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# THE BAPTIST QUARTERLY

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### TRANSATLANTIC DENOMINATION

The linkage between British Baptists and their cousins in North America is a subject worthy of more attention: the big names such as Joseph Belcher, Morgan Edwards, Morgan Rhees, Charles Hill Roe, and William Staughton stand out, but beyond them stand a multitude of others about whom Dr Davies writes in this volume. Its central spine is the correspondence of the Revd Samuel Jones (1735-1814), literate Calvinist theologian, respected leader in the Welsh Churches, major architect and builder of the Philadelphia Association, and faithful correspondent of Joshua Thomas, historian of Welsh Baptists. These letters enable Dr Davies to recreate the connexionalism between Welsh Baptists and those that left Wales for North America and Pennsylvania in particular. In so doing the interplay between ethnicity and religion in both private and public life is clearly revealed as correspondents on both sides shared experiences and encouraged one another with stories of gospel successes.

Amongst the Pennsylvanian Welsh there were Quakers, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Baptists, the latter being initially the smallest but the most Welsh in terms of both ministry and liturgy. The first Welsh Baptists in America had come in 1689 from Radnor and founded the church at Pennypeck, were of fair social substance, and spoke both English and Welsh; the more numerous second wave (1701ff) were

poorer monoglot Welsh from churches in the Teifi valley. The two groups did not come together partly because of these cultural reasons, partly because they differed over the necessity of the laying on of hands of new members which was essential in the younger Welsh Tract Welsh-speaking church. In the long-run it was memory of a Welsh heritage rather than the Welsh language and liturgy that was to perpetuate a Welsh tradition.

Dr Davies argues convincingly against the thesis that the *common* story of North Atlantic Baptists came to an end with the securing of independence by the American colonies, a cause which had widespread Baptist support on both sides of the Atlantic. Leaders like John Rippon were very anxious after independence to keep fellowship between Baptists as intimate as possible. Guidance was still sought from such bodies as the Particular Baptist Fund, major defences of Believer's Baptism remained those written by people like John Gill republished in American editions, and the establishment of new educational institutions saw Americans seeking both financial and academic support from Britain, though in both countries it was necessary to defend this against those who argued that evangelical experience alone was a sufficient preparation for ministry. Such provision proved important when new challenges to the orthodox faith emerged: thus it was in answer to Elhanan Winchester's espousal of notions of universal salvation that Samuel Jones established his theological credentials in penning his *On God's Covenant* in 1781.

Encapsulated in Dr Davies exposition are many good things of wider significance than simply Welsh-American relationships: for example there is an excellent account of Robert Robinson's political views on the separation of church and state and prime minister Pitt's response to these. Thus the conclusion: 'It was the American Revolution, not the French, which made Dissenters identifiable as potential traitors to the "Church and King" conception of the British constitution'. Related to this Dr Davies also lays out the debate about the fulfilment of prophecy and the 'Signs of the Times' in the 1790s perceived in such events as the French Revolution.

In so far as Britain was seen to be an unreformed nation inviting the judgment of God, such expositions of prophecy became a motivation to a new wave of emigrations to America's freedom, though clearly there was a distance here between ideal and reality. Samuel Jones and several of his correspondents were active promoters of emigration which, now construed as a political act, led to such correspondence being interrupted and examined by the British government. But then as now there were economic migrants as well as the sufferers of persecution amongst those who sought a new beginning in North America.

This documentation of an important aspect of what Gwyn Williams has called 'The Baptist International' is very much to be welcomed.

Hywell M Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren: the Rev. Samuel Jones (1735-1814) and his friends - Baptists in Wales, Pennsylvania, and beyond*, 1995, Associated University Presses, 25 Sicilian Avenue, London, WC1A 2QH, 361pp, £38.00.