

BAHNR 1: 51-2.

Ministry and Order in the Church of Christ

B.W. Newton

Ian Griffiths (ed.)

Pearl Publications: 2 Stanley Road, Ashford, Middlesex, TW15 2LW, UK (Fax: 01784 887748)

128 pp. £3.95 (including p&p £4.50 UK; £5.50 USA).

Perhaps I should not be reviewing this book. Its preface declares ‘This is not a book for historians’! However, I have no doubt that even historians may find it of interest and profit.

I have for the last thirteen years been collecting and preparing a definitive bibliography of Benjamin Wills Newton’s works, which is now (thankfully) nearing completion. Its impetus has not been academic curiosity, vindication or interpretation of the man. It derived simply from the perceived spiritual benefit to my own heart of his exposition of Scripture. When I then passed through great personal turmoil on issues of fellowship and church order it was not surprising that I turned to B.W. Newton’s works, and what I began for my own benefit was quickly seen to be of benefit to others and the outcome is *Ministry and Order in the Church of Christ*. It comprehensively brings together statements made by B.W. Newton on the subject, from his published and unpublished works and from the Hunt, Barnard notes of lectures.

Exclusive Brethren writers have always cast the first split among the Brethren as the result of spontaneous indignation at defective Christological statements alleged to have been made by Benjamin Wills Newton. Blair Neatby, and, in this generation, Harold Rowdon and Roy Coad, have stressed the importance of prophetic differences as a key factor, if not the principal one. Little attention has been given to the issues of discipline, government, order and fellowship, so central to the rapidly growing movement—indeed its very *raison d’etre*.

In essence B.W. Newton’s position and that of the Ebrington Street assembly, Plymouth, was very close to that of J.N. Darby, certainly in the earliest days. Nevertheless, in many respects, it was how one acts upon the proposition that every candlestick has been removed that governed the course of the controversy, and indeed the later divisions amongst Brethren. For example, Lord Congleton’s correspondence shows two assemblies (Ebrington Street and Rawstone Street) acting both on the same professed principles, but clearly on different courses.

Although Tregelles wrote his *Pastoral Relations* and acted as a defender of his cousin by marriage on the ecclesiological issues (asserting that J.N. Darby had earlier in writing acknowledged B.W. Newton as an elder at Plymouth), B.W. Newton himself wrote little on the principles of gathering. What we have of his position is in this new book. I leave it to others to make comparisons and to draw conclusions, indeed my object has been the spiritual good of the book’s readers rather than any other purpose. I think what has been provided will, nevertheless, be found to be a valuable Newton sourcebook.

Ian Griffiths