

THE JOURNAL
of the
UNITED REFORMED CHURCH HISTORY SOCIETY

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

EDITOR: PROFESSOR CLYDE BINFIELD, M.A., F.S.A.

Volume 8 No 1 January 2008

CONTENTS

Editorial and Notes	2
Geoffrey Fillingham Nuttall, 8 November 1911-24 July 2007 by <i>Clyde Binfield</i>	3
Wales and the World: A Journey through the Nonconformist Mind by <i>Robert Pope</i>	6
Why did the United Reformed Church Fail? I. The Origins of the United Reformed Church by <i>Martin Camroux</i>	30
Revisiting the Wilsons of Derbyshire by <i>Malcolm Harrison</i>	46
So Last Century? Review Article by <i>David Peel</i>	49
So Last Century? A Response by <i>Alan Sell</i>	55
Reviews by <i>Susan Durber, C. Keith Forecast, Robert Pope, Alan P.F. Sell,</i> <i>Andrew C. Thompson</i>	60

EDITORIAL

This first issue of the *Journal's* eighth volume has a combative tone which is fortuitous, but neither unwelcome nor inappropriate. Historians, like politicians, should value debate. In looking back they are bound to move on. Revisionism is built into their system. Historians should, nonetheless, shudder at such a title as "Why did the United Reformed Church Fail?" but the editor let it pass because Martin Camroux expresses what some readers might feel, he draws attention to an elephant in the URC room, and future readers will see that his article is valuable historiography. David Peel's review of Alan Sell's *Nonconformist Theology in the Twentieth Century* and Professor Sell's response tend to underline concerns surfacing in Mr Camroux's article.

With the Wilsons of Derbyshire we return to more accustomed haunts but here too there is revisionism. Robert Pope's paper was delivered as the Society's Annual Lecture during the Week-End School held at Mill Hill School, 31 August–2 September 2007. It too fits some of this issue's themes but also provides a rare insight for this *Journal's* readers of a religious Nonconformity which stands in its own right and yet is also a vital component of English Nonconformity. English historians may recognise that component but most are hobbled by the constraints of language and literature. Dr Pope is unconstrained.

Geoffrey Nuttall, that most disciplined of historians, whose death we note in this issue, was similarly unconstrained. Though born in Wales, reading and speaking Welsh and writing on Welsh history, Dr. Nuttall was not in fact a Welshman. He lived through and was greatly exercised by the developments interpreted by Martin Camroux and debated by David Peel and Alan Sell. He was unsurpassed as a historian of Radical Dissent and transformed our understanding of that too easily pigeon-holed and thus ignored aspect of religious experience, and he was not easily surpassed as an ecclesiastical historian. Within boundaries which he was scrupulous to observe, he was a Renaissance Man. He served this society as President and its Congregational predecessor as Editor, contributing to *Transactions* and the *Journal* for over seventy years.

We welcome as contributors Martin Camroux, minister of Trinity Church (United Reformed and Methodist), Sutton, Surrey, and David Peel, formerly Principal of Northern College, Manchester, and Moderator of General Assembly 2005-6. We welcome as a reviewer Susan Durber, Principal of Westminster College, Cambridge.

**GEOFFREY FILLINGHAM NUTTALL,
8 NOVEMBER 1911–24 July 2007**

There can be no doubt as to Geoffrey Nuttall's international standing as scholar and historian: Fellow of the British Academy, Doctor of Divinity, earned and honorary, frequent yet select preacher and lecturer, a Vice-president of the Hon. Society of Cymmrodorion, a founder and president of the Ecclesiastical History Society, a president of the Friends Historical Society and of the Friends of Dr Williams's Library, where he had been a reader since 1940 and of which he was a trustee for fifty years, becoming the Trust's first Honorary Fellow. And there was much else besides. Such distinction ensured him an entry in *Who's Who*, characteristically meticulous and therefore long, and full obituaries in *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, and *The Times*. If none quite reached the comprehensiveness of their subject's grasp as man, minister of the Gospel, and historian, together they presented a speaking portrait of one whose impact on our own Society and its Congregational predecessor has been incalculable. Even in his absence his presence was a palpable fact at our meetings and his approach has informed contributions far beyond the range of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which he made his own. His most recent contribution to the *Journal*, "George Whitefield and his Nonconformist Friends", was in July 2003; his first, in the Congregational *Transactions* which preceded the *Journal*, was in 1931. That article, "The Puritan Spirit Through the Ages", was published while he was still an undergraduate at Balliol College and its range was as ambitious as a clever undergraduate's should be but it accurately foreshadowed the mature scholar and was properly reprinted as the first piece in *The Puritan Spirit. Essays and Addresses* (London: Epworth Press, 1967). In between he had edited *Transactions* from 1938 to 1959, succeeding Albert Peel and succeeded by John H. Taylor.

He bridged the transition from Congregational Historical Society to United Reformed Church History Society, presiding over the Congregationalists from 1965 to 1972 and over our own Society from 1972 to 1977; the bridge year, 1972, also saw him as President of the Ecclesiastical History Society. Five years later a star-studded *festschrift*, *Reformation, Conformity and Dissent*, edited by R. Buick Knox, marked Geoffrey Nuttall's retirement from New College, London. In 1996 the *Journal* turned an issue (Vol. 5, No. 9) into a Birthday Tribute; a bibliography of his works since 1977 was a striking feature. It is hoped to prepare a bibliography of the years after 1996 for a future issue and there are plans for articles on Geoffrey Nuttall as theologian and in conversation.

"The Puritan Spirit" quoted *in piam memoriam* an ancestress, Ann Muscutt, who also lived into her ninety-sixth year. Geoffrey Nuttall was naturally proud of his ancestry. His grandfathers, a great-uncle by marriage, two great-great-grandfathers, one great-great uncle by marriage and two great-great-

great-uncles were Congregational ministers and he compiled charts of his connexions from which few Congregationalists of any note seem to have been excluded: John Whale, John Marsh, Nathaniel Micklem, H.C. Carter, John Pye-Smith, Curwens and Claytons and Rixes, Josiah Viney and Thomas Binney, all and more figured on them. So did Wesleyan Methodist Moultons and Osborns, Primitive Methodist Hartleys (“Cousin Jam”), Baptist Anguses and Bayneses. There was even one of Anglicanism’s more intellectual bishops (F.R. Barry of Southwell). By birth as well as conviction, Geoffrey Nuttall was at the heart of both Old and New Dissent.

Yet he felt that his own denomination, first Congregational and then United Reformed, regarded him with some ambivalence. His entry in the current *Year Book* seems to bear this out. The FBA and BD are missing and in line with current space-saving practice the university which furnished his first and higher degrees is unspecified. Certainly here is no tall poppy: college, Mansfield (1938); pastorate Warminster (1938-43); posts, Woodbrooke (Research Fellow and Lecturer 1943-5), and New College (Lecturer, Church History, 1945-77). The progress is more even than unfolding and it hid considerable frustration. The impressive Oxford BD and the remarkable Oxford DD followed thirds in Mods and Greats (not even the striking ignominy, the inverted distinction, of a fourth). There was to be no post at Mansfield. By temperament and disciplined conviction Geoffrey Nuttall’s was the “inevitable”, instinctive Congregationalism of W.B. Selbie, C.J. Cadoux, and Albert Peel. It was not the high-stepping churchmanship of the New Genevans, Nathaniel Micklem, J.S. Whale, or John Marsh, with whom the future seemed to lie. The later failure of Mansfield College to recognise that its membership included one of Britain’s most highly regarded ecclesiastical historians and to elect him to an Honorary Fellowship might therefore be attributed to long memories; or was it the ignorance that can afflict up-to-the-mark academics in a post-Christian society, an early instance of the Dawkins effect? In the wider academic world, in London, Manchester and Cambridge, chairs eluded him although King’s London gave him a Visiting Professorship on his retirement in 1977 and the British Academy elected him to its Fellowship in 1991 (even then Mansfield failed to take note).

In the light of retrospect these set-backs might seem as providential as they are bound to seem surprising. Geoffrey Nuttall’s influence at New College was far more pervasive than he realised (though he increasingly treasured the links with old students and was indefatigable in keeping his friendships in good repair). It was arguably more pervasive than it would have been elsewhere. His call was to the ministry of the Gospel, and his particular call was to educate ministers of the Gospel. New College was the setting for that ministry, marked by such a *rapport* between its Lecturer in Church History and its Principal, John Huxtable (about whose ecumenical statesmanship Geoffrey Nuttall was bound to have reservations), that there were none of the tensions which had earlier marked Mansfield College. Dante, Erasmus, Richard Baxter, Philip Doddridge, Howel Harris, the Countess of Huntingdon, *The Holy Spirit in*

Puritan Faith and Experience, Visible Saints, The Congregational Way 1640-1660, and all that made him known far beyond denominational boundaries, were after all subordinate to his calling. As a result the pulpit and pastoral ministries of a remarkable number of men and women continue to be enriched by his example, and their churches have benefitted beyond measure.

CLYDE BINFIELD

WALES AND THE WORLD: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE NONCONFORMIST MIND

“A country called Wales exists only because the Welsh invented it. The Welsh exist only because they invented themselves.”¹ So wrote the historian Gwyn A. Williams in his erudite but intriguingly entitled history *When Was Wales?* His subject was the creation and re-creation of Welsh national consciousness throughout the centuries. Being both a Marxist and a Nationalist, his treatment is highly entertaining, though at times provocative, even angry. His thesis, perhaps a little obviously, is that national consciousness evolved as a reaction both to internal and external forces. For the Welsh, national identity is, in the first instance, a matter of how they perceive themselves on the world stage. It is then, secondarily, a matter of how, if at all, the world has viewed them. Whatever else it has been, Welsh identity has always perceived “Wales” in relation to “the world”. There is no *nation*, then, without the *nations*.

Emergence of the Nation

(i) *Religion and Language*

“Nations”, it is commonly thought, are constituted by a combination of factors: a sense of common history and culture; a feeling of rootedness, of belonging to a particular place and a particular land; possibly a shared language; national institutions and a means of organising national life in social, political and economic structures. For much of their history, the Welsh have shared a specific and recognisable story and at least some of them have spoken a distinctive language. Only in the last hundred to a hundred and fifty years or so has Wales had national institutions, such as a University, a National Library and a National Museum, and only in the last decade has it been able to develop its own national political body in the shape of the Welsh Assembly Government, voted for by the narrowest of margins by the people of Wales in 1997.

While political and cultural institutions came late to Wales’s history (unless we consider as *institutions* the various kings and princes who ruled over parts of the land until the death of Llywelyn, the last prince of Wales, in 1282, or the two Parliaments called by Owain Glyn Dŵr at Machynlleth in 1404 and Pennal in 1406), a sense of nationhood has persisted over a much longer period. One of the earliest, though quite undeveloped, expressions of national sentiment is associated with Giraldus Cambrensis – Gerald of Wales – and his *Descriptio Cambriae* (1194). The work is simultaneously a compromise with Norman rule and an almost defiant statement of separateness and particular identity. For Gerald offered the Normans advice on “how the Welsh can be conquered and how Wales should be governed once it has been conquered”, followed

1 Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales? The History, People and Culture of an Ancient Country* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), 2.

immediately by “how the Welsh can best fight back and keep up their resistance.” Yet the most famous part of the work is the record, at its conclusion, of a conversation between Henry II – to whom Gerald had been chaplain – and one of his soldiers during one of the king’s military campaigns against the Welsh. The soldier, whose place in Welsh mythology is secure as “the Old Man of Pencader”, had joined the king against his countrymen “because of their evil way of life”. Despite this, his response to the king’s question was unequivocal:

My Lord King, this nation may now be harassed, weakened and decimated by your soldiery, as it has so often been by others in former times, but it will never be destroyed by the wrath of man... Whatever else may come to pass, I do not think that on the Day of Direst Judgement any race other than the Welsh, or any other language, will give answer to the Supreme Judge of all for this small corner of the earth.²

In these words, the primary focus appears to be the association between a particular people and a particular place. Yet the statement also emphasises the place of language and of the nation’s responsibility under God. As Welsh identity evolved over subsequent centuries so it became inexorably associated with the possession of a unique language, different from that spoken in any other part of the world, and the belief that there was something inherently religious about the Welsh character, the sense that it was naturally predisposed towards Christian faith.

While John Penry may have argued, in the late sixteenth century, that there was an “abysmal and general ignorance of Christian teaching in Wales” because of the lack of preaching in Welsh,³ or the Puritans could be sufficiently concerned in the seventeenth century at the parlous state of Welsh souls to enact a parliamentary Bill specifically to propagate the gospel in the land in 1650, or the famous hymnwriter Williams Pantycelyn could claim in the eighteenth century that it was “night” in the Welsh churches prior to Howell Harris’s conversion in 1735 and his subsequent evangelistic campaigns,⁴ there nevertheless developed the idea that there was something peculiarly and inherently religious – and Christian – about the Welsh. Glanmor Williams

2 Gerald of Wales, *The Journey Through Wales and The Description of Wales*, tr. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), 274; Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales*, 63. For a slightly different translation, see Jan Morris, *The Matter of Wales: Epic Views of a Small Country* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 72; R. Tudur Jones, *The Desire of Nations* (Llandybïe: C. Davies, 1974), 82.

3 R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in Wales*, ed Robert Pope (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), 12. See also David Williams, *Three Treatises Concerning Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1960), 35-37.

4 Jones, *Congregationalism in Wales*, 109. See also *Ateb Philo Evangelius* in Cynhafal Jones (ed.), *Gweithiau Williams Pantycelyn II* (Treffynon: P. M. Evans and Son, 1891), 463.

notes that “Of all the associations between religion and social value in Wales, the most intriguing and longest lasting has been that between religion and nationality. From the outset, the Christian religion seemed to be part of the essence of Welshness.”⁵ Echoing this, D. Densil Morgan has written: “By the beginning of the seventh century Christianity and the life of the emerging nation had become so tightly intertwined as to be virtually indistinguishable... In other words being Welsh *meant* being Christian.”⁶

Both historians draw attention to the place that religion has occupied in the nation’s mythology (recognising “myth” to mean the stories told in order to understand ancient origins rather than a fictitious fantasy). This mythology was given powerful expression during the Protestant Reformation and was vividly displayed in an “Epistle to the Welsh” written by Bishop Richard Davies and contained in the 1567 edition of the Welsh New Testament. It was Joseph of Arimathea, he claimed, who brought the Christian message to Wales directly from Palestine. This pure form of the faith had been nurtured and protected by the ancient Britons – by whom he meant the ancestors of the Welsh – only to be corrupted with the arrival of Augustine of Canterbury. Davies’s aim in writing his “epistle” was to demonstrate that the Anglican Reformation reconnected the Welsh to their Celtic past. R. Tudur Jones commented: “The history is hardly convincing but the legend commended Anglicanism to the Welsh people and gave them a dramatic historical role.”⁷ It was subsequently adopted by Puritan authors who sought to instil a pious discipline in their Welsh readers by claiming a connection to the Celtic and thus the original church.⁸

Within two hundred years, this sense of an inherent Christian spirituality lying within the Welsh nation was used not so much to encourage them to embrace Anglicanism as to support their Welsh-language Nonconformity. Although himself a devoted Anglican (and monarchist), Howel Harris

-
- 5 Glanmor Williams, *The Welsh and Their Religion* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), 14; *idem*, *Religion, Language and Nationality in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1979); W. T. Pennar Davies, “The Fire in the Thatch: Religion in Wales”, in R. Brinley Jones (ed.), *Anatomy of Wales* (Peterson-super-Ely: Gwerin Publications, 1972), 105-116; D. Densil Morgan, “Christianity and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Wales”, in *Religion, State and Society* 27/3&4 (1999), 327-342.
 - 6 D. Densil Morgan, “Christianity and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Wales”, 327.
 - 7 See R. Tudur Jones, *The Great Reformation: From Wyclif to Knox – Two Centuries that Changed the Course of History* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1985), 177. See also Dorian Llywelyn, *Sacred Place, Chosen People: Land and National Identity in Welsh Spirituality* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), 96-7.
 - 8 These ideas would surface repeatedly during the Puritan period, especially in the various editions of a most remarkable work, *Y Ffydd Ddi-ffuant: sef hanes a rhinwedd y fydd Gristionogol, o ddechreuad y byd hyd yn ddiweddar; ynghyd a hanes am y Merthyrion . . .*, by Charles Edwards.

influenced the Welsh to embrace a Methodism which soon seemed to have more in common with Dissent than with Established religion. He recorded in his diary that he had told the people of Pembrokeshire “not to be taken in by pride of the English and their language and forget their own tongue. I told them that God was a Welshman, and could speak Welsh, and that he had told many people, in Welsh, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’”⁹ Early in the nineteenth century, the Baptist preacher Christmas Evans claimed: “Perhaps there has never been such a nation as the Welsh who have been won over so widely to the hearing of the gospel. Meeting houses have been erected in each corner of the land and the majority of the common people, nearly all of them, crowd in to listen... There is virtually no other nation, whose members have, in such numbers, professed the gospel so widely, in both south Wales and the north.”¹⁰ The Revd David Davies claimed that the Welsh “are one of the most scripturally enlightened, loyal and religious nations on the face of the earth.”¹¹ In his review of preaching in Wales, the Calvinistic Methodist patriarch Owen Thomas wrote that “the pulpit is accorded superior status in our nation, and its influence on our nation’s thought, we would claim, is stronger and has lasted longer than on any other country in the entire history of the Christian church.”¹² The Welsh language apparently accounted for this, and Nonconformist ministers were, on occasion, keen to emphasise the need to retain the language for spiritual reasons. The famous Congregationalist, William Rees (known by his bardic

-
- 9 R. Geraint Gruffydd, “Ein hiaith a’n diwylliant”, in *Y Cylchgrawn Efengylaidd* vol XVIII, no 2 (March 1979), 82; also Llywelyn, *Sacred Place, Chosen People*, 50. For Howell Harris (1714-1793), see Griffith T. Roberts, *Howell Harris* (London: Epworth, 1951); Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Howell Harris: The Last Enthusiast* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1965); Geraint Tudur, *Howell Harris: From Conversion to Separation, 1735-1750* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000); J. E. Lloyd and R. T. Jenkins (eds), *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography Down to 1940* (London: Cymmrodorion, 1959 – hereafter *DWB*), 339-340.
- 10 Owen Davies (ed.), *Gweithiau y Parch Christmas Evans*, II (Caernarfon, 1899), p.13. I am grateful to my colleague, Professor D. Densil Morgan, for this reference. See his *Wales and the Word: Historical Perspectives on Religion and Identity in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, forthcoming), chapter 2. For Christmas Evans (1766-1838), see David Meyrick Evans, *Christmas Evans: a memoir ... with selections from his sermons* (London: J. Heaton and Sons, 1863); D. Densil Morgan, *Christmas Evans a’r Ymneilltuaeth Newydd* (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1991); Tim Shenton, *Christmas Evans: The Life and Times of the One-eyed Preacher of Wales* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2001). *DWB*, 221-2.
- 11 See Peter Lord, “Tir y Cymry”, *Taliesin* 89 (Spring 1995), 54-75; also Llywelyn, *Sacred Place, Chosen People*, 50.
- 12 Owen Thomas, *Cofiant y Parchedig John Jones, Talsarn: mewn cysylltiad a hanes duwinyddiaeth a phregethu Cymru* (Wrexham: Hughes, 1874), 968; R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation: Wales, 1890-1914*, ed. Robert Pope (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), 116. For Owen Thomas (1812-1891), see D. Ben Rees, *The Life and Work of Owen Thomas, 1812-1891: A Welsh Preacher in Liverpool* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991); *DWB*, 960.

nom de plume of Gwilym Hiraethog) wrote in 1872: “Nothing would be more pleasing to Satan than . . . to see our ancient tongue fall into disuse soon, in the hope that its evangelical religion would also fall into disuse with it . . . There is no Englishman in England, nor any traitor to the language in Wales who would like to see this happen as much as Satan.”¹³ And the extent of the spiritual connection between the language and Christian faith was noted by the Congregational minister, William Roberts, who wrote in 1876: “When the world is spoken of on the Sabbath, then let care be taken that one speaks of it in English, lest our ancient Welsh tongue be sullied by such usage.”¹⁴ Given this background, it is hardly surprising that the Revd Evan Williams could declare that: “We are, through God’s mercy, morally and religiously superior to our neighbours, if not also in general knowledge.”¹⁵

While most of this was merely rhetoric and hyperbole, the association between language and religion was, by the mid-nineteenth century, well-established by the dominance of the chapel in Welsh life. The Religious Census of 1851 demonstrated that almost 52% of the population was in attendance at worship on the designated Sunday; the overwhelming majority of them, some 75%, were Nonconformists. Some thirty years later, it has been claimed, around 75% of the population were members of Nonconformist churches.¹⁶ It is hardly surprising that Henry Richard, the Congregational minister and Member of Parliament who did more than any to ensure that Welsh issues were brought before the House of Commons, would call the Welsh a nation of Nonconformists.¹⁷

On the surface this national and religious consciousness appeared to reflect a confidence not only that the nation had emerged but that it had grown in strength largely through God’s providence which was nurturing the Christian life in the Welsh language. But this confidence was to suffer a vicious and insulting attack just when it appeared to be at its height with the publication, in 1847, of the Report into the State of Education in Wales – an event which came to be known as *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision* (“The Treachery of the Blue Books”).¹⁸

13 Adroddiad Undeb yr Annibynwyr (Carmarthen, 1872), 16; R. Tudur Jones, “Yr Eglwysi a’r Iaith yn Oes Victoria”, in *Llên Cymru* 19 (1996), 146-167 [165]; Llywelyn, *Sacred Place, Chosen People*, 51. For William Rees – Gwilym Hiraethog (1802-1883), see *DWB*, 831-832.

