

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

- 64 *Christ's Ambassador*, p.10: for Bevan Jones' concept of 'progressive revelation' cf. *Christianity Explained*, pp.50-1.
- 65 *ibid.* p.53.
- 66 E. F. F. Bishop, 'Tribute to the Memory of Lewis Bevan Jones', *MW*, 50, 1960, p.303.

CLINTON BENNETT, *Associate Minister, Highgate Baptist Church, Birmingham, and Executive Secretary, Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths, British Council of Churches. Formerly BMS, Bangladesh.*

REVIEWS

Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century, (A History of the English Baptists, vol.2)*, Baptist Historical Society, 1986, pp.187, £4.95.

'The early eighteenth century account of General Baptist life', Raymond Brown writes, 'is rarely inspiring', for General Baptists were for the most part inward-looking, exclusive and disputatious. General Assemblies condemned those who worshipped, however occasionally, with other denominations, labelled marrying outside the General Baptist communion as sin, and devoted much time to the petty feuds of neighbouring congregations. Particular Baptists appear to have been a little more flexible and outward-looking: marriage was to be 'in the Lord' but not necessarily to a fellow communicant and there was some interest in evangelism. In particular they translated into effective action the concern they shared with some General Baptists for an educated ministry: a fund for the education of ministers was established and academies, most notably that associated with the Broadmead church in Bristol. But they too were beset by controversy, as the ongoing debate on the permissibility of hymn-singing reveals. Moreover in the interests of safeguarding orthodoxy they could be exclusive: General Baptists were denied the benefits of the Particular Baptist Fund.

The eighteenth century marks a transition from 'local Baptist insularity' to 'ecumenical partnership'. In part early parochialism reflected the rural isolation in which most Baptists lived, whereas churches founded later in the century might be in or near growing communities. In part it reflected a defensiveness caused by long-established fear of persecution, though the advent of toleration saw both General and Particular Baptists immediately calling Assemblies, a symbol of the connexionist commitment of the former and the willingness of the latter to co-operate among themselves. National funds and the resumption of regional associations similarly testify to an early sense of partnership, though the history of associations also reflects regional diversity and antagonism. In 1696 General Baptists who disapproved of the unorthodox Christology preached by Matthew Caffyn in the churches of Kent and Sussex temporarily resigned from the Assembly, establishing their own association. Later in the century in Leicestershire and Lincolnshire a separate New Connexion of General Baptists was established, for men

such as Dan Taylor were unwilling fully to identify with the evangelistic indifference of other Arminians, although maintaining a presence in their Assembly until 1803. In Particular Baptist circles there was early controversy between influential London ministers and those who led the separate Western Association based on Bristol. As the century progressed, London men such as John Gill and John Brine adopted an extreme form of Calvinism, denying it was ever appropriate to 'offer Christ', but more moderate views continued to prevail in the north and west. 'Preach the *willingness* of Christ to save', proclaimed Caleb Evans, president of Bristol Academy, many of whose alumni actively encouraged evangelism. With the development of evangelical Arminianism and moderate Calvinism, General and Particular Baptists began to work more closely together, co-operating with evangelical paedobaptists in the missionary enterprises, evangelistic societies and local associations which the revival spawned. Some disapproved: in East Anglia Particular Baptists stated their opposition to Fullerism while the original General Baptist Assembly, unable to hold those of evangelical inclinations, showed increasing sympathy with 'rational religion' by nominating men of Unitarian belief as future preachers. Nevertheless the general tenor of Baptist life had significantly changed. While fairly noting the achievements of Baptists early in the century, Raymond Brown depicts the movement from introspection and insularity to confident expansiveness, the story of *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century*.

DOREEN ROSMAN, *University of Kent at Canterbury*

Richard L. Greaves, *Deliver Us From Evil: The Radical Underground in Britain, 1660-1663*. O.U.P. 1986. 291pp. £26.50.

