

BAPTIST PREACHING  
IN EARLY  
18TH CENTURY ENGLAND

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## BAPTIST PREACHING IN EARLY 18TH CENTURY ENGLAND

In any account of religious' life and thought in post-Reformation England it is almost impossible to exaggerate the influence of the sermon. Preaching is central in the developing story. It was not simply a Sunday activity. In early eighteenth century London, sermons could be heard in one Anglican church or other on every single day of the, week, to say nothing of the city's numerous meeting-houses where exegetical feasts were regularly and extensively served to dissenters; Sundays and weekdays alike. Any public event, significant or otherwise, provided an excuse for a sermon. In 1714 James Paterson published his description of parish life 'in and about the cities of London and Westminster' and tempting invitations to special sermons spring out from almost every page.[1] There were Charity sermons and Lent sermons, Visitation sermons and Gift sermons, Sacrament-preparation sermons and Funeral sermons. If, on the morning of 29th September, any of London's citizens chose to do so, they could hear a sermon celebrating the defeat of the Spanish Armada at St Maryle-Bow in Cheapside at 10 A.M., and hopefully hear another at St. Mary at Hill, near Billingsgate, before noon. Later in the day, anyone so inclined could look forward to another sermonic celebration of Drake's victory to be preached at St Martin Ludgate at 5 P.M. Predictably, on 5th November the city's churches became a sermon-lover's paradise. Sermons were preached on that day 'for the Gun Powder Treason' in at least four different parish churches in the city, and any glutton for homiletical punishment could either make a day of it or suffer some form of schizophrenic anguish that Bonfire morning sermons were being preached at St. Mary Magdalene, Bermondsey, Holy Sepulchre on the north side of Snow Hill, and St Martin Ludgate, all at 10 A.M., whilst another, possibly at the same time, was being delivered at St Matthew, Friday Street. Moreover, on the same day, a further sermon of the same kind, was preached before an impressive congregation at st Paul's Cathedral and the preacher was rewarded for his labors by a payment of forty shillings, quite a fair reward if Roy Porter's calculations are to guide us that, if we are to find a rough and ready equivalent, we ought to multiply by approximately 60.[2] One imagines that most ministers present would be reasonably happy with £120 for a Guy Fawkes Sermon.

Actually 5th November sermons provided some preachers in these churches with an opportunity not only to recall past mercies but to air present grievances. The Tory, Henry Sacheverell, gained public notoriety, as well as forty shillings, through a sermon he preached in St. Paul's on 5th November 1709. Later published under the title *The Perils of False Brethren both in Church and State*, it sold 40,000 copies. Many of the Whigs must have wriggled in the great Cathedral's uncomfortable seats as he gave their leading politicians a trouncing. Whigs were prepared to suffer a sermon or two on 5th November, for the day marked for them a double parliamentary triumph, not only the departure of Guy Fawkes in 1605 but the advent of William of Orange in 1688. Sacheverell's orations on Bonfire morning led to his impeachment, trial and suspension from preaching for three years, though the fact that he was allowed fully to continue all his other church responsibilities and be free to accept any preferment which might come his way, was understandably regarded by his Tory supporters as an outstanding victory. But the frustrations of the Spanish navy or Guy Fawkes were not the only occasions to be celebrated with an appropriate sermon. London's parish churches offered other delights. There were annual sermons to celebrate Queen Elizabeth's accession to the crown (1558), again at St Martin Ludgate when, whatever the quality of the preaching on 17th November at '5 a Clock at Night', patient listeners were suitably revived with 'a publick Supper'. There was another, preached in gratitude for deliverance from the Irish massacre and rebellion of 1641, whilst two others, on different days, were preached annually in thanksgiving for the cessation of London's Great Fire (1666). There were sermons on St David's Day, music sermons on St Cecilia's Day, whilst more sombre notes echoed in the Chapel of Newgate Prison as from time to time condemned victims and others listened to Penitential sermons. Those who wished to hand on tokens of homiletical kindness to later generations could provide in their wills, as scores did, for Gift or Birthday sermons. St Botolph's, Aldgate, had the questionable privilege of having 'more Donation sermons appointed to be preached' at their parish church 'than any where else'. The list of benefactors and their pious requests makes strange reading and must have confronted later preachers with conflicting loyalties as to whether the occasion was to be marked by appropriate spiritual instruction or some grateful recollection of the generous benefactor: 'On Trinity Sunday in every year a sermon is to be preached in

commemoration of Mr Newton'. On Trinity Sunday *'forever* another in commemoration of Mr William Kernett', whilst in December 'on the Sunday next before Christ's birthday, a sermon is to be preached in commemoration of Mr John Rouse'. On Good Friday 'yearly in commemoration of Mr Simeon Warner'. Some Gift sermon benefactions intrigue the humourist; 'April the first, in commemoration of Mr. Samuel Owen'; 'The next Sunday after Valentine's Day a sermon is to be preached in commemoration of Mary Bristol'.

Let this be said in favor of the donors: most of the Gift sermons, as Paterson observed, not only 'settled a yearly maintenance' for the lectures but also 'ordered Money, Coals, Bread, and other Necessaries to be distributed upon the several Lecture days for the relief of the poor of the Parish'.

