

‘Duties of Manhood’: South Australian Baptists and Manly Character circa 1880-1940¹

ABSTRACT

South Australian Baptists liked to view themselves as ‘people of the Book’. But their views on what constituted manliness were strongly influenced by a pervasive discourse on character which was rooted not only in biblical ideas but in notions derived from the Enlightenment and Romanticism. South Australian Baptists believed that men had a God-given responsibility to engage with the wider world and in the process protect women from the dangers of the world and provide for them. They maintained that men needed to provide strong leadership if manly character, families and churches were to flourish. Denominational leaders hoped that men would lead in a ‘red-blooded revival of vital religion’ that would result in many conversions and the transformation of society, but were often disappointed by what they viewed as men’s failure to fulfil their God-given duties.² Moreover, they viewed with alarm the disparity between the sexes in church attendance and membership.

The Importance of Christ-like Character

In 1877, James Gray, a leading South Australian Baptist, theorised that the ‘duties of manhood’ included protecting women from the demands of the wider world.³ He declared that ‘in all ordinary cases the protector

¹ This article is largely drawn from the author’s doctoral thesis. J.S Walker, ‘The Baptists in South Australia, circa 1900 to 1939’, (PhD thesis, Flinders University, Adelaide, 2006).

² The words belong to the Rev. F.W. Norwood, minister of North Adelaide Baptist Church. *Australian Baptist (AB)*, 3 July 1917, 2. Norwood later became the minister of City Temple, London.

³ South Australia was founded as a British colony in 1836. It was the only Australian colony not to accept convicts from Britain and from its

takes to the woman the place of society, and while her duties are towards him he meets for her all the demands of the great world outside'.⁴ Gray's beliefs about masculinity and femininity were predicated on beliefs about 'character' which were widely influential for much of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century in the English-speaking world. As Stefan Collini has argued in his study of political thought and intellectual life in Britain between 1850 and 1930, the popularity of political and social theories such as liberalism and socialism rested on their ability to give foundation and coherent form to attitudes and beliefs already widely held, beliefs such as the importance of 'character' and 'altruism'.⁵ Churches, too, invoked the idea of character in their attempt to provide church members and potential converts a compelling vision of life. Indeed, Hugh McLeod has suggested that the notion of character was the nearest thing to a basic tenet 'linking conversion-centred, sacrament-centred, and undogmatic liberal churches in late Victorian London'.⁶

Such was the importance of the idea of character to South Australian Baptists that they frequently used the term 'character' alongside (or even to displace) older terms such as 'holiness' that had previously been employed to describe the moral and spiritual growth of individuals. Edith Wilcox, secretary of the South Australian Baptist Women's League and a major influence within the South Australian Baptist Union (SABU) from the mid-1920s to the mid-1950s, for one, avoided the older terms when she claimed:

There is no denying that there are advantages and disadvantages in a man's birthplace and a man's birthright. We do not start equal in physical or any other endowment... Our ancestry is not our

foundation had no state-established church. Protestant denominations with their origins in British Nonconformity were much stronger in South Australia than in the other Australian colonies. In the 1901 Australian census, 6 per cent of South Australians described themselves as Baptist compared with 1 per cent in New South Wales.

⁴ *Truth and Progress (TP)*, July 1877, 76.

⁵ Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life In Britain, 1850-1930*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 4, 61, chapters 2, 4. On the influence of the idea of character on English socialists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Norman Dennis and A.H. Halsey, *English Ethical Socialism: Thomas More to R. H. Tawney*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 62, ch. 12.

⁶ Hugh McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*, (London: Croom Helm, 1974), 157-158.

choice but honesty is, intellectual integrity is, all moral value, all spiritual worth. In a word – CHARACTER.

Character is what you make of life. Character is made, not born. It is achieved, [her emphasis] not donated. The raw material is God’s free gift but the fashioning is done by men.⁷

Similarly, John Paynter, a leading South Australian Baptist minister, declared (quoting John Clifford) that ‘religion in the last analysis is character’.⁸

Biblical themes were foundational to Baptist beliefs about the importance of character. Baptist leaders, for example, held up Jesus Christ as the ultimate model for Christian character and as the living saviour and lord in whom everyone was called to place their trust. And they often portrayed one quality, self-denial, as the epitome of Christ-like character. The Rev. F.G. Benskin, was one who urged his congregation at Flinders Street Baptist Church to emulate Christ by living a life of self-forgetfulness.⁹ Similarly, when John Weymouth, an elderly Baptist, was killed in 1934 while fighting bush fires, he was lauded as someone who had ‘caught the spirit of his master’.¹⁰ By way of contrast, Baptists portrayed those who lived ‘selfish’ lives as being far removed from

⁷ South Australian Baptist Homes for Aged, *A Rainbow of Hope: Three Addresses by Edith Wilcox, a Founder of the Home*, (Adelaide: South Australian Baptist Homes for the Aged, 1999), 9.

⁸ *Southern Baptist (SB)*, 26 February 1902, 55. Baptists of widely different theological views embraced the concept of character. Paynter was a religious liberal, but Donald McNicol, a conservative evangelical, also defined success in life in terms of character. *Baptist Record (BR)*, 15 May 1930, 16. For further references to character, see *TP*, April 1869, 57; *SB*, 13 October 1908, 244; *AB*, 14 September 1915, 4.

⁹ *BR*, 15 July 1926, 7. Flinders Street Baptist Church is the central ‘cathedral’ church of Adelaide Baptists. Benskin was minister of Flinders Street Baptist Church in 1921–26. Prior to coming to South Australia he was a prominent minister in England.

¹⁰ *AB*, 17 April 1934, 3. For further examples of this focus on selflessness and self-sacrifice, see *BR*, 15 May 1929, 3; 15 October 1929, 13; South Australian Baptist Union, *Baptist Handbook for 1935*, (Adelaide: South Australian Baptist Union, 1934), 8. Hereafter, this annual publication of the South Australian Baptist Union and the Furreedpore Mission will be referred to as the *Baptist Handbook*.

