

"The Principles of a Servant of Christ": The Evangelical Piety of John Sutcliff¹



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INTRODUCTION

Among the Calvinistic Baptist figures of the late eighteenth century one of the most important is also one of the least known—John Sutcliff (1752–1814), the pastor of the Baptist church in Olney, Buckinghamshire, for thirty-nine years. An extremely close friend of Andrew Fuller (1754–1815), whom Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) once described as “the greatest theologian of the [nineteenth] century”² and William Carey (1761–1834), the so-called father of the modern missionary movement, Sutcliff played a central part in bringing revival to the English Calvinistic Baptist community, of whose churches far too many were moribund in the mid to late eighteenth century.³

¹ This paper was originally delivered at the National Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Baltimore, MD, Nov 2013.

² Cited Gilbert Laws, *Andrew Fuller: Pastor, Theologian, Ropeholder* (London: Carey Press, 1942), 127.

³ For a complete study of Sutcliff’s life and ministry, see Michael A.G. Haykin, *One heart and one soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, his friends, and his times* (Darlington, Co. Durham: Evangelical Press, 1994).

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

Sutcliff was born on August 9, 1752, to Daniel Sutcliff (d.1794) and his wife Hannah (fl.1735–1773), ardent Baptists, on a farm called Strait Hey, two miles east of Todmorden, West Yorskshire. The Sutcliffs attended a nearby Baptist cause, Rodhill End Baptist Church. But since there was a service at Rodhill End only every other week, the Sutcliffs worshipped at Wainsgate Baptist Church, near Hebden Bridge, on alternate weeks. Sutcliff's parents "were remarkable for their strict attention to the instruction and government of their children,"⁴ and Sutcliff was thus acquainted with the truths of Christianity from an early age. The Christian character of Daniel and Hannah Sutcliff is readily seen in a portion of a letter they wrote to their son in 1773. After telling John, who was then studying at the Bristol Baptist Academy, that smallpox had killed a number of their friends and relatives, they encouraged their son:

Dear son, thy life has been spared through that and other disorders which calls for thankfulness and gratitude. O that it may be devoted to God, spent to His glory and the good of them where His providence may call thee to which end I would suggest a few things...First, be humble, seek not great things for thyself...If thou have [John] Gillies' history near thee read the life of [Richard] Blackerby⁵ and the extract from the life of David Brainerd.⁶ 2nd. Indulge yourself in the happiness of frequent contemplations upon and addresses to the Lord Jesus for light and assistance in all thy studies: consider that this Divine Redeemer's presence is the life and light of thy soul.⁷

⁴ This remark is that of Andrew Fuller in his funeral sermon for his friend Sutcliff: *The Principles and Prospects of a Servant of Christ* in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, ed. Andrew Gunton Fuller and revised Joseph Belcher (1845 ed.; repr. Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 1:349.

⁵ Richard Blackerby (1574–1638) was a Puritan author, whose life would have been available to the Sutcliffs through a history of revivals written by John Gillies (1712–1796), *Historical Collections Relating to Remarkable Periods of the Success of the Gospel, and Eminent Instruments Employed in Promoting It* (1754).

⁶ David Brainerd (1718–1747) was a missionary to North American natives in New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey.

⁷ Daniel and Hannah Sutcliff, Letter to John Sutcliff [received on 7 March 1773] (Sutcliff Papers, Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford University).

Sutcliff was converted as a teenager in 1769 through the ministry of John Fawcett (1740–1817), then pastor of Wainsgate Baptist Church, near Hebden Bridge in Yorkshire.⁸ Fawcett himself was a child of the Evangelical Revival, having been converted under the preaching of George Whitefield (1714–1770) and shaped as a young Christian by the Anglican evangelical William Grimshaw (1708–1763).⁹ According to his son, Fawcett kept a portrait of Whitefield in his study and “the very mention of his name inspired the warmest emotions of grateful remembrance.”¹⁰ Baptized by Fawcett soon after his conversion, Sutcliff joined Wainsgate Baptist Church on May 28, 1769. For the next couple of years, Fawcett acted as Sutcliff’s mentor, giving him both academic and spiritual instruction. Sutcliff thus received his earliest nurture in the Christian faith from one who was very appreciative of the Evangelical Revival and its twin focus on Reformation theology and Christian experience.

