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NUMERICAL DECLINE AMONGST ENGLISH BAPTISTS 1930 - 1939

The 1930s were years of crisis for the English Baptist churches.¹ In various ways they found themselves re-assessing their position as they came to terms with their decline both in numbers and in influence in wider British society.

Decline had, in fact, set in long before the churches actually became aware of their true position. Statistical evidence indicates that the numerical decline in Nonconformity had begun long before it had become apparent to the leaders of the churches. Cox actually places the start of the decline as early as the mid to late 1880s and early 1890s.² The pattern would appear to be one of absolute growth but proportional decline (as against the national population) during the 1880s, and both absolute and proportional decline from the 1890s onwards. These seeds of decline only came to fruition in the wake of the steady weakening of the link between Nonconformists and the Liberal Party towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century.

The reasons for decline were several: Baptists were victims of their own success, their rise in social standing separating them from the working classes; the Labour Party was ready and waiting to receive those members of the working classes disenchanted with the church; social dependence upon the churches was also weakening as many social evils were ameliorated; the Sunday-School system to which Baptists were so committed had itself entered a time of uncertainty and change. Baptists themselves, meanwhile, were becoming more inward-looking - witness the disputes on theology that re-emerged in this period.

The First World War, of course, also left its dark cloud over the entire era as Christian pacifism had given way to a war in defence of Christendom. Although Baptist numbers showed a slight resurgence in the early 1920s, they soon dropped dramatically. The denomination was by then in a state of deep confusion as to its identity within the wider world of Nonconformity. That said, there is real doubt as to whether the Baptist Union at this time actually realized that this was the case.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the 1930s began on a note of numerical gloom. On 9 January 1930 a page 3 feature in the *Baptist Times* outlined a decrease in the membership of the Baptist churches of 4,435 (from 411,389 to 406,954)³, and a decrease in Sunday-School scholars of 11,138 (from 500,080 to 488,942). The following week, the topic reached the front page with an unattributed leading article - probably written by the editor, J. C. Carlile - beginning: 'The statistics of the religious life of the country during 1929 are now published. They are depressing reading; it is no consolation that other churches are no better off than ourselves. No doubt the apostles of comfort will find all-sufficient reasons for things being as they are, but we confess more than uneasiness'.⁴

A fierce debate followed. The General Secretary of the Baptist Union, M. E.

Aubrey, called for thorough and honest revision of church rolls in an attempt to determine the real extent of Baptist strength. Dismissing facile solutions, he asserted: 'That Church which is intent on winning the outsiders will find that the level of its own faith and joy, its whole life, will be immeasurably raised'.⁵ Much correspondence, a number of feature articles, and even a symposium were generated. The Baptist Union president for 1929-30, Dr Douglas Brown, agreed with Aubrey that a failure in evangelism lay at the root of the problem.⁶ 'We are not starting new centres of worship and service', asserted Dr Charles Brown, former minister of Ferme Park Baptist Church and president of the Free Church Federal Council in 1930.⁷ Prayer, brotherhood and zeal were lacking, suggested the minister of Cleethorpes Baptist Church, F. G. Kemp.⁸ 'Why, then, do not the Free Church leaders join hands and bring into being one United Free Church of England?'⁹ asked the leading London Baptist layman, Herbert Chown.

Interestingly, the Baptist Union president for 1930-31, Arthur Newton (a deacon of York Road Baptist Church, Battersea, and treasurer of the London Baptist Association), took for his theme, 'The Efficient Church'.¹⁰ His address was reflected in the *Baptist Union Annual Report* which, under the title 'The Main Business of the Church', argued that: 'While it is obviously dangerous to press the parallel between the business life of the outside world and the tasks of the Church, we may, nevertheless, ask ourselves if it is reasonable to continue our methods unchanged . . .'.¹¹

