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BAPTIST CHURCH GROWTH IN FIFE FROM 1750 TO THE PRESENT

"Fife" is a name which usually stands alone as sufficiently distinctive. In the mind's eye of any Scot it conjures up a vision of the peninsula on the east coast of Scotland, lying betwixt the Firths of Forth and Tay, and separated from the rest of Scotland across the neck of the peninsula by the rampart of the Ochils'. So wrote Alexander Smith in *The County of Fife* (1952) part of the Third Statistical Account of Scotland. (1) What Smith said thirty-five years ago is still true today, save for the opening up of the old county by the road bridges over the Forth and Tay in the 1960s.

The natural barriers of the Firths and the hills have only relatively recently lost their formidable nature. For long the interior of the peninsula was covered by woods, lakes and swamps and, as a result, movement was difficult, thus Fife has a very distinct history. That distinctiveness persists even today in the title 'The Kingdom of Fife' which survives as one of the nine regions of Scotland despite the recommendations of the Wheatley Commission that it should be divided between Tayside and Lothian.

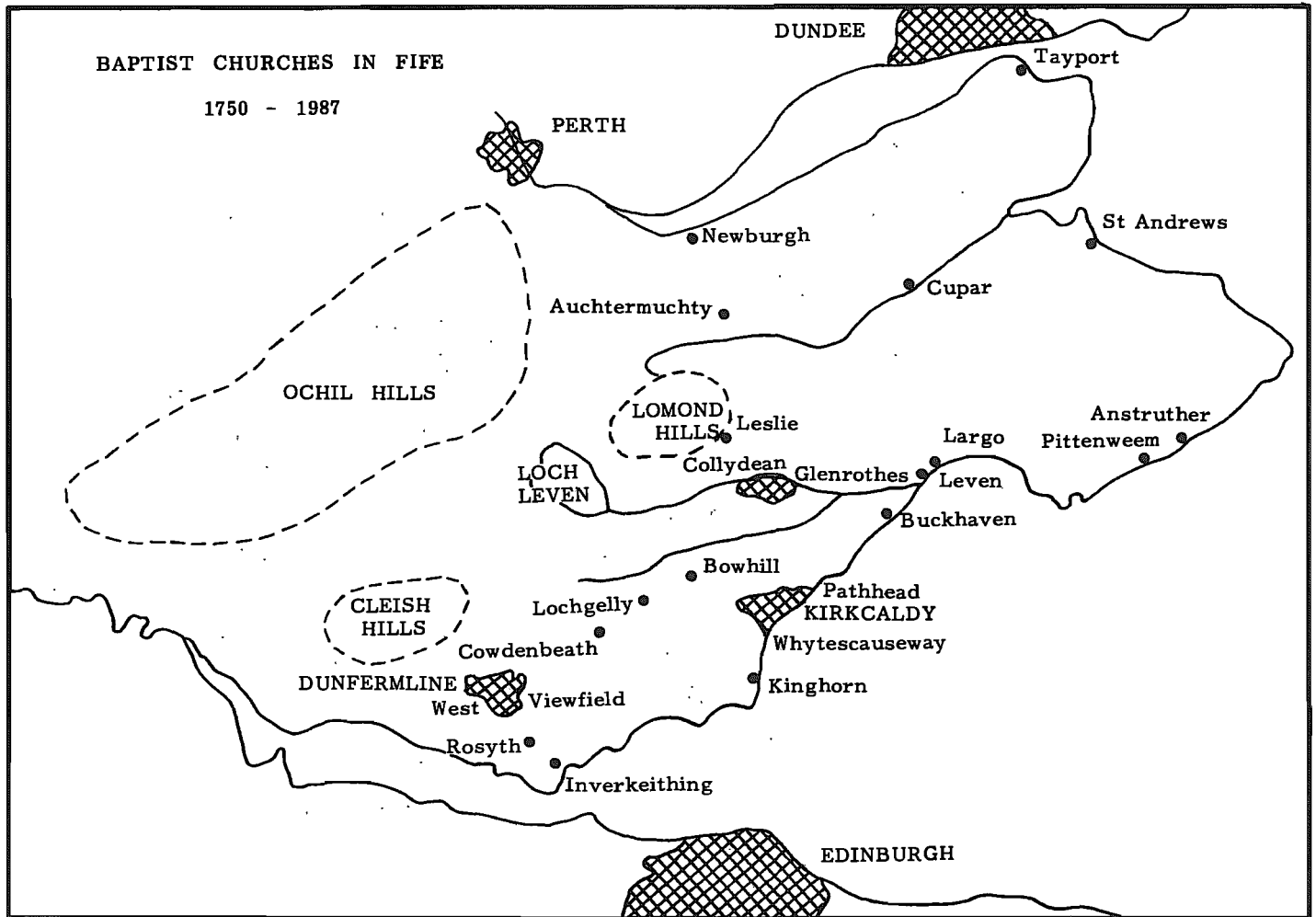
Having reached some prominence by the tenth century, Fife flourished during the Middle Ages. With both the chief seat of the court and an important bishopric, it gained importance in temporal and ecclesiastical affairs. Economic activity was seen in the number of Royal Burghs found within its bounds, mostly along the northern shores of the Forth.

Decline, however, came in the seventeenth century, with the removal of the court to London, the ravages of Cromwell's armies and the crippling of trade by the combined effects of the Dutch wars and the Navigation Acts. Following the Act of Union in 1707 the imposition of a salt duty hampered trade in fish and salt.

Recovery was slow during the eighteenth century, though new farming methods saw improvement in the efficiency and prosperity of agriculture. Industry was slower to develop than in the rest of central Scotland and the effects of industrialisation were not felt until well into the nineteenth century. Two industries in particular are worthy of note. One is linen production, a traditional industry which was becoming increasingly mechanised only by the 1850s. Factories in Kirkcaldy, Dunfermline, Cupar, Newburgh and Auchtermuchty grew throughout the remainder of the century. Coal, another traditional industry, also expanded steadily, though at a slower pace than other areas since the West Fife coalfield was much broken by faulting. The expansion of the coalfield, therefore, came late in the nineteenth century, but then with great suddenness. Between 1851 and 1881 numbers in the industry rose from 3200 to 5900. In the next thirty years they had risen to 27,000. This rapid growth shifted the hub of economic activity to the west of the county and saw the growth of numerous communities such as Lochgelly, Bowhill, Cardenden and Cowdenbeath.

