

THE BAPTIST MINISTRY  
OF VICTORIAN ENGLAND AND WALES  
A Social Profile

The 'great men' of the Baptist ministry - the Spurgeons, Cliffords, and Shakespeares, as well as those of an earlier generation like Dan Taylor and Robert Hall - have in general been well served by historians. Some have attracted biographers; all have received quite extensive coverage in denominational literature. Yet virtually nothing is known about the vast majority of those who manned the Baptist pulpits of Victorian Britain. Almost all of the 1600 or so individuals on the active and retired list in 1871 and of the 2000 on the same list in 1900 remain obscure, largely anonymous, figures lost in the shadows cast by the few giants.(1) Even though prosopography has a long pedigree and has been particularly useful when applied to the history of religious groups, historians have preferred to generalise on the basis of the experience of a few, well-known and well-documented individuals, an approach which reveals nothing about the ministerial group as a whole.(2) Matters such as the typical minister's social and geographical origins, or his career pattern, have barely been considered, let alone analysed in any depth. This may be because other questions - perhaps rightly - have assumed priority. Or it may be that Baptist historians, like those of other denominations, have simply followed the sociologists of religion who, in Britain at any rate, have tended to ignore the role of the religious functionary.(3) More plausibly, however, it seems that this neglect has been a reflection of the difficulties involved in acquiring adequate historical evidence. There is, however, no shortage of biographical and autobiographical material on Baptist ministers, though the former is often hagiographical and the latter frequently subjective and selective. Neither includes as a matter of course the sort of detail for which the social historian searches and such material still does not represent a typical cross section of the entire ministerial population. Biographical writings usually concern themselves only with the important or unusual, while to write one's own life story is an untypical act.(4) When Thomas Hunter contacted some four thousand free church ministers in 1878, asking them to furnish him with personal information so that he could build up a composite picture of the contemporary pastorate, he received only seventy-four replies and most of them were under no illusions as to their significance. One correspondent asked that his reply be placed 'among the similar stratification of your folio Mss to be consulted possibly, but more likely not, by the antiquaries of future centuries'.(5)

Yet there does survive a great deal of pertinent information, although it is locked away in denominational yearbooks, journals, local newspapers, obituaries, and the like. What follows is based on a systematic perusal of such materials. A sample of 560 men was constructed by selecting two out of every three of the men whose deaths were recorded in the *Baptist Handbook* for each of the five year periods 1851-55, 1871-75, 1891-95, 1911-15, 1931-35, 1951-55, and 1971-75. These individuals were then regrouped according to the

decade in which they first entered the ministry. A second sample of 357 men forms the basis of the paragraphs concerning career patterns, and was derived from the *Handbooks'* list of those entering the ministry in every tenth year between 1841 and 1911. The subsequent analysis provides a fuller and more representative picture of the typical Baptist minister, particularly in the years 1850-1911, the very years in which the denomination, as part of a broad nonconformist lobby, was probably at the height of its social and political influence.

Table 1 examines the social origins of the ministers using the occupational classification first urged by Professor Armstrong and now widely accepted by social historians of the nineteenth century.(6) The only amendment has been to merge classes IV and V since the overall numbers in these classes are low and job descriptions usually too vague to permit of an accurate distinction between the two. The allocation between classes in table 1 has been based on the occupations of the ministers' fathers, or where this was not known, the occupation of the individual minister immediately prior to the commencement of his clerical career.

It has generally been accepted that prior to 1850 the majority of Baptist pastors were, in the words of one scholar, 'very obscure men', an impression borne out in one well known contemporary source.(7) In Mark Rutherford's fictional village of Cowfold in the 1840s the Anglican vicar, together with the Independent and Wesleyan ministers, had nothing to do with the local Baptist pastor because he was 'a poor man, and poor persons sat under him'.(8) In the light of this - even though the sample is too small to allow any statistically valid generalisation to be made - it is worth noting the relatively high proportion of men originating in social class I before 1850. To some extent this is the product of the Registrar General's classification scheme which placed nonconformist ministers in the highest social echelon. As with other professions in the nineteenth century, there was a marked tendency for sons to follow fathers. This phenomenon accounts for some of the proportion drawn from class I. However, if we discount those men who were themselves sons of ministers, there still remain 3.6%, 6.7% and 4.8% of men entering the ministry from class I in the three entry cohorts between 1860 and 1909. These are figures too high to be explained away, for example by obituarists trying consciously to upgrade the denomination's rather fustian image. Rather, the figures would seem to represent the continuation of that same trend of higher level recruitment which was already apparent in the eighteenth century and to which L. G. Champion has already drawn attention.(9)

This is further borne out by the high proportions originating in class II, although this was consistently declining during the years after 1850, due mainly to the fluctuating number of farmers - a group whose social classification presents peculiar difficulties, as the term 'farmer' could mean anything from a substantial landholder to someone barely distinguishable from a farm labourer. It is also possible that the decline in class II entrants was more apparent than real, disguised by the fact that more candidates were entering the ministry direct from education. A number of class II entrants might thus appear in the table as students. On the other hand, there is no obvious reason why

TABLE 1 OCCUPATIONAL AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE: BAPTIST MINISTRY

