

BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL COLLEGES

A Review Article

Derek B. Murray, *Scottish Baptist College Centenary History, 1894-1994*, Scottish Baptist College: Glasgow, 1994, 88pp, pb £5-00 + 70p postage, from The Scottish Baptist College, 12 Aytoun Road, Glasgow G41 5RN.

Mike Nicholls, *Lights to the World: A History of Spurgeon's College, 1856-1992*, Nuprint, Harpenden, Herts, 1993, 208pp, pb £6-95, ISBN 0 9522641 0 2.

Roslyn Otzen, *Whitley: The Baptist College of Victoria, 1891-1991*, Victoria: Hyland House Publishing Pty Ltd, 1991, 190pp, hb \$30-00 Australia, ISBN 0 947062 84 X, available in UK from Gazelle Book Services, Falcon House, Queen Square, Lancaster LA1 1RN, £16-99.

Since 1894, the Scottish Baptist College has served both Scottish and British Baptist churches with great faithfulness but often with only limited recognition. It is not the best known of our colleges, certainly south of the border, and Dr Murray has done an admirable job to catch and convey, in fairly short compass, something of its vision, struggles, development and growth, as well as its community life.

Murray guides us through the controversy surrounding the pre-history of the College: the support offered to ministerial candidates by James and Robert Haldane in the early 1800s, eventually leading to the establishment of the Scottish Congregational College; assertions that ministerial education was unnecessary in the 1830s; and a number of ministers who trained men in their own homes (e.g. Lachlan McIntosh, Francis Johnstone and Dr James Paterson) at a time when other ministers were trained at, for example, Bristol and Bradford. From its formation the College has held an ambiguous place within the Scottish Baptist churches, as many individuals and churches have been highly suspicious of the need of theological training for ministry and especially of modern scholarship - the two frequently going hand in hand. This has dogged the College from its beginnings, and Dr Murray has done well in presenting controversies, not least in discussing the uneasy relationship between the College and the Baptist Union of Scotland (chapter 3). In all these, individuals and their views are dealt with sensitively and dispassionately.

When eventually the College was founded, it met first of all at the Adelaide Place Church, moving in 1925 to 113 West Regent Street, where it shared premises with the Union, then in 1967 it moved closer to Glasgow University at 31 Oakfield Avenue, finally, in 1981, coming to the present premises, next door to the Union, at 12 Aytoun Road.

Chapters on the staff, full- and part-time, officials and students give those unfamiliar with the College something of a taste of its ethos and a sense of its purpose. Throughout, the book has vignettes on leading figures, providing glimpses into the lives and contributions of leading Scottish Baptists. In fact, many important

British Baptists have been associated with the College, in its pre-history as well as in its hundred years of service. These include the Haldane brothers, James Culross, George Yuille, William Landels, T. H. Martin - the father of Dr Hugh Martin (who is unfortunately not mentioned), W. Holms Coats, John MacBeath, Guy Ramsey, R. E. O. White, Angus MacNeil, Gordon Martin, Peter Barber and John Drane. There is also a brief section given over to women students, which reflects the difficulty British Baptists have had in accepting women as ministers.

A chapter on the development of the courses taken by students gives insight into the changes which have taken place in ministerial preparation, not least the relationship with Universities, and the place of practical experience within all this. The final chapter looks forward to the next century, and the postscript, by Ian Balfour, briefly outlines the centenary year itself.

The book is attractively set out, well illustrated with many pictures and a number of line drawings (not all of the same standard or relevance). It provides a worthy companion to previous College histories and sets a good standard for succeeding ones. This reviewer was left wishing that Dr Murray had in fact written at rather greater length.

A history of Spurgeon's College has been long overdue and for supplying it we owe Mike Nicholls our gratitude. His aim is not simply to provide a history of the College, but to analyse its various roots and to record 'the interaction of social, educational, theological, denominational and personal factors that bore fruit in ministerial achievement' (p.19), a task he in part achieves, as these interactions are patchy in their distribution and brief in their substance, lacking cross-reference with other literature, for his material is predominantly from College or Baptist sources, as is reflected in the footnotes.

