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Journal of the Irish Baptist Historical Society



Editor: Joshua Thompson
BA, D Phil (Oxon)

Volume Six (New Series)
1998 ~ 1999

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- Joseph T Murray, FCIS, is an elder in Lisburn Baptist Church.

- Joshua Thompson is Editor of this Journal and teaches Church History as a visiting lecturer at the Belfast Bible College.

- Robert Dunlop, MA, M Litt is pastor of Brannockstown Baptist Church, Co Kildare and has written accounts of the origin of this church and its founding member John la Touche whose daughter Rose was a friend of John Ruskin.

EDITORIAL

The papers presented in this issue of the Journal provide a unique mixture, continuing the policy of the Members of the Society to stimulate interest in important historical topics outside our normal ambit, but to some degree germane to the witness of Baptists in Ireland.

The paper by Dr Hamilton Moore, Principal of the Irish Baptist College, entitled 'Back to the Future: Making Sense of Revelation' is the first of some theological papers to be contributed from time to time by the members of the College faculty. Historically, Irish Baptists have held a variety of interpretations of the Apocalypse during the past hundred years. Dr Moore is a specialist in eschatology and his contribution was heard with great interest.

Pastor Jim Byers' lively paper on 'Some Irish Baptist Evangelists' was received enthusiasm and applause. He has been invited to contribute further fruits of his research in this field at the 1999 annual meeting of the Society in May.

SOME IRISH BAPTIST EVANGELISTS

by W James K Byers

The word 'Evangelist' has been used in our mission in a very broad way. The word has, at times, been used to describe Colporteurs, Personal Workers and Extension Workers. A few years ago one quarter of the Pastors listed on the Handbook were recorded as having started as Evangelists with the Home Mission.

This paper is confined to the Itinerant Evangelist. One unknown author has described him:

Anointed by the Spirit
Trained at the Master's Feet
Commissioned and sent forth by Him All furnished and complete.
No human art or wisdom
His talent could assist.
A heavenly-moulded, God-sent man
Is the Evangelist.

This selection of 'Some Irish Baptist Evangelists' is largely based on personal memories. One is certainly spoilt for choice. At one time there were five itinerant Evangelists on the staff of the Home Mission. The contrasting accents and styles of these men is very interesting. There was a very clear difference between Hugh Orr and Willie Mullan, and between James Irvine and TP O'Connor.

In the post-war years Evangelists were asked, on coming to the staff, to give an assurance that they would not consider a Call to the 'Pastorate' during the first two years of their appointment. 'TP' received a Call to the Ballynahinch Church during his second spell as our Evangelist with the Mission. The story is told that he went upstairs to pray and his wife went to pack.

There was a clear difference between Charlie Lutton and James Tetley. Tetley served with the RAF during the war, and he retained his rank on demobilisation. I recall how he announced himself over the public address system during a tour of Dungannon to advertise the Gospel mission. 'This is Flight Lieut JE Tetley speaking.' He was a great 'word smith' and he had very clear diction. Also there was a difference between CJ Keenan and John McCrea; and between Samuel Draffin and Gordon McClements; and, in more recent times between James Henry and Jack Johnston.

Jack Johnston was noted for the titles that he gave to his addresses during a mission. Titles like 'The Conversion of the Devil's Postman', and 'Seven Ducks in a Muddy Pool'. Titles like these aroused great interest and encouraged people to return to the meetings on successive nights.

The work of the Itinerant Evangelist was a great encouragement to Pastors and Churches. Sower and Reaper rejoiced together. Many people who had been regular attenders at Church services were converted. One article in the Irish Baptist commented on the:

'Devoted services of our Evangelists. Their ministry continues to supplement the Pastoral work in our Churches and all the Evangelists have the joy of reaping the harvest in fellowship with the Pastors in the various centres'.

James Armstrong 1947-1952

A Sub-Committee of the Union was charged in 1944 with the responsibility of 'seeking out two suitable evangelists'. The committee subsequently brought forward two names. Pastor Hugh Orr, who was the Pastor of the Kilrea Church and Constable James Armstrong RUC. Both these men were offered appointments but Armstrong did not accept. He was very happy in the police. He came from the village of Milford in Co Armagh. James had four brothers and two sisters. His mother ran the village shop. His father was a bleacher in the local Bleach Green. Mrs Armstrong got saved in the Armagh Baptist Church under the ministry of the late Tom Rea and soon all her children were believers. Her first reaction on being saved was to close the village shop on the Lord's Day, much to the consternation of many of the villagers. Later

she was convicted about selling cigarettes. They were not thought to be a health hazard then, but were considered by many to be a fashion accessory. She immediately closed the shop altogether and opened her home for cottage meetings. Many of the villagers got saved at these meetings in the house. She continued to be a great influence on her eldest son who, at the age of seventeen left school and joined the Irish Guards. A few years later he entered the RUC depot in Newtownards having been 'bought out' of the Army. It was while he was in the RUC that he took an interest in athletics and represented Ireland at the shot-putt. He was the hammer-throwing champion of Northern Ireland in 1938. Most of his twelve years as a Constable were spent on the Springfield Road and Ballyhackamore Stations. One quarter of the men in the Springfield Road Station were believers and a number of them formed a Police Testimony Band. James was greatly helped and encouraged by the late Sergeant Baxter and was very anxious to know the Lord's will concerning is future. He even today speaks of the 'agony of mind' he experienced in the weeks and months after that initial approach from the Evangelistic Committee.

He asked the Lord for a sign. If he was asked to conduct three missions he would take this as confirmation of the Lord's will concerning his future. In a short space of time he was approached to conduct meetings in Lisburn and in two Halls off the Shankill Road, Keswick Street and the Welcome Hall in Cambria Street. Armstrong was still unwilling because he was very happy to pursue his career in the RUC. He asked for a further sign. In those days for thirty to pass through the inquiry room during a mission was considered to be exceptional. In the days leading up to the Lisburn mission he doubled that figure and added one and said 'If sixty-one people are counselled at the mission he would be sure of being in the will of God'. After the last service of the mission, Armstrong counselled one young man. He turned to the person who was in charge of counselling and asked him if he knew how many had passed through the room during the mission. He said, 'I do and I'm able to give you not only their names but also their addresses. There were 61'.

Armstrong still struggled with the will of God. He wanted to be really really sure! One day in the locker room in Ballyhackamore Station he scratched the date on the back of the locker door 7/11/46. Underneath it he scratched another date 26/11/46 and he prayed, 'Lord, if it is your will for me to go into full time service with the Irish Baptist Home Mission arrange that Mr Corbett

contact me before that date'. Some weeks later on the 21st of the month he received a message from Mr Corbett and was asked to attend a meeting of the committee to be held on 26/11/46. He remembers walking from Ballyhackamore to the Dublin Road in Belfast city centre to the office of the Baptist Union. He walked all the way on the road hoping that a car or a trolley bus would knock him down. He arrived at the meeting safely and was offered an appointment to engage in aggressive Evangelism. His allowance was £260 per year plus reasonable expenses. His reply was, 'He was not concerned about the financial position as he knew this would be all right as he had taken it also into consideration. He was most concerned about being in the will of God'. Before he left the meeting the Chairman asked him, 'What are you going to do?' He said, 'I'm going back to the Station to give in my resignation'.

A meeting was held in Shankill Church to bid Godspeed to Mr James Armstrong. The President of the Union, Mr James Guthrie, prayed that Mr Armstrong would have much joy and encouragement in seeing a great ingathering of souls. Mr J McCrea spoke of the qualifications of an Evangelist, an open heart, a clear mind and a consistent life. Mr Armstrong said during the meeting that he desired to be in the Lord's will and was prepared to follow at all costs the leading of the Spirit of God.

Armstrong's first meeting was in Coagh in February 1947. Such was the stir in the district that for a time Coagh was spoken of as the 'Holy Land'. Bus drivers leaving Cookstown depot spoke of going to 'Jerusalem' or to the 'Holy City'. There were many evidences of the movement of the Spirit of God. Young men and women and elderly persons too, who had not been to meetings were convicted and converted, some in their homes and some at work. Over 50 professed faith in Christ and a wonderful work of grace was still going on when the mission concluded. Missions followed in Glengormley, Kilkeel and Claudy. Tent missions were held in the Mourne District. The year closed with missions in Killyleagh, Orangefield and Newtownards. In the succeeding year he conducted missions in Lisburn, Cork, Cliftonpark Avenue, Belfast, in Glasgow, Mullycar, Dungannon, Upperlands, Kilrea, Ballymena and Poyntzpass, resulting in the restoration of backsliders, the conversion of sinners and the refreshment of God's people.

Reporting on the Cliftonpark Avenue mission, the Church correspondent wrote:

'During the mission Christian policemen came forward with their wives. Mothers of the fellowship came forward with their children. Backsliders, some with tears in their eyes, came back to God. In all 42 souls, including many backsliders, were accounted for, having come on the side of Christ during the mission. The Evangelist, whose everyday true-to-life experiences and illustrations, supported by the pure Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, made the facts of the gospel rich in their simplicity to the reaping of precious souls'.

James Armstrong has very often recounted an incident that happened on the last Sunday night of a mission in August 1948. He made an appeal at the end of the service couched in these words, 'Would anyone like to be converted? Please raise your hand and I will pray for you'. One young man sitting at the back of the tent jumped to his feet with both hands raised in the air. I, Jim Byers, was that young man.

There were many other evidences of abiding fruit from these missions. Graham Bell, the secretary of the Coagh Church for over forty years was saved on the last night of the mission in his church. Eva Ross was saved when she was a young teenager in Portstewart and later went to Peru with her husband, K en Needham, to serve as missionaries. Willard Kelly was saved and served the Lord with the Qua Ibo Fellowship in Nigeria. He returned home and was ordained into the Presbyterian ministry and served the Lord in Co Tyrone. He has gone back to Nigeria to teach in a Bible College.

Armstrong's preaching was clear, decisive and penetrating. His pulpit notes were not detailed but well structured. A number of his messages are in print and have been translated into Chinese and Macedonian. Here is a example of his pulpit notes:

'Repentance – The Missing Note'

1. The need for Repentance – Ezek 18; Is 55; John the Baptist; Jesus; Luke 24

2. The fruits of Repentance – Matt 36
   - A loathing of Sin
   - A Love for the Saviour
   - A Longing to please God
3. The means of Repentance – 1 Thess 1.2-5
4. The Time for Repentance – Acts 17.30-31; 'Now' 2 Cor. 62

One of the features of his missions was the invitation cards that he produced. One example is given below:

Mr James Armstrong
An ex-Policeman
Once he sought to make people keep the law.
Live a clean and perfect life without a flaw.
Till he found our blessed Saviour then he saw
They needed Jesus.
An ex-International Sportsman
Once on fitness of himself he set great store
Strove in front of public eye to rise and soar.
Till he saw that in his life he needed more
He needed Jesus.
Now an Evangelist
Now he seeks by God's grace to preach anew
The old old story. Proved and tried and true
And in a forthright earnest manner show to you
Your need of Jesus.

One of the outstanding missions he conducted was in Hill Street Church in Ballymena. The building, and it comfortably seats 400 people, was packed every night during the four week mission. The Evangelist had to step over young people sitting on the floor and on the pulpit steps in order to reach the lectern. There were no trained counsellors and the Pastor and Evangelist dealt with 50 souls during the mission. Two baptismal services were required to baptise the converts after the mission concluded. During that particular mission he only used soloists on two or three nights. The gospel was preached with power. Pastor Johnston believes that this was the most notable mission that

he has ever been involved with throughout his seventy years as a believer and sixty-three years in the ministry.

Mr Armstrong terminated his services with the mission at the end of January 1952. The following tribute was paid to him:

'The Committee desires to pay tribute to the splendid service rendered under God by Mr Armstrong during his ministry as EVANGELIST, not only through the Churches, but also in places where not a few difficulties were encountered. Again and again there were evidences of the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit in the solving of problems and in the conviction and conversion of sinners. Through his instrumentality many today are rejoicing in Christ their Saviour and quite a percentage of these are now useful and loyal members of our churches. We thank God for all our dear brother has been enabled to do and for his unwavering faithfulness in the exposition of the truth and in the preaching of the glorious gospel'.

James Armstrong embarked on an evangelistic tour of England, Scotland, Canada and USA. He continued in evangelistic work until he was called to the Pastorate of the Armagh Baptist Church in 1962 where he served the Lord until 1982 when he had to retire for health reasons. He and his wife Jean are very happy to continue as members of the Armagh Church in their retirement.

SC Brennan 1952-1962

Currie Brennan was interviewed by the Evangelistic committee of the Home Mission in 1951. During the interview he told of his conversion and of his call to work with the Cripples' Institute. He said that he had been engaged in this work, in a part time capacity, for five years. He went on to speak of having supplied the pulpit in several of our Churches. He spoke of a sense of call to full time work with the Irish Baptist Home Mission. He commenced service with the mission in 1952.

Four years earlier John McCrea, who was also an Evangelist with the Mission, wrote in the Irish Baptist:

'An Evangelist needs to be more than a Preacher, he must be a personal worker and be able to converse with men and women in such a way that will give them confidence. He needs to be more than a student of the Word, he must make a study of human nature'.

Brennan was encouraged and inspired when he read this article. McCrea went on to list the things that encourage the Evangelist:

1. That his work is of paramount importance. While there are sinners to be saved, the Evangelist is needed.
2. That his work is being remembered in prayer.
3. The large amount of help that is received from God's people.
4. The greatest encouragement of all. The seal of the Divine stamp upon his work.

Mr Brennan's first mission commenced on 6th January in Dunseverick. He went on from there to Carndaisy in South Derry. The Committee desired that there should be four week missions including five Sundays in each of the centres and Churches.

The Dunseverick secretary reported, 'Our brother was very faithful in the presentation of the Gospel message and his outstanding ability in leading the meeting was thoroughly enjoyed by all'. Those who remember brother Brennan conduct a service will not miss the significance of that statement. He had a fund of stories. He spoke often of his mother and how she brought up the family during times of recession. He said the Rent man would come to the end of the street and shout 'RENT'. His mother and the neighbour-women would come into the street and shout in unison 'SPENT'. He also spoke of a neighbour of theirs who was very hospitable. One day, in reply to a knock on the door, she opened it to find a stranger standing on the step. She said, 'I don't know you but come in and take a seat'. He replied, 'I'm taking them all, for I'm the Bailiff'.

Currie was unusual in that he was an 'all-round' person. He had many gifts. In most of his missions children's meetings were also held and sometimes during the final week of meetings children's services were held each evening before the main service commenced.

He reported from Moneymore, 'We are enjoying much of the presence of God in our meetings. I am convinced that we are in for a time of blessing if we keep true to Him and keep low at His feet'. His stay in South Derry was guided by the Holy Spirit. The whole district was worked over and many conversions were reported.

Currie Brennan was an extrovert and a perfectionist. He liked things to be done well and for people to be as fully committed to the work as he clearly was. Reviewing the year 1958, he wrote:

'As I look over the year I am reminded of the words 'Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day, so much to do and so little time to do it and so few willing to do it where it was most needed'.

On another occasion he prayed for Divine enabling to face the awful loneliness, the Satanic opposition, and worst of all the sickening apathy where one expects a little interest. As well as preaching and conducting the services in his own inimitable way, he was very often the soloist. It was reported from a Dungannon mission.

