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FREEDOM AND WITNESS IN A MULTI-RELIGIOUS SOCIETY

A BAPTIST PERSPECTIVE

PART I

THE NEED FOR A BAPTIST CONTRIBUTION:

Writing in 1967 from his vantage-point as Secretary of the Department of Studies in Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, the Baptist missiologist, Victor Hayward, drew attention to the increasingly global interpenetration of religions and cultures and noted the changes in the Christian theology and practice of inter-religious dialogue which had occured in parallel with this global process. Hayward went on to argue, however, that to achieve a fully developed ecumenical theology and practice, it would be necessary for contributions to be made from within the confessional traditions of Christianity:

> Few confessions have brought their theological thinking up to date in this regard. Neither this new and more realistic attitude, nor the early fruit of actual encounter at spiritual and more generally intellectual levels, has modified traditional theologies. There is, therefore, great need that theologians working within their confessional traditions should take up afresh questions relating to the place of other religious systems and the place of other religious communities in the economy of God's purposes for mankind. Only as this is done shall we be able to develop an 'ecumenical theology' in this field.[1]

The 1970s and 1980s saw a number of British Christian theologians responding to the challenge of interpreting the diverse religious world which Commonwealth immigration had brought to our shores,[2] but comparatively few took up Victor Hayward's challenge to work creatively on these issues from within their various confessional traditions. However, a number of people have seen the potential importance of confessional contributions. For example, from within the Baptist tradition, Denton Lotz of the Baptist World Alliance has urged that:

> The future mission of the Church demands that Baptists become more effective participants in the coming dialogue with world religions, even though participation might be emotionally difficult to accept. The Baptist emphases could help other Christian groups already in dialogue.[3]

Over the last few decades in the USA, a considerable number of articles have appeared in Baptist publications dealing with matters relating to the theology and practice of inter-religious dialogue[4] and a number of these articles have also approached the subject in terms of its potential for a specifically Baptist contribution. In Britain, however, much less theological work has been done by Baptists in this area, although the Baptist Quarterly has recently carried articles by Raymond Fung[5] of Hong Kong and the World Council of Churches, and Clinton Bennett[6] of the British Council of Churches. In addition, in the past, a number of British Baptist theologians gave substantial attention to matters of religious diversity,[7] although their work is not as widely known as it should be. However, it must be acknowledged that

in comparison with other denominations in Britain, the Baptist Union has done very little in regard to stimulating a Baptist confessional contribution to the current ecumenical debate. The Union is alone among all the major denominations in England in having no official Committee devoted to inter-religious matters, and up until the time of writing both it and the Baptist Missionary Society had failed to support the work of the British Council of Churches' (BCC) Committee for Relations With People of Other Faiths (CRPOF) financially, despite CRPOF's current Executive Secretary being a Baptist minister.[8] The Union's Ministry Department did publish a small pamphlet entitled *Dialogue With Other Faiths*[9] in its *Conversation Piece* series, and during the 1970s a joint working party of the Union and the Baptist Missionary Society gave some attention to inter-religious matters; but compared to the work sponsored by the Church of England, Roman Catholic, United Reformed, and Methodist Church Committees,[10] Baptist denominational work in this area has been minimal. There is an informally organised group of Baptist ministers and laypeople known as the Joppa Group,[11] which produces a quarterly newsletter and aims to stimulate Baptist thought and practice on inter-religious dialogue, but despite some assistance from the Union's Social Affairs Secretary the Group's potential is limited by meagre financial resources and by a lack of recognition within denominational structures.

