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**THE  
CONGREGATIONAL  
HISTORY  
SOCIETY  
MAGAZINE**

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**Volume 7 No 2 Autumn 2013**

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## EDITORIAL

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We welcome to our pages Dr John Travell who offers us here some of his reflections upon and memories of that pioneering and influential woman minister, Elsie Chamberlain. His paper is, as he makes clear in his title, a personal insight to her character.

We are also pleased to include the thoughts of Revd Graham Akers on the concept of the covenant in Congregational churches. Given his role as chair of the Congregational Federation's pastoral care board, he is clearly interested in the application of Congregational principles in the churches.

In addition we include a review article from Robert Pope who has written on *The Transformation of Congregationalism 1900–2000*, a new publication from the Congregational Federation.

## NEWS AND VIEWS

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### **The Bay Psalm Book**

A rare and precious but tiny hymnal, dating from 1640 and believed to be the first book actually printed in what is now the United States of America, is to be sold at auction. Estimates suggest that it might achieve an impressive sale price of \$30 million.

*The Whole Booke of Psalmes Faithfully Translated into English Metre*—universally known as *The Bay Psalm Book*—was produced in the then virtual wilderness of the Massachusetts Bay Colony by Congregationalists who travelled to the New World to practise their faith in freedom. A new translation of the Psalms, intended to express the essence of the original Hebrew poetry, was made by the leading scholars and ministers of New England—John Cotton, Richard Mather and John Eliot among them—and the book was printed by Stephen Daye, an indentured locksmith, on a press sent, with paper and type, from England. An enormous undertaking at the time, it reveals its translators' erudition, competence with ancient languages, and piety.

From a print run of 1700 copies, only 11 copies of *The Bay Psalm Book* survive in different degrees of completeness. The members of Old South Church, which was founded in 1669 in Boston, Massachusetts, have authorized this sale of one of its two copies at Sotheby's, in New York, on 26 November, 2013. Old South's present minister, Nancy Taylor, realises the book's importance. One of the founding fathers of the USA, Samuel Adams, was a member and the

polymath Benjamin Franklin was baptized there. Once the church owned five copies of the 6 inch by 5 inch hymnal but now one is held at the Library of Congress, another at Yale University and a third at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island. The church has decided to sell one of its two remaining copies—both in excellent condition—in order to swell its finances and assist its ministries, thus enabling it, according to Taylor, to strengthen its “voice ... as a progressive Christian church”.

*The Bay Psalm Book* was published in Cambridge, Massachusetts, only 20 years after the Pilgrim community landed at Plymouth. It was intended as a faithful English translation of the original Hebrew psalms because its editors believed that an edited paraphrase might compromise their salvation. Some historians argue that an almanac may have been printed before *The Bay Psalm Book* in the American colonies, although the almanac was more likely to have been a pamphlet or broadsheet rather than a book as such. However no copy of this almanac is known to have survived.

*The Bay Psalm Book* represents the beginning of the American colonists becoming a literate people, combining poetry with spirituality in a single, small volume. Yet the psalm books were working books, regularly used by ordinary people in their worship, making its survival even more remarkable. On the previous occasion when a copy appeared on the market, in 1947, it sold at auction for a record \$151,000, exceeding prices for the Gutenberg Bible, Shakespeare’s First Folio and Audubon’s “Birds of America”. Old South Church still retains its ownership of the Thomas Prince Collection which holds some 2,000 rare books and manuscripts and which is deposited at the Boston Public Library.

**The Association of Denominational Historical Societies and Cognate Libraries** is in need of a treasurer. This is not an onerous task and the secretary is able to supply a job description. Nominations must come from a member body and proposals should be sent to Andrew Worth (agworth296@hotmail.com) or the secretary, Pauline Johns, (secretary@adhscl.org.uk).

The ADHSCL is holding its annual general meeting and annual lecture on Thursday, October 17th at 2.00pm in the lower meeting room at Wesley’s Chapel, 49 City Road, London (the nearest underground station is Old Street). The lecture will be given by Revd John R Pritchard entitled ‘Missions and Societies’, in commemoration of the bicentenary of the founding of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. Refreshments will be served. If you can spare the time before the meeting there is an opportunity to visit the refurbished museum and also Wesley’s house and it is also possible to use the room from 1.00pm for a picnic lunch.

**The Friends of Dr Williams's Library** are holding their annual general meeting on Thursday, 31st October, 2013 at 4.15pm in the library's lecture room. This will be followed by tea from 5.00pm in the reading room. The annual lecture this year will follow at 5.30pm when Professor Justin Champion (Royal Holloway) will speak on 'Harmless Freedom: John Knowles and the English Unitarian reception of Socinian arguments for toleration and a "reasonable" Christianity in the 1650s and 1660s'. All are welcome to attend the lecture, although if you wish to attend the staff of the library would be grateful if you were to let them know in advance.

**The Congregational Lecture** this year is "The Cromwell Spirit: Nonconformist Chaplains' War Ministry and Experience (1914–1918)" to be held on 21st November at Dr Williams's Library at 5pm for tea, followed by the lecture at 5.30. The lecturer is Rev. Dr Neil Allison, Baptist minister and serving army chaplain. All are welcome to attend. Copies of the lecture will be on sale afterwards for £3.00 (£3.50 by post).

## Correspondence

Having read the recent biography, the Revd Tony Tucker has written expressing his appreciation of Elsie Chamberlain whom he feels is less well known now twenty years after her death than she deserves to be. He recollected her preaching in his church, when she was chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales and when he was but a young and impecunious minister. She then declined the preaching fee and instead donated it to Tony and his newly married wife. The couple chose to spend it on a shade for their standard lamp, ever afterwards known as the Elsie Chamberlain lampshade! Tony described that act as "typical of her generous nature".

## Pastor or Minister

In addition we have received two letters from Prof Clyde Binfield who is exercised about the use of the titles pastor and minister, with regards to the officers of Congregational churches in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

He objects to the 'indiscriminate use of "pastor" (how *Baptist* can you get?) for "minister" in Congregational parlance. Yes, of course we [Congregationalists] used "pastor"—it is a homely word, along with "folk" who are "poorly" before they "pass away"; and of course it was an easy word for local journalists to use in their press reports. But its use blurs a crucial *Congregational* distinction: it lurks powerfully in the *CYB* obituary (1880) to Andrew Morton Brown: "He regarded himself as a minister of the whole Church and not only of its local branch". A pastor sounds, & should be, warm, caring, cuddly, even touchy-feely, but he is locally bounded: a pastor, as shepherd, has full *control* of his flock *sheep* and *lambs*, for which he is answerable to the farmer/landowner: Pastor as

Enlightened or Benevolent Despot? A minister might be a pastor, and should certainly have pastoral qualities—but a minister is also a servant, or, rather, service is built into a wider sense of leadership. The two models overlap but they are not identical, and they have something to say about an understanding of the Church; in my book, “minister” is more Congregational. In *most* cases (but *not* all) “minister” would be the better word.’

The editor’s reply to Prof Binfield stated that ... ‘With regards to the term pastor, as you know, both R W Dale and E J Price used it and its place in our tradition is therefore at least ambivalent. I do not feel that I can support you fully on this, as you will see in my recent book *The Transformation of Congregationalism 1900–2000*.’

To this Binfield wrote: ‘I have been mulling over “pastor”. We must agree to differ, but I won’t quite let it go at that.

‘You are right in a key respect. There is a vital, in my view healthy, fault-line in Congregationalism, which is broadly speaking between those who descend from *radical* aspects of Independency, Dissent, Protestantism (sorry to use that word: “radicalised” is now a hate word), with some of those who, independent and evangelical ships in the night, have found themselves in a polity to which they have no rooted or intellectual affinity, and those who, while Dissenting, have retained a national, civic, sense of communal responsibility, which is informed by their sense of the Church, its composition, and its structures (call me Cromwellian, indeed). I would refuse to call Congregationalism a “Broad Church” (*pace* our Harold Wilson as Labour now copied by David Cameron as Conservative), because its strength rests on the authority of scripture, the nature of the church, the perspective of tradition, and the enforcing discipline in these contexts of the individual conscience. This is much more embracing than the often thoughtless wooliness of mere “breadth”. I hope that fault-line continues (*and* is continued) in both the Congregational Federation and the United Reformed Church. I fear—to use “pastor” and “minister” as pointer words—that the Cong Fed has attracted too much of the “pastor” tendency (to which you belong) and the URC has gone overboard for the “minister” tendency (to which I belong). Since pastors and ministers are vanishing breeds, that is probably all right.

‘Now words do count. “Pastors” and “Ministers” overlap in their calling; they are *not* identical. To point to an extreme: what is the essential difference between a pastor and an imam? They can express an authoritarian extremism, innocent of any sense of the Church. A true *Congregational minister* can, or should, no more be that sort of pastor than he (or she) could or should be a Methodist Minister, representative of that embodiment of the living Wesley, Conference. Of course, it is easier to be a *non Congregational* “pastor” in the parochial Church of England: the parson’s freehold was ever a headily dangerous thing.

‘Where does this leave the historian? The historian’s duty is to recognize *how* the words were used, always bearing in mind the distinctions of meaning behind them. Probably the word “pastor” is most often used in a woolly, folksy, way: that must be recognised, it is no excuse for the *historian* to be woolly or folksy. The local journalists use the word pastor (rather as their descendants have favourite words): it is of course used lots of times domestically: it has a rather cuddly Spurgeonic/Edwardian ring to it *but* ... The historian must recognise the usage, but sniff it, savour it, use it, *and* put it as accurately as possible in its proper place. That is why I am making rather a song and dance about what is apparently a small thing. And I have some “form” on this: I have written a book snappily called *Pastors and People* (admittedly about a *Baptist Church*).

‘Enough: but two final thoughts.

‘1) Do you *really* automatically think “Aha! R.W. Dale the Birmingham pastor” or “pastor of Carr’s Lane”?

‘2) Think G F N [Nuttall]: a man of surprisingly marked pastoral qualities, whose vocation was patent—yet is the phrase “Congregational *pastor*” what first comes to mind there—even in his Warminster days?’

This is a fascinating area of research and I have hopes that Clyde Binfield will find the time to contribute a much fuller piece on the pastor/minister discussion. I should also welcome readers’ responses.

## NOTES FROM THE CHS SECRETARY

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### Courage and Conscience

In this country we work hard at keeping alive the memory of the First World War and from 2014 to 2018 the Government has decided that we are going to work even harder. To what end?

I found myself standing near the war memorial in our church that lists those who lost their lives in the First World War. I was in conversation with a couple of people from an organisation called Middle East Concern. They provide advocacy and support in prayer, helping Christians who face persecution throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

One small leaflet caught my eye. It explored the background to the situation and encouraged people to be informed in their prayer for the region. It offered the briefest of introductions to the area’s historical context, suggesting there were three ‘historical eras’.

- The Ottoman Empire had ruled much of the region (and followed a number of previous empires).
- The Western Colonial era post World War One; current nation states



created by the West; most countries are colonial constructs, ruled either by a monarchy (eg Jordan) or endured one or more coups leading to one-party dictatorships (eg Egypt, Iraq, Syria).

- This second era is being ended (or is it?) by a clear call for the people's involvement in their governance; it is unclear what will emerge.

If we work so hard at keeping alive the memory of the First World War, perhaps we should not be surprised if people in the Middle East and North Africa also keep that memory alive. Perhaps from their perspective we in Britain are part of the problem and not part of the solution. As we approach the four year commemoration for a war that in that part of the world started earlier and finished later perhaps we need to cultivate a humility and a readiness to see things through the eyes of others.

In my church we still read out the names from that memorial at our Remembrance Sunday service. Their stories have been told in a two volume work that gives brief biographies of all the names on the town's war memorial. As we observe the two minutes silence, we show photos of these young people together with a résumé of their lives. Among the names on that war memorial is one Reginald Cole who was killed on 12 May, 1915. On that day a second cousin, my father, was born and was named Reginald in memory of the Reginald who lost his life. It was moving to couple that story with a poem 'Ghost Voices' by Judi Marsh, one of our congregation, and share it on You Tube and the church web site. It is a poignant reminder of the scale of loss of young life in that war that was to have ended all wars.

That longing is what stays with me from the conversations I had, at the start of my ministry, with people who had experienced the trenches of the First World War. They did not want to tell their story and told very little of it. It still left its scars. The memory of war was not something to glorify but was something sobering, a reminder of the longing for peace they had at the time.

