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# SCOTTISH BAPTIST RELATIONS WITH THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The arrival of the century of ecumenism was heralded for Scottish Baptists by Dr Jervis Coats in his Presidential Address of October 1900. Its title was 'Christian Union and the Denominational Spirit'. It was the year of the Union in Scotland of the United Presbyterian Church (itself the product of various earlier unions of Presbyterian seceders) and the Free Church of Scotland formed by Thomas Chalmers' Disruption of 1843. The resultant United Free Church of Scotland subsequently joined with the Church of Scotland in 1929.

Dr Coats sets 'the spiritual union of all who love the Lord Jesus Christ' as 'the supreme purpose of all the Divine leadings, and the goal of all human strivings'.<sup>1</sup> He sees as 'one of the most hopeful signs of the times ... a more genial atmosphere ... in which the whole of the Churches are surely, though unconsciously, ripening in the direction of larger unity'.<sup>2</sup> Dismissing uniformity as one extreme and 'an intense and even blatant individuality ... in the name of liberty or independence' as another, he appeals (in terms suggestively similar to the current ecumenical terminology) for a 'manifoldness in unity', for which the model is the Biblical image of the Body.<sup>3</sup> Here there is no 'lazy toleration' but a 'real sympathetic concord'. His 'two-fold principle' of 'manifoldness in unity' leads him to make the first twentieth-century Baptist comment on Presbyterian life in Scotland. Referring to the impending Union of the Free and United Presbyterian Churches, he says: 'It is a movement which comes under the great two-fold principle I have been enunciating, and to which, therefore, one can heartily wish God speed.' He quotes 'from the highest authority on the subject -the two Churches propose to unite on the distinct and express understanding that neither Church surrenders or compromises anything that has been characteristic of it in the past.'<sup>4</sup> Taking some pride in Baptist numerical supremacy over Presbyterianism worldwide and in great Baptist heroes past and current, he asks what Baptists have to contribute within this manifoldness in unity. Here he raises a point that recurs throughout the century and remains today as both the central point of disagreement and our main distinctive contribution to ecumenical theological debate -the priority of faith. '..."Without faith it is impossible". What is impossible? Anything, everything that is of a spiritual nature. We seek to carry this sentiment clear through from base to apex of the Christian system, to apply it to every act which can be regarded as religious. In this way we declare that there is no plea that can be considered to be valid for removing the first of our Lord's two ordinances outside this great principle. Without faith, personal consecration, true baptism is impossible.'<sup>5</sup> He quotes George Matheson unfavourably: 'When you baptise a child in the name of the Trinity, you are writing its own name in God's birthday book' - declaring that, if this is so, Christ sent us to baptise, not to preach the Gospel and claims that 'this doctrine of Baptismal regeneration ... lies at the basis of the rite of infant baptism everywhere.' We must resist this doctrine and place personal adherence to Jesus Christ in the very forefront. This, he says, is not divisive but rather giving diligence to keeping the unity of the *Spirit* (in contrast to other unities) in the bond of peace. 'The denominational spirit with us means the desire, the purpose, the endeavour to uphold the spirituality of the Kingdom of God.'<sup>6</sup> In that first Baptist comment of the twentieth century on the ecumenical scene, the grounds for Baptist separateness, which are also the grounds for Baptist ecumenism, are laid.

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Our particular concern, however, is not with wider ecumenical matters but specifically with the 'National Church', the 'Kirk'. It is simply true that no formal relations with the Kirk existed in the early part of the twentieth century, although Baptists were not loath to make comment on Presbyterian efforts at unity nor to define clearly the grounds for their own distinctive witness. A very few years after the formation of the United Free Church (with 1700 ministers and 500,000 members) talk of union with the Church of Scotland (with 1400 ministers and 700,000 members) was in the air and formal negotiations for union began in 1909. The Scottish Baptist President for the following year, 1910, the Revd J. R. Chrystal, had been a minister of Coltness Memorial Church of Scotland in Newmains, Lanarkshire. He and his wife, having become convinced of the truth of Believer's Baptism, joined the Baptist Union of Scotland. His Presidential Address was entitled ominously 'Church Union in Scotland: the Truth in Love'.

