John Clifford, (1836–1923): Liberal, Socialist, Free Churchman, Companion of Honour

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides background and context for a day conference marking the centenary of the death of the Revd John Clifford, a leading British Baptist minister of the late 19th and early 20th century. Brought up in a working class home on the Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire border, Clifford was trained at the Leicester General Baptist College, and spent his entire ministry at Praed Street/Westbourne Park Baptist Church in West London. There he studied at the University of London, gaining outstanding results in several Bachelor's degrees. He campaigned successfully to bring the Baptist Union and the New Connexion of General Baptists together in 1891. As President of the Baptist Union in 1888–89, he was involved in the Union's handling of the 'Downgrade Controversy' that had led to the withdrawal of C.H. Spurgeon (who remained a friend) from the Baptist Union, but did not secure his return. The later part of his career was dominated by the Education controversy, particularly in the passive resistance campaign in which many nonconformists refused to pay their education rate under the 1902 Education Act.

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I am honoured to have been invited to speak at this conference to mark the cen- tenary of the death of John Clifford, one of the greatest Baptist leaders, not only in this country but the world. My father once told me that his father (my grand- father), who was a travelling minister with the Churches of Christ and a rough contemporary of Clifford, always had a bust of Clifford on his desk. Sadly I don't know what happened to it; but as my father was the youngest of the family it is not surprising that it did not come to him. I have written several articles for the Quarterly on Clifford-related themes in my career, though not for a number of years; so I thought I would try to do a crash course on more recent scholarship by looking at the entry in the new ODNB – only to discover that I wrote it! What I should have done was to read Mark Hopkins's book on Nonconformity's Romantic Generation.[1]

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[1]Mark Hopkins, Nonconformity's Romantic Generation (Paternoster; Milton Keynes 2004) which is the most

thoughtful and thought-provoking book on late nineteenth century nonconformist ministers and theology

published in the last twenty years. © The Baptist Historical Society 2023

I have always felt a kinship for Clifford, as, like me, he was from the East Mid- lands. Whereas I am from Leicester, Clifford was from the Nottinghamshire/Der- byshire border. It does mean, however, that I have a basic knowledge of the General Baptists of the New Connexion among whom Clifford was brought up: the renewal of the old General Baptists, who had been tempted into Soci- nianism or Unitarianism in the eighteenth century. The church at Barton in the Beans in the Charnwood Forest area of west Leicestershire was founded in 1745, and the New Connexion was formed in 1770. It spread rapidly, influenced theologically and ecclesiologically more by Wesley and Whitefield than the General Baptists of the seventeenth century. It was thus very much a product of religious revival, largely unaffected by creeds and confessions, save that its Christology remained orthodox.

John Clifford was born in Sawley, a village just on the Derbyshire side of the Notts/Derbyshire border on 16 October 1836, first son of Samuel and Mary, both of whom were employed in the local lace mill. By the end of 1840 he had already started school, initially at the parish school in Sawley and then at Baptist schools in Beeston and Lenton (villages in Nottinghamshire to which the growing family moved).[2] Around the age of ten, John started at the lace factory as well, working as a 'piecer' for a sixteen-hour day. (This was before the Factory Acts were passed.) He used to retell a story from Richard Oastler, the factory reformer, about a meeting between a West Indian slave-master and three Bradford spin- ners, when the topic of child labour came up. After the slave-master had heard the spinners describe child labour in English factories, he said,

Well, I have always thought myself disgraced by being the owner of slaves, but we in the West Indies never thought it possible for any human being to be so cruel as to require a child of nine years old to work twelve-and-a-half hours, and that, you acknowledge, is your regular practice.[3]

His father was a strong supporter of the People's Charter, drafted in the year he was born, and also was originally a Methodist; his mother was a Baptist, three of whose brothers were Baptist preachers in the New Connexion. He regarded his father as the source of authority (and punishment) – he called him a Calvinist; whereas his mother was more gentle, and her ability in spoken prayer was one reason for his advocating that women take a vocal part in the Praed Street prayer meetings, when he first became minister, despite the lack of enthusiasm of some members at first.[4]

Clifford was converted in April 1851 after they had moved to Beeston and baptised in June. The minister there, the Revd Richard Pike, spotted promising signs in the boy, and encouraged him to prepare his first sermon, preached on 7 August 1855; after discussion with Pike, John was asked to become one of the

[2]Sir James Marchant, Dr. John Clifford, CH (London: Cassell & Co, 1924), 5. [3]Ibid., 5.
[4]Ibid., 7–8.

