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THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND THE BAPTIST ATLANTIC

Recent scholarship on early modern Britain and her North American colonies has been to emphasize the similarities rather than the differences between them. For example, David Grayson Allen in his *In English Ways* traces the essential continuity in community experience as English people moved from the mother country to Massachusetts in the seventeenth century.¹ Watertown, Massachusetts', small body of ruling select men borrowed their ideas of local government from their experience in East Anglian rural towns. Jon Butler, in his equally influential work on the English churches in the Delaware Valley between 1680 and 1730, argues that those who maintained denominations successfully in the Delaware Valley did so by manipulating a tradition of ministerial dominance that had already stimulated denominational growth in England.² His interpretation conflicts with the arguments put forward by other historians that American denominations eschewed their European notions to meet the needs of frontier settlement and by so doing reinforced a new democracy in their congregations which was qualitatively different from their experience in the British Isles.

There has been some debate concerning the extent of the development of an American Baptist identity prior to the American Revolution and different positions have been taken along national lines. Dr McBeth, in Texas, argues that 'one cannot regard Baptists in America as merely an extension of those in England, but neither can one minimize the connections between them'.³ Dr White in Oxford, England, takes issue: what were the Baptists in America - down to 1776 - but an 'extension of those in England' and, in brackets with a question mark, Britain.⁴

This exchange assumes that the American Revolution is the cut-off point for a common treatment of Baptists in Britain and America. It is presumed that the birth of American independence in a political sense also saw the emergence of an independent Baptist denomination in the new American Republic.⁵ My research has led me to believe that, even after American independence, connections amongst Baptists on both sides of the Atlantic continued to be of relevance and meaning. I have been involved in recreating the Atlantic World of the Revd Samuel Jones of Pennepek, near Philadelphia.⁶ Born in Bettws, Glamorganshire, in 1735, his parents emigrated to Pennsylvania in 1737, and his father, Thomas Jones, took up the charge of the Baptist church at Tulpehocken in Berks county. Samuel went to the College of Philadelphia and in 1763 followed his father into the Baptist ministry, when he was ordained the pastor of the Pennepek and Southampton churches, near Philadelphia. Minister, schoolmaster, and man of business, he became a leading figure in the Philadelphia Association, an influential man in an influential association. He was a prominent Baptist who in private nurtured a self-identity as a Welshman. He held a 'peculiar regard' for the Welsh Baptists, since they were 'our brethren in my native country', but he also corresponded with leading Baptists

in England. Samuel Jones was not the only American Baptist to participate in transatlantic communication. Isaac Backus, James Manning, William Rogers, and others were active correspondents with Baptists in Britain.

It is my intention to illustrate those themes which made for meaningful communication in the wake of the American Revolution; certain themes were continued from a shared past, others were renewed and restored, others were totally transformed. Organizational conjuncture, mutual encouragement and cross fertilization of Revival, issues concerning a learned ministry, were pre-revolutionary themes which were renewed and restored after the Revolution. Political independence for America made for conscious and new attempts to promote fellowship to bridge the new political divides. English Baptists, John Rippon in particular, aware of large and growing congregations, saw opportunities for sales in the new and wealthy American markets. Some of the English and Welsh Baptists who reached maturity during the 1780s and early 1790s were attracted by the political contrast between a free and independent America and a corrupt and oppressed Britain. They saw a link between the success of the gospel in America and the way in which religion was practised as a result of civil and religious liberty. Disaffected Baptists, particularly in Wales, became spiritual Americans in Wales and emigrated to America for ideological and religious reasons. Their emigration was facilitated by a well-established Baptist, transatlantic network. Readers of John Rippon's respectable *Baptist Annual Register* were made aware that they were members of a transatlantic, even world-wide, Baptist denomination.

The Baptists in the early years of the eighteenth century, in Britain and America, were small minorities of the church-going population. In Pennsylvania and the Jerseys, the detractors of adult baptism by immersion often fastened on the smallness of Baptist numbers to criticise their church order and theology. It was a criticism which was easily rebutted, as Abel Morgan of Middleton, New Jersey, the nephew of the great Abel Morgan of Blaenau Gwent, the architect of Baptist denominational order in the Delaware Valley, put it: 'we think it is better to be of the Number of this *small community*, and have *Truth* at our side, than to dwell in a *large House* with *ill-natur'd Error* in our arms'.⁷ It was the growth in the number of churches and in the number of members which engendered significant points of contact between Baptists in the Colonies and Britain. Baptists on both sides of the Atlantic from about 1760 onwards experienced a growing familiarity within their own respective communities as a result of better and more efficient organization made necessary by numerical growth. This familiarity had a transatlantic dimension. In 1761 the Philadelphia Association appointed Morgan Edwards, then the minister of the Philadelphia Baptist church, a Monmouthshire man, and alumnus of Bristol Baptist Academy, a 'man of strange make', as a fellow Baptist called him later,⁸ and Peter Vanhorn to 'revive and maintain our annual correspondence with the board of Baptist ministers at London, or elsewhere'.⁹ The letter from the Philadelphia Association, dated 16 May 1762, greeted the London ministers as

fellow members of the 'British dominions' - 'whereof you have in some sort the superintendence'.¹⁰ The letter from Philadelphia referred to the increase in their numbers since 1734, then, there were but nine churches in the Association, in 1762 there were twenty-eight 'all owning the Confession of Faith put forth in London in 1689'.

