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ENGLISH BAPTISTS OF THE 20th CENTURY

Ian M. Randall

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- *Ian Randall is Lecturer in Church History and Spirituality at Spurgeon's College and Senior Research Fellow of IBTS, Prague*
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In his analysis of evangelism and spirituality within Nonconformity in England in the twentieth century, David Bebbington contrasts the position of the Free Churches at the beginning and end of the century. At the beginning, a popular evangelicalism united most of the Nonconformist churches, and these congregations co-operated in the Free Church Council. At the end, he notes, there was 'astonishing diversity', with many new groups and fellowships having emerged alongside 'the rumps of Methodism, the United Reformed Church and the Baptist Union'.¹ There is no doubt about the extent to which Baptists and other Nonconformists were transformed. In 1906 the weekly the *Christian World* predicted that 'the future rests with the Free Churches'.² At the end of the century it was decided that the Free Church Council would become a Free Churches group in the ecumenical body, Churches Together in England.³

There are groups of English Baptists and individual Baptist churches that I do not deal with in the book, or in this paper. Strict and Particular Baptists, some known as Gospel Standard and others now as Grace Baptists, have their own historian, Kenneth Dix. He has written a

comprehensive account of Strict Baptists in the nineteenth century,⁴ and is working on the twentieth century. The churches traced here are those English Baptist churches that belong to the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

In this paper I cannot take in the whole century and so will look only at the first decade and the last decade in order to make what I hope will be some illuminating comparisons. The way in which Baptists advanced in the early twentieth century has been well told by Peter Shepherd in his life of J.H. Shakespeare, General Secretary of the Union during the first quarter of the century.⁵ Born in 1857, the son of a Baptist minister, Shakespeare studied at Regent's Park College, and when only twenty-five became minister of St Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich. Shakespeare had a compelling personality and a comprehensive vision, and his concept of what it was to be an effective denomination with an efficient ministry was to shape much of organized Baptist life in the twentieth century.

Re-shaping was needed. Writing in 1906 from Thame Baptist Church, Buckinghamshire, William Chambers quoted a piece of conventional Baptist 'wisdom'. It was said that '75 per cent of Baptist ministers want to change their pastorate and 50 per cent of the churches wish they would'.⁶ The awareness that change was necessary within the Union was to set the agenda for Baptist leaders, especially for Shakespeare. Similarly, the end of the century saw a radical reappraisal of Baptist life being undertaken. The state of the churches was a constant theme during the century.

1 THE LIFE OF THE CHURCHES

By 1900 there were 239,114 members in 1,744 Baptist churches in England, as listed in the *Baptist Handbook*. The figure for Baptist membership compared with 257,435 Congregationalists and 410,384 members in Wesleyan Methodism.⁷ Many Baptist churches were small. An analysis in the *Baptist Times* in 1902 (and for the book I have drawn a great deal from my reading of 100 years of the *Baptist Times*) showed that over one-third of Baptist churches in England had a membership of under 100, and many could not afford to pay a pastor.⁸ Smaller chapels, often in villages, were an important part of Baptist witness, but chapels struggled in many rural areas as people moved to the towns and cities.

The number of small churches was set to increase, with their average size decreasing.

The growth of the cities included the phenomenon of suburbanization. The middle-class movement to the fringe of cities was to have a profound effect on the life of inner-city Baptist churches. New churches were built to serve the spreading suburbs. Ferme Park, Hornsey, for example, which began with a membership of seventy-one in 1889, had 1,041 members by 1906. Like other progressive chapels, it offered sporting facilities such as Tennis Clubs, popularly referred to as 'marriage markets'.⁹ At Horfield, Bristol, a 'large and handsome new chapel', as the *Baptist Times* put it, was built to seat over 1,000 people. The foundation stone was laid in 1900, at a time of remarkable congregational growth. This church was designed to serve a new area and its membership would overtake that of the historic Broadmead church.¹⁰ Baptists in Leeds and Bradford built in expanding residential communities. In Bradford, they had the new Westgate Chapel, in the then leafy suburbs of Manningham, built in mock gothic style and able to accommodate 750 people. New churches were symbols of advance. The architecture spoke of Baptist confidence. Box-shaped chapels gave way to churches with spires, large organs and stained glass windows.¹¹

Particular attention was paid to Baptist strength in London because of a detailed survey undertaken in 1902-3 by Richard Mudie-Smith, a Baptist deacon, for the *Daily News*. The largest Baptist Union causes - with more than 1,000 people at one service - included the Tabernacles or Chapels in East London, Woolwich, Westbourne Park, Shoreditch, Upper Holloway, West Norwood, West Croydon and Peckham.¹² The best-attended church in the Midlands was Melbourne Hall, Leicester, where the pastor was W.Y. Fullerton, later Home Secretary of the BMS. In 1906 the Melbourne Hall membership was 1,200. Queen's Road, Coventry, was another leading Midlands church. In the North West, Manchester had Union Chapel, Oxford Road, where the famous Alexander Maclaren was pastor from 1858 to 1903, and also Moss Side Baptist Church, both with over 800 members. In Liverpool, Myrtle Street Chapel, together with its branch causes, had almost 900 members, and Accrington was comparable. Swindon Tabernacle and New Road Oxford, with several branch causes, both had around 750 members.

