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## PATTERNS OF BAPTIST MINISTRY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the summer of 1894, the Revd Joseph Taylor was travelling home by train from the annual conference of the Primitive Methodist Connexion to which he belonged. Sadly, as the conference minutes for the following year reported, he did not complete his journey. 'As the express train entered the tunnel at Oakengates, Shropshire, he went to lift the window with one hand, the other being full of biscuits and *Great Thoughts*. The door of the carriage being unlocked he fell through and suddenly entered upon life eternal'.<sup>1</sup> This was a demise more swift, and certainly less pleasurable, than that of Taylor's compatriot, the Revd John Stephenson, who, having married for the fourth time at what was euphemistically termed 'an advanced age', was shortly reported to be 'completely prostrated both in mind and body'. A brief spell in a county asylum somewhat restored his mental equilibrium but he remained 'very weak in body'.<sup>2</sup>

These deaths may be taken as symbolic of the two broad explanations offered by historians for the twentieth-century decline of the Free Churches. Thus Taylor represents a healthy nonconformity, travelling on the main line in an express, and ministering effectively to the recently revealed problems of the corporeal man (hence the biscuits) and also to the spiritual and cerebral man (hence the copy of *Great Thoughts*). Suddenly, in the dark, the door fell open and nonconformity was gone, its dying corpse left far behind by the onrushing train. In this scenario, of course, the tunnel and the resultant catastrophe stand for the First World War, which, in the words of the 1930s writer, Edward Thompson, took 'the heart out of the nonconformist half of our nation and all its distinctiveness and vigour'.<sup>3</sup> The alternative interpretation of decline is couched in terms of our much-married octogenarian. In this version, nonconformity, like John Stephenson, is deemed to have lost both its physical and mental energies. Like Stephenson, it has been unable to rise to a fresh challenge, its performance no longer capable of matching its aspirations. Whichever of these explanations is preferred - and of course they come with many variants - the metaphor does serve to underline the main premise upon which my recent book is based: that in studying the history and fortunes of nonconformity more attention needs to be paid to the person of the *average* individual minister, for it has been on his efforts that denominational health and influence has largely rested.<sup>4</sup> A writer in the *Baptist Handbook* for 1894 made the point when he commented that 'English writers have never fairly estimated the power of the Nonconformist minister. . . the influence of these men is an important factor in the tone and life of the. . . communities where they minister'.<sup>5</sup> This has perhaps been even more true in the twentieth century as the public national voice of the churches has been more muted and heard, if at all, with much less deference and interest than was previously the case. Some confirmation of this is provided by the findings of a survey conducted by Independent Television in the early 1980s. Notwithstanding the decline of formal religious observance in Britain during the course of the present century, over a third of those questioned still believed that priests and ministers were the most beneficially influential individuals in modern society.<sup>6</sup> Yet what is really known about the Baptists' twentieth-century ministers, save that from 1918 onwards they have usually been difficult to find at all, a point to which I shall return?

Partly in the light of this, partly to afford some comparison with my earlier study which effectively ends in 1914, and partly to expose Baptists to the sort

of investigations hitherto restricted to Anglican, Catholic and Methodist clerics, it seemed worthwhile to undertake a survey of the Baptists' twentieth-century ministerial personnel.<sup>7</sup> The analysis which follows is based mainly on two samples. One consists of all those who were enrolled as probationary ministers between 1928 and 1930. The other consists of two groups of 128 and 111 individuals who entered the ministry between 1911-1930 and between 1931-1950 respectively. All of them had successfully completed ministerial careers and were dead by the end of April 1985. In some instances, as in Table 1, for example, it has been necessary to treat the years 1911-1950 as a single entity, while in others the sample has been inflated by the addition of more individuals in order to achieve greater statistical reliability. Finally, because explicit comparisons with my studies of earlier years are being made, I have excluded female ministers from my samples.

