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UNITY AND DIVERSITY? SUCCESS AND FAILURE AMONGST BAPTISTS IN SCOTLAND PRIOR TO 1870

BRIAN TALBOT, BROUGHTY FERRY BAPTIST CHURCH, DUNDEE

Although the first Baptists appeared in Scotland in the seventeenth century, as converts of Baptist preachers serving as chaplains with the Parliamentary Armies stationed in Scotland,¹ persecution led to their virtual disappearance prior to the mid-eighteenth century.² The public re-emergence of the movement in 1750 in Keiss, Caithness, resulted from the conversion of a Scottish laird, Sir William Sinclair, who converted to Baptist views while serving in the British army. He brought his new-found faith back to his native land and established a congregation in his castle from amongst his family and employees. This congregation, though continuing to the present day,³ remained isolated and small.

It took the emergence of the distinct Scotch Baptist witness in 1765, to produce the first modern network of congregations of this denomination in Scotland. A second cluster of churches associated with the former Independents, Robert and James Alexander Haldane, accepted Baptist principles in the period 1808 to 1810, largely following the pastor-deacons model of church life, a characteristic of the 'English' Baptist churches in Scotland, in contrast to the plurality of largely unpaid elders that was a feature of Scotch Baptist life.

In the 1790s another family of churches, the 'English' Baptists, first appeared in Edinburgh. Though the congregations struggled to establish themselves in the last decade of the eighteenth and first decade of the nineteenth century, they grew to become the largest group of Baptists by 1830, due to their evangelistic zeal. These Scottish Baptists held to the

¹ See A. Laurence, *Parliamentary Army Chaplains 1642-1651* (Woodbridge, 1990), for information on these Baptist Chaplains, and for the Baptist Churches of this period, see D. B. Murray, 'The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries' in D. W. Bebbington (ed.), *The Baptists in Scotland: A History* (Glasgow, 1988), 10-13.

² Reference to some of the few Baptists surviving in the early eighteenth century is given in a forthcoming paper, B. R. Talbot, "'Go into all the World": The Home Mission Strategies of Baptists in Scotland from the 1790s to 1870', p. 1, n.4.

³ An excellent introduction to this Scottish laird and his congregation is given in C. Lumsden, 'The Life of Sir William Sinclair', an unpublished paper presented to the Scottish Baptist History Project, Keiss, 6 May 2000.

style of Baptist churchmanship seen in England amongst the Particular Baptists.⁴

It appeared that the future for Baptist witness was extremely promising by the 1820s, but there were to be both encouragement and challenge during the next fifty years. The Scotch Baptists will be considered first, followed by consideration of the three attempts to produce unity in the midst of diversity that were unsuccessful, together with a brief examination of the grounds for the success of the 1869 Baptist Union of Scotland.

UNITY IS UNIFORMITY: SCOTCH BAPTIST SUCCESS AND ULTIMATE FAILURE

In the period from 1765 to 1834 the Scotch Baptists made considerable progress. They appeared to lay a strong foundation for the future by their constant measures aimed at maintaining union between the churches in the connexion. Consider the factors that favoured their success. First of all Archibald McLean, an elder in the Edinburgh congregation, was the major bond of union between the different congregations. In the first forty-four years of Scotch Baptist witness his pronouncements served as a definitive statement of their beliefs and practices. Officially they had no doctrinal standards, in contrast to English Particular Baptists, as Maclean made plain in an article provided for the Baptist Annual Register, edited by London Particular Baptist minister John Rippon.

As to their principles, they refer us to no human system as the unexceptionable standard of their faith. They think our Lord and his apostles used great plainness of speech in telling us what we should believe and practice; and hence they are led to understand a great many things more literally and strictly than those who seek to make the religion of Jesus correspond with the fashion of the times.⁵

This quotation appears to rule out the use of doctrinal standards as the basis for unity between Baptist churches, yet McLean seemed to have no difficulty in accepting the articles of faith of the 1812 Particular Baptist

⁴ Details of the emergence of these types of Scottish Baptists can be found in B. R. Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity: The Origins of the Baptist Union of Scotland* (Carlisle, 2003).

⁵ J. Rippon, *Baptist Annual Register* (London, 1795), 374.

Union in England and appears to suggest that all Scotch Baptists could assent to them.⁶

This understanding of their position was easy to maintain while a strong leader like McLean dominated their connexion, but having an 'unwritten creed' was a potential source of problems for the future. The churches were in theory independent, but in practice closely dependent upon each other.