BAPTIST CHURCHES IN FIFE

1750 - 1987



The present century has seen the construction and growth of the naval dockyard at Rosyth, which today employs more workers than any other industry in the region, and, within the past twenty years, the New Town of Glenrothes has grown with the development of electronic and micro-electronic factories.

It is within this context of increasing industrialisation that Baptist churches have become established in Fife over the past two centuries.

Church Foundation and Church Planting

In his 1952 account Alexander Smith claimed that within the history of Fife was contained 'the concentrated essence of Scottish history and character'. (2) This is no less true of Scottish Baptist history, for the essence of Baptist progress in Scotland from the Commonwealth to the Scotch Baptists and the Haldanes, to the founding and growth of the Scottish Baptist Union, are all to be found here.

As with Scotland as a whole, the first we know of Baptists in Fife is with the arrival of the English armies during the time of the Commonwealth. Cromwell's army was quartered in four citadels at Leith, Perth, Ayr and Inverness, and at eighteen further garrison towns throughout Scotland. Cupar, the county town of Fife, was one of these. In 1652 Colonel Fairfax's regiment was stationed there. As in the other towns where the army was quartered, the influence of Baptists in the army was felt, the regiment's chaplain, Mr Brown, preaching and baptising a number of soldiers in the River Eden. The records of Cupar Kirk Session for the same year contain the following disciplinary decision, 'Christina Myllar was excommunicated for persisting in Anabaptism and other errors'. (3)

Such activity, however, was short-lived. The appointment of Cromwell as Lord Protector caused division among the Baptists in the army in Scotland, a number of whom harboured republican views. General Monk, aided by opponents of the Baptists, purged the army of Baptist officers and considerable repression followed. Baptist witness in Fife, as elsewhere, was no doubt affected and when the army withdrew few native Baptists would have been left to face the even more rigorous persecution of the Restoration period. At any rate, there is no record of further Baptist activity in Fife for over a century.

Mirroring the situation in Scotland as a whole, Baptist churches in Fife effectively date from the late eighteenth century. Foundation falls into roughly five phases:

- (a) The 1780s to approximately 1830
- (b) 1840 to the mid 1860s
- (c) 1873 to 1897
- (d) 1900 to 1919
- (c) 1950 to the present.

(a) The First Phase

Late eighteenth century Scotland was a country seeing rapid change in

society and economy. Following the problems created by the Union and the Jacobite rebellions the economy was beginning to flourish and there was a new vigour in intellectual life. The Presbyterian monopoly over religious life was beginning to falter: the First Secession from the Kirk took place in 1733. These early secessions most frequently occurred as a reaction to the system of patronage in appointing ministers. In this atmosphere there was, among some, an impetus to study the scriptures more carefully and a preparedness to consider other ways of church government and the nature of baptism. 'In one direction', suggests Derek Murray, 'it led to the growth of Moderatism, with its fashionable alliance of Church, learning and good society, and a consequent dilution of doctrine and zeal, and in the other, by reaction, to a renewed study of the Scriptures with less reliance on the authority of the Westminster standards'. (4)

One of those to re-examine Scripture was a printer, Archibald McLean. By 1765, along with Robert Carmichael, a former minister of the Secession Church, McLean had become convinced that Baptism was reserved for believers and should be by immersion. This led to Carmichael's baptism by Dr Gill in London in October 1765 and on his return to Edinburgh, Carmichael baptised seven others in the Water of Leith on 25th November and McLean a few weeks later. This nucleus formed the first church in Edinburgh, now known as the Bristo Church, which became a focus for those interested from a wide area, including Fife, and it is undoubtedly from this situation that the first churches in Fife came to be formed.

By 1790, three churches existed in Fife and all of them had connections with the Edinburgh church. These three were at Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy and Largo. The Dunfermline church is perhaps the earliest, though the most obscure, being formed in 1780 when some folks left the Independents over the question of baptism. In Kirkcaldy, a Baptist worker on the Raith estates gathered together a few friends in about 1786 and carried on weekly meetings until they were joined in 1796 by William Peddie who had trained for the ministry of the Secession Church but had joined the Baptists in Edinburgh. In 1796 he moved to Kirkcaldy and helped to organise the church there, becoming one of the two elders. In 1789, Dr William Goodsir, the local practitioner in Largo, who had moved from the established church to the Independents, but had adopted Baptist views, perhaps from reading McLean's pamphlets, was baptised by McLean in Edinburgh. The church at Largo was formed under his influence the following year with some twenty members. The local minister recorded of the parish that 'Clergy abound here. There being 1 of the Establishment, 1 of the Relief, 1 of the Independents, and 2 of the Anabaptists'. Goodsir himself ministered in the church until his death in 1816. In 1808, McLean's influence was felt in Newburgh, a small burgh in the north of Fife close to the ruins of Lindores Abbey and known for its quarries, and, like many another Fife burgh, its linen manufacture. Though little is known of its origins, it appears that the church was founded following a visit by McLean to the town in that year. There was, however, previous Baptist influence. Mr Andrew Ireland, the Church of Scotland minister, stated in his parish description for Sir John Sinclair, 'In point of numbers the Anabaptists and Unitarians scarcely deserve the name of societies. The Unitarians do not exceed

four; and the Anabaptists are not double that number. The Anabaptists are connected with a church of the same description at Dundee'. (5)

All these early churches were 'Scotch' Baptist churches. Many of their practices were derived from the Glasite origins of many of their leading members such as McLean and Carmichael. There was a plurality of elders rather than one pastor, the breaking of bread took place every Lord's Day, and was for baptised believers alone. The Agape or Love Feast was celebrated, and the principle of unanimity of decisions in church meetings was upheld. This resulted, not unnaturally, in frequent splits and secessions.

Brief note must also be taken of other churches founded in this period which did not survive the nineteenth century. These were at Tayport and Kinghorn, both ferry ports at either end of the Fife Turnpike, founded in 1814 and 1830 respectively, and at Auchtermuchty, also founded in 1830. The New Statistical Account records 'a few Anabaptists' at Kinghorn though not in either Tayport or Auchtermuchty. It also records 'one small congregation belonging to the Baptist connection' in Leslie, a 'small Baptist meeting' in Kilconquhar and a number of folk of Baptist persuasion in Kinglassie. Little else is known of these 'churches' but it might be reasonable to suppose that they were formed on 'Scotch' lines which led them to split and divide within a relatively short period of time.