There was another kind of courage that can be honoured one hundred years on and has been remembered only by a few. The courage of those whose conscience dictated they should not fight in war.

In August 1914 Christians from different parts of Europe had come together in an ecumenical conference in Constance, Germany. As war broke out they cut short their conference to return home. A former chaplain to the German Kaiser, Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze, and Henry Hodgkin, an English Quaker, shook hands as they parted on Cologne station and made this promise: "We are one in Christ and can never be at war". It was the beginnings of what later that year became the Fellowship of Reconciliation. The FoR has joined with other peace groups to produce 'an information briefing about conscientious objection and peace activism in the First World War: *Opposing World War One: Courage and Conscience*. It tells the story of men and women who said 'no' to the war, and to

the peace organisations the war spawned. With a full bibliography and list of links on the web, it is a useful resource as we move into this period of commemoration.

Perhaps we honour the memory of those who lost their lives in war as we recall their longing for peace and commit ourselves to a search for peace in a world that is still grappling with the aftermath of the First World War and struggling to re-shape nation states artificially constructed in its wake.

Standing near that war memorial was not a bad place to make some of those connections. It has only been thought of as a 'war' memorial since the Second World War. Do some digging into *The King's England*, that wonderful set of books by Arthur Mee (whose brother was a Congregational minister) from the inter-war years that tell the story of the counties of England, and you will find the memorials to those who lost their lives in the First World War described movingly not as war memorials but as 'Peace Memorials'.

Maybe the Peace Memorial in your church would be a good place to start to make some connections of your own.

<http://www.meconcern.org>

[www.for.org.uk](http://www.for.org.uk)

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*Richard Cleaves*

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## **OBITUARIES**

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### **Connie Burrough 1913–2013**

Constance Marjorie Burrough died on 17 June at Brook House Nursing Home, New Malden, Surrey aged 99 years. Her father was a publican who ran the Elephant and Castle Inn on Edgware Road, Paddington in London where Connie was probably born. Connie recalled seeing a searchlight-lit Zeppelin airship from the pub's roof, probably in 1917. Her father who had given up the pub trade, having been admitted to a sanatorium, died in 1924, aged only 52 years old.

After his death the family moved home often and her mother took the children to Peterborough where Connie did most of her growing up and later to Birmingham (probably during World War II). There the family attended a nonconformist church which advocated temperance and teetotalism and, during the 1930s with aggressive totalitarian regimes in Europe and Japan, supported attempts to find peace. Meanwhile Connie had trained as a secretary and also learned to play the organ.

She took seriously the Christian call to seek peace and embraced the cause of the conscientious objectors. She went youth hostelling and loved to visit

cathedrals. In 1940 she rode her bike to Coventry and was arrested by an over-zealous police constable for using her camera in wartime. Having spent several hours in the station, she was eventually released and had to cycle home from Coventry in the rush hour.

Connie was a civil servant and retired in 1974. Her radical interests surfaced in at least one trip to Greece during the junta. There she visited a political prisoner and later she holidayed to visit the prisoner's family and even learned Greek. She was active in the Fellowship of Reconciliation, with Kingston Peace Council, writing to prisoners of conscience, and recycling Christmas and birthday cards. She became a personal member of the Congregational Federation in the early 1970s when she lived in Ham and she was a stalwart of the Congregational Peace Fellowship and a supporter of the Congregational History Society. In her own understated way she remained a Christian radical, never ceasing to espouse the causes she believed in—decency, morality, pacifism, Christian involvement in society, making a positive difference to lives in this country and far away.

She was not always easy to know well but firm opinions, quietly but unshakably held, do not constitute a great character flaw. Her witness and her faith have left their mark.

## Stan Guest

It is with sadness that we report the death of Revd Stan Guest of the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches. He trained for the ministry at New College, London and was minister at Southchurch Park, Southend-on-Sea 1950–56. He moved to be the minister of Sawbridgeworth Congregational Church, Hertfordshire in 1956, and also from 1964 had oversight of the churches at Hadham Cross and Little Hadham. Stan was the first general secretary of EFCC holding that position until 1989 (when Alan Tovey succeeded him) and for many became the physical embodiment of EFCC itself. He edited the EFCC's magazine *Concern* until Peter Beale took over that role.

Stan had shown considerable courage in maintaining his witness for the evangelical gospel within the former Congregational Union of England and Wales which to many seemed a largely theologically liberal denomination. His steadfast witness became more evident in the 1960s when the CUEW's secretary and moderators steered the churches towards the coming of the United Reformed Church which finally occurred in 1972. Both spiritually and organisationally Stan spearheaded the foundation of EFCC which came into being in 1966.

Significantly Stan mastered the difficult technique of standing for the truth, as he saw it, while at the same time managing to retain the respect and often the affection of those with whom he was in disagreement. He and John Wilcox of the Congregational Federation, in particular, remained on good terms with each

other and with URC colleagues throughout the various and often protracted apportionment schemes following 1972. We send our sincere condolences to his family, especially to his widow Doris, as they now face the future without him, and also to the members and ministers of the EFCC and its churches who have benefited from his example and wisdom.

The funeral took place on Friday, 13 September at Alderholt Chapel, Hillbury Road, Alderholt SP6 3BQ.

### **Gordon Booth (1922–2013)**

Gordon was born in Teddington and grew up in south London. He attended Ramsden Road Congregational Church, Balham. He was converted through Upper Tooting Crusaders in the mid-30s. The Second World War delayed his thoughts of training for the ministry. He joined the Army and saw action in North Africa and Italy as a signaller. It was in the latter place that he was awarded the Military Medal for keeping his cool under fire and maintaining communications with headquarters. Gordon always played this down. “How did you get your medal?” “It came with the rations” would be his reply. Gordon trained for the ministry at New College, London along with Brian Dupont and Stan Guest (though they were not in the same year). Brian remarked that it was Gordon that kept them on the theological straight and narrow. During his time there Gordon was president of LIFCU (London Inter-Faculty Christian Union). Gordon was blunt with people, sometimes TOO blunt. Geoffrey Nuttall said of him (50 years later) “Gordon Booth: HE didn’t like ME”! On graduation Gordon was called to the ministry of Oldbury Congregational Church in 1951, where he saw considerable church growth. He lectured at the Birmingham Bible Institute and then at the Midlands Bible Training College. In 1971 he was called to Pall Mall Congregational Church, Leigh on Sea where he remained till his retirement to Gobowen in 1986. He was involved in the formation of EFCC serving on its committee until 1986. In retirement he became a member of Quinta Congregational Church. His wife Gertrude died in 1993, having struggled with muscular dystrophy for many decades. A collection of 54 of Gordon’s hymns (*Hymns for a Tabernacle*) were published as a Christmas present for Gertrude shortly before her death. Gordon was concerned about good hymns: they had to be theologically sound, be poetic, and be sung to suitable music. Modern “worship” songs he dismissed as ditties. Being mean (his own description of himself) he thought it cheaper to have his own details added to Gertrude’s gravestone.

The funeral on 6 August 2013 was in the Quinta Congregational Chapel. Gordon instructed that there should be no eulogy. “Don’t worry Gordon, no one would give you a eulogy. We’ll tell the truth!” According to his instructions, the gospel was preached. An expanded version of his hymn collection, with 202 hymns, was published on the day of his funeral.

## ELSIE CHAMBERLAIN AS I KNEW HER<sup>1</sup>

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I first remember the Revd Elsie Chamberlain when I became a member of The City Temple in 1956, and on occasion heard her preach there. Then in April, 1968, she was inducted as the associate minister there, when her old friend Kenneth Slack was the minister. In her address, delivered in her usual, very direct and forthright style, Elsie said that congregations got the sermons they deserved. No matter how hard you had worked on a sermon, and how much prayer and thought you had put into it, it was impossible to communicate with people whose minds were closed and didn't want to listen and to hear what you had to say.

In 1972 the Congregational Federation was very fortunate at the outset in being led by a group of strong minded personalities, who shared a determination to maintain Congregational ideals and churchmanship which they believed were not compatible with the new structures, then being created by the United Reformed Church. Elsie was not one of the original group from which most of the CF's founders emerged, but her leadership and especially her well-known commitment to church unity—serving on ecumenical committees, and her friendship and contacts with members of other church traditions—meant that she was a considerable influence in ensuring that the Federation was never in danger of becoming merely another reactionary sect.

My personal contact with Elsie came once I had become minister of Penge Congregational Church in south London in 1969. A few years later that church decided not to join the URC but rather to belong to the Congregational Federation. As the CF's officer for world mission, with the responsibility of producing council reports for the annual assembly which Elsie chaired, and then later with the development of the International Congregational Fellowship, we came to know each other much better. She was always very shrewd, helpful and encouraging. My wife particularly appreciated her friendship and help. We also shared a close and mutual friendship with the leading American continuing Congregationalists, John and Donna Alexander. When we met with them at Chislehurst in 1975, to discuss the forming of an international body (which later became the ICF), Elsie and I, together with the American Congregational minister Dr Harry Butman, were members of a small committee whose duty was to suggest an acceptable name. John Huxtable, the former general secretary of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, and then the joint general

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<sup>1</sup> The original version of this paper was first delivered at the launch of Alan Argent's biography of Elsie Chamberlain held on 28 February 2013, at Dr Williams's Library, 14 Gordon Square, London.

secretary of the URC, objected strongly to any suggestion that we should attempt to re-create the International Congregational Council, which we had no intention of doing. The Americans especially were totally opposed to the use of the word 'council'. A much more informal international fellowship of Congregationalists was what they, and we, had in mind, and so the ICF was brought into being.

Elsie and her husband, John Garrington, owned a small holiday cottage near Callington in Cornwall, which they kindly lent to my family for a summer holiday. It was very old, and very basic, but they had made it cosy and comfortable, and we spent a very happy time there. One modern device it conspicuously did not have was a television set and I remember Elsie explaining that she had got rid of it when, watching it one night, all the programmes seemed to be about people killing each other. She stated indignantly, 'There were twenty-one people killed in my living room!' And this, she felt, was a violent, unneeded and unwelcome intrusion into her home.

As she grew older, just as most of us inevitably do, she had increasing difficulty in recalling people's names. One year, she attended a conference in Penge, and a number of us were sitting together, having tea in the hall, when a man came up to the table and greeted her effusively. They chatted away together warmly, as old friends and acquaintances do, for about a quarter of an hour. Listening to their animated conversation I was convinced that they knew each other very well. Finally the gentleman took his leave and departed. When he had gone, she turned to me and said, 'Now who was that?'

In 1979, I was with her in the USA for a meeting of the ICF committee, and our American friends had kindly arranged for my wife and I, with Elsie and Felicity Cleaves, to share a flat together in Chicago where we spent an enjoyable few days. Shortly after we returned to the United Kingdom, Elsie was chairing the Congregational Federation's annual assembly in Norwich, when she was required to introduce me to make my report as officer for the Council for World Mission. However at that point she suffered a mental block and simply could not remember my name. I was strongly tempted to say at the time but didn't, though since then I have often wished I had, 'Come off it Elsie! A fortnight ago we were living together!'

Over the years whenever I needed her help and advice, she was always ready to respond, usually with a note hastily scribbled in her large, bold handwriting on any available scrap of paper, perhaps written when travelling on a train. I was particularly grateful to her for a letter she kindly sent me in 1985 when I was researching my book on Leslie Weatherhead, and which I was pleased eventually to include in it. In this she wrote, 'As far as I know, LDW was the first preacher to join Christianity and psychology. People say he attracted women especially—so he did, especially just after the First World War, when the girl-friends and the

widows of millions of dead men needed a specialist kind of help, and he taught them about the Christian sublimation of their instincts. What is more, he was a past-master at the art of communication ... He could talk psychology in simple terms with homely illustrations.'

I am delighted that Alan Argent's substantial and critical book on Elsie has been published<sup>2</sup> and that, in conjunction with her daughter Janette Williams' earlier memoir,<sup>3</sup> which it does not replace, readers now have access to a fuller and more rounded picture of the great woman herself. I trust that this will ensure that new admirers of her undoubted gifts will come to the fore and that she will long remain an inspiration in the 21st century. Certainly she deserves to be remembered and appreciated for the considerable and formidable person she was and for her singular contribution to the life and witness of the churches.