London's early risers could hear a sermon on any morning of the week, Monday to Saturday, before going on to their daily work. St John's, Wallbrook, had 'Morning lectures' every day at six in the summer and seven in the winter, 'maintain'd by the Gifts and Legacies of about twenty-four well-disposed Persons of good note; but too many to be rehearsed here', says Paterson, some to be preached, as he states rather ambiguously, 'for ever' and some for a limited time, as 'for five hundred Years'. For those who did not want to break the early morning habit, it was possible for them, when Sunday came round, to hear a 'Weekly Gift sermon' at 6 A.M. In the summer and 7 A.M. In the winter at St Giles, Cripplegate, or if ever a London sermon-taster wanted a change, then the Draper's Company had munificently provided for the delivery of a 6 A.M. Lecture every Sunday at St Michael's, Cornhill.

## II

Their precarious existence in the Restoration period had scarcely given Dissenters any opportunity to make such bequests even if they were so inclined, but financial provisions by means of generous legacies were scarcely necessary for the fervent continuance of Nonconformist preaching. Special sermons were delivered on national occasions and for deserving charities whether there was appropriate payment or not. In the opening years of the century Joseph Stennett preached a thanksgiving sermon 'for Marlborough's victory at Blenheim' (1704)<sup>[3]</sup> as did John Piggott,<sup>[4]</sup> of whom we shall hear more later. Piggott<sup>[5]</sup> and the General Baptist, Joseph Jenkins,<sup>[6]</sup> preached appropriate sermons on the death of William III, Stennett on the

progress of Queen Anne's troops and those of her allies in Flanders and Spain,<sup>[7]</sup> whilst in May 1707 both Stennett<sup>[8]</sup> and Richard Allen<sup>[9]</sup> preached on the happy union of England and Scotland. Eighteen months later Stennett was preaching another thanksgiving sermon 'for the many and great successes of the confederate arms in the Queen's last campaign'.<sup>[10]</sup> Two other Baptist preachers, Benjamin Stinton<sup>[11]</sup> and Thomas Harrison,<sup>[12]</sup> preached sermons on the accession of King George. It was not simply the age of patriotism;<sup>[13]</sup> the times called for realism as well. After all, dissenters had proved that their welfare was not unrelated to the religious views of the monarchy.

It is important to note at this point that large numbers of all such sermons by both Anglican and Dissenting preachers rapidly found their way into print. The Baptist preacher, David Crosley, describes what happened after a sermon he preached on Samson at a 'Morning-Lecture' given at 'Mr Pomfret's Meeting-House in Gravel Lane at Spittlefields' in July 1691. Crosley says:

. . . a gentleman Bookseller, unknown by Person to me, before I came down from the Pulpit, spoke to the Congregation, and proposed, That as the Discourse had been very pleasing to him and, as he conceived, to the whole Congregation . . . he was minded, if those that had heard it, thought fit to encourage it and that he could prevail with me to write it out, to be at the Charge of printing it himself; and if they that were able would buy, he would give to them that were not.

Crosley was utterly taken aback, merely as he says,

in the 22d Year of my Age, and not having the Convenience of Books, nor accustomed to the Use of Notes.

The sermon had been inspired initially by looking at a tapestry hanging in the dining room of a certain Mr Strudwick, a wholesale grocer in Snow Hill. This was the home in which John Bunyan had died three years earlier. As Crosley sat at Strudwick's table the tapestry was on the opposite wall, portraying 'the lively Figures of Samson and the Lion' but, as Crosley recalled the narrative in Judges, a sermon began to form in his mind. But now that it was preached he had little thought of publishing it. However, 'the Congregation was so unanimous and importunate' to do what the bookseller proposed 'that I could not gainsay it', says Crosley.

Whereupon, with the Assistance of some that had taken the Sermon in

Shorthand, I wrote it out: and in a few Days after it came out in Print, to the Number of One Thousand, which went off with such Expedition, that in little more than half a Year's time, that Impression was sold off.  
[14]

The continuing influence of the published sermon is illustrated in the fact that over fifty years later George Whitefield wrote a preface to that same sermon by Crosley, preached, he says, 'long before I was born', though pleased to commend the work knowing that the preacher was now 'far advanced in Years'.<sup>[15]</sup> Crosley at least had the opportunity to correct the shorthand writer's manuscript and the sermon was published with his full approval. Whitefield knew only too well from painful experience that sermons by famous preachers were not always published at the preacher's initiative or even with his consent. Outstanding preachers who were too busy to correct the finished manuscripts of shorthand writers frequently discovered that their sermons had been published by others, sometimes with little indication of theological awareness. For obvious reasons, peripatetic preachers were specially vulnerable in this respect. Whitefield can be forgiven for being a little cross when he writes to a friend:

I wish you had advertised against the publisher of my last sermon. It is not *verbatim* as I delivered it. In some places, he makes me speak false concord, and even nonsense. In others, the sense and connection are destroyed, by the injudicious disjointed paragraphs: and the whole is entirely unfit for the public review.<sup>[16]</sup>

This form of pulpit piracy did not only trouble Whitefield during his lifetime. It harassed his executors after his death. In the first collection of Whitefield's works, published in 1771, its editors explain that at one time they received nine of his sermons from a zealot who wished to publish them, but

to their great surprise, they found themselves, after perusal, unable to authenticate them, either as to language or sentiments: therefore judged them utterly unfit for publication and . . . that on no consideration whatever, could they recommend them to the public . . . as otherwise the purchasers must be deceived! And the name of the deceased sorely wounded.<sup>[17]</sup>

But, whether with the preacher's permission or not, sermons continued to pour off the printing presses. By the fourth decade of the century there was

such an embarrassing glut of sermons that when Henry Fielding published his famous *Adventures of Joseph Andrews* in 1742 he makes a bookseller complain to his parson Adams that 'Sermons are mere Drugs':