The links between the Philadelphia Baptist Association and the London Baptists, revived in 1762, were those of official communication; they were not concerned with the news of religious revival which had shaken the Protestant world during the period 1735 to 1750. The Baptist version of the evangelical transatlantic communication systems, described by Susan O'Brien,¹¹ revolved around Isaac Backus, the minister at Middleborough in Massachusetts in New England.¹² It was not until 1763 that the Baptists in America came to share in the international dimension of evangelicalism which had first taken off seriously amongst Anglican evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic, Scotland and New England in particular, during the 1740s. Baptists on both sides of the Atlantic who were sympathetic to the evangelical currents within their denomination realized the mutually beneficial effects which would be affected by news of revival in one part of the Lord's Vineyard to encourage similar evangelical activity in another area. This principle of mutual encouragement was outlined by Backus in a letter to John Gill in 1763: 'As all that love Zion's prosperity take delight in receiving intelligence of the advancement of the Redeemer's Kingdom, tho' in remote parts of the World, therefore a correspondence between the servants of Christ in different countries has often been practised to mutual advantage, and I have frequently thought that if I could enjoy anything of that nature, especially with any in the land of my forefathers' nativity I should prize it as a great favour . . .'.¹³ The success of the Gospel in America during the Great Awakening and the spread of believer's baptism eased Backus out of the inferiority which had previously inhibited him from communicating with such a prominent English Baptist scholar and cleric as John Gill. Revival gave the New England Baptists a new-found confidence.

News of gospel success in America was disseminated in England during the years of hostilities between England and the Colonies. In 1781, the year of the British capitulation at Yorktown and evacuation of Charleston and Savannah, the Baptist Western Association in England welcomed the news of revival from America: 'Amongst all the horrors of war which have so long prevailed and spread their baneful influence over the American Continent, it is with unutterable pleasure we learn that the Prince of Peace has taken to himself his Mighty Power . . .'.¹⁴ This news appeared in the Associational letter which was written by Caleb Evans, the Principal of the Bristol Baptist College. He hoped that the news of the success of the gospel in the 'wilderness' of America would refresh Christians in England also so that ' . . . the solitary places in this island may be glad and our deserts rejoice and blossom as the rose, that the parched grounds in the midst of us may become like pools and the thirsty lands springs of water'.¹⁵

This process of evangelical cross-fertilization was not a typical Baptist medium of transatlantic communication before the American Revolution. It was to become more pronounced as a theme of renewed transatlantic correspondence that occurred after the war. The prevalent topic of transatlantic communication before the Revolution was that of a learned ministry. The Baptist community in Britain and America was divided in its attitude towards education for the ministry. In general terms, the Separate Baptists in America and the Evangelical Baptists in Britain disapproved of learning, and a learned ministry especially. They associated a learned ministry with worldliness and regarded it an inadequate substitute for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand Baptists in Philadelphia, the Welsh-born pair, Morgan Edwards and Samuel Jones, who were themselves college-trained did not share this antipathy and valued learning as an indispensable prerequisite for the ordained minister. These ministers were attracted to Calvinistic scholarship in Britain and held the tradition of Dissenting education as characterized by the work of the London Particular Baptist Board and the Bristol Academy in high regard. Educational connections between Baptists were the oldest transatlantic connections. Before the Revolution, American Baptists looked to the mother country for books, theological advice and guidance, and most importantly for the supply of college-educated Baptist ministers.

Samuel Jones and Morgan Jones were instrumental with others in the Philadelphia Association in establishing a Baptist College in Rhode Island. The college was from its inception a transatlantic project, as the late Professor Bill McLoughlin has put it: 'Rhode Island College was not only the first Baptist college in the British colonies, it was the first in the British Empire. There were several Baptist academies . . . but none of them could be called colleges. Therefore, among Baptists everywhere there was considerable interest in the College. The founders did all they could to stimulate and capitalize in this interest'.¹⁶ Morgan Edwards travelled to England to raise funds for the college; the largest contribution came from the Welsh Baptist living in London, Thomas Llewellyn, who donated £21 and a sum of £10-10s 'in or towards books'. James Manning, the President of Rhode Island College, tried to maintain this connection; he suggested that the college should be named after him: 'Llewellyn College appears well when written and sounds no less agreeably when spoken'.¹⁷ The incorporation of Rhode Island College was thanking its British benefactors during the years of war.¹⁸