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John Travell

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<sup>2</sup> A Argent *Elsie Chamberlain: The Independent Life of a Woman Minister—Grace Amid Storms* (Sheffield 2013). This work was reviewed in the previous issue of the *CHS Magazine* in the spring of 2013.

<sup>3</sup> J Williams *First Lady of the Pulpit: A Biography of Elsie Chamberlain* (Lewes, Sussex 1993).

## Books for Congregationalists

**Manual of Congregational Principles** by RW Dale,

**The Atonement** by RW Dale,

**Visible Saints: The Congregational Way 1640–1660** by Geoffrey F. Nuttall

**Studies in English Dissent** by Geoffrey F. Nuttall

**Christian Fellowship or The Church Member's Guide** by John Angell James

**The Anxious Inquirer** by John Angell James

**Thomas Barnes of Farnworth and the Quinta: A Chronicle of a Life** by Jennifer Barnes

Quinta Press, Meadow View, Weston Rhyn, Oswestry, Shropshire, SY10 7RN 01691 778659

E-mail [info@quintapress.com](mailto:info@quintapress.com); web-site: [www.quintapress.com](http://www.quintapress.com)

Readers of this journal will be interested in some of the draft books being worked on. If you visit the web-site and click on the PDF Books link you will find draft versions of many books by important Congregationalists of the past, including John Cotton, Richard Mather, William Jay, John Angell James, RW Dale and PT Forsyth.

Also Edmund Calamy's 1702, 1713 and 1727 volumes of Richard Baxter's *Life and Times* detailing the ministers ejected in 1662 (these 3 volumes were the basis of AG Matthew *Calamy Revised*).

Click on the Whitefield link and there are further links to sermons of George Whitefield never yet reprinted and a new edition of his Journals that is more complete than that currently available.

There are many other titles too numerous to mention.

# THE HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE OF COVENANT IN ENGLISH CONGREGATIONALISM, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE CONGREGATIONAL FEDERATION

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the importance of the concept of covenant within historic and contemporary Congregationalism. For the most recent period my attention is focussed on the Congregational Federation. I shall begin with a rough and ready definition of the term covenant and then proceed to examine briefly the scriptural background from which our Congregational forebears gathered their concept of churches as covenant communities.

It may be generally accepted that a covenant is an agreement between two parties, neither of which needs to be an individual, which sets out the terms by which the parties are bound together for the achievement of some purpose. In the Old Testament a series of covenants are described in which God is the principal on one side. He declares a purpose bringing a benefit to the other party, which is normally obligated to obedience. Eight major covenants are generally recognised in the Bible. Seven are from the Old Testament and one, the New Covenant, from the New Testament although this last is prefigured in the Old Testament. For our immediate purposes the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant are the most important.

The basic expressions of the Mosaic Covenant are found in Exodus 19:5 and Deuteronomy 26:16–19. On the part of the people they are to “obey my voice” and “keep my covenant” which is to say the Ten Commandments, the judgements concerning the social life of Israel and the ordinances governing the religious life of Israel. God for his part undertakes to accept Israel as his “own possession among all peoples”. They will be to God “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”. Thus the covenant sets aside the descendants of Abraham and elects them to a special position in God’s regard, which other nations do not possess. Whilst God’s general benevolence extends to all peoples, his special grace is reserved for Israel. This covenant is based on the nation of Israel as a whole, rather than upon the individuals who comprise the nation.

The New Covenant was first announced by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31) and brought into effect by Jesus Christ. Its terms are set out in Hebrews 8, which is in effect an exegesis of Jeremiah 31:31. It differs from the Mosaic



Covenant in two important respects. Firstly it is efficacious. Whereas the Mosaic Covenant depended upon the condition “if you obey”, the New Covenant depends only upon the work of God accomplished in Jesus Christ his son. Secondly instead of being related to the nation and thus only indirectly to the individual, it is directly related to the individual by the personal revelation of the Lord to each believer. “I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts” (Jer. 31:33 quoted in Heb. 8:10). However those called into the New Covenant are not to remain in isolation. They are to be built into a new household of God, a new nation, a new priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices through Jesus Christ the mediator of the Covenant (1 Peter 2:4f & 9f). Thus as the Mosaic Covenant related the “saved” community to the individual the New Covenant relates the “saved” individual to a new community which comprises *only* of saved individuals; for their new nationality is secured by the call of God-in-Christ and not by the accident of physical descent within an ethnic group. The Protestant theologians of the Reformation earnestly desired to found their churchmanship upon scriptural precepts and therefore they took very seriously the concept of the church being the visible assembly of the people of the Covenant. This is true of all the Reformed churches and, so far as England is concerned, it was true of the puritan movement as a whole and not merely Congregationalism in particular. The “Covenant Theology” of the church was therefore the background to the churchmanship of our forefathers in Congregationalism. However, although not unique to them, the concept of the Church as the assembly of the covenant people was expressed at its clearest by 16th and 17th century separatists and Congregationalists and may be regarded as one of the most salient features of their churchmanship.

At this point the views of the separatists and later the Congregationalists contrasted sharply with the peculiarly English concept of a national church which arose from the Henrician and Elizabethan religious settlements. The Elizabethan Church required all infants to be baptised. Indeed fines were imposed for not bringing infants to baptism by the official clergy. Thus baptism itself was the means of incorporation into the national, and by extension universal, church. The Anglican Church regarded baptism as the effectual means of regeneration and consequently as the means of admission (albeit involuntary in the case of infants) to the covenant. As Article 27 of the 39 Articles shows, this remains the official doctrine of the Anglican Church to the present day. This infant baptism is, of course, followed by confirmation at an age of greater responsibility but confirmation is *not* incorporation into the Church. Indeed since it now takes place years after baptism instead of on the same day, as was the case up to the 4th–6th centuries, some have described it as a rite in search of a reason. The separatists pointed out that the Anglican Church encompassed profligates of every kind, solely on the grounds that they had been baptised as

infants. The separatists believed that infant baptism had symbolic value only and was later made effectual by the adult making a confession of faith and entering into the covenant relationship with God-in-Christ and with fellow believers. We, today, rather weakly term this “becoming a Church Member” but they thought of it as gloriously entering the covenant of grace and becoming a member of the covenant community. This covenant community was visibly expressed in the local church and only in the local church. It was not visibly expressed in groups of churches or in synods.

Thus the importance of covenant within early Congregationalism was that it expressed the relationship between believer and God and believer and believer. A church existed where a group of people were in covenant with God and with one another. The *Cambridge Platform* of 1646, an expression of the New England understanding of the Congregational ideal, records, “The form of the individual Church is the visible covenant whereby they (the prospective church members) give themselves up to the Lord ... in the Church covenant”. And again from the same document, “It is the acceptance of the Church covenant which gives Church members rights over one another in the exercise of Church discipline”.<sup>1</sup> This latter function of the covenant is very important and we shall refer to it again later. The Elizabethan separatist Robert Browne wrote, in 1582, that the believers should be united to God and to one another by a covenant, entered into not by compulsion (in contrast to the legal penalties imposed by the bishops) but willingly. Browne also stated that a church is planted:

First by a covenant and condicion, made on Gods behalfe.

Secondlie by a covenant and condicion made on our behalfe.

Thirdlie by using the sacrament of Baptisme to seale those condicions, and covenantes.

This latter point is to ensure that the covenant is prior in importance to and is not consequent upon baptism but gives rise to the community in which it takes place.<sup>2</sup>

The writings of Henry Barrowe and John Greenwood are in agreement with Browne in this matter. They too regarded the local church, and only the local church, as the visible covenant community. Very often this covenant was made explicit and “becoming a church member” meant in fact publicly

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<sup>1</sup> R. Mather “A Platforme of Church-discipline, Gathered out of the Word of God, and Agreed upon by the Elders and Messengers of the Churches, Assembled in the Synod at Cambridge in New England, the 6th month, 1648”. (Drafted in 1646 and first printed 1649).

<sup>2</sup> R. Browne *A booke which sheweth the life and manners of all true Christians and howe unlike they are unto Turkes and Papistes, and heathen folke. ... Also there goeth a treatise before of reformation without taryng for anie*, (Middelburgh 1582).

accepting a written form of words expressing the idea or even signing a declaration joining oneself in a covenant relationship to God and to fellow believers. The actual form of words varied greatly and was never held to be absolute or to have credal status.

The word “covenant” does not appear in the section of the Savoy Declaration of 1658 dealing with “The Institution of Churches And The Order Appointed in them by Jesus Christ”. Perhaps it was too obvious for explicit expression. The idea of a covenant society is however implicit throughout. Article 8 of this section deals with membership and contains the fundamental ideas of individual calling and willing consent to walk together according to the appointments of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Thus we may conclude that from the earliest days the importance of the covenant in Congregationalism is that a visible local church exists only where believers have consented, by implicit or explicit covenant, to walk together before God in their pilgrimage. In his *Visible Saints* G F Nuttall wrote that “In the seventeenth century the conception of the covenant meets us on every hand”.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to see what has happened to the idea of covenant in more recent times. Does it indeed still meet us on every hand?

In the mid-19th century John Angell James of Carrs Lane Congregational Church, Birmingham, wrote his *Christian fellowship or the Church Members Guide*. Using the version of the 10th edition of 1861, re-published in 1997 by the Quinta Press, I have found that the word covenant nowhere appears in James’s book. The idea of covenant, presented under the concept of “fellowship” (pages 15 and 16 in particular), is explored. James discusses the joining of individuals to Christ and to one another in the fellowship of the church and under its discipline. Therefore the essential ideas of covenant are expressed without the use of the term.<sup>5</sup>

The first minute book of Lees St Congregational Church, Higher Openshaw, Manchester contains a printed statement of the principles of Congregationalism. This must have been printed some time prior to 1871. Again covenant is nowhere explicitly mentioned, although it is clearly contained implicitly within the principles. They contain the fundamental ideas of walking together, of relationship with God and one another, and of mutual acceptance of church discipline.

R W Dale first published his *Manual of Congregational Principles* in 1884 and again I have been unable to discover a single mention of covenant in respect of the association of believers in churches within this book. However anyone

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3 “The Savoy Declaration 1658” in *Evangelical and Congregational* (Oswestry 2003).

4 G F Nuttall *Visible Saints* (Oxford 1957) 75.

5 J A James *Christian Fellowship or The Church Members Guide* (1861 edn, edited and abridged by G T Booth, Oswestry 1997).

knowing something of the covenant theology of Congregational church polity would recognise that it is there, but implicitly. Dale preferred to speak however of churches as “voluntary associations” and he wrote of “sharing” and “love” as the binding forces, without direct reference to the mutual acceptance of some form of covenant. He does however mention discipline which, of course, in a voluntary association requires a voluntary acceptance of the common authority of the body of believers.<sup>6</sup> This is the point drawn out in the *Cambridge Platform* referred to earlier.

In 1920 the Congregational Union of England and Wales published what proved to be the first of a series of books of services and prayers, sometimes with additional legal and general information. The 1920 *Book of Congregational Worship* contains a service of infant baptism and one of adult baptism. It also includes a service for the reception of members. In no case is “covenant” actually mentioned nor is it implicit in what is said and done. There is no service given for the formation of a church.<sup>7</sup>

At the request of the literature committee of the Congregational Union the Rev. E J Price produced a small and helpful guide entitled *A Handbook of Congregationalism*. This booklet was first published in 1924 and was last reprinted in 1961. In regard to the church meeting, we learn that “We come together as those who have entered into a sacred and loving covenant ...” A little later in discussing infant baptism we learn that “On the Congregational view, baptism is a solemn covenant entered into between God on the one side, and parents and church on the other.”<sup>8</sup> Although he does not say so one may assume that Price viewed adult or believers baptism in much the same light. Clearly covenant is an important concept for this author.

The case is rather different for *A Manual for Ministers* published by Independent Press in 1936. This is an official publication by the Congregational Union of England and Wales, although this is only apparent within the text where a reference is made to county unions in connection with ordinations. The section on the Reception of Church Members does not explicitly mention covenant but does refer to “uniting with Christ and with one another”. A reference is also made to “submitting to the rules of the church”. Thus the three elements of the covenant relationship are referred to. Under the section headed Formation of a Church the first members of the church are asked to repeat a declaration containing the words “We ... solemnly give ourselves to Him (Jesus) and to each other in covenant; promising ...” Thus the idea of a “covenant” is made fundamental to the establishment of a new church fellowship. Although not with the explicit use of the word “covenant”, the celebration of a church

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6 R W Dale *A Manual of Congregational Principles* (1884, repr Oswestry 1996).