(n = number of individuals used in calculating percentage in each social class. F = Father's occupation, S = Son's)

Cohort	1810-39		1820-49		1830-59		1840-69		1850-79		1860-89		1870-99		1880-1909		1890-1919		1900-29	
	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S
n	49		66		73		85		92		111		112		104		83		62	
CLASS I																				
Accountant					1		1		1		1		1		1		1			
Architect									1		1		1				1			1
Auctioneer													1		1					
Dentist				1		1		1												
Journalist						1		1		1					1		1			1
Land Agent																				
Minister	10		12		11	1	10	1	6	1	8		11	1	15	1	14	1		11
Naval Architect									1		1		1							
Naval Officer									1		1		1							
Publisher											1		1		1					
Solicitor																		1		1
Stockbroker				1		1		1												
Percentage	Not		Valid						11.9		10.8		16.0		20.1		Invalid			
CLASS II																				
Artist		1		1																
Builder							1		1		1		1		2		2			1
Farmer	5		7		7	1	8	2	8	3	7	2	4	1	3		2			1
Manager	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1							
Manufacturer					1				1		1		1		1					
Merchant			1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	2		1		2			1
Mill Owner							1	1	1	1	1	1								
Teacher	7		7		9		3	11	4	11	5	11	2	7	1	8	6			6
Percentage	Not		Valid						27.1		21.6		13.3		12.5		Invalid			
CLASS III (Whitecollar)																				
Chemist				1		1		2		1		1								6
Clerk		1		3		4		5		7		10		13		12		7		
Draper		1		3		3		4		3		4		3		2		2		1
Grocer		2		1		1				1		2		3		2		1		
Lab Demonstrator																		1		1
Optician																				1
Photographer																		1		1
Postmaster											1		1							
Salesman					1		1		1											
Shopworker																			1	1
Traveller							1		1		1		1	1	1	2	1	2		1
Percentage	Not		Valid						15.2		15.3		17.8		18.2					

Table 1, cont.	1810-30		1820-49		1830-59		1840-69		1850-79		1860-89		1870-99		1880-1909		1890-1919		1900-29	
	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S
Artisan																				
Blacksmith																				1
Boat Builder									2		2		2				1			1
Boot Maker			1		1		2		1		1									
Brazier	1		1		1															
Cabinet Maker					1		2		2		1									
Carpenter															1		2			2
Chainmaker		1		1		1														
Coach Builder					1		1		1											
Dyer			1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1										
Engineer							1	1	2		2		3	3		3				1
Gasman											1		1	1						
Iron Maker		2		2			2		2		1									
Mantua Maker	1		1																	
Metal Moulder																	1			1
Miller				1		1		1												
Miner						1	4		7		10		8	1	6	1	2	1	2	3
Plasterer													1		1		1			
Printer	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1			1			1
Railwayman																				1
Saddler														1	1					1
Sailor					1		1	2	1	3	1	2	1				1	1	1	1
Shipwright		1		1			1		1		1						1			
Silversmith										1		1		1						
Soldier											1		1		1					
Spinner	1	1	1	1	1	1														
Tailor				1		1		1		1		1		1						
Tinplate Worker							1		1		2		1		1					
Watchmaker		1		1		2		2		2		1		1		1				
Weaver				1		1		1			1			1		1				
Woodturner					1		1		1											
Percentage	N o t		V a l i d						26.0		22.5		20.7		12.5		I n v a l i d			
CLASS IV/V																				
Farm Labourer	1	5		4		3	1		1		2	1	1	2	2	4	1	3	1	2
Millhand		1		2		3		2		1		1		2		2		1		
Warehouseman							1		1		1									
Percentage	N o t		V a l i d						2.1		3.6		4.8		7.7		I n v a l i d			

Table 1, cont.	1810-30		1820-49		1830-59		1840-69		1850-79		1860-89		1870-99		1880-1909		1890-1919		1900-29	
	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S	F	S
OTHER																				
Colporteur													1		1		1			
Evangelist																	1			1
Missionary	1		2		2		1		1	2	1	3	1	3		1				
Salvation Army															1		1			1
Student	11		13		11		11			13		25		29		30		21		14
Percentage	Not		Valid						17.3		26.1		29.5		28.8				Invalid	

Overlapping the cohorts in this way is the equivalent procedure involved in constructing moving averages. It permits maximum use to be made of small amounts of information, and also isolates particularly significant periods more precisely.

TABLE 2 GEOGRAPHICAL ORIGINS OF BAPTIST MINISTERS (%)