14 Tudur Jones, “Yr Eglwysi a’r Iaith yn Oes Victoria”, 165; Llywelyn, *Sacred Place, Chosen People*, 51.

15 Lord, “Tir y Cymry”, 54-75; Llywelyn, *Sacred Place, Chosen People*, 50.

16 Llywelyn, *Sacred Place, Chosen People*, 49.

17 Henry Richard (1812-1888) is the subject of a recently published pamphlet, D. Ben Rees, *The Life and Work of Henry Richard* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 2007). See also *DWB*, 849.

18 See Gwyneth Tyson Roberts, *The Language of the Blue Books: The Perfect Instrument of Empire* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998); Prys Morgan (ed.), *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision* (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1991).

(ii) *The Struggle to Survive.*

The state of education was undoubtedly poor. According to the historian David Williams, "many parishes had no schools at all, and in very few parishes was there adequate provision".¹⁹ Nevertheless, other factors contributed to the tone of the reports. The chief commissioners were English, Anglicans, and barristers with neither knowledge of nor sympathy for education, Wales or the working classes. They assumed that ignorance of English language and literature was synonymous with illiteracy and that the Welsh language was associated with immorality due, in no small part they thought, to the overwhelming influence of Nonconformity. Welsh country-women, they claimed, were "almost universally unchaste", while the Welsh language was preventing the nation from progressing both economically and morally. Take, for example, the following paragraph from the words of one of the commissioners, Jelinger C. Symons:

The Welsh language is a vast drawback to Wales, and a manifold barrier to the moral progress and commercial prosperity of the people. It is not easy to over-estimate its evil effects. It is the language of the Cymri and anterior to that of the ancient Britons. It dissevers the people from intercourse which would greatly advance their civilization, and bars the access of improving knowledge to their minds. As a proof of this, there is no Welsh literature worthy of the name.²⁰

The point is, of course, that Symons was totally ignorant of the traditions of Welsh culture and literature. He had neither the facility nor the inclination to research it, suggesting that his comments were not dictated by aesthetic considerations. R. Tudur Jones, incensed by the slur on the Welsh nation, its customs and traditions as well as its people, believed that Symons's words betray the fact that he "was a mouthpiece for the policy of assimilating Wales to England",²¹ a process begun in earnest with the Act of Union in 1536 and

19 David Williams, *A History of Modern Wales* (London: John Murray, 1950), 255.

20 Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales (London: HMSO, 1848), 309-310 (this was the summary of the main reports). See also, Tudur Jones, *The Desire of Nations*, 145. There were plenty of Welsh Nonconformists who were persuaded that the language was a hindrance to the people's progress. They were largely influenced by the prevailing political approach of *laissez faire* and a utilitarianism that believed, with John Stuart Mill, that "Whatever really tends to the admixture of nationalities, and the blending of their attributes and peculiarities in a common union, is a benefit to the human race." Mill made his argument in his *Considerations on Representative Government*, quoted in Tudur Jones, *Desire of Nations*, 101. Witness, for example, Kilsby Jones's prize-winning essay at the Rhyl Eisteddfod of 1863: "The Advantage which Accrues to the Welshman from Possessing a Practical Knowledge of the English Language". See Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in Wales*, 210-216 (213).

21 Tudur Jones, *The Desire of Nations*, 146.

whose effects could be clearly seen in the nineteenth century and the notorious reference apparently contained in an early edition of *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* that “for Wales, see England”. The political historian, Kenneth O. Morgan, believes that the modern nationalist movement was launched primarily as a result of “the humiliation and . . . patronizing indifference” suffered by the Welsh over the years which reached its apogee with the Blue Books.²² Plenty of evidence can be amassed to suggest that, whatever else it encapsulates, Welsh identity is one characterised by the perception that it must struggle for its very existence because of the reaction of the wider world.

Indeed, this struggle can be perceived even at the point when the Welsh began to emerge as a particular people. Offa, king of the Mercians, built his Dyke in the eighth century as a demarcation of a boundary. Those people to the west of Offa’s Dyke believed themselves to be the oldest people on the island, referring to themselves as *Cymry* or fellow-countrymen. Those to the east of the Dyke called them *weallas* – Welsh – a word meaning “foreigners”.²³ In this way the Welsh suffered the ignominy of being foreigners in their own land and, as the author Jan Morris accurately if pointedly states “on the eastern side of it the English rose to world supremacy, on the west the Welsh survived.”²⁴ The first external reference to the Welsh as a nation can be found as early as 1417 when, during the Council of Constance, Owain Glyn Dŵr’s Chancellor, the brilliant but ambitious Gruffudd Young (c.1370–c.1435), persuaded Jean de Campagne, proctor to the French king (Charles VI), to agree that Wales, along with Scotland and Ireland, were *nationes particulares*.²⁵ Nothing concrete came of this. Glyn Dŵr’s rebellion fizzled out, Glyn Dŵr himself disappeared, Young ended his days as absentee bishop of Hippo, and the Dean of York, Thomas Polton, won the argument that the eight kingdoms of England, Scotland, Wales, Man, the four kingdoms of Ireland and the principality of John, prince of the Orkney Islands constituted the “English or British nation” (*inclyta nation Anglicana alias Brytannica*).²⁶ The “world”, at this point, chose not to listen to the Welsh claim and it would take over five hundred years for a similar opportunity to arise.

Even when the Welsh appeared to be doing well, there were forces at work which ensured that they never reached their full potential. When Henry Tudor grasped the crown at Bosworth Field in 1485, he apparently raised the Red Dragon. He had sought the assistance of the Welsh in the wars of the Roses and, as David Williams remarks “they followed him to court and obtained

22 Kenneth O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales, 1880-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1.

23 Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales*, 3.

24 Morris, *The Matter of Wales*, 60.

25 “History and Law Section: Wales and the Council of Constance”, in *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* (1951), 220-1.

26 *Ibid.*, 221; Tudur Jones, *The Desire of Nations*, 90.

many minor posts.” There were so many of them obsequiously seeking the king’s favour that he might reward them with status and responsibility, that they earned the dislike and contempt of the English courtiers. From this arose a work by the poet John Skelton, who recorded that St Peter, when he had become tired of the noise of the Welsh in heaven, arranged that someone, from beyond the gates, would shout *Caws Pôb* (“Baked cheese”, probably an early take on Welsh Rarebit) causing the Welsh to rush out upon which the gates would be promptly shut.²⁷

The Act of Union of 1536 may have come at the request of some Welsh noblemen seeking equality within the law,²⁸ but it came at the price of subsuming the Welsh kingdom into a national entity based on the monarch in London. Bureaucratic uniformity was the order of the day and this order required that the Welsh language be banned in all official conversation. The attack on the language was an attack on the last remaining distinctive characteristic in Welsh life. From that time, “all justices . . . shall proclaim and keep . . . all . . . courts in the English tongue; . . . all oaths shall be given . . . in the English tongue; . . . no person or persons that use the Welsh speech or language shall have . . . any office . . . within this realm of England, Wales or other the king’s Dominion . . . unless he or they use and exercise the English speech or language.”²⁹

In more recent times, the protests against the construction of a bombing school on the Llyn Peninsula in the 1930s, on the grounds that it would have a detrimental effect on the Welsh language and culture in that area, fell on deaf ears, despite the fact that the government had yielded to similar popular protests that Abbotsbury was home to a valuable swannery while Bude Bay in Northumberland, was home to the sheld-duck.³⁰ Legitimate protest³¹ was

27 See David Williams, *A History of Modern Wales*, 23; Morris, *The Matter of Wales*, 372-3; Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales*, 114.

28 There is evidence, found in Edward Lord Herbert of Cherbury’s *Life of Henry VIII*, that at least some of the Welsh had sought an act of union. Although the authorship of the document cannot now be authenticated, the king was, it seems, petitioned by some “craving to be received and adopted into the same laws and privileges which your other subjects enjoy.” They claimed this as a right following their loyalty to the Tudors. The existence of a different language, they claimed, was not a problem: “Your highness will have but the more tongues to serve you”, they said. See David Williams, *A History of Modern Wales*, 34-5.

29 Quoted in David Williams, *A History of Modern Wales*, 38.

30 D. Hywel Davies, *The Welsh Nationalist Party 1925-1946: A Call to Nationhood* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1983), 159.

31 In June 1936, a letter was sent to Stanley Baldwin stating that 1,000 bodies in Wales, representing 250,000 people, opposed the plan not because of the preservation of wildlife but of local, Welsh-speaking culture. In July, a petition signed by 5,300 local inhabitants was presented at Westminster – all to no avail. Hywel Davies, *The Welsh Nationalist Party*, 160.

followed by the arson attack at 1.30 on the morning of 8 September 1936 when three leading members of the Welsh Nationalist Party – the university lecturer Saunders Lewis, the Baptist minister Lewis Valentine and the schoolteacher D. J. Williams – set fire to the school before handing themselves over to the custody of the local constabulary. They explained their actions by claiming that this was “the only method left to us by a government that is insulting Wales.”³² They spent nine months in Wormwood Scrubs, but only after the trial had been removed from Wales to the Old Bailey, the defendants had refused to recognise the court, and the jury had returned its verdict without feeling any need to retire.³³

A sense of helplessness emerged. The Welsh felt that they had no real say in affairs which directly affected them, and this was deepened when, in 1957, an Act of Parliament was effected to drown the Tryweryn Valley in northern Merionethshire in order to supply water to Liverpool. Tryweryn was considered to be of particular cultural significance – the talk was that it was the only place left in Wales that was completely Welsh-speaking. There was passive resistance. A great emphasis was placed on the need to preserve Welsh rural communities and even to conserve “Welsh water”. Nevertheless, as Kenneth O. Morgan says, “The reservoir at Tryweryn was built, just the same.”³⁴ Despite the protestations of those of all kinds of political persuasion, the radical and the conservative, the nationalist and the loyal “Britisher”, “there was no local or other authority in Wales which could influence the decision of the Liverpool corporation at all.”³⁵ Such was the furore which emerged that slogans were daubed on walls throughout Wales bearing the legend *Cofiwch Dryweryn* (“Remember Tryweryn”). The most famous example can be found in a lay-by near Aberystwyth, visible when travelling south on the A487. Such is its iconic status, and such are the changes which have emerged in national life since, that the wall is now subject to a preservation order,³⁶ ensuring that, even in a very different political context, Tryweryn will never be forgotten.

These events remind us that identity is never merely a matter for the self – whether that be the individual or social self. Whatever place the Welsh have considered themselves to occupy in the world, the “world” has not always been particularly aware of their existence at all. Indeed, even more recent history tends to imply that Wales has yet to be put on the map, almost in a literal sense.

32 Hywel Davies, *The Welsh Nationalist Party*, 161.

33 See Hywel Davies, *The Welsh Nationalist Party*, 160-162; K. O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 254-5; Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales?*, 283. According to Kenneth Morgan, “Lloyd George, who had not supported their actions, fumed at ‘the craven, appeasing Baldwin government’ which was willing to ‘cringe before Mussolini in Abyssinia, but would wantonly bully gallant little Wales.’”

34 K. O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 382; Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales?*, 291.

35 K. O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 335.

36 For the news story, see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/mid/6056566.stm> posted on 17 October 2006, viewed on 25 September 2007.

In October 2004, the statisticians of the European Union left Wales off the front cover of their yearbook. It is not so much that the name did not appear, but that the very land itself was airbrushed out in what was claimed to be an error, a spokesperson for the EU explaining that the omission was a “design fault”.³⁷ Three months later, Sentinel Card Protection, an insurance firm, told Bernard Zavishlock, a pensioner from Abergavenny, that his insurance cover could not be renewed, because Wales was “an unknown country”. The company claimed that their letter had been sent to Mr Zavishlock “in error” suggesting that the renewal was impossible because he lived outside the UK.³⁸ Perhaps the officers of Sentinel Cards had, after all, been referring to the official documentation of the EU’s statisticians and discovered that, as far as the bureaucrats of Europe are concerned, Wales has been obliterated, consigned as Anne Robinson would have liked, to a pseudo-Orwellian Room 101.³⁹

What this brief, and admittedly one-sided, outline suggests is that, despite the claims of the Old Man of Pencader, and recent attempts to see national identity arising from almost a sacramental understanding of place, the land itself has rarely been of particular significance in Welsh identity.⁴⁰ Instead, Welshness has been characterised by a sense of struggling to exist and finding strength in its language and religion even when both came in for official censure. In this way, Welsh identity has traditionally been associated, often implicitly, with the temper of protest, the recognition that it must be fought for in a hostile environment if there is ever to be sufficient self-respect to

37 Responses to the story can be found at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/wales/3718632.stm>, posted on 6 October 2004, viewed on 30 July 2007.

38 Story can be found at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/4182661.stm>, posted on 17 January 2005, viewed on 30 July 2007.

39 Of Ms Robinson’s comments, made on the programme “Room 101”, a BBC Spokesman said “It’s a light-hearted programme. People go into the programme knowing they will be making some sort of joke and it will be said in jest.” The spokesman said nothing about why it is a “joke” to call the Welsh “irritating” and suggest their banishment to Room 101, or whether a call to consign any other race or people to Room 101 would also be taken as a piece of humour. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/man.jhtml2xml=/news/2001/03/07/nanne07.xml> posted 5 March 2003, viewed 2 July 2007.

40 This is despite the fact that the “national anthem” refers to the land (*Mae hen wlad fy nhadau yn annwyl i mi* – “The old land of my fathers is dear to me”) and that many Welsh people have been identified by their roots in a particular place. We have already noted Gwilym Hiraethog whose name reflects his youth spent as a shepherd boy on the Hiraethog mountains. We could also mention, by way of example, T. E. Nicholas, known as Niclas y Glais because he spent ten years as Congregational minister in the Swansea valley village of Glais. For Nicholas (1879-1971), see D. Howell, *Nicholas of Glais: The People’s Champion* (Clydach: Clydach Historical Society, 1991); A further example might be John Williams, the Calvinistic Methodist minister whose name is forever associated with the village of Brynsiencyn, Anglesey. For Williams (1853-1921). See R. R. Hughes, *Y Parchedig John Williams DD, Brynsiencyn* (Caernarfon: Gwasg y Cyfundeb, 1929); *DWB*, 1056.

for in a hostile environment if there is ever to be sufficient self-respect to constitute a nation and thus also to facilitate a relationship between Wales and the world. Nonconformity, then, became for a time a natural partner for such an identity and a number of its ministers became significant exponents of a national philosophy. We will mention four: Michael D. Jones, D. Miall Edwards, J. E. Daniel, and R. Tudur Jones.⁴¹

Four Nationalist Nonconformists

(i) *Michael D. Jones*

Hailed during the twentieth century as “the founding father of modern political nationalism in Wales”,⁴² Michael Daniel Jones⁴³ was ordained to the Congregational ministry at the Welsh church in Cincinnati, USA, in 1847, just as the Blue Books were being published and just before the outbreak of the nationalist movements in Europe associated with the names of Kossuth and Mazzini. His father, also called Michael, had established a college to train men for the Congregational ministry at Bala in Merionethshire and had been embroiled in the controversy surrounding the modification of Calvinism in the Welsh pulpit.⁴⁴ His son never really achieved theological prominence, despite attending the Presbyterian College in Carmarthen and Highbury College in London. Rather, it was his views regarding the nation and its morality, clearly and sometimes acerbically expressed, which earned him a reputation in the collective memory.

It was while he was living in Cincinnati that his national sentiment was awakened. While there, he realised that the Welsh emigrants were merely assimilating into the wider culture not through a specific loss of religion or through the lack of their own land and political institutions but because they were losing their language. As a result, Jones developed the idea of the Welsh as a cultural community primarily safeguarded by their use of a common Welsh tongue. This had important ramifications both for identity and for Jones’s subsequent career. First of all, it meant that national identity was a matter of choice and of will and thus also a matter of human morality rather than an ordinance of creation. Thus the people would remain Welsh for as long as they

41 The primary omission here is Robert Ambrose Jones – Emrys ap Iwan (1851-1906). For Emrys ap Iwan, see *DWB*, 509-510. However, Emrys ap Iwan was a Calvinistic Methodist minister while the four men mentioned here were all Congregationalists. Furthermore, all four were involved in theological education.

42 R. Tudur Jones, “Religion, Nationality and State in Wales, 1840-1890”, in D. A. Kerr (ed.), *Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe, 1840-1940*, II (Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1992), 271.

43 For Michael D. Jones (1822-1898), see *DWB*, 495-496; Jones’s contribution has recently been the subject of doctoral research, see Dafydd Tudur, “The Life, Work and Thought of Michael D. Jones (1822-1898)”, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wales, 2006).

44 For the controversy over moderate Calvinism, see Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in Wales*, 133-137. For Michael Jones (1787-1953), see *DWB*, 495.

were willing to take the trouble to learn and speak the language rather than because God had ordained it to be so. Likewise, the disappearance of the nation would be the result of the people's decision to opt for some other language which, in Jones's context, primarily meant the adoption of English. It was, then, human action rather than the divine will which ensured the appearance and development of national identity. Secondly, because this cultural community bore little relationship to any specific piece of land,⁴⁵ it could be removed and relocated anywhere in the world. Such an idea gave rise to Jones's advocacy of a settlement in another part of the world where the Welsh would be able to nurture their own customs and maintain a political structure through their own language. Finally, in 1865, one was established in Patagonia, Argentina, largely through the commitment and vision of Michael D. Jones.

What is most clear in Jones's pronouncements is the relationship between Welsh identity, as primarily characterised by the Welsh tongue, the practice of religion and the living of the moral life. He argued vehemently that the people's morality declined as their knowledge and use of Welsh diminished. "The loss of our language," he wrote, "will not mean the loss of a language, but also and to a considerable degree the loss of our religion and morality."⁴⁶ Jones was a gifted orator and an able polemicist, occasionally appearing to get carried away with his own rhetoric – a characteristic of Welsh Nonconformist preachers of the mid-nineteenth century.⁴⁷ As a result, what he said may sound appealing or even convincing, but there often appears to be a lack of substance to it. Take, for example, a typical diatribe of his published in 1849:

Let other nations boast of their learning, their refinement, and their civility, and we will strive with our religion. Religion, and not learning, is the glory of the world – Christianity is the glory of religion – Protestantism is the glory of Christianity – Dissent is the glory of Protestantism – Wales is the glory of Dissent.⁴⁸

There was, for Jones, a clear connection between the fortunes of the Welsh language and the morality of the people, the safeguard of which was the chapel. As a result, he saw the Anglicization of Wales as the cause of immorality. Again, we see more rhetoric than argument:

45 This thesis is worked out most cogently by Dafydd Tudur, see "The Life, Work and Thought of Michael D. Jones (1822-1898)", 111. I owe most of the following quotations that are attributable to Michael D. Jones to Dr Tudur.

46 *Yr Amserau* (January 1849), 11.

47 See W. P. Griffith, "'Preaching Second to No Other under the Sun': Edward Matthews, the Nonconformist Pulpit and Welsh Identity during the Mid-Nineteenth Century", in Robert Pope (ed.), *Religion and National Identity: Wales and Scotland c.1700-2000* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 61-83.

48 *Yr Amserau* (29 March 1849), 6.

