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1989 Congregational Studies Conference Papers

The Use and Abuse of Church History
Rev. John Legg

Josiah Conder—A Bicentennial Tribute
Rev. Gordon Booth

Savoy, 1833 and all that
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**Congregational
Studies Conference
Papers
1989**

**John Legg,
Gordon Booth,
and
George Hemming**

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Foreword

This year's Congregational Studies Conference began with a paper that was 8 years late—not that John Legg had spent all that time in preparation, simply that it would have made an ideal start to our first Studies Conference in 1981. However, here it is, a preface to our 1989 Conference. Better late than never, and never a better paper to stir the heart and create an Oliver Twist appetite for more history. 'Read no history, nothing but biography, for that is life without theory', wrote Benjamin Disraeli, and much of John Legg's excellent Paper, *The Use and Abuse of Church History*, confirmed that view.

Giving a paper early in the afternoon, following a substantial lunch, is never an easy task, but the Chairman detected no sleepers while Gordon Booth presented his bi-centennial tribute to Josiah Conder, author of *The Lord is King*, and *Thou art the Everlasting Word*. The Chairman did sometime later suggest to Mr Booth, that a quotation from Conder's hymn on Scripture (*O God, who didst, Thy will unfold*) might have been relevant to our present theological scene, only to be told it had been quoted. The Chairman must have nodded off at that point! The verse in question was by the way,

No need of prophets to enquire
The sun is risen, the stars retire,
The Comforter is come, and sheds
His holy unction on our heads

The final speaker at a Conference like this knows, that however controversial his paper, most of his hearers will be anxious to catch trains as soon as possible to distant parts of England and Wales, and not engage in heavy argument. It was not for this reason that George Hemming was asked to speak on, *Savoy, 1833, and all that*, at our final session! Mr Hemming certainly ruffled a whole host of theological feathers while providing much food for thought, which seems an appropriate time to say that the opinions expressed in these papers are not necessarily those of an Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches. Our thanks to all our friends for time and thought in preparing Papers which I trust you dear reader will peruse with profit.

Derek Swann

Chairman

The Use and Abuse of Church History

John D Legg

Really, I ought to add a third element to my title—disuse—for, in fact, many Christians simply, ignore church history altogether. They would join with the car-maker, Henry Ford, who said ‘History is more or less bunk!’—to which they would probably add, in the words so beloved of school-children, ‘It’s boring’. I received a letter recently, whose writer saw all mention of ‘men of the past’ as distracting from the great task of evangelism in the present. I feel sorry for anyone *in that* position, I really do. Not only he is missing out on one of the most wonderful, thrilling and profitable privileges of being a Christian, and especially a British Christian, with our glorious honourable aim.

Others ‘misuse’ or ‘abuse’ church history. Hegel the philosopher, is credited with saying, ‘History teaches us nothing’. That sounds too illogical for a famous philosopher, so let us quote him more exactly: ‘What experience and history teach us is this is that people and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it.’ Now that is rather different. He makes two points. First, not that nothing is to be learned, but that as a matter of fact, for various reasons, people have not done so. Secondly, that even when they do deduce principles, they do not act on them. Both of these abuses will concern us shortly.

What, then, is the proper use of church history? Is there such a thing? For this we must stop quoting men and turn to the Scriptures. What the Apostle Paul writes about the use of the Old Testament history applies, with one important qualification, to us also: ‘These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come.’ (1 Corinthians 10:11.) There are lessons to be drawn from the Scriptures, both examples and warnings, and the Bible itself frequently draws them. Deuteronomy and the Psalms (for example nos 44, 77, 78, 105 & 106) constantly look back to God’s dealings with Israel and deduce principles which can be applied and practised in the later period. We can and should follow that pattern.

The qualification is, of course, that church history does not have an infallible interpretation attached to it. Hence it is easy to make mistakes; one man’s truth is another man’s heresy, just as one man’s liberty is another man’s license. We must beware of using history without discrimination. Only the Word of God is perfect and we must test what has happened by that standard. before we take it as an example rather than as a warning. (This, however, need not always be explicit, as

in this paper for instance. Some reviewers do not appreciate this, as I have found out to my cost!)

Church history, therefore, must be of interest to a Christian; it can be of profit to a Christian and it should be used with due biblical care, because it is the story of God's truth for, of God's people and of God's work. I want to look at our subject under those three headings, dealing with abuse and use in each case.

I The History of God's Truth

1 Abuse

The abuse of church history in this area occurs in two opposing ways, both of which fall into the trap of being unhistorical, i.e. lacking a sense of history, not seeing the past properly in relation to the present.

1. The first error sees us as superior and the past as really beneath our notice. We have learning and scholarship; we are enlightened and sophisticated and these men of the past have nothing to teach us. This is particularly the error of liberals, the children of the Enlightenment—but not exclusively. Every minister comes across the person who dismisses the past as beneath his notice. Those who hold to this opinion should, if they can find one, read a little of one of John Calvin's commentaries on the Bible.

2. The other mistake is more likely to occur in our circles. This is the dangerous absolutising of the past, in which we adopt an uncritical attitude to the teaching of men such as Augustine, Wycliffe and Luther, as if they had all the benefits of centuries of Reformed study and teaching. In fact, both Augustine and Luther held to baptismal regeneration and Wycliffe was by no means clear on justification. The lack of historical perspective leads us to an uncritical admiration of things which ought to be rejected. It is good to honour the courage and principle of the Pilgrim Fathers, who left this land in search of religious liberty, but essential also to realise that when these early independents reached the New World they were most intolerant of any other form even of evangelical Christianity. The doctrine of the Scriptures has not, of course, changed, but man's understanding of it had developed with the centuries and we must recognise this fact.

This is true even of the great confessions. While we do not commit, I hope, the first error of despising them, we must not regard them as infallible and therefore sacrosanct on all issues. Even the marvellous *Westminster Shorter Catechism* is criticised by Prof. John Murray. Question 31 defines effectual calling as 'the work of God's Spirit', which, while hardly heretical or even seriously misleading, is not according to the New Testament, which refers calling to the Father (1 Corinthians 1:9 etc.). Similarly, no one should be horrified if I say that the seventeenth-century

confessions are quite inadequate for today. There is no mention in them of modernism, Barthianism, the kenosis doctrine, dispensationalism or the charismatic movement. Such omissions are as inevitable as they are regrettable, since these errors have appeared relatively recently.

2 Use

Bearing all that in mind, we can still gain great profit from the teachers and confessions of the past. Let me simply list some of the positive benefits of a knowledge of the history of Christian doctrine.

1. The first positive gain is humility. When you realise clearly our forefathers understood the Scriptures—without our modern advantages—and how deep their grasp of Christian doctrine was, you can only be amazed and deeply humbled. For me, the outstanding phenomenon of the past in this respect is that in the 17th Century the Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists were so far agreed on the truth, that the three confessions—the *Westminster Confession*, the *Savoy Declaration* and the *1689 Baptist Confession*—differ on only a few minor points. There was no problem over the atonement, the doctrines of grace, sanctification or eternal punishment. All the subjects we have to be tactful about and make allowances for, so that we do not wreck the fragile unity of the British Evangelical Council, they asserted without hesitation or apology. They deliberately adopted the same wording as far as possible to show their unity. (Remember also that the Westminster Assembly included some Anglicans!) Compare this with the difficulty that we have in getting agreement to the most basic and minimal statement of faith and you have some idea of how far we have gone down the road of theological decadence.

2. Further from this study we learn what our forefathers really believed, often, contrary to what tradition tells us. Leaving aside what we can learn about the modern corruption of reformation Anglicanism, we can immediately see how the very confessions give the lie to the idea that Baptists/Congregationalists ‘don’t have creeds’—a common claim of the ecumenically minded modern free-churchman. In a recent issue of *Reformation Today*, David Kingdon writes, ‘Many Baptists, long taught that Baptists reject creeds, have discovered that their forebears produced numerous confessions of which the *1689 Confession* is the most well known today’ (*Reformation Today*, 103, p. 11). Our Congregational forefathers, as this conference has helped many to realise, were not only convinced paedobaptists, but were also wedded firmly to reformed theology and the doctrines of grace. Again, look back to the 17th century and you will find that, far from boasting of the democratic processes of the Church Meeting, they believed in elders, who were to rule the church. Going a stage further, we find much teaching on synods and their authority. You will find, indeed, that they preferred to be known as Congregationalists

because they rejected the isolationist and separatist implications of being called 'Independents'.

3. If we may adapt the Preacher of Ecclesiastes, we may say that 'there is no new heresy under the sun'. Heresy, like history, repeats itself and an awareness of this can save much time and labour. While Scripture must remain the only arbiter of sound doctrine, the knowledge of how the church united to condemn Pelagius's doctrine of free-will in the days of Augustine, or various errors on the doctrine of the Trinity in the early centuries, will save us from having to go through the whole process once more. In fact, people do not know and we have to go through it all again, and sometimes the ill-informed come to different conclusions! It is well said that those who ignore the mistakes of history are destined to repeat them. Once Pythagoras has proved his theorem, we don't have to prove it over again from scratch for ourselves. We simply teach the children how it is done. I can think of one recent dispute in the church—in the BEC constituency—which is still unresolved, but which would easily be dealt with if those concerned had any knowledge of a man called David Sandeman, who, among other errors, held to a deficient definition of faith.

4. Put another way, this provides us with a short-cut. We need feel no obligation to investigate, and so waste time on, every new idea which crops up. When you are told that you cannot have power to win souls unless you are baptised with the Spirit and speak in tongues, the simple recollection that men like George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards and CH Spurgeon—to name no more—had no need of this, will preserve you from a wild goose chase. Let me illustrate this from Iain Murray's life of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Very early in his ministry, we are told,

He was presented with a Scofield Bible and encouraged to note the importance of prophetic beliefs. Perhaps they were surprised that the young preacher was unenthusiastic. He had never encountered this view of unfulfilled prophecy before. The literature he was given was wholly new to him, and he might well have taken it up as so many other pastors had done.

Commenting in later years on what had kept him detached from associations with which it was often assumed that he would be identified, Dr Lloyd-Jones spoke of two principles by means of which he had sought to determine his decisions: 'First, my understanding of the Scripture and, second, my reading of the Calvinistic Methodist revival of the eighteenth century. These things governed me and when anything presented itself to me, if it did not fit into that framework, I had no difficulty over my duty. When I saw something which was so different from the high spirituality of the Methodist Fathers I did not have a struggle over whether to follow it or not' (D Martyn Lloyd-Jones—*The First Forty Years*, p. 195).

