

## REVIEWS

**Kevin Roy**, *Baptism Reconciliation and Unity*, Carlisle, Paternoster, 1997, x + 204pp, £14-99, ISBN 0-85364-815-8

Dr Roy's book is a welcome addition to the revival of interest in baptism, the more so because he attempts 'to make a specific contribution towards the reconciliation and reunion of Christians traditionally alienated and separated ... over ... baptism' and 'to promote understanding, reconciliation and growing unity'. He succinctly outlines the development of baptism (Introduction), classifying baptismal theologies and practices into Catholic, Reformed and Baptist (ch.2), then assesses the strengths and weaknesses of these perspectives (ch.3), abandoning the categories of right or wrong for each 'seeks to preserve something considered vital which must not be lost to the Christian world'. He looks at baptism's psychological function, the proper administrator, timing and venue. He examines the alternative theories of Jeremias and Aland, and notes the developments over the first four centuries, after which infant baptism became dominant (ch.4). There is no easy explanation of these developments: Roy suggests the importance of the Church's transition from Jewish to Hellenistic culture, but fails to note that Judaism in Palestine was already deeply Hellenized before the first century AD.

In the central thesis (ch.5), Roy notes the irony that the sacrament of unity and reconciliation should have become a source of division and estrangement, undermining the witness and credibility of the Church. The effective pursuit of truth must involve pursuit of unity; a deeper understanding of baptism requires respect and love for those holding different views. Credobaptists need to grant some validity to infant baptism and paedobaptists need to allow 're-baptism' when a matter of conscience (ch.6). He is attracted to the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand's 1977 rite of the 'celebration of baptismal vows', which allows immersion in the name of the Trinity as an alternative to believers' baptism; the British Council of Churches had serious misgivings about this as liable to be understood as baptism whatever the wording. Discussing freedom of conscience, Roy tries to avoid subordinating the individual's right to that of the group, but finds this difficult.

The concept of a hierarchy of truths is explored (ch.7). Primary truths are those 'which constitute the very essence of the faith and without which there would be no distinctive Christian faith at all'. Secondary are truths 'which play a valuable and important role in promoting, confirming and consolidating the faith but which nevertheless do not form part of the very essence of the faith'. He then grades secondary truths: 'baptism and the eucharist ... obviously play a more central role than marriage customs ... [yet] they are *all* secondary, in that faith can exist without them'. Many will remain unconvinced by his argument that baptism should be regarded as secondary, for faith is a primary truth, since in the New Testament faith is always expressed in baptism, is commanded by Christ ('obedience to Christ's

commands' is one of his primary criteria), and is part of Gospel proclamation, which is implicit in his assertion that New Testament baptism was immediate baptism.

Roy gives (ch.8) four examples of South African congregations which accommodate two forms of baptism (similar to British LEPs), and discusses various church union schemes, including the Church of North India and *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. He summarizes (ch.9) the results of 182 questionnaires on theological students' attitudes; then presents a model for reconciliation, 'characterized by freedom of conscience and mutual respect in baptismal matters'. A final chapter brings together his conclusions, followed by three appendices of background material.

Roy demonstrates that contemporary baptismal practices differ significantly from New Testament baptism and outlines clearly and fairly the developments throughout history, but he is not content for the present baptismal impasse to continue. He believes that 'immediate, concrete steps towards reconciliation and unity are both possible and necessary, theologically and practically', and provides 'a theological basis for the co-existence of different baptismal practices and understandings within the unity of one Christian fellowship'. His work is all the more welcome because Roy writes as a conservative evangelical and this wing of the Church has often remained outside such 'ecumenical' discussions. This eloquent and compelling argument for the reconciliation of the various Christian traditions on an historically divisive issue deserves wide consideration and action.

**ANTHONY R. CROSS** *Lecturer in Theology, Roehampton Institute, London*

**Michael G. Haykin**, ed., *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, Leiden: Brill, 1997, pp.xv + 239.

Of John Gill the Congregational historians Bogue and Bennett declared that 'he seems to inquire how much, rather than how well he could write on every subject'. Nevertheless, Gill was the leading English Baptist theologian of his generation, and it was a happy thought to celebrate the tercentenary of his birth.