The Trade is so vastly stocked with them, that really, unless they come out with the Name of Whitfield or Wesley, or some other such great Man, as a Bishop, or those sort of People, I don't care to touch, unless now it was a Sermon preached on the *30th of January*, or we could say in the Title-Page, published at the *earnest Request* of the Congregation, or the Inhabitants; but truly for a dry Piece of Sermons, I had rather be excused: especially as my Hands are so full at present.<sup>[18]</sup>

The regular supply of printed sermons naturally provided other preachers with material ready to hand. In 1753 Sampson Letsome, the vicar of Thame, published a highly useful volume entitled *The Preacher's Assistant*, in which he cataloged every printed sermon he could find published since 1660. Part I of his book went systematically through every book of the Bible, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, listing every printed sermon on each relevant text; whilst Part II provided the reader with an alphabetical list of preachers whose work could be read in print, together with a list of all their sermons known to the compiler with brief details about the occasion and main subject of the sermon as well as, in some cases, a note of leading libraries where any particular publication might be found. Inevitably, most of the preachers are Anglicans, including Wesley and Whitefield, but some Dissenters produced work which Letsome believed at least worthy of attention, if not repetition. In case some lazy or unsuspecting parish minister should carelessly repeat a Dissenter's sermon, the names of Nonconformists in both parts of the book were printed in italics. The compiler clearly believed that the sermons of some outstanding Dissenters were worthy of careful study. Predictably, there are famous names like those of Richard Baxter, Stephen Charnock, Edmund Calamy, Philip Doddridge, Matthew Mead, Daniel Neal, John Owen, Matthew Sylvester, Isaac Watts, Daniel Williams, but some Baptists also appear. *The Preacher's Assistant* provided information about the sermons of a Seventh-Day Baptist like Joseph Stennett, as well as those of his close friend, the Particular Baptist John Piggott. Benjamin Keach is there, and Benjamin Stinton. The name of Joseph Burroughs is there, intensely interesting when the sermon listed is of a highly polemical character such as Burrough's attack on Auricular Confession and Absolution (1735), one of the twelve lectures



given at Salter's Hall and reprinted three times in a year. The General Baptist, John Gale, who ably answered Wall's *History of Infant Baptism*, is also noted, as is, more predictably, James Foster. Thomas Harrison junr. Has a sermon here which belongs to his pre-Anglican days.

Whatever the denomination, some of these sermons must have made tedious listening. One is mentioned, preached and published in 1707 by Thomas Wilson, Bishop of Sodor and Man, when he returned to share in a service in the Chapel of Latham Hall, near Ormskirk, where he had earlier served as chaplain to the Earl of Derby. The subject was 'The Danger of Living in known Sin' and, if preached as it was printed, would certainly have lasted nearly two hours. Some sermons did go on for as long as that. When Stephen Towgood, the Independent minister from Axminster, preached at the Exeter Assembly at the turn of the century, 'he 'continu'd above two hours in sermon'. No wonder that 'all future preachers' were warned to 'keep to their hour' and the Clerk was instructed to remove the hourglass once the sixty minutes had passed.<sup>[19]</sup>

Inevitably with such excellent choice, many of these sermons were not only faithfully read by devout believers but rather greedily consumed and recycled by harassed preachers. One enterprising clergyman with a fine eye for business even made provision for the lazy minister who wanted to repeat a man's sermon but may have been slightly timid about taking the printed version into his pulpit where any member of the congregation perched in some advantageous gallery-seat could easily see that, far too literally, he had entered into other men's labors. There was no need for alarm; on payment of an appropriate sum John Trusler would come to his aid. To save his customers from laboriously copying their favorite printed sermons into their own handwriting he had an ideal remedy. In 1769 he despatched circulars to every parish church in England and Ireland explaining that he proposed to print

in script type in imitation of handwriting, about 150 sermons, at the price of one shilling each, in order to save the clergy both study, and the trouble of transcribing.<sup>[20]</sup>

The scheme worked wonders and certainly paid off, but William Cowper was furious. And did nothing fifteen years later to conceal his distaste for the Trusler enterprise. Describing the clerical opportunist as the 'Grand Caterer

and dry-nurse of the church', the poet says:

**He grinds divinity of other days  
Down into modern user transforms old print  
To zig-zag manuscript, and cheats the eyes  
Of gall'ry critics by a thousand arts.**

Cowper finds it impossible to believe there could have been any sale for them:

**Are there who purchase of the doctor's ware?  
Oh name it not in Gath! - it cannot be  
That grave and learned clerks should need such aid.<sup>[21]</sup>**

It is hardly likely that many Baptists took advantage of Trusler's agency, though some of their best sermons may have been available in 'zig-zag manuscript' for others to plagiarize.

