

# THE BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY IN PROPER CONTEXT

## Some Reflections on the Larger Voluntary Religious Tradition

Hagiography has ever been a popular literary endeavour among religious enthusiasts and Baptists have been no exception. In times of significant anniversaries of organizations, the organizations themselves have often become the objects of reverence. The entire Baptist world is about to recognize with appreciation and interest the establishment in 1792 of the Baptist Missionary Society. In spite of the important attempts to set the record straight with historical accuracy, many Baptists and others will engage again in organizational hagiography. We shall continue to allow claims which fulfil our primitivist inclinations and reclaim our leadership in world evangelization by the stroke of an historical pen. The BMS has already been the subject of some exaggeration: Joseph Belcher, Carey's first American biographer, wrote, 'no society [previously] existed for this special object', discounting earlier efforts as sustained by government grants with little evangelical element. Pearce Carey, a British writer related to the famous missionary, called the BMS, 'the first voluntary association of private individuals for missionary purposes in modern times'. Church historian, Kenneth S. Latourette, asserted that 'Carey marks the beginning of a new era', and, in a recent doctoral dissertation at an American seminary, a student declared that, for his role in the Society, Andrew Fuller deserves the title (and glory!) of 'father of modern missions'.<sup>1</sup> 'These characterizations stand in marked contrast to recent and less 'churchly' assessments.'<sup>2</sup>

With greater insight, L. G. Champion, following Joseph Ivimey, wrote that the organizational structures of English Particular Baptists at the conclusion of the eighteenth century were powerfully influenced by evangelical Calvinism, so pervasive in the writings of men like Andrew Fuller (1754-1815), John Ryland (1753-1825), and Robert Hall (1764-1831).<sup>3</sup> Champion suggests that the BMS (and the Baptist Union) were primarily an outgrowth of a theological tradition which stressed, among other doctrines, 'the responsibility of every believer to order his whole life according to the will of God . . . and the obligation of all believers to bring the gospel to all men everywhere'.<sup>4</sup> While it is beyond dispute that the Society was the result of evangelical fervour, more was involved in the organizational accomplishment than a theological tidal wave.

In this article I shall argue that Baptists were both debtors and catalysts in a long tradition of Establishment and Dissenter voluntary associations. This structural history suggests more than squabbling over whose organization was the pioneer: it makes a strong case for Baptist interaction with the larger Dissenter and Protestant movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While many present day Baptists struggle with their relations with other Christian groups, their organizational heritage cannot deny it.

### ROOTS OF AN IDEA

The idea of voluntary association is a very old one in the Christian movement. Briefly defined, for the purposes of this essay, the voluntary principle in religious associations

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is manifested in three ways: (1) a voluntary decision or choice of members to participate in the association; (2) a managerial style which relies heavily (if not exclusively) upon voluntary or non-compensated workers; (3) financial support provided primarily by gifts or offerings rather than tithes, assessments or grants.<sup>5</sup> The term, 'society', was applied to many associations somewhat interchangeably from the fifteenth century.

In the New Testament, Christian groups clustered around local and regional leaders out of which emerged specialised interest associations. Jesus and his disciples were voluntarily associated. For ascetic purposes, the early monastic communities were a further extension of this principle of voluntary association. One entered such a community on a voluntary basis and took vows of voluntary submission to God and the rule of an Order. By the Middle Ages, various sorts of association were created, from the new monastic traditions to the Friars, to groups devoted to benevolence work, like care of the sick and relief during times of natural disaster. Even the militaristic orders at the time of the Crusades were a type of voluntary Christian association.<sup>6</sup>

As the later mediaeval Church experienced a need for renewal and revision, it was largely through voluntary associations that such changes were advocated. For instance, the Waldensians of the twelfth century were organized two by two and involved 'congregations of workmen' (*humiliani*) who, in their trade as weavers, used their earnings to assist the poor.<sup>7</sup> One could also point to the Anabaptist groups in the Reformation era as patterns of the voluntary principle.<sup>8</sup> In the seventeenth century, as lands in the Americas opened new opportunities for religious expression and expansion, and the rigidity of Establishment Christendom was called into question, a virtual plethora of Christian voluntary associations came into being, particularly in England.<sup>9</sup> The seventeenth century, in fact, forms chronologically the cradle of legitimation for the English Protestant voluntary association.

The organizational principle inherent in a religious voluntary association was brought into focus during the reign of Elizabeth I. An unmistakable root was the gathered church pattern, which derived from the Puritan-Separatist theology of the Church. In the works of Henry Barrow and John Greenwood, plus the later tracts of John Smyth and other Baptist writers, voluntary association for worship, education, witness, and survival was axiomatic<sup>10</sup> in contrast to the Established Church. During the reigns of James I and Charles I, Independents, Baptists, Quakers, and Millenarians openly and covertly organized voluntary ecclesiastical associations.<sup>11</sup> Long before religious toleration was granted permanently to Englishmen in 1689, Dissenter traditions proved the worth of voluntary association for religious purposes.<sup>12</sup>

Another equally important root was the pattern set by the commercial joint stock companies which emerged in the period 1590 to 1650. With profit as a motive, these entrepreneurs experimented in the English colonial ventures. Often, prominent clergy were closely allied and were called upon to assist the business projects with influence and to add here and there an evangelical agenda to the company charters, like preaching to the heathen peoples or further expansion of the Church of England.<sup>13</sup> Key organizational enthusiasts seized upon the principle of commercial association and applied it to specifically religious purposes to launch missionary endeavours, to care for special classes of persons in denominational families, and to create an educational system independent of the universities, to mention just the major categories.<sup>14</sup> Establishment

and Dissent alike used the vehicle to great advantage.