The dependence of American Baptists upon English patronage in the field of education was associated with a dependence on English theological guidance, especially in the defence of believer's baptism. John Gill was a prominent and effective defender of baptism against the attacks of paedobaptists, his works were translated into Welsh and they were also published in American editions. His works were as appealing to the Separate Baptist, Isaac Backus, as they were to Samuel Jones of Pennepek, near Philadelphia, since they were part of a great defence of Calvinistic principle against Arminianism. An early biographer noted that Gill's

writings 'were not only received with great approbation in these kingdoms but also in various parts of America . . . He was much solicited to cultivate an extensive correspondence, but this he was obliged to decline, as it would have proved too great an avocation from his studies'.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Gill did reply to American entreaties for theological advice and he became embroiled in controversy between the Boston Baptists and defended adult baptism against Jonathan Dickinson, the President of the College of New Jersey. This controversy, which began in 1743, continued with republications and republished answers into the 1760s. Gill was highly regarded by the American Baptists. There was no greater admirer than Samuel Jones. Looking back at the course of Baptist history in Pennsylvania in 1807, he referred to that 'great luminary Doctor Gill' and wondered since Gill 'had finished his course' whether the Baptists in Britain had become 'rather stationary' theologically.²⁰

As well as these theological, evangelical, and educational contacts before the Revolution, Baptists in the Colonies looked to their brethren in London and the Dissenting Deputies for means to redress their legal grievances. The New England Baptists used their transatlantic denominational connections to fight religious 'oppression' in New England. At a time when other religious groups were distancing themselves politically from the Mother Country, the New England Baptists, with the support of their brethren in Philadelphia were pursuing traditional means of redress. The Warren Association in Massachusetts orchestrated the Baptist response to the *cause célèbre* of religious taxation at Ashfield, in Hampshire, Mass. Isaac Backus noted in his diary: 'the oppressions at Ashfield and other places were considered, and it appeared so plain that while our country are pleading so high for liberty, yet they are denying of it to their neighbours, that we determined to appoint Mr Hezh Smith to carrying our cause to England unless speedy relief be granted'.²¹

With the support of the London Baptist, Samuel Stennett, who appealed to the Commission of Trade and Plantations, the Ashfield Law was rejected. However, this victory did not solve the general problem of tax exemption which continued to be administered in a way which was unjust to the New England Baptists. To achieve complete religious liberty, Backus argued that the Baptists had to reject the system of religious taxation in its entirety, and as a result Backus's theoretical defence of civil disobedience emerged, a 62-page tract entitled *Appeal to the Public*, which Professor McLoughlin has called 'pietistic America's declaration of spiritual independence'.²² Looking back over twenty-five years, Samuel Jones summed up the general Baptist feeling concerning the Revolution: 'It seemed unreasonable to us, that we should be called upon to stand up with them in defence of liberty if, after all, it was to be liberty for one party to oppress another'.²³

Isaac Backus and Samuel Jones saw the Baptist interest as paramount and were not prepared to compromise a principled stance for religious liberty for the sake of the patriotic cause. We may balance Isaac Backus's pietism and Samuel Jones's 'public service in the Baptist cause' with the outspoken radicalism of a recent

English Baptist emigrant to America, John Allen, to suggest some differing attitudes towards Revolution amongst English and American Baptists.²⁴ John Allen prefigures a type of Baptist emigrant who later migrated to the new republic in the 1790s. Allen was a disaffected English Baptist minister who was radical in politics. In 1770 he published *The Spirit of Liberty: or Junius's Loyal Address*. This work, which defended believer's baptism as well as the politics of John Wilkes, attacked virtually everyone in sight, not only John Wesley and George Whitefield, but also John Gill. Coupled with his trial at the Old Bailey for allegedly forging a promissory note, it shattered any remaining influence that he may still have held amongst the London Baptists. He left, his reputation in ruins, to renew his life and career in America. In Boston his politics found him a ready ally of the Boston Sons of Liberty. In Allen, we find a direct Baptist connection between the English artisan opposition to George III and the patriotism of the Boston Sons of Liberty. He continued his political criticism in America, but he had a minimal role as a political thinker amongst the New England Baptists. He was by his own rating an outsider within the Baptist community of New England.

Allen's political pamphlets in New England refer to the Baptists' 'internal opposition' to the local Congregational establishment.²⁵ It is at this point that the political affinities between Baptist dissenters in Britain and their American brethren radically diverge. The concept of opposition to a Dissenting establishment was unfamiliar to the English Baptists.

Support for the American cause emanated from Baptists who were also Whigs. One such supporter was Caleb Evans, who was to succeed his father as Principal of the Bristol Baptist College in 1781.²⁶ In a fierce debate with the Tory, John Wesley, Evans argued that the Americans should be given the same rights of parliamentary representation as any free-born Englishman. In the midst of their debate, Evans' position as a Calvinist and a Baptist was raised to infer that by dint of his theology and denominational affiliation, he was therefore prone to defend the rebellion of the American colonists. Evans refuted this argument and claimed with regret that Baptists *on both sides of the Atlantic* were friends of the ministry, not its enemies:

What relation my being a Calvinist, or a Baptist, has to the subject of the dispute with you I am yet to learn. There are too many Calvinists and Baptists, some in the very society I serve, and several Baptist ministers with whom I am personally acquainted who, through a mistaken view, as it appear to me, of our happy constitution and of the true meaning of the scriptures contend earnestly for those very sentiments which you so strenuously defend. And with respect to the *Americans*, if you apply to the late Governor Bernard or Governor Hutchinson, they can inform you, from the best authority, that no sect in the Massachusetts colony particularly, have discovered so great a disposition to acquiesce in the measures of the ministry, as the Baptists.²⁷

The Baptists, therefore, did not as a result of their membership of the Dissenting

interest, automatically give their support to the American cause. The Baptists, like other Dissenters, were divided over the issue. James Bradley's examination of electoral politics at Newcastle, Liverpool, Hull and Colchester suggests that the Dissenters failed to take a *political* position on the American crisis.²⁸ However, if one looks outside the normal channels of political expression, striking illustrations of the Dissenters' independence appear. A recent survey of Fast and Thanksgiving sermons finds that one in five of these documents expressed sympathy for the American cause,²⁹ and individual Dissenters, including Baptists, were among the principal leaders of the opposition to the government and led petitions to the Crown, frequently in urban centres as members of anti-corporation parties. There were distinctive local Baptist foci of American support in Bristol, London, Taunton, Coventry and Nottingham, but there were also vocal opponents to the American cause. Dr Jordan, the historian of the American War, wrote to James Manning, the President of Rhode Island College, in 1786 and referred to Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists in Britain who 'would have rejoiced to have had the promoters and encouragers of the Revolution, whether in civil or sacred orders, hanged as rebels'.³⁰

Given the 'internal opposition' of the American Baptists to their local religious establishments, there was a great deal of suspicion concerning the true patriotism of the Baptists in New England and the Middle Colonies.³¹ There is some evidence of mobs disrupting Baptist services and attacking Baptist churches.³² However, the majority of Baptists sprang to the patriotic ranks. Samuel Jones suffered directly from the activities of the English, and costed the damage at £35.³³ In July 1778, the Baptist church at Pennepok resolved to recommence communion after a disruption caused by the English army 'being in our midst'.³⁴ The Philadelphia Association record for 1777 contained one bald entry: 'In consequence of the ravages of war, and Philadelphia being occupied by the British Army, the Association held no meeting this year'.³⁵ The war also affected church discipline. The Southampton church, near Philadelphia, in 1779 attributed its undisciplined condition to 'the coldness arising from sentiment respecting Whig and Tory principals [sic] which too much prevails almost amongst all classes of people'.³⁶

There is no doubt that the war, inevitably, created a political distance between the Baptists in the newly independent republic and their brethren in Britain. Nevertheless, Baptist dissenters of the Whig school, such as Joseph Jenkins, Rees David and Joshua Toulmin interpreted the Revolution in spiritual terms in their Fast Day sermons which stressed the centrality of the Divine Purpose.³⁷ It was at this spiritual juncture that denominational connections between Britain and America became directly relevant. Baptists on both sides of the Atlantic, even whilst their countries were at war, shared a growing awareness that they were brothers in the same faith. Concern was expressed over the dislocation in Baptist correspondence caused by war. Backus wrote anxiously to Benjamin Wallin in 1776 and regretted that 'among the many and great troubles occasioned by the present war, the

interruption that it has made of our agreeable correspondence is not the least'.³⁸ This sentiment is further illustrated in a letter which Isaac Backus wrote to an unnamed 'brother in the ministry in London' in 1783.³⁹ In this letter, Backus referred to the English Baptist merchant, Thomas Mackenese, and his associate, David Shakespear, who were captured by an American privateer in September 1776 on their way to Quebec. They were brought to Providence, Rhode Island, and given considerable liberty though under arrest. They spoke to many of the Baptist leaders in Providence and Boston and did their best to persuade them to 'act as neuters in the contest'.⁴⁰ Backus wrote to his English 'brother' and explained why he had turned down this entreaty: 'you are doubtless sensible that different circumstances alter cases: so that some may be called of God to do things, which their brothers in other places are not called then to do. When I had an interview with our brethren, Shakespear and Mackenese in Providence they were very desirous that I and others should act as neuters in the contest between your country and ours. I know not but that in their circumstances such a conduct might have been excusable, if not justifiable; but in me it would have been criminal'. Isaac Backus appealed to a sentiment of transatlantic fellowship to achieve mutual sympathy and understanding of their different positions. This fellowship was based on the assumption that the Will of God was central to recent events - 'Different circumstances alter cases'. The concern among Baptists and other Dissenters in Britain was the 'first cause' or the 'root' of the crisis in Empire. The 'first cause' of the crisis being in their national rejection of God. The secondary 'political' effects stemmed from this distancing from God. By this analysis, spiritual lessons could be drawn from the political crisis.