Nottingham preachers; and after preaching a trial sermon, he satisfied the local ministers and was launched on his preaching career. He wasted no time in applying to the Midland General Baptist College, then in Spa Place, Humber- stone Road, Leicester, and entered in September 1855. For the young Clifford, 'Leicester was his gloryland'.[5] Throughout his life he was committed to edu- cation; and Leicester, often known as 'the citadel of dissent' had a number of leading dissenting ministers, to whom he listened on Sunday mornings. Soon, however, he found himself called upon to take the leading role as a student pastor at Market Harborough in the vacation between his second and third year. Called by the congregation to become their pastor, he declined on the advice of his tutor; but a few months later he received another call, this time from the small church at Praed Street in Paddington.

The church owed its origin to a Leicestershire girl, Alice Ludford, converted at the age of eighteen, who moved to London and settled in Paddington. Being a long way from the nearest New Connexion chapel in Commercial Road, White- chapel, at first she went to the local Wesleyans; then, after discovering a couple from Norwich in a poverty-stricken state nearby, she nursed them to health, hired and fitted out a house in Praed Street, with a room at the back for the couple, whom she made the chapel-keepers, and a room at the front in which to meet. Then with the assistance of some members from Commercial Road a new church was formally established in Church Street, Edgware Road in January 1832, after being dedicated for worship at the end of the previous December. By 1837 there were 125

members, and from 1841 to 1852 the min- ister was Dr William Underwood, later Clifford's Principal at the Midland College.[6] He recommended Clifford to the congregation as minister in 1858.

This time Clifford's Tutor, the Revd R.W. Stevenson, while still initially counsel- ling him again to refuse, recognised that the decision was less easy. So he suggested that he should only accept on condition that he would be allowed to attend two lectures a week at University College, London on the Old and New Testaments respectively in order to complete the London BA degree. The congregation readily agreed to this, and on 17 October, the day after his twenty-second birthday, Clifford began his only ministry at Praed Street (later Westbourne Park) Paddington. In his first year he baptised 42 new members, received 13 by transfer, 5 by restoration, and 13 more to the communion roll – a total of 73 members altogether.[7] Clifford took four London degrees in the next five years: BA 1861, BSc 1862, MA 1864 and LlB 1866 (all with first-class honours). That was quite an achievement for someone in his first pastorate, working part-time. But this was not simply two sermons a week plus pastoral work. Praed Street can claim to be the first 'institutional' church in London, that is with 'secular activities' alongside services, bible studies and prayer

[5]Ibid., 21.
[6]Ibid., 37–39.
[7]Ibid., 33–36, 38–41.

meetings. A Mutual Economic Benefit Society began in 1861, providing health and sickness insurance; then a Mutual Improvement Society, from which grew the Institute (1885), with free lectures in winter and a study class on Wednesday evenings. Eventually a weekly social gathering began to meet: music, singing. lectures, conversation, refreshment, concluding with evening devotions. so that the congregation began to run out of space and free time. Expansion on either side was impossible, and eventually attention focused on two adjacent houses in Westbourne Park Place, a mile street west. Meanwhile Praed Street was enlarged as much as possible, reopened in July 1872 by Charles Spurgeon. In July 1876 the foundation stone of the new chapel in the early Gothic style was laid by Sir Henry Havelock, Bt, VC, MP, and it was dedicated and opened at the end of September 1877: Spurgeon preached again the following Tuesday. The cost of the land was £2,560 and building £15,000.[8]

Meanwhile Clifford's work at Praed Street had begun to attract wider atten- tion nationally, for in 1872 he became President of the General Baptist Associ- ation for their meeting in Nottingham. The theme of his address was 'Jesus Christ and Modern Social Life', which was one of the earliest descriptions of what he regarded as the 'Social Gospel'. I discussed this in 1986.[9]

Along with Spurgeon and a distinct group of London and provincial minis- ters, Clifford was one of the most influential Baptist (and indeed Free Church) leaders of his day. This was recognised internationally when he was elected the first President of the World Baptist Alliance on its foundation in 1905. Where did his influence lie? In answering this question, I need to talk about a particular genre, which is very much a nineteenth-century development, though not confined to then. I refer to the denominational president's or chair- man's address. In looking at Clifford's literary output, we see that there were a few books, particularly series of lectures, but also occasional addresses, often published separately,

regular sermons, and articles for magazines and other periodicals. The origin of this genre, which I think is sufficiently distinct to be considered on its own, is obviously the post-Reformation sermon, which pre- ceded congregational hymns and ran alongside the publishing of prayer; but it was given new life by public addresses given in support of various campaigns in the eighteenth century: the campaign for prison reform, the anti-slavery movement and above all the overseas missionary movement. Like all sermons of the time, these addresses were long, anything up to an hour; they were elo- quent, and often rhetorical. In print, they could be up to 40–50 octavo pages. John Wesley's Conference Addresses provided a general pattern for other non- conformists who were given positions of leadership in their own denomina- tions; it was only with the Missionary Societies of the 1790s and the

[8]Ibid., 40–44.