If the Welsh do not stand up like heroes for their own country soon, and demand immediately that which they have been denied for so long, their country will decline into a Radnorshire, and a Radnorshire worse than Sodom.⁴⁹

In April 1849, he described Anglicised Radnorshire, together with English-speaking Pembrokeshire, as “the darkest, ungodliest and most corrupt places, where violence, poverty and sin increase as Saxonism increases.”⁵⁰ While a minister at the village of Bwlchnewydd, he made similar, unsubstantiated claims about the nearby borough town of Carmarthen. (It should be noted, perhaps, that the records of the first Baptist church established in Wales at Ilston, Gower, in 1649 had suggested that Carmarthen was a “town where Satan’s scent was”).⁵¹

Although much of this was exaggerated, and there is little real evidence for associating Anglicization with the growth of immorality *per se*, what can be said is that the statistics bear out the testimony that chapel attendance was higher in those districts where the Welsh language was predominant.⁵² It therefore might appear harsh to say so, but there may have been some truth in what Jones said in 1890 that “Wales’s experience is that Anglicization means paganization.”⁵³

Nevertheless, we do not find in Jones’s work a clear and reasonable delineation of national identity. He was an eccentric to say the least. He tended to see industrialization too as an aspect of Anglicization and immorality. For Jones, the Welsh were a nation of farmers, and this was quite simply the divine order of things.⁵⁴ Consequently, this vision was heavily dominated by the rural life which surrounded him in Bala. But there is something naïve about it all, not just because the valleys of the south were rapidly industrializing under the influence of king coal and steel, but because a trudge over the southern Snowdonia mountains to Blaenau Ffestiniog would have revealed to him the slate industry which, in the north west, was as pervasive as coal was in the valleys of the south. As one historian has recently concluded: “While consistently emphasizing that there was a much greater world beyond ‘Great Britain’, Michael D. Jones was unable, or perhaps unwilling, to see the rapidly changing Wales that was beyond Meirionnydd.”⁵⁵ Wales could be relocated

49 *Y Dysgedydd* (April 1849), 113.

50 *Y Cenhadwr Americannaidd* (April 1849), 109.

51 B. G. Owens (ed.), *The Ilston Book: The Earliest Register of Welsh Baptists* (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1996), 40, 42; I am grateful to Professor D. Denis Morgan for this reference. See his *Wales and the Word* (forthcoming), chapter 1.

52 Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, *Explorations and Explanations: Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales* (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1981), 217-35.

53 *Y Celt* (17 October 1890), 2. See also, R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation*, 10-40.

54 *Y Celt* (21 October 1887), 2.

55 Dafydd Tudur, “The Life, Work and Thought of Michael D. Jones”, 134.

anywhere on God's earth, but it is difficult to see how, if at all, the nation would develop an awareness of the wider world.

Despite his lack of logical argument and definition, Michael D. Jones is rightly recognised as the father of Welsh nationalism because he insisted that Welsh culture, including religion and language, were more vital characteristics in identity than location and land. Wales as place was secondary provided its people were loyal to the traditions and customs that could be identified as Welsh. Despite his call for self-determination, it was Jones's cultural nationalism that would dominate nationalistic debate in Wales until after the Second World War. Indeed, D. Hywel Davies, the historian of the early Welsh Nationalist Party, commented that during the first twenty years of its existence (1925-1945) "it was not really a political party at all but a cultural and educational movement."⁵⁶

There were not many at this time who took a different view, attempting to marry their commitment to Wales as a cultural entity with a more nuanced recognition of political realities. One who did so was David Miall Edwards,⁵⁷ though his political views remained undeveloped. Interestingly there is a direct link between Edwards and Michael D. Jones. For when Edwards and his family moved to Llandderfel, Meirioneth, in 1877, Michael D. Jones became their minister.

(ii) *D. Miall Edwards*

Edwards was a nationalist, but he was no fanatic. For a quarter of a century, he was the measured and erudite Professor of Systematic Theology and the Philosophy of Religion at the Memorial College, the seminary for training men for the Congregational ministry at that time based in Brecon. He had learnt his theology at Mansfield College, Oxford, where the Classics tutor, John Massie, claimed he was the most brilliant student he had ever taught, while Andrew Fairbairn, the principal, prophetically suggested that Edwards would make a significant contribution as one of the most bold and prominent thinkers of the age.⁵⁸ He drank deeply from the wells of philosophical Idealism and his debt fundamentally ethical approach to reality. Theologically he was a classic

56 Hywel Davies, *The Welsh Nationalist Party*, viii.

57 For D. Miall Edwards (1873-1941), see Robert Pope, *Seeking God's Kingdom: The Nonconformist Social Gospel in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), 38-55; John Taylor and Clyde Binfield (eds), *Who They Were in the Reformed Churches of England and Wales, 1901-2000* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2007), 56-57; R. T. Jenkins and E. D. Jones (eds), *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig 1941-1950* (London: Cymmrodorion, 1970), 12-13.

58 *Y Dysgedydd* (1941), 101. In a letter to him following his appointment to the Memorial College, Fairbairn wrote: "It was a great pleasure to me to find you amongst those I can honestly say I have pleasure in thinking of as a teacher. So I can salute you as Professor and the other two candidates I can only console with . . . I wish I could think of other men as equal to you." Letter from A. M. Fairbairn to D. Miall Edwards, 7 July 1909, D. Miall Edwards Papers, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

liberal. Although he had attended Alfred Garvie's lectures on the Ritschlian theology while a student at Mansfield in 1899, and indeed Garvie later said that these lectures were the means of persuading Edwards that theology was a subject worthy of study,⁵⁹ Ritschl was not really his mentor. Rather it was Schleiermacher's "feeling of absolute dependence" and Otto's "idea of the holy" which gave rise to a theological system based on the experience of a holy God to which Edwards gave expression in the only work of systematic theology to be published in Welsh during the twentieth century, his *magnum opus*, *Bannau'r Ffydd* ("The Beacons of Faith").⁶⁰ It is both Idealism and liberalism that come to the fore in his exposition of the place of language in national identity.

Language,⁶¹ in Edwards's view, was an essential aspect of national identity though not because it was either an utterance of sound or the act of communication. Instead language was the result of a self-consciousness and thus a close and intricate relationship existed between the words which communicate and the self which gives rise to the communication. "Language is art," he wrote, ". . . but it is art which embodies the soul of the artist."⁶² In other words, a language embodies the deepest and most indispensable characteristics of a nation. It is at one and the same time the incorporation of its essence, its history and its identity. As a result, a language cannot simply be dispensed with in order to adopt some barren and moribund uniformity. "Languages cannot be buried without burying something besides those languages," he wrote. "Every language is the product of long ages of co-operative labour of a host of people, and it is the embodiment of the soul, thought, experience, imagination and longing of those people."⁶³

Alongside language, Edwards also had a clear sense of the place of the nation within the world. He was not merely a nationalist, he was quite literally an *internationalist*. He took a full part in the conferences on Faith and Order and on Life and Work during the 1920s, and he developed a clear philosophy of how people relate to nations and how nations should relate to each other. This relating was, of necessity, subject to a higher, moral law which sought mutual recognition and benefit rather than merely the exaltation of one's own nation. Without the moral law, nationalism goes sour because it is merely

59 A. E. Garvie, *Memories and Meanings of My Life* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938), 116.

60 Published Wrexham, 1929.

61 In 1927, Edwards published a book entitled *Iaith a Diwylliant Cenedl* (The Language and Culture of a Nation), (Dolgellau: Hughes Bros., 1927). The book was in fact the republication of the final section of a previous book, *Crist a Gwareiddiad: Traethodau ar Faterion Diwinyddol a Chymdeithasol* (Dolgellau: Hughes Bros., 1921). In that book, the section was entitled "Am Gymru a Chenedlaetholdeb" (On Wales and Nationalism), 355-414.

62 Edwards, *Crist a Gwareiddiad*, 266.

63 *Ibid.*, 375.

self-serving and becomes an end in itself.⁶⁴ Instead of this, for Edwards, the nation existed as a means to an end. In other words, it was the means through which a people could contribute something unique on the world stage from which the whole of humanity could benefit. It was this Hegelian sense of the nation's vocation that led him to support self-determination. Indeed, he claimed that in order to "take our part with dignity in the work of promoting international peace and justice", Wales needed its own Parliament. Once self-determination had been granted, then Wales could apply for a seat in the League of Nations. This would be the forum in which the Welsh could make their contribution among the family of nations. To this end, he wrote:

Every nation has its place and its message, its primary characteristics and its mission, its special contribution to the total life and thought of the world . . . And you, dear Wales, you have your place in humankind's great *orchestra* and without you the choir will not be complete.⁶⁵

For Edwards, Welsh identity was wrapped up with cultural considerations of language, literature, and learning. He was hardly interested at all in national and social institutions unless they were to promote the use of the language. This is hardly surprising from a philosophical Idealist who exalted spiritual or noumenal reality beyond the material or phenomenal and the result was an emphasis on the duty of all Welsh people not only to speak the language but to write it idiomatically and to read it. "No one should feel that he has the right to call himself a Welshman," he wrote, ". . . unless he buys a number of Welsh books each year, as well as regularly receiving a number of Welsh journals and newspapers, not merely as a matter of duty, *but as a matter of solace for his soul*" (my italics).⁶⁶

Lying behind his philosophy was a sense in which Wales could be seen as a nation within a wider state, whether that state be the United Kingdom or a new, world state based on the League of Nations. Indeed, he defined nationhood not in terms of political and economic structures, or even in terms of a defined, geographical location, but in terms of "feeling" – "a flame of passionate feeling which makes people into a living unity . . . the consciousness in a large number of individuals that they are members of the one body."⁶⁷ Nevertheless, he took for granted that Wales was a nation and that all nations had a vocation on the world stage. And Wales's vocation was to spread religion. By this he did not mean chapel culture,⁶⁸ but true, spiritual religion that had been manifested in Welsh history through the spirit of its major figures and poets. If this spiritual religion could be manifest once again, and national life be consecrated

64 *Ibid.*, 369.

65 *Ibid.*, 411.

66 *Ibid.*, 13.

67 *Ibid.*, 371.

68 Edwards, *Iaith a Diwylliant Cenedl*, 69.

to its pursuit, then, he wrote, "I believe that we have within us the talent and quality that could make us as a nation one of the spiritual leaders of the world."⁶⁹

Even though Miall Edwards missed the irony that his description of Welsh religion and nationhood owed more to Germanic philosophy than to indigenous thought and a specifically Welsh spirituality, he nevertheless recognised the need to express nationhood on the world stage among the family of nations. Wales, in his thought, does not merely have a relationship with the world, it exists specifically *for* the world – a vital point for all nations to grasp, according to Edwards, in a world struggling to secure a peaceful future after the horrors of the Somme. But Edwards's nationalist philosophy did not become the basis for the nascent nationalist movement. For Idealism and theological liberalism were soon to be left behind in favour on the one hand of a sacramentalist account based on natural law and associated with the name of Saunders Lewis (who was a convert to Roman Catholicism despite prominent forebears in the Calvinistic Methodist Connexion – he was a grandson of Owen Thomas mentioned earlier) and, on the other, to the theology of crisis associated with the lesser-known John Edward Daniel.⁷⁰

(iii) *J. E. Daniel*

Daniel has been described as "the most gifted theologian of his generation".⁷¹ He was appointed Professor of Christian Doctrine at the Bala-Bangor Theological College in 1926 at the age of twenty four after a glittering performance as a student at Oxford where he gained a first in classics (1922), *literae humaniores* (1924) and theology (1925), while he subsequently spent a year at Marburg where he studied with Rudolf Bultmann (1931). Although he left little published work behind him, Daniel's genius was seen fairly early in his career as he led the break with the prevailing liberalism⁷² and also became one of the first exponents of the Barthian theology not just in Wales but in Britain as a whole.⁷³ His predecessor at Bala-Bangor, Thomas Rees, and his colleague and principal, John Morgan Jones, had allied their liberalism and

69 *Ibid.*, 35-36; for a critique, see Tudur Jones, *Desire of Nations*, 7-22.

70 He composed a set of poems entitled "Yn y Capel" (In the Chapel) in which he is particularly critical of the way the Nonconformists of his day practised their religion. See Robert Pope, *Codi Muriau Dinas Duw: Anghydfurfiaeth ac Anghydfurfwyr Cymru'r Ugeinfed Ganrif* (Bangor: Centre for the Advanced Study of Religion in Wales, 2005), 197-231; *idem*, "A Chapter in the Life of D. Miall Edwards", in *The National Library of Wales Journal* vol. XXXI, no. 4 (Winter 2000), 401-422 (413-419).

71 Edwards, *Iaith a Diwylliant Cenedl*, 89.

72 For J. E. Daniel (1902-1962), see Taylor and Binfield (eds), *Who They Were*, 47-48; D. Densil Morgan, *Torri'r Seiliau Sicr: Detholiad o Ysgrifau J. E. Daniel* (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1993); E. D. Jones and Brinley F. Roberts (eds), *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig, 1951-1970* (London: Cymmrodorion, 1997), 21.

73 The quotation belongs to D. Densil Morgan in the article on Daniel in Taylor and Binfield (eds), *Who They Were*, 47.

Idealism with Socialism, the Labour Party and the development of a Social Gospel.⁷⁴ Daniel, however, ploughed his own furrow and he joined the Welsh Nationalist Party in February 1928 (almost three years after it was first established).⁷⁵

Initially, Daniel appeared to see no need to justify his nationalism along theological lines, a rather anomalous point considering his role as a professional theologian and his natural penchant for religious ideas. As one of the primary spokesmen for the Welsh Nationalist Party, he had advocated Wales's neutrality in the Second World War, while he had made all too accommodating statements regarding Franco's Spain – two points which would haunt the Nationalist movement for at least half a century. Indeed, he believed that Hitler was not the real threat to world peace. That place was taken by Soviet Russia. "Whatever is the enmity between Fascism and Democracy, it becomes friendship in the face of the great enemy, Communism," he wrote, continuing in what is, with hindsight, a more troubling vein: "That is the lesson Hitler is trying to teach Europe, but that France will not accept."⁷⁶

Nevertheless, Daniel concluded that it was liberalism and Idealism which had led directly to Fascist and Nazist ideology. The unambiguous inheritance of the Renaissance, they had given rise to man *emancipatus a Deo*, human beings who refused to recognise any external authority. The doctrine of human creation in God's image had given way to "accidental and impersonal evolution". Given this, Daniel claimed, it was hardly surprising that Fascism and Nazism had developed based on the corrupt and loathsome idea that some nations are more important and "pure" than others, while Communism had developed a similar idea based on social class which distinguished the proletariat from the bourgeoisie and made a value-judgement on the distinction.⁷⁷

For Daniel, this was a perverse understanding of the nation and, being a theologian of the Word, he based his theological justification of the nation on a verse from scripture: Acts 17:26. In the Welsh, it read: "Ac efe a wnaeth o un gwaed bob cenedl o ddynion", literally "And he created from one blood all nations of men." Daniel claimed that, biblically, a person was not an individual, "the self-sufficient man who does not essentially depend on any relationship that may exist between himself and his fellow men or his relationship with God." Instead he was a social being, created in the image of the Trinitarian God. The "nation", then, was a divinely ordained social relationship: "since

74 To all intents and purposes this began with Daniel's review of Miall Edwards's *Bannau'r Ffydd*, "Diwinyddiaeth Cymru", in *Yr Efrwydd* vol VI, no. 5 (February 1930), 118-122; vol. VI, no. 7 (April 1930), 173-175; vol. VI, no. 8 (May 1930), 197-203. See also D. Densil Morgan, *Torri'r Seiliau Sicr*, 111-117.

75 See D. Densil Morgan, "The Early reception of Karl Barth's Theology in Britain: A Supplementary View", in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54/4 (2001), 504-527.

76 See Pope, *Seeking God's Kingdom, passim*.

77 D. Densil Morgan, *Torri'r Seiliau Sicr*, 47.

God created the nations, the Christian has no right to wish to see the nation wiped out.⁷⁸ The problem arises, however, when the nation refuses to recognise its divine election and hence its dependence on God's grace, emphasising instead its own importance over and above other nations. Daniel believed that the nation, though part of God's will in creation, was always subordinate to God. The nation can never be sovereign because that was a position that only God can occupy:

He made every nation of one blood. That puts an end to any Christian attempt to set the nation in place of God . . . He made every nation from one blood . . . That puts an end to any idea of Herenvolk or "lesser breeds without the law" . . . He made every nation of one blood. It is not God's will that humanity should be uniform and unvaried . . . One humanity in many nations.⁷⁹

Daniel never contributed any systematic or sustained study of theology or of national identity.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, he eruditely set forth the germ of an idea where the nation was to be seen as God's gift, but a gift that was never to usurp the rightful place of the giver and become an idol. The former gives the nation its proper place in the attention of human beings. The latter idea leads to its demonisation and to heinous human action of the kind seen in Nazi Germany and subsequently in the Balkans and in Rwanda and in other places. A proper sense of the nation requires the prior acceptance that God alone is sovereign. As a result, Daniel was unable to compromise with the prevailing liberalism. What was needed was revelation, the salvation of humankind from sin in Christ which at one and the same time would deal with human generality and specificity as it draws humanity together in a redeemed creation and calls on all peoples to be obedient within their own context to the divine will.

(iv) *R. Tudur Jones*

It was Daniel's brightest student, Robert Tudur Jones,⁸¹ who gave voice more clearly to these ideas. Like his mentor, Tudur Jones had studied at Oxford (though unlike Daniel he had spent six years studying in Bangor before this) with a year abroad, though in his case it was at the Protestant Faculty at Strasbourg. In time he became Wales's foremost theologian and Church historian. He spent his career as a tutor and then principal at Bala-Bangor

78 Hywel Davies, *The Welsh Nationalist Party*, 112.

79 J. E. Daniel, "Y Syniad Seciwlar am Ddyn", in *Cynllun a Sail: Anerchiadau Urdd y Deyrnas* (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1946), 12-20; D. Densil Morgan, *Torri'r Seiliau Sicr*, 159-165.

80 Quoted in Llywelyn, *Sacred Place, Chosen People*, 57.

81 J. E. Daniel, "Gwaed y Teulu", in S. B. Jones and E. Lewis Evans (eds), *Sylfeini Heddwch: Pregethau, Gweddïau a Barddoniaeth II* (Swansea: Cymdeithas Heddwch yr Annibynwyr Cymraeg, 1944), 11-15 [13-14]; D. Densil Morgan, *Torri'r Seiliau Sicr*, 166-170 [168-169].

theological college and a substantial list of publications came from his pen over the years. Alongside this and his support for the Welsh language he also undertook the Vice Presidency of Plaid Cymru and stood as a parliamentary candidate for Anglesey in the 1959 and 1964 elections. He gave expression to his view of nationalism in his book *The Desire of Nations* published in 1974.

Perhaps in order to avoid any pseudo-theological justification for national excess – as seen for example in Nazi Germany or in the justification of Apartheid in South Africa – Tudur Jones emphasised that the “nation” was not part of God’s order in creation. Indeed, for him, the nation was not even God’s gift. Instead it was an aspect of the created order instituted by human beings. “God did not create nations. God created man and man formed nations,” he wrote. The former view runs the risk of divinizing the nation and thus, as Daniel had argued, making an idol of it.⁸² As a result, when each nation is rightly established as part of human activity under God it also glorifies God and enriches the other nations. Thus, while nationality belongs to human, creaturely life, the maintenance of nationhood is the way to work out obedience to God’s will.⁸³ Consequently, fidelity to the nation was an aspect of the covenantal relationship which exists between God and human beings. This understanding of nationalism is not governed by political concerns, nor does it concentrate on selfish achievement to the detriment of others. Rather it is motivated by an understanding of God’s sovereignty over all aspects of life and by the recognition that all aspects of life are meant to glorify God.⁸⁴ In order to glorify God, the nation must be subservient to the Lordship of Christ. “And the best of all ways to foster the spirit of responsibility is to proclaim in time and out of time, the Lordship of Christ, and what that means for us . . . We are responsible to God for this nation . . . Self-government for Wales is not a convenient policy. It is rather the next step in Wales’s growth towards maturity before the King of Kings.”⁸⁵

Conclusions: Wales and the World

In a context in which nationalism is often derided as a dangerous concept, what is the legacy left by these four Welsh Nonconformists?

-
- 82 He did publish a short book, in English, on Nationalism entitled, *Welsh Nationalism: What it Stands For* (London: Foyle’s Welsh Co., n.d. [1937]).
- 83 For R. Tudur Jones (1921-1998), see Taylor and Binfield (eds), *Who They Were*, 120-121; Robert Pope, “R. Tudur Jones 1921-1998: Congregational Minister, Church Historian, and Welsh Nationalist”, in *The Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society* vol. 6, no. 7 (December 2000), 529-541; *idem*, “A Giant of Welsh Protestantism”: R. Tudur Jones (1921-1998) and Congregationalism in Wales”, in *International Congregational Journal* vol. 3.1 (February 2003), 13-35.
- 84 R. Tudur Jones, “Christian Nationalism”, in P. H. Ballard and D. H. Jones (eds), *This Land and People: A Symposium on Christian and Welsh National Identity* (Cardiff: Collegiate Centre of Theology, 1975), 75; see also Llywelyn, *Sacred Place, Chosen People*, 61-62.
- 85 Tudur Jones, *The Desire of Nations*, 180-1.