'The meetings throughout were as bright as the Evangelist's own personality. Mr Brennan takes Colossians 3.16 very literally, 'teaching psalms, hymns and spiritual songs'.

Brennan would sometimes leave the platform and go down to the aisle and with the same panache as he conducted the children's choir at the Sunday School demonstration during the May Meetings, conduct late comers to their seats at the front. His smile as he returned to the pulpit seemed to say, 'Boys, that how I want you to do it!'

Currie Brennan had an empathy with young people. 'Call me Currie' were his words of introduction. He was an inspiration to a number of us young people in the Dungannon Church.

He liked pig's feet for supper. This dish was not generally on a Tyrone menu. Rev WF Marshall in his poem, 'Our Son' reveals the very latest gastronomical delicacies in a Tyrone village.

'Soup and coffee, liver, bacon and fish,
And salad is a thing that must be had,
Kale cut up on a dish'.

He made no mention of pig's feet! They were not made popular until the Evangelist came from Belfast. Someone in the church was able to get this delicacy and present it to Currie one evening after the service. I remember watching in amazement as Currie attacked his supper. Taking it up in both hands he drew the foot up to his month as if he was going to play the mouth organ. A few minutes later there was nothing left but grease on the Evangelist's face stretching from ear to ear.

In all the missions that he conducted, the Word preached bore fruit in the conversion of sinners. He wrote, 'A four week mission is too short. Interest is just growing when meetings come to an end'. Brennan's pulpit notes were very sparse. Indeed only the Evangelist himself could interpret them. Often only his first two points were worked out in some detail.

Mr Brennan received a call to the Milltown Church in 1962. He resigned from the Mission to take up the Pastorate in that Church.

Samuel James McManus 1950-1967

Reporting on the work of the Irish Baptist Home Mission for 1946, Pastor Forbes wrote, 'The burden and need of isolated districts where there's little or no Gospel witness weighed heavily on the hearts of committee members'.

Their vision was to put a fully equipped caravan on the road at an estimated initial cost of £1,000. They did not know that God was working in the heart of a bus driver in Dromara at the very time that they were deliberating and praying. Samuel James McManus had made a profession of faith at a Faith Mission meeting in Maghera when he was a teenager. His parents had a business in that town. Sadly he did not continue and lived away from the Lord until early in 1947. He was restored to the Lord in that year after months of conviction and unhappiness. The meeting in the Dromara CWU Hall was conducted by the late Jack Currie of Portadown. James immediately got

involved in the Christian Busman's Testimony Band and in the work of Ballykeel Baptist Church. God was working all things together.

James McManus was given an appointment in 1950 to 'drive and maintain the van (which by this time had been commissioned), and to assist in open air work'. His colleague in the van was CJ Keenan, who was already an Evangelist on the staff. During that year 266 meeting were held with an aggregate attendance of 13,000. They conducted 49 open air meetings in 33 different places covering the six counties of Northern Ireland. They visited 1,245 homes and thousands of tracts were given out. McManus reported at the annual Home Mission Rally that same year.

In the providence of God we have been preserved from accident and record to the Master's glory that having travelled 11,000 miles over hill and dale, we have never had a roadside repair work'.

The Mission Secretary reported, 'In all of these Missions the presence and saving power of the Holy Spirit were very evident. Many were brought to a deep consciousness of sin and were led savingly to know the Lord Jesus Christ. Not a few have since been baptised and added to the Churches'.

'Since obeying the voice of my master, the Lord Jesus Christ', wrote McManus, 'one year and a half ago to give myself wholly to full-time service. I have been greatly surprised in Northern Ireland with all its privileges and opportunities, at the darkness that reigns in the hearts of so many people regarding 'Salvation through the blood of Christ alone'.' In one month he recorded 37 meetings and 74 homes visited. CJ Keenan retired from Evangelistic work in 1953 for health reasons. McManus was recognised as an Evangelist from that year.

James McManus was a man of great spiritual discernment. I was privileged to visit with him during the Mullycar Mission in the late 50's. I recall us approaching a house late one afternoon. I was aware that it had been a notorious home during the war years and tried to dissuade him from making a visit. I suggested that because it was late afternoon he should go to the caravan and make tea. He insisted on the visit because these people needed the Lord'. We were immediately invited into the house. The daughters were

now much older. They asked us if we would go upstairs to see their mother. The upstairs was the roof space which was approached by a ladder. It had never been converted and the mattress was spread over the rafters. James would very often ask me to read or to pray during these visits. As I studied this frail old lady, her body just skin and bones, I decided she needed comfort and reassurance. I chose Psalm 23 and John 14. This proved unnecessary because the Evangelist himself read from John 3 and briefly spoke to her of her need to be born again. I said afterwards, 'surely she needed words of comfort and reassurance' and he replied, 'what greater comfort is there than to know the Lord and your sins forgiven'. He said, 'Did you not know that she needed to be born again?'

He was also a man with a mischievous sense of humour. We visited one of the many farms in a mixed district. The farmer was in the stable. He wasn't very interested as James spoke to him over the three-quarter door. We finally left him and two or three hours later James said, 'Do you think, did he ever get out of the stable?' I said, 'Why would he not?' He said, 'I locked him in. I slipped the bolt on the door before we left. That would give him plenty time to think and reflect on what we had said'.

'We', I thought, but I hadn't spoken. James believed in team work. Believers working together and the weakest link was still a vital link.

In 1958, writing about the work in Co Fermanagh, he reported, 'Prejudice from Christian people, bitter opposition from Roman Catholics and support from the faithful few, but in spite of the opposition, God honoured His Word, souls were led to Christ and backsliders returned from the far country to the joy of fellowship. During the year 2,520 homes were visited'. He was a man of prayer and always stressed the importance of prayer in every aspect of the work. Prayer not only during the missions but before as well. He had also a great burden for Revival. He spoke at the annual Home Mission Rally in 1956 and the record reads:

'His burden for revival was clear, of which he spoke with a hint of prophetic fervour. May the Lord make our brother's vision a reality in our day and generation'.

The Evangelistic Committee was concerned about him staying in the caravan during cold nights. But he preferred the caravan to lodgings, even in the winter time as it gave him ideal privacy for prayer and Bible study. In 1957 he developed Bell's Palsy or Facial Paralysis. Although he made a recovery the effects of the paralysis were with him until he died.

It was his practice during the seventeen years that he was with the Mission to work a 13 hour day, a 78 hour week. He stayed in our home in the early sixties and I know these figures are true. McManus went into the pulpit with full notes. Every message was written, rewritten, prayed over for three or four hours each morning. The Union Secretary in commending Brennan and McManus to the Churches wrote, 'They are skilled and sympathetic in visitation and preaching the Word of God with conviction and power'.

It was often difficult to discern a clear structure to his messages. There was always an outline, but this wasn't stressed. Almost every word he spoke was written by hand. Preaching from the words, 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel' Romans 1.16, he considered three things:

It is the power of God
It is unto Salvation, and
It is to everyone that believeth

He simply, but sincerely, took the words of scripture and explained them in the power of the Spirit. It wasn't always easy to remember what the preacher had said, but we always remembered very clearly the presence and power of God.

James was a man of very wise counsel. I remember the last night of a mission in the Old Court House in Bushmills. He spoke appropriately from Matt. 27, one of the Court scenes and finished the message with the words 'What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ'. I invited the soloist to bring the meeting and the mission to a close. I recall how he opened his brief case and selected a music book from about a dozen and also the appropriate words from a selection of postcards. He gave the music to the organist and mounted the pulpit. As the music was played he quickly realised that he had given her the wrong music. And so the ritual was repeated once again. This

time the music was right but the piece he had chosen was 'Ere you left your room this morning did you think to pray'. These were the words but because the sound appeared to come down his nose what we heard was, 'Ere you left your room this morning did you stink to pray!' I was so embarrassed and apologised to James after the service. He said, 'Brother, in this work you soon discover that Almighty God can take our mistakes and make them instruments for His Glory'.

He resigned from the staff in 1967 on accepting a call to the joint pastorate of the Fivemilehill, Poyntzpass and Warrenpoint churches. He laboured in these churches for 14 years.

He was always interested in Pipe Bands. Many of his missions were conducted in Orange halls in rural districts where there was no other place to meet. He made it a practice to call into the band practice and encourage the men and invite them to the meetings. On his retirement from Pastoral work he was made President of Dromara Pipe Band. Pipers from the Band formed a guard of honour at his funeral and a lone piper played a lament at the grave side. The words that Pastor Hughes chose for a text were surely appropriate, 'A man who walked with God'. He is survived by his wife Molly who was a tower of strength to him throughout his ministry, and his two daughters Dorothy and Gertrude.

The New Testament named one Evangelist 'Philip the Evangelist'. I have named three. The words of John Bunyan are true of these and many more. Describing the Evangelist, he wrote

'His eyes were lifted up to heaven
The best of books was in his hand
The law of truth was written upon his lips
The world was behind his back
He pleaded with men
And a crown of gold did hang over his head'.

The lives of good men tell their own tale. Stories like these from the past are challenging. But we do not live in the past. We cannot recreate the past. We should not try. We can learn from the past. We live in today's world

on the threshold of a new millennium. In a changed and changing world we need to be reminded of the things that have not changed and that will not change.

The Gospel message has not been revised.
The Gift of the Holy Spirit of Power has not been rescinded.
The Great Commission by the Head of the Church has not been revoked.

And so we pray with the Psalmist:

'Bind up our wounds and show Thy face
Restore our service Lord
Help us again display thy Grace
The Banner of Thy Word
Let all the regions of our land
Submit to Jesus' reign
That multitudes may take their stand
Within Thy house again'.

(THE EVANGELICAL PSALTER)

BAPTISTS IN LISBURN: A SHORT ACCOUNT

by JT Murray

Lisburn is steeped in history. First known as Lisnagarvey, it was a small hamlet in the reign of James I, but it increased rapidly in size and population when Edward, Viscount Conway, was granted by Charles I in 1627 the entire district of Killultah and built a castle.

It had, and still has, many forms of religion. For about two hundred years it had a French-speaking congregation of Huguenots until 1903. John Wesley established his first preaching house in Lisburn, now the Christian Workers' Union premises. The parish magazine of Christ Church of 1873 records how three clergymen had visited the whole town with the exception of between 40 and 50 houses – and showed that of 1689 families, their denominations were:

942...Church of Ireland
307...Presbyterians
58... Methodists
344...Roman Catholics
15... Plymouth Brethren
10... Friends
8... Independents
5... Unitarian
1689

Lisburn Baptist church was formed in 1926.

1926 – A Notable Year

Newspaper editors love news that will make headlines and the year 1926 gave them plenty of material. It was a year of industrial unrest which reached its climax in a general strike when workers throughout the nation ceased work and all vital services were stopped. A Royal birth lightened the dark news for, in that year a daughter was born to the Duke and Duchess of York. She is our present queen. That year, too, marked the first radio telephone call from London to America and travel by air entered upon a grand new development when spectacular flights to and from South Africa took place. It was a momentous year.

Lisburn, though, provided no startling news for the papers. It was at that time a much smaller town than at present with many of its population employed in the then thriving linen industry. Wages were small and working hours long. Thankfully, however, there had been a marvellous spiritual awakening a few years earlier through the stirring missions conducted by the Rev WP Nicholson when great numbers of conversions were recorded. The churches in the town and district benefited with over-flowing congregations.

It was then that a few Christians began to meet together in Lisburn anxious to worship with the New Testament as their pattern. They were convinced that they should be baptized by immersion, that they should meet each Lord's Day around the table of the Lord in the breaking of bread to remember Him who had died for them and, that their worship and church government should be that as practised by Baptists.

The late Pastor James Shields who, at that time, was the Pastor of the Milltown church and was instrumental in the formation of the Kilkeel church, became a great friend of this small group. His guidance, advice and wise counsel gained from his long experience first, as an earnest and soul-winning evangelist and then his devoted pastoral care were of invaluable strength to the little flock. So, on 30th May, 1926 the Lisburn Baptist Church was formed. It had no building of its own and met first in a small rented hall in Wallace Avenue. Later it used the Good Templar Hall, which stood in Linenhall Street until a short time ago. Pastors and local preachers conducted the services.

These were faithful people with a deep love for the Lord and His Word. They sometimes had to endure the misunderstanding, prejudice and even ridicule of those who did not share their convictions. Nevertheless, the Lord stood by them and they saw the Lord's blessing in their service for Him.

Building in Priests Lane

A permanent building was the crying need of the little church. The faith of our spiritual forebears was strong and they showed remarkable courage in the face of great difficulties. A site was acquired in Priests Lane (now called Tonagh Avenue) on 25th September, 1928. A copy of the Deed for the ground contains the names of the signatories on behalf of the Baptist Union of Ireland as trustees are worthy of mention for their interest in and love for the Baptist cause in Ireland. Henry C Gribbon is one. His daughter, Mrs Mary Sloan was one of our veteran missionaries in Peru. Another daughter, Joan, is the wife of Major W Ian Thomas founder of Capernwray Missionary Fellowship whilst his son, Dr HD Gribbon was for some years the Honorary Secretary of the Irish Baptist Orphan Society, and is the President of our Historical Society. AW Tweedall, another signatory, helped to keep open the Waterford church through long, difficult years. A third signature is that of Alexander W McCay who was a generous benefactor to many of our churches and Missions. Mr John D Gilmore a faithful and devoted secretary of the Union, also signed.

Having acquired ground, the next big obstacle to be overcome was the raising of money to erect a building. Great care was exercised to avoid questionable methods being used and sacrificial, regular giving was the order of the day.

The rejoicing in having the building completed and ready for opening on 19th April, 1930 can scarcely be imagined. Pastor FH Forbes who was then Vice-President of the Baptist Union of Ireland presided at the opening ceremony. That building with its many alterations, extensions and hallowed memories is now our church hall. Two photographs of the original building taken about 1948 hang in our present vestry. One taken from the outside gives an idea of its size whilst the other shows the interior with a grand piano which at that time was used to lead the singing. That photograph also shows that on

the wall behind the pulpit there was inscribed, in the form of a scroll, the text, 'Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father'.

A former resident of Lisburn visiting our church a few years ago remarked on how God had blessed us. She went on to say that she knew the people who put up the first building. 'They were', she said, 'poor men but good men'. The text they chose to adorn their building confirms her words.

Here let us learn the importance of making and keeping church records. The first Minute Book has been lost and there is no record of the names of the original members nor of how many there were. Valuable historical information has been lost. I understand that a history of the church had been written after a few years of its existence. It would be a satisfaction if a copy came to light. Again, in considering records, some minutes written in the early days of ball-point pens have faded and are not easily read. Church secretaries should remember that what they write are permanent records and should use books of good quality paper and binding and indelible ink.

The erection and furnishing of the building in 1930 imposed a burden of debt which took many years to pay off. Regrettably as there is no Minute Book available until the one commencing on 25th May, 1932, so the cost of the property is not known nor has the history of the earliest days of the church been recorded.

References in the available Minutes were made repeatedly to the lack of funds and the inability to pay suppliers' accounts. We read that in June, 1932 there was no money to pay an outstanding bill and, in the following month there was great anxiety because legal action against the church had been threatened because the amount due had not been paid. It was agreed, therefore, to apply for a further loan of £100 from the Loan and Building Fund of the Baptist Union of Ireland. The amount already owing to that Fund is not stated, but, two years later the debt on the building still had not been cleared. So it is recorded – 'It was unanimously agreed that we get out collecting cards to raise an amount in the clearing off the debt on the building'.