However, a number of hints and suggestions of possible Baptist confessional contributions have begun to appear among British Baptist writers. In the collection of essays, *A Call to Mind*, Roger Hayden raised some relevant issues with regard to our tradition's possible contribution in an essay entitled, 'The Faith and Other Faiths'.[12] Brian Haymes of the Northern Baptist College also outlined some important themes in the essayists' follow-up volume, *Bound to Love*, to which he contributed an essay on the theme of 'Covenant and the Church's Mission'.[13] John Bayes, whilst undertaking research at Birmingham University into Christological normativity in the theology of Karl Barth, William Hocking, and John Hick, began to tease out the possibility of a specifically Baptist confessional contribution in an unpublished paper given to a Birmingham University Graduate Seminar in 1985 under the title of 'Responses to Religious Pluralism by a British Baptist'. Bayes later developed some of his ideas in a *Fraternal* article on 'Christology and Religious Pluralism - Clearing the Site'.[14] Bayes argues that:

> Baptists, I would suggest, are prepared for Christian response to non-Christian truth-claims because of their insistence on the importance of fidelity to Scripture (they are thus protected from dilution or distortion) and the supporting axiom of liberty for enquiry, interpretation, and expression.[15]

The aim of this article is to try to go beyond these hints and suggestions to indicate a more substantial outline for a theology and practice of inter-faith dialogue informed by the distinctive perspectives that lie within the heart of the Baptist vision of Christianity. The article is, therefore, an individual attempt at constructive theology undertaken from within the Baptist tradition. Of course, it is recognised that not all Baptists will agree with this article's conclusions or with the way in which it draws upon Baptist tradition. Due to limitations of space it is not possible in these pages to set out a full justification for the author's methodology and selection of source materials. However, those who wish to pursue the arguments further can refer to the thesis on which this article is based,[16] the research for which attempted to gain something of the feel of the tradition as a whole in order to undergird the historical and theological integrity of what is being proposed.

What emerged from this research is that there are indeed certain 'notes' of the tradition which indicate what it is that makes a Baptist a 'Baptist Christian' and not a 'Church of England Christian' or a 'Methodist Christian'. These *constant* and *distinctive* notes are concerned with convictions which are related to (i) The primacy of the Scriptures (ii) The liberty of conscience and religious practice (iii) The Church as a fellowship of believers (iv) The centrality of Christian witness to Jesus as Lord, and (v) The ethical imperative of discipleship. Of course, any identification of 'notes' or emphases is bound to be a somewhat arbitrary delineation of a tradition that is experienced as a living whole rather than as abstracted parts. Nevertheless, whilst this summary does not purport to be an absolutely exhaustive *definition* of the nature of Baptist Christianity, it does claim to give an accurate shorthand indication of generally accepted Baptist emphases. These convictions are not the exclusive property of the Baptist tradition, but they clearly lie at its heart in a similar way to that in which the claim to be a national Church and the importance of the three-fold order of ministry lie at the heart of the Church of England's particular refraction of the Christian vision.

What appear to be the constant 'notes' of a tradition often function in different ways in their original, transitional and contemporary contexts. But this article is based on the premise that it is as legitimate for contemporary Baptists to work creatively with the basic 'notes' of the Baptist vision as it was for our forebears. In an article entitled 'What is a Baptist Theology?' the North American Baptist theologian, J. R. McClendon Jnr., argues that Baptist life is, 'Not..well-furnished with a theology adequate to its own vision',[17] and that the tragedy of this has been that 'Thereby not only Baptists but the whole Church, the entire people of God, have been impoverished'.[18] This article seeks to redress a part of this impoverishment by contributing towards the filling of a significant confessional gap in the emergence of an adequate ecumenical theology and practice of inter-religious dialogue in Britain. In the process, it also hopes to try and stimulate a long overdue discussion on these matters within British Baptist life.

SCRIPTURE AND TRUTH IN THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF FAITHS

A fundamental question raised by the theology and practice of inter-religious dialogue is the epistemological issue. How do we know? How can we know anything? How can we know God? How can we know which religious path is the right one? Are thesis and antithesis, religious truth and falsity, locked in an eternal dualism or is there is a synthesis either beyond or through them? What is the nature of truth? What is the place of the Scriptures in Christian knowledge? Is religious truth the same kind of truth as scientific truth, or is it poetic truth? Does the opening of the Pandora's box of historical consciousness prevent the possibility of escaping from relativity in theological thought?