Dates of Entry	1820-49	1830-59	1840-69	1850-79	1860-89	1870-99	1880-1909	1890-1919	1900-29
n	116	126	150	165	203	215	216	186	140
Birthplace									
England	68.1	65.8	64.0	60.0	57.6	53.0	51.8	53.7	60.0
Wales	18.1	18.2	21.3	23.6	29.0	31.1	34.2	31.7	30.7
Scotland	6.8	5.5	3.3	4.2	5.4	10.2	10.6	9.6	5.0
Ireland			0.6	1.8	1.9	1.8	0.9	1.0	0.7
Other/Unknown	7.0	10.5	10.8	10.4	6.1	3.9	2.5	4.0	3.6
Birthtype									
Rural	39.7	33.3	36.6	36.9	40.8	39.0	38.8	35.4	29.2
Market Town	31.9	31.7	27.3	23.6	24.1	23.7	22.7	23.1	22.8
Urban	21.6	24.6	25.3	29.7	29.6	33.9	35.6	38.7	44.2
Unknown/Abroad	6.8	10.4	10.8	9.8	5.5	3.4	2.9	2.8	3.8

the rising real incomes and extension of school facilities which increasingly made such a course possible, should have benefited those from class II rather than those from class III. Again, it is also possible that the reduction of class II entrants reflected a drift into Anglicanism on the part of upwardly socially mobile Baptist families, a drift which almost certainly lay behind the drop in the proportion of class II candidates entering the Congregational ministry.(10) The removal of nonconformists' legal disabilities did not reduce the social attractiveness of the Establishment; as Dr Bebbington's study of Baptist M.P.s has shown.(11)

It is also evident that as the century progressed so the Baptist intake from classes IV/V, while always small, showed signs of increasing. As in other nonconformist denominations, the proportion of Baptist ministers who received formal training increased steadily after mid-century, rising from 58% of those listed in the *Handbook* of 1871 to 84.5% of those in the 1911 edition. Within the ranks of the trained, however, one institution came to account for an ever-increasing share. Spurgeon's College trained slightly more than a tenth of men in the ministry in 1871, just over a fifth by 1891. By 1911 almost a quarter of all Baptist ministers were Spurgeon's products.(12) Right from the outset Spurgeon had made a point of trying to cater for those men who felt called to the ministry but who lacked the educational background or monetary resources necessary for admission to the other colleges. 'What was wanted', he maintained, 'was an institution where these rough-and-ready men could be drilled in the simple rudiments of education, and so fitted for the work of preaching and the discharge of pastoral duties ... I shall not, in order to increase our prestige, refuse poor men, or zealous young Christians whose early education has been neglected'.(13) No fees were levied on the students, Spurgeon himself raising much of the financial support which sustained the college. This policy seems to have been responsible for attracting into the ministry a wider social range of men than might otherwise have entered it. It is interesting to note, for example, that of the Spurgeon's men in the sample used in table 1, no less than 67% left no trace of their previous occupations, suggesting perhaps that they were of a relatively low status, not thought to be worth recording. Of the rest, 17% were artisans or shopworkers, and almost 12% clerks.

This last is also indicative of another trend noticeable in table 1, for the Baptist ministry, in common with that of the Congregational churches, was also undergoing something of a white-collaring process. If, as has been suggested, small craftsmen dominated the Baptist ministry after the middle of the eighteenth century, this was a sector which declined with the relentless advance of new technology in the next century.(14) The 1860-89 cohort of new Baptist ministers is almost evenly divided between white-collar workers (including teachers from class II) and artisans. By 1870-99 the balance was shifting in favour of the former, reaching a ratio of more than three to two with the cohort of 1880-1909. This in turn was a reflection of the changes occurring in the occupational structure of the population at large, for the late nineteenth century witnessed a great expansion in the number of people working in clerical and commercial occupations.(15)

To some extent, of course, the social origins of the ministry

reflected the Baptists' geographical distribution. This accounts for the prominence of miners, for instance, in a denomination strongly represented in Wales. Table 2 classifies the ministers' birth places by country and then by type, whether urban, market town, or rural. Although about a fifth of men entering the ministry between 1800 and 1860 were Welsh, this was an almost exact reflection of the proportion of Baptists living in Wales during that time. T. M. Bassett's estimate that in 1851, 22.1% of British Baptist membership was Welsh, is virtually identical with the proportion of Welshmen entering the ministry between 1840 and 1869 - 21.3%.<sup>(16)</sup> Only in the years 1860 to 1889 did Wales contribute disproportionately to the Baptist ministry. Some 29% of new men came from Wales in those years, a time when the Principality accounted for only about 23.5% of total denominational population. Here, perhaps, the greater influence of the 1859-60 revival in Wales than in England was playing a part, although the later revival of 1905 does not seem to have had a similar impact in drawing men into the ministry. Bassett put the share of Welsh membership at 30.4% in 1911, compared with 31.7% of new ministers for the entry cohort of 1890-1919. It was Scotland which provided the most disproportionate influx of men into Baptist pulpits, especially in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when Scots made up only four or five percent of denominational membership.<sup>(17)</sup> This Scottish influx was doubtless aided by the establishment of formal ministerial training facilities for Baptists in Scotland after 1869, and also by the disappearance of the peculiar Scottish pattern of church order, the plurality of untrained elders being replaced by a single trained minister.<sup>(18)</sup>