Christ. Donovan Mitchell, Benskin's successor at Flinders Street Baptist Church, for instance, referred to the 'Christless and selfish individual'.¹¹

Although Baptist ideas about the importance of character drew heavily on biblical concepts, they were also much indebted to contemporary intellectual currents and cultural developments. Baptists, in using the language of character, were often influenced by the cluster of ideas associated with it. Collini's insights on character provide a helpful starting point to explore these ideas. He argues that the moral and political discourse of the eighteenth century was conducted more in the language of virtue than the language of character.¹² The language of virtue, he claims, was not focused on change but on preventing the corruption of the existing order lest the existing balance be disrupted. By way of contrast, the language of character that came to the fore in the nineteenth century with its focus on self-reliant and adaptable behaviour was essentially forward looking and was predicated on the ideas of change and progress – two notions that were characteristic of the Enlightenment. Applying Collini's insights to South Australian Baptists, we see that they believed that only the spread of Christ-like character could provide secure, godly foundations for society in the modern, fast-changing world. That is why one prominent minister, F.W. Norwood, declared that 'character is watched as never before' and why Baptists, worried about industrial conflict, often urged workers to consider the importance of individual character.¹³ Hence also the claim of A.T. Brainsby, Norwood's predecessor as minister of North Adelaide Baptist Church, that 'every man who builds up a steadfast Christian character is helping to build a Christian state'.¹⁴

¹¹ *BR*, 12 March 1931, 11. Mitchell was minister of Flinders Street Baptist Church in 1927-33.

¹² Collini, *Public Moralists*, 104-113.

¹³ *AB*, 28 April 1914, 3. Norwood declared that his generation had been 'born into a time of transition and crisis' and was seeking to discover its duty. *SB*, 15 June 1909, 142. Similarly, the Rev. Thomas Dowding believed he was living in a 'restless, shifting age'. *TP*, 4 January 1894, 9.

¹⁴ A.T. Brainsby (ed.), *Christian Outlook: A Monthly Calendar and Record of Christian Work and Outlook at the Baptist Church, North Adelaide, South Australia*, March 1913, 4. Brainsby, who came to North Adelaide from England, was minister of North Adelaide Baptist Church in 1911-13.

The Development of Christ-like Character

Baptists held that incremental change was essential to character development. They believed that Christians could develop Christian character if they consistently made the right choices and performed the right actions. In 1920, the *Australian Baptist* claimed, for instance, that 'A man has no character except what is built up through the medium of the things he does from day to day.'¹⁵ This was also Edith Wilcox's point when she claimed that character was made, not born, achieved and not donated.¹⁶ Furthermore, Baptists regarded perseverance in a hostile or unsympathetic environment as particularly important to character development. This is seen in a claim in the *Baptist Record* that the gospel way was the way of hardness and that only hardness could make a great soul.¹⁷ Baptists also stressed the importance of making the right character-building choices for the right reasons. Choices were not to be made on the basis of worldly acclaim. 'Character is what a man is in the dark', claimed the *Baptist Messenger*.¹⁸ In addition, Baptists believed that consistent right choices (good habits) led to 'fixity' of good character in which conscience and instinct had been developed aright.¹⁹ Wrong choices, it was thought, led to fixity of the wrong sort, a hardening of bad character from which it was difficult for a person to turn.²⁰ Thus Baptists regarded habit as having a 'mighty power', either for good or for ill. It was 'the magistrate of man's life'.²¹

It is likely that beliefs about incremental change through consistent effort not only owed something to biblical ideas about sanctification, but were partly derived from Enlightenment-inspired ideas about regularity and progressive development.²² Such traits were

¹⁵ *AB*, 2 March 1920, 9.

¹⁶ Wilcox, *A Rainbow of Hope*, 9.

¹⁷ *BR*, 15 October 1924, 14. See also *SB*, 14 July 1903, 165.

¹⁸ *The Baptist Home Messenger and Morphet Vale and Aldinga Church Herald*, April 1908, unpagged. This phrase originated with the American evangelist, Dwight L. Moody.

¹⁹ *AB*, 14 April 1914, 2; 3 August 1915, 16; *BR*, 15 May 1925, 11. On 'fixity' of character, see the sermon by F.C. Spurr, minister of Collins Street Baptist Church in Melbourne. *SB*, 1 January 1910, 13.

²⁰ *TP*, May 1878, 49-50; *SB*, 1 January 1910, 13.

²¹ *TP*, May 1878, 50.

²² The emphasis on regularity can be seen in the work of the English utilitarian, Jeremy Bentham. According to Roy Porter, 'irregularity was Jeremy Bentham's *bête noire*, and the rationalization of the legal and administrative systems his *raison d'être*'. Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World*, (London, Allen Lane, 2000), 213.

popularised by authors such as the nineteenth-century Scot, Samuel Smiles, who acclaimed qualities like duty, consistent effort, and perseverance in the face of adversity.²³ Given the widespread appeal of authors such as Smiles, it is highly probable that they influenced the thinking of South Australian Baptists regarding character development. Certainly, R.M. Waddy's presidential address to the SABU in 1908, entitled 'A Committee of One', reads like a Smiles book, so effusive is it in its portrayal of consistent effort and individual achievement.²⁴

While ideas about character development not directly drawn from biblical thought influenced Baptists, Baptists also derived many of their beliefs about character growth from the Bible. In the opinion of Baptist leaders, for example, the most important habits were the ones which helped develop an on-going relationship with God for it was this relationship that was regarded as being foundational to the deepening of character. They believed that 'the life of God in the soul' was essential to 'vital personal religion' and to the development of Christian character.²⁵ While some Baptists who had been influenced by liberal theology did not place as much emphasis on the need for a conversion experience at a particular point in time as did more conservative members of the denomination, Baptists of every theological hue shared a concern for religious experience. Richard Ostrander's argument that American Protestants of divergent theological perspectives all sought to 'recover vibrant spirituality in an age obsessed with material achievement' can be applied to South Australian Baptists.²⁶ Peter Fleming and Norman Beurle, both ministers who had been influenced by moderate religious liberalism, called for the return of 'vital religion'.²⁷ Beurle declared that what was needed to counter the modern world's 'feverish' and 'shallow' activity was Christians 'vitalized by the Spirit of God, and absolutely surrendered to the will of Christ'.²⁸ The same concerns are evident among those who held more conservative theological beliefs. The

²³ On Smiles, see Kenneth Fielden, 'Samuel Smiles and Self-Help', *Victorian Studies* 12 (December 1968), 155-176; Collini, *Public Moralists*, 100-101; Arthur Herman, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Scots' Invention of the Modern World*, (London: Fourth Estate, 2001), 326-328.