[9]See David Thompson, "John Clifford's Social Gospel," BQ, xxxi, 5 (Jan 1986), 206–7.

Nonconformist Unions of the early nineteenth century that such positions and opportunities came into existence.

Clifford was unusual in having five opportunities for such addresses. As we have seen, the first was in 1872, when he was Chairman of the New Connexion. Then in 1888 he was Chairman of the Baptist Union, with two addresses in the year. In 1898 he was President of the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches and spoke at their annual conference in Bristol. Finally, he was Presi- dent of the World Baptist Alliance in 1905. In principle, the President or Chair- man had complete freedom of choice over his (not, in the nineteenth century, her). In practice, it could be constrained by contemporary circum- stances. Thus, it was almost inescapable that he had to address the problems of the 'Down-Grade' controversy in 1888, though probably not many would have thought of focusing on the formative forty years of primitive church history. His choice of 'Jesus Christ and Modern Social Life' in 1872 was by no means obvious either. He was right to point out that it was a matter of increas- ing contemporary significance. It was no surprise that for his Baptist Union Autumn Assembly address in 1888, he should take 'The Primitive Christian Faith as a Social Gospel' But he was able to make his subject and method of approach auto-biographical and up to date, with hardly any repetition of material used sixteen years before.

It is easy to see why Clifford's own early life influenced the context in which he framed his understanding of Christian responsibility in society. He always believed that a political role was inescapable for the Christian, and after he put aside any thought of contesting a parliamentary seat himself, it was inevi- table that he should make this an essential part of his preaching. In order to understand how the various strands of his thought fitted together I want to illustrate them here. How did he reconcile his strong commitment to the indi- vidual's freedom of conscience with a similar commitment to the collective good. The simple answer is that he never saw any conflict. But the interesting question then is, Why not?

The root of the answer to that is that he was a General Baptist, or more specifically that he was not a Calvinist (or more precisely a determinist) in any sense. It has become customary to minimise the significance of the dis- tinction between Particular and General Baptists in the nineteenth century, despite the fact that the liberalisation of Particular Baptist theology under the influence of men like John Ryland, Andrew Fuller and Robert Hall[10] led the more conservative Particular Baptists to become 'Strict and Particular Bap- tists' from the end of the eighteenth century. The General Baptists of the New

[10]Thomas Nettles of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary begins his article. "John Clifford (1836–1923): Irre- pressible Liberal," Southern Baptist Journal of Theology 6, no. 4 (Winter 2002) with a section on Robert Hall as a kind of godfather to the 'Down-Grade', as though he was a prime influence on Clifford, when interestingly the latter did not refer to him at all, despite his admiration for the Leicester Baptist ministers, though Hall had retired before Clifford went to college; but Nettles is the epitome of Southern Baptist conservatism, and not a reliable guide to Clifford. The article is a pretext to criticise what Nettles regards as 'liberal' theology.

Connexion were more influenced by John Wesley and the latter's style of 'Arminian' preaching, that by the established Particular Baptists. Essentially the New Connexion rejected the Calvinist emphasis on predestination (while being unable to ditch the way in which it was understood by Paul in his New Testament Letters); instead they took the more optimistic view that individuals come to faith by publicly professing it. The pro-Calvinist view, which maintained the centrality of God's initiative rather than the human response, became an increasingly minority point of view, although one should never under-estimate the potential for a variety of Baptist views, which could emerge in the absence of any central organisation, or a binding single Confession of Faith.