BRISTOL BAPTIST ACADEMY, 1772–1774

An evident hunger for theological knowledge on the part of Sutcliff, coupled with a desire to put that knowledge into practice, prompted Fawcett and the Wainsgate Church to encourage Sutcliff to pursue formal study at the Bristol Baptist Academy, the sole institution in eighteenth-century Britain for training men for the Baptist ministry.¹¹ The principal teachers at the Academy at that time were Hugh Evans (1713–1781) and his son Caleb Evans (1737–1791), both of whom had

⁸ *Principles and Prospects of a Servant of Christ in Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:350.

⁹ For Whitefield’s influence on Fawcett, see [John Fawcett, Jr.], *An Account of the Life, Ministry, and Writings of the Late Rev. John Fawcett D.D.* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy/Halifax: K. Holden, 1818), 15–19. For that of Grimshaw on Fawcett, see Frank Baker, *William Grimshaw, 1708–1763* (London: The Epworth Press, 1963), 271. On Whitefield’s influence on the Baptists in general, see especially Olin C. Robison, “The Particular Baptists in England, 1760–1820” (D.Phil. Thesis, Regent’s Park College, Oxford University, 1963), 145–153; Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century* (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1986), 76–82.

¹⁰ *Life, Ministry, and Writings of the Late Rev. John Fawcett*, 15.

¹¹ *Principles and Prospects of a Servant of Christ in Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:350.

a reputation for being evangelical Calvinists.¹² Caleb Evans was also a fervent admirer of the writings of the New England theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), whom he regarded as “the most rational, scriptural divine, and the liveliest Christian, the world was ever blessed with,”¹³ and whose writings he strongly recommended to students at the Academy.¹⁴

Evans was not the only Calvinistic Baptist of his day to be deeply impressed by Edwards. For instance, in his obituary for Joshua Wood (1734–1794), pastor at Sallendine Nook near Huddersfield in Yorkshire, John Fawcett stated that Edwards was Woods’ “favourite author” and “he read his works with constant attention, approbation, and delight.”¹⁵ Fawcett himself first read Edwards’ works in the 1760s and appears to have encouraged Sutcliff to do the same. Since any encouragement Sutcliff received in this regard from Fawcett would only have been reinforced at Bristol by Evans, it is no surprise to find that after the Scriptures, Edwards’ writings exercised the greatest influence in shaping Sutcliff’s theological perspective.¹⁶ In fact, so great was the impact of Edwards on Sutcliff, that after his death there were some who stated that “if Sutcliff...had preached more of Christ, and less of Jonathan Edwards, [he] would have been more useful.”¹⁷ To these critics, Andrew Fuller replied in defence of his departed friend: “If those who talk thus, preached Christ half as much as Jonathan Edwards did, and were half as useful as he was, their usefulness would be double what it is.”¹⁸ More than any other eighteenth-century author, Edwards showed Sutcliff, and fellow Baptists like Fawcett, Evans and Fuller, how

¹² R. Philip Roberts, *Continuity and Change. London Calvinistic Baptists and The Evangelical Revival 1760–1820* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers, 1989), 127–28.

¹³ *A Catalogue of a few useful Books for a young Minister* in John Rippon, ed., *The Baptist Annual Register* (London, 1793), 1:255.

¹⁴ In his *Catalogue of a few useful Books*, which Evans had drawn up in 1773, four of Edwards’ works were recommended, including *A Careful and Strict Enquiry into the modern prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will* and *A Treatise concerning Religious Affections* (Rippon, ed., *Baptist Annual Register*, 1:255).