Voluntary associations had several advantages which existing ecclesiastical structures usually lacked. First of all, the association was made up ideally of those interested in the object of the association. Persons voluntarily joined the project from a sense of conviction, or need, or enthusiasm, or all three. At least for the first generation, this ensured that the leadership of the association did not spend excessive amounts of its energy convincing the membership of the project's validity. Second, the associating members could apply a major part of the revenues directly to the object of concern. This was the result of a primarily (if not exclusively) volunteer staff. By focusing on just one project or concern at a time, all of the influence and efforts could be powerfully directed. Finally, most of the early voluntary associations could run parallel to the dominant religious structures of the era, involving the same support persons at the same time. One could be a member of his/her parish or teach in a university while also serving on a voluntary committee to publish religious tracts or direct missions to the Indians in New England, a kind of 'amateur with a hobby', as one historian has called them.<sup>15</sup> Among the other self-evident characteristics of voluntary associations were their organizational flexibility, the loyalty of members, the egalitarian process of making decisions, and the potential mass appeal of the association's *raison d'être*.<sup>16</sup>

#### FUNCTION OF VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS

The historical function of voluntary associations is an important component of English Protestant and specifically Dissenter life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Among the specific changes wrought in the fabric of English Christianity through voluntary associations were renewal, increased co-operation, critique and empowerment.

In the spirit of the Reformation, there were continual waves of concern for spiritual renewal within English Christianity in the latter half of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Anglican Religious Societies movement during the 1690s, for instance, identified the widespread moral and spiritual apathy across the land and one response was to form bands of persons loyal to the Church who would instigate prayer meetings, and promote church attendance and benevolent work. Methodist historians demonstrate the extent to which the Wesley family later in the eighteenth century derived their concept of renewal societies from this earlier experience.<sup>17</sup>

The function of increased co-operation may be seen in the voluntary associations of like-minded congregations within a proximate region among Independents, Presbyterians, Baptists, Quakers and other sects. An important prototype of cross-confessional co-operation was the Three Dissenting Denominations (precursor to the Dissenting Deputies). This association, composed of Independents, Presbyterians and Baptists, was a loose voluntary federation which addressed the pressing political concerns of the era, like a congregation's right to hold property, the legal status of dissenting ministers, relief for tutors and schoolmasters, and the legitimacy of vital records kept by Dissenter congregations.<sup>18</sup>

Critique was an inherent function of many English voluntary religious associations. The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (1696) was a

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response to the dearth of moral education for poor children and the inadequate educational preparation of Anglican ministers. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (1701) emerged because some believed the Church of England was not managing the colonial situation adequately: Thomas Bray (1658-1730) persuaded the Bishop of London, Henry Compton (1632-1713), to experiment with young missionaries who were sent to plant Anglicanism firmly in the English colonies. Bray himself was quite a student of missions and designed his plan partly on the Roman Catholic *Congregatio Pro Propaganda Fide*.<sup>19</sup> During the same era, the Societies for the Reformation of Manners and Morals focused on public moral behaviour and jolted middle and upper class young leaders to take responsibility for moral behaviour.<sup>20</sup> In each of these cases, following the thesis of Max Warren, the desire was not to promote schism, but to stimulate the spirit of true religion within the Establishment.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, the empowerment of new groups was a significant outgrowth of the phenomenon of voluntary religious associations. Persons who were disadvantaged as orphans or widows in the Christian community were given assistance and heightened status in organizations like the Sons of the Clergy (1678)<sup>22</sup> and, in a variation upon the theme, through the establishment of Presbyterian, Congregationalist and Baptist solicitous 'funds' which were operated like voluntary associations.<sup>23</sup> Historians believe that the Anglican Renewal Societies in the closing decades of the 1600s involved large numbers of young persons not previously active in the life of the Church; the later Wesleyan movement similarly attracted young, sometimes single, preachers and class leaders.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, one cannot neglect the presence of women in both benevolent giving and charitable roles, such as teachers and nurses in the institutions and projects of the societies. The new roles earned in the early Dissenter groups for women and for the middle and lower classes were carried forth in later voluntarism.<sup>25</sup>

### ENTER WILLIAM CAREY

When, therefore, William Carey stepped on to the stage of history, he had patterns to draw upon and a century and a half of experience in other English Christian traditions of voluntary association. Influenced by the evangelical Calvinist movement, Carey realized that the organizing principle of a voluntary association would serve his purposes better than the regular ecclesiastical structures of Baptist life. Indeed, this is often noted in negative terms as an insensitivity to Carey's vision, on the part of Northamptonshire Baptist Association leaders.<sup>26</sup> In fairness to the ecclesiastical structures, their primary purposes had evolved to be maintenance of church order and the confessional traditions, functions which Clyde Binfield refers to collectively as 'the beloved "Association Tent"', an annual symbol of organized togetherness.<sup>27</sup>

It may be argued that four influences were primary upon Carey's organizational scheme. First, there was his own entrepreneurial mind-set. He was self-taught, he enjoyed success in building congregations at Moulton and later Leicester, and he knew his own considerable powers of persuasion. Carey's relatives noted that his obsession caused him great anxiety and his ministerial friends recalled his 'incessant

introducing and descanting' upon the theme of missions and his own willingness to engage in it.<sup>28</sup>

Second, as L. G. Champion points out, Carey's inner circle included Bristol men who themselves were part of a West Country tradition of structured voluntary action. Just as important as their evangelical theology was their appreciation of the voluntary society: the Edward Terrill Trust had been transformed in their midst in 1770 by Hugh and Caleb Evans into the Bristol Baptist Education Society. It is significant to note that in the design of the Bristol Society was evangelical service: 'Missionaries may be sent to those places where there is an opening for the Gospel'.<sup>29</sup> Among those who emerged from the Bristol tradition were Morgan Edwards (1722-1795), Joshua Marshman (1768-1837), and John Chamberlain (1777-1821).