The situation at the end of the century was very different. Whereas about 33% of British people were members of one of the Christian Churches in 1900, a hundred years later, in an increasingly multi-faith environment, the figure was 12%, with regular attendance at church services dipping to 7.5% in 1998.¹³ Many of the large Baptist churches had declined drastically. Free Churches such as the Methodists had shrunk. Significant growth in independent and Pentecostal churches, however, meant that in the English Church Census in 1998 Free Church attendances were two-fifths of all church-goers. In a century marked by overall decline in church involvement, the achievement of Baptists, together with some new Free Churches, compared favourably with that of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches.¹⁴

Looking specifically at Baptist churches, the 1998 Survey showed that over the period 1989 to 1998 the churches in the Union had an increased Sunday attendance of two per cent, from 226,700 to 232,200.¹⁵ Churches re-vamped their premises to help to attract new people and to connect with the community. Darrell Jackson, researching into mission, deduced from the census that the typical Baptist was a forty-one year old female living in the suburbs and belonging to a congregation of 160 people. Mrs Average Baptist was five years younger than the average worshipper in the Church of England, but in African Caribbean congregations the average age was twenty-seven. One worrying trend was that the twenties and thirties age group was under-represented in Baptist congregations. However, increasing numbers of people were coming to faith later in life.¹⁶

Many Baptist churches at the end of the century had congregations of under fifty. The huge Sunday schools of the first half of the century had disappeared. But many churches were reaching out to their local communities and beyond. Frinton Free Church, with 550 members, was chosen by ITV for two hour-long broadcasts to mark the new millennium. Churches with congregations of several hundred at the end of the century included many suburban-type churches. Among the largest congregations were Gold Hill, Chalfont St Peter, Trinity Hill, Sutton Coldfield, and Tonbridge, Kent. Each of these was attracting over 700 people to Sunday worship at the turn of the century.¹⁷

The most spectacular examples of church growth, however, were among Black-majority Baptist congregations. Kingsley Appiagyei, in

West Norwood, reported that when he came from Ghana to study at Spurgeon's College in the late 1980s a group of eight people began to meet in his flat. By 1991 the group had become a Ghanaian Baptist Fellowship of 180, in West Norwood. A year later, when this congregation was applying to join the Union, there were 350 worshippers, 95% Ghanaian.¹⁸ Another predominantly Ghanaian congregation, Calvary Charismatic Baptist Church, which began in 1994, had almost 400 members two years later. Loans from the London Baptist Property Board and the Union helped this church to acquire a former car showroom for worship.¹⁹ These two churches later became the largest in the Union. A number of very ethnically diverse congregations were also growing; for example Willesden Green, London, more than doubled in size during the 1990s, to over 600 members. The life of the churches had become much more diverse over the century.

2 MINISTRY AND MINISTERS

A second theme throughout the century was ministry. In May 1902 W.E. Blomfield, then minister of Queen's Road, Coventry, and later Principal of Rawdon College, delivered a crucial address about support of the ministry. Blomfield suggested a Sustentation Fund, incorporating the existing Home Mission and Augmentation Funds, to ensure a minimum stipend for all approved or 'recognised' Union ministers and also to make provision for evangelistic endeavour.

Backing for the Fund was forthcoming. The developments are covered in detail by Douglas Sparkes in *The Home Mission Story*.²⁰ The Union established a Ministerial Settlement and Sustentation Committee, with the settlement issue arising from Union concern to help pastors move from one church to another.²¹ There was much debate about these questions. Some saw Baptist independency being undermined by the moves towards help from central funds. Letters highly critical of Shakespeare appeared in the conservative paper, the *Baptist*. The *Baptist Times* would not always print these letters.²² It was edited by Shakespeare's brother. Despite considerable opposition and tension, the scheme for Home Mission support, linked with accreditation procedures for those who trained in Baptist Colleges as well as those who had not, was accepted, and was to play a key role throughout the century. Colleges increasingly

committed themselves to higher levels of theological education as well as to spiritual formation. J.H. Shakespeare also introduced Area Superintendents to provide oversight for ministers, guidance to churches and assistance with settlements.

At the end of the century further attention, this time of a more theological nature, was being given to issues relating to ministry in Baptist life. In 1994 the Union Council received major papers from the Faith and Unity Executive, chaired by John Briggs - *Forms of Ministry Among Baptists* and *The Nature of the Assembly and the Council of the Baptist Union*. These were the product of work done by the influential Doctrine and Worship Committee, chaired by Paul Fiddes, Principal of Regent's Park College. The paper on Assembly stated that concepts such as 'covenant, and fellowship (*koinonia*)' could be used 'to understand the theological basis of union between Christian churches in general, and Baptist churches in particular'.²³ *Forms of Ministry* argued for the distinction between 'pastoral oversight' (*episkope*) and 'pastoral service' (*diakonia*). The first was seen as the activity of the 'minister', who was called to a 'way of being' and was responsible to act as the 'representative of the Universal Church'.²⁴ Paul Fiddes' presentation of this theological material to the Council was, according to the *Baptist Times*, 'received with something approaching awe'.²⁵ This report led to an acceptance of diversity in Baptist leadership, while maintaining the uniqueness of ordained pastoral ministry.

The Council commissioned a number of studies of ministry and superintendency. A Task Group on superintendency was set up in March 1994. Brian Haymes, then Principal of Bristol Baptist College, the Task Group moderator, presented the report, *Transforming Superintendency*, to the Union Council.²⁶ The group's recommendations included: that the pastoral care of ministers should become the primary task of superintendents; that Associations should develop a mission and pastoral policy; that the greater responsibility for the life of the churches should lie with the Associations; that new guidelines for settlement should be drawn up; and that each superintendent should be called to exercise a ministry with some national dimensions.²⁷ The focus on translocal ministry would prove decisive.