7 *Book of Congregational Worship* (1920).

8 E J Price *A Handbook of Congregationalism* (1924) 30, 49.

anniversary takes up the theme of giving the church members to the Lord Jesus and to one another, thus supporting the notion of covenant renewal.<sup>9</sup>

The next publication of note is entitled *A Book of Public Worship* published by the Oxford University Press in 1948. This book was a private venture by the compilers, John Huxtable, John Marsh, Romilly Micklem and James Todd. However the preface and introduction made clear that the book was intended primarily for use by Congregationalists. In the introduction the historical idea of “covenant” is spoken of approvingly and as having relevance to the contemporary situation in regard to church membership. The baptismal service is clearly described as a covenant service. It speaks of an infant’s union with Christ in his body—referring to the church. The concepts are repeated in the service of adult baptism. The concept of covenant is even more explicit in the service of reception into membership. The prospective members are spoken of as “being sealed as members of the covenant of grace in their baptism”. It is said that they have now come “to covenant with us in the privileges and responsibilities of full communicant membership.” Again this is repeated in the service for reception by transfer that immediately follows. There is unfortunately no service for the formation of a church in the book. It would have been interesting to see how strongly “covenant” would have featured in this.<sup>10</sup>

The 1959 *Book of Services and Prayers*, was revised and republished in 1969 by the Congregational Church in England and Wales (CCEW). In it the idea of covenant is not explicit in the section dealing with the reception of members. Nor is it very plainly implicit. The baptismal service for infants however avoids any suggestion of baptismal regeneration by describing baptism as a “pledge”. Of course, the point of a pledge is that it is available for future redemption.

When we come to examine the section dealing with the formation of a church we find that this does specifically state that this is a “Covenant Service”. In fact the “Statement” and subsequent “Declaration” are indisputably a subscription to a covenant. All the potential members take part and this is the act which actually calls the church concerned into being. Covenant is again there but not explicitly at every point and certainly in a weaker form than might be desirable.<sup>11</sup>

In his book *The Congregational Way* Harold Hodgkins devoted a chapter to “Church and Covenant, Membership and Relationship”. It is noticeable that his examples of church covenants derive almost exclusively from the 16th and 17th centuries. In discussing modern times, possibly with the ecumenical movement in mind, he only lightly treated with the concept of covenant as a fundamental

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9 *A Manual for Ministers* (1936) 66, 132, 168, 210.

10 J Huxtable, J Marsh, R Micklem, J Todd *A Book of Public Worship* (1948) xix, 158, 163, 167.

11 *A Book of Services and Prayers* (1959 Rev. edn 1969).

of church polity.<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that his remarks were not proper or indeed judicious. But we see a trend away from explicit and rigorous covenant ideals.

In 1992 the Congregational Federation published *Patterns for Worship* co-authored by Michael Durber and Richard Cleaves. It contains no order for the formation of a church and so it cannot be compared directly with the 1959 CCEW book or its 1969 revision. However both the infant and adult baptismal services refer to entering into a covenant with God. This theme is picked up in the notes on church membership on profession of faith. It is not quite clear whether the covenanted community is the local or the universal Church but noticing that local church is normally spelt with a small c in the document and universal Church is indicated with a large C the latter may be in view. We should contrast this with the 17th century view that entry to the local church is the means and condition of entry to the universal Church, which had of course no visible existence on earth. The notes however do specifically suggest that at a certain point “a church covenant, outlining the faith shared by the members of the church together, could be read at this point”. In the baptismal services themselves explicit reference is made to the “covenant” into which the candidate is to be baptised.<sup>13</sup>

The Congregational Federation has not published any other books of services. However it has published several booklets of note on specific subjects. In 2012 the Congregational Federation published *Christ in All Things* which is a study guide for prospective church members or those who desire a better understanding of membership. The co-authors are Suzanne Nockels and Janet Wootton. Under the heading “Our Relationship with Jesus Together” the concept of “covenant” is mentioned no less than eleven times. The fundamental concept is found in the statement “Covenants are therefore an ideal model for our relationship with Jesus together”. Covenant is not mentioned in the session on baptism nor in the section on “Serving Christ Together” where we might have expected a further mention. However in Appendix 2 “Worship Suggestions for Reception into Membership”, under “a suggested formula for the act of reception”, the church members are explicitly asked if they will covenant with the prospective member(s) to work together.<sup>14</sup> It is a little strange that the candidate him/herself is not asked a similar question relating to his/her part in the covenant. However the concept of covenant is strongly upheld as a fundamental of the polity of a Congregational church in this publication.

Also in 2012 the Congregational Federation published *The Nature of the Household of Faith—some Principles of Congregationalism*. The author of the work, Alan Argent, further describes the book as “a primer for the Congregational

12 H Hodgkins *The Congregational Way* (Nottingham 1982).

13 M Durber, R W Cleaves *Patterns for Worship* (Nottingham 1992).

14 S Nockels, J Wootton *Christ in All Things* (Nottingham 2012) 8, Appendix 2.

Federation.” As such it is now placed in the hands of all who seek to engage in accredited ministry in the Congregational Federation by its pastoral care board.

In this work the ideas of R W Dale are referred to. In particular reference is made to his *A History of English Congregationalism* in which he gives the concept of covenant as fundamental to the local church.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to compare this with Dale’s *Manual of Congregational Principles* of 1884 which made *no* explicit reference to covenant as referred to earlier. Returning to *The Nature of the Household of Faith* we find the church referred to as a “covenanted community.” Later there is a discussion on “What is the place of a Church Covenant?” This discussion emphasises the importance of covenant to Congregational churches but points out that a covenant may be implicit as well as explicit.<sup>16</sup> We have already noted several publications in which the concept of covenant is indeed implicit and not explicit.

There are a further three references to the concept of covenant following the above and Appendix 1 quotes the terms of a model covenant based on that that published by the Independent Press under the title “The Church Covenant Idea.”<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately this work is undated. There can be no doubt that Dr Argent takes the view that the idea of covenant is fundamental to the nature of Congregational churches.

The survey of the above literature can be presented in tabular form as follows.

WORK	DATE	IMPLICIT	EXPLICIT	NONE
<i>Savoy Declaration</i>	1658	X		
John Angell James <i>Church Members Guide</i>	1861	X		
Lees St C.C <i>Principles</i>	1871	X		
R W Dale <i>Manual of Congregational Principles</i>	1884	X		
<i>Book of Congregational Worship</i>	1920			X

15. A Argent *The Nature of the Household of Faith* (Nottingham 2012) 12; R W Dale *A History of English Congregationalism* (1907).

16. Argent *Household of Faith* 14, 18.

17. *Ibid.* 74.

E J Price <i>Handbook of Congregationalism</i>	1924	Xs
<i>Manual for Ministers</i>	1936	Xw
<i>A Book of Public Worship</i>	1948	Xs
<i>A Book of Services and Prayers</i>	1959/69	Xw
<i>The Congregational Way</i>	1982	Xw
<i>Patterns For Worship</i>	1992	Xs
<i>Christ in All Things</i>	2012	Xs
<i>The Nature of the Household of Faith</i>	2012	Xs

Where W = Weakly explicit.S = Strongly explicit.

It is difficult to draw firm conclusions from the above. The sample is very small and the particular interests of the individual authors will no doubt have played a significant role. There is also the large gap between the 17th and the 19th centuries. The 1920 book should perhaps be excluded from consideration. It is a first attempt at such a product and is mainly devoted to what may be described as normal Sunday worship. However we may suggest that the baptismal services ought to have included some reference to covenant.

The Savoy Declaration may well have considered the concept of covenant so obvious that it required no explicit reference. The Savoy Declaration was intended to delineate the Independents' beliefs as against the Presbyterians rather than Anglicanism, which was then enduring a time of eclipse. It is possible that since the idea of covenant was common to both the Congregationalists and Presbyterians it did not need to be drawn out.

The lack of explicit reference in the 19th century is more puzzling. The Presbyterian Church of England was only coming into being in mid century. The Congregationalists were superior in strength to the Baptists but there was no essential difference between them in ecclesiology. Thus where contrast was needed it was drawn largely with the Church of England. One would have anticipated the concept of covenant would be prominent. It is possible that the authors of this time felt that the word "covenant" was rather old fashioned, indeed Old Testament, and not in accordance with the forward looking spirit of the time. Thus rather more conciliatory words such as "fellowship" were



favoured. Additionally P T Forsyth pointed to the growing importance of the concept of the Kingdom of God in the second half of the 19th century.<sup>18</sup> It is possible that, as the Kingdom is infinitely wider than the denominations, this too may have served to create a desire to blunt the sharpness of differentiation. These same factors may also have influenced the 1920 book.

What is very interesting is that in all the eight works cited between 1924 and 2012 “covenant” is explicitly present, either in a weak form or a strong form. In the case of those documents where it is present weakly it seems that covenant is part of the mental furniture of their authors. But it does not appear to be so vital an element of the nature of the church that it should be explicitly drawn out at opportune moments.

It is tempting to see the varying fortunes of the ecumenical movement in this, at least up to the 1959/69 *Book of Services and Prayers* and possibly as far as *Patterns for Worship* in 1992. The modern ecumenical movement effectively began with the World Missionary Conference of 1910 held in Edinburgh. The bishops of the Anglican Church issued an “Appeal to all Christian People” in 1920.<sup>19</sup> The Congregational Union gave this a cautious welcome in 1921. A series of conferences were held between the Anglican and Free Churches with considerable input from the Congregational Union. These conferences continued until 1925 and whilst no agreement on union could be reached they served to clarify the positions of both sides in the debate. The strong explicit presence of “covenant” in the 1924 *Handbook* should perhaps be seen against this background.

The pace of ecumenism quickened again in the 1930s, culminating in the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948. The Congregationalists were well to the fore at the preceding conferences at Oxford and Edinburgh both in 1937. We might suggest that the explicit but weak concept of “covenant” in the *Manual For Ministers* of 1936 is a reflection of the considerable involvement of Congregationalists in the ecumenism of the 1930s. As the ecumenical movement was gaining momentum then it was perhaps not the time to emphasise the distinctiveness of the gathered covenant community.

The World Council of Churches did not come into effective existence until 1948 having been delayed by the Second World War. Despite the war, the British Council of churches was established in 1942 and the Congregational Union was a keen participant. Interest in unity as opposed to ecumenism was ignited in Britain after the war with a sermon preached by Geoffrey Fisher, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in Cambridge on the 3rd November 1946. This led to a number of conversations between 1947 and 1950. The sticking point was that episcopal

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18. P T Forsyth *The Church and The Sacraments* (1917).

19. R T Jones *Congregationalism in England—1662–1962* (1962).

ordination was effectively non-negotiable. This would have implied that free church ordinations were defective or even invalid. Once again the conversations served to clarify the ecclesiastical polity of Congregationalism. We may wonder if history has not repeated itself. Just as the clarification of the Congregational position in the 1920s may explain the strong explicit references to “covenant” in the 1924 *Handbook* so the strong explicit references in the 1948 *Book of Public Worship* may arise from the contemporary debate of the late 1940s.

The urge toward unity picked up again in the late 1950s, culminating in the 1964 Faith and Order Conference at Nottingham which called on the British Council of Churches to work toward unity by 1980. The weakness of the expression of “covenant” in the 1959/69 *Book of Services and Prayers* could reflect the renewed interest in structural unity.

The last four works considered above all post-date the formation of the Congregational Federation in 1972 and ought, one feels, to reflect a stronger emphasis on “covenant.” But *The Congregational Way* of 1982 contains only a weak emphasis on “covenant.” I have suggested already that the author chose not to emphasize “covenant” under the by then well established influence of the ecumenical movement.

The 1992 *Patterns For Worship* presents a different problem. I have classed it as strongly explicit but the decision was finely tuned. There is within it quite strongly explicit reference in the explanations of the thinking behind the services presented. However the services are less explicit. The ecumenical movement cannot really be called into play here because by 1992 it was evident that structural unity was running into the sand. The proposals of the Council for Covenanting Churches for structural unity (formed principally by the United Reformed Church, Anglicans and Methodists) were finally rejected by the Church of England in 1982. The Anglican/Methodist talks staggered on but the emphasis shifted away from united structures to co-operative unity. Both authors have theological competence and it is possible that they wished to present the theological concept of “covenant” but felt that it should be experienced rather than emphasised in the actual services.