The nature of their connexionalism in the era of McLean bears some degree of comparison to Wesleyan Methodism in the time of Jabez Bunting, one of their most prominent ministers, though Scotch Baptist churches were by contrast officially independent. A strong leader was required to ensure the effective operation of their corporate activities. Methodism between the eras of the leaders noted above showed fissiparous tendencies which paralleled those amongst Scotch Baptists once McLean's influence began to fade near the end of his life.⁷ There was no figure of similar stature within their midst to take Archibald McLean's place after his death in 1812.

A second apparent strength of this movement was the desire to work closely together and to ensure harmony within the family of churches. Scotch Baptists were convinced that unanimity was essential in their ranks. A church wishing to be received into fellowship faced a process that was lengthy and thorough. Samuel Swan, an elder of the Leeds congregation, Wellington Road, Wortley, near Leeds, made this clear in a letter, in 1835, to James Everson, one of the pastors of the Beverley Church. 'I admit the independent right of each church to judge, but surely when a number of churches are associated, none ought to be received into the association without the concurrence of the whole...'⁸

This principle had been practised by the Scotch Baptist churches when Haggate Baptist Church, Burnley, sought union with them in 1834. The correspondence between Swan and Everson that year records in great detail the process by which approval was granted. The initial contact was between the Leeds and Haggate churches and involved the exchanging of statements of faith and practices for mutual inspection. Swan noted that in reply to a letter from his church the Haggate friends had declared: 'with respect to what is said of the Institutions of Christ our views exactly agree with yours.... Indeed we can truly say that we agree with every sentence

⁶ Rippon, *Baptist Annual Register*, 1795, 379-80; E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History* (London, 1959), 24.

⁷ D. A. Gowland, *Methodist Secessions* (Manchester, 1979), 1-19.

⁸ Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Letters relating to the Scotch Baptist Churches, ACC 11076, Samuel Swan, Leeds, to James Everson, Beverley, 15 February 1835.

in your letter.⁹ This outcome was remarkable considering that the Leeds letter contained a very full statement of their beliefs and practices. The Haggate church had been accepted as a sister church at the end of this process. In this example the friends in Haggate accepted all the changes of ecclesiastical practices recommended by the existing Scotch Baptist churches. Though on this occasion all went well, it was inevitable that there would be occasions when individuals or churches would stand their ground and the basis of church union would be severely tested.

A third factor promoting unity was mission. Evangelistic work led from within this connexion of churches became prominent from the late 1790s.¹⁰ Scotch Baptists in Glasgow had gone further than McLean had done when they united with some Haldaneite Baptists to form the Baptist Highland Mission in 1816.¹¹ This cooperative venture in home evangelism pointed forward to the greater unity amongst Baptists in Scotland that would become a reality in the next decade.

Archibald McLean also sought to broaden the horizons of the churches by urging them to cooperate in evangelism in Scotland and by supporting the English Particular Baptist Mission in India as early as 1796. Support for this work was consistent and generous.¹² This was the area of their work where Scotch Baptists were most outward-looking and creative, though it did not have a sufficient priority in their witness compared to the other streams of Baptists in Scotland.

There were even more powerful reasons that led to the ultimate failure of the Scotch Baptist connexion in Scotland. Social analysis of the backgrounds of members of Scotch Baptist congregations revealed that members with a higher social class background were less inclined than those of humbler backgrounds to promote union within the network of churches. The strict conservative congregation in Edinburgh, Argyle Square Scotch Baptist Church, who led the 1834 division that destroyed the connexion, had a membership largely consisting of prosperous members engaged in business, whereas the smaller working class Clyde Street Hall Church was enthusiastic about working both with other varieties of Baptists in Scotland as well as within their own ranks though they had very limited resources.¹³ Self-sufficient churches did not need the resources of other

⁹ Haggate Letter sent by John Hudson to Samuel Swan dated 6 April 1834, cited in Swan to Everson, 7 October 1834, MS Letters.

¹⁰ *Edinburgh Quarterly Magazine*, 1 (1798), 68-73.

¹¹ Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, 47-8 gives details of this initiative.

¹² W. Jones (ed.), *The Works of Mr Archibald McLean* (London, 1823), lxxiii-lxxiv. W. Jones (ed.), *New Evangelical Magazine*, 2 (London, 1816), 76.