Founded in 1856 by Spurgeon himself, he and his students met in the premises of the Metropolitan Tabernacle until they moved into the purpose-built Pastors' College behind the Tabernacle in 1874, where they remained until moving to the present site in 1923, when the name was changed to Spurgeon's. After Spurgeon's death, the College continued to receive considerable financial support from the Tabernacle, but as time passed this lessened, the process of separation of College from the church being accelerated by the move to South Norwood - and this provides a most interesting part of the College's history. The move also affected the College in other ways, e.g. making it residential, thereby altering 'the character, ethos, atmosphere and outlook of those trained there' (p.130).

Again, as in Murray's history, widespread Baptist mistrust of education in general and theological education in particular becomes very evident, leading to an uneasy tension within the College, whose aim has always been primarily to prepare preachers and evangelists (see, e.g. Spurgeon's comments on p.30) and this frequently by means of church planting (see pp.95f). The relationship between the College and academia again proves of interest and contemporary relevance, not least as many ministerial students today still regard the academic discipline as secondary

or even unnecessary to the ministry. Spurgeon's has never concentrated on the academic, and this itself caused problems with the College's association with the CNAA from 1974 onwards, forcing considerable changes on the College (pp.174-184). More recently the College has become affiliated with the University of Wales. Here, Nicholls partly provides the answer to John Briggs' question (in 'Baptists and Higher Education in England', in W. H. Brackney and R. J. Burke, eds., *Faith, Life and Witness*, 1990, p.110), as to when a Spurgeon's man first gained a London BD, when he notes that the link was formed in the 1930s (p.174), though the exact date would have been helpful. However, the University of London Library has informed the reviewer that they have no records of any BDs from Spurgeon's students in the 1930s, so the matter is still one requiring further research.

Throughout the book there are numerous brief biographical sketches of principals, tutors and, to a much lesser extent, students and officers. It is also recorded how, when the issue of women entering College arose in 1920, funds for them were refused on the grounds that the Trust Deeds stated the College was for the training of young *men* for the ministry (p.127). In time, women did gain admission (the first in 1961, see p.172), and in 1987 Debra Reid became the first woman to serve on the faculty, teaching Old Testament (p.191).

Nicholls occasionally lapses into preaching style, as, for example, on pp.45-48, when he examines three factors which account for C. H. Spurgeon's successful ministry. The book is also marred by poor proof reading, with a considerable number of typographical errors, e.g. n.17 on p.198 should refer to D. M. Himbury, not B. M.; in chapter 4, footnotes 20-23 are mixed up and nn.24-25 are missing altogether; and figure 4.7 on p.153 is a repeat of figure 4.2 on p.143 (the staff and students in 1923) and not Principal P. W. Evans. Further, his footnotes should have been standardized, cf. the two references in chapter 1 to Horton Davies's *Worship and Theology in England* (1962). Volume 4, as n.37 rightly points out, but n.56 on p.200 incorrectly attributes this book to IVP instead of OUP, and this latter note also incorrectly cites the quotation as being from p.355 when it is p.341. Here Nicholls also gives the impression that his quotation of Davies is one continuous sentence, whereas he has conflated two sentences and omitted the use of ' . . . ' to indicate this. The final chapter, covering the period 1958-1992, contains a number of quotations, though only two are referenced. This inadequacy, along with other careless typographical mistakes and poor checking of details does little to inspire confidence.

Nicholls is by no means uncritical of the College, as evident in his assessment of the content of the training (see pp.110f). The writing of contemporary history always poses problems to the historian, especially when dealing with controversial matters which require great sensitivity and fairness. On this, however, Nicholls' handling of Paul Beasley-Murray's principalship must be challenged. He earlier discusses the problems surrounding the short principalship of Eric Worstead (1956-58, pp.169f), and at first glance Nicholls' treatment of Paul Beasley-Murray appears

reasonable. However, on p.189 reference is made to a financial crisis in 1987 and the resulting controversy. Then (pp.189f), after a period of growth, Nicholls talks negatively of the conclusion to his principalship, but provides no explanation or outline of what he is specifically discussing. Such negative comments, when unsubstantiated, are out of place, and the way Nicholls treats this recent period is different from the previous controversies he has recorded.

In spite of these imperfections, there is much of interest in Nicholls' book, and much that has needed to be told is told well. Spurgeon's College is an important part of modern Baptist life, having, by 1992, trained some 2,300 men and women for ministries at home and abroad.

