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## THE CALL OF DR JOHN RYLAND JR

A large plaque in Broadmead Baptist Church, Bristol, which lists the pastors of the church, has an unusual entry:

The Rev. John Ryland, D.D.:

first invited by the Church in Broadmead, 1792;

accepted the call of the Church, 1794<sup>1</sup>

These simple lines mark an eventful period in the life of John Ryland Jr. (1753-1825) when he was caught between the appeals of two Baptist churches. It took him almost two years to accept the call to be pastor of Broadmead Baptist Church, a position which included serving as principal of Bristol Academy (later Bristol Baptist College). Very little has been written on this period in his life,<sup>2</sup> but manuscripts in Bristol and Northampton shed light on the factors which hindered him accepting the call sooner.<sup>3</sup>

The death in August 1791, of Dr Caleb Evans<sup>4</sup> (1737-1791), who had been the pastor of Broadmead and principal of the Academy, triggered the calling of Ryland. Shortly before Evans's death, the church had called Joseph Hughes to be his 'temporary assistant.'<sup>5</sup> Hughes,<sup>6</sup> then in his mid-twenties, was a graduate of Bristol, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh, and academically qualified to teach in the Academy. But because of his lack of pastoral experience, the church did not consider calling him to replace Evans. Therefore, the congregation began to look elsewhere. First, a Mr Jenkins, who 'had preached a few times at Broadmead, about twelve years before, with certain acceptance,'<sup>7</sup> was asked to supply the pulpit again. He did so, and was proposed as a pastoral candidate but, because of divisions, the congregation could not agree on him. 'After much altercation', they agreed that 'other ministers . . . should be sought.'<sup>8</sup> Next the congregation considered John Fawcett (1740-1817). They extended a strong call, but he declined.<sup>9</sup> Having been disappointed twice, the congregation then asked John Ryland Jr, pastor of College Lane Baptist Church, Northampton, to provide a month's pulpit supply.

From an early age Ryland's commitment to ministry was apparent. He had been converted as a teenager and soon became active in teaching at his father's school, as well as preaching in nearby churches<sup>10</sup> and on week-nights at College Lane, where his father was pastor.<sup>11</sup> In 1771, at the age of eighteen he was 'called out by the church',<sup>12</sup> and in 1781, at the age of twenty-eight, was ordained as 'co-pastor with his father.'<sup>13</sup> The congregation called him to serve with his father, who was finding the ministry in College Lane, the school and area churches too heavy.<sup>14</sup> Ryland senior, was nearly sixty years of age and 'most severely' feeling the recent death of his wife.<sup>15</sup> Then in 1782, he remarried and, in 1785, moved his school to Enfield, near London, leaving his son in sole charge of the church.<sup>16</sup> John Ryland junior's interests included denominational work and he became active in the Northamptonshire Baptist Association, serving as its moderator in 1785 and 1792.<sup>17</sup> He also enjoyed deep friendships with nearby pastors, among them John Sutcliff, Andrew Fuller, and William Carey (whom he had baptized in 1783).<sup>18</sup>

In spite of his busy schedule, he accepted Broadmead's invitation to supply the pulpit and, while there, received one of his many letters from John Newton (1725-1807), his friend and pastoral counsellor.<sup>19</sup> Newton raised the possibility that Broadmead might call him.

I wish you much comfort and usefulness while you are at Bristol, but I cannot say that I wish you may be induced to leave Northampton. I trust that you have already a single eye, an upright intention to know the Lord's will, and [desire] simply to follow it. If so He will guide you, and not permit you to mistake a point of importance. I am always afraid of the transplanting of a full grown

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tree, which perhaps may strike its root into new soil, and thrive, but it is often otherwise. The inconveniences of a present situation are known and felt, and may be escaped by a removal - but others will be found elsewhere, which will likewise be felt when they are known.<sup>20</sup>

In the same letter, Newton cautioned him about being attracted to such a prestigious position, and shared some pastoral advice:

Considering that our Lord's kingdom is not of this world, I have thought it a little strange, that when His ministers think He calls them to leave one charge for another, it should almost universally be from less to more: to a better income, a larger town or a more genteel congregation. We seldom have an instance of a retrograde call.<sup>21</sup>

Although Newton himself had moved from a town (Olney) to the city (London) he still felt it appropriate to challenge Ryland's motives: 'I make no apology for this hint, you will probably hear enough on the other side of the question.'<sup>22</sup>

While supplying, Ryland 'preached four Lord's-days with great acceptance' and 'gained the affection and esteem of the church.'<sup>23</sup> As a result, Broadmead voted unanimously to extend the call, and each of the 160 members present signed the letter.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the deacons from the paedobaptist congregation, which also met at Broadmead, invited him to be their pastor at the same time.<sup>25</sup>

While trying to make a decision, Ryland sought Newton's counsel.<sup>26</sup> Newton responded,<sup>27</sup> 'I think the removal, of ministers from places where they are acceptable and useful, is often hazardous. But it is not always improper.' Yet he conceded that a young minister often has to 'serve an apprenticeship in an inferior post, till age and experience have qualified him for one more important.' Ryland had expressed his concern that Joseph Hughes, the assistant, was better educated than he. Newton commented, 'If the assistant at the Academy should be a better classic scholar than yourself, I see not any harm, provided he be humble and peaceful. You would probably be his superior in general and [have] more useful knowledge.'

More generally, Newton wrote:

I give you full credit for the simplicity, and disinterestedness of your views, and your desire to do the Lord's will and therefore I believe He, on whom you depend, and whom you wish to please, will guide your determination to that which is right. When our hearts are upright, He will permit us to make no mistakes but what He will overrule for good.