George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age*[19] summarises the epistemological issues which face us today by outlining the two hitherto dominant models of religious truth. Firstly there is the traditional model which Lindbeck calls the 'cognitive-propositional'. In this model, doctrine is understood to be fixed for all times and places and any development or change can only be viewed as a departure from the truth. This model of truth has the advantage of clarity in that truth understood in this way can either be affirmed or denied and people of various religions who share this view of truth can at least clearly understand one another's position. But it does not allow for much possibility of mutual learning or mutual correction between religions. It is also a model of religious truth that rests on a pre-Enlightenment outlook whereas Lindbeck's second

model, the 'experiential-expressive' model is one in which the holder of a truth is highly aware of his or her own subjectivity and of its influence upon the shape of the truth which is held. This model of truth enables conversation to take place between different 'experiential-expressive' truths. However, it also lessens the possibility of breaking out of cultural and personal isolation in that truth: whilst it enables recognition of 'truth for me' and 'truth for you', it cannot provide any real basis for mutual challenge and dialogue. Although this model has been widely adopted in the contemporary theology and practice of inter-religious dialogue and it can certainly undergird inter-religious toleration, it is in many ways as inadequate as the 'cognitive-propositional' model for enabling inter-religious *dialogue*'.

The traditional Baptist understanding of religious truth has usually been expressed in terms of the 'cognitive-propositional' model, with the Scriptures understood to be a soteriologically and epistemologically sufficient basis of truth. Baptist confessions of faith have constantly affirmed the primacy of the Scriptures over appeals to both the Tradition of the Church and the 'inner light' and, as R. Aldwinckle contends, reflecting a view that Baptists would generally affirm:

> If a person says Scripture is in no sense an authority and feels free to reject its message and the Christ to which it points, it is difficult to see, if that person is logical, why he or she would even want to remain within the Christian Church.[20]

It is clear from the dominant place that this note of Baptist tradition has held in Baptist life that no adequate theology and practice of inter-religious dialogue which takes full account of the Baptist vision can be constructed without serious biblical engagement with the source materials of the Christian faith gathered in the Scriptures. At the same time, as Paul Clasper points out, a traditional Baptist understanding and use of the Scriptures contains the danger of '...turning the Bible into a source of frozen laws and dogmas and making it into an idol'.[21] However, working with a post-critical understanding of the role and content of the Scriptures, which recognises their historicity and yet preserves their centrality in Christian life and theology, it is possible to draw creatively upon the Scriptural tradition. Arguably this stance is in continuity with the exploratory spirit of John Smyth who recognised that the meaning of the Scriptures is not always self-explanatory and therefore that their interpretation is always open to correction: 'We are in constant error; my earnest desire is that my last writing may be taken as my present judgment.'[22] It is because interpretations are necessarily contextual and therefore limited that the Baptist vision of Christianity has always insisted that confessional statements cannot claim a definitional finality. Despite the differences in emphasis between W. J. McGlothin's and W. L. Lumpkin's studies on Baptist confessions of faith,[23] they both recognise that Baptist confessions were never meant to bind the conscience of the believer by claiming to be definitive credal formulations.

The confessions have been *relative* to Scripture, *revisable* in the light of Scripture and experience, and *localised* rather than universal in scope. It should be noted that, even when the Baptist Union adopted a Declaration of Principle[24] in the wake of the damaging Downgrade controversy,[25] the introduction to the Declaration referred to things: 'which are commonly believed by the churches of the Union', and an overall Preamble to the Declaration began by 'expressly disavowing and disallowing any power to control belief or restrict inquiry'.[26]

This kind of approach reflects what the Southern Baptist American theologian, Edgar Mullins, used to refer to as the Baptist principle of 'soul freedom'.[27] There are obvious dangers attached to this stance in that it can lead to an unbalanced

individualism and subjectivism. But as H. Moody has stressed, other elements of the Baptist vision can correct such tendencies by underlining the need for one's vision of truth to be:

> ...continually checked and corrected by a community or congregation of people faithful to the same God, disciples of the same Jesus. This community is not a 'higher authority', but another view of the truth by which one's own is tested.[28]