Another of the major strands in early Scottish Baptist history is also found in the formation of another of the Fife churches, this time at Anstruther. Here, the cause commenced in 1812 with the visit to the burgh of James Alexander Haldane, the younger of two brothers who had held commissions in the navy and East India Company. Concerned to evangelise their native land, they itinerated widely and preached and distributed tracts, not without opposition for they were laymen. Wealthy men, they were prepared to apply large sums of money to preparing young men to be evangelists and to constructing church buildings which they called Tabernacles. In 1808, after a lengthy period of exploration they were baptised and the churches which they had brought into existence tended to divide between Baptist and Independent. Despite its dating to 1812, there is still an element of this present in Anstruther. Yuille records in his church accounts that in 1820 'theological disputes arose which split the little body into two sects - Baptists and Paedo-Baptists'. (6)

The other major church in the County in this period had a quite different foundation. Jonathan Watson had come to Cupar from Montrose. A druggist, he demonstrated considerable gifts as a preacher. Apparently while in his first year in the town he spoke frequently on 'Baptist principles', the result being the meeting of a few souls on a regular basis and the formation of a church in 1816, with Jonathan Watson himself as minister. From the start, the church was more evangelistic and more dependent on the gifts and abilities of Watson as pastor than the 'Scotch' type of church.

(b) A Second Awakening

It is from the mid-nineteenth century that many of the Fife churches

date their origin, despite the fact that in all the places in this second list a church had existed from some decades earlier. The only new town to see a Baptist cause begun was St Andrews, though even here it was a result of those of Baptist persuasion withdrawing to form their own congregation. Until 1841, Baptists in St Andrews had worshipped as part of the Independent congregation until the Pastor preached on baptism which led to one young man, William Noble, seeking baptism from the pastor of the Cupar church. Noble was treated to some intolerance, and the church produced a statement on the position of those of Baptist persuasion within the congregation, which was in no way satisfactory to them. Accordingly they withdrew and formed a church with a membership of eight, who by the following year had acquired a chapel, James Haldane being present at its opening. Strong links were formed with the church at Cupar.

Of the other four churches, which date their existence according to their present entries in the *Scottish Baptist Year Book* to this period, three came from schism within the fellowship. In Anstruther, where the Baptists had seceded from the Independents in 1820, the work had been led by James Fowler, one of the original members. In 1859 the church decided to employ a man entirely set apart for church work. Accordingly they called James Cumming Brown to the pastorate and the following year opened a new chapel and so recommenced the work. At Viewfield in Dunfermline 'some dissatisfaction arose among several of the members regarding the method of conducting public worship and they [some thirty-two members] deemed it their duty to leave and form a church on different principles'.(7) In Kirkcaldy on 14th July 1852 'twenty-four members, including one elder and three deacons, withdrew and formed themselves into what is now known as Whytescauseway Baptist Church'.(8) Two years later they opened the present building. At Largo in 1867 'a number of members left the church on the question of open or close Communion'.(9)

By mid-century the population was growing rapidly. There was economic advance and growing prosperity: fishing continued to be profitable on the east coast and in Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy, the linen and linoleum industries continued to expand. This, allied to upheaval politically, educationally and in religious affairs (with the Disruption of 1843), created an atmosphere whereby Baptists found it possible to preach to find a response. Attempts were made to bring about a closer co-operation between the churches and here again Fife was in the forefront and notably the Cupar church. At a meeting in Tullymet in Atholl in July 1835 a Scottish Baptist Association was formed, with the Cupar church being one of the nine participants.

In 1842 Francis Johnstone moved from Carlisle to become minister of the Cupar church. Johnstone was energetic, clearly a gifted evangelist and a good organiser. A year later he was Secretary of the Association and in 1843 at its meetings held that year in Cupar it was renamed the Baptist Union of Scotland. Much activity followed. Evangelists were sent out to the large towns, a training scheme was begun to help men train for the ministry, a building fund was started and a number of magazines circulated. The time was not ripe for Union, and, lacking the support of the larger city churches and the older leaders, the infant Union waned. In 1856, when Johnstone left

Scotland briefly for Cambridge, the Union was dissolved though it was to reappear in a more vigorous and lasting form in 1869 with the founding minister of the Cupar congregation, Jonathan Watson, as its inaugural President. While he was at Cupar, Johnstone conducted a class of students preparing for the ministry. He believed in an educated ministry and while on a summer preaching tour of the Highlands met some Christian men whom he brought to Cupar, boarded them in his own house and conducted training classes for them, a practice continued when he moved to Edinburgh in 1845.

(c) Growth in Industrial Areas

The churches founded in the last quarter of the nineteenth century have in common the fact that they were situated in growing and flourishing industrial areas in Cowdenbeath, Leven, Leslie and Dunfermline, but there is no single, economic reason for their growth. Rather they were sited in growing communities and were brought into being through secession, church planting and the dedicated evangelistic preaching of one man.

Cowdenbeath was at the heart of the Central Fife coalfield which, late by comparison with other mining areas, began to develop rapidly in the late 1860s and 1870s. With growing incoming population from Fife and other parts of Scotland, Baptist witness emerged in this area. Its origins appear to have been indigenous. Yuille records that in 1873 a Mr McCaig offered his house for a meeting to study the Scriptures, and, he goes on, 'The truths of Baptism and breaking of bread upon the first day of the week were soon discussed. After a time of waiting upon God, they felt led to form themselves into a Baptist church'. (10)

Leslie was a different situation, though another flourishing community with the large flax spinning mills at Prinlaws and paper manufacture at Fettykill. Here Baptist witness was begun through the efforts of one man, the remarkable Thomas Whitson Lister. When the church was formed in 1880 Lister was still only nineteen and a clerk in the Union Bank in Leslie. The No.1 Minute Book of the church, which he wrote up himself during his ten-year pastorate, sets out 'Notes of the History and Acts of the Leslie Assembly of Believers called Baptists', which provide a remarkably clear and vivid picture of Lister himself and the way in which the church was formed:

This Church may be said, in a certain sense, to have grown from meetings which had been held in various places by Thomas Whitson Lister, first among the young, afterwards among the older people, and by his mother, over a course of six or seven years. At these meetings, especially that held at Greenside, where anyone present was allowed to propose the subject, the doctrine of baptism sometimes came in course and was always explained as believers' baptism. - Towards the end of 1879 with almost no prompting on the part of anyone, a desire began to be manifested by the believers in which they would have the privilege of closer fellowship with one another and the opportunity of observing the ordinances of the Lord in the way they considered scriptural. (11)