He also indicated that he had discussed the call with Abraham Booth,<sup>28</sup> the Baptist pastor in London:

Mr. Booth says, that if you consult only your personal ease and comfort you will stay where you are, for you will probably meet with more difficulties and exercises at Bristol - but if you regard the good of the whole [denomination], and the fairest opportunity of preventing evil and promoting the common cause, you must and will go. Of this, he is a better judge than I, but you must at least judge for yourself.

Newton concluded: 'I neither advise nor dissuade - but I seem to expect you will go. If you do, may the Lord go with you and bless you.'

Broadmead also wrote to College Lane to request its acquiescence to the call

to its pastor.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, on Sunday, 13 May 1792, after the administration of the Lord's supper, College Lane held a congregational meeting. The 'letter was read to them from the church at Bristol . . . soliciting the removal of the pastor of this church and the consent of the members thereof to his removal . . . Other letters, sent to Mr Ryland himself, were also read.' During the discussion 'most of the members' expressed 'much affection for Mr Ryland and [an] unwillingness to part with him.'<sup>30</sup> But because of their 'concern for the church at Broad Mead . . . and for the interest of Christ at large' they decided to meet again. They chose the following Tuesday for 'a day of prayer' and further deliberation.

On Tuesday, 15 May 1792, the congregation 'spent the greater part of the time in prayer from viii [8 am] till near 2 o'clock'<sup>31</sup> and then asked the deacons to prepare a negative response. This was read to the congregation the next Sunday, approved and given to Ryland when he returned from the Northamptonshire Association meetings.<sup>32</sup> He was attending meetings that would have global implications, for it was there that William Carey issued his missionary challenge: 'Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God.'<sup>33</sup>

Portions of College Lane's letter of response have been quoted in *Pastoral Memorials*:

We were not sorry to find his labours were acceptable to others; but if a month's acquaintance made you desirous to obtain him, you cannot wonder that above twenty years should make us unwilling to resign him . . . we are sorry that your circumstances have laid you under any necessity to make a proposal, that seems to militate against our interest. You profess, that your application gives you pain on that account, and we are sure that it causes in us somewhat very opposite to pleasure . . . on reviewing your pleas, we are more inclined to excuse your request, than to comply with it.<sup>34</sup>

These excerpts, however, omit the grounds for College Lane's decision. Fortunately, the full letter<sup>35</sup> is still available and outlines the reasons. *First*, they were offended that Broadmead had solicited Ryland, whom they had sent to help and who was apparently contented at College Lane:

We admit that your particular situation . . . calls for our commiseration, and in our opinion gives you better right than any other church in the kingdom to solicit the removal of a settled minister. But some of us can scarcely admit the propriety of this measure even in your case, and we are all of us reluctant to resign our own. When we consented, from fellow feeling for your afflictive situation, to our pastor's . . . supply to your church it was on the ground that the pastoral office in such circumstances of ours would be sufficient security from such an application as is now made.

*Second*, they wanted to be reassured that it was the Lord's will that Ryland should leave: 'if all things considered he could assure us he was fully convinced it was his duty, we should wish the Lord to go with him.' *Third*, they would have difficulty replacing him: 'We trust he could not part with us for any prospect even of usefulness, without seeing us tolerably well provided for first. And we are utterly at a loss whence to look for a supply were we to consent to his removal.' *Fourth*, they realized that their church was different from most Baptist churches at that time, and therefore few Baptist pastors would want to come to their church: 'As our church is

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mixed with some Paedobaptists, we should have a very small number of ministers to choose out of.' Here they referred to their policy of allowing both mixed membership and communion. For example, Thomas Trinder, one of College Lane's leading deacons, was not baptised (as a believer) until six years after he became a deacon.<sup>36</sup> *Fifth*, the church had just gone through a period of turmoil, and some members had left. Their conclusion graphically reveals their feelings:

We must therefore conjure you dear brethren to look out further, and see if you cannot find a person who would equally be acceptable to you, and yet his removal not be so great a loss to another church as ours would be. Our situation is really more critical than you are aware of. Our minister after meeting with long and continued opposition from a few, on account of the practical strain of his preaching, seems now through the secession of malcontents, more likely to be peaceful and useful than ever, and can you wish to take him from us at such a season as this?

Rather they encouraged Broadmead to call Hughes whom, though young, they saw as a man of 'considerable learning and piety.' They closed, by pleading, 'Dear brethren we desire to pray for you; we have done so repeatedly, and will do so again and again, [we] only wish you not to take our minister from us.'<sup>37</sup>

When informed of the church's decision, Ryland wrote<sup>38</sup> to J. Harris, a senior deacon of Broadmead. While this was not his official response to Broadmead, he affirmed College Lane's concerns. He wrote that he could not leave his congregation 'without a fair prospect' of its being 'well supplied with another pastor.' He said, 'I cannot see it lawful to leave those destitute of whom I have long since engaged to take the oversight in the Lord . . . I should think Bristol the more important stand, yet they [College Lane] having *possession*, I know not by law or Gospel to justify leaving them in a destitute condition.'

He was also concerned that College Lane might choose the wrong kind of pastor.

They have been so long used to me, that I fear some whom I think they ought to prefer, would not suit them so well and perhaps some others who might possibly please them, would to a degree, give them a new turn that I would be sorry for. But at present I know of no one at liberty, whom either they would like for themselves, or I should like for them.

He continued, 'the unanimous call was so unexpected . . . I only regretted not having the opportunity of conversing with you, or some other officer of the church, on the subject of my removal, that I might have prevented the application.'

Two days later, Ryland sent his official negative response<sup>39</sup> to Broadmead. Like Moses, he stressed his lack of qualifications:

I often feel humbled before God under a sense of my unworthiness of the respect His people have shewn me; and were I at perfect liberty, it would be with much fear and trembling that I should venture after longer trial, to comply with your invitation. I know my own defects better than you can be supposed to know them on so short acquaintance, and am aware that I am poorly qualified for the station to which you candidly deem me competent.