### **III**

We have already seen that other men's expositions were easily at the disposal of Anglican and Nonconformist preachers alike and not simply to be read, thanks to Trusler, as if they were one's own. Serious preachers, who were also diligent students, were glad to make use of aids like *The Preacher's Assistant* when attracted to a particular text in Scripture. A quick glance at Part I could introduce the preacher to a wide range of authorities and enable him to see how the verse in question had been treated by others. This is perhaps a good point at which to observe that Baptist preachers in the early eighteenth century recognized the immense importance of careful preparation. In any study of their sermons in this period it is interesting to notice the commendably wide reading of several ministers, clearly but not ostentatiously evident in their sermons. Some of them made the point that, although the preacher must spend some time reading published works on the passage or topic in question, they ought not to begin there. Many young ministers frequently turned to Joseph Stennett for advice about preaching and in his later years he took young ministerial candidates into his home as boarders so that he could guide them in their studies and sermon preparation. He maintained that it is of the greatest importance for the preacher to do serious work of his own on the text or passage before rushing to see what other expositors had to say about it. Among 'his many prudent counsels' he made a point of telling them that, although the preacher must make maximum

use of books, he advised that

. . . when they proposed to discourse upon any text of Scripture, they should, after seeking the divine assistance, first consult their own unbiased thoughts, by a close study of the text itself, compared with what goes before or follows after, and with other parts of Scripture relating to it, before they looked into any commentator. By this means, he observed, confusion of thoughts would be avoided, and their minds prepared to judge of the propriety of those explications or illustrations, which they should afterwards meet with in the works of learned men; – but without such a conduct they would seldom be able to write any thing; which they could justly call their own.[22]

Interestingly enough, Stennett, whose enchanting style, 'like a silver stream', as Isaac Watts described it,[23] captivated many a congregation, rarely included a reference to the writings of others, whilst the printed sermons of his friend John Piggott have margins well-stored with references to commentators, preachers, historians and theologians. He does not spoil the sermon itself by constantly dropping impressive names. He is content obliquely to introduce the appropriate saying with expressions like: 'a late Modern divine says' or 'a very Learned Interpreter', or 'even a Pagan has observed', 'a Learned advocate for Infidelity', or 'an excellent author', but then always acknowledges the source of his information in the margin with helpfully detailed references useful to other preachers who recognized the value of tracing the precise quotation and reading it carefully in context. Piggott's famous *Eleven Sermons* provide ample illustration of the fact that at least some of these early eighteenth century Baptist preachers recognized the importance of good reading. Apart from the predictable store of biblical illustrations there are classical allusions with references to Seneca, Aristotle, Lucian, Cicero, Posidonius, Heraclitus, Pliny, Herodotus, patristic writers like Clement of Rome, Tertullian, Cyprian, Gregory Nazianzen, Chrysostom, Augustine and Jerome. There are references to Mercerus and Scultetus, 'very Learned and Judicious Interpreters', historians and biographers like Echard, du Pin, and Gilbert Burnet, and theologians such as Luther, Melancthon, Turretini, and Grotius.

Even Jewish scholars appear like Manasseh ben Israel and Rabbi Isaac, whose 'spiteful Remarks' about Pauline theology have been 'fully confuted',

to Piggott's relief, by Bishop Richard Kidder of Bath and Wells, whilst Catholic writers are also quoted like the 17th century Spanish moral theologian, Antonio Escobar, the 16th century Dominican Soto, and the two 17th century Jesuits, Jean Morinus and Cardinal John de Lugo of Spain, though again, predictably, not with approval. For writers nearer his time he is greatly indebted to the ejected ministers such as Stephen Charnock, John Howe, especially William Bates, 'a late Modern divine', who is clearly a favorite. But his reading goes well beyond the borders of Nonconformity. Piggott has access to the works of 17th century Anglicans like Jeremy Taylor and John Donne, the 'learned Man' John Tillotson, and the 'very learned Divine' Edward Stillingfleet, Bishop of Worcester. He is conversant with the work of the 17th century biblical scholar John Lightfoot, on the Jerusalem Temple and amongst the writings of Anglican contemporaries he has read commentaries like those of Dr Hody<sup>[24]</sup> ('an ingenious Modern'), the expositions of Daniel Whitby,<sup>[25]</sup> sermons by William Wake, later Archbishop of Canterbury, and by Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, particularly the sermon he preached at Tillotson's funeral.

Piggott was not alone in demonstrating the importance of wide reading. Several Baptist ministers in the period under review recognized that in the production of a good sermon there needs to be solid content. A mere collection of what Gregory the Great described as a 'careless torrent of words' would not do. The shaping of a sermon required hard work. The point was expressed beautifully by Hercules Collins, pastor of the Particular Baptist Church at Wapping. He said:

We count them good Workmen that do their Work well, and a great deal too. Indeed there are some very good Workmen that do their Work well, but do a very little. Others again may speak a great many Words in a Sermon, who have but little Matter: He is most accepted that brings the best Bread and a full Meal. Some can deliver more matter in half an hour to the profit of their Hearers, than others can do in a whole hour. As some Persons do their Work so bad as makes some almost sick to see it, so some may preach as to make the Hearers sick to hear it.

It appears that even in the early eighteenth century some preachers were scarcely teachable. Collins realized that 'some are so conceited of their own Abilities, that there is little room for Instruction'. Yet instruction there must

be, and good reading with the clear recognition that the preacher is utterly reliant on God:

. . . he doth the best Work and the most Work, that labours most in his Study, with a dependance upon God for a blessing.[26]

Collins fears that there are 'too many Loiterers concern'd in this glorious Employment', reminding his readers of a prophetic utterance in Isaiah 56:10 where 'the Holy Ghost speaks of some *watchmen sleeping, loving to slumber*'. Collins knows that some of his contemporaries maintain that hard study is slightly unspiritual. They 'think it unlawful to study to declare God's Mind, and will contemptuously speak against it',[27] but for his 'part there is no alternative to hard work. He makes the point that just as distorted notions of the doctrine of grace can lead to Antinomianism, so can unbalanced ideas about the inspiration of the Spirit become excuses for idleness. This is how he gives expression to his conviction that grace and works are inseparable partners, even though the latter is always powerless without the former:

We may say in this case, as we use to speak about Salvation, that we ought to live so holily as if we were to be sav'd by our living, and yet when we have done all, to rely upon Christ and his Righteousness: so we should labour in Study, as if we should have no immediate Assistance in the Pulpit, and yet when we have done all, to go about our Work depending upon God for further Assistance.[28]

These men knew, of course, that in the work of preparation one sermon can come relatively easily, whilst the burden of another is an exercise to hard labour:

It hath been known by Experience, that sometimes a whole day hath been spent in Study and little done; tho at other times (blessed be God) when we have been under the Gales of the Spirit, we have done more in two hours.[29]

Samuel Wilson made the same point as Collins thirty years later when he told Thomas Flower, the young pastor at Unicorn Yard, Tooley Street, in his ordination sermon that not all 'who are called to this Office are equally assisted' nor will anyone Minister find 'at all times the Presence of God alike with him' for 'God has wise ends in leaving his Servants for a time to a dull Frame of Spirit'. Preachers must certainly not trust their feelings at such times

of seeming barrenness. Our own changeable moods are a poor index to spiritual blessing. Wilson is offering good advice to the young man when he tells him that there will be times when he will not always feel successful nor particularly 'on top', but good Ministers know that 'where they are faithful, they shall find, tho' they can do nothing of themselves, they can do all things thro' Christ strengthening them'.<sup>[30]</sup>

Collins had said much the same to the young men of an earlier generation. He knew that it was not only the preparation which might lack sparkle; the arduously-formed sermon might be equally difficult to deliver and, even in the moment of preaching, seem insufficiently interesting and arresting. But, once again, the preacher will be wise not to use his feelings to measure what has actually been achieved. As Hercules Collins reminded young preachers of his day, it depends little on how the preacher feels; what matters is what God has done, and that depends on His unchanging promise, not the preacher's vacillating feelings:

If thou hast much of God's Presence in preaching, be not over confident that that Sermon shall do most good: and if thou art in a dull frame in preaching, so long as you preach God's Word do not despair of a good Effect; for some have experienced some Sermons blessed which they thought were lost, and have heard nothing to their Comfort of that Sermon they expected most from, and this is done *that no Flesh might glory in God's Presence*.<sup>[31]</sup>

#### IV

It is probably necessary at this point, however, to guard against giving the impression that these Baptist preachers were little other than industrious book-worms who stoically delivered their pulpit orations unconcerned about either their feelings or those of the congregation. Nothing could be further from the truth. Feelings mattered though they must not be allowed to dominate. The Sermon must have vigor, inspiration and life. Preachers in this period who longed to communicate effectively to their congregations must have been only too well aware of the dangers inherent in a coldly logical, precisely-formulated type of Calvinism, an almost scholastic theological system which lacks Calvin's balance and is devoid of his passionate pastoral concern. Samuel Wilson deals with this aspect of the preacher's art in *The Duties of a Pastor and Deacons*:



And if you are favoured with the greatest Liberty of Mind in your private Preparations, you will equally need the Presence of God in your public Ministrations; not only to bring your former Thoughts to remembrance, but especially to warm your Heart with Divine Truths, that you may speak feelingly and with proper Zeal and Earnestness . . . A Preacher who is visibly unaffected with what he delivers to others, is not likely to engage the Attention or be of any considerable Service to those who hear him.

Wilson believes that it is not a matter of strenuously whipping up the emotions. The need for warmth and vitality in a sermon is a matter for dependent prayer, not a signal to increase the emotional volume:

Pray then to him with whom is the Preparation of the Heart, and who made the Mouth, that whilst you are musing in private, the Holy Fire of Spiritual Affections may burn, and that when you are preaching the Gospel, you may have all proper utterance.[32]

Richard Baxter made the discovery quite early in his Christian experience when he was 'newly entered into a Seriousness in Religion'. He recalls the time when he 'read such a book as Bishop Andrews *Sermons* or heard such kind of preaching'. He says: 'I felt no life in it: me thoughts they did but play with holy things'. He soon discovered that whether it was reading sermons or listening to them, his help came through 'the plain and pressing downright Preacher', the man who could 'speak with life, and light, and weight'. Throughout his ministry Baxter longed for that and there were times when, with an uneasy conscience, he confesses 'I have not reacht the thing that I desired'. The missing element was, for him at least, painfully evident:

. . . here wanteth that life and piercing quickness.[33]

In his famous *Reformed Pastor* he confesses:

I seldom come out of the pulpit, but my conscience smiteth me that I have been no more serious and fervent.[34]

These aspects of earnestness and warmth are scarcely more evident than in their moments of winsome evangelistic appeal. Benjamin Keach would have been deeply worried about a fair amount that Richard Baxter wrote, but he would not have disagreed about the need for 'life' and passion in preaching. Deeply convinced Calvinist that he was, Keach had it. With all his emphasis

on election, particular redemption, human impotence and the divine initiative, preachers like Keach could still *appeal* and did so.

Shortly after the Treaty of Ryswick (1697), with its cessation of hostility between England and France, Keach takes up a highly topical theme: 'The great Joy that generally appeared amongst all People upon the conclusion of the late Peace, put me upon Preaching on this subject'. He has a message of peace of far greater significance than that which marked the end of the costly fighting between two countries on either side of the English Channel. Keach was intent on proclaiming *enduring* peace. He hardly needed to be an expert in diplomatic affairs to make the prediction that 'the present Peace in the European world may not last long'. Like thousands of his fellow-countrymen, Keach had little confidence in any treaty made with 'the Proud and Haughty Tyrant Lewis le Grand'.