Some fifteen years ago L. G. Champion drew attention to the fact that the eighteenth-century Baptist ministry contained within it a disproportionately high number of individuals drawn from the upper reaches of contemporary society.<sup>8</sup> This was perhaps somewhat at variance with the more conventional view of the denomination's ministry, but a similar picture emerged from my rather fuller occupational analysis of the Victorian ministry - an analysis based, it should be noted, on the occupations of ministers' fathers.<sup>9</sup> This relatively high proportion of class I recruits owed something to the facts that nonconformist ministers were classified by the Registrar General as social class I and that the Victorian ministry relied quite extensively, as did many contemporary professions, on the recruitment of practitioners' sons. Indeed, I suggested that by the end of the nineteenth century the nonconformists generally were recruiting more intensively from just this catchment area. In the Baptists' case, by 1900 about one in seven of ministerial candidates was coming from a ministerial home, added confirmation perhaps of Dr Cox's argument that by this time the generality of nonconformist youth was becoming increasingly disenchanted with the idea of the ministry as a career.<sup>10</sup> After the war, this disillusionment appears to have spread as well to the manses, which lay at the very heart of Baptist community. At least, the proportion of recruits with ministerial fathers fell by more than half from 7.8% of the 1911-1930 cohort to 3.6% of the next generation. Why? Perhaps it was in ministerial families that the theological problems thrown up by the war were most deeply disruptive because ministers were those to whom nonconformists naturally looked for guidance in such an unprecedented political and moral crisis? Now we do not really know how the average minister responded, nor how far he was able to go along with the remarkably quick *volte-face* which occurred in official denominational thinking soon after the war actually began.<sup>11</sup> But it seems plausible to assume that for everyone who enthusiastically endorsed tanks and guns as legitimate artefacts for the Gospel of the Prince of Peace, there must have been another who, like the advocate of international arbitration, J. H. Rushbrooke, implored his congregation to 'pray for me. I need your prayers'.<sup>12</sup> Certainly, it cannot just be assumed that the 'many ministers' - to use Ernest Payne's rather loose term - who worked as chaplains or for the Y.M.C.A. actually supported the war.<sup>13</sup> Alternatively, it is possible that the explanation for declining recruitment from ministerial homes lay in a completely different direction in that wartime inflation so distorted the rewards to labour that fewer ministers encouraged their sons into a profession that even before 1914 had been notoriously badly paid. In this context it is worth noting that between 1917 and 1922 the number of men receiving salary sustentation increased by almost 30%.<sup>14</sup> At the very least, it seems likely that ministers themselves would have been the most acutely aware of their declining

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social status which the war seems to have exacerbated.<sup>15</sup>

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**TABLE 1 SOCIAL ORIGINS OF BAPTIST MINISTERS 1911-1950 (%)**  
(n = 110)

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Social Class I	4.5
Social Class II	10.9
Social Class III	
White-collar	20.0
Skilled manual	63.6
Social Class IV/V	0.9

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This diminishing status is perhaps explained and was to some extent caused by the changes illustrated in Table 1. Even discounting those who were the sons of ministers, about one in twenty of ministerial recruits between 1860 and 1909 were from social class I.<sup>16</sup> Table 1, which, it should be noted, is based on the previous occupations of ministers themselves rather than those of their fathers, confirms that, since thus peaking in the late nineteenth century, the proportion of men drawn from this highest social echelon has declined. Thus the percentage of such men entering the ministry in the first half of the twentieth century was 4.5%. In the same way, recruitment from social class II, running at just over 10% in the first half of the present century, has also declined consistently since the second half of the nineteenth century. Over a quarter of 1850-79 entry cohort, for example, came from this section of the community.<sup>17</sup> Even more significant, perhaps, has been the decline in the proportion of men recruited from the lowest social categories. In the years before 1914, and almost certainly because of the prominence of men trained at Spurgeon's with its less elevated social profile, Baptists recruited more heavily than almost every other mainstream nonconformist denomination from social classes IV and V. The evidence of Table 1 suggests that this trend was not sustained after 1918. We may speculate as to the reason for this. M. E. Aubrey's claim in 1923 that 'the ministry is only to be rehabilitated by education', may well have discouraged men from the lowest social strata from applying at all.<sup>18</sup> Or, again, while it would be wrong to suggest that Mammon figured unduly in the thoughts of those contemplating a ministerial career, he could not be ignored entirely. As I have argued in the context of the nineteenth-century, ministers, like everyone else, had basic material needs to be met.<sup>19</sup> Thus it is possible that the disproportionately high increase in the level of unskilled wages which occurred during the war acted as something of a deterrent, in the sense that entry to the ministry now represented even more of a financial sacrifice for previously poorly-paid workers. Alternatively, war-induced occupational mobility and re-skilling may have pushed many of those formerly in classes IV/V into a higher group. This, at least, might be deduced from the fact that as a denomination Baptists recruited more heavily in the years to 1950 from the manual rather than the white-collar sections of class III. The proportion of white-collar workers entering the pulpit during our period remained fairly constant at a fifth. This was a trend entirely at variance with the pre-war pattern in which white-collar recruitment had increasingly outweighed that from the artisan classes. It was also in complete contrast to the general occupational pattern in twentieth-century Britain where

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white-collar work was becoming progressively more significant, rising from 18.7% of the labour force in 1911 to 35.9% by 1961. Conversely, even though the proportion of artisans in the total labour force diminished from 74.6% in 1911 to 59.3% in 1961, they became ever more important as a source of Baptist ministerial provision, supplying almost two-thirds of all the recruits entering the church between 1911 and 1950.<sup>20</sup> Thus, even if the social standing of the majority of Baptist ministerial recruits rose in absolute terms, there was still an undue reliance on those relatively low in the social order and it would be interesting to know whether, as certainly was the case in the nineteenth century, this was a true reflection of the denomination's overall make-up.

