "The delegates were so keen that they raised issues about the relations of the Congress to the Council which will compel serious attention. It was quite obvious that they wanted Congress to be better informed as to the proceedings of the Council and to be granted a larger share in top level affairs." The Council responded with a long statement at the 1951 Congress and with the solution that Council would begin its meeting before the start of Congress, then stand adjourned and resume after Congress. By 1956 this was seen to be impossible and in 1961 dissatisfaction surfaced again when Council altered the wording of a Congress resolution. The Congress resolution was, "The Free Church Congress calls upon Her Majesty's Government to give urgent consideration to the whole problem of the death penalty, with a view to its total abolition." When it met, Council removed the last seven words, "with a view to its total abolition", and claimed it had the right to do so. The tension continued and was there until the last Congress was held in Llanelli in 1986.

In March 1941 the Council received a letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury suggesting that a special collection for the Red Cross and St Johns should be taken on Sunday 15 February 1942. The Council passed the letter on to the denominations because it realised that it was not a decision making body for the Free Churches. Perhaps it was this realisation that caused the Council to set up a Commission of Enquiry into the relationship between the Free Churches. The original motion included the words, "To secure the fullest possible measure of union", but this was amended to read "fullest and closest co-operation." The Enquiry extended over four years but the end was as the beginning with an affirmation of the desire for fullest co-operation. A Moderator's Commission with Benson Perkins as Chairman presented a report in 1956 which got no further. A sub-committee prepared a pamphlet entitled, *The Issue of Free Church Union* which was sent to 429 local Free Church Councils in July 1957. Reporting to Council in 1958 F.G. Healey said he had received 254 replies most of which indicated the time was not ripe for union and generally there was "a lukewarmness on the subject."

There was a lukewarmness in the Council in September 1959 when it was asked to vote on a recommendation that the Council appoint a Commission, "With special charge to review the part taken by the Free Churches in inter-church

discussions in England during recent years, and to suggest the theological and ecclesiological conditions for Free Church Union." So many members abstained that Howard Stanley suggested the vote be taken again. The Moderator, Russell Shearer, refused. Then came the outburst from Mrs C.R. Batten of Eastbourne, a former National Womens' President, "It is because we are so utterly confused that we did not vote. We have been going on like this for years. I have been desperately interested in the Council for a long time, but I have been desperately disappointed in it, because we seem to have no faith, no hope, or any guts to get things done." In a comment in the *British Weekly*, Thompson Brake, Methodist minister and journalist wrote, "Mrs Batten is right. The present Council lacks guts, because it was never given any at birth."

After the Agreement on Collaboration with the BCC in 1969 and parallel to the work on the BCC Structure Report the FCFC set up a Working Party on "The Relevance of the Free Churches". The Report, running to twenty-four pages was presented to the 1974 March Council. It was referred to the Executive Committee and the Working Party was disbanded. The Report's conclusion was that the Free Churches and also the FCFC did still have a part to play in the way forward, but there was a Minority report submitted by Revd. Richard G. Jones. His conclusion was different:

It is urgent for the British Council of Churches to acquire much more status amongst the Churches and much more expertise in speaking for them. But it is not well structured to serve that end, is starved of funds and resources and does not carry much conviction with most lay people. Yet this is the point at which a major renewal is needed, rather than with the Free Church Federal Council which has now served its day and should be wound up.

The questioning continued and it had added force when it came from the General Secretary, Richard Hamper, and was made public through the *Baptist Times* and the *Methodist Recorder* in March 1983. Hamper's anxiety was caused by a diminution in the number of people attending Congress, the number of people buying *The Chronicle* and the number of matters requiring specifically Free Church treatment or reaction. The Council appointed a Working Party which led to discussion at the Leeds Congress of 1985. Again there was affirmation of the need for a separate Free Church Council alongside the BCC, although there were those who would have preferred the FCFC to become an autonomous department within the BCC.