As well as diversity in forms of ministry, there was also much greater diversity by the end of the century in those entering ministry. Prior to the

1960s virtually all those entering training were single men in their early twenties, whereas by the end of the century the average age was early thirties.²⁸ At the same time, more churches were appointing paid youth leaders and children's workers. Diversity was also seen in the increasing numbers of women in ministry. In 1924 Violet Hedger was the first woman to appear on the list of College students seeking settlement. Progress in the area of women in ministry was, however, slow.²⁹ In 1990 there were ninety-four women on the accredited list.³⁰ Ten years later there were 155. Although this represented advance, fewer than 7% of accredited Baptist ministers were women.³¹ Several women Baptist ministers did, however, exert influence in the affairs of the Union. Myra Blyth became Deputy General Secretary, and Pat Took, minister in Leytonstone, became Area Superintendent for London, the first woman superintendent in the Union.³² Much greater ethnic diversity was also evident.

A recurring concern throughout the century was whether the right number of ministers was being trained. Often the call was for more people to come forward for training.³³ But in the early 1990s over-supply became a concern. A proposal was brought to the Council that colleges be asked to restrict student intake. One issue was that older ministers were finding it difficult to move since churches preferred younger ministers. Those who opposed this thought the denomination would be left unprepared for growth.³⁴ Nigel Wright, who was to become Principal of Spurgeon's College, regretted the 'air of uncourageous retrenchment communicated by the Council's decision' and referred to the report *Ministry Tomorrow* (1969), which had envisaged only 400 ministers being supported. Instead of a reduction, fresh vitality in the Union meant that the tide has been in the opposite direction.³⁵

3 DENOMINATIONAL REFORM

The denominational trend that was most evident under J.H. Shakespeare was towards denominational centralization. This was especially visible in the re-location in 1903 of the Union headquarters to Baptist Church House in Southampton Row. Previously the Union had rented rather dingy rooms in premises in Furnival Street, used primarily for the BMS. Some Baptists took exception to Shakespeare's ambitious plans to spend

£34,000 (in the event it was £50,000) on Church House. A correspondent, 'Fair Play Layman', writing to the *Baptist*, deplored this 'big house' which most ordinary Baptists would be too shy to enter, but which would be 'a nice centre for capitalists to debate the merits of ministers for vacant pulpits'.³⁶ Many other Baptists, however, took considerable pride in the centre, with its panelled oak Council Chamber and other fine features. Baptist Church House became the hub of denominational life, a fruit of what J.C. Carlile, Baptist minister and journalist (editor of the *Baptist Times* from 1925), called Shakespeare's push to centralization.³⁷

Baptist Church House was financed as part of what was called a Twentieth Century Fund for the denomination. Shakespeare's goal was to raise £250,000 for evangelism, the Union's Annuity Fund, student scholarships, Baptist Church House, and educational and other projects.³⁸ This was a massive target. On 1 May 1902, however, at the Assembly, Shakespeare announced to the 1,500 people present that gifts and promises amounting to £250,000 had been received. In fact a promise of £5,000 from the Chivers family (the jam manufacturers) had come that day. Wealthier Baptists, of whom there was a considerable number, contributed generously.³⁹ This Fund was an astonishing achievement and signalled Baptist denominational renewal.⁴⁰

The paper the *Baptist*, representing more independent thinking, featured trenchant criticisms of these centralizing trends, such as the remarks of a 'Minister' who asked in 1906: 'Have we degenerated into a Roman hierarchy with Mr Shakespeare as the Pope?'⁴¹ Yet Shakespeare, although somewhat autocratic, gathered around him able men and women as colleagues.⁴² One of these was F.B. Meyer, the visionary founder of Melbourne Hall, Leicester, and then minister of Regent's Park Chapel, London. As President of the Union in 1906, Meyer argued that Baptist churches – he added, in a phrase that implied centralization, 'may I not say the Baptist Church?' – with other Free Churches were uniquely placed to give leadership to the nation.⁴³

Issues of denominational reform were again addressed at the end of the century, but with a very different agenda in mind and against a very different background. Nigel Wright wrote that the 1990s could be an opportunity for Baptists to look at 'extensive change in the largely Edwardian structures of the Union'.⁴⁴ Wright hoped to see the Union cultivating a new spirit of warmth, engaging in decentralization, and

acting as a resource agency. He suggested a plan to be implemented by the year 2000.⁴⁵ This was to be taken up. The two people who led the process of reform were David Coffey, as General Secretary, and Keith Jones, as Deputy. Coffey, who trained at Spurgeon's College under George Beasley-Murray, had three pastoral ministries, and was then Union Secretary for Evangelism. He was committed to a broad vision of mission and renewal.⁴⁶ Keith Jones trained for ministry at Northern College under Michael Taylor and, following local pastoral ministry, became Secretary of the Yorkshire Baptist Association in 1980.

Coffey and Jones wanted to take seriously the Baptist understanding of seeking the mind of Christ for the Union by gathering Baptists together in the setting of worship to 'listen'. This was a process that did not happen in Shakespeare's time and as well as reflecting Baptist identity was also a product of the kind of culture in which change was debated at grass roots level. Bernard Green, as General Secretary in the 1980s, had moved the Union in this direction. 'Listening Days' involved meetings with 3,000 people and as a result *A Ten Year Plan Towards 2000: Incorporating the National Mission Strategy* (1993) was taken to the Assembly.⁴⁷ Three years later a significant Denominational Consultation was held. In January 1996, as Coffey looked forward to this, he described at the annual Mainstream Conference how the Council had felt 'a particular sense of God speaking'.⁴⁸ At the consultation itself there was a clear desire to implement new ways of associating 'for both effective local co-operative mission and quality pastoral care'. There was also a hope that mission could be a higher priority for the superintendents.