¹³ B. R. Talbot, 'Baptists and the Scottish Commission of Enquiry on Religion, 1836-1838', *Baptist Quarterly*, 39.8 (October 2002), 380-1.

congregations to meet their needs, and could display a lack of awareness of the consequences of their actions upon smaller churches in their constituency.

The most prominent external cause of conflict was the pressure from the followers of Alexander Campbell whose ecclesiological opinions were similar in many respects to Scotch Baptist views, but revealed a greater degree of flexibility and autonomy for local congregations. The attraction of this younger and more energetic movement in the late 1830s, at a time when Scotch Baptists were most vulnerable due to the internal dissolution of their network led to the secession of a number of their congregations, for example in Saltcoats and Stevenson, Ayrshire, and divisions in others in Dunfermline and Kilmarnock.¹⁴

The most important reason was an inability to exercise forbearance on almost any matter by a large minority of the connexion. The final blow to any pretence of unity amongst Scotch Baptists came with the division in 1834, officially, over the necessity of elders presiding at the Lord's Table, a repeat of the battle which had earlier split the movement in 1810 and dramatically slowed its advance, both in numbers of new members and churches. It was, in reality, an acknowledgement that their basis of union could not survive in an era of changing theological opinions. Scotch Baptists were imprisoned by their past and consequently were unable, as a body, to come to terms with a changing religious environment in Britain. There were some conservative Scotch Baptists like John Cowan, an elder of the Galashiels church, who regretted the opportunities that the connexion had failed to grasp in earlier years. He stated:

Our churches will never be what they have been, I fear – if indeed they long survive. Other connexions are occupying the fields which I am convinced we might have occupied had we been properly alive to our duty. But let us not despair nor faint in the Lord's work. His end will be secured independently of man.¹⁵

The Baptists who worked hardest to maintain fellowship with one another ended up losing the grounds of their own unity. The Scotch Baptist tradition contributed much to Baptist life in Scotland. It was, however, destined to play only a minor part in the future due to disunity within its own ranks.

¹⁴ D. M. Thompson, *Let Sects and Parties Fall* (Birmingham 1980), 26-7.

¹⁵ MS Letters, John Cowan, Galashiels, to James Everson, Beverley, 11 December 1848.

MAINTAINING THE OLD PATHS: THE 1827 BAPTIST UNION

The body within Scottish Baptist circles that had been the largest part of its constituency at the start of the nineteenth century, the Scotch Baptists, had shown signs of its future demise by the 1820s when its more liberally minded congregations sought to work more closely with other Baptist traditions in Scotland, to the evident disapproval of others in their ranks.¹⁶ The momentum towards union, though, had gathered pace in the late 1820s principally due to the desire of the majority of all the networks of Scottish Baptists to work together in home evangelisation. This process culminated in the formation of the Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland, a body that encompassed the mission agencies of its constituent members. Union in this body resulted in greater income and the consequent benefits of employing a greater number of evangelists to lead its activities.¹⁷ Morale was high as an increasing number of church members saw the practical fruits of co-operation.

The logical next step was a desire for a union of autonomous Baptist churches in Scotland. In the Spring of 1827 there was a series of meetings that culminated in the decision in June 1827 to form the first Baptist Union of Scotland.¹⁸ The groundswell of support for this venture was evident from the fact that twenty-eight out of sixty-two Baptist churches, 45% of the total number, opted to join. The significance of this percentage was that it was only in 1869, in the fourth and enduring Baptist Union, that the allegiance of a higher proportion of Baptist causes was gained for this initiative in Scotland.¹⁹

There were also churches joining this body from each of the three Baptist streams, although in terms of their proportions the Scotch Baptists were under-represented compared to the Haldaneite and 'English' Baptists, reflecting the reservations held by many in that part of the

¹⁶ See MS Letters, Robert Anderson, Edinburgh, to James Everson, Beverley, 1 March 1836, for an example of this disapproval of mixing with other types of Scottish Baptists.

¹⁷ See B. R. Talbot, 'The Baptist Home Missionary Society: A Substitute Baptist Union 1827-1868?' in Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, 153-90, and a forthcoming paper, B. R. Talbot, "'Go into all the World": The Home Mission Strategies of Baptists in Scotland from the 1790s to 1870'.

