

Overall, I would have liked greater historical depth from Randall and less plotting of screeds of events. I was intrigued with Randall's noting how English Baptists counted Lloyd George (Prime Minister of Britain, 1916-1922) as one of their own, notwithstanding his philandering, particularly his affair over thirty years with his private secretary, Frances Stevenson. Given the propensity of Baptists to view sexual sin as particularly serious, I would have liked some comment as to why English Baptists seemed to turn a blind eye to the situation. Maybe they were keener for their denomination to have a place of reflected glory in the centre of English life than to apply consistently the values that they otherwise held.

One crucial theme that keeps re-appearing in the book is the ongoing numerical decline of the English Baptist Churches in the twentieth century, notwithstanding repeated denominational attempts to arrest and reverse the decline through evangelistic and other strategies. The book does, however, note that the downward trend may have been reversed in the 1990s, research indicating that notwithstanding total British church attendance dropping by 14% in that decade, Baptist attendance increased by 13%. It is a pity that Randall does not explore more factors both in the decline and in the apparent turn-around.

Clearly I would have liked a different approach from the one Randall has chosen to deliver. At the same time I recognise the richness of resource he has provided us with in this voluminous work. In the end, where I was expecting a destination, Randall has provided me with a signpost, a pointer to lots of material, to lots of issues and to the interpretation of other scholars that I need to follow up. It remains a 'must-get' book for serious students of English Baptist history.

Laurie Guy

**P.E. Thompson and A.R. Cross (eds) *Recycling the Past or Researching History: Studies in Baptist Historiography and Myths*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought 11, Carlisle: Paternoster, 2005, ISBN 1-84227-122-9 (331 pp)**

This valuable series continues to present new material to the Baptist historian and theologian. This collection of essays, timed to coincide with the centenary meetings of the BWA, 'seeks to recover a sense of communal power through an interrogation of certain portions of the

Baptist past.'(xix). As the title suggests, the burden of some of the essays is iconoclastic, the questioning of myths which the authors discern to be too readily uncritically accepted. So, Clive Jarvis re-examines Particular Baptist Calvinism, suggesting that the picture of a fundamental shift from High-Calvinism to Fullerism has been overstated. In similar vein, Anthony Cross tackles the alleged non-sacramentalism of English Baptists and Ian Randall their supposed impoverished spirituality in the early part of the twentieth century. These and other specific essays - from studies of seventeenth-century soteriology, to the lives of Baptist women, to instances of episcopal function in Britain and Georgia - helpfully uncover poorly recognized aspects of the Baptist past or cast familiar questions in a new light.

The fifteen essays in this volume thus provide a stimulating look at a range of questions, often based on original research and fresh perspectives. It is the type of material which has been obscured or just plain lacking in Baptist historical literature. The gathering of a strong collection like this in one place highlights the worth of this focused series. Of the two threads suggested in the title historiography and myth, the second is well addressed. A number of assumed interpretations will need to be revisited in light of this and other research. The outcome with regard to the historiography side of the equation is not so satisfying, although this perhaps cannot be laid at the door of the editors and contributors. 'Historiography' is addressed here primarily in its relation to the 'myth' question. The focus of some of the studies is the way in which earlier historical writing has misrepresented or misjudged the complexities of Baptist life thought and practice. A good example is Mike Broadway's essay which identifies the blurring of categories like voluntaryism into individualism and the acceptance of the latter tag by many commentators and historians. On this level Baptist 'historiography', is indeed addressed and at times fairly criticized.

Yet there is another, theoretical, level of historiography which needs to be tackled if the editors' ambition of speaking for the Baptist religious tradition is to be fully realized. Drs Thompson and Cross accept E.S. Gausted's point that Baptists struggle to grasp 'that essence, that defining difference which constitutes being Baptist.' (xvi). This the editors put down to the multivalency of Baptist origins and the pragmatic concerns of Baptists themselves. The second factor, they conclude, makes it all the more imperative that the stories of Baptist origins be rigorously studied and related. Hence the attention in this volume to historiography in its literary sense.

There remains, however, a clear need for attention to historiography in its theoretical sense. Baptist historians have not satisfactorily wrestled with the philosophical task of understanding a Baptist way of doing history. This is a pity, as it is more than possible that the pragmatism - even (at times, let's face it) Philistinism - of Baptists may be found to be not merely an unfortunate additional barrier to understanding, but perhaps an intimate pointer to the nature of the Baptist view of the past.

A nod in this direction is found in Phillip Thompson's essay on 'the myth of changelessness in Baptist life and belief'. Addressing the role of tradition in the North American context, Thompson suggests that there is a deeper problem than mere 'amnesia', the forgetting of the past. Rather what is at work is a 'paramnesia', 'remembering of the wrong thing', an incorrect version of the past. Tradition continues to function in a sociological sense as a source of assurance which enables the 'communal embodiment' of belief. However it can detract rather than support the formation of a truly Christian identity when it propounds a false perception of the past. Thompson argues that Baptists need to re-envision the authority of tradition as a 'moral claim' on the present.

Thomson's interesting study is useful. It goes some way in grasping the dynamics of Baptist engagement with the past. There remains much ground to cover. The work of Baptist theologians across the centuries who have pointed forward, rather than backward for the organizing principles of Baptist thought needs to be incorporated in Baptist historiography. Even more so, the particularity of Baptist thought and experience must be more positively acknowledged. Baptist ecclesiology understands the church to be continuously created by the Spirit in the gathering of believers. This ongoing manifestation of the Kingdom is real, flesh and blood real. It thus involves decisions, choices and practical action. Until Baptist historians take seriously the inherent immediacy of the Baptist vision of Church and Kingdom then the apparent tension between a rich past and a pragmatic present will not be resolved.

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