²⁴ *Baptist Handbook for 1908*, 11-18. On the importance of consistent, regular effort, see also the poem 'Little by Little', *TP*, March 1879, 34.

²⁵ *SB*, 19 October 1911, 698; *BR*, July 1923, 13.

²⁶ Richard Ostrander, 'The Battery and the Windmill: Two Models of Protestant Devotionalism in Early-Twentieth-Century America', *Church History* 65:1 (March 1996): 42.

²⁷ *AB*, 7 October 1919, 4; 21 October 1919, 1, 4.

²⁸ *AB*, 21 October 1919, 1, 4.

thinking of another minister, E.H. Watson, was typical. In answer to his own question as to why so many Baptists had 'little desire to see souls won for Christ', Watson claimed that it was because they had not been inspired by the Holy Spirit. He declared that Baptists needed the 'Pentecostal fire'.²⁹

In line with their beliefs about the need for a developing relationship with God, Baptist ministers and other leaders in church life emphasised to church members the importance of regular public worship and the practice of other spiritual disciplines. 'Religion will never become a reality to us', claimed A.W. Badger in his presidential address to the SABU in 1921, 'unless we regularly attend the services of the sanctuary'.³⁰ Personal prayer and Bible study were seen as being of almost equal importance to public worship in the development of Christian character, as God used these two means to build 'direct contact with every human soul'.³¹ As Grimshaw Binns, minister of St Peters Baptist Church, claimed in 1918, only prayer touched 'the springs of character' that led to the kind of religious dynamism that would result in Christians 'building up the city of God in this fair land of ours'.³²

Man the Overcomer

Although Baptists believed that both men and women should strive to build character, they tended to believe, as this articles' opening quotation from James Gray illustrates, that the world outside the home was the main location for the development of manly Christian character. They held that men should shape their environment through strength of character, overcoming adversity in the process. Such beliefs are evident in a 1926 obituary to John Jamieson, a farmer from Orroroo in South Australia's northern wheat belt. Jamieson, whose efforts in life were categorised as heroic, was described as an 'incurable optimist' as neither 'drought, nor locust, nor loss of flocks and farm stock could conquer his

²⁹ *Baptist Handbook for 1943*, 10. Baptists who were active in the holiness circles or in the Oxford Group movement also hoped for a widespread renewal of Christian experience and vitality.

³⁰ *Baptist Handbook for 1922*, 10.

³¹ *SB*, 1 May 1906, 104. See also, *SB*, 14 April 1903, 91; *Baptist Home Messenger*, April 1908, unpagged, but the article is entitled 'The Bible About the House'; *Baptist Handbook for 1921*, 17; Westbourne Park Baptist Church Women's Guild, Women's Guild Minutes, 23 June 1927, Society Record Group 465/41/1, State Library of South Australia.

³² *AB*, 8 October 1918, 1.

indomitable courage, nor undermine his faith, nor diminish his zeal and liberality'.³³ William Lucas, a Baptist businessman from Melbourne, recorded of his friend, Charles Bright, an influential South Australian Baptist minister, that he had a painting on his study wall of 'Ulysses ploughing the sea-shore with his infant child before him'.³⁴ Bright's painting, and the description of Jamieson locate them precisely within the manly ideal that came to the fore in Victorian Britain. According to Collini, Victorian society 'paradigmatically envisaged the individual – often an isolated individual, whether literally so, in a remote hill station, or only subjectively so...confronting the task of maintaining his will in the face of adversity'.³⁵ As a popular English Baptist minister and writer, William Landels, argued in *How Men Are Made* (1859), men were not made by 'passively yielding to an internal pressure, but by the putting forth of an internal force which resists and masters, if it cannot change, the outward'.³⁶ Jesus Christ himself was interpreted through this lens. In 1937, South Australian Baptist minister and denominational historian, H. Estcourt Hughes, in a published radio address entitled, *The Splendid Ideal*, portrayed Jesus as one who was frequently and fiercely tempted, but one who triumphed through courage, long-suffering and self-control.³⁷

Baptists believed that men's especial ability to shape their environment could only be developed if young men detached themselves from the feminine comforts of home life and entered the arenas of paid employment and community involvement. In 1923, E.R. Ledger, one of the younger ministers of the denomination, used imagery drawn from a British Romanticist writer, John Ruskin, to express his prayer that 'our sons may be as plants grown up ... our daughters as ... pillars of a palace'.³⁸ Ledger likened young men to a tree which needed to face all the vagaries of the weather, for it was through this that the tree 'lives and flourishes, striking its roots more deeply, extending its branches more widely. In these things is the 'life of its spirit'. Ledger further declared:

³³ BR, 15 November 1926, 6. Also see, AB, 14 April 1914, 2; 16 March 1938, 14.

³⁴ AB, 8 January 1929, 2.

³⁵ Collini, *Public Moralists*, 114.

³⁶ Cited in John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle Class in Victorian England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 111.

³⁷ H. Estcourt Hughes, *The Splendid Ideal*, 2.

³⁸ BR, July 1923, 15. Ruskin wrote an influential set of reflections on the meaning of the home in a book entitled, *Sesame and Lilies* (1864). See Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 46.

