Who may administer The Lord's Supper?

THE Baptist reply to the Lambeth Appeal of 1920 included the following: ". . . any full description of the ministerial functions exercised among us must also take account of other believers who, at the call of the Church, may preside at the observance of the Lord's Supper or fulfil any other duties which the Church assigns to them." We are to attempt now to discover how far such a statement would have represented the views of our seventeenth century forebears.

(*a*) General Baptists

About the time of his se-baptism John Smyth questioned "whether the Church may not administer the Sacraments before there be any officers among them."[1] He does not question that the pastor should administer the Supper if there is a pastor, though he allows equal power in the matter to a "teacher."[2] In his subsequent Confessions of Faith, however, he assumes that the pastor or other teaching elder administers and says, "It is not lawful for every brother to administer the word and sacraments."[3] Yet, a little later still, shortly before he died, he still was questioning "whither (sic) the Church may not as well administer the seales of the Covenant before they have officers as Pray, Prophesy, Elect Officers and the rest."[4]

Thomas Helwys was more radical than John Smyth and, in fact, accused the latter of concern for "outward succession" in the Church when he repented of his se-baptism before he had looked for someone else, such as a Mennonite pastor, to baptize him.[5] Helwys, as Burrage pointed out,[6] was more sure than was Smyth about this matter, and, where John Smyth questioned, Helwys confidently asserted that any congregation, whether or not it has officers, "may come together to Pray, Prophecie, breake bread, and administer in all the holy ordinances."[7]

By 1625 there were five General Baptist congregations in England. These had some correspondence with the Waterlander (Mennonite) church of Amsterdam, with a view to receiving recognition for the purposes of inter-communion.[8] There were differences between the English and Dutch regarding such matters as the frequency of the Supper, the ordination of ministers and the administrator of the Supper. The Mennonites would not recognise

the English Baptists as true churches. One reason was that, while it was the custom of the English to wait for the "episcopus"* to celebrate the Lord's Supper, yet they could not see why they could not celebrate it in his absence by authorising a member to do so. As W. T. Whitley explains, "there was not a full minister for each of the five churches, and that made it impossible to observe the Lord's Supper at each church on each Lord's Day,"[9] if they waited for the "episcopus." While the English regarded proper authorisation as necessary they could not agree that this necessarily implied ordination by the laying on of hands.[10]

This viewpoint seems to be maintained in the "Orthodox" Creed of 1678, agreed to by the General Baptists of the Midlands, which was based on the Westminster Confession and attempted to conform to that as closely as Baptists could. Instead of "a Minister of the Word lawfully ordained"[11] we find the phrase, "those only who are rightly qualified, and thereunto called, according to the command of Christ."[12] This avoids the word "ordained," and perhaps allows a "gifted disciple," duly authorised by the local church to administer the sacrament if there is no pastor.

However, Thomas Grantham, leader of the General Baptists of the eastern counties, allowed no one but an ordained minister to administer the Supper; and said that if, in the absence of a pastor there is a "gifted disciple" sufficiently gifted to administer the Supper, then he is fit to be ordained pastor in the full and permanent manner.[13] This point of view was also maintained by the General Assembly of 1693, for when there was put to it the question, "whether a Gifted Disciple as such may Lawfully Exercise Discipline and Administer the Ordinacon (sic) of the Lord's Supper abroad in the Churches without Ordinacon. It was resolved in the Negative."[14] The 1702 Assembly concurred.[15]

Thomas Grantham was clear that Baptism must be treated differently from the Lord's Supper in this connection. "Baptism must be dispensed out of the Church, or where there is only a Disciple and an Instructor. . . . It is no reasoning therefore, that he is a Disciple only, may baptize; *ergo,* He that is a Disciple only, may minister the Lord's Supper; for let this Argument run, and it will make Ordination an insignificant Trifle, and every man to have the same power in the dispensation of Ordinances."[16]

He allows a "messenger" to administer the Lord's Supper, on the grounds that he was ordained.[17] However this was resisted by the Lincolnshire Association, which maintained that "preachers" who were ordained, but not elders in particular churches, could not preside at the Lord's Supper.[18] This was to assert against the claims of an ordained "messenger" such as Grantham, who was not however an elder in any church except the one which sent him forth, that the ground of administering the Lord's

Supper was not ordination, but the authority of the particular church where the Supper was being administered.

In general, Baptists were insistent that everything done within or in the name of the local church was duly authorised by that particular church. For example, in 1654 the Fenstanton church made the following resolutions :—

> " First, That it shall be lawful for any person to improve* their gifts in the presence of the congregation. Secondly, That it shall be lawful only for such as are approved by the congregation, to preach publickly to the world. Thirdly, That it shall not be lawful for any person to go from place to place to preach, except they be sent by the congregation."[19]

They must have been equally strict with regard to the administration of the sacraments. The Kent Association was equally strict.[20]

Among the numerous items relating to fixtures for preaching and " breaking of bread " at the various sub-congregations of the Ford-Cuddington church[21] are the names of a number of people delegated to preach from time to time, but only two names occur in connection with the " breaking of bread " appointments. We do not know whether these two were pastors or ordained, but it is clear that just these two men were authorised to administer the Supper.

