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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL: FROM ABERHART TO ZIONITIC	365
DISPELLING THE MYTH OF ENGLISH BAPTIST BAPTISMAL SACRAMENTALISM	Anthony R. Cross 367
F.A. COX OF HACKNEY: Nineteenth-Century Baptist Theologian, Historian, Controversialist, and Apologist	J.H.Y. Briggs 392
AMPTHILL'S AUSSIE	Stephen Bunker 412
REVIEWS	415
SOCIETY NOTES	366,414

FROM ABERHART TO ZIONITIC

When most such publications display an array of learned contributors, a one-author dictionary of the life of any denomination must be a very considerable undertaking. To achieve this for Baptists, not the most cohesive or confined of denominations, is particularly noteworthy. William Brackney's *Historical Dictionary of the Baptists*, 495pp, Scarecrow Press, £66.05, 1999, is accordingly a welcome addition to Baptist bibliography, for he manages to embrace a huge amount of information in the 500 pages or so at his disposal.

Starting with an interesting chronology of Baptist History, a kind of time-index to Baptist development, and an 8-page introductory essay, the entries extend from William Aberhart, the Back-to-the Bible preacher, who in the midst of the Great Depression, founded the Social Credit party in Canada and served as Premier of Alberta from 1935 to 1943, to that on the Zionitic Brotherhood, an eighteenth-century mystical society associated with the North American German Baptists: the stretch is intellectual as well as alphabetical! In between are articles on different Baptist conventions, many notable individuals, thumb-nail sketches of Baptist witness

in nearly every country of the world, and profiles of different mission agencies. Interspersed with these particular entries are more wide-ranging articles on Baptist polity, theology, and distinctives, which make this a most valuable volume, with entries also on themes like Baptist architecture, theological education and Baptist worship [though for the record there seems some confusion about UK Baptist hymn books – there were not two books produced in 1954 and 1962: in 1954 a committee was established which produced *The Baptist Hymn Book* in 1962]. The whole is rounded off by a well-formulated bibliography, which obviously has been the fruit of much thoughtful distillation. Whilst a list of Libraries and Archival Repositories is included it would have been good if space could have been found for Baptist journals of international significance, for these as much as monographs contain the fruit of much important research.

Clearly this is a North American publication, and this explains the preponderance of entries which relate to the country where Baptists are strongest. This is all to the good, and British Baptists should use it to increase their understanding of the development of Baptist life within that culture where it has been particularly influential and of which British Baptists are, on the whole, woefully ignorant.

The entry under Strict Baptists is generally helpful, but it needs further amplification because the issues here debated were two-fold, both that of particular redemption and the confining of communion to those baptized as believers. Thus, whilst Andrew Fuller might be regarded as the arch-revisionist on the first issue, he remained a close-unionist, and, in this precise sense, a Strict Baptist, like Joseph Ivimey and William Button, first joint secretaries of the Baptist Union, the latter of course one of the first to enter into argument with Fuller over his 'revised' Calvinism. Similarly the New Connexion of General Baptists initially practised closed or strict communion. Thus there were many who chose to stay in the mainstream of Baptist life in Britain within the fellowship of the Baptist Union who for many years opposed open communion [and *a fortiori* open membership], and some who diverged little from the Calvinism they had inherited, all of which is seen in the founding of the strict-unionist North Western Association in 1860, with which the Bury, later Manchester, College was associated, all within the life of the Union. Accordingly the abbreviation 'Strict Baptist' without the associated 'and Particular', though often colloquially used, is historically an unwise contraction. The issue is one in which the principles of Whig history are demonstrated in an ecclesiastical setting, that is to say, it demonstrates the danger of judging earlier history from the perspective of later developments, and imposing judgements from that viewpoint on earlier events and attitudes.

NOW AVAILABLE: Anthony R. Cross, *Baptism and the Baptists: Theology and practice in Twentieth-Century Britain*, Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs, Carlisle, 2000, 530 + xviii pp. ISBN 0-85364-959-6. £29.99.