Such desire continued to be felt and discussed through early 1880

and Lister records that on 5th May, 'the first step towards forming a church was taken in the baptising of two converts in the River Leven by Thomas W. Lister. This was a night to be remembered by all present both for the joy of the Holy Ghost which was felt by each and from the fact that it was the first step towards an important issue'.(12)

A further meeting was held in June to consider the advisability of proceeding. Lister produced a paper which set out the reasons why it was expedient for people to sever their present church connections:

These were 1st because they believed that the churches were unscriptural in some parts of their doctrine chiefly with reference to the ordinance of baptism and the frequency with which the ordinance of the Lord's Supper ought to be observed. 2nd because they believed them to be corrupt in practice, specially in the admitting of members.(13)

He went on to give the main features of the organisation of the new church: all believers joining to be baptised; communion to be held every Sunday, only those baptised as believers could take full communion though there was a nod in the direction of open communion, 'but that (so far as present light went) other believers might be allowed occasional communion'. Arrangements gathered pace until on 20th June 1880 the church met together for the first time in the Town Hall. The attendance was 47 at morning worship and at the communion service in the afternoon, some 70 in the evening, and Lister records, 'Though no rapture was experienced by anyone, a feeling of solemnity and peace pervaded each of the meetings'.(14) No doubt this detailed description of the founding of the Leslie church could be repeated in others built up before and after 1880.

Leven, larger than Largo, had no Baptist church until 1892, though a number of folk in the town clearly worshipped in Largo. Some former Brethren believers, baptised in Largo, began a Saturday meeting in Leven. When Mr A. Piggot became pastor in Largo, the meetings were held more regularly and it was agreed to establish a church with Mr Piggot as the pastor and some fourteen members. Within a short time a building for 250 had been constructed. The new congregation clearly had vision.

In 1897 Dunfermline saw the advent of a second church in the town. As with the Largo church some thirty years before, the issue was over the question of whether the Lord's Table should be open to all believers. The issue had raged for nearly a decade as a motion that the Table should be open had been defeated in 1888 and again two years later. Finally in 1896 it was passed by a small majority. Given the evenness of the difference of opinion it could only be resolved by the withdrawal of one or other party. In the event those opposed to open communion, over one hundred in number, withdrew to form the West Baptist Church. The result, within a few years, was two strong churches in the town. By 1903 Viewfield had 246 members, and the West 241. Twelve years later in 1915 Viewfield numbered 291 with the membership at West Baptist also having risen to 275.

Church Growth and Church Planting

As the twentieth century approached, Baptists throughout Britain shared in giving to the Twentieth Century Fund, to be used for Church Extension and Home Mission. The Scottish share of this was eventually to be some £20,000. At about the same time, Fife Baptist churches had come together in the Fife Baptist Association with the same aim of extending Baptist witness in the County. Together with the Baptist Union of Scotland they set up the Fife Joint Committee. Between 1900 and 1910 the result was the formation of a further six Baptist churches.

The first, in 1900, was at Pathhead in Kirkcaldy where the church at Whytescauseway had been carrying on mission work for some years. Yuille records that at a Conference of the Fife and Clackmannan Baptist Association at Alloa on 1st October 1898, 'it was considered desirable to raise a new Church in the Pathhead district'.⁽¹⁵⁾ Six months later at the next meeting in Leven, finance was forthcoming, a Mission commenced in December 1899 with the Revd G. Wilson as Agent, a term used for ministers engaged in pioneering work and supported by the Association, and the church formally constituted on the first Sunday of the new century with 28 members.

In somewhat similar vein, though in much more unpromising territory, there was born the church at Pittenweem, a small fishing village some two miles from Anstruther. Some twenty members of the Anstruther church came from Pittenweem and apparently had some difficulty reaching church during inclement winter weather. In addition two Anstruther deacons had been running a Sunday School in Pittenweem for a number of years and these two were instrumental in forming the church in January 1902, with some opposition at first from the Anstruther congregation. Nonetheless, by 1910 the membership had increased to fifty, though the moderate to low level of the membership in the years since perhaps bears out the initial doubts of the Anstruther fellowship.

Association support was enlisted in Inverkeithing in commencing a Mission and later a church when the local revival of 1905 presented good ground for commencing a cause. Support was also forthcoming for three other churches, Bowhill, Buckhaven and Lochgelly, all begun in the Edwardian era. Here too, the Fife Committee had pinpointed good ground. Bowhill and Lochgelly were in the rapidly expanding central Fife coalfield, the work of the Bowhill Coal Company causing an influx of population into the areas of Bowhill and Cardenden in the later years of the nineteenth century. Many of these in-migrants came from Cowdenbeath and this process, exploited by two tent missions, saw a church commenced in 1904. Lochgelly too found early growth easy, benefiting, as Yuille recalls, from being 'in the very heart of the Fife coalfields and in the midst of a teeming and growing population'.⁽¹⁶⁾

Buckhaven too was a centre of activity for the Fife Coal Company and was closely linked with Methil, which was then a thriving port for the coal trade. A Mission was formed under the auspices of the Association and two years later in 1910 a church was formed.

In March 1903 the government, requiring a new dockyard to

repair the Dreadnought battleships and concerned at the growing threat from Germany, announced a plan to construct a yard at Rosyth on the north shore of the Firth of Forth. Slow progress was made and by the outbreak of war in 1914 the dockyard was still in no state to receive ships. It was opened in 1916 in time to carry out vital repairs following the Battle of Jutland. From 1917, the whole of the Grand Fleet was based at Rosyth. All the construction work, as later the work of the yard, made for a growing community in 'Tin-town'. By 1913 there were some 3000 men employed. Among those who came to the area were a number of Baptists from Chatham and they took the lead in organising services. The formation of the church effectively began with a service on 23rd June 1918. It was clearly no accident that the service was conducted by Revd James Hair, minister of West Baptist Church, Dunfermline, but also President of the Fife Association and Secretary of the Fifeshire Joint Committee. The work now begun was expected to flourish as a correspondent for the *Scottish Baptist Magazine* suggested, 'All those who have been in touch with the Rosyth friends are impressed by their enthusiasm and competence, and it is no small privilege to share in laying denominational foundations in an area so unique and promising'. (17)