However, we are not here concerned primarily with Keach's ability to relate the message meaningfully to the actual world in which his people lived, important as that is. What we must note at this point is that, once he has made the contemporary link; he presents the terms for eternal peace with persuasive appeal and offers unhesitating Christian assurance to those who will respond:

Certainly here is good News to you Sinners who hear me this Day; I am appointed by the Lord to proclaim Peace to you in this Place; and do assure you, in the Name of my Great Lord and Master Jesus Christ, that if you come in, and i.e. believe in him, ye shall have Eternal Life, tho you have long been Enemies to God, ye Stout-hearted, and far from Righteousness, or tho never So Vile and Notorious Sinners, Grace, Pardon, and Peace is offered freely to you this Day.<sup>[35]</sup>

Sinners, Will not you accept of Peace . . . Shall such a Mediator make your Peace; nay, die to make your Peace with God, and shall any refuse to accept of that Peace which he hath made . . . The Terms are not hard but easie; it is to believe in him, to trust in him, to believe that he hath made your Peace . . . 'tis to *sue* out your Pardon through Faith in his Blood.<sup>[36]</sup>

Keach reminds them that we are penniless paupers, hoping to hear that some generous friend has remembered us in his will:



Contemplate on the Love of your dying Friend; shall the *King Immortal* become a dying Testator? O search into this Will to find your Names and see what vast legacies are bequeathed therein to you.[37]

But we are not simply helpless beggars, innocently waiting with outstretched hands; we are stubborn rebels, but still there is plenty:

Do you resolve to throw down your Arms and come in? 'Tis no matter what kind of Rebbels you have been: Here's a Pardon *for all Sins* and Blasphemy . . . Committed against the Father *and Son* . . . Is not this Good News? Do you believe it? And is it in your Heart to take hold of the Promises of the Gospel? What Answer shall I return to him that sent me?[38]

Only a few years before Keach preached that sermon, Edmund Calamy was describing Baxter's earnestness and appeal, clearly perceived by others, if not always by Baxter himself:

He talked in the pulpit with great freedom about another world, like one that had been there, and was come as a sort of an express from thence to make a report concerning it.[39]

Like Baxter, Keach was making the point that 'Gospel-Ministers' are God's 'Ambassadors of Peace',[40] who not only deliver a message but are required to report back to indicate the nature of the response. Keach makes the point more than once: 'What answer shall I return to my Great Master?',[41] The same notes of earnest appeal are found in an evangelistic tract written fifty years later by David Crosley. Serious warning is united with compassionate appeal:

. . . let me entreat you by the tender mercies of God, not to put of [f] repentance any longer but out of hand to humble yourself . . . And truly I am glad I can say, and God knows I can only say, you have yet space to repent . . . Remember a thief on the cross was converted; of whom *St Augustine* saith, one thief was converted upon the cross that none might despair; and *but* one, that none might presume . . . then hope in his mercy. But with all, here observe, the fear of God, and hope in his mercy, go both together. To hope in his mercy, and not to fear him leads to presumption: and to fear him and not to hope in his mercy, leads to despairr but both together, like an even balance keep the soul steady;

safe and comfortable.[42]

. . . and if you say your sins are many, very many, John the divine tells you, Christ cleanses us from all sin. Note the emphasis of the phrase, *from all sin*; or if the blood of the deepness of their dye affright you, hear what Isaiah saith, Chapter 1:18 . . . and say not, the hardness of the terms that God insists on discourages you. Hear what Jeremiah saith from the Lord (Jer. 3:13), *Only acknowledge thine iniquity*: Oh how gracious is this word ONLY![43]

It is important to emphasize the point that cold, detached indifference was no genuine part of authentic Calvinism in the period. It can become remote, detached and evangelistically unconcerned but that is an aberration. Keach pleads:

God calls, nay cries to you Sinners . . . He gives sinners time and space to repent, or a day of Grace . . . God hath sent his Son to die for Sinners . . . He sends his Ministers to call you, to invite you, who tell you all things are now ready.[44]

And the same note sounds out in his hymns as well as his sermons; like 'Christ at the Sinner's Door; a Song of Praise on Gospel Salvation':

**Salvation is brought very near  
your Saviour also stands  
Now, now, O Soul, ev'n at thy door,  
o yield to his Commands!**[45]

**And again, in another hymn:  
Rebels I (saith God) lay down your Arms  
and make your Peace with Me;  
o quickly now, come in to Day  
you shall Forgiven be!**[46]

There is a clear recognition with these preachers not only that God is appealing through them but in His mercy there is more than one way of reaching the hardened heart. In 1733 Andrew Gifford was preaching one of the many Storm Sermons which were delivered annually in commemoration of the highly destructive storm of 1703. He reminds his congregation of Nicodemus who 'notwithstanding all the Esteem he had expressed for Christ, and Readiness to learn of him . . . stumbles at the Threshold and rashly concludes that the Doctrine is incredible, because he does not understand it'.