'Young men must needs find their place in life's battle out in the world. This is in accord with the nature of things.'³⁹

Further evidence of the understanding of manliness as involving a vigorous, confronting and overcoming attitude to the world can be seen in Baptist acceptance of 'muscular Christianity'. This set of beliefs about masculinity, was, in part, an adjustment to a previous version of Christian masculinity that considered that true manliness could be found as much in a weak body as in a strong one.⁴⁰ The focus on muscular Christianity was prompted by fears of the supposedly emasculating tendencies of home life and the hope that a more 'manly' form of Christianity would bring men into the church, and help rectify the gender imbalance in churches.⁴¹ In an unmodified form, as spread by the English clergyman, Charles Kingsley, muscular Christianity involved:

the duty of patriotism; the moral and physical beauty of athleticism; the salutary effects of Spartan habits and discipline; the cultivation of all that is masculine and the expulsion of all that is effeminate, un-English, and excessively intellectual.⁴²

Amongst South Australian Baptists, muscular Christianity found expression in organisations like the Boys' Brigade and in church-run gymnasiums and sporting teams.⁴³ It was said of the young men's Bible class of Semaphore Baptist Church that it represented 'the muscular Christianity of the male members of the church, for in season both football and cricket clubs are organised among the members'.⁴⁴ Very importantly, ministers were expected, if not themselves able to participate in physical activities, to encourage the young men of the congregation to be physically active. Churches were very aware of a decline in male attendance and hoped that 'manly' ministers would help to turn this situation around. In 1911, North Adelaide Baptist Church looked forward to receiving its new minister, A.T. Brainsby, who was

³⁹ BR, July 1923, 15. These type of beliefs were widespread. See Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 110.

⁴⁰ On different versions of manliness in Victorian Britain and Australia, see Collini, *Public Moralists*, ch. 5; Tosh, *A Man's Place*, ch. 8; Martin Crotty, *Making the Australian Male: Middle Class Masculinity, 1870– 1920*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), chapters 2 and 3.

⁴¹ The issue of gender imbalance in churches is touched on later in this article.

⁴² Cited in Collini, *Public Moralists*, 188.

⁴³ In 1900, Flinders Street Baptist Church founded the first Boys' Brigade in South Australia to be affiliated with the parent organisation in Britain.

⁴⁴ *Daily Herald* (Adelaide), 27 September 1913, 11.

described as 'hearty, virile, eager, impetuous... in the best sense a manly man, vigorous in body, mind and soul.'⁴⁵ Brainsby's 'fine physique' and delight in 'manly sports' were also noted.

South Australian Baptists also believed that overcoming the 'world' was essential for the development of manly Christian character. The world, in this sense, included all 'sinful' thought, desire and behaviour.⁴⁶ In theory there was a clear division between Christ's way and the way of the world, but long before the beginning of twentieth century, South Australian Baptists were aware of changing interpretations of what constituted worldly behaviour. In 1875, William Clare, minister of Angaston Baptist Church, complained that 'the line of demarcation between the Church and the World seems to be passing away'.⁴⁷ Many voiced the same sentiment in the twentieth century.⁴⁸ By the beginning of the new century, activities such as the reading of novels and attendance at secular musical events, widely condemned by Baptists in the first half of the nineteenth century, were becoming popular among South Australian Baptists. The shifting beliefs of the Rev. D. Davis about novel-reading reveal the trend. In 1902, he condemned the 'weak craze for fiction reading' among Christians, but 12 years later he had become an enthusiast for the novels of Charles Dickens.⁴⁹

Baptists' attitudes to various social and recreational activities had softened, but Baptists remained guarded lest worldliness encroached. 'Leisure hours have become a positive menace', claimed one writer to the *Baptist Record* in 1925.⁵⁰ Some Baptists were more guarded than others. Card-playing was a much loved feature of family life when the young Tom Playford (a future Premier of South Australia) was growing up in his strict Baptist home at Norton Summit. In contrast, the Baptist

⁴⁵ *SB*, 6 July 1911, 439. Following his move in 1913 to the Pastorate of the Vivian Street Baptist Church, Wellington, New Zealand, Brainsby destroyed his reputation for Christian manliness when he exposed himself in public and was sentenced to six months in prison. For an account of this episode, see Martin Sutherland, 'Better to Ignore the Past: New Zealand Baptists and Historical Memory', *Fides et Historia* 36 (2004): 41-52.

⁴⁶ On the 'world', see *TP*, March 1878, 28; *SB*, 4 October 1900, 226; *BR*, 15 September 1927, 9.

⁴⁷ *TP*, November 1875, 132.

⁴⁸ See, for example, *AB*, 27 September 1921, 6; 8 January 1924, 6; *BR*, 15 September 1927, 9.

⁴⁹ *SB*, 3 September 1902, 195; *Baptist Handbook for 1915*, 22.

⁵⁰ *BR*, 15 May 1925, 11.

parents of Playford's future wife, Lorna Clark, prohibited the playing of card games in their family home.⁵¹

The development of radio and cinema posed serious quandaries for Baptists. They were ambivalent about the new mass media; recognising its potential for good but holding concerns about its misuse. A short film was shown for the first time at the 1909 SABU annual meetings and Baptist services were broadcast on radio on a regular basis from the middle of the 1920s.⁵² Despite their use of the new media, Baptist leaders believed that radio broadcasts and commercial films were often tainted by worldly values.⁵³ They were worried about the excitation of 'unnatural passions' that were thought to dissipate energies that might otherwise be used for godly purposes. The general advice was to avoid anything questionable lest worldly values smother the development of Christian character.⁵⁴

Man as Provider and Protector

In 1868, the Rev. Silas Mead, minister of the Flinders Street Baptist Church from 1861 to 1898 and the most influential leader among South Australian Baptists in the nineteenth century, reflecting on the roles of men and women in the home and the church, declared that 'it is the will of the Master that women should not usurp authority over the man'.⁵⁵ Likewise, James Gray interpreted biblical teaching in such a way so as to claim that one of the privileges of men was to be served by women, who were their 'helpmeets'. To Baptists, as to their fellow evangelicals, male leadership in the home and the church had the ultimate sanction, that of God himself.⁵⁶

According to the dominant understanding of gender relations that prevailed among Baptists, husbands and fathers as heads of their families, were also expected to be the principal economic providers for their families. Any other arrangement was regarded as unnatural as it was against the order of creation. Gray declared that when a man sat idly at home or in the public house and sent his wife to do 'the hard work' and

⁵¹ Stewart Cockburn, *Playford: Benevolent Despot*, (Adelaide: Axiom Press, 1991), 57-58.

