

HISTORICAL SURVEY OF ENGLISH

HYPER-CALVINISM

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The term, Hyper-Calvinism, has come to be used as a description of the system of theology, which couples a belief in the Five Points of Calvinism with a denial of the doctrine of the free offer of the Gospel. The Hyper-Calvinist does not believe that indiscriminate exhortations to faith and repentance should be addressed to the unregenerate. He may have a deep concern for men's salvation, but certain deductions from Christian doctrine lead him to his position. Because of man's total inability, he believes that

it is futile to exhort the unregenerate to believe, since the natural man is unable to exercise faith, apart from the grace of God. As well as being useless, such entreaty is dangerous. The unbeliever is deluded into believing that he can respond and may in fact make a response, which is simply the self-interested expression of his unregenerate heart. Further, to call upon the unbeliever to believe is to ask him to believe a lie, if he is not elect. The Hyper-Calvinist teaches that saving faith is to believe the proposition, "Christ died for me". Such knowledge is only received as faith is super-naturally communicated. The Gospel invitations to the thirsty and the labouring are taken to apply to those under conviction of sin and who are longing for Christ.

While certain tendencies towards Hyper-Calvinism may have been present in the seventeenth century, it only developed as a system in the eighteenth century, when it made considerable advances among the English Independents and Particular Baptists. It was ably challenged by Andrew Fuller and his associates at the end of the

'Hyper-Calvinism' is a term frequently used today but do we understand its doctrinal and historical significance? Here the writer, Pastor of a Baptist Church in Bradford-on-Avon in Wiltshire, provides us with a useful historical perspective to the subject. The writer is engaged in a long-term research project on early nineteenth century church history.

In the next issue we intend to publish an article on the Doctrinal Background and Significance of Hyper-Calvinism by Pastor Bob Sheehan.

century, but gained a new lease of life in the nineteenth century and has often been regarded as Calvinist orthodoxy in the present century.

The Development of Hyper-Calvinism

The first systematic exposition of Hyper-Calvinism appeared in 1707. It was a treatise, entitled, "God's Operations of Grace, but No Offers of Grace", by Joseph Hussey of Cambridge.¹ Joseph Hussey was born in 1660 and after training at the Newington Green Academy, entered the Presbyterian ministry, being called in 1691 to a church in Cambridge. He subsequently adopted congregational principles and persuaded the church to do likewise. At the same time he began an extensive review of his beliefs, reading widely in English and European theology. Increasingly he came to reject the bulk of the theological writing of his own and earlier ages.

"What ignorance is there in our Systems of Divinity! What defects in our Catechisms and Confessions! What barren heaps in our Librarys!"²

Hussey modified his thinking in the areas of Christology and soteriology as well as ecclesiology. It is with the matter of preaching the Gospel that this article is concerned. In 1693 he had taught the free offer of the Gospel in his book, "The Gospel Feast Opened". By 1707 he had completely rejected the indiscriminate offer and published his conclusions in "God's Operations of Grace".³

Hussey began by reviewing the Scriptural expressions used for preaching the Gospel and pointed out that the word, 'offer', is not one of these. He then considered the various theologies, which used the term offer, asking about those, who believe in election,

"Why then do they propound salvation, which is a spiritual good, and requires a spiritual act of the soul to apprehend it, whereas they do not insist upon the necessity of a new nature being previously imparted, nor upon the work of the Spirit to bring home this salvation?"⁴

He went on to argue that,

1. To offer Christ to sinners, is not to preach him to sinners.
2. To propound the Gospel offer is no means of the Spirit's working

an internal ability in sinners to close with that offer.

3. An offer of grace is no gift of grace.

The book then moves on to examine the way in which the Gospel should be preached without offers. This in fact constitutes the bulk of the work. He wrote,

"We must preach the doctrine of salvation to all sinners in general within hearing; and must preach salvation included in the doctrine, which is the gift of God, to the elect alone who are hid among them." ⁵

He believed that by this method the elect would be discovered by the powerful application of the truth.

"The chosen generation have ever been found out by the preaching of the Gospel as they have lain hid among the pots." ⁶

Hussey was convinced that his scheme honoured God and humbled the sinner.