Significantly, no analysis of the social dimension of the church's ministry appeared in these reports. The solution to the problems assailing the Baptist denomination was perceived in terms of renewed evangelism and/or a more efficient style of church leadership and management. It is also interesting to notice the manner in which the *Baptist Times* perhaps unwittingly gave the impression that the problems which Baptist churches were facing were unique to them. This was not the case, however. A year later in June 1931, for example, a South London newspaper, the *Croydon Advertiser*, carried a feature on the declining numbers of members in Anglican churches. Under the headline, 'Bishop's Warning - Church Losing Ground in Poorer Parishes - More Clergy Needed', it reported an address by the Bishop of Southwark, Dr C. F. Garbett, about: 'the grave position of the Church of England in the poor parishes'. He was concerned at the understaffing of Church of England parishes - at least 1,100 more clergy were needed. But the general problem of understaffing was accentuated by the difficulty faced by the church in filling vacancies in poorer areas: 'It was in those parishes, overcrowded and poor, where the shortage of clergy was most marked, far more than in the prosperous districts in the suburbs . . . It was useless to disguise the gravity of the situation. The Church was losing ground in many of the poorer parishes'.¹²

A measure of the importance attached to this issue by contemporary Baptist leaders can be seen in the fact that as 1930 drew to a close the Council of the Baptist Union resolved to include a discussion of the problem in their *Annual*

Report. Reflecting on the continuing decline in numbers they commented:

We have in former years uttered warnings against too great an emphasis on mere figures. The quality of our membership is of more importance than numbers. Periods do undoubtedly come in the history of the Christian Church when the vine is pruned. Dead wood has to be cut out. The Churches in this country have in recent days been passing through such a time. When the Church is manifestly succeeding it becomes popular and attracts many who have no vital religious experience. These become a source of weakness rather than strength, and the power of the Church declines. Those whose religion is formal or casual, a mere matter of custom or expediency, fall away, as they did in the days of our Lord. Numbers are reduced, but 'the remnant that remains' is the real Church, and our hope is there. That Church, with the life of Christ beating in it, must grow.

For years we have had to register a decline in our statistics. Last year it was so small that we hoped we had reached the bottom of the curve, and this year [1931] we should find an upward movement had begun. Our figures do give us encouragement for we can record, with thankfulness, that in England, to which by far the greater number of Churches in our Union belong, we register an increase of 1,004. Ireland also shows a small advance of 29. Unfortunately the figures for Wales and Scotland show a diminution, partly or wholly due to migration, so that, for the whole of the British Isles, we are faced with a net loss, in numbers, of 126.¹³

The urgency in this debate at a national level was caused in part by the fact that at a local level few Baptist churches achieved a peak in membership after 1929. Indeed, many were already conscious of falling numbers both of members and, very significantly, adherents. L. G. Champion has tested national statistical trends against those for the Bristol Baptist Association which for three hundred years had been one of the strong centres of Baptist church life in England. His studies indicate a stark decline in all statistics with the added observation that by 1981, the end of his study, Baptist congregations were more restricted to members, with only a small number of people who shared regularly in the fellowship without becoming members.¹⁴

The issue of numerical decline was thus to become an over-riding, even obsessional, concern within the Baptist denomination. During 1931 little comment was made by the denominational journal on this vexed question. Indeed, it was joyfully reported that during 1932 the numerical strength of the Baptist Union increased overall by 288 compared with 1931.¹⁵ Very helpfully, however, the Council of the Baptist Union made some pertinent comments about the geographical nature of these numerical changes. It pointed out that five counties had made significant gains, Essex (317), Sussex (237), Warwickshire (241), Somerset (174), and Surrey (92). Conversely, two counties had suffered sharp declines, Yorkshire (-248) and Lancashire (-321). In response to this analysis it was suggested that discussion should be promoted at Union and Association levels on the 'effects of industrial depression on religious work'.¹⁶ When considering this analysis it is important to keep in mind Aubrey's often repeated view of the best response to

declining numbers in the denomination. This was probably most clearly put in his presidential address to the Baptist Union Assembly in 1950, where he stated firmly: 'Organisation is important but cannot create life . . . Let us be warned. Our trust must be less in schemes and committees than in prayer, dedication, obedience and self-sacrifice'.