A further safeguard is provided through the Baptist community's dramatic re-presentation of the central themes of the Gospel in the act of believer's baptism. As H. Wheeler Robinson pointed out:

> That act, constantly repeated before the eyes of Baptists, has taken the place of any formal creed, and helped to keep them an evangelical Church without any authoritative confession of faith. Like the Lord's Supper, it has preached the Lord's death until He come, whilst leaving believers free, in successive generations, to interpret afresh the meaning of that redemptive death.[29]

In the Baptist vision, then, whilst interpretations are contextual and therefore necessarily change, the Scriptures as interpreted in the context of the sacramental community of faith do provide a solidly rooted point of reference for theological exploration. Constant conversation with the source materials of the Christian faith prevents a contextual theology and practice of inter-religious dialogue from slipping into a complete relativism. In this approach the centrality of the Scriptures in Christian life and theology is preserved, but they are appealed to in terms of an open invitation to join in an ongoing conversation rather than as a reference book of immutably fixed and definitive truths. As the American Baptist, H. Wamble, pointed out:

> To determine beforehand how Scripture must be studied and what it must say is to annul the supremacy of Scripture from which religious meaning still bursts forth with divine freshness.[30]

And as J. W. McClendon Jnr. argues:

> The Church as the apostolic community reads (in community) the apostolic writings, the New Testament ...The Bible is in this sense the Church's book; we are people of that book. But by shifting the emphasis from biblicism to a vision that shows how the Church sees itself as that people, we gain relief from any dogmatic bibliolatry that substitutes attention to the book for participation in life. That shift seems slight; the consequences are momentous.[31]

Such an approach represents a liberating way of dealing with Scriptural authority, which then becomes something that is understood in relation to a living and ongoing communal experience. In this process the diversity of the Scriptural witness is itself affirmed as a crucial part of taking the Scriptures seriously. This combination of recognising both Scriptural authority and Scriptural diversity has a good Baptist precedent in the theology of Andrew Fuller. Fuller recognised the importance of being able freely to interpret the Scriptures in a way that was liberated from the

shackles of dogmatic tradition when, at the beginning of 1780, he made the solemn vow in which he declared, 'Lord thou hast given me a determination to take up no principle at second-hand; but to search for everything at the pure fountain of thy word.'[32] And it was because he found that the commonly accepted Calvinistic view of justification 'did not quadrate with the Scriptures' that he began his study of the doctrine of salvation which led to a theological and ecclesiological revolution in Baptist life. Fuller passionately believed in the centrality and authority of the Scriptures but he was also acutely aware of the apparent incompatibilities between their witness to divine election and human responsibility. His response to such conflicts could well be instructive for us as we consider the conflicts within the Scriptural witness to the role of other faiths in the divine economy. Fuller says of Scriptural conflicts that:

> The truth is, there are but two ways for us to take: one is to reject them both, and the Bible with them, on account of its inconsistencies; the other is to embrace them both, concluding that, as they are both revealed in the scriptures, they are both true and consistent, and that it is owing to the darkness of our understanding that they do not appear to be so to us.[33]

Although the 'exclusivist' texts of the Books of Acts and of the Fourth Gospel are often highlighted by those opposed to inter-religious dialogue they are, in fact, far from being the only relevant biblical passages. Kenneth Cracknell's *Why Dialogue*,[34] and Wesley Ariarajah's *The Bible and Other Faiths*[35] explore some often overlooked parts of the Scriptural witness. Both books make it clear that there are other more universalistic passages and themes and that it is as dishonest to appeal to the exclusivist texts and themes as hermeneutical keys for interpreting the more universal ones as it is to overlook the more restrictive ones in favour of focusing on the others.