Those were extraordinarily hard times, especially for a church with a small membership. Twenty-eight names are listed presumably in May, 1932.

Three of these have been ruled out but neither the cause nor the date of removal has been given.

Despite their financial weakness there was, however, the desire for spiritual vigour and yearnings for the Lord's blessing on the witness to the Saviour as the following extracts from Minutes of a Church meeting held on 20th May, 1932 reveal:

'The chief object of the meeting was to get the Church in Scriptural form. Bro Bailie then proceeded to read the names of those who had been proposed as Elders of the Church. These were Bros Coulter and Stewart – being put to the meeting these Bros were unanimously elected to office'.

The small and dwindling number of people who knew these two brethren remember them gratefully as men of God who served the Lord and the church worthily and wholeheartedly. This further note sparkles like a gem – 'A baptismal service took place on Wednesday, (-) May there being 8 candidates for baptism. On the following Sabbath 4 more came forward for baptism making 12 for May, 1932'. Again, we can sense the spirit of deliglit experienced by all present as expressed in the closing words of the Minutes – 'Thus the meeting ended and Bro Bailie closed with the Benediction it being agreed by those present that it was one of the most uplifting meetings they had ever attended'.

The First Missionary

A notable day in the annals of the church took place one Lord's Day in July, 1932 when farewell services were held for Mr Stanley Reid before his departure to Peru as a missionary with the Irish Baptist Foreign Mission. His service for the Lord in South Peru lasted for thirty-eight years. The first missionary from our church, Stanley held strong Christian and Baptist convictions and was 'earnest to contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints'. He was courageous in the face of hardship, steadfast at times of opposition, and, determined and cheerful in discouragement. Above all, he loved his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ whom he trusted early in life and served enthusiastically. Even in retirement in the land of his birth he still

fulfilled his missionary calling as a colporteur and in door to door visitation until the Lord called him home to Himself on 6th March, 1980.

Like all churches without a Pastor, our church relied upon Pastors of other churches and experienced preachers to maintain the ministry of God's Word at Lord's Day services. We find, for example, that when Pastor William Wilson ministered in Portadown Baptist Church, he conducted Bible Studies in Lisburn on Wednesday evenings for some weeks in 1932. Other men served the Lord in this way.

The church also called upon outside help in business matters. Mr EG Combe, an accountant, one of the founding members of the Haypark Avenue Baptist Church, Belfast who was recognised as an able Bible teacher and preacher was invited to be chairman of a church meeting on 4th December, 1933. No explanation for this decision is given, but, he continued for some considerable time afterwards to chair meetings of office-bearers and the church. Reliance, too, was placed upon the advice of Pastor Fraser who was then Secretary of the Baptist Union of Ireland. Two former Presidents of the Union, Alderman WJ Chambers, Belfast and Mr JH Corbett, Portadown were helpful in business sessions. So too, was Pastor David Burrows.

The First Pastor – AEG Priestly

The need for a settled Pastor was recognised and, although there are no records leading up to the decision, the Minutes show that, at a meeting held on 22nd July, 1934 when seventeen members were present, a unanimous call was made to Pastor Warke, who, at that time was Pastor of Phibsboro Baptist Church, Dublin. The Minutes of the meeting say:

'The church undertakings were read to the meeting which included payment of £50 per annum to the Pastor, all our instalments to the Loan and Building Fund on due dates 25th April and 25th October £12 10s 0d each half-year'.

A footnote to the Minutes adds that Pastor Burrows supported by Alderman Chambers had presided. He made it clear that the cost of the Pastor's removal would have to be borne by the church. There is no reference to Pastor

Warke's reply to the invitation but, it would seem that a swift answer had been made, for, at a meeting on 20th August, 1934 – less that one month after the decision to call him:

'It was unanimously agreed to have a Church meeting on Sunday 9th September. The Secretary was instructed to write to Pastor Fraser and find if it would be in order to have a Church-Meeting after the service, and, if not, to have one on Monday 10th September, the object being to take steps for the appointment of a Pastor for the church!'

Again, events moved swiftly because:

'A special meeting of committee was held on 22nd October, 1934 the object being to make arrangements for the installation of Pastor Priestley'.

Albert Eric G Priestley, the first Pastor of Lisburn Baptist Church, was inducted on Lord's Day, 28th October, 1934. He was born in Belfast in 1904 and attended St Mary Magdalene Parish Church. His conversion took place at a mission in Belfast in April, 1927. After leaving his employment as a joiner in the shipyard in 1928 he went to America and worked with the Jewish mission in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Later that year he was baptized in a Baptist Church in New Jersey and, in September of the following year was enrolled as a student of the Moody Bible Institute, Chicago. After graduating in December, 1932 he became field representative for the American Board of Missions to the Jews. It was on a visit to Ireland in 1934 he was called to the Pastorate in Lisburn. In December of that year he was married to Miss Frieda D Koester in Milltown Baptist Church when Pastor James Shields officiated.

It is interesting to note that during his Pastorate a branch of the Women's Auxiliary was formed in 1938. The Auxiliary later changed its name to the Baptist Women's Fellowship. So, for sixty years the ladies of our church have met regularly to pray for and support missionaries at home and throughout the world. Fruitful gospel missions included those of Mr James McKendrick, a well-known Scottish Evangelist, in 1935 and Gipsy John Hawkins in 1939. There was great sadness in the church when Mr Priestley died at the early age of thirty-six on 7th December, 1940. He left a widow and two young children – one aged four and the other three. Pastor Priestley was a faithful Pastor, an

eloquent preacher and a man who loved the missionary cause especially amongst Jews since he had commenced his service for the Lord evangelizing them. He had scholarly gifts and ability and was proficient in Hebrew. I heard Mr Mark Kagan, a well-known Hebrew Christian and preacher, say on a visit to the Lisburn church that once on a visit here, he and Pastor Priestley sang a duet in Hebrew! His memory lingers in the hearts of the small number who remember his ministry in Lisburn.

The turning by the office-bearers to men who were not members of the Lisburn church was very commendable. One such was a Mr Ireland. I myself knew Mr EG Combe, WJ Chambers (an Alderman of the City of Belfast), JH Corbett and Pastor David Burrows. They were men of wisdom, business ability and, above all, men of faith. The independence of the local church is cherished by Baptists, Irish ones especially! , but there was no sacrifice of this principle in desiring advice and counsel from men of experience in church affairs. The term 'moderator' is not used among us, but in effect, the church at Lisburn had really appointed a 'moderator' in using men from outside the membership, to chair church meetings. It would be wise for young churches with inexperienced deacons to seek the help, and advice of such men as I have described, even to chair church meetings.

Pastor Priestley's early death brought sorrow to the church and his conscientious pastoral care was sadly missed. There was loving sympathy and concern for his widow and her two infant children. Although the membership was small and financial resources were very limited, the church endeavoured faithfully to sustain them in obedience to the Scriptural command, 'to visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction'.

'Those were days of national uncertainty and difficulty, being the second year of World War II. Food was scarce and rationed. Clothes rationing soon followed. Most necessities were scarce and difficult to obtain. Streets were unlit and it was forbidden to allow, even a chink of light to shine out of a window because of air raid precautions. These conditions and dismal war news made life extremely difficult – especially for those with young children. It is not surprising, then, that Mrs Priestley longed to return to America. She showed exceptional courage in making that hazardous journey across the Atlantic with two small children when ships were being sunk almost daily by

enemy submarines. This very moving account of her departure from Lisburn is included in the church Minute book:

'On Lord's Day morning, August 19, 1942, the members of this assembly presented to Mrs Priestley the wife of our late beloved Pastor, a little gift in token of the high esteem and respect the Saints held for her. Our Sister, believing it to be the Lord's will was going shortly to her native land America. The gift was handed over by Mr Coulter. Mrs Priestley replying (through tears) thanked the church for the gift. She also appreciated the Saints for the way which they had received her, though a stranger; saying also that it was hard to part with all. She could bring nothing with her but memories. This touching scene was brought to a close by our brother Samuel Sloan commending our sister and her children to the Lord's Grace'.

Alfred Olley

The need for prayer has always been stressed and so it is interesting to note that, on 15th January, 1941 it was decided to hold a prayer meeting on Lord's Day mornings from 11.00am. Happily, this godly exercise still continues, as well as another at 6.00pm; and another at 7.30am on the first Lord's Day of the month. Discussions and prayer concerning the pastorate led to the choice of Mr Alfred Olley who was inducted on 5th June, 1943. His term was very brief ending just two months later on 15th August. Pastor Olley tendered his resignation owing to ill health. It is recorded, 'The church could do nothing but receive this with good grace and so closes another chapter in the history of our assembly'.

External Relations

A noteworty event took place in September, 1943. This was the clearing of the debt on the building when the final instalment of £28 10s 0d accompanied by a thank offering of £10 0s 0d was paid to the Baptist Union of Ireland.

Some years earlier the church had severed its membership with the Baptist Union of Ireland but, in September 1943 this position was reconsidered. Careful thought over the following months led to a special meeting with

representatives from the Union on Saturday, 22nd April, 1944. The Minutes state:

'The Union were to understand that no interference would be tolerated in the local government of the assembly. They were also asked to define their attitude to the verbal inspiration of God's Word; do they teach it in their College and what steps have they taken to refute the charges brought against Principal Spurgeon by A[lfred] Olley?'

These questions having been put by Mr Samuel Sloan, the Minutes continue:

'A full and satisfactory answer was given to all and a lot of misunderstanding was cleared up after which our visitors hoped that the forthcoming May meetings would see Lisburn Baptist taking her place in the Union of Baptist Churches and thus help to present a united front to the world. Our friends also expressed their appreciation of the way in which they were received and remarked that in Lisburn they had been received more graciously than in any place they had hitherto visited'.

Afterwards, at a business meeting of the church, 'It was proposed by Mr Larmour and seconded by Mr Totten that we again enter the Union. All the members agreed with the exception of one who refrained from voting'.

The church has since remained in the Baptist Union of Ireland. A church meeting was held on 9th August, 1944 when approval for support of the Irish Baptist Orphan Society was given. This Society has continued to receive generous contributions from the church for its work of caring for widows and orphans in our churches and is deeply grateful for the long and regular assistance given by the church at Lisburn. The next church meeting was held on Saturday, 26th December, 1944 when it was unanimously agreed to support the Irish Baptist Foreign Mission and the Irish Baptist Home Mission. Now known as Baptist Missions with missionaries in Peru, France and Ireland the church is a wholehearted and enthusiastic supporter in spreading the Gospel of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in these countries.

Reaching out with the Gospel

Evangelism has taken a most important place in the witness of this church and many Gospel missions have been held. When the church met on Saturday 26th December 1944 at 4.00pm (note the time and date) the need of a mission was stressed and it was thought advisable that this should be conducted by Mr HH Orr who was an evangelist with the Irish Baptist Home Mission. Arrangements and obligations for the mission were accepted by the church and three hundred invitations were distributed throughout the district which was then less densely populated than now. There was blessing in the mission and it is joyful to record that fruit from the sowing of the good seed of God's Word by Mr Orr in the Spring of 1945 still remains with us.

Not only were special efforts made to spread the Gospel but also by the steady and regular distribution of 250 tracts every month. This was a commendable and worthy example to follow.

The Third Pastor

Although the membership was small the need and desire for a Pastor was keenly felt, but lack of funds stood in the way of proceeding in this direction. However, hope that this difficulty could be overcome was expressed at a church business meeting on 13th January 1946 when it was announced that a scheme was being prepared by the Baptist Union of Ireland to assist small churches by supplying their evangelists to take care of the work on occasions. It was agreed to write to the Union and ask their help in filling the pastoral vacancy.

In response, a letter from the Union was read to the church on Saturday 27th April 1946 offering the services of Mr Joshua Thompson (whom many of the members had previously heard) for a period of six months commencing June 1946. The appointment of Mr Thompson was approved and passed by the meeting when the need for special prayer and co-operation by the Members was impressed upon all present.

A meeting to welcome Mr Thompson to the Pastorate for six months took place on Saturday 1st June 1946. Pastor John Ravey presided and after a

hymn, prayer and reading from the Word, introduced Mr Thompson to the church with words of wisdom and advice to both. The Church Secretary, Mr Alex Totten on behalf of the church, welcomed Mr Thompson and gave him the charge, reading from 1 Timothy 4: 12-16. Mr Thompson replied briefly giving his testimony and call to the Lord's work The meeting was addressed by Pastor HH Orr who, in speaking from 1 Corinthians 3, contrasted spiritual Christians with carnal Christians and urged all present to avoid carnality in all its forms and to seek at all times to be spiritual.

When the six months ended, the Home Mission extended their period of support till the end of May 1947. Also, it was decided that the Pastor's salary should be raised by £6 per annum to £156. The church was asked to raise the full amount of the increase over the next six months (ie £3). Even allowing for the vast difference in the value of money today as compared with 1946, Pastor Thompson's commencing salary of less than £3 per week was pitiful. His appointment on a permanent basis, subject to the support of the Home Mission, was confirmed at a meeting on 16th February 1947. Special meetings to welcome Mr Thompson as Pastor were held on Lord's Day 18th and Monday 19th May 1947.

The Lord blessed Pastor Thompson's ministry of the Word and his pastoral care of the congregation. Attendance at the services increased to about sixty in the morning and eighty at the evening gospel services. At that time a common cup was used at the Lord's Supper and a second one had to be brought into use. It is interesting to note too that Deacons replaced a committee early in 1947 and that half-yearly business meetings were instituted. The Sunday School increased both in the number of pupils and teachers and our custom of holding anniversary services for the Sunday School began. Mr James Armstrong conducted a gospel mission in 1947 with much blessing and again we gladly mention that fruits from that mission still remain. Pastor Thompson drew up a Rule Book with hints to members and part of his work is incorporated in our present one.

The heavy duties falling upon Pastor FH Forbes as Secretary of the Baptist Union of Ireland as well as of the Home Mission, the Foreign Mission and the Orphan Society imposed a severe strain upon his health and the need of assistance was recognised. Pastor Thompson, whose gifts were evident,

was invited to become Assistant Secretary and at a meeting on 25th June 1949 informed the church that he would be assisting Pastor Forbes in clerical work in the office and also in spiritual ministry in the Churches. In September he announced that his ministry in Lisburn would terminate in three months. He succeeded Pastor Forbes who died suddenly in March 1952 and Pastor Thompson then served for twenty-five years as General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Ireland. A review of the year 1949 showed that thirteen members had been added, thus bringing the membership to forty-one. Pastor Thompson's Lisburn ministry is recalled with sincere thanksgiving to the Lord.

George F Blayney

Upon learning of Pastor Thompson's acceptance of the call to serve with the Baptist Union of Ireland, steps were taken immediately to avoid, if possible, a long pastoral vacancy. Not only were names of prospective pastors considered, but approaches were made to some to see if they would consider a call and, astonishingly, the house at 77 Warren Gardens, Lisburn was purchased as a manse. The price was £1,100, but, when it is considered that total weekly offerings at that time were less than five pounds a week, we must conclude that the deacons were men of strong faith in recommending the church to buy the house even though they had no idea as to when a pastor would occupy it or who he would be.