¹⁵ “Obituary for 1794. Rev. Joshua Wood” in John Rippon, ed., *The Baptist Annual Register* (London, 1797), 2:226.

¹⁶ *Principles and Prospects of a Servant of Christ* in *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:350.

¹⁷ John Ryland, *The Indwelling and Righteousness of Christ no Security against Corporeal Death, but the Source of Spiritual and Eternal Life* (London: W. Button & Son, 1815), 34.

¹⁸ Ryland, *Indwelling and Righteousness of Christ*, 34.

to combine a commitment to Calvinism with a passion for revival, fervent evangelism and experiential Christianity.¹⁹

It was in the depth of the winter of 1772 that Sutcliff set out from Wainsgate for Bristol. In order to save money for the purchase of textbooks, he walked the entire distance, a journey of some 200 miles. Afterwards, he often travelled on foot, primarily with a view to saving money for books. Indeed, in his latter years, he had accumulated a considerable library, of which the greater part consisted of choice theological works and which Andrew Fuller once described as "one of the best libraries in this part of the country." As Fuller further observed, Sutcliff "had a great thirst for reading."²⁰

During his two and a half years under the tutelage of Hugh and Caleb Evans, Sutcliff had an outstanding academic record. Moreover, he also had occasion to preach in various churches in the neighbourhood of Bristol, one of which, at Trowbridge, unsuccessfully sought to call him as their pastor.

MINISTRY AT OLNEY

Upon leaving Bristol in May of 1774, Sutcliff spent six months ministering at the Baptist Church in Shrewsbury, and then another six at Cannon Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. In July 1775 Sutcliff came to the small town of Olney in Buckinghamshire for a ministry that would last until his death in 1814. He was set apart for the gospel ministry on August 7, 1776. Among the Baptist pastors who took part on this important occasion were John Fawcett, who received Sutcliff's confession of faith, and Caleb Evans, who delivered a charge to Sutcliff based on Hebrews 13:17. It was also during 1776, at the annual meeting

¹⁹ "The most decisive Evangelical influence on the Particular Baptists was that of Jonathan Edwards" (Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978], I, 456). For further discussion of the influence of Edwards on the English Calvinistic Baptists, see especially E.A. Payne, "The Evangelical Revival and the Beginnings of the Modern Missionary Movement", *The Congregational Quarterly*, 21 (1943), 223–236; Robison, "Particular Baptists", 162–170; Watts, *Dissenters*, I, 456–461. For Edwards' influence on Fuller, see now Chris Chun, *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards in the Theology of Andrew Fuller* (Studies in the History of Christian Traditions, vol.162; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2012).

²⁰ *Principles and Prospects of a Servant of Christ in Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:354.

of the Northamptonshire Association in the spring that Sutcliff first met Andrew Fuller and soon discovered in him a kindred spirit.²¹

The initial years of his ministry, however, were trying ones. Sutcliff's evangelical Edwardsean Calvinism deeply disturbed some of his congregation, who saw it as a departure from the canons of "orthodoxy"—they appear to have had Hyper-Calvinistic tendencies—and they began to absent themselves from the Church's celebration of the Lord's Supper and from Church meetings. But Sutcliff was not to be deterred from preaching biblical truth. Matters came to a head towards the end of 1780. At a Church Meeting on December 7 the dissidents declared that the reason for their conduct was their "dissatisfaction with the Ministry."²² After a long debate, it was agreed to let the matter rest for four months and to drop the matter entirely if the dissidents took their places at the Lord's Table.²³ Although it took more than four months, Sutcliff, "by patience, calmness, and prudent perseverance,"²⁴ eventually won over all of the dissidents. The patience and prudence which he exhibited on this occasion Fuller would later point to as prominent features in his character. As Fuller stated:

Whatever might have been his natural temper, it is certain that *mildness* and *patience* and *gentleness* were prominent features in his character...It was observed by one of his brethren in the ministry, at an Association, that the promise of Christ, that they who learned of him who was "meek and lowly in heart should find rest unto their souls" [Matthew 11:29], was more extensively fulfilled in Mr. Sutcliff than in most Christians.²⁵

Among the few extant manuscripts in Sutcliff's own hand is one that dates from these early days of his ministry at Olney. It consists of six "observations or rules" that Sutcliff drew up to shape his conduct in life. They ran as follows:

1. To view everything in religion as much as possible with my own eyes. Let me examine for myself every text in the Bible & every sentiment in divinity. Let me frequently read and study my

²¹ Ibid., 1:350.