5. Lastly, the history, involving as it does the experiences of men, helps to flesh out the doctrine, to show its relevance and power, and perhaps to make it clearer. It is all very well to read the definition of justification by faith in the *Shorter Catechism*, but what can compare with reading the life of Martin Luther, with the account of all his struggles with the idea of God's righteousness until he found freedom through the dynamic concept of Christ's righteousness counted as ours. Or read the same thing in John Wesley's *Journal* for 1738.

II The History of God's People

1 Abuse

Once again there are two opposing tendencies.

1. The first fault is merely to be interested in the past. There are those who have an antiquarian interest in old books, who take great pride in possessing all the old volumes that they can collect, but never read any of them. Others simply like to delve into the past or—and this is worse in some ways—use Christian biography as a form of escapism. This is just a historical version of the missionary slides syndrome! The past is just entertainment and the stories of God's people in the past are lust an evangelical equivalent of Mills and Boon. An amazing further extension that I have encountered is the attitude which says 'I don't understand why I have problems. I've got all the right books!'

Such a detached attitude to the men of the past leads to other forms of abuse. We can sit in judgement on them, either admiring uncritically or denigrating according to our pleasure. We must resist the modern over-reaction against hagiography, which leads to efforts to find all a man's faults and lower him in the eyes of the Christian Public. Iain Murray once said that he had learnt to speak of the dead as carefully as if they were alive, as if we may add, they could sue us for libel. Equally, we must resist the tendency of the past to hero-worship (or saint-worship!) as with John Calvin, CH Spurgeon and, more recently, Dr Lloyd-Jones, where the great man can do no wrong and his opinions are quoted as ending all argument.

2. The opposite error is imitation, often referred to as the sincerest form of flattery, but in this connection a serious fault. Imitation is not the same as learning from their example and applying it in our own lives and circumstances. What I am referring to is the undiscerning, direct and wooden copying of the past. How many little Puritans have filled our pulpits in recent years—aping their manners, their speech, their methods, in totally different settings, and with little of their life and power. Dr Lloyd-Jones has also suffered in this respect from those who have heard him often and, consciously or unconsciously, are found using his 'Very

wells' or 'No, nos' on their unsuspecting congregations. Let me quote him on the subject:

There are men who seem to me to be using the Puritans and their writings as a substitute for thought. Let me expound that. A man once came to me after listening to an attempt of mine to preach a sermon in which ... I had made a detailed analysis of a certain condition and given the reply to it in a number of propositions. He was a preacher himself and asked me: 'Did you find that list of questions in one of the Puritans?' He revealed to me thereby that that was what he did himself! I must confess that I was rather amazed and alarmed at the thing, but I can see the possibility. Now if you do that, you are using the Puritans as a substitute for thought. You are not working the thing out yourself and putting yourself through the process and discipline of thought, but you are taking ready made divisions and thoughts ... This applies equally, of course, to the misuse of any other writers (*The Puritans*, p. 32).

If you imitate Joseph Caryl, who spent ten years expounding Job, you may end up with a tenth of your congregation as he did! If you write to your maiden aunt using Samuel Rutherford's letters—with their use of the language of love from the Song of Solomon—she will probably refer you to a psychiatrist! And if you copy Billy Bray, the Cornish Methodist, and dance round the vestry carrying your minister, he will get a shock!

2 Use

Please do not allow the abuse to put you off the correct use. The reading of Christian biography is one of the most healthy ways to spend the afternoon of the Lord's Day and the easiest way to learn the history of the past so that we may profit from it.

1. In order to profit from the men of the past, we must, first of all, see them as Christians like ourselves. Christians are essentially the same in any age and we can learn much from these great men. Dr Packer wrote in his Foreword to the 1958 Puritan Conference papers,

We look on the Puritans as our fellow Christians, now enabled to share with us, through the medium of their books, the good things which God gave them three centuries ago. We study their teachings on the topics which took first place in their own thoughts and writings ... We study the history of their doings as a commentary upon their convictions (*A Goodly Heritage*, p. 5).

Earlier in that Foreword he pointed out how the Puritans differed from us, not merely in the externals which we have to take into account, but in the basics of godliness:

a) Whereas the Puritans demanded order, discipline, depth and thoroughness in every department of the Christian life, the modern Evangelical temper is

rather one of casual haphazardness and restless impatience. We crave for stunts, novelties and entertainments; we have lost our taste for solid study, humble self-examination and unspectacular hard work in our callings and in our prayers ... b) Whereas the Puritan outlook had God and his glory as its unifying centre, and was in consequence a broad, balanced, Biblically proportioned whole, its modern Evangelical equivalent has a different centre. It revolves round the individual man, as if he were the real hub of the universe. (*A Goodly Heritage*, p. 4. I commend the whole foreword to your careful perusal.)

Thus we can test ourselves by comparison with them.

2. Secondly we must see how they applied the Bible, not by slavish copying, but by noting their principles. To continue Dr Packer's words,

The question which we ask is not simply the historical one: what did they do and teach? ... Our questions are rather these: how far is their exposition of the Scriptures a right one? and what biblical principles does it yield for the guiding of our faith and life today? (*ibid.*, pp. 5–6)

Thus we see how their doctrine worked out in their practice. It is sometimes a failing of historical and biographical works that they fail to do this. For instance a review in the *Banner of Truth* Magazine (No 296, May 1988) says that

it would have greatly enhanced the value of the book, if it had shown what kind of Christianity motivated these men and the church that was to suffer such severe trials.

When we read about the great men of the past we need to understand what it was that made them tick, what it was that made them great. It was certainly not modern pseudo-Christianity or neo-evangelicalism.

Listen again to Dr Lloyd-Jones on the dust-jacket of the 1953 reprint of John Calvin's *Institutes*:

The most urgent reason why all should read the *Institutes*, however, is to be found in the times in which we live. In a world which is shaking in its very foundations and which lacks authority, nothing is so calculated to strengthen and to stabilise one's soul as this magnificent exposition and outworking of the glorious doctrine of the Sovereignty of God. It was the 'iron ration of the soul' of the Reformation martyrs, of the Pilgrim Fathers, the Covenanters and many others who have had to face persecution and death for Christ's sake.

This procedure of the application of principles, rather than lifting their methods directly into the twentieth century, is most important, for their situation differed from ours in many ways. We may read Richard Baxter's *Reformed Pastor* with great profit, provided that we remember that he was minister of a parish and everyone recognised his right to visit and require them to attend for catechising. Try to do the same thing in the same way and you will soon learn something about historical

relativity! Similarly, when a somewhat discouraged listener at the Puritan Conference expressed his despair of ever matching the Puritan devotion to prayer and meditation. Especially this year's Congregational Studies Conference began with a????? at the beginning of the day, Dr Lloyd-Jones simply reminded him that 'they had servants in those days!'

3. Another benefit of this historical study is tolerance, or at least it should be; too often it is not. It can do only good for dyed-in-the-wool Congregationalists to be reminded that Adoniram Judson's becoming a Baptist on the way out to the east to become a Congregationalist missionary did not ruin his ministry in Burma. It can only do Baptists good to realise that most of the great men of history before the twentieth century were paedobaptists whom the Lord did not exclude from his communion and service. It can only do good for consistent Calvinists to know something of the godliness and effectiveness of the saintly Arminian John Fletcher of Madeley, not to mention the Wesleys, while nonconformists in general do well to remember that most of the great men of the eighteenth-century awakening were ministers in the Church of England.

Even Dr Lloyd-Jones needed to be reminded of this sometimes. For instance he blamed the supposed lack of revival in the Anglican church on 'something in her form of service that militates against the freedom of the operation of the Spirit' (*The Puritans*, p. 3), apparently forgetting that revival broke out at Llangeitho while Daniel Rowland was actually reading the Anglican Prayer Book Litany!

An overwhelming force came upon his soul as he was praying in those most melting and evangelical words ... a sudden amazing power seized his whole frame and no sooner did it seize on him, than it ran instantly, like an electrifying shock, through all the people in the church, so that many of them fell down on the ground they had been standing on in a large mass together, there being no pews in the church. Quoted in Eifion Evans, *Daniel Rowland* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1985), p. 50

The moral is to read as widely as possible, about men of every persuasion—to be aware that all the truth and godliness does not lie in any one camp. Samuel Taylor Coleridge put it like this: 'If men could learn from history, what lessons it might teach us! But passion and party blind our eyes.'

III The History of God's Work

1 Abuse

All that we considered in the previous section applies here also, but we can add to it. (This also applies in reverse!)

1. There is a danger of prejudice arising from denominational bias. This results in some strange interpretations of history, such as the tendency nowadays to regard the Waldensians as evangelical baptists or primitive Plymouth Brethren, when in fact they were quite unclear about the gospel. The same desire to claim everybody for our party leads to a somewhat romantic view of Augustine and Wycliffe. In an age when Congregationalists are regarded by most evangelicals as the lowest of the low, because of our recent liberal history, it is, no doubt, good for morale to remember that John Owen is still the greatest of English theologians, but we do well to make sure that we agree with him before we lay much stress on this fact! In a different direction a refusal to see anything wrong with those who are without doubt of our party—for example, the frequent attempt to justify Calvin completely in his treatment of Servetus.

2. There is, also, a great danger of seeing history merely in terms of men, movements and trends, and forgetting God. We must not neglect to consider properly the means that God uses, so that we may learn our duty from them, but we must take care to glorify God. It is difficult to keep the balance here, but the key seems to be to see them within God's purposes at all times. Thus Psalm 44:3 says of the fathers, 'It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory: it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them'. Similarly Psalm 77:19–20 keeps the balance: 'Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though you footsteps were not seen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.' This gives due attention both to God and to his instruments.

3. Further, I have noticed in our day a tendency to become stereotyped in our attitude to revival in a way which effectively, at least in our minds and prayers, limits God. I am referring to our frequent desires and prayers for 'another Whitefield' or 'another Spurgeon'. If God had worked like that in the past, we would not have had Whitefield or Spurgeon, but only a succession of Pauls, who would not have been suited to the situations with which the Lord actually dealt. One lesson of history seems to be that God, almost invariably, does a new thing, not in the current charismatic sense, but in the sense of his unfailing wisdom and power to deal with any and every situation.

An extension of this fault is the feeling that, if we reproduce the pattern of a previous awakening, then we shall enjoy the same blessing. Thus because two old ladies prayed in an isolated cottage and revival ensued, we must look for two old ladies, etc. Because Jonathan Edwards preached on the sovereignty of God in justification and revival came, if we follow him we, too, shall be successful.

2 Use

The usefulness of church history from this angle can hardly be overstated. As someone has said in a totally different connection, 'The history of art is the history of revivals'. So it is with the history of the church. Viewed as a continuation of the story of God's people recounted in the Scriptures, it encourages us to serve and glorify God in our own day as our forefathers did in theirs.