⁵² *SB*, 12 October 1909, 243.

⁵³ *AB*, 1 September 1914, 12; 1 April 1924, 7; 26 July 1932, 6.

⁵⁴ *AB*, 20 January 1910, 61; 1 April 1924, 7.

⁵⁵ *TP*, May 1868, 112. See also *AB*, 27 May 1913, 8.

⁵⁶ I will more fully explore South Australian Baptist beliefs about men's and women's roles in the church in a forthcoming article in this journal.

‘maintain the family’, ‘our human nature rises up against him, and our indignation would fain express itself in another manner than by words’.⁵⁷ These were strong words for a Baptist. To Baptists like Gray, failure to provide for one’s family was to fail as a man.

The notion of man as economic provider was inextricably linked with the idea of man as protector. In an article in the *Australian Baptist* in 1914, Jane Stoddart, an English Nonconformist, stated that the ideal father was one who:

thinks, as he looks at his young, growing daughters, ‘I do not intend my girls to take part in the rough and tumble of the City, to catch early suburban trains in wet weather, to rub shoulders with men in the Tube lifts, to return at night tired, cross, and dispirited. I mean to stand between them and the stress of wage-earning competition’.⁵⁸

Here the father is the provider and protector. He is the one who guards the sexual purity and wider well-being of the women of his household by rendering it unnecessary for them to ‘rub shoulders’ with men at close quarters, or face energy-sapping paid employment.

Men, too, were expected to protect women in time of war by enlisting to fight overseas.⁵⁹ F.W. Norwood believed that men who did not enlist without good reason failed in their manly duty. While allowing for the fact that some men had valid reasons for not enlisting, he claimed in 1916 that the ‘normal man’ should throw every ounce of his strength into Britain’s defence.⁶⁰ Alec Raws’ letter to his father, John, a prominent minister, reveals the impact of this type of thinking on one young Baptist soldier. Raws, who along with his brother Goldy was later killed in the Battle of the Somme, claimed: ‘there are principles, and there are women, and there are standards of decency that are worth shedding one’s blood for, surely. I am content to believe that you will be with me in this.’⁶¹ Raws’ comment, ‘and there are women’, suggests that he believed that the duty of men was to protect women by going to war if need be. Man, the warrior, needed to defend woman, the vulnerable one.⁶²

⁵⁷ *TP*, July 1877, 76.

⁵⁸ *AB*, 24 March 1914, 10.

⁵⁹ All Australians who fought in the Boer War and in the First World War were volunteers.

⁶⁰ *AB*, 16 May 1916, 5.

⁶¹ Alec and Goldy Raws, *Hail and Farewell: Letters from Two Brothers Killed in France in 1916*, (Kenthurst, New South Wales: Kangaroo Press, 1995), 104.

⁶² For a discussion of the beliefs of Australians during the First World War

'Domestic Man'

While South Australian Baptists believed that authority in the home resided with the husband and father, they also believed that God placed constraints on how that authority could be used. It was incumbent on men to expect only a 'reasonable service' from women; no more than Christ, the head of men, expected from them. In addition, men should not please themselves for even Christ did not please himself.⁶³ These types of expectations can be categorised as fitting with 'Domestic Man', one of the two Australian male 'ideal types' identified by Australian historian Marilyn Lake; the other being 'Lone Hand Man'.⁶⁴ Domestic Man read religious magazines, avoided gambling and alcoholic beverages, was devoted to his family, and preferred the fellowship of the church to that of the hotel. He broadly reflected the middle-class ideal.⁶⁵ Building on the work of a British historian, Catherine Hall, Lake claims that Domestic Man was the product of the 'cult of domesticity' and of the reformation of morals and manners that were linked to the rise of evangelicalism.⁶⁶ For the evangelical, domesticity had become a defining attribute of manliness.⁶⁷ Lake reasons, by way of contrast, that Lone Hand Man, who was principally found among urban working-class males, was dissatisfied with the constraints of domestic and urban life.⁶⁸ Lone Hand Man idealised the freedom of bush life and gave himself to drinking, gambling and womanising.⁶⁹ To Lone Hand Man, 'home influence' was emasculating.

about the roles of men and women in wartime, see Carmel Shute, 'Heroines and Heroes: Sexual Mythology in Australia, 1914-1918', in Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (eds.), *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 23.

⁶³ *TP*, July 1877, 76-77.

⁶⁴ Marilyn Lake, 'The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context', *Historical Studies* 22 (April 1986): 116-131.

⁶⁵ Miriam Dixon, 'The 'Born-Modern' Self: Revisiting *The Real Matilda*: An Exploration of Women and Identity in Australia', *Australian Historical Studies* 27 (April 1996): 24.

⁶⁶ Lake, 'The Politics of Respectability', 117.

⁶⁷ Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 113.

⁶⁸ Dixon, 'The 'Born-Modern' Self', 24.

⁶⁹ I have also drawn on, Stuart Piggin, 'From Independence to Domesticity: Masculinity in Australian History and the Female Ordination Debate', in Mark Hutchinson and Edmund Campion (eds), *Long Patient Struggle: Studies in the Role of Women in Australian Christianity*, (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1994), 151-160.