Christ is patient with him and deals no less kindly with us. Merciful and persuasive, He does not deal with everyone alike:

. . . we cannot tell which way the Spirit will go herein. Sometimes he steals upon Sinners unawares, and prevents them with the Blessings of his Goodness, like the Morning Dew. At other times, his Descent is like the sound of a rushing mighty Wind . . . Job was convinced by a Whirlwind, the Jaylor by an Earthquake: To others he speaks in the soft still Voice of the Gospel, the gentler Whispers of free Grace . . . If you see your Need of this Blessing and your own Insufficiency, to procure it of yourselves: Ask and ye shall receive; wait at the Pool. Others have done so with Success, and why may not you?[47]

## V

One final point ought to be made. These preachers genuinely believed that in the art of communication they had an enormous amount to learn from one another. Preaching was rarely regarded as an isolated detached exercise, highly individualistic and insular. Good preachers had regular opportunities to talk to one another about their sermons, to exchange ideas, and even submit one another's sermons to the scrutiny of others. London's 2,000 coffee-houses were highly convenient meeting-places in early eighteenth century London and, if Oliver Goldsmith is to be trusted, sermons were a regular topic of conversation in some. Joseph Stennett says that John Piggott 'could not be easy in publishing any thing to the World, without first consulting some of his particular Friends'.<sup>[48]</sup> Stennett tells the young Ministers present on the occasion of Piggott's funeral sermon that if they did the same 'it would mightily contribute to their Improvement, to use the same Method'. He hopes that they might have 'the good Sense to expose their compositions to Persons capable of observing to them their Mistakes, and Humility enough to hearken to the advice of those who are able to inform them'.<sup>[49]</sup>

They could certainly learn a great deal simply by submitting their sermon outlines to one another for criticism, advice which Doddridge gave to his students.<sup>[50]</sup> So a good structure for a sermon was so important that they were regarded as extremely valuable items in a preacher's resources. Hercules Collins was appalled when he heard that when one greatly valued preacher died all his sermon-outlines were buried with him, in Collins' view an

appalling waste. He grieves that some relation had found it necessary 'to bury in the Grave, with its Author, the Heads of about thirty years Sermons, which was very lately done, I suppose to the trouble of many that heard them. Is it not a great pity, that what has been gotten out of the Furnace and Fire of so many Years Temptations, should be lost for ever?'

[\[51\]](#)

Piggott, Collins, and several of their contemporaries were troubled about the shortage of good preachers. The churches must do something about it. When Hercules Collins died, Piggott shared his concern:

You must not expect that Preachers will drop down from Heaven, or spring out of the Earth; but due Care must be taken for the encouragement of humble men that have *real Gifts* and let such be train'd up in *useful Learning*, that they may be able to defend the Truths they preach.

[\[52\]](#)

Hercules Collins had made the same point only a short while before:

. . . if all the Elders of the Churches in every City in England would not only be concern'd in their own particular Congregations for a future Ministry, but . . . would set apart some time every Week for the instructing young Men, Members of Churches, inclin'd to Divine Studies; and so in the Country where two or three Churches are not far asunder, that all their Elders would agree to meet once a Month, or oftner, to hear the Gifts that God hath given their Churches.

[\[53\]](#)

And in his robust, down to earth way Collins went on to explain how such young men ought to be taught. He emphasized some of the features we have noticed already and usefully practical advice is bluntly and necessarily given. They must avoid mere 'Rhetorical Flourishes' which are merely 'like painted Glass in a Window, that makes a great show but darkens the Light'. There must be good content as well as fine words:

What doth it signify that have a Dish daintily set off about the Brims, if no Meat be in it?

[\[54\]](#)

And the preacher must look smart. He finds those Ministers offensive who have 'their Hair and Shoulders covered with Pouders, especially when they enter the Pulpit', and is astonished that some preachers who already have white hairs take the trouble to put powder on.

[\[55\]](#) Moreover, the preacher must speak up: 'We must speak so loud as our Auditory may hear us, or else both

the End of Preaching and Hearing is lost', and he has appropriate biblical authority to support his point. Isaiah is told to lift up his voice like a trumpet. On the last great day of the feast Jesus cried with a loud voice. At Pentecost Peter stood up with the eleven and lifted up his voice.<sup>[56]</sup> Young preachers are urged to write out a manuscript and yet cultivate the use of their memories.<sup>[57]</sup> They must pray about the art of speaking simply. It is a gift from God and 'we ought to lie at the Throne of Grace for it'.<sup>[58]</sup> Sincerity and example are of the greatest importance: ' . . . deliver nothing to the People but what you are willing to practice yourselves'.<sup>[59]</sup> But brevity is also necessary. John Piggott once told a congregation that he had to say what he could within 'the narrow limits of an Hour'.<sup>[60]</sup> That is, perhaps, an appropriate place for me to close. After all, the advice of Hercules Collins is recorded not simply for me to share but heed:

Let not your Sermons in common be very long; it is better to leave the People longing than loathing.<sup>[61]</sup>

## FOOTNOTES:

- [1] James Paterson, *Pietas Londinensis: Or the Present Ecclesiastical State of London*, London, 1714.
- [2] Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, Harmondsworth, 1982, p. 13.
- [3] Joseph Stennett, *Works*, London, 1732, I, pp. 213-58.
- [4] John Piggott, *Eleven Sermons*, London, 1714, pp. 333-69.
- [5] *ibid.*, pp. 127-54.
- [6] Joseph Jenkins, *A Sermon preach'd upon the mournful occasion of the death of the Late Glorious and Mighty Prince William the Third*, London, 1702.
- [7] Stennett, *op. cit.*, pp. 259-309.
- [8] *ibid.*, pp. 310-40.
- [9] Richard Allen, *The Death of a Good King a great and publick loss*, London, 1702.
- [10] Stennett, *op. cit.*, pp. 341-82.
- [11] Benjamin Stinton, *A Discourse of Divine Providence*, London, 1714.
- [12] Thomas Harrison, *A Sermon . . . preached . . . for the happy accession of . . . King George*, London, 1715.
- [13] Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 22, 'The great English patriotic songs - "God save the King", "Rule Britannia", "Heart of Oak" and "The Roast Beef of all England" were all penned during this century; not just composed, but struck up lustily when the opportunity offered'.
- [14] David Crosley, *Samson a Type of Christ*, London, 1744, pp. v-vii.
- [15] *ibid.*, p. iv.
- [16] George Whitefield, *Works* (ed. J. Gillies), London, 1771, III, p. 406 (Letter MCCCCXL).
- [17] *ibid.*, pp. 406-7.
- [18] Henry Fielding, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews*, London, 1742, I, ch. xvi, p. 117.