New Towns

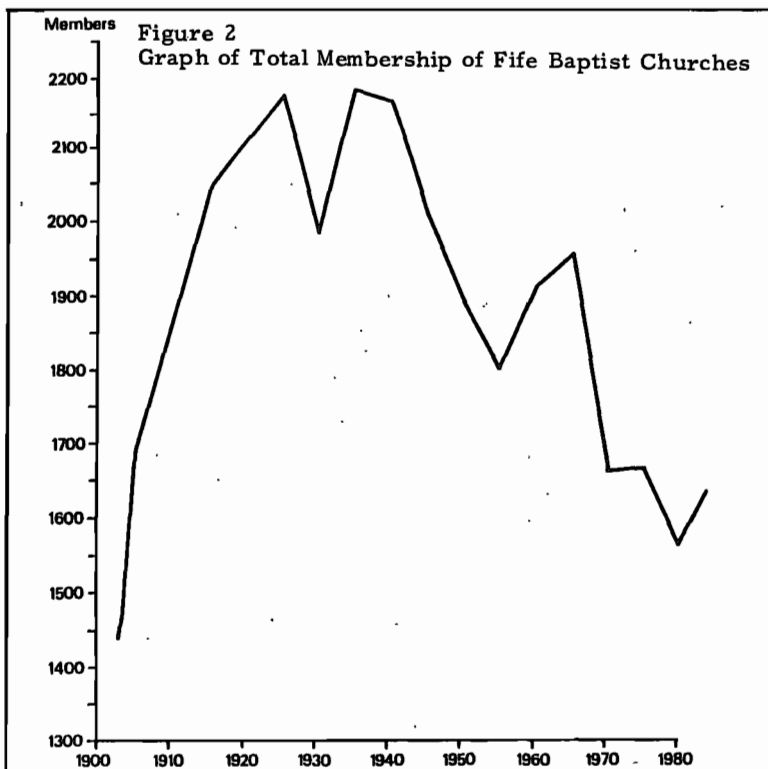
The impetus of the early part of the century was not maintained, however, and it was a further 37 years before a further church was formed. Then the same marks of church planting again became clear: a growing population, the support of the local association and the initiative of a neighbouring church. The church historian records that:

It was the recently inducted young minister of Leslie Baptist Church, the Rev. J. Norman MacDonald, and a few of his congregation who had the vision of a Baptist Church in Glenrothes, growing with the town, and providing an evangelical witness and a spiritual home in a community where almost everyone arrived as a stranger. (18)

The town, after a difficult start, grew steadily and the church with it, to the extent that another church was constituted in 1983 in Collydean, a northern precinct of the new town. Glenrothes was this time a contributor to its birth, along with Leslie and the Fife Baptist Association under whose auspices the Steering Committee had been set up some years earlier.

Growth and Decline: An Analysis

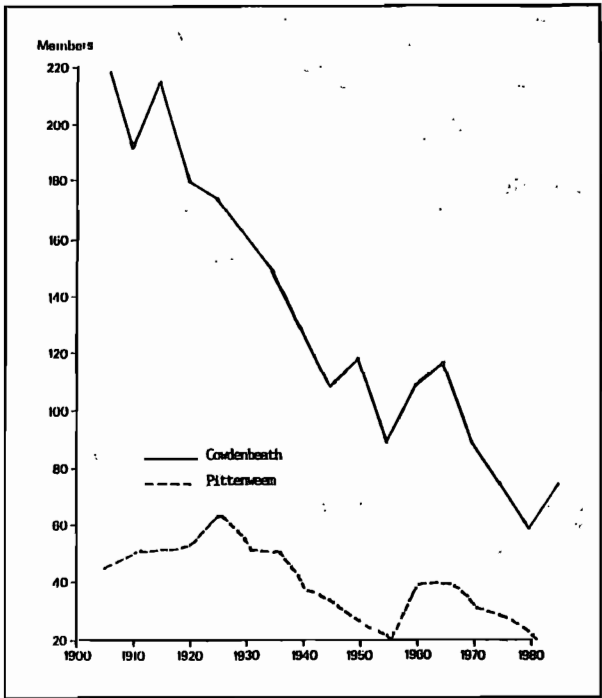
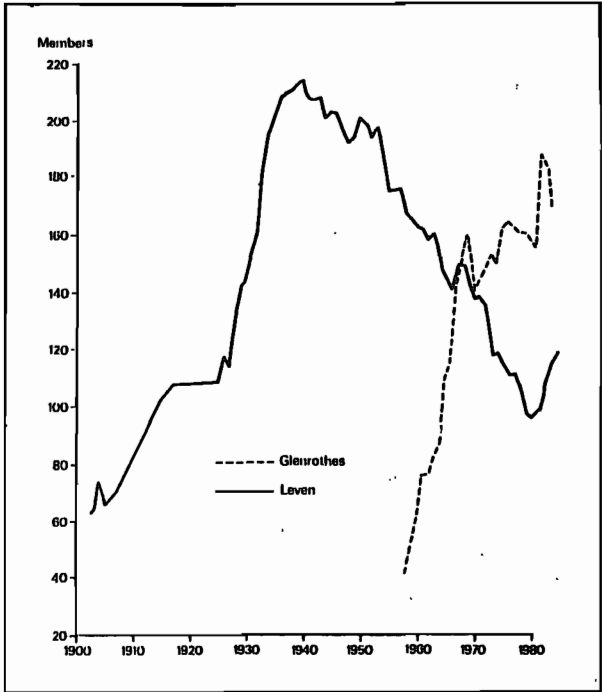
A study of growth in Baptist churches might be fairly straightforward if churches had the same characteristics. Fortunately, for the life and vitality of the churches and their witness in the areas they serve, they do not. A number of problems occur in attempting to discover growth and in seeking to analyse the reasons for it. One of these is the scanty nature of the evidence. Scottish Baptists, in Fife at any rate, were not noted for keeping detailed and informative records of their membership or activities which go beyond the mundane. Figures are available for most of the twentieth century, but before that figures are difficult to acquire.



Undoubtedly, though, there has been growth. About 1850, using Francis Johnstone's estimate of the number of Baptists in Scotland, there may have been about five hundred in Fife. By 1900 this had risen to some 1400. The growth in the number of churches is reflected in the growth of membership to 1690 in 1905, 1875 in 1910, 2050 in 1915 and a peak of 2125 in 1925. There is a decline to just under 2000 in 1930 before membership climbs again to a peak of 2135 in 1935. After that the trend was downwards, though there was increase in the decade between 1955 and 1965. Most recently there has been a further increase since 1980, a trend confirmed by the recently published *Prospects for Scotland*. (19)

It would be interesting to compare graphs of other regions to see if there was any overall trend similar to that found in Fife. Certainly it appears clear that decline in membership of Baptist churches in Fife follows the Second World War and no doubt we could deduce disillusion, social dislocation, and the influence of various social and economic factors as reasons for such decline.