Chrystal, writing a paper in a rather sharp and critical style, describes the plea for union of the two great Presbyterian Churches as 'amiable as well as powerful', notes the impulse given to Church Union by the famous World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in June of that year, records rather huffily that 'no overtures ... for Union have as yet been addressed to our Baptist Churches with their 20,000 members'<sup>7</sup> and then spells out the two main reasons for Baptists being where they are. These are, first the familiar notion of the 'spirituality of the Church' (that all Churches ought to consist of believers and of believers only) and secondly, that the two ordinances are not *saving* ordinances but *Church* ordinances and are equally for believers and believers only.<sup>8</sup> He suggests that certain arguments for the Baptist position 'can now be said without protest on the floor of the General Assembly itself'.<sup>9</sup> But, Chrystal records sadly, the Paedobaptists had yet to square their practice with their scholarship and until they did, while giving due weight to concern for the unity of God's people, while respecting 'many in all the Churches', while 'prepared as ever to co-operate with them in every good work, the time has not yet come when we can with safety withhold our witness.' In such terms was ecumenism understood in those days: J. H. Shakespeare's ideas on federalism and the current Inter-Church Process were yet to make their points.

Further ecumenical developments were delayed until after the Great War, but by 1920 two pre-War issues were taken up again, both of which related to Scottish Presbyterianism and drew Baptist comment. The first was the question of faith and order. In the context of Presbyterian reunion, Thomas Stewart, a prominent Scottish Baptist thinker who became Union Secretary in 1920, noted a 'surprising evidence of a deep hankering in Presbyterian ministers and members for the sacramental gift in the Holy Communion' and sees this, coupled with their restriction of the dispensation of the sacraments to ordained ministers, as evidence of the deep division running through the Churches, between the sacramental and the purely spiritual view.<sup>10</sup> The Moderators of the two Presbyterian Assemblies, however, in 1920 chose to speak on the subject of faith, or 'the faith', itself and the restrictions imposed on their Churches by the Westminster Confession. Principal Storey, fourteen years earlier, had criticised the theology of the Confession in strong terms as legal and not moral, ignoring the fatherly love of God and presenting 'a monstrous travesty of divinity and omnipotence ...'. The Moderators were more respectful but pleaded for a simpler and more contemporary expression of faith. The Baptist comment on this was to agree that creeds and confessions are unhelpfully binding (like 'swaddling-clothes') and are a 'fruitful source of schism'. The Established Church Moderator's declaration that 'personal loyalty to Christ must be the *supreme* test' is welcomed and Principal Denny's formula, 'I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, my Saviour' is suggested as a basis for 'that unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace which will unite all

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believers together in indissoluble fellowship.<sup>11</sup>

Still, however, Scottish Baptists were mere observers upon the schemes and processes and federations in which so many others were engaged, including, by this time, through the efforts of J. H. Shakespeare, the 'English Union'. 'Reunion in our land', commented Thomas Stewart, '[is] at the moment, a Presbyterian question.' This Presbyterian question (the second of our concerns) was being addressed again with vigour. Scottish Baptists, hesitant about the positive responses by their English fellow Baptists to the 1920 Lambeth Conference which was hailed by some as ushering in a new era, critical of Shakespeare's *The Churches at the Cross Roads*, which expressed especially his views on reunion and episcopacy, professing little if any interest in 'bishops' or 'orders', and dubious about the 'creed basis' required by reunion schemes, were nonetheless 'thankful for the freshening air and the enlarging vision'.<sup>12</sup>

The Presidential Address in 1920 by the Revd Alexander Paterson took 'Denominational Union' as its subject and dealt extensively with matters of Church Union and Re-union. Specifically, he addressed the problems of United Free/Church of Scotland re-union and identifies the two questions that required to be resolved. These were the questions of Establishment and Endowments. Already certain obstacles to Presbyterian reunion had been removed, including, in 1874, the abolition of patronage. The United Free Church wanted the removal of all 'State entanglements'. The passing by Parliament in 1921 of certain Declaratory Acts in which the Church of Scotland asserted its 'right and power, subject to no Civil Authority, to legislate, and to adjudicate finally, in all matters of doctrine, worship, government and discipline' effectively gave them their request.<sup>13</sup> Andrew Melville must have been pleased.

It is perhaps worth spending a moment in clarifying the Church of Scotland claims to be the National Church, which the 1921 Act confirmed to them. Scottish Baptist life has been lived out against this background in the twentieth century and its significance increased after 1929. In a recent publication<sup>14</sup> challenging the relevance of the concept of a National Church in today's pluralistic society, two Church of Scotland writers interpret the Third Declaratory Article of 1921 as acknowledging a five-fold claim by the Church of Scotland to the title 'National Church'. These are an *historical* claim of continuity with the Scottish Church which existed before 1560 and was reformed at that date; a *legal* claim to be recognised and protected by the State as the Church of Scotland; a *geographical* claim to an effective parish structure and territorial ministry covering the whole country; a *sociological* claim to be 'representative of the Christian faith of the Scottish people'; and a *theological* claim to have 'received a distinctive call' to proclaim that Faith and to administer those 'ordinances' throughout Scotland. The second and third claim Scottish Baptists could not dispute as facts; but they appealed beyond Scottish history to the apostolic Church of the New Testament, claimed their place among the Churches of which the Church of Scotland was only one other and were not in any way intimidated by the size of the others in pursuing their own sense of call to proclaim the faith throughout the Nation.