In his Introduction the editor adjusts himself to the views of some who have passed judgement on Gill down the years, and there follow papers on the subject's life and ministry (Robert W. Oliver), his relationship to the Reformed tradition (Richard A. Muller), and his doctrine of baptism (Stanley K. Fowler). Raymond C. Ortlund writes on Gill as interpreter of the Old Testament, while Thomas K. Askol discusses his approach to New Testament exposition. Gill's stance *vis-à-vis* the Evangelical Awakening is Tom J. Nettles's theme, while Curt Daniel investigates Gill and Calvinistic antinomianism. Gregory A. Wills writes on Gill's spirituality, Sharon James on his reflections on women, and Timothy George on his

ecclesiology. There are notes on the contributors, a chronological table, and indexes of persons and places, and subjects.

Many comments might be made, but space forbids. Readers should, however, be warned that Oliver's reference to 'Unitarianism in both its Arian and Socinian forms' in 1719 obscures more than it reveals, and that Wills offers a hostage to fortune with his one-sentence account of Locke's view of conversion. The latter writer, however, does well to remind us that 'Gill believed that spirituality withered if separated from the institution of the church' - a challenge perhaps to the more individualistic spirituality of our own time; while Gill's conviction, recorded by George, that churches can be too large is worth pondering when one hears of local Baptist churches of 40,000 members. Those Baptists who are eucharistic 'memorialists' may care to measure themselves against Gill's view that for faithful believers the Lord's Supper is 'a participation in Christ, and of the blessings of grace by him'. A general caution is appropriate: the writers do not all mean exactly the same thing when using the slippery terms High and Hyper-Calvinism.

All of the papers are informative, though some authors are more abreast of current relevant scholarship than others. I miss a concluding paper under some such title as 'Gill for today'. Ortlund cannot responsibly overlook the fact that Gill was 'a pre-critical interpreter of the Bible'; but in the absence of detailed critical analysis of Gill's theological presuppositions in the light of subsequent intellectual developments, one is left with the impression that some of the contributors are more or less content to be ideological clones of Gill. This will not harm him, but it may not be very good for them - or for present-day proclamation.

ALAN P.F. SELL, Aberystwyth

**M.F. Thomas**, *A History of Tottlebank Baptist Church*, 1999, 72pp, £3-50 + £1-50 p&p.

Margaret Thomas has produced an attractive history of this venerable Dissenting community in modern Cumbria. Gabriel Camelford, ejected in 1662, originally led the gathered church, where family names link succeeding generations of church members, although the membership was rarely substantial. The first baptisms were in 1744 in John Sedgefield's ministry. Thriving in the nineteenth century under Thomas Taylor, Thomas Frearson and Thomas Harbottle, this century has seen decline and the doors closed in 1980, to be re-opened in 1989. So the account ends on a note of promise.

Recent minute books are missing but the first church book from 1669 is in the archives at Regent's Park College, Oxford. Mrs Thomas makes good use of the sources available, blending text with photographs and reproductions of documents. More than a record of ministers, the author delves into church accounts, water

pumps, the adjacent farm and uncovers an intriguing Ruskin link. The list of trustees from 1722 includes a good representation of this rural community: tanner, shoemaker, slate splitter, butcher, yeoman and Gent. The fortunes of the church, accentuated by its geographical remoteness, mirror that of many small Baptist communities - at times vibrant and at others a struggle. The book is available from Mrs A.D. Walker, The Manse, Tottlebank, Grenodd, Ulverston, Cumbria.

## STEPHEN COPSON

**Michael I. Bochenski**, *Theology from Three Worlds: Liberation and Evangelization for the New Europe*, Regent's Study Guides 5, xiv + 205pp, £8-95

In some ways this is a quite unusual book, and for that reason well worthwhile pondering. It encompasses a kind of four-way conversation: between the Scriptures, Latin American liberation theology, and the situation of Europe as exemplified particularly by the social, political and spiritual realities of Poland and Britain. The intention is to reflect deeply on what evangelization in Europe might mean at the turn of the century and the millennium.

In one sense the book deliberately begins in a kind of inverse order: first, the 'third world' (Latin America), then the 'second world' (Poland), and finally the 'first world' (Britain). Only then does it move to an extended discussion of the biblical message about liberation and evangelization. The final part of the book attempts to answer the question, what now? It looks at some of the major issues facing Europe since the collapse of communism in 1989 and sets out, through the use of some interesting case studies of local churches, to explore an authentic process of evangelization.