When we look at the membership figures for the various churches in the twentieth century, however, an extremely varied picture emerges. Certainly, there is no such thing as the average or standard Baptist church, in terms of membership. A glance at a number of



Membership Graphs for Fife Baptist Churches

graphs of the membership of the churches in the twentieth century would suffice to show this.(20) Many of the reasons for growth are, therefore, to be found in the local situation and personalities, rather than in national or regional factors.

One instance, however, where a national event played an important role was the Tell Scotland Crusade led by Dr Billy Graham in the early summer of 1955. Certainly local churches were active before this event took place, In Lochgelly the January 1955 meeting of the deacons saw concern about increasing attendances sandwiched between the need to purchase teaspoons and the pastor sharing with the deacons the inconvenience of not having a telephone. The secretary minuted this report, 'How to increase numbers at services was raised: after some discussion it was agreed to hold a four night mission from April 12th to 15th'.(21) The April meeting reported that those meetings had been very successful and the deacons also approved a retiral offering for the All Scotland Crusade. By the autumn results were being seen in the number of folk coming forward for baptism. The church, at this time, minuted in some detail their interviews. Of one candidate it was reported that, 'Miss Wilson made her decision for Christ at the Glasgow Crusade held in the Kelvin Hall conducted by Dr Billy Graham. She felt that for some time back, she would have made the decision, it only needed someone to take the lead'.(22)

A number of similar reports were heard throughout that autumn and winter. Other churches throughout Fife also reported fairly large increases in membership following the crusade. These included Bowhill, Buckhaven, Cowdenbeath, Viewfield, Pittenweem and Rosyth. However, it must be recorded that this growth was not sustained and, indeed, in succeeding years some of these churches found their membership decrease as quickly as it had gone up in 1955/56.

Local work also played its part. The largest single increase in a year in a Fife church was 89 reported for the Lochgelly church in the 1925 yearbook. Sixty-nine had been baptised in the year. Reference to the Lochgelly minutes for this period, however, provide little enlightenment as to the reasons. Certainly, there appeared to be remarkable calm with which this increase was met. There appears to have been little activity by way of special efforts either. There were missions, but these were a regular feature of the life of the church in the 'twenties and 'thirties with one being held every three or four months.

A more significant part in growth is played by particular ministers. There is considerable evidence for growth coming during the period of one man's ministry in most of the churches. In the ten years of Revd T. W. Lister's ministry in Leslie between 1880 and 1890, some 216 members had been placed on the roll.(23) Of these, only twenty had transferred from elsewhere, the rest was what we would call conversion growth. Ten years further on and only another fifty names had been added. It is a remarkable testimony to Lister's work and amply justifies the praise lavished on him from all parts of the community when he left for the Rattray Street Church in Dundee.

Other churches at other times could give similar testimony to the

importance of the pastor. Cupar in its early days was blessed with a number of notable and effective ministries in those of Jonathan Watson, Francis Johnstone and William Landels. In Leslie in the 1930s the ministry of John McBeath saw sustained growth, the minute books recording applications for baptism and church membership coming hard on the heels of one another, a situation not in evidence before or after Mr McBeath's pastorate. At about the same time in Lochgelly, John McKendrick's ministry was producing similar results. A few years earlier, St Andrews had seen much the same occur during the incumbency of R. F. Conway.

One of the most noteworthy instances of sustained growth is in the Leven church where T. G. Esplin became pastor in 1926. The membership stood at 114. Between 1926 and 1940 the membership grew every year to 214 by the latter year. It then fell back slightly in the 1940s but still stood at 194 when Esplin retired in 1948. The graph shows clearly this steady increase and, as clearly, the steady decrease since that time. (24)

More modern stories of such situations can be found in Viewfield under the ministries of J. R. G. Graham and W. Freel, Rosyth under J. W. Tyrrell and R. Marr and in the 1970s and 80s the ministries of W. Cowie, I. Paterson and W. Wright in Leslie, Inverkeithing and St Andrews respectively.

Not that such men went without assistance, for in all these instances we could list those in the churches who gave them able assistance whether as church office bearers or as leaders in Sunday School, Band of Hope, Christian Endeavour, W.A., choirs and in leading or organising social outreach activities and open air evangelistic events.

To give but one recent example. Shortly before Leslie received a new young minister in 1968, the dwindling and ageing congregation received new blood in the form of John Anderson whose wisdom and steadfastness was to prove vital to the church. At about the same time there arrived James Thomson, whose drive and vigour, later to be seen when as President of the Fife Association, he was instrumental in getting the new cause at Collydean underway, similarly brought much needed gifts to the fellowship. Such a story could be told many times over in other generations and we could mention James Westwater at Lochgelly, H. F. Seager at Rosyth, William Mathewson at Viewfield and Peter Thomson in Anstruther who made considerable contributions to the growth of these churches.

Whatever the part of the minister and key laymen in a growing situation, there is also an economic aspect, together with a growing or declining population, to be considered. This is most clearly noticeable in the growth of a New Town church such as Glenrothes. If we look at the graph of its membership since its foundation in 1956, (25) we find a fairly steady growth which is not to be found in any other church in the region over the same period of time. Clearly, the situation of the New Town with not only an incoming Baptist population but also an area where people have few 'roots' or settled church connections has been a fruitful area for growth. This is seen not only in the growth of

Glenrothes Baptist Church, and its sister church at Collydean, in the more recent and still expanding north of the town, but also in the growth of the Leslie church which is situated on the north-west edge of the town and draws roughly half of its membership from the New Town.

In much the same way, earlier this century, the growth of the central Fife churches has a great deal to do with the health of the mining industry at that time. The converse is also true. In the early 'fifties, Smith in a chapter on coal mining could still look forward in confidence. 'An expansion of mine-working there will be', (26) he could say. It was an expectation built on the prosperity of the 'fifties for since that time there has been a considerable contraction notably in central Fife, where most of the pits have disappeared, and the only one remaining, Seafield in Kirkcaldy, has an uncertain future. From the early 1960s, accelerating towards the end of the decade and through the 1970s, the membership of Bowhill, Cowdenbeath and Lochgelly have experienced great decline.