Thirdly, the influence of Thomas Gotch (1748-1806) was of undoubted importance. Gotch provided both the lay encouragement and funds to enable the Society to begin. He had urged Carey to put aside shoes for studies, and in 1792 he gave a businessman's blessing to the accumulation of capital and management of the effort to launch the new Baptist Missionary Society. Gotch in fact brought important expertise to the enterprise as he had begun the manufacture of shoes in Kettering and was a leader of the town's banking community. Carey trusted his advice and the friendship provided generous dividends in future years.<sup>30</sup>

John Sutcliff's (1752-1814) influence upon William Carey cannot be neglected. A member of the constituting associates of the BMS, Sutcliff understood not only the practical limits of the Baptist association, but also he was a student of the organizing pattern of the Evangelical revival commenced by Jonathan Edwards in Massachusetts. He had been a leader in the Prayer Call of 1784-5 and was particularly impressed by the story of the establishment in 1744 of thirty 'societies' of young people for prayer in various Scottish cities. Sutcliff believed in the efficacy of single purpose small organizations and was second only to Carey as a voluntarist.<sup>31</sup>

### CAREY EMPLOYS THE PRINCIPLE

In the rush to herald Carey as 'the start of a new age', what is overlooked is his own assessment of, and appreciation for, organizational precursors. Carey was a keen student of organizational strategies. In his *Enquiry* (1792), he surveyed the advance of Christian mission from St Paul to Wycliffe, after which he specifically mentioned the John Eliot mission to the American Indians, Danish Lutheran missions, the Moravians and John Wesley's work.<sup>32</sup> From other sources it is known that Carey was especially fond of the Moravian story, although he could not assess either their organizational scheme or success.<sup>33</sup> There is a good deal more, however, that Carey did not specifically acknowledge in the *Enquiry*, perhaps owing to his ecclesiastical and theological heritage.

Of equal importance to his proposal was the model of commercial ventures. In the fifth section of his *Enquiry*, he likened his proposed 'company of serious Christians, ministers, and private persons' to a chartered trading company. Such trading companies went to great lengths and hardships, 'crossing the widest and most

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tempestuous seas . . . their minds continue in a state of anxiety . . . until the rich returns are safe arrived in port'.<sup>34</sup> Therein was an unmistakable resemblance to both the joint stock companies of the English seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but also the methods and techniques of the Puritan and Anglican prototypes. The joint stock companies had perfected the corporate structure of investors who pooled their resources, the executive managerial plan which involved a 'committee' and annual reports to establish accountability to the 'stockholders'. Just as the SPCK and the SPG had followed a joint stock plan to recruit serious 'investors' in their missionary endeavours, Carey also urged that only 'persons whose heart are in the work, men of serious religion and possessing a spirit of perseverance' should be included.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, despite the disclaimers of Carey's biographers that he intentionally sought volunteers of lesser social influence, Carey also planned to solicit prominent clergy and 'private persons' as his precursors had, to their great benefit.<sup>36</sup> One of the most consistently used arguments in the SPG literature was that God had singularly blessed the colonial businesses of merchant-adventurers (sometimes at the expense of native peoples and slaves), and in response those so blessed should be willing to support generously the effort to evangelize native and slave souls.<sup>37</sup> Given his otherwise meticulous data-gathering methods and wide reading of relatively obscure Moravian missionary literature, plus the encouragement of the businessman, Thomas Gotch, Carey most certainly drew upon earlier trading company and religious models.

Several of the decisions which the Society made during the critical first years reflected time-honoured experiences of other voluntary associations. Foremost was the statement of purpose: 'to propagate the gospel among the heathen . . . agreeably to what is recommended in brother Carey's late publication on that subject'. This statement was clearly beyond the scope of the Baptist association, as Carey and Fuller had learned in their visits to associations and ministers' meetings, 1787-1790. Carey was aware of the crisp statement of purpose in the SPG charter, the Moravian mandate, and the preamble to the Bristol Baptist Education Society. There were protocols for doing this sort of thing and Carey moved intelligently. At one point, he considered seriously the alternative of applying to the Presbyterians or Moravians for an appointment with Baptist assistance.<sup>38</sup> His ultimate concern, of course, was to find a community of support for his own sense of calling to foreign mission.<sup>39</sup> The BMS met all the tests of a classic voluntary association, and the organizational plan reveals important connections with precursors, particularly the Bristol Baptist Education Society (1770).<sup>40</sup> General membership in the Society was set at a contribution of one pound sterling per year, not an inconsiderable sum, beyond one's obligation to a local church. In order to enlist long-term support and to build up a fund, life members were set at gifts of ten pounds sterling, which compared favourably with the Anglican and other Dissenter precursors.<sup>41</sup> The voluntary committee, which was formed at Kettering on 2 October 1792, was not as serendipitous as it might appear. From the era of the first formation of the joint stock companies, an executive group, called a 'committee', was formed to create policy for the membership, to approve disbursements and to make administrative

decisions between general meetings.<sup>42</sup> As early as 1717 Baptists had experimented with the administrative committee structure in the operation of the Particular Baptist Fund in London.<sup>43</sup> The BMS 'committee' was composed of five persons, all of whom energetically endorsed Carey's plan. Carey expected this body to facilitate the overall arrangements, most importantly by raising funds. The key 'executive' was undoubtedly Andrew Fuller, who became the voluntary superintendent in the operation of the society.<sup>44</sup>