¹⁸ The key published documents promoting this initiative were: Glasgow: Scottish Baptist History Archive, Waugh Papers, *Circular from the Committee of Proposed Baptist Union*, 4 May 1827, and *To the Baptist Churches in Scotland*, 13 June 1827.

¹⁹ Appendix 4.2 'The Proportion of Churches Affiliated to the Scottish Baptist Association or the Baptist Union of Scotland, 1827-1879', Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, 357.

constituency about aspirations for a union of churches in which uniformity in all ecclesiastical matters was not required. The chances of success appeared to be strengthened by a strong leadership team and by a good geographical representation of urban and rural congregations throughout Scotland from Aberdeen in the north-east to Hawick in the south of the country.

In addition, the strength of sharing the same Calvinistic theological heritage could be assumed. Although there were some ecclesiological differences between these groups, these were small in comparison to what was held in common. These factors ought to have guaranteed the success of this Baptist Union, but by 1830 it had ceased to function.²⁰

What was the catalyst for the failure of this innovative venture amongst Scottish Baptist churches? By contrast, the home missionary society had gone from strength to strength since its inception, also in 1827.²¹ There were two stumbling blocks that had to be addressed.

The lesser of the two issues here was the Scotch Baptist fear of doctrinal and ecclesiological compromise. The small number of congregations from this Baptist stream that joined the union came under pressure from other Scotch Baptist causes for assurance that they had not 'compromised' their principles. This factor explained the lengthy and detailed correspondence between David McLaren and Charles Wallace, joint-pastors of the North Portland Street Baptist Church, Glasgow, and Archibald Smith, secretary of the new union. Smith, himself a Scotch Baptist, and a member of Clyde Street Hall Church, Edinburgh, understood their position and patiently answered their questions until this Glasgow congregation felt sufficiently assured to join the Baptist Union.²²

The major issue was a controversy concerning James Watson, minister of Montrose Scotch Baptist Church. Watson had preached for one Sunday in Clyde Street Hall Scotch Baptist Church in Edinburgh. Given that Scotch Baptist elders regularly preached in each other's congregations this in itself was uncontroversial, however, on some unknown occasion(s) the Montrose minister was suspected as having uttered Arminian sentiments in his own pulpit.

Archibald Smith, in written correspondence, assured David McLaren that the decision to invite Watson to preach in Smith's church was an error of judgement.²³ After all McLaren had previously issued a similar

²⁰ *To the Baptist Churches in Scotland*, 13 June 1827.

²¹ *Baptist Home Missionary Society Reports* (Edinburgh, 1829-1836).

²² Glasgow: Scottish Baptist History Archive, Waugh Papers, correspondence between David McLaren and Charles Wallace with Archibald Smith, 1827.

²³ Archibald Smith to David McLaren, 27 June 1827.

invitation to Watson, an opportunity presented when the Glasgow congregation 'were ignorant of his [Watson's] Arminian sentiments'.²⁴ So Smith could have expected understanding from a colleague who had apparently made the same 'mistake' on an earlier occasion. However, this plea of ignorance was deemed inadequate by this Glasgow minister, who was of the view that Smith ought to have known of the reservations of other Baptists regarding Watson's apparent departure from Calvinistic orthodoxy, and therefore prevented the Montrose minister from fulfilling this engagement. He proceeded to give advice as to the appropriate course of action.

I entertain the opinion that you should disavow to Mr W [atson] all further connection with him. This would be much better than a circular entertaining a statement of the sentiments of your church in opposition to the Arminian heresy.²⁵

Smith and his own congregation would have readily agreed to separate themselves from James Watson, as Scotch Baptists regularly disassociated themselves from individuals or churches deemed to be less than orthodox. However it was another matter altogether to persuade the churches from other Baptist traditions represented in the Baptist Union to do the same thing – after all neither the Montrose church nor its minister had applied to join the union! So this would be an extraordinary step to take.

The matter was referred to the committee of the new union, a body that included Jonathan Watson, minister of Cupar Baptist Church and brother of James. The Cupar minister was a man of genuinely ecumenical sympathies. His church was an open membership cause that had both Baptists and paedo-baptists in its ranks. There was no possibility that he would entertain notions of the union agreeing to separate from someone who was outside its constituency.²⁶

In the twenty-first century it is difficult to comprehend how a difficulty of this sort could result in the dissolution of a most promising initiative. Documents regarding the later stages of the union have not survived, but it is clear that the inability of Scotch Baptists to comprehend the compromises necessary for this new body to function caused its demise.