The primary claim which lies behind the work of all four men is that there is a close association between the concept of nationalism and human morality rather than nationalism as an expression of God's particular favour towards a special people. In the years following the Second World War, such an idea was given theological treatment by Karl Barth. Partly as a response to the European experience under Nazi oppression, Barth implicitly located the issue of nationalism within the field of ethics. He argued that ethics concerned human freedom and that Christian ethics concerned the freedom to respond to God within the creation. Within the creation, human beings live this freedom in relationships which entail responsibilities. These included the relationship between men and women, parents and children and also what he called "near and distant neighbours".⁸⁶ Those who were "distant" included the whole human race; those who were "near" concerned those who share a common history, a land and a language. As a result his attitude to the nation ensured that it was a "fact" to be dealt with rather than a "necessity" to be divinized or idolised.⁸⁷ Like the relationships between men and women, this is a "natural creaturely relationship" and thus one of the "relationships in which it is essential for every man to exist as man."⁸⁸ Yet as "man" he also has a relationship with those "distant neighbours" which, when true to the divine command, means that they cannot be completely neglected even in favour of the relationship with the "near neighbour". What Barth's work intended to show, more than anything else, is that a correct *theology* – the understanding of human responsibility under the command of God – was the only thing that would safeguard people from making an idol of the nation and thus causing trouble and tribulation to other nations and peoples on the earth.

In other words, national differences, both cultural and linguistic, simply cannot be swept aside and the Christian duty is to deal with them responsibly. These four Welsh Nonconformists were, with certain qualifications, trying to articulate their Christian responsibility within the context of a particular nation. Despite an occasional tendency to overplay their rhetoric – something particularly true of Michael D. Jones – none of them was narrowly partisan.

86 Tudur Jones found a parallel to this kind of Christian approach to politics in general and nationalism in particular in the work of the nineteenth century Dutch Calvinist minister, reformer and politician, Abraham Kuyper. See R. Tudur Jones, "Abraham Kuyper", in Noel A. Gibbard (ed.), *Ysgrifau Divinyddol 2* (Bridgend: Evangelical Press of Wales, 1988), 105-22; also "The Christian Doctrine of the State", in *The Congregational Quarterly* vol. XXXI, no. 4 (October 1953), 314-21. One commentator has suggested that Tudur Jones owed much of his mature thinking to Kuyper and his school, and to the Princeton tradition in the U.S.A. See R. M. Jones, "R. Tudur Jones fel llenor a newyddiadurwr", in *Cristion* 83 (1997), 15.

87 R. Tudur Jones, "Crist: Gobaith Cenedl", in Dewi Eirug Davies (ed.), *Gwinllan a Roddwyd* (Llandybïe: C. Davies, 1972), 110; see also Llywelyn, *Sacred Place, Chosen People*, 63.

88 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/4 The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 285.

They had all studied in England; Michael D. Jones had lived in America; Daniel and Tudur Jones had studied in continental Europe, and Miall Edwards was a frequent visitor to international ecumenical conferences during the 1920s. Wales was, understandably, their primary concern. For they were motivated to think about the nation because of their understanding of the importance of the Welsh language which was, for them, the language of worship and prayer. But their vision was not concerned with Wales alone, but with Wales and the world. Their conclusions were never intended for application only to the Welsh. Instead, they sought for Wales what all nations rightly should enjoy while they sought nothing which would mean that any other nation should suffer as a result.⁸⁹

Important as the nation is, these men knew also that, under God's creating and redeeming work, human beings begin not with the specific context in which they find themselves but with their common humanity. In other words, a theological view of nationhood has to recognise that God created men and women and the object of salvation, which is the heart of the gospel, is *humanity*, not any particular nation or peoples but men and women in general. Consequently, a nation can never be true to its vocation unless it first of all understands the importance of the world and thus the rights and privileges of all people. The world can never exist for the nation; rather the nation exists for the world. Such a conviction, as expressed by these Nonconformists, arose from theological considerations and ensures that the excesses of nationalism, of which we are only too aware, can be avoided.

However, with the possible exception of R. Tudur Jones, these men wrote in a time when it would have been inconceivable that Nonconformity would be abandoned wholesale by the Welsh people. They lived and worked at a time when Welsh identity had to be fought for and thus it became easily allied with a Welsh Nonconformity whose numerical strength obscured the fact that it had been a persecuted group. Both in its identity and in its religion, there was a seachange during the last quarter of the twentieth century resulting in a modern Wales which bears little resemblance to the historical picture which emerges in the work of these men. In the past, identity was seen as being under constant threat partly because there were no political institutions in Wales and the Nonconformists, themselves survivors, became the saviours and guardians of the language and culture. Today, Wales has its Assembly as well as the highest number of Welsh-speakers for a century (7.5% speak Welsh and a further 7.5% claim to understand it according to the most recent Census). Nevertheless, there has been no revival in chapel attendance and religious observance (despite 72% of the population claiming to be Christian in the same Census). Indeed, one historian has noted that "By 1979 Nonconformist Wales was dying

89 D. Denis Morgan, "Basel, Bangor a Dyffryn Clwyd: Mater y Genedl yng Ngwaith Karl Barth ac Eraill", in Gareth Lloyd Jones (ed.), *Cenadwri a Chyfamod: Cyfrol Deyrnged i'r Athro Gwilym H. Jones* (Denbigh: Gwasg Gee, 1995), 153.

a lingering death,"⁹⁰ while another Nonconformist leader claimed that, by 2002, Welsh Nonconformity was in "terminal decline".⁹¹ Welsh identity is now stronger than at any time since the Act of Union of 1536, but it is no longer a specifically *Christian* identity; it is, at best, multi-cultural and, more likely, secular. Glanmor Williams commented that by the 1990s: "For the first time since the sixth or seventh century when the Welsh could be said to have come into existence as a separate people, being a Christian is not, for the majority of them, an essential part of being Welsh."⁹²

Given this, and that at the most recent elections for the Assembly in May 2007, the Welsh Nationalists, in the shape of Plaid Cymru, became the second strongest party in the chamber leading, eventually, to them entering into an agreement with the Welsh Labour Party to form an Assembly Government, an overview of national consciousness, and a theological critique of it, is perhaps more necessary than ever in order to ensure that this new, politically identifiable Wales does not descend into an idolised and sinister form of nationalism. Rather than cause a divinisation of the nation, a properly theological view of the nation warns against nationalistic excess. There are few signs that Welsh nationalism seeks to take such an insidious path. Nevertheless, in a context in which the generally accepted existence of a transcendental criterion by which all human action – individual, social and national – can be judged has been swept aside, a reminder that both the Welsh and other nations exist only in a reality which is penultimate could be a timely one. These Nonconformists, in the subtlety of their argument, provide as good a view as any of the way in which Christians have to deal with the existence of the nation as a fact of life, both their own nation and other nations to which they do not belong. As a result, they saw too that the nation can never be allowed to act oppressively or destructively towards other nations because their presence too is a fact of life.

However, perhaps more significant than Wales's new political identity is Wales's renewed cultural contribution on the world stage. The popularity of rock bands such as Catatonia and the Stereophonics, singers such as Bryn

90 Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/4*, 285.

91 Their understanding is summed up in a famous address by Emrys ap Iwan to the youth of Wales: "Remember first of all that you are *men*, of the same blood as the English, the Boers, the Kaffirs and the Chinese; therefore, be prepared to grant them the privileges that you wish for yourselves. Remember in the second place, that you are a nation by God's ordinance; therefore do what you can to keep the nation inviolate, by nurturing its language and every other valuable thing that belongs to it. If you are unfaithful to your country and language, how can you expect to be faithful to God and to humanity?" Tudur Jones, *The Desire of Nations*, 181-2; R. Ambrose Jones, *Homiliau* (Denbigh: Gee and Son, 1907), 52-3.

92 D. Densil Morgan, *The Span of the Cross: Christian Religion and Society in Wales, 1914-2000*

Terfel and Katherine Jenkins, and actors such as Ioan Gruffudd, Rhys Ifans and Matthew Rhys not only suggests that there remain areas in which Wales holds its own on the world stage alongside larger and stronger nations but it has led also to the claim, at the end of the twentieth century, that to be Welsh is now to be *trendy*. By that time, it was, apparently, “Cool Cymru” which took its place on the world stage. And that is certainly something which has never happened before.

ROBERT POPE

WHY DID THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH FAIL?

I

THE ORIGINS OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

The United Reformed Church was created in 1972 by a union of Congregational and Presbyterian churches. I have been a minister of the Church for all but three years of its life. During this time the context of my ministry has been uninterrupted decline. Whether we consider the dream it embodied, its numerical strength, or its identity and vitality, the failure of the United Reformed Church is stark and unmistakable. Born in illusion, without real purpose or coherence, it has declined to the point where its future is, at best, problematic. This failure can be attributed partly to the general process of secularization but also to factors specific to the URC – the disastrous collapse of its ecumenical dream almost at the moment of its birth, its theological poverty, and its failure to find any significant motivating purpose. In a series of papers, of which this is the first, I shall seek to explain the failure and ask what future there is for the United Reformed Church.

Secularization and the end of Christendom

For both Congregational and Presbyterian Churches the context of ministry in the twentieth century was a society increasingly influenced by a process of secularization. Secularization theory is one of the classic meta-narratives of the sociology of religion and originates with one of the founding fathers of sociology, Max Weber, and his interpretation of modernity. Its meaning was well expressed by Bryan Wilson who defined secularization as a process by which “Religion – seen as a way of thinking, as the performance of particular practices, and as the institutionalisation and organization of these patterns of thought and action – has lost influence . . . in western societies.”¹

The concept has been criticised for postulating an irreversible religious decline as part of the inevitable progress of history. Peter Berger, one of its leading proponents, has recanted and now asserts that “the assumption we live in a secularised world is false.”² Harvey Cox now calls secularization “the myth of the Twentieth Century.”³ Others would see it as a European phenomenon not replicated elsewhere. Grace Davie, for example, argues that far from the undoubted secularization of Europe being typical it is in fact exceptional.⁴ “Secularisation is essentially a European phenomenon and is extrinsic rather than intrinsic to the modernising process per se.”⁵ Even in

1 Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1969), 11.

2 Peter Berger, *The Desecularization of the World*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 2.

3 Harvey Cox “The Myth of the Twentieth Century”, in G. Baum *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), 135.

4 Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case*, (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 2002).

5 *Ibid.*, 161.

Britain some commentators, such as Christopher Partridge, are now arguing that what is taking place is not secularization but the re-sacralization of society:⁶ we are witnessing a tectonic shift in the sacred landscape in which Christianity is replaced by spirituality.

Secularization theory certainly needs to be treated with caution. Secularization has not progressed smoothly, homogeneously, or continuously in all societies. Stark and Bainbridge may be right in arguing that it is a self-limiting process.⁶ It may turn out that in Africa, for example, secularization is not the inevitable consequence of industrialization. As Daniel Hervieu-Leger has argued, the decline of religious institutions is not to be equated with the renunciation of belief: "Secularization of belief is not the end of belief but the movement by which elements of belief break free of the structures prescribed by religious institutions."⁸ There is certainly an increase in alternative spiritualities in Britain as elsewhere. The fact that around 20% of the population of Western countries say that they believe in reincarnation is, as Tony Walters argues, a sign of a substantial change "since the middle of the twentieth century when British surveys found figures of 4 and 5 percent."⁹ None the less the reality in all western societies has been the displacement of religious institutions from cultural dominance and an undermining of the Christian meta-narrative. According to the 1982 edition of the *World Christian Encyclopaedia*, "White westerners cease to be practising Christians at the rate of 7,600 a day."¹⁰ Today Christianity is marginal to British society and its beliefs alien and implausible. The failure of the United Reformed Church is inexplicable outside this context.

The starting point and rate of church decline in the nineteenth century is uncertain.¹¹ Nineteenth-century attendance figures pose special problems because the methods of data collection do not match present standards of reliability. Of all the denominations the Methodists were the only ones to keep membership figures throughout the century and their membership peaked in 1841, reviving with the religious revival of the 1850s. From 1886 they went into continuous decline.¹² Other churches' statistics are less reliable and the patterns not necessarily identical. However, relative to the growing population, general Free Church decline seems to have begun in the 1880s – although this

6 Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol 1, (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 2005).

7 R Stark and W Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

8 D. Hervieu-Leger, "Limit of the notion of secularization," in Linda Woodhead (ed), *Peter Berger and the study of Religion*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 119.

9 Tony Walter, "Reincarnation, Modernity and Identity", *Sociology* 35, 21.

10 David Barrett (ed), *World Christian Encyclopaedia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.

11 M. Watts, *Why Did the English Stop Going to Church?* (London: Dr Williams's Trust, 1995).

12 *Ibid.*, p 8.

was little noticed until the absolute membership began to fall. Callum Brown suggests that the peak year for Congregationalists as a proportion of the total population was 1863¹³ (considerably earlier than the Church of England which peaked in 1904). Tudur Jones, in his history of Congregationalism, headed the chapter on 1890-1930 "The Beginning of Sorrows."¹⁴

There are a variety of explanations for this decline. One of the more recent is given by Michael Watts who in *Why Did the English Stop Going to Church*¹⁵ argues that the high rates of Church going in the nineteenth century were the results of the fear of hell inculcated by the Evangelical Revival. Watts carefully examines the conversion experiences of 670 Nonconformists from the period 1790 to 1850 and finds the major factor "that predisposed men and women to respond to the Evangelical Message of the Methodists and Dissenters was fear: fear of death, fear of judgement, fear above all of eternal torment in the fires of hell."¹⁶ By the mid-nineteenth century however there was the beginning of a liberal reinterpretation of Christianity in a more humanitarian form. "The response of English Christians to the challenges of the late nineteenth century was enlightened, liberal and humane. And yet it contained within it the seeds of its own destruction . . . Liberal Christianity did not fill the churches, it helped to empty them."¹⁷ By jettisoning eternal punishment Christianity lost its winning card.

Watts may be correct in identifying the fear of hell as central to the success of the Evangelical Revival. Perceptive evangelicals like William Booth knew that "nothing moves people" like terror. "They must have hell-fire flashed before their faces or they will not move."¹⁸ But in down-playing hell the churches were responding to a change in culture not, as Watts argues, causing it.

Fear of hell is only an effective evangelism strategy as long as it is plausible. As the nineteenth century developed people began to question whether hell existed and to see the doctrine of eternal damnation as immoral. As John Kent says: "The movement which shuddered at the condition of life in eighteenth-century prisons and rejected altogether the use of torture as punishment was unlikely to tolerate the theological claim that finite human sin both deserved and received everlasting retribution at the hands of an angry God".¹⁹

The failure of the churches to frighten people into faith was not due to liberal Christians gratuitously abandoning their most effective evangelistic strategy but because the terror of hell was increasingly perceived as

13 Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge 2001), 163.

14 R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England*, (London: Independent Press, 1962), 314.

15 Watts, *op.cit.*, 8.

16 Watts, 7.

17 Watts, 11.

18 F St G. de L Booth-Tucker, *Catherine Booth* (London: Salvationist Publishing & Supplies, 1924), 116.

19 J Kent, *Holding the Fort*, (London: Epworth Press, 1978), 183.

implausible and immoral. Susan Budd's analysis of the experiences of 150 secularists, who rejected Christianity between 1850 and 1950, found that the most common reason given was that the churches were morally wrong.²⁰ Perceptive evangelicals, as much as liberals, found themselves moderating their emphasis in recognition of the changing intellectual climate. An evangelist like Moody, who would certainly have preached hell straight if it would have worked, in fact made only rare references to the cruder aspects of the doctrine. "Moody differed from his predecessors in as much as he talked much more than they did about heaven; he felt his ways towards a new synthesis of the traditional ideas whose temporary success tell us something about the state of English popular culture in the last quarter of the nineteenth century."²¹ Attempts to frighten people into faith by threats of personal torment or manipulating their anxieties over the safety of their children were no longer successful evangelistic strategies.

Rather than seek an explanation for church decline in terms of the humanitarian nature of liberal theology we need to seek the cause in the crisis of belief which in the later nineteenth century undermined Christian theology. The fact that church decline began within a generation of Darwin's *Origin of Species* is no coincidence. Quoting a Harrow schoolboy who in the early 1880s announced, "Darwin has disproved the Bible"²², Owen Chadwick comments, "This is bringing us near the heart of the problem over secularization. When we come down to the axioms which intelligent schoolboys of fourteen years learn from less intelligent schoolboys of fifteen years, we come near to the point where the cloudy apprehensions of what is known as intellectual history . . . can be shown to affect the attitudes of a whole society."²³

The intellectual origins of this profound change were not confined to the impact of science on faith, however, nor did they originate with it. The effect of historical criticism was also deeply important. From the publication of Strauss's *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* in 1835 the historicity of the Gospels was in question. With this went a great deal else. As Troeltsch put it: "Once the historical method is applied to biblical science and church history, it is a leaven that alters everything and, finally, bursts apart the entire structure of theological methods employed until the present."²⁴

With remarkable rapidity Christianity lost its place in English intellectual life. Douglas John Hall graphically describes this change as "The End of Christendom."²⁵ Christian churches were no longer central to the dominant

20 S Budd, *Varieties of Unbelief*, (London: Heinemann 1977), 106.

21 Kent, 187.

22 O. Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 164.

23 *Ibid.*, 164.

24 E. Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 2, (Tübingen, 1913), 730.

25 Douglas John Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*, (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 1.

culture and increasingly people no longer understood their lives by reference to the Christian meta-narrative. By the 1920s, as Adrian Hastings recognises, the principal intellectual orthodoxy in England was agnosticism. "The period of our consideration [1920-1990] does not witness a slow crumbling intellectually of religious belief; rather does it start with an emphatic presupposition of disbelief . . . Religious thinking was more and more simply abandoned among the wise as essentially primitive and, in the modern world, redundant."²⁶

This did not extinguish immediately the influence of Christian ideas. Jeffrey Cox's work on Lambeth suggests that they had a hold on working-class oral culture (especially in terms of morality and world view) well into the nineteen thirties.²⁷ In a different social stratum Clement Attlee said he subscribed "to the ethics of Christianity. Can't believe the mumbo-jumbo."²⁸ But the startling fact is the rapidity with which Christianity lost its hold on intellectual life. As far back as May 1909 when C.F.G. Masterman published his *The Condition of England* he observed that the middle class was "losing its religion . . . slowly or suddenly discovering that it no longer believes in the existence of the God of its fathers or in life beyond the grave."²⁹ Winston Churchill, as ever, put it rather splendidly, "I believe that death is the end . . . when it comes to dying I shall not complain. I shall not miaow."³⁰

With traditional faith undermined church decline began. Congregationalism reached a membership peak in 1915 and then, between 1916 and 1927 lost nearly 10,000 members in England.³¹ In 1935 there were 439, 448 Congregational members in England and Wales. By 1965 the number had declined to 198,488.³² Presbyterian attendances were continually boosted by immigration and did not follow such a simple curve. From its First World War peak the number of communicants fell slowly until the Second World War. Membership increased between 1947 and 1949 and again between 1955 and 1961. The relevant factor here is that the number of English residents born in Scotland increased from 366,000 in 1931 to 654,000 in 1960. After that, decline set in rapidly, with communicants falling from 71,100 in 1961 to 59, 573 in 1970.³³

If we take the broader picture in the period 1947-1972 we find that the Presbyterian Church of England lost twenty-nine per cent of its membership

26 A. Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1990*, (London: SCM Press, 1991), 221-2.

27 J. Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870-1930*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

28 K. Harris, *Attlee*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1993), 2-3.

29 C.F.G. Masterman, *The Condition of England*, (London: Eyre Methuen, 1909), 17.

30 Mark Pottle (ed), *Daring to Hope*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2000), 298.

31 David M. Thompson, *The Decline of Congregationalism in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Congregational Memorial Hall Trust, 2002), 5.

32 Taken from *Congregational Yearbooks*, London.

33 R. Currie, A. Gilbert and L. Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 135.

and the Congregationalists thirty-six per cent.³⁴ In fact the reality of decline was significantly worse than these figures indicate. Before the First World War the number worshipping at Congregational churches was generally two or three times greater than the church membership, whereas today it is rarely more than half of the membership. At the heart of this was secularization – a decline in the social significance of religious institutions and belief caused, at least in its first phase, by the intellectual collapse of Christian faith.

Special factors in Congregational and Presbyterian decline

In 1851 Congregationalists and Presbyterians constituted 4.23% of the total population while in 1989 0.29% attended the URC – a fourteen-fold decline. This compares with an eight-fold decline among Methodists, a six-fold decline among Baptists, and a seven-fold decline among Anglicans.³⁵ This differential suggests that there was something *sui generis* to Reformed decline. In part the Free Churches had fewer financial resources and their congregations were often strong in the declining industrial heartlands from which population was moving away. “The neglected Bethels of South Wales and the crumbling chapels of Co. Durham”, writes Ross McKibbin, “were poignant souvenirs of these regional catastrophes.”³⁶ But more fundamentally the question the Reformed Churches had to answer was: why should people choose to belong to them rather than the larger national church?

Historically Congregationalists believed that their church was the most faithful to the New Testament model. There were deep grievances against the dominant national church and fundamental objections to its theology. In 1833 Thomas Binney could declare, “The Church of England damns more souls than it saves.”³⁷ Similarly if you were a Presbyterian you believed the Presbyterian system to be superior to any other and saw a clear purpose in being the Scots church in England. All this was to change.