Clifford began his argument in 1872 by observing that there had been no new rationalist challenges to Christian theology in recent years, which left 'Jesus Christ and Modern Social Life' as the supreme question of the present hour. Moving via the safe ground (denominationally speaking) of rejection of the recent legal judgement on the legality of Anglican teaching on the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine at the Eucharist and affirmation that the disestablishment of the Church of England as a depart- ment of the State 'was needed, and that right early', he affirmed that the key utilitarian test that the different church polities had to face was which one made the noblest saints and created the wisest sympathy with and prac- tical help for human misery and wretchedness. He cited a recent article suggesting that the proportion of paupers to population was still the same as it had been in William III's reign, and the cost per head likewise. More impressive still was the state of declared war between the captains and sol- diers of industry, with the language of warfare openly used to describe that situation. Even worse was the lack of agreement on the right method of curing the situation. Clifford categorically rejected the solutions proffered by communism[11], positivism as posed by Fourier or Robert Owen, and Auguste Comte. He also included what he described as 'state mechanism', meaning suggestions that the solution to every problem was state interven- tion. Interestingly from a twenty-first century perspective he regarded the United States as the scene for most communist experiments, in the form of communes and communities, where he noted the experimental patterns of sexual relations among the Mormons or in the Oneida Community. The Shakers, who were probably the earliest new community were celibate. The scientific basis of Positivism should not be too readily dismissed since it was calculated to appeal to the English mind, but it was nevertheless deeply flawed:

[11]'Whether Christianity be right or not, it is certain that the Communistic method is wrong' John Clifford, Jesus Christ and Modern Social Life (London and Leicester, 1872), 19.

Its directions for practice are bad where they are original, and lack motive when they are good. It has no God, no personal immortality, no place for prayer, no realm of spiri- tual fact and its efficacy in regenerating social life is inappreciably small.[12]

But Clifford concurred with Lecky's History of European Morals that intellectual knowledge was no guarantee of moral renovation. Similarly it was folly to expect the state to remedy

every evil, and certainly not without cost. I am sure that the Chancellor of the Exchequer would agree. 'The State is but a machine after all; and it needs Christianised humanity to work it, if it is to work well.'[13] So he concluded with Elizabeth Barrett Browning in Aurora Leigh, that 'It takes a soul/ to move a body.'[14] Christ was needed to regenerate the Churches. At one level the address was entirely traditional, but it showed an openness to new thoughts and a confidence in tackling them which was far from common; he was still only 36.

The context he had to address from the chair of the Baptist Union in 1888 was very different. It is unnecessary to go into the detail of the 'Down Grade' controversy, and the situation at the Spring 1888 meeting of the Baptist Union was more specific. Charles Haddon Spurgeon had written articles in his magazine The Sword and Trowel alleging that the Baptist Union was on the theological 'Down Grade' with various leading ministers abandoning key evangelical doctrines; and he therefore resigned from the Union. The Union Council felt obliged to respond, but how? Spurgeon himself had suggested that the Council should adopt a more detailed statement of faith, such as that of the Evangelical Alliance. The Council did not believe that it could carry such a proposal, and a number of members were clearly opposed to it. It therefore adopted an alternative statement of principles (largely drafted by Clifford). That all happened before the Annual Meeting of the Union gathered.

Obviously the Council had to explain its action and, so far as possible, gain the meeting's approval. Instead of simply waiting for the item to be reached on the agenda, Clifford took the initiative by making the issue and the questions around it the theme of his Spring Address. Importantly, he did not take them up in the way in which Spurgeon had framed them, but in the context of the history of the Early Church. 'The Great Forty Years' were the years from 30 AD to 70 AD, when Christianity was nurtured in controversy, and in Clifford's view necessary controversy. So in the opening minutes he made two significant moves: the first was to suggest that controversy had always been part of Christianity; the second was to suggest that controversy was a source of strength for the faith and there was no need to fear it. Indeed he cited J.H. Newman's Essay on the Development of Doctrine as evidence that the acknowledgement that

[12]Ibid., 21. [13]Ibid., 23. [14]Ibid., 36.

differences of opinion existed in the Early Church now extended even to Roman Catholics:

> Romanists and Evangelicals have both tried to make out the Christians of the early cen- turies were perfectly agreed as to the significance of the Christian revelation, and moved on the same lines of theological doctrine. It is a vain attempt.[15]

The question was how one responded to the recognition of that: did one welcome it, as Clifford did because he believed that controversy strengthened faith; or did one deny it, as instinctively many others did, not liking the rocking of boats?

How did we know what primitive Christianity was? Clifford continued by referring to Martin Luther's Reformation, and the change of emphasis that it brought, and also used it as a type for the questions raised by scientists in the century afterwards. Then he argued powerfully that there were three con- fessions made in the first forty years that epitomised early Christianity: that of Peter, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God', which is ratified by

Jesus as being given to Peter by God; that of Thomas, after the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, 'My Lord and my God';

And that of Paul to the Romans,

If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved ... for there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich upon all that call upon Him.[16]

He emphasised that Christianity today was based on solid historical facts, and quoted A.B. Bruce's Apologetics to the effect that we were more sure of the facts today than at any time since the death of the Apostle John.[17] The Council secured majority approval for its actions.