Fund-raising proved to be the test of the plan. The original thirteen associates had voluntarily subscribed a little over thirteen pounds sterling as a prayerful example to others. Within a month, over a hundred pounds sterling had been received.<sup>45</sup> Wisely, Carey and Fuller developed a 'corresponding' or auxiliary society model to involve distant churches and donors in the central enterprise. This kept well-intentioned but disparate groups from organizing competitively. Samuel Pearce (1766-1799) of Birmingham introduced the idea, while Fuller carried it as far as Scotland, where he produced a 'hallowed excitement' and enjoyed great personal popularity.<sup>46</sup> The auxiliary plan itself had enjoyed success in the SPCK in the early decades of the century, where distant societies had emerged across England and Scotland, and in the German states. The Religious Societies in the Church of England, later imitated by the Wesleys, provided another successful example. Before 1792, there were no known examples of this arrangement among the Particular Baptists.<sup>47</sup>

As time went on, the Committee recognized the need for other sources of income than regular gifts. For decades other voluntary societies had relied upon planned giving through wills and estates. In fact, the Three Dissenting Denominations had achieved a legally sound means of conveyance which they urged upon all co-operating churches and societies. In 1798 the BMS advertised the following form of bequest, which followed the acceptable formula:

I give and bequeath unto A B and C D the sum of ---- upon trust to the intent that they or either of them pay the same to the treasurer for the time being of the Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Heathens; for the use and support of the said Society; and his receipt shall be a full and sufficient discharge for the same.<sup>48</sup>

Related to the matter of fund-raising was nurture of the constituency. Soon after the initial meetings of the Committee, circulars were printed and distributed among the associations and churches. Meetings of the Committee were held in co-operating churches, and in 1795 a general meeting of the Society was held at Birmingham, a location of demonstrated support for overseas mission.<sup>49</sup> The Committee also called for a 'day of fasting and prayer', beginning 28 December 1796, for the support of the mission.<sup>50</sup> The SPG had long used such means to great advantage, usually through the proclamation of a bishop or the monarch.<sup>51</sup>

Probably the most significant means of reaching the constituency was the publication of a magazine, *The Periodical Accounts*, which was widely circulated, beginning in 1793. Fuller and the Committee used this vehicle quite effectively to

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seek the advice of its friends, as in the case in 1795 when the Committee looked into supporting itinerant preaching in England.<sup>52</sup> American assistance was solicited through the circulation of the *Accounts* in the United States.<sup>53</sup> Eventually the periodical included an annual sermon or address to its readers, and a list of donations to the work, plus a report of the disbursements. Samuel Pearce urged that the primary use of the magazine be direct and personal communication with the missionaries, since the Society was dependent for its support on the pious public, whose least compensation, he believed, should be an acquaintance with the success of their missionaries.<sup>54</sup> At times the Committee even used the journal for disclaimers, like defining the differences between the Scotch Baptists and themselves.<sup>55</sup> The Moravians had used their *Periodical Accounts* for these purposes, as the Anglican organizations had perfected the vehicle seventy-five years earlier.<sup>56</sup>

The managers of the Society exhibited a high degree of accountability to their constituency. In recognizing the singularity of their original purpose, they reported that funds would be used for Carey's translation before itinerant preaching in England.<sup>57</sup>

### A CATALYST FOR NASCENT VOLUNTARYISM

Baptist historians since Ivimey have been fond of noting the impact of the founding of the BMS on other societies. Frequently such efforts were interlaced with those of other denominations. One important network began with the founding of the Sunday School Society in 1785; this group involved equal numbers of Churchmen and Dissenters on its committee. Two leading figures in that body were William Fox (1736-1826), a deacon at Prescott Street Baptist Church, London, and his pastor, Abraham Booth (1734-1806). When Booth learned of the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society seven years later, he was one of the first London pastors to lend support. He early endorsed the appointment of William Steadman and John Saffery to itinerate in England for the BMS. In 1797 he and Deacon Fox took a logical next step and became prime movers in the formation of the Baptist Itinerant Society; Fox served as its first treasurer. According to Ivimey, Booth was as much influenced by the founding of the Congregational Society for Domestic Mission as he was by the need within the BMS to separate home from foreign work. Prior to Booth's death, he and Fox also actively supported the revival of a society to promote education of London Baptist ministers.