Like the Scottish College, Whitley has a pre-history and Dr Otzen, in her first chapter, guides us through the background to the College in the context of Australian and Victorian Baptist life, the largely negative attitudes towards the needs for theological education which existed and the passionately evangelical and evangelistic nature of Victorian Baptists. Though the need for properly trained ministers was recognized by the 1880s, disdain for an educated ministry made the founding of the College a matter of great perseverance and sustained determination.

The Victorian College proper was founded in 1891 with four students under the principalship of Dr W. T. Whitley, later the founding editor of this journal. Prior to this a number of students had been trained at the Congregational College, f.1862. For ten years, Dr Whitley and the College experienced many discouragements, mainly over the need for such a theologically-trained ministry but, on his resignation in 1901, a visionary and undaunted committee kept the College alive under the presidency, later principalship, of W. H. Holdsworth. In 1912 the College moved from the premises of Collins Street Baptist Church (where the Revd James Taylor had privately trained young ministers from 1860-68) to Errol Street, North Melbourne.

Holdsworth was one of the founders of the governing body of the Melbourne College of Divinity, and in 1924 was elected one of its Presidents. When Frederick Wilkin was appointed Professor in 1911 he was the first Australian-trained minister appointed to the staff of the College, and he was the first man to be awarded a DD in Victoria. As time passed more and more Australians have rightly led the College, though there has always been a strong connection with British Baptists.

In the centenary year of the Victorian Baptists, 1962, the foundation stone for the present building was laid on the new site in the Parkville area of Melbourne nearer the University, and the College was given the name it now bears, the College eventually being opened by the Australian Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, in February 1965. The building is itself of great interest, being circular with an inner courtyard, 'a place of peace at its heart' (p.112). As a newly founded University of Melbourne College (1962), Whitley was enabled to expand both its faculty, student intake and courses, but had to adapt to the changes that such a position imposed on it. This difficult transition is written honestly and difficulties are not

hidden, a characteristic of the whole book.

The reader is guided through a century of changes in the understanding and practice of ministerial education, and of a College which has developed from its training of single men, usually in their twenties, unmarried and often with minimal education, to men and women, often married and living out of College, many of whom are either non-ministerial or non-theological students, and all within the context of a University College. The first woman tutor, Miss Anna Littlejohn, was appointed in 1899 to teach elocution, and she was followed by Miss Florence Sims, a Methodist, who taught Greek, but it was not until 1975 that the first woman, Marita Munro, began a full theological course, becoming in 1978 the first woman ordained to the Australian Baptist ministry.

Interest for a British readership comes from the intrinsic value of the history of the College, but also from the number of British Baptists who, along with Dr Whitley, have contributed to its life and work. These include the Revds Samuel Chapman, William H. Holdsworth, Eric C. Burleigh and D. Mervyn Himbury, whilst the present Principal, Dr Kenneth R. Manley, studied for his DPhil at Oxford. The book's interest is further enhanced by the inclusion of profiles and pictures of most of the leading figures, and also transcripts of reminiscences by students, recording College life in their time and from their perspective.

Roslyn Otzen has written a most interesting and attractively produced history of Whitley College. Its large and spacious format provides ample space for the many photographs, of individuals, College groups and buildings, and a few good pen and ink sketches. Controversies and problems are handled well, representing all parties fairly and with as little bias as possible: the inclusion of this material makes the work both more interesting and also more helpful to those willing to learn from the past. A few typological errors are of little consequence, except for the omission of 'no' from the penultimate paragraph (p.180, line 2), which appears to cast doubt on Whitley as a dynamic institution. This book, like the others, contains a valuable insight into Baptists' struggle over the need for an educated ministry. In all, we should thank the author for a most interesting history of a notable College.

To have three histories of Baptist Colleges in close succession is somewhat of a luxury, and the three histories fill much needed gaps. Though they vary in quality, particularly in their handling of controversies and those involved, they nevertheless provide much information which will further Baptist historical research. We can but hope that some of the older colleges will look to updating their histories as we approach the beginning of a new millennium: such histories, notably of Northern and Bangor, would be most welcome, as would updates of Regent's Park and Cardiff. We can but hope, wait and see.

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