- [19] A. Brockett, *The Exeter Assembly: The Minutes of the Assemblies of the United Brethren of Devon and Cornwall*, Torquay, 1963, p. 42.
- [20] *DNB*, John Trusler.
- [21] William Cowper, 'The Task', Book 11, pp. 362-71, *Poetical Works* (ed. H. S. Milford), Oxford, 1967.
- [22] Stennett, op. cit., 'Some account of the Life of . . . Joseph Stennett', p. 33.
- [23] T. Gibbons, *Memoirs of the Rev. Isaac Watts*, London, 1780, p. 155.
- [24] J. Lightfoot, *Works*, London, 1684, I: pp. 1049-2070, and Humphrey Hody, *The Resurrection of the (same) Body asserted*, London, 1694.
- [25] Daniel Whitby, *Paraphrase and commentary on the New Testament*, London" 1703.
- [26] H. Collins, *The Temple Repair'.d*, London, 1702, p. 22.
- [27] *ibid.*, p. 24.
- [28] *ibid.*, pp. 36-7.
- [29] *ibid.*, p. 31.
- [30] Samuel Wilson, *The Duties of a Pastor and Deacons*, London, 1736, p. 9.
- [31] Collins, op. cit., pp. 33-4.
- [32] Wilson, op. cit., pp. 19-20.
- [33] Richard Baxter, *A Treatise of conversion*, London, 1657, 'Epistle to the Reader'.
- [34] Richard Baxter, *Gildas Salvianus: or the Reformed Pastor* (ed. J. T. Wilkinson), London, 1939, p. 110.
- [35] Benjamin Keach, *The Display of Glorious Grace: or the Covenant of Peace*, London, 1698, p. 129.
- [36] *ibid.*, p. 65.
- [37] *ibid.*, p. 118.
- [38] *ibid.*, p. 128.
- [39] Edmund Calamy, *Historical Account of my own Life* (ed. J. T. Rutt), London, 1829, I: pp. 220-221.
- [40] Keach, op. cit., p. 134.



- [41] *ibid.*, p. 150.
- [42] David Crosley, *The Triumph of Sovereign Grace*, London, 1743, pp. xi-xiii.
- [43] *ibid.*, pp. xvi-xvii.
- [44] Benjamin Keach, *A Golden Mine Opened*, London, 1694, p. 69.
- [45] Benjamin Keach, *A Feast of Fat Things Full of Marrow*, London, 1696, Hymn 21, p. 26.
- [46] *ibid.*, Hymn 54, p. 75.
- [47] Andrew Gifford, *A Sermon in Commemoration of the Great Storm commonly called the High Wind* (1703), London, 1733, p. 5, 21.
- [48] Joseph Stennett, 'The Rest of the People of God' in J. Piggott, *Eleven Sermons*, London, 1714, p. 532.
- [49] *ibid.*, p. 533.
- [50] Philip Doddridge, *Lectures on Preaching*, London, 1821, p. 60 (Lecture ix. 9).
- [51] Hercules Collins, *Three Books viz I The Scribe Instructed . . .*, London, 1696, iv.
- [52] J. Piggott, *Eleven Sermons*, London, 1714, p. 239.
- [53] Hercules Collins, *The Temple Repair'd*, London, 1702, p. 239.
- [54] *ibid.*, p. 28.
- [55] *ibid.*, pp. 29-30.
- [56] *ibid.*, p. 30.
- [57] *ibid.*, p. 36.
- [58] *ibid.*, p. 42.
- [59] *ibid.*, p. 34.
- [60] J. Piggott, *Eleven Sermons*, p. 84.
- [61] H. Collins, *The Temple Repair'd*, p. 34.

RAYMONO BROWN.



## BAPTIST UNION LIBRARY

Members of the Society are advised to note that under an arrangement which has been worked out in conjunction with the Baptist Union, the Society and Regent's Park College, the whole of the Baptist Union Library is to go to Oxford, to be integrated with the Angus Collection. This will strengthen the Oxford Baptist Collection considerably. Part of the stock has already been moved~ and more is to follow within the next twelve months. Miss Frances Williams, formerly of Serampore, India, and more recently of the Selly Oak Colleges, is a retired Librarian who has kindly offered her services to Regent's Park College to supervise this project. The Baptist Union has arranged for substantial financial help towards the cost of this. But it will still be necessary for Regent's Park College to find considerable sums of money to house the Library and make it available for researchers. The idea for the move originated in the necessity to find a new home for it in the event of the Baptist Church House redevelopment. Members of this Society who know of trust funds which might help with this very large project, should contact the Principal of the College with details.

## NORTHERN COLLEGE RECORDS

Another part of our Baptist heritage is that which stems from the merging of the Rawdon and Manchester Baptist Colleges, to form the Northern Baptist College. In 1977 it was decided to lodge the historical materials of the combined institution in the John Rylands Library in Manchester. Anybody wishing to consult materials should first contact Dr Brian Haymes, at Northern, who will advise on how to consult the Rylands Library.