Related to the domestic mission effort was the Baptist Irish Society, founded in 1814. Its roots may also be traced to the BMS, as missionary appointees of that body and the Itinerant Society had visited Ireland early in the new century and determined that concerted, focused work was essential.<sup>58</sup> To this list within the Baptist family could be added, for example, the Baptist Union (original body in 1813), the Northamptonshire Baptist Provident Society (1813), and the Society for the Relief of Aged and Infirm Protestant Dissenting Ministers (1820), the Northern Education Society (1804), from which emerged Rawdon College, and the London Education Society which organized the Baptist College at Stepney in 1810.<sup>59</sup>

Beyond Baptists, the BMS had a long-term impact upon voluntary enterprises for



foreign missions. In London in 1795 a group of Baptists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists read Carey's letters and formed what would become the London Missionary Society.<sup>60</sup> Elsewhere, the Mennonites in Holland had organized an 'Afdeeling' (literally 'branch') in 1821 for the support of the Baptist Missionary Society. Twenty-six years later, that group imitated the English Baptist plan by establishing their own Dutch Mennonite Missionary Society, which commissioned its first missionaries to the Dutch Indies.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was founded in 1810 on a voluntary model, portraying direct influence from the BMS. Three years later, William Staughton<sup>62</sup> was a guiding hand in the formation of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, which arose to create support for Adoniram and Ann Judson of Burma, who had requested believer's baptism of Carey in India.<sup>63</sup>

The founding of voluntary religious societies among Baptists finally had a salutary effect upon Baptist associational life. As William Steadman wrote in the circular letter of 1807 for the Lancashire churches,

That which constitutes the great benefit of associations and warmly pleads for their necessity is, that without them we cannot conceive of any effectual means of ministers and churches uniting their endeavours and concentrating their strength for the farther advancement of the interest of Christ in the world.<sup>64</sup>

Similarly, John Sutcliff commended to the Northamptonshire churches in 1812 the excellence of enlarging a voluntary fund established by that association in 1774 to encourage village preaching, to aid destitute churches, and to alleviate the wants of aged ministers. This, he felt, had long established an evangelical design for associations, which otherwise had become 'so common and so long exerted an insensible influence upon our churches that it was difficult to ascertain the precise degree of good of which they have been productive.'<sup>65</sup> There is little doubt that the evangelical revival, which erupted in the shape of voluntary societies among Baptists, profoundly transformed the regular organizational life of the denomination.

## CONCLUSION

The voluntary principle was a primary force in the transformation and revival of religious culture in England beginning in the seventeenth century and blossoming in the eighteenth century. Voluntary dynamics were borrowed from commercial enterprises and reform movements, first by Establishment, then by Dissenter groups. The Baptist experience falls in the midst of this larger cultural transformation.

Baptists emulated patterns set by Anglicans, carried forth by Presbyterians and Congregationalists, and to a large extent already suggested in the Separatist/Baptist theology of the Church. Three-quarters of a century before the establishment of the Baptist Missionary Society, other voluntary societies were involved in foreign mission work, educational endeavours, and care for disadvantaged persons. Even a poorly endowed cobbler-preacher in Northamptonshire had access to this well-documented heritage: William Carey read indefatigably and created a mosaic from many pieces of the voluntary tradition.

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It is, therefore, important to place the Baptist Missionary Society in proper context. Rather than a 'new era' or the 'first of a kind', the BMS stands in direct descent from the Bristol Baptist Education Society, Moravian missions, the Anglican SPG and SPCK, the New England Company . . . indeed, a tradition which reaches back to the New Testament itself. Baptists were able to profit greatly from specific achievements of others: managerial structures, stewardship theology, periodical accounts, and co-operative endeavours.

As one success bred another, the results of the founding of the BMS spawned new voluntary associations. In many ways, this was according to plan, for Carey and his cohorts recognized well the value of Christian co-operation. The pioneer missionary wrote in his *Enquiry*,

I do not mean by this, in any way to confine it to one denomination of Christians, I wish with all my heart, that every one who loves our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, would in some way or other engage in it. But in the present divided state of Christendom, it would be more likely for good to be done by each denomination engaging separately in the work, than if they were to embark on it conjointly. There is room enough for us all . . .<sup>66</sup>

### NOTES

1. Joseph Belcher, *William Carey: A Biography* (Philadelphia, 1853) 48; S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey* (1934), 89; Kenneth S. Latourette, *Three Centuries of Advance: A.D. 1500 - A.D. 1800*, (New York, 1939), 281; Doyle L. Young, 'The Place of Andrew Fuller in the Developing Modern Mission Movement', (PhD dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1984). See also E. A. Payne, 'William Carey and His Biographers', *BQ* (January 1961), for a helpful summary.
2. Ford. K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge, 1961), 284, 367, scarcely mentions Carey and has no reference to the BMS. Instead, he credits the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804) as the 'greatest single agency of moral reform under the Christian dispensation that the world has seen' (246). David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (1989), 41-2, while appreciative of Carey, is more cautious, noting that 'the BMS was the first foreign mission to spring from the revival.'
3. Ivimey wrote that the sermon of Robert Hall of Arnsby on Isaiah 57.14, at the 1779 meeting of the Northamptonshire Association was 'the commencement of a new era in the history of our denomination'. See Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists* (1830), vol.IV, 41.
4. L. G. Champion, 'Evangelical Calvinism and the Structure of Baptist Church Life', *BQ* 28.5 (January 1980), 196-208, also links the Bristol Academy and Education Society (1770) as the structural continuity (p.204) for this theological emphasis among Particular Baptists.
5. Peter Hinchliff has helpfully suggested that voluntary association is to be contrasted with 'coercive jurisdiction'. The degree to which the organization is subject to ecclesiastical jurisdiction or discipline is a key determinant in establishing its voluntary nature. Compare his essay, 'Voluntary Absolutism: British Missionary Societies in the Nineteenth Century', in *Papers Read at the 1985 Summer Meeting and the 1986 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, eds. W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood (1986), 363, with the functional classification chart in Stephen Hatch, *Outside the State: Voluntary Organizations in Three English Towns* (1980), 35.
6. In a classic work, *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal from Earliest Times Down to the Coming of the Friars* (1927), Herbert Workman demonstrates the lay orientation of monasticism and the protest of the individual

