

## MURIEL LESTER, BAPTIST SAINT

33 It so happened, p.xiv.

34 For Lester's contribution to the struggle for the rights of women, see Deats, *Why Forbid Us?*

1930, pp.57ff.

35 Muriel Lester, 'Easter at Kingsley Hall', *Reconciliation* 1, May 1924, 72.

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## REVIEWS

**Keith W. Clements**, *What Freedom? The Persistent Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Bristol Baptist College, 1990, pp.189 inc. notes and index. £7-95.

Yet another book on Bonhoeffer might seem an encumbrance or an extravagance, but Keith Clements' collection of essays should soon establish itself as an essential item. The introductory chapter deals with 'why and how' we should read Bonhoeffer, and gives a succinct biographical sketch. This is followed by the transcript of an interview with Eberhard and Renate Bethge. Eberhard became Bonhoeffer's confidant and married into the Bonhoeffer family. Subsequent essays deal with religious liberty, peace, patriotism, South Africa, the Old Testament, and the suffering of God.

The value of Bonhoeffer, whose enigmatic life might be compared with an 'unfinished masterpiece', is perhaps well summed up by the author when he observes that in him 'intellectual alertness and spirituality, original thinking, and concrete engagement are fused in a singular way.' And it is certainly this marrying together of theological reflection with certain decisions and choices in the political and religious sphere which helps to account for Bonhoeffer's enduring appeal and usefulness.

It is the way in which Bonhoeffer, who before the war had leaned towards pacifism, could take a role in the plot to kill Hitler which particularly invites interest. That plot not only had assassination as its goal, but also inevitably involved a sequence (perhaps rather, a spiral) of deceptions to maintain its viability. Bethge's interview both sheds light on the historical details of all of this, and offers a convincing theological commentary upon it. The Christological parallel becomes most striking when Bethge agrees that Bonhoeffer's involvement constituted a willingness to become guilty for the sake of others.

For any who have read Bonhoeffer this territory is fairly familiar, and the real 'revelations' of the book will come in later chapters. In particular, in discussing issues of religious liberty and the freedom of the church, Clements shows how Bonhoeffer has a very great deal to contribute to current debate. Amidst our discussion on 'Baptist identity' some of Bonhoeffer's thoughts on what it means to be a 'free church', and a 'gathered church', seem highly relevant. Indeed, they may make crucial contributions. The gathered church is portrayed as 'deputising' for the whole of humanity, and the free church is called to be free to stand with others. Bonhoeffer's involvement with the politics of his day was strongly moulded by his concern at the treatment of the Jews. In standing by this ruthlessly oppressed minority the church showed its true freedom, which manifests itself in the liberating of others. Bonhoeffer wished to speak of the

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freedom God gives, quite irrespective of the freedom bestowed by the world. The church is free when it obeys the Word, rather than when it enjoys civil liberties!

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## CHAPEL HISTORIES

**M. J. Burton**, *Middleton Baptist Church: A History 1858-1989*, 1989, 48pp, £2 (inc. p&p) from the author, Temple Street Baptist Church, Middleton, Manchester M24 2HT

**Eric Strouglar**, *Foulsham Baptist Church 1816-1991: The First 175 Years*, 1990, 76pp, £2 + 35p p&p from the author, Bates Moor Farm, Foulsham, Dereham, Norfolk NR20 5RS

**Harry Foreman**, *The Baptists of Bewdley: A History of Bewdley Baptist Church*, 1992, 100pp, £3-00 + 75p p&p, from Mr Cedric Quayle, Bowcastle Farm, Bewdley, Worcestershire, DY12 2N. ISBN 1 872924 01 8.

**Robert W. Oliver**, *Baptists in Bradford on Avon: The History of the Old Baptist church Bradford on Avon 1689-1989*, 1989, 22pp, £2-00 inc. p&p, from author, 4 St Margaret's Place, Bradford on Avon, Wiltshire, BA15 1DT.

Baptists living in Middleton requested help of the minister of the Rochdale Church, the Revd W. F. Burchell, and he and his assistant, the Revd John Horne, began services in Middleton in 1858. The meetings were held at first in Water Street. Strangely, Michael Burton does not comment on the fact that W. T. Whitley in *Baptists of North West England* said that the meetings began in Temple Street. The church met at two other places before it moved to Temple Street in 1889. According to Whitley, the church was given a site in Market Place by Morton Peto and his partner, but it seems that the members were unable to avail themselves of this gift because of hardship caused by the cotton famine. The early days of the new cause were not without difficulties as there appears to have been a disagreement between the Rochdale ministers. So W. F. Burchell resigned in 1860, but J. Horne continued as the minister of Middleton Church until 1862. Prior to Mr Burchell's resignation, however, Mr J. P. Catanach, a member of the Rochdale Church, became a regular pastor and minister at Middleton, becoming the first full-time minister in 1864. Again, according to Whitley, it was J. P. Catanach who brought the church into the Lancashire and Cheshire Association of Baptist Churches. This took place in 1862, the church being first 're-formed' to meet the rules of the Association. Following Catanach's resignation in November 1865, the church did not have another full-time minister until 1887, when the Revd Henry Watts accepted the pastorate. During his ministry the present chapel was built. The longest pastorate was that of the Revd Thomas Smedley from 1904 to 1923. The church was then to remain without ministerial leadership until 1935, when Sister Ivy (Manning) of the Lancashire and Cheshire Baptist Women's League came to the church. Since then the work has been led by ministers, students and a lay pastor. It is currently without ministerial leadership and is dependent on students and lay help from the Greater Manchester area. The history of the church has been written 'with only the present members of the church in mind' and it contains a list of all those who have been members since its foundation.