TABLE 2    MINISTERS BY COUNTRY OF BIRTH (%)

Birth Country	1911/1930	1931/1950
England	60.2	44.1
Scotland	8.6	7.2
Wales	27.3	42.3
Ireland	-	0.9
Abroad	-	2.7
Unknown	3.9	2.7

Within this manual group, one occupation stands out as being particularly prominent. Rather more than a quarter of such recruits had originally been miners, a reflection of the denomination's continuing strength in parts of the East Midlands certainly, but even more noticeably in Wales. Indeed, as Table 2 indicates, the Welsh contribution increased significantly in the first half of this century. More than two in five of new Baptist ministers were Welsh in the period 1931-1950, although the Welsh share of total British denominational membership in 1964 was only about 30%.<sup>21</sup> This strong Welsh presence is all the more interesting in that the inter-war years did see something of a collapse in nonconformist strength in the Principality, as economic depression and population decline together ate into the theological and human capital of Welsh Christian belief. Thus D. B. Rees has suggested that 'all the Welsh Nonconformist denominations have witnessed a substantial decline in membership figures since the 1926 General Strike'.<sup>22</sup> Certainly, the Pilgrim Trust survey reckoned that by 1935 the chapels in the Rhondda Valley alone had lost almost three quarters of their 1921 membership.<sup>23</sup> Whether this was because, as has recently been suggested, 'most of those who abandoned the chapels did so because they had lost their faith', or whether it was because the individualist philosophy on which nonconformity was based could not protect contemporary society against the vicissitudes of the individualist market economy, is a matter for debate.<sup>24</sup> What is clear, however, is that during our period the proportion of Welshmen in the Baptist ministry increased. This suggests that depression could not only weaken ecclesiastical life by undermining human dignity and economic well-being, but that it could also strengthen it by intensifying religious sensitivities. Here, perhaps, there is a parallel with E. P. Thompson's suggestion that early nineteenth-century Britons, ground down both economically and politically, turned for consolation and understanding to nonconformity, in his view the 'chiliasm of despair'.<sup>25</sup> Thus as Table 3 shows, even in the depression the Welsh colleges maintained their

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level of contribution to the Baptist pulpit. Almost a third of the college-trained men who enrolled between 1928 and 1930 came from the Welsh colleges.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps it was the existence of this type of relationship which prompted Adrian Hastings' comment that in the present century there has been a general relocation of Baptist support away from the impoverished north into the *prosperous but less deeply committed* south-east.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, the contribution of Scotland, which also had its economic blackspots during the

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**TABLE 3    MINISTERS' COLLEGE BACKGROUNDS 1928-1930**  
(n = 162)

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Bangor	19	Manchester	10
Bristol	7	Rawdon	13
Carmarthen	1	Regent's Park	17
Cardiff	20	Spurgeon's	24
Dublin	4	Other	3
Edinburgh	1	B U Exam	37
Glasgow	6		

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period, remained fairly constant, while that of England was rather more uneven. Taking a longer term perspective, the contribution of Englishmen to the Baptist pulpit hovered between 50% and 60% throughout the nineteenth century and the real downturn appears to have come in the 1930s. Although the samples used here are too small to be statistically valid for individual decades, it is perhaps worth noting that Englishmen constituted 59% of the entrants in the 1920s, 48% of those offering in the 1930s, and 32% of those coming forward between 1941 and 1950. These figures may not be statistically sound, but they indicate the trend quite clearly. It is also worth noting that a decline in the number of English recruits would also have the effect of increasing the *proportion* of Welshmen.