Another Task Group was set up - on Associating. Its report, *Relating and Resourcing*, called for a rediscovery of 'the reality of associating'. There should, it considered, be mutually supportive 'relationships, clusters and networks'. It also affirmed regional and national structures. A crucial recommendation was for the merging of the twenty-nine Associations and the Areas set up by Shakespeare, to create new regional associations. Each of these would be served by a regional team comprising a variety of ministries including visionary, pastoral, evangelistic and others.⁴⁹ In March 1999 the Council agreed a new framework. Associations would facilitate clustering. Regional team leaders would be appointed and regional teams would have responsibility for mission and pastoral care. A National Strategy Team would deal with

mission and a Settlement Team would take on the settlement aspects.⁵⁰ In some respects this was a continuation of the vision of Shakespeare, but it also represented hopes for decentralization.

4 MISSION AND SOCIETY

Reform was intended to aid spiritual advance. The early twentieth century saw significant growth in Baptist membership. Much of this took place because of local church activity. The minister at New Road, Oxford, James Dann, typically urged commitment to evangelism, arguing that 'every one of us is called to be a missionary'.⁵¹ There were evangelistic missions, such as those conducted by two Americans, Torrey and Alexander, who followed the model of Moody and Sankey. David Davies, however, at Holland Road Baptist Church, Hove, said after large meetings in the Brighton Dome in 1904, that 'the converts with comparatively few exceptions have been drawn from the churchgoers and not from the masses, who seldom, if ever, attend religious services'. Davies spoke of the problems of reaching people 'in a pleasure-seeking town like Brighton'.⁵² Probably of more importance was the Welsh Revival of 1904-5. Its impact spread to England through ministers who visited Wales. In 1905 the Berkshire Association reported over 200 baptisms in a year, following a period of stagnation. The vitality was attributed to the influence of the Revival.⁵³ At the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London a mission conducted by students from Spurgeon's College, inspired by the Revival, lasted several weeks and hundreds were added to the congregation.

Work done by Baptist churches among children and young people was crucial. An organization that trained many Baptist young people in the early twentieth century was the interdenominational Christian Endeavour. Many young people found in 'CE' their first opportunities to give leadership or speak publicly.⁵⁴ Other youth movements, especially the Boys' Brigade and the Girls' Life Brigade, were also important in an increasing number of Baptist churches. The Baptist Women's League was formed to support ministry among women.

Most Baptists in this period were also committed to involvement in society. In many deprived areas the work of Baptist deaconesses was crucial. In 1890 a Baptist Deaconesses' Home and Mission had been

founded under the direction of the London Baptist Association, and medical, social, pastoral and evangelistic work was undertaken.⁵⁵ Many Deaconesses were to lead churches. In one year, 1910, the deaconesses' medical work treated 27,000 patients. The best known deaconess was Hettie Bannister (who later married Robert Rowntree Clifford) at the Barking Road Tabernacle, West Ham, where she was involved with many young men and women employed in factories. The Tabernacle, which launched the West Ham Central Mission, offered alternatives to pubs through clubs and further education. Sister Hettie was passionately concerned about poverty: it was estimated in 1905 that out of 140,000 people in Barking, 35,000 were in a state of semi-starvation.⁵⁶

In 1902-3 the focus of wider social engagement became education. There was considerable Free Church resentment when the Conservative government proposed to fund church schools (Anglican and Roman Catholic) from local rates. Baptists argued that this represented religious inequality. At the Baptist Assembly in 1902 there was support for the principle of refusing to pay the new rate.⁵⁷ Baptist ministers and members were highly active in the subsequent campaign of resistance to the Education Act. One of the main Baptist activists was George White from Norwich, a shoe manufacturer, Liberal MP, Chairman for many years of the Norwich School Board and the pioneer of the Norwich City College.⁵⁸

White, as Union President in 1903, gave a powerful speech at the Assembly on education. He called for resistance to the Act even if this meant imprisonment. White's address was reckoned one of the ablest delivered by a President of the Union.⁵⁹ The willingness of Baptists to engage in political action is striking.

A month later, in May 1903, many Baptists joined a huge demonstration against the new Act. This was staged in Hyde Park and attracted more than 140,000 people. John Clifford, the famous minister of Westbourne Park, and F.B. Meyer, were major speakers on this unparalleled occasion.⁶⁰ Some individual Baptists who refused to pay the tax received special publicity. Some were imprisoned and others had goods confiscated. In Kegworth, in the East Midlands, the Baptist minister, after refusing to pay, had his organ sold. It fetched two guineas at auction. The Shepshed Brass Band was present at the auction and when it struck up the 'Dead March' the auctioneer, 'pale and nervous', disappeared. At another East Midlands auction of a Baptist minister's

possessions one lady hit the auctioneer on the head with her umbrella.⁶¹ Such tactics naturally attracted much press attention.

Other issues were taken up by Baptists in their on-going desire to change society. The issue of alcoholic drink was one which aroused strong feelings. There were temperance 'Band of Hope' groups for children in over 2,000 Baptist churches. In response to a Conservative government Licensing Bill of 1904, Free Church leaders organized mass rallies. F.B. Meyer and others typically denounced in vehement terms the 'pro-Beer government' or called for 'less beer, more boots'.⁶² Baptists also opposed those who did not seem to them to be upholding the standards of morality which would offer the right example to the country. This was the essence of what has been called the 'Nonconformist conscience'. Surprisingly, the spotlight was never turned by Free Church leaders on the relationship that David Lloyd George, later Prime Minister, had with Frances Stevenson. Baptists counted Lloyd George, who had been baptized at the age of thirteen, as a Baptist.⁶³

Nonconformists fought hard for the return of the Liberals in the 1906 election.⁶⁴ When the Liberals came in with a huge majority, it seemed to many Baptists that a great battle had been won: it was reckoned that there were nearly 200 Free Church MPs in the new Parliament. A victory banquet was held at which Lloyd George and John Clifford were speakers. 'I hail this victory', said Clifford, 'with the deepest joy.'⁶⁵ Seventeen Baptists were elected, more than ever before (in the last parliament there was one).⁶⁶ There were also thirteen mayors who were Baptists. But Baptists began to discover that the new government was unable to bring about hoped-for changes. A major obstacle to reform was the House of Lords, and Clifford stated that the hereditary principle 'is bound to go'. He referred derisively in 1908 to the 'Philistines of the Upper House'. By contrast, he had words of praise for socialism, suggesting that Labour MPs 'received their training where I got mine, in a village pulpit'.⁶⁷ Some Baptists were seeking radical change. By mid-century, however, evangelical involvement in socio-political affairs had waned.