The question of Endowments was of equal interest to Scottish Baptists. Since the time of Charles I (1633), parish ministers had been maintained from the 'teinds' (tithes), a land tax paid by all in the parish whether of the Free Churches or the Established Church. In addition, in each parish, proprietors of the land were required to build and maintain parish churches and manses. Paterson, on behalf of Baptists and the non-Presbyterian Churches, raised a number of questions. 'To whom do the revenues from the teinds belong? Do they belong to the Church itself? Are they a patrimony of the Established Church? Can Parliament hand over to one Church, that no longer represents the majority of the Scottish people, monies that are held in

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national trust for the use of the whole country?'<sup>15</sup> Since the teinds were intended to support not only parish ministers but 'also the poor and the schools', according to John Knox's first Book of Discipline, Paterson had a real point to make on behalf of Baptists and others. However, having made the point he then loftily disclaims any interest - 'As to the endowment we have no covetous eyes, nor any denominational desire to receive a share of State trust funds.' On 4th May 1920, the Baptist Union Council appointed a watching committee in response to the whole question of Church Union and a year later this appointment was renewed with specific concern for the Church of Scotland Bill.

A Government committee, the Haldane Committee, had recommended that the teinds, which were *national* property, be transferred to the Church of Scotland as the *private* property of that Church. The Baptist Assembly of October 1923 reacted to this proposal, which had been characterised as 'a gigantic act of robbery which would inevitably condemn the Church responsible for it, and permanently hinder that Church from being a spiritual force among the people'<sup>16</sup>, by adopting unanimously the following resolution:

That this Assembly of the Baptist Union of Scotland, while recognising the importance and advantages of the proposed Union between the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church, would call attention to the fact that in the view of the Report of the Department Committee on the property and endowments of the Church of Scotland and its recommendations, the proposed United Church will be a State-established Church with all its privileges and prerogatives preserved and confirmed, as the Teinds Bill to be introduced into Parliament expressly provides; this Assembly therefore renews its protest against the principle of a State-established Church as a violation of religious equality, and especially against the final appropriation of the National teinds to the exclusive advantage of one section of the people and for only one of the three purposes for which the teinds were originally designed.<sup>17</sup>

Despite such well-argued protests, in 1925 the Church of Scotland (Property and Endowments) Act carried out the Haldane proposals and granted financial independence to the Church of Scotland, transferring as a Trust Fund the value of the teinds frozen at the existing level, and relieved the proprietors in parishes from their obligation towards church buildings. Thus with the provision of spiritual and financial autonomy to the Church of Scotland, the way was paved for Union with the United Free Church.

Paterson clearly expresses the Baptist position:

We, as Baptists, however, have an outstanding position that differentiates us from all other denominations. We are not averse to co-operate with Christian brethren of all denominations in a unity of aggressive service and evangelical effort, but we cannot for a moment dream of watering down the distinctive principle that is more than an ordinance of baptism of different method and subject from that of our Presbyterian brethren, but to us it is one that is spiritual in its purpose and in which the authority of Jesus Christ is involved. The fair and just interpretation of the Scriptures is more precious to us than any worldly advantage to be derived from a coalition with larger and more influential Churches. Amalgamation with other denominations is only possible on the basis that they agree to the apostolic meaning and practice of the Baptismal rite.

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And not only agree; for the foremost scholars of their Churches have yielded all that we contend for, but that they restore the primitive meaning of the word 'Baptism', and let their practice conform thereto.<sup>18</sup>

The awkward squad strikes again! Paterson softened this position a little with a later comment:

I venture to think that a much closer bond of union between ourselves and other Churches is able to be attained by co-operation with them in all that makes for the furtherance of the Gospel reclamation of men, rather than in any incorporation when our distinctive principles would be weakened and our testimony made ancillary to prevailing notions, out of courtesy to those that differ from us in the interpretation of Christ's commands.<sup>19</sup>

All this fervour for union and re-union continued to call forth Baptist comment and a year later a 'statement' in the name of the Revd T. G. Dunning of Glasgow appeared in the *Scottish Baptist Magazine*. In introducing this, he notes the movement among other denominations and comments that: 'it becomes the duty of the remaining communities to see if there be no avenue to an honourable reunion for them also'. 'In this matter', he continues, 'we in Scotland occupy a unique position. Unlike the Baptists in England and other parts of the world, we do not, at present, come within the scope of any suggested scheme of Church re-union. It would be, however, a matter of regret to us if our attitude was, therefore, misunderstood.' He speaks of our Baptist concern for a true unity, compatible with the richest diversity, and justifies our historic separation as being a protest against a unity far too narrow to be wholly Christian. He is convinced that in time such separation will cease to be necessary. Laudable and amiable sentiments indeed, but followed, predictably, by a re-statement of the Scottish Baptist conviction of the primacy of faith and the secondary nature of Church order.