²⁴ David McLaren to Archibald Smith, 22 June 1827.

²⁵ David McLaren to Archibald Smith, 22 June 1827.

²⁶ *A Brief History of Cupar Baptist Church* (Cupar, 1936), 1-9.

STAKING OUT NEW GROUND: THE SCOTTISH BAPTIST ASSOCIATION
1835-1842

After approximately a five year interregnum a new initiative was launched by a group of small churches in Perthshire, together with a handful of other Baptist causes. These congregations had formerly been Scottish Independent bodies that had followed their mentors Robert and James Alexander Haldane into Baptist circles at the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century. During their time in Independency these causes had benefited from funding from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Home (SPGH),²⁷ the mission agency associated with that loose network of Scottish churches, but had suffered severe hardship due to financial difficulties since adopting Baptist principles.

Under such circumstances it was not difficult to grasp the advantages of sharing resources in a union of churches. A more positive reason that inspired the launch of the Scottish Baptist Association (SBA) in 1835 was the reconstituting of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland (BUGBI), in 1832, on a more inclusive evangelical basis. In fact the objects of this new body were the same as those of the earlier and larger English body.²⁸

There were ten churches that agreed to launch the SBA, but although numbers rose to fifteen by 1842, it was an initiative that failed to grasp the imagination of the majority of the ninety-four Baptist churches in existence in Scotland. From 45% of churches involved in the first attempt at union now a mere 16% at best were constrained to support this initiative just over a decade since the demise of the 1827 Baptist Union of Scotland.²⁹ This body did grasp the need for a greater flexibility in the operations of the SBA and also choose to allow the Montrose Baptist Church, together with its minister James Watson, to join in 1840. This decision was taken unanimously. Like the English Baptist Union on which it was modelled the SBA was still in sympathy with Calvinistic doctrinal views, but it also allowed evangelical Arminians like Watson to associate with them.

²⁷ Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, 78-83; for fuller details on the work of that agency see D. W. Lovegrove, "A set of men whose proceedings threaten no small disorder": The Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home, 1798-1808", *The Scottish Historical Review*, 79.207 (April, 2000), 61-81.

²⁸ E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History* (London, 1958), 60-1; Glasgow, Scottish Baptist History Archive, Scottish Baptist Association Minutes, 29 July 1835, 1-5.

²⁹ Scottish Baptist Association Minutes, 1835-1842, 1-16.

What were the reasons for the failure of this body to attract greater support for its efforts? First and foremost it failed to attract support from the leading ministers and the larger churches. Undoubtedly there were some individuals who were disappointed by the failure of the previous initiative and were extremely hesitant to invest time in a similar venture without any certainty of success. Secondly, any organisation with the vision to be a national body lacked credibility without any support from Baptists, for example, in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee. The supporters that had been attracted were essentially rural and Highland in location, with no interest in the south-west of Scotland or in the east of the country south of Kinghorn in Fife. Likewise the north-west and north-east of Scotland had only one representative in the SBA, the small and struggling John Street Baptist Church in Aberdeen. New vision and fresh leadership were required if the SBA was not to expire like its predecessor body.

UNIFORMITY PRECEDES UNITY: THE BAPTIST UNION OF SCOTLAND 1843-56

In 1842 a new and young Baptist minister with a charismatic personality, Francis Johnston, joined the SBA. His dynamic impact was such that he was invited to become the secretary of this organisation and to have the honour of writing the annual circular letter for the following year.³⁰ This practice was long established amongst the English Baptist Associations, and gave an opportunity for one of the ministers to put before his colleagues and other church leaders an address on a particular subject deemed pertinent to their current situation.

The vision outlined at the July 1843 assembly was centred on evangelism and the means whereby Scottish Baptists could more effectively reach the unchurched people of the country, especially in the growing urban communities of the central belt of Scotland. He called for the employment of more full-time and part-time evangelists; more imaginative use of evangelistic literature; a greater focus on church-planting and the renewal of struggling causes, based on careful and strategic planning for the implementation of his vision.³¹

In the first seven years to 1850 affiliated churches had risen in number from sixteen to thirty-eight, though only 39% of the ninety-eight Baptist churches in Scotland; the geographical spread was transformed with churches from the Shetland Isles to the Borders and from Aberdeen across

³⁰ Scottish Baptist Association Minutes, 1842, 14.