1. In the first place the history of the past shows us just how low we have sunk, a fact of which we would otherwise be ignorant—as indeed, many are ignorant. To hear people talk of the great things that are happening, of the strength of the evangelicals in the Church of England, of the popularity of Christian Unions in the universities and colleges of our land, you would think that all was well with us today—that is, until you read something of the great days of the past.

This is true, not only of the light and superficial observers, but also of those who, quite rightly, rejoice in the progress of Reformed doctrine as evidenced by increased numbers at events like the Banner of Truth Ministers' Conference. Last year there were three hundred reformed ministers present. Great! But do you realise that in 1662, the year of the Great Ejection, with a population far smaller than today, there were two thousand reformed ministers prepared to sacrifice everything for the sake of the gospel and be 'ejected from the Church of England'. The equivalent today would and be in the order of thirty thousand reformed ministers! I do not see them anywhere.

We need the dual perspective of Ezra 3:12, where we find great rejoicing over the fact that the temple's foundation had been laid, combined with sorrow from those who had seen the former temple in its glory and realised how far they had to go before they achieved anything like that. We must be glad and glorify God for all that has been done in the last thirty years, but be aware of just how little it is what the economists call 'real terms'. Our complacency must be shattered, if we are to be strong and strive for a great work of God in our own day.

2. Further, the study of God's past working can convince us of the reality and possibility of things that we have never experienced for ourselves. If we were limited to our own lives and times, we would not know that there is such a thing as deep and general conviction of sin, that whole communities can be changed, that the most desperate situation can be completely reversed. When we look at our towns with nearly empty churches and chapels, do we realise that once upon a time, with much lower populations, these buildings were both necessary and full?

Can you imagine a situation in which your town was like Richard Baxter's Kidderminster? When he first arrived there, he records, 'there was about one family in a street that worshipped God and called upon his name, and when I

came away there were some streets where there was not past one family in the side of the street that did not do so'. Paul Cook comments, 'During that time—under fifteen years—hundreds had been converted and the church had had to be enlarged to hold the crowds. And Baxter was only one among many.' (*A Goodly Heritage*, p. 17) If that kind of work happened in our towns, where would we put the people? Could we use two or three football stadiums every Sunday? Our eyes need to be opened to what is possible under God: our children and young people must be informed as to what we are looking and praying for.

3. The example of the past will also stir us to work. There were giants in those days—and our stress on the activity of God should not be allowed to blind us to that fact. By comparison we are only pygmies. Think of the hours that Luther must have worked merely to produce his written works it takes almost a lifetime to read them! Remember Calvin slaving away to teach the Word of God, in spite of suffering from almost every known illness, and when his friends pleaded with him to ease off, answering, 'Would you have my Lord find me idle when he comes?' Read of those who were ready to be burnt at the stake for the sake of the gospel. Consider William Carey and his colleagues going boldly where no man had gone before, without the example and encouragement of generations of successful evangelical missionaries. We need not limit ourselves to the distant past. Read of Hudson Taylor going into inland China when almost all others were confined to the treaty ports. Notice their labours, their prayer and their sufferings. All this must stir us up to action—to be men ourselves in our day.

4. Lastly, the study of the history of revivals will lead us to pray in hope. Get hold of Bishop Ryle's *Christian Leaders* and read his account (pp. 13–14) of the state of religion in this land before Whitefield and Wesley, and realise that even our spiritual decadence and moral decline can be reversed. On a more local level read the account of Peter Thacher's ministry in Gillies, *Historical Collections*, pp. 401ff., of how he despaired after thirty-four years with an unresponsive flock. Then revival came to New England and to Middlesbrough in particular. Within two months nearly a hundred were converted and the following year saw a hundred and seventy joining the church.

Lastly, and perhaps more helpfully for us in this country, let me refer you to *Contemporary Concern* for Autumn 1984. There, alongside the discouragement of articles about Don Cupitt's TV series *The Sea of Faith*, about the ineffectiveness of the charismatic movement, and about the problem of relating the gospel to modern man, is the account of 'The Revival at Bulford' in 1860–61. The Independent Chapel at Bulford, now an EFCC church with Peter Beale as minister, saw a former pastor who had left once, at least partly because of 'want of success', come back for a second period of ministry in 1853.

He recorded in the church book,

The first indications of the great work became visible about the end of November last [1860] and were observed in the quiet stillness which pervaded the congregation—in the earnest desire and deep anxiety of the members to see among them a general awakening—in the extraordinary spirit of prayer which was poured out upon the people, and their faith in the efficacy of prayer—and in some mysterious influence, almost irresistible, which I felt on my own mind by which, for some time before the Revival ‘broke out’, I was all but impelled to preach to my people from certain subjects preparatory to the coming blessing, and by which I was more than ordinarily led to depend upon the promised aid of the Holy Spirit in the discharge of public engagements.

Following a week of prayer in the wider church, in which they took part, he continues,

for some few months after that event we had meetings for prayer almost every night in the week ... Under one sermon preached by me ... at least nine months before the awakening actually took place, five or six persons were deeply and savingly impressed, and led to the Cross and to the throne ...

The fields at length became white for the harvest and a voice was heard to say, ‘Thrust in the sickle and reap for the time is come for thee to reap’. Souls have been gathered into the garner—the number of members already added to the church, since the revival began, has more than doubled the former number of church members—nearly trebled it. Even at one of our church meetings, lately held, I had the unspeakable pleasure and honour to give the right hand of fellowship to twenty on their admission into the church, and to propose, at the same time, ten more as candidates for Christian communion ...

For the last four months, meetings for prayer have been held almost every night in the week, and are not only numerously attended but generally crowded ... I have seldom had a meeting without having at its close some enquirers after salvation. Even as many as fifteen persons one night remained after the service to converse with me about the concerns of their souls ... A happy change has come over the Village, and everywhere around its influence is felt. The Police Officer, located in our neighbourhood, referring to this happy change, one day remarked that, in his walks thro’ Bulford, instead of trifling conversation he could now hear only the voice of prayer and praise ascending to God from the cottages of the poor which may now be styled ‘Bethels’.

There is, of course, no substitute for the Word of God itself—heard, read, understood, believed and put into practice—but accounts like this—and there are thousands more—cannot fail to enlighten, encourage, move and stir us to action. Truly, we have a goodly heritage. Let us make a right and proper use of it.

USE AND MISUSE OF CHURCH HISTORY

(John Legg's own book *The Footsteps of God* (Evangelical Press) is warmly recommended as a readable and popular introduction to church history.)

Josiah Conder—A Bi-Centennial Tribute

Gordon Booth

My text is Psalm 45:1

My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the King: my tongue is the pen of a skilful writer.

Conder: A Man for his Times

An outline of Conder's life is simple. He was born on September 17th, 1789 in Falcon Street, Aldersgate. At the age of thirteen he entered his father's engraving and bookselling business which he took over in 1811 because of his father's ill-health. In 1814 he acquired a literary journal *The Eclectic Review* which he managed until 1837. He married Joan Thomas in 1815 and they lived at 18 St. Paul's Churchyard. Literary and editorial work occupied the rest of his life and shortly after a new paper, *The Patriot*, was first published in 1832 he became its editor until his death on December 27th, 1855.

Origins

Josiah's son, Eustace, became a Congregational Minister and was Chairman of the Congregational Union in 1873. His *Memoir* of his father, published in 1857, incorporates many letters and one dated May 5th 1839 (pp. 30off) touches on the subject of baptism.

I have told you that I am in the practice of attending the Baptist Chapel in this town, of joining with them in the Lord's Supper and of occasionally occupying their pulpit; so that you will never suspect me of being very strongly influenced by party prejudices. But I am more and more firmly convinced that the restricting of baptism to adult confession of faith is an error, and, like all errors of evil consequences.

The letter makes some interesting points. Conder suggests that baptism is "an admission to discipleship" rather than its profession. He stresses the grave responsibility of the parents to ensure the Christian teaching of their children. He notices that Baptists have to distinguish between the baptised and unbaptised members of the one household, but in fact, the position of a believer's child is

very different from that of the worldling. “When a Gentile in primitive times embraced the faith of Christ, did he not renounce idolatry for his offspring and descendants, and pledge himself to bring up his children in the Christian faith.”

In the second part of this lecture we shall meet a baptismal hymn by Conder. Why we have wandered into this topic at our beginning is because of Conder’s beginnings. The *Memoir* has an intriguing introductory chapter called *Origins*. In the early 17th century, two brothers moved from their native Yorkshire. One of them, Richard, became a dairy farmer at Croydon-Cum-Clapton in Cambridgeshire. He was described as a “godly man and strict non-conformist.” His conversion is recorded. Richard liked to play football, but one Sunday the Parish minister told his congregation that he was compelled by the order of James I, to read *The Book of Sports*. By this, ministers were forbidden to discourage the youth from sports and recreations on the Lord’s Day. Richard recalled how he “was seized with a chill and horror not to be described. Now... iniquity is established by a law and sinners are hardened in their sinful ways.” Fear of God’s wrath upon the nation made him seek salvation. So he says, “I date my conversion from that time, and adore the grace of God in making that to be an ordinance for my salvation, which the devil and wicked governors laid as a trap for my destruction.”

Richard’s great grandson, Dr John Conder, recorded the succession of faith. At the Restoration, Richard’s son, also named Richard, joined a Congregational church in the area. It had been gathered by Messrs Holcroft and Addy. They were later both imprisoned for long years in Cambridge Castle. Richard preached in his own hall until his death in 1718. His second son, Jabez, became pastor of a church in the meeting house at Croydon, but died a few months later. John, his son, was baptised by grandfather Richard in June 1714, two months before the great deliverance to dissenters of Queen Anne’s death. Much later he wrote that “for more than 60 years [he had] seen nothing but goodness and mercy following them and the churches of Christ even to this day...”

John, when about 18, was introduced to the *King’s Head Society*. He was ordained in 1738 and served 16 years as a pastor in Cambridgeshire before becoming Theological Tutor at the Mile End Academy, established by the Society, later removed to Homerton and later incorporated in New College. John was awarded an Aberdeen DD in 1762. The night before he died he asked his son Thomas to sing a favourite hymn:—

Never weather-beaten sail
More willing bent to shore

Thomas’s son Josiah, the subject of this paper, incorporated it in the Hymn Book he edited, published in 1836. It was printed as no. 611 and was one of only five removed from the second edition. Thomas, Dr John’s fourth son, married a young

lady who was also named Conder and Josiah was his fourth son and sixth child. With a such a long, genuine Christian ancestry is it any wonder he was happy and sure in his paedo-baptist convictions? The text heading his baptismal hymn *Oh thou whose Covenant is sure* is Psalm 103:17f “His righteousness is unto children’s children, to such as keep His Covenant.”