This was the typical approach of Scottish Baptists at the time. They were interested in what was happening but as observers on the sidelines because they had a sense of the unassailable rightness of their own position. Being, therefore, unthreatened theologically, they could be magnanimous in their attitudes to Church Union among others. The editor of *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* put it clearly in the July 1922 edition when commenting on the Church of Scotland Act which rendered it established and endowed but free from State control. 'To Baptists these matters are intensely interesting, but, as they do not touch the main truth and principle for which we stand, namely, the necessity of conversion as qualifying, and alone qualifying, for membership as for baptism, they do not affect our position nor will they influence any who really understand it.' At the same time, the Baptist position was that they had a place among the Churches whose Christian status they did not deny.

Meanwhile, Scottish Baptists happily agreed to become part of the new Scottish Churches Council which developed initially from the Scottish Churches Missionary Campaign.<sup>20</sup> They refused, however, to co-operate with the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church in drawing government attention to the problems created by Irish Roman Catholic immigration.<sup>21</sup>

Over the next few years, *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* made regular comment, generally favourable but with an occasional swipe at the Teinds Bill, about the impending Union of the two great Presbyterian Churches. Walter Hankinson, Baptist President in the year before the reunion took place, felt it necessary to devote his

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Presidential Address again to the theme of Church Union in which he sets out Baptist distinctives in terms of 'Our place among the Churches and the challenge of today'. This was significant of Baptist spirituality and churchmanship in those days: we belonged to the family of Churches while maintaining our individual witness. Hankinson wanted to say to 'our friends in the other Churches' two things:

First, we would gladly recognise the great work they have done for Scotland... And, secondly, we would say that while we represent certain principles *which have given us a place among the Churches of Christ*, we gladly acknowledge our unity in the great essentials of the faith and the central message of the Gospel with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ and seek to extend His Kingdom.<sup>22</sup>

However, Thomas Stewart in the December 1928 issue of *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* posed the question: 'How will this Union or Re-union affect our Churches?' After welcoming the move, he says: 'we can see nothing likely [in it] to make our own testimony and work less necessary, but much that may make it more so... If it brings a quickening of religious life and service among the Presbyterian hosts... we shall rejoice, and go on with our own work.' Co-existence rules!

Then in May 1929 the re-union was effected and duly welcomed by Baptist commentators - 'the two sections are settling down together amazingly well...'. However, when in the same year, invitations were received by the Baptist Union Council, meeting in Edinburgh on 24th September, from both the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church (continuing) to send representatives to their respective Assemblies, the Council, by a large majority, voted to send one only to the United Free Continuing Church. Thus did the Baptists make their point and this pattern of representation continued for many years.

Three years later *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* in an unattributed article (possibly by Thomas Stewart again) entitled 'Is Presbyterian Union succeeding?', made a fierce attack upon the United Church for its failure in stewardship. Spiritual alertness should be expressed in liberality. Instead both in giving to Foreign Missions, where they come at the very bottom of the league table, and in support for the ministry, they are found sadly wanting. Referring to its 1,300,000 members and its State endowments, the article says brutally, 'Why should the largest and richest Church in Scotland show such poor financial results? It can only be from lack of interest in the work of Christ both at home and abroad on the part of the average member.' It is the concept of a National Church that is faulty, for it concerns the question of Church Membership and the spirituality of the Church. Great doubt is expressed about success in creating a Protestant National Church. 'Meanwhile the Church of Scotland is on its trial.'<sup>23</sup>

Also in 1932 the specific matter of Baptism was raised again in the light of the potential opening of infant baptism to infants of non-church members. It was noted that the Presbyterian Church had no consistent doctrine on the subject, unlike the Catholics, Anglicans and Congregationalists. The suspected increasing sacramentarianism of the Established Church indicated that 'there is still need for Baptist Witness in Scotland'.<sup>24</sup>

At a celebration in Adelaide Place Church, Glasgow, in the same year, at which the Baptist Union President, Robert Stewart, brought greetings, Dr D. P. Thomson of the Church of Scotland raised the possibility of Mr Stewart or his successors attending the Church of Scotland Assembly year by year 'to tell us what your churches are doing and how they are doing it, and that we should come to your Assembly as part of the Church of Christ in our land, and so encourage one another

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in the common work of Christ.'<sup>25</sup> In not too many years, this unofficial invitation bore some fruit.