Given the economic basis of Britain in the first half of the century it is hardly surprising that table 2 should indicate a preponderance of men drawn from rural backgrounds. If market towns are included as being places where the predominant rhythms and ethos of life were agrarian rather than urban, then between 60% and 70% of new Baptist ministers had rural roots in the years prior to 1879. Of greater import, however, is the pattern of recruitment prevailing at the end of Victoria's reign. By 1901, official estimates reckoned that 78% of the population of England and Wales was urban - yet less than 40% of new entrants in the period 1890-1919, and rather more than 40% for the period 1900-1929, came from urban communities. Dr Waller has rightly warned against exaggerating the divergence between town and country in the late Victorian period.<sup>(19)</sup> Yet even if we assume that improved transport, communication, and education, had so diminished the agrarian emphasis of market towns that they can be redefined as urban, this still leaves about a third of new men with rural origins at a time when only about a fifth of the total population was still classified as rural dwellers. It may legitimately be asked how far declining Baptist growth rates were due to the fact that substantial numbers of their ministers were divorced, certainly in terms of their upbringing, from the everyday environment of the vast majority of the population? Certainly there is evidence that by the end of the nineteenth century Baptists were increasingly concerned that their college training programmes were largely irrelevant to the challenge of modern urban, industrial society. One minister wrote to *The Christian World* in 1895, for example, suggesting that 'we want in every college a Chair of Pastoral Theology. Our young men can do with a little less comparative religion, and a little more knowledge as to how to deal

with the men and women of England today ... Congregational and Baptist churches are in supreme need of devoted pastors'.(20) A few years later, another minister told Rawdon students that because of the colleges' academic emphasis ministers tended to neglect the study of people. As a result, he concluded, 'men often enter the ministry a good deal crippled in this direction'.(21) Midland College was virtually unique in offering its students the opportunity to study economics, but even then the single economics course was swamped by a curriculum which concentrated heavily on more traditional ministerial subjects, the arts, languages, and biblical studies.

This lack of acquaintance with the ordinary experience of the majority of the population may have been further compounded by a second development, which is apparent in table 1. In the 1860-89 entry cohort 7.2% of men came from ministerial homes. The figure rose to 9.8% for the 1870-99 cohort and reached 14.4% by 1880-1909. In some ways of course this was the ideal upbringing from which to enter the ministry, since it provided first-hand experience of its challenges and requirements. On the other hand, ministerial homes could be quite effectively insulated from the lives of outsiders. William Dawson, a Wesleyan minister, found his childhood in a manse a positive disadvantage in his own ministry because 'I had no data concerning the lives of ordinary men. The only lives I knew by actual observation were highly specialised'.(22) J. F. Makepeace, who followed his father into the Baptist ministry, was even more sheltered, commenting later that as a child he had believed the denomination to be synonymous with Christendom. 'We knew nothing' of any other form of Christian life or organisation, he wrote.(23)

Ultimately, both Dawson and Makepeace quit the ministry altogether, a course of action which, as table 3 indicates, was more common than has perhaps been assumed. This table charts the cumulative losses of men at stated intervals since the commencement of their ministerial careers. Column A includes those who, while still associated with the denomination and holding ministerial status, were entered in the year books as being without pastoral charge. Some of these were in fact retirements which had not been officially notified, others were men between pastorates. The main constituent of column A, however, is what might be termed 'natural wastage', i.e. deaths and retirements. Column B counts those who were lost to the pastoral ministry in Britain, either because they went abroad, were absorbed into denominational administrative or educational machines, or took up an alternative and specialised form of ministry, such as serving a missionary society or overseeing a cemetery chapel. It also includes those who joined the ministry of other denominations. The third column contains all those who quit the ministry to take up secular work, as well as those who are described in the records as 'resigned', and also those whose names simply vanish from the lists.

Table 4 provides a finer disaggregation of the figures contained in column B of table 3. We can note first of all that Baptists were remarkably loyal to their denomination, a negligible number leaving for other churches. The commitment to believer's baptism tended to set them apart theologically from other major forms of Protestantism and it is interesting in this context to note that in the 1890s Charles Booth



TABLE 3 CUMULATIVE LOSS TO THE BAPTIST MINISTRY (%)

Years of Entering Ministry	1841-61			1851-71			1861-81			1871-91			1881-1901			1891-1911		
	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C
Years since career start																		
In 4 years	4.5	1.4	14.5	4.2	3.5	14.0	0.8	4.3	8.7	0.8	7.0	11.5	1.4	7.1	17.8	1.6	10.3	14.7
In 14 years	26.1	3.0	23.0	25.2	6.3	19.0	21.8	7.7	21.9	8.7	10.5	13.3	7.1	9.9	19.2	7.0	15.1	15.8
In 24 years	31.1	3.7	25.3	33.6	8.4	21.1	28.9	10.4	23.6	18.6	17.6	13.3	15.8	14.2	19.2	15.3	20.4	15.8
In 34 years	48.3	5.2	26.1	44.8	9.1	22.5	42.9	10.4	23.6	30.2	17.6	13.3	25.8	14.2	19.2	24.2	22.8	15.8
In 44 years	59.1	6.0	26.1	58.3	9.8	22.5	58.7	15.6	23.6	55.2	18.5	13.3	54.6	14.2	19.2	52.5	22.8	15.8

TABLE 4 CUMULATIVE LOSS TO THE BAPTIST MINISTRY BY CAUSE (%)