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Although the author speaks of the church's 'great confidence in its progress into the twenty-first century, as a living symbol of Christ's Kingdom, for another hundred years', it is worth noting that in the ten years, 1978-1988, it only received nine new members.

Eric Strouglor's history of Foulsham Baptist Church is an interesting account of the life of a village church over 175 years. During that time there have been thirty-two ministers and often financial support of the ministry has proved difficult. Significantly, the longest pastorates were those of Daniel Thompson (1828-1847), who supported himself by working at a bank in Fakenham, and Henry Vince (1882-1900), who had been a market gardener and supplemented his income from the church and a grant from the Association by selling vegetables grown in the large manse garden. Sadly the ministry of Thompson ended on an unhappy note, as he favoured close communion while the church had practised open communion from its foundation. His resignation and the departure of about twenty members left the church in a divided state and the communion question was not fully resolved until 1860 when the church unanimously passed a motion in favour of open communion. Strouglor's book is illustrated by photographs and attractive line drawings. The church, which has recently carried out significant improvements to its buildings, looks forward confidently to the future under the leadership of its present minister, the Revd P. J. Lane, who contributes the foreword to the book.

Although Bewdley Baptist Church is one of the oldest in the country, very few attempts have been made at writing its history, but now Dr Harry Foreman has written a history which covers the period from its foundation by John Tombes in the mid-seventeenth century to the closure of the pastorate of the Revd Brian Butcher in 1969. Tombes became convinced that infant baptism had no scriptural basis during his period as Rector of St Gabriel's Church, Fenchurch, and his refusal to baptize infants led to his removal from that church. After a brief period as Master of the Temple, he returned to his native Bewdley, on appointment to a perpetual curacy in a chapel of ease, where he was not obliged to christen. Whilst continuing his curacy, he founded Bewdley Baptist Church by baptizing about twenty members as believers. After the Restoration Tombes subscribed to the Church of England as a lay-communicant and Dr Foreman concludes that he should be regarded not so much as a Baptist but as an Anglican who had serious doubts about the practice of baptizing infants. Bewdley Baptist Church is fortunate in possessing many of its records and this enables its story to be told in considerable detail. The author does not appear to have had access to the *Baptist Handbook*, for it would have confirmed his supposition that the Revd Ronald Lewis did not pass the Baptist Union Examination while at Bewdley (p.68). and also provided information that the Revd Lewis Merrett left Bewdley to become minister of Salisbury Road Baptist Church, Plymouth, in 1953. Sadly, the author died on 26 April 1992, while serving as minister of Union Free Church, Telford, and President of the West Midlands Baptist Association, but *The Baptists of Bewdley* is a fitting tribute to his meticulous scholarship.

Dr Robert Oliver, who wrote a brief account of the history of the Old Baptist Church at Bradford on Avon in his *The Strict Baptist Chapels of England: Vol.5 Wiltshire and the West* (1968), has now written a detailed history of the church. During the nineteenth century the church was included in the Gospel Standard List, which requires adherence to an extreme statement of Calvinism. There was a serious division in the church in 1903 and no church meetings were held for thirty years. By the nineteen-thirties the extinction of the work appeared inevitable. However, the tide began to turn when in 1937 a married couple, who were living in the town, became convinced that they should

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be baptized and join the church. By 1947 a part-time pastor had been appointed and the Sunday School, which had been closed since 1912, re-opened. The church was strong enough to call Robert Oliver as the full-time minister in 1976 and a second minister a year or so later. *Baptists in Bradford on Avon* is based on careful research, although the records are not as extensive as those of Bewdley Baptist Church. It is regrettable that the author has not given detailed references, so anyone wanting further information would need to contact him. Although he comments that 'No local church can live in isolation from the wider work of God' and draws attention to the links between the Bradford on Avon church and the Reformed Baptist churches of Malaysia and Singapore, strangely he does not say anything about links with Baptist churches in this country.

The Bewdley and Bradford on Avon chapel histories show how two different Particular Baptist churches responded to the theological issues affecting Baptists in the nineteenth century. Bewdley Baptist Church moved away from its Calvinistic roots, although as late as 1857, when inviting the Revd George James to the pastorate, it drew attention to the 'Strictly Particular' nature of the church. Bradford on Avon moved in the direction of Hyper-Calvinism only to leave the Gospel Standard List and to return in 1969 to its original Articles of Faith and Church Covenant.

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