Although the 1990s was, by contrast with the first decade of the twentieth century, a period of general decline in church attendance and influence, Baptists could point to some encouragements. Against a background of a 14% decline in churchgoing overall in the UK in the

1990s, numbers at Baptist churches grew.⁶⁸ In Yorkshire, for example, Baptist congregations grew by 19% during the 1990s after a fall of 6% in the 1980s. What caused the growth? At a Union conference in 1990 on church planting, Geoffrey Reynolds, Southern Area Superintendent, stressed the importance of Associations having a church planting strategy. This was fruitful in several Areas. Baptists also showed great interest in Alpha courses, which provided a non-threatening setting within which people were introduced to the Christian faith. In 1998 500 Alpha courses were being held in Baptist churches.

Baptist mission in the 1990s was marked by social action as well as evangelism. Oasis Trust, directed by Steve Chalke, took several initiatives. In 1990 it opened a new hostel for the homeless.⁶⁹ Christmas Cracker restaurants raised about £1 million in 1990 for social projects in Africa and India. The seed-bed was a restaurant Chalke set up during his ministry at Tonbridge Baptist. Later Oasis began training youth specialists for church and community settings. Emphasis on social action and evangelism was encouraged by the Union. Initiatives were supported through 'Green Shoots' grants and 'Against the Stream', helping fund projects in needy areas. World debt was another major concern. In the mid-1990s a campaign began - Jubilee 2000 (as it was called). Leading Christian aid agencies, denominations and church members, including many Baptists, supported the campaign. In May 1998, 70,000 people, many from churches, formed a human chain in Birmingham to highlight the issue to world leaders at an economic summit. Following this, the British government called for a review of debt relief.⁷⁰ At the end of the 1990s Baptists were deeply involved in areas of mission and social action, although the huge political campaigns early in the century, led by nationally-known Baptist ministers like Clifford and Meyer, were hard to imagine.

5 BAPTIST IDENTITY

Both at the beginning and end of the century Baptists engaged with issues of identity. In the first decade of the century the pattern of worship in Baptist churches was fairly uniform. The sermon was central. Hymns were sung from the *New Baptist Church Hymnal* of 1900. Choirs were common, and usually the only instrument used was the organ, although

at some large churches such as the Woolwich Tabernacle there was a full orchestra.⁷¹ An example of the sense of commonality in Baptist worship was the way in which the use of individual cups at communion spread. It was suggested in the *Baptist Times* in 1901 that people were avoiding Baptist communion services because they were not happy with the common cup.⁷² From a temperance standpoint, churches should use non-alcoholic wine, but then the common cup was thought by some to be unhygienic.⁷³ Many letters about this were published in the *Baptist Times*. One theme was how to express unity if individual cups were used. In September 1901, the Baptists in Lowestoft, suggested a solution. All the members drank from individual cups simultaneously.⁷⁴ This practice spread rapidly.⁷⁵

Some recognized that further changes in worship were inevitable. The *Baptist Times* suggested in 1901 that the kind of music which might be enjoyed in Baptist chapels 100 years in the future would split the churches in 1901 if it was even considered.⁷⁶ This prophetic statement that anticipated later, often acrimonious splits over music, was made in the context of a debate beginning to emerge. From the 1960s significant changes began to take place in Baptist worship. Guitars began to accompany worship and organs began to be replaced. The use of overhead projectors and then power point meant that less reliance was placed on hymn books.⁷⁷ Baptist worship in the 1990s had lost something of the sense of identity it had at the beginning of the century. Many younger Baptist church members drew their understanding of worship from charismatic renewal or from large events such as Spring Harvest and had little sense of being avowedly Baptist.⁷⁸

This was linked with wider issues of ecclesiology. At the beginning of the twentieth century Baptists spoke of their particular witness to believer's baptism and to the gathered church in which members sought the mind of Christ together. But even then there were fears for the future of Baptist practice. In 1903 Charles Williams of Accrington observed that the unspiritual character of the monthly church members' meeting was well known.⁷⁹ At the end of the century there were many more 'baptistic' denominations and groups in British evangelicalism, but in 1994 David Coffey, speaking of his debt to the evangelical stream of Christian tradition, noted that evangelicals had not been strong in their ecclesiology. He asked whether Baptists had been influenced by evangelical thinking

that lacked 'a rich understanding of a distinctive Baptist doctrine of the Church'.⁸⁰ A census in 1991 showed that 84% of Baptists identified themselves as evangelical. To an increasing extent it was this pan-denominational evangelicalism, rather than Baptist tradition, that gave Baptist congregations their identity.