Not all General Baptists insisted on the one who administered the Lord's Supper being an ordained pastor, though a number did, but all insisted that everything was properly authorised by the local church. If there were the local pastor then he administered the Supper without question.

(*b*) THE PARTICULAR BAPTISTS

With the Particular Baptists also we find some divergence of opinion. Some, such as Thomas Collier[22] and Benjamin Keach,[23] said that the sacraments should be administered by no one but a pastor duly called and set apart. The Western Association Meeting at Broughton, likewise decided, in 1691, that according to Scripture only a person set apart by ordination could administer the Lord's Supper.[24]

The Kensworth church, a group of congregations in Hertfordshire, held that only the pastor could administer the Supper, it appears; for it appointed an assistant pastor to help maintain the regular administration of the Supper at its various constituent congregations.[25] Similarly, Blaenau[26] and Swansea[27] group-churches had two elders each to enable the sub-congregations to receive the Lord's Supper regularly, both in time and manner. It was the same elsewhere in Wales.[28]

However, some Baptists were less rigid, and gave power " to

others besides ministers to celebrate . . . even the Lord's Supper, without so much as the presence of any Ministers."[29] Despite the fact that William Mitchell wrote[30] that only a pastor, lawfully called, could administer sacraments, some of the churches started by his colleague, David Crosley, celebrated the Lord's Supper without a pastor, although with some scruples.[31]

The 1677 Confession of Faith said that the Lord's Supper was to be administered by "those only, who are qualified and called according to the commission of Christ."[32] That Confession followed the Westminster Confession as closely as Baptists could, yet in this matter it is less explicit than "a Minister of the Word lawfully ordained."[33]

The Baptists were attempting to cover certain exceptions in avoiding the word "ordained." One such exception is suggested by the minutes of the 1693 Western Association meetings in Bristol.[34] The Association said that only elders might administer the sacraments; but an elder might administer it who had been "called to the office by the suffrage of the church, who had not yet been ordained by the laying on of hands."[35] This modifies the ruling of two years before, mentioned just above. The Association's revised opinion is exemplified in the practice of the Broadmead church in Bristol. It would not celebrate the Lord's Supper when either it had no pastor or was deprived of one temporarily, e.g. when he was imprisoned. During the Civil War, when the Broadmead church, then of the "Open" membership type and including both Baptists and Independents, was pastorless, it was joined by the Independent church from Llanvaches which had a pastor in Walter Cradock. Then the joint church held the Lord's Supper with Cradock administering it.[36] On a number of occasions the church omitted the Supper because of the lack of a pastor,[37] yet the church did not insist on the one administering having been ordained with the laying on of hands; but it did insist on him being the duly authorised pastor, on whom hands would be laid later.[38]

However, some churches were even less rigid. The same 1693 Western Association further appealed to the churches "to prevent all such from exercising their pretended gift," for "some persons, who being vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds, do presume to preach publickly without being solemnly called and appointed by the church thereto, and some to administer the ordinances."[39] Daniel King, of the Warwick Church, said that any "disciple" may baptize or break bread," although "after the Church hath officers, then it properly belongeth to them."[40] In 1684, Hercules Collins, pastor of the Wapping-Walthamstow church was in prison: the church meeting suggested that a Mr. Roofes should administer the Supper meanwhile. The pastor objected. The matter was not dropped even after his release and return. Finally, at a church meeting "it

was againe maintayned Ratified and Confirmed: by ye deliberate Aprobation & Authority of ye Chu: that it is lawfull for a Bro'r whome ye Chu: shall Judge Able to Oppen ye Nature of ye Ordinance; (Tho hee bee nott called to ye Office of an Elder) To Administer the Lds Supper."[41]

Another possibility for the pastorless congregation was to call in the pastor of a neighbouring church. However, some Baptists would not allow this, notably Benjamin Keach[42] and William Mitchell.[43] But the Assembly in 1689 decided that "an Elder of one Church may administer the Ordinance of the Lord's Supper to another of the same Faith, being called upon to do so by the said Church; tho not as Pastor, but as a Minister, necessity being only considered in this case."[44]

All agreed that the pastor was the proper person to administer the Supper, when he was available; but prolonged lack of pastors, because of "inter-regnums" or imprisonment, saw differing points of view emerge. However, all agreed that the proper authorisation of the local church was necessary, even when ordination was not made a pre-requisite.

E. P. WINTER.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Smyth, J.: *Works*, I, p. 313. Cf. II, pp. 419f.

[2] Smyth, J.: *Principles and Inferences*, pp. 18-20.