He conceded that if he were free, he would be willing to 'stand in the gap for a time, till a more able man was found.' However, duty bound him to his existing church:

'After so long a connection with our church, and such friendship as most of them have all along shewn me, how can I rend myself from them against their consent, unless they had prospect at least of a speedy and certain supply?'

Moreover, he expressed concern for his congregation's safety. College Lane needed a pastor who 'would naturally care for their welfare, and who would be concerned to guard them against dangers on the right hand and on the left.' These two dangers were the Methodists, who would draw his people away from 'the doctrines of grace,' and the antinomians, who 'would make void God's law.' The antinomian reference is probably to the teachings of William Huntington, who had visited the town and caused some division among the church's members.<sup>40</sup> Ryland confessed that '[if] I heard of the flock being scattered that was once committed to my care, I should faint under my burden, and be unable to do you any service.' In closing he promised that he would continue to pray for them that God would 'yet point out' to them a person 'more suitable' than himself.<sup>41</sup>

He suggested that Broadmead consider Hughes, and said that God might supply them with a pastor 'by pouring out a double portion of His Spirit on the young minister' they already had and on some other who might assist him. He apologized for his brief official response, explaining that as moderator of the Association he was under much pressure, and that their call had caused him added strain: 'I am exceedingly thronged with business on the approach of the Association, when I have both to preach and prepare the *Letter to the Churches*, and know not how to do either thro the anxieties and searchings of heart your application has caused.'

He wrote<sup>42</sup> to the paedobaptist congregation in Broadmead, informing them that had he accepted the call to the 'Baptist brethren' he would have had no objection to do 'everything in [his] power' to serve their 'spiritual interests also.' He also expressed his hope that the Baptist congregation would call a pastor who could give pastoral oversight to both congregations.

Ryland sent Newton copies of his responses, and Newton commented, 'I read your letters to the churches at Bristol, with no small satisfaction.'<sup>43</sup> Yet a discerning Newton was aware that probably more pressure would be placed on Ryland to accept the call to Bristol. Therefore, he advised Ryland:

And now you have given such an answer I can speak more freely . . . I hope you will still be enabled to abide by your late determination. I think it probable, they will still try to get you away from your own flock, over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseer, if they can.

Newton was correct because on 24 June 1792, Broadmead extended a second call to Ryland and wrote again to College Lane.<sup>44</sup> It appears, from the minutes of the record book of College Lane, that although the deacons informed the congregation of the second call, no meetings were held to decide the issue.<sup>45</sup> Despite this, the two churches continued to have friendly relations<sup>46</sup> and Ryland agreed to return periodically for pulpit supply.<sup>47</sup> During one such visit to Bristol, in late August and September, 1792, Ryland informed Newton of the ongoing discussions, and Newton responded:

I believe your word, that you desire to do what is right, and I believe the Lord's word, that He will guide those who simply wait upon Him for direction. And, therefore, whether you go to Bristol or stay at Northampton I shall hope you will be led to determine for the best. I know where I think you would be most comfortable. But I retract. What signify appearances? The Lord can make you

comfortable at Bristol.<sup>48</sup>

Hearing no congregational response from College Lane, Broadmead then reinforced its second call by extending a third unanimous call to Ryland while he was supplying its pulpit in September.<sup>49</sup> This time the letter was signed by the 215 members present and the opening paragraph says, 'It is with increasing ardor of affection and esteem that we take the opportunity, whilst you are present with us to repeat our unanimous request that you will accept the call we have already given you to settle with us as our minister.' The positive impact of his ministry among them had confirmed their belief that they 'were proceeding under the direction and influence of the supreme governor of the church and world.' The same day, the paedobaptist congregation in Broadmead, also repeated its call to Ryland.<sup>50</sup> Obviously, these steps placed much pressure on Ryland to accept.

However, many issues weighed on Ryland's mind during this period. In October 1792 the Baptist Missionary Society was formed, and Ryland was deeply involved in this whole process.<sup>51</sup> He also learned that Hughes was dissatisfied with his present salary and might not stay at the Academy. Ryland informed Broadmead that the news about Hughes gave him 'a good deal of concern' because he could not 'discharge the duties of the Academy without his [Hughes] abilities.'<sup>52</sup> Aware that Hughes was soon to be married and would need an increase in income, Ryland suggested, 'should I become his senior colleague, I should very cheerfully agree to his enjoying a larger proportion of the salary than the younger minister was accustomed to receive.'<sup>53</sup>

By now College Lane was trying to find a replacement for Ryland, should he eventually leave. In September 1792 William Staughton (1770-1829) 'occupied the pulpit of College Lane.'<sup>54</sup> Although still a student at Bristol Academy, he was an eloquent preacher and the church deeply appreciated his ministry. As a result the congregation convened a meeting on 16 October 1792 to discuss Broadmead's request and the suitability of Staughton: 'The meeting began at 8 in the morning, & was continued with prayer & alternate reading & singing till a quarter before XII.'<sup>55</sup> In the discussions that followed this time of worship and prayer, 'several members expressed a good deal of reluctance' to choose him, 'tho they all avowed that Brother Staughton's ministry was generally acceptable.'<sup>56</sup> Their problem was though 'they liked the young man and his preaching . . . they liked . . . Ryland more.'<sup>57</sup>

After this meeting, a more delicate question arose regarding Staughton. He had developed a romantic relationship with a married woman who was separated from her adulterous husband. In the ensuing discussions with Ryland and the deacons, the couple 'mutually saw the impropriety of pursuing'<sup>58</sup> this romantic relationship and agreed to end it. Staughton also sent letters to Ryland, on 31 October and 5 November 1792, confirming this.<sup>59</sup> As a result, the church asked Staughton to return after Christmas and provide further pulpit supply.<sup>60</sup>