In response to these numerical concerns of the churches, the Baptist Union launched the Discipleship Campaign in 1932. That year's presidential address had been given by the distinguished lawyer and leading Baptist lay preacher, Alfred Ellis, JP, under the title of 'Our Discipleship Campaign'.¹⁷ However, in 1932, the Union actually suffered another net loss in its membership. The *Annual Report* for that year finally had to concede that the numbers battle required more positive initiatives. It noted that:

We are unable to report numerical progress and in this we confess disappointment . . . The complaint that people are moving away from the Churches must inevitably raise the retort: 'Then why are not the Churches moving with the people?' We have pleaded before, and we do so again, that Churches in districts where they can no longer secure congregations should seriously consider whether it is their duty to move to other districts where a better response can be secured.¹⁸

The leadership of the Baptist Union gave constant attention to means by which the decline in numbers might be stemmed. As 1935 commenced and it became clear that 1934 was to be remembered as yet another year of numerical decline, Aubrey urged that the continuance of the Campaign was essential.¹⁹ The 1934 *Annual Report* presented a three-page analysis of the situation in an attempt to clarify the reasons for the continued drop in membership figures and to consider responses,²⁰ but still the *Annual Report* considered the Campaign to be going well.²¹ The Union had, in fact, appointed an Evangelism Commissioner, the Revd J. N. Britton,²² to push forward this work. Britton had previously been minister for thirteen years of Avenue Baptist Church, Southend.²³ The finance for the post had been donated by an 'anonymous friend' - probably Robert Wilson Black.²⁴ Aubrey gave constant support to the Discipleship Campaign through his visits to the provinces.²⁵ The Discipleship Campaign was seen as: 'a new effort to bring our Churches into harmony with God's purpose for them, to kindle fires of devotion in the hearts of our people . . . [to] constrain us all to do more for the evangelising of mankind everywhere, both in our own land and beyond the seas'.²⁶

About this time, a contemporary and widely-read author, David Williamson, editor of the *Daily Mail Year Book* and a leading religious commentator, in his *Religion in the King's Reign* made a considerable impact on the denomination with the publication of his comparison of church statistics for 1910 and 1934. During that period the population of England and Wales had risen by 4.397 million - despite the ravages of the Great War. The Church of England had increased the numbers of communicants by nearly 300,000, but had lost nearly 700,000 Sunday School scholars. The Methodist Church had decreased in membership by 57,363, and had

lost nearly 700,000 scholars. The Congregational Union had lost 149,600 members and 297,939 scholars. The Baptist Union in 1910 had returned a membership of 394,262 and in 1934 had dropped to 375,383, a decrease of 18,879. It had also lost 123,220 scholars.²⁷ The *Baptist Times* reviewer of Williamson's book had something to say to nearly everyone in Baptist church life. 'Preachers should commit these lurid figures to memory'. They had lost touch with the modern mind. 'Our congregations are too middle-aged'. The pulpit had become boring. 'The Radio makes it easy for half-interested people to listen-in at home rather than turn out to a public service'. He then posed the question: 'Are we still to go on in the same old way that our grandfathers trod until we come to the end of the journey, perhaps to the end of our existence as organised forms of religion?' Whilst Sunday-School methods had been update - 'revolutionised' - the Churches had lagged behind. He then wondered whether 'the surprise power of the pulpit [could] be re-discovered? Is it really necessary to follow the stereotyped order of public worship that has become so familiar that Church attendants could go over it in their sleep?'