Conder’s Life and Work

Josiah was a bright child who learnt to read when only four, but his concentration on books when young was occasioned by the loss of his right eye in 1795. He had a smallpox inoculation which went wrong. He regarded it later as providential, otherwise he might have been drawn into more active outdoor pursuits. As it was, even as a boy he became much interested in literature, especially poetry. In his mid and late teens he had poetry printed in various periodicals. He made the acquaintance of such literary figures as Ann Taylor, James Montgomery and Robert Southey, largely through *The Eclectic Review*.

Throughout his life, Josiah was occupied with writing not only for the *Review* but to support the non-conformist and ethical causes to which he was committed—and to make ends meet for his family. One of the earliest works *On Protestant Nonconformity* came out in 1818 and was reprinted in 1822. It was printed in two 300 page volumes and covered such matters as Church government, Creeds, Ministry, Discipline, the Sacraments and Public Worship. He quoted Doddridge on the title page “We are to be concerned for this interest, not merely as the cause of a distinct party, but of truth, honour and liberty; and I will add, in a great measure, the cause of serious piety too.”

His writing ranged widely including *An Analytical Sketch of All Religions a Literary History of the New Testament*, a translation, with notes, of Hebrews and an explanation of the Apocalypse. Most fascinating is a series of more than 30 volumes *The Modern Traveller*, which I have not yet been able to examine. Conder had agreed to edit a series “designed to supply for general readers a popular, correct, and comprehensive survey of the principal countries of the world. Unfortunately, help was forthcoming for only one or two volumes. So he wrote virtually the lot! They were published in monthly parts, 180 pages a part, and each country covered by two parts. Not a trifling undertaking! And Conder, until after the age of sixty never travelled as far as the Lake District and never left these shores.

Most of Conder’s writing was related directly to his Christian concerns. He produced two works on *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and a major revision of Watts’ *Psalms and Hymns*. Albert Peel¹ quotes Conder’s purpose in the latter work as to cast aside “all those compositions which have become obsolete, discard superfluous verses, correcting objectionable phrases and arranging all the hymns in a methodical

series, to aid in preventing these noble strains from falling into disuse.” This work was followed by an address to the 1851 Congregational Union Annual Assembly printed as *The Poet of the Sanctuary*.

It seems to me that a rational appraisal of Conder must recognise his overwhelming importance as hymn-writer and compiler. I have, therefore, devoted more than half this lecture to this aspect of his work. But I question whether his contemporaries saw him in that way. Peel² speaks of him as “perhaps Independency’s most famous layman at the time. . . . Poet and hymn-writer, editor and scholar, lay preacher and theologian, Conder was held in high regard by men who by no means shared his religious and political opinions.” Eustace writes³ “these closing years . . . of unremitting and varied toil . . . to write their history would be to fill pages with details of endless Committee meetings, Deputations to Ministers, Parliamentary tactics, Newspaper Controversies—things of empty interest now.” How much more 130 years later! In Dr. Morison’s funeral eulogy⁴ he said “As their correct and enlightened annalist—as the conductor for many years of the only review they could call their own—as the author of not a few productions which had earned for him the reputation of a scholar, a theologian, a Biblical critic and a man of general knowledge and accomplishments—and as the wise, the prudent, and energetic editor of one of their best newspapers, Josiah Conder will deserve a name and a place among non-conformists as long as the world lasts.” Fulsome perhaps; but eminently fair by contemporary judgements while making no mention of the one reason he is remembered today. Waddington⁵ writes “In ecclesiastical politics. . . [he] seems to have been the most trusted leader of the London Congregationalists, at this time” although he gives the impression that Conder, “a prudent journalist,” was a little too “respectable.”

If there were more space we might question the strength of Conder’s theology, usually described as moderate Calvinism. One of his letters suggests that, however much he detested “neology,” (the contemporary term for “modernism”) he was probably infected by Tübingen-style Biblical criticism. He could not be unaffected by the times in which he lived. A more scholarly and orderly approach to this lecture would have been, probably, to start by giving a comprehensive account of Conder’s “times.” What we can say is that he served his generation through his editorial work with extraordinary diligence and commitment. His contemporaries saw him as a valiant contestant for truth, righteousness and non-conformity against strongly entrenched and bitterly opposing forces.

This present year, 1989, is also the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution. All Conder’s youth and early manhood was spanned by the Napoleonic wars and there followed a strong backlash by an aristocratic and repressive government against the cry for liberty, equality and fraternity. The Industrial Revolution had begun. Agricultural reform, and particularly the enclosures, had driven farm

labourers into unemployment and grinding poverty. There was work in the new factories of the Midlands and the North, but how were they to get there? They could not “get on their bikes,” not yet invented, and which they would have been too poor to buy, Nor could they get to the work without being arrested on the way for vagrancy. If they got there, just like the modern unemployed, where were they to live? The Speenhamland system was widespread in the south, a method of “granting rates in aid of wages to prevent families from positively dying of starvation.”⁶ Trevelyan continues: “While engaged in beating Napoleon, the authorities recognised a double duty in relation to starving men—to keep them alive and to keep them in due subordination.” Trevelyan attempts scrupulous fairness. “The relative misery of the poor at this period as compared to that of their forebears is hard to estimate for want of facts about earlier times. The absolute misery of many of them is a fact incontestable.”⁷ The date of the Peterloo Massacre and the Six Acts is 1819 and that of the Tolpuddle Martyrs is 1834.

On the religious scene there was also much activity and change. Both the Brethren and the Oxford Movement date from around 1830 and in 1833 the Congregational Union was founded. The Evangelical Alliance was founded at this time, the modern missionary movement was progressing and these were the days of the Clapham Sect who combined wealth and privilege with evangelical faith, missionary and evangelistic zeal, social concern and persevering action. Meanwhile Dissenters were still suffering many political and social disadvantages.

The Eclectic Review of September 1857⁸ had an article about its previous editor saying that during Conder’s 20 year editorship “services rendered to the highest interests of the English nation during the stormy years which preceded the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, the carrying of Catholic Emancipation and the Reform Bill, were eminently great.” This was doubtless true, but the *Review* was much more a literary magazine with a few lengthy articles each issue than a newspaper occupied with current affairs and political and social life. *The Patriot* was a better vehicle for disputation and the recording of current events. It had the format of an old-fashioned large sheet newspaper with the front page filled with advertisements for religious books, services and events. There were sixteen pages with four wide columns to a page and small, sometimes very small type. Each weekly edition included an unsigned Leader, presumably by Conder, a Weekly Register of Important Events and Parliamentary and Foreign Intelligence.

In the first number, dated February 22nd, 1832, a lengthy *Address to the Public* included the following statements. It is “devoted to the maintenance of the great principles cherished by Evangelical Non-Conformists. We will repel with becoming feeling the slanderous attacks made upon the body to which we belong, by opponents who, instead of endeavouring to refute our principles, content themselves

with the easier task of calumniating our characters, impeaching our loyalty and representing Dissent as vitally connected with faction, sedition and heresy.”

We are left in no doubt concerning the stand taken by *The Patriot* on the struggle for reform. The second edition revealingly refers to the Tories as “profoundly skilled in all the arts of a tortuous subterranean policy.” The divide between Whig or Liberal and Tory was religious and philosophical. The Establishment was Tory and Dissent anti-Tory from the time of Anne (or some would say the Commonwealth) into the twentieth century. With his ancestry, and dissenting convictions, we would expect Conder to be anti-Tory. But there is a warmth and passion in Conder’s commitment to social justice which far extends beyond a traditional political alignment and the early numbers of *The Patriot* betray his zeal. On the 12th March he printed extracts from a pamphlet on Factory children and West Indian slavery, on the 11th April he deals with the £240,000 annual beer consumption in Sheffield (population 91,000) and on the 22nd March he reports on the New York Temperance Society. The Lord’s Day Observance Society is also fully reported with the agreed Sabbath Position that “The Civil Magistrate [acts] not on religious but political grounds...] so that] every man can employ the day on religious exercises *if he chooses*.”

The great causes were slavery, constitutional reform and the welfare of workers in industry. Until the Anti-Slavery bill was passed, in June 1833, *The Patriot* engaged in the conflict giving many detailed descriptions of the abominations of the “institution” of slavery and the antagonism of the planters to every effort to lessen the cruelties suffered by the slaves. After 1833 the work was incomplete and a letter to Eustace, dated 20th April 1839, shows Conder’s concern had not ceased. “You will see that I assisted, on Wednesday, in forming a new Anti-Slavery Society, for promoting the abolition of the slave trade and slavery throughout the world, in which the older societies will merge.” He also writes “The Religious Freedom Society continues to progress, ... it takes up a great deal of my time.” In fact the society, which was mainly led by Conder and aimed at religious equality and disestablishment, did not last long. Stoughton⁹ is probably justified in his criticism that “Mr Conder’s cry was “organise,” supposing that there was enough in existence of the life he valued, and that it only needed to be brought into action; but he soon found that there was little of the vitality on which he calculated, and that there was no inspiration on the part of committees and officers for carrying out elaborate resolutions.”

However strongly Conder fulminated against the detestable evils of slavery, there can be no question of *The Patriot*’s view of “Infant Slavery in England.” The Archbishop of Canterbury is quoted (March 3rd 1832). It is “a disgrace to a Christian and civilized country to allow such a system to continue, merely for the sake of putting money into the pockets of the master manufacturers.” He also

argued, debatably, that “West India is far less atrocious than the slavery of English children in factories.” He believed that the Planters gained by keeping their workforce strong and healthy but the mill owner did not. Wesley Bready’s biography of Shaftesbury quotes Robert Southey¹⁰ “Moloch is more merciful than mammon.” Bready¹¹ describes Shaftesbury’s 1838 inspection of Bradford when he gathered more than 80 factory cripples “They stood or squatted before me in the shapes of the letters of the alphabet . . . the effects of prolonged toil on the tender frames of children at early ages.” Bready goes on to describe “a countless array of children young yet strangely old: for they are bowed, maimed and broken by the weight of the chains that bind them to their toil.”

In view of the extreme inhumanity involved the pertinacity with which, on the basis of laissez-faire economics, the Ten Hours Act and other factory legislation was contested is hard to credit. All the power was on one side. The poor, however numerous, had but a few tenacious individuals to represent their cause. Shaftesbury was the distinguished leader but Conder used his influence as an editor and a leader of Independency to help the poor. He was a true social reformer having no time for “market forces” when they spelt early death, lifetime suffering and unbelievable hardships for men, women and children, who were often mere infants.