During the remainder of the 1930s Baptist ecumenical concerns were directed more towards involvement in the Scottish Churches Council and interest in the Edinburgh Faith and Order conference of 1937, both of which were treated favourably. But again the issue of how salvation is offered and received was the centre of doubts in the Faith and Order field and in the same year a Church of Scotland booklet on Baptism was dismissed as 'charming, well written...' but having 'nothing to do with Baptism in the New Testament sense at all; and is only a well-phrased piece of adroit special pleading.'<sup>26</sup>

The Church of Scotland, however, for its part wanted to have closer relations with the smaller denominations and suggested reciprocal visits to the Assemblies by appointed representatives. In 1940 the Moderator of the General Assembly himself was an honoured guest at our Baptist Assembly and received 'an upstanding welcome'.<sup>27</sup> Further Moderatorial visits occurred for a few years and Baptist Presidents visited the General Assembly. Representation has not been at so high a level since then from the Church of Scotland side but the Baptist Union has often been represented by one of the Presidential Office-bearers at the General Assembly.

Again after the War, the dominant issue became that of wider ecumenical involvement, and for many years Scottish Baptists appeared to lose their poise. Gone were the statesmanlike comments on matters of faith and order; gone, too, the quiet confidence in the Baptist position. Since the War, of course, an increasing proportion of evangelical Christian life has been experienced outside of denomination loyalties, one factor, perhaps, in the fading understanding of Baptist principles and traditional attitudes. Baptists were always and inevitably 'evangelical' in the broad sense of that term, but usually found room for different expressions of evangelical understanding. As long as we were not vitally involved, we could adopt high-minded attitudes about the attempts at union by other Christians. But the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948, to which, with strong pressure from the leadership, the Union affiliated by a majority of one vote, brought acrimonious division to Scottish Baptist life for many years.<sup>28</sup> In such a climate bi-lateral relations with other denominations could be maintained only by such undisturbing practices as reciprocal representation at Assemblies.

Scottish Baptists expressed their solidarity with other Christians through a low-key involvement with the British Council of Churches and through the very personal contributions of individual Baptists to the Scottish Churches Council. From 1965-85 Scottish Baptists participated only as observers in the Scottish multi-lateral Conversations, the reason being the stated aim of structural union. In the Church of Scotland inspired ecumenical Church in Livingstone New Town, West Lothian, Baptists declined to be involved. During these post-war decades, as Scottish Baptists were losing their Baptist confidence, they were finding a new identity as, or what I think of as, non-denominational evangelicals, which was, in my view, a sad development. More recently bilateral and wider ecumenical moves have forced and are forcing us to rediscover our true identity and our best contribution once again.

It was the disputed question of Believer's Baptism which brought the Church of Scotland and Scottish Baptists into direct conversation and ushered in the period of growing relations which covers the last twelve years. For many years Baptist ministers had irritated their Church of Scotland colleagues by a willingness to baptise by immersion members of the Church of Scotland who usually returned to their own churches. Most Baptist ministers wisely adopted the policy of advising the Church of Scotland members to discuss their decision to be baptised with their own minister and usually those ministers accepted the wishes of their people and welcomed them



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back.

In 1975, however, in Wishaw in Lanarkshire, a controversy arose which reached great proportions and drew wide media interest. The story was as follows. Two members of the same Church of Scotland, a man who was an Elder and a lady prominent in children's work, approached the local Baptist minister independently of each other, a week apart, and asked for Believer's Baptism. Both were advised to see their minister who reacted angrily and insisted on their attending classes in which he instructed them in covenant theology. 'On finishing this course, which lasted six weeks, they were both more convinced than ever in the truth regarding believer's baptism!' The minister, therefore, suspended the lady from her duties. When he threatened disciplinary action against both through the local Church of Scotland Presbytery, the lady resigned her membership and was subsequently baptised and welcomed into membership at Wishaw Baptist Church. The Elder, convinced of God's will for him to remain in the Church of Scotland, received 'baptism only, stating his conviction in the Kirk Session Meeting before his fellow Elders, who... supported him. The Minister, without the support of the Session, went to the Presbytery and asked for the Elder to be... disciplined. The Presbytery on a split vote upheld the Minister's viewpoint. The Elder then decided to appeal to the Glasgow Synod... his appeal was upheld, with the Synod unanimously supporting his liberty of conscience and personal right of guidance in Scripture by the Holy Spirit, quoting the Westminster Confession as the basis of their decision.' The Minister and the Presbytery then brought the issue to the General Assembly and the matter became widely reported in the press, with letters and articles broadly favouring the Elder. In the General Assembly debate, well-known evangelical Church of Scotland ministers gave support to the Elder; the Assembly, however, 'voted against [him], upholding the legitimacy of 'one baptism only', and recommended discipline in the form of instruction which it was hoped would reveal the error of his ways.' He was suspended from eldership but continued to worship in the same church.<sup>29</sup>

Such unhappy matters - and this was only the most dramatic among several - demanded that the two denominations consult together. The Inter-Church Relations Committee of the Church of Scotland approached the Officers of the Baptist Union and a set of guidelines was quickly agreed and accepted by both Assemblies in 1977, although they had a rather rockier ride in the General Assembly. It is worth quoting these in full:

### JOINT STATEMENT ON BAPTISMAL PRACTICE

The Church of Scotland and the Baptist Union of Scotland, recognising the difficulties which sometimes arise through their differing views of eligibility for baptism, recommend that their ministers adopt the following guidelines where a request is made of a Baptist minister for baptism by a communicant member of the Church of Scotland.

