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A table of contents for the *Irish Baptist Historical Society Journal, new series,* can be found here:

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Editor: Joshua Thompson
BA, D Phil (Oxon)

Volume 8 (New Series)
2000 - 2001

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CONTENTS

Editorial	5
Narrowers of the Narrow Way: Edward Cooney and the Cooneyites	7
'Christ not a Patch'	34
The IBFM History: The Sources and Their Implications	~~38~~ 51
Book Review	49
Annual Report to Assembly 2001	50

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- Andrew Reid is serving with his wife Ruth on the staff of Baptist Missions. Currently, they are in Spain on their first assignment. A son of missionary parents and grandparents Andrew has followed in their footsteps.

Editorial

This issue of the Journal contains a medley of articles which we hope will inform and inspire our readers.

The authoritative paper on the Cooneyites by Norman Shields aroused interest when it was read at a Society meeting. Baptists are latecomers to county Fermanagh, and they experienced the influence of Edward Cooney and his followers in the area. Few will realise how widespread the Cooneyites became. It is of interest that a Baptist church is located in Mullaghmeen, one of the centres of Cooneyism.

Although some of the language and sentence construction in 'Christ - not a Patch' sounds quaint to ears in the twenty-first century, it is a captivating testimony to the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of sinners. Although one hundred and fifty years have passed since its publication, it is apposite to our times when in Ireland there are many who are searching for spiritual reality. William Sloan Eccles was a successful evangelist who understood the power of the gospel and preached it in dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Andrew Reid's paper on writing the history of the IBFM reflects the careful and comprehensive character of his thesis and his book (reviewed elsewhere in this issue). There was a justified sense of achievement and satisfaction which held the attention of the audience.

At a members' meeting in March 2001 the secretary was unanimously elected President of the Society in succession to the late Dr H D Gribbon. Dr Thompson will continue to service the needs of the Society until a new Secretary is appointed.

Edward Cooney and the Cooneyites

by Norman Shields

Introduction

Widely regarded as the 'Secret Sect' the Cooneyites are hard to assess objectively. They do not commit their doctrines or practices to print so leaving us dependent on second-hand information, which is sometimes rather out of date and/or unreliable. An early document sometimes still quoted is 'The Cooneyites or Go-preachers', by WMR, an article in a book called ***Heresies Exposed***, ed. Wm. C. Irvine. This was published in a series of editions, enlargements and reprints in India and the US from 1921 to 1946.

Since the 1960s several publications that come from folk with insider experience of life in the movement have appeared. Those I have used include:

1) ***The No-Name Fellowship*** by Carol Woster, Great Joy Publications, Breda Centre, Belfast, 1988

Woster, a Norwegian, became involved with the Cooneyites in the United States and again when she returned to live in Norway. She left the movement in November, 1986. While her English is good, sometimes her phrasing is rather unusual.

2) ***The Life and Ministry of Edward Cooney, 1867-1960*** by Patricia Roberts, Enniskillen, 1990.

3) ***Selected Letters, Hymns and Poems of Edward Cooney*** by Patricia Roberts, Enniskillen, 1991.

Roberts, who writes as an admirer and follower of Cooney, provides us with considerable insight into the movement that is widely known by his name.

4) **'The Invisible Church'** by Keith Crow, an unpublished Master's Degree Dissertation submitted to the University of Oregon in 1964.

Crow provides a description in sociological terms of what he calls 'a large primitive Christian sect'. His grandparents were Cooneyites and when he wrote in 1964 his mother was still a member.

He says that he had attended their meetings in his childhood and had access to letters and other papers going back to 1913. In preparing his dissertation he had discussed the group at length with his parents and other relatives and had attended some meetings to refresh his memory (p.4). His work gives insight into the movement in the US up to 1964.

Crow died in 1981 and his dissertation is only available on Inter-Library Loan through a university. It may not be removed from the library of the receiving university

5) ***Incidental references to Cooney and the Cooneyites in other works.*** When cited a reference will be included in the endnotes.

1. Early History

1) Its Origins

(1) William Weir Irvine

William Weir Irvine was born near Kilsyth in 1863. He had a conversion experience under the ministry of John McNeill, the renowned Church of Scotland evangelist. He became an evangelist (or 'pilgrim') working with the Faith Mission and conducting evangelistic missions in the Irish Midlands in the late 1890s.

J Arthur Hynes, a Methodist minister from that area, while acknowledging that later developments changed the picture, pays warm and unre-

served tribute to Irvine's early ministry. He indicates that through that ministry in Borrisokane, Co. Tipperary, he himself had received a call to become a minister. He says that many remarkable conversions took place under Irvine's ministry and adds, 'he was without question a man 'full of the Spirit of wisdom'. I have listened to many an evangelist since then, British and American, but none to surpass him for sheer spiritual power of utterance.' [1]

Things quickly changed, however. 'A new spirit,' Hynes continues, 'gradually crept over Mr. Irvine's pulpit ministrations. He commenced to depreciate the work of all the Churches - Methodism not excepted. He described all ministers as 'the Devil in black clothes' and advocated two doctrines that were alien to Methodism, 'the baptism of believers by total immersion and the perseverance of the saints.'[2] The Methodist Conference then withdrew its permission for Irvine to use their premises and so forced him and his associates to hold their meetings in homes that were made available to them.

Soon Irvine seems to have adopted a negative reaction to a developing bureaucracy in the Faith Mission. This apparently gave district superintendents, of whom he was one, oversight of missions and Prayer Unions, which were local groups designed to provide fellowship and give regular follow-up to converts. He also thought that the mission's organisation was vitiating its 'faith principles' and seems also to have been out of sympathy with the then dominant Holiness teachings of the Mission. [3]

For three or four years Irvine and some of his colleagues remained loosely associated with the Faith Mission. However he was gathering round him a group of at least a dozen men of like convictions who formed the nucleus of an organisation independent of the Mission. JG Govan, then leader of the Edinburgh based Mission, visited Ireland and though, acknowledging the earnestness of the independent group, had to make it clear that his mission was not responsible for them. [4]

Hynes comments: 'to me it was all very tragic, for I can think no evil of William Irvine, believing him to have been to the end a thoroughly sincere, albeit, from our point of view, a sadly mistaken man of God.' [5] One can't help wondering if things would have been different, if the Methodists in Ire-

land and the leaders of the Faith Mission in Edinburgh had handled things in a different way. Maybe, however, Irvine was the type of man who always did his own thing and who would not submit to any leadership however wise or benign it might be.

(2) Irvine and Edward Cooney

In August 1897 Irvine was joined in an evangelistic mission in the Methodist Church at Nenagh, County Tipperary, by Edward Cooney from Enniskillen. That mission was apparently highly successful and one writer, John Long, quoted by Roberts, called it a revival and said that it 'was the origin of 'the Go preacher fellowship.' He also said, 'Irvine was rather severe on Christians but very merciful to sinners and most successful in leading them into the experience of salvation through Christ. He was known to preach for five hours at a time and retain the interest of his audience (sic!).' [6]

Cooney was born in 1866 into a Church of Ireland family and was converted at the age of 17. He worked as a commercial traveller (in our day a 'rep') for his father's Enniskillen business and first met Irvine at Borisokane, Co. Tipperary, earlier in 1897. He began to see himself as a freelance evangelist and to believe that the all the churches had wandered from the faith and practices of the first Christians.

Cooney wrote of Irvine and himself having been 'drawn together as brothers in Christ each claiming liberty to follow Jesus as we received progressive light from God by the Spirit.'[7] 'Progressive light' in that sentence seems to indicate that the two were claiming a prophetic gift by virtue of which they received and would continue to receive new revelation. He saw Irvine as a prophet raised up to call his followers in the new group 'out of Babylon', by which term was meant the churches of Christendom.

Both men sought to live by what they thought were New Testament patterns, particularly those set out in Matthew 10. They made that passage normative for their work and insisted that others follow their example. What they did not seem to realise is that our Lord's instructions to his twelve disciples related to one specific short-term mission. There is no indication in Matthew 10 that the details were to become an obligatory pattern for all future missionary activity.

Carol Woster, citing facts from Doug and Helen Parkers' book, *The Secret Sect*, says that at their first convention in 1903, held on the farm of a William Gill some 25 miles from Dublin, Irvine insisted that their followers:

- reject certain specific Christian doctrine and traditional worship
- be ascetic
- oppose worldliness

believe that they alone were the rightful heirs of ancient Christian tradition

At the close of the convention those present took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. It seems that Irvine and probably Cooney favoured celibacy. It was also insisted that

- only those responding to Irvine and his workers were saved
- converts be taught that they are exclusive they are 'in the truth' or 'on the way' and
- must cut all church connections.[8]

Clearly a cult had come into being.

Interestingly at a first convention in the US in 1906 and in the movement's activities in Australia in the same period it was maintained that the group had begun with the earliest Christians. The sect's beginnings in Ireland were not mentioned.[9]

In the early period Irvine was the movement's 'pope', but the two men soon became recognised as co-leaders. However Cooney, who, according to Roberts, was the more charismatic figure, gradually became more popular. As early as 1903 or 1904 the movement had became known to many as 'The Cooneyites'.

From 1909 onwards Irvine seems to have become jealous of his colleague. However in 1913 they were still together and both addressed thousands of their followers gathered for a convention held on the farm of John West at Crocnacrieve, near Ballinamallard, in Co Fermanagh.[10]

In 1914 the two finally became estranged and, after what seems to have

been a moral lapse, Irvine was told by his senior colleagues that he could no longer lead the work. Roberts says, 'the more Irvine sought position, the more he lost the power. Pride led to his downfall.' Another factor was his weakness for women, as a result of which his senior colleagues told him he could no longer occupy a position of leadership in the fellowship.[11]

Irvine, who by then had travelled round the world seven times in the cause of the new movement and had been in the United States on several occasions, returned to Scotland. In 1920 he went to Jerusalem to await the Lord's return and remained there till his death in 1947 at the age of 84 and still a single man! He seems to have commended himself to British soldiers in the Holy City during World War 2. One wrote a fulsome appreciation which appeared in the *Sunday Post* and was copied by an Enniskillen newspaper. One paragraph is worth quoting:

'He greeted nearly everyone he met with a smile and a word of encouragement. And they felt the better for meeting him. You knew at once there was something remarkable about the man.'[12]

Cooney writing after Irvine's death in 1947 spoke of 'William's defeat' and of his own efforts to help his former and now fallen colleague. Apparently, however, they maintained some contact and Irvine even invited Cooney to join him in Jerusalem. Cooney"s reply was that when his beard grew again, as it was when he first met him, he would be glad to work with him but not till then! Cooney, who always wore a beard, regarded it as indicating the receipt of divine revelation. He said that Samson, shorn of his hair found that God had departed from him. [13] Clearly he was telling Irvine that the same fate had befallen him!

Cooney's father, for whom he worked, had disinherited him in 1901 because he had left the Church of Ireland. He had then given up all interest in business, given his money to the poor and set out to preach depending on God to move the hearts of others to supply his needs. He literally took no money, no food, no extra coats etc. Some years later (25 April 1907) he wrote of having given away his bicycle, 'I saw it was better to give the bicycle I had away, and now I get the use of a saint's one on the same terms as Jesus got the use of the colt.'[14] He regarded Matthew 10 as the pattern for

preachers in every age. The words, 'as you go preach' (v.7) became the basis of his world-wide travels.

Roberts quotes an early worker in the movement, Alfred Magowan, who described the motivations of the founding fathers thus:

'We set out to form a brotherhood where all would be equal. We wanted to break from all tradition and become a people neither Catholic nor Protestant, with no regulations, no authority, no machinery or human control, to be free to serve God and make people free like ourselves. We put all worldly ambition behind us, none of this world's satisfactions or regards held any attractions; we had no theology to propound, no congregations to please; we saw ourselves as workers and not bosses.'[15] Cooney, in particular, maintained these ideals or most of them throughout his long life. Others, as we shall see, have tended to neglect or reject some of them.

One by-product of these emphases was a vitriolic campaign against all the clergy, Catholic and Protestant. For example, at a convention in 1908 Cooney said:

'Some people imagine the Devil is horrible to look at Not at all. The Devil always comes in the most attractive form he can possibly assume. Probably he would put on a clerical collar and assume the holiest tone of voice. People wonder why we say that Spurgeon, Moody and Wesley are not in heaven. We say that these men are not in heaven because they did not walk the way Jesus walked.' [16]

Cooney spent many years outside Ireland concentrating mainly on London (England), Australia, New Zealand and North America where his main centres were in the West (California and Washington State) and in Alabama. It is clear that he kept up an extensive correspondence with disciples in these places and that there were nuclei in all of them throughout his 50+ years of itineration. He died at Mildura in Victoria, Australia, on June, 21, 1960 at the age of 94.

2) Its growth

It is somewhat surprising to find that this Irish sect soon had world-

wide tentacles! Cells were formed in England and in some European countries in the early 1900s.

Irvine Weir (not the same person as Weir Irvine) took 'the Jesus Way' to North America in 1903. Keith Crow maintains that in the early 1960s there were between 300,000 and 500,000 members in the US alone.[17] He indicates that he was aware of members throughout Europe, Asia and Africa, people from whom his grandparents had received letters.

Crow also alludes to a possible origin of the movement in Europe, probably Great Britain but also affirms that the members with whom he was in contact indignantly denied an Irish origin. He then transcribes the full text of WMR's article in *Heresies Exposed* and says that while some older members remembered having heard of Irvine and Cooney they did not regard them as founders of their movement because they thought it had no founder other than Christ.[18]

Crow maintains that 'The Church', as he calls the movement, didn't reach the western United States till around 1910. In support he quotes William Mann, who argued that the sect started in Alberta between 1910 and 1914 (Wm. E. Mann, *Sect, Cult and Church in Alberta*, University of Toronto Press, 1955, p. 15).[19] Apparently there were a lot of converts in Western Canada in the 1930s.[20] Woster says that, try as she might, she could not get any of her North American contacts to admit that they were descended from earlier members of what she calls 'The No Name Fellowship' [21]

In 1903/4 the movement arrived in Australia. Later Cooney spent several years working in both Australia and New Zealand and seems to have had some success in both countries. As noticed earlier he went to Australia at the end of his life and died there in 1960.

Roberts mentions 150 people of Irish origin who by 1904 had gone overseas in the interests of the movement. WJMcK McCormick says that by 1908 there were 600 people learning foreign languages with a view to living abroad in order to spread the message.[22] In addition Germany, France, Brazil, Norway, Latvia, China, Italy, Greece and even Nigeria are countries known to have been penetrated during the twentieth century, but due to the secretive approach of the sect, the degree of success is not known.[23] Woster mentions

receiving a letter in the late 1980s from a worker in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, indicating that a group had been started there.

Crow thinks (perhaps rather optimistically) that in the early 1960s there were between one and two million members world wide.[24]

3) Its organisation between 1896 and 1928.

The group believed (and their followers still seem to believe) that the only true Christians are those who leave Babylon (the churches) and follow their particular interpretation of the instructions of Jesus when he sent his disciples out on mission (Matt. 10 and Lk. 9). Converts were apparently instructed to avoid association with anyone who belonged to the churches or 'sects' as they called the traditional denominations of Christendom. This is another mark of a cult - the claim that they and they alone constitute the true church.

Roberts claims that there were 'no regulations and no asserting of authority ... no organisation because the Holy Spirit led them And they got on without leaders too, for although Irvine was most used ... they were all brethren'. [25] However the fact is that the workers/preachers were leaders and they did provide organisation.

There were strict requirements - preachers had to follow Matthew 10 literally and forsake wealth. Saints (i.e., non-preachers) had to renounce wealth, which meant dedicating it to the Lord and regarding it as a stewardship to be used mainly in the support of preachers. The principles enunciated by Irvine at the first convention in 1904 in the Dublin area became operative and still largely dominate the movement.[26]

S.E. Long says that, at the conference held on West's farm at Crocknacrieve in July/August 1907, without money of their own, 600 of them and their families were able to travel from across the world to be present there. He adds, 'with adherents and sightseers the attendance reached several thousands for the sessions. Everybody was fed, watered and housed as they needed.' Sympathisers were generous in making donations of food to the organisers. The adults, with a few exemptions, had duties of one kind or another. [27] All this in a group that denied that it had leaders or organisation!

The fellowship also liked to think of itself as nameless - the members were just Christians! But they used terms like 'Go Preachers,' 'the Jesus Way' (sometimes just 'the Way'), 'the Pilgrims' (probably a legacy from Irvine's days in the Faith Mission), 'the First Christians', 'the Body' and 'the Friends'. These were in effect names that tended to endorse the claim that they were the only true Christians.

During the First World War, however, they found it necessary to adopt designations so as to gain conscientious objector status for men likely to be conscripted into the armed forces. In the United Kingdom they used the name 'The Testimony of Jesus', in North America 'Christian Conventions' and in Australia and New Zealand 'United Christian Conventions'. In 1947 Cooney wrote that this had been sinful and that in accepting it he had gone against his conscience in order to avoid differing from his fellow-workers. He himself had registered as 'Christian' and had urged others to do the same.[28]

2. The Testimony and the Outcasts

Cooney was in New Zealand from 1921 to 1925 and in the United States (mainly Seattle) from 1925 to 1928. He remained implacably opposed to the idea of organisation believing in immediate guidance (or ? prophetic revelation) by the Spirit. In his absence those, whom Roberts calls 'the chief workers', developed a council of twelve apostles (Cooney, though absent, being named among them). She maintains that they began to exercise tight control over the movement and for some years were planning to excommunicate Cooney, who was critical of their developing organisation and of the fact that they were sending women out as preachers. By 1928 organisation had developed to a point where leaders in the various territories acted like bishops and archbishops.

Tensions developed over a period of years between Cooney and the other apostles. As early as 1916 one, Wilson Reid, is said to have noticed that Cooney; was out of step with his brethren; on a number of issues. Roberts says that some felt this harked back to the fact that in 1914 Cooney had indicated that he rejected what was she calls; 'the living witness heresy' (see below), i.e., the idea that God spoke only through the movement's preachers.[29]

Roberts says that on his return to Ulster in October 1928, Cooney refused to be bound by a rule that he gain permission from a local leader before entering or preaching in his area and that he would not preach anything different from the beliefs of that leader.[30] Apparently a second issue at this time was that Cooney wanted business men associated with the movement to renounce their wealth. Anecdotal evidence indicates that some simply refused to do so.

At a meeting of the apostles at Lurgan a few days after Cooney's return to Ireland in October 1928 ten of the twelve withdrew fellowship from him and from another of their number, Tom Elliott. The two were excommunicated! This split the movement into the Testimony (i.e., the mainstream following the ten continuing apostles) and the Outcasts (i.e., those joining Cooney and Edwards 'outside the camp'. Roberts says, that of the twelve apostles 'only Cooney and Edwards claimed the freedom which can be enjoyed by every born again person, namely, the liberty to move and speak as directed by the Holy Spirit.[31]

One of the leading anti-Cooney apostles was Wilson Reid, who came from the environs of Enniskillen and who was then the 'chief worker' in Ireland. In 1928, in what, Roberts calls a pastoral letter, Reid had denounced Cooney and pleaded with the fellowship in Ireland 'to reject him as a malefactor.' [32] After the split Reid's farm became an important centre for mainstream Cooneyite activity and in County Fermanagh those associated with 'The Testimony' are still sometimes called 'reidites'

Roberts maintains that Cooney tried to be open and non-recriminatory, indeed loving, towards the Testimony. She says that his attitude was that of Jesus and of Stephen, 'Father lay not this sin to their charge' - 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.' In 1930 he wrote, 'I hope I shall, like Joseph, love more and more my brethren who treat me thus. And although the iron may enter my soul, profit as he did from the experience and become as he became a blessing to my brethren.' [33] She also maintains that he made many approaches to the mainstream people and tried to maintain links with them but Reid and another antagonist, George Walker, waged a relentless campaign to have him discredited throughout Ireland. She says that their efforts prevented Cooney's side of the controversy from being heard.[34]

Roberts admits that between 1928 and 1939 the so-called Outcasts, with whom she later became associated, suffered decline and 'disarray with almost no workers to keep them in order', while 'the Testimony' flourished under the control of the workers. [35] In saying this she surely admits that, despite Cooney's insistence that organisation was illegitimate, organisation and leadership were needed.

After the 1928 split, Cooney still maintained contacts abroad and had homes in which he could stay despite the fact that the 'Testimony', which appears to have had much greater numbers than the Outcasts, made strenuous efforts to close all such doors to him.

Commenting on the years 1947-1950 Roberts says, 'The Testimony had a vast organisation with a well-planned programme of hundreds of missions and conventions as well as house churches all over the world. By contrast Cooney believed that God would accomplish more through twos and threes controlled by the Spirit.' [36]

Roberts also indicates that when she was writing in 1990 the same patterns still obtained in both groups. She claims that the 'Outcasts' were then maintaining their identity in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, Norway, Australia and the United States.[37] That she omits the Republic of Ireland suggests, perhaps, that the still considerable number of Cooneyites there belong to the mainline Testimony group.

Of the Outcasts Roberts says, 'there are now no workers among them, for God hasn't sent any, no leaders in the sense of rulers and no organisation. Yet they continue to have fellowship with one another believing that the revelation of the Christ to, in and through the individual human heart is alone the Rock on which Christ builds his church. Cooney defined the church as that company of individuals each living by revelation from the Father and, therefore, collectively one.' [38]

Again we have evidence of cultism in the idea of ongoing revelation and in the total subjectivisation of authority. It is not Scripture controlling the church and its life but individual subjects putting themselves and their thoughts above Scripture and claiming that those thoughts are authoritative divine revelation. Cooney and his friends talked a lot about Scripture but in

the end their authority was/is subjective rather than the objective truth of Scripture. It is the inner light of so-called prophecy coming to the individual. Roberts adds with a touch of arrogance like that of cultists who see themselves as the sole company of the saved, 'and the Lord continues to add to their number those who are being saved.' [39]

3. World-wide extension

As noted early in this study Cooneyism originated in the Irish Midlands. It quickly spread across from West Tipperary to Wexford and other parts of Ireland. Roberts devotes two chapters (5 and 6) to a mission conducted by Cooney in Newtownards in 1904. Crowds attended and it is probable that the continuing presence of Cooneyites in the Ards area of North Down is to some degree a result of that mission. Other pockets of significance are to be found around Enniskillen, Dungannon, Monaghan, Downpatrick and of course, in Irvine's original stamping ground, the southern part of the Irish Midlands.

There is, as Crow indicates, a considerable following in the US and Canada. In 1984 I visited a former student then working in Vermillion in eastern Alberta. He told me there were at least fifty 'Two-by-Twos', as the Cooneyites were known, in that small town. On one occasion in the 1950s in Nigeria a friend and I met two men from Yorkshire, who were then living in native quarters and working in Port Harcourt. We spent a couple of hours with them but, though we were pretty sure they were Cooneyites, we could not extract a specific confession of what organisation, if any, was sponsoring them. They were just Christians! A number of friends in Ulster have told me that they have worked with Cooneyites, who were usually fine upright people, but who were always careful to avoid identifying their religious affiliation. One man asked directly if he was a Cooneyite said, 'That is what some people call us.'

Interestingly Roberts says that Fred Wood, who stood by Cooney in 1929 and on whose shoulders Cooney's mantle of shepherding the Outcasts fell in 1960, learned Norwegian at the age of 80 in order to help the fellowship in Norway. [40] Obviously, therefore, there were Outcasts in that country in the 1980s. Woods also missioned in North America and throughout the

British Isles virtually up to the time of his death in 1986 at the age of 97.

International organisation

Carol Woster, who was involved with what seems to have been the Testimony group in the US and in her native Norway, says 'they claim no headquarters or organisation ... yet organisation is clearly evident. They take expensive flights to attend conventions and the adherents in the host country know they are coming and have their names printed on programmes'. She maintains that 'in Norway the preachers take no employment, lead frugal lives, but have a strong 'back-up' system and would never leave food or lodging to chance or to the kindness of 'kind strangers.' [41]

There appear to be clear lines of communication around the world and a supply of 'Bible study sheets indicating what is to be studied world-wide on Wednesday evenings.' [42] Keith Crow indicates that he was able to recover from family sources a sizeable collection of these documents for use in his research. [43]

4. Its worship, evangelism and general ethos

In reading Roberts and, indeed the comments of those who have written about the movement, it is difficult to distinguish between the practices of the two factions. In many ways they seem to be more or less identical.

1) House Churches

In 1908 Irvine, who was against everything associated with denominations, said, (or maybe we should say, decreed) that meetings were to be held in homes. [44] Church buildings are regarded as unscriptural but sometimes halls are rented or more probably borrowed especially for missions, which can go on for long periods. Mission meetings seem to be held or sometimes held on Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings.

House churches are kept small - around a dozen people - and meet twice on Sundays and once mid-week. The person presiding is known as the 'bishop' or 'elder'. The Lord's Supper is observed each week. Baptism is by immersion (hence the nickname 'Dippers') and has to be accompanied by a renunciation of all previous religious affiliations and by a declaration of total

commitment. Women can participate in services and some, at least in the Testimony, actually preach.

Singing is unaccompanied and apparently rather dull. Crow says that hymns are sung without musical accompaniment and are important in setting the emotional tone of the meeting and in bringing the members to the unity they desire.[45] He indicates that Sunday morning meetings begin with a hymn, which is followed by a period of silent prayer and an open session in which any member can offer a testimony or a religious thought based on Scripture. Breaking of Bread follows involving thanksgiving for bread and wine and the passing round of the token elements in silence. Prayers of a praising/ thanksgiving type follow. There is never any reference to personal problems or current affairs. Despite the restrained nature of the meeting, Crow says that there is strong emotion with women and in some cases men, often weeping quietly. He reckoned that this pattern had remained unchanged for 50 years.[46]

Cooney himself wrote hymns, some of which were included in a book called *Hymns Old and New*. This was published by RL Allan of Glasgow. Another hymnbook printed in Enniskillen in 1935 is called *Memorial Hymnbook* and is subtitled, 'Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs'. The fly leaf reads:

In Memory

Of one known and loved by those for whom this book is made. Doubly blest with heart and voice to sing God's praise. In her latter years she earnestly desired new songs of Praise, Conflict and Pilgrimage in keeping with the strange experiences of the Days of Trial.[47]

The poetry in some of the hymns is like that of Cooney. An informant who came from a Cooneyite home told me that the lady in whose memory the book was produced was the first wife of Alfred Magowan, the worker who wrote of the motivations of the founders of the movement (see above) and who was, in fact, the compiler of the book. The reference to 'Days of Trial' may have related to the split that occurred in 1928 but he is not certain.

Though it uses hymns from other sources the book does not acknowl-

edge any authorship or copyright. Indeed the Foreword rejects the need to do so, 'patent right or copyright shall have no standing here!'

The hymns by Cooney printed in Roberts' second book strongly reflect the author's ascetic stance but to be fair they also contain some apparently orthodox references to Christ as the divine sin-bearer.

Hymn 232 in the *Memorial Hymnbook* is an interesting exposure of Cooneyite or more probably of Cooney's own thinking around 1930. In it normal evangelical emphasis on our Lord's atoning death is presented as distracting people from obedience to his word. Lines 3-5 of verse 2 could be aimed at those (Dispensationalists) who, at the time, tended to say that the Sermon on the Mount and our Lord's other ethical teachings were not applicable to this age but belonged to a future Jewish dominated millennium. To show its emphasis the hymn is printed in full:

1. Men think they glorify the Lord
   By speaking of His Grace
   And telling by dramatic word
   How He His life blood had outpoured
   To save the human race.

2. They magnify the death He died
   By worldly flattery,
   And think themselves well qualified
   To set the words He spoke aside
   As not for them to-day

3. There is a crooked bit in men
   Who name the name of Christ
   And talk about His love to men,
   Repeating 'Õer and 'Õer again
   How He was sacrificed.

4. They seem to think that eulogy
   About the death He died

And how He bore Sin's penalty
Will blind Him to their vanity
When they by Him are tried.

5. If they but knew their Enemy
Or their own hearts' deceit,
They would not think that flattery
Would let them off on that Great Day
Who walked in vain conceit.

6. They compass land and sea to make
Religious proselytes,
But in the making, from them take
Heart honesty and in them break
All that in Truth delights.

2) Gospel services

Mission meetings and other Gospel services are designed to attract and convert non members. Keith Crow says they are always arranged and conducted by workers, a fact that harmonies with the movement's understanding of the workers as the only recipients and the only valid communicators of God's truth. Carol Woster says that much later on the new adherent learns that their liberal use of the phrase 'the truth' is a way of referring to themselves - as though it was the name of the no-name group!

Crow indicates that these gospel meetings are usually held not in homes or in properties owned by 'The Church' but in schools, fraternal or (community) halls, public auditoriums etc.[48] He says that the talks given at mission services 'are designed to introduce newcomers to the special beliefs and practices of 'The Church'. Prospective converts are invited to attend the worship services in their home areas.

Carol Woster presents a less favourable picture based on her own experience with the workers.

'The workers,' she says, 'have a re-moulding pattern, and that is a fixation. They lay great emphasis upon 'hearing' them to the exclusion of 'hearing' É

genuine Christian voices 'It is a pattern used over and over by the workers' each newcomer is made to feel that he or she has been called out, 'drawn by God' to get this foretaste of heaven by experiencing life in the no-name group. They do the converting; they hold the keys into this exclusive fellowship that is grooming individuals for eternal life.[49]

Referring to her own experiences, Woster says, she had made a strong commitment to Christ in 1971. In the early eighties quite by accident she reactivated a relationship with a former school friend and in that context met 'a worker.' She says that this worker whom she calls, ZX, drew a picture of an absorbing 'spiritual world', a realm where people had been 'drawn out' of the masses 'into God's heavenly family' on earth. The ever-frequent visits to her flat in Oslo (22 different workers in the winter of 1984-5), plus being included in a small circle of adherents right away, absorbed her. She assumed she was being welcomed as 'another Christian' but later discovered that ZX-worker believed he was converting her to Christianity! [50] She adds:

'In retrospect, there were tell-tale things I witnessed and heard that at the time deep down I questioned. However in the flurry of their lovely, embracing acceptance, my inclusion in many social occasions, I put these 'things' aside, and began ostensibly (more than ostensibly, I must admit) to accept the party line.'

After two and a half years Woster realised that no group calling itself Christian dare use the word 'truth' as a name for itself, when Christ is the way, the truth and the life. It was, she says, 'a travesty of the highest order, to discover that I was in a group that, although claiming no name, freely and liberally called itself ' the truth'' [51]

3) Conventions

According to Roberts annual conventions were a 'big thing' from 1904 until the split in 1928. Some in County Fermanagh lasted for up to four weeks with accommodation, feeding, laundry and other amenities organised with meticulous detail. Four days at Mullaghmeen (County Fermanagh) was the usual pattern in the 1920s when the final day was given to meetings of workers in which 'administrative, financial and organisational aspects of the ministry were dealt with, matters of doctrine and practice decided, judgment

passed on volunteers for the work. The chief workers, who were themselves established in permanent fields of labour, decided where all the other workers should be sent for the coming year'.[52] Clearly, despite a pretence of having no organisation, the movement was highly organised.

Roberts also tells us that in 1929 Cooney became unhappy about conventions but agreed to a three day convention of Outcasts at Mullaghmeen. This was much less organised than had previously been the case. The mainstream Testimony group continues with conventions, which are not, however, advertised publicly. One such is held annually in the Northern Ireland July holiday week in July in the Downpatrick area in County Down. Other centres are Monaghan, Dungannon and Reid's farm at Mullaghmeen, Co Fermanagh.

Crow indicates that three conventions were held each year in Oregon State and as many as thirty annually in the western seaboard states of the US and in British Colombia. These conventions lasted three, four or five days and members often slept in what he calls 'bunkhouses.' They all contributed to a common kitchen staffed by volunteers.

Conventions are for the benefit of members. Crow says, 'the impression created upon the outsider is one of restraint and simplicity carried to the point of dullness' [53] One convention that he mentions took place in 1963 at Saginaw, where buildings erected by voluntary labour on the grounds of a prosperous farmer were used. Some 1,500 people and 60 workers attended. The pattern seems remarkably similar to the earlier conventions in Ireland.

Crow also mentions the fact that, at the conventions, meetings of workers take place to discuss and decide upon practical affairs. He had no information about how these meetings were conducted or what the decision-making processes involved. The picture he presents indicates that the pre-1929 practices were continued in the States right up to 1963/4. It also indicates that the group(s) he was studying belonged to 'The Testimony' rather than to 'The Outcasts'.

4) Preachers

There are two classes of Cooneyite:

1. Preachers.

These work in pairs and so give rise to the name 'Two by Twos'. When not accepted they shake the dust off their shoes in a literal application of Matthew 10:14.

2. Saints.

These are the people who house and feed and generally support the preachers. It seems that some of these folk are prosperous farmers and/or business people. The photographs of the homes of the saints in Robert's books suggest that their owners belonged to the more prosperous segments of society.

There are also folk known as Friends or adherents. These are more loosely connected to the movement and according to Woster can be kept on the fringe of things by the workers. Because they are not quite 'in' and are not 'tried and true' members even their gifts of money are likely to be rejected and returned! [54]

The preachers have always gone about in pairs - two men or two women and occasionally a married couple. Crow says that workers are not supposed to marry - a home and family would be incompatible with the life of an apostle - but the prohibition is not absolute. He knew of an elderly married couple who were both workers and who travelled together.[55]

Woster says, 'there are reportedly elders in each area who make judgments as to whether individuals are adequately prepared to withstand the rigors of missionary life.' [56] Crow says he does not know how workers are selected but adds, 'it is apparent that there is a high degree of selectivity and persons considered unsuitable are firmly discouraged.' He continues, 'There seems to be no formal rite of ordination, although it is possible that some simple ceremony is performed privately by a group of workers.' [57] He also noted that the workers have no distinguishing ranks or titles and says that, while it is never discussed, there must be some means of assigning them to geographical areas and of making other administrative decisions.[58]

It is maintained that everything operates informally. Because there are

no jobs, no buildings, no publications, no finances, no budgets and no relationships with other bodies, administration is not needed. Members apparently give money privately to the workers, thus minimising or eliminating the need for central handling of funds. Crow reports that some members believe that 'The Church' has large financial resources held, they believe as trust funds in Britain and elsewhere. An uncle of his had said that the workers were highly skilled in extracting money from the members.[59]

Cooney and his co-workers workers maintained a violent anti-clericalism. In August 1908 the Enniskillen newspaper, *The Impartial Reporter*, said that a big convention with 2000 people gave the impression that it was primarily an anti-clerical crusade.[60] Luther, John Knox, John Wesley, William Booth and even the leaders of the Plymouth Brethren were dismissed as rejecters of God's plan. Roberts quotes Irvine as saying that Presbyterianism was white-washed popery! 'God's message to clericalism is,' he said, 'the same as when Jesus said to them: 'Ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell.' [61]

Cooney's language in this regard was also very strong - 'every man who climbs up in the world in the name of Jesus is going to Hell ... if you are on the side of the climb-up preachers you will go to the hypocrite's hell unless you repent'. [62]

One reason for this attitude was the conviction that God's servants must, as the charge to our Lord's disciples recorded in Matthew 10 indicated, eschew salaries and espouse poverty. Another reason is likely to have been the negative reaction of clergy to the appearance of a new sect that took away some of their members and that constantly decried their work.

Such language, it should be said, is not reported by either Woster or Crow and it is possible that with the more secretive and the more gracious approach of the movement today such statements would not be made.

5) Family life

Among the workers celibacy seems to be favoured and regarded as in some sense 'a higher way of life'. Marriage is recognised but the traditional formalities and legal requirements are tolerated rather than valued. When

families are raised the children are segregated as far as possible from other kids and a strong parental authority is maintained.

Crow says, however, that the members of what he calls 'The Church' do not attempt to bring up their children in the faith. The kids may attend meetings but generally no strong attempt is made to hold them and many do not join the sect, which is constantly replenished by converts. Four members of the sect in his own family were converts from other Protestant denominations, but of their six children, who grew up in contact with The Church, not one became a member.[63]

In Ireland things seem to be somewhat different - it seems that in many cases whole families belong to the movement and live together in reasonable harmony. Crow even admits that this is sometimes the case in the U.S.A.

One informant told me that members of a Cooneyite family, who do not conform, can be pushed out into the world without spiritual care. Carol Woster confirms this: 'Shunned psychologically' not having been drawn by God to profess and embrace the whole lifestyle as 'the truth' they are shunted to the world. Stripped of hope in Christ, because they did not accept the 'package' as laid out by the workers and by adhering family members, they dwell in an often bitter state. 'This sub-group, the ones that drift out,' she concludes, 'is left with no spiritual home.' [64]

The reverse side of the coin is that for fear of contamination by the world a member of a non-Cooneyite family who adopts 'the Jesus Way' is expected to break away from his or her natural family and find warmth and a substitute family in the house church (another mark of a cult). Those who continue in their family homes tend to live in a withdrawn way and do not discuss their religion and in some cases other matters as well with their own kith and kin.

6) Moderate asceticism

In 1903 Irvine asked his followers to adopt an ascetic lifestyle and to oppose worldliness.

Describing the workers (almost certainly in the mainstream Testimony

group), Carol Woster writes:

'Their dress is meticulous and dignified. Female workers would be adorned with long hair; no slacks or clothes that even hinted at a relaxed spontaneousness would ever be worn.

They reportedly make the supreme sacrifice as far as worldly goods and the enticements the world has to offer are concerned. Television is shunned, few have seen any films, and preoccupation with current worldly events is generally minimal or non-existent (this is often the case with lay members as well). By taking on the worker role they say no to marriage and family. No divorced person can become a worker. As a prerequisite they own no land, property and claim money is just for daily needs.' [65]

Keith Crow says that his grandparents were given a radio in their old age but after conversation, probably with a worker, they left it in the living room for others to use and never turned it on themselves. [66]

He also indicates that Christmas and Easter are regarded as pagan holidays and, though those with children observe them in a conventional way, there is no religious significance whatever. [67] He adds interestingly that no conflict is seen between science and religion. The opposition is between the 'Jesus way' and the 'worldly way' and 'the sect is perfectly willing to accept ideas such as evolution' [68]

Later Crow tells us that, since all worldly things are profane, the world is the constant threat.

'To become absorbed in worldly things, no matter how innocent or meritorious to those outside, is as fatal to salvation as a life of crime and vice. It is inconceivable that a successful politician or a movie star could belong to the group, since it would be impossible for him to reconcile the worldly demands of his occupation with the doctrine of The Church.' [69]

7) High moral standards

Woster says of the workers:

'Adjectives to describe them are all positive: ever-gracious, polite, exceed-

ingly respectful to persons and property, loving, kind, not given to offend; reliable, honest; often meek, and ever pleasant. For personal life standards all are in complete compatibility with what the Bible teaches on the highest Christian character traits. I have never heard of any worker found in a situation that would compromise what he or she represented in their capacity as workers.' [70]

Speaking of the broader membership - the saints - Woster says,

'They have world-over, it appears, formed a 'body' where many of the Bible's verses regarding Christian character are not only applicable but find a most excellent expression. In my long years of observing Christian groups, particularly in the US, I have never seen this excellence attained as I have witnessed in the no-name group' [71]

Informants in Northern Ireland, who have contact with Cooneyites, speak of them as people of moral integrity, people who work well, who keep their word and who pay their bills. Such a reputation, which is partly at least the result of a gospel of works, has to be commended.

Keith Crow also indicates a degree of leniency or, maybe, inconsistency. He says, for example, that, while indulgence in alcohol is deplored, in old age his grandfather sometimes drank a bottle of beer. He always did so in private not for fear of other Cooneyites but lest total abstinence groups could use his behaviour against 'The Church'!

Despite the fact that Crow says 'The Church remains at an extreme of asceticism', [72] it seems that there is some leeway, especially for the saints and that their asceticism is more moderate than that required of workers.

5. Cooneyite doctrines

In the area of doctrine it is most difficult to be precise about Cooneyism. This is 'the Secret Sect' ! Neither the Testimony nor the Outcasts believe in or publish a statement of doctrine. Information we glean from Roberts tends to be incidental to her main concern to eulogise Edward Cooney and criticise those, the Testimony group, who separated themselves from him.

1) The workers are the sole purveyors of 'the truth'

Roberts tells us that Cooney, 'believing as he did in progressive revelation, concluded that all organised religion was, by its very nature, the systematising of error'.[73] Against such a background it is little wonder that no fixed statement of doctrine is available from either faction. Doctrine can change as new light, new revelation, is received and so can never be committed to writing, because that would give it the appearance of having permanent validity!

It is clear that from the beginning Cooneyites claimed that they fully accepted Scripture and preached from it alone. Aids like concordances and commentaries were forbidden and there seems to have been an ongoing belief that God was giving new truth, the progressive light Cooney claimed he and Irvine were receiving. Preachers use no notes and claim that they are under the control of God's Spirit as they speak. In effect revelation of 'the truth' is coming through them.

What is also clear is that by 1905 the workers were claiming to be the sole recipients and the sole purveyors of 'the Truth'. Roberts calls this the doctrine or the heresy of the 'Living Witness'. It asserted that Scripture must be interpreted by one of the preachers, who are the true descendants of the first Christians and the holders of the Holy Spirit! In Philadelphia in 1907 Irvine said, 'A person may be born again through a living witness, without one, never ... One cannot be born again through reading the Bible'.[74] This echoes similar statements in early Jehovah's Witness and other cultic writings. Roberts says the unthinking masses accepted this teaching and the workers made it an article of faith because they saw what power it gave them.

Roberts also sees a parallel between the living witness doctrine and elements of Catholicism. She writes, 'in saying no one can be saved but through us the workers were usurping the function of Christ as the means of salvation and as the sole intermediary between God and man, and were thereby limiting the power of the Holy Spirit.' She goes on to speak of the preachers guarding their power after the manner of Rome and behaving in a similar way to the pope whose behaviour the reformers considered blasphemous.[75] Just as John Nelson Darby and his associates, who were violently anti-clerical and anti-

Anglican, adopted the authoritarian stance of bishops and archbishops, so the Cooneyites, who attacked both Catholic priests and Protestant ministers were in fact given to the very abuses they condemned in others. They got out of their original churches but the governing principles of those churches did not get out of them!

John Long, an erstwhile worker and companion of Irvine, was kicked out of the movement in 1907 for refusing to say that there were no clergy in Noah's Ark! He subsequently saw 'the living witness' doctrine as leading to 'the unchristenising of all others outside the fellowship and to refusing to worship with them'.[76] Around this time Cooney, who in the early days went along with this living witness idea, inferred that people like Wesley, Spurgeon, Booth, Knox and Luther were in hell rather than in heaven.[77]

However after the break with Irvine in 1913 or 1914 Cooney abandoned the 'Living Witness Doctrine' but others did not follow him. Roberts, who agrees with Cooney on this says that after the 1928 split the workers in the Testimony maintained the living witness doctrine that no one could be saved except through them. [78]

This is confirmed by Carol Woster, who, writing in 1988, says, 'the workers present themselves as the embodiment of the Gospel message - unless they utter the lessons of the Gospel it is somehow invalid.'[79] She tells how after two years with the movement (1984-1986) she realised after a meeting in Oslo on November 16, 1986 that all was not right with the movement. Her unrest, as noticed already, centered on the equating of the movement with 'the truth'. She came to the conviction that, since CHRIST is THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE no group calling itself Christian dare breathe the word 'truth' as a name for itself. [80]

In relation to the claim to be the continuation of apostolic Christianity and the sole purveyors of truth, Doug and Helen Parker, quoted by Woster say,

'It is a serious fiction for any of these people to say they originated from New Testament times. This deception hides the true historical origin from 1899 and leads people in the wrong 'way' in embracing religious ideas of a few men. Since the basis of this was a falsehood telling people this movement had

origins that it certainly did not have, what has been built on this erroneous foundation results in a serious mis-use of the Bible. Ideas have found their way into this movement that are in opposition to the Christian doctrine of the shed blood of Christ, as the redemptive act for ALL, who call upon Christ and seek to do his will. No group on this earth has the right to call itself 'the truth', or claim exclusive rights to the message' [81]

Crow doesn't discuss this doctrine specifically but doesn't seem to rule out its continuance among those with whom he had contact. It does, of course, make salvation depend on the mediating work of the preachers much as in Catholicism it depends on the sacramental ministrations of the priesthood.

Roberts also tells us that, as an element in their stance as the sole purveyors of truth, the workers in The Testimony claim authority to 'bind and loose'.[82] They use this to make rules and as an instrument for exerting power over their followers.

Crow, perhaps with a degree of inherited bias, says that the sect's body of beliefs is not much removed from mainstream Protestant theology. He says it uses the New Testament as its exclusive guide and, while the wisdom of the Old Testament is sometimes mentioned or discussed, it is regarded as entirely superseded by the New Testament. The workers, he says, devote much time to the study and exegesis of the New Testament but avoid hair-splitting analysis of the precise meaning of particular words and phrases. Their concern is for general 'spiritual' rather than literal meaning. [83]

2) The group restored early Church truth and practice

Crow discusses a notion, which he says has occurred now and again within Protestantism, namely that a particular sect has been in existence since the first century. He says 'this belief is of fundamental importance to the group as a 'legitimising myth'. [84] He then quotes at length from an unsigned document that circulated in a local area and of which he had obtained a copy. It is entitled '*Glimpses in History of Simple Christian peoples*'. It seeks to connect second century dissidents, like Marcion and the Ebionites, with the Waldensians and the Lollards of the later middle ages and with the Cooneyites of his own twentieth century. [85]

Roberts claims that the 'Go Preachers' did restore some of the basic elements of the early church in their first few years (another mark of a cult!). She lists four items that indicate something of the doctrinal and practical stance of the movement.[86] These are:

1) *'A fellowship in which saints and workers formed an equal brotherhood ... controlled by Christ through the Spirit ... assuming no name and recognising no earthly leader or leaders.'*

Comments

These claims do not stand up to examination - the group had and still has earthly leaders and there were/are attitudes and actions that belie the idea that the Spirit of God alone was or is in control.

2) *'A homeless, itinerant, unpaid ministry called to forsake all and depend on God.' This was a dominant element in the thought of Irvine and Cooney and would seem to be still affirmed.*

Comments

The Cooneyites were not the first sect to espouse that ideal. Roberts actually acknowledges that there were forerunners in the late Middle Ages. She mentions Peter of Bruys, Henry of Lausanne and Peter Waldo, the founder of the Waldensians who, as preachers, had given away their worldly goods and had decided to follow the example of Christ by leading a simple life of poverty and preaching. 'Dedicated men and women,' she says, 'rallied to Waldo and this ideal of illiterate lay folk living in simple poverty'. [87]

From the American scene Crow suggests that the thinking of Alexander Campbell, may have played a part in the origins of 'The Church'. Campbell was a founder of the Church of Christ movement, who, says Crow, 'strongly denounced salaried and titled clergymen, benevolent societies, church edifices and other visible appurtenances of organised religion'.[88] There may be similarities with the Campbellite movement on this and other issues but, as noticed earlier, they don't prove that the one is dependent on the other. The evidence would seem to be that the early Cooneyites thought they were simply and literally reproducing a pattern set out in the New Testament.

According to Roberts, Cooney maintained this emphasis throughout his life and it is still characteristic of his followers, whom she designates 'the Outcasts'. Woster's and Crow's evidence would indicate that at least up to the mid-1960s it was maintained in 'The Testimony'.

3) *Breaking of bread on the Lord's Day in the homes of believers under the guidance of local elders'.*

Comments

Again Crow thinks it possible that the thinking of Alexander Campbell and his associates in the Disciples of Christ played a part in the origin these practices. 'Campbell,' he says, 'instituted the practice of weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper', a practice which he thinks marks a sharp break with the main traditions of ascetic Protestantism. [89]

The use of homes is indeed traceable to the New Testament (Philemon etc.). Homes were the normal meeting place for Christians till Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in 312 AD, when Church buildings began to appear. Down the centuries homes have been used by evangelists and missionaries as they have sought to establish a Christian witness around the world. In them churches have been formed and, as numbers grew and larger meeting places were needed, church buildings were erected.

Cooneyites are perhaps unique in keeping the numbers of each congregation small enough to meet in a home and so avoiding the expense of having buildings for the specific purpose of worship. Once the number reaches 10 or 12, two members are expected to hive off and start another house church.

4) *'Baptism of believers by total immersion'. Because of this the Cooneyites were often called 'Dippers'*

Comments

While Roberts alludes to the Anabaptists of Reformation times, she doesn't mention the fact that the baptism of believers by immersion has been practised since the early seventeenth century by Baptists. Neither does she say that since the middle of the nineteenth the Open Brethren followed suit or

that more recently Pentecostals and others have also done so.

6. Cooney's (and the Outcast's) doctrines

Among the Outcasts there seem to have been no rules, no doctrines, no theology, but simply an agreeing to follow Jesus and to become progressively more like him. Roberts describing her own conversion in 1950 and her subsequent baptism by Cooney, says that she asked him what she should do in the expectation that he would supply a list of do's and don'ts. His answer was, 'Jesus will tell you what to do if you yield your heart to him'. She adds, 'So there were no rules, no doctrines, no theology. He simply pointed to Jesus as the one to follow.' [90]

However it does seem clear that Cooney firmly maintained some positions that would normally be called doctrines. These included:

1) *Followers of Jesus become partakers of divine nature*

Cooney taught that as a result of making a commitment to follow Jesus a person would become 'a partaker of the divine nature'. In a letter written to a Mrs Greenaway on March 17, 1960 he even said, 'we must become part of God to worship him.' [91] This seems to tend towards a deification of disciples that would endow them with an illusion of infallibility and a feeling that they alone are God's people and on the right path (again a mark of a cultic group).

This should be compared and contrasted with the Eastern Orthodox position that man in possession of the Holy Spirit is 'divinised'. The Orthodox base this on 2 Peter 1:4 which speaks of those who inherit the promises of Scripture as participating 'in the divine nature'. They say, however, that divinisation involves unity with God, not in terms of essential being, but of moral activity, of doing what he does. When Cooney says 'we must become part of God', he seems to go beyond that position.

2) *Works are more important than grace*

Overall there seems to be little emphasis on sovereign divine grace. Cooneyites talk of regeneration, new birth and conversion but these terms seem to mean turning to the 'Jesus Way' with its go-preaching and its theoretical poverty. Walking the 'Jesus Way' seems to involve a considerable

element of earning salvation by what one does oneself. As WJMcK McCormick says in his appendix to Woster's booklet, 'the Two by Two preachers very largely confuse and mingle justification with sanctification. [92]

Carol Woster tells of a member who for years had entertained, fed and clothed workers. This person's fear of being judged unfit for the eternal kingdom was driven to an attitude of 'giving the workers the best I have got. One must struggle always', this person said, 'to be with them to be a suitable believer and host in their eyes... This is the truth. Outside of this, the only choice is to be a child of the world.' For this person the truth was a matter of life style, that is, of doing the things that pleased the workers. [93]

The constant insistence on asceticism and the accompanying opposition to worldliness clearly imply that salvation largely depends on what a person does. The Reformation principles of 'by grace alone' and 'by faith alone' are thus compromised.

3) ***The triune nature of the Godhead.***

Cooney baptised Roberts and others in the triune name.[94] He spoke of Christ as the Son of the Living God, the Christ and not a Christ.[95] He also said, 'As the Son of God, he was God.'[96]

He referred to the Holy Spirit as 'the Spirit,' 'God's Spirit' and as 'the Spirit of the Father'.[97] He always used the capital S when referring to the Holy Spirit, but I have found no specific affirmation that the Spirit is a distinct person within the Godhead. We can, I think, give him the benefit of the doubt and regard this as an omission indicating his lack of theological definition rather than as a deliberate presentation of the Spirit as non-personal divine power or influence.

4) ***The Atonement***

Cooney used words like propitiation, atonement and reconciliation when speaking of the work of Christ. In Roberts' notes taken in 1953 as she listened to one of his sermons we find these statements: 'His death saves us from the penalty of sin. His life saves us from the power of sin. We are reconciled to God by the death of his Son ... the blood of Jesus speaks of cleans-

ing and forgiveness. The Lord bought us by his blood.' [98]

One of the hymns she prints has these words:

Tell it out with gladness
This the gospel true,
Christ for you atonement,
Then 'tis Christ in you.

We can hardly doubt that these words represent truths that were dear to Cooney's heart. However they seem to be compromised by the next four lines which suggest that atonement results more from man's work of actually following Christ than from what was accomplished as a finshed work on the cross:

Treading in his footsteps,
Walking in the light
Blood of Jesus then cleanses
All that is not right.[99]

Another line seems to suggest more than a hint of a sacramental view of baptism as that which effects regeneration and cleansing.

Born of water makes us clean,[100]

While it is encouraging to find Cooney mentioning the atonement in a positive way, it is clear that his view falls somewhat short of a full and proper biblical understanding. In that understanding the focal point is that Christ took our place and actually bore the penalty of sin due to us 'he gave himself a ransom for (in the place of) many' 'he himself bore (carried the load of) our sins in his body on the tree' (Mark 10:45, 1 Pet. 2:24).

5) *Repentance and forgiveness are always needed*

Cooney taught that there is forgiveness for the erring saint who repents and, indeed, that there is a continual need to be repentant. Writing in 1925 to someone called Harry, he said, 'If you err or sin, my dear brother, God for Christ's sake will forgive you. So the moment you realize you have done wrong, that moment lift your heart to God and you will find him willing to forgive you your sins and to cleanse you from all that's not right. Keep short

accounts with God and if you sin get it squared right away through your advocate, Jesus Christ, the Righteous, for he is the propitiation for our sins.[101]

One of his hymns has a verse that epitomises the point:

Shoulds't thou ever stumble,
Falling into sin,
Jesus is thine advocate,
He thy case will win.
With the Father pleading
Pardon give to thee;
Cleansing in his precious blood
Will always set thee free.[102]

6) *The possibility of repentance after death*

Cooney for a considerable time believed in and late in life began to preach what seems to be a 'second chance' doctrine. Roberts reports thus: 'Edward had held a belief for many years, which he did not preach for he thought people weren't ready for it. But he felt compelled to do so before he died and time he knew, for him, was getting short. Briefly this was that God's mercy didn't end at the grave, 'His mercy endureth for ever,' *and that there would still be opportunity for repentance even after death of the body* (italics mine).

'This', she says, 'caused a great deal of unrest in the fellowship and some of his staunchest supporters turned against him. Some left the fellowship and returned to the Testimony. For Edward's last year in Ulster then, there was nothing but conflict, contention, schism and confusion within the fellowship of the outcasts Things got to such a pitch that in his 93rd year he decided to leave Ulster, where he had hoped to die in peace, and go to Australia' [103]

7) *Return of Christ to a millennial reign*

Cooney believed in the Second Coming of the Lord and in a thousand year reign of Christ on earth. In one of his letters he mentions with a degree of commendation comments by CI Schofield on the Nicolaitans of Revelation 2:15. Such commendation of a scholar/clergyman is most unusual for Coo-

ney and may well indicate that his eschatology was either derived from the Schofield Bible or was, at least, compatible with it. In a letter to someone called Hosmer Durham in November 1946 he referred to Christ as, 'He who was in the Old Testament and in the New Testament and is to come in glory to reign on earth 1000 years ' [104]

One of his hymns also refers to our Lord's return

For Thou art coming back, Lord
The time is drawing near;
The whole creation groaneth
And wearily doth sigh;
And we ourselves do long, Lord
To see the King of earth
Our weeping turned to singing,
Our sorrow into mirth.[105]

Obviously Irvine had also believed in the Lord's return because, as noticed earlier, he went to Jerusalem in 1920 to await 'the Coming'.

Conclusion

The preachers consider themselves to be 'the truth' and there is, therefore, more emphasis on them than on the content of their message. While the Bible is often quoted, its message is 'cherry picked' and there is no overall appreciation of its revelatory content (a criticism that applies also to many others including not a few Evangelicals).

Revelation is what the individual experiences subjectively rather than what Scripture teaches. Doctrine is therefore secondary. The call is to follow Jesus in poverty and not to espouse a definitive doctrinal statement of his person and work.

But, if Roberts' picture of Cooney is correct, he himself displayed some positive elements of character he didn't seek personal glory and was sincerely concerned to get people to follow the Lord in what he understood as the 'Jesus Way'. He persevered with this understanding despite the fact that close associates turned against him.

He had a streak of kindness and writing to friends in 1949 he said, 'let us love those, in the family and outside, who don't love us. And if others love us less, let us seek to love them more.' [106] It looks, however, as if these words were meant essentially to refer only to Cooneyites separated from his own group, that is, to those who belonged to The Testimony. For him members of 'the churches' were apostate and on the road to hell and probably not worth embracing in love.

It is a sad irony, often repeated in Christian history that men, who sincerely seek to please the Lord can become obsessed with one element in revelation and, by pressing it to the neglect of other equally or more important truths, fall into error. It seems that Cooney was such a man and that, by virtue of his emphasis on what men had to do in terms of following the Jesus way, he put works above faith and neglected the great doctrines of salvation by grace alone, by faith alone and by Christ alone. The two groups flowing from him seem to maintain the same departure from true Biblical Christianity.

Footnotes:

1 J. Arthur Hynes, *Signs Infallible*, Epworth Press 1949, p. 44

2 Ibid

3 T. Rennie Warburton, Art., 'The Faith Mission' in *Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain No. 2*, SCM, 1969, p. 84

4 Patricia Roberts, ***The Life and Ministry of Edward Cooney, 1867-1960***, p. 17f (hereafter Life)

5 Hynes op.cit.

6 Roberts, Life p.13

7 Roberts, op. cit. p.10

8 Cited by Carol Woster, ***The No-Name Fellowship,*** pp. 20, 21.

9 Ibid

10 Roberts: op. cit pp. 108-112.

11 Ibid. p.114 12 An Enniskillen newspaper (probably *The Impartial reporter*) quoting an obituary in the *Sunday Post*

13 Patricia Roberts, ***Selected Letters, Hymns and Poems of Edward Cooney***, p.43 (hereafter Letters)

14 S E Long, Art. 'Edward Cooney' in *The Orange Standard*, October, 1984.
15 Roberts, Life p.24
16 Roberts, Life p.71
17 Keith Crow, 'The Invisible Church' p.2
18 Crow, pp.16-23
19 Crow, p.72
20 Woster, p.21
21 Woster, p.5
22 WJK McCormick in Appendix B in Carol Woster, ***The No-Name Fellowship***, pp. 20ff
23 Crow, p.16
24 Ibid.
25 Roberts, Life pp. 23, 24
26 Woster, Appendix A, p.18
27 SE Long, art. cit.
28 Roberts, Letters p.45
29 Roberts, Life p.124
30 Roberts, Life pp143f
31 Roberts, Life p144
32 Roberts, Life p.144
33 Roberts, Life pp. 138, 157
34 Roberts, Life p.145
35 Roberts, Life pp.145-167
36 Roberts, Life p.204
37 Roberts, Life p.255
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Roberts, Life p. 129
41 Woster, p.3
42 Source of this quotation has been lost.
43 Crow, p.4
44 Woster, p.20
45 Crow, pp. 8, 11
46 Crow, p.1
47 Frontispiece in Memorial Hymnbook.

48 Crow, p.12
49 Woster, p.12
50 Woster, p.12
51 Ibid.
52 Roberts, Life p.165
53 Crow, pp.12-13
54 Woster, p.8
55 Crow, p.26
56 Woster, p.3
57 Crow, p.29
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Roberts, Life p.67
61 Roberts, Life p.72
62 Roberts, Life p.94
63 Crow, pp. 71, 72
64 Woster, p.13
65 Woster, p.2
66 Crow, p.37
67 Crow, p.38
68 Crow, p.37
69 Crow, p.40
70 Woster, p.2
71 Woster, p.4
72 Crow, p.31
73 Roberts, Life p.233
74 Roberts, Life p.58
75 Roberts, Life pp.57, 59
76 John Long's Journal, cited Roberts, Life p.63
77 Ibid.
78 Roberts, Life p.64
79 Woster, p.1
80 Woster, p.17
81 Woster, p.19
82 Roberts, Life p.164
83 Crow, p.31

84 Crow. p.53
85 Crow. pp.54-57
86 Roberts, Life pp.29-30
87 Ronald Finucane, The History of Christianity, (Lion Handbook), p.315
88 Crow p.52
89 Ibid.
90 Roberts, Life p.211
91 Op. cit. p.247
92 Woster, p.23
93 Woster, p.7
94 Roberts, Life, p.213
95 Roberts, Letters, pp.24, 26 etc.
96 Roberts, Life p.221
97 For example, Roberts, Life pp.24, 28 etc.
98 Roberts, Life, p.222
99 Roberts, Letters, p.111
100 Op. cit. p.112
101 Roberts, Letters, p.3
102 Roberts, Letters, p.111
103 Roberts, Life, p.240
104 Roberts, Life, p.41
105 Roberts, Life, p.110
106 Roberts, Life, p.61

'Christ not a Patch'

A pen-sketch by W. S. Eccles

William Sloan Eccles trained for the ministry at the Baptist College, Bristol, and is described as having been 'a fine classical scholar'.

S A Swaine, a later pastor of the Great Victoria Street church, Belfast, regretfully, did not mention Eccles in his book, Faithful Men; or Memorials of Bristol Baptist College, (London, 1884).

Before he came to Belfast Mr. Eccles had been an itinerant minister of the Baptist Irish Society for seven years with responsibility for the Coleraine church. When he settled in Belfast in 1847, he was only thirty-one years of age. His ministry in Academy Street church (which later moved to Great Victoria Street) lasted until 1858 when he became pastor of the Banbridge Church.

He was President of the Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland in 1875-76.

His reports to the BIS committee in London reveal his consistent devotion to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ over years of service in Coleraine, Belfast, Banbridge and Grange.

The editor of the *Irish Chronicle*, the monthly news-sheet of the Baptist Irish Society, prefaced the article: 'The following sketch is from the pen of our brother Eccles of Belfast, who was personally acquainted with the facts. It exhibits scenes that are thoroughly Irish, and will be read, we doubt not, with lively interest.'.

* * * * * * * * *

In a rural district of the north of Ireland, quite near the public road, stands a Roman catholic chapel. It is the Lord's day. *Ave Marias* and *Paternosters* are repeated by the assembled throng, with a zeal which would do honour to a system in strict accordance with holy scripture. But there is one who, though in that crowd, is not of it. He too is intently engaged; but it is with a book. That book is the New Testament. To some circumstances connected with the history of this man attention is now solicited.

He was by birth and education a Roman catholic. When a boy he had learned, at a school in the neighbourhood, to read with considerable propriety. His mind, naturally strong and inquiring, was thus, to some extent, cultivated. While therefore he received the doctrines of his church with unhesitating and unqualified submission, he felt himself under a reasonable obligation to state the grounds of them, when asked to do so by those Protestants with whom he occasionally came into contact. He presently became bolder. He was not content with merely stating his conscientious convictions as a Romanist; he became the assailant, denouncing the doctrines of Protestantism as heretical and consequently destructive to the soul.

In all this Paul (for so was he called) was perfectly *sincere*. He was satisfied that Romanism and the truth were equivalent terms, that his church was infallible, and that all those who were without her pale were rushing with all the rapidity of time, into everlasting ruin. So he was taught; so he thought he read in the scriptures; so he believed.

Paul was a man of strong passions. In all his debates he was thoroughly in earnest. Thus the doctrines for which he contended became rooted in his heart, engrossing and directing not only his waking thoughts but his sleeping fancies.

Many a hard-fought field had there been to decide the truth or falsehood of a purgatory, and the prospects of such as died protestants. The proof from scripture was not, it seems, so strong as to preclude additional evidence. Visions and revelations, therefore, came to Paul's assistance.

In a state, whether in the body or out of the body he could not tell, he felt himself borne into the unseen world. Purgatory and hell were alike unveiled to his view. The Catholics of his acquaintance who had died he saw in the former place, some of them suffering severely enough, others on the very point of deliverance All the protestants who, known to him, had departed this life, he saw in the unquenchable fire, plunged deep in proportion to the extent of their opportunities of knowing and embracing Romanism, and all bitterly bewailing the fatal prejudices by which such a step had been hindered.

To the arguments from the bible Paul was thus able to add additional proof from his own experience - proof of which doubtless he was himself satisfied, but the cogency of which was lost on the private judgment of his opponents. And thus, notwithstanding the apparent vantage ground on which he now stood, he still required to argue from the written word. 'The bible, and the bible only,' was received as conclusive evidence by those with whom he had to do. A close and continual searching of scripture is thus necessitated, and a ray from the lamp of God pierces even the self-satisfied mind of Paul. He who had been so full of confidence, begins to doubt. The true nature of the supposed vision he begins to understand. Tradition, as an authority in matters of faith, he finds he must surrender. He is persuaded that God's word should be the rule even to Romanists. *A scriptural worship should be according to scripture*, he now proclaims as a self-evident truth. And accordingly when the great congregation is engaged in vain repetitions of prayers, Paul, on his bare and bended knees is diligently inquiring after 'a better way.'

The light increases. Paul's understanding opens gradually to the wide discrepancy between popery and the bible. The extent of this discrepancy, according to his conviction for the time being, he marks by the distance at which he kneels from the assembled throng. At first the prayerful perusal of the New Testament was the only peculiarity of his worship as he knelt amid

the others. By and by he becomes satisfied that the church he thought infallible is in error. Then he moves out of the crowd, and draws between it and him a slight line of demarcation. That line becomes more and more marked as his conviction of the extent of error increases. Removed at length to a considerable distance from the other worshippers, this man completely by himself in the chapel-yard engaged on his knees in the diligent perusal of the divine word, presents to the passengers on the public road, according to their respective characters, matter either of merriment or of deep and solemn interest.

It was in this way that this eccentric seeker after truth supposed he was to come out, and to be separate. The space which separated him from the other worshippers he intended as a protest against their unscriptural doctrines and practices.

Paul now gave his testimony loudly and strongly against the errors of his church. As soon as he had learnt for himself the truth, which saves the soul, he laboured incessantly, as opportunity offered, in the chapel yard, and on the way side, on the Lord's days and on the the week-days, to make it known to his fellow worshippers. He was laughed at for his pains, which he felt painfully; but he could not desist. He was in bodily danger: but he committed himself onto Him who preserved his servant in safety in the lion's den.

It is the Lord's day. The attention of a military gentleman, on horseback, is attracted by a considerable crowd on the wayside. Warmer still was the strife of tongues. As he approaches the ear is caught by these words pronounced in a strong, distinct voice;- 'No, no, friends; be not deceived; *Christ will never be a patch.*' Satisfied as to the nature of the assemblage, the gentleman pursued his journey. He arrives in London. A few years pass; he is laid upon a sick bed, and feels he is dying. He has lived a dissolute and thoughtless life, but is now truly concerned about his soul. More than one clergyman waited upon him with instruction and consolation; but they seemed to the sufferer not to understand his case, or not to know the appropriate remedy. The admonitions of one, however, obtained the confidence of the dying man, and showed him that at length his case was understood. To him he felt he might speak all that was in his heart. He told him of the journey in Ireland, of the crowd by the road-side, and the strange language of the

peasant, which, said he, remains unaccountably rooted in my memory: 'a strange association, is it not - Christ and a patch ?' The minister proceeded at once, in connection with these words, to preach Christ is 'the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth' (Rom. x. 4); and that this righteousness, described as a wedding garment (Matt. xxii. 11, 12; Isa. lxi. 30), is a *complete covering*, before God, for the guilty soul; that this work of the Lord, which, ere he died, he declared *'finished'*, does not need the aid of man's performances, but is, of itself infallibly sufficient for the salvation of all who are willing to have life in the way appointed by God (I Cor. iii. 11; Gal. ii. 16; Phil. iii. 9; Heb. i. 3). By means of this testimony, He 'who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shined into the heart of the dying man, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' Joy and peace were his in the final struggle, through the truth, which he had heard the Irish peasant preach.

Paul continued to witness to small and great, and to testify the gospel of the grace of God. The whole amount of good which followed from his disinterested labours eternity only shall reveal. How little of it did he himself know! He has already entered into his rest. Owing, it may be, in part to his great poverty, to his eccentricities and his never entirely amalgamating with any particular body of protestants, he was, too much, overlooked during his last illness. His latter end, however, was eminently peace. The truth which, under every disadvantage he had maintained so long was his support in death.

From these particulars we should learn the value of the bible in the evangelisation of the world. It alone, in the 'demonstration of the Spirit,' was the means of turning Paul to the 'wisdom of the just.' Let us circulate, then, this blessed book in thousands and tens of thousands. Popery in Ireland is strong; the word of God is stronger still. 'My word *shall not return to me void.* It shall *accomplish that which I please*, and *prosper* in the thing whereunto I send it.'

Every Christian also may be useful, Paul never was idle. The word of God was his constant companion; and meet whom he would in conversation, he had always a portion of it at command appropriate to their particular circumstances. Reader, go thou and do likewise. Up, and be doing, and the

Lord shall be with thee. 'Be thou faithful unto death, and thou shalt receive a crown of life.' 'The Lord is at hand'.

The IBFM History: The Sources and Their Implications

Records of the Irish Baptist Foreign Mission 1924-1977

by Andrew Reid

The phrase 'dry as dust' may well be an accurate depiction of the physical condition of the records of the Irish Baptist Foreign Mission, but it certainly does not describe the stories that emerge from those archives. Nor does it convey their importance, for every one of the six implications identified in this paper arising from the history of the IBFM remains very much a live issue today. Before turning to these conclusions however, some brief notes follow on the seven main sources for this project, which has culminated in the publication of *By Divine Coincidence*.

A. The Sources for the IBFM History

1. Annual Reports of the IBFM

A continuous series of Annual Reports exists and for this we are deeply indebted to Miss Evangeline Creighton. After her father, Billy Creighton, died she found copies of reports spanning the years 1931 - 1966 amongst his papers and in 1995 she sent these to Pastor Derek Baxter. The few remaining gaps were filled from the Reports and Statistics of the Baptist Union of Ireland, or in the case of reports prior to 1931, from reprints in the *Irish Baptist Magazine*.

2. Minute Books

The Minute books are complete for the IBFM General Committee 1924 - 1977; the IBFM Executive Committee 1932 - 1963; the IBFM Field

Council 1948 - 1977; and the IBFM Field Executive 1965 - 68. The field minute books were brought back to Ireland only a few years ago once this project had first been mooted.

3. IBFM Prayer-letters and News-letters

The first of these was the mimeographed monthly IBFM circular quaintly addressed 'To the Lord's Remembrancers' (drawing on the marginal translation of Isaiah 62:6-7 in the King James Version) which was circulated from 1927 - 1947. There is by no means a continuous archive of these but perhaps 30% of them have been preserved. These circulars were supplemented and later superseded by articles in the *Irish Baptist Magazine*, including the following regular features and supplements: 'News Bulletin' (1946-1961); 'Foreign Mission News' (1962-64); 'News from Peru' (1965-1967); and 'Irish Baptist Missions News Tie' (1968 on). Between 1965 and 1967 the IBFM also produced a quarterly magazine called *The Tie*. It was not intended primarily as a vehicle for news, so its articles often described the environment the missionaries worked in or else reflected on the IBFM's history, which made them useful for this project. All of these magazines are extant.

4. Correspondence files

These included the correspondence of Mission Secretaries: Fred Gracey, James Shields; Frank Forbes, Bertie Bennett, Joshua Thompson, Louis E. Deens and William Lyttle; and of Mission Treasurers: Robert Arnold, H. Arthur Johnston, John Jeffrey Jr and John G.M. McCullough. A few comments are in order here.

The first sight of the pre-war IBFM correspondence was something of a shock. Fred Gracey's papers were very disordered and were intermingled with James Shields' as well as with those of the early IBFM Treasurers Robert Arnold and Johnston. IBFM correspondence had also become mixed up with files that were nothing to do with the Foreign Mission at all. The physical condition of the papers was somewhat discouraging, too. The long hours spent in that hot, airless cubby-hole under the stairs at 117, Lisburn Road will not quickly be forgotten!

The system adopted for dealing with these early records evolved only

gradually. Firstly, any correspondence to or from any of the missionaries was separated out and filed separately. The remaining IBFM correspondence whether Gracey's or Arnold's was kept together. Each of these folders was sorted into chronological order and sifted to make sure there was no non-IBFM material left. To keep track of all these records Pastor Billy Colville helped set up a computer database which eventually grew to contain 10,000 items of pre-war IBFM correspondence. Pastor Colville has made plans for a permanent record of this data base to be made, probably on CD ROM.

Thankfully this level of work was not necessary for the period after the war. This was due to a number of factors. These archives were in a much better state and for this Dr Joshua Thompson is primarily responsible. Secondly, the introduction of telephones had meant that a lot of trivial communication was no longer recorded and there was thus less clutter in the files. Thirdly, the regular features in the *Irish Baptist Magazine* often quoted directly from the missionaries' letters making the job of finding important passages in the correspondence much easier. For these reasons the computer database was not extended to the period after the War.

Some may question whether reading the correspondence was necessary at all for this project. One reply to this would be that for the early period there often was little information available elsewhere. Further, reading these people's letters provided an insight into their personalities and characters not available in any other way. Pastor L.E.Deens was called 'Louis the Lucid' by his peers. His letters are a delight to read, every sentence elegantly expressed. It seems Bertie Bennett wrote exactly as he spoke. Certainly his letters are long (if infrequent), breezy and newsy. Robert Hosford's correspondence reveals a man of extraordinary vision - and strength of character to match. Stanley Reid's writing communicates a feeling of urgency, no time to waste. The intensity that marked Leslie Scott's personality is shown by his habit of signing his letters 'Pressing on'. One of the most remarkable correspondents was Do–a Rosa. She frequently reported the most extraordinary occurrences in a style best described as down to earth, even matter of fact.

5. IBFM Booklets, Pamphlets and Papers

Many booklets are extant, of which only a few will be mentioned here.

The evangelistic publications which survive were written mainly either by Robert Hosford (under a pseudonym) or by Stanley Reid. Recently his son Austin made a present to the Association of a bound edition of the 66 issues of Stanley Reid's *Verdad* (Truth) magazine published monthly from 1955 - 1959.

Three women proved to be particularly gifted at publicising the work of the IBFM. Ella Hosford wrote three short books during her enforced stay in Ireland during World War Two: *Dona Rosa de Bettin: Ceaseless Sower and Rejoicing Reaper* (18pp) in 1942; *Raul Bettin: Railway Engineer and Gospel Pioneer* (16pp) in 1943; and *Bringing in the Sheaves in Argentina* (31pp) in 1944. This last publication focussed on the work in San Cristobal. Kathleen Reid recounted the story of the conversion of Rufino Chicuyo, who became one of the Union evangelists, in *God calls an Aymara Indian to serve Him on the shores of Lake Titicaca* (4pp) 1956. The previous year Mary Sloan had painted a verbal picture of life around Yunguyo in *Twenty-Four Hours in Peru* (4pp). In 1958 she produced another vivid portrait called *The Transformation of Simon* (5pp).

One interesting IBFM publication consisted of excerpts from Billy McManus' diary kept on his voyage out to Peru. Its full title *From Ireland to Peru: The Journey of Missionaries Wm McManus and Saml Sloan July 19 to Sept 4 1947* (24pp) reveals how long it took in those days for the missionaries to travel to the field. For McManus, as for many of the other early missionaries, one of the highlights of the trip was passing through the Panama Canal.

6. Transcripts of Interviews

During the course of this project over 40 interviews were held with individuals connected with the history of the Mission. Seventeen former IBFM missionaries helped me in Ireland and one answered my questions by post from Australia. I believe I have talked with every former IBFM missionary still living who served for more than three years in South America. In October 1998 I visited South Peru and there interviewed around two dozen believers from Baptist churches there. They included key leaders from Juliaca, Puno, Ilave, Yunguyo, the Yanapata area, Huapaca, Tacna, Tarata and Moquegua. Amongst them were former Presidents and Secretaries of the Union

of Churches as well as three former Evangelists. There were a further six individuals who had other connections with the IBFM's history. The names of all these people are listed in the Preface of *By Divine Coincidence*. Transcripts of these interviews are filed with the other IBFM materials.

Why invest so much time and effort in these interviews? Firstly, in the case of the Peruvian believers no written records existed covering these people's experiences in a systematic way. Secondly, minute books can never provide a full picture on their own - sometimes the atmosphere in a meeting is as significant as any decision made. Thirdly, when I reached the more controversial periods in the Mission's history where there were strong differences of opinion I believed it was essential for me to try to understand both points of view. Inevitably not everyone will agree with all of my conclusions but I trust I have done my best to be fair.

7. Published Reminiscences and Partial Histories

Three articles in the *Irish Baptist Historical Society Journal* are based on the 'Reminiscences of a Retired Missionary'. Mary Sloan wrote an article with precisely that title in Vol. Four (new series) 1996-97 pp45-58. Almost 20 years before her, Bertie Bennett recounted 'Some Recollections of the Early Years of the Foreign Mission' in Vol. Twelve 1979-80 pp34-44. John McVicker gave a paper on 'Hugh and Sadie Mitchell' in Vol. One (new series) 1993-94 pp21-43.

Before me at least five others attempted a history of the early years of the Mission. As early as 1943 Fred Gracey wrote a booklet entitled *A history of the IBFM* although only a printer's draft survives. Another IBFM Secretary, Dr J. Thompson, documented 'The Origins of the I.B.F.M.' in the *Irish Baptist Historical Society Journal* Vol. Two 1969-70 pp17-35. Much more recently he devoted one chapter to the Mission in his book published to celebrate the Centenary of the Baptist Union, *Century of Grace. The Baptist Union of Ireland: A Short History 1895 - 1995* (Belfast 1995).

Before retiring from the field, Sam Sloan gathered information for a paper he entitled *La Historia de los Bautistas en el Sur de Peru - Recuerdos del misionero Samuel Sloan* (The History of the Baptists in the South of Peru - Recollections of Missionary Samuel Sloan). One of his sources was a

series of three lengthy letters written to him by Billy Creighton in 1983. These are especially valuable for the Urubamba years and for Creighton's epic journey down the tributaries of the Amazon in 1931.

Sam Sloan's recollections in turn provided some of the information for Andrew Lovell when he contributed a paper to a joint consultation held by different Baptist missions in Lima in 1990. His paper was published as 'El Ministerio de la Asociacion Bautista del Sur del Peru (Mision Bautista Irlandesa)' (The Ministry of the Baptist Association of the South of Peru) in T. Gutierrez (ed.) *Presencia de la Iglesia Bautista en el Perú* (Fe y Sociedad : Cuadernos de Investigacion Num. 1) Lima 1991 pp12-19. Lovell was one of the first to try and quantify the numerical growth amongst the Baptist churches in the South. His paper is a valuable one, but it needs to be supplemented, as the records available to him were very incomplete.

When other sources not available to Lovell are included in this kind of analysis they show that rather than long periods of uniform growth the churches in Peru underwent two very sharp growth spurts or surges. The first was between 1947-1957, the second from 1968-1972. In the latter period - only five years long - the Union doubled in size from 34 congregations to 70. In both cases the growth surge then dissipated over the following years. The reasons for this cannot be discussed here but are dealt with to some extent in *By Divine Coincidence* and in much greater detail in the thesis.

Finally, contributions to two particular areas of the history of the IBFM should be mentioned: the Women's Auxiliary and the Camps ministry in Peru. For the first see Joan Thompson's article 'The Beginnings of the Women's Auxiliary' in *Irish Baptist Historical Society Journal* Vol. Ten 1977-78 pp4-18 and the anonymous booklet Working Together: 50 Years of the Women's Auxiliary 1928 - 1978 (16pp). Claude Macquigg gathered a lot of information for his short book *Baptist Camps, Peru... twenty-five years of evangelism* Belfast 1993.

B. Implications of the IBFM's History

1. Priorities.

Have we the same motivation for Mission today as Irish Baptists had in

the past? I have been deeply moved by the sacrifice and dedication shown by our workers. Irish Baptists had no idea initially of how difficult an area we had chosen to work and yet 16 of our missionaries served for over 20 years. In rural Argentina the difficulties included severe drought. In Peru the physical and mental effects of the altitude wore down a series of missionaries including Bertie Bennett, Helen Creighton, Stanley Reid, John McVicker, Andrew Lovell and may have played a part in the difficulties experienced by others like Leslie Scott and Molly Allen. The formidable list of health casualties included five children, too: Daphne Reid, one of the Barr—n twins, Alan McManus, Stephen Thompson and David Hughes. One particular risk not known when the IBFM relocated to the South of Peru was that the probability of children being born with holes in their heart is multiplied many times over if they are born at the altitude of Puno.

Less dramatically there was simply the harshness of everyday life. As late as 1963, Mary Sloan was still describing their living conditions in Yunguyo like this, 'there is no water except in the street and lavatory facilities are nil - we use a box covered with oilcloth and a five gallon drum below. This we empty into a special hole on the property'.[1] The early missionaries led very isolated lives. Of course there was no telephone, but it also took six weeks for a letter to cross the Atlantic so a minimum of 3 months would pass before they received an answer to any query. They were separated even from the other missionaries by miles of perilous travel. Of course we know that the dangers of the Peruvian roads ultimately claimed the lives of Hugh and Sadie Mitchell.

What motivated our missionaries to make those sacrifices? Three convictions surface repeatedly in the Mission records. Firstly, the missionaries were sure that without Christ people were lost eternally. Secondly, the IBFM had a tremendous confidence in the power of God's word to transform lives. Thirdly, the Lord's Return was a real and immediate prospect to the mission staff- they believed that time was short. Shortly after the creation of the IBFM Fred Gracey wrote, 'What if this latest missionary organisation should be the means of evangelising the last tribes to be reached before Jesus comes?'.[2] Are we as confident about those three doctrines today?

2. Culture

Robert Hosford was perhaps the IBFM missionary who thought most deeply about the need for the gospel to be expressed in terms appropriate to the culture in which he was working. In 1930, decades before the term 'contextualisation was coined, Hosford wrote to Gracey, 'I understand [Christ] as though he was born and reared in Cork. To the Argentinians and to the Indians it is just the same. We must become as native as we can in all things of thought and interpretation. '[3] This was why he argued that the IBFM should employ more South Americans than Irish missionaries, so that the gospel would not seem foreign to those hearing the message.

Our Irish missionaries tried hard to adapt themselves to the local culture. One amusing incident involved Lila Marks. After she had worked in the Puno hospital for some time she was invited to a social gathering for the medical staff. One of the other workers was curious about her faith and asked her. 'What are you allowed to do, I see you don't drink, smoke or eat olives!' Lila's response to this was to decide, 'If it kills me, I am going to learn to eat olives' - and she grew to love them! [4]

The experience of the missionaries in Peru before 1947 illustrates the need for this cultural adaptation. They found that they struggled to win converts in the Peruvian highlands whereas churches were planted much more quickly in Tacna or in Argentina, but the reason for this dawned only slowly on the IBFM. Quite simply the missionaries had adapted reasonably well to the predominant, Spanish-speaking culture of urban Peru and Argentina. On the other hand there was still an enormous cultural and linguistic barrier to be crossed before the Aymaras could be reached with the gospel.

Surely the application is obvious in Ireland, North or South. To win the travellers, or the resident Chinese community we must adapt to them. If we want to win Northern Nationalists to Christ then we will need to adapt to Northern Nationalist culture. Where are the Irish Baptists prepared to change their lifestyle accordingly? Will the rest of us allow them the freedom to do so?

3. The Role of Women

The IBFM deeply affected the lives of Irish Baptist women. The creation of the Women's Auxiliary gave a new opportunity for women to exercise gifts in the Irish Baptist Churches. In 1945 a secretary of one W.A. branch wrote that 'many of our members who never before heard their own voices in public have been enabled to lead in prayer, in testimony and to lead the meeting'.[5]

However, what is particularly striking is the enormous variety of roles adopted on the field by our female workers. Some of the married women elected to play little part in public ministry, believing their role to be primarily that of supporting their husbands or caring for the children. Irene Bennett provides a clear example. Helen Creighton combined her role at home with visiting women and organising children's meetings, but other women had much more visible roles. Nurse Sloan's ministry focussed on midwifery and teaching the children of Ilave. Dona Rosa was an Evangelist, perhaps the most effective Evangelist the IBFM ever employed. Mary Sloan and Dorothy Black preached on occasion and Kathleen Reid did so regularly.

This shows that the IBFM had the same outlook and made the same assumptions as many other Evangelical missions. On the mission field there was considerable liberty for women to minister due to the relative scarcity of trained men, but at home ministry opportunities for women at home remained restricted. Do we still perpetuate this compromise today?

4. Partnership

One of the most remarkable episodes in the IBFM history occurred between 1933 and 1943 when the mission took on twice as many nationals as Irish missionaries. This was common enough amongst missionary societies but the IBFM also recruited and sent five Argentinian missionaries to Peru. This was a development decades ahead of its time and it had tremendous consequences. Amongst them are the first evangelism in the Carumas valley, the establishing of the Tacna church - started largely through the work of Orlando Avalos - and the beginning of Evangelical witness in Moquegua. For five years Avalos also published a magazine spreading news amongst the Peruvian churches and this has never since been repeated.

The consequences for the Argentinian missionaries themselves were also far-reaching. Their experience of service in Peru later stood them in good stead in years of ministry with the Southern Baptist denomination in Argentina. Yet, as the number of these workers grew, the IBFM was forced to ponder unsettling questions about its ethos and practice. Did Argentinian Baptists have the same goals and priorities as Irish Baptists? How should sending churches in Argentina relate to the IBFM Committee? Did the Argentinian workers feel a loyalty to the IBFM or only to Robert Hosford, who had recruited them, and so on? Sadly, the leaders of the Mission became disturbed about these issues to the point where they dramatically reversed their policy in 1943 and from then on took on no further Argentinians. It is hard to resist the conclusion that the IBFM had been prepared to employ them but not to give them a real say in shaping the ethos and direction of the Mission.

Twenty years later in Peru a number of national leaders had acquired significant experience either as Evangelists or in positions of leadership in the Union of Churches. The missionaries valued their ministries and service and were delighted to see them assuming responsibility in directing the affairs of the Peruvian churches. However, it does not seem to have occurred to the Irish missionaries that the work of the Mission itself should evolve into a partnership with Peruvians. When national believers demanded a say in the use of Mission property or finances, or over the location of Irish missionaries, these demands were resisted strongly. The circumstances at the time were not favourable, as the current Union Council had become very hostile to the Mission. Nevertheless, the IBFM did not seriously consider, neither before the crisis nor after it had died down, whether it was right in the long term for it to maintain a separate identity within Peru. This raises questions as to the extent to which Irish Baptists are truly committed to working in partnership, to sharing resources and authority.

5. Discernment in understanding our social and political context

The further back we look in history the easier it is to pick out the 'Divine Coincidences' through which God brings his purposes to pass. One famous example, often quoted, is that the dissemination and impact of Martin Luther's writings, and especially of his translation of Scripture, owed a great deal to the fact that God had arranged for Gutenburg to discover movable-

type printing some decades beforehand.

The history of the IBFM provides several examples of such 'Divine Coincidences'. The most striking is the timing of the arrival of the 'second wave' of missionaries in Peru (1947-1950). The welcome given to those workers and their message by the Aymara Indians is intriguing; as is the resulting explosive growth of the Baptist congregations amongst them, because it stands in sharp contrast to the experience of the IBFM missionaries up until 1947. Research revealed that this exactly mirrored the history of five other Protestant missions working amongst the Aymara in Bolivia. The Canadian Baptists, the Bolivian Indian Mission (later renamed the Andes Evangelical Mission and later still merged with SIM), the (Quaker) Oregon Friends, the Bolivian Holiness Mission and the Seventh Day Adventists all found that their work suddenly began to grow rapidly in the late 1940s.

It is surprising to find so little reflection in the IBFM missionaries' correspondence on why the situation amongst the Aymara had changed so dramatically. It seems the Mission assumed that the greater response was simply due to the increased numbers of IBFM missionaries on the field and did not enquire further. However, several writers who have studied recent Aymara history argue that a substantial change occurred in their culture in the 1940s due to factors such as the increasing number of roads being built across their land, exposing them to new influences. I am convinced that, in his providence, God ensured that the arrival of that second wave of missionaries coincided with a new and unprecedented openness to the gospel amongst this ethnic group.

One reason that none of the missionaries asked the question 'Why are the Aymaras responding in a new way to the gospel?' was simply that the rapidly-expanding demands of the work did not leave them time for reflection. In addition, when things are going that well there is less sense of urgency about such questions. However, the lack of attention to the social and political context left the Mission vulnerable to change.

There was another significant shift in Aymara culture in the 1960s. Two decades earlier the Aymaras turned to the outside world looking for help, but now they demanded their rights. The mood of the country, indeed of

most of Latin America, had become much more radical and the Aymaras were now strongly influenced by socialism. But the Mission continued to operate much as it had done decades before because there was little real understanding or empathy with the new Aymara situation.

We have similar examples in Northern Ireland. W.P. Nicholson continued to visit the province several decades after the heady days of the 1920s yet the same response was not seen. It was the same man, his message and methods had not changed, but the context had. Today we live amidst great change and need considerable discernment to understand what God is doing in our social and political context.

6. Relationships

The saddest feature of the IBFM records is the frequency of internal conflicts. Disagreements on the mission field, as in any area of life, are inevitable but the strong individualism displayed by the Mission staff made these very difficult to resolve. More workers left the IBFM due to conflict than for any other reason except health.[6] In the early years conflict was rarely mentioned in public as the reason the worker was leaving but often it is easy to establish that this was the real problem.

There are a number of factors that contributed to the strong individualism of the workers. Firstly, the IBFM was not the first mission to find that pioneer missionaries tend to have strong characters. Consider this quote from a Ph.D. thesis on the Overseas Missions of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. 'The inner force of personal convictions and determination which enables the solitary pioneer to carry on and overcome against all odds often has, as its other side, an inability to see things from another person's point of view. The virtues which enable such people to face the foes without, also unfortunately become the vices which have a tendency to create foes within'.[7]

Secondly, the Northern Irish Protestant background of most of the missionaries is one that sometimes prizes standing up for one's beliefs more highly than skills in reaching accommodation or compromise. In an address to be given at the 1990 May Assembly, Hugh Mitchell intended thanking the Mission Committee on his retirement though he had not 'always seen eye to eye on every issue' with them. For that to have happened, he wrote, would

have needed 'the blood of some other nation to be running in our veins.' [8]

Thirdly, might our Irish Baptist ecclesiology militate against us in the area of interpersonal relationships? It is possible so to over-stress the autonomy (or even the independence) of the local church that we have no sense of accountability at all to anyone outside our own local congregation. In 1974 David Kingdon in a paper to this society described one of the characteristics of Irish Baptist Theology as 'evangelical individualism'.[9] The consequences of this for missionaries on the field are not difficult to see. Workers do not see themselves as answerable to each other but only to an extremely-distant Mission Secretary and beyond him to their home church. Perhaps a more Biblical position would lay equal stress on the autonomy of the local church and on our responsibility to love one another? In any case, as Bertie Bennett wrote to Billy Creighton in 1941 'I cannot get away from the idea that it is the lack of our spirituality which prevents us from working harmoniously together.' [10]

We should not be surprised to discover that the missionaries were human and thus fallible! In his wisdom, God has always chosen 'jars of clay' [11] in which to store his priceless treasure. Noah, Abraham, Moses, Gideon and David were all less than perfect, but the inspired author of the epistle to the Hebrews had no qualms in using their example to spur on his readers. What characterised that 'cloud of witnesses'[12] - and the men and women of the IBFM - was not perfection, but faith.

Acknowledging our limitations and weaknesses should not discourage us from dedicating ourselves to the extension of Christ's kingdom. For, as Bishop Frank Houghton wrote,

> 'It is a secret joy to find
> The task assigned beyond our powers;
> For then, if aught
> Of good be wrought,
> Clearly the praise is His, not ours!'[13]

Footnotes:

1 Mary Sloan to Gina Lloyd 13.11.63

2 Irish Baptist Magazine March 1927

3 Hosford to Gracey 04.02.30
4 Interview with Lila Marks 27.7.99
5 Home and Foreign Mission Annual Report for 1945 pp18-19
6 Out of a total of 66 workers, 13 left IBFM service before completion of their contract for health
reasons, 11 due to conflict. Children's education was the most important factor for a further 10.
7 W.P Addley, 'A Study of the Birth and Development of the Overseas Missions of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland up to 1910Õ, PhD thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1994, pp318-9.
8 Macquigg. Baptist Camps, Peru... twenty-five years of evangelism Belfast 1993 p96.
9 *Irish Baptist Magazine* July 1974 pp6-9).
10 Bennett to Creighton 19.8.41
11 2 Corinthians 4:7
12 Hebrews 12:1
13 Quoted in *Reaching for the Goal. The Life Story of David Adeney, Ordinary Man, Extraordinary Mission* (OMF and Harold Shaw Publishers, 1993) p246, reproduced by permission of OMF International.

BOOK REVIEW

Andrew Reid, ***By Divine Coincidence*** (Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland, Belfast, 2000) pb. £6.99 plus p & p £1.60), 218pp.

The story of how Irish Baptist missionaries pioneered gospel outreach in South America told in an easy, readable style but well-researched and documented. It deals with the triumphs and challenges of establishing churches in a difficult physical and spiritual climate in Argentina and Peru from 1925 to 1977. It deals frankly with inter-personal problems.

This book provides valuable insights into spreading the gospel in south Peru, particularly among the Aymaras of the high Andes and the economically-deprived people in the towns of the coastal area around Tacna. It sheds light on the current operations of Baptist Missions in Peru as part of the Irish Baptist overseas programme.

Written by Andrew Reid, a grandson of one of the first missionary couples to work with the Irish Baptist Foreign Mission in south Peru, this book should be widely read by all who have an interest in mission and is a must for every Irish Baptist.

Irish Baptist Historical Society

Report to Annual Assembly 2001

The year 2000 brought a great sadness to the members in the death of our President, Dr. H D Gribbon on 27 April. A tribute appeared in volume 7 (n.s.) of the *Journal*. Arrangements are afoot to elect a successor.

The year 2000 saw the publication of *By Divine Coincidence*, by Andrew Reid, being a history of the Irish Baptist Foreign Mission from its formation in 1924 until it was merged with the Irish Baptist Home Mission in 1977 to form Baptist Missions. It is gratifying that the book has been well-received in our churches and beyond. We are grateful to Sir Ivan Neill for sponsoring the project.

At the annual meeting during the Assembly of our Association of Churches, Andrew Reid read a paper on writing the history of the IBFM. A good attendance at the September meeting listened attentively to a stimulating paper read by David McMillan on 'The Local Church in the Twenty-first Century.' At the November meeting Norman Shields presented a thoroughly researched paper entitled 'Narrowers of the Narrow Way', a history of the Cooneyites. The March 2001 meeting considered future arrangements for the work of the Society, and heard a paper from the Secretary on William Sloan Eccles, sometime pastor of the Academy Street Church, Belfast, including an account by Eccles entitled 'Christ is not a Patch!'.

Sadly the topics - 'Changing Patterns of Worship among Irish Baptists', and 'Comparisons between the Baptist Community in 1900 and 2000' - had to be deferred due to our failure to find writers. We hope they will figure in our programme another year.

Members of our churches are invited to become members of the Society for a modest subscription of £10 a year. Husbands and wives may be joint-members for £15. Included in subscription is the Society's *Journal* published annually in May.