"We are to preach the Gospel with confidence in Christ, and fear as to ourselves that we do not lay any stress upon the creature. But offers are presumptuous. They rob the Gospel of its properties, privileges and glory. They usurp Christ's authority and prerogative, affecting to say to dead Lazarus come forth ... Our work is to sow the seed and leave it in Christ's hand to bring it forth in His time." ⁷

Hussey continued to propound his new doctrines in Cambridge until his removal to London, where he became pastor of the Petticoat Lane Church in 1719. His influence among the Independents was continued by Samuel Stockell and Lewis Wayman. Stockell, at one time member of the Petticoat Lane Church under Hussey, was pastor of the church at Red Cross Street London from 1728 to 1750. Wayman, pastor at Kimbolton, Hunts from 1718 to 1764, had made a close study of Hussey's writings and adopted his teachings.

Hyper-Calvinism among the Particular Baptists.

One of Joseph Hussey's converts at Cambridge was John Skepp.⁸ Skepp became a Baptist, but took with him his pastor's teaching on preaching the Gospel. In the second decade of the eighteenth century he became pastor of the important Particular Baptist Church at

Curriers' Hall, Cripplegate, London. Although he lacked formal training, Skepp was a diligent student and with the help of a Jewish teacher made good progress in the study of Hebrew, in which he encouraged the young John Gill. Skepp died in 1721. In the following year his only work, "The Divine Energy" was published. Its theme was the work of the Holy Spirit in effectual calling and conversion, but he too rejected invitations to the unconverted, calling such appeals, "Arminian dialect".

In 1719 the church at Horsleydown, Southwark, called John Gill, a member of the church at Kettering, to be its pastor. Gill⁹ was a gifted young man, although his education had been cut short by his nonconformity. He was a diligent student with a love of languages and this may well have drawn him to Skepp, who participated in his ordination in 1720. By the time of his death in 1771, Gill had become the leader of the London Particular Baptists, while his writings had secured his reputation among Baptists throughout the kingdom. Gill's 'magnum opus' was his "Exposition of the Old and New Testaments", but he was also an active controversialist, defending the divinity of Christ and also the doctrines of grace. His abhorrence of Arminianism led him into controversy with John Wesley. Over against the Arminianism, which he feared so much, he asserted a strong Hyper-Calvinism. In 1751 he republished Skepp's "Divine Energy" and took the opportunity to pay his personal tribute to its writer. In his tract on Predestination, he made clear his opinion on the preaching of the Gospel.

"That there are universal offers of grace and salvation made to all men, I utterly deny; nay I deny that they are made to any; no not to God's elect; grace and salvation are provided for them in the everlasting covenant, procured for them by Christ, published and revealed in the gospel and applied by the Spirit." ¹⁰

Another writer, who defended Hyper-Calvinism among the Particular Baptists was John Brine.¹¹ Brine a prolific writer was pastor of the Curriers' Hall Church, London from 1729 to 1765. In the light of later Hyper-Calvinist intolerance it is interesting to note that in 1754 Brine published a pamphlet, "Motives to Love and Unity among Calvinists". In this he urged unity amongst those, who differed on the question of the free offer of the Gospel.

While the London Particular Baptist churches were largely under the

influence of the theology of Gill and Brine, it is not surprising that they experienced a decline. The Baptist historian Joseph Ivimey was to point out that while London was enjoying the blessings of the Great Awakening, God was working "by means which these good men thought unnecessary, by instruments whom they thought but babes in the knowledge of the mysteries of Christ, by the influence of principles they considered to be erroneous, and by a kind of preaching which they called an "Arminian dialect", and "Semi-pelagian addresses".¹²

The picture must not be overpainted. The victory of Hyper-Calvinism among the Particular Baptists was not complete. In London, Andrew Gifford, isolated from his brethren, maintained a close association with George Whitefield. In the provinces, Benjamin Beddome of Bourton on the Water and Daniel Turner of Abingdon were two men, who did not succumb to the prevailing fashion of preaching.

The Assault on Hyper-Calvinism.