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- against collectivism. C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1984), 26ff, argues that under the Rule of St Benedict monks were challenged with the ultimate voluntary decision, namely to surrender to Christ all worldly goods and prospects.
7. A. H. Newman, 'The Early Waldenses', *BQR* (July 1885) 300-320, found the Waldenses hostile to Church and clergy, organized into 'societies', and forming much of the foundation for later evangelical reform in Bohemia and Moravia. That the Waldenses were a voluntary sect is borne out by their polity and means of ministerial support; Robert Baird, *Sketches of Protestantism in Italy* (Boston, 1845) 389-391.
  8. See Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1968), 246ff; Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, 1970) 132f.
  9. The area of Protestant mission history in this period needs radical revision. Historians specialising in the nineteenth century evangelical advance tend to neglect the large contributions of the previous two centuries; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism . . .*, 40f demonstrates this tendency in an otherwise useful analysis.
  10. Leland H. Carlson, ed., *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrowe 1587-1590* (1962) 97-103 has 'The True Church and the False Church'; Erik Routley, *English Religious Dissent* (Cambridge, 1960) 56f; Paul Sangster, *A History of the Free Churches* (1983) 27-38 covers Robert Browne's views. Geoffrey Nuttall, 'The Early Congregational Conception of the Church', *TCHS* 14, 4 (May 1944) 198-205, summarises the early tradition.
  11. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (1975) 184-268; Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1978) 164-168; F. D. Dow, *Radicalism in the English Revolution 1640-1660* (Oxford, 1985) 64-70.
  12. Prior to 1660 Particular Baptists associated regularly in England and Wales; General Baptists met in London in 1654 to consider the merits of a wider, organized voluntary fellowship. Compare B. R. White, ed., *Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales and Ireland to 1660* (1974) and William T. Whitley, ed., *Minutes of the General Assembly of General Baptists 1654-1720* 2 vols (1911).
  13. Louis B. Wright, *Religion and Empire: The Alliance Between Piety and Commerce in English Expansion 1558-1625* (New York, 1973) 87-88.
  14. In the Puritan context, see William Kellaway, *The New England Company 1649-1776* (1961). For authoritative general accounts, consult Garnet V. Porteus, *Caritas Anglicana or An Historical Inquiry into Those Religious and Philanthropical Societies that Flourished in England between the Years 1678 and 1740* (1912) and F. W. B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies 1520-1799* (St Leonards on Sea, 1963).
  15. No less than the eminent Robert Nelson (1656-1715) wrote a contemporary handbook to the various types of benevolent work organized primarily on the voluntary model: *An Address to Persons of Quality and Estate* (1715); Hinchliff, op.cit., 367.
  16. Comprehensive lists of voluntary associations are difficult to find. Predictably, a writer's definition of terms limits the types. I have found the lists in Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians*, 329-340, useful but very inadequate, and those in Deryck N. Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People: Itinerancy and the Transformation of English Dissent 1780-1830* (Cambridge, 1988), 24-35, 98-99, 197ff to be selectively helpful, as they pertain to the domestic missionary movement.
  17. Elie Halevy, *The Birth of Methodism in England*, trans. B. Samuel (Chicago, 1971), 11, 40-44; Rupert Davies, Gordon Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* 2 vols. (1965), I, xxxiii, 215f.
  18. Ivimey, *History*, IV, 24; Bernard, Lord Manning, *The Protestant Dissenting Deputies* (Cambridge, 1952) 146ff.
  19. According to Bray's biographer, he 'detested the Church of Rome but envied its missionary zeal and efficient organization'. See H. P. Thompson, *Thomas Bray* (1954) 36.
  20. Yates, *An Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners in London and Westminster and Other Parts of the Kingdom: with a Persuasiveness to Persons of All Ranks to be Zealous and Diligent in Promoting the Execution of the Laws against Profaneness and Debauchery, for the effecting of a National Reformation* (1699).
  21. Max Warren, *The Missionary Movement from*