1. The Baptist minister, respecting the sincerity both of a Church of Scotland member applying to him for baptism, and the sacramental beliefs of another Communion, should advise the person to consult with his or her own minister, if such consultation has not already taken place.
2. The Church of Scotland minister should explain to his member his Church's view of the meaning and validity of infant baptism, the significance of Confirmation, and the repeated opportunity for rededication in the Sacrament of the Gospel.

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3. If the member continues in his desire, both the Church of Scotland minister and the Baptist minister, as a matter of pastoral concern, should advise him to consider applying for membership of the Baptist communion.
4. In addition, in the case of a minister or elder of the Church of Scotland requesting baptism from a Baptist minister, pastoral oversight should be exercised by the Presbytery or Kirk Session respectively, in view of the contemplated breach of his ordination vow 'to uphold the doctrine and... discipline of the Church'.

The two Communions believe that if these guidelines are followed, they may contribute to an improved climate of understanding and co-operation.

Baptist ministers have certainly found these agreed guidelines helpful and, though some further controversy has occurred, they appear generally to have achieved their purpose. It should be noted that at the height of this unhappy affair the Moderator of the General Assembly, Professor Tom Torrance, sent a telegram of congratulations to the incoming President of the Baptist Union, Dr Ian Balfour; but these two men were personal friends and that was undoubtedly the reason for the communication. It was helpful nonetheless.

Other areas of grievance, however, had to be dealt with only a year or two later, the documentation of which is oddly absent both from Church of Scotland and Baptist files. I rely therefore on a personal letter to me from one of our representatives, Dr Ian Balfour, a distinguished Edinburgh solicitor and the Baptist Union of Scotland Law Agent, on these matters.

Baptists had long been aggrieved that the Church of Scotland assumed that their ministers had the right to school and hospital chaplaincies, the latter being remunerated posts. In addition, in development areas where housing was scarce, the Church of Scotland insisted on their prior right to such housing as was available. At Sullom Voe, the Scottish Baptists had asked the local authority for housing for a pioneer minister, but the Church of Scotland, though not intending at that stage to appoint a minister, had insisted that the one available house be reserved for them. This was upsetting and protests were made. Following the pattern of the *ad hoc* Committee on Baptism, a group including Dr Ian Balfour was set up to explore the extent of the 'friction' and to recommend solutions. This was chaired by Lord Grieve, a member of the Church of Scotland and a Judge of the Court of Session. Perhaps the absence of documentation is an indication that no solutions were found - they have certainly not been implemented. (Neither Lord Grieve nor Dr Balfour have any documents on this Committee and have poor memories of it and neither of their denominational offices could produce any evidence of the Committee having been set up or having reported!)

It was possible to raise the matter of chaplaincy appointments again in a submission to the Church of Scotland Department of Education for which, on behalf of our own Doctrine and Inter-Church Relations Committee, I was myself responsible. Despite being confronted with clear statistical evidence, the only comment in the final report was that 'the question of fairness should not be overlooked.'<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, a major forward move was in process inspired by one of the multitude of bilateral conversations recently or currently being pursued by the World Confessional bodies. In this instance, of course, it was the World Alliance of Reformed Churches/Baptist World Alliance conversations, 'Baptists and Reformed in Dialogue', which was considered by Church of Scotland and Baptist Union representatives. Nine meetings were held involving a most amiable group of eight Church

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of Scotland and five Baptist participants. Their Report, behind which lies a tremendous amount of discussion and sifting of papers from both teams, was published as 'The Kirk and the Union', and was widely circulated to Scottish Baptist Churches and to Church of Scotland Presbyteries. A number of groups representative of local Baptist Churches and Church of Scotland Presbyteries met around the country to discuss this document.