During the nineteenth century the distinct social identity of Nonconformity rapidly eroded. In 1828 the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts allowed Dissenters to accept public office without fear of prosecution. In the same year the foundation of University College London opened English higher education to them. By the 1860s the Church Rate was effectively obsolete. Socially too as a minority of Dissenters became increasingly prosperous and upwardly mobile some felt the temptation to leave their chapels for the parish church. “It would be difficult to find a family who, for three generations, have kept their carriages and continued Dissenters,” wrote a contributor to the *Monthly Magazine* in

34 David Cornick, *Under God's Good Hand: a history of the traditions which have come together in the United Reformed Church*, (London: United Reformed Church, 1998), 66.

35 Watts, *Why Did The English Stop Going to Church*, 4.

36 R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 282.

37 R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism In England 1662-1962*, (London: Independent Press, 1962), 215.

1798.³⁸ When the children of Dissenters went to university they frequently came back Anglicans.³⁹ As politics became more class-based and secular the old issues on which the nineteenth-century Nonconformist Conscience centred were now politically tangential and Nonconformists increasingly diverse in their political allegiances. By 1918 the Nonconformist Conscience was dead. By this time Nonconformists were no longer a separate community and the iniquity of an established church seemed less pressing when many people were unsure whether to belong to a church at all.

Congregational identity crumbled. One sign of this was the number of those who grew up in Congregational churches but no longer felt the need to stay within them. Daniel Jenkins even suggests that there were more leaders of thought and action who were products of Congregational homes but had left the church than the denomination itself possessed.⁴⁰ Michael Ramsey, growing up at Emmanuel Congregational Church in Cambridge, was one of many who made the move into the Church of England. Others went in other directions. Leyton Richards ended up worshipping with the Quakers, although he remained on the roll of Congregational ministers. W.E. Orchard (trained for the Presbyterian ministry, but serving the Congregational King's Weigh House) did the unlikely thing by becoming a Roman Catholic. More significant was the stance of Martyn Lloyd Jones. Jones, who was not himself a Congregationalist, was minister of the Congregational Westminster Chapel and a leading evangelical. In October 1966 he urged his audience at the National Assembly of Evangelicals to leave their denominations and instead draw together with other evangelicals. This led to a horrified reaction from the evangelical Anglican John Stott who was chairing the meeting.⁴¹ The sense of being an Anglican was more important to Stott than being a Congregationalist was to Lloyd Jones. What is more Martyn Lloyd Jones could and did take Westminster Chapel out of the Congregational Union and remain its minister. Anglican evangelicals did not have a similar option.

A theological dead-end?

There were two major attempts to seek theological renewal. Significantly each was more influential in the first half of the century than in the second. As traditional Calvinism died, more than any other evangelical Dissenters the Congregationalists turned to theological liberalism. By the 1870s, as the Leicester Conference⁴² made clear, a new liberal generation was shaping the

38 Quoted Watts, *The Dissenters* vol. 2, 602.

39 For examples see Watts, *ibid.*

40 Daniel Jenkins, *Congregationalism: A Restatement*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), 37.

41 Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: A Global Ministry*, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 65-71.

42 M. Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004), 85-144.

churches with a theology resonating to the belief attributed to John Robinson in George Rawson's hymn that "there was yet more light and truth to break from God's holy word". This almost became Congregationalism's central principle. Intellectual substance was given to the new liberalism by the first Principal of Mansfield College, Andrew Fairbairn, "the father of Liberal Evangelicalism among Congregationalists."⁴³ After losing his early evangelical faith Fairbairn came back to faith through contact with German critical and philosophical scholarship. He came to believe that the new critical approach could uncover the real historical Jesus and through him the Fatherhood of God. He was appointed to Mansfield in 1885 and there mediated German liberalism into Congregationalism.

Into the post First World War world liberalism continued as the dominant theology in Congregationalism. No-one was more typical of this in the early twentieth century than W.B. Selbie, who became Principal of Mansfield College in 1909, and declared his commitment to "a free, progressive and undogmatic Christianity" linked to "an evangelical faith".⁴⁴ Selbie believed that "the task of the moment" was "to discover a modernist gospel, to preach the Christian message in terms which modern men can receive and understand, and yet retain all its saving and sanctifying power."⁴⁵ Other powerful liberals of this generation included Albert Peel (1887-1949) and C.J. Cadoux (1883-1947). For many this gave coherence to Congregationalism and seemed the way to give new meaning to the tradition. In the hands of someone like Charles Silvester Horne – preacher, liberal, radical MP – Cromwell, freedom and progress fused into what seemed a new Free Church destiny.

It was not as easy as it seemed. In the new class-based politics Nonconformity was increasingly out of place. Renewing Christian belief proved a far harder task than anyone imagined. Liberal belief often seemed more convincing to those instinctively within the faith than to those increasingly estranged from it. Congregationalist numbers fell from 453,138 in 1910 to 385,545 in 1946. At Mansfield College chapel Selbie might still draw the largest congregation in Oxford⁴⁶ but the numbers coming for training for the ministry were falling and as C.H. Dodd noted, "We don't seem to get the type of men offering for the ministry to which we were formerly accustomed."⁴⁷ One liberal group, gathered around Thomas Wigley, minister of Blackheath Congregational Church, drew severe criticism for the tentativeness of their beliefs. One joke going the rounds in the Student Christian Movement was "I like the Congregationalists. I don't believe much either". But whether this is applicable to the Blackheath Group or not (and they deserve reappraisal) it could not

43 Tudur Jones, *op.cit.*, 269.

44 W.B. Selbie, *Positive Protestantism* (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1926), 3.

45 *Congregational Quarterly* (1926), 359.

46 Elaine Kaye, *Mansfield College* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996,) 173.

47 *Ibid.*, 171.

fairly be brought against the leading Presbyterian liberal John Oman, who taught at Westminster College Cambridge from 1907 to 1935 and drew on the work of Schleiermacher to see religious truth in ordinary living. David Cornick sees in him the real “sinew and muscle” of liberalism.⁴⁸ None the less the undeniable fact was that liberalism was not halting the collapse of faith. Bernard Plowright recalled how liberalism had seemed at the turn of the century to be “something that would fill the churches and gain the sympathy of modern man” but by 1931 “all those hopes are sped and dead.”⁴⁹

Perhaps then it was liberal theology itself that was the problem? Would reversing it end the decline? An early critique of liberalism came from P.T. Forsyth (1848-1921) who is often seen as a precursor of Karl Barth. Forsyth grew up in liberalism and never entirely rejected its heritage but came to see it as sentimental and a cause of the church’s decline. In place of “the ill-founded sentiment which had sapped faith” there needed to be evangelisation based on God’s own action in revelation. The churches “must banish the amiable religiosity which had taken possession of them in the name of Christian love, and to restore some sense not only of love’s severity, but of the unsparing moral mordancy in the Cross and its judgement.”⁵⁰ Forsyth had little impact on the churches in his lifetime – although several attempts have been made to rediscover him.⁵¹ The problem was not simply that, as David Cornick points out, his writings were difficult⁵² or that, as Alan Sell acknowledges, he was “not a systematic exegete or historian of thought”.⁵³ More than that, for Forsyth the content never quite matches the rhetoric. He gives very few references and does not provide adequate evidence for his assertions. He delights in antitheses which often break down on examination. He caricatures opposing views. The often quoted phrase about Forsyth, “fireworks in a fog,” may be harsh but it helps explain why Forsyth remained the odd man out and had such a limited effect on the churches.

Much more influential was the reaction against liberalism signalled by a manifesto sent out to all Congregational ministers in 1939 drafted by Bernard Lord Manning, Nathaniel Micklem, and J.S. Whale. They asserted:

The depressing and alarming thing about our churches is not their tiny congregations, their social insignificance, their political impotence . . . If our churches are in peril, it is because they have forgotten who they are.⁵⁴

48 Cornick, *op.cit.*, 154.

49 B. Plowright, “The Misgivings of a Modernist”, *The Congregational Quarterly*, 1931, 291, quoted in Tudur Jones, *op.cit.*, 449-50.

50 P.T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, (London: Independent Press, 1907), 199.

51 See for example Trevor Hart (ed), *Justice the True and Only Mercy*, (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1995).

52 Cornick, *op.cit.*, 153.

53 Hart, *op.cit.*, 134.

54 N. Micklem, *The Box and the Puppets*, (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1957), 92-99.

The three of them together became known as the New Genevans (though Whale's debt to Calvin was greater than Micklem's) and they led the charge against what seemed to them the excesses of liberalism. "Theological liberalism had run to seed . . . I was quite certain that the religion being taught in our churches was a form of Christianity so watered down, that it could not be called the religion of the New Testament, and that it was no proclamation of the Gospel as our fathers and all previous generations knew it".⁵⁵

By contrast the New Genevans sought the distinctive nature of the church in Reformation tradition, emphasized the importance of the links between Congregationalism and the other Reformed Churches, stressed the dignity of the ministry and, in line with Calvin, saw synods as expressions of the communion of local churches with one another. As Clyde Binfield notes,⁵⁶ they had their own dialect: "Fathers and Brethren", "God's holy Purpose", "Our most holy religion."

The New Genevans were not as conservative as their rhetoric sometimes suggested. Whale may have said "If much of our modernism is true, then St Paul was a blockhead,"⁵⁷ but in later life he could say "I have more in common with Morna Hooker and John Robinson than I have with the British and Foreign Bible Society."⁵⁸ In the calmer reflection of age Micklem recognised that he was still both a liberal and an evangelical and avowed his debt to the liberalism of John Oman.⁵⁹ And there was nothing Old Genevan about their commitment to ecumenism. With their stress on the close relation between Congregationalism and the other Reformed Churches it was no surprise that they supported the move for Congregational-Presbyterian unity in 1933. "Personally," said Manning in that year, "I have no doubt that unity with the Presbyterians is the next step. Having no sort of doubt, whatever, I personally would pay almost any price to achieve that union."⁶⁰ But that was only the beginning. Micklem in particular saw Congregationalism as belonging within the Catholic tradition and looked for a wider unity. As far back as 1911 when drafting the covenant for the Free Church Fellowship at a conference at Mansfield he included the words:

Our desire is to cultivate a new spiritual fellowship and communion with all branches of the Catholic Church; our hope is of a Free Church so steeped in the spirit and the tradition of the entire Catholic Church as to be ready in due time for the reunion of Christendom.⁶¹

55 N. Micklem *The Religion of a Sceptic*, (London: Acton Society Trust, 1976), 53.

56 Clyde Binfield, "A Learned and Gifted Minister: John Seldon Whale", *The Journal of the United Reformed History Society* Vol. 6 No 2 May 1998, 115.

57 *Ibid.*, 116.

58 J.S. Whale, *Christian Reunion: Historic Divisions Reconsidered*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1971), 121.

59 Micklem *op.cit.*, 54.

60 B. Manning, *Essays in Orthodox Dissent* (London: Independent Press, 1939), 148.

61 D.J. Harris, *The Free Church Fellowship 1911-1965*, (n.d. priv., Royston).

The New Genevans took organizational form through the Church Order Group which continued until the 1960s and was to include a number of younger ministers such as John Huxtable, Daniel Jenkins and John Marsh. They were to provide much of the intellectual leadership for the next generation of Congregationalists and out of their ecclesiology came much of the impetus for the United Reformed Church.

Clearly their influence was considerable. Their conviction that public worship should be dignified and in order was, at least for a time, highly influential in the Church. It became more common for churches to have a chalice on the communion table and for ministers to wear cassock and gown. The hymnbook *Congregational Praise* published in 1951 reflected their strong commitment to a high musical standard in the tradition of the *English Hymnal's* belief that "good taste is a moral concern." The emphasis on synodical government, a high view of ministry, and a commitment to church unity made possible the creation of the United Reformed Church and justifies Tony Tucker judgement that "there is no doubt that Micklem's influence was decisive in preparing Congregationalists for the changes which led eventually to this union."⁶²

But if they were winning a battle were they fighting the right war? Their belief that a rediscovery of Genevan tradition would reinvigorate the Church proved to be illusory. If Manning had thought that the congregations drawn by liberals were tiny they began to look quite large in comparison with what came after. The New Genevans were mis-diagnosing the problem. It was not that liberals were failing to preach the gospel; it was that people increasingly were finding Christianity in any form implausible. In this dilemma the new Genevans were not much help. Significantly while Micklem and Whale might influence church leaders the most influential preacher for most lay Congregationalists was the liberal Methodist Leslie Weatherhead who was called to the City Temple in 1935. Weatherhead was not the intellectual equal of Micklem or Whale but he knew what the problem was. One young man, Ronald Ward, who went on to be a United Reformed Church minister, said, "For me LDW was the great liberator who set me free from fundamentalism once and for all. I was amazed and delighted to find a preacher who encouraged his congregations actually to think about the gospel".⁶³

It is even doubtful if the New Genevans were helpful in renewing a sense of identity. In the pews hardly anyone shared their highly technical interest in Reformed theology or found in it any sense of purpose for the church. At heart, like Reinhold Niebuhr in the United States, the New Genevans may have been closer to liberals than to conservative evangelicals but they blurred the appeal of Congregationalism as a liberal church. From now on most members, and many of their leaders, might be liberals but it was a kind of

62 Tony Tucker "Nathaniel Micklem and the Ecumenical Movement", *The Journal of the United Reformed History Society* Vol. 6 no 9 October 2001, 710.

63 Letter to Martin Camroux.

muted liberalism that became increasingly diffuse. Oddly for a movement that wanted to restore theology to the Church the New Genevans contributed to a situation in which it was increasingly hard to know what the Church's theology was, if any.

And was their passion for ordered worship any more helpful? No-one was more committed to such reform than Nathaniel Micklem. "He gave lectures on St Thomas Aquinas, encouraged students to attend courses by the Dominicans at Blackfriars, and threw himself into the liturgical movement. Why do all this and remain a Congregationalist?"⁶⁴ Mansfield College symbolised all this in its chapel. Here were early morning prayers in Latin, cassocks, stained glass windows of the saints and the only statue of Richard Hooker in Oxford. After this how easy would it be for graduating students to go back to the standard Nonconformist chapel? Increasing numbers in the Free Churches hardly knew why, except for accident of birth, they were there.

Evidence for the failure of the New Genevans was the amazing rapidity with which their influence collapsed. The 1950s have been viewed as a time of religious revival but, as S.J.D. Green has pointed out, this belief was a delusion.⁶⁵ It was in fact in the 1950s that the second and most destructive form of secularization really took hold. As Eric Hobsbawm put it in 2002, "The Fifties are the crucial decade. For the first time you could feel things changing, Suez and the coming of rock-and-roll divide twentieth-century British history."⁶⁶

Increasingly the traditional facade collapsed revealing a secular, consumerist, and individualistic culture in which the churches did not seem to belong. In the churches the liberal questions seemed pressing once more. When in 1963 John Robinson, the Bishop of Woolwich, published *Honest to God*, the response was incredible. In the *British Weekly* Erik Routley wrote "I can see no point at which [Robinson] comes within ten miles of heresy. But there is no paragraph here which does not demand revolution - the revolution of clear thinking, of shameless honesty".⁶⁷ As for the New Genevans with all their talk of "Fathers and Brethren" – how antiquated they now seemed. I entered Mansfield College to train for the ministry in 1969. I finished my training without reading a single work by a New Genevan – I cannot even remember any being recommended to me.

Congregationalism was now disintegrating. The decline was numerical, sociological and intellectual. The intellectual decline was shared in pew, pulpit and theological college. David Thompson has suggested that an underlying theological poverty in twentieth-century Congregationalism may have played a

64 Hastings, *op.cit.*

65 S.J.D. Green "Was there an English Religious Revival in the 1950s?", *The Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society* Vol. 7 no 9 November 2006, 517-538.

66 Quoted in Peter Hennessy, *Having it So Good: Britain in the Fifties*, (London: Allen Lane 2006), 491.

67 See *British Weekly*, 21 March and 16 May 1963.

part in its failure to meet the intellectual challenge as traditional faith dissolved.⁶⁸ He notes Kenneth Brown's observation that at a time when four-fifths of the population came from urban areas under half of Congregational ministers did so.⁶⁹

It is possible that the majority of ministers were theologically safe but unadventurous, preferring to emphasize familiar certainties than to engage with new questions and issues. In other words, ministers may have been theologically more conservative than at least a proportion of the more enquiring in their congregations, and this may have resulted in a gradual haemorrhaging of the intellectually aware.⁷⁰

Such a haemorrhage certainly occurred. Only rarely were the vital questions honesty faced and a good many ministers were either not capable of addressing them or else did not do so for fear of upsetting their congregations. Growing up in a small town Congregational church in Norfolk I can remember no occasion when the crisis of belief was helpfully addressed either from the pulpit or in discussion. Certainly the intellectual challenges facing the Christian faith were so severe that few clergy of any denomination could cope. But by the mid-twentieth century if you wanted ideas the English Reformed Churches were not good places in which to be. As Adrian Hastings comments: "When the *Congregational Quarterly* ceased publication in 1958, it was saying something about the near extinction of the old sort of reading public in that tradition."⁷¹ In the early 1960s, when I was developing my own theology, it may be significant that none of the theologians who influenced me were Congregationalists or Presbyterians. The fact that more were German or American than English suggests that this may have been a more sharply defined incidence of a pervasive English intellectual phenomenon – the inability to produce serious systematians. But as Alan Sell notes, "Undeniably the bulk of Nonconformist theological scholarship appeared during the first half of the twentieth century"⁷² – by the 1960s few Congregational or Presbyterian theologians were at the heart of scholarship.

A biting analysis of the desperate state of the Free Churches came in 1962 with Christopher Driver's *A Future for the Free Churches?* He argued that Free Church decline had now gone so far as to be irreversible. Had he not grown up in a Congregational Church he could not imagine that he would ever have

69 K.D. Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales 1800-1930*, (Oxford: Clarendon 1988), 38-49.

70 Thompson, *op. cit.*, 28.

71 Hastings, *op. cit.*, 466.

72 Alan Sell, "The Theological Contribution of Protestant Nonconformists" in A. Sell and D.W. Bebbington, *Protestant Nonconformity in the Twentieth Century*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003) 60.

joined one. In the public mind the Free Churches no longer stood for anything except “Bad architecture and good works”⁷³.

While the fundamental cause of Church decline was a secularization which all the denominations had to face, the fact that Congregational decline began earlier, proceeded faster, and involved a drift not simply to secularism but, among its most educated, to the Church of England, reflects the lack of self-belief within the denomination and its theological poverty. For the Presbyterians decline was less acute and there was at least one saving grace – the old card of Scots Church in England could still be played. At St Columba’s or St Ninian’s the Scottish country dancing went on. But as secularization took its effect everywhere this could hardly be enough. The Reformed Churches had reached a theological dead-end.

Creating the United Reformed Church

In all this reality of decline Driver could see at least one solid gain – the ecumenical movement. That must be the way forward. “There is no future for the Free Churches, as they are, short of reunion.”⁷⁴ This was the conclusion to which many were coming. Here at least the New Genevan vision seemed to be offering renewal to the Church.

From the outset ecumenism was about a strategy for evangelism. This was reflected in the World Student Christian Federation’s watchword “the evangelization of the world in this generation”. As Adrian Hastings notes the commitment to ecumenism grew out of “a remarkable, if fairly brief, flowering of evangelical missionary zeal.”⁷⁵ The ecumenical pioneers saw the missionary task as one that was now beyond the resources of any church working individually but which became possible if they all worked together. It cannot be a coincidence that this happened at a time when, in the western heartland of the church, Christianity was being socially and intellectually marginalized, when as A.E. Taylor astutely observed to the Anglo-Catholic Conference of 1920, “The fate of our Christianity is visibly hanging in the balance.”⁷⁶

The first responses of Congregationalists and Presbyterians to proposals for church union were sceptical. The Congregational Assembly of 1921 welcomed the Lambeth Conference’s appeal for unity but had no wish seriously to pursue it. As Tony Tucker observes, the problem was not simply Episcopal authority but the Congregational concept of the Church.⁷⁷ There was the place of creeds, the established nature of the Church of England and the autonomy of the local church. At this point Congregational self-belief was still strong enough, and decline had not advanced fast enough, for unity to seem necessary. Talks between Presbyterians and Congregationalists began in 1932 and continued

73 Christopher Driver, *A Future for the Free Churches*, (London: SCM Press, 1962) 18.

74 *ibid.*, 18.

75 Hastings, *op.cit.*, 87.

76 *Ibid.*, 221.

77 Tony Tucker, *Reformed Ministry*, (London: United Reformed Church, 2003), 27.

until the war, although by 1935 it had been decided that full union was impossible.

As church decline quickened so did the impetus towards unity. After the Second World War moves towards unity were resumed and a scheme of union was laid before the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches in 1947. This failed and in the 1950s the English Presbyterians were involved in conversations with the Church of England and the Church of Scotland over the possibility of introducing a modified form of episcopacy into both England and Scotland. When this was rejected by the Church of Scotland the English Presbyterians were left in confusion. Out of this came new discussions with the Congregationalists. The situation now seemed to point more clearly to ecumenism in England as the way ahead.