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- Britain in Modern History* (1965) 31.
22. Ernest H. Pearce, *The Sons of the Clergy: Some Records of Two Hundred and Seventy Five Years* (1928) 4f.
  23. R. Tudor Jones, *Congregationalism in England 1662-1962* (1962) 117; T. G. Crippen, 'Origin of the Congregational Fund Board', *TCHS* 5 (1911-12) 134-148; Theo F. Valentine, *Concern for the Ministry: The Story of the Particular Baptist Fund 1717-1967* (Middlesex, 1967) 3ff; 'Baptist Board Minutes', *TBHS* 5 (1916-7) 197-240.
  24. E. Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England 1688-1791* (Oxford 1986) 294ff, 327ff on the connection with Methodism.
  25. E. D. Bebb, *Nonconformity and Social and Economic Life 1660-1800* (Philadelphia, repr. 1980) 44-46, 169ff. Some apparently were in their teens and family units were involved: Earl K. Brown, *Women of Mr Wesley's Methodism* (New York, 1983) 42-50, 90-99. The remarkable story of Lady Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, illustrates the role of a woman as philanthropist and theologian: Henry W. Clark, *History of English Nonconformity* (New York, repr. 1965) 236-238. See also Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians* . . . 150-155.
  26. Joseph Belcher, *William Carey: A Biography* (Philadelphia, 1853) 62, recovers the lethargy of response: 'the ponderous minds moved slowly . . . Carey, absolutely unable longer to endure disappointment, took Fuller by the arm saying with a most imploring look, "And are you, after all, going again to do nothing?" It was later reported that Carey met with almost certain negativity, his idea denounced as "wild and hopeless".' F. A. Cox, *History of the Baptist Missionary Society of England from 1792 to 1842* (Boston, 1843) 21.
  27. Clyde Binfield, *So Down to Prayers: Studies in English Nonconformity 1780-1920* (1977) 25; on the purposes of associations in the era, see Ivimey, *History* IV, 39ff. Associations exhibited remarkable flexibility to reform as in the cases of the Western and Midland Associations in 1789 and 1791 respectively, voting support for the Abolition Society: Ivimey, IV 63.
  28. See Pearce Carey, *Carey*, 45, 84; Cox, *Mission History*, 18, 20. This is a fairly typical leadership style among Baptist ministers. Ironically, William's persuasive powers were to little avail on his wife, Dorothy, who only consented to go to India to avoid separation from their son, Felix.
  29. 'Transactions of the Bristol Education Society', Book I (1770-1805) 1, in Treasures Room, Bristol Baptist College; Norman S. Moon, *Education for Ministry: Bristol Baptist College, 1679-1979* (Bristol, 1979) 12f.
  30. *Northamptonshire Biographical Notices: The Gotch Family* (Northampton, 1858?) 4-16. Carey's relationship with Gotch is recalled in a manuscript copy entitled 'Letter from Rev. Dr. William Carey to his Son the Rev. Jabez Carey' in Angus Library, Regent's Park College. The Gotch family took special interest in the welfare of ministers and missionaries, helping to organize an insurance company in 1813. J. D. Gotch, son of Thomas, repaid the debt of this venture when the banks failed in 1857.
  31. E. A. Payne, *The Prayer Call of 1784* (1941) 6-10.
  32. William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (Leicester 1792) 36f.
  33. From Andrew Fuller's recollections, one may surmise that Carey was also a student of Roman Catholic missions as well as more recent (1788) Afro-American missions from the Savannah, Georgia region to Jamaica. See Fuller, *An Account of the Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Heathen, Including a Narrative of the Rise, Plan, with a Short Address earnestly recommending this benevolent design*, (Kettering? 1792) 2-4.
  34. *ibid.*, 81-83.
  35. *ibid.*, 83.
  36. *ibid.*, 83-85; Pearce Carey, *Carey* 89.
  37. Lord Bishop of Sarum, *A Sermon Preached at St Mary le Bow February 18, 1703/04 Before the Society incorporated for that Purpose Exhorting all Persons in their Stations to Assist So Glorious a Design* (1704) 23.
  38. Cox, *Mission History* 18.
  39. The editor of the first historical account, probably Andrew Fuller, put it pointedly: 'the origin of this society will be found in the workings of our brother Carey's mind, which for the last nine or ten years, has been directed to this object with very little intermission'. See *Periodical Accounts Relative to a Society formed among the Particular Baptists for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen* No.1, 1, (hereinafter *PerAc*).
  40. *An Account of the Constitution of the Bristol Education Society, June 7, 1770*, 2, pamphlet

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in Treasures Room, BBC.