The statistics for 1935 were again depressing. An anonymous writer in the *Baptist Times* commented on 16 January 1936 that the declining number of Sunday-School teachers and scholars was a cause for deepest concern. Significantly, however, genuine attempts were by now being made to study and understand the underlying causes of the decline. This writer, for example, suggested that there might be social-class reasons which resulted in the most severe decline being in 'great industrial areas'.²⁸

J. C. Carlile's own analysis came in a *Baptist Times* leader on 23 January 1936, entitled 'Fear of the Figures'. In his typically robust manner he pointed out that the decline was not unique to Baptists. Both the *Church Times* and the *British Weekly* had recently been discussing 'leakage' from respectively Anglicanism and Nonconformity generally. Carlile's contention was that the Great War had been the crucial factor: 'Those who would have been our strength and support did not come back from the Front. Much of the flower of our manhood never bloomed in the Church but was buried in the fields where Flanders poppies grow'.²⁹ He further argued that war had unsettled the youth of the 'twenties and 'thirties. The church, too, must bear responsibility for not seeking an understanding of contemporary issues. Instead, it must live in 'the real world'. He concluded: 'We offer no opiate, no drug that will induce further sleep. There is a call to action. Each man must use his own weapon in the fight, play his own part, and give his own answer to his conscience and his God'.³⁰ Others who also reflected on this issue included the Revd G. M. Wylie of Bradford³¹ and Councillor S. Taylor, president of the North East District of the Lancashire and Cheshire Association, who concluded that: 'We are in a parlous state'.³²

The *Annual Report* for 1936 also discussed in detail the issue of decline in Sunday-School attendance. It was noted that some 19,000 Sunday-School scholars had been lost in 1935. The drop in numbers over the past twelve years was

100,000.³³ The reasons were seen to be several, but included the falling birth-rate, Sunday games and non-church-based religious activities for the young, and inefficient Sunday Schools.³⁴ A Sunday-School adviser, Miss Phyllis Morgan, had been appointed by the Baptist Union in 1935, and it was to be hoped that her services would be fully used.³⁵ The *Report* concluded: 'Until our Church members, as well as our Ministers, really grapple with this problem and make serious efforts to learn what those around them are thinking and find ways to their minds and consciences, the prospects for the Church are not bright'.³⁶

Part of the perceived answer for the Baptist Union lay in the launching of 'The Call to Advance'. This was announced in a *Baptist Times* leader on 19 March 1936.³⁷ Later in that edition M. E. Aubrey explained that the Baptist Union Council had resolved to raise £1 million over the next decade for the purpose of church extension.³⁸ In April of that year the Council plans were presented to and accepted by the annual Assembly.³⁹ Acceptance of the principle behind the Forward Movement, as it was to be known, was both rapid and whole-hearted.⁴⁰ By the end of April £267,700 had already been subscribed.⁴¹ The formal launch of the Movement took place at a Royal Albert Hall rally at the beginning of May. The Movement was seen as rooted in the vision of M. E. Aubrey's predecessor as General Secretary, J. H. Shakespeare.⁴² The Forward Movement was to feature regularly in the *Baptist Times* throughout 1936.⁴³ The Movement was then re-emphasized in an extended leader on 26 November.⁴⁴ Aubrey also opened 1937 with a plea for personal revival as a step to national revival.⁴⁵ This wider revival was often linked to the potential of the Forward Movement.⁴⁶ In February 1937 Aubrey, as moderator of the Federal Council of the Evangelical Free Churches of England, also signed a statement in support of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Recall to Religion.⁴⁷

Not to be outdone, the Revd F. W. Jolly, MBE, president of the Spurgeon's College Conference for 1937 and long-time missionary to India, took as his theme, 'The Church's Unfinished Task'. In this he argued that: 'The great need in the face of the terrible drift from religion all over the world, is that the Christian life should be lived. It must be seen in our commerce and in all social, national and international relationships - not merely talked about and preached'.²¹⁴⁸

In this climate of seeking ways out of the numerical decline in the denomination it should come as no surprise to discover that the *Baptist Times* was generally sympathetic to the Oxford Group Movement. Although perceived to be High Church in ethos, it was also renowned for its theological conservatism - a clear point of appeal for many Baptists.⁴⁹ Enthusiasm for the Oxford Group was by no means unequivocal, however. Numerous news items led up to a leader on 3 September 1936, addressing itself to the Oxford Group sharing principle. The writer, presumably J. C. Carlile, was unconvinced of the efficacy of this element of the Movement.⁵⁰ Yet Carlile had actually given patronage to the Movement a year earlier.⁵¹

