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Reviews

Children of Abraham. David Kingdon, Worthing and Haywards Heath. Henry E. Walter and Carey Publications Ltd. 100pp. 60 pence.

The Rev. Kingdon is an associate editor of *Reformation Today*, a magazine saying in the terms of its editor, "Reformation is the conforming of Churches to the biblical pattern . . . the ever-present responsibility of the Church". This active, if small, movement overseas and here takes the 1689 edition of the Confession of Faith of the Particular Baptist Churches as the standard symbol of faith. To this the author refers as the canon of rule of the "Reformed Baptist Churches". It is to be noted that the author uses this edition and not the original of 1677 (virtually unchanged in 1689), especially as the appendix to the 1677 Confession, which does not appear in that of 1689 has matter of considerable length which the author might have drawn upon with gain. The study consists of papers given at a Summer School in the Baptist College in Belfast, conferences in Birmingham and Nottingham, and lectures in South Africa. It may be considered as an authoritative presentation of the "Reformed Baptist Churches" position on the matter under review.

The thesis is the sustaining of believer's baptism over against the paedobaptist position, on the basis of "covenant theology", hence the reference to Abraham in the title. Overall there is a sense that the field under review is peripheral to the real question of the child in the Church, and therefore perhaps somewhat irrelevant in the light of the broad movements in theology and ecclesiology. The author is countering the arguments of a minority with whom he has close affinity doctrinally in Calvinistic theology. An attempt is made to establish a Baptist theology of the Covenant, first by sustaining a direct nexus between the covenant with Abraham and the New Covenant in Christ, without drawing sufficiently on the radical distinction between the two, which is much more than that between "natural seed" and "spiritual seed". "It is my considered opinion", says the author, "that Baptists must recognise the analogy between circumcision and baptism". This is to fail to recognise that the New Covenant is so radical as to be disruptive of the Old, as Paul maintains, indeed so far as to obliterate comparisons. Few will be willing to give the spiritual value to circumcision the author is compelled to give by his covenantal stance. It has no warrant in Scripture. Moreover there are inherent basic dangers in covenantal theology which appeared in the New England churches of the late seventeenth century.

The writer will meet more serious controversy in respect of his chapter on "Children and Regeneration" especially when he con-

troverts the position "that all infants dying in infancy are saved". "It is questionable", he says, "whether such a thought was in the minds of the authors of the Westminster Confession of Faith . . . It seems to me that if Spurgeon, Hodge and Boettner do not intentionally go beyond Scripture, they certainly take the barest hints and press them, so that they become the assertion of this doctrine of infant salvation. For nowhere in Scripture, as far as I can see, is there express warrant for this belief". The author is parting company with some Calvinistic notables here! "My own position", he adds, "is that in the matter of infant salvation one can only adopt an attitude of reverent and hopeful agnosticism". Which needs the counterbalance of Pascal's, "the heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing at all". Calvinism has always to be beware of being dominated by logic, and run out by its own rationalism. Faithful interpretation of Scripture needs heart reading.

There is a serious omission of attention to the place of children in the Church. Emphasis is very properly placed on home training, and home taught evangelism but no reference is made to a desirability or possibility of a "theology of the child". Neither is there reference or examination of the service commonly called, "Infant Dedication", or "Infant Presentation", which among Baptists in the green isle is called "Dry Baptism".

All in all the impression is made that this contribution to the place of the child in the Church carries too much of the fugitive character given by the nature of conference papers, and we await from Principal Kingdon's able mind and pen a more exhaustive study with wider reading than of those with whom he has Calvinistic affinity. Nevertheless we welcome the challenging spirit of this work with its irenic quality. The exponents of *Reformation Today* have a decided part to play in the thinking of our Churches if they can keep to the fore that established positions in theology are bases for further progress, and that part of the Reformed position is its comprehensive character. It is essential to its usefulness that it unites kindred spirits in a bond which debate cannot sever, and that it plays its part in the broad and pressing issues of our times in our churches. There is no doubt that Principal Kingdon desires just this, and has a very worthy and able role in the continuing study of the matter he here initiates.

A. J. BARNARD.

Michael Taylor *Guidelines: Variations on a Theme* London, Galliard, 1973 pp. 122. Price not stated.

The sub-title describes the book as: "Some guidelines for everyday Christians who want to reform the Liturgy." In the Preface the author declares himself to be the "ally" of "the more restive" in our congregations who are interested in new ways of worshipping. Anyone who opens this book hoping to find a blueprint for avant-garde religion, however, is in for a shock. Principal Taylor has spotted the weakness of much of the "experimental" worship of recent years: it is often

superficial and alienates rather than involves the congregation.

Half the book is devoted to exposing the bedrock upon which all Christian worship must be built. The origins and development of the Liturgy, centred on the Communion Service, controlled by the Bible, shaped by the life of the Christian fellowship, are presented in a masterly sketch which, with style, wit and great economy of line suggests the full portrait. The four actions of Jesus at the Last Supper – taking the bread and the cup, giving thanks, breaking the bread, giving the bread and the cup to the disciples – become the basis of the Liturgy. Since these are the actions of Jesus and no other, they are inseparable from the story of Jesus and in Christian worship this story is constantly re-told.

Here are the great constants of the Church's worship, always present, though often obscured by the shifts of time and place. The serious distortions of the Middle Ages are revealed for what they really are and the over-corrections of the Reformation are no less justly assessed. The account of the Greek East and the Latin West is of special interest, with their counter-emphases on Resurrection and dying Lord. How refreshing, too, to find a scholar who at last admits that human temperament has its place in shaping the Liturgy!