Seeking to address the question of identity, the idea of core values was proposed in the 1990s. Five core values 'for a gospel people' were adopted. Baptist churches should be prophetic, sacrificial, missionary-minded, worshipping, inclusive.⁸¹ Baptist life was communal. Many Baptist churches used an attractive booklet, *Five Core Values*, for study purposes. The need for missionary congregations was emphasized by David Coffey. In the sphere of worship, Keith Jones gave considerable attention to the place of the Lord's Supper in Baptist worship, for example in his *A Shared Meal and a Common Table*.⁸² In the area of inclusivity, Fred George, minister from 1969 at East Barnet, became Union President in 1997-8, the first person from an Asian background to hold the presidency. George wrote on 'Race and Racism', urging recognition of the contribution of Black and Asian spirituality and scholarship to theology, worship and mission, and calling for it to be the norm to consider the gifts of Black members.⁸³

In a post-denominational age, there were many questions about whether the priority should be an ecumenical Christian identity rather than a Baptist identity. As early as 1910 Shakespeare made an eloquent plea for a United Free Church of England. He envisaged the end of denominationalism. By November 1918, when he published his most important book, *The Churches at the Cross-Roads*, he was advocating unity with the Church of England. His 'grand passion' had become 'a Church truly holy, truly Catholic'.⁸⁴ He was not, however, able to convince Baptists that this was a route to be taken, and he felt deeply his failure in this respect. There were, however, Baptists who kept the ecumenical vision alive. In the late 1980s many evangelicals, Baptists included, welcomed the opportunities opened up by Churches Together in England (CTE), and the Union voted in 1989 to join CTE. In the latter part of the century Baptists filled several offices in the ecumenical movement.⁸⁵

Other Baptists, however, opposed ecumenism, particularly involving Roman Catholics, and Baptists engaged in heated debate, with some

churches leaving the Union. At the 1995 Assembly, there was a decisive vote, over 90%, for continuing Baptist involvement in Churches Together. Alec Gilmore, a veteran in the ecumenical arena, perceptively suggested that Baptists were relaxed about ecumenism since it had in fact become inter-church co-operation.⁸⁶ It did seem that the churches of the Baptist Union had, as a whole, decided that Roman Catholics were fellow-pilgrims. In 1998, at the invitation of Douglas McBain, then Union President, Cardinal Basil Hume addressed the Baptist Assembly. He received a prolonged ovation. This would have been unthinkable at an Assembly 100 years before. David Coffey was to become Moderator of the Free Churches Group in association with CTE and one of four CTE Presidents.⁸⁷

Those who were advocates of ecumenical partnership were also in many cases people who affirmed the importance of the world-wide Baptist community. Shakespeare was key to the formation in 1905 of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). The first Congress was in 1905 in London. Shakespeare, congress secretary, welcomed the delegates with the ambitious claim that Baptists were probably 'the greatest Protestant evangelical community on earth'. The congress was described by Shakespeare as 'distinctly evangelical' and 'optimistic', the conviction being expressed that Baptists beliefs were going to triumph in the world.⁸⁸ The congress closed after a week of meetings, some in the open air, with a 'demonstration' in the Albert Hall, which attracted 10,000 people. At this, Maclaren and Meyer were particular heroes. Maclaren had led the congress in the words of the Apostles' Creed to emphasize Baptist solidarity with the universal Church. Meyer called the congress a 'veritable Pentecost'.⁸⁹ Much of this was to provide the inspiration for the 2005 Congress, again with Britain as the host country.

The sense of bonding as a Baptist community was expressed in two final elements – which David Bebbington used to look at Free Churches in the twentieth century: spirituality and evangelism. In the early twentieth century many Baptists attended the Keswick Convention, where Baptist leaders such as Meyer and Graham Scroggie were speakers. In the later twentieth century, although Baptist involvement in Keswick and also in Spring Harvest was considerable, specifically Baptist groups such as Mainstream and the Baptist Union Retreat Group, formed by Margaret Jarman (the first woman minister to be Union President), were influential.

Many Baptists were discovering Catholic writers like Henri Nouwen. At the 1991 Assembly, Gerard Hughes, a Jesuit, spoke on 'The Spirituality of Freedom', and won rapt attention.⁹⁰ The area of mission was also seen as a priority both at the beginning and end of the century. Shakespeare's vision was for a united church to reach the nation. 100 years later the focus was on mission to the *nations* – through cross-cultural ministry in this country and globally. Under the leadership of Bernard Green and Douglas Sparkes, Union General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary, the Union and the Baptist Missionary Society moved in 1989 to new offices in Didcot, fulfilling a long-held dream to bring together home and overseas mission. To a large extent the Union and the BMS function separately, but both bodies share a comprehensive missional vision. Baptists in the later twentieth century affirmed that mission included evangelism, social action, prophetic protest, world mission and an awareness of international affairs and environmental concerns.⁹¹

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the twentieth century the Baptist denomination in England had a sense of confidence. By the end of the century, the religious outlook was quite different. The church attender had, as Adrian Hastings put it, 'become, just slightly, an oddity'.⁹² Yet there were signs of Baptist life. Considerable attention was paid during the century to the role of ministers and their proper support. By the end of the century there was far greater diversity in those entering ministry, and varied ministries were operating. Denominational reform was a continued theme. Under Shakespeare the emphasis was on a strongly centralized and well organized Union. At the end of the century aspects of this were being questioned and the emphasis was on relationships rather than structures. One striking difference is in the political arena. 100 years ago Baptists were public supporters of the Liberal Party and were prepared to break the law in opposing Conservative legislation. But socio-political activity gradually declined. There has been a recovery of social involvement, but Baptist political involvement is at a relatively low level. Finally, there have been attempts to renew Baptist identity, particularly in the ecumenical context. In line with the thinking of evangelistic leaders such

as F.B. Meyer, who wrote 'My remedy for all our ills is a deeper spirituality',⁹³ there has been concern for authentic expressions of worship, fellowship and mission. David Coffey urged in 1995 a spiritual renewal that led to full-orbed mission: 'We know from the past', he wrote, 'that Renewal which goes deep into the life of the church possesses a reforming zeal which is personal, ecclesiastical and social in its dimension.'⁹⁴ Our Baptist past continues to inform Baptist life today.

