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EDITORIAL

While they are usually motivated by what interests them personally, historians often seek to achieve at least two ends; the first is to reveal the uniqueness of their subject, the second is to demonstrate that it should be of interest to others. In recent years, there have been those who have issued the warning that we are sometimes too quick to draw general conclusions from particular and local events or once-prominent but largely-forgotten figures. Nevertheless, it remains the case that our reconstruction of the past, even when focused on the local and the particular, often supplies us with insights of more general significance. In some ways this befits the traditions inherited by the United Reformed Church, and it is reflected in the articles which are published in this Journal. Stephen Orchard's study of James Gawthorn was delivered as the Society's Annual Lecture at Launde Abbey in September 2011. It records the life and significance of a minister within his locality, but also offers insight into the nature of provincial Congregationalism which, especially at that time, often found itself at odds with London Congregationalism. Fleur Houston's account of John Oman's activities during the Great War was, in a modified form, also delivered at the Society's weekend at Launde. It recounts Oman's personal journey through the conflict by weaving together Oman's understanding of events with the development of his thought, while it also locates him in his denomination and its war-time activity. Tony Tucker looks at the addresses from the Chair of the Congregational Union. Through this lens we see the concerns of church and society as they came and went over the course of the twentieth century. All speeches were context-bound. Many contained a prophetic edge. A few remain fresh many years later. Part II of the article, treating the period to the formation of the United Reformed Church, will be published in a later Journal.

With this Journal a new volume begins. We record grateful thanks to Clyde Binfield for his work as editor and as mentor of the denomination's historians, work which has spanned the whole period of this Journal's existence. It is no easy task to succeed him. Happily this frees him to publish more of his work in future issues, beginning here with a fitting tribute to Ron Bocking, a much-loved and highly-respected minister and member of the Society. I am grateful to the contributors and to Alistair Smeaton, Nigel Lemon and Michael Hopkins all of whom we welcome as reviewer.

JAMES GAWTHORN AND DERBYSHIRE CONGREGATIONALISM

On 11 September 1857 a funeral procession moved from the centre of Derby to the new cemetery on the Uttoxeter road. The streets were lined with a crowd of spectators; blinds were down and shutters up on the shops during the time of the funeral as a mark of respect to the memory of the deceased. A sexton with a wand led the procession, followed by the mayor and town clerk, with aldermen and councillors. Then came the Revd E. W. Foley (incumbent of All Saints', Derby's principal church), the Revd W. F. Wilkinson (vicar of St Werburgh's), and other members of the Bible Society Committee for the town. The next group consisted of ministers of various Nonconformist denominations in Derby and from the county, with representatives of the Provident Society for ministers. Behind them was the first mourning coach, containing the Revd S. McAll of Nottingham and the Revd H. Ollard of the London Road, Derby, Congregational Chapel (the officiating minister), with S. W. Fearn, Esq. (medical attendant), and Mr L. W. Bates (executor). A second mourning coach contained the pall bearers, the Revds J. Stevenson, S. C. Sargant, J. Merwood and J. Walker. The silent crowd saw all this before the bearers with the hearse, shepherded by two undertakers, came into view. Then a third mourning coach appeared, containing as mourners the deacons of the Victoria Street Congregational Chapel, Messrs Tomlinson, Pike, Sparkes, Spalton, and Bryer. Next, a huge crowd of mourners followed on foot, consisting of members of the Victoria Street Church, Sabbath School teachers and senior scholars and, finally, friends from other congregations. Only the clash with the visit of the justices to the county asylum prevented yet more grandees from attending. Mr Ollard gave a funeral address after the interment; most of his hearers had already listened to McCall in Victoria Street Chapel at the funeral service. Eight days later five funeral sermons were preached simultaneously at various venues in the town in order to accommodate the numbers wishing to be present. The local hero being buried was the Revd James Gawthorn.¹ Already the subscriptions were coming in to erect a monument to his memory. He had been minister at Victoria Street for fifty-seven years, long enough to baptise, marry and bury various of its members.

If Gawthorn was so celebrated in Derby in 1857 why is he so little known beyond that place in histories of Congregationalism? He is quoted once in Tudur Jones's history of Congregationalism, but not described. He has a standard biography in the *Congregational Year Book* for 1858. Pike, one of the deacons in the second mourning coach, was proprietor of the *Derby and Chesterfield Reporter*, which did Gawthorn proud with both an obituary and a funeral ode. In the obituary there is the following paragraph:

1 An account of the funeral is to be found in the *Derby Mercury* [hereafter DM] (16 September 1857).

The general estimate formed of his worth by the body of Christians to which he belonged, may be judged of by the fact that a few years ago he was elected by the Annual Assembly of the Congregational Union to be its Chairman. This is the highest honour which the body is capable of conferring on any of its members, and though from feeble health at the time he declined the honour, the appointment shows that his brethren had not been unobservant of his consistent course.²

The man described is clearly not a pulpit prince but a valued member of the corporate enterprise, whose turn came up, even if he declined to take it. The nature of Congregationalism in the first half of the nineteenth century was essentially provincial. Indeed, a case could be made for provincial Congregationalism losing patience with London Congregationalism. It was provincial Congregationalists who drove forward the radical agenda of the anti-state church party. Gawthorn was a provincial notable, the axis around which the Derbyshire Congregational Union spun and grew. Above all, Gawthorn was a man who, by the time of his death, had only a church family to gather around him. He had married three times but had been a widower for forty years and his two children had both died young. These relationships are unmentioned in the local obituaries, though stress is laid on Gawthorn's own childhood as an orphan. There was no devoted child to write a biography and none of Gawthorn's papers survive. All these factors combine to make Gawthorn elusive, which may also be why he is uncelebrated. However, he remains a man in whom all the characteristics of a Congregational minister of the period are wonderfully combined; he is a text-book example of the emergence of the denomination and its ministers as a force in the social and political life of England.

The newspaper obituary also makes the obvious comment that the Derby to which Gawthorn came in 1800 was a very different place from the town in which he died. He came direct from Thomas Wilson's Hoxton College to serve a church created by the senior Thomas Wilson in 1783. The congregation had hovered between Independency and the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, whose preachers had first gathered the church. The Church Minute Book contains rules of 1784, which are clearly of an Independent church sponsored by Wilson and of 1793, formed as a result of negotiations with Lady Ann Erskine, representing the Connexion. The reason for the new rules was almost certainly the departure of the then minister, John Smith, to Melbourne, Derbyshire. In 1793 Wilson wrote to say that how ministry was provided was a matter for the church and wished it well, but by the end of 1796 the church decided to cut its links with the Connexion and find its own minister. Inevitably this led back to asking the Wilsons for help and Wilson's son recommended Gawthorn on probation in 1800. The church called and ordained him the following year. One of his first tasks as minister was to stabilise a church which was not yet twenty years old.

2 *Derby and Chesterfield Reporter* [hereafter DCR] (10 September 1857).

Fifty years later Gawthorn held up at his jubilee celebrations a copy of “Peace and Holiness, recommended in a set of rules agreed to be observed by the Congregational Church in Derby”, published in 1781, which is an even earlier version of the rules, of which the minute book knows nothing. Gawthorn clearly valued them; they specify the Articles of the Church of England and the Westminster Shorter Catechism as giving the doctrinal basis of the congregation. The later rules of 1784 are devoid of doctrinal statements but require testimony from those seeking membership. The 1793 rules are supplementary to the 1784 ones to allow for the interests of the Connexion. By 1816 Gawthorn had steered the church to adopt rules which fully embraced a Congregational ecclesiology and set out procedures for appointing ministers and deacons. Women and men enjoyed the same rights in electing church officers, though women did not stand as candidates. Although not mentioned in these rules the church almost certainly continued to use the Shorter Westminster Catechism for instruction and in an 1829 Directory for Derby Gawthorn described himself as a Calvinist minister.³

The Derby to which Gawthorn came in 1800 was little different from other Midland market towns of the time and might now look like modern Stamford, but for the fact that Stamford found itself on a branch line and Derby rapidly became the hub of the Midland Railway, which created its engineering base there. Gawthorn came to a small chapel on Brookside, at the edge of the historic centre of the town. By the time of his death the brook had been culverted, the street renamed in honour of the sovereign, and the chapel enlarged and given an impressive neoclassical front, complemented by the new Royal Hotel and Athaeneum buildings not far away on the opposite side of the road. Beyond the chapel a warren of cheap housing engulfed the old villas and supplied many of the Sunday School children. Derbyshire Congregationalism had also come a long way over the years, from a handful of chapels to a thriving county union with ambitions to expand.

In 1800, Gawthorn almost certainly received an invitation to join an Association of ministers, recently formed, which embraced Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire. In a small publication called *Family Instruction*, published in 1799, we learn a little about its meetings.⁴ A group of ministers had undertaken to meet together quarterly for Christian friendship, mutual edification and “General usefulness in promoting the cause of Religion”. They saw Religious Family Instruction as “one of the best & most radical means of spreading the knowledge of Christ”.⁵ In an appendix are to be found the minutes of their association for 1798 and 1799. The founding brothers, as they termed themselves, who met in the vestry of the Nether Chapel, Sheffield

3 *The Directory of the County of Derby* (Derby: Stephen Glover, 1829).

4 *Family Instruction. A circular letter from an Association of Ministers in the counties of Derby & Nottingham & in the West Riding of the county of York, addressed to the Congregations under their Pastoral Care* (Doncaster: [J. Smith], 1799). Derby Local Studies Library 3786/4.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

on 19 April 1798 were Burgess of Chesterfield, Boden and Reece of Sheffield, Ellis of Barnsley, Phillips of Rotherham, Kirkpatrick of Sutton in Ashfield, Alliot of Nottingham, Thorpe of Penistone, Sugden of Moor Green, on the Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire border, and Bincliffe of Alfreton. They agreed that there would be three meetings a year, a permanent Secretary, minutes and a membership list would be kept. Those who sit easily to church structures today might like to note that expenses were to be met personally, admission was by vote, members would keep their own minutes and there would be a 5 shilling fine for non-attendance. On the positive side, they would dine together, but only one joint of meat and no wine or spirits, or tobacco, were allowed. Three sermons were required at each meeting and a moderator would be appointed, to sit with a Bible and the Rules before him. Members were expected to come prepared for edifying conversation. At the July meeting in Nottingham, Smith of Melbourne and Milward of Mansfield were proposed as members. Smith, as the new boy, found himself with the job of drawing up the text of *Family Instruction*, the first missionary activity of the association. At Chesterfield in September they agreed to compile church membership statistics. Returning to Sheffield in March 1799 they consulted about their next project, which was to build a chapel at Belper, where they met in July. The last meeting recorded, at Sutton in Ashfield in October, agreed a further venture, to support the friends at Tutbury in establishing an Independent church. This had larger implications, for at Tutbury Miss Mansfield from Brookside, Derby, met Mr Glover from Carrs Lane, Birmingham, and from their union we may trace the origins of first Spring Hill and then Mansfield College. Although we have no records from the time when James Gawthorn would have joined this Association, he is found working with Boden and Alliot in the revival and establishment of Congregational churches in Derbyshire in the early years of his ministry.

Around about 1811 a new association of churches in the counties of Leicester, Nottingham and Derby began to be canvassed and it came into being in 1814, under the leadership of Alliot, with Gawthorn as secretary.⁶ From 1815 it was called The District Union and Itinerancy Society of the Counties of Nottingham, Leicester, & Derby. Its printed reports concentrate on promoting the London Missionary Society, with briefer reports on the missionary activity in the three counties. Presumably because he was in possession of the minute book we find it records a Derbyshire body, with Gawthorn as secretary, from 1824, though a report of the old association was published for 1825. Gawthorn was to remain an advocate for the London Missionary Society for the rest of his life, serving as Derbyshire representative. In his time the printed reports of the Derbyshire Congregational Union always began with the LMS report. He was also appointed representative to the Congregational Union of England and

6 R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England* (London: Independent Press, 1962), p. 175 n.2 lists Derbyshire as an early county union of 1815 without mentioning the other two counties.

Wales, which Derbyshire resolved to join in 1840, following a visit from Algernon Wells. Gawthorn no doubt encouraged the drawing up of formal rules for the Derbyshire Union. In other respects it continued the traditions of the 1798 Association – promoting new churches, organising representation at ordinations, inductions and chapel openings, and celebrating the Lord’s Supper when it met. Meetings were held over several days and consisted largely of worship with substantial sermons, often from visiting ministers. Business, while taken seriously, was secondary to encouragement and exhortation. This mirrors the local church meeting, certainly in Brookside under Gawthorn. The admission of members, occasional discipline cases, election of officers and general edification were the order of the day. County Union meetings were the same writ large. A concern for the safe-keeping of chapel deeds is one notable exception. The other, following the education controversies of 1843 and the call from the Congregational Union to support its Education Board, was when the Derbyshire Union resolved to constitute itself as an auxiliary to that body. None of the detail of such business appears in the minutes. Matters requiring planning and action were always delegated to committees. This was the world in which Gawthorn flourished, as did many like him in other parts of England and Wales. When national bodies met such people embodied their own area. Thus, to the world beyond, Gawthorn was Derbyshire Congregationalism.

Gawthorn’s origins are tantalisingly sketched in his obituary notices, and must be derived from what he had told contemporaries during his life. His father was, it is said in the *Congregational Year Book* obituary, a catechumen of Philip Doddridge and subsequently a deacon at Castle Hill after Doddridge’s death. The records of Castle Hill fail to bear this out, although an Edward Gawthorn was received into church membership in 1778. James said he was born on 10 February 1775 at Hardingstone, Northamptonshire, so would have been too young to know when his father became a member and may have transformed a family memory of his father hearing Doddridge into something more significant. His baptism is recorded at Hardingstone on 16 April 1775, the son of Edward and Elizabeth Gauthern. His father died in December 1779, soon after coming into membership at Castle Hill and then according to his obituary, his mother suffered a fatal fall, leaving James an orphan at six. In fact, the Hardingstone registers place the death of his mother in March 1790, when James was fifteen. In any event, at an early age, he was sent to the Orphan Working School, on the City Road, London, a charity founded by Dissenters. This suggests there was no family money and no close relatives to take him in. He suffered from smallpox when he was ten and counted this the beginning of his religious life.⁷ The Orphan Working School was what its title suggests and the boys and girls were apprenticed to trades as they left. In the very last summer of his life Gawthorn led public prayer at the anniversary celebrations of this institution which had

7 Letter of Application to Hoxton College, Dr Williams’s Library, New College Papers, 418/16.

been so influential in his early life.⁸ From school Gawthorn went as apprentice to Fludall, Tallow Chandler, Water Lane, Fleet Street. His religious life continued to develop and in 1797, at the age of twenty-two, he made application to be admitted to Hoxton Academy. To judge from his later speeches and writing Gawthorn had a fine mind, combining his evangelical piety with a love of history and a forensic skill in argument. This was the man Thomas Wilson marked out for Derby, in which he had a special interest.

The Derby bookseller, William Pritchard, was a deacon at Brookside and was nominated as the correspondent with Thomas Wilson senior in the 1780s. He may well have been the equivalent of the church secretary. So we should not be too surprised to find the young minister marrying the bookseller's daughter, Mary Pritchard, on 9 August 1803. A daughter, Mary Ann, was born the next year, only to die in infancy. Her mother soon followed and in 1809 Gawthorn married again, to Hannah Bradley in Kirkby in Ashfield. Their son, James, was born in 1810, only for Hannah to die at the beginning of 1814. Left with a young son to bring up, perhaps we should not be surprised if Gawthorn married again quickly, but it was not until 1823 that he found a third wife in Catherine Humphries of Hanley. Within ten months of their wedding Catherine died and the forty-eight year old widower remained single for the rest of his life, though Catherine's niece did come and keep house for him for a time. Finally, his son James died in 1829 at the age of nineteen. There is no public record of Gawthorn's reaction to these losses. He lived at the rear of the chapel and his family were buried in the graveyard there. Poignantly, when the church resolved to close the graveyard in 1842, they held open the possibility that their beloved pastor might rest there, rather than in the new cemetery.⁹ He left no written instructions and the decision of his executor was to bury him at Uttoxeter Road, perhaps anticipating the destruction of the burial ground when the new church was built in 1861.

From the first years of his ministry Gawthorn took part in the wider life of Derby, beyond his church and denominational labours. He was active in the local auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society and in support of the British and Foreign School Society, which opened a school in 1813 following Joseph Lancaster's visit in 1810.¹⁰ His local interests extended to the general welfare of the town. He was on the Board of Health established to deal with the cholera outbreak of 1831.¹¹ He supported the Derby Benevolent Mendicity Society;¹² and the opening of the public library and newsroom on Sundays;¹³ he spoke at the meeting to promote a new water works;¹⁴ he was on the committee of the

8 *DM* (1 April 1858). Derby celebrated the centenary of the school in 1858 in honour of Gawthorn.

9 Minute Book 1842.

10 *DM* (15 November 1810).

11 *DM* (16 November 1831).

12 *DM* (13 March 1833).

13 *DM* (25 February 1835).

14 *DM* (13 November 1839).

New Gas Light and Coke Co.;¹⁵ he was a supporter of the proposed Derby, Gainsborough and Great Grimsby Railway and of moving the Midland Railway station nearer to the town centre;¹⁶ and in his last years he was active in defending Nonconformist rights in the new municipal cemetery, the same cemetery where he was eventually to be buried. He showed similar diligence in national and international affairs. In 1823 he was one of the subscribers to a fund to assist the Spanish, following the French invasion, while a church member, the printer and publisher Walter Pike, offered his shop as a receiving place for donations of arms.¹⁷ He supported petitions against the Hindu practice of Suttee,¹⁸ slavery, no doubt informed by his London Missionary Society connections,¹⁹ and spoke at parliamentary reform meetings.²⁰ He attended the Society for superseding the necessity of climbing boys,²¹ campaigned against the Maynooth grant,²² expressed sympathy with the Hungarians in 1849,²³ and supported national model asylums for idiots.²⁴ He was identified with the emerging Liberal party and Free Trade. Above all, in the years of his widowhood, he was known as a campaigner for the rights of Nonconformists and unswerving support for voluntarism in education.

In January 1834, at a public meeting in Derby, Gawthorn delivered a closely argued speech setting out the grievances of the Dissenting community.²⁵ The resolution he was moving stated:

That all compulsory payments in support of the Ecclesiastical Establishment – the necessity of conforming to the rites and ceremonies of the Established Church in the celebration of marriage – the denial to Dissenters of the right of burial by their own Ministers, and according to their own forms in the parochial cemeteries – the want of a legal Registration of births, marriages and deaths – and the exclusion of Dissenters from the universities, are among the grievances from which we consider we have just right to claim redress.

15 *DM* (28 May 1845).

16 *DM* (18 and 25 February 1846).

17 *DM* (9 and 23 July 1823).

18 *DM* (7 March 1827).

19 *DM* (20 October 1830).

20 *DM* (9 and 16 March 1831).

21 *DM* (23 May 1838).

22 *DM* (21 May 1845).

23 *DM* (8 August 1849).

24 *DM* (3 May 1854).

25 The speech is reported verbatim in *DM* (22 January 1834).

This speech was a deliberate contribution to the public debate on church establishment, which is mostly remembered now as the genesis of Tractarianism. Gawthorn argued the case for civil registration of births primarily on legal grounds. People needed legal proof to establish rights of inheritance. Rather than talk of great estates he cleverly instanced the widows of sailors, trying to claim prize money, but unable to put the necessary proofs together from defective church registers. They were defective because, said Gawthorn, giving an example, "I know a case of a clergyman, who when he had baptized, married or buried, refused to stop to make an entry, because there was not a vestry with a fire in it." Moreover, an entry of baptism did not provide what was often legally more critical, a date of birth. In any case, Dissenters keep their own baptismal registers, which Gawthorn claimed were often superior to parish ones. Certainly, his Derby registers did record dates of birth.

On marriage and burial Gawthorn placed the emphasis on the spiritual needs of Dissenters to have their own ceremonies. He quoted Blackstone in support of the Dissenting view that marriage is a civil contract and arguing that marriage was only declared sacramental quite late in church history. Protestant Dissenters had been allowed to conduct their own marriages until the tightening of the law in 1754, which required weddings to be conducted in a parish church, except for Quakers and Jews. Gawthorn argued his case strongly. The law exposed Dissenters to a Prayer Book service, with its implied sacramentalism, the use of a ring and invocation of the Trinity. The service required a man to promise that he was endowing his wife with all his worldly goods when, in fact, he was taking control of her property. Dissenters in England were required to bear with all this when the law allowed different ceremonies according to one's religious convictions in Scotland and Ireland. So far as burials were concerned, Dissenters had to contribute to the purchase and upkeep of a parish burial ground, but it was, "by a legal fiction ... called the freehold of the incumbent". Incumbents then insisted on using their own burial rite. Gawthorn then cited a worse injustice.

In this neighbourhood, a member of a Baptist's family was lately taken to the church yard for interment; the Clergyman refused to perform any service, and because a Baptist Minister prayed, or spoke a word of consolation at the grave, he was threatened with prosecution in the Spiritual Court.