The Joint Committee of Congregationalists and Presbyterians met for the first time on New Year's Day 1964. A few months later the British Council of Churches challenged the British Churches to covenant for unity by Easter Day 1980. In the context of this commitment a scheme of union was produced in 1969 and in 1971 this received an eighty-nine per cent majority from the Congregationalists and a seventy-nine per cent majority from the Presbyterians. The new Church was formed on 5 October 1972. Five hundred and ninety seven Congregational churches (twenty six per cent) opted not to join the new church and two Presbyterian congregations opted out and petitioned to join the Church of Scotland.

In the debate in the House of Commons introducing the United Reformed Church Bill the Roman Catholic Norman St John Stevas declared, "In the ecumenical movement there is no loss but only gain. No one loses his own traditions; people add new perspectives to those traditions".⁷⁸ In fact there was real loss in the formation of the United Reformed Church. The creating of the Church led to a deep schism within the Congregational Church with eighteen per cent of Congregationalists staying outside the new church. This was a heavy price to pay.

There was also a loss in ecclesiastical diversity. In essence the United Reformed Church adopted a Presbyterian Church order. This was in line with many of the recent developments within Congregationalism which had been moving to a more connexional (if not fully Presbyterian) church order from the effective formation of the Congregational Union in 1833. But the URC inevitably reflected a further weakening of historic Congregationalism.

To the majority the cost was worth paying. Maybe not everyone would have gone as far as Manning in asserting that any price was worth paying but it was axiomatic that unity would lead to greater missionary effectiveness and there was a deep hope that the creation of the URC would break the ecumenical log jam and become a catalyst for a wider union. In his sermon in Westminster Abbey John Huxtable took as his text Ephesians 4.13: "until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God". As Tony Tucker

78 Quoted in Cornick, *op.cit.*, 178.

says, "It was a text for a grander theme than the union of two relatively small churches. The goal was nothing less than the visible unity of all God's people in one Church."⁷⁹ In his sermon Huxtable referred to his expectation that "the union of our two churches would be but the beginning of a larger coming together". During the service Cardinal John Heenan, Archbishop Michael Ramsey, and the Free Church Moderator Irvonwy Morgan, each greeted the Moderator of the General Assembly and pledged, "I give thanks for this union, and share your resolve to seek that wider unity which is Christ's will."⁸⁰ The Basis of Union of the new Church declared that it saw "its formation and growth as part of what God is doing to make his people one."⁸¹

The United Reformed Church was never about just the formation of a new Church – it was created in the belief that this was the solution to the churches' central dilemmas. Ecumenism was the key to successful mission. It seemed to be the new Church's last best hope. "It is our conviction", wrote Huxtable, "that unity and mission belong together and there is a real hindrance to mission in disunity. The word of reconciliation cannot be convincingly spoken by those who are manifestly unreconciled."⁸² Or as Colin Morris put it: "Would you buy hair-restorer from a bald headed man?"⁸³

This unity was not, it was believed, simply a device popular with church bureaucrats seeking a future for declining institutions. It was a movement of the spirit and was what ordinary Christians were demanding. "Most Christians simply do not see why the churches don't get on with it. Life is too urgent and important to bother with ecclesiastical niceties. The theologians and ecclesiastics cannot agree with that; but they had better not forget that while the top-brass debate this is the mood of the troops."⁸⁴ In particular, it was asserted, the demand for national unity was greatest in the Local Ecumenical Partnerships. There the need for unity was desperate because the local could not operate for long without the national. "If national communions do not unite as soon as possible the very ecumenical work at the grassroots will inevitably produce a condition of confused impotence."⁸⁵

Of course those who formed the United Reformed Church realised that the merger of two small churches would not of itself lead to a fundamental change in the missionary situation in England. Only a wider union could do that. But the creation of the URC would, it was hoped and believed, be a trigger point for such a move towards unity. There was little need to define a role or identity for the United Reformed Church because the Church would only be in existence for a short time.

MARTIN CAMROUX

79 Tucker, *op.cit.*, 97.

80 John Huxtable, *A New Hope For Christian Unity*, (Glasgow: Fount, 1977), 33.

81 United Reformed Church, *The Manual*, (London 1998), A1.

82 Huxtable, *op.cit.*, 52.

83 Colin Morris *What the Papers Didn't Say* (London: Epworth Press, 1971), 20.

84 Huxtable, *op.cit.*, 81.

85 John Huxtable, *Reform*, November 1972.

REVISITING THE WILSONS OF DERBYSHIRE: A NOTE

In 2001 Stephen Orchard wrote suggestively on the continuing connection of the two Thomas Wilsons, father and son, with Derbyshire.¹ What cemented that connection was business and Dissent. Dr Orchard's thesis needs some revision on three counts.

Dr. Orchard refers to John Wilson of Stenson, nephew of Thomas Wilson the elder (1731-1794); John (1763-1838) was a trustee of Brookside chapel, buried at Barrow, with a son William Wilson (b.1791), who was in business in Derby, and whose descendants include Dr Orchard.² Thomas Wilson certainly had a nephew, John Wilson of Stenson (1755-1835) who in later life attended the meeting house at Barrow. This John Wilson, however, died unmarried and, although he left his Derbyshire farm to a niece, almost all his surviving kin lived in London and the Home Counties.³ Wilson is a common name; here seem to be two men sharing name, place, generation, and faith, who in fact belong to different families. There may be a connexion, but it has yet to be found.

A similar confusion arises with the Bateman family, who were closely related to the Wilsons. Thomas Wilson the elder had a nephew, Stephen Wilson (1753-1813), whose son Daniel (1778-1858) became the famous Bishop of Calcutta and whose daughter Ann (1776-1884) Dr. Orchard marries off to William Bateman of Middleton-by-Youlgreave.⁴ In fact there are two Bateman families, both at that time largely Dissenting, who were connected to the Wilsons, but the William Bateman (1774-1850) who married Ann Wilson was a Londoner, goldsmith of Bunhill Fields and grandson of the celebrated Hester Bateman, "Queen of English silversmiths"; John Newton, slave captain turned Evangelical parson, officiated at their marriage.⁵

There was, however, another William Bateman (1787-1835), of Middleton Hall in the Peak District, whose Dissenting connections were impeccable. Samuel Morley (1806-1886), the manufacturer, philanthropist, and politician, married this William Bateman's niece, and this Bateman's aunt married the younger Thomas Wilson (1864-1843). Joshua Wilson (1795-1874), steward of Dissenting history and tradition, was thus this William Bateman's first

1 S.C.Orchard, "The Wilson Family and Derbyshire", *JURCHS*. Vol 6. No. 8. May 2001, 570-589.

2 *Ibid.*, 588, n.76.

3 J.Wilson, *Memoir of the Life and Character of Thomas Wilson Esq.*, (London, 1849), 20. I am grateful to John Wilson and Mrs Neville Bird for confirmation of genealogical details.

4 Orchard, *art.cit*; 582, n. 43, 583.

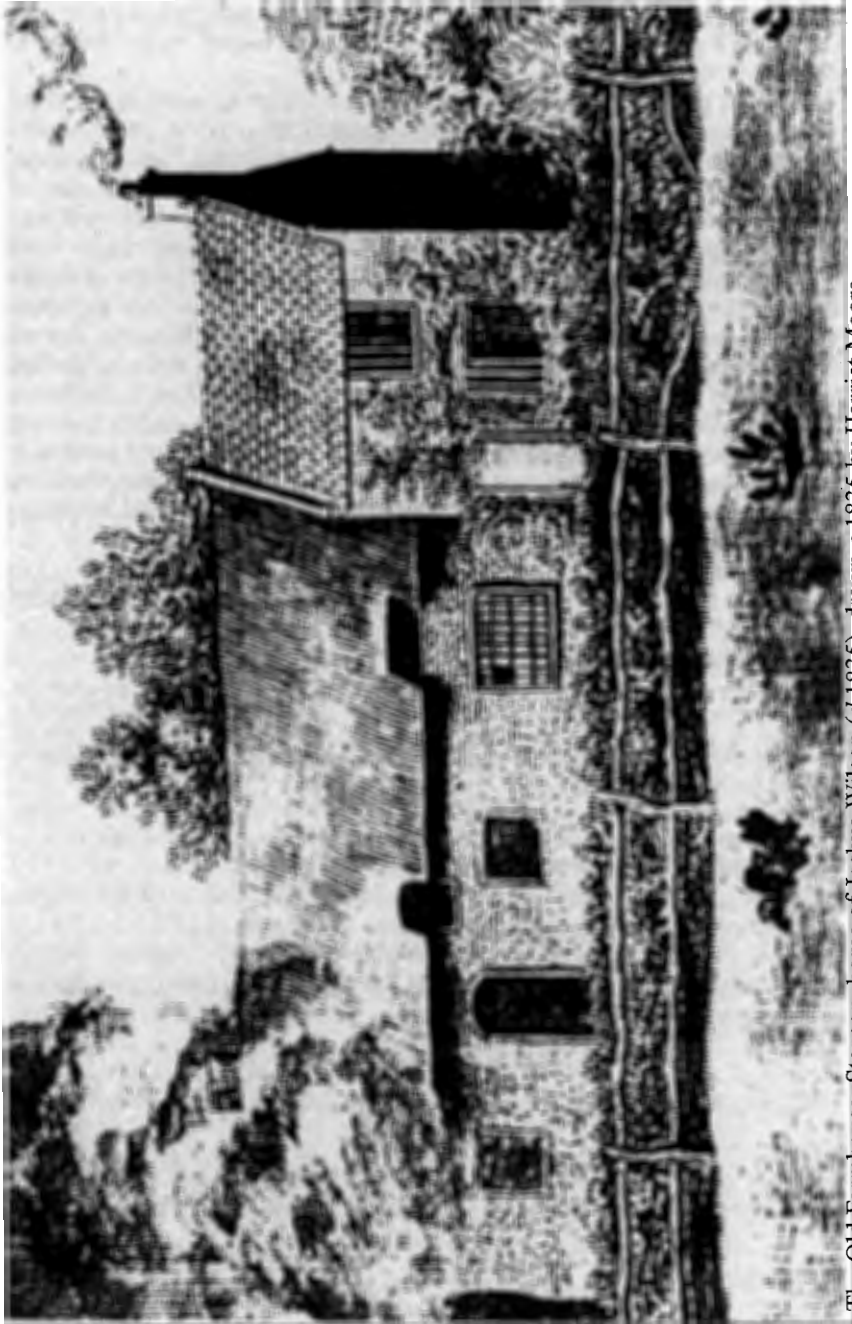
5 See D.S.Shure, *Hester Bateman, Queen of English Silversmiths*, (London, 1959); S. Wilson, "Private calendar 1795-1803", in private possession.

cousin.⁶ Bateman, like Wilson, is a common name; here too are two men sharing name, generation, and faith, who, though connected, in fact belong to different families.

My third point concerns another nephew – this time by marriage – of the elder Thomas Wilson. This was Ambrose Moore (1757-c.1799), who, suggests Dr. Orchard, “with his son [also Ambrose] ran the Derby firm of Wilson, Moore and Robinson, silk throwsters.”⁷ The ongoing silk connection is enticing, and it is not impossible that London Wilsons invested in the Moore business, but it is equally possible that the silk dimension is coincidental, since the Derby firm began in 1823.⁸ This introduces further dimensions of family and industry. Harriet Moore (1806-1887), wife of Ambrose Moore, Junior, who founded the Derby firm, drew the illustration of John Wilson’s Stenson farmhouse which accompanies this note; it was to Harriet’s sister-in-law that John Wilson (1755-1835) left the property. As for Harriet’s family, the Foxes, they can be connected to the Strutts, who had been Unitarians, and the Galtons, who had been Quakers, and their firm of engineers became world famous as Freeman, Fox and Partners: and the Freemans had been Highbury Quadrant Congregationalists and Devonshire Square Baptists.⁹ Genealogical confusion can lead to enlightenment.

MALCOLM HARRISON

-
- 6 W. Bateman, *Pedigree of the Batemans, formerly of Hartington and now of Middleton Hall by Youlgreave*, (1821), Derby County Record Office, Matlock, D1756M/17; L. Jewitt, “The late Thomas Bateman of Lomberdale House and Middleton by Youlgreave”, *The Reliquary*, Vol 2, 1861-1862, 87-97.
- 7 Orchard, *art.cit.*, 571.
- 8 H.A. Moore, “A Family Sketch”, (1901), unpublished diary, privately owned.
- 9 I am grateful to Clyde Binfield for the Freeman reference.



The Old Farmhouse, Stenson, home of Joshua Wilson (*d.* 1835), drawn c. 1835 by Harriet Moore.

SO LAST CENTURY? – REVIEW ARTICLE

Nonconformist Theology in the Twentieth Century. By Alan P. F. Sell. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006. £18.99. Pp. xii + 239. ISBN 1-84227-471-6.

Our self-descriptions are seldom accurate: pride often tempts us to claim too much, or unnecessary modesty finds us selling ourselves short. When I heard Alan Sell introduce himself recently he could not be accused of committing either fault. “I am an inveterate theological scribbler,” said the doyen of Reformed historical, philosophical and systematic theologians. No one is going to question such a claim when the speaker is author of twenty-two books, editor of fourteen others and publisher of many articles. Professor Sell’s great contribution to the church, however, is not so much the volume of his scholarly output as his determination to keep alive significant Nonconformist (and usually Congregational) theological voices within an English theological world dominated by the Established Church.

Sell’s inveterate scribbling, during a long and distinguished career spanning Westmorland, Geneva, Calgary, and Aberystwyth, placed him in an excellent position to sketch Nonconformist contributions to recent theology in his 2006 Didsbury Lectures, now published under the title *Nonconformist Theology in the Twentieth Century*. Sell has expanded the four lectures he delivered in Manchester into a significant review of Nonconformist theology during the last century. The resulting book makes good his claim that hidden within the Nonconformist theological corpus are insights of great importance for contemporary theologians and ecumenists. The four well-crafted lectures cover the work of Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Unitarian thinkers from England and Wales with genuine enthusiasm and at times considerable wit. The resulting picture serves as a sensitive *apologia* for Nonconformist (and particularly, Congregational) theology at a time when the United Reformed Church is struggling with its identity amidst a contemporary ecumenical scene largely unenvisioned when it came into being in 1972.

Lecture 1, entitled “Surveying the Landscape”, starts with the “spirit of hopefulness” which typified the late nineteenth century: the fetters of scholastic Calvinism had been broken and the theme of “the fatherhood of God” had become prominent. The early twentieth century saw an explosion in Nonconformist theological writing. R. J. Campbell’s extreme liberalism brought a robust counter from P. T. Forsyth, but the horrors of the First World War far from eroded belief in the providence of God. The influence of Barth on Nonconformist theology is judiciously surveyed, showing – if it ever needed showing – that one does not have to be a Barthian in order to be faithfully Reformed. Oman and Farmer’s stress on using personal categories for interpreting God’s nature is given a brief hearing before Sell offers short accounts of Nonconformist contributions to debates about *Honest to God*, *The Myth of God Incarnate* and religious pluralism.

In Lecture 2, Sell outlines what he regards as the doctrinal peaks of

Nonconformist theology in the twentieth century. In order of appearance they were: consideration of the person and work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity. The Nonconformist contribution to discussions concerning the atonement was extensive and impressive, with the books of Forsyth, Cadoux, Franks, Cocks, Taylor, Whale, Gunton and Fiddes providing an excellent reading list for anyone who today wishes to explore this theme. By comparison, Nonconformist writing on the Holy Spirit seemed sparse. Sell notes correctly that, “no Nonconformist theologian did more in the last two decades of the twentieth century to place the Trinity in the centre of theological debate than Colin Gunton”. He also lays out the impressive Nonconformist contribution to Trinitarian thinking earlier in the century as even-handedly as he outlines the Unitarian Arthur Long’s trenchant dismissal of Trinitarian theology *per se*. Sell then chides Gunton for forgetting “his cautionary word regarding our imperfect knowledge of the inner-Trinitarian relationships of the divine persons”. Some of us will sleep more soundly after being told that “competence in Trinitarian exposition has never been a condition of entry into the kingdom of heaven”. The lecture ends with Sell showing why the Congregational *A Declaration of Faith* (1967) is “probably the most significant document of its kind produced during this century from any quarter within the Reformed family”. How odd and disappointing therefore to find myself recently working with a group of URC ministers who had no knowledge of it.

In Lecture 3 Sell takes us into the “Ecclesiological Thickets”. He outlines the distinctive features which separated “Protestants” from “Catholics”, but I was left wondering whether it is now the case that divisions between contemporary Christians are drawn up in such traditional, doctrinal and institutional ways. (Most Western Catholics seem to pay as much attention to the Pope today as URC members do to the Moderator of the General Assembly. Doctrinal differences in a largely post-denominational world lie *within* just as much as *between* denominations. And opinions about human sexuality generate more heat today than concerns about the inner workings of the Trinity). Sell’s primary interest in this lecture concerns the way in which the theologians of the various Nonconformist churches defined and described their tradition during the twentieth century and how subsequent ecumenical endeavour sought to overcome the differences between those traditions. Sell has forthright and persuasive things to say about “episcopacy” and “establishment”, but the problem is that some people in the United Reformed Church *are* prepared to take “episcopacy into their system” and do *not* regard “establishment” as still a living issue.

Lecture 4 is entitled “Rivers, Rivulets – and Encroaching Desert?” The “Rivers” running through Nonconformist theology are eschatology and the Cross. Sell insists that the latter is central: “it is on the ground of what was done at Calvary that new life is given, forgiveness is experienced, fellowship is engendered, and the command to mission and service is delivered”. P. T. Forsyth is the theologian of the period who “more decisively than any other has driven to the heart of the gospel of God’s holy love”; and it is Forsyth who is

credited with "the most important single sentence in the whole of twentieth-century theology", viz. "The atonement did not procure grace, it flowed from grace." The "Rivulets", on the other hand, are sources hitherto unmentioned in the lectures which Sell recognizes in an annotated bibliography. The author finally offers a reflective appraisal of the state of Nonconformist theology at the start of the twenty-first century and implied within this are judgments about the current health of the church. While the urgency of the present situation tempts Sell "to wax homiletic", he refuses "to don the mantle of a prophet of doom". He outlines various reasons why so many in the churches have lost the ability to handle traditional Christian terminology. Then he wonders whether we might have lost the gospel which engendered that language in the first place. One senses that Sell wants to answer: Yes, in many ways we have! The lecture continues with an appeal to liberate the doctrine of atonement from several mistaken ideas often associated with it. Thus, with a faith anchored in the gospel of God's holy love, Christians are challenged to embrace their calling and avoid all forms of "ecclesiastical sectarianism". Sell ends by wondering where the next generation of theologians is going to come from in denominations which "do not have the 'critical mass' of scholarship that they once had." Without theologians "deeply learned in the things of God as well as technically competent" the church will be impoverished.

This is a well-written book which deserves to be widely read both inside and outside the Nonconformist world. Sell sets before us the theological riches to be found within those Christian communities who base their lives on that "liberty under the gospel whereby the saints can order their worship and practice their polity without state interference." We would have been more richly blessed, no doubt, if he had included Scottish Presbyterianism within his frame of reference. Only by doing that can we understand fully the theological influences flowing into and out of English Presbyterianism. The inclusion of Unitarian voices within Sell's survey, however, helps us appreciate the great theological breadth of Nonconformity.

Sell admits at the outset that he is bound to omit "somebody's favourite theologian, somebody else's pet doctrinal skirmish". Meanwhile, some will find reasons to question the amount of space Sell devotes to certain theologians. Presbyterians, sensing that their Scottish theological heritage has been unnecessarily sidelined, may conclude that the work of Oman and Farmer deserves more attention. Methodists would have a point if they questioned Sell's treatment of the work of David Pailin, a thinker who habitually probes the adequacy of theological conclusions whose truth other theologians simply beg. Overall, many may be left wondering whether the significance of Congregational thinkers during the period really was as great as Sell's survey suggests. But such questions should not obscure what Sell has achieved in this book.

When writing the lectures Sell placed himself under certain constraints. He decided to present the views of others rather than critiquing them and also to avoid references to his own writings. I wish his failure to abide by such

restrictions had been greater because some of the more important and controversial sections concern his insight and judgement on some of the selected thinkers and the period in which they worked. For example, at a time when the theology of Barth has been back in vogue in some theological quarters, it is noteworthy that Sell shows how several Nonconformist theologians in the first half of the century (e.g. A. E. Garvie and C. J. Cadoux) were very critical of Barth. He also notes how Colin Gunton, in the latter part of the century, became dependent upon Barthian methodology, if never fully accepting all Barth's theological conclusions. Whilst being critical of Barth's rejection of apologetics in theology, Sell nevertheless can still refer to "the Barthian leaven". This is hardly surprising given that Sell's theological hero is P. T. Forsyth who once was referred to as a Barthian before Barth – even though, as Sell points out, Forsyth from time to time engaged in apologetics. If Sell had provided more by way of critique he would have been able to give us an even fuller appreciation of the theological spectrum within Nonconformity.

