

## REVIEWS

*The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century* by B. R. White. Baptist Historical Society. 1983. pp.155. £4.95.

This, the first volume of the long awaited history of English Baptists, will not only fill a real need for the coming generation of students in our colleges, but will be appreciated by all who seek an up-to-date survey of Baptist history. Since A. C. Underwood published his *History of English Baptists* 36 years ago, considerable research has been going on, much of it published by the Baptist Historical Society in the *Quarterly* and elsewhere, as a glance through the notes will demonstrate. Dr White has now set our history into closer perspective.

The author defends the study of denominational history: 'especially for the ecumenically committed, it is useful to clarify the tradition and to establish the identity and inner drives and characteristics of one significant group of Christian Churches'. He goes on to consider 'Baptist definitions and assumptions' clearly distinguishing between the General and the Particular communities.

Eight pages of survey of historians of the English Baptists - from Thomas Crosby to Ernest Payne - are useful. Altogether, the introductory chapter is stimulating and enlightening.

The three main chapters are approximately the same length as the corresponding four chapters in Underwood, but the treatment is different. It is mainly thematic, though there are also lively biographical sketches.

'The English General Baptists to 1660' traces the story from Smyth and Helwys to the days of the great rebellion. Their emphasis (shared by others) on religious liberty 'seemed to many conservative churchmen, both episcopalian and presbyterian, merely a demand that every man should be free to choose his own road to hell'. Many of the sectaries were consciously or unconsciously the agents of social revolution. 'To social revolution was added a profound spiritual instability. Men's convictions grew from seedling to harvest at breakneck speed in these tumultuous years'. True enough, yet amid the pressures from Levellers on the one hand and Fifth Monarchists on the other, Baptists worked out their church life, though the evidence of their joint consultations is more fragmentary than that available concerning Calvinist Baptists. The contribution of several General Baptist evangelists receives good attention.

But it is the chapter on 'The Calvinist Baptists to 1660' that is probably the most valuable contribution made by the book. The importance of the 1644 Confession is stressed, and points of difference from the early Separatist Confession of 1596 are carefully noted: 'The restriction of baptism to believers, the subordination of the ministry more fully to the congregation, and the severance of any links between church and state imply a narrowing of the circle... It is however clear that their retreat from any traditional concept of the Christian state seems to have sharpened their sense of mission rather than to have blunted it'.

Not only the origin but the *theology* of Associations is carefully expounded: 'there is a like relation betwixt the particular churches towards each other, as there is betwixt particular members of one church. For the churches of Christ do all make up of one body or Church in general under Christ their head'. This speaks to contemporary Baptists seeking to work out the meaning of inter-dependence. It is noteworthy that whereas Baptists organised Association life from about 1650, English Independents waited until the 19th century. The United Reformed Church has moved on much further!

Like the General Baptists, the Calvinists sought to work out their political stance, particularly during Cromwell's Protectorate. Were they left-wing? 'In fact', observes Dr White, 'while the majority of leading Calvinist Baptists were probably republican in their political sentiments, there must have been many who had hardly any political opinions at all. Revolutionary militancy was most likely to be found among those who held Fifth Monarchy views and looked forward to the coming reign of Christ upon earth as the fulfilment of the prophecies of Daniel 2'. All this is fascinating, and important for us to consider in our very different environment, wherein Baptists so often maintain divergent attitudes to political involvement.

In the last section, 'The End of the Great Persecution 1660-1688', Dr White attempts a balanced assessment of the motives of those who sought to impose a monolithic national church as a bastion of political stability, and the motives of Baptists and other dissenters who felt compelled in all good conscience to resist such pressures, and affirm the 'Crown Rights of the Redeemer'. But the story is not merely one of courageous resistance by congregations, doggedly determined to survive. Baptist life went on: '... the discipline of the churches was maintained; at its best it meant that kind of care for one another whereby the members held each other up to what they believed'. Books were written - Dr White includes a survey of Baptist theological writing during this turbulent period. New confessions of faith were being formulated, and plans for the renewal of inter-church consultation when persecution eased.

Of interest to us in our contemporary heart-searching about episcopacy is the practice of the General Baptists in appointing messengers (or Apostles), Bishops (or Elders) and Deacons. It was clear that messengers elected by their brethren had some authority among the churches and the ministers, 'advisors whose counsel must be listened to with great respect'. Also of interest for today is the stress laid by General Baptists on the laying-on of hands after baptism - a theme expounded in two chapters.

Many of the issues focussed by Dr White can help to illuminate our path today. It is a pity, however, that the quality of production could not have matched that of the Underwood volume. The three portraits reproduced (Kiffin, Knollys and Hardcastle) are disappointing. Perhaps when the volumes on the 18th and 19th centuries have been published they could all be worthily reproduced in one handsome volume - hopefully well before the 21st century dawns.