## Conclusion

The Free Church Federal Council - a retrospective view. It has been but a glance over our shoulders but are there judgments we can make or advice we can follow? Ernest Payne's *The Free Church Tradition in the Life of England*, was published in 1944. In the final chapter he wrote, "many streams have contributed to the

broad flood of Free Church witness." Nearly thirty years later he began his history of the BCC with the same theme of streams converging. Thirty years on again and John Newton continued with the theme in the FCFC Report for 1994.

The question must be whether convergence is sufficient. To converge is to approach nearer together. That did happen. Within the FCFC the Free Churches learnt what it meant to co-operate. They had few problems with united action. They had many with Church unity. In this the FCFC was being true to its Constitution and its title. The article on "federalism" in *The Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* is critical of federalism. It quotes the description given by W.R. Huntington, who inspired the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, that the federal pattern is "denominations glued together at the edges." That takes us back to Mrs Batten's comment, that the Council had no guts, which is slang for no real value of force.

The FCFC was not equipped to lead the churches from convergence to merger. To merge is to cause something to lose its own character or identity in something else. In his report to Council in March 1950, Henry Wigley, the General Secretary, said the Council was "The next best thing to the Council of a United Church." It never moved from that point. If we put it in the terms of the Swanwick Declaration, the Council did not make the step from co-operation to commitment. Is Churches Together in England equipped to do any better? Will denominational representation prove more effective than territorial and conciliar better than federal in responding to the Call to be One?

BASIL AMEY

## REVIEW

*The Decline of Congregationalism in the Twentieth Century: The Congregational Lecture 2002.* By David M. Thompson. London: The Congregational Memorial Hall Trust (1978) Ltd., 2002. Pp. 36. £2.00. ISSN 0963 - 181X

Nothing is harder to review than a single lecture. The review should illuminate without betraying the plot, but a lecture's plot is constricted. This lecture is good, certainly judicious, history. It asks plenty of questions and several are the sort to puncture easy assumptions. It suggests where answers might lie but it leaves the reader to draw conclusions, even to provide solutions. That Congregationalism, particularly as expressed in Britain's Congregational Unions, declined numerically in the twentieth century, Dr. Thompson takes as read. That congregational politics, particularly as expressed in Britain's Congregational Unions, altered significantly, indeed radically, and that the alteration might be construed as decline (at least by those so inclined), he is prepared to concede. But he also reminds us of two foundational issues: recruitment and retention. Nineteenth-century Congregationalism had no problem of recruitment and therefore, recognised none of retention. For twentieth-century Congregationalism however, the problem was retention, and recruitment slipped from the foreground. That leaves the twenty-first century, when more Christians than ever will experience some elements of congregationalism in (steadily evolving) theory as well as practice, but very few in fact be Congregationalists. Here the problems will be: recruitment to what? and retention in what? Naturally these problems have a twentieth-century root. Congregationalism, Dr. Thompson reminds us, "places a strong emphasis on belonging", but Christians currently fight shy of the commitment which Congregationalists understand to be implied by "belonging". Here Dr. Thompson becomes speculative, and he is most persuasive when most speculative. He discerns - at least for our sort of congregationalists - an intellectual problem: "although denominational representation in the teaching profession has remained high, the number in tertiary education seems small, given the social and educational composition of the membership. This....raises....questions about the intellectual quality of the membership, the perceived readiness to tackle the implications of modern intellectual enquiry, and the possible existence of an anti-intellectualism which is a product of a particular kind of anti-élitism". It also raises questions about the ministry and "a persistent reluctance on the part of many ministers and preachers 'to question the simple faith.' Whether this has been a deliberate strategy to avoid unsettling people (as several theological manuals advise) or whether it is because ministers themselves have never questioned their simple faith, I do not know". Neither, no doubt, will his readers know, but we will have our suspicions. Here, in sum, is a lecture which readers of this *Journal* will want to obtain and, if their intellects permit, read.

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