There remains so much more that could—and ought—to be said of Conder’s laborious public life. But we are limited! So, finally, in this part, let me say a little of the most private aspect of his life. His conviction was there was an “inseparable connection between politics and religion.”¹² This governed “all his labours of a political character.” His faith governed all his life but he wrote no diary and only a few fragments reveal his inmost desires. A note dated 5th September 1819 reads “I contemplate the ministerial work with very different feelings from what I have done. I see and feel that I lack the first requisite—a heart overflowing with Divine love towards sinners.”¹³ In 1820 he writes “Oh to be emptied of self, the source of all evil, to be more careless of happiness, bent on glorifying God, and leaving him to provide: desiring more to serve him than to enjoy him...”¹⁴

Conder—A Man For All Times

Let us now turn to Conder’s contribution to Christian worship because for this alone he is remembered and for this he deserves to be honoured.

1) Conder as editor of the 1836 *Congregational Hymn Book*

First, he was editor of *The Congregational Hymn Book* of 1836. The book resulted from a resolution passed at the 1833 annual meeting of the Congregational Union. The preface tells us “the preparation . . . was confided to a Sub-Committee, by

whom the task of collecting and revising the materials ultimately devolved upon a single Editor.”

It was most successful. The advertisement to the edition of 1844 refers to sales of 90,000 copies.¹⁵ Dr Tudur Jones¹⁶ mentions further sales of 26,000 by the following year. It must have made a considerable contribution to the Union’s financial viability in its early days. Conder’s collection was only a supplement to Dr Watts’ *Psalms and Hymns*. As a book of 620 hymns it made available to congregations more than 1,300 pieces, more even than Sankey’s *Sacred Songs and Solos* at its largest.

Even when later Congregational books were published and included a reasonably large selection of Watts they do not merit comparison with Conder. Barrett’s collection of 1887 *The Congregational Church Hymnal* has hymns by many writers whose dates excluded them from consideration fifty years earlier. But I cannot imagine Conder would have been interested in Faber or Newman, Dix or Baring-Gould, Thring or Whittier, Lynch or Rawson. He would, I think, have made room for a few of the translations of Neale or Caswell or, especially, Catherine Winkworth. Unquestionably there would have been work by Mrs Alexander, Frances Ridley Havergal and William Tidd Matson. Bonar, born 1808, must have been too late. The one surprise to me is the omission of anything from Charlotte Elliott, born on March 17th 1789 exactly six months before Conder.

We must pause to observe Conder’s own remarks in the Preface. He declares that the directions to which he worked included “that the preference should be given to hymns containing direct addresses to the Divine Being.” Furthermore, “hymns for private and family devotion ... were ... reserved for a distinct part of the work.” The last 120 hymns fell into that category, and included, rather remarkably, such hymns as “Awake my soul, and with the sun” (501), “Rock of Ages” (532), “Come, Thou fount of every blessing” (534) and “O happy day” (574). The original intention was “to make the first division (Hymns of Praise and Thanksgiving) ... a prominent feature of the work.” Indeed it was originally intended to make that section virtually complete but when it became obvious, during compilation, that Isaac Watts had supremely fulfilled the need for such hymns the first division became only the first hundred.

What other principles guided Conder? The preface explains “As a general rule, it has been the study of the Editor to select hymns upon those subjects and occasions with which the greatest deficiency has been felt. In his own peculiar walk, as “The Poet of the Sanctuary,” Dr Watts stands almost alone. But in his day the Missionary Spirit had not been poured out upon our churches; nor had Protestants been roused to a sense of their highest duty as the conservators of the true faith. For hymns breathing the spirit which ought to animate the exertions of the disciples of Christ to propagate the gospel the church stood in need of

additional contributors; and in the elevated and thrilling strains of a living writer, one of the sweetest singers of Zion, we seem to hear the silver notes of the trumpet of Jubilee (I suppose he means Montgomery!). Between 50 and 60 hymns adapted to Missionary prayer-meetings and public services, will be found in the present volume.” Conder goes on to mention the supply of hymns “adapted to the special services of our Congregational discipline. Under the heads of Baptism, Funereal, Ordination, Founding or opening a Place of Worship, Admission of Members. Prayer Meetings and Church Meetings, a sufficient variety, it is hoped, to meet this want, many of them new to the religious public.”

Finally we read Conder’s judgment of another need fulfilled by the new work. I quote: “Another class of hymns in which Dr Watts has been found deficient, is of an experimental cast. For these we have to turn to the fervent compositions of Charles Wesley, to the pathetic complaints of Cowper, and to other writers, of an inferior order, whose hymns owe their popularity to their character.” I rather like the way in which Conder continues “But, keeping in view the adaptation of the Selection to Congregational Worship, it has been deemed proper to place a large proportion of these effusions of piety among those appropriate to the family and the closet, although some of them may, perhaps, be deemed suitable for occasional use at sacramental and other services of a more private nature, under the guidance of a sounder discretion than is found to preside over the choice of hymns for public worship.” Amen and amen to that last sentiment!

We may summarise by suggesting that Conder and his committee wanted to add to Watts missionary hymns, hymns particularly suited to the Congregational denomination and hymns stronger in devotional feeling that is plain and obvious in Watts. It only requires a reading of the “Hymn Book” to appreciate that it is devoid of the sentimentality of Sankey and makes no surrender to mere subjectivism, no yielding to the temptation of the flowery. But Conder’s poetic sense was also strong. He would not do more than glance in the direction of the stricter Calvinists whose writings fill so much of the space of such a collection as the Strict Baptists’ *Gospel Hymns*, however sympathetic he may have been to their theology. So we find nothing of Medley, only 1 of Berridge, 3 of Stennett, 4 of Beddome and just 7 of Fawcett.

The index omits ascriptions to no fewer than 82 hymns, including some regularly ascribed to such men as Wesley or Fawcett. I work only from the attributions given and am therefore not precise in indicating the main contributors to the book. James Montgomery (1771-1854) has 72 hymns, Charles Wesley (1707-88) 44, Philip Doddridge (1702-51) 41, John Newton (1725-1807) 31, William Cowper (1731-1800) 23 and Thomas Kelly (1769-1855) 23. Lesser contributions come from Augustus Toplady (1740-78) 12, Bishop Heber (1783-1826), Henry Lyte (1793-1847) and William Bathurst (1796-1877) have 11 each.

The last named has sunk into almost complete and undeserved oblivion. Modern books rarely include even his rather delightful –

O for a faith that will not shrink
 Though pressed by many a foe. (Christian Hymns 803)

But Conder appreciated Bathurst just as he turned unerringly to the lastingly great writers of the 18th century and his own time. Tudur Jones remarks¹⁷ “Some three-quarters of the hymns which he selected have maintained their popularity.”

Routley¹⁸ firmly maintained that after Watts and Wesley, Montgomery and Doddridge are to be acknowledged as the greatest of hymn writers. By his choice it is evident that Conder and Routley are of one mind. The four stand firmly at the head of the list. Wesley was a little suspect to Conder. In a letter to his son Eustace, dated September 9th, 1838, he comments on *O Love Divine* “like many other beautiful hymns of almost impassioned devotion ... it savours too much of the mystic school of devotion, which is not the Pauline.” In the preface to the Hymn Book Conder had said that Wesley “one of the most beautiful of our sacred poets, is often bold, careless and unequal to an extreme, and requires a pruning hand to render his hymns fit for general use.”

If Conder had done nothing else his editorship of the *Hymn Book* would have been a magnificent service to the churches of his denomination. It was impossible for Watts *Psalms and Hymns* to maintain the virtual monopoly they had enjoyed for more than a century. Other “supplements” had been produced incorporating many an unsatisfactory hymn. To quote the Preface to the quite dreadful *Congregational Hymnary* of 1916 “each generation requires—or, at least, demands—its own hymn book.” The wealth of 18th century hymn writing was waiting to be fully employed in the worship of God. The 19th century was to prove disappointing. All that is needed is to look through Barrett’s *Congregational Church Hymnal* of 1887 to observe the invasion of the Oxford Movement and of theological liberalism. Then turn, for a different kind of shock, to Sankey’s and Alexander’s. Of course the fifty or so years between the *Hymn Book* and the *Hymnal* was not a completely barren wilderness. There are refreshing fountains in Bonar and Mrs Alexander, Miss Havergal and Charlotte Elliot and Fanny Crosby (Mrs Van Alstyne). There was much of Lyte and Kelly too late for Conder’s collection. However Conder gave the Congregational churches 50 years of worthwhile hymn singing to add to Watts; before the deprivation and penury introduced by Dr Barrett and the obnoxious Garrett Horder.

ii) Conder’s own hymns

Having acknowledged Conder the editor we must pay tribute to Josiah Conder the hymn writer. Of the aforementioned 620 hymns, headed by Montgomery’s

72, there follow 61 by the editor himself. Eight of these were single verses. Naturally he makes reference to this, if a little obscurely, in the Preface. “For the frequency with which the name of ONE contributor occurs in the Index of first lines, the Editor feels as if some apology were due; but the Committee must share in the blame, if blame attaches to the circumstance. Many of the hymns referred to had, without the Author’s permission already found their way into other Collections, and come into general use. Others, composed on various occasions, and at distant intervals, had been accumulating in his hands before the present volume was contemplated; and a few have been written expressly for this work, during its passing through the press.”

We must attempt the difficult task of evaluating Conder as hymnographer rather than collector and editor. Let me start by quoting from the little foreword to the worst selection of hymns etc., in widespread use in modern evangelical churches. “In a time of mission and evangelism, it is vital that the power of music to unite Christians is harnessed. This does not come easily because we all like what we like in music. We need to become familiar with the songs that other Christians sing and encourage them to enjoy what we enjoy.” (Some may recognise the source¹⁹)

“We like what we like” is either the most obvious truism or arrant nonsense and moreover, verbally at least, linked to music rather than words. The question is whether Christians have any right to “like” certain hymns or songs because of a melody or by reason of certain sentiments expressed. For example ought we to like to sing (or should we sing!) Matheson’s *Gather us in* (*Congregational Hymnary* 326)

Gather us in; we worship only Thee;
 In varied names we stretch a common hand;
 In diverse forms a common soul we see;
 In many ships we seek one spirit land;
 Gather us in.

AG Secrett²⁰ wrote: “A few minutes spent with the index of authors in any popular 20th century hymnal should [make us realize] the ruthlessness with which modern compilers have robbed evangelical people of their heritage. He goes on to quote Bernard Lord Manning’s references to “the pedestrian rhymes of ethical common places,” “the wretched stuff ... (of) that casual papist rhymer Faber” and the strange fact that “the Orthodox will sing hymns by unitarians and theosophists without turning a hair.”

I do not regard this as a needless, if enjoyable, digression. We are to attempt an evaluation of Conder as a hymn-writer. There are simple, straightforward criteria we should apply. First, (to follow on from Secrett and Manning), the writing should be theologically sound and accurate. We need correct doctrine as

we sing or we shall become lax and targets for attacks on our minds by Satan. Secondly, it should be steeped in and derived from Scripture. Thirdly, it should afford a medium through which the congregation, a corporate body comprising different individuals, can express desires and aspirations, thoughts and feelings, in God's presence and in the light of divine truth.