Encouraged by this progress, Ryland informed Bristol,<sup>61</sup> 'I hear of no object [sic] to Mr Staughton, and yet our friends are slow in sending him an invitation lest it seem to indicate an inclination to part with their present minister.' He thought that he could soon go to Bristol, yet the thought of leaving his 'dear old friends at Northampton' was painful: 'We scarcely know how to act, nor who must begin. For in fact our own feelings are much like those of a person who is required to draw a tooth, that does not ache, out of his head. Neither hand likes the office of giving the painful pull.' He realized that he must take the lead: 'perhaps I must first tell them more positively, that I dare not refuse complying with the Bristol call in the spring.'

In this letter he also expressed his alarm of a report that Hughes was likely to accept an invitation to go elsewhere. If this happened, Ryland said he would feel utterly 'unequal to sustain' the load at Bristol. Therefore he challenged Broadmead

to keep Hughes: 'I have no right to dictate to the Church in Bristol but it would afford me encouragement and satisfaction to find they were to come to such a decision in that matter as would insure me a coadjutor in whose temper, piety, learning . . . I could confide.' He concluded his letter, expressing the hope that the coming College Lane congregational meeting would clarify things: 'You may expect to hear again in the course of next week.' They met in November, but still wanted to retain Ryland.<sup>62</sup> But one encouraging development was that in December 1792 Broadmead responded positively to Ryland's advice and Hughes 'received a formal invitation to continue as assistant minister.'<sup>63</sup> Although the call was 'far from being unanimous,' Hughes accepted the invitation.<sup>64</sup>

In the early months of 1793, events moved along quickly. Staughton provided pulpit supply at College Lane (the costs being covered by Broadmead),<sup>65</sup> and Ryland was away preaching and giving leadership to the growing missionary cause. For example, in March, Ryland and other Baptist leaders commissioned John Thomas and William Carey for missionary service.<sup>66</sup> The following week, College Lane met to consider calling Staughton, whose ministry was 'increasingly acceptable.'<sup>67</sup> Of Ryland, the church minutes conclude: 'notwithstanding his warm attachment to his present situation and friends, he durst not refuse the invitation to Bristol if this church could be well provided for.' Therefore, feeling 'that it was for the general good of the denomination,' and although 'many seeming to yield to it with reluctance from affection for their present minister,' they agreed ('no one opposed') to ask Staughton to supply the pulpit for three more months and then become pastor at the end of that period. The letter was drawn up to be signed the following Sunday, 31 March 1793.

Ryland, who now had every reason to expect a unanimous vote on that Sunday and 'knowing that Staughton appeared equally satisfied with the people,' hired a wagon and servant and prepared to move.<sup>68</sup> But Staughton, 'to the surprise of all concerned,' declined the call because of his poor health. The congregation thought otherwise, and the church book states: 'it is well known and more privately acknowledged that his refusal was wholly owing to an unhappy entanglement in love with an artful and self-willed woman.'<sup>69</sup> This appears to be the case, for later that year Staughton followed the woman back to America where they were married.<sup>70</sup> 'All arrangements fell through, and Mr Ryland and his wife, who had made extensive arrangements for their departure, had to settle down once more.'<sup>71</sup>

As soon as this happened, Ryland sought Newton's advice. Newton responded, after first giving thanks for the recovery of the Rylands' only child, who had been seriously ill:

You wish me to write about your dilemma. I can feel for your perplexity, but what can I say? I suppose to yourself it is hardly a dilemma, after the many steps that have been taken. You have already passed the Rubicon, and I see not how you can retreat.<sup>72</sup>

Yet even at such a crisis, Newton could not resist teasing Ryland, for he says:

Your Northampton friends must be pinched for parting with you so easily. I almost think they deserve it. Had I been one of your church I should have voted for nailing your ear to the door of College Lane Meetinghouse.

Returning to the situation at hand, he continued:

But seriously, when the day that passed cannot be recalled, I endeavour to consider what can be done now . . . I try to refer all to the Lord - nothing occurs by chance, without either His

providence or His permission . . . When I am conscious that I have acted uprightly and to the best of my judgement, I try not to distress myself about consequences which I could not possibly foresee. He has wise reasons for what He permits, though I may not know them. He can make the crooked straight though I cannot. Therefore, if you must go, go with confidence and leave the rest to Him. The Lord can provide. Mr. --- [Staughton] is not the only man that may be found . . . But the Lord is wise and good, and a hearer of prayer. To Him you must look, and I will try to look for you. I have little doubt that the Lord will lead you right, and overrule all for good. If I could have stopped you, you should not have gone to Bristol, but I am a short sighted creature.

Despite Newton's comment that Ryland had crossed the Rubicon and must leave College Lane, it was still a problem for Ryland and the two churches. It had taken many months for College Lane to become willing to accept Staughton, and now Staughton was gone. The subsequent correspondence between the three parties reveals that although both churches were becoming weary, they were still concerned for each other.<sup>73</sup> But both churches wanted Ryland and he was feeling 'an increasing obligation to each.'<sup>74</sup> He was embarrassed by all the attention he was receiving: 'I am justly ashamed to find myself made of so much consequence and wish I may prove worth half this struggling for.'<sup>75</sup> Ryland was again uncertain, as seen in his comments about College Lane:

If it should appear in the course of events that the Lord only designed to try them, if they were willing for the sake of the general good, to resign me, and then intended to give me back to them, I believe they will be thankful . . .