In the two works of 2012 the idea of “covenant” is not merely strongly present but close to being fundamental. By the time these works were published structural unity was clearly a dead letter and the stress on the concept of covenant cannot be laid at its door. But it may be supposed that within the Congregational Federation other pressures may be at work.

The first of these pressures is the increasing geographical mobility of people and their willingness to attach themselves to congregations (of all denominations) largely on social rather than denominational grounds. Thus from the late 1970s onward an increasing proportion of the members or congregation of any Congregational church actually came from other denominations and

have had little direct knowledge of Congregationalism. This has had the effect of diluting the churches' awareness of and respect for Congregational polity and ecclesiology. Furthermore it has had the effect of seriously diminishing the importance of denominational awareness and involvement. It has become increasingly evident that if Congregationalism is to make an important contribution to ecclesiology by its unique churchmanship that churchmanship needs to be rescued from oblivion. Hence there is a feeling among some in positions of responsibility in the Congregational Federation that the specific identity of Congregationalism must be asserted.

Another serious pressure comes from the needs of ministry. Although the Congregational Federation's training scheme is well regarded, it is not able to provide enough candidates to fill all the pulpits of even so modest a denomination. Consequently many churches have appointed men and women to their pulpits who have no Congregational background. Whilst many of these appointees have fully engaged with Congregationalism and some have indeed gone on to grace the denomination, there have also been less happy outcomes. In some cases ministers impatient with Congregational ways (and on occasion its insistence on inclusive baptism) have led churches out of the Federation. In recent times the Federation has begun to take positive steps to assert Congregational identity and the insistence on covenant may be construed as part of this process.

It is my belief that the concept of covenant has suffered a serious decline in modern Congregationalism. For most of the 19th and early 20th centuries the concept of covenant scarcely "meets us on every hand". This is possibly in response to a laudable desire for wider comprehension within the churches, although I should claim that John Owen himself was no exclusivist, despite his firm adherence to covenant principles. In the second half of the 20th century "covenant" was on the whole only weakly expressed, although notable exceptions exist. The practice of making covenant implicit rather than explicit resulted in a serious decline in the understanding of Congregational polity. It has also led to a decline in understanding discipline within the local fellowship. After all if covenant is implicit many will not understand that the acceptance of discipline, and the possibility of censure, were all part of their covenant to walk with the church fellowship, which they voluntarily accepted. Thus the attempt to exercise discipline may result in deep resentment and the rupture of fellowship. As a result it often fails in its objective. The tendency in the Congregational Federation at the end of the first decade of the 21st century has been to rediscover and emphasise the concept of covenant, although it almost seems that this emphasis has been a child of necessity. Building on this, I should argue that something along the lines of the 1959/69 service book covenant at the formation of a church should be incorporated into every service at which

new members are received. I would suggest that this distinctive element of Congregational ecclesiology should be emphasised at every opportunity and made, as far as possible, part of the thinking of every member of a Congregational church.

Whatever the reason it is certain that there has been a resurgence in the concept of covenant in the Congregational Federation in recent times. It is pleasing to note therefore that the historical and contemporary significance of covenant within Congregationalism remains as it has always been. It is the means by which the grace of God is translated into practical and effective churchmanship in accordance with the scriptures and with the will of God, as Congregationalists understand them. It is of great importance that they should recover the stress upon this aspect of belief and organisation.

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*Graham Akers*

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## REVIEW ARTICLE

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***The Transformation of Congregationalism, 1900–2000.* By Alan Argent. The Congregational Federation, 8 Castle Gate, Nottingham NG1 7AS, 2013. Pp xii + 557. Illustrated. Hardback £35.00. ISBN 978-1-904080-03-9.**

More than fifty years have passed since the publication of R. Tudur Jones's comprehensive masterpiece *Congregationalism in England, 1662–1962*. Covering the whole sweep of Congregational history, that volume sat rather too closely to some of the more recent events which it sought to evaluate while—arguably—it appeared before the occurrence of the most significant events in twentieth-century Congregationalism. That Congregationalism underwent *transformation* during the twentieth century is undeniable, with the most significant changes occurring in the mid 1960s through to the union of a vast number of Congregational churches with the Presbyterian Church of England in 1972 to form the United Reformed Church (URC). Other churches continued the Congregational witness, though it proved impossible to keep them together in a single fellowship. In one sense, then, the end of the Congregational Union revealed that there were, in fact, a number of different *Congregationalisms*, with events of the preceding half century playing a significant part in the forging of their identities. A detailed history of Congregationalism during the twentieth century was therefore both desirable and necessary. That task has now been fulfilled and this handsome volume is the result.

Like Tudur Jones, Alan Argent is personally committed to the tradition he seeks to outline and analyse, which leaves some, if not most, of what he has to say charged both with the effects of his own relationship with (or perception of) those who played crucial parts in the splintering of Congregationalism in the late 1960s and his association with the continued witness to the Congregational Way. The book is not biased, nor does it lack balance; Dr Argent is a solid enough historian to place distance between himself and his subject. But he is also wise enough to know that the historian always brings her or his perspective to the debate (indeed this is a subject discussed in the book). As a result, he has produced an erudite, intensely readable but supremely *committed* account of Congregationalism in the twentieth century. There is little doubt that his book has much to commend it and it should be warmly welcomed. It recounts a history that ought to be recorded, both the account of the general trends in

religious life in England and Wales in the twentieth century and the specific outlining of an ecclesiological tradition which, to some extent, might well, over the course of the twentieth century, have betrayed its origins. Such a claim, of course, is in itself contentious: can a claim be made for a pristine Congregationalism to which all Congregationalists should aspire if not adhere? When and where did such an authentic Congregationalism truly exist? Or does the very claim to prioritise the leading of the Spirit require that Christians recognize that no part of ecclesiastical order (and no *expression* of the faith) is anything other than contingent? This is, in some senses, the crux of the Congregational witness. But, consequently, can what was thought right in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries (or any other century for that matter) be right eternally (or even until the eschaton)? What will surely prove to be contentious, then, is Dr Argent's explanation of *why* Congregationalism was transformed over the course of the twentieth century, and his assessment of the consequences. But it is the combination of a lively account and a passionate commitment to his thesis, alongside careful research into all aspects of Congregational life during the twentieth century, that has enabled him to produce a compelling, insightful and provocative narrative.

As would be expected, the book makes reference to social, political, global and theological developments as they affected Congregationalists and as Congregationalists in turn affected them. There is a chronology to the book (which is important to the main thesis), but the chapters are thematic in content. Thus early chapters consider the apparent conjoining of theological and political liberalism, though the author concludes that this was a 'historical accident' (p 28) based on the Liberal Party (and its antecedents) being more open to assist in appeasing Nonconformist grievances than were the Tories with their identification with the social and religious establishment. It could be argued that political and theological liberalism are more closely associated than this and that both stemmed from similar ideological and theoretical foundations, but that is a debate which will not assist us greatly here. The New Theology and R J Campbell receive treatment which, despite the rather hackneyed nature of the subject itself, comprises an account which is both animated and original. Unlike many, the author offers a less than fulsome evaluation of P T Forsyth and his contribution, arguing that it was, in fact, the controversy surrounding Campbell which enabled former radicals to assert their orthodox credentials and suggesting that much of the opposition directed at Campbell stemmed from the older generation's jealousy of apparent success and support enjoyed by the younger man. Thus the New Theology controversy became a catalyst for Forsyth to fine-tune his views on incarnation and atonement, which had been developing over the previous decades from his initial espousal of a liberal creed. It is, perhaps, as well to be reminded that Forsyth was largely ignored in his own

day and his theological reputation owes much to his rediscovery by a subsequent generation. Having said that, unlike Campbell, the mature Forsyth had quite significant insights into the problems of extreme Modernism and into the heart of the Christian gospel itself. He might well have had his faults, but he cannot be dismissed, and certainly not characterized as a convenient rediscovery by the neo-Orthodox or neo-Calvinists of a subsequent age. Even if promoted by enthusiasts, it was found to be the case that Forsyth had something genuinely theological to say, and that his conclusions retain a potency in subsequent ages.

Reactions to the Great War are analysed, with pacifism and patriotism both being discussed alongside the anomalous position adopted by Free Churches *vis à vis* the State, as a result of engagement in recruitment to and chaplaincy in the armed forces. Chapters analyse the role of Secretary of the Congregational Union as well as of Provincial Moderator alongside the influence once exercised by principals of the various theological colleges. The first two are characterized as having created a central bureaucracy which drew authority away from the local church meeting, thus denuding Congregationalism of its distinctiveness. The third of these are characterized as falling victim of those centralizing tendencies and thus losing their influence over the course of the century. In any case, there were less of them as the century proceeded. In 1900, there were eight colleges in England, three in Wales and one in Scotland training ordinands for the Congregational ministry, and part of Congregationalism's transformation was to see virtually all these colleges gradually merge or disappear over the course of the twentieth century. While pressures were placed on the colleges by the Congregational Union, and the Union itself held various enquiries into the provision of ministerial training, it is perhaps more crucial to remember that the number of ordinands declined dramatically, and running costs spiralled, to the point that it was simply no longer possible to sustain all the colleges: there were insufficient numbers of ordinands to keep them all solvent. Whether Congregationalism was centralized or not, what else could have ensued other than closure or merger?

The Second World War challenged the pacifism previously adopted by Nonconformists and is the subject of a further chapter, while the London Missionary Society and its transformation into the Congregational Council for World Mission (later CWM) as well as the International Congregational Council are analysed as part of a discussion of Congregationalism's global reach. Indeed, Congregationalism's international and global significance is something that becomes increasingly clear as the account proceeds. It is good to be reminded that the dominance of Anglicanism in England is not necessarily replicated globally, and that what constitutes smaller communions in Britain have connections with significant bodies of similarly minded Christians in other parts of the world. There are also two chapters which analyse some of the

publications associated with Congregationalism over the course of the twentieth century, including the *Congregational Quarterly*, *The Christian World* and the *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*. The account of these journals and newspapers is far more fascinating than it might sound, and they are paraded as representative of the Congregationalism of which the author approves but which, it seems, lost favour (or came under deliberate attack) over the course of the twentieth century. In that sense, the disappearance of the first two (and the inevitable change which came to the third following the formation of the URC) helped to ‘erode the sense of Congregational identity’ (p 382).

All this is both interesting and engaging. Dr Argent has certainly written an account of twentieth-century Congregationalism which is informed and captivating. But these chapters are intended to build up a picture which supports his primary thesis, namely that Congregationalism underwent a process of centralization, with more and more responsibility, not to mention power, placed in the hands of the Congregational Union. In turn, this led ultimately to the ‘destruction’ of Congregationalism in the 1960s, with the local church being eclipsed by the formation of the Congregational Church of England and Wales in 1966 and then its union with the Presbyterian Church of England to form the URC in 1972. Thus the book begins with an account of the various calls made at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century for the formation of a United Congregational Church (or even a United Free Church) by, among others, Dr Joseph Parker. While it can be conceded that this appeared contrary to some historical Congregational principles, it is not clear that the single motivation for this was ‘the demand for social parity’ with the Church of England (p 13). There can be little doubt that arguments about the status of Nonconformity, demonstrated by the 1851 Census to be numerically equal (or thereabouts) to adherence to the parish church, as well as the arguments Nonconformists formulated in support of disestablishment, spoke about statistics rather than principle. This could be demonstrative of a yearning for social equality. But was there no residue of a theological conviction that, in fact, there were other ways of pursuing Christian discipleship than that of the parish church? Was there no sense that Church and State were simply not to be in league with each other? Admittedly evidence for this is sparse, the consequence of the sensibilities of public engagement where ‘secular’ arguments have to be employed in order to achieve theological goals. But, as a result, can such theological conviction be ruled completely out of court?