In writing this present study and planning two further volumes which will carry the study to 1688, Professor Greaves is consciously pursuing W. C. Abbott's thesis that a study of the radical tradition from 1660 to 1688 would 'help to restore that sense of continuity between revolution and revolution which has so long been lacking...'. It is a sense of continuity in which he becomes confirmed: thus he sees the troubled survival of religious and political radicalism and reactions to it after 1660 as the key to the ultimate triumph of 'its broadest principles': government bound by law, personal freedom of speech and expression, and religious toleration. So much is already clear here - undoubtedly to be writ larger and argued more closely in his subsequent work. The real focus of this first volume is the hard core of unrepentent supporters of the 'Good Old Cause', in whichever of its many guises, who set their faces against the very idea of the restored monarchy and the re-established order in Church and State, and formed a sort of permanent radical/revolutionary 'underground' committing themselves by word and deed to a day of deliverance. The weight of research, in a mass of rich but difficult evidence, has, therefore, been placed on the series of plots and insurrections running from John Lambert's abortive revolt in April 1660 to the Northern uprising of the autumn of 1663.

It is Professor Greaves' considerable achievement to have provided a first full conspactive evaluation of these events - covering their

provenance and substance; the common elements and links in three kingdoms; the basis of support among the exiles of the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland; the pattern of response by government; and their relationships to the legislation creating and affecting Nonconformity. It is a work which has required the full complement of his scholarly skill and judgment, particularly in discerning and isolating, to the degree that he has, the actual intent and threat of the radicals from reports which are so redolent of the zeal and animosity of the supporters of the restored régime, reflecting all too much credulity and confusion. He has thereby been able to establish a real status and significance for Venner's rebellion of 1661 and events in Dublin and the North of England during 1663 in the political history of the period - and also, less expectedly, for the embryonic Tong Plot of 1662, which, with its nucleus of a London-based revolutionary council linked to cells in the country, is seen as an important prototype for future activity and which, despite its discovery, marks a major failure of the government to uproot 'the underground'. Professor Greaves' study is throughout written in a clear, unforced style and is rich in incident and personality - in a way naturally to stimulate curiosity and inquiry (one wonders, for example, at the apparently high degree of 'delinquency' of the Baptist church at Derwentdale, and about their co-religionist, John Ellerington's state of mind in reporting it; and one wonders at the ubiquity, even allowing for exaggerated accounts, and elusiveness of ringleaders such as Colonel Henry Danvers).

If a measure of criticism of Professor Greaves' work is justified, it is in what appears to be a lighter and looser usage of the term 'radical' and 'radicalism' as the argument develops, notwithstanding his concern with the problem of definition. One of the consequences is that he does not make as consistently clear as he might the fact that for most of those regarded as 'dissident' in post-Restoration society what mattered above all was a simple devotional and ethical freedom among their fellow-believers, and that for most of them the road to be followed was one of suffering, trust, and survival rather than insurrection.

C. H. T. PARRY, *University of Keele*

H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: four centuries of Baptist witness*, 1987, 850pp.

It was in 1950 that Robert Torbet published the last attempt to cover the history of the world Baptist family. Now, a generation later, after the writing of many themes, articles and whole volumes on aspects of that story, Leon McBeth has produced a new version which is about half as long again as Torbet's.

Even while it is recognized by the author himself that such a wide-ranging survey as this must skim many areas of detail, avoid many areas of hot theological and historiographical debate and omit the contributions of many other writers, it is clear that here, in one volume, is a contribution to Baptist historiography which is weighty and will be widely influential. The first two hundred pages are largely

concerned with the 17th and 18th century developments among the English Baptists. Thereafter the story focuses more largely, and necessarily, upon the various Baptist groups in North America. However, continuing attention is given to Britain, to Europe and to other smaller groups of Baptists both in the English-speaking world and beyond. It must be clear to any reader that Dr McBeth has worked extremely hard with a wide range of primary sources and with a single-minded commitment that others of us must envy and be rebuked by.

However, since a great deal of work is continuing to be done on the English story, a story which is crucial for American developments and much Baptist missionary work all over the world, I intend in this review to concentrate my attention upon the English scene in the 17th and 18th centuries. Of course, writing is continuing in this area and since Dr McBeth's work went to the press Dr Raymond Brown's important work, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century* has been published and, for example, such theses as those by Dr Denis Morgan on the Welsh Baptists and by Dr Karen Smith on the Hampshire and Wiltshire Calvinistic Baptists of that century have been completed in Oxford.