After the Revolution relationships amongst Baptists in Britain and America were revived and, in certain aspects, became more intense. John Rippon, who became the leading London Baptist after the Revolution, in his initial correspondence with James Manning, the President of Rhode Island College, overstated the English Baptists' support for the American Revolution in an attempt perhaps to impress the American. Rippon went so far as to claim that 'all our Baptist ministers, except two, and most of our brethren in the country were on the side of the Americans in the late dispute . . .'.⁴¹ John Rippon, at this time at least, was an enthusiastic Whig and it was as such that he wrote excitedly of the war in his correspondence with Manning: 'We wept when the thirsty plains drank the blood of your departed heroes, and the shout of a King was amongst us when your well fought battles were crowned with victory . . . the independence of America will for a while secure the liberty of this country; but if the continent had been reduced, Britain would not long have been free'. John Rippon was, ironically, more Whiggish than James Manning whose main concern during the war was to keep Rhode Island College from the ravages of the enemy.⁴²

After the war, 'political' considerations were more often than not thrust into the background. John Rippon, conscious of their political separation, tried to place

transatlantic fellowship above political considerations. In writing to James Manning in 1786, he asked for a few hymns from Manning and his American brethren to be included in the 'Selection' of hymns which he was compiling, 'not that we want hymns', he explained, 'but a few American hymns in our English book would show we are yet brethren'.⁴³ John Rippon's *Baptist Annual Register* was a conscious attempt to restore and continue the correspondence which the 'unhappy war' had interrupted. Correspondence continued to be of mutual benefit, and lessons were drawn from the similar problems and issues which were experienced.

Leading Baptists on both sides of the Atlantic became active supporters and promoters of 'association' and circular letters began to be exchanged between them. John Rippon, as with so many other aspects of transatlantic connection, was instrumental in the exchange. The transatlantic exchange of Associational Circular Letters was an extension into the transatlantic sphere of the growing intimacy which Baptists experienced within their own Associations and with other Associations. Transatlantic communication gave Baptists an opportunity to enlarge on this local fellowship. The principle of 'association' was the same. A minister in Charlotte county, Virginia, wrote to John Rippon:

New England was as much, or more out of our idea, than Old England, but blessed be God, not only an epistolary acquaintance and correspondence is kept up, but personal visits have actually taken place, at least from them to us, the salutary effect of which we are daily experiencing. These things prompt me to be more determined, I hope with an eye to the glory of God, to extend the correspondence to our brethren and fathers in the kingdom of Great Britain. Much in favour to us may be expected to result therefrom.⁴⁴

This associational exchange was based on a transatlantic network between individual Baptists which had originated since the Revolution and reached its peak during the 1790s, through the channelling of John Rippon's *Baptist Annual Register*.⁴⁵ Transatlantic correspondence was eagerly sought by the Baptist ministers. Isaac Backus noted in his diary for 7 July 1784: 'Received a letter from Pennsylvania which mentions Mr Timothy Thomas in London who would be glad of a correspondence with me, therefore on the 8th I wrote to him'.⁴⁶ This 'letter from Pennsylvania' had come from Samuel Jones, who was an avid disseminator of transatlantic correspondence. In this way, American Baptists came to know and share each others' transatlantic contacts.

As a result of the growth in the transatlantic network, Baptists in Britain became more familiar with the advance of the Baptist denomination in America. The connections with Rhode Island College continued. When Morgan Edwards, by temperament and politics a loyalist supporter of the Crown at least during the early stages of the Revolution, heard that Andrew Gifford and Thomas Llewellyn had decided to leave their valuable libraries to Bristol and not to Rhode Island College, as promised, he guessed the reason: 'our College had the promise of them. How it has happened I know not, except our political condition has disoblged

them . . .'.⁴⁷ Despite Edwards's fears the Revolution did not sever the connection between Bristol and Rhode Island. In 1785 the Bristol Education Society resolved that a present be made to the Baptist College in Rhode Island of the duplicates of such books as the President and tutors may think proper for their purposes.⁴⁸ James Manning wrote to Caleb Evans to thank him, apologizing at the same time for being unable to return the favour by sending American publications in return, he confessed that 'this is a barren soil'.⁴⁹ However, Rhode Island College could confer the ultimate academic accolade: the degree and the honorary degree. Much of the transatlantic correspondence is comprised of requests by Baptists in Britain to acknowledge their friends' scholarship by the award of an honorary degree. Usually, Rhode Island College obliged. In 1793, for example, seven out of the eleven honorary graduates were from Britain; of these five were alumni of Bristol.⁵⁰

The major themes of transatlantic correspondence after the Revolution were drawn together by John Rippon under the cover of his *Baptist Annual Register*. When John Rippon embarked on his project, he had his eye especially on the American market. The *Register* was directed specifically at his American brethren and was intended to give European Baptists an opportunity 'of shewing their love to the American brethren'.⁵¹ He deliberately eschewed theological controversy and concentrated on evangelical and missionary matters which were the concern of a broad spectrum of evangelicals and dissenters alike. In practice, however, it was the Baptists both in America and Britain who supported the project. The men who were the most prolific contributors were also those who were the main pillars of transatlantic connection. The *Register* intended to institutionalize the correspondence which had previously been of an accidental and personal nature.⁵² He stressed the need for accuracy from his American correspondents 'as extracts will occasionally be made from their letters' and asked that personal information, not to be printed, should be distinguished accordingly. Rippon's correspondents in America, who also distributed the *Register*, were: Revds Burgiss Allison, New Jersey; Richard Furman, Charleston, South Carolina; Benjamin Foster, New York; James Manning, Rhode Island (or if he was too busy some 'gentlemen of the college'); Lewis Richards, Baltimore; Thomas Ustick, Philadelphia; William Rogers, Philadelphia; Samuel Stillman, Boston. Isaac Backus was also deeply interested in the work, a regular contributor. Backus wrote to Rippon in November 1791, 'As your plan of the Baptist Annual Register appears to me to be calculated for public good, and extensive usefulness, I shall willingly contribute my mite towards it'.⁵³