Years of Entering Ministry	1841-61			1851-71			1861-81			1871-91			1881-1901				1891-1911			
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Cause of Leaving																				
Years since career start																				
In 4	0.7	0.7		2.1	2.1		3.5	0.8		5.3	0.8	1.7	5.7	0.7	0.7		8.2	0.5	1.1	0.5
In 14	2.3	0.7		2.8	1.4	2.8	4.3	1.7	1.7	6.2	1.7	2.6	7.1	0.7	0.7	1.4	10.0	1.7	2.3	1.1
In 24	3.0	0.7		3.5	1.4	3.5	5.2	1.7	3.5	7.1	1.7	8.8	7.9	2.1	2.8	1.4	11.2	3.4	4.7	1.1
In 34	3.0	0.7	1.5	3.5	1.4	4.2	5.2	1.7	3.5	7.1	1.7	8.8	7.9	2.1	4.2	1.4	11.2	4.0	6.5	1.1
In 44	3.0	0.7	2.3	3.5	1.4	4.2	5.2	5.2	5.2	7.1	1.7	9.7	7.9	2.1	4.3	1.4	11.2	4.0	6.5	1.1

Key: 1 = Abroad; 2 = Denominational education and administration; 3 = Different type of ministry; 4 = Different denomination.

reckoned that Baptists in general had a far deeper religious commitment than Congregationalists who, he averred, were already adopting a broader view of Christian truth.(24) Another small though gradually increasing loss came through the siphoning off of experienced men into denominational education or administration. The extension of the powers of the Baptist Union and increase in the number of men undergoing formal training ensured some increase in the number of administrators and educators but of those entering the ministry between 1891 and 1911 only about 4% could expect to be thus employed within thirty years. The domestic ministry also lost through a persistent, if somewhat erratic, flow overseas. Many went under the auspices of missionary societies but others were sometimes tempted to seek ordinary pastorates abroad. In commenting on the upsurge of men going to the United States in the 1870s *The Baptist* warned against the assumption that ministerial life there was in some way less onerous or more prosperous than in Britain. The paper did concede, however, that men on typically small salaries would find the temptation hard to resist.(25) Equally influential in encouraging men overseas was the fluctuating level of pastoral opportunity at home. It is significant that almost a quarter of the students who left Spurgeon's College between 1880 and 1889, for example, went abroad within four years. Some few churches, perhaps, were reluctant to call Spurgeon's men because of doubts about their intellectual quality. Equally, at a time when theological certainties were increasingly in question, a few other Baptist congregations may have preferred ministers less closely identified with the champion of evangelical orthodoxy. More likely, however, the outflow of Spurgeon's students reflected his own high international standing. He gladly responded to the numerous requests which came from abroad for his students. At home, Spurgeon's students often went to causes which existed on the margins of economic viability and if they subsequently failed to build up the congregation sufficiently an overseas call might have appeared as a welcome release. Whatever its precise causes, however, the propensity of Spurgeon's men to go abroad, coupled with the fact that by the end of the century about a quarter of new men were being trained by him, must explain the increase in the percentage of emigrating Baptist ministers evident in the late century cohorts in table 4.

This leaves the losses classified in table 3 under column C, those whose cause is unknown. Why did 14.5% of ministers quit within four years of starting in the period 1841-1861? Why did almost one in five leave within fourteen years of starting in the last two decades of the nineteenth century? Some small proportion undoubtedly consisted of unnotified deaths or retirements, as the collection and recording of such information depended very much on the assiduity of local denominational representatives. Some were the products of moral lapses, although chapel and denominational authorities naturally preferred to draw a discreet veil over such cases. It seems likely, too, that the inadequacies of training noted above may explain some of the losses in the 'unknown' category. One would expect such deficiencies to be most apparent in the first few years after leaving college. One Baptist writer quoted with evident approval the comment of the American Bishop Brooks that 'it is the first five years after college which are the most decisive in a man's career'.(26) This appears to be borne out by the loss rates within four years recorded

in table 3. Finally, it is clear that for some the decision to leave the ministry was prompted by the realisation that a vocation had been mistaken. J. F. Makepeace was one such individual. He had been in the ministry for some time before he finally found the Calvinism of his deacons too much and resigned, finding resolution for his turmoil about the nature of authority by joining the Catholic Church as a layman.(27)

Such explanations may account for some specific losses, but the evidence suggests that two particular pressures were more generally responsible for pushing men out of the ministry. It would clearly be invidious to claim that material matters such as income and amenable working relationships were the chief considerations with most ministers. For the majority, such earthly rewards were as nothing compared with the high calling of the Christian ministry. Yet like men in secular employments, ministers could not be totally indifferent to such concerns.