Even a hard-driving Baptist businessman like John Darling (junior) fitted the type of Domestic Man. It was said of him that

he had a great love of his home, and in this he was rewarded by as congenial a family life as any father ever enjoyed. ... His own and his family's chief pleasures were found within the walls of their own dwelling.⁷⁰

A contemporary commentator, Hippolyte Taine observed of the English in the 1850s:

Every Englishman has, in the matter of marriage, a romantic spot in his heart. He imagines a 'home', with the woman of his choice, the pair of them alone with their children. That is his own little universe, closed to the world.⁷¹

The domestic arrangements of the Darling family represented this Victorian middle-class ideal. This ideal continued to exert a powerful influence on South Australian Baptists in the first half of the twentieth century.⁷²

Underpinning this ideal of family life was the idea of the 'companionate marriage', a concept that came to the fore in the first half of the nineteenth century. This was a marriage based on romantic love and common values and interests, rather than on the parental choice of marriage partner and strict hierarchy.⁷³ The Victorian English middle-class, as John Tosh contends, 'inherited a liberal discourse from the Enlightenment which laid down that in marriage, as in the body politic, authority should rest on reasonableness and shared values, not on the exercise of force'.⁷⁴ The idea of companionate marriage, which also resonated with biblical notions of self-giving love, was well established among South Australian Baptists by the middle of the nineteenth

⁷⁰ *AB*, 14 April 1914, 2.

⁷¹ Cited in Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 28.

⁷² This ideal was a heterosexual one. I have not found any reference in South Australian Baptist literature and documents to homosexual behaviour. Presumably Baptists thought that homosexual behaviour was not a proper subject for public discussion.

⁷³ Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 7, 26-27, 53-44. The English historian, Lawrence Stone, was the first to use the term, 'companionate marriage'. He suggested that companionate marriages became widespread among the upper bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century and slowly spread through the rest of society. Lawrence Stone, *The Family Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*, (London, Weidenfeld, 1977).

⁷⁴ Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 29.

century. The young James Holden, courting his future wife, Mary Phillips, declared to his diary his overwhelming love for her and his delight that they seemed to 'agree at every point'.⁷⁵ For many Baptists, that companionship was based around a shared commitment to following the way of Jesus. The biographer of Dr. Cecil Mead and his wife Alice, South Australian Baptist missionaries who met in Bengal and married in 1896, stated of their relationship:

A fellowship of 'great praying' and mutual help in great crises developed into a mutual understanding which consummated in their marriage. No two people, as man and wife, could be more perfectly the complement one of the other than were Alice Pappin and Cecil Mead.⁷⁶

So highly did Cecil Mead rate the importance of companionate marriage that one of the questions he asked Bengali baptismal candidates immediately prior to baptism was, 'Will you endeavour to make your home full of love, peace, forbearance and kindness?'⁷⁷ To the Meads, the qualities that contributed to a companionate marriage were universal ones that God required of all races.

Polished Man

While South Australian Baptists continued to hold that men should maintain a vigorous, assertive approach to life, there is abundant evidence that the 'pinched and hidebound type of character' (which writers such as John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold claimed was widespread amongst English Nonconformists in the nineteenth century) became less common among South Australian Baptists in the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Cited in Nancy Buttfield, *So Great a Change: The Story of the Holden Family in Australia*, (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1979), 44. Holden was to found a family business that grew into Australia's largest car manufacturing firm.

⁷⁶ Walter Barry, *There Was a Man: The Life of Cecil Silas Mead, Missionary Doctor*, (Melbourne, Australian Baptist Foreign Mission, 1952), 67. Barry was a fellow missionary of the Meads.

⁷⁷ Barry, *There Was a Man*, 123.

⁷⁸ The quote comes from John Stuart Mill. Cited in Collini, *Public Moralists*, 101. Mill's famous work, *On Liberty*, was in part a protest against the promulgation of this character-type in the chapels of provincial Nonconformity. See Collini, *Public Moralists*, 101.

Obituaries reveal the trend.⁷⁹ Frank Cowell, a member of a successful Baptist professional and business family, was described upon his death at age 41 as a 'polished shaft in the Divine quiver'. Described as a man of 'scholarship and grace' and of 'consecrated personality', his eulogist praised his love of others, courtesy, thoughtfulness, generosity, loyalty, commitment to self-improvement, and strength of character. These combined to make him a 'Christian gentleman' who had the 'spirit of the scholar and the diligence of the merchant'.⁸⁰ The reference to Cowell being a 'polished shaft' is one of a number of indications that the Baptist compendium of virtues had widened. Further evidence of the trend is found in Robert Charlick's obituary of 1914. The writer was alert to the fact that he was not representative of a new generation of Baptists: 'Some might have thought that he was almost severe in his religious scruples, but we do not in these days err too much on the side of austerity in religion.'⁸¹ Obituaries in the 1920s and 1930s continued to mention character traits such as integrity, deep spirituality and firmness of belief and purpose, but they also give an impression of a more relaxed and less driven people.⁸² While such qualities were by no means absent among Baptists of earlier generations, they were now more to the fore. Obituaries in the 1930s also frequently made mention of traits such as tolerance, cheerfulness, and very commonly, geniality.⁸³

Apart from the fact that many young Baptists received more schooling and a broader education than their parents' generation had done, two developments contributed to (and reflected) the trend towards a greater roundedness of character. Firstly, the spread of more liberal approaches to theology provided many South Australian Baptists with alternatives to the world-rejecting stance favoured by some conservative evangelicals. A corollary of liberalism's rejection of the total depravity of human beings was a more optimistic assessment of human achievement. This type of optimism was evident in the title of a sermon by A.H. Collins on Christian attitudes to art, music and politics: 'All things are

⁷⁹ Obituaries not only tell us something about the person who died, but through the choices of the writer, the qualities of character which the writer valued.

⁸⁰ *BR*, 17 February 1925, 8-9.

⁸¹ *AB*, 22 September 1914, 13.

⁸² These impressions are drawn from my comprehensive reading of obituaries in *Truth and Progress*, the *Southern Baptist*, the *Australian Baptist* and the *Baptist Record* for the period, 1868-1950.

⁸³ *BR*, 15 July 1936, 13; 17 February 1937, 10; 15 September 1937, 9; 16 June 1937, 11; 18 October 1938, 6.

yours'.⁸⁴ In this sermon, Collins, minister of Parkside Baptist Church in suburban Adelaide from 1908 to 1919, affirmed Christian engagement with contemporary culture for the purpose of transforming it in the image of Christ, an engagement which he believed was about to result in a radical betterment of society.