³¹ F. Johnston, *An Inquiry into the means of advancing the Baptist Denomination in Scotland* (Cupar, 1843), 6-12.

to the Isle of Skye.³² A theological tolerance of both Arminian and Calvinist opinions within its midst pointed to a very different kind of future spiritual life within Baptist circles in Scotland. This period of steady and sustained growth both in the quality of relationships between Scottish Baptists and the numbers of members and churches associated with the Baptist Union came to an abrupt halt in 1850, due to the adoption of a new vision for the future that came from union secretary Francis Johnston.

The seeds of the inevitable failure of this national agency were planted as early as the December 1845 Baptist Union Executive committee meeting and confirmed in August 1846 at the annual meetings of the Baptist Union when the proposed merger of the Union with the better supported Baptist Home Missionary Society (BHMS) was rejected.³³ The offer of uniting these two organisations had come from the Calvinistic leaders of the BHMS and had the support of the majority of the churches.³⁴ Yet Johnston, increasingly opposed to Calvinistic theological views and unwilling to yield some of his executive powers, vetoed the proposal persuading both the Union executive and the annual assembly that the time was not propitious for such a step.

There was a strong and passionate response to Johnston from the BHMS leaders in an open letter published in *The Free Church Magazine*,³⁵ a sign that the good will granted to Johnston by all sections of the Baptist community in Scotland in 1842 had now been forfeited. The initial inclusive vision of Johnston had dissipated, but it was not until April 1849 that his new perspective on the way ahead was revealed. It was a complete reversal of his former views. Now unity required uniformity and that was entering uncharted waters for independent-minded Scottish Baptists.

When the 1827 Baptist Union leaders set out the principles on which their union was based there were reasonable grounds for expecting almost universal agreement within the Baptist community in Scotland. By contrast, when Johnston persuaded the 1849 Baptist Union assembly to agree that from 1 January 1850 the Baptist Union would stand for militant Arminian views, as this viewpoint presents 'the only consistent view of the character of the triune God', he knew it would cost him a sizable proportion of union members, but this was apparently a price worth paying.

³² Appendix 5.1 'The Baptist Union of Scotland, 1843-1856', Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, 360-1.

³³ Glasgow: Scottish Baptist History Archive, Baptist Union of Scotland Annual Meeting Minutes, August 1846, 33-9.

³⁴ Baptist Union of Scotland Annual Meeting Minutes, August 1845, 21-5.

³⁵ *The Free Church Magazine*, 26 (February 1846), 60-1.

We have counted the cost. Our principles we cannot renounce for friendship's sake.... We calculate on the defection of those friends, with whom we differ in sentiment.... The spread of truth, so important, is worthy of labour, of self-denial and sacrifice.... We ask no favour.³⁶

Within less than three years the union had collapsed,³⁷ though it continued in name only for a further three years until Johnston left Scotland in January 1856. What factors precipitated this dramatic collapse? First of all the total breakdown of relations with home mission leaders, a group of men who were the most prominent and influential of the older ministers in the denomination. This ensured that Johnston's task of leading the union was now guaranteed to be extremely difficult. Secondly, differences in methodology between the union secretary and older colleagues were magnified by Johnston's confrontational style.

An example comes from the home mission station of Auchterarder where the evangelist Alexander Kirkwood had been appointed by the Home Mission in 1845 to work in that place and in neighbouring Crieff. Despite being funded by the BHMS, Kirkwood asked the union if they could take responsibility for him and his work. It was inappropriate for him to have asked, even if he was frustrated with the way he was instructed to carry out his duties, but it was even more foolish for the Baptist Union to consider seriously his request. Not surprisingly the BHMS sent a blunt letter to clarify the situation. It stated: 'that neither Mr Kirkwood, nor the station at Auchterarder have been yet given up by the society'.³⁸ As the work, including his salary were being paid by the BHMS, Kirkwood and the union had needlessly antagonised Baptist colleagues.

A third reason for its decline was the departure of James Taylor to Birmingham. In the period up to 1849 Taylor was the editor of the union periodical *The Evangelist* and a strong moderating influence on Johnston. Taylor was a bridge-builder who had good relations with BHMS leaders. Ill health through overwork forced him to relinquish many of his union duties to be replaced briefly as editor of the denominational magazine by William Landels and then by Thomas Milner, a fiery young member of Johnston's Edinburgh congregation. Milner appeared to relish confrontation, eventually falling out with Johnston and joining the Churches of Christ in Scotland,³⁹ but for two years he allowed Johnston to launch

³⁶ W. Landels, 'Editorial Address', *The Evangelist*, 5.1 (January 1850), 1-2.