When we meet to hear gospel truth and the issues of eternity are in our minds and affecting our emotions it will be as natural to reach out to God as for the new born lamb to seek its mother's milk. So hymns should largely be an address to the Almighty but not so absolutely as to exclude devout meditation. Conder's own final collection, published in 1856, was entitled *Hymns of Praise, Prayer and Devout Meditations*.

Apart from the essentials of content we should notice certain aspects of form. Hymns are not poems to be read but songs to be sung. *Songs of Praise* is a good title of an exceedingly poor book. The words must fit the music. Stress must be faithful, reliable and rhythmic. A congregation unfamiliar with a hymn ought to be able to sing it without undue difficulty without needing to juggle with inaccurately stressed words or syllables. The memory is aided by faithful rhyme. The great writers seldom fail in their poetic form. All great hymn writing is poetic. It is not enough to bear the form of poetry. But the poetry is to subserve the spiritual purpose. It is the creature, but it is strong and must be held on a tight leash. There is a fine balance to be drawn between the dull and pedestrian and the restrained but poetic use of words. Hymns should not be dull though they must not be flowery. The best hymns are dug from a deep mine of spiritual experience, transported through deep and poetic feeling to fire the singing congregation with devotion. By these principles Conder, who wrote two hymns of such outstanding quality that it is extraordinary to find any reasonable collection omitting either. But that would not suffice to make him a great hymn writer. Binney wrote one great hymn, *Eternal Light* (So far I have read only one other hymn of his).

It is altogether proper that we should observe Conder at his glorious best but we must also think of his wider output. For convenience, I will refer to *Congregational Praise* whenever possible. CP no. 58 provides five verses of *The Lord is King*. This exceptional hymn is based on Revelation 19:6. "Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." The tunes to which it is usually sung enhance the joyful lyricism of the poetry. As so often with Conder doctrinal truths are tight-packed verse by verse. God is presented as the omnipotent Sovereign whose wisdom, justice, truth, holiness and providential care are worthy of adoring praise. His will, His decrees, are to be accepted by His creation. He is the Father and especially the Father of the loving, crucified, Saviour. Men are only His creatures but through His conquering grace they may know eternal enjoyment and praise of God.

Of the three verses missing from *Congregational Praise* Conder's fifth most frequently appears in other books.

Come make your wants, your burdens known,
 He will present them at the throne;
 And angel bands are waiting there,
 His messages of love to bear.

The poet moves naturally from contemplating and exulting in God's sovereign power to the privileged state of his people, who are able at any time or circumstance to avail themselves of the Great Intercessor. This is followed by an excursion into paradox for their further encouragement.

Oh, when his wisdom can mistake,
 His might decay, His love forsake,
 Then may his children cease to sing,
 The Lord omnipotent is King.

Conder's seventh verse is universally neglected, but in fact complements the preceding and completes the unity of the hymn. In it he stresses God's omnipresence and reminds the world battered and embattled believer of the nearness of the infinite.

Alike pervaded by His eye,
 All parts of His dominion lie;
 This world of ours and worlds unseen,
 And thin the boundary between.

It is not difficult to recognize that here is one of the greatest hymns. Compact and concise, it is simple but wide embracing in conception, instructing in the truth, expounding scripture, enlivening the spirit and rejoicing the heart.

One lecture does not allow more than a cursory examination of other hymns. CP no. 187 is not so popular with editors but should vie with *The Lord is King* for grandeur of thought, facility of expression, and the true spirit of adoration. Conder's chosen text was Hebrews 1:3, "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person". *Thou art the Everlasting Word* is, if anything, more theological and scriptural. We might suppose a congregation would struggle to encompass the high thinking. In practice it seems to provide a pathway to an expectant, worshipful, awe-filled spirit in the worshipper. Conder does not leave us in the court of the Gentiles but takes us beyond the veil into the eternal "Holy of Holies."

In the preface to *Hymns of Praise, Prayer and Devout Meditations*, Eustace writes that "the preparation of the volume had occupied much of its Author's time and thought during the closing year of his life, and he had revised for the press all but the last two or three sheets, when the arresting hand of death was

gently laid upon him.” It consists of 160 hymns, including 22 single verses, plus seven by his wife and his own Latin translation of *Thou art the everlasting Word*.

Apart from those already mentioned a number have been accepted. The two-verse communion hymn *Bread of Heaven* CP no. 304, is much anthologized. It is thoughtful and evangelic, faithful to the purpose of cross and sacrament. CP no. 101 *How shall I follow Him I serve?* is also frequently used. It is a ten verse hymn, but *The Congregational Hymn Book* prints the last three verses as a separate hymn. *Christian Hymns* no. 749 supplies the missing verses.

Privations, sorrows, bitter scorn,
The life of toil, the mean abode,
The faithless kiss, the crown of thorns,
Are these the consecrated road?

'Twas thus He suffered, though a Son,
Foreknowing, choosing, feeling all,
Until the perfect work was done,
And drank the bitter cup of gall?

Hebrews 2 is evidently much in the authors mind in the latter verse. The view of consecration is wholesome and scriptural. It is another magnificent hymn.

I would like to introduce you to much more of Conder but the clock is inexorable. Conder's hymns cover a wide spectrum of Biblical thought and scriptural experience. I am glad that *Christian Hymns* no. 836 has rediscovered an excellent wedding hymn blending Genesis 2, Ephesians 5, John 2 and 1 Corinthians 6.

The opening couplet

O God, Who didst an equal mate
For Adam of himself create

has been helpfully changed and reads

O God, Who didst from Adam's side
Fashion an helpmeet for his bride

Another line is altered from “Who dost these vital frames possess” to “Who dost these bodies now possess.” I think the modern mind probably needed the change but was it necessary to tamper with

O let thy love the model be,
Of this their nuptial unity

and make it limp along reading

As they together live to Thee?

Beyond, beyond that boundless sea, CP no. 19 is still fairly common and *Christian Hymns* no. 408 preserves for us another good communion hymn, *Lord in this blest and hallowed hour*. Conder's first verse was “Far from my thoughts, vain

world, depart” but this has been omitted and the third substituted as the opening stanza. Another most useful hymn is found in the splendid collection in *Christian Hymns* in no. 329 *O God, who didst thy will unfold*. Conder compares the Old Testament revelation “by dreams, by oracle, by seer” with the provision of God’s Word and Holy Spirit which we enjoy.

No need of prophets to inquire.
The sun is risen, the stars retire.

It is as if the writer has anticipated some of the vainer pretensions of our own times.

Christian Hymns no. 288 has also preserved a two verse advent hymn of high value:

Hasten, Lord, the promised hour!
Come in glory and in power!
Still thy foes are unsubdued;
Nature sighs to be renewed;
Time has nearly reached its sum;
All things, with Thy bride, say “Come!”
Jesus, whom all worlds adore,
Come and reign for evermore.”

How often Conder is inspired by the book of Revelation!

The baptismal hymn, no. 165 in *The Congregational Hymn Book*, deserves to be restored to use.

O Thou Whose covenant is sure
To all who fear thy name;
Whose mercies age on age endure,
Eternally the same:
Thou art our fathers God, we plead
That title: we are Thine.
Pour down thy Spirit on our seed,
And sanctify our line.

In Thee our fathers put their trust;
Thy ways they humbly trod:
Honoured and sacred is their dust,
And still they live to God.
Heirs to their faith, their hope, their prayers
We the same path pursue.
Entail the blessing to *our* heirs.
Lord! Show Thy promise true.

We must bring our taste of Conder to an end. He was a man full of concern for lost souls. No. 225 in the *Hymn Book* is a warm missionary hymn.

That light divine, oh, let it spread,
Till all the darkness shall have fled;
And the false crescent's fading ray
Be lost in the full noon of day.

Reveal, O Lord Thy saving plan
To all the families of man:
Let distant nations hear Thy word;
Let every people praise the Lord.

My final offering is no. 432 in the *Hymn Book*. This shows us the man to whom we pay tribute today.

Welcome, welcome! Sinner, hear!
Hang not back through shame or fear.
Doubt not, nor distrust the call;
Mercy is proclaimed to all.

Welcome to the offered peace:
Welcome, prisoner, to release.
Burst thy bonds; be saved; be free.
Rise and come; He calleth thee

Welcome, weeping penitent!
Grace has made thy heart relent.
Welcome, long-estrangèd child!
God in Christ is reconciled.

Welcome to the cleansing fount,
Springing from the sacred mount;
Welcome to the feast divine,
Bread of life, and living wine.

None can come that shall not find,
Mercy called whom grace inclined;
Nor shall any willing heart
Hear the bitter word, Depart.

Oh the virtue of that price,
That redeeming sacrifice!
Come, ye bought, but not with gold:
Welcome to the sacred fold!

Amen.

References

¹ *These Hundred Years*, p. 124.

- ² *Op. cit.*, p. 191.
- ³ *Memoir*, p. 306.
- ⁴ Quoted in Skeats and Miall, *History of the Free Churches in England*, p. 560.
- ⁵ *Congregational History*, Volume iv, p. 547.
- ⁶ Trevelyan, *History of England*, p. 538.
- ⁷ *Op cit.*, p. 607.
- ⁸ *The Eclectic Review*, September 1857, p. 247.
- ⁹ *History of Religion in England*, Vol. VIII, p. 270ff.
- ¹⁰ Wesley Bready's biography of Shaftesbury, p. 708.
- ¹¹ *Op cit.*, p. 270ff.
- ¹² *Memoir*, p. 270ff.
- ¹³ *Memoir*, p. 122.
- ¹⁴ *Memoir*, p. 219ff.
- ¹⁵ *Congregational Hymn Book*, 1844.
- ¹⁶ *Congregationalism in England*, p. 225.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ Eric Routley, *Philip Doodridge, 1702–51: His Contribution to English Religion*,
- ¹⁹ *Mission Praise*
- ²⁰ *Evangelical Library Bulletin*, 11–1951

Savoy, 1833 and all that

George Hemming

The somewhat lighthearted title for this paper has an underlying seriousness. Some years ago a book was published entitled *1066 and All That*. This book, which is quite amusing, owes its title to the fact that the one date known to every child in England was 1066, the date of the Battle of Hastings. Nowadays the date 1066 has little significance to most people. If you talk to youngsters and say 'What is the significance of 1066?' they will normally look blank. If you say 'When was the Battle of Hastings?' they will scratch their heads or shrug their shoulders. I have tried this and speak from experience. This indicates a complete change in the way history is taught and the way in which the great dates in our history are regarded.