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**TABLE 4    MINISTERS' EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS (%)**

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	1911/1930	1931/1950
Unknown	3.1	6.3
College	2.3	6.3
Theological College	58.6	52.3
University	28.9	27.9
B U Examination	7.0	7.2

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Whatever its geographical and social origins, however, there is no doubt that Baptists in the first half of this century had a more highly educated ministry than at any time in the past. As with the other Old Dissenters, the denomination had a long tradition of educational excellence, although the advent of Spurgeon tended to introduce a rather different emphasis in the late nineteenth century. Even so, by that time about three quarters of the new entrants had received either a college or a college and university training.<sup>28</sup> In the first fifty years of the present century this figure was raised to about 88 per

cent (Table 4). Furthermore, the church recruited more graduates than ever, a trend symbolised perhaps by the removal of Regent's Park College to Oxford. In the period between 1911 and 1930 some 42% of new entrants possessed a degree. In the second of our two periods this figure rose to 47.7%, the majority being Bachelors of Arts (20.7%) and Bachelors of Divinity (19.8%). Such proportions also contrasted favourably with those of the previous century. Slightly more than a fifth of those entering in the period 1890-1909 held degrees, while a further 7% had qualifications awarded by the *Senatus Academicus*. It is important to note in Table 3, however, that by 1930 the denomination was meeting its manpower needs only by taking in a very large proportion of men, almost a quarter, by way of the Baptist Union Examination. That it was both necessary and acceptable thus to take in such a high proportion of men who either lacked college training or who, at best, had received one outside the denominational system, might legitimately raise doubts as to the utility of the Baptists' own colleges' training, or, indeed, questions about the whole emphasis on higher education for the ministry. This, of course, was a recurrent theme in nonconformist debate in the nineteenth century and the divisions to which it gave rise did not entirely disappear in the twentieth.<sup>29</sup> Thus, while the Secretary of the Baptist Union, M. E. Aubrey, could argue strongly that 'the ministry had not kept pace in education' even though it was imperative for the modern minister to be 'a man capable of meeting others on equal intellectual terms', this belief was not universally shared within the denomination.<sup>30</sup> (One is reminded of the hoary local deacon who told a young minister that there were two types of preacher - those who were college-trained and those who were spirit-filled. 'Which', he went on, 'are you?', apparently oblivious to the fact that, unusually in Baptist circles, the young man was a graduate of both Oxford and Cambridge.)<sup>31</sup> G. Ruffell Laslett was more cautious than Aubrey, conceding that Christian convictions needed to be related to modern thought but he was also fearful lest the baby disappear with the bathwater. 'We all ought to be fundamentalists', he argued, 'or we are not truly Christian. We all also ought to be Modernists, or we are not truly intelligible'.<sup>32</sup> Small wonder, then, that H. Wheeler Robinson should use his inaugural lecture at Regent's Park in 1920 to address the contentious issue of the relationship between academic training and the more obviously practical requirements of the ministry.<sup>33</sup> In 1926 the Pastoral Session set up its own commission to investigate matters relating to ministerial efficiency but it produced little of any real consequence. Perhaps here it will suffice to observe that a more highly educated ministry was apparently powerless to halt the continued decline of denominational membership, which between 1911 and 1950 fell by over 20% in Britain, from 415,000 to 331,500.<sup>34</sup> As one fictional layman (albeit a Methodist) put it: 'What's all this about your B Hays and your Hem Hays? Hi'm a B Hay and a Hem Hay! Hi'm Born Hagain and Marvelously Haltered!'<sup>35</sup> Niebuhr made the same point in a rather more academic, if somewhat less emphatic fashion. Writing of Methodism, he suggested that 'religious enthusiasm declined in later days because. . . [it] became more literate and rational'.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, improvements in the content of the training were apparently more successful in equipping men to withstand the personal strains of the ministry. Throughout the nineteenth century there had been a chronic leakage of ministerial personnel from the nonconformist churches, a loss which peaked among the Baptists in the last two decades of Victoria's reign, when almost one in five of new ministers quit within four years of starting. A similar though not identical type of analysis is undertaken in Table 5 for probationers enrolled between 1928 and 1930. This shows that over 15 per cent

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of men entering the pastoral ministry in this period were no longer in it twelve years later. Most of the losses can be accounted for. Of the total 1928-30 entry, I have been able to trace the careers of 145 individuals. By 1971, 15 were still working, death had carried off 26, 77 had retired, and 27 had taken up alternative ministries in education, administration, the mission field and so on. This leaves us with 17, or 10.5% who disappeared for unexplained reasons from the denominational record, and the assumption must be that they left the ministry altogether. Now this was certainly a lower loss rate than that evident in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and which had been described by W. E. Blomfield in 1923 as 'much too high', but it still represented a major waste of resources, both human and economic.<sup>37</sup>

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**TABLE 5 CAREER PATTERNS: 1928-1930 ENTRANTS**  
(n = 162)

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Number gone by 1941	25
Number gone by 1951	46
Number gone by 1961	74
Number gone by 1971	147
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Still working in 1971	15

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Furthermore, the reduced losses might be more apparent than real, in that, for a variety of reasons, the nineteenth-century ministry attracted many who discovered their unsuitability only when they had actually started in it. In other words, the pool from which losses could occur was much bigger than it subsequently became after 1918.

