

Christopher Ellis argues for baptism to be understood in the context of ecclesiology as 'an instrumental act of meaning', I found my heart strangely warmed. However, not knowing who Ellis was, I turned to the list of contributors at the front. Alas, he was not.

Brian K. Smith

D.W. Bebbington (ed.), *The Gospel in the World: International Baptist Studies* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002) pp. 361.

This book is a compilation of papers delivered at the first International Conference on Baptist Studies, held at Regents Park, Oxford, in 1997. A book of this nature is almost inevitably a 'mixed bag', but there is a high percentage of excellent essays in this volume.

Some of the essays, while of quality, may not hold much interest to 'down-under' people like me. One example of this is a chapter on the Gaelic hymns of Peter Grant, a nineteenth-century Baptist pastor among the Gaelic-speaking Scots.

More disappointing was an insufficiently researched chapter on 'Patterns of Developments among Baptists in Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea in the First Fifty Years since their Respective Beginnings'. I was struck by the fact that the material on New Zealand seemed to go little further than a drawing from the *Handful of Grain* series of small books. Perhaps that highlights the inadequacy of good major historical writing on New Zealand Baptist history.

Paolo Spanu's paper on Italian Baptists since World War Two, however, was fascinating. There were two aspects that particularly intrigued me. One was the way the weak Italian church, though desperately needing American missionaries, then had to cope with an excessive flood of those missionaries,

sent without proper consultation with the Italian church. The issue stood out starkly to me through this occurring in a first-world country, to a church which was theologically very literate. It made me reflect on how much this is still happening in third-world missionary contexts. Why don't mission agencies get the message that this is often unhelpful and unwise missionary imperialism? The second intriguing aspect of this chapter was its highlighting that most Italian Baptists of that time supported the Communist Party (feeling they could not support the other main alternative, the Christian Democrat Party, as it was the vehicle of the Roman Catholic Church). It says a lot for the maturity of the American missionaries that they could continue to work positively with the Italian church, given the extreme anti-communism of America at that time.

A highlight was an essay by a non-Baptist, Andrew Walls, on 'The Multiple Conversions of Timothy Richard: A Paradigm of Missionary Experience'. Richard began as a conventional missionary in China in 1870, seeking to evangelise the Chinese. A dire and drawn-out famine soon drew him into relief work. This then led him into reflection on the causes of famine and into providing education and debate within Chinese society to create a nation more able to avoid such disasters. Doing this led him at one time to serve as editor of a newspaper and at another to be secretary of the Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge, which sought to reach educated Chinese with progressive, nation-building ideas. Was this a departure from Richard's original missionary calling? Walls argues that it was not, that Richard's original motivation to evangelise remained. He sees the broadening journey of Walls as common in missionary endeavour. The environment of the recipient people often forces a rethink as to the nature of the gospel and the missionary task. Richard then is a paradigm of missionary development, not abandoning the original missionary calling, but seeing it through a much wider lens.

The most outstanding essay for me was the opening chapter by John Coffey on 'Baptists and Religious Tolerance' in the first two centuries of Baptist life. Baptists have commonly claimed the championing of liberty of conscience as a Baptist distinctive and that it has been a feature of the ongoing Baptist tradition. Coffey agrees that it indeed had prominence in the thinking of early Baptists such as John Smyth and Thomas Helwys in England and Roger Williams and John Leland in America. Coffey argues, however, that, particularly on the English side, this related only to the right of people generally to believe and worship as they chose. Within Baptist congregations, however, there was considerable control over the beliefs and behaviours of their members. Thus along with civil tolerance of other religions there was internal intolerance. Moreover, much of the early English Baptist movement imbibed a markedly millenarian framework in the 1640s and this could easily result in civil intolerance towards the ungodly as one sought to bring in the kingdom of God on earth. On the American side, the tolerant stance of Roger Williams and John Leland was not the lodestar of subsequent Baptists. So intent were nineteenth-century American Baptists on the triumph of the gospel and the advance of Christian America that they held to a Christian nation position. The result was that they raised little protest against laws that made non-Protestants feel like second-class citizens. Thus Baptist rhetoric on liberty of conscience needs to be weighed against 'the persistent strain of intolerance within the [Baptist] movement' (p.37).

Not every chapter of this book is a winner. However, there is a great deal of insightful and provocative material. I therefore highly commend the book.

Laurie Guy