In pursuing his primary thesis (of over-centralization leading to the partial demise, rather than the transformation of Congregationalism), the book gives considerable attention to the work (not to mention influence) of J D Jones and Sidney Berry while a later chapter devoted to Leslie Cooke and Howard Stanley—successively secretaries of the Union—argues that the movement



throughout the century was definitely towards taking authority away from local churches and placing it in the hands of the Union. Indeed, by the mid-to-late 1960s, 'CCEW [Congregational Church in England and Wales] churches no longer expected to question nor take the initiative' (p. 479), asserts the author. The centralization thesis is difficult to dispel, though it has to be admitted that, for the most part, this was undertaken with a view to assisting churches, offering legal, financial and practical support and trying to increase ministerial remuneration which, for many, was pitifully low. This is recognized at points in the book, though the greater part is given to what appears at times to be a conspiracy by certain ecumenically-minded, ill-informed Congregationalists about how the church should in fact be ordered in the modern world. And behind all this lies the emergence of the 'New Genevans' including John Whale, John Marsh, Daniel Jenkins and, especially, Nathaniel Micklem. The book analyses their contribution in terms of a selective recollection of the Congregational past, upholding the Savoy Conference (1658) as an authoritative Congregational Synod (but unable to suggest any other examples), commending aspects of John Owen's work which suited their own views, and appealing finally beyond the Nonconformist and Dissenting tradition to Calvin and the Genevan Reformation (which, it could be argued, was never the standpoint of historical Dissent, despite the fact that historical Dissent—on the whole—considered itself 'Calvinist'). The 'New Genevans' debated ecclesiology, ministry and worship in *The Presbyterian*, a publication which also receives analysis in the book. Dr Argent suggests that there were other parts of historical Congregationalism, rooted in Independency (rejected outright by the New Genevans but also, as this volume admits, by Congregational leaders at the beginning of the twentieth century) and in the prioritizing of the church over the ministry, and represented in the twentieth century by intellectual giants who shared interests in history, a wide-ranging and catholic culture and an essential in the adequacy of liberal-mindedness, best epitomized, perhaps, in figures such as Albert Peel and Geoffrey Nuttall. It could be argued that this, too, is a partial reading of Congregational history. But what is significant and, perhaps disarms such a protest, is that whereas the two elements (along with others) had to some extent been contained within the Congregational Union when it had been a fellowship of churches agreed on chief principles of polity and committed to offering support and advice, the ascendance of the New Genevans resulted in the smothering, even exile, of the latter as they sought to establish a homogeneous Reformed Church on what was admittedly a pseudo-Presbyterian polity.

Some of this is clearly contentious. Dr Argent seems to lay considerable responsibility at the feet of John Huxtable as the most loyal of Micklem's students who, though charismatic and personable, appears in the account as

sincere, but ultimately manipulative and unwilling to allow any dissent to voice its opinion or to hinder the progress of his ecumenical goals. Thus Huxtable is presented as having borne considerable influence on Howard Stanley, his predecessor as Secretary of the Congregational Union. Stanley, as the epitome of Lancashire Congregationalism, had once expressed opposition to union with the Presbyterians. Yet following his election to the office of Secretary, he appears to have been more accommodating. Dr Argent portrays him as vacillating, as one 'in search of a vision'—a vision which Huxtable was all too willing to provide. However, this would seem to go against what would have been the much-lauded, single-minded and self-assured Congregationalism of the north-west. Why would Stanley not have known his own mind? What really accounts for the suggested influence that Huxtable played over him? Moreover, why would such a previously redoubtable figure have changed his position? Can it really be down solely to the charm and persuasive skill of John Huxtable? We can only speculate, for it is not easy to account for Stanley's change of heart. But could it not be that, for one reason or another, Stanley came to his own conclusions regarding the future of Congregationalism as he tried to grapple with, and understand, the signs of the times? Of course, such an answer is as dissatisfying as any other, but it remains, surely, a possibility.

The ecumenical imperative, the author asserts, was interpreted exclusively in terms of organic and visible union and was promoted as the will of God which left no room for an alternative view. Thus the processes were skewed so that the New Genevans' agenda—commitment to visible unity as a result of a high doctrine of the church, a 'high' view of ministry as in some senses incorporating the church and the renewal of worship through the introduction of Reformed liturgical forms—was imposed on churches which had gradually been disempowered by the centralizing tendencies in the Union. This might well have been the case, though three particular points come to mind.

First, were there justifiable reasons for the movement towards centralization, such as the weakening of local churches over the course of the century? Quoting Martyn Lloyd-Jones's criticism that the Congregational Church marked 'a departure from historic Independency' (p 505) is hardly conclusive; Lloyd-Jones was stubbornly independent, largely in order to be able to follow his own agenda (which is hardly the principle encapsulated in historic Independency) but he also maintained his link to the Presbyterian Church of Wales (which is not, and never has been, an 'Independent' denomination in any sense of the word). Could it not be argued that local churches required the assistance of the Union in legal, financial and other matters which required expert advice or the injection of funds? Centralization could, after all, have been a two-way process.

Second, the centralization thesis is at once proven and, at times, slightly

forced in the book. There can be little doubt that the Union sought to take on roles which could exercise authority over local churches. Yet the conclusion that post-1918 Congregationalism 'no longer convincingly portrayed itself as the vibrant and growing body which it had believed itself to be before 1914 ... provided further arguments for those who favoured a more centralized denomination' (p 107) is not supported by reference to any who made such an argument. Furthermore, the idea that further centralization was enabled as a result of the end of the provincial autumnals after the Second World War (chapter 16) because the Union's decisions were then indelibly associated with London might be a little too convenient; the Union, inevitably, was always associated with London from its beginning in 1831/2.

Third, what is ultimately most puzzling is that if the New Genevans were peddling a singular and homogeneous church order which excluded a legitimate form of Congregationalism, why exactly were so many churches persuaded to join the new denomination? The statistics here are telling—1776 churches voted to enter the Congregational Church in England and Wales with 42 against. It can be admitted that Dr Argent is correct that there are other, historic, legitimate forms of Congregationalism (even, possibly, more legitimate than that of the New Genevans). But to suggest that the churches that voted to join the United Reformed Church were hoodwinked or charmed into it by the wily, determined, if sincere, John Huxtable, while recognizing the significance, charm and influence of the man, tends to draw attention away from the ecumenical optimism of the period which could have taken precedence in the minds of otherwise committed and sincere Congregationalists. Could it not be said that there was a general ecumenical optimism in the air in the 1960s which accepted such arguments at face value? Were Congregationalists, even those not of the Genevan mould, willing to consider that this truly was the movement of the Spirit? In looking back, we can see that the optimism might have been misplaced and even theologically naïve, but could this have been clear at the time? After all, Christians are not required in all circumstances to have reached the *right* decision, which means that the church is always left trying to make sense of the decisions it has made rather than awaiting unanimous agreement on the way forward.

And this leads to the real question which emerges in this account, namely what constitutes Independency (or even what constitutes Congregationalism)? For much of Congregational history, it seems that independence of church order has been affirmed, but that independence of faith has been rejected, even when human creeds have been eschewed. Congregationalists remained orthodox Calvinists over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; they were affected by the theological liberalism of the nineteenth century, and some in the twentieth century sought to take this to an extreme (if logical)

conclusion. In some ways, Forsyth's opposition to the New Theology (as well as that of Horton) and the opposition of Micklem and the New Genevans to Frank Lenwood and the 'Blackheathens' belongs to this tension. The New Genevans sought to confirm that Congregationalists were Christian and that to be Christian meant to stand for *something* rather than for *anything*. Even if restating the gospel is an apologetic imperative for the Church in every given age, there might come a point where it is restated in such language as to suggest that there are current expressions of belief which have parted company from the historic faith. That does not mean that everyone has to understand and practice their faith in exactly the same way, but it does mean that expressions of faith ought to be recognizable to fellow Christians. The New Genevans were fearful of encroaching liberalism which they considered obscured the gospel; for their part the liberal Congregationalists (especially the extreme modernists such as Lenwood) probably did not understand the New Genevans either. Dr Argent's book certainly demonstrates that, in twentieth century Congregationalism, this mutual respect and understanding of different viewpoints broke down and not on a decidedly evangelical/liberal divide. It is probably unfair to lay the blame solely at the feet of the New Genevans; liberals—especially of an extreme Modernist type—can be very illiberal. Furthermore, had previous generations really suffered theological difference with any greater sense of toleration? What certainly emerged with the New Genevans was a sense of a credal Christianity, liturgical and more rigid worship, and the association of orthodox faith or catholicity of the church with a particular order. That order upheld the dignity and significance of ministry and supported it by insisting on clerical dress, but it is probably slightly disingenuous to associated this with the aspiration 'to a social equivalence' with Methodists and Anglicans (pp 232, 243). What this debate demonstrates more than anything else is that there is a crucially important argument which recognizes Congregationalism to be more than merely a polity. But quite what constitutes that theological 'other' is, quite properly, debatable.

There is much of value in this volume and the preceding discussion should demonstrate that this book is both stimulating and captivating. The final sections which discuss the formation of the United Reformed Church and what happened to the continuing Congregational churches are, perhaps, most valuable, though some questions emerge here too. Dr Argent characterizes the formation of the United Reformed Church as part of the trend towards centralization and the denuding of the local church of its authority. Thus churches were closed, he asserts, 'at a distance' by a centralized bureaucracy (p 493). While it is possibly true that Councils of the Church exerted exceptional and undue influence in such debates, it is certainly the case that no church in the URC has ever closed without the local church meeting resolving to do so. This is a small point of detail; it is not possible to say how many felt pressurized

to do so (though anecdotal evidence suggests that closure often came as a relief to small congregations with an elderly membership and burdened by the responsibility to ‘keep going’). Perhaps more critically we can look at two observations. The first is that the URC entered into ‘numerical freefall’ (p 502) and its formation ‘added impetus to the process’ (p 524) of closing churches and colleges. The numerical decline in the URC since its formation has been cruel and dramatic. But it might have been more informative to set this alongside the general trends of decline (against which URC statistics still make for stark reading) and alongside clearer information regarding the statistics around the continuing Congregationalists. This might have demonstrated similar decline there, or it might have demonstrated that continuing Congregationalism has not suffered as much as the URC, which in turn would have helped strengthen the conclusion that the formation of the URC in some senses precipitated decline.

Of perhaps greater significance, and something not unrecognized in the URC, is that the clear failure of the ecumenical agenda (in terms of visible unity) has left the URC struggling for identity and purpose. It is notoriously difficult to say what it means to be ‘Reformed’, but while the conclusion that the URC has ‘no identifiable distinction, save its willingness to unite’ (p 502) might appear harsh, it certainly reflects debates within the URC itself. Nevertheless, this is true, to some extent, of Congregationalism too. It is not homogeneous—indeed, it ought not be or else it could not be Congregational (or could it?). Indeed, the continuing Congregationalists have not united around shared principles of either faith or order begging the question whether the ideal of Congregationalism here expounded (attractive and justifiable as it is) can be considered to represent *Congregationalism* as a whole. Indeed, can (and should) any singular vision embody the whole?

It cannot be denied that the formation of the URC neither stemmed decline in church attendance and membership nor facilitated further union. Perhaps, too, it can be argued that to be ‘URC’ does not offer a clear identity in the way that being ‘Congregational’ does. This depends on a specific reading of the Congregational past and, as the preceding discussion suggests, Congregational identity has never been entirely homogeneous. This at least suggests the likelihood that ‘identity’ in itself is only one factor—and possibly only a minor factor—in the overall story of decline and thus, also, only one factor among many in what enables a church to flourish.

In conclusion, it can be categorically stated that this is both an enthralling and captivating study. It is well-researched and it is presented in a lively and intriguing manner. It is, furthermore, produced to a very high standard and enhanced by the inclusion of thirty well-selected photographs. The Congregational Federation has done its work well in producing the book, and it can stand proudly alongside any other study of Christianity in Britain during

the twentieth century. Dr Argent is to be congratulated in producing a work that has taken years of research and reflection and has been constructed in a captivating and alluring way. Those who share his Congregational convictions have much to be grateful for; those who do not, but share a fascination in the history of twentieth century Christianity in Britain ought to share that gratitude. The overall thesis can be confirmed even when details of the argument could (perhaps) be interpreted in different ways to those advocated by the author. Further discussion of his thesis and of the decline of Christianity in Britain in the twentieth century should arise from this scholarly and challenging study. But it can be said, too, with confidence that this book will constitute the standard work on this subject for years to come. It should appeal to students and scholars and to the interested lay person, all of whom will benefit from its careful research, its engaging account and its provocative thesis. It deserves notice and it deserves to be read.