In the report itself, which is cast in the most cordial terms, common ground is recognised in regard to the authority of Scripture (which is 'normative for the Church'. God's Word 'through the Bible' is prior to His Word 'through the world'); in the nature of the Church (defined in the Report sociologically rather than theologically); and in the relationship between the corporate and personal dimensions of faith.<sup>31</sup> Noting the variety of theological viewpoints, as much within the teams as between them, the Report concedes that specifically on 'baptism and church order the Church of Scotland representatives offered no homogeneous view - a circumstance which constituted a difficulty for their Baptist counterparts'.<sup>32</sup> The Report's comments on baptism, however, are of particular interest, especially the honest recognition that Baptists do not, from their point of view, indulge in 'second baptism'; they 'baptise believers already "baptised" in infancy because they do not accept that the rite involved on the earlier occasion was baptism'.<sup>33</sup> Disagreements are honestly recognised in the areas of the relationship between grace, faith and baptism, and baptismal practice: Baptists 'stand essentially on the base position that infant baptism is not Scriptural'.<sup>34</sup> The document recognises that both traditions are currently reassessing such matters as the place of children in the church, and the nature of ministry.

Addressing prospects for unity or, more clearly, 'the possibilities of church union', the Report, having noted the unsatisfactory situation of the Churches of Christ within the United Reformed Church and the unresolved questions within the Church of North India, in which there is 'double practice', makes clear that for Scottish Baptists no union is possible 'in which those "baptised" in infancy are thereby excluded or may be excluded from the possibility of believer's baptism'.<sup>35</sup> The Report notes, in a section entitled 'Signs of Convergence', the movement within Scottish Baptist life towards greater recognition of gatherings wider than the local congregation as genuine manifestations of the Church, for example, in the greater authority of the Baptist Assembly, and remarks also on the role of the Superintendent in connection with this wider view. It remains clear, however, about the difference between mandatory and voluntary association. In concluding its survey of the world document, the Report offers a list of practical proposals, including greater efforts in local ecumenism, even on the pattern of local covenants as in England, joint mission and exchange of documents, challenges the Church of Scotland to clarify its doctrine on baptism and encourages both traditions to end the misunderstanding and resentment over 'second baptism'. An analysis of the content of this Report would require a full paper, so we must consider rather its effect upon relationships.

How has the Report been received? Among Baptists, sadly, it has been received with apathy; and in the Church of Scotland it produced a backlash. This was immediately evident when the Report was presented at the 1986 General Assembly; an addendum was moved from the floor, expressing concern 'that the Report... does not adequately represent the understanding of baptism acknowledged in the Reformed tradition and the Church of Scotland.' The mover of the addendum was subsequently asked by the Church of Scotland Inter-Church Committee to clarify his concern and identified three areas: first, the questioning in the Report (3:8) of the effectiveness of baptism to impart what it promises. The reply is that it is the grace of God that 'effects'; of which grace baptism is a sign and seal. Second, a concern that the Report

implies that the Church of Scotland is a 'double practice' church (Report 6:11), practising both infant and believer's baptism rather than one baptism which, whenever received, is a sign of the covenant. The reply from the Committee asks the question: 'in what sense is a person baptised, according to the Book of Common Order, after repentance and profession of faith, not baptised as a believer?' Thirdly, the mover is unhappy that the 'hurtful' effect of 're-baptism' on Reformed convictions is not sufficiently recognised, especially when a baptisand is informed that he is 'denying that his infant baptism was baptism'. (Report 6:12) The reply is that 'it is not that Baptists, asked to baptise an adult already baptised in childhood, should *require* that adult to renounce his infant baptism; it is that Baptists should warn the person making this request that the adult baptism is *ipso facto* a repudiation of infant baptism'.<sup>36</sup>

The deluge, however, was yet to come and it came in the responses of the Presbyteries: 'The gap... is wider than it seems from the eirenic tone of the document'; 'the Church of Scotland has no double practice'; 'second baptism is intolerable... and is an unjustifiable treatment of a sister church's sacramental integrity'; 'the Church of Scotland cannot and should not cease to regard itself as *the* National Church'.<sup>37</sup> These responses were presented to the 1987 General Assembly, together with a Statement, jointly prepared earlier and not in response to the Baptist Union of Scotland's request following the Report, for a 'definitive theology of infant baptism as the basis for any future discussions.' The General Assembly papers for 1987 also included a sharply-worded Comment to their constituency by the Board of World Mission and Unity on the wider context of the Reformed-Baptist dialogue: 'several points need to be heard'; 'inter-church conversations... [help denominations] to assess what is merely parochial, habitual or even "knee-jerk" reactions to other people's words and phrases'; 'we can no longer have local conversations as if the rest of the world was out of earshot...'; 'such dialogues involve members in the rescruity of their own reading of Scripture, heightening their awareness of how the living Word of God to the Churches must be distinguished from the Churches' historically conditioned, merely customary and possibly blinkered interpretations'; and finally three questions are posed: How far are the Church's responses to conversations such as that with the Baptist Union of Scotland influenced by the global ecumenical context? How far are they influenced by the position which the Church adopted on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* in 1985? Are the disagreements with Baptist fellow-Christians accepted with equanimity or faced with urgency?<sup>38</sup>

Among the suggestions for increasing co-operation and growing understanding was a continuing twice yearly meeting of Baptist and Church of Scotland representatives and these have now begun with an increased Baptist representation. In addition, the General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Scotland was asked recently to comment personally on a Confession of Faith which the Church of Scotland is currently considering to set alongside the Westminster Confession. Very much, therefore, is continuing to happen.

