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# THE BAPTIST QUARTERLY

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#### CHRISTIANS AND CAPITALISM

At a time when the communist system is being shown to be unworkable in so many countries, David Jeremy's *Capitalism and Christians: Business Leaders and the Churches in Britain, 1900-1960* (Oxford University Press, 491pp, £45) is a timely study. Dr Jeremy is no stranger to the readers of this journal who will also know him as one of the historians of the Avenue Baptist Church at Westcliffe-on-Sea as well as being the editor of the *Dictionary of Business History*, out of which arose the set of essays he edited on *Business and Religion in Britain*. Any corrective to the clerical and ecclesiastical bias of the history of Christian life is to be welcomed, but following the laity out of church and into the workaday world is a remarkably difficult task.

Whilst on the one hand Marxists have emphasised religion as a tool of social control, at the opposite extreme heirs of Max Weber prefer to see religion, at least in its Calvinistic form, as the engine of social change - the dominant ideology in empowering the development of capitalism. Whilst not addressing these questions head on, Dr Jeremy addresses the essential subsidiary questions that lie behind such hypothesising. What has been the Christian presence among the leaders of industry and to what extent have they tried to introduce religion into their business enterprises? What has been the churches' teaching about business values? How extensive was Christian paternalism at the end of the nineteenth century, and was that paternalism used as a form of worker discipline? When family businesses grew into large multi-divisional corporations and owners gave way to professional managers, did religious instrumentality fade? What part did business leaders exercise in the

decision-making processes of the several churches both nationally and locally? The author uses tight definitions and quantitative methods as far as that is possible, but in the end the account is about people and their respective stories. Because he uses objective categories to identify church leaders, the clerical monopoly of the government of the Roman Catholic Church means that Roman Catholics have had to be excluded from the study, as also members of minor Christian groups.

Part II concerns formations, first in terms of changing church views on the business world. These are carefully explored with an analysis of church and nonconformist thinking on the industrial situation: the writings of individual thinkers like Tawney and Temple, Keeble and Forsyth, the initiatives of various Anglican groups with particular perspectives on society, together with official pronouncements - *Rerum Novarum* for the Catholic Church, Anglican Archbishops' Reports on *Christianity and Industrial Problems* and a 'Declaration of the Methodist Church on a Christian View of Industry' (1934), as well as the Reports of the Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC). Baptists, *per se*, apparently had nothing to say. Thereafter, the formation of the business élite is carefully scrutinised in terms of family, schooling and the impact of the local church. Here Baptists feature little, without denominational schools and a theology of rebirth rather than birth, though the local church might be expected to show more strongly. It is seen in the life of Sir Gordon Radley, Director General of the General Post Office, brought up at St George's, Leeds, but converted and baptized in a local Baptist church, although in later life he returned to Evangelical Anglicanism.

Christians in 'Big Business' are considered in three successive periods (pre 1914; between the Wars; and the 1940s and 1950s). Anglican predominance is to be expected, perhaps more surprising is the role of the Quakers in the earlier part of the century, which is out of all proportion to their numbers, but gives way to Methodists in the later period. The profession of Christian values in the world of business reveals human vulnerability, as seen, for example, in the insolvency of the Pease financial and industrial empire in the North East which exposed human weakness with grave consequences. The Cadburys rightly secured popular acclaim for their Bournville experiment, with morning prayers conducted in the factory from 1866 until the First World War, but had at the same time to face serious questioning - was their involvement in the Anti-Slavery Society hypocritical when they derived their cocoa supplies from the West African islands of Sao Tome where it was suggested contract labour had degenerated into slavery? The *Evening Standard* in September 1908 accused the firm of profiting from the 'monstrous trade in human flesh and blood'. A libel action against the paper secured only a farthing damages for the Quaker chocolate manufacturers, though significantly with costs, for in general Cadburys were scrupulous about such matters. Nearer at home, Huntley and Palmers, the Reading biscuit manufacturers, are shown as a firm with overtly Christian directors which had a lamentable track-run on wages; slightly obliquely, the minister of Carey, Reading, played a part in the dispute by welcoming the proposal of the Co-operative Wholesale Society to set up a jam factory in the town. By contrast the contribution of Christian conscience in other firms, especially in concern for employees' welfare, is carefully chronicled.