[3] (Longer) Confession §80. An earlier draft added "except those only who are called and ordained to it" (Evans, B.: *The Early English Baptists*, I, p. 269). Cf. (Latin) Confession, §16 and (De Ries) Confession, §28.

[4] Smyth, J.: *Works*, II, pp. 419f.

[5] Whitley, W. T.: *History of British Baptists*, pp. 30-32. Underwood, A. C.: *History of English Baptists*, pp. 39-47.

[6] Burrage, C.: *The Early English Dissenters*, I, p. 253, II, pp. 182-4.

[7] Helwys, Th.: *Declaration of Faith*, §13.

[8] Whitley, W. T.: *Op. cit.*, pp. 51f. Underwood, A. C.: *Op. cit.*, pp. 50f. Evans, B.: *The Early English Baptists*, II, pp. 22-35. Burrage, C.: *Op. cit.*, I, p. 273. Baptist Historical Society *Transactions*, IV, pp. 250-4.

[9] Whitley, W. T.: *Loc. cit. supra.*

* An ordained minister of a church or churches.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Westminster Confession, §XXVII.

[12] *Op. cit.*, §XXVII.

[13] Grantham, Th.: *Christianismus Primitivus*, Book II, Part II, Ch. 7, §VIII, p. 93.

[14] Whitley, W. T. (Ed.): Assembly *Minutes*, p. 39.

[15] *Op. cit.*, p. 70.

[16] Grantham, Th.: *Loc. cit*, p. 94.

[17] Grantham, Th.: *Hear the Church*, p. 28.

[18] Underwood, A. C.: *Op cit*, pp. 119f. Taylor, A.: *History of the General Baptists*, I, p. 419.

[19] Underhill, E. B. (Ed.): *Fenstanton Records*, p. 98.

[20] Baptist Historical Society *Transactions*, III, pp. 249f.

[21] Whitley, W. T. (Ed.): *Ford-Cuddington Church Book, passim.*

* *i.e.* exercise, utilise.

[22] Collier, Th.: *Body of Divinity*, p. 474.
[23] Keach, B.: *The Glory of a True Church*, pp. 16f.
[24] Letter from the 1691 Association to Whitchurch Baptist church. Contents conveyed verbatim in a letter from Mr. L. C. May, 14th October, 1952.
[25] Kensworth "pocket book"; entries under 1688 and 1694. Cf. Ivimey, J.: *History*, II, p. 174.
[26] Thomas, J.: *Materials for a History of the Baptist Churches in the Principality of Wales, passim.*
[27] Thomas, J.: *History of the Baptist Association in Wales;* printed in Rippon, J.: *Baptist Annual Register*, IV, p. 23.
[28] Thomas, J.: *Op. cit.*, p. 13.
[29] Baillie, R.: *The Dissuasive from the Errours of the Time Vindicated*, p. 83.
[30] Mitchell, W.: *Jachin and Boaz*, §15; printed in the Baptist Historical Society *Transactions*, III, pp. 168f. Cf. p. 160.
[31] Whitley, W. T.: *Baptists of North-West England*, p. 76.
[32] McGlothlin, W.: *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 269.
[33] Westminster Confession, §XXVII (V).
[34] Ivimey, J.: *History*, I, p. 527 (verbatim record). Underwood, A. C.: *History of the English Baptists*, p. 130. Goadby, J. J.: *Bypaths in Baptist History*, p. 210.
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] Underhill, E. B. (Ed.): *Broadmead Records*, pp. 29f.
[37] Underhill, E. B. (Ed.): *Op. cit.*, pp. 34f., 106, 284, 395f.
[38] Underhill, E. B. (Ed.): *Op. cit.*, p. 383.
[39] Ivimey, J.: *History*, I, p. 527.
[40] King, Daniel: *A Way to Zion sought out*, p. 59.
[41] Kevan, E.: *London's Oldest Baptist Church*, pp. 60f.
[42] Keach, B.: *The Glory of a True Church*, pp. 16f.
[43] Mitchell, W.: *Jachin and Boaz;* printed in Baptist Historical Society *Transactions*, III, p. 168.
[44] 1689 Assembly *Minutes*, p. 18.

Jairus, a one-act Play, by T. A. Dewing, Speedwell Plays. (Independent Press, 1s.)

This play is for eight male characters and two female. Despite the fact that it only runs for thirty minutes, the delineation of character is so deft that we feel that we know the people. The play presents excellently the contrast between the impact of our Lord's warm humanity on ordinary people and the rigid conventionalism of the scribal religion of His day.

Spurgeon's Homes, by Graham W. Hughes. (Spurgeon's Homes, Birchington, Kent, 6d.)

This is a reprint of the story of Spurgeon's Homes as told by the Editor of *The Baptist Quarterly* in an article printed in this periodical. It sets out clearly and impressively the establishment and subsequent history of this fine piece of practical Christianity. There are a number of illuminating photographs.

DENIS LANT.