Or, if it should appear that divine providence after this strange disappointment in Mr.S---, had another in reserve who was equally acceptable, and free from ensnaring connections, I believe they would yield to the necessities of the Academy.<sup>76</sup>

Ryland was busy, with his church hosting the Association meetings, but he was able to spend a few Sundays in June at Bristol.<sup>77</sup> His letter to Harris<sup>78</sup> in early August reveals that in addition to pastoral responsibilities and uncertainty over the call, his family had experienced much personal stress. His only child, John, was away from home recovering from illness and 'through mercy she [Frances Ryland] was continuing to recover faster than they could have expected.'<sup>79</sup> He does not specify the nature of his wife's problems, but an entry in her diary in September 1793 reveals that she had lost a baby girl:

I had many fears and anxieties respecting the event [i.e. birth], but . . . the Lord was pleased to deal with me, and prepare me for the event [i.e. death] that awaited me. Yes, He meant to try, and prove me by the removal of the dear infant I had just brought forth, but in judgement the Lord remembered mercy. My health and strength were soon recovered . . . Though bereaved of my sweet little girl, yet I am satisfied with what the Lord has done, it was best for me, and I trust I have been kept from the least murmuring thought, may He ever preserve me . . . and enable me to praise Him for all that goodness and mercy which has followed me through life!<sup>80</sup>

The death of their baby girl was a heavy blow to them both.<sup>81</sup> Mrs Frances Ryland did not have any children of her own until eight years after her marriage to

Ryland.<sup>82</sup> The child John, mentioned earlier, was the son of Elizabeth, Ryland's first wife who had died on 23 January 1787, a few weeks after his birth.<sup>83</sup>

At about this time Brown University, in America, whose founder was a graduate of the Bristol Academy, conferred an honorary doctorate on Ryland.<sup>84</sup> Newton thought it appropriate for Ryland to be called doctor, though Newton himself refused to use the title of doctor which Princeton had bestowed upon him: 'I think you have as good a right to the title doctor, as most of those who wear it.'<sup>85</sup> Yet he observed, 'It does not raise you an inch higher, nor sink you an inch lower.'

November 1793 was an eventful month, and Ryland kept Newton informed of the proceedings. In return, Newton encouraged him with these words:

As to your settlement, I have only to say, that I pray, hope, and believe, the Lord will set you down, where, according to your own views, you ought to be. You cannot see with my eyes, nor I with yours. But you honestly mean to do His will, and I have no doubt but He will guide you.<sup>86</sup>

While the Rylands were visiting Bristol, two pastors met with College Lane to encourage them to release Ryland. On returning to Northampton, Ryland informed<sup>87</sup> Harris of the results: 'I believe both Mr Francis and Mr Birt have had considerable influence by their conversation with our people, to reconcile their minds to my removal, especially the latter who urged them strongly to resign me immediately.' Although an official congregational meeting had not yet been held, Ryland said, 'I perceive it seems to be the judgement of many, and I suppose most of them; that though I had repeatedly said I could not be easy to leave them unless they were in a fair prospect of being well provided for, that they would not insist upon any further delay.'

The church record book notes the strong advice that Isaiah Birt<sup>88</sup> had given in his meetings with some leaders of College Lane. He said<sup>89</sup> that it would be to their 'advantage' to release their pastor and not wait until they had found another. 'What man of honour or delicacy' would come to preach while they still had a pastor? 'It would be like courting a married woman whose husband is yet alive.' He emphasized that 'had it been merely the call of the church at Broadmead inviting him [Ryland] there . . . it was by no means his duty to go in that case. But it was the seminary for the educating of young men for the ministry which was the great and urgent call for his removal, as this must have an extensive influence upon the churches of the Baptist denomination.' Birt said that he believed Ryland was the only pastor with all the qualities necessary to be principal of Bristol Academy, the only seminary in their denomination. Furthermore, 'to him [Ryland] the eyes of all the churches and ministers were directed, and in him they all agreed,' therefore it was College Lane's 'duty' and 'honor' to release him before they were provided with another pastor.

Therefore on 17 November 1793, College Lane held their official church meeting and agreed 'to release Mr Ryland from the pastoral office over this church.' Their letter of release said:

When we solicited your acceptance of the pastoral care over this church (June 8, 1781) we fondly hoped it would have been for life. We had not then the least idea that divine providence would ever require us to revoke that call. But the great Shepherd of Israel appears now to have otherwise determined . . . [He] commands your removal to another department in His vineyard, not only to the care of a larger church, but to the culture of such as are designed for ministry of the Word . . . Convinced at length of this, we now release and acquit you of any further pastoral charge or care over

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us; and intreat you to accept of our sincere and united thanks for the clear evidence we have had of your tender and faithful concern for us . . . When we reflect on these things, you will excuse us if we feel a pang, and drop a tear at parting with you . . . and pray . . . that the blessing of the Lord may go with you, and attend all your various labours, and crown them with abundant success.<sup>90</sup>

Now that the long awaited decision had been made, the Rylands apparently lost no time leaving, for they moved within the next two weeks. In December 1793, Mrs Ryland wrote some reflections in her diary:

The dispensations of God, like all His other works are very intricate and wonderful, but which by degrees gradually unfold themselves to our view . . . my dear J.R. by a singular train of divine providences is called to sustain a very important station both as a minister and as a tutor. The difficulties which for some time appeared to impede our removal have at length subsided and we arrived at Bristol.<sup>91</sup>

Yet although the prospects of increased ministry in Bristol brought them joy, she confessed that it had been painful leaving College Lane:

Parting from our relations<sup>92</sup> and other dear friends with whom we had been long and happily connected has been a painful task - We have left many with whom we had often taken sweet council [sic] together, and gone up to the house of God in company - Many, whose love and esteem we shall have long in remembrance - and many whose late expressions of affection, will not easily be forgotten.