²² "Baptist Meeting at Olney Minutes", December 7, 1780 (Sutcliff Baptist Church, Olney Buckinghamshire).

²³ "Baptist Meeting at Olney Minutes", December 7, 1780.

²⁴ *Principles and Prospects of a Servant of Christ in Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:350.

²⁵ Ibid., 1:354.

- Bible, as if no commentary had ever been written. *January 31, 1783.*
2. To search for truth everywhere in the writings of friends or foes, & seize it as my own property wherever I meet with it, & always follow evidence impartially wherever it leads me. *January 31, 1783.*
 3. Let me consider that every increase of religious knowledge should not only make me wiser but better; not only make my head clear, but purify my heart, influence my affections, and regulate my life. *January 31, 1783.*
 4. In every sermon let me have some *fixed end* in view and let me keep that object steadily in my eye, both in my study on the Subject and in the delivery of it. *November 2, 1783, Friday afternoon.*
 5. Since man is a compound being of judgment and affection, let me remember that each should be addressed in the Gospel ministry. ...*August 20, 1784.*
 6. Whatever sentiment I entertain myself, or propose to others let me always put the question *Cui bono?* [To what good?] *September 25, 1784.*²⁶

PRAYING FOR REVIVAL

The 1770s and 1780s also saw Sutcliff's growing involvement in the affairs of the Northamptonshire Association of Baptist churches, which included the Olney church and that which Fuller was pastoring in Kettering. The circular letter that the Association annually sent to its member churches was drawn up by Sutcliff in 1779 on the subject of divine providence, as was that in 1786, which focused on the Lord's Day. And in 1784 he presented to the Association a proposal that was to have far-reaching impact.

Earlier that year there had come into Sutcliff's hands Jonathan Edwards' treatise *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer, For the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth*. In this treatise, first published in 1748, Edwards appealed for the establishment of regular prayer meetings where there could be fervent prayer that God "would appear for the help of his church, and in mercy

²⁶ Archives, Bristol Baptist College, Bristol. The spelling has been modernized.

to mankind, and pour out his Spirit, revive his work, and advance his spiritual kingdom in the world.”²⁷ The treatise came to Sutcliff through John Erskine (1721–1803), who had corresponded with Edwards in his younger years and who was the minister of the historic church of Old Greyfriars, Edinburgh. Erskine has been well described as “the paradigm of Scottish evangelical missionary interest through the last half of the eighteenth century.”²⁸ From 1780 till his death in 1803 he regularly corresponded with a number of English Baptists, including Sutcliff, and would send them not only letters but also on occasion bundles of interesting publications which he happened to receive.

So it was in April, 1784, Erskine mailed a copy of Edwards’ *Humble Attempt* to a good friend of Sutcliff, John Ryland, Jr. (1753–1825), co-pastor with his father of the Baptist work in Northampton, not far from Olney. Ryland in turn shared it with his friends Sutcliff and Fuller. Sutcliff was so impressed by this treatise that at the next meeting of the Baptist churches of the Northamptonshire Association he proposed that monthly prayer meetings be established to pray for the outpouring of God’s Spirit and the revival of religion. This proposal was adopted by the representatives of the twenty or so churches of the Association and attached to the circular letter sent out that year to the churches there was a call for them “to wrestle with God for the effusion of his Holy Spirit.”²⁹ Practical suggestions as to the way in which to implement these monthly meetings followed. It was recommended that there be corporate prayer for one hour on the first Monday evening of each month. The call then continued:

The grand object in prayer is to be, that the Holy Spirit may be poured down on our ministers and churches, that sinners may be converted, the saints edified, the interest of religion revived, and the name of God glorified. At the same time remember, we trust you will not confine your requests to your own societies [i.e. churches], or to your own immediate connection [i.e. denomination]; let the whole interest of the Redeemer be affectionately remembered, and the spread of the gospel to the most distant parts of the habitable globe be the object of your

²⁷ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (1834 ed.; repr. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 2:281.

