

- 8 Julie Collings, 'Don't be a working lad!', unpublished dissertation, University of Luton, Also interviews conducted with Les and Jess Rumble, P.K. Tongeman, Dorothy Baker John Rowlands, Sandra Connolly, and Cath Claridge. See also *Newsletter*, Baptist Historical Society, autumn 1996.
- 9 'East West Home's Best' exhibition, Luton Museum, 1998.
- 10 Interview with Kath Floyd (born 1918), 24 June 1998, *University of Luton Sound Archive*.
- 11 John Burnett, *Destiny Obscure: Autobiographies of childhood, education and family from the 1820s to the 1920s*, 1982.
- 12 Interview with Norman Pepper, 8 July 1998, *University of Luton Sound Archive*.
- 13 Interview with Pat Swindell and Frances Day, 26 February 1999, *University of Luton Sound Archive*.
- 14 Interview with Doug Bedford, 29 June 1998, *University of Luton Sound Archive*.
- 15 Roger Laidlaw, 'Jack Mary Ann and the Myth of the Sinning Deacon: Images of Nonconformist asceticism in fictive folklore', *Oral History*, autumn 1996, 24, no.2.
- 16 Interview with George and Lily Horsler, *op.cit.*
- 17 Interview between Julie Collings and Les Rumble, 17 January 1996, *University of Luton Sound Archive*.
- 18 For example, Gladys Wagstaff lived next door to Ampthill Baptist Church but was apprenticed to a hairdresser in Luton. By the time she had returned home in the evening there was little time left after her meal until bed. What little spare time she had was spent at the church. Interview with Gladys Wagstaff, 5 February 1997, *University of Luton Sound Archive*.
- 19 Interview between Julie Collings and John Rowlands, 21 April 1995, *University of Luton Sound Archive*.
- 20 Callum G. Brown, 'The Mechanism of Religious Growth in Urban Societies: British cities since the eighteenth century' in Hugh McLeod, *European Religion in the Age of Great Cities 1830-1930*, 1995.

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**Prescot Stephens**, *The Waldensian Story*, Book Guild Ltd, Lewes, Sussex, 1998, 375 pages, £16-95. ISBN 1 85776 280 0.

Prescot Stephens's book provides in thirty well-balanced chapters an up-to-date narration of the 800-year history of the Waldenses. The task is enormous, not only for the wealth of information that the author has brilliantly mastered, but also because the result is rightly the history of the Waldenses as well as a history of the Waldensian church. Deep into the Waldensian soul lies the awareness of being not only a church, but also a people (*popolo chiesa* in Italian). From this point of view, this 'Story' recommends itself as an elegant and well-constructed narration of one of the most intriguing experiences by Christians to preserve and to propose their faith as unique in European history. Contemporary Waldenses are proud of their past, but they are also strenuously committed to witness in the Italian context, which has hardly any parallels in Europe.

In this light, the contents of this book contradicts, in my opinion, its subtitle: 'A study in faith, intolerance and *survival*' (the italics are mine). It would be, in fact, a gross understatement to see the history of the Waldenses and their understanding of their faith as mere commitment to survival. The Waldensian Church looks to its

future with hope and pride. This book, therefore, contrary to what the cover promises, is an honest tribute to the effort made by the Waldensian church in shaping its particular identity. Even though clearly aware of them, Stephens has judiciously avoided any extreme interpretation of controversial periods and events. Typical is his summary treatment of the events and related debates that contemporary scholarship has devoted to Cameron's original methodology and theories on the Synod of Chanforan of 1532. The question at issue is not only Cameron's criteria in evaluating sources, but also his conclusions concerning the acceptance by the Waldenses of the Swiss Reformation, notably its Calvinistic brand.<sup>1</sup>

May I recommend also to readers of the *Baptist Quarterly* a careful consideration of the nineteenth-century narrative, not only because it provides a critical perspective of Waldensian life and spirituality against the background of great movements of revival and missionary awareness originating from Anglo-Saxon Christianity, but also because it enlightens, from a specific and original perspective, a century in which Baptists came on to the Italian scene and soon discovered that they could not ignore the presence of a Church which had a long-standing, though understandably discontinuous, experience of evangelization, courageous dealing with intolerance and persecution, and above all a faith centred on robust Biblical knowledge. And this discovery by the early Baptist missionaries contrasted with the generally poor opinion they had of the spiritual decadence of the Italian people and the pagan aspects of the nineteenth-century Roman Catholic Church.

Perhaps as a closing comment I may confess I feel a little disappointed by the concluding chapters, where no mention is made of the ecumenical work in which Baptists, as well as Waldenses and Methodists, have been increasingly engaged throughout this century. This aspect of Waldensian life, in fact, witnesses to the leading role the Waldenses have undoubtedly played in shaping, in co-operation with Baptists and Methodists, the future of Protestant witness in Italy.

[E. Cameron, *The Reformation of the Heretics*, Oxford 1984; Cameron's theories, stimulating for historians and theologians, have been discussed by Jonathan Calvert, pastor of the Hunstanton Church,

in a BA dissertation, Spurgeon's College, 1987. The standard history of the Waldensian Church and its people is a three-volume work by Claudiana of Turin, 1974-80.]