The fishing villages of the East Neuk experienced the effects of decline at an earlier period. Smith describes the 'very depressed period of the 1920s' (27) and this can be traced in the membership of both Anstruther and Pittenweem where there was a sharp decline in 1924-25. In Anstruther there was a recovery in the 'thirties to be followed by further decline in the 'forties and 'fifties, largely following the fortunes of the fishing industry.

The 'twenties also saw difficult times for the very young Rosyth church. Despite being the most modern Royal dockyard in the country, the government in 1925 decided to use it as a 'Care and Maintenance' facility. Many of the workforce were moved south, houses stood empty and the Admiralty reduced their rents. (28) The effect, catastrophic for many aspects of social life, was felt in the church, and in the course of a year membership fell from 70 to 38. Worse was the fact that many who left were in positions of leadership and it is difficult to find a month in the minutes when another deacon or Sunday School teacher was not returning to the south of England. Gradually the church recovered as folk from the surrounding area took over tenancy of the now low-rent houses.

Elsewhere the Great War produced difficulty for the Fife churches. Most of the churches saw men join the forces, though this hardly dented membership rolls. In many churches the war is scarcely noted in the minutes. Perhaps the worst affected areas in Fife were the churches of the fishing towns of the East Neuk. The Secretary of the Anstruther church reported in an article in the *Scottish Baptist Magazine* for September 1915 the disaster that had come upon the town, 'One of the busiest of the smaller fishing towns on the east coast a year ago, it is now a dead city (industrially) and a fish is one of the last things you see'. (29) The minutes of the Pittenweem church record in December 1914 'the great crushing depression so very much felt in our district caused by the war'. These comments apart, the war appeared to have little effect on the life of the churches.

Nor is there any evidence of decline in the post-war period. The

life of the churches continued as normal. A look at a graph of Baptist church membership shows decline between 1925 and 1930, but recovery between 1930 and 1935. When we examine individual churches, we may conclude that fall in the late 'twenties was as much a result of the economic situation as of anything else.

Finally we need to consider the effect of open membership on growth. Open membership Baptist churches are not a particularly common phenomenon in Scotland as a whole, nor in Fife, though undoubtedly restriction of membership is much less rigorously enforced in these days than in past times. From the beginning the Glenrothes church has been an 'open membership' church. Since then the annual statistics, recorded in the *Scottish Baptist Year Book*, have shown totals of 133 baptised, 121 admitted by profession of faith and 129 by transfer. The number admitted by profession is very high indeed over the same period compared to other churches in the region: the church at Viewfield, some three times the size of Glenrothes, admitted only 86 by profession. It would seem reasonable to conclude that this has had some effect on the Glenrothes membership, especially when the nearest church at Leslie has maintained a 'closed' position. In Cupar, in 1973, the church took over an older Church of Scotland building. The Cupar church, at its foundation an open membership congregation, had become closed but finally reverted to its original position. The result was that in 1973 it received a number of new members from the Church of Scotland congregation which resulted in an increase in members from 61 to 104 and a year later to 128. It may be interesting to watch the trend in membership if the church at St Andrews, currently considering the situation, also adopts an 'open' membership position.

Despite a declining trend since 1930, membership of the churches in Fife is currently growing at a rate not seen since the mid-fifties. Are there any lessons to be learned from past times of growth to consolidate and indeed increase the current situation? Much might depend on fluctuations in the economy and consequent inflow or outflow of population. There is, however, still some growth in the region, notably in Glenrothes, but also in Dalgety Bay and Dunfermline. These are areas where churches and the Association should consider further activity.

Church planting is firmly established in Fife, most of it generated by the Association. The Fife Association has shown interest and concern both early this century and in recent years in establishing and supporting new causes in the region. It is a suitable vehicle for such a purpose, enabling wider experience to be brought to bear on a situation and being in a better position to act quickly and effectively than the Baptist Union of Scotland.

Finally, there are the individual churches themselves and particularly their leadership. The importance of adequate and vigorous leadership has been amply demonstrated in the past, both in commencing churches and in building the membership and work of the churches. The Fife churches have always existed and do so today in very varied situations which demand different gifts of leadership and of approach in building God's Kingdom. Success will depend much more on local willingness, dedication and vitality than on national movements

or campaigns, and perhaps one of the strengths of the present Scotreach activity is that it is designed for just such an approach. Time will tell whether the growth of the 1980s will prove to be as steady as that experienced in the first two decades of the present century.

NOTES

- 1 Alexander Smith, *The County of Fife*, Edinburgh, 1952, p.2.
- 2 Ibid., p.34.
- 3 Quoted in G. Yuille, ed., *History of the Baptists in Scotland from Pre-Reformation Times*, Glasgow, 1926, p.29.
- 4 D. B. Murray, *The First Hundred Years*, Glasgow, 1969, p.8.
- 5 Quotations from *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, ed. Sir John Sinclair.
- 6 Yuille, op.cit., p.141.
- 7 Ibid., p.146.
- 8 Ibid., pp.149-150.
- 9 Ibid., p.151.
- 10 Ibid., p.144.
- 11 Leslie Baptist Church, *Minute Book No.1, 1880-1890*, p.1.
- 12 Ibid., p.2.
- 13 Ibid., p.3.
- 14 Ibid., p.5.
- 15 Yuille, op.cit., p.148.
- 16 Ibid., p.155.
- 17 *Scottish Baptist Magazine*, August 1918.
- 18 S. Stevenson, *Glenrothes Baptist Church: The First Twenty-Five Years, part 1 1956-1960*, Glenrothes, 1981, p.1.
- 19 P. Brierly and F. MacDonald, *Prospects for Scotland: Report of the 1984 Census of the Churches*, Edinburgh, 1985, p.68.
- 20 See Appendix 2. Graphs are based on figures of membership taken from the *Scottish Baptist Year Book*.
- 21 Lochgelly Baptist Church, *Minute Book No.6*, January 1955.
- 22 Ibid., 27 November 1955.
- 23 Roll of Membership in Leslie Baptist Church 1880-1928.
- 24 See Appendix 2.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Smith, op.cit., p.249.
- 27 Ibid., p.225.
- 28 Inverkeithing High School. *The Story of Rosyth*, n.d., p.117.
- 29 *Scottish Baptist Magazine*, September 1915.
- 30 Smith, op.cit., p.96.