Of course, some chapels had avoided these kinds of confrontations by opening their own burial grounds, but Gawthorn maintained that Dissenters had the right to expect their own ministers to conduct burial services in parish graveyards.

He then turned to the subject of the universities. He began by making the debating point that most of the colleges in Oxford and Cambridge were founded before the Reformation and, if it is argued that they are private institutions only

admitting persons of the same communion as the founders, then only Roman Catholics may go to them. If, on the other hand, they were founded to serve the nation, then no sect, by which he meant the Church of England, can claim exclusive rights. He then cast doubt on the legality of excluding Dissenters and points out that it was an ecclesiastical rather than a civil grievance. The core of his argument was scriptural.

All this is only a prelude to what he had to say about church rates, which was to become a major campaigning issue for Gawthorn over the next decade. His primary argument is that God does not lay on the civil authorities any responsibility to form an Established Church, ordain its creeds and worship and require citizens to belong to it. To be a Dissenter who allows for the possibility of an Established Church is to practise hypocrisy.

The primitive Churches were voluntary Societies of professed Believers, their worship was regulated by the sole authority of Jesus Christ, it was unostentatious and spiritual, whatever expence [sic] it occasioned they defrayed by their own voluntary contributions. They did not present to the world that disgusting Caricature of Christianity, which Establishments in general, and that of Ireland in particular, exhibit, of a Posse of Constables or an armed force going about to seize a Poor Man's Cow, or a Widow's Bed, to support the religion of Jesus Christ. The honour of this frightful spectacle belongs to Establishments alone.

He claimed that the argument about Establishment had now moved away from the area of divine right into a defence based on utility.

Where is this utility to be found? An Establishment cannot give a man any religious and spiritual rights. Without an Establishment every man has a right to read, examine and believe his Bible, a right to approach the Mercy Seat by the Mediator, a right to attend on the ministry and ordinances of the Gospel. All that the Establishment gives is this; it allows one sect to seize the property of others with impunity; it allows the Ministers of that sect to take away a man's corn or his cattle without being sent to Botany Bay. If there be a spectacle to make angels weep and demons grin, it is that of a band of policemen or a file of soldiers seizing the bed and blanket of a widow and a fatherless family in the name of Christ and Christianity.

He quoted Thomas Chalmers, in his pre-Free Church days, saying that the Establishment is a Home Missionary Society. This allowed him to pour scorn on the record of the Church of England in this respect. It was Dissenters who were building new chapels. The only new churches built for the Establishment had been funded out of general taxation, to which Dissenters contribute. In a passage

eerily reminiscent of twenty-first century experience Gawthorn went on:

A writer in the Monthly Magazine says, he went into two Churches in London on a Sabbath day; in one place there were two hearers, in the other, about twice as many. A former resident of Derby told me, he spent a Sunday in London; he went into one of the most elegant Churches in the City, where the auditors were not more than four or five. One Sabbath I attended Church in a parish of this county, where the population is, I suppose, from four to five thousand; with myself and friend the congregation amounted to nineteen.

There was no excuse for such evident failure in the evangelical task which faced Christians, especially when the huge resources available to the Establishment were borne in mind. Gawthorn recognised the difficulty of assessing the real income of the Church of England and quoted figures of between £2 million and £8 million pounds *per annum*, settling for his own estimate of £6 million. The point was not, of course, the actual size of the figure, but that Dissenters had to contribute to what was not only unjust but ineffective.

While Dissenters bear all the expences [sic] of erecting their Chapels, supporting their Ministers, maintaining their own worship, and numerous Institutions among themselves, and disbelieve the right of the civil power to interfere with their religion, they cannot but look on the seizure of their property to support the incorporated sect, as downright oppression and robbery. Many clergymen and other churchmen acknowledge the hardship of our case, and profess their belief, that the episcopal community would prosper more if left to its own support.

He then reduced the argument to the absurd by claiming that the advocates of exclusive Establishments must take up one of two positions; either, that the civil authorities ought to establish that sect whose creed they think comes nearest to divine truth; or else, settle on that denomination which has the greatest number of adherents in the land. This would lead to an Establishment of either Hinduism or Islam in India and Roman Catholicism in Ireland. Would not the defenders of Establishment in England claim it was a violation of conscience if they lived in India and were required to pay taxes to sustain Hindu institutions? Surely they must see that you either have to support a Roman Catholic establishment in Ireland or cease to enforce the payment of tithes for the benefit of the Church of Ireland? Gawthorn, being opposed to all state subventions to churches, saw all this as exposing the arguments for Establishment to ridicule. When the British government actually gave money to Roman Catholic institutions in Ireland he opposed it equally. He concluded by saying that Dissenters could not conscientiously accept subventions from the State, since

that money would represent property stolen from their neighbours. Either the robbery which church rate represented must continue, or it must cease.

In October of the same year Gawthorn took the fight to the enemy at the Vestry meeting for St Werburgh's, chaired by the vicar, the Revd E. Unwin. When the meeting was opened to the floor he began a long and complex argument against church rates, against a background of barracking and interruptions. At the core of his argument was his contention that, although parliament was supposed to be considering abolishing the church rate, until that happened it was the duty of those who opposed it to take all lawful means to suppress it, so that the strength of feeling on the matter might be apparent to the legislators. Meanwhile, a proper application of tithes would make the church rate unnecessary. At length Gawthorn moved the adjournment of the meeting for six months, effectively stopping the setting of the rate. The motion was seconded by the Revd Noah Jones, the Unitarian minister, who also lived in the parish. The resolution was lost and a rate set.²⁶

It may be that Gawthorn was particularly moved to action by a petition circulated among Derbyshire parishes in January 1834. A private meeting of clergy in Derby had prepared this document. It requested Parliament, amongst other things, to secure a permanent mode of collecting tithes and to promote the extension of clerical supervision throughout the country. This last request was an aim of High Churchmen and was bound to alarm Dissenters such as Gawthorn. But what really riled him was a request "to promote and aid such measures as may extend the efficient instruction of the Church, not only to all the people of this kingdom, but to all the foreign dependencies of the Empire". Gawthorn foresaw a heavy burden of taxation arising from such a regime, but he went to town on ridiculing the reference to the Empire.

The private Meeting at Derby have the assurance to call on you, to assist in setting up an Establishment of their Sect in all the Foreign dependencies of the Empire. To set up the Established Church, to build Cathedrals and Churches, Episcopal palaces and parsonages, to maintain Archbishops, Diocesan Bishops, Deans, Archdeacons, Prebends, Rectors, &c, &c in the East and West Indies, in Africa, in Canada, in New South Wales, and in a word in all the foreign dependencies of the Empire. It is impossible to foresee the many millions per annum, this modest scheme would require. Ask yourselves, who is to pay this incalculable expense? Are Englishmen to do it, or is the burden to fall on the Colonies? Are Protestant Dissenters at home, the Catholics in Canada, and Hindoos in India, to be taxed for the still farther extension of the incorporated Sect? This

26 *DM* (22 October 1834).

wild scheme would be likely to shake the Indian Empire, and most likely to raise an universal revolt throughout the province. Is the property of Hindoos and Musselmen to be seized, are they to be dragooned into the support of Christianity?²⁷

Gawthorn has, of course, laid his finger on one of the fault lines in the Church of England – its extension to the colonies – whose effects we still see in the Anglican communion. A Church, however ancient and orthodox it may regard itself to be, which is essentially defined in terms of territory, has problems once it moves beyond those bounds.

Over the next few years Gawthorn continued to use combative language. He termed church rate robbery and he consistently described the Church of England as a sect. He called for parish polls on the rate, which he always lost. In 1844 he led organised protests against the church rate in his own parish in Derby. On 11 June 1844 Gawthorn, and his assistant minister, John Corbin, were amongst those summonsed to appear before the magistrates for non-payment of parish rate. His solicitor found several technical errors in the collection of rates and the case was referred to a higher court. Corbin said he had been summonsed for refusing to pay the amount of his church-rate, but that since then some unknown person had paid it. He believed such payment was a sin against Almighty God. Gawthorn then spoke, uninvited, to say that on a former occasion his church-rate had been paid for him in the same way as that of Corbin. This was an offence against scripture. He would have said more, but the mayor cut him short, saying that they could not go into theology. Gawthorn kept on saying that church rate was a violation of conscience. The mayor silenced him and said he did not think that any man's conscience was violated by his obeying the law of the land. It was proper, in those individuals who objected to a church-rate, to do what they could in a fair and legal manner to obtain an alteration in the law, but, while it was the law, obedience was a duty. In all eight people were summonsed and five of them made the same technical objection as Gawthorn and had their cases referred to the higher court. A further defendant from All Saints' parish pleaded conscience and was ordered to pay.²⁸ Gawthorn and his church members were playing their part in a wider national campaign, which only ended when Parliament finally abolished church rates in 1868.

It may have been that Gawthorn's political and denominational interests had an adverse effect on his local ministry. I have written elsewhere about the three deacons who wrote to Thomas Wilson in 1831, anxious that Gawthorn might be failing and urging the opening of a new church and the addition of a young assistant. This was one of the factors which led to the erection of the London Road building in the classical style and the arrival of Corbin as an assistant.²⁹

27 A letter of 27 January 1834 published in the *DCR*.

28 *DM* (12 June 1844).

29 Stephen Orchard, "The Wilson Family and Derbyshire", *JURCHS* vol. 6 no. 8 (May 2001), p. 586.

Amongst the families transferring to the new church were the Goodales. This has a bearing on subsequent events. Towards the end of his ministry James Gawthorn involved himself directly in two different wills. This created a direct conflict of interest between his pastoral and legal roles. It is possible, though we cannot know from the evidence available to us, that he did this deliberately, since the outcome in the second case was to divert family property into the charities he supported. It was also a measure of the growth of the congregation under his leadership, for the two court cases which arose from these wills involved considerable sums of money. The story began with the death of John Goodale in 1847. He was the owner of property all around Derby and at Wymeswold in Leicestershire, most notably a lead paint factory in Normanton, Derby, which he ran with an uncle, having inherited his father's share. When John prepared his will in February 1847 he knew he had not long to live. He had no children, but his wife was pregnant. He drew up a will which secured the income of his mother and two sisters according to his father's will and provided for his widow, but the bulk of his property was bequeathed to his unborn child or children. He knew neither the gender of the child, nor if it might be twins, so the clauses are elaborate. He nominated three of his friends as executors, who could act as trustees during the minority of any child. The first of these was James Gawthorn. In the event of all these provisions for a child coming to nothing, the will provided that the bulk of his estate should go to his uncle in trust for his nephew William Goodale, although sums of money were left to his mother and sisters, to friends and to various charities. John Goodale died before his wife was delivered of a daughter, who became the heir.

Of John Goodale's two sisters one, Frances Alice, was married to a Derby solicitor, John Moss, who was an Alderman and served as Mayor on two occasions. Like Gawthorn, he seems to have been a man used to having his own way. Presumably the Mosses had rather expected to come into more of the Goodale fortune when John, who had been childless for many years, died. Not only was the child unborn at his death a surprise to them; they also took exception to the proviso that the bulk of the estate should go to cousin William in the event that no heir survived. Moss immediately contested the will on behalf of his wife's sister and his mother-in-law. This meant that probate was delayed until the end of 1848 when the objections to the will itself were dropped. Even then, Derby's own *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* ground its way through the Court of Chancery as a suit was brought to determine the legal point of whether the unborn child was entitled to the revenues of the estate in the time between her father's death and her birth. Moss demanded to see documents, sent clerks to copy them and raised technical points about the dowries. Considering that John and Frances Moss were rich and childless and that John Goodale's mother's dowry was secure, the suit is an odd one, rather designed to make a point.

This was certainly the view that Gawthorn took in December 1848, as he appealed to the old Mrs Goodale to drop the suit. He wrote two letters to her, referring to his long friendship with the family, the ill-will among relatives, the expense, and re-iterating his view that it was all rather pointless.

[The executors] are ready to settle every claim without delay, if you only let me know distinctly what you wish, I will spare no pains to effect it in the speediest and most harmonious manner. Let me beg of you calmly to ask yourself, what it is you wish to be done; only let me know this, and I repeat, every effort on my part shall be made for its immediate accomplishment. Surely nothing can be more desirable than a termination of the present unhappy circumstances. Anything rather than a continuance of this unseemly strife and litigation.

One suspects that the last thing John Moss wanted was to cede power in this case to Gawthorn, who tried a further letter in 1850.³⁰ It was to no avail. The case dragged on in Chancery until 1854 when a ruling was made in favour of the child who had been unborn. The Mosses had previously been connected with Gawthorn's church but were now thoroughly alienated.

The lawyer who acted for Gawthorn and the executors through the long Goodale suit was John Barber. We now find him in 1856 drawing up the will of John Hill, who also attended the Victoria Street Church and who appointed Gawthorn one of his executors. The name conceals the fact that Hill was first cousin to John Moss. Moreover, Hill was a childless bachelor, practising as a doctor but also drawing the revenues from the estate he inherited from his father. Moss clearly had his eye on this estate. He was always to contend that but for an oversight by an aunt, who failed to act at the right time, his mother would have had a share in the estate which came to John Hill's father. More than that, the father had promised that he would right this wrong in his own will and had, at one time, appointed John Moss a trustee of a will which kept his son from inheriting the estate outright. John Hill was seriously ill at the time and notorious for his drinking. But John Hill recovered and promised his father he would mend his ways and the father wrote a new will leaving him the property unencumbered. John Moss always contended that this was only done after extracting a promise that John Hill in his turn would put right the family wrong and leave property to his cousin. It was of great interest therefore to John Moss to see his cousin's will when he died at the end of 1857, a few weeks after Gawthorn.

The scene which emerges from the subsequent witness statements is worthy of Dickens. The surviving executors, both members of Victoria Street Church, and Mr Moss were sent for. Mr Moss, accompanied by his office clerk, Mr Sadler, arrived first and asked the housekeeper if she knew of a will. She took Mr Sadler upstairs and recovered the will from a locked cupboard, giving him the will and the key, which he took downstairs to Mr Moss, who pocketed them. The housekeeper then went off to the inquest on John Hill. Mr Cooper and Mr Sparkes, the executors, now arrived with Mr Barber's son. They asked for the will, but Mr Moss declined to say whether he had it or not. Only when Mr Barber

30 *DM* (1 December 1858).

senior arrived and the housekeeper returned did he admit to having it in his pocket. He declared it was not a proper will and he would contest it, but suggested that he had no objection to the supposed executors arranging the funeral.

What was in this will which Moss wished to set aside? The answer was nothing for the Mosses. Indeed, it was subsequently alleged that John Hill had told people he wanted to prevent them inheriting any of the property. He had left it instead to his executors as trustees to distribute among named charities, apart from a few small personal bequests. The list of charities used in drafting the will was found to be in Gawthorn's handwriting. Moss reacted as peremptorily as he had in the Goodale case. He petitioned for the will to be set aside because it had been produced when his cousin was under undue influence exerted by Gawthorn. He also hinted at further suits to recover the family property. Writing to the executors, whose rights he contested in any case, he stressed how expensive a long law suit could be and proposed an out of court settlement. He also speculated as to what "malignity" could have led Gawthorn to influence his cousin to make such a will. We might answer that either Gawthorn was naïve in associating with Hill in making his will or that Gawthorn saw a chance of teaching Moss a lesson for prolonging the Goodale case. We do not know and Gawthorn could not be called to the witness stand from his grave.

The picture of John Hill which emerges is of a lonely and rather disorganised man, accustomed to letting others take decisions for him, whether it be his housekeeper or his rent-collector. Opinion was divided over whether he drank too much. He was certainly so fat as to make walking difficult and went everywhere by carriage. When he attended the service at Victoria Street he laid up his horse and carriage at the Spotted Horse opposite and retired there for a drink after worship. It was said he was much affected by Gawthorn's sermons and cried into his sherry wine. Moss had the difficulty of presenting a case in which he sought to show that he got on well with his cousin at the same time as describing him as feckless and at the mercy of others. He also had to show, not simply that Gawthorn made suggestions to Hill about his bequests, but that Hill was somehow threatened by or subject to Gawthorn. He did not succeed. The jury interrupted the judge's summing up to say that they had no difficulty in saying the will was valid. John Moss himself died soon afterwards. In 1868 his childless widow spent her part of the family fortune building St Luke's Church for a new parish in Derby, about a mile from Victoria Street. It was built in the High Church style and in the twenty-first century identifies itself with the Forward in Faith party within the Church of England. Nothing further from Gawthorn's kind of church could be imagined. But in 1859 the London Missionary Society and Spring Hill College got their £500 legacies and the Victoria Street Dissenters also did quite well.

One of the events in Methodist history for which Derby is noted is the emergence of the Wesleyan Methodist Free Church, following the expulsion of William Griffith from the Wesleyan Methodist Conference in 1849. This was the culmination of a dispute over what some regarded as the high-handedness of

Jabez Bunting, the Secretary of Conference. With two others Griffith had been expelled for failing to deny his part in the authorship of fly sheets critical of Bunting, which had been widely circulated among Methodists. Griffith was a Republican and well to the left in his political sympathies. He was Superintendent of the Ripley Circuit but settled in Derby after his expulsion and ministered at a new church built in Becket Street, a few hundred yards from Gawthorn's chapel. It is clear that Griffith had the active support of Gawthorn in his opposition to the Wesleyan Conference. In July Gawthorn spoke at a public meeting in Derby in support of the Wesleyan rebels.³¹ At a subsequent public meeting in Derby in November 1850, called to oppose "papal aggression", a rift was evident in the Protestant lute.³² Griffith moved an amendment to the main resolution incorporating some of his grievances against the Conference, which was represented by William Horton. Having been cheered through a speech pouring scorn on Roman Catholics and the government's financial support for them Gawthorn caused an outcry by linking the Wesleyans with the Roman Catholics, saying he was sympathetic to Griffith's amendment, even though he would not second it. Horton rose to defend Conference against Gawthorn's accusations that the Wesleyans had assisted the passing of the Maynooth Grant and been weak on the 1843 Education Bill. Gawthorn had a further shot in his locker. The Wesleyans had committed the ultimate sin in his lectionary – they had accepted government money for church purposes, albeit in Canada. "The Wesleyans and Papists go hand in hand to the public treasury in Canada and other places, and receive treasury money." In Gawthorn's book this was to take the thirty pieces of silver. Gawthorn co-operated with Griffith at various local meetings over the next few years and in the final summer of his life presided at the foundation stone laying for the rebels' new chapel in Becket Street, Derby.³³

In the context of this Annual Lecture something must also be said about Gawthorn as an historian. Gawthorn shared an interest in church history with his patrons, the Wilson family. An invaluable collection of dissenting history in Derbyshire is to be found in the *Congregational Magazine* for 1823-4. This was run as a series, dealing with places in alphabetical order, over two years. At the end of the series the help of Gawthorn and Joshua Shaw, the minister at Ilkeston, in assembling the statistical account, is acknowledged.³⁴ Since the statistics run through the whole, it looks as if Gawthorn and Shaw collected the historical information which is the basis of the articles. In 1820 Gawthorn wrote to Joshua Wilson about his failure to buy the library of Ebenezer Latham, who ran the academy at Findern near Derby, where he also ministered in the first half of the eighteenth century.³⁵ He also recorded an anecdote about Robert Seddon, an

31 *DM* (17 July 1850).

32 *DM* (25 November 1850).

33 *DM* (27 May 1857).

34 *Congregational Magazine* (1824), p. 612.

35 Congregational Library MS Hd 7/13.

ejected minister, for Wilson.³⁶ It is possible that this one letter and note are all that remain of a larger correspondence from Gawthorn, contributing to the *Congregational Magazine* articles. Certainly, in all his public speeches that are recorded Gawthorn displays an eye to history in general and the history of Dissent in particular.

The most extraordinary example of Gawthorn's sense of history is to be found in his speech at the celebration of his ministerial jubilee in 1850. He apologised for reading his script, on account of the emotion of the occasion, and then delivered a carefully researched paper, beginning in pagan Derbyshire and following what he called "spiritual history", ending with his own ministry in Derby. It revealed wide reading and research. Modern historians do not connect the ancient stone circle at Arbor Low with the druids, as Gawthorn did, but he rightly associated it with paganism. No doubt this reference was a delicate compliment to Thomas Bateman of Middleton Hall, antiquarian and excavator of barrows across the Derbyshire Peak District, as well as builder of the Congregational chapel at Middleton by Youlgreave in 1826. Through the age of St Alban and early British Christianity, which Gawthorn clearly regarded as heroic, he moved to the "idoltrous and semi-barbarian Danes", who pillaged churches and slaughtered the clergy. This period led to corruption of doctrine and superstition in worship, preparing Britain for the darkness of popery. Having written off a thousand years of history in a sentence he was then able to celebrate the re-illumination of Britain by the Reformation. Edward VI appointed two chaplains in ordinary to preach in Lancashire and Derbyshire, says Gawthorn, not considering that this might be because they were considered most needing a Protestant boost. He mentions the martyrs of Mary's reign, notably young blind Joan Waste, who was burned in Derby. He then moves to the worthy Puritans of the Elizabethan and Jacobean era, the majority of whom were Presbyterians. Gawthorn quotes the Derbyshire historian of the sixteenth century, Philip Kinder, whose work existed only in manuscript. He then moved to the 1662 ejections and Presbyterian worship in Derby at St Mary's Bridge Chapel and at the 1689 Meeting House in Friargate. But these people, in time, moved away from evangelical truth.