John Clifford was to be found in 1872 lamenting the fact that too many Baptist ministers were characterised by their 'overeagerness to obtain wealth and their want of love for souls'.(28) True, one can find examples of relatively well-paid Baptists. One Exeter chapel paid its pastor £200.00 in 1868 and J. F. Makepeace recalled that his father earned £300.00 a year.(29) Yet there were no centrally determined salary scales and much depended on the size and situation of the particular congregation, as well as on the standing of the minister. More typical, therefore, was John Cragg's salary in rural Norfolk in the 1860s. He had a rent-free house, an income from rent on church property of £25.00 a year, and hoped to raise another £10.00 or so from subscriptions, giving him a projected annual income of about £65.00.(30) Spurgeon considered Baptist congregations to be parsimonious in the extreme, even though he personally was the object of affections which sometimes bordered on the idolatrous. It was remarkable but true, he once observed, that 'ministers of the Gospel were not able to live on much less than other people. They cannot make a shilling go as far as other people make a sovereign. Some of them try very hard, but they do not succeed'.(31) It was in Wales that Baptists were worst off. The Principality did not have a fully monetarised economy in the first half of the century and the uncertainties of employment made many chapels reluctant to take on full-time ministers. As a result, many were part-timers, sustaining themselves in the main by farming or shopkeeping. In mid-century it was reckoned that only about twenty Baptist and Independent ministers earned more than £100.00 a year, and that the average income was about half that figure. In 1862, 77 Welsh Baptist chapels paid their settled ministers a total of £1905.00, an average of less than £25.00 per man.(32) In low paid pastorates and in Wales generally, it seems likely that men slipped in and out of the pastorate as economic circumstances dictated. Although the Baptist hierarchy did not care for this, rightly viewing it as a dilution of ministerial efforts, little was done of practical or comprehensive utility before the end of the century to remove its underlying economic causes.(33)

That income was sometimes a cause of men quitting the ministry is confirmed by events in the second half of the century. With the

importation of cheap foodstuffs into Britain after 1873 prices fell quite dramatically, even those on fixed incomes benefiting in real terms from the cheapening of the cost of living. Yet the drop-out rate among Baptist ministers remained high, especially in the first four years, as table 3 indicates. By the end of the century such complaints as were being voiced about inadequate levels of remuneration tended to come from men in one or other of two particular locations. The development of suburbs left many chapels isolated in the major city centres, especially London, with falling and generally poorer memberships, as the wealthier took advantage of improved transport and suburban building to move to more salubrious surroundings. Such chapels, said the Baptist Union report in 1884, 'are languishing for want of attendance, and are frittering away their strength and the property which they hold from their fathers in the vain attempt to battle with circumstances too strong for them ...'.(34) Another contemporary report described such chapels as being in 'a desperate state', their pastors 'fighting desperately for bread and butter'.(35) Over 60% of the Baptist chapels in England and Wales had less than the denominational average membership, which was 140, yet it was estimated in 1884 that a church with between fifty and a hundred members could support a pastor adequately only if it received a subsidy of £20 or £30 annually. Small wonder that in 1911 almost a half of English Baptist ministers and over two-thirds of those in Wales received less than £100 a year.(36)

The other main area of difficulty in the latter years of Victoria's reign was the countryside, as it was for Methodists, Anglicans, and Congregationalists.(37) The long-term effects of rural depopulation had already seriously weakened the strength of many Baptist causes, a trend which was exacerbated by the impact of agricultural depression after 1873. In 1875 Alexander McLaren pointed out that in rural counties such as Hereford, Surrey, Sussex, Cumberland, Dorset, Lincolnshire, Oxford, Shropshire, and Stafford, three fifths of the chapels had average memberships of only twenty-seven. 'Village nonconformity', he concluded, 'is in a perilous condition ...'.(38) When in 1875 *The Christian World* offered books at cut prices to country ministers, it received within a fortnight letters from more than 260 men unable, so they claimed, to be able to afford books at all. As the depression deepened, so the situation deteriorated still further. Chapel rolls stagnated or diminished, pew rents fell and, as a result, ministerial incomes came under further pressure. The late century denominational press was full of letters of complaint about the financial hardship associated with rural ministry. It was difficult, as one correspondent to *The Baptist* argued, to maintain a proper position of respectability on £60.00 a year, and herein lay the problem.(39) Baptist ministers were regarded as being part of the professional middle class and while Spurgeon and a few others could afford the appropriate life style, the vast majority could not. Spurgeon took his holidays on the Riviera, kept a carriage and pair, and had a penchant for expensive cigars. A lesser Baptist light complained that he had to live on £50.00, plus a small allowance from the local County Association which covered his rent. He cast an envious eye on the local Wesleyan who had £150 a year and a free manse. Yet, he went on, 'I am expected to dress as well as he, to move in the same society, to be able to put my hand into my pocket just as he does, to send my child

to the same school, and what applies to me applies also to my wife'.(40) This individual was apparently willing, however, to soldier on. For others the financial hardships were too great to bear and, as table 3 suggests, they continued to quit the ministry. Only the prodigious energies of J. H. Shakespeare finally galvanised the Baptists into tackling the problem of inadequate incomes. By 1914 he had helped to raise a quarter of a million pounds to underwrite minimum salaries of between £100 and £150 a year.(41)