Another example concerns Nonconformist views on "process theology", where Sell calls up Colin Gunton for the opposition and David Pailin for the defence. Gunton's Barthian sympathies of course meant that he was opposed to any theology which, as he put it, "wishes to stand on the intellectual feet of a philosophy". It is no surprise therefore to find that he is critical of process theology. But if Sell knew the work of Hartshorne as well as he does that of Forsyth, he would have recognized that Gunton had engaged in the destruction of a straw man due to a misreading of Hartshorne's concept of dipolarity. Positive references to Gunton's critique of Hartshorne appear in several contemporary theological text-books, thus continuing to project serious misunderstandings of Hartshorne's thoughts. Sell, meanwhile, suggests that "Pailin is inclined to slay foes . . . without always according them adequate hearing". Whatever may be the truth of that judgement, a closer inspection of Pailin's writings suggests that, unlike Gunton in his critique of Hartshorne, at least Pailin understands the theological positions of his Barthian "foes".

Sell is at his best when he outlines some of the unfortunate ways in which the churches have been thrown off course by various contextual pressures, e.g. political correctness, the ecumenical "friendliness" which guarantees that issues of great importance are side-stepped and left festering below the surface, and those patterns of pastoral care which reduce "the care of souls" to non-directive counselling. But he hardly gets to grips with the more challenging and positive ways in which some of those major pressures impinged upon the thinking and practice of the later twentieth-century Nonconformist churches. During the last quarter of the twentieth century the impact of liberation theology, feminist theory and charismatic renewal was very significant. Sell chooses to concentrate upon Nonconformist books and thereby does not treat that impact in sufficient depth – even though, on his own admission, "most theologizing has been done in quite other ways". A cursory acquaintance with the theology which underpins the ministry of Church-related Community Work in the United Reformed Church, for example, shows the depth to which

liberation theology has penetrated our perceptions of mission and ministry. Meanwhile, the finest example of theological debate at a URC General Assembly undoubtedly concerned proposed changes to the doctrinal statement in paragraph 17 of the *Basis of Union* that had been generated by feminism.

It is arguable that one of the best ways of discovering the theological heart of the church in any era is to analyse the hymns sung on a Sunday, not rely totally on the books published by theologians. Sell could have made reference of course to Brian Wren's *What Language Shall I Borrow?*, but he presumably ruled it out because the Mansfield College trained hymn-writer now lives and works in the USA? Since he clearly belongs to a tradition in which preaching has been a major carrier of the church's theology, it is a great pity that he does not take into account *Silence in Heaven: A Book of Women's Preaching*, edited by Heather Walton (a Methodist) and Susan Durber (a member of the URC and now one of its college principals). More could have been made of resources such as these in order to present the impact of feminism on twentieth-century Nonconformist theology in a less defensive and more even-handed way than is revealed in these lectures.

It is also odd to read an account of what twentieth-century Nonconformists have been claiming about the Holy Spirit which does not make more than a passing reference to the Charismatic Renewal movement and the theology which drove it. Again more lateral thinking might have been used to govern the selection of resources Sell used. An end-to-end reading of the URC Group for Evangelism and Renewal's magazine *In Gear*, for example, would have revealed a pneumatological perspective which has been widespread among a sizeable section of all the Nonconformist churches since the 1980s, but which fails to gain a hearing in this book. Nevertheless, an even bigger issue concerns the way in which the various liberation theologians have challenged the patterns of theology which ruled supreme for much of the last century. Close inspection of current curricula in many theological colleges reveals the centrality of "action-reflection-action" models of theology drawn from the methodology of liberation theology. Nowhere in these lectures, however, is there any reference to the challenge posed to traditional theology by praxis models of theology.

In particular, praxis models of theology raise questions about the Nonconformist theology covered in these lectures: What did it lead to by way of mission? Who was it really for? It was produced in the main by ordained men; it influenced the churches less than either Sell or I might have wished; and it accompanied exponential numerical decline in the mainstream Nonconformist churches. One senses that Sell wants us to have more of it so that we can once again achieve "the enculturation of the saints." But might it not be the case that our inherited patterns of theology are part of the problem we need to address? This kind of theology, it can be argued, is élitist and clerical, when what we need is a way of cultivating the reflective faith of Christian men and women which is more "bottom-up" than "top-down". In fairness to Sell, his Congregational principles lead him quite properly to believe that "the local church

ought to be a nursery of theologians . . . a tiny minority of whom will surface as the Church's future leaders in that field". He firmly maintains that "theologizing is the task of the Church as a whole", while at the same time opines that "a leaven of deeply learned theologians . . . is a gift not to be despised." That is fine as long as those "learned theologians" are rooted in local church life and view their roles as enabling their fellow church members to think theologically. But we all know that, much of the time, "learned theologians" tend to be found speaking to other learned theologians in and around the academic circle. Those whose careers have spanned academy and church also know full well that often there is mutual suspicion between "academy" and "church-based" theologians. I was left pondering whether Sell's "learned theologians" in fact will ever be the "leaven" he hopes for, given an inherited theological infrastructure which tends to professionalize theology and divide pulpit and pew. How true is Sell to his Congregational background and how beholden is he to the academic world which has been his life? At best, the two worlds need not conflict; but when I read that "speaking the 'word of power' is the task of the whole church" while "reflecting upon it is the primary duty of the theologian" I start to worry. The "theory-practice" fault-line is appearing once again and theological reflection is being left in the hands of the seemingly learned few.

I share Sell's wish that our theological colleges produce learned ministers who will have the ability to enable our church members to become encultured in the gospel. Such learning will be best gained by extended reflection on placement in community and congregation as well as within the academy. Sell is apt to view his "quasi-monastic" preparation for ordination uncritically. He forgets how ill-equipped for ministry most of his contemporaries were when they were ordained; he ignores the "drop out" rates in ministry of people trained that way; he glosses over a system which made adolescents out of once grown men and only tolerated women provided they became like (and better than) men. He wants to return to a world in which we provide ordinands with "a full and rigorous academic course", and if that means leaving placement learning for in-service training so be it. The current integrated learning which aims to produce ministers who are competent reflective practitioners is thus implicitly eschewed, and with it an understanding of theology separated from practice is implicitly advocated. But this is only to be expected, I guess, if, like Sell, one inhabits a world in which one can suggest that the theological health of the church might possibly be measured by how many of its members hold earned DDs. There is an alternative canon which measures theological health in terms of the ability of church members to give an account of the hope that is in them in word *and* by deed. The problem with "trickle-down" theories of anything is that sooner rather than later one does end up with a desert.

DAVID R. PEEL

SO LAST CENTURY? – A RESPONSE

Nonconformist Theology in the Twentieth Century

My first word is one of thanks to David for the time he has spent on my book, for the kind remarks he has made about myself, and for his accurate account of the contents of my Didsbury Lectures.

It is not my normal practice to reply to reviewers, but on this occasion the possibility has been suggested to me, and I have decided that, although a personal defence is not necessary, some of David's observations merit careful analysis. What follows is therefore an attempt to carry the discussion forward. I shall deal first with questions of content and then with substantive matters. As we proceed we shall see that on occasion David is tantalizingly enigmatic. He raises issues but does not let us know where he stands (behaviour most uncharacteristic of a Yorkshireman). This makes replying somewhat difficult.

Turning first to questions of content, David surmises that Presbyterians may feel that Oman and Farmer deserved more attention than I gave them, and Methodists may think similarly regarding David Pailin. On the very first page of my book I explained that biblical, moral, pastoral and liturgical theology were not within my remit, and that "my focus here is upon doctrinal, systematic, constructive and, *to a very limited extent*, philosophical theology"; and I noted two works in which I have treated the last mentioned in somewhat more detail. I do not think it can be denied that Oman and Farmer were philosophical theologians, or that Professor Pailin is a philosopher of religion. None could justifiably be omitted, but none could be given detailed treatment within the parameters I had set. Indeed, I agonized over what to do about process theology, of which up to 2000 Pailin was the leading (almost the only) published Nonconformist exponent in England. When planning my book, I remember thinking that if I failed to mention process theology David Peel would complain that I had neglected his Ph.D. supervisor. So, having noted that Pailin is not uncritical of some aspects of process thought (p. 34), I simply set the best known English Nonconformist process author against that genre's most prominent English Nonconformist critic, Colin Gunton, recognizing that any detailed adjudication of the matter would take me too far away from my main line of enquiry. David Peel thinks that in his critique of Hartshorne Gunton was attacking a "straw man", and charges (in *ad hominem* mode) that "if Sell knew the work of Hartshorne as well as he does that of Forsyth" the fact would have been plain to me. This is a stab in the dark, for David does not know how well I know Hartshorne's writings. I beg to reassure him that I have read more than a page or two of them; indeed, I have briefly discussed Hartshorne's contribution here and there.

Still on the question of content, David properly notes what he calls my "admission" that "most theologizing has been done in quite other ways [than books]", but whereas I was announcing the limits of my brief, he regrets the absence of the themes I could not treat given those limits: liberation theology, feminist theology and charismatic renewal. All of these, he says, have been significant in Nonconformity during the last quarter of the twentieth century.

I was careful to state that I could think of no *ordained* Nonconformist theologians who had published book-length contributions to feminist theology or to the several varieties of liberation theology before 2000, though I left open the possibility that there may have been works from lay authors of whose denominational allegiance I was unaware (pp. 38-9). To which books can David point? Only, it appears, to Brian Wren's *What Language Shall I Borrow*, which was omitted not because its author works in the United States, but because it concerns worship and liturgy (its sub-title is *God-Talk in Worship*); and the volume of sermons edited by Heather Walton and Susan Durber which belongs to a sizeable class of published Nonconformist sermons which could not be included in the present work. I by no means deny that a study of the theology of Nonconformist liturgies,¹ hymns, sermons, sacramental practice, and even assembly resolutions could be very revealing; but all of this, like the no less worthy fields of pastoral and biblical theology, was beyond my brief. Incidentally, I do not think that I was "defensive" concerning feminist theology. On the contrary, I appealed for the harvesting of insights from it (p. 178); and I may, perhaps, be permitted to say that when teaching theology I have brought into the conversation a wide range of theological views not only because this is the right thing to do, but also because I abominate the theological sectarianism which can result if students are permitted to select only those modules which match their interests (or feed their prejudices). Hispanics need to hear about something other than liberation theology, misogynist males need to hear about feminism, and – dare one say it? – candidates for Reformed ministries need to hear about theologians other than Calvin and Barth. By encouraging the open and incisive discussion of a variety of views we both honour the ideals of higher education and also discourage the substitution of party ideology for theology.

Concerning ecclesiology, David makes the familiar point that "Doctrinal differences in a largely post-denominational world lie *within* just as much as *between* denominations." There is some justification for this claim, though (a) it all depends what one means by "world" – traditional denominationalism is rife in many parts of the world; and (b) David does not make it clear whether he is content with this state of affairs, or with the alleged fact that "some people in the United Reformed Church *are* prepared to take 'episcopacy into their system' and do *not* regard 'establishment' as still a living issue!" As to "episcopacy", everything turns upon what one means by that slippery term. I feel quite comfortable in the role of a New Testament bishop. I have no qualms about pastors to the pastors. But there are sacerdotal understandings of episcopacy which yield that sectarianism which divides from one another at the Lord's table those whom Christ has already made one. This is a tragic.² As for

- 1 In this connection see Norman Wallwork, "Developments in liturgy and worship in twentieth-century Protestant Nonconformity," in Alan P. F. Sell and Anthony R. Cross (eds), *Protestant Nonconformity in the Twentieth Century* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), 102-131.
- 2 See further Alan P. F. Sell, *Aspects of Christian Integrity*, (1990), (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998), ch. 4; *Enlightenment, Ecumenism, Evangel. Theological Themes and Thinkers 1550-2000* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), ch. 11.

“establishment”, there is no question that good church-state relations are of great importance. But the Church of England “by law established” is a theological anomaly – and an Anglican one too, since there is no other Anglican church in the world which is established. Our forebears lived and sometimes died for their conviction that Christ is the sole Lord of the Church. If this is so, the Church cannot have a monarch as its temporal head, nor its ways of worship and the appointment of its principal officers determined or influenced by a monarch or a parliament. There probably are, in this consumerist age, United Reformed Church members who are quite unmoved by these considerations; there may even be ministers whose grasp of such matters is shaky. All the more reason for the careful articulation of our principles in church membership classes. The communion of saints is not to be slighted, and the needful reconciliation of memories between the Church of England and ourselves will not come about if historical amnesia is tolerated on both sides. In the meantime our Nonconformist witness to the truth that “The church’s *one* foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord” is by no means redundant.³

Towards the end of his article David correctly declares that “Nowhere in these lectures . . . is there any reference to the challenge posed to traditional theology by praxis models of theology.” He appears to favour what he calls “‘action-reflection-action’ models of theology drawn from the methodology of liberation theology.” He charges me with forgetting “how ill-equipped for ministry most of [my] contemporaries were when they were ordained”, and says that I ignore the “‘drop out’ rates in ministry of people trained that way.” Against the “action-reflection-action” model of theological education he pits my reference to “a full and rigorous academic course,” and says that I wish to return to a world in which this is provided. He complains that I disjoin theory from praxis, and then, teasingly (or faintly hysterically?), he says, “this is only to be expected, I guess, if, like Sell, one inhabits a world in which one can suggest that the theological health of the church might possibly be measured by how many of its members hold earned DDs.” I shall attempt to untangle these half-truths one by one.

1. To say that “most” of my college contemporaries were ill-equipped for ministry is to slight a number of ministers who faithfully preached the Gospel and cared for their flocks during a period of disquieting numerical decline across the Nonconformist denominations (and not only there). It is true that the type of training I received “accompanied exponential numerical decline in the mainstream Nonconformist churches” but it did not cause the decline. To suppose that it did would be to ignore post-War cultural shifts, increasing mobility of the population, and much else besides.

2. To suggest that ministerial “drop-outs” were caused by the education received is an example of the fallacy of incomplete enumeration. Some became

3 See further, *idem*, *Dissenting Thought and the Life of the Churches. Studies in an English Tradition* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1990), ch. 22; *Testimony and Tradition. Studies in Reformed and Dissenting Thought* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), ch. 11.

unsettled during the theological ferment of the 1960s; some realised that their true calling was elsewhere; unresponsive churches may also have played a part. Moreover, what David does not show is that the “action-reflection-action” model has reduced, still less wiped out, the “drop out” rate.

3. David correctly notes my belief that theologizing is the task of the whole church, and that the local church should be “a nursery of theologians ... a tiny minority of whom will surface as the church’s future leaders in that field.”⁴ But he then proceeds to charge me with driving a wedge between theory and praxis, illustrating this by reference to “learned theologians” who are insulated from church life and simply talk among themselves. At this point we need to reckon with an ambiguity. On the one hand we speak of degrees in theology which may, and frequently do, include biblical studies, ecclesiastical history, and philosophy of religion alongside “theology” in the sense of systematic, doctrinal or constructive theology. In the case of the first three disciplines named, and of others which might have been named, there is no necessary connection between scholarly competence and personal faith. Biblical scholars, historians and philosophers may or may not be believers (indeed, some of the most challenging philosophy of religion has been contributed by writers who were not), though it helps if non-believers have some imaginative insight into what it would be like to believe. On the other hand, it is generally understood that although their writings may be challenged by non-believers, systematic, doctrinal and constructive theologians speak from faith to faith. They seek to articulate, commend, and where necessary defend from intellectual attack, positions to which they are personally committed. Now it is conceivable that within this class of scholars there are some who are “praxis-innocent”, but they will not be very effective according to the terms of reference just specified, because their calling is to address the Church, a task which presupposes an awareness of its nature and condition. I submit that it would not be correct to say that the most learned Nonconformist theologians of the twentieth century were remote from church life or that they did not know what real people were. On the contrary, many of them could communicate effectively with a wide range of people, as their children’s addresses, sermons, lectures and scholarly books testify. Again, David finds a “theory-praxis” fault-line in my remark that whereas “speaking the ‘word of power’ is the task of the whole church”, “reflecting upon it is the primary duty of the theologian.” The alleged “fault-line” is immediately obliterated if by discharging their primary (= the first) reflective responsibility theologians stimulate the churches to action. It can happen. This is not to deny there are technical theological questions which are the particular preserve of scholars; it is simply to affirm that theological endeavour and Christian or churchly praxis are not necessarily disjointed. Farmer, Lovell Cocks, Gunton and Fiddes are among those who amply demonstrate the point.

4. I made it clear that where theological education for ministry is concerned it is not the case that “one size fits all.” I also pointed out that none of the three

4 See further, *Testimony and Tradition*, ch. 1.

ministers who influenced me most when I was a youth was a university graduate. In context, therefore, it is clear that my reference to “a full and rigorous academic course” was my recipe for those younger ministerial candidates who have the time and the ability to become the church’s future theological leaders. At the present time we have a shortage of such persons, and my unaccustomed piece of “bean-counting” with regard to DDs was not at all my measure of the theological health of the churches, as David implies, but was simply intended to show that we once had a greater critical mass of these than we now have. It takes time to grow such persons, especially if we wish them to have had good pastoral experience as well as a high level of scholarly competence – I do not, you see, divorce theory and praxis. But for this class of persons I come at it in a different way. There is so much to be mastered – think, for example, of all the “genitive” disciplines which have come into their own during the twentieth century: philosophy of religion, sociology of religion, psychology of religion, history of religions, etc. (I am sometimes tempted to think that I nearly know enough to contemplate a teaching career). On grounds of the limited amount of study time that can be afforded, I do say, *for this class of candidates*, “if that means leaving placement learning for in-service training so-be it.” But note that I further observe that “required in-service training for licensed probationers prior to ordination is not impossible to provide, and is never more readily received than by those at the pastoral ‘coal face’” (p. 191). I agree with David that “the two worlds [of theory and praxis] need not conflict.” Indeed, I would suggest that where systematic, doctrinal and constructive theology are concerned it is possible to speak of “two worlds” only when something is out of joint. This leads me to my concluding reflection.

David wonders “how beholden [I am] to the academic world which has been [my] life.” It is always interesting to see ourselves as others see us; and it is true that whether in pastoral, educational or ecumenical contexts, I have sought to anchor my work in careful scholarship. But I see the work as a whole, and fundamental to it has been the proclamation of the Gospel of God’s grace. This is what I have sought to preach; this is what has motivated my care of the saints in rural and urban pastorates; the presuppositions of commending the Christian confession in the intellectual environment have kept my pen busy; the ways in which what has been professed has influenced Christianity on the ground has been a major theme of my excursions into history; and my ecumenical work has been motivated by the concern not to have the Gospel denied by sectarianisms whether “catholic” or “evangelical” which would divide at the Lord’s table those whom God has already made one. In a word, I have sought in various contexts to encourage Christians to become enculturated in the Gospel.⁵ I have long known that David Peel shares this objective, and it is good to have it confirmed in the course of his review of my book.

ALAN P. F. SELL

5 See further, *Enlightenment, Ecumenism, Evangel*, Preface.

'Black Tom': Sir Thomas Fairfax and the English Revolution. By Andrew Hopper. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007. Pp. 262. £55.00 (hardback) ISBN 978 0 7190 7108 9 £16.99 (paperback) ISBN 978 07190 7109 6.

Andrew Hopper's new book aims to bring Sir Thomas Fairfax out of the shadow of Oliver Cromwell. Hopper's contention is that far from being Cromwell's stooge, as Restoration and later portrayals of Fairfax's career alleged, Fairfax was an important commander in his own right and a generally more active presence in British politics in the 1640s and 1650s than is usually allowed. The approach that Hopper adopts to bring his subject into the limelight is twofold – the first part of the work covers Fairfax's career from a more biographical standpoint (although Hopper is clear that this is "a", not "the", life of the man), while the second considers Fairfax's relationship to seventeenth-century political culture. Generally speaking, this division is successful, although it does lead to some repetition when themes that arise naturally from Fairfax's life are given a second treatment as aspects of the discussion of political culture.

The story of Fairfax's early career is fairly typical for the Puritan gentry of the early seventeenth century. Fairfax's family were committed to the Protestant cause to the extent that family members fought in the Thirty Years War, several losing their lives. The family also had close connections with the Veres, the leading Puritan martial family of the period. Yet, despite these strong Protestant credentials, Fairfax's path to rebellion against his monarch was not straightforward. Hopper evokes eloquently the local circumstances in Yorkshire that led Fairfax to side with Parliament during the First Civil War. He traces Fairfax's path through the 1640s with assurance, showing at various points how Fairfax's role has been underestimated by previous commentators. He is keen at all times to absolve Fairfax from accusations of political marginality. Fairfax's seeming passivity in the face of putting Charles I on trial may have been more "political" than it first appears because recent work, by Sean Kelsey in particular, has been keen to stress how Charles's trial and execution were far from the foregone conclusion of popular perception.