At the time of which I now speak, real religion seems to have been in a sad state of decay, and at a very low ebb in Derby. Since the Ejection there had been little or no evangelical preaching in the parochial pulpits. Among the Presbyterians there was a great departure from the faith and piety of their forefathers, and there was no congregation of Independents, Baptists, or Methodists in the town.

The stage is set for the beginning of the Brookside chapel, beginning with the street preaching of Thomas Jones and Joseph Griffiths, two of the Countess of Huntingdon's preachers from Melbourne, just south of the town. From these meetings a church was constituted with help from Thomas Wilson in London, and guidance from Mr Hall, the minister at Ilkeston. This was the point at which Gawthorn held up his copy of the church rules of 1782. The scene was set for Wilson's gift of the building in 1783. Gawthorn makes no mention of the link with the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion or the dissidents who refused to move to the new building, but moves swiftly from the ending of John Smith's ministry in 1792 to his own arrival in 1800.

On looking back to the state of the Church when I came amongst them, and on what has since passed, I am filled with astonishment, self abasement, and thankfulness. Of all who were then members of the Church, there is not now one living amongst us. Mrs. Glover, of Birmingham, and her old and excellent servant, Alice Baxter, and Mr. Smale, now of Nottingham, are the only survivors – all the rest have passed into the eternal world. I am happy, however, to say some of their children and grandchildren are now members of the Church, and are walking with us in the ordinances and commandments of the Lord. I know also that not a few of the descendants of our deceased members are now in fellowship with various churches of Christ in Britain and in other parts of the world. If my voice could now reach them, I would earnestly and affectionately say, I desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence that your pious parents did, to the full assurance of hope unto the end, that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Only after this substantial historical introduction did Gawthorn go on to a conventional homily, giving thanks for church members and colleagues and exhorting people to keep faith for the future. A hymn, contributed for the occasion by James Montgomery, was then sung. It was not one of his best; one stanza will suffice to give the tone of the occasion.

For all that Thou in him hast wrought,
 For all that Thou by him hast done,
 Our warmest, purest thanks be brought
 Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Thy Son.³⁷

37 *DCR* (27 September 1850). The full report was also published as a separate booklet.

Montgomery's hymn of 1850 was not as embarrassing as Beebe Eyre's Funeral Ode of 1857, which concluded:

Still at his post this veteran was found,
 Though seven and fifty years had circled round;
 Nor would he yield to soft inglorious ease,
 The dearest friend amongst his flock to please;
 But grasp'd his shield till Jesus said, "Well done!
 Lay down the crook to wear the pastoral crown."
 Releas'd by death the Conquering Hero flies,
 To join the noble army of the skies;
 Where *Howe* and *Watts* and *Hill* and *Whitefield* greet,
 And sweep their harps and bow at Jesu's feet;
 While *Wesley*, *Fletcher*, *Pike*, and *Newton* join,
 To celebrate the depths of Love Divine!³⁸

This offering conveniently overlooks any efforts on the part of his congregation or colleagues to get him to take up the offer of soft inglorious ease. It also brackets Gawthorn and his late Baptist colleague, J. G. Pike, both worthy ministers, with an evangelical pantheon of more significant figures. Neither Gawthorn's own attempt in 1850, nor this panegyric, were sufficient to secure his place in history.

On its way from the church in 1857 Gawthorn's cortège went up the ancient street known as the Wardwick, passed the Jacobean House which was half demolished to create Becket Street, where the Wesleyan Reformers had built their new chapel, then rounded the corner into Curzon Street. It passed the new Temperance Hall before reaching the suburban villas of the Uttoxeter New Road and then the new cemetery. That cemetery is now a quiet backwater. Gawthorn's chapel and house were torn down almost immediately after his death. When the replacement church building was demolished in its turn, no-one remembered that it had originally been dedicated to Gawthorn's memory. Even his family graves were forgotten and accidentally desecrated during alterations to the latest building in the 1990s. This lecture seeks to recover his memory from absolute obscurity and to celebrate his part, however modest, in the rise of English Congregationalism and the Derbyshire Congregational Union.

STEPHEN ORCHARD

38 Beebe Eyre, b. 1792 in Tideswell and published *Miscellaneous Verse* in 1866.

“IN THE OPEN COUNTRY OF ACTION AND ENQUIRY”¹ JOHN OMAN AND THE GREAT WAR

In September 1907 John Oman left Clayport Church Alnwick, where he had ministered for almost eighteen years, for Westminster College, Cambridge. At the farewell social evening the two tributes were discerning.²

John Balmбра, elder of the church and manager of the local savings bank, spoke of Dr Oman’s ministry: what a noble ministry it had been and how practical. What a grasp he had of the life of ordinary mortals face to face with life’s difficulties and tasks. As a preacher, he had been both fresh and forceful. Not only had he shown them the Gospel of love, but he had preached to them with all his outstanding ability, wide learning and large-hearted affection. They were proud of his academic distinction. “Henceforth he no longer would be found in Alnwick, but in the forefront of the battle, and they were sure he would make a good soldier of the Cross and a courageous leader.” The Revd William Rogerson, Interim Moderator, spoke of how Oman had

... won the respect of the entire community. Whatever his opinions had been they had been the result of careful and prayerful thought. He had ever been ready to stand up to any truths or principles which had commended themselves to his conscience, without fear or favour, and with an earnest desire to discharge his duties faithfully in the community in which he lived.

The faithful and courageous behaviour alluded to had on one occasion led him to infringe the law. Four years before, on 6 June 1903, Oman had appeared before the Alnwick petty sessions.³ He was summonsed by the overseers of the parish for refusing to pay the education rate of 3d in the pound. Oman had nothing to say except that he had a conscientious objection to the rate being imposed.⁴ An order was made for £1. 15s which he refused to pay. On the advice of the newly formed Passive Resistance Association of the Presbyterian Church of England (PCE), the next step would be enforced payment by distraint by the

1 John Oman, *Grace and Personality* (2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1919), p. viii.

2 “The Departure of Dr Oman from Alnwick”, reprinted from *Alnwick Guardian* (28 September 1907), Northumberland Collections [hereafter NC], UR/P28/2/1/2/3.

3 *The Times* (8 June 1903).

4 At a subsequent public meeting in Alnwick Town Hall, he elaborated on his reasons. Under the Education Act, which had received the Royal Assent on 18 December 1902, he, a Nonconformist, was legally obliged to contribute a sum each year towards the upkeep of Church of England and Roman Catholic Schools; he was being asked to pay for the teaching of “the crude material idea of the mass”; this offended his conscience. Freedom was at stake: “unless there were a few who valued justice as above goods and liberty above life, no community could remain free.” *Alnwick and County Gazette* (11 July 1903), NRO 2636-N-1-20.

bailiffs; if these were impeded in their duties, there would be a prison sentence.⁵ For the protestors, it was a form of latter-day martyrdom. At the communion service on 5 July, Oman preached from Galatians: “For I through the law am dead to the law that I might live unto God.”⁶

It is likely that Oman’s protest against “the teaching of sectarian dogmas at the public expense”⁷ was fuelled by indignation at the fact that his old friend, Benjamin Mein, minister of Thropton Presbyterian Church, had been “deliberately set aside” as a member of the local school board which he had served for the previous fifteen years in favour of “an episcopalian”.⁸ But his stance was entirely consistent with his background in the United Presbyterian Church. As one might expect from a reputed descendant of Robert and Ebenezer Erskine, Oman was persuaded that freedom of conscience might for a Christian lead to conflict with the demands of political society.

The Great War was to bring out this conflict with unique clarity. But the issues were now more complex. Oman had earlier acknowledged that “there is no matter in which I am more perplexed than our Lord’s teaching in respect of force”.⁹ In 1914 it appears that he was still undecided. John Skinner, Principal of Westminster College, wrote of Oman in September: “I have not pressed him as to his attitude; but I hardly think he is prepared at present to go the whole hog. In fact, I don’t know if I can myself!”¹⁰ Neither Skinner nor Oman had signed the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Reply to the German Theologians; Skinner hesitated for “most of a forenoon” till he saw that “this was not the mind of Christ on the situation.”¹¹ So he wrote in September an explanation as to why the Church ought to refrain from official declarations which might be regarded as sanctioning war. When this was published in *The Presbyterian Messenger* in January 1915, Oman was one of seventeen signatories.¹²

Despite the distinction of those signatories, the editor found the letter inadequate. “In the light of the ideals so ably and clearly presented, what are we here and now to do?” Oman had already risen to the challenge. True to his belief that “it is a sad hindrance to our progress that thinking has to be done by thinkers, for it is virile action and not the dust of books that makes man”,¹³ he

5 Westminster College Archives [hereafter WCA], uncatalogued pamphlet in United Reformed Church History Society Collection; also James Munson, *The Nonconformists: In Search of a Lost Culture* (London: SPCK, 1991), p. 267.

6 Minutes of Session, Clayport Presbyterian Church, 5 July 1903, NC, UR/P28/2/1/2/3.

7 *Digest of the Proceedings of the Synods of the Presbyterian Church of England 1876-1905* compiled S. W. Carruthers, (London, 1907), p. 609.

8 *The Monthly Messenger* (November 1903), p. 284.

9 Unpublished sermon: “Righteousness exalteth a nation” 1896; WCA WT 1/5-7.

10 Letter to Richard Roberts, 25 September 1914, United Church of Canada Archives [hereafter UCCA], Richard Roberts Fonds, file 38.

11 “John Skinner, an appreciation by a former student”, *Reconciliation* (1925), pp. 205-6.

12 The name of the Revd J. D. M. Rorke of Bexhill was “accidentally omitted”. *The Presbyterian Messenger* (February 1915), p. 54.

13 *The Problem of Faith and Freedom in the Last Two Centuries* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906), p. 26.

had begun to serve as voluntary chaplain at the 1st Eastern Hospital in Cambridge, housed in the Leys School, in marquees erected in the grounds of Trinity College and later in temporary huts on the cricket grounds of Clare and King's Colleges.¹⁴ Along with W. A. L. Elmslie, "he was responsible for the greater part of the work" with Presbyterian and other Nonconformist soldiers, leaving the acting chaplain, R. H. Strachan, freer to work at the two isolation hospitals and among the cadets.¹⁵

He had also begun to pay regular visits to prisons and internment camps and in this, his fluency in German stood him in good stead. On one of these visits, which by deduction took place in September 1914,¹⁶ he describes having lunch with two German doctors;¹⁷ it is likely that this was in Lofthouse Park Camp, near Wakefield, where Mr Sinnreich,¹⁸ a student of the college and an Austrian citizen, was interned for seven months along with many other German or Austrian students, professors and lecturers from Cambridge.¹⁹ This was against a background of marked hostility to "enemy aliens" and a strong feeling in government that these presented a serious threat to national security.

Meanwhile Richard Roberts, minister at Crouch Hill Presbyterian Church, noted that a number of young Germans, regular members of his congregation, were missing.²⁰ Realising with horror that they might soon be fighting on opposite sides from their fellow worshippers, he decided to arrange a conference on Christianity and War.²¹ He consulted Skinner as to whom he might invite. On 31 October, Skinner told him that: "Oman should certainly be invited. I am not sure that he will come; but I am hopeful that ... he might see it to be his duty to do so."²² At the end of December 1914 the conference was held in Cambridge. "Somewhat daringly"²³ the distinguished mathematician Ebenezer Cunningham

14 Addenbrooke's Hospital Archive

<http://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/db/node.xsp?id=EAD%2FGBR%2F1919%2FAHRO%206>

15 *The Presbyterian Messenger* (April 1917), p. 91.

16 The encounter took place "just when Mackensen had defeated the Russians". The allusion would appear to be to the Battle of Tannenberg which ended on 30 August 1914. <http://www.firstworldwar.com/battles/tannenberg.html> 9 September 2011.

17 "Germany: Fifty Years Apart, 1. The Changed and the Unchanged," *The British Weekly* (24 January 1935).

18 Senatus Minutes, 6 June 1914, 25 November 1914, 20 January 1915, WCA.

19 John Walling, *The Internment and Treatment of German Nationals during the First World War* (Great Grimsby: Riparian Publishing, 2005), p. 9.

20 Gwen R. P. Norman, *Grace Unfailing: The Radical Mind and the Beloved Community of Richard Roberts* (Etobicoke, Ontario: United Church Publishing, 1998), p. 83.

21 Jill Wallis, *Valiant for Peace, a History of the Fellowship of Reconciliation 1914 to 1989* (London: Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1991), p. 5.

22 Letter to Richard Roberts, UCCA, Richard Roberts Fonds, file 38.

23 Quoted by John Ferguson, "The Fellowship of Reconciliation", in *The Cambridge Review* (December 1984).

had gained permission from the University Vice-Chancellor to use the Arts Theatre as a venue and the Fellowship of Reconciliation was born. Oman and Skinner were amongst the first members.²⁴ They saw themselves as “a company of people who seek, individually and corporately, to take their part in the ‘Ministry of Reconciliation’ between man and man, class and class, nation and nation, believing all true reconciliation between men to be based upon a reconciliation between Man and God.”²⁵ Love, as revealed and interpreted in the life and death of Jesus Christ was the framework by which members viewed the world. With regard to war, it was for the individual conscience to decide how best to proceed.

Amongst those members “who had offered to speak or write”, and whom Lucy Gardner the secretary was to approach, was Oman.²⁶ But Oman still felt a need “to think out [his] own relations to the present crisis”.²⁷ To this end, in March 1915, he published *The War and Its Issues*, an elaboration of a speech he had given to students at Queens’ College. Although he stressed that this was written for his own benefit and “without thought of a public”, he agreed to publication in the hope that “in the present great perplexity” the little book would be “a gift to help towards a better solution”.²⁸

“Given to discerning the signs of the times,” he had recognised that the outbreak of war was a watershed. His greeting to Watchman on the sand at Warkworth towards the end of the previous August was prescient: “I feel that never will you and I look upon a world recognisably like anything we have known!”²⁹ And he knew too that when the war was over “those of us who are not prepared to reconsider all our judgments and help to build a new heaven and a new earth will ... wander in the new time as shadowy ghosts of a vanished past.”³⁰ But the issues were not clear-cut. “That Christianity must seek to overcome war is not in doubt – the only question is, How does it set to work on that task?”³¹ Oman perceives that something more than pacifism is required. While the basic principles of non-resistance save us “from worshipping at the shrine of militarism” yet “militant pacifism cannot be what is meant by not resisting evil.”³² For no Christian can see in war anything other than “a stern,

24 Skinner was appointed to the Committee; FOR General Committee minutes, 7th Committee Meeting, 11 March 1915, London School of Economics Archives, FOR 1/1.

25 Ibid., 1st Meeting after Cambridge conference, 13 January 1915.

26 Ibid., 5th Committee Meeting, 17 February 1915.

27 *The War and its Issues; an Attempt at a Christian Judgment* (Cambridge: CUP, 1915), preface.

28 Ibid.

29 *The British Weekly* (25 May 1939).

30 *The War and its Issues* p. 4.

31 Ibid., p. 27.

32 Ibid., p. 38.

negative necessity” and “there are worse evils than war – moral surrenders, against which we must contend even to blood, and it may be the blood of others as well as our own.”³³

The churches, in his view, were not living up to expectations. They were not preaching “love and truth”.³⁴ Too many were resorting to telling men their duty like a sergeant major;³⁵ the majority were “largely governed by men of an arm-chair habit of body and a bank-note habit of mind – apt to translate sacrifice into giving money for bad architecture and worse upholstery.”³⁶ Above all, “the church had succumbed to the temptation to think of itself in terms of the state,”³⁷ but the state is not wide enough; it is not deep enough; it is not a high enough idea. What was required, Oman maintained, was “an organisation different at once in principle and in working.”³⁸ This would be founded on “a great unifying idea, an idea which would raise politics to the level of science and art as a uniting force and even make it an ally of what religion ought to be.”³⁹ At this stage, his vision of Christian internationalism seems primarily to be derived from his reflections upon the Church, his reading of Kant and contemporary philosophical idealists, and ultimately from Plato.

The book had a mixed reception. “R.” in *The Presbyterian Messenger*,⁴⁰ reacted vigorously to what Oman had to say about the Church: “This is a statement which is so far from truth and charity that on all grounds of internal evidence it must be regarded as non-Omanic, having been inserted in the manuscript by a malicious brownie while the good professor slept.” The political content was also controversial. For the *New York Times Book Review*, “The spirit of his book is much finer than its substance;”⁴¹ the *Cambridge Review*⁴² felt that “no fair-minded man should pass the same judgment on British and German policy.” Oman’s refusal to be drawn into hatred of Germany, his belief that German imperialism was similar to Britain’s in the Victorian era, his perceptions that war was turning Britain into a military and authoritarian state, his dislike of secret diplomacy and his thoughts on the need to create a just peace – all of these were contrary to the general thrust of public opinion. But they did find an echo in the programme of the Union of Democratic Control, a group of radicals who campaigned for democratic control over the war effort and whose first public meeting took place in Cambridge on 4 March 1915.⁴³ The Cambridge

33 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 59, 122.

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 87f.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

40 (July 1915), p. 255.

41 (8 August 1915), p. 283.

42 *The Cambridge Review* (1 March 1916), p. 238.

43 *The Cambridge Magazine*, iv, no.16 (6 March 1915).

branch was “extraordinarily unpopular” – the secretary, G. H. Hardy, had his cat poisoned and Bertrand Russell was deprived of his college lectureship at Trinity.⁴⁴ G. Lowes Dickinson “suffered nothing in Cambridge except a complete want of sympathy.”⁴⁵ Oman, however, gave them his support.⁴⁶ A “wayfarer” in terms of party politics, he was persuaded that “God suffers us to try blind alleys, but not to find finality in them.”⁴⁷

In the meantime, what sort of guidance could he give the students of Westminster College? The Senatus, the teaching staff, agreed that Oman should address the College on the first Friday of Lent Term 1915. He should “refer to the claim of national service in one of its many forms” and assure the students that “the case of any man who entered such service would be sympathetically considered by the college authorities.”⁴⁸ Nearly all the students had already opted with alacrity to serve the YMCA in Bedford in response to an urgent invitation from the YMCA, supported by Tissington Tatlow, General Secretary of the Student Christian Movement.⁴⁹ From 26 October to the end of November 1914, arrangements were made for them to do this in relays of four for a fortnight at a time.⁵⁰ *The Presbyterian Messenger* reported approvingly on this “admirable piece of work”: “The students run the refreshment tent and in part of it ... hold service on Sundays and family worship on week-days.”⁵¹ Their congregation consisted mostly of soldiers of Scottish regiments preparing to go to France.

In 1915, some of these students were themselves to go to France with Oman. The Revd John C. Carlile of Folkestone, who had just come back from a tour of the Base Camps, writes in May:

I have been appealing to theological colleges that tutors and students should go out to Northern France, either as Red Cross workers or in YMCA huts. My friend Dr Oman, of Cambridge, with a batch of students, is already on the other side, and others will follow. No college

44 He was not at this time a Fellow of the College; Keith Robbins, *The Abolition of War: The ‘Peace Movement’ in Britain, 1914-1919* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), p. 89.

45 H. Hanak, “The Union of Democratic Control during the First World War”, *Historical Research*, 36 (1963), pp. 168-180, here p. 175.

46 I am indebted to Professor Charles E. Bailey for his notes of an interview with Mrs Ballard, Oman’s eldest daughter, Cambridge, March 1979, where she gave this information. Although in September 1915 the executive of the UDC decided not to permit FOR to affiliate, that did not prevent individuals from being members of both bodies; see Robbins, *The Abolition of War*, p. 60.

47 *Concerning the Ministry* (London: SCM Press, 1936), p. 53.

48 Senatus Minutes, 20 January 1915, record the decision that “Dr Oman ... should *urge on* students the claim ...”; this is amended on 13 February 1915 to “Dr Oman ... should *refer to* the claim ...”