Secondly, Romanticism, with its critique of Enlightenment rationality and its emphasis on aesthetic beauty, non-intellectual means of apprehending truth, and development of all aspects of human personality helped to create a social milieu which greatly influenced South Australian Baptists. Their embrace of 'Nonconformist Gothic' architecture was one expression of this Romanticist mood as was Baptists' enthusiasm for pipe organs, church choirs and stained glass windows. The *Baptist Record* summed up the prevailing mood when it claimed in 1929 that 'our God is a lover of beauty'.⁸⁵ To Baptists, following Christ still involved strenuous effort and sacrifice, but aesthetics now had a place in the growth of Christian character.

Manly Duties Fulfilled?

Baptist leaders hoped that Baptist men, in developing manly Christ-like character, would be able to give a vigorous lead in extending Christ's kingdom. There were many men who did their best to fulfil these expectations. Two who made great sacrifices were E.F. Nickels and J.A. Innes who did pioneering home mission work in the 1920s in newly opened farming areas on Eyre Peninsula, west of Adelaide. Both Nickels and Innes faced the difficulties of isolation, loneliness, and constant travel in horse-drawn buggies on 'never to be forgotten roads' in heat, dust, sand and mud.⁸⁶ They lived and preached – when they were fortunate – in small, galvanised-iron buildings, and gave strenuously of themselves as they provided a full range of religious services, taught secular subjects to school children, helped erect farm buildings, assisted with harvests, and generally provided whatever support they could to often isolated farming families.⁸⁷ Such work took its toll. Innes, who slept in a tent with a bag stuffed with papers as his mattress, suffered a physical breakdown following surgery for appendicitis.⁸⁸ Milton Lee, a

⁸⁴ *AB*, 16 February 1915, 7.

⁸⁵ *BR*, 15 August 1929, 4.

⁸⁶ *AB*, 20 April 1915, 10.

⁸⁷ For a description of home mission work on Eyre Peninsula, see *BR*, 15 August 1925, 6.

⁸⁸ *BR*, 15 January 1927, 4; Hughes, *Our First Hundred Years*, 211.

college student who temporarily took Innes' place on Eyre Peninsula, had no doubts that Innes' poor health was 'largely due to the life he has led here'.⁸⁹

Despite the vigorous efforts of many men such as Nickels and Innes, Baptist leaders often voiced concern about the lack of impact that Baptist men were having in church life. They believed that any race, organisation or denomination that did not have vigorous male leadership lacked 'virility' and consequently faced decline, especially when faced with a more virile competitor. Thus the *Baptist Record*, reflecting perspectives drawn from social Darwinism, attributed the decline in the number of indigenous Australians to dispossession by 'a more virile race'.⁹⁰ The same concern over lack of virility was evident in a special conference of male deacons convened by the SABU in 1939 to address the issue of denominational decline. It was noted that women in Baptist churches were doing wonderful things and that the 'men are willing to leave it to them'. One leader asked:

Will someone tell us how to arouse the enthusiasm and interest of those (male) officers, who, whilst quite willing to take up the offering, occasionally, or give out books at the back door, are never found in the prayer meeting, nor evince any interest in the spiritual life of the church?⁹¹

Baptists believed that their denomination would decline if men did not cast aside their passivity and become vigorous leaders in church life.

A shortage of men in Baptist churches fuelled leaders' concerns. As early as 1881, Baptists commented on the comparative lack of men in churches and they continued to bemoan the lack of male members in the twentieth century.⁹² In 1923, John Raws observed that 'under any circumstance the male sex is seldom well represented in a really spiritual gathering'.⁹³ Such comments were well justified. As Paul Barreira has demonstrated, there was a marked male–female asymmetry among South

⁸⁹ *BR*, 15 January 1927, 4.

⁹⁰ *BR*, 15 December 1925, 3.

⁹¹ *BR*, 18 May 1939, 3.

⁹² *TP*, 1 June 1881, 70. When there was an abundance of men, this was worthy of special comment. *TP*, 1 October 1885, 130.

⁹³ *AB*, 27 March 1923, 3. For other expressions of the same sentiment, see *SB*, 11 September 1901, 205; *AB*, 3 April 1923, 3; *BR*, 15 May 1930, 6.

Australian Protestants.⁹⁴ In South Australia, an average of 44.8 percent of all self-described Baptists aged fifteen and over in the five census years between 1901 and 1947 were male.⁹⁵ Membership rolls are even more revealing. In 1928 only 30 per cent of Norwood Baptist Church's membership was male. At Port Pirie Baptist Church in 1929 male members constituted 31 per cent of the membership. In the Baptist church in Angaston in the same year they made up only 20 per cent of the membership roll.⁹⁶ These figures are similar to male–female ratios in English Free Churches of the period.⁹⁷

Local churches used various strategies to interest men in the church and to preach the gospel to them. In 1915, Port Pirie Baptist Church established a men's club that met in the church hall. Gymnasium equipment, a billiard table and a literary room were provided.⁹⁸ Unley Park Baptist Church had a more direct approach. It held open-air Sunday evening meetings on the church-owned tennis court adjacent to the church in an attempt to attract men.⁹⁹ On another front, some Baptists churches attempted to reach working-class men through evangelism in the work place.¹⁰⁰ In 1911, Donald McNicol, the SABU young people's worker, addressed workers at a factory in suburban Edwardstown.¹⁰¹ In 1913, Alberton Baptist Church conducted wharf-side services at Port Adelaide.¹⁰² But such efforts were isolated and seemingly had little impact.

⁹⁴ Barreira, 'Protestant Piety and Religious Culture in South Australia, c. 1914 - c. 1981', (PhD thesis, Flinders University, Adelaide, 2003), 121-124. However, Barreira notes that such feminisation occurred before the twentieth century, and claims that between the world wars the membership density of Protestant women in South Australia declined faster than that of men.