The author writes out of a passionate commitment to a local church that in its life and work, as well as in the message it communicates, is itself good news in a way that is faithful to the apostolic gospel and appropriate to the social situation in which it finds itself. 'In one sense', he says, 'the whole final part of this book is about evangelization'. It is an evangelization thoroughly informed by what can be learnt by others parts of the world Church. In this sense, so it seems to me, the book is actually about an integral mission practice for the local Christian community.

What is being attempted is a demonstration of both the possibility and the absolute requirement that churches hold together in their thinking and practice a faith-in-action which does justice to the whole of biblical revelation. The author is fighting against all kinds of missiological reductionisms, whether of the left or the right: 'It is no good preaching only half a Gospel ... The Gospel is about conversions, nurture, and evangelism, *and* it is about bias to the poor, feeding the hungry, and liberation' (p.183). He bases it on ten themes or principles (or, perhaps, missionary criteria) which emerge from listening to Christians from three worlds

grappling with the meaning of their faith in changing times (p.89).

Would that only books on evangelization, mission and spirituality that include all elements of the Gospel without being ashamed of any of them were published! This book is stimulating and timely, both for its theological explorations and for its practical advice. Perhaps it should only be read by those truly open to change. The reader should not be put off by the fact that, owing to 1990 being taken as the cut-off point for the social and political analysis, some of the material (e.g. Northern Ireland, the common currency) is quite dated.

**J. ANDREW KIRK**, *Dean and Head of the School of Mission and World Christianity, the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, UK*

#### OTHER RECENT PUBLICATIONS INCLUDE

**Frank Louis Mauldin**, *The Classic Baptist Heritage of Personal Truth: The Truth as it is in Jesus*, Providence House Publishers, Hillsboro Press, 238 Seaboard Lane, Franklin, Tennessee 37057, USA, 224pp, \$18-95, ISBN 1-57736-131-8; e-mail: books@providencehouse.com

'Mauldin documents and demonstrates that authentic Baptists have always majored on experiential religion informed by "the Holy Word of God" and quickened by God's Spirit. The author says it all when he affirms that "Baptists ... defend the thesis that truth is someone real, not something true". One who reads this book may discover what a Baptist is.' James M. Dunn, Executive Director, Baptist Joint Committee

**Faith Bowers**, *A Bold Experiment: The story of Bloomsbury Chapel and Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church 1848-1999*, 472pp, 215 illustrations, ISBN 0 9530341 1 9, £20 + £2 p&p, from Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2 H 8EL.

'The building of Bloomsbury Chapel was a bold experiment', declared the *Freeman* in the obituary for the first minister, William Brock. The book describes that experiment in church planting with associated social and educational work, and shows how the experiment has continued over 150 years.

STILL AVAILABLE Keith G. Jones, *A shared meal and a common table: some reflections on the Lord's Supper and Baptists*, The Whitley Lecture 1998-9, price £2-50 from Mrs Faith Bowers, 89 Brockenhurst Avenue, Worcester Park, KT4 7RH.

## AN APOLOGY

The sub-editor of the *Baptist Quarterly* apologizes to readers for the confusion over the footnotes in the July 1999 issue. The only mitigating excuse she can offer is the exhaustion resulting from completing the Bloomsbury history to the printers in time for the 150th anniversary. The computer ran away with the note numbers when not watched sharply enough!

In the article by Anthony Cross, 'Service to the Ecumenical Movement', endnote 1 was inadvertently transferred to the list of contents and then renumbered as 2 on the article title. As a result the note numbers in the notes at the end are all one lower than in the text, and so 1-55 should be altered to 2-56. Then on p.110 the entry for Dr H. Wheeler Robinson is incorrect. This should read 'BU representative to discussions with Churches of Christ, 1941 to his death in 1945'.

From p.128 the endnote numbers have again gone awry. In Louise Kretschmar's 'The Privatization of the Christian Faith' the numbers in the text run from 57 to 67, when they should be 1-11 as in endnotes. Similarly in the piece by Paul Msiza, 'Congregational Church Government and its relation to African Context', the text has 68-73 rather than 1-6. In Roland Fleischer's 'Looking for clues' 74-97 in the text represent 1-24 in endnotes. And in Stephen Bunker's 'When we were (fairly) young' 98-117 appear in the endnotes as 1-20.

I can only apologize to authors and readers for the inconvenience caused.

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Have you yet acquired this year's BHS book? Bernard Green's *Crossing the Boundaries: a history of the European Baptist Federation* is available from the Treasurer now. This account of Baptist fellowship across a turbulent continent over the past fifty years is well researched and readably written by one who understands the tensions and joys involved.