49 Senatus Minutes, 6 June 1914.

50 Minutes of the Westminster College Committee, 18 November 1914.

51 *The Presbyterian Messenger* (December 1914), p. 389.

curriculum can provide anything like the help in the development of experience, the art of securing attention, the methods of dealing directly with men as men and witnessing for Jesus Christ, as any man may obtain in the open university of an army base, or even a remount camp.⁵²

In June, Dr Oman is mentioned in the Principal's report to Synod as being "fresh from his experiences with the students in France". He had described "the work of the juniors in a YMCA tent as near the fighting line as possible and within sound of the guns." And Skinner concludes: "Dr Oman's testimony goes with that of a great many others to tell how great an opportunity these tents have – an opportunity greater than that of any chaplain I ever met."⁵³

The Base camps made good placements. In Calais, Boulogne, Le Havre, Dieppe and Rouen, thousands of men were handling ship-loads of men and materials for a soldier's pay; many were irked by the restrictions imposed by military discipline and bored with the dull routines of daily work. The huts were also full of units waiting for their turn on the firing line. The YMCA kept them human in the midst of unnatural and at times inhuman conditions. The huts catered for social and intellectual needs. Typically, a counter at one end of the hut met a constant demand for tobacco, cigarettes, bootlaces and polishes, soap and candles, bachelors' buttons; in another slightly smaller hall, beyond, there was a billiard table, a small lending library, and a supply of free stationery. Lectures were popular as were the concert parties by Miss Lena Ashwell⁵⁴ when "the hall was packed to the utmost, by a dense, khaki-clad crowd; every window crowded by those who could not gain admittance."⁵⁵ They also catered for spiritual needs. Sunday morning services were usually held by an army chaplain; on Sunday evenings, by one of the workers, and every week-night at 8.30 there were family prayers consisting of a hymn, a passage of scripture with occasionally a few words of comment, prayer and the National Anthem. Oman cautioned the students against levity:

... when a young parson in France used to talk to men just out of the trenches as if life were a gay affair, its conflicts only a football scrimmage, with a copious use of slang, the cheaper that it was mainly the clever college article, it was somewhat of an outrage. Nevertheless, to have exchanged him for Chaucer's "full solempne man" who speaks in one deep sombre tone, as though only the sob of the wind across a grey plateau were God's voice, and never the zephyr in the smiling

52 John C. Carlile, "With the Troops in Northern France", YM (21 May 1915), [Special Collections, University of Birmingham], YMCA [Collections]/K27.

53 *The Presbyterian Messenger* (June 1915), pp. 201-02.

54 "Concerts for the Army" by Miss Lena Ashwell, YM (15 October 1915), YMCA/K27.

55 "Lights and Shadows of War-Time, V. Some Experiences of Work with the YMCA", by Marcus N. Tod, *The Presbyterian Messenger* (May 1916), pp. 155-6.

valley or the tempest on shining mountain-tops, would not have won a better or more sympathetic hearing, even amid a welter of mud and sudden death.⁵⁶

They were “somewhere in France” – the conventions of censorship did not encourage greater precision. But there are clues. Oman relates how, in a street in Boulogne, he met a young lad whom he had seen only recently, full of the joy of life. “Now, a few days before, he had left three hundred of his comrades behind him at Neuve Chapelle, and his face had the haggard, dazed look of a child that had lost all its bearings in the dark.”⁵⁷ From the reference to Neuve-Chapelle, and the shell-shocked young man, this was likely to have been in late March 1915. A month or so later, Oman had left the security of the Base Camp. Following the carnage of Hill 60, Oman was with another lad, “dying slowly ... of a bullet through the spine, beseeching him to write his mother assuring her that he was all right.”⁵⁸ The lad was “in a little hospital at the Forward Base.” “Forward” here must mean “nearer to the Front.” “A little hospital” would be an apt description of a Casualty Clearing Station which was usually a few miles behind the lines; a patient with a severe injury to the spine would have been retained there – a move to a large base would not have been considered unless survival was likely. Amongst the places that had such medical units at the time, the most likely seem to be Poperinghe, Bailleul or Hazebrouck, all “within sound of the guns.”⁵⁹

Oman came home “with a sense of the greatness of the work of the YMCA, and the possibilities of it”. But he made it clear in his report to Synod that the possibilities afforded were not simply of pastoral experience or evangelistic opportunity. He reiterated the “feeling that we are passing into a new era. If we did not realise that we are in the very heart of an enormous crisis for humanity that had in it the possibility of ‘scrapping’ civilisation, we would not have realised the call of the opportunity. For this reason he welcomed the opportunity which had come to the students.”⁶⁰

The students, on their return to college, had now to decide where their duty lay in respect of Lord Derby’s appeal and the Senatus had to decide how best to assist. Faced with a dwindling flow of army recruits, the government had adopted a voluntary recruitment policy with the assurance that men who

56 *Concerning the Ministry* p. 95.

57 “Turfing the Grave”, in *A Dialogue with God* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1950), p. 45.

58 *Ibid.*

59 For an account of the Casualty Clearing Stations, see Nick Bosanquet, “Health Systems in Khaki: The British and American Medical Experience”, *Facing Armageddon* (London: Leo Cooper, 1996), pp. 451-465. I am also indebted to Sue Light, The Great War Forum, <http://1914-1918.invasionzone.com/forums/index.php?act=idx>

60 *The Presbyterian Messenger*, Synod Supplement (June 1915), p. 17.

registered would be called upon only when necessary. The view of the Senatus was that the students' "obligation to the Church is not to be held as debarring them from responding to the call for national service." And it expressed "its sincere sympathy with them in the difficulty of their situation."⁶¹

Oman's attitude was consistent:

If a man feel his call to go forth to fight his country's battle, we have a right to require him not to be swept off his feet by the mere emotion around him, to weigh his duty prayerfully, and to bear it in mind, that if a Christian can fight, it may not be for mere victory in battle, but only for a greater victory of justice and right to which even his country must be subject. After that his Christianity must decide and we must respect his decision.⁶²

Each had to decide for himself. This was on a par with Oman's educational methods. When he had to present his own views in lectures, "these were only taught in such a way as will help each student find his own".⁶³ We may instance this by two students who each expressed appreciation of Oman's support. These were to opt for different courses of action. Kenneth Keay, one of the students who went with Oman to France in 1915, subsequently took up a commission with the Cameronians and was wounded on the Somme.⁶⁴ He was later to serve as one of Oman's chaplains during his moderatorial year.⁶⁵ Percy Bernard Hawkrigde joined the OTC with a view to obtaining a commission.⁶⁶ But in December 1914 he became a pacifist. He told his appeal tribunal in 1916 that "his objection to combatant service was because it was under military organisation." And he explained: "I am already pledged to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and if the requirements of the military cross the teachings of the Lord I could not see my way to do them."⁶⁷ Percy Hawkrigde made it clear that he saw the Military Oath as an abrogation of freedom.

61 Senatus Minutes, 9 December 1915.

62 *The War and its Issues* p. 44.

63 Report by Senatus to Synod, 1910, p.300, quoted in R. Buick Knox, *Westminster College, Cambridge* (Cambridge: Westminster College, 2007).

64 Fasti record, WCA (URCHS collection).

65 *The Presbyterian Messenger* (January 1932).

66 Minutes of Board of Studies, Westminster College, 18 November 1914.

67 *Oxford Times* (1 April 1916), report of Oxfordshire Appeal Tribunal, 28 March 1916.

Oman himself now adopted the advice he had often given his students: “you will help no-one to victory if you yourself shun the battle.”⁶⁸ On 5 May 1916 his war medal card testifies that he arrived in France to begin civilian service with the YMCA.⁶⁹ He went out as a lecturer in the base camps. In submitting the names of proposed lecturers for approval to the Lectures Committees of the War Office and the YMCA Basil Yeaxlee and Gilbert Murray state: “It is obvious that men who are personally out of sympathy with the war and the national policy which it implies are hardly suitable for this work. Nor would any mere profession of orthodoxy in these matters be of much value.”⁷⁰ The implications are that Oman qualified. He lectured on “the historical problems of the war.”⁷¹ The lectures typically lasted for an hour to an hour and a half with half an hour or so of questions. If the men could not get their questions in in time, they would hand them in on paper in advance of the next lecture:⁷² “Have we any right to assume that God will give victory to the allies?” “What is God doing in this business? Are fatalities providence, fate or merely blind accident? What is the use of talking of conscience, when the Germans are fighting us as conscientiously as we are fighting them?” Oman was impressed by “their strong sense of what was right and just, their earnestness, fairness and courtesy in debate ... If their knowledge was more limited than a scholar’s, it was closer to life and readier to hand than most scholars manage to keep theirs.”⁷³

He would have been given a copy of the YMCA “Hints to speakers.”⁷⁴ The advice was crisp:

The soldier is chary of the parson. But he honours the padre. It is decidedly advantageous for the speaker to spend some considerable time among the men during the day for personal dealing. If he can play a good game of chess, draughts or billiards with them it will help ... Speakers must be prepared to address men under quite unusual conditions, especially where the meeting room is used for writing, games, and the sale of refreshments ... the necessity therefore, of concentrating the thoughts and attention of those willing to listen is

68 *Concerning the Ministry* p. 42.

69 National Archives, WO/372/15. The British War Medal, authorised in 1919, was awarded to eligible service personnel and civilians. The basic requirement was that they either entered a theatre of war or rendered appropriate service overseas during the War; service with the YMCA was recognised. The medal, in solid silver, has a mounted figure of St George trampling the shield of the central powers with the dates 1914 and 1918. The reverse has the coinage head of George V.

70 *YMCA Lectures for the Forces in France*, YMCA/K26.

71 Sherwood Eddy, *With our Soldiers in France* (New York: Association Press 1917), p. 42.

72 “Tommy in his Hours of Ease. Lecturing to the Troops in France”, by Frank Adkins, M.A. YM (23 July 1915), p. 666. YMCA/K27.

73 *Concerning the Ministry* p. 157.

74 YMCA/K24/67.

apparent ... speakers will probably find the atmosphere dense with smoke ... The singing of a solo ... will help greatly in securing the goodwill of the audience.

As regards accommodation, “modest expectations are advisable. The beds have varying degrees of hardness. Sheets are not the rule; take one, also a towel ... There is much mud ... Leggings are better than spats. Silk hats are not de rigueur, any other kind will do better.” And finally, “The cut of the coat, or collar, matters little – the man matters more.” While Oman was not given to bursting out in song or to wearing a silk hat, he clearly had no difficulty in relating to the soldiers. One of his students commented:

He is thoroughly and entirely human. During his work in France under the YMCA you would see him sitting pipe in hand, amid a crowd of soldiers, his audience as much at ease with him as he with them ... If anyone has the idea that Dr Oman is remote, aloof, unapproachable by simple folk, let his mind be disabused at once. I have heard him described as “just a great brotherly soul” and that is exactly what he is.⁷⁵

He was absent in France “for some months”.⁷⁶ At least some of this time was spent in the Rouen camp. His old friend David Smith Cairns, who had come to France on 18 April,⁷⁷ was quartered there in the Cavalry Hut and delivered to the soldiers four addresses which he had given three years before in the Cambridge Schools. In the published form under the title *The Reasonableness of the Christian Faith*, Cairns records his gratitude to Oman for his “invaluable help in Cambridge and in the Rouen camp.”⁷⁸

But not all of the summer was spent giving lectures. Oman “spent a good part of that delectable period in hospitals seeing the efficiency of civilisation in abusing its powers.”⁷⁹ On the southern outskirts of Rouen in 1916 there were six large General Hospitals, part of the evacuation chain manned by the RAMC; there were four smaller Stationary Hospitals and a convalescent Depot, a half-

75 “Appreciation of Dr Oman: The New Principal”, by E. W. P., *The Presbyterian Messenger* (July 1922), pp. 154-5.

76 *The Presbyterian Messenger* (April 1917).

77 War Medal Card, National Archives WO/372/3. Letter from J. Callan, 4 February 1916, YMCA/K26.

78 *The Reasonableness of the Christian Faith* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), p. vi.

79 John Oman, “Mr. Henry Ford’s Philosophy of Industry”, *The British Weekly* (20 June 1929).

80 <http://www.1914-1918.net/hospitals.htm> 9 September 2011.

way house for casualties returning to the Front.⁸⁰ In these, Oman “learned to look at all kinds of physical wounds without a tremor;”⁸¹ as he hints here and there, he was brought face to face with the grim realities of war, both physical and spiritual.

As he had done the previous year, he went beyond the base camp and nearer the front line. He records a visit to Abancourt which was associated with a rail regulating station and an ammunition dump.⁸² By 1916 the YMCA tent there had been transformed into a “first class hut and billiard room,”⁸³ supplying refreshments daily for up to a thousand men on the railway station. Oman’s reference is not, however, to the YMCA but to “the labour colony”. But what was this “labour colony”? The Abancourt Labour Camp only existed for two months in March and April 1918,⁸⁴ and I have not come across any reference to a visit by Oman to France in 1918. So it seems likely that the reference is to the military prison complex at Blargies, just south of Abancourt.⁸⁵ This was a penal unit where prisoners were regularly detailed for arduous work in labouring gangs. Amongst the thirty or forty inmates of a particular hut, several of them recidivists, Oman met a “young lad who had been brought up in the most religious kind of Congregationalist home, and had never before met anything but the most reputable people.” It is likely that the lad was a Conscientious Objector, a hypothesis that may be confirmed by the fact that in May 1916 two hundred Conscientious Objectors arrived in France for “work behind the lines”.⁸⁶ We can only speculate about the lad and his future, but it appears from questions raised in the House of Commons the following year,⁸⁷ that seventeen men in the 2nd Northern Non-Combatant Corps were sentenced at Abancourt for refusing to handle military supplies, their sentence of two years’ hard labour being commuted to eighty days of Field Punishment No.1, where the offender was tied, usually to a wooden cross, for up to two hours daily, sometimes within range of enemy shell-fire. On the same occasion, fourteen Seventh Day Adventists were court-martialled at Abancourt for refusing to do military work

81 *Concerning the Ministry* p. 28.

82 *Ibid.*, pp. 155-6.

83 “Memorandum of Interview with Mr. Oliver McCowen re Centres in France”, 31 December 1915, YMCA/K26.

84 For this information I am indebted to Ivor Lee, The Great War Forum, <http://1914-1918.invasionzone.com/forums/index.php?act=idx>

85 See Julian Putowski, “Mutiny at Blargies”, <http://www.shotatdawn.info/page30.html>; David Payne, “Why the British army did not Mutiny En Masse on the Western Front in the Great War”, 22 May 2008, <http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/great-war-olland/43-britain-allies/416-brit-mutiny.html>

86 “News in Brief”, *The Times* (6 May 1916).

87 See <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1918/mar/06/non-combatant-corps> and http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1918/apr/16/non-combatant-corps.

on the Sabbath and sentenced to nine months' hard labour.

Although Oman makes no comment here about the appropriateness of COs being dealt with by military rather than civil authorities his visit would appear to coincide with a concerned letter to the press⁸⁸ on the subject signed by a cross-section of churchmen and professors and a similar appeal addressed to the Prime Minister by a number of professors of Victoria University and the Nonconformist colleges in Manchester. *The Presbyterian Messenger* was less convinced: "If a man has a conscientious objection which leads him away from, rather than towards, sacrifice and suffering ... he ought not to complain if the nation which he is refusing to help in the hour of its need is inclined to deal with him somewhat curtly."⁸⁹ For the PCE this was a particularly sensitive issue. The view of a vocal minority was that the church was on a slippery slope if it engaged in politics. And those who did not agree with that could scarcely avoid the regular postings in *The Presbyterian Messenger* of "Losses in War" and "The Manse Roll of Honour". On 11 April 1916, during the Synod of the Presbytery of London North, "a breeze arose over the 'Conscientious Objector'."⁹⁰ Mr McBean, of Chorlton-cum-Hardy, and Mr Robinson of Hartlepool, had moved a motion of respect and sympathy. The Synod Clerk, acknowledging the controversial nature of the resolution, moved that the Synod pass to the next business:

Mr McBean's motion was finally withdrawn after an appeal to that effect from Dr Oman. But the Synod greatly enjoyed a brief passage of arms between teacher and pupil. Dr Oman said the motion was not in a form that could command his support. Mr McBean retorted that his thought on the subject had been formed by Dr Oman's teaching. And the Synod found relief in an outburst of laughter from a somewhat tense situation.

Oman does not appear to have written directly on the theme of conscientious objection and it is interesting to speculate as to why this may have been. But in September that year, he published two lectures on "Human Freedom" and "War" in a collection of essays, edited by Professor Stanton.⁹¹ The overall theme for 1916 was the difficulties for Christian Theism raised by the spectacle of conflict and suffering in the world. These originated as lectures given during the Summer Meeting held in Cambridge under the University Local Lectures' system. In that

88 See "Conscientious Objectors", *The Times* (25 May 1916); cf. also <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1916/may/25/non-combatant-corps>

89 *The Presbyterian Messenger* (May 1916), p. 151.

90 *The Presbyterian Messenger* (June 1916), p. 180.

91 V. H. Stanton and W. M. Ede (eds.), *The Elements of Pain and Conflict in Human Life, Considered from a Christian Point of View* (Cambridge: CUP, 1916), pp. 56-73, 157-72.

they took place after the two visits Oman made to France with the YMCA in 1915 and 1916, they provide the only systematic evidence of his thinking about the war during that time.

Here we have in embryo the thinking which was to find fuller expression in *Grace and Personality*. He raises issues which he has dealt with before⁹² but these are handled with a vividness that stems from his war-time experience. In both there is an emphasis on “theological difficulties which were emphasised by the war in acutely practical ways.”⁹³ One of the most frequent problems raised by soldiers was “the omniscience and omnipotence of God”:⁹⁴ how can we say God is wise and powerful if he allows the horrors of war? It had particular force in the context of military discipline and the suppression of individuality; one of the effects of this upon soldiers was a widespread sense of fatalism; it was a strength “to be able to believe oneself safe till ‘one’s number is up’.”⁹⁵ Oman warns to his subject. God needs sons, and not slaves. The issue is not determination but the “living freedom of the children of God”. Ultimately, all freedom stands “by the faithfulness of those who have discerned that freedom is greater than life”; this is a truth accepted by insight and “a love embraced by our own hearts”.⁹⁶

As has been noted, Oman was aware that the outbreak of war marked a new era. He now explores the radical implications of this for Christian faith. First, war is so catastrophic that it negates any idea of human progress; the “spectacles of custom” are knocked off our eyes, and we are forced to consider the evil of the world.⁹⁷ Then, secondly, the millions of dead confront us with questions about eternal life. Can we really believe any more that the final meaning of the world is pleasure and its ultimate purpose worldly possession? We need to find something in our present experience which enables us to face all its evil in the assurance that this is God’s world and we are God’s children.⁹⁸ His third point is this. In the light of the brutal realities of war, the internationalist vision he had outlined in *The War and its Issues* seems utopian. We had dreamed of a republic of letters, science, art, religion, labour:

Suddenly we found our morning vision of the dawn turned to the black and lightning-riven thunder-cloud of brutal violence and national

92 *Vision and Authority* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1902); *The Problem of Faith and Freedom in the Last Two Centuries* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906); *The Church and the Divine Order* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911).

93 “Human Freedom”, p. 59.

94 *Ibid.*

95 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

96 *Ibid.*, p. 73.

97 “War”, p. 159.

98 *Ibid.*, p. 160.

hatreds ... An extraordinary hardness is infecting our minds, so that we think less of 100,000 men killed in battle with hundreds dying slowly between the trenches, than we used to do of a small railway accident.⁹⁹

Faced with such evidence of human sin, Oman sets out his conception of the Children of God; the Kingdom of God; the Love of God. And he concludes in a breathless outburst of passion:

The man who thinks we can have final peace merely by slaughtering Germans or by making commercial treaties, and who sees no need of knitting up again, and more closely than ever, the brotherhood of man, as the healing power after this rude surgery, I do not know what he may be, but he is not of the spirit of Christ, and he has never understood how Christ's cross is the world's true meaning, which is not pleasure or profit, but discipline and duty, and he has no vision of the goal of the world which is to be the Kingdom of God established in the liberty of His children, through the service and the sacrifice of love.¹⁰⁰

During these years when he was living, at home or in France, "continually among the men in the army" his "whole view of the world" was being tested. The result was *Grace and Personality* which was to earn a place amongst the great spiritual classics.¹⁰¹ "If you have no money, advised the editor of *The Challenge*, then sell your shirt and buy it."¹⁰² It was, Oman says in the preface to the first edition in October 1917,

the effect of the War. It scattered my students, interrupted more directly historical and philosophical studies into which an appointment to the University lectureship on the Philosophy of Religion at Cambridge had led me, sent me into camps and hospitals, where fundamental religious questions were constantly being discussed, and forced upon me the reconsideration of my whole religious position.

The systematic groundwork had been done in a series of twelve articles published in *The Expositor* between July 1911 and December 1912 under the general title "Personality and Grace",¹⁰³ but these were entirely re-written. The

99 Ibid., p. 163.

100 Ibid., p. 170.

101 *Grace and Personality* (Cambridge: CUP, 1917). Subsequent editions, in 1919 and 1925, are revised and amplified. This lessens to some extent the vivid immediacy of the 1917 edition.

102 Quoted by E. W. P., "The New Principal. An Appreciation of Dr Oman", *The Presbyterian Messenger* (July 1922), pp. 154-155.