May I conclude, however, with a reference to a most interesting and perhaps very significant document whose message may in the end be the most challenging both to the Church of Scotland and ourselves. This is the paper referred to earlier, published by the Scottish Churches Council and written by Alistair G. Hunter and Steven G. Mackie, entitled 'A National Church in a Multiracial Scotland'. It challenges the appropriateness of the concept of a *single* National Church in a 'situation of Church of Scotland decline (from 1,300,000 in 1929 to 800,000 today with only 29% attending), notes the growth of ecumenical co-operation, the developing pluralistic society and the inappropriateness of 'overtones of ethnic nationalism' inherent in the National Church concept, and appeals for a new concept, not simply of replacement

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of one National Church with several, but rather a reinterpretation which would include the following points: ministry throughout the national community, concern with every aspect of national life, freedom from any legal or constitutional position, prophetic proclamation to the nation and national institutions on the basis of the relevance and persuasiveness of what is proclaimed, an international as against a nationalistic framework of reference, an open and sensitive concern for all in society, including a respect for people of other faiths and ethnic and cultural minorities, and a concern, in co-operation with other Churches and religious communities, for national harmony and prevention of social and cultural fragmentation. Such a reinterpretation would clearly allow for more than one 'National Church'. To be such a church would be no longer the prerogative of one body for historical or any other reason: it would become the ideal to which churches or denominations would aspire. But perhaps the truth is that these ideals would be and will be better served through such a movement as the current Inter-Church Process, which will also provide the context and the inspiration for more fruitful bilateral conversations.

### NOTES

1. Baptist Union of Scotland (BUS) Presidential Address, *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (SBM), November 1900, P.171.
2. *Ibid.*, p.172.
3. *Ibid.*, p.173.
4. *Ibid.*, p.174.
5. *Ibid.*, p.175.
6. *Ibid.*, p.176.
7. BUS Presidential Address, *The Scottish Baptist Year Book* (SBYB), 1911, p.26.
8. *Ibid.*, p.26ff and p.30ff.
9. *Ibid.*, p.33.
10. SBM Jan. 1920, p.3.
11. SBM July 1920, p.75-6.
12. SBM Sept. 1920, p.97f.
13. Gordon Donaldson: *Scotland, Church and Nation*, p.101.
14. *A National Church in a Multiracial Scotland*, Alistair G. Hunter and Steven G. Mackie, Scottish Churches Council, 1986, p.7.
15. BUS Presidential Address. SBYB 1921, p.45f.
16. SBM March 1924 in an article which expresses a strong sense of injustice felt by Baptists at the time.
17. Quoted in SBM, March 1924, p.34.
18. BUS Presidential Address, SBYB 1921, p.47.
19. *Ibid.*
20. BUS Council Minutes, 8th May 1923.
21. BUS Council Minutes, Nov.1923.
22. BUS Presidential Address, SBYB 1927, p.120.
23. SBM May 1932, p.70.
24. SBM Feb. 1932, p.1.
25. SBM April 1932, p.56.
26. SBM Aug. 1937, p.2.
27. SBYB 1941.
28. Subsequently at its 1955 Assembly the Union decided to withdraw from the W.C.C. for a period of seven years, on the grounds that the then basis of W.C.C. was not sufficiently clear and its doctrine of Scripture not sufficiently explicit. Since that decision the Baptist Union of Scotland has remained outside the W.C.C.
29. All quotations from a personal letter to me from the Baptist Minister of Wishaw, dated 28th July 1987.
30. *Church, School and Chaplain*, p.18. Church of Scotland Education Department, 1987.
31. *The Kirk and the Union*: Section 2:4.
32. *Ibid.*, 2:6.
33. *Ibid.*, 2:9.
34. *Ibid.*, 2:13.
35. *Ibid.*, 4:5.
36. Quotations from a 'Note of Guidance' to Presbyteries, following 1986 General Assembly.
37. *General Assembly 'Blue Book'*, 1987. Appendix VII, p.380ff.
38. *Ibid.*, p.383ff.

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### FOR SALE

Having recently bought new word processing and printing equipment, the Society has for sale an IBM 85 electronic typewriter with disc drive and numerous type heads. Enquiries and offers to the sub-editor.