PAOLO SPANU *Chiesa Evangelica Battista, Milano*. 1995.

Members of the Society should note there is still just time to book for  
 the conference on Religious Liberty:  
 'BEYOND MERE TOLERATION'  
 at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church  
 on 8-10 July 1999.  
 More details inside back cover.

James R. Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation, English Separatism, Mennonite Influence, and the Elect Nation*, Herald Press, Waterloo, Ontario and Scottsdale, Pennsylvania [distributed by Metanoia Book Service, 14 Shepherds Lane, Highgate, London], 1991. 239 pages. ISBN 0-8361-3109-6. £14-50.

This book, which has only recently come into my hands though published in 1991, is still available and deserves to be more widely noticed. Coggins has turned his successful doctoral dissertation (University of Waterloo) into a well-written and illuminating account of a congregation which, exiled in Amsterdam, found itself tolerated yet alien, and doctrinally concerned to the point of internal strife.

The Smyth-Helwys story has often been told, but what makes this work especially welcome is the author's ability to draw on materials not all of which were available to earlier historians (to whom he adjusts himself in an introductory chapter), and to pay equal attention to the English and the continental contexts in which the Separatist saints gathered. What is more, by focusing on the congregation and not simply upon its leaders, he is able to correct some common misapprehensions concerning its members. Thus he notes that perhaps as many as three hundred Puritan clergymen defied James I's 1604 canons which, among other things, required subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles and exclusive use of the Book of Common Prayer. Some recanted, but a remnant continued as a Separatist cause comprising educated ministers and their loyal followers - a significant qualification of William Bradford's later description of Separatists as groups of farmers 'used to plain country life and the innocent trade of husbandry'. Against Calvin Pater, Coggins argues that Smyth's congregation was led not by lay-people but by dispossessed ministers. The conventicle became a covenanted church. When it became clear that the majority of Puritans were declining the Separatist option and harassment from an unsympathetic regime would continue, they left for Amsterdam, and were there by mid-1608.

Coggins shows that whether by the state or by the Reformed Church, the Separatists, though tolerated, were for a variety of reasons not warmly welcomed. They soon quarrelled with the Ancient Church of English Separatists over the use of human books in worship, church offices, and the propriety of receiving financial assistance from outside donors: hence the breach with John Robinson and his congregation, who departed for Leiden. Smyth argued his points of difference on the basis of a radical distinction between the Old and New Testaments, the former being conceived as 'the letter', the latter as 'the spirit'. This distinction facilitated subsequent relations with the Mennonites, whose view of Scripture was similar, though Coggins does not think that Smyth owed his view to Mennonites, whose influence upon the Separatists as early as 1608 was not strong. It also appears that those church members who remained with Smyth had adopted believer-baptists' views 'prior to any documented significant Mennonite influence' (Coggins chooses his words carefully).

We turn next to relations with the Mennonites in their several varieties. Relations began with the renting by Smyth's congregation of Jan Munter's bakehouse. Smyth moved increasingly towards Mennonite views on a number of issues. For example, whereas even Separatists thought that civil magistrates should enforce the true religion, Mennonites did not - though Smyth did puzzle over the appropriate response if a magistrate were ever converted to the true religion. The impact of Melchiorite christology on Smyth is helpfully discussed in relation to then current medical notions according to which a father planted his seed, while the 'second flesh' was provided by the mother's nourishment of it: hence, Christ was wholly divine but nourished by an earthly mother.

Helwys's differences of opinion with the Mennonites and his defection with his supporters to England are the matters next discussed, as are the repeated requests of Smyth's remnant congregation to join the Mennonites. Coggins links these applications to the break-up of the broad Mennonite alliance, the Bevredidge Broederschap, the questions at issue including mixed marriages, the ban, and the shunning of spouses. Smyth's congregation was, however, able to unite with the Waterlander Mennonites, amongst whom the wealthy Hans de Ries was a prominent elder. The English, to whose numbers were added between fifty-five and sixty-five members between 1615 and 1640, continued to meet separately, though not as a distinct church. Largely successful assimilation meant that after 1640 English-language services were no longer held.

In an important interpretative chapter Coggins reflects upon the significance and implications of the covenant ecclesiology, the Old-New Testament distinction, church offices, the incarnation, the role of women, church and state, freedom and justice, and the concept of the elect nation.

Among the general conclusions is one to the effect that, given the varying degrees and types of influence in a variety of areas, there is no simple answer to the question, Are Baptists Anabaptists? Another is that in uniting with the Mennonites the Smyth congregation denied that the elect nation was either England or the Netherlands, but was, rather, the congregation of the saints united to God and to each other.

There are appendices in which the members of the Smyth, Robinson and Helwys churches are named, and Thomas Helwys's letter to the Mennonites and the 'Defense of de Ries's Confession' are reproduced. Careful notes, a bibliography and an index complete this informative and suggestive work.

**ALAN P.F. SELL**

**MEMBERS OF THE BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
 should note details of the E.A. Payne Memorial Prize Essay Competition  
 inside the back cover