The membership statistics for 1936 were no better than previous years. Aubrey expressed confusion at the lack of any clear pattern in the figures. He began: 'As in previous years, I have been analysing [the membership statistics] rather closely, especially those dealing with Associations in England and the English Associations in South Wales. Once again it is very difficult to reach any general conclusions'. After discussing various regional findings he concluded:

Will some statistical genius tell us what these figures mean? Depression might be an excuse in the North, but it does not seem seriously to affect membership in South Wales, and prosperity has not helped in the big cities. I find it difficult, even impossible, to draw any conclusion except the general one that we all should pray, think and work with our whole might for a new revelation of the glory of God in Christ Jesus.⁵²

On 22 July 1937 J. C. Carlile produced what had by now become an annual leader on the subject.⁵³ He could offer no easy answers. As another of the several attempts at analysis of the problem in 1937, Arthur Porritt, editor of the *Christian World* and regular columnist for the *Baptist Times*, shared 20-year statistics indicating that the numerical decline was common to all denominations. Porritt concluded that the over-riding moral to be drawn from these statistics was that the Sunday-School system was facing 'swift and cumulative collapse'. He further raised the question whether, for the child of today, a wholly different technique has not to be worked out by the Churches'.⁵⁴ Herbert Henry Elvin, General Secretary of the National Union of Clerks and Administrative Workers, and chairman of the General Council of the Trade Union Congress, was much more scathing in his appraisal. Under the title, 'My Church and the Labour Movement', he concluded: 'For years there has been an estrangement between "The Church" and the working classes'.⁵⁵ Still another position was postulated by David Williamson, editor of the *Daily Mail Year Book*. His analysis, under the title, 'Church Statistics from a Layman's Point of View', argued that Sunday cinemas and other pleasure facilities were not the cause of the decline in the churches. He identified three causes. Firstly, there was people's experience rising out of the Great War. Secondly, there was a strong feeling that the churches had not grasped the deep undercurrent caused by the problems of modern life. Thirdly, the churches had become more formal and lacked any passion for souls. If Williamson offered three criticisms, he also suggested five positive changes. Firstly, there should be more elasticity in the manner of services. Secondly, there should be more 'special services'. Thirdly, times of services should be more flexible. What about 10 a.m. services at seashores, and 8 p.m. evening services? Fourthly, churches should use good notice-boards and newspaper reporting to commend themselves to others. Fifthly, preachers should challenge themselves after they have preached. Were they speaking beyond their experience?⁵⁶

The membership figures of the Baptist Union declined again in 1937.⁵⁷ Thus, with a certain sense of inevitability, Aubrey addressed the question in his first

Baptist Times notes for 1938. Membership had declined by 1,524 persons. The Sunday-School decline was staggering, a loss of 16,577 children. His answer remained the same as ever: 'we must preach a more adventurous Christianity, as well as more definite faith than has been the general custom in the Christian Church for some time past'. Arthur Porritt followed this a week later: 'The only consolatory thought is that people who go to church nowadays go not to conform to convention, but because they need and want what the churches can give them'.⁵⁸

Aubrey next applied some simple statistics in his attempt to understand the real nature of the problem. There were still approximately 400,000 scholars in Baptist Sunday Schools. Their average length of attendance appeared to be seven years. Therefore, he deduced, 60,000 join and leave each year. Baptisms, however, remained at less than 10,000 per annum. Therefore, only one-sixth of scholars passed on to baptism.⁵⁹ The denomination was facing a failure to convert those in its Sunday Schools. Once again widening the debate to other denominations, Arthur Porritt noted the loss of 49,375 Sunday-School scholars from Methodist churches during 1937. Membership also fell by 3,564. One factor in the equation, he argued, was the widespread movement from rural to urban areas taking place as a result of the slump. Urban areas, particularly when redeveloped into flats, had poor Sunday-School provision. This was a factor which gave impetus to the various City Missions around this time.⁶⁰

The *Daily Mail Year Book* published in November 1938 brought its usual sad tale. During 1937 Protestant churches had lost 20,000 members and 94,000 Sunday-School scholars. The picture for Baptists appeared to be reflected elsewhere.⁶¹ Not surprisingly, concern about numerical decline within the Baptist denomination was eclipsed by world events as the decade drew to a close. Few comments appear in the pages of the *Baptist Times* during these last two years.