A special church meeting was held on 6th September 1950, when nineteen members were present. They agreed unanimously that a call to the pastorate should be given to Mr George F Blayney. The report of the church secretary for the year 1950 referred to these two notable events – the purchase of the manse and the calling of Pastor Blayney whom he described as 'one who will prove to be a tree of life in our midst'. (Proverbs 13:12). Mr Blayney, who since 1949 had been on the staff of the European Christian Mission, became the Pastor in Lisburn in January, 1951. Just over a year later, on 27th January, 1952 Mr Blayney tendered his resignation having accepted a call from the Ballymena church. After prayerfully considering all the circumstances he believed this to be the will of God.

During his ministry he arranged for the first Easter Tuesday conference which was held in 1952. These conferences became an annual and well attended

event for twenty-five years. The Minutes also record that, at a member's meeting held on 22nd November, 1951, after stating his convictions concerning who should serve at the Lord's Table, the church resolved that office-bearers only should do so. This has since been the practice in Lisburn. During his short pastorate, five persons were baptised and seven were added to the membership which stood at forty-seven when he concluded his pastorate on 27th April, 1952.

John A McCrea

Two important decisions were made at a meeting held on 26th February, 1953. The first was to sell the manse at 77 Warren Gardens. The other was to call Mr. John A McCrea to the pastorate. Mr McCrea's letter of acceptance was read to the church on Lord's Day 26th April, 1953 and his ministry commenced in September of that year. He came to Lisburn with a long and wide experience in the Lord's service having first served for eighteen years with the Belfast City Mission, then as Pastor of Kilkeel Baptist Church and as an Evangelist with the Irish Baptist Home Mission. He pioneered Baptist witness in County Fermanagh which led to the formation of Stonepark Baptist Church.

Pastor McCrea was an ardent evangelist with a passion for souls. He preached with uncompromising boldness and unwearied zeal and the blessing of the Lord was evident from the very commencement of his ministry. The following report on his first year in Lisburn appeared in the Irish Baptist.

Another milestone in the history of Lisburn Church was passed when the Anniversary and Thanksgiving Services were held on October 3rd and 4th, 1954. The services on the Lord's Day were conducted by the Pastor, the church being filled to capacity. On the Monday evening, Pastors HH Orr and J Irvine ministered with great acceptance to a large audience.

In thanking the office-bearers, church members and friends for their support and loyal co-operation, the Pastor gave a brief review of the past year. The year, he said, had under the guidance of God, been one of marked progress in every department of the work. He was glad to say that over thirty adults had professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as a number of

young people in the Sunday School and children's meeting. Twenty-five believers had been baptised and thirty-seven new members had been received into the church. This surely was the seal of God upon the efforts put forth in His Name and called not only for much thanksgiving, but also for much humiliation and rededication of all their lives to the Lord and His service. In addition to the weekly activities of the church, special missions were held in which Pastor Irvine of Dromore took a large share, and here again the Lord was pleased to bless and souls were saved. One of the most outstanding meetings of the year had been the Women's Bright Hour' a weekly Gospel Meeting under the auspices of the WA. Under God this meeting had been a great blessing to large numbers of women as well as a great asset to the church. 'Thanking God for all that is past we take fresh courage for the future and in His name are venturing into new fields of activities, including a number of cottage meetings, to be in the charge of our young people. Our motive in every effort is the glory of Christ in the salvation of souls, and that in a small way we might fulfil the Lord's commission to us, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that My house may be filled'.

God blessed the efforts of his servant in Lisburn and there were sad hearts when he announced that he had accepted a call to a Baptist Church in Toronto. As he reviewed the three and a half years of his Lisburn pastorate, he mentioned that, when he came, the membership was forty-six and had grown to one hundred and eight; a church hall had been erected, the church had become financially self-supporting and the Women's Bright Hour Gospel Meeting had commenced and was established. He declared, 'Surely the Lord has done great things'. His final services in Lisburn were held on Lord's Day 17th February, 1957. Some ten years later when the church was looking forward expectantly to his first return visit to Ireland the sad news of his sudden home call reached us. His ministry was honoured of the Lord and only eternity will reveal how many came to the Saviour and how others grew in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

John J. Baxter

Three months after the departure of Pastor McCrea to Canada the half-yearly church business meeting was held on 26th June, 1957 when the members considered the recommendation from the deacons 'that Pastor JJ Baxter should

be invited to take over the pastorate of the Lisburn Church'. The record states, 'The proposition was passed'. Pastor Baxter who commenced his ministry in Lisburn on Lord's Day 22nd December, 1957 continued until 30th October, 1968 before leaving to become Pastor of Memorial Baptist Church, Stratford, Ontario, Canada.

A Banbridge man, he prepared for the Lord's service at the Bible Training Institute, Glasgow and afterwards worked as an evangelist in England, Scotland and Ireland. Later he became Superintendent of a branch of the Railway Mission in Birmingham. Following these callings he pastored the church at Londonderry for ten years and, after that was pastor of the Magherafelt church before accepting the call to Lisburn.

Pastor Baxter loved the gospel and preached with fervour. As congregations increased, it was necessary to enlarge the original building by an extension at the rear measuring thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide. This was known as the Minor Hall and was used for prayer meetings, Sunday School and Bible Classes and by the Youth fellowship. When the present building was erected the Minor Hall was made into the church kitchen.

That Mr Baxter was a diligent pastor can be seen from a report showing that in one month he had visited 145 homes travelling mainly by foot. Since he never had a car he used his bicycle or public transport for pastoral and hospital visitations.

A Pastor with Foresight

It was largely due to Pastor Baxter's foresight that we now have our present building and car parking facilities. The need for a bigger meeting place was apparent but, it was he who saw that the site was too small for a more commodious building. So, when three houses on Longstone Street with their long gardens running down to our property came up for sale, he urged the church to purchase them. This was done in September, 1964. The following year when another adjoining house came on the market he again realised that the opportunity to purchase should not be missed so that one day a church building with a frontage to Longstone Street could be erected. Earlier still, in September, 1958 a substantial part of the ground which is now our car park

was acquired through his influence. Here we can see how the Lord has guided the church. Business men, banks and shop keepers had not the foresight of Mr Baxter and later, they would willingly have bought those four houses from the church at prices far in excess of what the church had paid for them.

Again, as we look back further still, the guiding hand of the Lord times can be discerned through difficult and discouraging times when some thought that the wrong site had been chosen at the beginning. The Minutes of a meeting held on 26th December, 1944 written by Mr Alex Totten who was then Secretary have this entry:

'The site on which the church is built was deplored by the committee but in the meantime nothing can be done about it'.

Then, in June 1945 he wrote:

'We were glad to know that the proposed road was to go ahead, Mr Coulter remarking that he felt quite relieved seeing he was one of those who had the church where it is; the way at last opening up'.

The development of Lisburn and surrounding district after the 1939-45 war, leading to its greatly increased population and travelling by cars, called for larger church premises together with adequate car parking facilities. Pastor Baxter should ever be remembered and his memory honoured for his wisdom in bringing the church office-bearers and members to grasp the chance to acquire the site even though so many years were to pass before the new building was erected. Sadly, it has to be recorded, unhappy divisions compelled Mr Baxter to tender his resignation on 1st September, 1968. A recital of the events preceding that day would be contrary to his written expressed wish that – 'we endeavour to forget those happenings, but not its lessons, and to seek true unity and humility born of God'.

The happenings were indeed sorrowful. As the only present church officer-bearer who was a deacon and church treasurer during the disruption, I want it to be known that no fault was found in the late Pastor Baxter's character, doctrine or Christian virtues. What lessons should be learned? Mrs CF

Alexander's hymn for children, 'We are but little children weak' teaches this lesson:

'When deep within our swelling hearts
The thoughts of pride and anger rise;
When bitter words are on our tongues,
And tears of passion in our eyes:
Then we may stay the angry blow;
Then we may check the hasty word;
Give gentle answers back again,
And fight a battle for our Lord'.

Solomon wrote, 'A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger'. (Proverbs 15.1)

Missionary Vision

Worldwide missions have always been of interest to Lisburn Baptists. Even when the church was struggling financially, missionaries and their work received support and prayerful interest. At present (September 1998) nine of our members are serving the Lord at home and abroad. Six former members entered the pastorate – Robert Trueman, Victor McWilliams, Harry Dowds, David Whitmarsh, George Baxter and Ivor Thompson. Mrs Delwynne Heron, now serving with Baptist Missions in France was 'brought up' in the church. This annual conference holds a precious place in the life of the church. The first of our annual Missionary Conventions was held on Lord's Day, 20th October 1957. These conferences have brought news of worldwide missions and have been blessed in providing generous support to all of the Societies which have taken part over the period to date of forty-one years. A glance at our missionary giving during the past three years was:

1995	£40,434	including to Baptist work	£21,155
1996	£48,174	do	£28,665
1997	£43,942	do	£27,277

A Long but Interesting Vacancy!

There was a lengthy pastoral vacancy from the end of September, 1958 until February, 1972. Even so, attendances at the services continued to grow and new members were added frequently. At that time, Lisburn had been designated by the Government as a growth area and the church benefited numerically by those who came to live in the new housing developments.

Mr Alexander Russell, JP, a founder member of the Portadown church and an ex-President of the Baptist Union of Ireland, who joined the Lisburn church shortly before the vacancy occurred, was recognised and received as Elder on 21st November, 1968. His long administrative experience and wise counsel were of immense benefit to the church especially as an expert chairman of church and office-bearers' meetings. He sometimes conducted the Lord's Day services and the mid-week prayer meetings when his ministry brought spiritual enrichment and uplift to the congregation.

Upon retiring as a colporteur with the Irish Baptist Home Mission after forty-three years of loving and devoted service, Mr HA Ferguson took up residence in Lisburn and joined the church. His deep spirituality and gentle disposition which were so evident, made him an ideal choice as sick visitor. He undertook this work with the conscientiousness and sincerity which characterised the life of this godly, Christian gentleman.

It is interesting to note that the very hearty congregational singing was supported by a very old American reed organ until 30th June, 1969 when a Praise Service was held to celebrate the installation of a Conn electronic instrument.

Meeting the Needs of Youth

Increasing numbers of children and young people brought repeated requests from parents for the provision of a uniformed Organisation of some description. The deacons gave serious consideration to this innovation and agreed that, since many of our young people were already enrolled in such organisations in churches of other denominations, and, that, as others intended to follow their example, it would be prudent to introduce a suitable

Organisation. Long and careful consideration of uniformed organisations in existence was made and discussions took place with known leaders in them. It became clear that the Campaigners had a solid Evangelical foundation requiring leaders who professed to be born again and, that the organisation's objects which were epitomised in its motto, 'UNTO HIM' would be admirably suited to our needs. A report was brought to the church at the half-yearly meeting on 28th May, 1969 which agreed that the Campaigners should be the uniformed Organisation. Then, at a special church meeting on 27th November, 1969 detailed information about the functions of the movement were outlined and also the necessary spiritual qualifications and dedication of those who should be appointed for this new venture. There followed an intensive programme of leadership training over the next few months. Prospective chiefs who were church members attended courses in our former church hall, at seminars and at group meetings before passing written examinations set by the Campaigners to show that they were qualified to undertake the leadership of young people. With some measure of nervousness, yet with confidence, our first Campaigner chiefs commenced their useful work in January, 1970. Large numbers of young people since then have been influenced by dedicated leaders in their weekly meetings and annual camps. We record our gratitude to those early chiefs and to all who have succeeded them and to those who now so enthusiastically lead our Campaigner Clans. Their reward is in knowing that some who have come through the ranks of the Campaigners are now faithful followers of the Saviour and, that others are in church membership.

The Search for Another Pastor

The need of a Pastor was continually in the mind of the church office bearers – especially so, because the deacons had undertaken the regular visitation of members and adherents. They were, therefore, closely in touch with the people and their needs. Much prayer and thought were given to know the will of the Lord before making a call to Pastor WL Hibbert on 9th June, 1970. After careful consideration Mr Hibbert believed that he should continue in the pastorate of the Castlereagh church in Belfast. Later that year a Gospel mission was conducted by Pastor William Mullan. Members and friends worked wholeheartedly in preparing for the campaign by door-to-door visitation with personal invitations over a wide area. The two week mission ended on 6th December, 1970. Two weeks later the church met again to

consider a call to the pastorate. The deacons proposed Pastor J Garrett, BA who was then pastor of the Dunseverick church. In March 1971 Mr Garrett informed us that, as he felt the Lord had still work for him in Dunseverick, he had to decline our invitation.

At the half-yearly church meeting Mr Russell said that the office-bearers were very exercised about the pastorate but, in view of the two previous disappointments, they wished to be wary. They were, he said, pursuing the question. Just three months later the church met again at a Special meeting on 28th September, 1971 when a call was made out to Pastor GAC Cardwell who was then serving the Lord in Windsor Baptist Church, Belfast. Several members in supporting the call said that they had been praying that the Lord would lead Mr Cardwell to Lisburn. It was, then, with great delight that the church was informed at the services on Lord's Day, 14th November, 1971 that Pastor Cardwell had accepted our invitation.

Gordon C Cardwell

Having been without a pastor for over three years, the church looked forward eagerly to February 1972 when the ministry of Pastor GAC Cardwell was set to commence. The first sermon of Pastor Cardwell's ministry was preached on Lord's Day morning, 6th February 1972 from the text: 'The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build' (Nehemiah 2:20). Although spiritual building was the theme of his first sermon as pastor, it was not long before it was recognised that a larger meeting place was needed to accommodate the increased numbers attending the services. When the half-yearly meeting was held on 20th June 1972, two ideas were considered: to extend the existing building or to erect a new one as soon as possible. It was clear to all and agreed that a new building was needed.

Let Us Build Again

Following upon this decision the next three years were spent in intensive and painstaking work in obtaining additional ground, the purchase of another house in Longstone Street, the preparation of site plans, the application for and obtaining of planning permission and many other necessary legal requirements too numerous, detailed and boring to be enumerated here.

However, a separate record of these important matters has been kept and they show the conscientious and earnest endeavours made to go forward with the erection of a building suitable not only for the pressing needs of that time, but also that future generations would have a worthy heritage.

A Building Fund had been in existence for some years and here it is appropriate that appreciation should be expressed to those who paid into it at times when a new building was like a dream. A legacy of £3,330 out of the Estate of a former member, the late Miss E McMillen, was received for the building fund in 1964, but when the church at last proceeded with plans to build, the total funds on hand amounted only to £8,880. Faced with the burden of heavy expenditure and slender resources, it was considered advisable to ask the church for an offering of at least £10,000 on Saturday 3rd and Lord's Day 4th November, 1973 as a pledge of support for the project. The amount received was £10,037.14 with promises of more to come!