By the 1780s a number of men were beginning to question the dominant Hyper-Calvinism. In 1781 the veteran preacher, Robert Hall, senior, of Arnesby, published "A Help to Zion's Travellers". This was a sermon urging a freer presentation of the Gospel. More influential was Andrew Fuller's "The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation",¹³ which appeared in 1784. This was the result of Fuller's deep and painful struggle with the Hyper-Calvinism in which he had been nurtured. Although the book aroused a storm of controversy, which continued throughout Fuller's life, its influence steadily grew. An evangelistic Calvinism spread through the land and helped to provide the theological impetus for the work of William Carey and his associates.

In 1796 Abraham Booth, who had emerged as the leading Particular Baptist theologian in London, after the death of John Gill, published his "Glad Tidings to Perishing Sinners or the Genuine Gospel a Complete Warrant to believe in Jesus".¹⁴ This was a plea for the free offer of the Gospel. There were, however, differences between Booth and Fuller. Although both men opposed Hyper-Calvinism, Booth believed that Fuller had weakened in his adherence to the doctrine of Particular Redemption. This charge Fuller repudiated. Booth was also concerned about Fuller's understanding of the doctrine of

Christ's substitution. To counteract what he considered to be Fuller's weakness at this point, Booth published "Divine Justice essential to the Divine Character" in 1803. Although relations between Booth and Fuller were on occasions strained, the combined influence of these two men had gone far to break the dominance of the Hyper-Calvinism of the Hussey-Gill type by 1800. The men who led the Baptist Missionary Society and who were to promote the Baptist Union in 1813 were generally Calvinists, who accepted the free offer of the Gospel. Hyper-Calvinism was not, however, extinct and it was to receive a new stimulus from a movement rooted in the eighteenth century revival.

The Resurgence of Hyper-Calvinism

The pioneer of this new movement was the eccentric London minister, William Huntington (1745-1813).¹⁵ Huntington was converted in the early 1770s. At first an ardent Anglican, he came under the influence of the Calvinistic Methodists and was ordained to the Christian ministry in 1776 by Torial Joss, the former associate of George Whitefield. From 1782 until his death in 1813 he was pastor of a London Independent Church, which steadily grew until he was regularly preaching to congregations of 2000. With his London pastorate he combined frequent preaching tours throughout England. He first came into collision with his fellow evangelicals because he taught that the Moral Law is not the Christian's rule of life. With this doctrinal Antinomianism he combined a Hyper-Calvinist theology. He wrote to John Ryland, junior,

"You set the law before the believer, as his only law of life and conduct; and the gospel is set before the unconverted as their only rule of duty. The carnal man has got an evangelical law and the heir of promise has got a legal one; the life giving commandment is palmed upon the congregation of the dead, and the ministration of death is saddled upon the children of the resurrection; the believers are all sent to Moses, and the unconverted are all sent to Jesus; Moses is to have the legitimate sons and Christ is to have the bastards."¹⁶

Not only were Huntington's frequent travels reminiscent of the Methodists, but so was his insistence upon a deep personal experience. Although he did not exhort sinners, his experimental preaching was used to convict men and to stimulate Christians to seek a deeper

and more personal knowledge of God. Although very few ministers would associate with him, his immense following in London and throughout the country meant that he could not be ignored. Through Huntington's influence a number of Independent churches sprang up in the London area, the Midlands and especially in the county of Sussex.

Huntington had his admirers in the Church of England. Amongst ministers these included Robert Hawker of Plymouth, David Doudney, sometime editor of the "Gospel Magazine" and Samuel Adams, vicar of Thornton, Leicestershire. Robert Hawker (1753-1827) was probably the best known of the Anglican Hyper-Calvinists. Ministering at Charles, Plymouth from 1778 to 1827, he was a prolific writer and an able preacher, who always attracted crowds on his visits to London. His works included "The Poor Man's Commentary on the Bible" and a set of daily readings and meditations. He ridiculed the free offer of the Gospel

"The preachers of it are continually holding forth a motley religion which they call the gospel, made up of law and gospel, faith and good works. Were it not for the awfulness of the subject, a man might smile to hear what very wooing and winning words are made use of by them to gain upon the hearts of their hearers by human persuasion." ¹⁷