³⁷ Baptist Union of Scotland Annual Meeting Minutes, in *The Evangelist*, 7.9 (September 1852), 180.

³⁸ Baptist Union of Scotland Executive Committee Minutes, 18 December 1845, 26.

³⁹ Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, 262-5.

personal attacks in *The Evangelist* against Baptist ministers with whom the union secretary had disagreements. Andrew Arthur, a co-pastor of Bristo Scotch Baptist Church, Edinburgh; Jonathan Watson, now minister of Dublin Street Baptist Church, Edinburgh, and Peter Grant of Stirling Baptist Church were recipients of this unpleasant attention.⁴⁰

A final factor was Johnston's controversial book, *The Work of God and the Work of Man in Conversion*,⁴¹ which was overloaded with passionate phraseology, but was extremely thin on edifying theological content. Some years later in March 1861 at a BHMS committee meeting Johnston apologised for writing some unorthodox theological views in that book concerning the work of the Holy Spirit and declared that he now was fully convinced of mainstream opinions on that subject.⁴² An older, wiser Francis Johnston realised by the 1860s that trying to impose theological uniformity on the Baptist denomination in Scotland had been disastrous and taken together with his aggressive leadership style, destroyed the very initiatives he had been seeking to develop. In future a very different approach to union needed to be adopted.

UNITY INCLUDES DIVERSITY: THE GENESIS OF THE 1869 BAPTIST UNION

The final and successful attempt to unite Scottish Baptists began in 1856 with the formation of a society of interested individuals called the Scottish Baptist Association. Its activities culminated in the constitution of the third Baptist Union in 1869 which quickly gained and retained the support of the overwhelming majority of Baptist causes in Scotland. There were a number of reasons for this development.

First of all there was a more realistic attitude to theological differences. Calvinists and Arminians had to work together and acknowledge each other's ministries. The excesses of the later years of Frances Johnston produced a new realism on the part of ministers and churches. They were now more willing to accept each other and work with each other, accommodating their different emphases. An example of this new situation was James Malcolm, a supporter of Johnston, who was an evangelist

⁴⁰ *The Evangelist*, for example, 5.7 (July 1850), 135, 138-40; 5.8 (August 1850), 149-50; 5.9 (September 1850) 173-4;

⁴¹ Details of this book and its significance is given in a forthcoming book, M. Smith (ed.), *British Evangelical Identities*, (Carlisle, 2006), in a chapter by B. R. Talbot, 'Contrasting Interpretations of Baptist Identity in Nineteenth Century Scotland'.

⁴² Appendix to the *Report of the Home Missionary Society for Scotland*, (1861), 17-18.

of the Baptist Union of Scotland and minister of Michael Street Baptist Church, Greenock, 1853 to 1855. He moved to the more conservative John Street Baptist Church, Aberdeen in 1855, prior to accepting a call in December 1857 to Dover Street Baptist Church, Leicester, a New Connexion General Baptist cause in England.⁴³ A focus on promoting an evangelical faith, typified by Malcolm, was the direction adopted.

A second factor was the inclusion of the ministers and churches from the large urban areas in the central belt of Scotland. The leaders of this SBA were determined to learn from the mistakes of the previous union in failing to engage with Glasgow and Edinburgh ministers and their churches. Each year, but especially in the 1860s, the gatherings of the SBA grew in numbers. The organisers of these events deliberately alternated assemblies between Glasgow and Edinburgh and utilised the premises of more than one Baptist church in each city for these events, together with a dinner in a suitable temperance hotel to encourage fellowship outside of the context of formal meetings. When this strategy was placed alongside the equally wise invitations to different ministers from churches outside these cities to lead particular parts of the programme, it is not difficult to see how these confidence-building measures were extremely fruitful in strengthening the support base of this venture.⁴⁴

One external factor that transformed the life of many denominations was the 1859 religious revival. The 1859 annual meetings heard that one of the grounds for Baptists working more closely together in Scotland in the late 1850s was in order to experience 'a larger outpouring of the Spirit of God... the report gratefully acknowledged that many of the church connected with the Baptist denomination had participated in these tokens of God's mercy and grace'.⁴⁵ The revival reports in the Baptist newspaper *The Freeman*, provided by Glasgow Baptist minister John Williams, emphasised the pan-denominational nature of the prayer meetings and other services.