103 "Personality and Grace", *The Expositor*, 8th series, 2-4 (1911-1912).

reversal of terms in the new title suggests a primary emphasis on theology. There is a new directness and a proliferation of vivid images drawn from every-day experience. He now addresses the questions of theodicy raised by soldiers,¹⁰⁴ he reflects on peace-making, he introduces new material on Fellowship and Means of Grace, and on the Communion of Saints, which has vivid resonance in a context of war; as has the expanded section on Eternal Life. Drawing on Christian experience, he affirms that “the suffering of the righteous ... [is] love’s highest victory”.¹⁰⁵ For in this the paradoxical nature of God’s supreme power is revealed. “In that, the only song of triumph ever truly sung in the earth, these strangely conflicting strains of universal dominion and a very little remnant, of utter peace and intensified conflict ever mingle, and they harmonise into the song of victory because God’s victory is by the sacrificial power of love and not by the crushing weight of power.”¹⁰⁶ From this he reaches two conclusions: first, the rightness of conflict cannot be determined merely by regard for life – till the issues of freedom are above the fear of them that kill the body, they are not real. And second, he is now absolutely clear that the question cannot “be settled merely on grounds of non-resistance ... we are to resist the organisation of evil in the world with all our might.”¹⁰⁷ Yet there must ever be doubt whether war is the best way.

And finally, God’s Kingdom is always at hand: “the equinoctial gales are the herald of the spring, and the sowing of its seed in the bitter March weather is cheerful with the promise of the summer and the harvest.”¹⁰⁸ His renewed thought on the subject “stood the test” in a way that would have been impossible for “any doctrine that starts from the Absolute”.¹⁰⁹

In early 1917, Oman ordered his uniform.¹¹⁰ This had only recently, after much debate, become a requirement for YMCA workers;¹¹¹ but Oman’s action signalled clearly his intention of returning to the Front. It signalled too that he had no objection in conscience to “belonging to the show where everyone is in Khaki”.¹¹² However, whereas up to then those clergy who went to France did so “by individual arrangement with the YMCA”, in the winter of 1916-17 the

104 *Grace and Personality* pp. 16, 55.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 265.

106 *Ibid.*, p. 267.

107 *Ibid.*, p. 269.

108 *Ibid.*, p. 272.

109 *Ibid.*, p. vi.

110 Charles E. Bailey, notes of an interview with Mrs Ballard.

111 McCowen to A. K. Yapp, 4 July 1916: “The question of uniform is practically settled. The people at GHQ are very keen on its adoption ... I think it will be possible to turn out the uniform so that our men will not run the danger of being mistaken either for officers or privates.” YMCA/K27 War Work No.14. France. By September uniformed YMCA secretaries were being routinely saluted: *The Times* (27 September 1916).

112 20 January 1915, letter from Oliver McCowen. YMCA/K26 War Work No.13. France.

chronic shortage of workers obliged the association to “approach the authorities of the principal denominations in England and Scotland”.¹¹³ The Presbytery of London North Synod, of which Oman was a member, “appointed an Advisory Committee” and suggested “that any ministers contemplating such service should put themselves into communication with the Convenor of the Presbytery’s Committee before they take any steps”.¹¹⁴ While D. S. Cairns was “set free for a year” by the United Free Church College, Aberdeen, to help in the religious work of the YMCA,¹¹⁵ Oman was told by his church that he was “needed more at home”.¹¹⁶

Ironically, some of the time he was to spend “at home” was spent helping Cairns with the work for which he had been seconded: “to consider and interpret what was being revealed under war conditions” about the religious life of the nation and to present that result to the Churches.¹¹⁷ Funding was provided by the YMCA who, in line with a desire to act as “the handmaid of the Church,”¹¹⁸ gave Cairns *carte blanche* “to associate with him such Leaders from the Churches as he thinks most fitted to help him in the matter”.¹¹⁹ He appointed a distinguished steering committee representing a cross-section of British Christianity, amongst whom was John Oman. While the ensuing publication, *The Army and Religion: An Inquiry and Its Bearing upon the Religious Life of the Nation* (1920), has not been without its critics,¹²⁰ it was a Herculean task for Cairns who accepted the task of draftsman; and the committee had three residential meetings between August 1917 and autumn 1918. There were also several day meetings where it considered nearly three hundred printed memoranda.¹²¹ The resulting “beguiling and grandiose manifesto for church

113 “Memorandum Regarding the Interdenominational Position of the YMCA”, prepared at the request of Oliver H. McCowen by E. C. Carter, December 1916. YMCA/K24/5.

114 Minutes of Presbytery of London North Synod, 9 January 1917, WCA (URCHS collection).

115 Letter from E. C. Carter to Oliver H. McCowen, 24 January 1917, YMCA/K27.

116 Charles E. Bailey, notes of an interview with Mrs Ballard.

117 *The Army and Religion: An Inquiry and Its Bearing upon the Religious Life of the Nation*, with preface by the Bishop of Winchester (New York: Association Press, 1920), p. v.

118 “Memorandum Regarding the Interdenominational Position of the YMCA”, YMCA/K24/5.

119 *The Back Parts of War: The YMCA Memoirs and Letters of Barclay Baron, 1915-1919*, introduction by Michael Snape (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), p. 87; for the complete list of committee members, see *The Army and Religion*, pp. xi, xii.

120 Snape, *The Back Parts of War*, pp. 87-88, considers the report to be “deeply flawed”. Richard Schweitzer sees it as “misleading or incomplete”: “The Cross and the Trenches: Religious Faith and Doubt among some British Soldiers on the Western Front”, *War and Society*, 16 (1998), p. 33.

121 *The Army and Religion* p. vi.

122 *The Back Parts of War* p. 89.

reform”¹²² contains a section on “a re-statement and vitalising of Christian doctrine”¹²³ and here we may detect strands which are a feature also of Oman’s essays on *War* and *Freedom* in particular – the sections on “Evil” and “The Life to Come”, the questions of theodicy and fatalism, the critique of the spiritual inadequacy of the Church.

In what other sense was Oman “needed”? At the May Synod, the suggestion was made “without Oman’s knowledge or consent,”¹²⁴ that he might be deployed to Birmingham. The remaining six Westminster students, all of whom had been rejected by the army for medical reasons, could continue to study there while assisting the many congregations without a minister. Further details were left to the college. The Board of Studies “approved heartily” of the scheme and Oman agreed to serve as Director of Studies.¹²⁵ He later “accepted complete responsibility” for the decision to house the students at Woodbrooke Institute in Selly Oak, and “explained fully his reasons” to an uneasy College Committee.¹²⁶ We may not know what these were, but it is unlikely that they included promotion of the courses which were being provided in Woodbrooke for pacifists and Conscientious Objectors who were waiting for their tribunals.¹²⁷

The months at Woodbrooke consolidated Oman’s conviction that internationalism would be the best way to foster peace after the war. The Warden, H. G. Wood, had recently succeeded James Rendel Harris as Director of Studies. His biographer suggests that the Wardens would have found solace “when John Oman brought a group of his students from Westminster College to share for a while in the life of Woodbrooke and to enter into the free range of discussion possible there at a time when many minds were closed against a future in which Germany could have a place”.¹²⁸ Wood sensed the need for a deeper understanding between the nations after the war and the Woodbrooke curriculum included a scheme of study of International Relations which was proving increasingly popular.¹²⁹ He believed that what was needed to end war once and for all was “a genuine international fellowship of Christians”. Oman too saw the future of world peace in terms of the *World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches*,¹³⁰ which emerged from the

123 *The Army and Religion* pp. 264-292.

124 *The Presbyterian Messenger* (June 1917), p. 152.

125 Minutes of the Westminster College Board of Studies, 19 June 1917.

126 Minutes of the Westminster College Committee, 17 October 1917; the elder son of the most uncertain member of the Committee, Dr Voelcker, had “been killed in the great advance”. Minutes of Presbytery of London North, 19 September 1916.

127 Richenda C. Scott, *Herbert G. Wood: A Memoir of his Life and Thought* (London: Friends Home Service Committee, 1967), p. 54.

128 *Ibid.*

129 Minutes of the FOR General Committee, 10-11 September 1916, 15-17 January 1917, LSE Archives, FOR 1/1-1/4 Coll MISC 456.

130 The Alliance and the FOR each originated in the aborted gathering of Christian leaders in Constance 2 August 1914 and there was overlap between the early members.

welter of ecumenical peace initiatives of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and in the inter-war years was to become the major international religious peace body.¹³¹ One of three representatives of the PCE on the British Council of the World Alliance, which he served faithfully from its formal constitution in June 1923 until his resignation in 1931, Oman remained “very enthusiastic about the work”¹³² proposing motions, speaking to motions, giving papers and sitting on sub-committees.¹³³

He resisted the tendency of the Council to “rush in with political resolutions”. The business of the Alliance in his view was “to represent the Catholic spirit” and “to build up the true Church Universal”.¹³⁴ In his unpublished essay on “Spiritual Regeneration as the Basis of World Reconstruction”,¹³⁵ he is convinced that we cannot and we ought not to win peace except by “a true Catholicism”. Only as we see the same reality can we be wholly at one. “The more clearly we see that all our visibly organised Churches are only means for advancing this true Catholic Church ... the more we shall perceive that no Church is wholly lacking in (its) elements, and the more we shall be content to serve loyally in our own denomination.” And he concludes:

Finally, we must be peace-makers, not as the peaceable who have no iron in their blood ... but ... as relentless fighters against evil ... Yet, even so, it is with peace in our hearts, because we fight in the faith which works by love ... When we have accomplished these ends, we shall perhaps discover that our divisions have passed away; and we shall certainly find that they do not really matter.

In advocating these ideas of ecumenical internationalism, Oman was showing not merely a defensive reaction to the horrors of the War, but an incisive Christian ethical response to the new world that was emerging. He should have the last word:

131 See Daniel Gorman, “Ecumenical Internationalism: Willoughby Dickinson, the League of Nations and the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 45 (2010), pp. 51-73.

132 From scrap-book fragment, 28 May 1925, WCA, Box WX4.

133 Not all his colleagues shared his visionary zeal: “Garvie”, he lamented to Cairns, “is solemnly stodgy and Burroughs is very light-weight and those who might count on the council don’t come.” John Oman to D. S. Cairns, 19 December 1925. University of Aberdeen, Historic Collections. MS 3384/3/5 No.130.

134 Ibid.

135 Submitted for an international competition under the auspices of the Walker Trust, University of St Andrew’s. First prize of £200 was awarded to Henry Hodgkin. Oman was awarded one of four consolation prizes of £25. *The Times* (20 February 1921).

My own particular job has been trying to get a free draught through the flue of common conviction ... I saw that the important matter is a decision about the world we live in and that is not decided by intellectual conclusions but by a way of living in the world we know.¹³⁶

FLEUR HOUSTON

136 Fragment of an address, WCA, WT1/18.

FATHERS AND BRETHERN¹
ADDRESSES BY CHAIRMEN OF THE
CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF ENGLAND AND
WALES (1940-1965) AND PRESIDENTS OF THE
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN ENGLAND AND
WALES (1966-1972)

PART I

The Chairmanship of the Congregational Union of England and Wales was the highest honour that Congregationalists could confer on any of its members. Limited, at least in practice, to one year of service, the Chairman had no power. With their strong emphasis on the autonomy of the local church, Congregationalists were wary of creating structures that might weaken local independency and throughout the life of the Union from 1831 to 1966, when the Union was succeeded by the Congregational Church in England and Wales, Congregationalists lived in tension between local autonomy and the need to provide structures and systems of mutual support, without which many local congregations would struggle to survive. However, while the office of Chairman was denied power, it offered its holder considerable influence. Election to office was a sign of the respect and esteem which had been gained through years of service in the denomination. During the term of office the denomination looked to its Chairman for inspiration and prophetic leadership.

The role of Chairman itself might be the subject of a separate study of how the holders of the office exercised their functions in the Assembly, the councils and committees of the Union, and their representative function on the national stage. This study focuses on just one aspect of the role – the requirement that, following induction to the Chair, the Chairman should deliver a major address to the assembled representatives of the churches and to the Assembly's distinguished guests who represented the wider Church. It was an awesome responsibility. From 1939 the Chairman delivered only one address, since the Autumnal Assemblies were discontinued because of the war and were never resumed.² All but one of the addresses considered in this paper were delivered in the massive Westminster Chapel in Buckingham Gate, London, which hosted successive Assemblies from 1941 onwards, seating 2,500 people, with two tiers of galleries reaching to the distant ceiling. For most Chairmen it was the largest congregation they would ever address. The physical task alone of projecting a human voice into the far corners of the auditorium was daunting. The emotional and spiritual demands were even greater. Few could have approached it without mixed feelings of pride and trepidation.

1 This was the traditional opening salutation. It gradually fell out of use during the period under review.

2 The last Autumn Assembly was held at Bradford in 1938. An Assembly due to be held at Plymouth in 1939 was cancelled following the outbreak of war.

Who were appointed to this honour? Of the thirty-three holders of the office of Chairman included in this survey, thirty were ordained ministers. Eleven of them were serving as ministers of local congregations; five were exercising a wider ministry among the churches as Provincial Moderators; one, Dr Sidney Berry, was a long-serving Secretary of the Union; seven were Principals of theological colleges recognised by the Union for the training of Congregational ministers; two were engaged in service to the London Missionary Society, with a further two serving in World Church affairs; one was working in the media, and another in journalism and historical research. The remaining three were laymen.

Of those in local pastoral ministry, most were ministers of large congregations. The largest in the period under review was Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, which in 1960, when Dr J. Trevor Davies was Chairman, recorded a membership of 1,020. Its membership in 1949, when Dr John Short came to the chair, was 756 (though down from 921 in 1940). Carrs Lane, Birmingham, recorded 770 members in 1952 when Leslie Tizard was Chairman (though its membership in 1940 had been 960). East Hill, Wandsworth, recorded 608 members during F. Chalmers Rogers's chairmanship in 1946. A. E. Gould, Chairman in 1965, ministered at London Road, Chelmsford, to a membership of 546 (up from 428 in 1940). In 1961 H. A. Hamilton was minister of Union Church, Brighton, with 437 members and in 1969 R. W. Hugh Jones was minister at Petts Wood, a growing south London suburban church, with 436 members. Bromley, where Oswald George Whitfield had ministered since 1913, registered 495 members when he came to the chair in 1943. "Smaller churches" – the term is relative – were Highbury Chapel, Bristol, with 300 members when K. L. Parry was Chairman in 1943, and Mill Hill, London, with 400 members in 1948 when S. Maurice Watts was inducted to the chair. St James's, Newcastle-on-Tyne, had 265 members in 1969 when Dr Erik Routley was President of the Congregational Church in England and Wales; this was down from 340 in 1940, but was also at the close of a decade in which overall membership of the denomination had significantly declined – from 212,077 members in 1959 to 168,337 in 1969.

It is not surprising, given their high profile in the denomination, that Principals of the theological colleges were the next largest group. Two were Principals of Mansfield College, Oxford (Nathaniel Micklem, 1944 and John Marsh, 1963). New College, London, also provided two of their Principals in John Huxtable (1962) and Charles Duthie (1971). Western College, Bristol, Lancashire College, Manchester, and the Yorkshire United College at Bradford each provided one chairman during the period under review in H. F. Lovell Cocks (1950), W. Gordon Robinson (1955) and H. Cunliffe-Jones (1957). The mention of these names, and of theological colleges long closed, is a vivid reminder of the rich resources of scholarship and leadership which the colleges and their teachers provided to the denomination. Nor should we forget that all those named had earlier served in local pastoral charge.

Next came the five ministers serving as Provincial Moderators. Howard

Stanley (Lancashire, 1951 and later to be Secretary of the Union), W. Griffith Jones (Wales, 1958), J. A. Figures (North West, 1964), Charles Haig (Western, 1968), and C. J. Buckingham (Eastern Province, 1972). All brought to the chairmanship or presidency their extensive experience of local ministry and the insights derived from their service to the wider church.

The churches' commitment to overseas missions and to the ecumenical movement, which grew in importance during the period of this survey, was represented by two General Secretaries of the London Missionary Society. Dr A. M. Chirgwin came to the chair in 1945 and Maxwell Janes became the first President of the Congregational Church in England and Wales in 1966. Dr Norman Goodall, Secretary of the International Missionary Council, became Chairman in 1954 and would later negotiate the merger of the IMC with the World Council of Churches of which he then became Associate General Secretary. Ecumenical relationships were also recognised in the election to the chair in 1967 of Dr Aubrey Vine, then General Secretary of the Free Church Federal Council.

Surprisingly – or should it be shamefully given the commitment of Congregationalists to the principle of the priesthood of all believers? – only three lay members were called to the chair. All were prominent in public and denominational affairs. Alec Glassey (1941), a leading Congregationalist from Dorset, had been Member of Parliament for East Dorset. Benjamin Hartwell (1959) was a lawyer who had given distinguished service to the denomination. Ebenezer Cunningham, a Cambridge mathematician and long-term member and deacon of Emmanuel Congregational Church, was elected to service in 1953, thus representing the Union at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth in Westminster Abbey during that year.

Dr Sidney M. Berry's long service to the Union as its Secretary from 1923 to 1947, to which he briefly returned in 1955-56, was honoured by his call to the chair in 1947. Prior to his work for the Union, Berry had also served as minister of Carrs Lane, Birmingham. During his period as Secretary he was also Secretary of the Federal Council of Evangelical Free Churches and its Moderator from 1934 to 1936. Sidney Berry truly embodied the face of the Union.

Two names remain which are more difficult to categorise. Dr Albert Peel was Congregationalism's foremost historian and guardian of the Independent tradition of churchmanship. After a happy and distinguished pastorate at Clapton Park, London, from 1922 to 1934, a church of over 600 members and 1,500 Sunday School scholars, Peel devoted the remainder of his life to historical research and journalism. This included the founding and editorship for twenty-two years of the highly-regarded *Congregational Quarterly* and for a quarter of a century editing the Transactions of the *Congregational Historical Society*. His eminence as a historian, the esteem in which he was held as a pastor, and his faithfulness to the Congregational tradition were recognised in his election to the Chair in 1940.

The remaining name is that of the Revd Elsie Chamberlain (1956), the only

woman to be elected to the chairmanship of the Union throughout its history. It is tempting to suppose that she was elected as the “token” woman, but that would be to anticipate the gender awareness of a much later period. Elsie Chamberlain had come to national prominence both as the first woman chaplain to the Forces and also as a member of the Religious Broadcasting Department of the BBC to which she had been appointed in 1950. She was also the first Nonconformist minister to be married to an Anglican priest, against much determined opposition by the Anglican establishment. Her voice became known to millions of listeners through her “Lift Up Your Hearts” broadcasts. Elsie Chamberlain brought to the office of Chairman [sic] a then unique experience of communication and the mastery of the modern media.

It is apparent that during the period from 1940 to 1972 Congregationalism drew its Chairmen (and from 1966 its Presidents) from a rich pool of talent. These were decades of massive social and cultural change which the church could not ignore. Were those called to the responsibility of chairmanship equal to the task of enabling the churches to identify and respond to these changes? Would their themes be relevant to the condition and needs of the churches during these turbulent decades of the mid-twentieth century? Would they be given a prophetic word to empower the churches for mission? These are the questions to consider.

I: 1940s: The Struggle for Survival

Adrian Hastings remarks that English Christianity in the years leading up to the Second World War appeared “respectable, quiet, rather unheroic, even cosy”³ in comparison with Christian experience in Spain, Russia or Germany. When war came it was accepted with sad inevitability. There was no glorification, no enthusiasm, as had marked the outbreak of the earlier conflict of 1914-18 and which had rapidly turned to profound disillusionment. In 1939 there was a feeling that everyone was in it together. Human and Christian values demanded that the Nazi menace be resisted. The churches faced long years in which many of their buildings would be damaged or completely destroyed, premises would be taken over for military or civic purposes, many of their menfolk would be absent on war service and many churches would face a desperate struggle to maintain even a semblance of congregational life.

The years of war gave impetus to the emerging ecumenical movement which had not hitherto greatly impacted on the British Churches. In 1940 two Free Church bodies, the National Free Church Council and the Federal Council of Evangelical Free Churches merged into the Free Church Federal Council. The British Council of Churches was inaugurated in 1942 to become a key instrument of British Protestant Christianity. A remarkable local ecumenical

3 Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-85* (London: Collins, 1986), p. 382.

event took place at a midnight Christmas Eve mass in Bristol in 1940 when Free Church ministers shared with Anglican colleagues in administering the sacrament. Relations with Roman Catholics began to thaw under the leadership of Cardinal Hinsley. It is not fanciful to see these as the products of the war crisis, although the ecumenical journey ahead would be painful and uncertain. High hopes rested on the visionary leadership of William Temple who was consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury in 1942. His *Christianity and Social Order*, published in the same year, reflected the established Anglican Church's support for the welfare state that would be created after the war.

The second half of the decade, from 1945 until at least 1951, were years of unparalleled austerity for Britain. The war had bankrupted the country and its economy had to be rebuilt from scratch. Food rationing persisted into the early 1950s. With full employment the problem was not shortage of money but of goods to buy. Factories converted from producing munitions to goods for export. With much of the housing stock having been damaged or destroyed in the war, and new families being formed, there was a severe shortage of residential accommodation.

For the churches this was a period in which damaged buildings were reconstructed, and in which congregations attempted to restore the patterns of church life which the war had disrupted. It was also a period during which Congregationalists reflected on the nature and significance of their churchmanship. The decade saw a revival of interest in the theology of P. T. Forsyth (1848-1921) and the republication of his books by the Independent Press. An influential and talented group of ministers, including Nathaniel Micklem, John Marsh, Daniel Jenkins, Ronald Orchard, John Huxtable, Alec Whitehouse, H. F. Lovell Cocks, H. Cunliffe-Jones, R. T. Brooks and Romilly Micklem, produced the Forward Books in which they explored the roots of Congregationalism and its significance for the present day. *The Congregational Quarterly* (edited by Dr Albert Peel) and *The Presbyterian* (edited by Daniel Jenkins) were respected journals for the dissemination and discussion of ideas on the traditions of Congregationalism and its churchmanship. A new interest in liturgy was heralded in the publication by the Oxford University Press of *A Book of Public Worship* (1949) edited by John Huxtable, John Marsh, Romilly Micklem and James Todd. Seeds were being sown in this troubled decade that promised a fruitful harvest in years to come.

The first Assembly since the outbreak of hostilities in September 1939 met at the City Temple, London, in May 1940 under the chairmanship of Dr Albert Peel. *The Christian World* noted that throughout the Assembly there was a universal note of *gravitas*. Only a few hours before the Assembly opened, hundreds of people had been killed or wounded in the German attack on Paris. The invasion of England seemed an imminent possibility.

In preparation for his year of office Dr Peel had visited the United States of America and Canada, in order to test attitudes to the war, and also the British Expeditionary Forces in France. His address was belligerently entitled: "Let the

Church Attack”, based on the legendary words of Marshall Foch at the first battle of the Marne in the First World War: “My centre is giving way; my right is pushed back; the situation is excellent: I attack.” In the dark and terrible days of war, this should be the Church’s slogan. What was to be attacked was the whole creed of Fascism which had as its aim the destruction of the Church. Adolf Hitler had declared that he was determined to tear up Christianity in Germany root and branch. The response must be an attacking Church. A realistic assessment of the situation did not give grounds for confidence. Peel however quoted Charles Raven who had said that “the Church seems concerned for its safety rather than its mission, with its traditions rather than truth, with the process rather than its results.” The Church’s present temptation was to seek safety and escape. The response of an attacking Church must be fourfold; penitence and humility for its failure to lead humankind into the ways of peace; quietness and confidence in the face of death, destruction and ruin; living in such a way that people notice “we are always of good cheer” and that we have the power to conquer hatred and bitterness; avoiding, when peace comes, the follies of 1918-19 in the Treaty of Versailles, i.e. being magnanimous in victory. Peel offered these as the weapons of a Christian warfare that would ultimately prevail. “When men are as ready to die for peace and for God, as they are to die for England, then – and only then – the gates of Hell will fall.” Seventy years later it still reads as addressed to the situation of its time.

Shortly before the 1941 Assembly opened in May, the City Temple was destroyed in the London blitz. The Assembly met instead at Westminster Chapel. By then a large number of churches had suffered damage or total destruction. The Union’s secretary, Dr Berry, reported to the Assembly that 150 churches had been slightly damaged, ninety had suffered serious damage, of which thirty-two had been in London, and over sixty-five (twenty-eight in London) had been totally destroyed.

The Chairman that year was Alec Glassey, one of Congregationalism’s leading laymen, an elocutionist and experienced public speaker. He took as his title “The Ordinary Man Speaks”. War was terrible but the Church’s response should not be a resigned acceptance of the present conflict as a sign of God’s will or judgement. Rather the war situation was a call to conscript everyone in the churches into the work of healing – rehousing those whose homes had been obliterated, re-planning destroyed cities, rebuilding damaged and destroyed churches, the re-ordering of industry, the restoration of broken family and communal life, and the creation of a new spirit within the hearts of men and nations. Such conscription allowed neither exemption nor discharge until these tasks had been accomplished. As the Union’s Chief Commissioner for Reconstruction (1942-57), Glassey would be tireless in the work of restoration and also in church extension into new areas in the post-war years. No ecumenist – in his address he challenged the view that the man in the street was repelled by the disunity of the Church – he argued that the ordinary man, whom he claimed to represent, demanded choice in preferring particular forms of worship

and churchmanship just as he did in the choice of cars, tobacco or biscuits. “I see neither virtue nor necessity in union at this juncture.” This was a robust defence of denominationalism, and in particular the Congregational Way, which would have had strong support from his immediate predecessor in the Chair. Later addresses, as we shall see, would take a different view.

In one sense however, Glassey struck in his own way a note that would be sounded by three of his immediate successors in the 1940s. This was that Congregationalists would best serve the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church (though few might choose that form of words) by reinvigorating their Congregational roots and demonstrating that Congregationalism was a church order that was a true and faithful expression of the Gospel. Thus, in 1942, Kenneth Parry, then minister at Highbury Chapel, Bristol, pleaded in an address entitled “The Church the House of Piety” that Congregationalists should recover their roots in Puritan piety. Parry took more seriously than Glassey the harm done by division within the Church. The gigantic task of winning England back to the faith could not be achieved by separate denominations. The time had come to repeal the 1662 Act of Uniformity and for Congregationalism to be included as a kind of order within the National Church. “Cannot the Church of England not only make it possible for us to go back whence we came, but impossible for us any longer to remain out?” A revived Puritan piety should be Congregationalism’s contribution to such a united and national church. Parry made a clear distinction between “piety” and “pietism”. The latter tended towards introspection and subjectivism. “Piety” meant “making your own the faith once delivered to the saints” and expressing that within the framework of the Church and in public affairs and social duty. It is not other-worldly but seeks the transformation of justice into righteousness. Parry, as a student at Mansfield College, had learned from his illustrious former Principal, Dr Andrew Martin Fairbairn, that religion was concerned with the totality of human existence.

Leslie Tizard, reporting Parry’s address for the *Christian World*, commented that the address was listened to in almost unbroken silence because it was too heart-searching and thought-provoking to be received in any other way. It was greeted at the end by a spontaneous outburst of applause.

A similar plea was made by Parry’s successor, O. G. Whitfield, another Mansfield alumnus and former student of Fairbairn, who focused his address in 1943 on “The Centrality of Worship in the Church’s Life and Work”. In quoting from J. S. Whale’s *What is a Living Church?* that “a Christian congregation is primarily a company of believers whose belief finds its living expression in corporate worship”, Whitfield urged the revival of some kind of family worship in every Christian home. He drew on Richard Baxter’s model of the periodic catechising of every family – parents, children and servants in his Kidderminster parish – as a means of encouraging the habits of personal devotion in the lives of its members through bible study, prayer and meditation. Personal piety and public worship were mutually refreshing. Brought together they would lead to a deepened sense of fellowship within and between churches, and generate a new zeal for evangelism.

“Penitence and Obedience” was the theme of the address by Dr Nathaniel Micklem, Principal of Mansfield College, who came to the chair in 1944. Micklem was the third chairman in succession during this decade to have been taught by Fairbairn. He began his address by drawing a parallel between Israel, about to enter the Promised Land, and the Church now also facing a decisive hour. Both were faced with the choice between the way of life and the way of death. “In this day of hazard and opportunity, will our churches be reborn to newness of life or will they peter out?” The progress of the Reconstruction Scheme was an encouraging sign, but there was also evidence of despair. What was required of the churches at this time was obedience. Congregationalism had long fought for freedom but the basic principle of its polity was obedience. Churches boasted of their freedom but they were free only to obey. Renewal would depend on repentance, on taking seriously the obligations of church membership, and according central place to the Church Meeting as the “true and appointed instrument for the guidance of the church”, and where its obedience is expressed. Obedience also included the relationship of churches to each other. Congregationalists were deeply aware of the spiritual responsibilities and privileges of the local congregation, but their tradition also emphasised the duty of every church to walk in harmony with God’s people everywhere. Representatives of the churches should meet together in synods to seek the mind of Christ for the whole Church. This was not a matter of the strong churches helping those that were weaker, but of all churches, rich and poor, seeking mutual advice, support and admonition. The call to repent was to all, not least to the successful and more complacent churches which could pay their way and were often styled “good” churches. The renewal of the churches, Micklem insisted, lay through repentance from dead works and what John Owen had described as “Gospel obedience” growing out of the constraint of the love of Christ.

The 1945 assembly opened on 7 May on the day preceding the end of hostilities in Europe. This year marked the 150th anniversary of the founding of the London Missionary Society, and it was appropriate that the Assembly chairman should be its General Secretary, Dr Arthur Mitchell Chirgwin. Chirgwin had given long service to the Society, initially as Assistant Home Secretary, then for thirteen years Overseas Secretary for Madagascar, and as General Secretary since 1932. The work of the Society had suffered greatly during the war years when its London offices had been bombed, but Chirgwin had used those years to raise funds for new enterprises to mark the anniversary.

Chirgwin chose not to dwell on the adversities of war but to highlight what he saw as two hopeful signs in the present time. The first was the emergence of the World Church which was now a geographical reality. In its horizontal dimension it embraced in its fellowship people of every nation. In its vertical dimension people from every part of the world were being brought into touch with the living God. The World Church could not solve problems. The war would leave a legacy of suspicion and mistrust which would sorely test fellowship

within the World Church, not least in Europe where there would be much misunderstanding to be resolved. He foresaw pitfalls in the Mission Field itself where younger churches, now growing up to maturity and themselves changed by the experiences of war, would make demands. These problems however were to be addressed in the context of a new concern for evangelism which had grown out of the exigencies of war and the growing conviction that the salvation of the world lay in the Christian gospel of peace and reconciliation.

Twelve months later the world was at peace following the horrific ending of the war in the Far East with the destruction by atomic bombs of the two Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There was a profound sense that an old order had passed away, but even more that the world now lay under the threat of new and frightening possibilities of destruction. Chalmers Rogers, minister of East Hill Congregational Church in Wandsworth, and chairman in 1946, declared in apocalyptic language, in an address with the title "For Such a Time as This" that history had reached an unprecedented crisis and the world was trembling on the edge of the abyss. At home Britain had embarked on a great social experiment with the election of a Labour government in 1945 and the launching of the Welfare State with the National Insurance Act of 1946, which guaranteed universal protection from the financial hazards of sickness, unemployment and old age. It offered a social justice that the churches should welcome. But their traditional role as providers of voluntary services would now change as these became the responsibility of government. The churches should welcome this as liberating them to focus on the supreme task of evangelism and making religion relevant to life. There was a particular need to improve its care of young people who through the war years had often been "as sheep without a shepherd". Congregationalism's emphasis on liberty, matched with moral responsibility, were gifts for the whole world, not just for the Christian community. "Our Congregational way", he concluded, "was surely given to be matched to such an hour."

As the decade of the 1940s drew to its close the immediate crisis of war receded into the background. The threat remained real, and was intensified with Europe now divided by the Iron Curtain, and its western nations acutely aware of their vulnerability to attack. Congregationalism began to focus more directly on the re-ordering of its life after the ravages of war. In 1947 Dr Sidney Berry came to the Chair on the eve of his retirement as its long-term General Secretary. His address was an overview of where Congregationalism then stood. He posed the question: "What are we being called to do?" to which he offered four possible answers. Congregationalists needed to relearn their faith, to emphasise the importance of the Church Meeting, to draw together for fellowship and mutual help, and to do more for its young people. In some churches the Church Meeting was currently experiencing a revival through the vision of a number of younger ministers. The Reconstruction Fund, which had reached its target, was a sign of the effectiveness of the churches working together. A similar venture was the proposal to set up a Home Churches Fund to improve the living

standards of ministers. On the world stage the formation of the International Congregational Council, due to meet in 1949, would make the world-wide Congregational fellowship a deeper reality. More imaginative work should be done by the denomination for the young people in the churches, where much could be learned from the experience of Congregational Churches in the USA with their Pilgrim Fellowship and youth camps.

This was a denominationally focused address and it was perhaps significant that no reference was made to the proposal made six months earlier by Geoffrey Fisher, by then Archbishop of Canterbury, in a ground-breaking sermon in Cambridge, that the Free Churches should consider taking episcopacy into their systems of church order. Nor was that challenge taken up in the following year when S. Maurice Watts, minister of Union Church, Mill Hill, came to the chair. Watts used the opportunity to plead support for two causes close to his heart. One was that the Union should provide better support for ministers' widows whose meagre pension at that time was only £25 per annum. The second, and related cause, was that the Union should acquire a large country house, which its owners could no longer maintain, and convert it into flats for retired ministers and their spouses. Both these practical suggestions eventually bore fruit, and for several years Fen Place, near Crawley, which the Union purchased in 1950, provided a welcome haven for retired ministers and their spouses.

The final address of the 1940s was given in 1949 by Dr John Short, minister of Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, on "The Relevant Christ". His principal concern was the menace of secularism and its challenge to the churches. Secularism was invading every aspect of human life with its aim of the practical exclusion of God from human life and affairs. Its claim that man had come of age and no longer needed the tutelage of religion faced Christianity with a major challenge which Christianity could meet. "Christians reject the implications of the secularist view that this world is 'a road that leads to nowhere' ... and that human life is doomed in the end to perish without leaving a single trace in some vast cosmic cemetery." Applying this to Congregationalism, Short proposed a greater degree of organisational cohesion within the denomination with more authority given to the deliberations and decisions of the General Assembly; church premises should be improved, beautified and brought up to date for their work, following the examples of the United States of America and Canada; Christian Social Centres should be built and equipped, in co-operation with other churches, to meet social needs in their localities. Worship also should offer more symbolism; a cross on the communion table, stained glass windows, and a robed choir would enhance the experience of worship, which in many churches was drab and lacking in stimulus to mind and heart. Less clear is how these measures would address the menace of secularism and its intellectual challenge. Short had however identified an issue which would trouble the churches in later decades.

II: 1950s: A Decade of Hope

“Taking the churches as a whole, the tendency during the ’fifties was for the weak churches to become weaker while churches that were numerically strong were able either to hold their own or to increase their number.”⁴ Some have claimed that the 1950s were a time of religious revival. Callum Brown identified a “return to piety”: “The late 1940s and 1950s witnessed the greatest church growth that Britain had experienced since the mid-nineteenth century.”⁵ Positive signs for revival were seen in the massive attendances at the Billy Graham crusades of 1954-56 and in programmes for church extension. The 1950s was perhaps the last great era of church-building in new towns and expanding suburbs which were optimistically seen as fruitful fields for evangelisation. The *mores* of the time, especially the post-war emphasis on family life and domesticity, and the role of women as home and family builders, greatly benefited the churches. “Traditional values of family, home and piety were suddenly back on the agenda between the end of the war and 1960.”⁶ A more sober assessment is that this did little to slow the inexorable process of decline. Congregational membership declined from 232,822 in 1949 to 212,017 in 1959. Nevertheless a spirit of optimism prevailed.

Socially the 1950s were characterised by “deference, respectability, conformity, restraint and trust – these were probably all more important than piety in underpinning the 1950s.”⁷ Not surprisingly it was often an authoritarian, illiberal and puritanical society. Discipline was strong, especially in schools, where corporal punishment remained the penalty for rule-breaking. Sexual activity was surrounded by prudishness and un-mentionability. Homosexuality was shrouded by secrecy, guilt and fear. Marriage was highly valued and divorce was generally stigmatised. Overall it was a decade of growing prosperity, for which Prime Minister Harold Macmillan is associated with his comment of 1957, “most...have never had it so good”. Certainly the churches – or some of them – flourished in this soil. It was a conservative era of general contentment and satisfaction.

The addresses delivered from the chair of the Union in this decade were in no way complacent or conservative. H. F. Lovell Cocks, Principal of the Western College in Bristol, gave what is still remembered as probably the most powerful address of the period. Entitled “A Church Reborn”, he questioned in 1950 whether the churches were really as free as they claimed to be. “Ours should be the least institutionalised, the least hampered by traditions, the most readily

4 R Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England 1662-1962* (London: Independent Press, 1962), p. 462.

5 Callum G Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 170; S. J. D. Green, “Was there an English Religious Revival in the 1950s?”, *JURCHS*, vol. 7 no. 9 (November 2006), pp. 517-38.

6 Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* p. 172.

7 D. Kynaston, *Family Britain: 1951-57* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009), p. 538.

adaptable to changing social situations, and the most sensitive and responsive to the Word of God.” In reality many churches were in bondage to their past, to bricks and mortar, to middle-class ideology, and to their love of ease. “It is easier to become a member of the church than a member of the Communist Party.” He quoted Martin Luther, who had that said that one of the marks of the Church is that “it stands under the Cross and is persecuted”. “We are not persecuted because it is clear to the world that we are not proposing to take the Gospel seriously.” The remedy for the creeping paralysis that immobilises so many of the churches is regeneration by the Spirit and taking seriously Congregational churchmanship and polity. “Congregationalism is nothing but a thoroughgoing and revolutionary attempt to take in dead earnest the abiding presence of the Living Christ with his people and His absolute authority over them.” The Church Meeting is the supreme place where this becomes effective. It is not a democracy, whose purpose is to express and make effective the sovereignty of the people, but the means by which it expresses and makes effective the sovereignty of Christ. It is nothing less than the place where men and women can offer free obedience to God.

Leslie James Tizard, minister of Carrs Lane, Birmingham, and describing himself as an “ordinary working minister”, brought to the chair in 1952 wide experience of pastoral ministry. The theme of his address was “The Gospel and the Individual”. The duty of the Christian was to make the authority of Christ effective in society. But there could be no gospel for society without a gospel for the individual. “No gospel can make a truly Christian society which cannot make true Christians.” He therefore challenged any assumption that Christian values and those of society were identical. The Church’s primary task is to bring people to Christ. “A Christian is a person who has come face to face with God in Christ, who has found in him the forgiveness of his sins, and has opened his life to the renewing, creative power of his spirit.” The purpose of evangelism is to co-operate with God in securing this personal encounter with Christ which is the basis of membership of the church. Addressing ministers in the Assembly, he urged that the great task of the ministry is the cure of souls. Preaching could have no effect without the preacher knowing and understanding the fears and anxieties of men and women. Addressing lay members, he urged that the priesthood of all believers meant they were equally charged with bringing about the personal encounter with Christ through gifts of friendship, personal concern and time. He quoted Von Hügel who had said “Christ taught us to care. Caring is the great thing. Caring matters most.” A church that did not care or seek to bring about personal encounters with Christ, was failing in its task.

“Gathered – for what?” was the title of the 1954 address by Dr Norman Goodall, then secretary of the International Missionary Council. The core principle of Congregational churches was that they were “gathered” from the world as fellowships of believers. But for what purpose were they gathered? In the first instance churches are gathered for worship. Corporate worship is the means by which the whole of human life – in society, nations, and the international order – is to be lifted up to Him who is the Way, the Truth and the

Life. Liturgy for Congregationalists was inseparable from life. The agonising dilemmas of everyday existence – including in 1954 the awful possibilities of the hydrogen bomb which threatened death and misery on a scale hitherto unknown – are to be faced in the context of Christian worship where the real nature of suffering, sin and moral responsibility are most sharply brought home. “In worship we recognise that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.” Worship is also the place where the Church proclaims God’s Kingdom, power and glory.

Secondly the Church is gathered for scattering: “the purpose of the Spirit is to drive believers out of the fellowship of belief into the unbelieving world, into real encounter with the unbeliever.” This was the historic work of what had been called “foreign missions”. But the unbelieving world is not some far-away place but close to us. “The unbelieving world can no longer be delineated geographically. Its frontiers have shifted. It is the environment in which our churches are set.” The apostolic sending forth demands that the church engage with the circumstances, the thought world, the habits of a generation which does not know Christ.

An underlying concern throughout this address was that worship and mission were acts of the whole church and must express as far as possible the gatheredness of all believers. “We cannot truly eat his flesh and drink his blood in a private insulated corner as though there were a Congregational Jesus and an Anglican Jesus and a Roman Catholic Jesus.” Jesus comes to break the insularity of the two or three. The worship of the churches in their denominational gatheredness must strive to express and not betray the fundamental unity of Christ’s people. In many different ways the Spirit is gathering believers together and making inescapable the question of the Church’s unity. Gathered recently in the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam, the churches had affirmed “We intend to stay together.” This was a sign of the gatheredness of the whole Church – gathered for worship, gathered for scattering and gathered in the Name of Jesus.

The note of opportunity was also sounded by Elsie Chamberlain in her 1956 Address – “White to Harvest”. Her address was based on a twofold conviction: first, that this was possibly the greatest time in the history of the Church since it first received its commission from Jesus to carry on his work. Second, that the world was expressing its need for what the Church stood for more generally than ever before. The fields are already “white to harvest” (John 4:35). Evidence for this lay in the emergence of the World Council of Churches in 1948 and its more recent Assembly in 1954 which had represented one hundred and sixty three denominations from fifty four nations. “The stirring towards Christian unity is one of the signs that the fields are already white to harvest.” Another striking and hopeful sign was the growing interest in religion. The religious boom in the United States was paralleled in England where there was a new concern for religion. As a religious broadcaster she reached an audience numbered in millions. She noted also a changed attitude about religion in daily

work. The barrier of religious reticence had been broken down. The petty persecution of the church-goer which had been common in office and factory had largely disappeared. Industry was beginning to realise that spiritual values were important. Much of this change had passed un-noticed by church people for whom it presented a new opportunity for witness. "Today, not only do we see that religion must not be separate from our daily work; we see also the tremendous importance of the layman's witness in his own walk of life." People were concerned about moral and spiritual foundations and the churches needed to seize the opportunity of an entire change of attitude for "now is the acceptable time."

A cautionary note however was sounded in the 1959 Address by the lay chairman, Benjamin Hartwell, on the text, "The field is the world" (Matthew 13:38). He quoted words from Wendell Wilkie, "The world has become small and completely interdependent." Modern modes of travel had brought the peoples of the world closer together and exposed their differences. The Church was being challenged to manifest its spiritual and intellectual integrity in new terms in a world of rival religions and ideologies. Christianity was a world religion and, by its own definition, an exclusive religion in its claim that "there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we may be saved" (Acts 4:12). Presciently he warned that "we shall delude ourselves if we do not recognise that each of these other great religions is rampant in the earth, and competing with, if not openly defying, the Christian faith's bid for the souls of men." Hartwell had identified an issue which would increasingly preoccupy the churches as they sought to reconcile their witness to Christ as the unique Saviour while engaging in dialogue with the claims of other faiths.

In the 1950s the Congregational Churches subjected their life and work to intensive examination. Eight commissions studied and advised on different aspects of the denomination's life. One of these, Commission VI, examined the recruitment of ministers and their training. This was the subject of the address given in 1955 by the Principal of Lancashire College, Dr Gordon Robinson, on the theme: "Let us give ourselves to our ministry". The starting point of ministering, which is of the essence of Christian practice and churchmanship, lay in the words, deeds and person of Jesus who came "not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Service was the indelible mark of ministry as Jesus came among us as one who served (Luke 22:25-7). The whole Church – ordained ministers and lay members – is engaged in a servant-ministry to Christ and his people. Congregationalists needed to avoid two impossible extremes into which they were prone to drift. The first asserted that, since they affirmed the "priesthood of all believers", ordained ministers were unnecessary and a sad incubus on the finances of the church. The second required the ordained ministry to carry all the burdens of ministering. "All of us who are members of the body of Christ are ministers: the only difference is in the kind of service which different people give." Robinson identified the variety of ministries which were God's gift to the Church

– the diaconate, lay preaching, the ministry of voluntary service to members of the community which was still required in the Welfare State, the ministry of healing and the ministry of administration. All these forms of ministry contributed to the total ministry of the churches to which all members were called. In the “gathered church” all were ministers together. “Ministering is an enterprise in which the whole company is knit together in fitness and harmony and common purpose.” Its goal is “the perfecting of the saints for the work of ministering.” Perfecting – a word rich in meaning that could include the preparation of warp and woof for weaving, the setting of bones in surgery, the reconciling of rival factions – is the bringing of anything to its proper condition of fitness and making one harmonious body out of many different individuals. This was the ministry to which the church was called.

Another Commission prepared a comprehensive statement of what Congregationalists believed. Published in 1967 as a Declaration of Faith,⁸ it was largely the work of the Principal of Yorkshire United College, Hubert Cunliffe-Jones, who as Chairman of the Union 1957-58 had taken as the theme of his address “God’s Truth and Power through the Bible Today”. The later Declaration of Faith reflected some of the insights of his earlier address. He began with the affirmation that the Bible contains the potential of being God’s instrument for transforming human life. Many in the churches enjoy the fellowship, perhaps value the gifts of a particular minister, are rested by the worship but have no great interest in the Bible. But unless the Church is the place where the claim, the transformation and the sustaining power of the everlasting God are continually being disclosed, it is nothing. The Bible enables the Church to expose itself unceasingly to the transformation which God alone can work. If Christian people have become ill-at-ease with the Bible and uncertain how to use it, then it is a matter of life and death that we should escape from this predicament. In answer to the question, “How are God’s truth and power available through the Bible today?”, he offered ten propositions to aid understanding of what the church thinks about the Bible and how it can be of use. In summary the Bible is the historical record of God’s revelation of himself in Jesus Christ as a God of grace and mercy. Through saturating our minds and hearts in the message of the Bible, our minds are quickened, our spirits are renewed and our love is fortified. We are to use the Bible in a way which is both believing and yet discriminating – “a middle way between an intolerable literalism and an unbelieving repudiation.” It is not the Bible itself which has our total and implicit obedience but Christ who is the Lord of the Bible. But we love and respect the Bible because of its abiding testimony to God’s judgment and mercy in Christ Jesus which surrounds human life. It is that testimony which gives the Bible its authority and its transformative power. This was a notable address which still resonates half a century later.

8 David M. Thompson (ed.), *Stating the Gospel* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), pp. 198ff.

Of the three remaining addresses of the 1950s, one was by Howard Stanley, then Moderator of the Lancashire Congregational Union, and soon to become General Secretary of the Congregational Union. Howard Stanley took the title of his address from Philip Doddridge – “On the evils and dangers of neglecting the souls of men” – and spoke of the work and place of the County Unions which had come into existence at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, leading eventually to the formation of thirty-five associations. They were not synods but agencies for home missions, called into being in order to evangelise the areas in which they stood. They met the challenge of their day mainly in three ways – by the training and employment of evangelists, by raising money for ministerial stipends, and building churches and Sunday schools. They fulfilled more widely the plans which in 1741 Doddridge had submitted to the ministers in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk for the advancement of religion in those areas. That pattern had continued to the present day. The recently launched Home Churches Fund for the maintenance of the ministry, especially in rural areas, had been the product of County Union initiatives. The County Unions now had an important role in the field of church extension: “We are or should be at the beginning of a new period of expansion when Congregational churches and Sunday schools should be established in the many new housing areas and satellite towns where several million of our people have gone to live.” Without the vision and energy that County Unions could provide, many opportunities would be lost. It was a stirring address which set out a vision of how the Unions might develop relationships between themselves and the national Union in order to improve their effectiveness. Less than a quarter of a century later, however, the County Unions would disappear, their functions handed over, in the case of the United Reformed Church, to the synods of the new Church, and their two centuries long contribution to Congregational life would be soon forgotten.

Practical issues facing the Union and the churches were addressed by Ebenezer Cunningham, who came to the chair of the Union in 1953, the first layman in the chair since 1941. His address, “Faith, Fellowship and Finance”, followed the pattern of his title. As a Senior Wrangler in Mathematics of the University of Cambridge, he knew that science had revealed new powers beyond anything we had previously known. It was, however, a mistake to see Science and Religion locked in conflict. “The great conflict is not between religion and science. It is the age-old conflict between the heart of man with all its human attributes of desire, fear, envy and mistrust, and the eternal principle of love undefeated and invincible.” Faith gives a new understanding that man is made in the image of God. On Fellowship he urged that separate churches as communities of faith were called to live in fellowship and to support each other in their work. Examples were the Reconstruction Fund, which had been established during the years of war and was now restoring and rebuilding broken causes, the recently published hymnbook, *Congregational Praise* (1951), which was enriching the worship of the churches, and the Forward Movement was

challenging churches to seize the new opportunities opening up before them. However, the lack of adequate finance was hindering the churches' mission. His goals therefore were an increase in the basic ministerial stipend, the provision of realistic support for retired ministers and widows, and restoring cuts in staff at Memorial Hall which lack of finance had made necessary. These goals could be achieved by a contribution of two pence and one farthing weekly by each of the Union's 225,000 members. Thus spoke the layman's voice of reason and good sense.

ANTHONY TUCKER

APPENDIX TO PART ONE

Chairmen of the Congregational Union of England and Wales (1940-59)

1940-41: Revd Albert Peel MA, BLitt, LittD, FRHistS (1887-1949), Journalist and Historian. Address: "Let the Church Attack", The City Temple, London, 4 June 1940. (London: Independent Press, 1940). See John Taylor and Clyde Binfield (eds.), *Who They Were* (Donnington: Shaun Tyas, 2007); *Congregational Year Book* (CYB) (1950); Alan Argent, "Albert Peel: The Restless Labourer", *JURCHS*, Vol. 4, no. 5 (October 1989), pp. 319-36.

1941-42: Mr Alec Ewart Glassey JP (1887-1970), Congregational layman, Liberal politician. Address: "The Ordinary Man Speaks", Westminster Chapel, London, 13 May 1941. (London: Independent Press, 1941). See Taylor and Binfield (eds.), *Who They Were*.

1942-43: Revd Kenneth Lloyd Parry MA (1884-1962), Highbury Chapel, Bristol. Address: "The Church, the Home of Piety", Westminster Chapel, 12 May 1942. (London: Independent Press, 1942). See CYB (1962), *Mansfield College Magazine* (1962).

1943-44: Revd Oswald George Whitfield MA, (1879-1956), Bromley Congregational Church. Address: "The Centrality of Worship in the Church's Life and Work", Westminster Chapel, 11 May 1943. (London: Independent Press, 1943). See CYB (1957); *Mansfield College Magazine* (1956).

1944-45: Revd Nathaniel Micklem CH, MA, DD, LLD (1888-1976), Principal, Mansfield College, Oxford. Address: "Penitence and Obedience", Westminster Chapel, 8 May 1944. (London: Independent Press, 1944). See *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004); Taylor and Binfield (eds.), *Who They Were*; Nathaniel Micklem, *The Box and the Puppets* (London: G. Bles, 1957).

1945-46: Revd Arthur Mitchell Chirgwin MA, DD (1885-1996), General Secretary, London Missionary Society. Address: "The World Church and Its Task", Westminster Chapel, 7 May 1945. (London: Independent Press, 1945). See CYB (1966-67); Taylor and Binfield (eds.), *Who They Were*.

1946-47: Revd Frederick Chalmers Rogers MA (1887-1949), East Hill Congregational Church, Wandsworth. Address: "For Such an Hour as This", Westminster Chapel, 6 May 1946. (London: Independent Press, 1946). See CYB (1950).

1947-48: Revd Sidney Malcolm Berry MA, DD (1892-1961) General Secretary, CUEW. Address: "What are we being called to do?" Westminster Chapel, 12 May 1947. (London: Independent Press, 1947). See ODNB; CYB (1962); Taylor and Binfield (eds.), *Who They*

Were; Mansfield College Magazine (1962).

1948-49: Revd Sidney Maurice Watts BD, DD (1892-1979), Union Church, Mill Hill. Address: "The Gathering of the Church", Westminster Chapel, 10 May 1948. (London: Independent Press, 1948). See *United Reformed Church Year Book* (URCYB) (1980).

1949-50: Revd John Short MA, PhD (1896-1989), Richmond Hill Congregational Church, Bournemouth. Address: "The Relevant Christ", Westminster Chapel, 9 May 1949. (London: Independent Press, 1949). See W. D. McNaughton, *The Scottish Congregational Ministry: 1794-1993* (Glasgow: Congregational Union of Scotland, 1993).

1950-51: Revd Harry Francis Lovell Cocks BA, BD, MA, DD (1894-1983), Principal, The Western College, Bristol. Address: "A Church Reborn", Westminster Chapel, 15 May 1950. (London: Independent Press, 1950). URCYB (1984); Taylor and Binfield (eds.), *Who They Were*.

1951-52: Revd Howard Spencer Stanley MA (1901-1975) Moderator, Lancashire Province CUEW. Address: "On the Evils and Dangers of Neglecting the Souls of Men", Westminster Chapel, 7 May 1951. (London: Independent Press, 1951). See URCYB (1977); Taylor and Binfield (eds.), *Who They Were*.

1952-53: Revd Leslie James Tizard BA, BD, BLitt (1902-57) Carrs Lane, Birmingham. Address: "The Gospel and the Individual", Westminster Chapel, 12 May 1952. (London: Independent Press, 1952). See CYB (1959); *Mansfield College Magazine* (1958); Taylor and Binfield (eds.), *Who They Were*.

1953-54: Mr Ebenezer Cunningham MA (1881-1977), Cambridge mathematician. Address: "Faith, Fellowship and Finance", Westminster Chapel, 18 May 1953. (London: Independent Press, 1953). See Taylor and Binfield (eds.), *Who They Were*.

1954-55: Revd Norman Goodall MA DPhil (1896-1985), Secretary, International Missionary Council. Address: "Gathered – for what?", Westminster Chapel, 10 May 1954. (London: Independent Press, 1954). See ODNB; Taylor and Binfield (eds), *Who They Were*; URCYB (1985-86); *Mansfield College Magazine* (1984-85).

1955-56: Revd William Gordon Robinson BA BD PhD (1903-1977), Principal, Lancashire College. Address: "Let us give ourselves to our Ministry", Westminster Chapel, 16 May 1955. (London: Independent Press, 1955). See URCYB (1979); Taylor and Binfield (eds), *Who They Were*.

1956-57: Revd Elsie Dorothea Chamberlain BD (1910-91), BBC Religious Broadcasting. Address: "White To Harvest", Westminster Chapel, 14 May 1956. See Taylor and Binfield (eds), *Who They Were*; articles by Alan Argent in *The Congregational History Circle Magazine* (1999-2003), ODNB.

1957-58: Revd Hubert Cunliffe-Jones BA BD BLitt DD (1905-91), Principal, Yorkshire United Independent College. Address: "God's Truth and Power through the Bible today", Westminster Chapel, 13 May 1957. See URCYB (1991-92); Taylor and Binfield (eds), *Who They Were*; *Mansfield College Magazine* (1990-91).

1958-59: Revd William Griffith-Jones (1895-1961), Moderator, Province of Wales. Address: "Our Churches – Their Witness in the Community", Westminster Chapel, 12 May 1958. (London: Independent Press, 1958). See CYB (1962).

1959-60: Mr Benjamin J. Hartwell LLM (1910-1965) Clerk to the Justices of Southport, Chairman of the CUEW Council (1955-58). Address: "Think of the World", Westminster Chapel, 11 May 1959. (London: Independent Press, 1959).

RONALD ARTHUR HUBERT BOCKING
7 JULY 1923- 26 APRIL 2012

Could Ronald Bocking have been other than a Congregational turned United Reformed minister? He had the authority, the humour, the executive ability, the pastoral skills, and the gift of reasoned, persuasive communication, and all of them in equal measure. He was credible, again in equal measure, to deacons, elders, fellow ministers, and anybody of any age in the pew and out of it. He taught at New College, he would have made a fine Provincial Moderator, and he had a knack for dealing authoritatively and getting on well with significant figures in other denominations, and yet, to the benefit of the churches and the Church, his vocation as minister of Word and Sacraments was allowed to flower in full-time congregational pastoral charge. He kept pace with the times and he was often ahead of his time, and yet his style of ministry, so representative of the strengths of Congregationalism and the United Reformed Church, now seems to belong to a suddenly past age.

All this made him a vital member of the United Reformed Church History Society. He was increasingly interested in History and he knew that he had played his part in significant ecumenical initiatives at local and national level. He was himself a historical artefact.

He relished and was liberated by the Nonconformity which was woven into his own and his wife's background, nourished by lively Congregational churches in the London suburbs. Further back, there had been Anglicanism but in the 1890s his mother's family had reacted against High Anglicanism and found a home in Ilford High Road Congregational Church, at that time a model for extrovert Congregationalism. Ronald was baptised by its minister, C. H. Vine ("Vine of Ilford" became a household name for many Congregationalists), who had also married his parents; Ronald's Anglican father became a Congregationalist on marriage and, in due course, a deacon and treasurer at Seven Kings, a church which had begun as a High Road mission.

At Seven Kings, late in 1941, Ronald accompanied his parents to have a meal with the new minister, Ralph Essex, and his wife. There he met Doreen Essex's sister, Moira Packer, whom he was to marry. This, no doubt, is all part of the small change of denominational life but it illustrates how much contemporary Congregationalism (however disrupted by war) owed to ministerial and familial consolidation. Ralph Essex (1915-93) exercised an alertly contemporary ministry, chiefly in London, but he had first encountered Congregationalism and answered the consequent call to its ministry when a friend, Bevill Packer (1915-2000), introduced him to Tooting Congregational Church (where he was later to minister). Five young Packers were active in the Tooting church; three found spouses in that church; two married ministers, Ralph Essex and Ronald Bocking. Bevill Packer, who had set all this in motion, became an educationist, serving in Central Africa from 1941 to 1982, for the first twenty-one of those years with the London Missionary Society. Congregationalism, in fact, was part

of being a Packer. Ronald Bocking worked out that, traced through the Packers, Allens and Isaacs, there had been Congregational ministers in his wife's family at least since 1810.

This was the sort of entrenched Congregationalism that instilled the confidence that bred ecumenism. This explains the quality of Ronald Bocking's historical sense. In addition to five entries in *Who They Were* and one in the *ODNB*, he contributed five articles to the *Journal* and one to *Congregational Transactions* (the alert will note the date of that contribution). Two of them reflect his pride in and debt to New College, notably to Geoffrey Nuttall, past President of URCHS and past editor of *Transactions* C.H.S., and to Sydney Cave, his college principal. Three of them reflect his interest in the knottiest aspects of true ecumenical endeavour, his experience of them at local level, and the part which he played nationally in the formation of the United Reformed Church. They have the quality of primary sources. At least one more (about his involvement at Barnet) was in the pipe-line, because he delivered it at one of our Society's week-end schools. It might yet appear.

CLYDE BINFIELD

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REVIEWS

***John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity.* By Tim Cooper. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011. Pp. xii + 343. £70.00. ISBN 978-0-7546-6361-4.**

In England, John Owen (1616-83) and Richard Baxter (1615-91) were the giants of seventeenth century Reformed thought and practice. They witnessed the dawn of the movement which gave rise to the Nonconformist churches in England and Wales and their contribution has been heralded by subsequent generations as being both formative and foundational.

The two men are remembered for different reasons. Owen is hailed as the outstanding example of a Calvinistic and Independent divine. A prolific author, he upheld the Calvinism of Dort primarily because he could not accept that human beings played any part in their own redemption. They were, instead, elected to salvation by the grace of God. However, and possibly paradoxically, he consistently argued the case for toleration in religion. He was a consummate politician and this certainly contributed to the fact that he successfully eluded persecution after 1662. While he had been episcopally ordained, he consistently threw his lot in with the Independents. He was not ejected as a result of the Act of Uniformity, but he was thereafter counted among the Nonconformists. Although he preached to Parliament on the day following the execution of Charles I, he avoided any direct reference to, and more importantly endorsement of, the event, something which meant that he was not subject to the reprisals suffered by the regicides following the Restoration. He was a thorough disciplinarian, especially while Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, a post to which he was appointed by Oliver Cromwell and which he occupied from 1652 to 1657, but he recognised that conscience was supreme in matters of faith and made space even for the rites of the Book of Common Prayer as performed by the chaplain of Christ Church College.

Baxter was as prolific as (if not more so than) Owen, despite not having enjoyed the privilege of a university education. His was a modified Calvinism (sometimes called Amyraldism) which rejected limited atonement and he emphasised not only that Christ died for all, but also that discipline and perseverance of the saints was vital in living the authentically Christian life. However, he was less sure of the cause of toleration than Owen. A respected preacher and the mastermind of a system of pastoral care and visitation which became the pattern for subsequent ministerial activity, he was eager to see a comprehensive settlement which would have included all theologically orthodox Dissenters within an expanded establishment, even under a modified episcopate. When the Act of Uniformity was passed, requiring episcopal ordination, adherence to the Book of Common Prayer, the swearing of an oath not to take up arms against the king and renunciation of the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, Baxter was courageous in his opposition and became one of the first

to declare his nonconformity (despite himself having been episcopally ordained). He subsequently suffered almost continuous persecution, and spent eighteen months in gaol following an appearance before the “hanging judge” George Jeffreys for “libelling the church” in his *Paraphrase of the New Testament* (1685).

In many ways the two men had similar, if not identical, interests and priorities. But the minor differences between them, particularly concerning the specifics of their theological systems, as well as the fact that they were both strong characters, meant that rather than allies in the cause, they became bitter opponents. This book explores the enmity that existed between them.

This is a fascinating, erudite and lucid account of the encounter – in print and in person – between the two theological giants. The research, assessing primary and secondary sources, is meticulous and sound. Dr Cooper asks the question “why did Owen and Baxter dislike each other?” and the whole book revolves around offering an answer which throws light not only on the life and work of the two major subjects but also on why Nonconformity in England and Wales developed as it did. For the author, the controversy was sparked by Baxter’s almost throw-away comments regarding Owen’s *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1648), but it was pursued and sustained by Owen who felt that he had to respond to Baxter’s rather easily-made, even off-hand, criticisms. Dr Cooper is clearly a fan of Baxter; it was in Baxter’s work that he immersed himself while undertaking doctoral study and this gave rise to his first publication, *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: Richard Baxter and Antinomianism* (2001). He is not uncritical of the Kidderminster theologian (he asserts, it seems rightly, that Baxter was “peremptory”), though it is clearly Owen who comes off the worse in this discussion. But then, perhaps Baxter is the more likeable character, and character figures large in the way in which Dr Cooper forms his argument. Owen was truculent, even tetchy, possibly vain and certainly impatient with those who disagreed with him or who showed him disrespect. Baxter was warmer, but self-promoting and prone to overdoing his criticism of others. Even before he had established himself as a theologian, he still entered into aggressive criticism of those who had already made their name, Owen included. Owen’s *bête noir* was creeping Arminianism (which, for him, meant the idea that human beings had a role to play in the mystery of salvation) and Socinianism (which was primarily a Christology which was non-Trinitarian) all of which meant that while keen on toleration, he was not “prone to broad consensus” (p. 170). Baxter’s bugbear was antinomianism to which, he held, predestinarian Calvinism inevitably led (why be bothered with living a good life if salvation was the gracious gift of God to the elect alone?) and while he consistently spoke of “unity” between Christians, he in fact believed this required a degree of uniformity (despite having found that prescribed by the 1662 Act to be unacceptable). In other matters there appears to have been little between them. But, argues Dr Cooper, this difference of detail, along with their respective personalities, meant that they were not only unlikely but probably unable to work together. And Owen’s apparent (though

still unproven) contribution to the downfall of Richard Cromwell meant that, for Baxter, he was beyond the pale.

None of this should suggest that Dr Cooper's thesis is based on some kind of fantastical construction revolving around an anachronistic account of the two men and their respective personalities. He recognises that such a case would be purely speculative, and so he bases his conclusions on a fastidious and masterful assessment of his sources. From this he formulates not just a coherent but a convincing argument which, at the very least, warns against building too much on the detail of theological disagreement when the broad range of belief is shared in common. Baxter, the author affirms, was keen to see Christians live peaceably and not dispute over anything that did not affect the fundamentals of Christian belief and living. This is, of course, precisely the problem. Baxter and Owen disagreed over what constituted those fundamentals and, despite the clear common ground that they shared, this meant that they were doomed (preordained? *sic*) to disagree, while their disagreement was also fuelled by personal enmity.

The author might appear on occasion to be overly critical of Owen, especially given that Owen genuinely defended toleration (certainly in wider terms than many of his contemporaries). Indeed, at times it seems that he is unwilling to acknowledge that a Calvinist of Owen's sort could also believe that each person had a conscience which ought to be respected (which, at least on the surface, was Owen's position). But that is a minor criticism. Dr Cooper has done his work well and has produced an excellent and highly readable book. His work tells us much about the work of the two men, the political and religious machinations of the Commonwealth and Restoration periods, and the legacies which were left to be suffered, or dealt with, by subsequent generations.

ROBERT POPE

***The Great Ejection of 1662: Its Antecedents, Aftermath and Ecumenical Significance.* Edited by Alan P. F. Sell. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012. Pp. xii + 296. £22.00. ISBN 978-1-61097-388-5.**

“The Great Ejection of 1662” is as much an icon as it is an event. What has been made of it is as significant, if not more so, than what in fact occurred. It came to prominence among Nonconformists in the mid nineteenth century when they were at the height of both their confidence and their numerical strength (they were unable, for a variety of reasons – as outlined in this book – to do so before this). Spurred by the repeal of the despicable Test and Corporation Acts in 1828, they were at that time embroiled in the battle to rescind all the legal, political and social constraints that they suffered because of their exclusion from the establishment and their dissent from the Anglican Church, an effort which became all-encompassing in the (only partially successful) campaign for

disestablishment. Though Nonconformist confidence would be much denuded as a result of the relentless decline in members and adherents during the twentieth century, these points nevertheless remind us that while the details of the events of 1662 are complex, they also mark the willingness of some to protest against the unjust and ungodly existence of a state prepared to discriminate against its own otherwise loyal and law-abiding citizens on what amounted to a sacred matter of conscience. As such 1662 might be an icon, but it is no mere symbol. In four comprehensive chapters, this book explores the details of the events leading to the passing of the Act of Uniformity, the direct consequence of the Act and the subsequent legacies it left for the churches of England and Wales. More than that, the collection reminds us that these are significant events for continued Christian identity and witness in a context which is secular, even atheistic, and far removed from that enjoyed by our spiritual predecessors.

The first chapter, by John Gwynfor Jones, charts the “growth of Puritanism” from the accession of Elizabeth I to the throne in 1559 to the passing of the Act of Uniformity in 1662. The history is clearly and masterfully arrayed before the reader, for the events that led to the Act of Uniformity are complex to say the least. Professor Jones notes the way in which the period is characterised primarily by the tension between those who sought conformity in religion and those who sought further reformation. He demonstrates how Puritanism was basically Calvinist in theology and Presbyterian in ecclesiology (with a sizable group attracted to an Independent and even Separatist order), but shows too that the context was ripe for further development with the Independents arguing for religious toleration (or at least arguing against compulsion in matters of faith and conscience) and Baptists arguing for believer’s Baptism by immersion. These constituted the “tolerable” sects, while the Quakers and, more seriously, the Levellers, Diggers, Muggletonians and Fifth Monarchists took a more radical approach which proved to be less acceptable and also fleeting; none of those groups (with the exception of the Quakers) made a lasting impression. The theological debates are touched upon: the Calvinistic Puritans objected to Laudian Arminianism, though perhaps some more could have been said about debates over Antinomianism and its incompatibility with orthodox Christian faith, and Socinianism with its heterodox Christology. Nevertheless, this comprehensive chapter demonstrates effectively that, when it came, the Act of Uniformity was the result of political machination as much as theological conviction, and that it owed as much to the victors’ desire for vengeance on the vanquished as anything else.

Having set the scene, the book then turns to two chapters outlining the events which followed the passing of the Act of Uniformity to the so-called “Toleration Act” (1689) in England and Wales respectively. David J. Appleby’s chapter effectively describes the precarious nature of the restored monarchy. There was general nervousness in the establishment. Yet while episcopalianism was zealously pursued by the restoration parliament, and persecution of

Nonconformists secured by the penal code passed between 1660 and 1665, in fact repression simply did not work. Dissent and Nonconformity grew stronger in commitment if not in actual numbers. The chapter recounts the terms of the Acts of Parliament which together make up the so-called Clarendon Code, the response by Nonconformists and the general recognition that, if anything, persecution made the Dissenters more determined in their nonconformity. A measure of toleration might well have been achieved had parliament not been so resolutely keen on religious conformity, and had the Dissenters been able to agree with each other. The hierarchy of the Church of England sought the zealous enforcement of the penal code, driven by the sporadic rumours of plots on the king's life, some of which lacked real evidence – such as those described by the thoroughly vile Titus Oates – while there were others whose threat was perhaps more real such as the Rye House plot (1683). Nevertheless, there was no opportunity at this time for a comprehensive settlement; even by 1662 that possibility had passed. When “toleration” finally came, it in fact merely exempted Dissenters from certain punishments under the terms of the penal code. Legislation was not repealed and Nonconformists – whether Protestant or Catholic – would remain second class citizens for at least another century-and-a-half.

Eryn M. White's assessment of the aftermath of the Ejectment in Wales raises an interesting paradox. While, in 1662, Puritanism in Wales was primarily an English movement whose success was restricted to the border areas and to the more “urban” centres of Swansea and Wrexham, by 1689 and the passing of the “Toleration Act”, the “future character of Welsh Nonconformity” was determined (p. 176). This would be a specifically *Welsh* Nonconformity; it was made to be Welsh-speaking and thus of wider appeal and it did much to create a new Welsh identity. The chapter outlines the patchy enforcement of the penal code, especially the Five Mile Act (Marmaduke Matthews, for example, simply remained pastor to his congregation in Swansea), the establishment of the Academies, the relationship with the Bishops, the suffering of the Quakers and the importance at this time of the publication of books in the Welsh language. Wales's Puritans were mainly Independents of the semi-conforming type, though in 1676 they constituted merely 1.15 per cent of the population. The chapter confirms that history developed in different ways in Wales. Its leadership was in the hands of an alternative list of names to those prominent in England – especially, but not exclusively, that of Stephen Hughes – which ensured that Welsh Nonconformity cultivated its own character and developed in parallel with, but independently of, its English neighbour.

In his closing chapter, which takes up about one-third of the book, Alan Sell reflects on “the doctrinal and ecumenical significance of the great ejectment.” Here Professor Sell characteristically draws on the detail of historical events and the theologies of long-forgotten figures in order to make an argument of contemporary relevance. He begins by lamenting that the contemporary church – especially the Free Churches of England and Wales – appear to have lost any

historical sense, especially in the way in which their past lives on in folk memory. He first outlines how the Ejectment was commemorated in the past, noting that, of necessity, little happened in 1712, 1762 and 1812, but that much more occurred in 1862, 1912 and 1962. He then analyses this activity under the heading of “distilling the message”, demonstrating how the celebrations were understood according to the primary concerns of the time. Thus, in 1862, in the midst of the Liberation Society’s campaign for disestablishment, plans were drawn up for the Congregationalists to build the Memorial Hall in London and the Memorial College in Brecon, a monument was erected to the ejected ministers in Bunhill Fields and Joshua Wilson called for fifty new congregational chapels to be opened on St Bartholomew’s Day. However, in 1962, with the context transformed and disestablishment long sidelined, the ecumenical dimension of the day took precedence over the stark reality that 1662 marked the outlawing of religious dissent. Professor Sell identifies, as the major issues in 1662, that the Church should be separate from the State in matters of Faith and Order; that the revelation of God as contained in the Scriptures is the supreme standard in matters of Faith and Order; that the episcopate is not necessary either for the good ordering or the apostolicity of the church; that worship does not have to conform to that found in a book; and that the Reformed faith be upheld (the latter being attacked by the necessity to abjure the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643). He outlines the fact that not all of the ejected made their stand for the same reason and thus did not agree with each other on all of these points. Equally, he recognises that moderns do not need to make a stand on all these issues, though each one remains potent. He concludes by making the rather more significant point that 1662 is about the Church being those visibly and willingly gathered and whose unity is rightly found in the gospel (“that the Father has already given us in Christ by his Holy Spirit”, p. 221) and not in other external and secondary matters. Although often remembered for their protest *against* something, in fact Professor Sell reclaims the Ejected Puritans of 1662 as basing their protest on “pneumatological convictions of great importance”, namely “that on the ground of Christ’s saving work, God the Holy Spirit, the original hunter-gatherer, both pursues sinners with grace, transforms them into willing saints, and gathers them into one catholic ecclesial fellowship which is both eternal and visibly embodied in the world, and over which Christ is the sole Lord” (p. 270). The claim that this has contemporary ecclesiastical and ecumenical significance does not – or should not – need embellishing.

This is a detailed and erudite collection of essays which remain lucid and fascinating as well as significant for church life in the twenty-first century. It is a fitting commemoration of the Ejectment not so much because of the history it records (which is itself important) but because of the points of theological principle which it highlights. It is vital reading for all those concerned with the gospel and its place in the public square in a context which, though far removed from that of 1662, still requires that we judge Christianity’s engagement with culture, society and politics on the grounds of gospel principles. Yet any reader

will be left to ponder: what kind of commemoration will there be in fifty years' time?

ROBERT POPE

***The Cockermouth Congregational Church Book (1651-c.1765)*. Edited by R. B. Wordsworth. Kendal: Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, 2012. Pp. 172. £30.00 (£23.00 with CAWAAS flyer). ISBN 978-1-87312-455-0. Illustrated.**

“But now in the yeare 1662 all publike liberty is denied.” So begins George Larkham’s entry in the Cockermouth Church book for 1662, which would seem to make 2012 a fitting year for the publication of Bob Wordsworth’s excellent edition of the Cockermouth Church book. This work began as part of a Master’s dissertation but now comes to a wider audience. Many readers will know that this church book is an important example of the genre but the original, which resides in the County Record Office, is very difficult to read. This scholarly edition makes the text accessible and supersedes all previous attempts at transcription.

Most of the book is the work of George Larkham, the first pastor, relating events from the founding of the church in 1651, after his appointment by parliament to Cockermouth, up to his death in 1700. The account of his successor peters out in 1706 and there are a number of short entries circa 1765. There follow lists of members and baptisms. The text, for the most part, offers a contemporary account of the life of this community. However it appears that George Larkham only started a document in this form during or after his exile in Yorkshire following the Act of Uniformity and so the 1650s have been compiled retrospectively.

The book begins with the foundation covenant of the “wee poor wormes” and relates the life of a covenanted church whose pastor is also the publicly appointed minister of the town. During these years the pastor attended the Savoy Conference, members were admitted and officers appointed. The church had to work out its relationship with Baptists and Quakers locally on the one hand and like-minded churches around Cumberland on the other. There is a sense that things changed when the Lord Protector died and this foreboding is confirmed at the Restoration.

In the years between then and the “Toleration Act” (1689) persecution came and went, though the church still managed to function and even to grow; the Larkhams were able to live in the neighbouring village of Tallentire where the church often assembled in contravention of both the Five Mile Act and the Conventicle Act.

The transcription has been prefaced by a helpful introductory essay and the text itself is clearly presented with consistent editorial treatment. The entries cover the everyday happenings of a local church, including the details of which

members were admonished, excommunicated and readmitted. It also alludes to national and international events. For the modern reader there are helpful footnotes that clarify these passing references. There are ten illustrations and diagrams. The book as a whole has been well produced by the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society. Furnished with such a tool the field would seem open for new studies in the life of Congregational churches in second half of the seventeenth century.

ALISTAIR SMEATON

***Free Churches and Society: The Nonconformist Contribution to Social Welfare, 1800-2010.* Edited by Lesley Husselbee and Paul Ballard. London and New York: Continuum, 2012. Pp. 254. £19.99. ISBN: 978-1-4411-0911-8 (paperback).**

As Adrian Hastings wrote three decades ago, the belief that “most of the consistent Christian concern with social evils ... from the late-nineteenth century on was more or less Anglo-Catholic in inspiration” is all too common. If counter-claims were needed, this significant book records the past to aid the future in continuing our own tradition’s strong participation in this field. *Free Churches and Society* is the product of collaboration between Northern College, Manchester, and the URC History Society: the former’s CRCW course required for its students a written history to provide background to its current work, the latter is dominant among the contributors to the volume. “This Project is about Mission,” writes joint editor Paul Ballard, now retired from his post in Practical Theology at Cardiff University. But as the historical picture serves today’s community ministry, it may equally be read simply as a succinct account of recent dissent and nonconformity.

The book comprises an introduction, seven chapters surveying thematically the relevant history, and two more by the editors assessing recent practice and theological needs. After Kirsty Thorpe describes the project’s aims and methods, recognizing diversity amongst practitioners and historians, Stephen Orchard offers a general survey of the Free Churches in society across the centuries and later charts Nonconformity’s approach to and involvement in providing education. Robert Pope’s coverage of churches working to meet their communities’ needs includes local and denominational projects, but not without visiting the covenants which explained the intent of gathered churches. David Bebbington names countless Free Church individuals and organisations variously seeking equality of treatment, moral purity, the reconstruction of society on a Christian basis, or the relief of world poverty, through rising and diminishing political involvement and influence. Clyde Binfield details three Congregational business families enlightened by “philanthropic paternalism” yet seen as precursors to a very different socialized state. Peter Catterall, of

Queen Mary University of London, explores Free Church engagement for the urban vulnerable's social salvation from overt mission and institutional churches to today's street pastors. David Thompson investigates the fascinating world of societies and campaigners frequently informed by a collective Christian philanthropy, not always church-connected and knowing varying success. Lesley Husselbee, latterly Director of Church Related Community Work at Northern College, shifts the focus to the period from 1945. She notes major developments in public provision, and her modern societal overview observes keenly how more recent changes are leading to altered opportunities and obligations for churches seeking to fulfill their gospel challenge. Paul Ballard's "practical theology" complements Husselbee's preceding chapter and reinforces the theological importance of understanding history to facilitate a current generation's wrestling with present and future. A Christian faith which asserts and lives the resurrection has a need for social prophecy, accepted or not, but faithfully following the pattern of Jesus. Only thus do we see God here and now.

This book is easily read, both in its individual chapters and as a whole. Some chapters are sub-divided while others are simple one-unit pieces. Such differences detract from neither individual cohesion nor overall story. If its information is in part already known, those generalisations of, for example, a social gospel or Nonconformist Conscience, are here reinforced and exemplified through relevant, clear details reflecting the individual strengths and personal researches of the contributors. Dozens of widely distributed local churches are named, pioneering alone or in association with other causes. Ministers who galvanized churches to engage in Christian care and outreach and individual laymen alike promoted radical involvement, building new communities to move forward this communal interpretation of Christianity. There is little unnecessary duplication, despite a necessary overlap between themes and people cited. The fully referenced specialist articles may introduce some literature not best known to us all, yet of considerable value, while a practical challenge emerges for today's church, "in market-towns as well as Manchester" in Dr Catterall's phrase.

Despite its common cause, Free Church action in this field has been far from uniform or indeed uniting, posing interesting questions. Must Nonconformists inevitably diverge from each other politically and socially? Why do some base equality on economics, others on morality? After periods of apparent liberal monopoly, does the evangelical return to social concern suggest any other shared ventures or attitudes? Why has civil disobedience been only an intermittent response to bad and unequal law? Does the salvation of individuals or the attempted inclusion of Christian values in civil society take precedence? How in all this do we relate sin, economics, morality and faith? Ironically, today's "Choice" mantra may well have been timeless and pivotal.

Perhaps surprisingly, there is virtually no mention of Primitive Methodism, despite *inter alia* its various London Missions, while a parochial view could wonder at the omission of the Presbyterian experimental outreach at

the Rock Church, Everton. But recognising the wealth of material which the writers did use, it might seem ungracious to wonder about such gaps. Presentation is of a high standard, the one observed error being where “proscribed” has ousted “prescribed”; elsewhere, unnoticed repeated words twice interrupt the flow.

This important and optimistic book should serve quite excellently its own stated purpose. For past, present and future, it particularly exemplifies a concern with “the salvation of the whole”, P. T. Forsyth’s verse-phrase memorialising a Saltaire lay preacher and partner in that model mill village’s business. By dismissing a Christianity which was only individualistic, the book’s concern with history, action, people, the local church and mission indeed illustrates the widest work of the Gospel. That a URC College and its courses evoked this study is impressive. That the History Society’s contributors join so prominently and successfully with others is the best of advertisements for our own purposefulness.

NIGEL LEMON

***Philosophy, History, and Theology: Selected Reviews 1975-2011.* By Alan P. F. Sell. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2012. Pp. 324. £24.00. ISBN 978-1-61097-968-9.**

I have never seen a book like this before, and was not sure what I would make of it, being a selection from the many book reviews that Professor Alan Sell has written during part of his distinguished career. I was pleased, but not surprised, to find it was a very worthwhile collection, from which I have learned a great deal. As the title implies, it brings together reviews from a very broad range of subjects indeed, and few, apart from Sell himself, are likely to read most of the journals where such reviews might appear, or be so proficient in all three areas. Hence, most readers, I suspect, will learn a great deal from whichever subjects are not their primary discipline. The Introduction begins with a description of what Sell sees as the purpose of reviews, and the various points to be covered.

The first section consists of thirty reviews on philosophical books, at least eight of which are directly about John Locke. One review in this section which particularly caught my attention was of Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-century Britain edited by Knud Haakonssen. Sell introduces readers to a book which clearly breaks new ground in a contentious area in such a way that non-specialists might be tempted to dip into it. The final section contains thirty-two theological reviews, on such diverse topics as The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics and our own David Cornick’s Letting God be God. The former is a general book, which Sell has persuaded this reader to consider further. The latter is a book many readers of this journal will already know, and Sell’s most helpful review was published in this Journal in 2008.

Part Two contains 35 history reviews, and it is perhaps in this area that the reader of this Journal might be most interested. These are naturally broad in the areas that they cover, including Heterodoxy, the Hutterian Brethren, American Congregationalism, Revival in Wales, and C. J. Cadoux, amongst many others. It is clear that Sell appreciated each one of the books he has reviewed, and reflected upon them in a way that is helpful to any intending reader. For instance, David Bebbington's *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* is a volume many will know and cherish. Sell summarises, and at times gently questions, in a way which draws this reader to look for more. C. J. Cadoux was a labour of love by Mansfield College's historian Elaine Kaye, and Sell clearly commends a helpful and illuminating portrait of an overlooked Dissenter (in more ways than one) which merited wider study.

What was most helpful to me about this book was broadening my own horizons, and pointing me to things I had not yet discovered. It will not be complete without the production of a further two volumes to accompany it: one of reviews Sell is yet to write in what we hope will be a long time to come, and one of reviews of Sell's own books.

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