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**TABLE 6 NUMBER OF PASTORATES HELD (%)**

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Number held	1911/1930	1931/1950
1	3.1	4.5
2	14.3	16.1
3	16.6	19.6
4	23.8	21.4
5	18.3	19.6
6	11.1	12.5
7	10.3	4.5
8	2.4	1.8
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Proportion who served abroad at some time	12.7	7.1
Average number held	4.2	3.9

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However, in general it does appear from this analysis that the Baptists' ministerial personnel were rather less volatile than in the nineteenth century

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and this impression is confirmed when career patterns are considered.(Table 6) Thus the number of men who served abroad at some time showed a marked reduction, indicative, too, of diminishing opportunities as indigenous churches assumed more responsibility for their own manning, in the process often providing much-needed students for the British colleges.<sup>38</sup> Domestically, there was a tendency for a smaller number of men to occupy more than half a dozen pastorates in the course of their careers, and the average number of churches served by individuals during their working lives hovered around four throughout the period. The length of individual pastorates continued to vary widely, but it is apparent from Table 7 that between three and six years was the most typical length, accounting for 47.4% of pastorates in the first entry group,

TABLE 7 LENGTH OF PASTORATES HELD (%)

No.of years	1911/1930	1931/1950	No.of years	1911/1930	1931/1950
1	2.0	1.5	14	1.8	2.0
2	7.2	6.8	15	1.0	2.0
3	10.5	10.8	16	0.6	1.3
4	11.7	13.5	17	0.8	1.0
5	12.3	11.3	18	1.6	1.0
6	12.9	10.8	19	1.2	0.8
7	6.4	6.8	20	0.4	0.3
8	8.7	8.3	21	0.8	
9	4.8	4.8	22		0.5
10	4.8	3.5	23		0.5
11	4.6	2.8	24	0.6	0.5
12	2.0	3.0	25	0.2	0.5
13	1.4	2.8	26+	1.8	3.5

and 46.4% in the second. There was also some reduction in the number of short pastorates. Of those taken by men entering the ministry between 1891 and 1911 over 51% lasted for five or less years. This proportion fell to about 43% for entrants between 1911 and 1950. It is also worth noting that over a tenth of all pastorates lasted for more than fifteen years and this relative longevity was particularly marked in Wales and among Welsh ministers. Time and time again in the denominational obituaries long-serving Welshmen appear. Ben Meyrick, for example, remained at St Clears in Carmarthen from 1926 until his retirement in 1951. Caersalem in Llanelli retained William Morris George for 26 years, while Pontypool's Crane Street was pastored by Edward Evans from 1919 until 1958. A fourth man might stand proxy for what seems, from this analysis, to have been the most common type of Baptist minister of all in this period. Evan John Evans was born at Treorchy in 1903 and became a miner when he left school. After nine years he entered Cardiff Baptist College which he left in 1933. His ministerial career spanned two pastorates only - one in Monmouth and Radnorshire from 1933 to 1945, and a second at Ammanford until 1968. Such examples - and there are many more - might reinforce the doubts already expressed above about the alleged loss of Baptist vitality in

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might suggest stagnation and lack of opportunity.

If more settled career patterns thus suggest a less volatile ministry in the first half of the present century, falling death rates also point in the same direction. First, the average age of death of those who lived to be more than 51 reached 74.95 years, an increase of almost a year on the first quarter of the century. Then there was a dramatic decrease in the proportion of men dying while still active in the ministry. Some 12.6% of the 1911-1950 entrants thus failed to achieve a normal working-life span. Yet this was a substantial improvement when it is noted that 30.0% of the 1900-1929 entry cohort died while still working. Doubtless much of the explanation for this lies in the better arrangements provided for the elderly which made it easier for them to retire, rather than soldiering on - because they had no other form of income - until they died. Nineteenth-century salaries had frequently been too low to permit of any saving against old age with the results that, as one contemporary put it, aged ministers often had 'too great an anxiety to retain the emoluments arising from the discharge of pastoral duties and have found them a temptation sufficiently powerful to prevent them quitting the pulpit'.<sup>39</sup> Those that did retire, like John Warburton, often found that they could not manage. Within a year of leaving Soothill in 1887 Warburton was in the bankruptcy court, writing to a friend that 'I am insolvent, I am broken, I have failed. . . I suppose it is no use asking a loan of thee'.<sup>40</sup> Of those whose retiring age is known, 17.5 per cent of the 1911-30 cohort worked on past the age of 70. Thomas Robinson, for instance, started at Raleigh Park, Brixton, after he left Spurgeon's in 1923 and concluded his ministry at Weston Turville in 1976 when he was 77 years old. But in the second of our two cohorts the percentage of such cases was halved at 8.5%. One suspects that the main reason for this was Aubrey's success in raising the necessary finance for the superannuation scheme established in the late 1920s, although the level of pension fell way below what was needed, especially in the years after 1945.