In fact, Cracknell's exposition of the Acts chapter 19 story of the Apostle Paul's witness in the city of Ephesus[36] shows that there are good grounds for arguing that the diversity of the Scriptures in these matters is itself related to the specificities of context. In Ephesus Paul had dialogue with the Jews in the synagogue and with the Hellenistic philosophers in the Hall of Tyrannus. Yet he also attacked the magical invocation of the name of Jesus and denounced a system of idolatry which exploited religious devotion for the sake of financial gain. It would therefore seem that this part of the Scriptural witness affirms the adoption of contextually-specific stances. In the Ephesus story the two points at which dialogue is replaced by confrontation are in relation to behaviour which Israel's prophetic tradition had denounced equally, if not more rigorously, in Israel's own religious practice as in that of its neighbours. Such behaviour includes the perversion of religion into magic and cases in which the cloak of religion is used to mask the perpetration and perpetuation of injustice.

On the basis of such an approach we need not operate with a 'fixed' view of the content and role of the Scriptures in relation to the theology and practice of inter-religious dialogue. Instead, we can recognise that the Scriptures were themselves written in a multi-religious context and are a collection of writings which are in conversation with themselves; with the changing community of faith; with the world; and with the Mystery which we call God. Contemporary Christians are thus called upon to join in this ongoing conversation by relating to the Scriptures as we begin to relate to people of other religions, and as we continue to relate to each other. In this way, we remain within the living (which also implies incomplete and ongoing) Biblical tradition.

The contribution of the Baptist vision to the issues of religious truth with which Christians are faced in contemporary British society thus insists that the Scriptures have a central role to play in a dialogical process of epistemological discernment. By relating to the Scriptures in this way the possibility opens up of embracing intellectual freedom from confining dogmatic definitions, whilst affirming the centrality of the original Christian sources in the life of the contemporary Christian community. There are similarities here with George Lindbeck's proposal for what he called a 'cultural-linguistic' alternative to the 'cognitive-propositional' and the 'experiential-expressive' models of truth. In this model the specificity of the various religions is maintained - like the 'grammar' of a language which cannot really explain itself in terms of anything else - whilst the real possibility is affirmed that another 'language' can be learned. The Scriptures are thus central to the 'grammar' of the Christian faith and must remain so for that faith to retain its identity. But at the same time, they are central in such a way that conversation about the truth is encouraged and not stifled, and discernment rather than definition becomes the keynote of a Baptist perspective on Christian theology and practice in a multi-religious society.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

The commitment to religious liberty is perhaps the nearest thing to a universal 'note' of the Baptist vision of Christianity which can be found in Baptist history and tradition. Its centrality to Baptist life can be illustrated from the Constitution of the Baptist World Alliance, which states that a primary purpose of the organisation is, 'The safeguarding and maintenance of full religious liberty everywhere, not only for our own constituent churches, but also for all other religious faiths'.[37] The historical roots of this commitment are to be found in Thomas Helwys' *A Short Declaration of the Mistery of Iniquity* which contained what in his historical and religious context was a remarkably clear and prophetic plea that, '... men's religion is betwixt God and themselves: the King shall not answer for it, neither may the King be judge between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.'[38]

As W. K. Jordan's authoritative survey on *The Development of Religious Toleration in England* affirms:

> Helwys gave to religious toleration the finest and fullest defence which it ever received in England, if we except the thought of Jacobus Ancontius. And when we consider that Ancontius' work had been an isolated apology by a detached observer while Helwys drew his inspiration from the underlying religious philosophy of the sect of which he was a member, and gave to that sect a missionary impulse which was to fix its roots in England, it would seem possible that his work was of greater historical significance than that of his predecessor.[39]

That Helwys' appeal for religious liberty was indeed intimately related to an underlying belief about the nature of Christian existence and Christian community as something which is free, responsible and chosen rather than something which is imposed, assumed or merely inherited can be seen in the fact that it was soon followed by Leonard Busher's *Religion's Peace* and John Murton's *Objections by Way of Dialogue Wherein is Proved ..That no Man Ought to be Persecuted For His Religion.*[40] Furthermore, Busher and Murton gave practical expression to their

general arguments by writing pamphlets which supported the return to England of the exiled Jewish people.