Backus was especially pleased with the comments that the *Register* came to contain 'of the work of God in various parts of the world'. Backus provided Rippon with copious accounts of revivals in America and it was mainly as a result of the publicizing role of the *Baptist Annual Register* that news of American Revival became familiar to English and Welsh Baptist evangelicals before the days of the Second Great Awakening. Similar but independent theological developments

amongst the Baptists in Britain and America allowed a sophisticated commentator such as Joshua Thomas to interpret the division amongst the Regular and Separate Baptists in America in terms which were familiar to his brethren in England: 'I think that Backus is of Mr Fuller's side of the Question [i.e. the "modern Question"], probably the Philadelphia ministers are not'.⁵⁴ Similar theological issues made for a meaningful dialogue. Baptist Associations in England and America gave the *Register* their official support, and Rippon hoped that American Associations, as their English counterparts were doing, would take it upon themselves to sell a certain number of the *Registers*. The *Register* was thus a transatlantic project. Rippon expected his American brethren to criticize the project, since the whole denomination both in America and Britain was 'interested more or less in it'.⁵⁵

After the Revolution, several Baptists including Rippon came to refer to the Baptist denomination as a transatlantic body. When transatlantic correspondents referred to the Baptist denomination, they referred to it as "our denomination",⁵⁶ individual Baptists were 'our brethren'.⁵⁷ William Rogers of Philadelphia introduced the Welsh Baptist emigrant, Morgan John Rhys, to Isaac Backus in June 1795 as 'one of our ministers from Wales'.⁵⁸

However, the transatlantic network also communicated disagreement and tensions as well as sentiments of union and fellowship. Samuel Jones was a direct competitor against John Rippon for the Baptist market in hymn books in the United States. Jones tried to sell his *Selection* to Richard Furman in Charleston; Furman replied, 'most of our friends in Charleston have been obtaining Rippon's *Selection* lately, which may be some obstacle to their purchasing this directly'.⁵⁹ Several hymns in Rippon's Hymn Book of 1791 had American titles: New York, Vermont, Boston, Providence College, in order to be attractive to the American market.⁶⁰

For his part, Rippon thought very little of Samuel Jones's Hymn Book. He was astonished by its numerous typographical errors and envied the liberty which Jones had, to take what he pleased, from Watts' *Hymns and Psalms*, as well as hymns from his own editions. He thought little 'of the *poetical* talents of the Compilers', but tried to mollify the influential American Baptist.⁶¹ The sensitive Jones was offended and Rippon was swift to apologize: 'I ASK YOUR PARDON A THOUSAND TIMES', he printed in bold in one of his letters.⁶²

The general question of American dependence upon English publications was a matter of principle as well as a matter of financial consideration for Samuel Jones. Dependence upon English books and scholarship was a continuation of a pre-revolutionary tendency which seemed to militate against their independence as Americans. Samuel Jones and James Manning were proud Americans as well as Baptists, and Jones in particular believed that American Baptists were too dependent upon English scholarship. Manning agreed with him: 'I agree with you that we ought not to send to England for all our books, but our people are so backward that little is to be expected from them in the way of printing an Edition of Hymns . . . I hope the period is not very far distant when Books printed in England will be

interdicted by us . . .'⁶³ Samuel Jones was not the only Baptist to lament dependence upon Britain. Isaac Backus wrote: 'The very name of independence hath been odious until America was declared to be independent of Great Britain, and she is far from being so now as to religious teachers'.⁶⁴ When James Manning died in 1791, the American Baptists looked again across the Atlantic to fill his place as President of Rhode Island College.⁶⁵

Transatlantic fellowship helped to conceal the tension between patriotism and denomination but did not eradicate it. One of the most effective ways to conceal the tension of irreconcilable differences was to keep silent about them. Samuel Medley, the Baptist minister in Liverpool, disagreed with American politics and its form of government, but decided to correspond with his American brethren on religious themes only. In his English correspondence, not of course meant for American eyes, Medley was scathing on the topic of American republicanism. Nevertheless, he cherished his American correspondence for the spiritual benefits it brought. He informed Rippon in 1789:

It is a mercy for America that the Lord Jesus Christ has received Gifts from the *Rebellions*, also that he the Lord God might dwell among them, was it not for *These Good Tidings*, I should almost despair of receiving any from *That Land of Rebels*. But notwithstanding all this, as far as any of them are, and appear to be conquered and renewed by Sovereign and Almighty Grace, I do love, receive and rejoice in them in the Lord Jesus Christ, and however I and them Differ (as we most certainly and very widely do) in Political matters, I am free to own and confess that I receive and enjoy much Spiritual Profit and Pleasure in my correspondence with several of my Dear Brethren in that Continent and wherein we differ in other matters, we say nothing about it.⁶⁶

1789, of course, was a crucial year, the year of the fall of the Bastille. The British Government's reaction to the French Revolution was motivated by a well-established concern to counter the progressive organization and articulation of Dissent which pre-dated the French Revolution and could be traced to the years after the American Revolution.⁶⁷ The reputation of the 'Jacobins', a cant term of abuse meant to engineer an association between reform either in Church or State with the revolutionary excesses of the Terror, originated with the American Revolution. It was the American Revolution which first made Dissenters identifiable as potential traitors to the 'Church and King' conception of the British Constitution. The American Revolution was the first instance of rupture between Dissent and the State.⁶⁸ As George Lewis, the Independent minister at Caernarvon put it to Samuel Jones in 1793: '. . . ever since America has asserted her Independence, we have been looked upon with a jealous eye, and considered as the authors of every mischief . . .'.⁶⁹

As well as marking the Dissenters as potential traitors to the State, the American Revolution also reinforced the allegiance of Dissenters to the English freedoms of the balanced constitution. God had endorsed Whig and Protestant liberties in America, which had long been enjoyed in Britain. Relative successes for Dissent in seeing Parliamentary support for the albeit unsuccessful Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1787 and 1789 seemed to be convincing proof that Government was gradually beginning to acknowledge the 'respectable' and worthy position which Dissenters held in society. Even the staunchest of Whigs, Caleb Evans would rejoice in 1788 in a sermon on the anniversary of the centenary of the Glorious Revolution that British freedom had at last been realized. Civil and religious liberty was being enjoyed; the 'divisions about the late unhappy war' were forgotten and English government, Evans claimed, was the 'best of earthly governments'.⁷⁰

Evans was consistent in his Whiggery throughout his life. Other Baptist leaders, however, changed their political allegiance. John Rippon criticized Robert Robinson, the Baptist champion of 'liberty of thinking', for his religious inconsistency and in turn, Rippon was criticized by Robinson's biographer and friend, Benjamin Flower, for his political oscillation. He recalled that Rippon's use of language against the government during the American War of Independence was so strong that some of his friends were alarmed on his account, but during the war with Revolutionary France he had 'veered almost to the opposite point of the compass', had congratulated Pitt and referred to the government as a 'Beatified State'.⁷¹ John Rippon was not the only Baptist minister to change his political allegiance during the years of the French Revolution. However, political trimming was a secondary influence upon the 'political' attitudes of the denomination in general. Evangelical changes within the denomination, which pre-dated the French Revolution, reinforced the tendency not only to be satisfied with 'civil and religious liberty' in England but also to consciously eschew any interest in 'politics'.

The unspoken differences in politics between the American Baptists and their brethren in Britain, mentioned by Samuel Medley, were topics of conversation in the correspondence which centred around Samuel Jones. The potentially divisive political questions were, more often than not, a source of agreement rather than a source of discord. It was this political contrast and in particular the separation of Church and State which furnished a minority of radical Baptists in England and Wales with an idealized image of America, which implied that American polity and society was totally removed from that of their own. To the generation of Baptists who reached maturity during the 1780s, who were influenced by Robert Robinson of Cambridge, America was a glorious example of civil and religious liberty made possible by the downfall of Religious Establishment. The idealization of America in liberal Baptist and Dissenting circles in general was popularized by an alumnus of Bristol - Anthony Robinson in his *Short History of the Persecution of Christians . . . to which are added an Account of the Present State of Religion in the U.S.A. and some observations on Civil Establishments of Religion*. Extensive

extracts from this work were translated into Welsh by Morgan John Rhys, who himself became an effective publicist for America.⁷² Although Anthony Robinson deserted the association of the Calvinistic Baptists and became increasingly unorthodox, it is significant that he turned to the *Baptist Annual Register* for evidence of civil and religious liberty and gospel success in America.⁷³

Baptists who were friends of religion and liberty came into political contact with the anti-Calvinist and Socinian unorthodoxy of rational Dissent. However, the Baptist 'Rational Dissenters' shared connections with America which were not only different but more intimate than those of Joseph Priestley and Richard Price. Their connections were rooted in a well-established transatlantic Baptist tradition, and during the years of the French Revolution, emigration, complaints against persecution, millenarian comments upon the 'Signs of the Times', and general criticism of the British State became themes of the Baptist transatlantic correspondence which centred around the Reverend Samuel Jones at Pennepek.

Samuel Jones's initial transatlantic contacts were with Joshua Thomas, of Leominster, the historian of the Welsh Baptists. Their correspondence during the years after the American Revolution was involved with a mutual remembrance of their shared historical heritage. Joshua Thomas was interested in the Welsh Baptists who had emigrated to Pennsylvania, Samuel Jones and Morgan Edwards were interested in Baptists in Pennsylvania who had come from Wales. They were the same people.