Clifford's address at the Autumn Assembly was entitled, The New City of God, or The Primitive Christian Faith as a Social Gospel.[18] A comparison of this with the 1872 Address provides an interesting illustration of how the general scene had changed. There was, for example, no mention of American experiments with communities. (The Oneida Community had changed into a Joint Stock silver- ware company in 1881.) There were references to Bishop Westcott and the Anglican Christian Social Union. He began by noting the supremacy of social problems in all areas of contemporary discourse: 'Man, in his sharply defined and selfish individualism, is being superseded by mankind in co-operative com- munion and mutual beneficence'.[19] As in 1872, Clifford urged that all social

[15]John Clifford, "The Great Forty Years," in The Christian Certainties (London: Isbister & Company Ltd, 1894), 110. [16]Ibid., 120, 122, 124.

[17]Ibid., 126.

[18]John Clifford, "The New City of God, or The Primitive Christian Faith as a Social Gospel," Baptist Handbook, 1888,

66–95.

[19]Baptist Handbook, 1888, 67.

problems were spiritual at heart. The corollary of the doctrine of equality before the law long recognised by Christianity was the equality of all in making the law. What he called

the quietly operative energy or the popular vote was loosening the keystone of the arch of monopolies, lifting the 'agricultural labourer' out of the mire, opening the doors of industry and opportunity to women, and weakening the existence of every social and political edifice that is built on wrong and force instead of on right and freedom.[20]

Like it or resent it, Clifford asserted that God's will in this matter was irresistible.

The only place of the Church of the Lord Jesus is first in all self-denying reforms, first in all unselfish service, in the van of every battle with iniquity; first in everything that pre- vents the waste of manhood, diminishes vice, promotes national well-being and saves the souls of men.[21]

Apart from the rhetoric, see the ease with which different ideas are clustered together.

Noting that Lessing distinguished between the Christian religion and the reli- gion of Christ, and accepting (rather than rejecting) the distinction, Clifford argued that we must not look to the Church of the fourth or the nineteenth century, but the age of the Founder of Christianity himself.

Misery gravitates to Him, as flowers to the sun. The pariahs of society, the 'roughs' and 'fallen women' come out of their hiding places whenever He draws near. Himself despised and rejected of men, cast out by the leaders of 'Society', 'Theology', 'Ritual', and 'State'. He is the natural friend of social outcasts, the poor, maimed, halt and blind.[22]

Again, note the irresistibility of the rhetoric. In conclusion Clifford suggested that we all knew what we should do, but that did not make it any easier to do it. The cross of Christ was what constrained people to sell land and houses. But the cross was not all ... the relation of Christ to society 'is only fully interpreted by His Incarnation'.[23]

Christianity offered a superior understanding of humanity; not only that, it was necessary to investigate further Christians' working idea of woman.

How far we are even yet from the Christian teaching concerning woman as a distinct human entity ... in double standard of morals we still adopt for men and women, in the cowardly refusal to permit women to share in making the laws under which they live and suffer.[24]

[20]Ibid., 71. [21]Ibid., 73. [22]Ibid., 75. [23]Ibid., 78. [24]Ibid., 82.

This is twenty years before the heyday of the suffragettes. People were needed with the courage to put their vision into action. Thus we needed to commit to the moral improvement of the citizen, and also to extinguishing the evils of competition, aiding co-operation in all legitimate trade and adopting profit- sharing as was being done in various parts of France. The supreme task was to find the people for this task; and he told of a down-hearted and penniless man who found his way into a richly furnished and beautiful sanctuary. He received no greeting, no eye spoke a welcome, no voice offered a word of sym- pathy. So he turned and went back along the aisle a sadder man, pausing to ask the sexton, 'What church is this?' 'This is Christ's Church' was the answer. 'Then I reckon,' the man replied, 'the Master isn't in today'. 'Pray ye the Lord of the harvest,' Clifford concluded, 'that He send forth labourers into His harvest.'[25]

What I find impressive about Clifford's exposition is his range of reference, and breadth of imagination. A striking feature of Clifford's sermons and public addresses is the frequency with which he illustrates his arguments with scientific analogies, from physics, chemistry, biology, botany and geology. To the 'hard sciences' may be added subjects like history, ancient as well as modern, and biblical criticism. Clifford had no fear of such areas, since he regarded all of them as products of the human use of the faculties given us by God. Christianity had nothing to fear from truth, nor did Clifford set much store by concepts such as a hierarchy of truths. And of course, his dazzling array of first-class degrees from University College, London, gave him a natural authority in this area. So we have first, complete absence of fear of what the exercise of reason might bring, and second, an abundance of supporting knowl- edge. In other words there is a straight run back without apology to core ideas of the Enlightenment.