41. 'Proceedings of the BMS', 2 October 1792, 3. Thomas Bray had designed the idea of an annual subscription for the SPCK; the level was set in the early eighteenth century among the Dissenter funds and societies.
42. On the general organizational scheme, consult William R. Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint Stock Companies to 1720* (Cambridge, 1912), Vol. I, 2-20; on the pattern followed by SPCK, see Clarke, *History of SPCK*, 2-6.
43. *Rules and Orders of the Particular Baptist Fund in London* (n.d.) 9-11. John Rippon, *A Brief Essay Towards An History of the Baptist Academy at Bristol* (1796) 10ff, suggests a dependency of the Bristol founders on the London model earlier in the century.
44. This is the thesis of Young, 'The Place of Andrew Fuller . . .'. Cox, *Mission History* 75, called Fuller 'not only the chief officer, but the very soul of the mission'.
45. 'Proceedings of the BMS', 1 November 1792, 6.
46. Cox, *Mission History*, 75; in *PerAc*, 5 (31 October 1792), the Kettering organization is thus called the 'primary society'. Early on, in response to the auxiliary principle, Pearce was granted two delegates to the primary society and membership on the Committee. See 'BMS Minutes', 1 November 1792, 8, Archives, Regent's Park College.
47. In fact, the Particular Baptists had developed *competing* bodies in support of education for ministers in 1717 and 1752 respectively. See William T. Whitley, ed., *TBHS VI* (1918-19) 114. The latter group was known as the Baptist Society for Assisting Young Men in Grammar and Academic Learning.
48. *PerAc*, 434; the BMS form is remarkably similar to the one used by the Bristol Baptist Education Society. See *To the Friends of Religion and Learning among the Baptists, 1 January 1770* (Bristol: The Society, 1770).
49. *Proceedings*, 16 September 1795; *PerAc* 99.
50. *PerAc* 261.
51. *A Short Abstract of the Most Material Proceedings and Occurrences in the Society . . . Between February 1707/10 and Ditto 1710/11* (1710).
52. *PerAc* 117, 239, 262-263. In 272-73 the work of Methodists was acknowledged.
53. *PerAc* 123.
54. *PerAc* 518.
55. *PerAc* 241.
56. The Moravians called their magazine, *Periodical Accounts Relating to the Mission of the Church of the United Brethren, Established Among the Heathen* (published in English from 1790). In 1701 Thomas Bray and Josiah Woodward, two Anglicans, were instructed to draw up a brief account of the affairs and design of the SPG. This was usually included as an appendix to the printed annual sermon or every five years as a separate tract: 'Journal of the Committee of the SPG', Book I (1702-40) 12 (MSS., Rhodes House, Oxford).
57. *PerAc* 416-17. The Edinburgh Mission Society was recognized for its designated gift toward printing the New Testament in 1798.
58. I. J. W. Oakley, 'A History of the Baptist Irish Society', *Irish Baptist Historical Society Journal*, III (1970-71) 56; Charles Kirtland, *A Historical Sketch of the Baptist Denomination in Ireland* (Dublin, 1868). Andrew Fuller was one of the founders of this society.
59. E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History* (1958) 15-28; *A Brief Account of the Origin and Design of the Northern Education Society* (Rochdale, 1806); Robert E. Cooper, *From Steepney to St Giles: The Story of Regent's Park College 1810-1960* (1960).
60. Cox, *Mission History* 54.
61. Edward van Straten, 'Some Baptist-Mennonite Contacts in the Early 19th Century' (Paper presented to Baptist-Mennonite Theological Conversations, May 1991); see also T. E. Jensma, 'Doopsgezinde Zending in Indonesia' (PhD Dissertation, Leiden, 1968).
62. Staughton had been the youngest member present at the formation of the BMS in 1792. A Bristol College graduate, he emigrated to the United States in 1793 and became a leading advocate of the voluntary society principle. See Roger Hayden, 'William Staughton: Baptist Educator, Missionary Advocate, Pastor' (Bristol, 1965).
63. Robert G. Torbet, *Venture of Faith: The Story of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society and the Woman's American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, 1814-1954* (Philadelphia, 1955), 22-30.
64. William Steadman, 'The Utility of Associations' in *A Circular Letter Addressed to Baptist Churches . . . By the Elders and Messengers Met in Association at Rochdale, Lancashire, May 20-21, 1807* (Bradford, 1807).
65. J. Sutcliffe, 'The Nature, Design, and Advantage of Associations', in *The Circular*

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*Letter from Ministers and Messengers of the  
Several Baptist Churches of the  
Northamptonshire Association, May 20-21,  
1812 (1812).*

66. William Carey, *An Enquiry* . . . , 84.

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### REVIEW

**Christopher Stell**, *Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting Houses in South West England*, HMSO 1991. 263pp. £60.

It is good to see Christopher Stell's name on this second volume of his many years' study of nonconformist architecture. The designation South-West is expanded by Lady Park in her foreword to South and South West, which means that the record covers the seven historic counties of Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire, Hampshire and Berkshire. This is a comprehensive record of the wealth of nonconformity's architectural heritage from the urbanities of the meeting houses of prosperous nonconformist merchants to barn-like chapels of simple piety, the habitations of the consciences of the rural poor. This is a book making for greed for, although Mr Stell provides a rich diet, one finds oneself asking for more - e.g. for a representation of the privately funded elaborate Gothic chapel at Churchill, Somerset, more studies to enable one to follow through more of the oeuvre of some of the provincial architects here mentioned. But this remains a remarkable tribute to the culture of the nonconformist past. Baptist chapels of note here described include the Doric strength of Ock Street, Abingdon, the Corinthian Newport (I.o.W.), and the Ionic Victoria Street, Windsor. By contrast, you will find the rural simplicity of Culmstock and Loughwood, Devon, and the thatched charm of Poulner, Hants, not to mention the ogeed windows of Paulton, Somerset, the eighteenth-century symmetry of Bratton, Wilts, and the wholly domestic proportions of Chippenham. The Regency designed 'Ebenezer' Teignmouth that called George Muller to be its pastor and under his influence transferred to the Brethren is here, as is the austere Early English of Niton, IoW. In Devizes, the domesticity of the former Old Baptist Chapel of 1780 contrasts strongly with the ecclesiastical aspirations of the new Baptist Chapel of 1851. This volume fully contradicts the nonsense I encountered in a recent student dissertation which, closed-eyed, argued that nonconformist chapels were confined to side streets and dark alleys until the middle of the nineteenth century: the high quality photographs here displayed give the lie to that - though some churches, like New Street, Torrington, were concealed from the road by cottages until their twentieth-century removal.

Not surprisingly, the west country throws up an interesting range of Methodist dissent - and other more exotic groups, such as the Agapemonites and Swedenborgians. The picture is of an ever changing church: the high culture of the Unitarians all but eclipsed, fragmented Methodism reunited and needing fewer buildings; new patterns of worship making new demands upon church buildings. Mr Stell rightly pays attention to how easily the heritage can be squandered, but how to relate that heritage to the dynamic mission of the church in an ever-changing world is a problem requiring sympathetic and strategic thought and action.

**JHYB**