He also declared, "it never was in the plan of Christ's preaching to make "general offers to sinners indiscriminately". ¹⁸

The influence of William Huntington among the Baptists can be seen in the life and ministry of William Gadsby, who embraced Huntington's teaching on the Law and the Gospel. From 1805 until 1844 Gadsby was pastor of the old Particular Baptist Church in Manchester, which became a centre for evangelistic Hyper-Calvinism in Lancashire. Like Huntington, Gadsby combined a prosperous pastorate with an extensive itinerant ministry. Under his influence over forty new churches came into existence, mainly in the growing industrial areas of Lancashire and Yorkshire. Gadsby emphasised the need for conviction of sin, the substitutionary work of Christ and of assurance granted by a direct work of the Holy Spirit upon the soul. One of his contemporaries, Robert Halley, principal of New College, London, wrote of Gadsby, "He seemed a preacher made on purpose for the working classes. The common people heard him gladly."¹⁹Comparing

Gadsby with other preachers, he went on, "they might have made better Christians of Mr Gadsby's converts, if they had been the agents of their conversion; but could they have influenced in any way the men and women who listened with intense interest around the pulpit of William Gadsby?"

Gadsby's preaching helped to create a reading public for the "Gospel Standard", a magazine commenced by his son, John, in 1835. From about 1840 until 1869 the "Gospel Standard" was edited by Joseph Charles Philpot, a former fellow of Worcester College, Oxford, and like Gadsby a great admirer of Huntington.

The "Gospel Standard" group was not the only section of Baptists to oppose Fuller's teaching. In 1803 there appeared from the press "A Help for the True Disciples of Immanuel" by John Stevens.²⁰ This was a reply to Fuller's "Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation". In 1811 Stevens became pastor of a London church and gathered a considerable following. He rejected the teaching of Huntington on the Law and also denied the orthodox doctrine of the eternal sonship of Christ. Like so many of the early nineteenth century Hyper-Calvinists, Stevens was a self taught man of considerable ability. By preaching tours and through the men, who went into the ministry from his church, his influence grew in London, the East Midlands and East Anglia.

Men similar to Stevens and possibly greater preachers were John Foreman of Hill Street, London, (1791-1872)²¹ and James Wells of the Surrey Tabernacle, (1803-1872).²² Wells was a pioneer, who began preaching in the streets of Westminster and was eventually preaching to congregations of over 2000 only half a mile away from the Metropolitan Tabernacle, where C.H.Spurgeon was exercising his powerful ministry. Wells was one of Spurgeon's sternest critics, when the latter first arrived in London. It is pleasing to note that the two men came to respect each other, while differing theologically.

The group represented by John Stevens and James Wells were as opposed to moderate Calvinism as were Gadsby and his friends. In fact they often seemed more outspoken in their opposition to it. Wells declared, "You might as well give me heathenism as give me Arminianism; you might as well give me popery as give me duty-

faithism." ²³ Nevertheless Steven's followers came to differ from Huntington's in that they developed a concern for missionary endeavour. Huntington had opposed the early missionary movement. Stevens had been suspicious, but came to see that Hyper-Calvinists needed to preach the Gospel doctrinally to every creature even if they did not exhort all men indiscriminately. Thus amongst his followers there came into being a missionary society, whose doctrinal basis included the statement, "saving faith is not a legal duty, but the sovereign and gracious gift of God".

J.C.Philpot, editor of the "Gospel Standard", opposed missionary societies. He asked,

"What scriptural precept or precedent there is for a number of ministers forming an association of this nature? The Lord indeed sent out the seventy, two and two; (Luke x.1); Paul and Barnabas are separated by the Holy Ghost to labour together in the work to which he had called them, (Acts xiii.2); and the apostle speaks of his 'fellow labourers', and 'fellow helpers;' (1 Thess.iii.2; Phil.iv.3; 2 Cor.viii.23). But these co-labourers widely differed from a body of associated ministers furnished with a committee, a president, a chairman, &c. Such associations, therefore, having no precept nor precedent for their formation, in the word of God, we are bound to reject them as unscriptural." ²⁴

Although Philpot may have intended to distinguish between missionary societies and individual missionaries, it is significant that the churches with which he was associated were not noted for missionary activity during his life time or later.