*Robert Pope*  
*University of Wales: Trinity St David*

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## REVIEWS

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***Richard Bancroft and Elizabethan Anti-Puritanism.* By P Collinson. Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History. Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp xvi + 232. Hardback £45.00. ISBN 978-1-10702-334-5.**

Patrick Collinson who died in 2011 was the unsurpassed historian of his generation of the religion of late Tudor England and this is his last book, prepared at his home in Devon when he was in his long terminal illness. He found working on this volume a welcome distraction from his medical treatment. The book is a return to the territory of his first major writing, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (1967), and it explores again the pressure for presbyterian reform within the late 16th century Church of England, especially from the perspective of puritanism's most vociferous and determined opponent, Richard Bancroft. As a result the reader is led into a world of clandestine meetings, conferences, prophesyings, classes and exercises, through which the godly puritans sought to reform the Church of England. As Collinson's two literary executors, Alexandra Walsham and John Morrill, state in their preface, Collinson was so fascinated by Tudor puritanism that at times Bancroft himself seems to disappear from the text, supplanted by his godly enemies.

This is far from being a conventional biography but is rather an "extended pre-history" with Bancroft firmly in the role of the "arch Anti-Puritan". Starting in Bancroft's native south Lancashire, with its residual Roman Catholicism, and then moving to Christ's College, Cambridge, the study arrives in London where Bancroft, Collinson's anti-hero, was chaplain first to Christopher Hatton and then crucially to John Whitgift. After this he became bishop of London and, as such, he led a campaign to hunt down the subversive and revolutionary threats to the Queen and her church which he identified with the radical puritans. Collinson's book extends into the 17th century but ceases with Bancroft's appointment as the Archbishop of Canterbury, which post he retained at his death in 1610.

Clearly Collinson had no love for Bancroft and this relatively slim study stands in stark contrast to his earlier, fuller and more sympathetic treatment of Edmund Grindal. This present book offers "an anatomy of a conspiratorial obsession" which obsession possessed Bancroft who identified even moderate puritan critics as extremists and republicans. At the last, Collinson asks if Bancroft himself had any real religion. He concludes that although the

archbishop was fully committed to the “unchallengeable power of the monarchical state to determine the religion of its subjects”, he was not a supporter of *iure divino* episcopacy and he had a deep aversion to a parody of Calvinism which he revealed, among other ways, in his crude reception of the puritans at the Hampton Court Conference. He was also fiercely opposed to the puritan demand for a preaching ministry in the parishes. Collinson understood that Bancroft was “a violent, cantankerous man, dedicated to the defeat of the Church’s supposed enemies, and endlessly resourceful in the weapons he chose to wield”.

In contrast Collinson saw puritanism as essentially constructive and respectful of order. It was not sectarian and did not lead, for the vast majority, to secessionism. However Bancroft, by singularly interpreting the religious movements of his day as polarised and reacting to that view with repression and cruelty, helped to lay down for the next 400 years the “seismic divide” between church and chapel.

This volume is part of the Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History and is produced to a high standard with an index and footnotes. With Collinson’s other writings, it is an essential tool for those interested in the puritanism of late Elizabethan England.

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*Alan Argent*

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***Baal’s Priests. The Loyalist Clergy and the English Revolution. By Fiona McCall. St Andrews Studies in Reformation History. Ashgate, Farnham 2013. Pp xvi + 336. Hardback £70. ISBN 978-1-40945-577-6.***

Those of us who trace our intellectual and denominational allegiances to the ejected ministers and their churches of the Restoration period probably pay little attention to the sufferings of the loyal Anglican clergy who were similarly, but a few years earlier, deprived of their livings during the civil wars and the interregnum. It is salutary to recall that thousands of Anglicans were forcibly removed from their homes by parliamentary troops and also by the decrees of official parliamentary committees and, though some were idle and spent their time in the taverns and in other irreligious ways, many were zealous for the truth as they saw it.

Fiona McCall has drawn upon a variety of contemporary sources for her impressive book, most notably upon the collection of family reminiscences compiled by the early 18th century Anglican cleric and polemicist, John Walker, who entered into controversy with Edmund Calamy the III. Of course, from these two sets of sources, Walker and Calamy, the fine 20th century



Congregational historian, A G Matthews, was to produce two ground breaking reference works.

McCall addresses the plight of the sequestered Anglican clergy and their families in the 1640s and 50s who were often branded as ‘malignants’ or ‘Baal’s priests’. This book not only reassesses the sufferings of a relatively neglected group but also helps to explain why feelings ran so high at the Restoration of Charles II and why the Restoration settlement of the Church in 1662 contained such a powerful element of revenge, and seemed so harsh on the dissenters.

Curiously McCall defends her choice of subject, by arguing that most historians have tended to omit from their accounts of the wars the sufferings of “ordinary people”, although it is not clear to me that the subjects of John Walker’s polemics were in every sense “ordinary”, any more than in our own very different age the Anglican parish clergy are ordinary now. Indeed her use of the term revolution in her book’s title may even imply some sympathy with the Marxist view of the wars, a view which stressed violence between the various classes then found in the three kingdoms. She accepts that most historians agree that religion had a central part in the conflict, although no acceptance of the degree of disorder caused by the wars has been arrived at. Nevertheless McCall to her credit notably does not confine her sources to the gentry families who so often provide historians with evidence for their findings, even though she does concentrate on the Royalists.

Hers is, at times, a heart rending story which provides a corrective to those who assert the sufferings of the party in those wars with whom they wish to identify, forgetting that even in ancient, seemingly romantic (to modern readers) wars all parties suffer.

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*Anthony Browne*

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***Spirituality in Adversity. English Nonconformity in a Period of Repression, 1660–1689.* By Raymond Brown. *Studies in Evangelical History and Thought.* Paternoster, 2012. Pp 374. Paperback £34.99. ISBN 978-1-84227-785-0.**

Raymond Brown, the former principal of Spurgeon’s College, is a warm, engaging Christian, a fine preacher and a modest Baptist minister. As this book shows, he is also a good historian. He has dedicated this work in pious memory to his friend, the Congregational scholar, and inspirational critic to so many, the late Geoffrey Fillingham Nuttall. Raymond Brown writes thus—

“His enriching friendship over many years and his vast knowledge of church history, always generously shared, was of immense help to me both as a teacher and a writer”.

Many would echo that.

The book begins with an account of the England of the Restoration of Charles II from exile on the continent. The failure then to achieve a comprehensive ecclesiastical settlement led to almost three decades of persecution. The religious nonconformists were seen as threatening the peace of the realm, both political and religious. Such potential disruption was treated with severity, although the dissenters were subject to sporadic, rather than sustained, bursts of repression, often depending on variable local factors. Indeed in some places sympathetic justices of the peace and local landowners treated them with leniency.

Part II examines how official repression led some dissenters to reflect on and arrive at an understanding of their own identity and calling. Suffering thus proved an aid to inward study and helped to shape their theology, supported by gracious family memories of a rich spiritual life and by the writings of their fellows. Therefore they made “creative use of potentially destructive experiences”, as Brown states.

Part III treats with the theological resources available to these nonconformists. Brown notes their confidence in God, their identifying with Christ and their being equipped by the Holy Spirit—a formidable Trinity at work in their adversity.

Part IV deals with the corporate values experienced by the nonconformists, as evidenced in both infant and believers’ baptism, and in the Lord’s Supper. He discusses their teaching and learning, their integrity and their service of others. Throughout the author has tried to use sources which indicate the lives and witness of ordinary people, rather than rely exclusively on the diaries and journals of ministers.

So what then would Geoffrey Nuttall have made of it? He would have approved the design with quotations to introduce the chapters and sub-headings to break up the text. He would have enjoyed the fluent writing which sets out the issues and the evidence and he would have liked the theological sensitivity which the author brings to his task. Furthermore he would have appreciated the use of footnotes, the extensive bibliography of over 22 pages, and the 12 pages of index (two columns a page). Incidentally curious readers will look in vain for references in the index for the denominational labels and boundaries of later years. Here then do not appear the terms Baptists, Congregationalists, Independents, Presbyterians, Quakers or Friends, although readers will find ample references to Nuttall’s favourites like Philip Henry, George Fox, Richard Baxter and, above all, John Bunyan, but also to Owen Stockton, John Flavel, Oliver Heywood, Joseph Alleine, Edmund Calamy and other characters of this remarkable drama.

I heartily recommend this work which deals with Christian history. That is to say, it is not history written by someone outside the body of believers, as so

much of what passes for serious scholarship on Christian themes is nowadays. Rather this is a writer who understands faith and does not view it as a quaint branch of sociology. We are indebted to Raymond Brown for his patient and productive industry, as set out here.

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*Alan Argent*

***The Clergy in Khaki. New Perspectives on British Army Chaplaincy in the First World War.* Ed Michael Snape and Edward Madigan. Ashgate Studies in First World War History. Ashgate, Farnham 2013. Pp xvi + 222. Hardback £65.00. ISBN 978-1-4094-3000-1.**

**W**ith the coming of the centenary of the onset of World War I in 2014 we are likely to be inundated with radio and television programmes, as well as books, good and less good, commemorating the conflict and the terrible sacrifice of life not only next year but also for the following four years. Yet as this book's editors point out, the lot of the army chaplains, the padres, has often been overlooked and perhaps it is unlikely to receive great attention in these coming commemorations. In this collection 12 scholars offer their insights into a subject which touches on imperial, military, social and political history, as well as the more obvious religious and theological themes. The book originated in a conference held near Andover in June 2009.

In 1914 only 3 denominations—Anglican, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic—provided the British army's commissioned chaplains, although some Wesleyan Methodists were acting chaplains. However this left Jewish soldiers and many nonconformists without padres to whom they might turn for sympathy and understanding. By the close of 1915 Britain had recruited over 2 million volunteers into its military service. They were seen as having clear religious needs although many of these were inadequately provided. Consequently the war saw a huge expansion of the provision of chaplains. At its beginning the army had only 117 commissioned padres but at its end 5,053 new commissions had been granted to ministers who together reflected the diversity of British denominations. By the Armistice of November 1918, more than 170 padres had died and hundreds had been decorated, many for rescuing wounded soldiers from no man's land between the opposing trenches. On the whole the churches and their ministers in all denominations supported the war, although Christian pacifism was a notable if small development from it. The war also had a profound effect on those chaplains, not least in shaping their attitudes to men from other religious bodies than their own, rendering many intolerant of the divisions between them and eager for reunion.

In this collection John Thompson, himself a member of our CHS, has written on the Nonconformist chaplains, Neil Allison on Free Church

revivalism in the army and Ieuan Elfryn Jones concentrates on the letters of a decorated Welsh speaking chaplain, a Baptist who owed his conversion to the 1904–5 revival of Evan Roberts. David Coulter discusses the experience of Scottish Presbyterian chaplaincy on the western front and Stuart Bell examines the thinking of the most celebrated chaplain of that war, Studdert Kennedy, often known still as ‘Woodbine Willie’.

Gary Sheffield considers three case studies of Anglican padres, each drawn from the officer class. He shows that their paternalism did not prevent their having good relations with combatant officers, although their success depended on strength of character and mental toughness. James Hegarty reveals that, although the Roman Catholic chaplains have generally been seen as integrating well, tensions in the upper hierarchy certainly existed. Michael Snape turns his attention to the chaplains of British India, several of whom served in Mesopotamia where, of the 7 padres who died, 6 fell victim to disease or debilitation.

The last three chapters tackle the issues left at the armistice for the post-war world. Peter Howson looks at the conferences of army chaplains in 1918 and their hopes for church reform with the coming peace. Linda Parker examines the “shell-shocked padres” of the Church of England in the 1920s and 30s, showing that their experiences of the war profoundly affected them. Lastly Alan Robinson deals with the continuing existence of the Army Chaplains’ Department after the war and the criticism which chaplains then had to face from a war weary public.

This is an important collection which must be read by all serious scholars of the subject and by those interested in the ultimate issues which that generation had to confront. The Christians of that period had, for us, unenviable decisions to make which would deter any sane person. Our criticism and our admiration should go together as we learn more of their world and their lives.