²⁸ J.A. De Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea. Millennial Expectations in the Rise of Anglo-American Missions 1640–1810* (Kampen, The Netherlands: J.H. Kok N.V., 1970), 166.

²⁹ John Ryland, Jr., *The Nature, Evidences, and Advantages, of Humility* (The Circular Letter of the Northamptonshire Association, 1784), 12.

most fervent requests. We shall rejoice if any other Christian societies of our own or other denominations will unite with us, and do now invite them most cordially to join heart and hand in the attempt.³⁰

There are at least three noteworthy points about this call to prayer, which Sutcliff appears to have written.³¹ First, there is the conviction that reversing the downward trend of the Calvinistic Baptists could not be accomplished by mere human zeal, but must be effected by an outpouring of the Spirit of God. As Sutcliff observed elsewhere:

The outpouring of the divine Spirit...is the grand promise of the New Testament...His influences are the soul, the great animating soul of all religion. These withheld, divine ordinances are empty cisterns, and spiritual graces are withering flowers. These suspended, the greatest human abilities labour in vain, and the noblest efforts fail of success.³²

In both this text and that of the circular letter cited above there is evidence of what Richard Lovelace has called "a theology of radical dependence on the Spirit,"³³ a recognition that the Spirit is the true agent of renewal and revival.

Then there is the inclusive and catholic nature of the recommended praying. As the Calvinistic Baptists of the Northamptonshire Association gathered to pray together they were urged to direct their thoughts beyond the confines of their own churches and denomination, and embrace in prayer other Baptist churches and other denominations.

³⁰ Ryland, Jr., *Nature, Evidences, and Advantages, of Humility*, 12. For a detailed study of this influential call to prayer, see especially Ernest A. Payne, *The Prayer Call of 1784* (London: Baptist Laymen's Missionary Movement, 1941) and Haykin, *One heart and one soul*, 153–171.

³¹ Payne, *Prayer Call of 1784*, 2.

³² *Jealousy for the Lord of Hosts illustrated* (London: W. Button, 1791), 12. See also John Sutcliff, *The Authority and Sanctification of the Lord's Day, Explained and Enforced* (Circular Letter of the Northamptonshire Association, 1786), 8: "Be earnest with God for the gift of his Holy Spirit, in an abundant measure. Seek his divine influences, to furnish you with spiritual ability, in order that you may be found in the discharge of that which is your indispensable duty. Highly prize his sacred operations. These are the real excellency of all religious duties. Brilliant parts and abilities, natural or acquired, can never supply their place."

³³ "Pneumatological Issues in American Presbyterianism", *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 31 (1986): 345–346.

In fact, churches of other denominations, along with those of other Baptist associations, were encouraged to join them in praying for revival. Third, there is the distinct evangelistic or missionary emphasis: the readers of this prayer call are encouraged to pray that the gospel be spread "to the most distant parts of the habitable globe." This emphasis is rarely found in earlier eighteenth-century English Baptists. It is not surprising that many of their churches at the time were stagnant, if not moribund.