Prior to this the level of salary that a particular individual could command depended to some extent on the sort of relationship he had with his flock, and this leads us to the second most obvious cause of ministerial loss. It seems likely that some were driven from the ministry by the frictions which bad relationships could generate. It is true that we are dealing here with relationships that in the main were cemented with Christian ideals of love, service and submission, but the practice did not always match the theory. The members of independent congregations who called ministers, usually by vote, were not subject to any higher authority - at least not an earthly one. Certainly ministers were regarded as possessing an authority which derived from Christ himself, not a source to be lightly discounted. Yet a domineering minister facing a strong-willed congregation, a young man presenting new theological ideas to a conservative chapel, the power of the purse proud or the ambitious office holder - all could easily cause relationships to degenerate into sour confrontation, love replaced by virtual tyranny. Young ministers were especially vulnerable, as William Best realised. The decorative hyperbole of his comments should not be allowed to obscure their substantial foundation of truth. Mulling over an invitation to a pastorate in 1855, this young Baptist minister showed a discernment beyond his years. 'My preaching perhaps would not suit them. It might be too simple, or too elaborate; too intellectual, or not sufficiently so; too highly Calvinistic; not doctrinal enough; the tie of my cravat might not suit their taste, or the fashion of my whiskers. Churches can be very funny sometimes'.(42) This certainly was Robert Martin's experience. When he died in 1852 it was reported that he had been chronically depressed for two years as a result of differences between himself and his congregation.(43) Small wonder that John Angell James should claim that in many Baptist as well as Congregational churches, 'the pastor is depressed far below his just level ... his opinion is received with no deference, his person treated with no respect'.(44) Similarly, J. H. Rigg, writing from a Methodist perspective, claimed that Baptist pastors had 'the burden but not the power; office without prerogative and responsibility without authority'.(45)

If, as seems likely, problems of salary and authority were liable to unsettle men working in the Baptist ministry, it is important to remember that such concerns may not have driven them out of the ministry altogether. They were, after all, free agents and if a particular situation became too unbearable then they were free to seek another. Some, as we have seen, went abroad in the quest for more congenial circumstances. Others preferred to stay within Britain and the indications of table 5 are that restlessness was increasing in the last years of the century. Until the 1850s the bulk of pastorates - about 70% - lasted for less than ten years. This rose to over 80% with

TABLE 5 LENGTH OF BAPTIST PASTORATES BY %

Year of entry	1841-61	1851-71	1861-81	1871-91	1881-1901	1891-1911
Length						
0-5 years	43.5	44.8	44.1	46.0	49.6	51.2
6-10 years	26.9	27.0	29.0	30.0	29.1	30.4
11-15 years	11.7	11.1	11.1	8.8	9.9	9.8
16-20 years	6.7	6.5	6.4	5.1	3.7	3.4
21-25 years	3.8	3.0	2.8	2.7	2.1	1.5
26-30 years	3.1	1.5	1.3	2.3	2.4	1.9
31-35 years	0.9	1.2	1.0	1.3	0.8	0.8
36-40 years	1.6	2.1	2.3	1.3	0.8	0.4
41-45 years				0.9	0.8	0.6
46+ years	1.4	1.2	1.4	1.0	0.8	0.4

men entering the ministry between 1891 and 1911. From about 1870 onwards the number of pastorates of less than five years duration also increased. *The Freeman* had no doubts as to the real origin of this trend. 'Among the causes of ministerial unsettlements the smallness of the stipend attached to the office of pastor occupies a prominent place'.(46) The paper reverted frequently to this theme during the next quarter century, publishing a letter in 1895, for instance, from an irate deacon who complained that his minister had just removed to a new chapel, a decision, he claimed, that had been prompted purely by 'monetary considerations'.(47) Within Baptist circles generally there was growing disquiet about the growth of ministerial movement, the particular fear being that the whole process was degenerating into an undignified scramble for place. It was against this background that the Baptist Union established its Board of Introduction and Consultation in 1887. It did not work very well, however, and it was not until 1914 that a more effective scheme of guidance was adopted as part of Shakespeare's package to improve ministerial training, income and career prospects.

The debate on the reasons for the decline of nonconformity in Britain has touched on many features of church life - the loss of belief and commitment fostered by Darwin and the biblical critics, the theological doubts and social disruption consequent upon the Great War, the increasing marginality of the church as a social institution.(48) This profile of Baptist ministers perhaps permits us to add other dimensions of explanation. The ministry was never as stable as concentration on the memoirs of the great and the successful might lead us to infer. This study shows quite clearly that there was a chronic leakage of men out of the ministry throughout the nineteenth century, the causes of which were often to be located in discontent about working conditions and remuneration. It also shows that by the late nineteenth century the denomination was increasingly served by men whose backgrounds did not equip them adequately for the pastoral challenges of urban, industrial society. The implications of this were to unfold, albeit slowly, in the years after 1918.