- 1 D.W. Bebbington, 'Evangelism and Spirituality in Twentieth-Century Protestant Nonconformity', in A.P.F. Sell and A.R. Cross, eds., *Protestant Nonconformity in the Twentieth Century* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), p. 215.
- 2 *Christian World* [hereafter *CW*], 8 February 1906, p.11.
- 3 *Free Church Chronicle*, November 2000, p.1; B. Amey, 'The Free Church Federal Council', *The Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, Vol.7. No.3 (2003), p.196.
- 4 K. Dix, *Strict and Particular: English Strict and Particular Baptists in the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot: BHS, 2001).
- 5 P. Shepherd, *The Making of a Modern Denomination: John Howard Shakespeare and the English Baptists, 1898-1924* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001).
- 6 *The Baptist*, 27 September 1906, p.203.
- 7 R. Currie, A. Gilbert and L. Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp.128, 142, 149; *Baptist Handbook* (1901). Baptists had 2,812 chapel buildings.
- 8 *Baptist Times* [hereafter *BT*], 9 May 1902, supplement p.ii.
- 9 H. McLeod, '"Thews and Sinews": Nonconformity and Sport', in D.W. Bebbington and T. Larsen, eds., *Modern Christianity and Cultural Aspirations* (Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), p.42.
- 10 *BT*, 8 February 1900, p.105; *Horfield Baptist Church: Diamond Jubilee Celebrations* (Bristol, 1952).
- 11 I. Sellers, ed., *Our Heritage: The Baptists of Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire, 1647-1987* (Leeds: Yorkshire Baptist Association and Lancashire & Cheshire Baptist Association, 1987), p.73.
- 12 *BT*, 12 February 1904, p.127.
- 13 P. Brierley, *Religious Trends: 2000/20001, No.2* (London: Christian Research Assoc., 1999), p.8.17; P. Brierley, *The Tide is Running Out* (London: Christian Research Assoc., 2000), p.27.
- 14 R. Gill, *The 'Empty' Church Revisited* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp.163-7.
- 15 P. Brierley, *The Tide is Running Out*, p.39.
- 16 *BT*, 16/23 December 1999, p.5.
- 17 *BT*, 18/25 December 2003, p.1. The attendance at Gold Hill was 1,200.
- 18 *BT*, 11 March 1991, p.11. K. Appiagyei, 'Reaching Africans in London: An Ethnic Ministry', *Baptist Ministers' Journal*, Vol.238 (April 1992), pp.6-10.
- 19 *BT*, 20 June 1996, p.1.
- 20 D.C. Sparkes, *The Home Mission Story* (Didcot: BHS, 1995).
- 21 Sparkes, *The Home Mission Story*, p.22.
- 22 *Baptist*, 20 February 1903, p.118.
- 23 *The Nature of the Assembly and the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain* (Didcot: BU, 1994), p.4. Faith Bowers, sub-editor of the *Baptist Quarterly*, was secretary of the committee.
- 24 Faith & Unity Executive, *Forms of Ministry Among Baptists: Towards an understanding of spiritual leadership*, (Didcot: BUGB 1994), pp. 23, 30-1.
- 25 *BT*, 17 November 1994, p.2.
- 26 *Transforming Superintendency: The Report of the General Superintendency Review*