Two years later, near the beginning of the circular letter which Sutcliff wrote for the Northamptonshire Association on the subject of the Lord's Day, he gave the following progress report and exhortation concerning the prayer meetings that had hitherto been established:

The monthly meetings of prayer, for the general spread of the gospel, appear to be kept up with some degree of spirit. This, we hope, will yet be the case. ...We learn that many other churches, in different, and some in distant parts of the land, and some of different denominations, have voluntarily acceded to the plan. We communicate the above information, for your encouragement. Once more we would invite all who love truth and holiness, into whose hands our letter may fall, to unite their help. Let societies, let families, let individuals, who are friends to the cause of Christ, unite with us, not only daily, but in a particular manner, at the appointed season.³⁴

Not only were Baptists and Christians of other denominations responding warmly to the monthly prayer meetings for revival, but also, as Sutcliff immediately goes on to indicate, God was answering their prayers by providing opportunities for evangelism.

With pleasure we were informed of an open door in many places, for the preaching of the gospel. We request it of our friends, that they would encourage the occasional ministry of the word in their respective villages and neighbourhoods, where they may be situated, to the utmost of their power. Be not backward to appear on God's side.³⁵

In a later circular letter, which he wrote for the Northamptonshire Association in 1797, Sutcliff again linked prayer and itinerant

³⁴ *Authority and Sanctification of the Lord's Day*, 1–2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

evangelism: "A readiness to listen to the tidings of the Gospel, evidently exists in many dark, and, until of late, inaccessible villages. There is encouragement for prayer, and matter for praise."³⁶

Behind this emphasis on prayer and itinerant evangelism lies the firm conviction that it is the responsibility of believers to communicate the gospel to the unconverted. This task, however, involved far more than simply opening the doors of the Baptist chapel in the hope that outsiders might enter, be converted under the preaching of the gospel, and become members of what was an established congregation. The task, as envisaged by Sutcliff, required believers to take the gospel to prospective converts, which would entail the formation of new congregations. Priority was being given to expansion, rather than consolidation, which is markedly different from the ethos of earlier eighteenth-century Baptist life.³⁷

In 1789 Sutcliff decided to bring out an edition of Edwards's *Humble Attempt* to further encourage those meeting for prayer. Measuring only six and one quarter inches long, and three and three-quarter inches wide, and containing 168 pages, this edition was clearly designed to be a handy pocket-size edition. In a "Preface" to this edition, Sutcliff re-emphasized that the Prayer Call issued by the Northamptonshire Association five years earlier was not intended for simply Calvinistic Baptists. Rather, they ardently wished it might become general among the real friends of truth and holiness.

The advocates of error are indefatigable in their endeavors to overthrow the distinguishing and interesting doctrines of Christianity; those doctrines which are the grounds of our hope, and sources of our joy. Surely, it becomes the followers of Christ, to use every effort, in order to strengthen the things which remain... In the present imperfect state, we may reasonably expect a diversity of sentiments upon religious

³⁶ *The Divinity of the Christian Religion* (Northampton, 1797), 3.

³⁷ Robert Hall, Jr. (1766–1831), in a sketch of Sutcliff's character that he wrote shortly after Sutcliff's death, could state: "Few men took a deeper interest than our deceased brother in the general state of the church and the propagation of the gospel abroad. The future glory of the kingdom of Christ and the best means of promoting it were his favourite topics, and usurped a large part of his thoughts and his prayers; nor was he ever more in his element than when he was exerting his powers in devising plans for its extension." ("Character of the Rev. John Sutcliff" in *The Works of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M.*, eds. Olinthus Gregory and Joseph Belcher [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1854], 2:389).

matters. Each ought to think for himself; and every one has a right, on proper occasions, to show his opinion. Yet all should remember, that there are but two parties in the world, each engaged in opposite causes; the cause of God and Satan; of holiness and sin; of heaven and hell. The advancement of the one, and the downfall of the other, must appear exceedingly desirable to every real friend of God and man. If such in some respects entertain different sentiments, and practice distinguishing modes of worship, surely they may unite in the above business. O for thousands upon thousands divided into small bands in their respective cities, towns, villages, and neighbourhood, all met at the same time, and in pursuit of one end, offering up their united prayers, like so many ascending clouds of incense before the Most High!—May he shower down blessings on all the scattered tribes of Zion! Grace, great grace be with all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity! Amen!³⁸