Decline in numbers was thus a constant concern to Baptists during the 1930s, and many possible reasons for the decline were discussed during the period: the young were not being reached, the cinema was proving too attractive, radio services tempted people to obtain their religion in their own lounge, Sunday Schools were thought out of date, much Baptist preaching was weak and boring, the Discipleship Campaign had not been fully taken up by the churches, social divisions existed between the churches and the masses, the Great War had done severe damage to the churches.

With the benefit of fifty years of hindsight it is possible to suggest that two of these factors were key elements in this decline. The first was the deepening crisis within the Sunday-School system from the mid-twenties onwards. P. B. Cliff has demonstrated the severity of this decline. Amongst Baptists, numbers fell by 29.7% between 1901 and 1939, a third of that decline occurring between 1914 and 1919.⁶² Cliff has also argued that a number of negative factors were at work within the Sunday-School system. The continued movement of population towards larger urban areas was clearly a problem for many provincial Sunday Schools. Equally, it must

be noted that only a small percentage of the children from provincial Baptist Sunday Schools actually settled into urban churches.⁶³ He has further demonstrated the urge for Sunday Schools to develop their own para-church identity. This resulted in pressure being exerted to have their own premises. He also describes the decline of morning attendance by teachers and scholars (as low as 10% by 1939).⁶⁴ The tension between 'church' and 'Sunday School' is attested by the ongoing challenge to grading systems that arose from time to time at Baptist Union Assemblies. Much energy was thus expended on Sunday Schools for very little tangible return in terms of church membership. Although longstanding, this crisis within the Sunday Schools came into focus in the 1930s at a time when those 1920s scholars should have been coming into full church membership.

Secondly, and closely linked to the first point, Baptist churches fell foul of their own social aspirations. As they became more and more respectable they unwittingly increasingly distanced themselves in ethos, worship and outlook from the working classes. This was no new phenomenon. Indeed, it can be demonstrated to have been a continuing process from the late 1870s onwards. What is significant is that by the mid-thirties the public perception of Baptists - and other Nonconformists - was that they were decidedly middle-class.

The response of the Baptist leadership, in launching the Forward Movement and the Discipleship Campaign, simply served to compound the problem of numerical decline because it failed adequately to challenge the churches to see the root cause of the problem in their own attitudes and structures. The dalliance of some Baptist churches with the Oxford Group Movement with its strongly middle to upper-middle class ethos had the same effect.⁶⁵ The result was continued confusion and an increasingly defeatist attitude and wistful longing for the old days. A subtle political parallel can be observed here in the constant harping back to 'the real England' which is to be found in the writing and speeches of the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin. A certain nostalgic romanticism had arguably crept in to both Baptist religion and national politics.

Finally, it must be asked whether Baptist concern and confusion over denominational decline and its causes also distracted them from social and political engagement with all the grass-roots contact that it afforded with various strata within society, or whether, in fact, their weakening political and social voice was itself a factor in their numerical decline. The balance of argument rests with the former. By the 1930s the denomination was facing a clear identity crisis. The halcyon days were now past and, whether or not the average church member was aware of the changed religious climate, the leadership of the denomination could see that change most clearly. In turn, their concern lay more with finding a new identity for the denomination and thus, hopefully, moving back to a policy of growth - or even simply of holding current numbers - than in seeking to regain major national influence.