Baptist confessions of faith generally included clauses in support of religious liberty.[41] Whilst some individuals, such as Christopher Blackwood, qualified their support for the principle of religious liberty by the argument that Roman Catholics should not be allowed to become a numerical majority in the country,[42] and Jacob Tombs went so far as to declare that he was against the toleration of Popery, in an article on the English Baptist doctrine of religious tolerance, T. George stressed that these instances 'are clearly exceptions to the larger Baptist consensus which continued to advocate unrestricted religious liberty'.[43] This is not to say that Baptists agreed with Roman Catholics! Indeed, whilst they generally opposed the legal harassment of Catholics, they also strongly opposed a number of aspects of Catholic belief and practice. An extreme example of this apparent paradox can be found in Benjamin Evans' book, *Modern Popery: A Series of Letters on Some of Its More Important Aspects*[44] where, in the preface, Evans explained that whilst he felt 'unmingled hatred' for Roman doctrines, he was also an 'unwavering friend' of the civil rights of Roman Catholics. From such an extreme example as this we can see that the Baptist vision indicates the possibility of holding together one's own commitment to distinctive and passionately-held religious convictions whilst at the same time maintaining a deep concern for the religious rights of others, even where one is strongly opposed to the content of their beliefs.

This possibility is affirmed because the Baptist vision of religious liberty is based upon theological principle more than on the political pragmatism which, as the Mennonite theologian, H. S. Bender, points out, had often been the motivation for the introduction of limited religious toleration:

> It is a deeply disturbing fact that the victory for toleration in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries was to a large degree due not to the will of the dominant Christian Churches, Catholic or Protestant, but to the will of rulers exhausted by religious wars and determined to find a basis for peace in the European community which would transcend the warring religious parties; or to the growing rationalism, secularism and materialism of the politically ever more powerful upper middle class, which placed religion low in the scale of cultural values and, in the words of Frederick the Great, was quite willing to have everyone 'saved after his own fashion'.[45]

The strength of the Baptist vision of religious liberty is that it is not such a product of religious indifference, nor is it the result of a retreat into privatised religion consequent upon the increasing secularisation of the social context. Rather, the Baptist vision is theologically and ecclesiologically rooted in an eschatological perspective which was very much a part of the atmosphere that gave rise to the Baptist movement. As H. C. Jackson argues:

> We have not yet had the full or completed revelation. The Christian community is an expectant community, existing eschatologically until the close of the age when God will be 'all in all'.[46]

Jurgen Moltmann has shown how a contemporary rediscovery of eschatology could form an important theological basis for eschewing all attempts to establish the Kingdom of God on earth by coercion.[47] Of course, it must be acknowledged that eschatological visions have been implicated in a number of attempts violently to

establish a theocracy, as in the case of the Munster uprising. But when an eschatological perspective is coupled with the other key elements of the Baptist vision, then attempts to extend the social 'range' of the Christian faith by use of physical, social or psychological force are excluded. An eschatological perspective, when coupled with a Christologically-centred affirmation of the centrality of the Scriptures, the freedom of conscience and the promotion of religious liberty, and a congregational view of the structure of the Christian Church, undercuts the legitimacy of claims to *definitional finality*, both in purely 'religious' terms and in terms of the social outworking of religious claims or convictions. It asserts that Christians, whilst witnessing clearly to what they have received, can wait for the eschatological revelation and establishment of truth in which God will indeed be 'all in all', whilst in the present affirming that *relationship* with God and with humankind are the key criteria for discerning the adequacy and validity of religious truth claims.

In our contemporary context, then, the Baptist vision of religious liberty can provide a 'theological imperative' for the Christian acceptance of the existence of religious pluralism. However, whilst in principle the Baptist vision of religious freedom is relatively clear, it must be admitted that in actual practice questions of religious freedom, diversity, commitment, tolerance, social space and repression are extremely complex. They are posed in a particularly sharp form by the increasingly relevant and contentious area of Christian responses to and relations with the so-called 'New Religious Movements' (NRMs). As yet these questions have not been properly faced by the majority of Christian theologians, including many who are otherwise deeply involved in the exploration of the theology and practice of inter-religious dialogue.