⁹⁵ Calculated from Barreira, 'Protestant Piety and Religious Culture in South Australia', Table 1, 298.

⁹⁶ Statistics derived from Barreira, 'Protestant Piety and Religious Culture in South Australia', Table 1, 314; Table 3:2, 315; Table 4:2, 315.

⁹⁷ Clive D. Field, 'Adam and Eve: Gender in the English Free Church Constituency', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44, (1993), 63-79.

⁹⁸ *AB*, 8 June 1915, 13.

⁹⁹ *AB*, 6 January 1914, 7.

¹⁰⁰ For claims about the absence of the working classes from Baptist churches see *AB*, 3 August 1920, 2; *TP*, 18 October 1894, 312; *SB*, 2 October 1906, 235; 11 December 1906, 303.

¹⁰¹ *SB*, 3 August 1911, 511.

¹⁰² *AB*, 1 April 1913, 16.

In the 1930s, the Oxford Group movement had some influence among South Australian Baptists and some thought it had the potential to reach men outside the orbit of the church. Disappointingly, to some, the early enthusiasm soon dissipated and the movement had little practical effect. Its one legacy among South Australian Baptists was that some of its popular terms, such as 'sharing', 'guidance', and 'life-changing', became a more prominent part of their religious vocabulary.¹⁰³

The most successful attempt by South Australian Baptists to reach men who were not regular churchgoers was made by A.H. Collins. In 1908, Collins, an avowed socialist who believed in the nationalisation of industry, began a long-running, highly successful series of monthly Sunday night services directed particularly to working-class men.¹⁰⁴ Topics of his addresses included 'The Golden Rule of Capital and Labour', 'He Was One of Us', 'The Collapse of Competition', and 'The Social Redemption'. Three-quarters of those attending were men. The special services resulted in an increased involvement of men in other aspects of the church's life. The thrust of Collins' message was that the true solution to social questions lay in the acceptance of Christ's authority over all aspects of life and society. In 1913, five years after their commencement, the monthly special services at Parkside Baptist Church were still going strongly.¹⁰⁵

One attempt to strengthen Christian work amongst Baptist men was the formation of a men's brotherhood. At a SABU men's meeting in June 1917, F.W. Norwood challenged his hearers to initiate 'a league of spiritual men, not to hold concerts or while away evenings in vague discussions, but to inaugurate a movement which will result in a red-blooded revival of vital religion in our churches'.¹⁰⁶ A direct result of his call was the formation of the 'Baptist Brotherhood', an organisation whose members promised to display an 'unselfish spirit', to 'regularly pray and read the Bible', to 'attempt the improvement of the spiritual tone' of their own churches, and 'to labour for a new and more truly Christian civilisation in Australia'.¹⁰⁷ A number of Brotherhoods were formed in South Australian Baptist churches, but the movement soon

¹⁰³ For comments on the South Australian Baptist use of the vocabulary of the Oxford Group movement, see *AB*, 9 May 1933, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Parkside Baptist Church, *Parkside Baptist Church Centenary, 1880-1980: To God be the Glory*, (Adelaide: Parkside Baptist Church, 1980), 7; *SB*, 28 July 1908, 181.

¹⁰⁵ *AB*, 3 June 1913, 16.

¹⁰⁶ *AB*, 3 July 1917, 2.

¹⁰⁷ *Baptist Handbook for 1918*, 45.

collapsed.¹⁰⁸ It was revived, though, in 1927, and branches were formed in local churches, annual camps were held, and quarterly conferences and rallies conducted. Nevertheless, Baptist Brotherhoods were not as numerous as Baptist women's organisations, and, as H.E. Hughes claimed in 1937, the Brotherhood movement did not 'become the power in our church life that it was so confidently hoped and anticipated it would be'.¹⁰⁹ The programme of local Brotherhoods bore some similarity to that of women's guilds. Addresses on popular topics were given, and service and fundraising activities were undertaken.¹¹⁰ But there was little of the intense spirituality that Norwood had called for. Baptist Brotherhoods played a part in Baptist church life, but they were not the dynamic force that denominational leaders hoped they might be.

Conclusion

Throughout the history of the church, the beliefs and culture of the day have inevitably influenced Christian belief and practice. While South Australian Baptists derived some of their beliefs about the role of men from the Bible, their views and practices on this matter were as much a product of the contemporary social and intellectual milieu as they were of biblical reflection. Their ideas about 'the duties of manhood' owed much to prevailing ideas about character and to thinking derived from the Enlightenment and Romanticism. While changes in thinking resulted in greater 'roundedness' of character, Baptists continued to hold to the belief that men must take leadership in the home, church and wider society. While many Baptist men tried hard to live up to the ideals of manhood that were presented to them, Baptist leaders were often disappointed by a marked gender imbalance in churches and complained about a lack of leadership shown by Baptist men. When F.W. Norwood helped found the Baptist Brotherhood of South Australia in 1917 he

¹⁰⁸ H.E. Hughes, *Our First Hundred Years: The Baptist Church of South Australia*, (Adelaide: South Australian Baptist Union, 1937), 249.

¹⁰⁹ Hughes, *Our First Hundred Years*, 250-251. Baptist Brotherhoods were possibly not as strong as women's organisations because of competition from various lodges for men such as the Freemasons. Baptist leaders sometimes complained that their men were more committed to lodge meetings than to church meetings. *BR*, 15 May 1928, 3; 15 September 1937, 3.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, Lorraine Badger, *Celebrate 100: Unley Park Baptist Church, 1903–2003*, (Adelaide: Unley Park Baptist Church, 2003), 87; *BR*, 16 June 1937, 18.

adapted William Blake's 'Jerusalem' for the Brotherhood's member pledge card. It read:

I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my right hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In Australia's pleasant land.¹¹¹

However, Norwood's optimism was misplaced. There was no revival of the type of fervent spirituality among men he called for and there was to be no earthly Jerusalem established in South Australia.

John Walker
Global Interaction, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

¹¹¹ *Baptist Handbook for 1918*, 45.