## NOTES

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- 1 Note that these are totals of active and retired men. This explains the differences between figures given in this paper and those used in J. E. B. Munson, 'The Education of Baptist Ministers, 1870-1900', *Baptist Quarterly*, XXVI, 1976, pp.320-27.
- 2 For the application of prosopography see L. Stone, *The Past and the Present*, 1981, pp.30-69.
- 3 There have, however, been some studies of the subject. See, for example, B. R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society*, 1966; R. Ransom, A. Bryman, and B. Hinings, *Clergy, Ministers and Priests*, 1977. Studies of the role of ministers in the past include A. J. Drewett, 'The Social Status of the Ordained Minister in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Modern Churchman*, 9, 1966; R. Towler and P. Coxon, *The Fate of the Anglican Clergy*, 1979; B. Heeny, *A Different Kind of Gentleman. Parish Clergy as Professional Men in Early and Mid-Victorian England*, Hamden, Conn., 1976; A. J. Russell, *The Clerical Profession*, 1980; A. G. L. Haig, *The Victorian Clergy. An Ancient Profession Under Strain*, 1984; R. S. Blakey, *The Man in the Manse*, Edinburgh, 1978. The only studies which deal with nonconformist ministers are J. C. Bowmer, *Pastor and People. A Study of Church and Ministry in Wesleyan Methodism from the Death of John Wesley to the Death of Jabez Bunting*, 1975; J. E. B. Munson, 'A Study of Nonconformity in Edwardian England as Revealed by the Passive Resistance Movement against the 1902 Education Act', Oxford D.Phil., 1973; C. D. Field, 'Methodism in Metropolitan London', Oxford D.Phil., 1974.
- 4 For a discussion of this point see J. Burnett, *Useful Toil*, 1974, pp.9-18.
- 5 E. Higginson to T. Hunter, 27 August 1878. 'Autobiographical Notices' by Thomas Hunter. Dr Williams's Library, Ms 37/64.
- 6 A. Armstrong, 'The Use of Information about Occupations', in E. A. Wrigley, ed., *Nineteenth Century Society. Essays on the Use of Quantitative Methods for the Study of Social Data*, Cambridge, 1972, pp.191-310.
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- 8 M. Rutherford, *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane*, 1929, p.197.
- 9 L. G. Champion, 'The Social Status of Some Eighteenth Century Baptist Ministers', *Baptist Quarterly*, XXV, 1973-74, p.13.
- 10 For this see my forthcoming book, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales, 1800-1939*, Oxford, 1988.
- 11 D. Bebbington, 'Baptist M.P.s in the Nineteenth Century', *Baptist Quarterly*, XXIX, 1981, pp.7ff.
- 12 Calculated from lists of ministers contained in *Baptist Handbook*, 1871, 1891, 1911.
- 13 Quoted in A. Dallimore, *Spurgeon*, Chicago, 1984, p.102.
- 14 T. M. Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists*, Swansea, 1977, p.94.
- 15 For this expansion see G. Crossick, ed., *The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 1870-1914*, 1977; G. Anderson, *Victorian Clerks*, Manchester, 1976.

- 16 Bassett, p.232.
- 17 Calculated from information in R. Currie, A. Gilbert and L. Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers. Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700*, Oxford, 1977, pp.142-49.
- 18 See D. B. Murray, *The First Hundred Years: the Baptist Union of Scotland*, Glasgow, 1969, pp.69-75; G. Yuille, ed., *History of the Baptists in Scotland*, Glasgow, 1926, p.54.
- 19 P. J. Waller, *Town, City and Nation. England, 1850-1914*, Oxford, 1983, pp.185-88.
- 20 *Christian World*, 12 September 1895.
- 21 R. Gray, 'Some Conditions of a Successful Ministry', *Baptist Magazine*, 96, 1904, p.310.
- 22 W. J. Dawson, *The Autobiography of a Mind*, 1925, p.43.
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- 24 A. Gilbert, *The Making of Post Christian Britain: A History of the Secularisation of Modern Society*, 1980, p.149.
- 25 *The Baptist*, 26 June 1874.
- 26 Quoted in P. Evans, 'The Ideal Training for the Ministry', *Baptist Quarterly*, II, 1926-7, p.69.
- 27 Makepeace, *passim*.
- 28 *General Baptist Repository*, 74, 1872, p.303.
- 29 Makepeace, pp.2ff. For details of the Exeter chapel see A. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter, 1660-1875*, Manchester, 1962, p.204.
- 30 J. A. Smallbone, 'A Village Pastorate, 1847-1856', *Baptist Quarterly*, XV, 1953-4, p.220.
- 31 Quoted in *Congregationalist*, 3, 1874.
- 32 Figures from Bassett, p.285.
- 33 See, for example, Baptist Noel's comments to the annual assembly in 1867, reprinted as 'A Brief Review of the Churches Associated in the Union', *Cardiff Memorial. Five Papers Read at the Autumnal Session of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1868.
- 34 *Baptist Handbook*, 1884, p.21.
- 35 *Christian World*, 22 January 1891.
- 36 Figures from *ibid.*, 27 April 1911.
- 37 For Anglican problems see C. Linnell, *Some East Anglian Clergy*, 1961, p.170.
- 38 *Baptist Handbook*, 1876, p.60.
- 39 *The Baptist*, 14 February 1873.
- 40 *The Baptist Times and Freeman*, 4 April 1914.
- 41 The details are readily available, for example in A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists*, 1947, pp.248-54.
- 42 'Selections from the Letters of the Late Rev. William Best B.A.', *Baptist Magazine*, 69, 1877, pp.208-09.
- 43 *Evangelical Magazine*, 30, 1852, p.601.
- 44 J. A. James, *Church Members Guide*, 1850, p.60.
- 45 J. H. Rigg, *A Comparative View of Church Government*, 1887, p.177.
- 46 *The Freeman*, 14 July 1871. 47 *Ibid.*, 1 September 1893.
- 48 The decline of nonconformity is discussed from differing perspectives in E. R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, 1957; H. McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*, 1974; S. Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis*, 1976; J. Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society, 1870-1930*, Oxford, 1982.