Increasing congregations made seating arrangements difficult and uncomfortable. Chairs in the aisle and porch had to be used and then an entrance was made into the Minor Hall (the present kitchen) and this was used for extra seating. Those using this area were facing the wall behind the pulpit. So, mirrors were fixed at the doorway into it to enable them to see the preacher and, more importantly for him, to see them. Even this arrangement was only a temporary measure for the aisle was still used for seating. This led to the appointment of Mr Desmond Black and Dr J Cupples to consider a way out of the dilemma pending the time of erecting another building. Should we purchase a portable hall or again extend the existing building? These brethren recommended that the wall on the left hand side be demolished, the building widened and another aisle made. This work was done by enthusiastic voluntary labour by the men of the congregation working late into the evenings of the summer of 1974 and stimulated by the nourishing refreshments provided every night by the ladies who catered so tastefully and with an enthusiasm matching that of the men. When finished, the extension gave a welcome relief but not a solution to the accommodation problem. It did, on the other hand, become the present church hall.

At last, the day came in June 1975 when building operations commenced. The main contractors were again Glenabbey Building Works

(Kirkland Bros), helped by our voluntary workers who did so much, so willingly, so devotedly and so wholeheartedly. Their abundant labours are remembered gratefully as so much of the building is a tribute to their diligence in the Lord's service.

Cold print can never express, the delight of those who assembled on the forecourt of the completed building to await the opening service on the afternoon of Saturday 28th May 1977. Many friends came quite a distance to be present on this glad occasion, as did local residents and Christian well-wishers from other denominations. The joyful feelings were like those returning from captivity, 'we were like them that dream' (Psalm 126:1).

It had been the fervent hope of all, that the building would be opened free of debt, but, no sooner had building operations commenced than the nation faced an unparalleled period of inflation, when costs of materials and labour rose at alarming rates. The church was compelled to borrow from the bank for a short time when the rate of interest was 18% per annum. Members and adherents contributed generously and also gave interest-free loans which made a very great saving. These loans were cleared in 1981. The total cost of the new building amounted to £175,328.64.

Just over a year before the work was finished the church mourned the loss of its Secretary, Mr Edward Megaw, who died on 7th April 1976. He was deeply interested and involved in every department of the church and his great interest in life was the work of the Lord. He had been a deacon for many years, a Sunday School teacher, Missionary Secretary, a leader in the children's meeting and Church Secretary from 1968. His methodical leadership, sound judgment and careful attention to the sick were treasured by all, especially when the church was without a pastor. In recognition of these qualities the church appointed him an elder in January 1975. A capable and experienced engineer, his advice and wise counsel were invaluable in planning for the building which, in the over-ruling will of the Lord, he did not see completed.

An Expository Ministry

The text of that opening sermon of Pastor Cardwell's pastorate laid the foundation of his ministry of the Word. His expository ministry on Lord's

Days and clear gospel preaching held the congregations in rapt attention. His series of morning sermons included such topics as 'The Making of a Man of God', 'Joshua, the Man of Conquest', 'Great Certainties of the Faith', 'Christians in Crisis' (sermons on 1 Peter) and 'Into His Likeness'. Then the studies at the Wednesday evening Bible meetings took the hearers through detailed expositions of the Scriptures when they learned of 'Excellent things in Philippians', 'The Church at Prayer', 'Five Smooth Stones – 1 John' and 'The Church of the Living God'. Studies in the epistle of James, Paul's epistles to the Romans, Corinthians and Galatians and in other books of the Bible brought sound and profitable instruction in the great doctrines of the Faith. The evangelistic services were used by the Lord to lead many to Christ and baptismal services were held frequently. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was exalted in every sermon and Bible study.

Pastor Cardwell gave of his best and his God-given gifts were recognised not only in Lisburn, but also in all our churches, in several of which he conducted evangelistic missions. After serving in Lisburn for nine and a half years he believed that he should accept the call to the pastorate of the Newtownards church. He left our church at the end of June 1981 revered and respected as preacher, teacher, pastor and friend, but, above all, as a faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ and one led by the Holy Spirit.

James K McBratney

When the pastorate became vacant at the end of June 1981, it was the earnest hope and prayer of the church that the Lord would lead us clearly and early to the man whom He had chosen for this holy office. In considering their responsibilities in such a solemn and important matter, the office-bearers agreed that, as soon as they felt so guided by God, they should inform the church. Pastor JK McBratney was the preacher on Lord's day 21st March 1982 when considerable interest was expressed by many of our members and friends regarding the possibility of his becoming our new pastor. He was invited to conduct a series of Bible readings at our Wednesday prayer meetings during the month of June, when his rich, spiritual ministry and clear scriptural teaching so impressed all who were present, that, when the elders and deacons met in July, they believed that they should commend Mr McBratney for the pastoral care of the church. A special meeting was held on 17th August when

a clear expression of confidence in Mr McBratney was expressed. He was inducted to the pastorate on Saturday evening, 4th December 1982. The building was packed to overflowing with members, friends and well-wishers from far and near. Mr McBratney had been pastor of the Ballyclare church before coming to us and had served previously as pastor of the churches at Limavady and Bethel, Belfast.

Attentive congregations on Lord's Day mornings benefited from sermons taking them through great subjects such as the Life of Abraham, the book of Jonah, a series of ten addresses in which our Basis of Doctrine was expounded and devotional meditations on prayer and our Lord's cries from the cross. Mr McBratney was a faithful and earnest preacher of the gospel and his messages were full of entreaties to sinners to repent and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as well as warnings of the eternal loss of those who do not do so. On Wednesday evenings, Bible readings were given from Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians and the Feasts of Jehovah, as well as addresses on the Church and the great doctrines of the Christian faith. In all of these the Word of God was ministered reverently and sincerely.

Gospel Missions during Mr McBratney's ministry were conducted by Mr William Smylie from 19th February until 11th March 1984 and by Mr Harold Peasley and a team of helpers from Pretoria, South Africa in October 1986. Intensive preparations were made and door-to-door visitations by church members over a wide area were rewarded by exceptionally well attended meetings. This was especially so in the case of Mr Smylie's mission, when it was sometimes necessary to use the upper and lower prayer rooms to accommodate those who could not be seated in our main building. Closed circuit television enabled them to participate in the atmosphere of the marvellous services. A tent mission was conducted by Pastor McBratney at Ballymacash cross-roads in the summer of 1984 when he was assisted by members of the congregation. Following upon this mission an outreach team carried out door-to-door evangelism in this area weekly and distributed gospel literature. This led to the foundation of Emmanuel Baptist church on the Glenavy Road. Other members of the church helped with the formation of the churches at Lambeg, Crumlin and Moira.

Those who were present at the meetings conducted by Pastor Francis Dixon, the renowned former pastor of Lansdowne Road Baptist Church, Bournemouth, who was well known as a speaker at Keswick and similar conventions in many parts of the world, look back thankfully to his week of ministry with us in September 1984. Testimonies to the spiritual enrichment which that week of ministry of the Word brought to Christians have often been given. Sometime later we were gladdened when we learned from an applicant for membership, that she had been converted on one of those blessed evenings.

On 7th December 1986 Pastor McBratney announced to the church that he would be resigning as Pastor with effect from 31st July 1987 to work in a full time capacity with the New Tribes Mission. He said that this was something which had been exercising both himself and his wife for eighteen months and that it would be a major step for them in giving up their home and salary to go into a 'faith mission', depending on the Lord's people for their prayers and support. Mr McBratney preached the closing sermons of his pastorate on 26th July 1987 and a farewell service was held on the following Wednesday evening when he and Mrs McBratney received the thanks of the church for their labours amongst us and left with the assurance of our continuing interest in their work for the Lord wherever they might be sent to serve Him.

Some Notable Events

Friday 4th March 1988 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Lisburn Branch of the Baptist Women's Fellowship. A great rally was held to celebrate this Golden Jubilee. Ladies from many of the other branches joined with ours on this joyful occasion of thanksgiving and praise to the Lord. Three former pastors, J Thompson, GF Blayney and GAC Cardwell, with their wives, were also present and many links from previous years were reunited in happy recollections of fellowship and friendship. Mr Desmond Creelman, one of our missionaries in Peru, brought the closing address.

It was our happy privilege to hold services to mark the entery into the pastorate of two of our young men. Harry Dowds, who had come through our Sunday School and Campaigners and had served as a Deacon, accepted a call

to become pastor of Craigavon Baptist Church. After completing his studies at Lebanon Bible College he served as a children's evangelist with the Bible Club Movement. Our service of farewell took place on 19th May 1988. The following week, 26th May 1988, brought us together again for the joy of bidding our sincere good wishes to David Whitmarsh upon his becoming pastor of the Baptist Church in Cheddar, Somerset. David had trained at the Irish Baptist College after being in membership with us for some years. During that time he was an enthusiastic Campaigner Chief and a leader of our Young People's Fellowship.

In Conclusion

We close these brief glimpses of our history with praise God for his loving kindness and faithfulness to succeeding generations during the sixty-two years we have surveyed. When the first building was erected the text chosen to be written on the wall behind the pulpit and which adorns our present one was 'Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father'. If each church member crowns Him as Lord and if the entire church honours and glorifies Him, then we will bequeath a worthy heritage to future generations.

BACK TO THE FUTURE: MAKING SENSE OF REVELATION

by Hamilton I Moore

It may come as a surprise to you but it is a fact that many doubts have been expressed about the inclusion of the Book of the Revelation in the New Testament canon. The work has been regarded as sub-Christian, if not unchristian, in content and tone. These difficulties are not just a modern phenomenon.

Revelation, after early acceptance, experienced problems in being recognized as canonical, especially in the east.[1] Also at the time of the Reformation one notes Luther's comments, 'My spirit cannot accommodate itself to this book. There is one sufficient reason for the small esteem in which I hold it – that Christ is neither taught in it nor recognized'.[2] Again, Calvin passed over the book in eloquent silence in his exposition of the New Testament. In more recent times for many the book has been viewed as a frightening enigma.[3] Even Ladd in his well-known commentary on Revelation could write, 'Revelation is the most difficult of all New Testament books to interpret, primarily because of the elaborate and extensive use of symbolism. How are these strange, often bizarre symbols to be understood?'[4]

Anyone who has seriously looked at the book will identify with these comments. It is a neglected work in our circles and few have ventured in their exposition beyond the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2-3.

Should we be frightened off by the imagery and symbolism of Revelation and not, as John exhorts us to do, read it, hear it and be blessed (ch 1v3)? I intend first of all, to examine a number of recent approaches to the book of the Revelation and comment briefly upon them before expressing my own suggestions as to how we might endeavour to make sense of it.

RECENT APPROACHES TO REVELATION – A BRIEF HISTORICAL SURVEY

Excessive Emphasis and Unbalanced?

CH Dodd[5] claimed that the excessive emphasis on the future had the effect of relegating to a secondary place the elements of the gospel which are central to Christianity. For Dodd, the book's conception of the character of God and his attitude to man falls far below the level, not only of the teaching of Jesus, – which is said to reflect the new understanding of the infinite loving-kindness of our heavenly Father, – but also of the best parts of the Old Testament. Therefore, 'The God of the Apocalypse can hardly be recognized as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, nor has the fierce Messiah, whose warriors ride in blood up to their horses' bridles, many traits that would recall him of whom the primitive kerygma proclaimed that he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with him'.[6] Bultmann also adopted a similar stance, regarding the book as a 'weakly Christianized Judaism' in which 'the peculiar between-ness of Christian existence has not been grasped'.[7]

What should we make of these approaches? It can be stated that those who view the Book of the Revelation as 'too Jewish' or 'more Jewish than Christian' should remember the Jewish roots of Christianity and the fact that what distinguished the early Christian community from Judaism was simply the way the Christians understood that traditional hopes were coming to fulfilment in Jesus the Messiah.

Dodd may claim that the book's teaching falls far below the teaching of Jesus and the best parts of the Old Testament, but it should be remembered that in its judgement passages Revelation does exhibit a certain restraint when compared with other Jewish apocalypses, which detail the punishment of the wicked[8]. Even if many scholars hesitate to fully endorse Beasley-Murray's view that the judgement of the seals, trumpets and the bowls cover a short period in history,[9] the majority will see a great deal of recapitulation in these three series of judgements. Again, we should note that it is easy to lose sight of the fact that Jesus himself did not always just express words of love, but also at times warnings of judgement.[10]

The Judas of the New Testament?

Some will be surprised to discover that DH Lawrence also expressed his views about the Book of the Revelation,[11] He called the Apocalypse 'the Judas of the New Testament' and explained that while authentic Christianity claims salvation is to be completed hereafter, but is already present and tangible now (2 Cor 5v17, Col 3v1), Revelation seems intoxicated with the future – the hope of reigning in glory hereafter compensating the frustrated desire to reign now.

Lawrence finds in the book a vindictive harping on the torture and destruction of enemies (6v10, 14v11, 20; 18v20; 15v17-21), and claimed that the titles of God and of Christ in Revelation are always titles of power, never of love. He maintained that there are two kinds of Christianity in the New Testament – the Christianity of tenderness, focused on Jesus and the command to love one another, and the other focused on the Apocalypse, ie the undying will to power in man. So for Lawrence, the devil has slipped into the New Testament at the last moment, in apocalyptic disguise! 'Just as inevitably as Jesus had to have Judas Iscariot among His disciples, so did there have to be a Revelation in the New Testament'.[12]

Sweet[13] has responded to Lawrence's criticisms. As for the absence of a Christianity of tenderness, Lawrence has lost sight of the master image of the slain lamb, signifying the power of redemptive love. Again, he has also failed to grasp that the structure of the book makes the severity of chapters 6-20 subordinate to the pictures of creation and redemption in chapters 4-5 and of healing fulfilment in chapters 21-22.[14]

Pre-Christian?

A unique approach to the question of the Christian character of Revelation is found in J Massyngberde-Ford's commentary.[15] She maintains that Revelation is not primarily a Christian book. The authorship of chapters 4-11 originated in a trance-like revelation to John the Baptist, recorded by a disciple, before Jesus commenced his public ministry. Chapters 12-22 was written by a disciple of John in the mid sixties, who may or may not have been converted to Christianity. Chapters 1-3, 22v16a, 20b, 21 were added

later by a Jewish Christian disciple, who still retained the fiery, somewhat pessimistic outlook of his former master John. Therefore Massyngberde Ford places Revelation earlier than the gospels and most of the New Testament. It is 'a prophetic link between the Old and New Covenants, and prepares the way for the gospel'.[16]

The problem here is that there are clearly Christian statements and references to Jesus in the book, which many are not ready to explain simply as interpolations. Also the majority of scholars have not accepted Massyngberde-Ford's view that the lamb of chapter 5 is simply the unnamed divine-human Messiah of Jewish apocalypticism, with no direct reference to the triumph of Jesus and his sacrificial death. Jesus appears indeed to be the central figure in the Apocalypse and the determination of the future depends upon and issues from his enthronement and victory highlighted in chapters 4-5.

Persuasive Rhetoric?

ES Fiorenza, Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity school, Massachusetts, has produced an impressive number of articles on Revelation over many years.[17] In her most recent publication she acknowledges the difficulties many theologians and preachers have with Revelation's 'bizarre imagery and bloody content'.[18] The approach to Revelation which Fiorenza adopts can be described as involving 'rhetorical reading'. This 'rhetorical' approach for Fiorenza does not mean interpreting Revelation as 'mere rhetoric' or something which does not correspond to fact or truth. She proposes that 'rhetorical' be understood in its classical sense of 'the art and power of persuasion'.[19] Revelation should be understood as a dramatic poem to be read aloud, whose language is to be approached as apocalyptic, which is, for her, not predictive-descriptive language but mythological-imaginative language. It has been developed by John to persuade his audience to accept his prophetic interpretation of their situation.[20] It appears however, that for Fiorenza, when all is said and done, John's dramatic poem is only his interpretation.