Now if we transfer this to church life we find that at one time Congregationalists or Independents if asked 'What is the significance of the *Savoy Declaration*?' could have told you. They would have known that this was the Declaration of Faith of the original founding fathers of Congregationalism. Alternatively, if you had said '1833?' then many, if not most, Congregationalists would have said 'Yes, that was the year when the newly formed Congregational Union of England and Wales issued its Declaration of Faith and that is the platform upon which modern Congregationalists should be standing'.

That situation no longer obtains and in any Congregational church, whether now in the Congregational Federation, United Reformed Church or an Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches, the same questions would produce very little positive result. Generally our people know little of their own history. Indeed it is probably not too extravagant to say that there are many ministers of Congregational Churches who have never studied the *Savoy Declaration*, as the very similar *Westminster Confession*, and that they have certainly never pondered the changes between that took place between the writing of the *Savoy Declaration* in 1658 and the *1833 Declaration*.

What I seek to do in this paper is to comment, very briefly on the content of these two Declarations of Faith, move onto the Declaration made by the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1964 and then to bring the matter right up to the present day. In order to help us do this I will also sketch in the historical background very briefly.

The Reformation to the Savoy Declaration of Faith

We all know of the 16th Century reformation when this country was, in the great mercy of God, delivered from the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church. Although most intelligent Englishmen were very thankful to be free from Rome they had no idea of complete religious freedom. The idea that a man might have his own religion, or that a group of people might have a religion of their own was simply not possible in the climate of that day. If you were an Englishman you belonged to the Church of England and though there might be considerable debate as to the doctrine and practice of that church it would all be carried on within the boundaries of the church. So in due course the Reformation led to the Elizabethan settlement and the establishment of the Church of England with its *39 Articles*.

Time passed and the country found itself in the grip of a civil war and the episcopalianism of the Elizabethan settlement was now being rejected. The need for a new settlement was clear and urgent and so Parliament decreed that a group of ministers should gather together and formulate a new Confession of Faith. This was during a time of strong Scottish influence on English affairs and hence the Westminster Assembly, which deliberated over a period of 5½ years, consisted very largely of presbyterian minded ministers. In due course the *Westminster Confession of Faith* emerged. Its doctrinal position was thorough going, 100% Calvinism. In other words it was completely biblical. In church order it was presbyterian which reflected the thinking of the time. Men thought 'We are English, we belong to the Church of England and that church ought to be a Presbyterian Church'.

There were however a number of men present who dissented from the dominant presbyterianism and became known as 'the Five Dissenting Brethren'. You may read their names and an account of their activities in a number of publications referring to that time. Although they were asked time and time again, at the Assembly, what they really wanted they never answered the question fully and preferred simply to dissent. However, a few years later, when Scottish influence in English affairs had diminished and there was an increase in the number of independents in Parliament, Parliament requested 'the Dissenting Brethren' and their colleagues to formulate their own Confession of Faith. So in 1658, after deliberation which lasted 11 days in contrast to the 5½ years of the Westminster Assembly, the 'brethren' produced what became known as the *Savoy Declaration*, their meetings having taken place at the Savoy Palace.

Now quite simply the doctrine of the *Savoy Declaration* is very, very similar to the doctrine of the *Westminster Confession* which is 100% Calvinism, thoroughly and totally biblical. The Church order was not Presbyterian but Independent,

visualising the local assembly as being the manifestation of the Church of Christ in a particular locality. In doing so it went completely against the current climate of opinion. Now I emphasise this point because to me it is all important in considering these themes. Let me reiterate that the average Englishman believed that he belonged to a national Church of England. You can argue about its doctrines and practises but we are all English, we are all Christian and we all belong to the one church. But these men of Savoy came up with this quite startling idea that not all Englishmen are Christians but only those belong to the church as are set aside by God the Father and quickened by God the Holy Spirit, having been redeemed by God the Son. These, and these only, are Christians, and therefore the church in any locality is a gathering together of such men. The local church is *the* church.

Now at this point we need to remember that these Men of Savoy did not envisage any diminution in the doctrine of the church. These men were high churchmen. This point could be developed but we must stress that they were high churchmen and their doctrine of the church was indeed very solemn. The local church gathering is the body of Christ and the actions of that church are indeed the actions of Christ himself.

The Savoy Declaration of Faith to the 1833 Declaration of Faith

Now, passing on, we have come from the Elizabethan settlement via the Westminster Assembly and *Confession* to the *Savoy Declaration of Faith*. Independency or Congregationalism is now an established force in the land. As the years pass by it needs to be noticed that although the Savoy Men were most insistent on the doctrine of the local church at no time did they imagine that every church would simply go its own way without any thought for the well being of other churches. Right from the start, Independents recognised the need of fellowship and there was indeed a great deal of fellowship and practical help among the Independent churches in the country. We pass over 175 years now and come to the year of 1833. It was about this time, or perhaps from the beginning of the 19th Century, that more ministers of Independent churches felt the need to formalise this requirement of fellowship among churches. It had been carried on so far on an *ad hoc* basis but now many men, sober godly men, felt the time had come to set up some kind of federation or organisation of Independent or Congregational churches. So, without going into any detail at all, in the 1830s the Congregational Union of England and Wales came into being and once more the need was felt for a confession of faith so that when any individual Congregationalist was asked 'Well now, what do you actually believe?' he could answer 'This is our position'.

So in 1833, representatives of the individual churches gathered together and after much deliberation the *Declaration of Faith of the Congregational Churches of England and Wales* was produced. I am happy to say that it is now available again and copies are readily obtainable. Now why couldn't the Congregational Churches say 'We have been in existence 200 years and this (the Savoy Declaration) is what we believe?' Now what had happened was that a change had taken place in the thinking and doctrinal position of the Congregational Churches of which many Congregationalists had no idea. They believed that they still held the same views as the men of Savoy but there was in fact a very important difference. At this point I can do no better than quote extensively from RW Dale's *History of Congregationalism* because Dale puts it far better than I can. I quote:

Among the ministers who were present in the Congregational Library when the declarations were adopted there were some who could not be called Calvinists in any proper sense of the designation rather they approached the Arminian standpoint. It is probable that a still larger number, perhaps a majority, supposed they were Calvinists but had admitted into their creed beliefs that were inconsistent with the fundamental assumptions and characteristic conclusions of Calvinism. They had not consciously and frankly rejected the theology of their ecclesiastical ancestors but it was no longer the accurate expression of their true faith. When they approached the critical articles of the system they were ill at ease. They had clung to the substance of the old faith but the traditional and authoritative definitions seemed too hard and uncompromising. They thought it possible to express the same truth in a form more tolerable by expressing it more vaguely. They did not know that their Calvinism was decaying and that as yet they had found no other system that satisfied them. There were some vigilant theologians like Richard Winter Hamilton of Leeds who saw clearly the drift of Congregational thought. 'I am no accuser' he said 'but I do feel that there is creeping among us a refining method as to the great propoundings of the Gospel. A full blooded dogma of the old school must be revived. Our Congregational Union symbol of faith is to me unsatisfactory and lamentable.' Hamilton was a man of singularly vigorous intellect, of great wit, an excellent classical scholar and a learned dogmatic theologian. He had a masculine understanding and was very impatient of vagueness of thought and doctrinal statement and he saw that many of the articles of the Declaration were intentionally vague. They were meant to be Trinitarian but wanted the firmness and courage of genuine Athanasianism. A minister who was not too scrupulous might accept them without difficulty. They were meant to be Calvinistic but the Calvinism was timid, almost apologetic, as if there had been an anxiety on the part of the Union not to provoke Arminian hostility, and this want of theological precision accurately represents the mind of the English Congregational Churches in 1833.

So we have moved from the full blooded Calvinism of the Savoy to the palatable Calvinism of the 1833 men. Why did this happen? Now the first reason which is sometimes advanced is this, and Dale himself brings this out quite strongly, that for a number of years before 1833, indeed during the second half of the preceding century, England had been blessed with the Methodist revival. In contrast on the continent there had been the horrors of the French Revolution. I think it is true to say that it was the Methodist revival which spared this country the horrors of the French Revolution.

Wonderful though the Revival was it had the effect of turning Ministers' attentions more and more to evangelism and the gathering in of lost souls and gave them less time to ponder theological matters. We cannot but have great sympathy for these men and I think that if we were given the choice of spending a day pondering theological matters or spending a day or week going out on preaching with results guaranteed to the faithful preaching of the gospel we would choose to go out preaching in the highways and byways, I say this so we can understand what was happening but I suggest that the argument is, to a certain extent, specious. Insofar that it is true that ministers were occupied mainly with evangelism and therefore had little time or inclination for profound theological thought it is truly a reflection on the ministers. This must be said because it is here I disagree with the view Dale puts forward. If you look back on the men of Savoy they too had been powerful and effective evangelistic preachers. Many had been brought under the sound of the gospel and many had been brought into the kingdom through the preaching of these men but they had also given time and intellectual energy to theological thought and discussion. Of course if we go back further to the apostle Paul we have to recognise that not only did he go hither and thither preaching, gathering in converts and founding churches but during the same period, he was also formulating profound theology. Paul's greatest and most massive theological writing, the epistle to the Romans, was not written from prison but while he was still actively engaged in his evangelistic and church planting work. So if it is true that men were attracted to evangelism at the expense of theological thought that has to be a criticism of the men concerned.

There was, I would suggest, a much more profound and unrealised reason for this change. The horrors of the French Revolution, from which England was saved by a time of revival, arose simply because of a change in the underlying thinking of men. When you use the phrase 'the climate of opinion' you are talking about something which is nebulous, very hard to define, but it is most powerful. We are all of us, at all times, influenced far more than we realise by the climate of thinking and opinion round about us. During the preceding 100 years there had come in the thinking of Europe a great surge of rationalism and men, without understanding what had happened, found themselves thinking in a rather different

way. For the men of Savoy it was instinctive to go to Scripture and formulate everything on that basis but for the men of 1833 Scripture needed to be interpreted in a reasonable way and if the interpretation of two passages of Scripture led to an apparent contradiction this presented a very real problem. I am oversimplifying here but I think that what I am saying is basically accurate. The Savoy men were true Calvinists who studied the Scriptures and saw clearly that the Scriptures teach the sovereignty of God in all areas of life, including and especially in the area of the salvation of an individual. This they therefore declared fearlessly and unhesitatingly. In the study of Scripture they also saw that man is a responsible creature, that he is accountable for his sins and that he will be held responsible on the day of God's judgement. They were well aware, as every true Calvinist is aware, that these two doctrines put together create philosophical difficulties. If God is sovereign how can man be blamed? If man is responsible and can make free choice how can God be sovereign? These are the questions which are continually being raised. Now to the men of Savoy this was not as severe a problem as it is to us and as it was in 1833 because the men of Savoy were not particularly concerned to have a nice rounded philosophy. They were not ruled by rationalism. The men of 1833 though not ruled by rationalism were undoubtedly influenced by it. They saw the difficulties which the Calvinistic and biblical scheme of truth presents and they backed away instinctively from the sharpness of the dilemma.