A comment made of the churches in Eyemouth, Berwickshire, including the local Baptist church, was representative of what was happening in

⁴³ *The Freeman*, 1 (3 October 1855), 590; 1 (17 October 1855), 621; 3 (16 December 1857), 762. New Connexion General Baptists were working ever closer with the Particular Baptists in England during this period, though a merger of their operations did not occur until 1891. For further details see J. H. Y. Briggs, 'Evangelical Ecumenism: The Amalgamation of General and Particular Baptists in 1891', *Baptist Quarterly*, 34.3 and 34.4 (1991).

⁴⁴ *The Freeman*, 2 (17 September 1856), 553; 4 (3 November 1858), 668; 6 (31 October 1860), 696; 7 (30 October 1861), 697; 9 (28 October 1863) 684; 11 (1 November 1865), 709; 13 (22 November 1867), 428.

⁴⁵ *The Freeman*, 5 (2 November 1859), 665.

many communities in Scotland at that time. 'The most cordial union exists among the ministers of the town, as well as among all Christians. Denominationalism is out of sight, and all are cooperating most heartily on behalf of Christ alone.'⁴⁶ The spirit of the revival continued into the 1860s. The 1861 SBA annual report declared that the SBA was 'designed to promote the cause of revivals'.⁴⁷ Cooperation with other Christian churches showed the benefits of this ecumenical activity and ensured that by the early 1860s Scottish Baptists saw the advantages of working much more closely with each other.

An equally important external factor was the influence of the London Baptist Association (LBA) and the settlement of ministers in Scotland who had been trained at the Pastors' College in London by Charles Spurgeon. This Baptist minister, together with clerical colleagues William Brock and William Landels, formed the LBA in 1865. The church-planting successes and track record in getting Metropolitan Baptists to work together was second to none.⁴⁸ Spurgeon's former students began settling in Scottish Baptist churches from 1859, and by 1870 twenty-five men were in pastorates and promoting a case for a union of Baptist churches.⁴⁹ The presence of individuals who could testify to the success of the LBA was the final confirmation needed before a union of churches was launched in 1869 with fifty-one churches in membership, a figure rising to eighty-three out of ninety-two a decade later in 1879.⁵⁰

These English Baptist ministers had not convinced their Scottish colleagues of the need for a union of churches, or that joint efforts were required: these points were almost universally accepted in this ecclesiastical constituency. What they had done was demonstrate that this proposed course of action had worked in London and, therefore, was most likely to succeed also in Scotland.

Scottish Baptists, although holding many views in common, considered themselves a diverse group of church networks in the early part of the nineteenth century. The first opportunity presented by the 1827 Baptist Union failed because the Scotch Baptists in its membership could not grasp that unity does not automatically require unanimity in doctrinal and practical matters. The second body, the 1835 SBA, struggled to make an impact due to its support base being almost exclusively from small and

⁴⁶ *The Freeman*, 5 (21 December 1859), 778.

⁴⁷ *The Freeman*, 7 (30 October 1861), 697.

⁴⁸ For details see W. C. Johnson, *Encounter in London*, (London, 1965).

⁴⁹ Appendix 6.1 'English Baptist Colleges and Scotland', Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, 364.

⁵⁰ *Baptist Union of Scotland Annual Report*, 1 (Glasgow, 1869) 22-3; 11 (Glasgow, 1979), 14-16;

rural congregations. A more promising initiative was the 1843 to 1856 Baptist Union that began by offering an inclusive vision of Baptist identity, together with a plan of action for developing the work. The change of vision to an exclusive and militant Arminian identity for the union in January 1850 was disastrous. In their history independent-minded Scottish Baptists had never accepted that uniformity precedes unity.

The final and successful move to build ties between Baptist congregations was an overwhelming success. Its leaders grasped the need for an inclusive union in which time was taken to build relationships between the different congregations. Evidence on the ground of close ties between Scottish Christians during the 1859 revival and the impact of the LBA amongst London Baptists proved that closer cooperation by Scottish Baptist churches could gain similar benefits. At the heart of this successful union, was the recognition that in order to prosper, unity must include diversity within its ranks.