Naturally, in a work of this scope and breadth there will be the inevitable minor errors: not many people would describe Bishop Hooker as a puritan and none would judge Thomas Cartwright to be an Oxford man (p.24). Equally, I doubt whether Separatists were concerned to reject the title Brownist because of Browne's unlovely character (Dr McBeth tells us he was a known wife-beater) but rather because Browne was an apostate and, anyway, they believed that their convictions were drawn from Scripture and would not therefore accept the name of any man for their sect (p.27). I am not so sure as Dr McBeth that John Smyth had rejected infant baptism as early as 1600-02 (p.33). A Broadman Press misprint mentions the 'Millinery Petition' but the Petition concerned had nothing to do with hats! (p.41) Nor was the 'Millinery Petition' produced by Separatists as is suggested later (p.100). I know of no evidence that Praisegod Barbone ever became a Baptist but there is some that he was their strong critic. Equally, the Midland Confession was produced by a group of churches in the Midlands *not* in the West Country (p.67). But these points and others like them are small matters for correction in any new edition.

There are more major issues which I would like to discuss more fully with Dr McBeth as I recognize how carefully he has had to pick his way through the minefield of historiographical debate concerned with the first two centuries of the English Baptists' history. His own method, he explained in his preface, was to consult the major secondary works dealing with the Baptists but to draw his own 'materials and interpretations mostly from primary sources'. Inevitably, his judgments on a great many matters cannot be fully supported by argument in this limited text and it may be that he would want to take them further in learned journals at a later stage, but it seems worth raising some of many questions now.

First, his statement (p.123) that: 'One cannot regard Baptists in America as merely an extension of those in England, but neither can one minimize the connections between them' is unexpected. What were

Baptists in America - down to 1776 - but 'an extension of those in England' (Britain)? Furthermore, it would be interesting to discuss much more fully the part played by Roger Williams in the whole story - surely he, admittedly but a few months a Baptist, cannot justify nearly twelve pages in this book? Or is there something we have all missed? The treatment of the Baptist defence of religious liberty is very useful and there are some splendid quotations from early writers which should provoke further research.

Secondly, the question of Baptist origins is given a lengthy airing by Dr McBeth and can now, surely, be given a rest. The vitally important point which he makes about Baptist commitment to the Scriptural ideal of the Church is an essential one and, although Baptist theologians may argue about just what this means for the modern church, the trail of blood across the centuries can now surely be regarded as washed out. Nevertheless, the links between the Smyth/Helwys group of General Baptists and those who came after them are assumed here with a readiness not entirely justified by the evidence now available.

Thirdly, it appears that Dr Torbet's explanation of the origin of associations (p.96) is still accepted in the present history although no reference is made to my discussion in the *Journal of Theological Studies* (new series) XIX, 2 pp.584-9. While I am not able to claim that the arguments there are the only possible ones they have never, to my knowledge, been refuted.

Fourthly, while a good picture, drawn from the *Broadmead Records*, of the Baptists under persecution is provided, I am not sure whether it would be easily possible to prove that (p.122) 'Historians generally agree that the Baptist witness was a major factor in leading to the Toleration Act of 1689'. It could be argued that the Anglicans were chiefly bounced into agreeing to it in an access of relief at the accession of William III and that this was the only factor that really mattered!

Fifthly, Dr McBeth has accepted, with most other students of the period, the view promulgated by the Baptist historian, Joseph Ivimey, that John Gill's version of Calvinism had a deadening effect upon the Calvinistic Baptists in the 18th century. This seems to have been only part of the story and to require further investigation. Equally, the history of the General Baptists' move, in many but not all cases, to Unitarianism needs to be examined more fully.

In conclusion, I should say that while this review is not uncritical of a major event in Baptist world historiography, I recognize that one of the main problems with which Dr McBeth has had to struggle is the large number of gaps in local Baptist history writing. I believe that not only is much more research required to be done but that, perhaps, the next 'universal' Baptist history should be done by a team of scholars each able to dig deeply into their own national story and each able to build on a generation's research.

We salute Leon McBeth for his courage in this great undertaking and hope that it will stimulate others to seek answers to the questions he has opened up.

B. R. WHITE