NOTES

- 1 The complex nature of this crisis is the subject of my PhD thesis, 'English and Welsh Baptists in the Nineteen Thirties', Open University, 1993.
- 2 J. Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society*, Oxford 1982, p.178; cf. p.273. A. Hastings, *A History of English Christianity: 1920-1990*, 1991, pp.34ff. Hastings also helpfully analyses the geographical nature of the decline, pp.38ff.
- 3 *Baptist Times* (hereafter *BT*) 9 January 1930, p.19. For the statistics of the British Baptist churches in the twentieth century, see: ed. P. Brierley, *A Century of British Christianity: Historical Statistics 1900-1985, with projections to 2000*, 1989, *passim*.
- 4 *BT* 16 January 1930, p.33; cf. pp.33ff.
- 5 *BT* 23 January 1930, pp.55-6.
- 6 *BT* 1 May 1930, p.302.
- 7 *BT* 23 January 1930, p.61.
- 8 *BT* 30 January 1930, p.71.
- 9 *ibid.* For further discussion of possible schemes for uniting the churches, see *BT* 1930 30 January p.73, 6 February p.90, 20 March p.189, 27 March p.218, 3 April p.225; H. Townsend, *Robert Wilson Black*, 1953, pp.103-17. cf. W. M. S. West, 'The Reverend Secretary Aubrey: Part 3', *BQ* 34, no.7, pp.320ff. Henry Townsend, 'Revelation and Democracy', in *Records of the Baptist Union Presidential and Other Addresses: 1931-1933*, 1933, p.88, also published as *Religion, Revelation and Democracy*, nd.
- 10 *Baptist Union Presidential and Other Addresses: 1927-31*, 1931.
- 11 *Baptist Union Annual Reports* 1935, 1930, p.11, see also pp.7-9.
- 12 *Croydon Advertiser*, 13 June 1931, p.7.
- 13 *Report of the Council of the Baptist Union* 1931.
- 14 L. G. Champion, 'Baptist Life in the Twentieth Century - Some Personal Reflections', in *Baptists and the Twentieth Century*, ed. Keith W. Clements, 1983. For just three examples of decline within the London Association, see: *Fillebrooks 100 Years* (Fillebrook Baptist Church, Leytonstone), private publication, nd; R. Bolton, *175 Years of History: Ilford High Road Baptist Church*, private publication 1975; *Fifty Years of Witness: Hampstead Garden Suburb Free Church, 1910-1960*, private publication 1960, p.13.
- 15 *Annual Report* 1932, p.8.
- 16 M. E. Aubrey, *Baptist Advance*, nd.
- 17 *Baptist Union Presidential and Other Addresses, 1932-36*, p.5, delivered on 25 April 1932. The aims and methods of both the Discipleship Campaign and the Forward Movement are detailed in the *Annual Reports* 1935, pp.7ff, 50ff, and 1936, p.12.
- 18 *Annual Report*, 1933, pp.7f.
- 19 *Annual Report*, 1934, pp.10ff.
- 20 *BT* 10 January 1935, p.27.
- 21 *Annual Report*, 1935, pp.7f.
- 22 See, for example, *ibid.*, p.10.
- 23 *BT*, 28 November 1935, p.875.
- 24 *Annual Report*, 1935 p.9.
- 25 See, for example, *BT*, 16 January 1936, p.54.
- 26 *Annual Report*, 1935, p.11.
- 27 Cited and discussed in *BT* 1 October 1935, p.716.
- 28 *BT* 16 January 1936, p.43.
- 29 *BT* 23 January 1936, p.61.
- 30 *ibid.*, p.62.
- 31 *BT* 27 February 1936, p.161.
- 32 *BT* 5 March 1936, p.174.
- 33 *Annual Report*, 1936, pp.14f.
- 34 *ibid.*, p.15.
- 35 *ibid.*, p.16.
- 36 *ibid.*, pp.18ff.
- 37 *BT* 19 March 1936, pp.209f.
- 38 *ibid.*, p.211.
- 39 *BT* 9 April 1936, p.271. See also *Annual Report*, 1936, pp.9ff.
- 40 See, for example, *BT* 16 April 1936, pp.293ff; 30 April 1936, p.332.
- 41 *BT* 30 April 1936, p.327.
- 42 *BT* 7 May 1936, pp.355ff.
- 43 A typical brief report is that of *BT*, 21 May 1936, p.391.
- 44 *BT* 26 November 1936, p.897.
- 45 *BT* 7 January 1937, pp.2f.
- 46 *BT* 18 February 1937, p.122.
- 47 *BT* 25 February 1937, p.143.
- 48 *BT* 8 April 1937, p.270. See also *Annual Report*, 1938, pp.20f.
- 49 cf. Hastings, *English Christianity* pp.289ff; D. Bebbington, 'The Oxford Group Movement between the Wars', in *Voluntary Religion*, ed. W. J. Shiels and D. Ward, Oxford 1986, pp.495ff.
- 50 *BT* 3 September 1936, pp.668, 670.
- 51 cf. Bebbington, 'The Oxford Group', p.499; *The Times*, 9 July 1935, p.11.
- 52 *BT* 4 February 1937, p.83.