In 1984 Richard Cotterell, a British Member of the European Parliament, tried to introduce a European Parliament measure to restrict the liberty of the NRMs.[48] Under the guidance of Kenneth Cracknell, the then Executive Secretary of the British Council of Churches' Committee for Relations With People of Other Faiths, the BCC was led to perceive that these proposals presented a serious threat to religious freedom[49] because they contained possibly unforeseen consequences for all religions. As a result the BCC's Executive opposed the proposals. But the Churches were not prepared for the public storm which ensued from politicians, pressure groups and ordinary Church members, and their confusion in the face of this response revealed that in reality they had not properly taken on board a theological rationale for the defence of religious liberty.

It is questionable whether there can ever be any real inter-religious *dialogue* in contexts which are shaped by ignorance, fear, and mutual suspicion, or are undergirded by religiously-based social inequalities. Although changes of theological perspective are important in enabling dialogue, the Baptist vision insists that such changes must include the development of a social context in which religious freedom and equality are affirmed in all spheres of life and it is at this point that the 'note' of the Baptist tradition which promotes, defends and extends religious liberty becomes of great importance in the context of our contemporary multi-faith society because it challenges the Christian Churches about attempts to cling on to social and institutional privileges. Whilst it is true that such privileges can be used constructively, from the standpoint of religious liberty it could be argued that the Churches should actually consider taking some positive steps voluntarily to divest themselves of socially institutionalised power so that they can freely enter into a true *dialogue* with minority religious communities, relying instead only on the inherent power of that to which they bear witness.

Education is one crucial area in which some parts of the Christian community

have a significant degree of institutionalised privilege and power. In this respect, Baptist tradition has been very clear. Following the Baptist Union's acceptance of the principle of universal education in 1868, it called for separate religious and secular instruction, with inspection and control to be limited to the secular departments, and efficiency in the secular department being the sole aim of Government support.[50] When W. E. Forster's Education Bill proposed state financial subsidies for existing voluntary (and largely Church of England) schools rather than fully integrating them into the new national system, the Union appointed representatives to the National Educational League[51] and protested strongly against the extension of denominational education at public expense. In 1869 the autumnal meeting of the Baptist Union resolved that the Government should confine itself to secular teaching.[52] *The Freeman* of 27th May 1870 stressed that Baptists had been the only denomination to decide, as a denomination, for secular education,[53] and these struggles rumbled on throughout the nineteenth century, breaking out again into a sharp conflict over Balfour's 1902 Education Bill, in the wake of which John Clifford launched a passive resistance movement against the payment of public rates to subsidise Church schools, where denominational teaching was taking place.

The Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches have a significant investment in voluntary-aided schools which is partly a result of the historical origins of education in England. Whilst there are important functional differences between Anglican and Roman Catholic Church schools, and despite the positive development of some Anglican proposals for the sharing of Church school resources with other faith communities,[54] in general terms both Anglicans and Roman Catholics wish to retain their voluntary-aided schools. A number of these have, in fact, promoted good practice in a multi-religious society, and have sometimes been more sensitive to questions related to the faith and practice of Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh parents and children than some county schools have. It is also true that some parents of other than Christian religious traditions have chosen to send their children to Church schools rather than county schools because they believe, rightly or wrongly, that these schools will provide some form of religious environment which, although it is not that of their own religion, is viewed as being preferable to the framework provided by a secular school.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of upholding religious liberty it is important to examine the social implications of these voluntary-aided schools within the context of a multi-religious society. Whilst many Christians of the Anglican and Roman Catholic traditions strongly uphold their own right to voluntary-aided schools, Christians are also to be found amongst the most vociferous opponents of the idea of Muslim, Hindu or Sikh schools being aided by public funds. But if Christians (and Jews) have access to public funds for voluntary-aided schools they cannot, in principle, deny the same rights to others who will justly demand parallel institutions for themselves as a matter of social and religious equality. As such demands intensify, especially from within the Muslim community, it is clear that the current form of the dual system of education in England cannot continue for long and that decisions about the future framework of publicly-funded education cannot be forever postponed. In this context, the Baptist tradition's advocacy of a publicly-funded educational system without religious privilege is germane to the situation in England today.