In December, Ryland received a number of letters of encouragement. Andrew Fuller, his long-time friend, wrote:

I am satisfied you are in the path of duty: on this consideration, I am willing to part with you. I loved Carey, but I loved the cause of Christ better; and, on that account, I could not be sorry for his departure; though it was with a probability never to see him more. Your views of divine truth, I consider as of great importance in the Christian ministry. Go then, my Brother, pour them into the minds of the rising generation of ministers.<sup>93</sup>

Newton sent these words of reassurance: 'I am glad you are satisfied with your removal, and hope you will be so more and more. I am satisfied, likewise, because as I believe your views and motives were right, I am persuaded the Lord would not permit you to take a wrong step.'<sup>94</sup>

On 12 January 1794, College Lane sent Broadmead the official letter of release and commendation for the Rylands. Of Ryland, it says that from the day he joined the church 'to the day of his departure from us, his life and conduct have been in every character and office he has sustained amongst us remarkably diligent and exemplary.'<sup>95</sup> It concludes, by saying, 'we do hereby, at the call of divine providence, release them from immediate communion with us, and recommend them to your communion, mutual love and watchful care, hoping and trusting they will both prove great blessings to your community.'

Subsequently, on 25 January 1794, John Ryland gave Broadmead his official letter of acceptance.<sup>96</sup>

I give up myself to your disposal, and if you continue in the same mind as you expressed, which I have no reason to question, I am willing, in the strength of Christ, to take oversight of you in the Lord . . . But indeed, I feel my weakness, both for the discharge of the pastoral duty towards so large a church, and for the other station connected with that office, in the superintendence of the Academy. I request you, therefore, to pray for me and for my colleague, and hope you will endeavour to strengthen our hands, by your best efforts to watch over each other in love, and to adorn the doctrine of God your saviour in all things.<sup>97</sup>

Thus Ryland began his ministry in Bristol that would last until his death in 1825 at the age of seventy-two.<sup>98</sup>

Although it is most unusual to take twenty months to accept a call, Ryland's actions are understandable, considering various dynamics and developments during those months. Throughout this time he was pulled in two directions. Being a humble person of integrity, he could not easily break with common Baptist practice of the day and leave College Lane against its wishes. Being a person of great vision, he could not close his eyes to the pressing needs of Broadmead, the Academy and the denomination. Therefore, he finally chose Bristol<sup>99</sup> and from there was to exercise a 'commanding influence in Baptist Church life.'<sup>100</sup> He also brought his large missionary vision. It is no accident therefore, that during the period Ryland was principal, no less than twenty-six of his students became missionaries with the Baptist Missionary Society.<sup>101</sup>

NOTES

1. **Broadmead Baptist Chapel**, n.a., n.d., p.13.
2. See brief accounts J.E. Ryland, **Pastoral Memorials**, 1826 (hereafter PM), and James Culross, **The Three Rylands**, 1897.
3. I would like to thank Broadmead Baptist Church, Bristol Baptist College and College Street Baptist Church (Northampton) for permission to examine their manuscripts, and to quote these in this paper.
4. See Norman Moon, **Education for Ministry: Bristol Baptist College**, Bristol 1979, pp.114-5. (Hereafter EM)
5. Nathaniel Haycroft, ed., **Records of a Church of Christ, 1640-1687**. . . a continuation to the present time, 1865, pp.315-6. (Hereafter RCC)
6. EM, p.26,118. For further information see J. Leifchild, **Memoir of Joseph Hughes**, 1835.
7. 'Broadmead Church Records from 1779 to 1817', in Bristol Record Office, document Bd/M1/3. (Hereafter 'B'd Records')
8. B'd Records. See also RCC, p.316, and J. G. Fuller, **The Rise and Progress of Dissent in Bristol; Chiefly in Relation to the Broadmead Church**, 1840, pp. 197-8. (Hereafter DB)
9. Fawcett to Broadmead, 1 Feb. 1792, document #103 in the bound binder in the archives of Broadmead Baptist Church (hereafter B'd). A copy is also in Bristol Record Office, Bd/M1/3.
10. For example in 1771 he preached 138 times, all from different texts. See **History of College Street Church, Northampton**, Northampton 1897, p.31. (Hereafter HCSC)
11. Ernest A. Payne, **College Street Church, Northampton 1697-1947**, 1946, p.20. (Hereafter CSC). At first young John preached from the Table Pew in his home church. See HCSC, p.30 for picture and description of this table.
12. HCSC, p.31. In PM, p.8 this is described as a time when he 'received the final approval of the church'.
13. HCSC p.31. See copy of the letter of official call, 3 Dec. 1780, pp.31-2.
14. See these details in the letter of call from the congregation, June 1781, in HCSC, pp.32-3.
15. HCSC, p.33. His wife died in 1779.
16. HCSC, p.33, CSC, p.24. Ryland senior died 24 June 1792, and was buried at College Lane Baptist Church.
17. T.S.H. Elwyn, **The Northamptonshire Baptist Association**, 1964, p.100. (Hereafter NBA)
18. CSC, p.22.
19. Although Newton was almost 30 years older than Ryland, he continued to show much interest in him, and they carried on an extensive correspondence which lasted 30 years. For a discussion of this see L.G. Champion, 'The Letters of John Newton to John Ryland', **Baptist Quarterly**, 27 (1977), pp. 157-62.
20. Newton to Ryland, 10 April 1792, in archives at Bristol Baptist College (hereafter BBC). All of Newton's letters to Ryland quoted in this article are in BBC archives. I am presently preparing these and other letters from Newton to Ryland for publication.
21. Newton to Ryland, 10 April 1792, BBC.
22. Newton to Ryland, 10 April 1792, BBC.

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23. B'd Records quoted in DB, p.198.
24. Copy of this letter, dated 22 April 1792, is in B'd Records.
25. A marginal notation in a later letter, Paedobaptist to Ryland, 16 Sept. 1792, says 'An invitation had been sent before dated April 27, 1792, signed by the deacons only'. (BA:Bd/M2/1) This independent Paedobaptist congregation was formed in 1757 and eventually amalgamated with the Baptist congregation in 1853. The two volumes of the *Independent Paedo-Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* are stored in Bristol Records Office, BA:Bd/M2/1, and cover the periods from 1757-1818 and 1830-1853.
26. It would seem that Ryland sent Newton copies of the letters, because Ryland apologizes to him for some of the strong Baptist comments that Mr. Harris, deacon of Broadmead, had made.
27. Newton to Ryland, 30 April 1792, in BBC.
28. Booth (1734-1806) was pastor of Prescott Street Baptist Church, London.
29. A copy of this letter, 29 April 1792, is in B'd Records.
30. *The Church Record Book of College Street Baptist Church, 13 May 1792, 'CSBC 48' (hereafter "CS Record Book")* in the Northamptonshire Record Office. Portions are also quoted in HCSC.
31. CS Record Book.
32. HCSC, p.39.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *PM*, pp.21-2.
35. The quotations are taken from the original rough draft, which is in the bound edition "Ryland's Original MSS, E13," in Bristol Baptist College archives. A copy of this letter, College to Broadmead, 20 May 1792, is in B'd Records.
36. CSC, p.19. Payne says, 'College Lane maintained its open tradition and was ready to call to spiritual leadership those best able to give it.' Thomas Trinder was an Anglican who became an usher in Ryland's school in 1762. In 1765 he married Martha Smith, a member of College Lane and governess of the girl's boarding school, and became a deacon in 1777. He became a very active layperson in the Baptist Missionary Society and upon his death bequeathed money for missionary work.  
College Lane's openness made it difficult for them even to get pastors to visit their church. See HCSC, p.43, for congregational discussion of this policy in 1798.
37. College Lane to Broadmead, 20 May 1792, 'Ryland's Original MSS, E13' in BBC. (Punctuation changed for clarification)
38. The original letter, Ryland to Harris, 16 May 1792, is mounted in the B'd book, item #106. A handwritten MS copy, but without an address or date, is in a bound edition 'Ryland's Original MSS, E13,' at BBC. On it is the notation 'J.R. to Mr. Harris/No. 13.' and it appears to be Ryland's rough draft, since there are minor corrections in it.
39. Ryland to Broadmead, 18 May 1792, in the bound edition at B'd, item #109. Unfortunately it is torn, and pieces are missing, but it contains the address and the date. MS draft copy of the complete letter (with no date) is in 'Ryland's MSS, E12,' at BBC. Extracts were published in *PM*, pp.18-20.
40. HCSC, pp.37-9. For an example of this see copy of 'Mr. Ryland's Letter to Mr. Adams at Northampton, Oct. 30, 1791' in 'Excommunication, and the Duty of all Men to Believe, Weighed in the Balance. In a letter to Mr. Ryland Jr., Occasioned by a Letter of Excommunication Sent to Mr. Adams, Mine Host, at Northampton', 1791, in *Works of Huntington*, vol. II, pp.3-17.
41. Ryland to Broadmead, 18 May 1792.
42. Ryland's draft letter in 'Ryland's Original MSS, E12,' item #12, in BBC. A major portion was published in *PM*, p.20.
43. Newton to Ryland, 29 May 1792, in BBC.
44. B'd Records contains copies of these two letters.
45. See church meeting, 12 Aug. CL Record Book.
46. See Thomas Trinder to John Harris, 30 July 1792, #112 in bound volume at B'd.
47. Travel Diary of Ryland, in bound volume 'Ryland's Original MSS, E12', in BBC, shows he went to Bristol in August, September and December in 1792, and June, August, December 1793.
48. Newton to Ryland, 11 September 1792, in BBC. A portion (with the names of the places omitted) was published in *Baptist Magazine* (1816):361.
49. Broadmead to Ryland, 16 Sept. 1792, with all signatures, is in 'Ryland's Original MSS, E13' in BBC. Also see copy in B'd Records.
50. MS 'Copy of the Letter sent from the PaedoBaptist Church to John Ryland then Pastor of the Baptist Church at Northampton' in *Records of the Independent Church, 1757 to 1818*, pp.45-6, in the Bristol Record Office, Bd/M2/1, Bristol. It was signed by 3 men (including one deacon) and 14 women.
51. NBA, p.18.
52. Ryland to [Broadmead], 10 Oct. 1792, in bound volume 'Ryland's Original MSS, E12,' in BBC.
53. Ryland to [Harris], 10 Oct. 1792.
54. HCSC, p.40.
55. C.L. Record Book, 16 Oct. 1792.
56. *Ibid.*
57. HCSC, p.40.
58. C.L. Record Book, mentioned in a later meeting, 29 March 1793.
59. *Ibid.*
60. HCSC, p.40.
61. Ryland to [Harris], in 'Ryland's MSS, E13,' at BBC. The letter has no date, but content indicates it was written at this time.
62. C.L. Record Book does not mention this meeting or the decision. However, College Lane's letter written much later (12 Jan. 1794) refers to the decision made by the congregation, and mentions that they had written to Broadmead on 18 November 1792. The copy of this letter, 18 Nov. 1792, is in the B'd Records in which they apologize for the long delay caused by the congregation not being able to decide. B'd Records also contains the copy of Ryland's

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- response (25 Nov. 1792) to the third call in which he expresses his desire that College Lane first have a new pastor. He refers to Staughton as being the person College Lane would probably agree upon.
63. DB, p.198.
  64. DB, p.198. However, in a letter from Hughes to a friend, he indicates that this still did not settle everything for him. 'I have not been without my anxieties - the sound of applause has been joined by the vociferations of censure, and coldness and cordiality live in the same street. The invitation was far from unanimous. No one offered any specific objection: their personal opinion was highly respectful. I believe the objectors think me scarcely plain and evangelical enough, though they cannot pronounce me even the neighbour of Arminius. I may perhaps assign too great a proportion of a sermon to practice. They are not altogether wrong. To preach Christ crucified is certainly the great object of a truly Christian minister.' (DB, p.199) The history of the church, says that 'he was invited, by a majority of two-thirds of the church, to permanently occupy that position.' (RCC, p.316). The MS acceptance letter, 15 Jan. 1793, is mounted as #107 in B'd.
  65. C.L. Record Book, mentioned in minutes, 29 March 1793.
  66. HCSC, p.40. The meetings were on 20 March 1793.
  67. C.L. Record Book, 29 March.
  68. C.L. Record Book, p.142.
  69. *Ibid.*
  70. HCSC, p.41. He moved to America where he had an influential career as pastor, preacher, missionary promoter and college president. For further details on Staughton's life see articles by Roger Hayden: 'Kettering 1792 and Philadelphia 1814', *Baptist Quarterly* (1965), pp.3-19 and 'William Staughton: Baptist Educator and Missionary Advocate', *Foundations*, Vol.X, 1967, pp.19-35.
  71. HCSC, p.41.
  72. Newton to Ryland, 28 March 1793, and postmarked 29 March 1793. A portion of this letter was published by Ryland in the *Baptist Magazine* (1816), p.362, but the date was incorrectly printed as 23 March 1793.
  73. See Ryland to Harris, 1 May 1793, item #104, in B'd.
  74. *Ibid.*
  75. *Ibid.*
  76. *Ibid.*
  77. HCSC, p.41, says that he preached at Broadmead in May, June and August. It was his plan to be at Bristol in May, but his letter of 1 May 1793, indicates that the plans were changed and that he did not go in May.
  78. Ryland to Harris, 6 Aug. 1793, #104 in B'd.
  79. *Ibid.*
  80. MS Diary of Mrs. [Frances] Ryland, in BBC, covering the period 1789-1806.
  81. She lost another child at birth two years later. See Diary of Mrs. Ryland, 27 December 1795.
  82. *Ibid.*, 28 May 1797. Her first child was Jonathan Edwards Ryland, born 5 May 1797, named after one of Ryland's favourite authors. Therefore, John Ryland Jr. had two sons with similar names: his son by his first wife was called John and his son by his second wife was called Jonathan.
- An entry on 4 May 1800, mentions the birth of her first daughter, Frances Barrett Ryland on 14 April 1800.
83. PM, p.40.
  84. See EM, pp.9,14, for further details. I have not been able to determine the exact date. DNB says that it was in 1792 and HCSC, p.42, says it was after he left Northampton. But the correspondence from Newton to Ryland would place it between these two periods of time.
  85. Newton to Ryland, 6 Nov. 1793, in BBC. A portion, with this paragraph omitted, was later published by Ryland in the *Baptist Magazine* (1816), pp.321-3.
  86. *Ibid.*
  87. Ryland to Harris, 11 Nov. 1793, #102 at B'd. See also Ryland to Harris, written the next day (12 November 1793), #102:b in B'd.
  88. See EM, pp.23,118 and memoir in *Baptist Magazine* (1838), p.54. He was a graduate of Bristol, 1780, and pastor of Plymouth Dock.
  89. C.L. Record Book, p.145.
  90. College Lane to Ryland, 24 Nov. 1793, in 'Ryland MSS, E13,' at BBC. It was signed by 39 men, including the deacons, 'in behalf of the whole church.' A copy is also in the C.L. Record Book.
  91. Diary of Mrs Ryland, 15 December 1793.
  92. John Ryland's sister, Elizabeth, was married to Joseph Dent, one of the leading deacons at College Lane. (CSC, p.19)
  93. Quoted in John Ryland, *Life & Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (2nd ed), 1818, p.224.
  94. Newton to Ryland, 13 December 1793, in BBC. Ryland published this in the *Baptist Magazine* (1816), pp.362-6.
  95. College Lane to Ryland, 12 Jan 1794, in C.L. Record Book. This letter also tells us much about Mrs Ryland, for it says: 'And with respect to his partner in life, Mrs Frances Ryland, who was received a member amongst us Feb. 12, 1790 by letter of dismission from the church in Carter Lane (Southwark), over which the Rev. Rippon presides as pastor, from which time, and during several years prior thereto while she had occasional Communion with us, her walk and conversation among us, have been such as becometh the Gospel.'
  96. Ryland to Broadmead, 25 Jan. 1794, item #105 at B'd. A rough draft is in 'Ryland's MSS, E12' at BBC. It was later published in DB, pp.200-1.
  97. Ryland to Broadmead, 25 Jan. 1794, #105 in B'd. A copy is also in B'd Records and a rough draft is in 'Ryland's MSS. E12.'
  98. Ryland died on 25 May 1825. DB, p.203.
  99. After Ryland left College Lane, it was without a pastor for nearly six years. Mr Reading, of Truro, was called but declined. George Keeley, who had been prepared for the ministry under Ryland at the Academy, applied for missionary

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service. While in the final phases of the application process, he supplied the pulpit for four weeks at College Lane. When the Missionary Committee rejected him because of his poor health, College Lane unanimously asked him to supply the pulpit for the summer of 1799, and then called him to be their pastor. HCSC, pp.43-4.  
100 CBC, p.37.  
101 EM, p.35.

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