JEALOUSY FOR THE LORD OF HOSTS ILLUSTRATED (1791)

A final text that draws together these themes of prayer and evangelism is found in what appears to be Sutcliff's only extant sermon, *Jealousy for the Lord of Hosts illustrated*, which was preached on April 27, 1791, to a gathering of the ministers of the Northamptonshire Association at Clipstone, Northamptonshire. The sermon was based on 1 Kings 19:10, in particular Elijah's statement, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts." Sutcliff first explored the historical context surrounding Elijah's statement. He came to the conclusion that while Elijah's statement contains a "degree of impatience...and murmuring," his jealousy for God is commendable, because such jealousy "enters deep into, and is integrated in the very soul of true Christianity."³⁹

³⁸ "Preface," to Jonathan Edwards, *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer, For the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, pursuant to Scripture-Promises and Prophecies concerning the Last Time* (1748 ed.; repr. Northampton: T. Dicey and Co., 1789), iv–vi. On the key role that the republication of this tract played in the ultimate formation of the Baptist Missionary Society, see Fuller, *Principles and Prospects of a Servant of Christ* in *Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 1:351.

³⁹ *Jealousy for the Lord of Hosts*, 2.

Sutcliff proceeded to detail the ways in which such a jealousy manifests itself. As he did so, two characteristics came to the fore. First, Sutcliff laid great stress on the vital importance of bringing the entirety of one's beliefs and life into conformity with the revealed will of God as found in the Scriptures. True jealousy for God is accompanied by a reverent obedience to God's Word.⁴⁰ Second, Sutcliff emphasized the visible extension of "the empire of Jesus." True jealousy for God is revealed in a love for men which "can embrace a globe" and which longs that "the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord."⁴¹ Such a longing is first expressed in "[f]ervent prayer for the outpouring of the divine Spirit." As Sutcliff stressed: "Anxious to see the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom, you will give vent to your fervent desires by warm addresses at a throne of Grace."⁴² Then it is seen in an evangelistic lifestyle which takes seriously God's desire for his people to be the salt and light of the world. Reflecting on the calling of all of God's people, Sutcliff declared:

Are they not the *Salt* of the earth? It is not proper that the *Salt* should lie all in one heap. It should be scattered abroad. Are they not the *Light* of the world? These taken collectively should, like the Sun, endeavour to enlighten the whole earth. As all the rays, however, that each can emit, are limited in their extent, let them be dispersed, that thus the whole globe may be illuminated. Are they not *Witnesses* for God? It is necessary they be distributed upon every hill, and every mountain, in order that their sound may go into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.⁴³

In commending this balance of ardent prayer and vigorous evangelistic effort Sutcliff was not only describing what he regarded as characteristics of genuine Christianity, but he was also outlining measures he considered essential for revival. When these marks of true jealousy for God are present, he concluded:

This will tend to promote the interests of religion in the world. The cause of Christ will prosper; he must increase; his kingdom shall come. But, though he is indebted to none, he kindly

⁴⁰ Ibid., 5–6.

⁴¹ Ibid., 8.

⁴² Ibid., 12.

⁴³ Ibid., 14–15.

condescends to employ his people in accomplishing these glorious purposes...Under the divine smile, "Satan will fall before you like lightning from heaven" [cf. Luke 10:18]; his power be broken; his policy confounded; while the empire of Jesus shall advance; his kingdom arise; and the crown flourish upon his head.⁴⁴

One cannot help but notice "the mood of expansion and optimism"⁴⁵ which pervades this conclusion to Sutcliff's sermon, a mood that is present throughout much of the discourse. Little wonder then that this sermon was later recognized as a key step on the road to the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society in the following year.⁴⁶

CODA

John Sutcliff was a Baptist, committed as his eighteenth-century forebears had been, to such ecclesiological convictions as congregationalism, separation from the state Church, and believer's baptism.⁴⁷ But these ecclesiological issues were not the fulcrum upon which his theology turned. In the texts from Sutcliff's hand that have been examined in this paper, it can be readily seen that he is a true heir

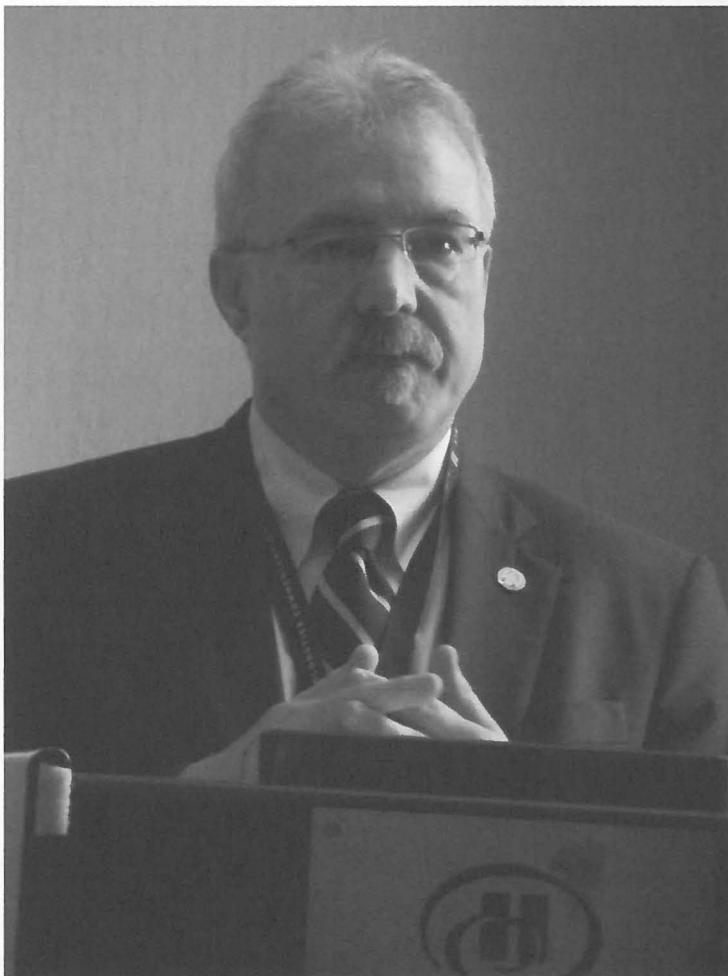
⁴⁴ Ibid., 15–16.

⁴⁵ The phrase is from D.W. Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People. Itineracy and the transformation of English Dissent, 1780–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 19.

⁴⁶ Eustace Carey, *Memoir of William Carey, D.D.* (London: Jackson and Walford, 1836), 62. See the letter by Brian Barker, "BMS bi-centenary", *Baptist Times*, 7355 (April 18, 1991), 15, which describes the meeting at Clipstone as a "watershed" in the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society.

⁴⁷ The continuing strength of Sutcliff's Baptist convictions is amply illustrated by a story conveyed to Thomas Wright by a woman who had known Sutcliff and had attended his funeral. According to this woman: "One Independent minister of high standing came from Newport, five miles distant, on purpose to consult him. Having given his opinion with customary freedom and kindness, to the great satisfaction and pleasure of the visitor, Mr. Sutcliff went to the door with him, and opened it; thereupon the latter, taking his hand, shook it heartily, and said, 'I do love you, brother John, but should love you much better if you were not a Baptist.' Mr. Sutcliff cleared his throat and replied very deliberately and quietly, 'Should you not love Jesus Christ much better if He were not a Baptist? Good morning, sir,' and shut the door to." (*The Town of Cowper* [London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1886], 166–67).

of the Evangelical Revival, which was centered upon the essential principles of the Christian faith, their vigorous propagation, and the bonds of fellowship that these principles established between all genuine believers. Such was the theological centre of gravity needed for revival in the late eighteenth-century community of the English Calvinistic Baptists.



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