The experience of religiously segregated education in the North of Ireland does not inspire confidence, and removing religious believers from the county schools could damage the possibilities for mutual understanding which are provided by the county system and lead to a religious ghettoisation in which children of one religion could grow up without ever meeting or knowing children of another religion in a

society where these differences of religion often overlap with difference of race and ethnicity. But even to raise the question of whether Anglicans and Roman Catholics should consider fully merging their voluntary-aided schools into the county system is to invite a storm of controversy such as that which occured when Christians Against Racism and Fascism merely asked this question in a discussion leaflet on *Church Schools in a Multi-Faith Society*.[55] The paper simply posed the issue without advocating any particular response and yet in some quarters it was denounced as anti-Christian.

The Baptist vision's promotion of religious liberty and equality is therefore particularly relevant in an era which is seeing the fulfilment of the prophecy of the historian, Arnold Toynbee, that the religious map of the world would become one of geographically intermingled diasporas. When religions believe that their geographical monopolies are being challenged, they are often tempted to turn to 'the powers that be' to repress other religious communities or at least to reduce the social space available to them. Toynbee realised this danger and as a result he often referred to the dispute between Quintas Aurelius Symachus and St Ambrose over the Imperial Government's forcible closure of pagan temples, believing that now, as then: 'To suppress a religion is not an answer. The question raised by Symachus is still alive in our world today. I think we shall have to face it in our time.'[56] If Toynbee was correct, then the promotion of this 'note' of the Baptist vision of Christianity could well be of critical importance for the future of the theology and practice of inter-religious dialogue in Britain.

NOTES

This article is based on the author's M.Phil. thesis on 'The Theology and Practice of Inter-Religious Dialogue: A Baptist Contribution to Ecumenical Debate in England' (unpublished, Manchester University, 1988)

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[The second part of this article will appear in the next issue of the *Baptist Quarterly*.]

REVIEW

Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink in Victorian England*, Macmillan Press, 1988, x + 309.

Shiman deals with the anti-drink movement in Britain from its inception in the 1830s until its final collapse in 1914. During this time reformers' responses to the problem of alcoholism varied tremendously. As a result anti-drink campaigners often profoundly disagreed with each other over the best way to achieve their objective. This study catalogues all the organisations which emerged from this movement and also pays considerable attention to local groups.

The social context of the anti-drink movement is also discussed and Shiman analyses how the reformers were received by their contemporaries. She argues that during the nineteenth century support for this movement ebbed and flowed: a constant hardcore of anti-drink activists were augmented by larger numbers when the cause was fashionable. The movement initially faced enormous problems as heavy drinking was an established custom in society and every social function seemingly required the consumption of alcohol. However, in the 1870s, due to greater public awareness of the problems caused by alcoholism, the movement became more popular.

The attitude of the churches is shown to have been a major influence on the success of the movement, with many individual church members involved from its inception. For example, many Baptist ministers served as temperance agents during the early years of the crusade. However, the church hierarchy reflected the attitudes of society in general and was at best indifferent to this movement. This lack of widespread ecclesiastical support, Shiman argues, was the major reason for the movement's lack of success before 1870. After this date a new concern among the churches with the problems of the poor and the contribution of alcohol to poverty helped to revitalise the anti-drink campaign, with the Church of England Temperance Society becoming the leading temperance organisation. Religion and drink reform became most closely associated in the gospel temperance movement of the 1870s, a heady mixture of revivalism and teetotalism; with its most notable achievement being the creation of the Salvation Army. Shiman suggests that one of the reasons for the ultimate failure of the anti-drink movement was its inability permanently to integrate this message of gospel temperance into the life of the established churches.

Well written and informative, this study helps to shed new light on a crusade which may prove to be one of the most important mass movements in Victorian society.

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