Having confessed that thus far his position is "unashamedly conservative" – which will surprise some quite as much as the news of Enoch Powell voting for the Labour Party – the author turns to the contemporary scene. "Multi-media" theatricals and electronics are coolly received. The over-busy activist, thirsting for instant results, is also on the list and clearly won't be missed. Reform then boils down to involving the congregation in an assortment of groups to plan services in detail, including sermons. Much is informal, with chats over cups of tea in the middle of the Communion service and a "secular calendar" which includes sporting fixtures. The minister is to be the self-effacing "enabler" of these activities.

It begins to sound rather contrived. The listening is over – now we want to argue the case. Our local church life is not totally inert: the possibilities – and the limits – of ad hoc groups are not entirely unexplored and the shared beauty and power of the Baptismal-Communion service (not mentioned in this book) suggest that more has been recovered than is here allowed.

A book worth listening to and arguing with: no Fraternal could ask for more!

G. H. TAYLOR.

Philip Wright: *Knibb, 'the Notorious': Slaves' Missionary 1803-1845*. London. Sidgwick and Jackson, 1973. Pp. 264. £3.95

This book provides a sympathetic but not uncritical account of the life and work of William Knibb. It is very readable and is dependent upon carefully researched primary sources but does not attempt much in the way of analysis to enrich its narrative.

Knibb's ministry coincided with the heroic period of anti-slavery

agitation in Jamaica when slavery was itself abolished and the near slavery of the apprenticeship system brought to an end. Of course there were many cross currents during this struggle, among them the clash of class between the plantocracy and the small tradesmen turned missionary preachers, the deep bitterness between the established clergy and the 'sectarians', the tension between colonists and mother country and, not least, the political convictions of missionaries on the spot and the caution of the leaders of their Society at home.

Quite evidently, William Knibb was not everybody's favourite: a flamboyant, melodramatic, near fanatic orator, he seems to have spent little time attempting to see anyone's point of view but his own. But then, it could fairly be argued, has anything ever been achieved by a preacher who chilled the banner headlines of truth and justice into the discreet footnotes beloved of academics? There is plenty of evidence that the polemic which is drawn with bold, sharp, lines by a William Knibb or a Joseph Sturge is the only polemic which will sting a sleeping Christian conscience awake. The author's own evidence for the atrocious violence, utter dishonesty and corrupt society produced by the institution of slavery in Jamaica, though provided with a low profile and without hysteria, seems to justify the campaign waged by Knibb and his 'sectarian' friends up to the hilt. It is also interesting to notice the account given of the 'tired liberal' element who tended to blow rather cold as they began to see that freedom from slavery meant no apprenticeship system, then collective bargaining for fair wages, then independent villages for the former slaves. It all became *too* political—and so for the "tired liberals" did the missionary preachers.

Nevertheless, beneath the surface of this book lie all kinds of questions about the nature of the sub-Christian sects who proliferated on the very borders of the churches and of the sub-Christian practices which often flourished within even Baptist congregations. Not all the allegations about these matters can be brushed aside as quickly as can allegations from, of all people, Anglican clergy in Jamaica, of Baptist arrogance.

Knibb himself had a robust way of dealing with his critics as was evidenced in his remarks about some L.M.S. missionaries whom he had previously helped and who later questioned the quality of his churchmembers: "I feel no enmity to them," he explained, "but such mean, snake-like crawling conduct inspires my unqualified disgust". Yet even his critics could say, and one did, that Knibb was "by no means a perfect character but a man of ardent piety, an indomitable advocate of liberty, a straightforward though not always consistent man, and a warmhearted friend. I loved his society . . ." At the conclusion of Mr. Wright's book one accepts this as a judicious epiphany.

Come with Us: The Story of Loughton Union Church, 1813-1973, Vivian Lewis, 1974, pp.52. (obtainable from the Church Secretary, The Union Church, High Road, Loughton, Essex, price 50p).

This is a story worth telling, and it is told in an interesting way. Mr. Lewis has the knack of being able to clothe old records with life. What is equally important, he is able to distinguish between what is significant in a church's story and what is not. The format, too, is attractive, the text being liberally interspersed with photographs.

The intriguing title *Come with Us* is from Numbers 10.29, which is quoted in the "Summary of Doctrines held and Form of Government" adopted by the church at its formal constitution in 1817. This document and other information, including a statement expressing the church's ecumenical principles, are to be found in appendices at the end.

Come with Us not only recounts the story of a church; it enables us to see how the past has helped to shape the present. We get a glimpse of the kind of things which determine the pattern and direction of church life. These are not always deep spiritual principles; sometimes they are much more mundane things—a former pastor insisting on sitting on the platform beside his successor, and snorting whenever he disapproves of his preaching; a minister's ill health; a church meeting divided on the introduction of individual communion glasses, resulting in a compromise.

Two features of the Loughton church stand out. One is the breadth of its ecumenical vision. The other is its commitment to the missionary cause. Five of its members have become missionaries, two of them martyrs. Four other missionaries have been associated with the church, including W. Holman Bentley, the Congo pioneer, who heard the call to the mission field whilst a boy in Loughton.

This little book is an excellent example of what a local church history should be, and deserves to be widely read.

ERNEST F. CLIPSHAM.