Essential Truths or Timeless Relevance?

Another approach to Revelation has been an appeal to the value of its 'essential truths' or its 'abiding message' for today. For example, Hunter in his work, Interpreting the New Testament[21] suggests that John is involved in a particular historical situation and is sure that God is going to intervene catastrophically very soon, with the result that Rome's end and the world's end will come. For Hunter, John's prognostications were not fulfilled as he expected. Rome did not fall. Yet if the seer's lurid vision of the outpouring of God's wrath on Rome was not literally fulfilled, his promises of divine succour for the stricken church were realized in the essential truths which he proclaimed through his apocalyptic imagery. Beneath that imagery the seer can emphasize that (a) all history is divinely controlled; (b) the world is a scene of great conflict between good and evil; (c) in the end of the day God will finally cope with evil bringing it to an end; and (d) heaven is the most real place of all! According to Hunter, this 'modern understanding' of Revelation makes us value it higher than the Reformers did.[22]

A similar approach is adopted by Sweet,[23] whose criticisms of Lawrence we have already noted. He asks whether this book, if based on the assumption, evidently wrong, that the world was about to end, has any further importance or value? In reply, he likens Revelation to the writings of modern ecologists. Their predictions of disaster may fail to come off, but their basic perceptions of disaster may still be sound. Therefore, 'In spite of its timebound imagery and unfulfilled promises of Christ's return, Revelation may still be saying things which are of timeless relevance to the world's health'.[24] Not all New Testament scholars will be content just to defend Revelation's place in the canon by affirming simply its 'essential truths' or some 'timeless relevance' for today.

A Perceived Social Crisis in the mind of John or the Community?

Biblical studies which examine the social situation reflected in a particular work have become quite popular in recent years. This 'sociological perspective' has also been adopted in the study of the book of the Revelation. In addition, several recent discussions seem even less concerned with the historical or social realities of the situation as with John's perception of it. We

have already mentioned Fiorenza,[25] who sees the communities to which John wrote facing persecution in the reign of Domitian (AD 95), but focuses more on the 'rhetoric' by which the author seeks to persuade them to remain faithful. Others are not so certain that actual persecution was even happening at the time. Collins[26] can speak of a 'perceived crisis' in the writer's own mind. Although, admittedly, she does suggest that the situation may not be all that different from that in 1 Peter ie, the conviction, from present experience that there were more and greater trials still to come.

Thompson in Apocalypse and Empire[27] clearly concludes that the crisis is only in the mind of John and his community, which he sees as a 'cognitive minority' far from representative of Christians generally in Asia Minor. This minority saw the main body of Christians who conformed to Asian society as compromisers, while the Jews were a synagogue of Satan. Ramsey Michaels[28] also takes a similar approach. He acknowledges that we have all known individuals in our own time who lead quiet and peaceful lives in prosperous suburban communities and yet can speak constantly of 'spiritual warfare' or 'attacks of Satan' and the like, but suggests that most of us would be reluctant to think of John as such a person. However, he continues, 'When the Revelation is stripped of actual historical references we are tempted to conclude that it is merely the expression of a mood or an eccentric world view and is not about anything'.[29] We should, however note that he also acknowledges that there is always the possibility, disturbing to some, that a 'naive' approach to Revelation may be right after all.[30]

It is difficult to accept that this book is only about the expression of a mood when one sees the claims the author makes for the origin of his visions. They are God-given, through Jesus Christ (1v1) via an angel and in the Spirit (1v10; 4v2; 17v3 and 21v10). The conjunction of God, Jesus Christ and his angel has, as Beasley-Murray explains, the effect of according an unheard-of authority to the content of John's prophecy or 'perceptions'.[31]

In this context we should mention Stephen Smalley's recent work on Revelation, Thunder and Love.[32] He also focuses to a large extent on the Christian community in Asia Minor. This community is seen as beset with theological and ethical problems to which Smalley believes the apostle John gives an early response, before the composition of his Gospel or the Johannine

Epistles. He seems able to explain any reference to a 'vindictive tone' in this book, which he sees for example in Rev 18, as John's own reaction to his Patmos experience. 'Such rage would be in line with the Psalmist's hatred of God's enemies (as in Ps 58), and the holy anger of Jesus when he cleansed the temple (John 2v12-22)'.[33]

MAKING SENSE OF REVELATION

Having surveyed recent opinion we must now adopt a more positive approach in seeking to arrive at an understanding of the Book of Revelation. I wish to bring to you four convictions I have about the book itself which are all important if we are going to make sense of it.

(1) Revelation is Christian Through and Through.

In support of the true Christian nature of the Book of the Revelation I wish to refer to the excellent contributions made by GR Beasley-Murray on the subject.[34] He examines the supposed sub-Christian nature of its Christology. its eschatology and its doctrine of God, which we noticed was said to obscure the apostolic gospel, lying at the heart of the New Testament. In considering its eschatology, he compares the portrait of the Messiah as a lamb in the Jewish apocalyptic work, Testament of The Twelve Patriarchs (2nd cent BC), with that in Revelation chapter 5. In the Testament of Joseph (ch 19) we have in fact two Messiahs, one from Aaron and another from Judah, a lamb and a lion. The lamb arises to destroy the mighty nations and bring deliverance to Israel by way of orthodox conquest in battle. It has nothing to do with sacrifice. but is the young champion of the Flock of God. In Revelation 5 the two figures of the lamb and the lion are fused together and unlike the lamb in the Testament of Joseph, John's Lamb 'stands as it had been slain', ie it has been slaughtered but lives again. Since Exodus typology is common in the Book of the Revelation, it seems clear that John intends his readers to recognize here also God's Passover Lamb – in 5v9 the Lamb ransomed men to God. The Warrior Lamb has thus conquered by accepting the role of Passover Lamb and so has made possible a second Exodus. For Beasley-Murray this transformation of the orthodox viewpoint of apocalyptic cannot be exaggerated. 'It is more than the change of an apocalyptic figure into a Christian symbol for the Saviour. The very nature of eschatology and salvation has been transformed in this

change of concept of the Messiah'.[35] The eschatology of Revelation is proclaiming that the long awaited deliverance that initiates the new age has already been achieved!

For Beasley-Murray also the Christology of Revelation is 'very lofty'.[36] Worship is offered to the Lamb such as belongs to God alone. He is Alpha and Omega (22v13), mediator of creation (3v14) as of redemption (ch 5) and of the final kingdom (19v11ff), which is the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ (11v15). Again, the doctrine of God in the Revelation should not be viewed by itself, but rather in the light of the Christology, soteriology and eschatology presented in the book. The God of creation (ch 4) is also the God of redemption (ch 5). It is God in Christ who delivers mankind and God in Christ who judges mankind.

For Beasley-Murray, Revelation's unfolding of the judgement of God has often been misunderstood. Although, as we have mentioned already, not all will be as confident of this particular point, for him, the three series of messianic judgements, seals, trumpets and bowls, present from three different aspects a single, short period of judgement in history. Most however will be happy with Beasley-Murray's further insight that the brief period in Revelation of whatever length, ought to be seen as a repetition of Israel's experience in Egypt. Antichrist is another Pharaoh, who resists God and brings judgement on himself and those associated with him, like the plagues of Egypt. But, as in Exodus, the crucial event is not the plagues, but the redemption which brings deliverance.

These arguments which Beasley-Murray has presented make a strong case for seeing the true Christian nature of Revelation. Its purpose will not only have been the encouragement of the saints in their dark hour, but, for him, the bringing of men to their senses (9v20) and to belief in the gospel (14v6), that they might share in the blessings of Christ's redemption (ch 5) and future glory (ch 21-22) – a truly Christian book.

(2) In Revelation, the victory which makes the purposes of God sure, has already been achieved.

Kümmel[37] examines the Apocalypse of John as an apocalyptic and prophetic book. In a masterly way, he outlines how the Christ event has meant Christian modification to the apocalyptic view. As others have, he finds many links in Revelation with this genre, but stresses that 'at more than one point the seer of the Apocalypse frees himself in a characteristic way from the scheme of apocalyptic literature and sketches an historical picture of quite a different sort from Jewish apocalyptic'.[38] Some notable differences are the fact that Revelation is not a pseudonymous book. John writes under his own name, he presents what he has seen, not secret wisdom allegedly from primitive times. The book is intended for a large circle and its literary framework, a preface (1v4f) and conclusion (22v21) is reminiscent of the epistolary form of much early Christian literature. However, it is in its view of history that the Apocalypse contrasts even more sharply with the Jewish type. What we have in Revelation is 'a total recasting of the apocalyptic view of history out of the Jewish into the Christian mold'.[39] The apocalyptic view of history has received a new substructure through the historical appearance of Jesus. The apocalyptic character of Revelation is distinct from the normal pattern in Jewish apocalypticism where, for example, first century works like IV Ezra or 2 Baruch were penned as if by their original heroes. Here in Revelation there is no look back into the past or predictions of the future written after the event or as Kümmel put it 'no forward view out of the fictional past into the present. For John, the point of departure for his eschatological hope is rather the belief in the saving act of God in Jesus, and in his redemptive work which signifies victory'.[40] In the light of this, we must acknowledge that while apocalyptic has been strongly influential in this book, it has experienced significant modification because of its presentation of Christ's appearance or God's intervention in world history in him. The apocalyptists looked forward to the end of the age for deliverance and blessing. John stresses that this deliverance has already been achieved in Christ.

Morris[41] also acknowledges that with its interest in end-time events, its symbolism and the revelations made through angels, Revelation has generally been classed as an apocalyptic book. Yet he sees a different emphasis here. Apocalyptists were normally very pessimistic about this age, with the present

world dominated by evil. John however, while recognizing that there will be an outbreak of increasing satanic activity in the last time, still sees history as the sphere in which God has accomplished his redemption. 'The really critical thing in the history of mankind has already taken place, and it took place here, on the earth, in the affairs of men'.[42]

These are vital insights from both Kümmel and Morris. It is so important to grasp the fact that the lamb has already been victorious and all future history flows from this. John wishes to assure the threatened church that it is not Rome which rules, it is God who rules (see 4v2, where a throne stood in heaven), in fact, it is the Lamb who rules, for he has taken the book out of the right hand of him who sits upon the throne (5v7). The Lamb will execute the future purposes of God for the world. Revelation is an optimistic book and the message is that God's purposes are sure and cannot be overthrown.

(3) In our interpretation of Revelation we must get 'Back to The Future'.

This is where we should start in our approach to Revelation. It was common in the past in seeking to interpret this work to outline four main approaches. Those who adopted the Historicist approach sought to find throughout the book the entire history of the church until the return of Christ. The Idealist view avoided having to find any such historical fulfilment in the symbols of Revelation and saw only a symbolical portrayal of the spiritual cosmic conflict between the kingdom of God and the powers of evil. The Futurist interpretation viewed the seven letters as successive periods of church history followed by the rapture of the church as John is caught up into heaven in chapter 4v1. The rest of the book is future and leads up to the millennial reign of Christ, the judgement and the end of the world. Finally, the Preterist view understood the book as a 'tract for the times' written in response to the persecutions which God's people were experiencing. The beast was imperial Rome and the Asian priesthood promoting the worship of Rome was the false prophet. The book proclaimed that God would intervene, Christ would return, the beast would be destroyed and the kingdom of God would be established. The fact was that God did not intervene, Christ did not return and Rome was not overthrown.

Many today would suggest that there may very well be elements in all four views which are useful in interpreting Revelation. However it would be important to grasp clearly that the book should be read in the light of its own time and the particular situation of the Christian community under the cruel might and power of the Emperor and Rome. The author's purpose is to give a prophetic interpretation of the difficult situation of the church in the end-time from the perspective of the eschatological future. The real point here is that to begin to understand Revelation one must be transported back to John's day and see him prophetically addressing the threatened church as to what will happen in the future. Thus the people of God are being made aware how God will undertake for them, since the future of the world is in his hands. Rather than compromise with the Roman powers, which some may have been advocating, as the letters express, the Lord calls for faithfulness unto death (eg Rev 2v10). Therefore, in understanding Revelation we must seek to get 'Back to the Future', back into John's time and see what God has revealed about the future from that perspective.

It is possible then that the best approach to Revelation is a blending of the preterist and the futurist view. A moderate futurist view will find no need to only see the church in chapters 1-3. The seven churches cannot be only a forecast of the seven ages of church history. They were actual churches in a threatened situation to whom John wrote and the church as the people of God may also be seen in the later chapters. The primary purpose of John throughout the whole book is to call God's people to be faithful until the final outworking of God's purpose and the end of the world.

(4) The Book of the Revelation is True Prophecy.

Richard Bauckham's approach[43] to Revelation has also been very helpful. For Bauckham John is a prophet himself with a fresh revelation to contribute (1v1-4; 22v6,9). He was convinced that God's purposes in history were consistent and therefore His great acts of salvation and judgement in the past could be understood as models for what He would do in the future. John could therefore echo the Old Testament imagery and prophecies, for example, of the exodus or the fall of Babylon or Tyre. This does not mean that he was ignorant of their original reference to the great pagan powers contemporary with the prophets who pronounced these oracles. But he saw Rome as the

successor to Babylon in its political opposition to the church. For John, since the evil of such cities was echoed and surpassed by Rome, God's judgement would certainly also fall upon her. As Bauckham explains, 'The city which the prophetic cap fits must wear it', and adds further, 'This principle allows prophetic oracles to transcend their original reference, without supposing that somehow when Jeremiah referred to Babylon he meant Rome'.[44] Again, as Bauckham explains, Old Testament prophetic promises frequently exceeded the fulfilment. In other words, what was promised was not fully realized in the return from exile and in this lay the roots of John's further visions as to how they would be fulfilled.

Bauckham also makes clear with regard to the prophecies of Revelation that the book still has a kind of eschatological excess. This is seen in the use of universalistic language which was not fully relevant at the time, since the church was not yet truly universal. It is however this language which gives it power to reach as far as the *parousia*.[45] For Bauckham, we can only understand this if we grasp the true nature of biblical prophecy. Biblical prophecy always both addressed the prophet's contemporaries about their own present and the future immediately impending for them, but it also raised hopes which meant that the readers were able to transcend their immediate relevance and continue to direct them and later readers to God's purpose for the future. This is also the case when we come to the Book of the Revelation.

Should the question be asked as to whether we can accept that Revelation is true Christian prophecy, I would agree with Bauckham that this matter cannot simply be answered by the judgement of individuals or groups. The use of the book as scripture by the church over many centuries in a wide variety of historical situations vindicates, for him, its ability to convey the Word of God to God's people today.[46]

It is time, in the light of our discussion to turn afresh to the book of the Revelation. Even if we will still have difficulties with not a few of the details of the book, the overall message – the Lord God omnipotent reigns – and its subsequent call to faithfulness is vital and no doubt will become increasingly more so, in the age in which we live.

Let me close by giving to you a proposal which needs serious consideration about how we should understand the structure of the book.

Proposal on the Structure of The Book of the Revelation

At the end of the seven seals in 8v5 we have peals of thunder, loud noises, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

After the seven trumpets (11v15) in 11v19 we have the same flashes of lightning, loud noises, peals of thunder, an earthquake and heavy hail.