- Group (Didcot: BU, 1996), p.3.
- 27 *Transforming Superintendency*, pp. 24-45; cf. *BT*, 21 November 1996, pp.1, 3 and 5.
- 28 *BT*, 21 December 1989, p.10.
- 29 See articles by Edward Lehman, Shirley Dex, Margaret Jarman, Ruth Matthews, Carol McCarthy and John Briggs in *BQ*, Vol.31, No.7 (1986).
- 30 *BT*, 25 January 1990, p.4. Dianne Tidball, 'Walking a Tightrope: Women training for Baptist ministry', *BQ*, Vol.33, No.8 (1990), pp.388-95. For the Church of England, see S. Gill, *Women and the Church of England* (London: SPCK, 1994).
- 31 I am indebted to Douglas Sparkes for the statistics.
- 32 *BT*, 20 November 1997, p.2. Pat Took was appointed in 1998 and Mara Blyth in 1999.
- 33 *BT*, 12 September 1991, p.3.
- 34 Baptist Union Council Minutes, 9 and 10 March 1993; *BT*, 18 March 1993, p.2.
- 35 *BT*, 22 April 1993, p.6.
- 36 *Baptist*, 26 January 1900, p.58.
- 37 J.C. Carlile, *My Life's Little Day* (London: Blackie, 1935), pp.152, 158.
- 38 Sparkes, *Home Mission Story*, p.17.
- 39 E.A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History* (London: Carey Kingsgate, 1959), p.159.
- 40 P. Shepherd, 'Denominational Renewal', *BQ*, Vol.37, No.7 (1998), pp.336-50.
- 41 *Baptist*, 18 January 1906, p.36.
- 42 Payne, *Baptist Union*, pp.164-5.
- 43 *BT*, 27 April 1906, p.308.
- 44 *Mainstream Newsletter*, No.35 (January 1990), pp.2-4.
- 45 *Mainstream Newsletter*, No.35 (January 1990), pp.2-4.
- 46 *BT*, 25 March 1991, p.8; conversation with David Coffey, 17 July 2002.
- 47 *A Ten Year Plan Towards 2000: Incorporating the National Mission Strategy* (Didcot: BU, 1993).
- 48 *BT*, 25 January 1996, p.5.
- 49 *Relating and Resourcing*, (Didcot: BUGB 1998), pp.10-15; *BT*, 26 March 1998, pp.1 and 8.
- 50 *BT*, 1 April 1999, p.7.
- 51 R. Chadwick, ed., *A Protestant Catholic Church of Christ* (Oxford: New Road Baptist Church, 2003), p.181.
- 52 *British Weekly* [hereafter *BW*], 3 November 1904, p.84; 10 November 1904, p.108.
- 53 E.A. Payne, *The Baptists of Berkshire* (London: Carey Kingsgate, 1951), p.124.
- 54 For Christian Endeavour in this period see E.J.T. Bagnall, *The British Manual of Christian Endeavour* (London: Christian Endeavour Union, 1936). For the Boys' Brigade see J. Springhall, *Sure and Steadfast: A History of the Boys' Brigade, 1883 to 1983* (London: Collins, 1983).
- 55 D.M. Rose, *Baptist Deaconesses* (London: Carey Kingsgate, 1954), p.10; N. Morris, *Sisters of the People: The Order of Baptist Deaconesses, 1890-1975*, *CCSRG Research Paper 2* (Bristol: University of Bristol, 2002), p.10. The first home was at 59 Doughty Street. From 1903 it was 98 Guildford Street.
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- 57 *BT*, 17 October 1902, p.763.
- 58 C.B. Jewson, *The Baptists in Norfolk*, (London: Carey Kingsgate 1957) pp.133-4.
- 59 *BW*, 30 April 1903, p.60.
- 60 *BW*, 28 May 1903, p.64.
- 61 F.M.W. Harrison, *It All Began Here: The Story of the East Midland Baptist Association*, (London: East Midland Baptist Association, 1986), p.97.
- 62 *CW*, 26 May 1904, p.3.
- 63 *BT*, 2 October 1903, p. 675; M Goodman, 'A Faded Heritage: English Baptist political thinking in the 1930s', *BQ*, Vol.37, No.2 (1997), pp.60-1.
- 64 D.W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics 1870-1914*, (London: George Allen & Unwin 1982), pp.142-7; D.A. Hamer, *Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p.311.
- 65 *BW*, 8 March 1906, p.619.
- 66 D.W. Bebbington, 'Baptist Members of Parliament in the Twentieth Century', *BQ*, Vol.31, No.6 (1986), pp 254-5.

- 67 *BW*, 27 September 1906, p.83; *BT*, 28 February 1908, p.149.
- 68 *BT*, 2 December 1999, p.1; cf. G. Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994).
- 69 *BT*, 8 March 1990, p.3.
- 70 *BT*, 12 March 1998, p.1. 21 May 1998, p.1.
- 71 J. Munson, *The Nonconformists: In search of a lost culture* (London: SPCK 1991), p.48.
- 72 *BT*, 16 August 1901, p.552.
- 73 Sellers, ed., *Our Heritage: The Baptists of Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire*, p.81.
- 74 *BT*, 6 September 1901, p.606 (report by J. Edgar Ennals).
- 75 *BT*, 13 June 1902, p.441.
- 76 *BT*, 8 March 1901, p.157.
- 77 This period saw the production by the Psalms and Hymns Trust of a new Baptist hymnbook, *Baptist Praise and Worship* (1991). The book contained a fine mixture of older and contemporary hymns, and also liturgical responses. In 1999 the comprehensive survey of Baptist worship, *Baptist Worship To-day*, produced by Chris Ellis (who in 2000 became Principal of Bristol Baptist College), showed that most churches were using several hymnbooks and also overhead projectors to display the words of hymns. Changing patterns of worship meant that *Baptist Praise and Worship* did not achieve the acceptance that earlier Baptist hymnbooks had done. More use was made, however, of the liturgies in the new *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship*.
- 78 *BT*, 20 October 1994, p.8; cf. paper by David Hart, 19 December 1991, 'Baptist Union – Student Ministry Policy'. Many Baptist students also joined the Christian Unions linked to the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF).
- 79 C. Williams, *The Principles and Practices of the Baptists* (London: Baptist Tract Society, 1903), pp.99, 102; J.W. Grant, *Free Churchmanship in England, 1870-1940* (London: Independent Press, [1958]), p.148.
- 80 *BT*, 28 April 1994, p.7.
- 81 *BT*, 1 October 1998, p.1.
- 82 K.G. Jones, *A Shared Meal and a Common Table: Some reflections on the Lord's Supper and Baptists* (Oxford: Whitley, 1999).
- 83 *Mainstream*, No.55 (January 1996), p.9.
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- 85 A.R. Cross, 'Service to the Ecumenical Movement: The Contribution of British Baptists', *BQ*, Vol.38, No.3 (1999), pp.107-22.
- 86 *BT*, 1 June 1995, pp.5 and 13. For Alec Gilmore and ecumenism see J.A. Newton, 'Protestant Nonconformists and Ecumenism', in Sell and Cross, *Protestant Nonconformity*, pp.372-3.
- 87 *BT*, 14 May 1998, p.2.
- 88 *First Baptist World Congress, London, 1905*, (London: Baptist Union 1905), p.vi.
- 89 *BW*, 20 July 1905, p.363.
- 90 *BT*, 18 April 1991, p.1.
- 91 *BT*, 25 March 1991, p.8; conversation with David Coffey, 17 July 2002.
- 92 A. Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-2000* (London: SCM, 4th ed., 2001), pp.xv-xvi.
- 93 *CW*, 16 December 1920, p.4.
- 94 D. Coffey, 'When the Spirit Comes', *Baptist Leader*, Issue No.10, Winter 1994/95, pp.1-2.