The emphasis on the importance of political culture will come as no surprise to anybody acquainted with recent literature on British politics of the period. Hopper covers all the areas that one might expect. He considers whether Charles's troubles were the result of a revolution from above or below and stresses the motivating power of anti-popey for firing both the popular and élite imagination in seventeenth-century Europe. The importance both of Fairfax's beliefs and his notions of honour also comes in for thorough scrutiny. Hopper views Fairfax as motivated by a sense of providence and duty. No book on this period would be complete now without a discussion of both gender issues and the porous boundary between history and literature. Fairfax is ideally suited to such a treatment. His wife was a controversial figure, even at the time. Brought up in the English Church in the Hague, she was a vigorous

opponent not only of the Caroline church but of the Regicide. It was alleged that Fairfax was ruled by his wife and Hopper shows how one aspect of this debate revolved around whether Fairfax was an Independent or, like his wife, more Presbyterian in his inclinations. The attempts by previous generations of denominationally-minded historians to claim Fairfax as one of their own is a reminder of how relations between Presbyterians and Congregationalists have not always been cordial. Literary influences can be discussed because Fairfax employed Andrew Marvell as a tutor to his son. Hopper also addresses Fairfax's relationship with Cromwell directly. The conclusion considers how Fairfax's own writings were edited before their publication in the 1690s and shows what this indicates about changing attitudes towards the mid-century crisis.

Overall, Hopper has produced a clear and cogent study of Fairfax. He has read widely in recent secondary literature and is attuned to many of the major debates of the last twenty years. It is not entirely clear, though, how a study of Fairfax will force a broader change of historiographical direction. The conclusion is a case in point. Hopper has discovered that the ways in which Fairfax's writings were re-edited for publication in the Williamite period is remarkably similar to the patterns that Blair Worden identified in his recent work on *Roundhead Reputations* (2001) – largely, that many of the more providentialist and religious aspects were removed. Yet this seems more like confirming existing interpretations and views than anything substantively innovative. Nevertheless, there is also value in adding case-studies that confirm existing views and in many respects (on Fairfax as Protestant soldier, gentry rebel, and in relation to his posthumous reputation) Hopper has performed this task in exemplary fashion.

ANDREW C. THOMPSON

Incarnation and Inspiration: John Owen and the Coherence of Christology.
 By Alan Spence. London and New York: Continuum/T & T Clark, 2007.
 Pp. xvi + 164. £60.00 ISBN 978-0-567-04537-9.

Given the misconception which governs the modern mind's understanding of Puritanism, it is easy to forget that the Dissenting tradition in England and Wales possesses a host of theologically astute and pastorally minded divines whose work may retain a contemporary significance. This, alongside the tendency in modern scholarship to deprecate the historical – plus the dominance of Anglicanism in British theological circles – has led us to the point where such substantial, pastorally-minded thinkers as John Owen have become an unknown quantity even among the current heirs of the tradition he did so much to establish. Any attempt to rediscover Owen's significance in our day is to be welcomed and this is especially true of this volume.

The author of this book contends that Christological debate has been characterised by a tendency to emphasise one of two apparently opposing ideas. On the one hand, there has been the understanding of Jesus as a human being inspired by the Holy Spirit, a tendency which the author finds in the Synoptic accounts and the quest of the historical Jesus and which he characterises as the Christology of Antioch or as an "inspirational" approach. On the other hand, there has been the understanding of Jesus as the incarnation of the Eternal Word, the divine Son who takes upon himself human existence, a tendency which is more abstract than historical, and which the author suggests can be found in the Pauline writings and in the Christology of Alexandria, which he characterises, not unreasonably, as an "incarnational" approach. This division in Christological approaches can be readily admitted and is certainly to be found in New Testament scholarship, especially that of a particular period in the twentieth century. The author quotes New Testament scholars such as Leslie Houlden and C.F.D. Moule, for example, both of whom suppose that the two approaches cannot be integrated. What is slightly more controversial is the author's constructive attempt to bring the two approaches into a coherent whole. In order to do this, he looks to the work of John Owen, the doyen of sixteenth-century Puritan divines.

The book is a splendid example of how best to present an argument, with the primary thesis and the main conclusions constantly being presented to the reader. In a careful reading and analysis of Owen's work, Dr Spence suggests that the sixteenth-century Puritan had a coherent understanding of Christ's two natures. By carefully arguing that Christ "assumed" human nature into a personal union he maintained a sense of Christ's divinity. Nevertheless, in recognizing that – biblically – Jesus was a man who was "prepared, sanctified, empowered and glorified" by the Holy Spirit, Owen also maintained a significant place for an understanding of his humanity. Two major conclusions result from this. First, there can be no adequate Christology without a Pneumatology, for only then can account be given of a humanity assumed into a divinity and a humanity which, in a way akin to Athanasius's *theosis*, is

divinised. In other words, a proper Trinitarianism is required in order to understand Christology. Secondly, this sense of Jesus growing in grace by means of the Holy Spirit renders him an example for his followers. Thus Owen's work provides a description of "a mental, physical and spiritual development of Christ's human nature through the action of the Spirit which is in no way qualitatively different from our own possible experience". Indeed, this sense of Christ as example appears to be commended in this work in part as a means to make Christology understandable (if not also relevant?) in the twenty-first century. If that is so, then we would do well to remember, as Dr Spence points out, that Owen did not over-emphasise this to the detriment of his sense of incarnation. The goal is to maintain the two approaches, and thus the two natures, in a coherent whole rather than to emphasise one over the other, however tempting such a conclusion might be.

While it will serve the purpose of introducing readers to the various Christological controversies (each one clearly and cogently explained), this is not a historical work but one of constructive theology. Dr Spence uses Owen in order to address what he, correctly, perceives to be a more contemporary, and even a pastoral, problem. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is reported to have asked from his prison cell, "who is Jesus Christ for us today?" and Dr Spence's approach seeks to answer this by drawing inspiration from a significant, if now somewhat neglected, figure in the history of Nonconformist and Dissenting theology. His grasp of Owen is masterful, and his explanation of what is not an easy corpus of ideas demonstrates not only that he is an authority on the Puritan's work but that he is a clear thinking theologian and a gifted commentator and communicator. Owen himself was *au fait* with the Church Fathers and drew heavily on them in justifying his own position (something that was common in the Reformers and in the Puritans, both groups seeking to justify themselves as the true inheritors and expositors of the apostolic faith). Dr Spence too draws on patristic sources, but he enhances his work by engaging in a dialogue with Edward Irving (for his understanding of inspiration) and contemporary figures such as Barth, Rahner, Pannenberg and even William Temple in order to construct his own answer to the Christological question. Sometimes he finds himself in agreement with these men, while at other points there is disagreement, perhaps most notably with the theology of Karl Barth which he sees as concentrating too much on the divine assumption of flesh to the detriment of Christ's real humanity. His conclusions may, in the end, be controversial. Nevertheless, the book cannot be faulted for raising an issue of central importance for the contemporary church and for doing so in an erudite and lucid way. It is well worth reading.

ROBERT POPE

***The Taunton Dissenting Academy.* By Brian Kirk. Taunton: Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society, 2005. £9.95. Pp. viii + 86. ISBN 0-902152-19-X. Illustrated. Available from SANHS, Taunton Castle, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4AA (cheques payable to SANHS. Add £3.00 p & p).**

“Postmodernism” notwithstanding, there is a welcome revival of interest in some of the more philosophically inclined Dissenting ministers of the first half of the eighteenth century. Prominent among these was Henry Grove, a selection of whose *Works* has recently been reprinted, and whose thought has received fresh attention. Now Brian Kirk, to whom we are already indebted for *A History of Taunton URC* (1999), turns his attention to the important academy at Taunton which Grove served for thirty-two years, sandwiched between Matthew Warren and Thomas Amory, Grove’s nephew.

Mr Kirk provides an historical sketch of the circumstances in which historic Dissent arose, and then introduces us to Taunton’s Puritan heritage. Particular attention is paid to Pauls Meeting, where Warren and Emmanuel Harford were co-pastors. Warren’s life story is told, and his contribution to the academy is recorded. He “encouraged the free and critical study of the scriptures,” and in this he set a pattern to be followed by the tutors who succeeded him.

Grove took charge of the academy on Warren’s death in 1706, and remained there until his own death in 1738. A surprisingly full account is given of his life, and the amount of effort which went into the making of the Rowe, Grove and Amory family tree should not be underestimated. Grove was educated by his cousin, Thomas Rowe, at the latter’s significant academy in Newington Green, London. Whilst in the capital he became firm friends of Isaac Watts. On assuming the Taunton tutorship he taught faithfully, published widely – ethics being his favourite subject, and did the best he could with his more wayward students.

There follows an account of Amory. He held Arian views – a factor in a secession from Pauls Meeting, and one which dissuaded the Exeter Assembly from supporting him in his role of academy tutor. The academy went into decline, and it ceased *circa* 1752.

Not the least interesting chapter is the last, on the academy’s students. A considerable amount of detective work on the author’s part has yielded as full an account of frequently elusive persons as might reasonably be expected. The alumni included the staunch trinitarian John Enty, the “not strictly orthodox” Congregationalist John Sandercock, many Presbyterians, and John Wiche the General Baptist.

One appendix is devoted to the academy’s assistant tutors: Harford, Robert Darch and Stephen James; in another the successor academies to Taunton are listed; while a third comprises extracts concerning calls to ministers from the minutes of Pauls Meeting.

This attractively produced book is furnished with a bibliography and indices, and is enhanced by a number of illustrations.

ALAN P. F. SELL

***From Cambridge to Sinai: The Worlds of Agnes Smith Lewis and Margaret Dunlop Gibson.* Edited by David Cornick and Clyde Binfield. London: United Reformed Church/United Reformed Church History Society, 2006. £13.99. Pp. iv + 143. ISBN 0-85346-251-8. Illustrated.**

This is a beautifully presented and fascinating collection of essays about two very remarkable women. These Scottish twin sisters, born in 1843, were self-made Biblical scholars whose adventures on the way to discovering significant manuscripts that were all but buried in a monastery at Sinai have an almost Indiana Jones flavour about them. It was their inherited wealth that gave them freedom to take up interests deeply unconventional for women then, and also to become significant and influential benefactors for the Presbyterian Church of England. But for all that money brought them a kind of freedom within the very constrained world of Victorian society, their choices in spending it were, in the best sense, peculiar. This book goes some way to exploring the conjunctions of inheritance, place, gift, conviction and interest that led them to such extraordinary lives and achievements. Their portraits, hanging in the dining room at Westminster College, Cambridge, bear testimony to their determination to influence and to play a part in the University town in which they lived, but the academic awards they were given came as honorary degrees from other universities, so their academic dress stands also as a kind of rebuke to an institution which could not then give such women as these their proper place.

The book brings together reflections by different writers on the history, biblical scholarship and faith of the sisters with some selections from their writings, some diary fragments from a German visitor to Cambridge and the telling of the story of their part in English Presbyterianism and the founding of Westminster College. What a wonderful idea to allow writers from such different disciplines to reflect on the same subjects. From this collection of perspectives and approaches the two women emerge as complex human beings; biblical scholars who thought deeply and theologically about their faith, Scottish dissenters who had broad and ecumenical sympathies and interests, scholars who were committed to the Church, women who yet stormed the male world of academia and suffered opprobrium even from their sisters. If the variety of contributors sometimes leads to some tiresome repetition (we hear several times, for example, the joke that the sisters were Catholics, but more Greek than Roman ones) then this is more than compensated for by the fruitfulness of an interdisciplinary approach.

Particularly revealing is the chapter from John O'Neill on Agnes Smith Lewis as a textual critic. This is the chapter, above all, in which we get a real sense of Agnes the scholar and of the workings of the mind of this one of the twins. The story of these two women has so many elements which encourage a rather adventure-story take on them, that it was refreshing to encounter the astonishingly patient and detailed work of the biblical textual critic. This is not the stuff of popular story-telling, but it may reflect more closely what these

sisters deserve to be remembered for. They were more than eccentric, dour women with fur coats and the hint of a moustache (aspects which the diary extracts tend to emphasise), but engaged in the kind of scholarship that requires wide knowledge of languages and history, and the shrewd judgement which the best scholars take years to acquire. It would be easy to concentrate on their eccentricities, the rather lurid early novels and poetry that they (with many of their contemporaries) indulged in writing, or on their sometimes rather singular household customs. So I am glad that this collection gave them due credit for their academic work too.

David Cornick emphasises at the beginning that they played a significant part in the stories of women's emancipation and of women's contribution to the study of theology. He is surely right in this, but the book would have been improved had it contained more intentional reflection on this aspect of their story. The reader is left uncertain, for example, about their own attitudes to women's emancipation and to some of the obstacles that they inevitably faced as those outside the male scholarly establishment. It is unfortunate that there were no women among the contributors to the book, but even more that there is no real analysis, from a feminist perspective, of their story and their work. We learn, from David Cornick, that they faced criticism for not being "proper women" and that, in order for their work to be recognised, it had to be advocated by friendly male scholars, but it would be interesting to reflect further about what this says more generally about the story of women's struggles to enter the academic world. We learn at one point that since they weren't beautiful they chose to become academics instead, and it is astonishing to discover that an article about the sisters published in a Swiss feminist journal had so much to say about what they wore. There is something in itself to be said about the way their work and thought has to be constructed from fragments, and that even the telling of it seems to repeat this pattern, at least in this book. It would be tempting to conclude that a sense of the eccentricity of the scholarship of women persists long after it should have gone.

However, it perhaps bears testimony to the quality of a book that it leaves the reader wanting more – more detail and more reflection. The story of these women would bear more study yet, but this book will without doubt intrigue and delight many readers.

SUSAN DURBER

***Leadership in The Salvation Army: A Case Study in Clericalisation.* By Harold Hill. Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2006. Pp. xviii + 341. £24.99 ISBN 1-84227-429-5.**

Although it has rarely been the subject of scholarly, theological enquiry, the claim that radical renewal movements become institutionalised over time is generally accepted as a sociological norm. In this volume, that claim is tested in relation to the Salvation Army. What was initially a missionary movement gradually clericalised during the course of its first hundred years, says the author, as the ideal of the priesthood of all believers gave way to a reality in which the “laity” are to some degree separated from a professional “clergy”. Although its initial emphasis was firmly placed on mission and service and its members were permitted to maintain membership in another church (indeed William Booth instructed in 1883 that the administration of the sacraments be abandoned because the Army did not claim to be a church), it has become a highly bureaucratic and centralised organisation which offers its members a distinct identity. Although Army rhetoric remained concerned with mission, the role of the officer has received considerable scrutiny. The official line is that they are functionaries – “Captain is as Captain does”. In practice many see them as functioning in a priestly way. The net result is, according to the author, the depreciation of renewal and mission in favour of ecclesiastical identity where the structures exist not to “spread the gospel” in word and deed but to nurture and nourish the saints. This may be the case, though such goals are not as pejorative as perhaps the author tends to imply and some greater subtlety over the need for Christian organisations to be both inward and outward looking would have enhanced the value of his analysis not only for the Salvation Army itself but for the wider Church as a whole.

The book is neatly separated into five parts. Part 1 looks at the issue of leadership in church history. This is an inevitably brief section and tends to lack sophistication: the author seeks to establish his thesis that renewal movements become clericalised over time and the information is skewed in order to demonstrate the point. Part 2 reviews the first century of the Salvation Army’s existence. It makes the point that the organisation has always been hierarchical if not also autocratic: the Booths, both William and Catherine, “led boldly”, strongly opposing any attempt to bring democratic rule to bear upon the movement while subsequent leaders also avoided moves towards majority rule. Thorny issues of ecclesiology including understanding and practice of the sacraments, teaching and preaching and pastoring are touched upon. Part 3 is concerned with the “second century” from 1978 when the Salvation Army began to “ordain” its officers. There is a rather interesting review of the Army’s response to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* which occurred in a context where the Army was moving inexorably towards a more identifiable ecclesiology. Part 4 demonstrates some of the anomalies which have arisen such as the evolving of the role of the Auxiliary Officer, a “lay soldier” who officiates as an officer, thus belying the idea that “Captain is as

Captain does.” Official attitudes towards the laity and towards women are also evaluated, the latter demonstrating that despite the fact that the Army has always welcomed women officers, women have still had to fight to have any real presence in its leadership. Part 5 offers an evaluation of the evidence, demonstrating the movement from a pragmatic ecclesiology to more theological considerations without necessarily changing much in practice or common understanding. The book ends with some practical suggestions for the future.

Three particular points could be raised in passing. First, the book was originally a doctoral thesis and while it has lost little of the style of an academic dissertation, it remains cogent and lucid. Those who read it will learn much and will do so relatively easily.

Secondly, and more importantly, the book raises the theological consideration regarding what constitutes a church. It would seem minimalist, to say the least, to contend that the existence of a full-time, paid, “professional” leadership is sufficient. Clearly the Salvation Army is no longer a renewal *movement* within the churches, while its membership of the World Council of Churches tends to add to the ambiguity of its status rather than reduce it. From a Reformed perspective, it is certainly inadequate to suggest a church exists where the sacraments are not duly observed. Dr Hill is not unaware of this, but some more attention to this question might have been of benefit to the analysis. The fact that the Salvation Army has established a professional bureaucracy and, from 1978, has “ordained” its captains does not in itself make it a “church”.

Thirdly, while there is sufficient evidence to suggest that there is a general move within church history towards clericalisation, the idea that this is solely a historical and sociological phenomenon – rather than, say, a theological requirement – is not really proved and is certainly not demonstrated by the overview given here in chapter 2. Dr Hill’s analysis seems to lead naturally to the conclusion that a movement which espoused an egalitarian theology (“priesthood of all believers”) inevitably became clericalised because of its militaristic and therefore hierarchical structure. For the Salvation Army, clericalisation was therefore an inevitability (understanding clericalisation not merely as the presence of a professional priestly caste but as the establishment of hierarchical structures and the ultimate depreciation of the laity). It is not so clear that the same process can be seen inevitably at work elsewhere or that a process at work elsewhere has here been applied to the Salvation Army. It could be that the specific thesis Dr Hill seeks to argue is not as general as he seems to imply and that in fact it belongs to the specific history of this particular movement. It could be that a “church” simply *requires* specific ministry.

As a detailed exposition of the practice and understanding of leadership in the Salvation Army this book contains much that can be commended. While its particular focus is narrow, the wider history of the movement does not pass without comment. Consequently the book contributes knowledge of

a movement which, by and large, has received little attention. The study is undoubtedly erudite, drawing on published and manuscript material, while its scope is not restricted to the movement in Britain but draws on evidence from all countries which have been infiltrated (the metaphor almost demands "invaded") by the Army. This book can with confidence be commended to any reader who wants to know more about the Salvation Army.

ROBERT POPE

***Together Met, Together Bound: The Story of Fifty Years of Partnership between the United Reformed Church and the Evangelical Church of the Palatinate.* By John Reardon. London: The United Reformed Church, 2007. £12.99. Pp. 113. ISBN 978-0-85346-262-0. Illustrated.**

I seem to have been conscious of the Evangelical Church of the Palatinate all my life. Having read this book I know why: the church in which I was brought up, Emmanuel Church in Cambridge, has had links with this German church for decades. So have scores of other United Reformed Churches in the United Kingdom, though principally in England.

John Reardon has been involved with this international fellowship for a long time and visited the Palatinate every year for twenty years. It is thus very appropriate that he was chosen (or volunteered, he does not say which) to write this book to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. This is, as Keith Clements says in the foreword, “a story well told, and well worth the telling”. It is not, I think, as well-known as it should be that the story began with Shelley Road Congregational Church in Worthing sending food and clothing parcels to the small town of Wolfstein in response to an urgent post-war need in 1946. Gradually the link developed, until an historic declaration of reciprocal Pulpit and Table Fellowship was signed between the two denominations in 1957 – the golden jubilee of which this book celebrates. At the time this declaration was remarkable, and it has been followed through in the subsequent years by regular theological conferences, including for a time tri-national ones involving the Reformed Church in France, by bi-annual conferences for teachers, by a particular link developed by the Yorkshire Synod on the back of mutual women’s work, and not least by many local church twinning arrangements. This is indeed a story worth telling and very well told.

Sadly, John admits in his closing chapters that, with changing times, the partnership seems to be not only changing but becoming less well-known and less supported than it was. Perhaps this is inevitable. But in these days of closer and closer European integration (to the joy of some and the chagrin of others) it would seem still to have a part to play. If this book is bought and read, and carefully considered, it could play a vital part in keeping the relationship alive and helping it to develop. I hope so.

It seems churlish, though that is not intended, to mention what I believe to be two small omissions. Several quotations are made from other publications without acknowledging their source. And I would have found informative a note in the introductory page (ix) headed “The Church of the Palatinate” giving details about the size and composition of this Church. Notwithstanding, this is a perceptive, helpful and well-written account of an important chapter in the life of the Reformed Churches in Europe.

C. KEITH FORECAST