This is an attitude we find in surprisingly different areas. The 'Jehovah's Witness' cannot understand how one person could be God and at the same time man and therefore rejects Christ's divinity. The Arminian says that man has free will and choice and therefore God cannot be sovereign. Passages in Scripture which teach God's sovereignty are either avoided or reinterpreted. Again the hypercalvinist accepts God's sovereignty but cannot understand the free offer of the gospel if only a limited number of people are to be saved. Basically each group satisfies its need for philosophical completeness at the expense of full gospel teaching and belief. The true Calvinist is content with an incomplete philosophy and declares the full counsel of God without fear. The men of 1833 were not full blooded Calvinists and so you have moved from the Calvinism of 1658 to the so called 'palatable' Calvinism of 1833 and the underlying reason is, I suggest, the climate of opinion in which these men lived their lives.

The 1833 Declaration of Faith to the 1964 Declaration of Faith

The next document to which I call your attention is the 1964 *Declaration of Faith of the Congregational Union of England and Wales*. It is an interesting document which conveys clearly the impression of men who were godly, men who were

seeking to reconcile all that they had been brought up in and all that they had learned from Scripture with what was going on in the world around them. Therefore they produced a document which was quite definitely Trinitarian but it is no longer evangelical. I say it was Trinitarian but I think, as was true in 1833, a Sabellian who was not too clear about his own beliefs or too scrupulous could have stood with the 1964 declaration. When we try to see why this was so you will understand that my fundamental thesis is that men are influenced by the climate of opinion around them. You may bring the charge back at me that I too am influenced. Perfectly true and I think one of the tasks that besets us always is to try to discern the climate of opinion around about us and then to examine our own position to ensure that we are being controlled by Scripture and not by the climate of opinion.

Now what had happened in the 130 years since 1833? Rationalism was still there and it had got a very firm grip on the thinking of cultured men. Added to this you have a new factor in evolutionism. I am not meaning evolution as a scientific theory but evolutionism which is in effectively almost a religion. They were affected by this and therefore they found it very difficult to accept the authority of Scripture as it had been accepted hitherto. You see the 1833 men truly believed that they were Calvinists and that they stood with Savoy but they didn't. The 1964 men truly believed that they stood on the authority of Scripture but in point of fact they didn't. It is sad to see the way in which they are seeking to adjust their thinking to modify and make palatable the earlier declarations. To rationalism had been added evolutionism and this affected the men of 1964.

Beyond 1964

Before going on to other matters we will pursue this subject a little further. Evolutionism inevitably leads ultimately to the doctrine of the autonomy of man. That man is completely free and there is no God. Man is himself the master of his fate and the master of his universe. Autonomous man has now come centre stage and it is interesting to see the effect this has had upon those who have moved into the URC. The URC is taking a leading role in the ecumenical 'Not Strangers but Pilgrims' movement. The idea being to promote fusion with other churches, and ultimately with Rome, to have just one great church. Now why is this? I think the answer lies here, that rationalism and evolutionism have led to the doctrine of the autonomy of man and this leaves man in a very vulnerable and lonely situation. Here is man in the universe and it is a large and terrifying place. There is no God and no ultimate authority and man is just left to himself. He must cope with his own destiny with his own resources for there are no other resources and man is on his own and that is frightening. The reaction to that fear is to go

back to the security of Rome because Rome is always there and Rome doesn't change. Rome sits back and watches people trying to work out an adjustment between the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith and the Romish method of justification. Rome sits back and waits, and all that is going on is leading inevitably to this one position where all of us go back under the shelter of Rome. We can argue among ourselves once we are inside, but we shall have the complete security of being in the one church with the one head on earth and we will feel secure. So to summarise, Calvinism has given way to palatable Calvinism which has given way to an non-evangelical situation, which has given way to the ecumenical attempt to find security in one large organisation.

Developments among Evangelicals in the 20th Century

Side by side with these developments there has taken place another movement and we need to look at this. In 1922 the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches came into being and in some ways they have taken the position which the older Congregational Churches took. But I would emphasise only in some ways and if you look at the FIEC declarations of faith you will see that it is thoroughly evangelical but it is certainly not Calvinistic. In many ways this also represents the position of the average Congregational church and I imagine that people moving from an FIEC church into a Congregational church would find few changes. They seem to be much the same nowadays and indeed the question may be asked 'What is the difference?' Wouldn't it be a good idea for EFCC simply to merge with FIEC for we both hold to independency and are evangelical? There are of course practical reasons for not doing so but the theological reasons are much more important.

First of all what has amazed and saddened me over the years is the way in which, quite unthinkingly, Congregational churches have moved away from the Congregational, Calvinistic and biblical doctrine of baptism. I read with sadness, but no longer with surprise, in *Concern* of a church which is rejoicing in the way in which the Lord has provided the money so they can build a baptistry. What would the men of Savoy have thought of the fact that again and again Congregational churches have turned themselves into Baptist Churches? They have not realised that the implications of this are that they are departing from the old ways. Many ministers of such churches would claim to be Calvinistic but of course they are not for the doctrine of baptism in the Savoy Declaration arises directly from Calvinism, that is to say from the New Testament.

The biblical doctrine of infant baptism was very ably dealt with at this conference some years ago by John Legg and I say nothing more on that theme. I simply remind you that the true Calvinistic Savoy position is that baptism is a

sacrament which sets forth the work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating the individual. For an individual to become a child of God the work of the Father, the work of the Son and the work of the Holy Spirit is necessary. It is needful that God the Father elects that person. It is necessary that the second person in the Trinity redeems that individual. It is necessary that the third person of the Trinity quickens to life. The work of God in election is secret and cannot, by its nature, be represented or demonstrated in any sacrament. The work of the Son in redeeming is set forth and demonstrated in the sacrament of the Lord's supper but the work of regeneration, the work of the Holy Spirit, is set forth in the sacrament of baptism and it is of the essence of that work that it is the direct free work of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is a work that is done upon us and therefore the whole idea of dipping somebody in water is repugnant to the doctrine. The Holy Spirit comes to a man, it is he who brings grace and therefore the biblical mode of baptism is pouring or aspersion. A simple comparison of the statements in Acts 1 and 2 shows this is quite clearly taught in Scripture. The whole trend of Scripture demonstrates that the work of the Holy Spirit is applied to men and that is why baptism by immersion is repugnant to Savoy, to Calvinism and to the New Testament. In departing from this pattern FIEC, and, alas, modern Congregational churches have departed from the old faith.

In addition the climate of opinion is currently highly individualistic. The individual is all important and this is reflected so much in church life. The idea of discipline has disappeared almost entirely from modern thought, as anyone with experience in schools or who is a parent or grandparent could tell you. Something goes wrong in a Congregational church and people don't like what is going on. But this is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ and must be injured only in the last resort. We must treat the unity of the Church as of utmost importance and we will only leave after considering the matter with utmost gravity. But today people don't think like that and if they don't like what is going on in a church they go down the road to another, or set up their own church in their own home. This individualism, which fits in with the modern climate of thought, is a very far cry from Savoy Congregationalism, from the New Testament order.

Another great characteristic of modern thought is its hedonism. The pursuit of pleasure is the one end paramount in the thinking of many. Many people at the present time. The important questions are 'Do you enjoy it?' and 'Are you getting satisfaction in your work?' This comes out when you interview young people for missionary service. At one time the thought was 'I am willing to sacrifice myself and my whole life and my ambitions in the service of the gospel overseas'. Nowadays the thoughts are 'Shall I get job satisfaction from this?' and 'If I go out to the mission field what work will I do and will I enjoy it? Shall I get a sense of fulfilment from doing this?' Now in the world pursuing pleasure may be the one

end but this influence coming into the church means that again and again our whole approach is experience based. You will find in the more excessive parts of the charismatic movement that what is so important is experience. Are you having the right experience? Are you really enjoying it? So our approach is based upon experience rather than truth. Here in 1989 we in Congregational churches need to reassess our whole position as to what extent we are being controlled or influenced by the climate of opinion around us. Let us to be our guard and come back to our roots.

A twofold plea

I To ministers

I should like to finish with a twofold plea. First may I speak to my fellow ministers. I think that most would agree with me that one of the things that we need desperately in our own personal lives is to recapture the sense of the majesty and awe of God. So often our whole way of worship has become trivial. The minister comes in on a Sunday Morning and he goes into his pulpit and he beams at his congregation and says 'Good Morning Everybody' to which the congregation reply 'Good Morning Jack' and morning service then begins. There is something profoundly wrong here. If the minister has truly been before God, and if his own soul has been impressed with the sense of the majesty of God and his own smallness by nature but his own greatness because of his being engrafted into Christ and the sheer wonder of his calling as a minister and a steward of holy mysteries, then that minister will have an affect upon his church. If we could but recapture in great measure that sense of the majesty of God then what we say may not be any different but the way in which we say it will be profoundly different. The other thing is this: that we need again to return to teaching the Scriptures. The idea that on occasions you preach the gospel and on other occasions you teach is, I think, a false dichotomy. If we are truly preaching and expounding the Scriptures then we are preaching the gospel and if we attempt to preach the gospel without exposition of the Scriptures then we are not truly preaching. We should above all be teachers of the word.

2 To an Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches

My plea to EFCC as a whole is this: can we not make some provision for Congregational training for the ministry? Young men who feel a call to the ministry can be sent to the various thoroughly reformed evangelical seminaries with which we are now blessed, but there is nowhere, that I know of, where a man can be taught true Congregationalism. Surely it should not be beyond our resources to

provide for the training of men in true Congregationalism. This I think applies particularly to the increasing number of men who are becoming ministers of churches and who have no formal training. Now I realise a seminary education is not an absolute necessity but men do need some training even if it is only on a short term basis. We ought to be teaching and my plea to EFCC is to set up some machinery so men can be taught in the old way.

Conclusion

Savoy, rationalism and hence 1833. 1833, rationalism compounded by evolutionism and hence 1964. 1964 with hedonistic individualism and hence the state of our churches today. May God in his mercy bring us back into the old paths to Savoy, to Calvin and hence to the New Testament itself.

Amen.

The *Savoy Declaration* and the *1833 Declaration* are available and is included in the book *Evangelical and Congregational* available from EFCC. The *1833 Declaration* is also included in the book *Christian Fellowship* edited and abridged by Gordon Booth (Quinta Press—available from EFCC).