This put him first of all at odds with the Evangelicals in the Church of England, but also differentiated him from the traditional products of the Dissenting Aca- demies in the ministry of Old Dissent in England. Of particular importance was the fact that Clifford never seems to have been attracted by any form of Soci- nian or Unitarian speculation, either in the Church of England or Dissent. Indeed the emphasis he placed on faith in Christ as the Revelation of God, as well as his dismay at the way in which the drift of some of the older General Bap- tists towards Unitarianism had (in his view) sapped the spiritual energy of the movement, probably ensured that the space he carved out for an incarnational emphasis to replace that on the atonement became central to his resolution of the nineteenth-century 'crisis of faith'.

For Clifford the importance of personal commitment was what made him a Baptist. He followed other contemporary Baptists in rejecting any view that baptism effected regeneration; that he regarded as sacerdotalism. To seek baptism was an act of personal obedience. (He did not believe that holy

[25]Ibid., 95.

communion effected anything either, for the same kind of reasons.) This inevi- tably meant a strong emphasis on the importance of the individual. But unlike many other evangelicals, Clifford did not believe that this precluded an empha- sis on the significance of the collective, as well as the individual; and this opened the way for him to emphasise 'socialist' ideas, to the extent that he did. Here he was quite explicit in acknowledging the influence of Bishop Westcott and other Anglicans, such as the authors of Lux Mundi (1889), who espoused 'Christian Socialist' views. In fact, such acknowledgement was quite significant given his generally anti-Establishment views and his scathing assessment of 'priestcraft'.

One significant influence on Clifford was Ralph Waldo Emerson, and in par- ticular his two sets of Essays, published in 1841 and 1844, This is particularly interesting given Emerson's Unitarianism – Emerson was a Unitarian minister for three years – and Clifford's own views on Unitarianism cited above. He quoted Thomas Carlyle in his first conversation with Emerson, 'Christ died on the tree; that [sc. Christ's death] built Dunscore Kirk yonder; that brought you and me together.'[26] Clifford does not quote Emerson directly on many occasions, though one can see why he would warm to the sentence in Emer- son's essay on 'Self-Reliance' that 'Whoso would be a man, must be a noncon- formist',[27] that is, not take positions based on conformity but on conviction. In practice I doubt whether Clifford would have agreed with all the sentiments Emerson expressed to illustrate his convictions. He did not buy uncritically into the admiration for leaders of strong character expressed by both Carlyle and Emerson, even though he was an admirer of Cromwell, as they were; Clifford always judged people by both their characters and convictions.

I want to cover two other points briefly before I close; one concerns the ques- tion of whether Clifford was a socialist or a liberal; the other concerns his under- standing of and attitude to Christian unity.

On the question of whether Clifford was a socialist or a liberal, in so far as that is a sensible question to ask given the period of Clifford's career, I think one has to say that he was essentially a liberal. It is true that he described himself as a Christian Socialist, but in his day 'Socialist' did not denote a separate political party. Although the Independent Labour Party was formed in 1894, the Parlia- mentary Labour Party was only created in 1906. It is also true that two of Clifford's addresses were published as Fabian Society Tracts: no 78, Socialism and the Teaching of Christ, (August 1897), an address given at the Annual Meeting of the Christian Socialist League at Westbourne Park Chapel in February 1895; and no 139, Socialism and the Churches, (September 1908), an address given at Forest Hill Baptist Chapel to the London Baptist Association. Not all members of the Fabian Society identified themselves as political Liberals; 'Lib-

[26]Ibid., 78. Cf. Joseph Slater, ed. The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle (New York & London: Columbia Uni- versity Press, 1964), 99, n 10.

[27]Ralph Waldo Emerson, Emerson's Essays: The First and Second Series Complete (1841) (Adansonia Publishing, 2018), 6.

Lab' MPs tended to be Trade Unionists that identified themselves with local Liberal politics, later formally distinguished from the Liberal Party when the Labour Representation Committee was established in 1900. Indeed the com- plexity of Labour politics between 1900 and 1900 was revealed long ago by Frank Bealey and Henry Pelling in their book, Labour and Politics 1900–1906,[28] when it was made abundantly clear that socialism was not even decisive in the original arguments at the inauguration of the Committee. Relations between some trade unionists and socialists were as much marked by hostility as alliance.