Yet easier and therefore earlier retirement cannot be the sole explanation of falling death rates within the ministry, for premature death - arbitrarily defined here as occurring before the age of 50 - also fell dramatically. At various times in the nineteenth century this had caused considerable concern among the Baptist hierarchy and it still claimed about 6% of men whose careers began in the years between 1891 and 1911. Subsequently, however, as Table 8 shows, this figure fell to about half that level. The effect of this, coupled with growing state provision and the falling size of ministerial families was to reduce another potential call on denominational resources - that coming from large numbers of dependants suddenly deprived of the main breadwinner.

In part, no doubt, all of these trends can be attributed to the denomination's success in improving ministers' material circumstances as salaries, accommodation and pensions came increasingly under central influence in the aftermath of J. H. Shakespeare's efforts to make the Union more of a functioning administrative and political reality. In part, too, they can be related to the fact that Baptist ministers shared in the general improvement of living standards and health which characterised the years after 1918, even though their relative economic and social position may have deteriorated. But success in thus safeguarding the health of its ministers produced more severe problems for the denominational authorities responsible for the care of the increased numbers who consequently survived into retirement.

It is at this point, perhaps, that we come back to the most obvious trend of all in twentieth-century recruitment patterns. In the late nineteenth century, despite the fact that the pulpit was facing increasing competition from other outlets as the main channel of ecclesiastical influence, there was something of

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a glut of manpower. In 1891 the Union President, James Owen, publicly acknowledged the fact, admitting that 'the supply of ministers is in excess of demand'.<sup>41</sup> Despite indignant rebuttals by the college, it was freely asserted that over three-quarters of the men then without pastoral charge were from Spurgeon's.<sup>42</sup> Whatever its cause, however, it was certainly a situation radically different from that which prevailed in the years immediately after 1918. By 1923 the five English colleges were turning out only twenty students a year, a marked drop on the fifty being produced annually in the 1890s.<sup>43</sup> For a time, the Baptists, like other denominations, were able to live off their accumulated ministerial fat, although one corollary of this was an ageing ministry which left the average age in 1931 at over 54, ten years higher than it had been eighty

**TABLE 8 PROPORTION DYING AT GIVEN AGES (%)**

Age		Age		Age	
Unknown	3.7	66	1.8		
-49	2.7	67	1.3	84	2.0
50	0.3	68	3.7	85	2.0
51	0.7	69	2.7	86	2.0
52		70	2.0	87	4.0
53		71	3.4	88	1.7
54		72	4.0	89	2.7
55	0.3	73	3.0	90	1.3
56	1.0	74	3.7	91	3.0
57	1.0	75	2.0	92	0.3
58	1.0	76	3.0	93	0.3
59	0.7	77	3.7	94	1.3
60	0.3	78	2.3	95	1.7
61	0.7	79	3.0	96	0.3
62	1.0	80	4.7	97	0.3
63	2.3	81	2.7	98	1.0
64	1.7	82	4.0	99	
65	2.3	83	2.7	100+	1.0
Modal age of death 75.9 years					

years earlier. The real effects of failing recruitment began to show through most clearly in the years after the Second World War. Over the twelve years before 1939 the Union had an annual average manpower of some 2200 ministers. In the twelve years after the end of the war the annual average fell to 1923, and the Union appointed yet another committee on the ministry in 1951. Subsequently, there was something of an improvement although the average never regained its pre-war level.<sup>44</sup> Here, perhaps, the ministry, like the denomination as a whole, was reflecting the fact that Sunday School membership between 1925 and 1939 had shrunk by almost 150,000 children. This problem of failing ministerial recruitment was so apparent and so often discussed, that I do not propose here to rehearse its many possible explanations. Some of them, such as the possible effects of relatively low pay or the dilemmas