The story between the wars is more organizational and concerned with the establishment of forums for debate, within which concern for values in industry might be raised. Attention is given to the meetings of successive conferences of Quaker employers; the rise of Methodist businessmen; the coming together of the evangelical Navvies Mission and the Christian Social Union to form the Industrial Christian Fellowship; and the work of COPEC. But personality is firmly there, especially in the person of Dr Joseph Oldham, and the various agencies that

surrounded him, especially the *Christian Newsletter* and the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life, in which M. E. Aubrey played a part. Later the instrument was to be the fertile and influential Christian Frontier Council, for whom George Goyder wrote his *Future of Private Enterprise* (1951), which sought to secure a common purpose in industry, shared not only workers, management and shareholders, but also by consumers, the local community and the community at large, an analysis cogent enough to persuade Ernest Bader, a Baptist turned Quaker, to give his company away with all but 10% of the profits shared between the employees and charities. Industrial Missions are considered: personality again comes through, with Bishop Leslie Hunter obviously a key figure. A further section gives attention to Bruce Reed and Christian Teamwork, which leads into an exploration of Sir Gordon Radley and A. G. B. Owen's approaches to the application of the Christian conscience to the task of management.

A final part looks at 'Mammon in the Temple: Commercial Men in the Churches'. The Anglicans and Methodists have chapters of their own, but Baptists are a small part of a chapter called 'Nonconformists and Celts'. Surprisingly, however, they are seen to have had a higher percentage of their council members who had company directorships than the Congregationalists, generally regarded as more monied. The Baptists, however, seem to have been of lesser stature than the Congregationalists. David Jeremy identifies for 1907 a London interest embracing Herbert Marnham, H. E. Wood and A. H. Baynes. From the provinces came Alfred Caulkin of Birmingham, George Macalpine of Accrington, W. G. Davies of Newcastle upon Tyne (on the Board of the Union Assurance Society, with which Baptists had had long associations), John Horsfall of Leeds, W. D. Shaw of Huddersfield, John Chivers of Histon and George White of Norwich. In 1935 the names of R. W. Black, Arnold Clark, H. E. Ennals, R. B. Hodgson, W. H. Mayne, Seymour Price, A. R. Timson and H. L. Taylor need to be added. Twenty years later the new names are Cyril Black, F. W. Dawson, Alfred Dickins, Horace Gale, Sir Herbert Janes, C. B. Jewson and A. L. Simpkin. Few, though, had national significance. 'Small was beautiful among Baptists', argues Jeremy. Scotland adds the names of Sir Adam Nimmo, who has the dubious distinction of being known during the General Strike as 'the most forceful and intransigent member of the Mining Association central council', and various members of the Coats dynasty in Paisley, together with Sir John McCallum, the soap manufacturer, and Charles Muir. From Wales came William Evans (of Corona drinks).

A last section looks at business men and interdenominational societies, especially at the evangelical end of the spectrum, under the summary judgment, 'Bible religion united; apostolic religion divided'. This may be so, but it is unfortunately equally true that a dogmatism claiming Biblical authority can also be remarkably schismatic. In this respect a case study of business involvement in the Billy Graham Crusade of 1954 is illuminating, exposing a difference of opinion over whether the necessary funds should be raised from within the churches or by means of a more general appeal. In the event, Owen's appeal to all members of the Federation of British Industries, with the uncomfortable argument that a militant Christianity was the only answer to the growth of Communism, yielded pitifully little - £1367 or about 1% of expenditure. Arguably the businessmen behind the Graham Crusade made a better contribution in terms of management than funding. Overall the argument is that the influence of business on the life of the churches has been more substantial than the impact of the churches on business. For that reason, as well as the pendulum swing of world affairs, the re-establishment of a forum where the values of our society can be scrutinised afresh is urgently needed, and Baptists ought to be part of it: