

BAPTISTS AND THE SHAPING OF AMERICA

William G. McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty: The Baptists' Struggle in New England, 1630-1833*, University Press of New England, Hanover and London 1991. Pp.xvi, 341. \$35-00. 0-87451-532-7.

Carla Gardina Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, Cambridge University Press, 1991. Pp.xii, 197. £30-00. 0-521-41111-4.

Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Ma., and London, 1990. Pp.xiv, 360. 0-674-05600-0.

Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1989. Pp.xiv, 312. 0-300-04770-4.

James L. Peacock and Ruel W. Tyson, Jr., *Pilgrims of Paradox: Calvinism and Experience among the Primitive Baptists of the Blue Ridge*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington and London, 1989. Pp.xiv, 290. \$14.95. 0-87474-923-9.

Through the 1970s and 1980s the United States experienced a deep conservative reaction against the political and cultural liberalism of the 1960s. Its sources were many and varied, but few would doubt the importance of the role of fundamentalist Protestants, particularly Southern Baptists. The largest body within American Protestantism, Southern Baptists moved from their isolated regional fastnesses towards the political and social mainstream, while at the same time waging war on liberal forces within the denomination. Conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention moved to seize the central bureaucracy, to uphold Biblical inerrancy and to ensure that Baptist seminaries and missions maintained traditional standards. They carried the day against the 'moderates', who feared that the fundamentalists' agenda threatened Baptists' congregational autonomy and tradition of 'soul liberty'.¹

Those with a sense of the history of North American Baptists may see some irony in these developments. The persecuted, radical prophets who made up the earliest groups of Baptists and suffered persecution at the hands of colonial authorities appear improbable ancestors of those who, bearing their name, today work not to remove the mighty from their seats but to elect and counsel the nation's presidents, and to set conservative agendas for church and state. Though their forebears paved the way for the separation of church and state and for the principles of religious freedom laid down in the first amendment to the Federal Constitution, later generations of Baptists have laboured to sustain an informal Christian establishment. Yet it may be that we err in drawing too sharp a distinction between the earliest Baptists' presumed anti-authoritarianism and radicalism, and their successors' apparent enthusiasm for intolerant coerciveness. That, certainly, is the lesson of the books under review here; collectively, they enjoin interpretative caution and encourage us to stress the complexity of Baptists' historical experience.

Understanding the role of the early Baptists has grown apace in recent decades, not

least through the industry and consistently intelligent scholarship of the historian, William G. McLoughlin. Over twenty years ago, in a prize-winning study, he explored at length the contribution of New England Baptists to the evolution of religious toleration through the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.² In *Soul Liberty* he has brought together thirteen of his essays devoted to that same theme, pieces first published between 1965 and 1976. Thanks to shrewd editing, a chronological arrangement, short new prefaces to each chapter, an introductory overview and a thoughtful conclusion, the volume has a much greater integrity and cohesion than is often the case with collections of this kind. In the main the chapters are vignettes of Baptists' experience, many of them first-hand accounts of the persecution and struggles of ordinary individuals in the face of the suffocating Puritan Standing Order. The book is marked by the author's evident sympathy for the courage and suffering of his subjects - as well as his clear-eyed perception of their inconsistencies and the limits they themselves were to place on religious nonconformity. Those familiar with McLoughlin's earlier study will find this a valuable companion volume, while those searching for a lucid, accessible *entrée* into the world of colonial and early Republican Baptists need look no further.

In essence, McLoughlin argues that the ideal of the confessional state - transplanted to the colonies by Anglicans and Calvinists - ultimately failed in America less as a consequence of its opponents' clear-visioned ideological commitment than as a result of dissenters' 'prudent and pragmatic effort, over many generations, to work out a *modus vivendi* within the established order.' In other words, Roger Williams, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison were far less influential in securing the separation of church and state than were ordinary Baptists and other nonconformists, who operated not according to some long-term plan but in response to immediate exigencies. That process can be subdivided into a number of broad phases, beginning in the early 1630s, when New England Baptists first emerged as a dissenting group, and culminating in the disestablishment of the Congregational church in Massachusetts in 1833. McLoughlin stresses that it is not in Rhode Island that we find the key to the New England history of religious freedom. As 'rogue's island', it was scarcely a model to other colonies. Rather the inspiration lay with the Baptists who stayed in Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth Colony and Connecticut, and with their fellow dissenters, the Quakers.

The earliest Baptists initially lacked self-definition, unclear about how far to separate from other Reformed Protestants, about open or closed communion, about their enthusiasm for Calvinist theology, and even about the form of baptism itself. Their Puritan persecutors, however, ascribed to these varied Antipaedobaptists an homogeneity they did not possess, associating them with the Anabaptists of Munster, regarding them as a danger to peace and political order, and fearing that through them God's wrath would be visited upon the whole community. Baptists lacked high-status, college-educated advocates (with the notable exception of Henry Dunster, president of Harvard) to protect them against the whippings, jailings and other cruelties of the Puritans. Consequently, their evolution was 'disorganized and sporadic'. They

enjoyed no church or leader until 1665. In that year they formed a small church in the home of Thomas Goold across the river from Boston, in Charlestown. Threatened with banishment, they fled to an island in Boston harbour. In 1679, however, they audaciously erected a meeting-house in the heart of Boston itself, on the pretext of building a brewery. Once they realized what was happening, the authorities boarded up the doors, but in 1682, afraid that the restored Charles II might revoke their charter, they at last accepted that Baptists should be allowed to worship without hindrance in Boston. Baptists had secured religious toleration. Yet, as is clear from the remarkable transcript of a formal two-day public debate between their leaders and the Puritans in 1668 (here printed in full), their ideas on religious liberty and separation of church and state remained at this stage ambiguous, disparate and poorly defined.

In the next phase of their struggle, Baptists, having hitherto made no objection to the system by which religious taxes were compulsorily levied to support Congregational churches, themselves sought exemption from these demands. The geographical locus of this campaign was south-eastern Massachusetts, the area of the old Plymouth colony. Here Baptists and Quakers were in the majority in some towns and refused to levy the required taxes. A Quaker-instigated appeal to George II in 1723, under the Toleration Act, led to the king's demand that Congregationalists (as non-Anglicans) cease taxing 'other' dissenters to support their churches. There followed from 1728 a series of tax-exemption laws. What the Baptists then understood by religious freedom is evident both in their acquiescence in the Congregationalist Standing Order once they no longer had to pay for it, and - more significantly - in their willingness before the revision of the tax laws to exploit them to their own advantage in towns where they themselves were in the majority. In Swansea, Massachusetts, Baptists forced orthodox Congregationalists into financially supporting their meeting-house. One of the more surprising documents of colonial New England history is the petition of the Congregationalist minority in Swansea, addressed to the state governor, complaining of persecution by the Baptist majority.

Baptists' tax exemption, increasing respectability, dalliance with Arminian doctrine, and agreement not to evangelize around Boston might have spelt the end of a distinctive Baptist movement had it not been for the energising effect of the Great Awakening of the 1740s. In New England that revival spawned a New Light Calvinist movement, a reaction against the alleged corruption and lukewarmness of the established Old Light churches. About half the resulting separate churches would within a few years adopt believer's baptism by immersion, and by the 1760s an invigorated Baptist movement, rededicated to Calvinism, was firmly established in the Puritan colonies (the come-outer movement's radical energy and tendency towards antinomian perfectionism is well captured in McLoughlin's essay on Ebenezer Ward and the 'free-love' heresy). Magistrates refused to recognize separatists as a new denomination and continued to impose taxes on them. In consequence, in this subsequent phase of the Baptists' struggle, a new breed of leaders (most notably Isaac Backus, Ebenezer Smith and Thomas Green) arose to fight for tax exemption and -

aided by Baptist ministers from middle colonies - to embark on a programme of institution building. Even so, the authorities continued to tax Separate Baptists, distraint their property, and jail them.

A number of essays deal with the tax issue, the violent persecution of Baptists, their martyrdom, and Baptist strategies of resistance during this phase. McLoughlin proffers extraordinary tales of ordinary folk: people like the elderly widow, Esther White of Raynham, who as a dissenter refused to pay the eight pence tax to support the town's established minister. Jailed, she 'lay on the naked floor and . . . said she never imagined that the floor was so easy to lie upon before . . . and she said that she was easy to stay there as long as God saw best she should'; only after thirteen months did embarrassed Congregationalists release her, the charge still unpaid. But Baptists were not loath to fight back. Petitions, lawsuits, protests and grievance committees formed essential elements of their resistance. In 1773 Backus turned to massive civil disobedience as a tactic, seeking to fill the jails with Baptist who, in language similar to that of the revolutionary Sons of Liberty, would appeal to a higher law in their refusal to obey the tax laws. In practice, that campaign was overtaken by the wider fight for American political independence. For, as McLoughlin argues ('Baptists Face the Revolution, 1776'), the Revolutionary War exposed Baptists to a cruel dilemma, but one to which they responded with far less ambivalence than some have suggested. Belying the charge that they were 'Tories', they flocked to the Revolutionary army. It was true that their pietism made them as hostile to their immediate oppressors, the New England Congregationalists, as to the Anglican hierarchy but, as patriots, men like Backus saw that their lot lay with those seeking political liberty, especially as it dawned on them after 1775 that 'in the rise of imperial control [lay] a potential . . . obstruction to the free flow of God's grace, even a greater hindrance than that of the Standing Order of New England' (p.189). For Baptists, as for other pietists, the Revolution took on a millennial significance: 'Natural rights, social contract, the protection of property provided the milieu for the reception, distribution, and expansion of God's grace' (p.190).

However, the Revolution did not secure the religious freedom that New England Baptists had expected. Although Virginia, thanks to the efforts of Madison and Jefferson, abolished the tax-supported system for religion in 1785, in parts of New England a 'general assessment system', or 'multiple establishment', persisted for another half century: taxes were still levied for the support of religion, but these were to be divided up proportionately in each town according to the relative strengths of particular denominations. The complex processes by which complete disestablishment was eventually secured make up the final phase of the New England Baptist story. A minority of Baptists welcomed the system of multiple establishment and sought incorporation from the state legislature; but many others, including Backus, regarded this as bowing to Caesar and persisted in their commitment to the voluntary principle. In due course, but only after Backus' death, formal disestablishment was achieved: in Vermont (1807), Connecticut (1818), New Hampshire (1819) and finally in Massachusetts itself.

McLoughlin tells a fascinating story, and tells it compellingly. The principal lesson of his book is that for all their earnest talk of religious freedom and equality, Baptists essentially acted to promote their own sectarian ambitions and not to advance a general principle. This did not make them hypocrites. They spoke sincerely when they sought to establish the separation of church and state. But this principle they sustained because they believed that in the free market of religion Baptist views would prevail and that they would become the 'national' (but not established) church. Jefferson and other deistic leaders of the young republic wanted the state to be neutral and could formally assert that America was not a Christian nation. Backus and the Baptists, however, while supporting Jefferson's party as the political agency by which disestablishment might be achieved, sought to make and keep the nation firmly Christian and specifically Baptist. Many saw no inconsistency in supporting sabbatarian laws, government licensing of the publishing of Bibles, or political test oaths that discriminated against Roman Catholics. These attitudes, when allied to the increasing success of their church in the half century after the Revolution, meant that Baptists ceased to be critics of their society and became 'captives of the culture against which they had fought for so long'. In sum, McLoughlin shows us [p.2] that between 1630 and 1833 'the Baptists went through the classical evolution from a dissenting sect to an established church.'

Carla Gardina Pestana's comparative case studies of the Salem Quaker meeting and the Baptists of Boston over the first century of their existence emphasize their differences, rather than celebrate their similarities as dissenting sects (in the manner of Geoffrey Nuttall and Philip Gura). Her close local focus allows her to get beyond the ideas of the ministerial and intellectual élite to explore the social development of the two movements. The book provides an excellent complement to McLoughlin: it picks up some minor errors in his scholarship, but in the main does not so much challenge as flesh out elements of his analysis. In particular, her comparative approach helps to identify the limits of Baptist radicalism when set against the experience of the Quakers.

She follows McLoughlin in seeing Baptists' experience in the New World, not the Old, as the principal key to understanding their development, but recognizes the importance of transatlantic linkages. Not least, the roots of both the Quaker and Baptist movements in mid-seventeenth-century Massachusetts lie in part in the policy of orthodox Puritans in the Bay colony, a policy shaped by the religious turmoil in Britain: Puritans sought to protect the churches against foreign subversion at the same time as their institutional progress to religious establishment made them more conservative in church practices. But these changes (towards increasing ministerial authority, limiting lay preaching, and making church membership more inclusive) made domestic disaffection and sectarianism all the more likely.

The emergent Quakers and Baptists, both outlawed by the authorities, related to orthodoxy in opposite ways. Quakers rejected the fundamentals of orthodox Calvinist belief and practice, dismissing predestination, stressing the individual's inner light and the positive elements of human nature, minimizing the role of Scripture, and

advocating preaching by women and children. Whereas Quakerism was imported, a product of missionary invasion, Baptists were an indigenous growth. They retained most of the beliefs and practices of orthodox churches, with which they remained in dialogue. Unlike Quakers, they pursued biblical primitivism. The principal impetus to their growth came from mounting objections within orthodoxy to Puritan efforts to promote the 'halfway covenant', a means of offering baptism to children of those who were not church members. This was deeply offensive to those determined to maintain the purity of the church. Because most Baptists were good Calvinists to begin with, and because many orthodox Puritans harboured doubts over infant baptism, the establishment's persecution of Baptists never reached the same level of cruelty as that meted out to Quakers. No anti-paedobaptist, after all, was hanged on Boston Common.

The two movements also differed in their patterns of sectarian development. Their social bases, organization, leadership, and relationship to the orthodox establishment all shaped their contrasting evolutionary trajectories. At first the Baptist community, unlike the Quakers', was scattered: Baptists required little contact with other radicals to arrive at their dissenting views (whereas Quakerism spread rapidly through the work of missionaries). Baptist ties cut across familial and town lines. More men than women were drawn to the sect's stark, exclusive predestinarianism. Their rejection of infant baptism, strict attitudes to membership, and passivity towards the conversion of their own children meant that Boston Baptists lacked the clannishness of Salem Quakers (amongst whom sect and family converged). Both groups lost elements of their earlier radicalism as their organization matured during the eighteenth century, but their path to more church-like institutions followed different routes: Baptists moved gradually, following their understanding of biblical models, building meeting-houses, establishing sabbath worship, keeping records, setting up disciplinary procedures, and moving closer to the orthodox establishment institutionally; for Quakers, however, institutionalization involved much more of a wrench from their millennialist origins and they remained self-consciously separate from the larger society. Both groups also developed more systematic approaches to leadership but, while Quakers kept responsibility more diffused, Baptists by the mid-eighteenth century had accepted the established church's distinction between laity and clergy, hired professional ministers and downgraded lay preaching and leadership.

Relations between these sectaries and the orthodox were shaped as much by popular antipathies as by the hostility of the Congregationalist leaders. But Pestana suggests that there was greater popular sympathy for Baptists than for Quakers, not least since some amongst the orthodox questioned the practice of infant baptism and advocated open communion. Over time the boundaries between Baptists and the orthodox gradually blurred, Baptists' better integration into the wider community being aided by the growing cosmopolitanism of eastern Massachusetts. Baptists' reading habits suggest that during the first half of the eighteenth century they saw themselves not as isolates but as part of the larger community of English Reformed Protestants. Though the Boston Baptist Church in this period, under the ministry of the erudite Jeremiah Condy, moved in the direction of theological liberalism and Arminianism, and resisted

the Great Awakening, the revivals of the 1740s revitalized Calvinistic Baptists. Not only was a New Light Baptist church formed in Boston, claiming to be the true descendant of the original church in Charlestown, but the First Church, under the charismatic Samuel Stillman, renewed its commitment to Reformed Protestantism. As new members flocked to their cause, Boston Baptists were able to maintain their distinctive principles and identity, yet maintain congenial relations with their orthodox neighbours (and support the Patriot cause). The Quakers, in contrast, reasserted their separatism, not least in consequence of a Revolutionary struggle which confronted pacifism with patriotism. By the end of the colonial period Baptists had chosen the blend of cooperation and competition for souls that would characterize evangelical relations from the early nineteenth century, while Quakers had chosen the divergent path of sectarianism and separation.

If Pestana's careful case study is a fine example of how to exploit local history to fullest advantage, the studies of Butler and Hatch provide a breadth of vision and range of analysis which make them indispensable reading on colonial and early national religion. *Awash in a Sea of Faith* sweeps across the history of American Christianity from the sixteenth century to the eve of the Civil War. Rebellious against the New England Calvinist synthesis of American religious history, Butler argues that America became a Christian nation less through seventeenth-century Puritanism (in crisis by the 1690s) or a fictive eighteenth-century Great Awakening than as a consequence of institutional authority (which was given physical presence through a landscape sacralized by church building), state churches and - after church disestablishment - denominational and cooperative interdenominational societies. Nathan Hatch's *Democratization of American Christianity* shares with Butler's study an emphasis on the importance of the early national period in the great expansion of evangelical Protestant power, and on the importance in that story of the two great popular movements, the Methodists and the Baptists, but whereas Butler's keywords are coercion and authority, Hatch is concerned with the power of the 'sovereign audience', with popular rebellion against Calvinist authority, with individualism, egalitarianism, liberation, and the dispersal of power. He is anxious to explode the theory (here he is of one mind with Butler) that the Second Great Awakening is best explained as an exercise in social control mounted by conservative elements fearful of social and political upheaval.

In Hatch's account, Baptists appear as the quintessential democratizers of American Christianity, harbouring more than their fair share of anti-élitism, openness to religious enthusiasm, and self-confidence. Hatch locates their representative figure in John Leland, a leading New Light Baptist in Virginia in the 1780s, and thereafter in New England. As preacher and publicist, Leland - the declared enemy of Federalists, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, clerical hierarchies, missionary agencies and theological seminaries - fought passionately for religious freedom. In contrast to his older colleague, Isaac Backus, he was energetically anti-clerical and socially egalitarian. When leading Baptist ministers met in Triennial Convention from 1814, in a move towards pulling scattered autonomous churches into a national denomination

for purposes of education, publishing and mission, Leland 'smelt a rat'. In resisting the drive towards pomp, status and central control, Backus spoke for much of the Baptist hinterland beyond the respectable city congregations and eastern seaboard. As Hatch puts it, he 'exalted the individual conscience over creedal systems, local control over powerful ecclesiastical structures, and popular sensibility over the instincts of the educated and powerful' [p.97].

However, in Butler's interpretation of the same period (1770-1840), Baptists appear in the company of those seeking to christianize state authority and alongside other creators of denominational institutions which reached out into parts of American society that would otherwise have lacked an institutional Protestant presence. It is not Backus, the hammer of a controlling church establishment, who interests him, but Backus, the defender of coercive government action in upholding religion, and Backus, the eulogizer of the 'sweet harmony' in relations between civil and Christian authorities. It is not Leland, the critic of Baptist institutional growth, who attracts his comment, but that growth itself (from six Baptist associations countrywide in 1780 to 100 in 1820 and over 500 by 1860), and the denominational authority through which expansion was achieved. In Butler's story power flows mainly downwards from above and outwards from the centre: associations settled local disagreements and tied congregations into a 'national spiritual market'; the book trade extended denominational authority; colleges asserted the power of the church's élite; interdenominational reform and missionary organizations similarly extended church power.

Both historians cannot be right, of course, but there is truth in both analyses; their differences have more to do with perspective than with outright incompatibility. Coercion and democratic self-expression co-existed in mainly constructive (but sometimes destructive) tension within the Baptist movement - as, indeed, in the other great expression of surging evangelicalism, Methodism. Just as Methodists experienced a number of rebellions - principally by Republican Methodists and Protestant Methodists - against what many considered an authoritarian central control, so too there were centrifugal forces at work within the Baptist churches. Baptists were never bound together so powerfully as Methodists, but the efforts of their institution builders to give more central direction to the denomination resulted in a number of defections. The most influential of these was the anti-mission - or Primitive - Baptist movement rooted most deeply in the South and Midwest, one which championed local independence and traditional Calvinist orthodoxy against the perceived authoritarianism of 'priestcraft': that is, the 'Arminianised', mission and revival-focused, reform-centred, 'Yankee'-originating religion that seemed to threaten the whole denomination. Fearful of authoritarianism in both church and state, they spoke the language of Jefferson and Leland, not of Backus and the early nineteenth-century denomination builders like Richard Furman and Francis Wayland.

James Peacock's and Ruel Tyson's absorbing *Pilgrims of Paradox* vividly and sympathetically shows that this primitivist, anti-authoritarian tradition persists - albeit as a minority stream against the broad current of the American Baptist movement. It is only too easy for the massive presence of Southern Baptists in modern America to

obscure the continuing existence of an 'anti-mission' element of Old Baptists, deeply hostile to the theology and practice of the dominant Baptist culture. In fact, Primitive Baptists have over 1,300 churches scattered across thirty-two states of the Union, most of them located in the South and Midwest. Their absence from New England and New York reflects their anti-Yankee origins. Over half the churches are clustered in just six southern states: Georgia, Alabama, Texas, Tennessee, Mississippi and Virginia. These are modest churches, rarely found on the main streets of their towns, and attended by modest, largely rural people.

Primitive Baptists have a well-developed sense of their own history. No elder's bookshelf lacks a copy of the *History of the Church of God, from the Creation to A.D. 1885; including especially the History of the Kehukee Primitive Baptist Association* (written by two of their late-nineteenth-century elders). Though they trace their formal origins to the 1832 schism between the old and new Baptists at the Black Rock Church in Maryland, they pursue their doctrinal roots to the primitive Christian churches and subsequently to sixteenth-century Calvinism (technically, they deny they are 'Calvinists', on the grounds that Calvin deviated from strict predestinarian doctrine). Their principal credal statement lies in their third article of faith: 'We believe in the doctrine of eternal and particular election'. They deny that men and women can rescue themselves from damnation by virtue of misconceived ideas of freewill or ability: their only hope comes from 'effectual calling'.

In this stark, unyielding Calvinism, which shapes their lives, their discourse and their church conflicts, they find themselves closest to the British Strict and Particular Baptists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They read and cite with approbation John Bunyan, John Gill ('the soundest, the most learned, and the most able Baptist theologian since the death of the Apostle John . . . the only man that ever hunted and drove out Arminianism from the explanation of every verse in the Bible') and, from the nineteenth century, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Using William Gadsby's hymnal, they sing (slowly, in dissonant harmonies, and unaccompanied by any musical instrument) 'Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah', 'Amazing Grace', and other impeccably Calvinist dissenting hymns. Preaching - on doctrine, experience and duty - stands at the heart of their meetings (it is often said that 'Primitive Baptists will drive the furthest and hear the least'). Their elders deliver their 'discourses' (not sermons) without notes, drawing on a memorized king James Bible. Some, the 'absoluters' or 'fatalists', are strict predestinarian logicians; a few are perceived as 'progressives', making some unwelcome accommodation to the 'Arminianism' of missionary evangelicals; 'old regulars' see themselves pursuing a middle course between these two extremes. In contrast to mainstream evangelical Baptist churches, there are no dramatic conversions. Nor are there baptistries in churches: baptisms take place in a river or any other suitable watery setting out of doors. There is no sign of elaborate bureaucracy, Sunday schools, social welfare and educational projects, or financial campaigns.

Loyal to their descent from the separatist Puritan tradition, Primitive Baptists reject any linking of church and state, any semblance of civil religion. They refuse to

recognize the Fourth of July or any other day that attaches ritual to community and state. They may treat televangelists, like Jim and Tammy Bakker, with scorn, and dismiss the theological vacuity and wrongheadedness of the 'missionaries', but they are deeply fearful of Jerry Falwell and other representatives of the politically ambitious New Christian Right. Primitives are not so other-worldly that they demand political detachment: it is open to all as individuals to be politically engaged, even to march on Washington. But the church has no business *as a church* to involve itself in political activism. Its function is simply to spread the message that Christ died for the souls of the elect.

Peacock and Tyson are anthropologists and sociologists by training; their study is ethnographic in approach. In the early 1980s they spent two summers living amongst the Primitive Baptists of the Mountain District Association, which embraces portions of the North Carolina and Virginia Blue Ridge. Here, on the eastern margin of the Appalachians, where the terrain is rugged, most Primitives work out of doors, many of them small-scale farmers spending their leisure time hunting and fishing. They are a practical and geographically dispersed people, often having to travel many miles for church meetings. Hospitable and gracious, they live without pretence and display. Their relationships are direct, their style simple. Men and women operate a clear division of labour. Their values are individualist and they possess a strong sense of independence.

The authors focus on a conflict between their most gifted preacher, Elder Walter Evans, and a pseudonymous elder, 'Joseph Reed'. The precise details need not concern us here: essentially the issue was whether or not Evans had exceeded his authority in dealing with a church rift in a neighbouring association. By exploring that conflict, Peacock and Tyson are able to pursue their larger purpose: depicting the lives of the Primitive Baptists and the meaning they attach to them. They especially seek an answer to the question of how the Calvinist, while not knowing his future for sure, could organize his life and sustain religious community in a fallen world. If the world is ordered by a cosmic division between the elect and the fallen, how do Calvinists manage differences and divisions among themselves? The authors also use their case study to examine and compare Weberian and Durkheimian approaches to the sociology of religion, an exercise made all the more pertinent by the fact that Weber himself visited relatives in the foothills of the Blue Ridge in 1904, and attended a baptism held by a group of North Carolina Primitive Baptists. Comfortable with Weber's emphasis on the power of Calvinist doctrine to shape culture and politics, Peacock and Tyson make considerable use of Weber's discussion of the paradoxical psychology of Calvinism, with its mixture of pessimism and hope. The community of the Blue Ridge Primitive Baptists they regard as a world of paradox and tensions - tension between the community that these Baptists cherish and the individual's ultimately lonely path to the next life; between their struggle to give a meaning to life on earth while forbidden to know anything of their destiny in the next; between their cherishing of history and their recognizing that history proffers a limited (and possibly flawed) basis for understanding; between their admiration for their leaders and their sense of those

leaders' limitations; between their tendency to schism and their fear of romanticizing rebellion.

What Peacock and Tyson call the 'bitter-sweet religion' of the Primitive Baptists, of those 'poised between anxiety and hope', is a far cry from the triumphalism of white Southern Baptists, from accommodation with the world, and from any partnership between church and state. Standing, like their seventeenth-century colonial forebears, on the margins of mainstream American culture, Primitives remind us that there has been more than one historical route for Baptists. They also remind us, perhaps as effectively as the cumulative force of the books noticed here, that the reciprocal relationship between Baptist culture and the wider culture of the nation is rich, complex and ambiguous.

NOTES

- 1 There were nearly 15 million Southern Baptists in the United States in 1988. For a brief discussion of the themes of this paragraph, see Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1992), 463-73, 486-8.
- 2 William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent 1630-1833: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Ma., 1971). The assault of Baptists in the southern colonies on the Anglican establishment is most profitably explored through the writings of Rhys Isaac, in particular his acclaimed study, *The Transformation of Virginia 1740-1790* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC, 1982).

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REVIEW: *Islington Chapels*, Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, Newlands House, 37-40 Berners Street, London W1P 4BP, 168pp, 122 plates & plans, £9-95.

This little jewel of architectural and ecclesiastical documentation seeks to record the chapels and mission halls, that, once so much a feature of the urban scene, are now under threat of disappearance or of tragic and ill-conceived conversion into dreary workshops and warehouses. This too is a function of changing social class. Thus the evangelicals of Islington built big in its heyday as an opulent middle-class suburb, but handed on to successive less affluent residents of the borough not only the prestige buildings of an earlier generation, but a range of more modestly constructed missions. Baptist buildings in this borough seem to have been both fewer and less prestigious than those of their Congregational cousins, who here erected churches of cathedral-like proportions. However, at the beginning of this century, when the ministry of the established church in Finsbury was deemed 'a complete failure', three Baptist churches were able regularly to draw congregations in excess of a thousand. Surviving churches are few after war damage and other accidents have taken their toll (fire at Salters' Hall, and Camden Road, a collapsed ceiling at Upper Holloway Road). The attractive Strict Baptist Chapel at the Angel, completed in 1824 and elegantly filling its restricted site, was originally built for the Calvinistic Methodists, but has been in Baptist hands for 140 years. Also illustrated are Vernon and Cross Street, both altered after war damage, as well as Spurgeon Memorial at Tollington Park, Highbury Strict, and Hornsey Rise. There is also an interesting entry on St Giles' Christian Mission, which was originally associated with Bloomsbury but is now a lively baptistic enterprise not a church of the Baptist Union.