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posed by the First World War, I have touched on already. In any case, it was a problem not confined to the Baptist denomination, but one which affected the whole church because it sprang from deep-seated changes occurring in society at large. What might be a useful exercise (for another occasion) is a comparative study of twentieth-century ministerial recruitment by denomination. This might reveal whether the sociological explanations advanced, for example by A. S. Gilbert or Hugh McLeod, for the general weakening of formal religion – a weakening of which declining ministerial recruitment was a part – are universally applicable or whether a denomination's theological stance or ecclesiastical structure have also had an influence.<sup>45</sup>

In a much-cited article, the *British Weekly* argued in 1955 that the blame for continued nonconformist decline lay squarely with the theological colleges and their antiquated training programmes.<sup>46</sup> Much the same diagnosis had been offered when the problem of failing support first attracted concern, albeit somewhat dilatory, in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Since that time men entering the Baptist ministry may have been drawn from a rather narrow social base in that classes I, IV and V were somewhat less prominent, but at the same time, they were more highly educated, survived the challenges of ministerial life in greater numbers and better health, and were more settled than their grandfathers had been at the end of Queen Victoria's reign. None of this, however, served to halt the decline either of church membership or of formal religious observance to which the *British Weekly* had addressed itself. Perhaps therefore as a denomination Baptists, like other nonconformists, were in the end victims rather than beneficiaries of the numerous centralised efforts made to improve the quality of both ministerial life and training. This at least was the view of the editor of the *Christian World* when he suggested in 1921 that church authorities were already so taken up with material matters such as salaries and pensions that they could reproduce only like-minded men in the pews – from which the ministry itself was ultimately drawn.<sup>47</sup>

Such a comment, of course, was less than fair to the motives and dedication of the vast majority of those who entered the Baptist ministry in the years between 1911 and 1950. These men had to serve in a society which was much less inclined to accept as axiomatic the claims of the Christian gospel and which was far less inclined to listen to what the church had to say. When Independents and Baptists had convened at Rhymney in November 1844 for a public debate on the ever-contentious issue of baptism, its meanings and modes, the discussion ended, not with a vote but with a fistfight, the Independents being accused of trying to extinguish Baptist oratory with tobacco juice.<sup>48</sup> It is difficult to imagine the Christian passions of the average twentieth-century pew-filler rising to such levels – except in Scotland or Ulster, or about the charismatic movement!

### NOTES

1. Primitive Methodist Conference, *Minutes*, 1895, p.16.
2. *Primitive Methodist Magazine*, 1874, pp.239-40.
3. E. Thompson, *John Arnison*, 1939, p.ix. This viewpoint is discussed quite fully in the context of the wider church by E. R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, Sheffield, 1957, pp.205-13 and G. S. Spinks,

*Religion in Britain Since 1900*, 1952, pp.65-89.

4. Kenneth D. Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales, 1800-1930*, Oxford, 1988.

5. *Baptist Handbook*, 1894, p.158.

6. Cited in P. A. Welsby, *A History of the Church of England, 1945-1980*, Oxford, 1984, p.104.

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7. See, for example, R. Ransom, A. Bryman and B. Hinings, *Clergy, Ministers and Priests*, 1977; R. Towler and P. Coxon, *The Fate of the Anglican Clergy*, 1979; A. J. Drewett, 'The Social Status of the Ordained Minister in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Modern Churchman*, 9, 1966.
8. L. G. Champion, 'The Social Status of some Eighteenth Century Baptist Ministers', *BQ* 25, 1973-4, p.13.
9. Kenneth D. Brown, 'The Baptist Ministry of Victorian England and Wales: A Social Profile', *BQ* 32, 1987.
10. This argument is developed in J. Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930*, Oxford, 1982.
11. On this see K. Clements, 'Baptists and the Outbreak of the First World War', *BQ* 24, 1975-7; T. M. Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists*, Swansea, 1977, pp.388-91; S. Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics*, 1975, pp.126-8.
12. *Baptist Times*, 11 September 1914.
13. E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History*, 1958, p.181.
14. *Ibid.*, p.183-4.
15. See, for example, M. E. Aubrey, 'The Future of Our Ministry', *BQ* I, 1922-3, p.172.
16. Brown, *BQ* 32, 1987, pp.106-7.
17. Brown, *Nonconformist Ministry*, p.30. As in the nineteenth century, however, the proportion of class II entrants may be artificially inflated by the fact that almost half of it consists of farmers who, although included by the Registrar General in class II, may well have not been men of any substance.
18. Aubrey, *BQ* 1, 1922-3, p.172.
19. The figures for occupational structure are from A. H. Halsey ed., *Trends in British Society since 1900*, 1972, p.113.
20. Kenneth D. Brown, 'An Unsettled Ministry? Some Aspects of Nineteenth-Century British Nonconformity', *Church History*, 56, 1987, pp.217-21.
21. Calculated from *Baptist Handbook*, 1964, pp.224-5.
22. D. B. Rees, *Chapels in the Valley*, 1975, p.72.
23. Pilgrim Trust, *Men Without Work*, 1938, p.291.
24. These are the opinions respectively of S. MacIntyre, *Little Moscows: Communism and Working Class Militancy in Interwar Britain*, 1980, p.159; and Bassett, *Welsh Baptists*, p.393.
25. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 1968, p.411.
26. This, of course, was not the total Welsh contribution to the ministry since one of the students studying in Wales was an Englishman, while six individuals from the Principality were at English colleges. Furthermore, 13 of the 37 who entered the ministry via the Baptist Union examinations in this period were Welshmen. Altogether 36% of the 1928-30 entry group were born in Wales. This is exactly the sort of proportion that might be anticipated, given the rising trends of Welsh recruitment apparent in Table 2.
27. A. Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1985*, 1986, p.265. My italics.
28. This was, however, a lower proportion than that of any other mainline nonconformist denomination. Brown, *Nonconformist Ministry*, p.60.
29. This debate is discussed at length in Kenneth D. Brown, 'Ministerial Recruitment and Training: An Aspect of the Crisis in Victorian Nonconformity', *Victorian Studies*, 30, 1987. The high number of men taking Baptist Union Examinations at this time might have been the result of Shakespeare's reforms which meant that henceforth only accredited men could qualify for financial help from central Union funds. It should be remembered, of course, that men who qualified via the Baptist Union Examinations might have attended a college outside the denominational system.
30. Aubrey, *BQ* 1, 1922-3, p.172.