In his first tract, Clifford sought to demonstrate that collectivism (rather than trusting only to individual entrepreneurs) was compatible with the mind of Christ. Although he was sure that individual entrepreneurs would obviously resist such a conclusion, he was convinced intellectually that they would be bound to lose, if only because of the numbers who would take the opposite view. The question (and note the significance of the phraseology here) was whether in social policy we were 'providing the best industrial body for the incar- nation of His spirit.'[29] He spelt out quite clearly what, in his view, collectivism was not: no suppression of the family, no total extinction of private property, no sudden overthrow of the machinery of industrial life. Collectivism would not extinguish vice and manufacture saints, but it would abolish poverty and reduce the hungry to an imperceptible quantity and systematically care for the aged poor and for the sick.[30] Effectively it would model the programme of the Progressives (an alliance of Liberals and Socialists) on the London County Council.

His second Fabian tract (139), an address given to the London Baptist Associ- ation in 1908, (Socialism and the Churches) is in some ways more interesting, since I doubt whether his audience would have been primarily Socialists or Fabians. After referring to the early nineteenth century origins of Socialism, he suggested that 'a more English way of thinking' was to look at an idea is it was embodied in a familiar fact, 'such as that department of State called the General Post Office. Englishmen are not theorists, and are rarely captured by theoretical reasoning.' Of course, the Post Office no longer is a socialist construc- tion, but just another inefficient private company; nor do letters 'come with regularity, and on the stroke of the clock all through the day.'[31] Clifford saw socialism as the next stage in social and political development, but declined to see it as the final form of human society. Nevertheless he attributed sanity, catholicity and even divinity to socialism; it was 'of God'. The Churches were at last awakening to it, though hitherto they had been instinctively inclined never to 'touch these unspiritual things'.[32] Whilst they must not allow anything

[28]F. Bealey and H. Pelling, Labour and Politics 1900–1906 (London: Macmillan, 1958), 1–54. [29]John Clifford, Socialism and the Teaching of Christ (London: Fabian Society, 1897), 5. [30]Ibid., 9–10.
[31]John Clifford, Socialism and the Churches (Fabian Tract no 139, London, 1908), 4.

[32]Ibid., 9. So when Clifford opened a new building for the orphanage associated with Fulham Cross Church of Christ in 1908 in memory of his friend, Sydney Black, he could say in the same address, 'We are not simply

to detract from their primary spiritual task, their particular responsibility lay in looking after the spiritual element of socialism, because 'men are not yet "mor- alized" up to the point where a co-operative community is possible'.[33] That would involve commitment to study, and possibly commitment to electoral action: churches ought 'whilst not, as churches, identifying themselves with Socialist organisations, to take their full share in the gradual reformation and rebuilding of society'.[34]

If one were to ask why Clifford and, for example R.W. Dale emerged on oppo- site sides of the fence in this respect, one might answer at various levels. It is partly the difference between the small industries of Birmingham and West London; it is partly the difference between the Birmingham and London City Councils; it is certainly the difference between Liberal Imperialists and 'Pro- Boers' in relation to the South African War; it is also the differences between the two cities in their Education policies and the effect of the 1902 Education Act in the two places. Dale and Clifford were not only at different ends of the Lib-Lab political spectrum, but were at extreme ends of that spectrum; and yet in some respects they were not as far apart as the presentation of a polarised picture might suggest; and the reforms such as Old Age Pensions and National Insurance that the Liberal government of 1906–10 introduced gave the sense that the collectivist agenda was safe in Liberal hands for the time being. Ironi- cally, he remarked in one of his letters to the Christian World on the completion of his world tour in 1897 (mainly in Australia) that he had received a certificate from a Presbyterian minister that he was a 'good Conservative'.[35]

Before concluding I will say just a word about Clifford's attitude to Christian unity, since he was President of the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches at their meeting at Bristol in March 1898. His Presidential Address bore the title, 'The Unity of the Churches: the Problem solved'. The explanation of that apparently surprising statement is simple. Clifford did not think the unity of the Churches could go any further than it had already gone, and that Churches such as the Roman Catholic, Anglican or Eastern Orthodox needed to recognise that the terms that they demanded for unity went beyond those required by Christ or the New Testament.

Although he acknowledged that relations between the Churches had improved by the end of the War in 1919 – indeed he rejoiced that the King and Queen had attended the national Free Churches Service of Thanksgiving for Victory in the Albert Hall – he was sceptical from the first about the 1920

here to provide a shelter for these children, but we are supplying them with training and education. We are preventing them from drifting into the masses of the unemployed. We are preventing them from becoming a burden on the rates. Let Fulham [Poor Law] Guardians and Councillors take note of that. ... I like to think that this building will be a witness to the people of Fulham of the necessity ... that the children of the nation should be cared for by the nation.' Thomas J. Ainsworth, Sydney Black (London: Book & Tract Depot, Twynholm House, Fulham Cross, 1911), 101, 102.