In 1789, Samuel Jones's contacts broadened to include William Richards, a Welshman who ministered at King's Lynn in Norfolk, and Morgan Jones in Hammersmith. Morgan Jones had extensive and personal transatlantic contacts. His father, a Welsh Baptist, left Hengoed in 1749 for Pennsylvania and the Welsh Tract church in Delaware, where he became a member and assistant pastor.⁷⁴ His son, Morgan, also went with him and showed talents for the ministry. He was encouraged to return to Britain and in 1754 he enrolled in the Baptist Academy at Bristol, thus adding a Welsh and American dimension to that institution. After Bristol, he moved to London and continued his education under Thomas Llewellyn who had once been his fellow student at Trosnant before he went to America. He took charge of the Baptist church at Hemel Hempstead, and it was he who was the Moderator at the Eastern Association at Harlow, the infamous 'Harlow Synod' according to Burke, which endorsed Robinson's anti-Establishment 'Plan of Lectures'.⁷⁵ Ill health forced him to retire early from the ministry in 1782 and he opened a seminary in Hammersmith. He was greatly admired by the most eminent Baptist divines and his preaching style received the praise of Samuel Stennett, Robert Robinson and Caleb Evans.

As a result of the transatlantic Baptist network, Morgan Jones became reacquainted with the friends and memories of his boyhood in America. His passion for America overrode any personal consideration of nostalgia or family sentiment. His commitment to America was an ideological statement which emanated from the

American Revolution. In writing to Samuel Jones in 1793, he claimed: 'I always preferred America and more so since its Independence'.⁷⁶ Again in 1794 he wrote: 'I do assure you I am in no way attached to this country. My heart has always been in America, ever since I left it, but I am more dissatisfied with this, and more enamoured of yours now than ever'.⁷⁷

Samuel Jones tried to tap the pro-American sentiments of his Welsh and English brethren who were disaffected with the British State and confirmed from the American perspective that which Morgan John Rhys, William Richards and Morgan Jones held to be the case, namely that Britain was in absolute decline. He communicated the material benefits of America to his transatlantic brethren to illustrate the moral and spiritual superiority of that country. His particular identification with the land of his birth made him particularly anxious that his countrymen and fellow believers should share in the benefits of America through emigration. Samuel Jones certainly encouraged emigration: 'my wish that some of our honest, industrious, poor countrymen would come over is fervent'.⁷⁸ There was also a mercenary element in his thinking: Jones owned land in Kentucky and he promised to make this land available to prospective settlers on easy terms.⁷⁹

Enoch Edwards, a member of Samuel Jones's congregation at Pennepek, came over to Britain to sell land for Samuel Jones as well as for John Nicholson, the Comptroller General of Pennsylvania. He landed in London in June 1793 and came immediately into contact with the London brethren. He visited John Rippon and dined at Hammersmith with Morgan Jones. William Richards undertook to invest £400 in Pennsylvania Bank stock. He used the Baptist network to his advantage and worked on their predilections for America.

Similarly, the American aspect of this network helped Welsh and English Baptists in the United States. The Welshman and Baptist minister, Jenkin David, was advised to use Samuel Jones's name if he went to Philadelphia, Samuel Stillman's if he went to Boston, 'and so on'.⁸⁰ Morgan John Rhys used and travelled along the same Baptist network when he went to the United States. Rhys was welcomed by William Rogers, a leading Baptist in Philadelphia, when he went to that city; in contrast, Joseph Priestley at least initially was publicly shunned.⁸¹

Baptists, through their transatlantic communication with each other, yearned in public for the day when the Baptist family separated geographically and 'by different manners, language and political regulations' 'would become one people under the Divine Spirit'.⁸² In practice, 'different manners, languages and political regulations' compromised their connection and introduced elements of discord. It is as important to be aware of what was not said as what was said. The Baptist Atlantic, or Baptist Internationale as Gwyn A. Williams has described it,⁸³ has been partially lost to Baptist historiography as a result of the national and nationalistic paradigms of Baptist history in the nineteenth century. It has also been overlooked because of its distinctive Welsh dimension, which has either been mythologized by American Baptist historians or totally overlooked. Welsh historians have been

encouraged to look for their history in the interstices of other people's history.⁸⁴ This approach is as valid for American and Baptist historians as it is for the Welsh.

It is important to recognize that ideological, physical and spiritual horizons have not always been limited to, or within, local or national boundaries. It is equally important not to lose touch with the historical milieu by losing sight of the actual context in which Baptists were living and worshipping. To the 'transatlantic brethren' of the eighteenth century, there was a dynamic tension between local circumstance and transatlantic influence. Events in Europe or America, ideas or sentiments from loving, albeit distant, brethren, often had a significant impact upon their local situations. In order to make sense of the meaningfulness of this interaction, we must rid ourselves of the notion that the Atlantic was a social moat,⁸⁵ and give proper attention to the study of the Baptist Atlantic.

NOTES

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