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31. Cited by B. R. White, 'Who were the Puritans?', public lecture delivered in The Queen's University of Belfast, 2 December. 1987.
32. G. Ruffell Laslett, 'Things I Miss in the Modern Pulpit', BQ 6, 1932-3, p.58.
33. E. A. Payne, *H. Wheeler Robinson: A Memoir*, 1946, p.135.
34. Calculations based on church membership figures given in Halsey ed., *Trends in British Society*, p.419. By 1969 the membership was 35% down on the 1911 figure.
35. E. Thompson, *Introducing the Arnisons*, 1935, p.96.
36. H. R. Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, New York, 1960, p.63.
37. *Baptist Times*, 27 April, 1923.
38. See, for example, N. Moon, *Education for Ministry: Bristol Baptist College, 1679-1979*, Bristol, 1979, pp.76-7, 91.
39. Quoted in J. Upton, 'Ministerial Problems, 1830', BQ 10, 1940-1, pp.178-9.
40. C. Hemington ed. *Memorials of John Warburton*, 1892, p.193.
41. *Baptist Handbook*, 1891, p.37.
42. *British Weekly*, 26 March 1891.
- On the same theme see letters in the *Baptist*, 4, 11, 18, 25 January. 1895.
43. *Baptist Times*, 27 April, 1923.
44. Figures calculated from R. Currie, A. Gilbert and L. Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles Since 1700*, Oxford, 1977, pp.209-11.
45. A. S. Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain*, 1980; H. McLeod, *Class and Stratification in the Late Victorian City*, 1974.
46. *British Weekly*, 10 March, 1955.
47. *Christian World*, 19 May 1921. Among Baptists this was reflected, not only in the declining numbers offering for the ministry but ultimately in the reduced numbers of lay preachers. The annual average number of individuals accredited between 1911 and 1939 was 5233. Between 1944 and 1960 the average was 4418, a reduction of 16%. Figures calculated from Currie, Gilbert and Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers*, pp.209-10.
48. This incident is described by E. T. Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales*, Cardiff, 1965, pp.51-2.

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## REVIEWS

Ronald C. White, Jr., Louis B. Weeks, Garth M. Rosell (eds.), *American Christianity: A Case Approach*, Exeter: Paternoster, 1986, xv + 188pp. £9.80.  
Douglas W. Frank, *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century*, Exeter: Paternoster, 1986, x + 310pp. £12.25.

Christians in the United States have not been reticent to reflect on their own identity and character. *American Christianity* offers a survey of American church history by employing an educational tool that has become vogue during the last decade, namely, the case study method, first developed at the Harvard Business School. Edited by three scholars serving at seminaries related to the Presbyterian tradition (Princeton, Louisville Presbyterian and Gordon-Conwell), it presents the major persons, ideas, issues and movements in American Christianity by means of twenty case studies, which attempt to assist the learner by presenting actual historical situations, complete with narrative and documentary data, from the viewpoint of the main characters, so that the