[33]Ibid., 12.
[34]Ibid., 14.
[35]John Clifford, God's Greater Britain (London: Clarke & Co., 1899), 7.

Lambeth Conference's Appeal on Reunion. In private correspondence Clifford was scathing about the so-called 'Concordat' of 31 May 1922[36], published over the signatures of the Archbishops of York (Cosmo Lang) and Canterbury (Randall Davidson) and the Revd Dr J.D. Jones, Moderator of the National Free Church Council (Congregational minister in Bournemouth). He wrote an agonised letter to the Revd W.E. Blomfield, Principal of Rawdon College, thank- ing him for the resolution of protest he had moved at the meeting of the York- shire Baptist Association in June 1922, which had criticised the vague generalities about Baptism, the suggestion that in future episcopal ordination would be expected, the agreement to use the Nicene Creed as an expression of the corporate faith of the Church, and the Apostles' Creed for candidates for Baptism and Church Membership.

The situation is pathetically painful. To me it is not less painful because I cannot do what I would. My fighting days are over ... The question is surrender or advance. The policy of the concordat is surrender; so far as the Free Churches are concerned, and as Baptists, we cannot accept it, whoever else may. We belong to that regiment of the Reformers who carried Reformation the farthest ... The Reformation of Henry VIII and Elizabethan days was made up of compromises; many of them abide. Our fathers never accepted them.

Clifford feared that Baptist support for such an agreement would weaken their links to Europe and America by surrendering 'to the traditional teaching and practices of the imperfectly Reformed Churches of Europe'. He continued,

No doubt our leaders are sincere in their efforts to establish ecclesiastical unity; but sin- cerity is not enough; and material and mechanical unity is not enough. The real unity is of soul and spirit and does not depend on identity of ideas as to forms and policies ... Why not cultivate amongst all [Churches] spiritual unity and cease making further div- ision and strife by debating the terms of a further mechanical and unreal union?

But the capital defect of this document is its lack of actuality. It never grips reality. It is not in line with the forces of today. It is ancient, remote, ambiguous and altogether unreal. It is groping in the dark for the Church of the future, and absorbed so comple- tely in the traditions and conventions of the past, that it fails to see what the Church of the future must of necessity be. It talks of external authority as though it had any exist- ence in a spiritual democracy that is seeking to move in the ampler spaces of the world's life ...

The rhetoric is almost irresistible; and anyone of comparable age and experi- ence cannot but sympathise with the frustration so obviously expressed in that letter, particularly as one recalls Clifford's own contribution towards ending the division between General and Particular Baptists in 1891. In many respects I sympathise with his criticisms of the Lambeth conversations, and par- ticularly the attitude of the Anglican representatives, and I have written about

[36]Marchant, Clifford, 260–63. The Report is in G.K.A. Bell, Documents on Christian Unity, 1920–1924 (London, 1924), no 44, 143–51; Section II on The Ministry is on 148–50.

this elsewhere.[37] But, with the benefit of hindsight, both positive and negative, I don't find Clifford's remarks any more in touch with reality (always notoriously difficult to judge) than the comments from the Lambeth Committee. So long as the Church of England insists on re-ordination, I see no prospect of any kind of agreement on ministry.

Finally, Clifford did become a Companion of Honour in the New Year's Honours List of 1921. Although the number of Companions of Honour is restricted, and its award is therefore relatively rare, clearly this was the result of Lloyd George's influence as Prime Minister; the number of nonconformist CHs is still quite low. But it does reflect a particular personal achievement and public recognition, despite the bitterness of the division over the 1902 Education Act and Clifford's prominence in the Passive Resistance campaign. He died at a meeting of the Baptist Union Council on 23 November 1923. The first sentence of the Memorial Resolution of the Baptist Union read,

Dr Clifford belonged to the whole Church of Christ, to the Nation, and, indeed, to humanity, but it is our honour and our pride that he belonged especially to us, that he lived his whole life in our Communion, and served our Church with unfaltering loyalty and devotion to the end.[38]

Disclosure Statement

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[37]David M. Thompson, "The Unity of the Church in Twentieth-Century England: Pleasing Dream or Common Calling?" in Studies in Church History 32, Unity and Diversity in the Church, ed. R.N. Swanson (Oxford, 1996), 507–31.

[38]Marchant, Clifford, 289.