- 53 *BT* 22 July 1937, pp.549f.
 54 *BT* 25 November 1937, p.891.
 55 *BT* 2 December 1937, p.917.
 56 *BT* 9 December 1937, p.957.
 57 *BT* 6 January 1938, p.3.
 58 *BT* 13 January 1938, p.27.
 59 *BT* 17 February 1938, pp.122f.
 60 *BT* 21 July 1938, p.567.
 61 *BT* 1 December 1938, p.903. See also *Annual Report* 1938, pp.10f.
- 62 P. B. Cliff, *The Rise and Development of the Sunday School Movement in England, 1780-1980*, Redhill 1986, p.231.
 63 *ibid.*, p.221.
 64 *ibid.*, 220ff.
 65 cf. Hastings, *English Christianity*, pp.288f; Bebbington, 'The Oxford Group', pp.504f.

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REVIEW: Edgar Young, *More than Bricks and Mortar: The Story of Central Baptist Church, Luton, with personal memoirs by the author*, 1994, 156pp; pb, £5-95 + 70p p&p from author, 130 Cutenhoe Road, Luton, Bedfordshire LU1 3NJ

More than Bricks and Mortar not only describes the life of Central Baptist Church, Luton, from 1974 to 1993 but provides a brief history of the three uniting churches. Park Street Baptist Church traces its origin back to the mid-seventeenth century. An early list of members of the Kensworth church in 1675 included fourteen names of members living in Luton. Subsequently further names were added and it is certain that this group was active in forming the Park Street Meeting House, as the church was then known. Forty-seven members left in 1836 to form Union Chapel, Castle Street. The first two ministers were Independents but from then on the church became Baptist by name, doctrine and practice and the church joined the Baptist Union. In 1864 forty-three members resigned to form with others the King Street Congregational Church. Ten years after the first secession from Park Street, a further group left and, with others from Castle Street, formed the Ceylon Chapel in Wellington Street in 1846. The name 'Ceylon' was inspired by the life and ministry of Ebenezer Daniel who left the Park Street Church to go to Ceylon with the Baptist Missionary Society; he had died in 1843.

From time to time visiting preachers would ask why there were churches at Park, Castle and Wellington Streets; but the churches were convinced of the need to continue their distinctive witness. However, in 1973 for the first time in living memory two were without ministers and the Park Street Church was considering large-scale refurbishment. In September Park Street wrote to the others, asking whether there was indeed need for three. Events moved rapidly, leading to formal amalgamation on 12 January 1975. It was intended to establish the church in a new building on the Park Street site but for ten years they failed to sell the other buildings. Then both properties were sold within one year and the new building opened in 1986. The Castle Street sale was remarkable. Edgar Young mentioned to Joseph Batty Pierson their need to sell to meet the cost of the new premises. 'More by inspiration than with tact', Young said, 'I thought you might buy it as an investment'. Within half an hour they were viewing the property and Pierson bought it! This is a fascinating account not only of the work of the Central Baptist Church but also of the other Baptist churches in Luton.

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