Philpot died in 1869. It is evident that in the years after his death there was unease amongst the churches represented by the "Gospel Standard" about the preaching of the Gospel. Eventually in 1878, under pressure from John Gadsby, additional articles of faith were added to those upon which the magazine was run and which were adopted by many of its supporting churches. These included the statement,

"We believe that it would be unsafe, from the brief records we have of the way in which the apostles, under the immediate direction of the Lord, addressed their hearers in certain

special cases and circumstances, to derive absolute and universal rules for ministerial addresses in the present day under widely-different circumstances." ²⁵

During the decline of Evangelicalism of the early twentieth century, Biblical Calvinism disappeared almost completely in England. Hyper-Calvinism survived amongst various groups of Christians and by default came to pass as genuine Calvinism. Many of its adherents were men and women of genuine piety, conscious of the greatness and glory of God, the evil of sin and the wonder of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Some were deeply introspective and lacked assurance. Others became less conscious of doctrine and more concerned with methods of evangelism. Few were really examining the Biblical basis of their teaching. Not until after the Second World War did some Hyper-Calvinists begin to see that their theology needed to be modified in the light of Scripture and in order to challenge the thinking of the age. By that time a new Biblical Calvinism was beginning to spread across the land and to capture former Arminians and Hyper-Calvinists alike. Old traditions were challenged. There was a concern to be doctrinal and evangelistic, but above all Biblical. It was clear that a new situation had developed in English Evangelicalism.

Notes

1. For fuller details of Hussey see P.Troon, Hyper-Calvinism, London, 1967, pp. 70 ff.
2. Quoted, Ibid, p.74
3. J.Hussey, God's Operations of Grace, London, 1851 ed.
4. Ibid, p.4
5. Ibid, p.34
6. Ibid, p.39
7. Ibid, p.104
8. For further details of Skepp see J.Ivimey, History of the English Baptists, III, London, 1823, pp.363 ff.
9. Ibid, for details of Gill, pp.430 ff.
10. J.Gill, Sermons and Tracts, III, p.271
11. Ivimey, Op.cit. for Brine, pp.366 ff.
12. Ibid, p.280
13. J.Ryland, Life of Andrew Fuller, London, 1818.
A.Fuller, Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation, Northampton, 1784.

- Various reprints of the second and revised edition (1801) have appeared.
14. A.Booth, Works; London, 1813, 3 vols. Vol.1 includes memoir.
 15. T.Wright, Life of William Huntington, London, 1909.
A detailed life but weak on doctrinal issues.
 16. W.Huntington, Works, XI, London, 1811, p.151
 17. R.Hawker, Works, IX, London, 1831, p.474
 18. Ibid, p.489
 19. R.Halley, Lancashire: Its Puritanism and Nonconformity, II, Manchester, 1869, pp.484f. For further details of Gadsby see J.Gadsby, Memoir of Wm.Gadsby, Manchester, 1847.
 20. Anon. Memoir of Mr J.Stevens, London, 1848
 21. For details of Foreman see obituary in Earthen Vessel 1872, pp.72 ff.
 22. For details of James Wells see R.W.Oliver, The Dangers of a Successful Ministry, London, 1969.
 23. James Wells, Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit, London, 1863, p.10
 24. Quoted by W.Palmer, A Plain Statement, London, 1847, p.7
 25. Articles of Faith and Rules, published by the Gospel Standard Aid and Poor Relief Society, London, n.d., Article XXXII.

THE CHURCH MEETING

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Mr Swann pastors the Congregational Church in Ashford and his article will be relevant to many of our church situations

At the annual lecture of the Congregational Historical Society, delivered on May 12th 1970 on the subject 'The Survival of the Church Meeting 1691', John H.Taylor began by saying "For more than seventy years these lectures have come and gone and this year we begin the 21st volume of Transactions (the Journal of the C.H.S), yet in all that time there has never been a contribution on the church meeting."¹ Considering the centrality of the Church Meeting to Congregationalism this is an astonishing fact. In 1952 the Life and Work Department of the Congregational Union of England and Wales