*Baptists in the Twentieth Century: Papers presented at a Summer School* edited by K. W. Clements. Baptist Historical Society. 1983. pp.147. £4.95.

After pointing out that the authors of these papers, given to the Baptist Historical Society, worked quite independently on specific subjects, the editor claims that they nevertheless provide the most substantial publication to date on British Baptists in the modern period. He may well be right. The content of the book is decidedly heterogeneous. This is what reviewers habitually say about symposia, but in this case the remark is not a criticism. The time has not yet come for an overall, synoptic assessment of twentieth century Baptist history, and any attempt at it in this volume could have been artificial. Meanwhile, we have here some new, valuable material for such an assessment in the future.

Yet, in a way, Leonard Champion's magisterial survey of Baptist church life in this century does offer a first draft of that eventual assessment. He gives the sobering facts of decline in numbers and in influence upon society, emphasizing the inner change in Baptist consciousness, from the time when being a Baptist meant a complete way of life, to the present time, when being a Baptist is only one among a plurality of spiritual, mental and social interests. He indicates signs of regression and of progress, and asks for clear theological direction to be given through the dilemmas and issues of our quickly changing times.

David Watts grounds us in the problems of Glasgow, but hints that these are also the problems of every great city. Michael Walker, in what will strike many Free Church people as an idiosyncratic contribution on 'Baptist Worship', condemns the Church Growth Movement because of its sociological bias and its emphasis on 'success', berates the Baptist people for not taking seriously the Liturgical Movement in the form commended by Neville Clark and others, and powerfully urges a return to the theological foundations of worship.

'Still at the Crossroads', by Roger Hayden, is a persuasive vindication of J. H. Shakespeare as an ecumenical statesman before his time. Morris West is able to show, in 'Baptists in Faith and Order', that in at least one very important field of the theology (the concerns of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches), Baptist influence has contributed substantially, not least to the process leading to the Lima document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, which at last gives due place to the theology of baptism. David Bebbington narrates in scientific detail the painful divorce of the Baptist community from Liberalism and the erratic decline into pietism, except in matters connected with alcohol, of many Baptists. The editor takes as a model of British misunderstanding of European Christianity the reactions of Baptists to the German Church struggle of the thirties. They saw it as a matter, not of basic theology (as Bonhoeffer knew it to be), but simply of religious freedom; whereas the German Baptists (and Methodists) said that, thank you, they were completely free, and backed the Government. (As a student in Germany at the time, your reviewer

can confirm the diagnosis).

Clyde Binfield is a precise guide to Baptist architects, almost dispelling the illusion that Baptist chapels are narrowly functional structures.

The general tone is self-critical - rightly perhaps, since any sign of praising one's own denomination is at once dubbed triumphalistic. But, on the facts presented, a cautious optimism would be in order, so long as Baptists are willing to take a greater and greater part in *local* ecumenism, where at present they are not prominent.

RUPERT E. DAVIES

*The Journal of Henry Alline* edited by James Beverley and Barry Moody. Lancelot Press (for Acadia Divinity College and Baptist Historical Committee of the United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces), PO Box 425, Hantsport, N.S. Canada BOP 1PO, 1982, pp.268, \$8.95.

This is volume four in the Baptist Heritage in Atlantic Canada series, though in time it comes before that of Payzant's journal (Vol.3) already reviewed (*Baptist Quarterly* October 1982).

Henry Alline (1748-1784) was born in Newport, Rhode Island. He was 12 when the family moved to Nova Scotia to take advantage of Governor Charles Lawrence's offer of free land, settling in Falmouth, Nova Scotia, on land adjacent to the Payzant family.

Alline was converted in 1775 and the following year began a preaching ministry which was felt throughout Nova Scotia. Caught up in the pressures of the Great Awakening, Alline's itinerant preaching was vigorous, dramatic, emotional and unorthodox. Tuberculosis took its toll of Alline, but he preached relentlessly until he died in the home of David McClure, minister at the Northampton, NH, Congregational church.

His chronicle is one man's view of the Great Awakening: an important view, since he was a primary figure in the founding of New Light churches which eventually became Baptist. Alline's mysticism, deriving from the writings of William Law, and his abandonment of Calvinist theology for a free-will position, resulted in several generations of Nova Scotian Baptists largely ignoring his contribution to their origins. This volume seeks to redress the balance, demonstrating that 'Alline's ministry led eventually to the development of Baptist work in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick', though admitting that Alline himself had no sympathy with those who insisted upon only one form of Baptism.

If any true Christians are conscience bound to be sprinkled, they and their children, by no means forbid them; and if others are conscience bound to omit the baptizing of their Infants, but choose to go all under Water themselves after Conversion, why should they not go; and if others are Conscience bound to omit both, for the Lord's sake, do not compel them to use it. (p.20)