The seven bowls end in a similar fashion in 16v18-21 with flashes of lightning, loud noises, peals of thunder and a great earthquake such as had never been.

So the same formula occurs in all three. This suggests that it is the same final judgement which is reached in the seventh of each of the three series.

In 4v5 the repeated formula, flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of thunder is a theophany confined to heaven. Now it becomes a theophany resulting in judgement upon the earth. Therefore, the formula really anchors the divine judgements in chapters 6-16 to the vision of God's rule from the throne.

With each of the first two sevens we get a preliminary glimpse of the final judgement which is then expanded in the last.

The seven seals are linked to the seven trumpets by 'overlapping or interweaving'.[46] Notice that the lamb opens the seventh seal in 8v1. There is silence for about half an hour in which God hears the prayers of the saints, to which His response is the judgement of the earth in 8v5. Between the reference to the silence and the offering of the prayers of the saints, in 8v2 John has already introduced the seven angels with the seven trumpets in preparation for 8v6.

When we look at the seven trumpets and the seven bowls, the seventh trumpet (11v15-19) is separated from the angels with the bowls (15v1) by chapters 12-14. But the link is maintained by the first part of 11v19 and 15v5-6, ie the temple being opened. The second part of 11v19 we have already noted is expanded in 16v17-21. So despite the intervention of chapters 12-14 the trumpets and the bowls are connected.

The three series of seven judgements have a four plus three structure. In the seals the first four judgements are the horsemen. The last three have a shorter introduction. In the trumpets (8v2, 6-11v19) the last three are emphasized more – we have a three-fold woe (8v13) between the fourth and fifth trumpet which are then noted in 9v12 and 11v14 signalling their sequence.

It is clear that the first two seals and trumpets have an intercalated passage between the sixth and seventh judgements. They have no literary links between them but are parallel, which is seen in the way that each deals with the issue raised at the end of the sixth judgement in each series (6v17; 9v20-21). In each case the interruptions delay the final seventh judgement and are both concerned with the people of God. In the first (7v1-17) the subject is about protection from the judgement; the second (10v1-11v13) the prophetic witness of the people of God. John also has established literary links between both intercalations and the vision of the victorious lamb of chapter 5 – compare 7v4-14 with 5v5-14 and 5v2 with 10v1.

It is also possible that the open scroll which the strong angel holds in 10v2 may be the same scroll as that in chapter 5. The passage in which John eats the scroll (10v8-10) is modelled on Ezk 3v1-2, the second part of the account, the first part of which (Ezk 2v9-10) formed the OT basis for the description of the scroll in 5v1. Bauckham states, 'The scroll which has been opened by the Lamb through the opening of the seven seals (6v1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8v1) is then brought down from heaven by the angel for John to consume, so that he may reveal its contents as prophecy (10v11). He does so initially in 11v1-13, more fully from chapter 12 onwards'.[47]

Commentators have been reluctant to see both scroll's as one because the scroll in ch 10 is referred to as a *biblaridion* or, 'little scroll' three times and that in ch 5 as *biblion*, or 'scroll'. But it has been suggested that words

which are diminutive in form may no longer carry diminutive meaning in Revelation and in 10v8 John may actually have used the shorter term as well. In support, we should note the literary link in the strong angel already mentioned and also that both passages allude to Ezekiel 2v8-3v3.

The scroll, opened so that its contents can be seen, will not refer to the Torah or the OT since these are known. There is no indication that it is a legal document or last will and testament, or marriage contract or a bill of divorce. From the allusion to Ezk 2v9-10 it must contain some revelation of the divine purpose. Rev 10v5-7 also alludes to Dan 12v7 and supports the view that here we have a revelation of the final period of world history in which God will establish his kingdom upon the earth.

The strong angel with the rainbow about his head, who comes from heaven and stands astride the land and the sea, reminds us again of ch 4 and a creator of land and sea who has bound himself to his whole creation (symbolized in the rainbow, 4v3), who now reveals his purpose for that creation. The scroll therefore which the angel brings can contain the revelation for John through the angel from the lamb who has received it from God in ch 5. This corresponds to the opening words in 1v1-2 and 22v6. It also makes clear that the contents of the scroll extend to 22v5.

This is a very useful suggestion concerning the structure of the book of the Revelation and one needs to come to a decision whether to accept it or not simply because it will affect our whole interpretation of the book.

Footnotes:

1 For an outline of these difficulties see WG Kümmel, Introduction to the New Testament, p 469ff, and RH Mounce, The Book of Revelation, (Grand Rapids, 1977), p 36ff.

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3 JJ Megivern, 'Wrestling with Revelation', BTB, 8 (1978), p 147.

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5 CH Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching and its Development, (London, 1936), p 86ff.

6 Apostolic Preaching, p 33.

7 R Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, p 175.

8 M Himmelfarb, Tours of Hell: The Development and Transmission of an Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature, (Philadelphia, 1983), p 68ff.

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10 Eg, see Matt 8v11f; 11v5-24; 12v28-32, v38-42; 13v10-17, v24-30,v47; 18v1-9; 25v1-13, v14-30, v31-46.

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12 Lawrence, p 14.

13 JM Sweet, Revelation, (London, 1979).

14 Sweet, p 48f.

15 J Massyngberde Ford, Revelation (New York, 1975), Anchor Bible Series.

16 Massyngberde Ford p 37.

17 See ES Fiorenza, The Book of the Revelation: Judgement and Justice, (Philadelphia, 1985) for a collection of her essays.

18 Revelation: Vision of a Just World, (Edinburgh, 1993), p 2.

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24 Sweet, p 4.

25 See n 18.

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28 R Michaels, Interpreting the Book of Revelation, (Grand Rapids, 1992), p 49.

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30 Michaels, p 49.

31 GR Beasley-Murray, The Book of the Revelation, (London, 1974), p 51.

32 SS Smalley, Thunder and Love, John's Revelation and John's Community, (Milton Keynes, 1994).

33 Smalley, p 144 n 137.

34 Beasley-Murray, 'How Christian?' p 275-284 and The Book of the Revelation, (London, 1974), p 23-29 and p 125-126.

35 'How Christian?' p 279.

36 'How Christian?' p 282.

37 Kümmel, Introduction, pp 458f.

38 Kümmel, p 459.

39 Kümmel, p 461.

41 L Morris, Apocalyptic, (London, 1973).

42 Morris, p 93.

43 R Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of the Revelation, (Cambridge, 1993)

44 Bauckham, Theology, p 153.

45 Bauckham, Theology, p 156.

46 R Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, (Edinburgh, 1993), p 9.

47 Bauckham, Climax, p 13.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ADULT BAPTISM IN THE REFORMATION PERIOD

by Joshua Thompson

The meaning of baptism for the Reformers, both Protestant and Radical, is not easy to approach systematically. This is because the great controversy which raged over baptism – its significance and its proper subjects – reflected every facet of the struggles of earnest men to understand the implications and to consolidate the gains of solefideism. Further complications intrude when political structures, social factors and personal temperaments are taken into account.

I. Infant or Adult Baptism

The Protestant Reformers, (even though solefideism demanded personal faith), retained infant baptism because of their belief in the continuity of the 'Old Church' 'They saw their own Churches as standing in the succession of the ancient church and the medieval papal church... Consequently they did not see their work of reform as deliberate and premeditated separation from the 'Old Church'... the problem with the 'Old Church' was primarily the papacy and its perversion of Christian order and doctrine... [along] with the Catholics [the Protestant Reformers] continued to profess belief in the one, holy Catholic church which had existed from the beginning until their own time – a continuity attested by unbroken adherence to the ancient creeds and by the presence of the Word and Sacraments – especially baptism – in it'.

The Radical Reformers rejected infant baptism not only as a denial of solefideism, but chiefly because infant baptism confused state, church and society, and because it was not found in Scripture. Luther's view of Scripture in this context was that he upheld freedom, development and tradition, and tended to reject the imitation of Christ. He wrote, for example, [in Against the

Heavenly Prophets] that though Christ had walked on water we need not try to follow him in that.

The Radical Reformers believed that the 'Old Church' had fallen into apostasy and could no longer be regarded as 'the true church'. Part of that apostasy was the practice of infant baptism which (to them) was a clear denial of apostolic doctrine and practice. Luther justified infant baptism as 'the child's appropriation of faith' from its sponsors, Bucer as 'a guarantee of godly training', Zwingli and Bullinger as the Christian parallel to Old Testament circumcision.

The Schleitheim Confession of 1527 condemned infant baptism as non-apostolic:

'The Great Church said it was necessary to baptise children lest they die in sin. But if children were in mortal sin in their natural state before the age of understanding would Christ have said, 'Suffer the little children to come unto me...' (Lk 18:16)?... children were restored by Christ's sacrifice from the depths of original sin, and remained so until able to distinguish between good and evil'.

The 'Old Church' had compromised the purity of the Church by taking into membership generation after generation of children who had not reached the age of understanding, which was contrary to the apostolic practice of baptising those who repented and believed when they heard the gospel.

An intermediate position was adopted by some Reformers who opted to postpone baptism beyond infancy, that is, that children should not be baptised before they were instructed in the faith. In 1525 Hubmaier, from Waldshut, described to Oeclampadius in Basel, his local practice of consecrating infants and postponing their baptism in order to bring the sacrament into line with the principle of solefideism, (though he was prepared to baptise an infant if the parents insisted!). Oeclampadius rejected Hubmaier's practice on the ground that the faith of the parents or church 'suffices mysteriously' for the child. Zwingli thought the withholding of children from baptism (like rebaptism) was tantamount to subversion of church and state.

The Protestant Reformers rejected adult baptism, or rebaptism, not only because it asserted a discontinuity between the 'Old Church' and the Primitive (or NT) Church, but also because they recognised in it a significantly different view of the nature of the Church. The Swiss Reformers and Luther did differ on the doctrine of the real presence in the Lord's Supper, but were united in holding the principle of the unity of church and society. 'To divide the church was to rend society'. They considered that the Anabaptist move to a separate church life threatened the religio-social unity of the Protestant Reformation. The political structures of the Swiss cantonal system and the Saxon electorate depended on a unified citizenry with a common religion, hearing a common moral and social teaching from the pulpit. Social and religious controls operated together in support of 'the state' and, conversely, 'the state' or 'the magistrate' used their secular power to uphold the religion of the people and to enforce uniformity of faith and practice. It was a comfortable doctrine which accommodated the schism between the Catholic and the Protestant Reformed Churches, but it was intolerant of any 'alternative religion' within territorial boundaries.

The Radical Reformers, for their part, advocated adult or believer's baptism, not only because they rejected infant baptism as illogical and unbiblical, but also because the restitution of 'the true church' required the separation of the Church from the world. They rejected the 'corpus Christianum' as a valid structure for society. Infant baptism was the cement of that church-state relationship which had (in their view) caused the Church to lose her identity and function in the world, and to collapse into unreformable apostasy. The restored Church must be, and remain, separate from the state; religion must be free from state control; and membership of the Church must be voluntary and uncoerced. The unity of the restored Church would be seen in terms of people who had made a true and genuine commitment to Christ, who proved it by their lifestyle, and who were gathered in a church fellowship separated from the world. That unity would be ensured by guarded entry to the Church through believers' baptism and by mutual discipline backed by the ultimate sanction of 'the ban'. The question, 'Was this concept of the Church drawn out of Luther's view of a hidden church within the visible?' is an interesting one.

Baptism, undeniably, was a critical issue because it was the most obvious dividing line between the two opposing systems of state church and gathered church. It was their refusal to baptise infants which branded the Radicals as anti-social revolutionaries, because it threatened to undercut the very structure of society. Furthermore, it was the issue that gave the authorities of both church and state grounds for suppressing the radicals by force.

II. Baptism and 'the pure Church'

In a curious conclusion to his doctoral thesis on 'The Hermeneutics of Peter Rideman', RC Holland says, 'the Anabaptists advocated the right condition, separation of church and state, over the wrong practice, adult baptism, while the Reformers maintained the wrong condition, church-state unity, promoting it with the right practice, infant baptism'.

This seems to argue more for Holland's paedo-baptism and American culture rather than his historical appreciation. His second conclusion is more apposite, when he says, 'Had the Anabaptists not been so intransigent about the pure church, the Reformers might not have been so vicious in their persecution'.

Peter Rideman himself stated baldly, 'All baptisers of children have forsaken the church and community of Christ and separated themselves from the same'. With reference to Mk 16.16 he comments that it is 'a pure tomfoolery to baptise children before they have believed'. Leonard Schiemer, an elected preacher of Austrian Anabaptists, who was executed in 1528, put the same point quaintly, 'A child', he said, 'should not be baptised any more than an envelope should be sealed in which there is no communication'.

Here again, the radicals attacked a central doctrine of the Protestant Reformers. Luther expounds Mk 16.16, 'He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved', as God's promise which faith appropriates, and argues that unless this faith is present or is confessed in baptism, baptism is meaningless.

Thus Christ says, 'He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved: he that believeth not shall be damned'. He shows us in this word that faith is so necessary a part of the sacrament that it can save even without the sacrament;

for which reason he did not see fit to say, 'He that believeth not and is not baptised..."

So far, Luther has actually expressed the radical position. Also in a passage on "Vows' (in the same tract), he says, 'It is simply foolish and stupid for parents to dedicate their children, before birth or in early infancy, to 'the religious life' or to perpetual chastity... this can by no means be termed a vow'. One might ask does not the same logic apply to infant baptism?

In fact, Luther taught that the efficacy of infant baptism lies in the baptised living in the faith expressed in that baptism:

'It is not baptism that justifies or benefits anyone, but it is faith in the word of promise ('he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved') to which baptism is added'.

However, he still feels the need for some guarantee that faith is present in infant baptism and so he falls back on the notion of vicarious faith, 'Infants are aided by the faith of others, namely, those who bring them to baptism'.

He is careful to stress that 'the effect of baptism depends not so much on the faith or use of him that confesses it as on the faith or use of him that receives it'. In making the claim that subsequent faith appropriates God's promise made in baptism, Luther turns Mk 16.16 on its head and leaves it open for his radical opponents to point to multitudes in the Church who had received baptism with no evidence of subsequent faith.

The 'mixed multitude', the Christians and the seeming Christians in the visible Church, appeared to Anabaptists to be a damning indictment of infant baptism. Multitudes, like envelopes sealed without messages, had been baptised without faith. They had been assured of their salvation and their place in the Church by baptism, whereas only faith could bring the sinner into a right relationship with God through Christ the Saviour. For radicals 'the Old Church' was no Church; infant baptism was no baptism. So, the Anabaptists argued and insisted that 'the true Church' was not some invisible entity, but the visible saints gathered and disciplined on the apostolic pattern, as they understood it. It was not 'the Old Church' reformed from within through

the Bible, as the Protestant Reformers believed, but the primitive apostolic Church reconstituted out of the Bible.

The Anabaptists were 'primitivists' in religion. They were, they believed, not establishing something new but aiming to recover something old and essential, that is New Testament church order. They idealised the Church of the New Testament and hoped to achieve a partial restitution of its pattern with the belief that in the future God, by an eschatological act, would restore the Church to its pristine purity. In 1525 when Hubmaier passed through Augsburg on his way to Moravia he found Denck and his conventicle ready to constitute themselves as 'the reformed church among whom the apostolic order would be fully restored by believers' baptism'. This simplistic view ignored the defects apparent in the New Testament Church (vide I Corinthians); but it did provoke violent retaliation from both Catholics and Protestants in defence of the 'Old Church'.