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*Mary Kemp*

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***Religion, Identity and Conflict in Britain: From the Restoration to the Twentieth Century. Essays in Honour of Keith Robbins. Ed Stewart J Brown, Frances Knight and John Morgan-Guy. Ashgate, Farnham 2013. Pp xi+281. Hardback £65. ISBN 978-1-40945-148-8.***

This festschrift to the distinguished historian, Keith Robbins, is a handsome publication, touching on many themes close to the heart of its principal subject. The 15 authors crucially turn their attention to the role of religion in framing social movements and institutions, and in shaping national identity. Given that the church in the different nations of Britain was established, although different

denominations were dominant in those nations, religion occupied a central place in civic ceremonies, rituals and public processions. Christianity therefore permeated society and provided a sense of continuity between the present, past and future. As the editors of this volume maintain, the state appeared under “the special care and protection of providence; they were a chosen people, and their commercial and military success, their imperial expansion and the stability of their institutions and social structures were all expressions of divine favour”.

Yet if there was a religious conception of British state and society, religious conflicts also existed, and bitter divisions arose between Church and Dissent. In addition, divisions within the denominations became evident between those who responded positively to science, moral questioning and biblical scholarship and those who rejected such developments, leading to issues which are explored in this book.

Here then are studies touching on themes close to Robbins’ own wide-ranging scholarship. John Spurr examines the changing understanding of blasphemy from 1676 to the 21st century. Peter Borsay considers the political landscape of English towns 1660–1760, with particular stress on the power of civic elites. Joris Eijnatten, a cultural historian of the University of Utrecht, provides a discussion of the fascinating subject of the somnolent effect of preaching and hearing sermons in 18th century Britain. Do we still send our congregations to sleep?

Eryn White writes of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists and of their forging a distinct identity and Paula Yates treats with the influence of Sunday Schools in helping the Welsh to understand their own national identity. The leading historian of evangelicalism in this country, David Bebbington, contributes a paper on Evangelicalism and British Culture and the late Professor Nigel Yates analyses some Anglican Attitudes to Roman Catholicism in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

6 chapters are grouped together under the heading of conflict and identity. These include Hugh McLeod on religion, politics and sport in western Europe 1870–1939, Stewart Brown on that curious Congregational layman who drowned with ‘The Titanic’, WT Stead, the new journalism and the new church in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain, and Sir Brian Harrison on Oxford University Press and the Oxford History of England. I have not mentioned Thomas O’Loughlin who writes on reactions to that early church text the Didache in early 20th century Britain, Frances Knight on episcopal reactions to the drink question in the 1890s, and John Morgan-Guy on Bishop Ellicott and ‘angry controversies’ in the Church of England.

This is then an admirable collection of essays. I particularly appreciated Harrison’s ‘Ambitious Venture’ on the Oxford History of England, as most historians would. However my enjoyment increased with the photograph of the

then Princess Elizabeth and G N Clark being delayed by the tortoise of Oriel College, Oxford who decided at a crucial moment to go walkabout, apparently to the amusement of all.

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*Michael J Cooke*

***The Theological Education of the Ministry: Soundings in the British Reformed and Dissenting Traditions.* By Alan P F Sell. Pickwick Publications, Eugene, Oregon, 2013. Pp xiv + 313. Paperback \$36. ISBN 978-1-62032-593-3.**

The prolific Alan Sell here provides another collection of well crafted essays which were originally published elsewhere. As might be expected, they deserve to be made more easily available to a wider readership and this reviewer is grateful for learning more of John Oman in an illuminating paper. The first substantial essay is of Caleb Ashworth of Daventry (1721-75) who taught at and ran an academy which was the successor to that of Philip Doddridge of Northampton. Justifying this book's title, the reader learns of the content of the academic curriculum and of the lives of both students and their teacher. Sell reflects on Scottish religious philosophy in the second half of the 19th century, thus presenting the intellectual background to his chapter on John Oman (1860-1939), the well-known principal of Westminster College, Cambridge. Returning to Scotland, he considers also the contribution of the theologian and ethicist Norman Robinson (1912-78) of St Andrew's, hitherto unknown to me.

The two chapters on Geoffrey Nuttall were first published in the *Journal of the United Reformed History Society*. They offer Sell's memories of visiting his friend and also his considered view of Nuttall's theological thinking based on a study of his many writings. Valuable as these pieces are to those wishing to know more of this historian of puritanism, they reveal much more of the questions which tested both him and Sell at the time. How helpful they might be for the general reader is perhaps debateable. Chapter 8, 'A Valued Inheritance of New Testament Scholarship', was written for a festschrift to Professor Zsolt Gereb of the Protestant Theological Institute of Cluj/Kolosvar in Rumania. It deals principally with the New Testament teachers whose classes Sell attended in Manchester, namely T W Manson, Owen E Evans, W Gordon Robinson and J H Eric Hull.

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*James L Stratton*

***Why Priests? A Failed Tradition.* By Garry Wills. Viking, New York 2013. Pp [xiv]+302. Hardback \$27.95. ISBN 978-0-670-0287-2.**

The author, a well-known and prolific American historian and critic, Pulitzer

Prize winner, and a Roman Catholic layman, has taught at Northwestern University since 1980 and is now emeritus professor of history. He has consistently criticised the doctrine of papal infallibility and found fault with Catholic teachings on abortion, contraception and homosexuality. In addition he does not accept traditional Catholic teachings on the eucharist. Yet he has defended his decision to remain a Catholic whilst criticising its structures from within.

In *Why Priests* he argues furiously about what is wrong with the notion of priests in the Roman Catholic Church. He specifically criticises the hierarchical structure of priests whose *raison d'être* is that they perform the miracle of converting bread and wine into the body and blood of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. These miracle workers once ordained (through the laying on of hands by a bishop) cannot lose this miracle-making ability, even if the priest is later “unfrocked”. More curiously the miracle worker doesn’t need the presence of a congregation to perform his (and never her) miracle. By himself it works, both in a private mass and in a mighty congregation of fervent believers, but without a priest it doesn’t.

There are further anomalies; the priest can’t de-consecrate the elements, which leads to problems. “The un-de-consecratable Host, which is entirely and nothing else but the body and blood of Christ” poses many difficulties which Thomas Aquinas himself considered, such as if crumbs fall to the ground or a fly accidentally falls into the wine; but more strikingly one might worry how does this holy mass pass through the intestinal system? Some, like the Belgian theologian, Edward Schillebeeckx, have pointed to the need for a “reverse transubstantiation” to separate Jesus from the (Aquinian) “accidents” of bread and wine before they were excreted.

How did this absurd situation come about? As a Congregationalist I too believe in a truly lay church where, if there is a priesthood, it is a “priesthood of all believers”. According to Wills, some of the first converts to the post-Resurrection church were priests from the Temple in Jerusalem who wanted to continue the sacrificial system. They took the Lord’s Supper, which had originated in the Last Supper as a Passover meal and was no more than a remembrance, “do this in memory of me”, and made it into a sacrificial meal—the Mass. In order to counter this tendency the *Epistle to the Hebrews* was written, of which Wills provides a fresh translation. *Hebrews* explains that the only true priest was Christ the perfect priest (because he was sinless) making the perfect sacrifice (himself, freely offered unlike the paschal lamb in the earthly Temple) in the perfect place, Heaven. Because of this the cross is once and for all time. There is only one priest, only one altar (Hebrews 13:1) and only one sacrifice, “once and for all”. Or as Paul put it, “Christ *our* Passover lamb *has been* sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7).

The *Hebrews* argument presents reasons why the priesthood is redundant but, with most adjacent religions involving sacrificial rites, and some like Mithraism involving meal-like celebrations, Jewish sentiments gave way to the overpowering Roman influence. What was once a communal democracy, a “ministry of gifts” (charisma, 1Cor 12) was replaced by a “ministry of orders”, the hierarchical threefold ministry of deacon, priest and bishop. The Constantinian revolution rendered Christianity the official religion, with the title of Pontifex Maximus, head of the college of cults, first assumed by Julius Caesar, later claimed by Bishop Damasus of Rome, from “the dust bin of history” having been disregarded by the emperor Gratian as being too pagan! So in effect the Roman Catholic Church became the new Roman Empire and the Bishop of Rome, after the demise of the western empire in the fifth century, the new emperor.

Wills is right about priests (Greek *hierus* Hebrew *cohen*) and sacrifices. With no sacrifices after the Temple was destroyed in 70CE priests became redundant and to this day have remained so. The *cohen* is still priest but plays little, even though an honoured, part in synagogue worship. His role disappeared with the end of the Temple and will only commence again with a re-constituted Temple which will surely herald the end time!

Wills is wrong that the Lord’s Supper requires a miracle and that a priest is needed for that. Transubstantiation is a later interpretation of the eucharistic meal, going way beyond the New Testament account of the Last Supper as the passover meal and in any case it’s no part of a priest’s role to perform miracles. A Roman Catholic priest is an unnecessary intermediary between man and God. With the incarnation the priest has no function in the post-Resurrection church. It is by the incarnation that Jesus perfectly fulfils this role as mediator, being both man and God, so that since the risen Christ all believers can come to God through the intercession of the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Meanwhile, why would the church adopt the title and function of priest? It is a good question. There is no mention of “priest” in the New Testament as a separate order, except as Jewish priests or referring to Jesus as the High Priest. We, the church, are a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2.9)—all believers! We each have gifts which contribute to the whole. No one person is more important than another. This was the ministry of gifts. Only much later did this change to the three-fold order of deacon, priest and bishop.

It seems that confusion started with a conflation of the following separate and quite distinct elements; the Last Supper, a meal, the Cross, as the means of redemption, the Paschal lamb, at home and in the Temple (until 70CE), the living presence of the risen Christ (“Peace be with you. As the father has sent me, so I am sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20.21). The simple



meal combined with the atoning nature of the cross and sacrifice in the Temple all were laid upon one another.

Be that as it may, the Gospel message clearly separates Good Friday from Easter day (day 1 of the Omer, Lev. 23.15) and Easter day from Pentecost (day 50 of the Omer), the coming of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the church—“whenever two or three are gathered together in His name” (Matt. 19.20). There is no mention of churches being founded by bishops and led by priests. This came much later. There were certainly many external pressures to organise and systematise things, over the next centuries, as the church grew. For instance, to make use of house-churches and to abandon the synagogue. Later to change the church from being the people to being a building. The Gospel message was first given to both the apostles and the disciples through women in the garden and later many women like Priscilla, Lydia and Nympha hosted church assemblies, yet in spite of this the church increasingly denied an equal place to them. This was repeated when Methodism grew into a separate denomination. Two good innovations of John Wesley, women preachers and open air meetings, were abandoned as a more streamlined organisation developed.

All this doesn't explain the peculiar position of the Church of England which rejects the miracle of transubstantiation (article 28 of the 39 Articles) yet still has priests. Why is this? Priests and sacerdotalism became a leading issue of the Reformation (and earlier of the Cathars, the Hussites and the Lollards). Calvin made use of the New Testament word *presbuteros* elder. In Presbyterianism the elder is distinguished from the minister and, while both are ordained, neither are priests.

But what about the Church of England which is Protestant but has priests?

Apparently the first conversations between the Anglicans and Methodists broke down when the Anglicans were told that the Methodist practice, after the communion service, was to throw the remaining bread out for the birds to eat. The Anglicans, without formally maintaining transubstantiation, behaved exactly as if they did. Once a priest had prayed over the bread and wine, it couldn't still be bread and the wine, wine, could it? Yes, it could! That's what we mean by not being a miracle. And it only becomes a symbol when it is swallowed as a symbol. The birds eat bread not symbols of the body of Jesus! Is that too hard to understand? Even the mention of the word “priest” muddies the waters. The word “priest” is just not needed.

The Jewish priest remains redundant—with no Temple there can be no sacrifices. The RC priest *is* according to Wills, redundant, if he thinks he can perform the miracle of transubstantiation. In any case he is not a priest in the Jewish and Biblical sense—whose calling is to officiate sacrifices not miracles. The Anglican priest ought to be redundant as he/she only has to preside over a memorial meal of the Lord's Supper where the elements are (only) bread and

wine (Article 28). When you think about it there is nothing even vaguely “priestly” about consecrating (dedicating) the offertory (an offering) of bread and wine. As to the other functions of the Anglican priesthood, *benedictions* and  *blessings* are given by God alone at the request of any good person and  *confessions* are likewise best heard from spiritual friends not sacerdotal strangers.

Garry Wills does both the Roman Catholic Church and non-episcopalian Protestants like the Congregationalists an invaluable service. Sadly, for neither and for quite differing reasons is his argument totally convincing. The Roman Catholic Church will continue seemingly to the end of time with priests and bishops while Congregationalists will happily continue without them. Yet, and for me this is the main point, he at least has explained his position, why no priests.

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*Colin Price*

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