III. Baptism and Persecution

The radical leaders, Denck and John Hut, distinguished three kinds of baptism – by the Spirit (the inward covenant), by water (the outward covenant) and by blood and anguish (martyrdom). This view of suffering and martydom as a baptism had a New Testament origin in the passion-saying of Jesus recorded in Mk 10.38 (Cf Matt 20.22; Lk 12.50). There Jesus speaks of his sufferings and death in terms of 'a baptism'. In the waves of 'vicious persecution' which overwhelmed them, the Anabaptists understandably (as did the Early Church) identified their sufferings with those of Jesus at the hands of his enemies, and used his analogy of baptism to describe their 'fellowship in his sufferings' (Philipp 3.10).

IV. Baptism and Covenant

Radicals made some use of the fact that Jesus was baptised when he was about thirty years old. When Zwingli contended that there was no instance of rebaptism in the Bible, Blaurock and Grebel pointed to the action of the apostle Paul in rebaptising the disciples of John the Baptist at Ephesus (Ac 19.3,5). Calvin denied that they were rebaptised, and argued that the statement, 'They were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus' meant – '... the baptism

of the Holy Spirit, in other words, the visible gifts of the Holy Spirit,... given by the laying on of hands... There is nothing repugnant to this interpretation in its being afterwards added, 'When Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them'. In this last sentence is described what the nature of the baptism was.'.

These and similar uses of Scripture by both sides were trivial and unimpressive, but were indicative of the Reformers' common concern to authenticate their positions from Scripture.

Perhaps the most serious attempt by Zwingli to provide a biblical defence of infant baptism was his equation of Christian baptism and Jewish circumcision under the Abrahamic covenant. Calvin developed this connection in his elaboration of a covenant theology. Zwingli argued in his Of Baptism (1525) that water baptism was a covenanted sign to be administered to children 'born within the covenant' by which he meant children of Christian parents. Just as Jewish male children were circumcised on the eighth day after birth to mark their participation as born Jews in the covenant between Yahweh and Abraham, so children of Christian or seeming Christian parents were to be baptised with water as a sign that they had been born within the covenant of grace.

Luther (as above) taught that faith was confessed in baptism and was crucial for subsequent living as a Christian: 'We should be even as little children, newly baptised, who are engaged in no efforts and no works, but are free in every way, secure and saved solely through their baptism'.

The radical reformers – and here George Blaurock may serve as an example –saw believers' baptism as an open act of repentance from former sins, as an affirmation of a new-found faith, and as a sign of admission to the church of visible saints. The Hutterite teacher, Peter Rideman, stated this view of baptism in succinct language:

'Since children are not born of God after the Christian manner, that is through the preaching of the word, faith and the Holy Spirit, they cannot be baptized in the right way. For baptism is acceptance into the Church of Christ. Now since all who are born of Adam partake of his fellowship, should they

desire to be embodied into the Church of Christ, they must be born of Christ in the Christian way; that they may be accepted in the right way, which was committed to his Church by him... Whoever now is to be born in Christian wise must... hear the word and believe the same, that when his faith is sealed with the Holy Spirit he may be truly accepted into the Church of Christ'.

The radicals' rejection of infant baptism in a sense may be seen in terms of Paul's rejection of circumcision in the flesh.

The covenant of grace, in Rideman's view, is 'a covenant of the knowledge and recognition of God' and baptism is 'the bond of a good conscience with God'. Here Rideman is following Luther's translation of 1 Pet 3.21 where he renders 'the answer of a good conscience towards God' (KJ) as 'the covenant of a good conscience with God'. The covenant of grace on this view was between 'a conscience purged from dead works by the blood of Christ' and 'the living God' (Heb 9.14) – a covenant of the knowledge and recognition of God. To hear the word, repent of sin and be born of the Spirit (called baptism in the Spirit) were experiences dramatised in baptism, which was a confession that the candidate in believing the gospel had died to sin and his old life (repentance) and had become alive to God and to walk in newness of life (the new birth). In other words there was an unbridgeable gulf between the Radical and Protestant Reformers.

Ironically, Luther's covenant *(bundesgenossen)* became 'a major constitutional-eschatological term fraught with significance for the whole Anabaptist movement'.

V. Adult Baptism and Mission

The doctrine of adult baptism had another dimension. It was seen as an integral part of the Great Commission of the risen Jesus to his disciples (Matt 28). Luther argued that the Great Commission was intended for the apostles alone and was fulfilled by them. This was a natural interpretation for those who held a territorial church concept which, by baptism, claimed all the citizens as church members. Their reforms were carried through by legislation rather than evangelism. They saw the church's task of evangelism in terms of inducing people, if need be with the aid of the secular power, to live up to their baptism.

The Radicals, by contrast, held that the Great Commission was Christ's mandate for all time to the Church to preach the gospel worldwide and make disciples of all nations. Disciples would attest their repentance and faith and commitment by baptism. This view engendered among the Anabaptists a concern for the salvation of the lost and led to sustained evangelistic activity.

VI. Adult Baptism and Schism

Klassen argues that the charge of schism against Anabaptists, made by Protestants in the sixteenth century, sticks only if Protestants were prepared to admit their own schism from Rome. If Protestant secession from Rome is justified on the ground of Catholic intolerance then, similarly, Anabaptism separation may be defended on the ground of both Protestant and Catholic intolerance. Separation, Klassen sees quite reasonably, as a natural consequence of an intolerant age – 'It was the basic assumption of the sixteenth century that there was only one truth' – an assumption held by Catholic, Protestant and Radicals alike, which made each intolerant of the others. It is interesting, as Littell shows, that where a tolerant spirit like Philip of Hesse predominated it was possible to heal schism. Through the peace-loving Bucer, Philip initiated a partially-successful policy of reconversion among Anabaptists. Bucer said of Michael Settler who was tortured and burned on 21 May 1527, 'We do not doubt that Michael Settler, who was burned at Rottenburg, was a dear friend of God, although he was a leader of the Anabaptists, but much more skilled and honourable than some'.

VII. Adult Baptism in England

The two strands of Baptists in England emerged from Puritan Separatism with only indirect links with continental Anabaptism, and from what Burrage designated as 'independent non-separatist Puritanism'. The General Baptists arrived at their understanding of believers' baptism by logical deduction from the concept of the gathered church, during exile in Amsterdam under the pastoral care of John Smyth. The Particular Baptists originated in a secession from the famous 'Jacob' church in Southwark, London. They, unlike Smyth's group, retained their Calvinistic doctrines. The London Baptists, as Parnell has shown were prominent in the radical politics of the city for the period of the Barebone's Parliament. Many Baptists served in Cromwell's New Model

Army which was to provide Baptists with an opportunity to spread their beliefs and influence to Scotland and Ireland in the 1650s. With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 Baptists with other Dissenters and Catholics were severely restricted once more.

To conclude. While the rite of Baptism was common to all Christendom, (except for 'the spiritualists' who had no use for baptism or the Lord's Supper), it was the interpretation of the meaning and subjects of baptism that was determinative in the Reformation period, and we may be grateful for those who saw with clarity the doctrine of believers' baptism, and rejected the almost universal practice of infant baptism.

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BOOK REVIEWS

by Robert Dunlop

PROPAGATING THE WORD OF IRISH DISSENT: 1650—1680

Kevin Herlihy (ed) (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 1998). In two editions cased at £IR30 and in paperback at £IR11.95.

Collections of essays contain an in-built possibility of becoming a 'turn-on' to browsers and serious readers. The treatment meted out in this anthology falls into the category of careful research. Written up with a sure touch. The book, of 137 pages, is the fourth of a series, the forerunners being The Irish Dissenting Tradition, 1650-1750; The Religion of Irish Dissent, 1650-1800; The Politics of Irish Dissent, 1650-1800.

The presentation is satisfactory and all seven chapters carry their own internal emphasis and interest quota. For some, a book with a cut-off date of 1800, is incomplete with only passing references to the Methodists. Mr Wesley's people were certainly propagators of the Word, in both preaching and singing and the early chapels were. Frequently called 'preaching houses'. A strange omission.

On the other hand, the inclusion of the Baptists is welcome and throws considerable light on the development of an educated ministry in this strand of Irish Nonconformity.

Personally, I found the two most informative and stimulating chapters to be 'Singing the Word in Irish Dissent' by Raymond Gillespie and Ruth Whelan's article on 'The Huguenots and Anglican Liturgy'. This comment is

not intended to downplay the important insights of Terence McCaughey in his chapter dealing with the implementation of the Irish language by the Synod of Ulster, or the equally fascinating examination of Communion Sermons in Munster from the pen of Katherine Meyer.

In an eloquently argued piece Ruth Whelan opens up the world of the Huguenots who settled in Ireland at the end of the 17th century. She investigates the worshipping habits of the French incomers, especially in relation to Anglican liturgy and deals with the vexed question of conforming Huguenots, some of whom worshipped in the Lady Chapel of St Patrick's. Cathedral. Professor Whelan identifies some of the bonding agents which attracted some Huguenots to the Established Church – a Reformed liturgy, the appeal of the sermon, use of the French language and political considerations. She shows that the majority remained faithful in exile to the polity and rites of their Reformed tradition occupying 'something of a middle ground between the largely non-liturgical form of the Presbyterians and the elaborate liturgical and ceremonial form observed by the Established church'.

Raymond Gillespie's 'Singing the Word in Irish Dissent, 1660-1701' is a stimulating examination of the place of singing in the Free Churches. With some exceptions 'the singing of psalms and hymns was part of the culture of dissent', not only in public worship but in family devotions. He picks up the contribution of Tate and Brady to Irish hymnody and quotes the Precentor of Christ Church who recorded in 1679 that congregational singing in the Church of Ireland was 'sometimes full of ungrateful jars, discords, squeaks, screeches, roarings etc'. Gillespie thinks the Dissenters weren't much better!. As to the thinking which under-pinned congregational singing it is suggested that it might have been an 'emotional release from the darker side of the Calvinist sermon'. More significantly, Dr Gillespie sees the use of the Scottish Psalter of 1650 as doing two things – universalising the particular, linking the world of the seventeenth century with the elect nation of Israel, and, particularising the universal. by 'adapting the universal truths of religion to the particular circumstances of the singers of the word'. (p 29). Anglicans and Dissenters evinced considerable similarity in developing a theological and devotional hymnology and the pioneering work of Dublin Presbyterian minister Joseph Boyse is well registered in this study. His Sacramental Hymns first appeared in Dublin in 1693 and were intended to interpret the sacraments experientially.

In addition his Family Hymns had both a devotional and social dimension. Boyse was a leading member of the Society for the Reformation of Manners, and he saw his hymns as 'a means of giving the rising age an early tincture of seriousness and piety'.

The material in this chapter offers a way into many tributaries, leading into the place of hymns in worship and Christian thought and not least, today's emphasis on subjective songs with repetitive lines. Gillespie notes that sleeping in meeting house was a problem often addressed by dissenting denominations, One of the lesser advantages of hymn singing is that it helps to keep worshippers awake whether they happen to be Anglicans or Dissenters!

The two other chapters in the book deal with the 'Literary Practice of Dissent' in which David Hall details the treatment of the Bible as a 'speaking book' and the commitment of dissenting writers to 'replicate the transforming power of the Word' in their words thus to advance the glory of God and be of service to His people.

A final chapter by Elizabethanne Horan is an excursion into the little explored world of early Irish Baptists who established an Education Fund in Dublin in 1698. The author discusses how the library disclosed an on-going debate among Baptists on the place of the minister in the life of the gathered congregation and the place of education in ministerial formation. She concludes, 'As late as 1770 Baptist congregations were still riven by internal dissension on the subject of the education of ministers. Until Baptist ministers could successfully convince their congregations of the importance of the education of ministers for the dissemination of the Word, Baptist educational initiatives were doomed to failure'. (p 132).

The entire collection is a worthy contribution to the study of Irish Nonconformists in relation to their self-understanding, their contribution to theological and devotional life and their place within the surrounding cultural and religious atmosphere of Ireland's past.

THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

(Oxford University Press, 1997). Price £70.

The publication of a literary work of almost 2,000 pages containing over 6,000 entries from over 80 contributors, deserves the status of a landmark event. This is a high-quality production of encyclopaedic proportions, which updates and expands the original Oxford Dictionary of 1957.

It carries substantial entries spanning the thought and developments across the centuries, reflecting theological variety and diversity. The expertise of the main editor, Dr EA Livingstone, who, with the late FL Cross, was involved in the 1957 edition, has ensured the sort of editorial continuity which yields an abundant literary harvest.

Dictionaries are by definition reference volumes designed to impart the maximum amount of information within the scope of limited space. They usually follow an alphabetical order and are thematically bountiful. Readers will not be disappointed with either the range of subjects or the style of treatment in the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. Here is distilled theology, precise and clear; historical biography, succinct and accurate; descriptive analysis, stimulating and informative. Careful research has brought the contributors into territory where their expertise is hospitably enabled. The end-product is a verbal mosaic, colourful and inviting.

Few subjects of interest to those with a theological bent are left out of this highly contemporary work. All the major churches, sects, cults and religious communities are treated. The reader can access helpful information on subjects and movements as diverse as patristic thought, the Nag-Hammadi papyri, the Amish people, Black churches, the ordination of women, canon law revision and Freemasonry.

Pastors, students, teachers, historians and spiritual enquirers will find perusal of this dictionary a rewarding experience. The volume seems expensive, but at less than fourpence a page it is more than good value. More than a book – a little library – and a worthwhile investment.

IRISH BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY REPORT TO ANNUAL ASSEMBLY 1999

The programme of meetings for the past year included a lively paper, at the Annual Meeting, by Pastor WJK Byers on 'Some Irish Baptist Evangelists' which earned a round of applause from the audience. We were the guests of the Lisburn Church for the September meeting attended by over fifty people who heard from Mr JT Murray a well-prepared and detailed review of the origin and development of the Baptist witness in the thriving town of Lisburn. Mr Murray prefaced his paper with a racy account of Lisburn in the early 'Twenties'! In December Dr J Thompson gave a paper on 'The Significance of Adult Baptism in the Reformation Period' which was well-received. At the March meeting we introduced an experimental venture into the realm of theology with a stimulating paper by the College Principal, Dr Hamilton Moore on the topic, 'Back to the Future: Making sense of Revelation'. These papers and other articles of interest appear in the Society's Journal.

Windsor Church, Belfast, has proved a popular venue with the members. We are indeed grateful to 'Windsor' for granting freely the use of their church hall and facilities.

The cataloguing of archival material in the Society's care continued, but slowly, through the year under review.

Andrew Reid is well-advanced with his research towards a definitive history of the Irish Baptist Foreign Mission for publication. His work is being supervised by Dr Maurice Dowling as the topic has been approved by Queen's University, Belfast, leading to the award of an M Phil degree. The joint IBHS/IBC sub-committee is grateful to the Baptist Missions Board for a grant towards the project.

Special topics in preparation for the year 2000, include 'The Local Church in the 21st Century', 'Changing Patterns of Worship among Irish Baptists', and 'The Importance of Baptist Principles Today'.

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