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REVIEW

Kenneth W. Bennett, *Men in the Service of God: 70 years of the Baptist Men's Movement*, BMM, 93 Gloucester Place, London 1987. 64pp. £1.50.

The Baptist Housing Association, Operation Agri, the Missionaries Literature Association have one thing in common: they originated in the vision of laymen who co-operated together in the Baptist Men's Movement, founded in 1917 as a direct result of the National Laymen's Missionary Movement call from the conference at Edinburgh, 1910. Sir Alfred Pearce Gould, W. Parker Gray and Alec Tyler were the inaugurators of what became the BMM.

[continued on page 356]

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RESTORATIONISM

An Alternative View

I read with much interest the article in the January 1987 issue of *The Baptist Quarterly* by my good friend, Haddon Willmer. The article was perceptive and stimulating; nevertheless there are several points at which I would want to assess the significance of Restorationism differently, and I therefore venture to write the following by way of reply to his article.

Dr Willmer presents us with a helpful and, for the most part, accurate, exposition of Andrew Walker's book, *Restoring the Kingdom*. He makes several criticisms, some valid, and some, in my view, not. I want to begin by making two criticisms of Walker which Dr Willmer did not make, and which underlie some of my questions about his own article. The first relates to Walker's division of Restoration into R1 (the networks in fellowship with Church House, Bradford) and R2, an open-ended category in which Walker locates the John Noble and Gerald Coates axis, the Basingstoke community, and John MacLauchlan's groups. I presume that R2 would also include such networks as the Grapevine Churches and Antioch Ministries. Walker classifies all these together 'simply to avoid the infinite regress of R3 to Rn',⁽¹⁾ and he tells us that he has invented this rubric 'to help our understanding'.⁽²⁾

My first criticism is that it does *not* help our understanding; it is actually confusing. Walker is right to recognise that the network of fellowships relating to Bryn Jones is different from that relating to John Noble. However, the network relating to John Noble is also different from that relating to Derek Brown, though both are in R2. Then the network relating to Bryn Jones is distinct from that relating to Terry Virgo, though both are in R1. Furthermore, the comparison of R1/R2 with the Exclusive/Open Brethren is not only, as Dr Willmer recognises, inexact, it is also unhelpful. The Basingstoke network is, I would judge, far more exclusive than Bryn Jones, although it is in R2. The Restoration movement is a plethora of distinct, but overlapping, networks, and to separate out one grouping from the rest is arbitrary.

My second criticism of Walker is that there is a flaw in his basic perception of Restorationism. It is because Dr Willmer has omitted to take account of this that some of his criticisms require modification. Walker confesses that at one time he thought that 'kingdom' and 'church' were interchangeable terms in Restorationist circles; he then notes: 'Apparently, this is not so'.⁽³⁾ Nevertheless, it seems that his earlier misunderstanding still underlies much of what he says. He expounds Restorationist teaching like this: God 'wants Christians of this last generation to restore the kingdom', here distinguished from denominational Christianity.⁽⁴⁾ He believes that Restorationists see the Church's task as 'to usher in the kingdom of God prior to the historical return of Christ to earth'.⁽⁵⁾ Dr Willmer accepts Walker's exposition: 'Restorationism ... looks for the Restoration of the Kingdom of God before the end'.

This is, however, a mistake. Four points need to be made in

correction. First, Restorationists do not see the Kingdom as in need of restoration. 'The Kingdom of God has come', says Hugh Thompson, not meaning that it was restored in the 1970s but that its 'Grand Arrival' took place in the Person of the King, Jesus, supremely at Calvary and Pentecost.(6) Since then the Kingdom has been continuously present.

Second, what Restorationists believe is in need of restoration is the Church. In my reading of Restorationist writings, I have only once seen a reference to the restoration of the Kingdom.(7) Juxtapositioning of 'restoration' and 'Church' is common. David Matthew writes: 'The church is being restored... We want a full recovery of all that has been lost, a putting right, that is, of the wrongs of Church history'.(8) Terry Virgo speaks of 'restoration in the church',(9) Eileen Vincent of 'the church restored',(10) while Ron Trudinger subtitled one of his books, 'Biblical Principles for Church Restoration'.(11) The restoration of the Church entails an honest embracing of New Testament principles,(12) this may include restoration to a way of life under the Kingdom rule of God, but that is very different from restoration of the Kingdom, an absolute non-necessity.

Third, what Restorationists look for prior to Christ's return is what Arthur Wallis calls 'the establishment of the Kingdom'.(13) Before 1986 *Restoration Magazine's* statement of principle included a reference to the Church as God's instrument to bring in His Kingdom. We need to be careful to understand what Restorationists themselves mean by such phrases. They do not mean that the Church is commissioned to actualize the universal reign of God; only He can do that. The Church is God's instrument in the sense that it stands in the vanguard of God's work of actualizing His rule, and the establishment of the Kingdom is the Church's fulfilling of its destiny of becoming 'a pure bride ready for the heavenly Bridegroom at His coming', as in the more recent statement of principle of *Restoration*. 'The establishment of the Kingdom' means its establishment in the Church. Dr Willmer is correct when he notes that 'the positive enthusiasm is for establishing a Kingdom people in preparation for the return of Christ to reign on earth'.

Fourth, Restorationists view the present-day restoration of the Church in the context of the 'restoration of all things'. Acts 3.21 is probably the key verse. The process began immediately following the fall,(14) and will culminate when the King returns in glory, an event which will be preceded by the greatest worldwide revival that the world has ever seen.(15) Eileen Vincent writes: 'Following the recovery of all that has been lost, the return of Jesus will unfold a totally new era of unimaginable glory'.(16) That will be the consummation of the restoration of all things. It is not the Kingdom which is being restored; the Kingdom of God is the restoration of all things. In this discussion of Walker's erroneous explanation of the core belief of Restorationism I have already touched on the next topic which I want to address in the light of Dr Willmer's article, namely the relationship of the movement to denominational Christianity and the allegations of divisiveness.

Dr Willmer interprets Walker as seeing Restorationism as

supplanting denominations, since the renewal of traditional Churches is not to be expected. This statement requires qualification: it is the denominational structures which are perceived as ultimately unrenewable, not individual denominational congregations. Denominations may not be in God's plan⁽¹⁷⁾ (and who would not say 'Amen' to that?) but Restorationists look and long and pray and work for the restoration of the whole Church. Terry Virgo once declined an invitation to speak on 'Restoration Churches and the whole Body of Christ' on the grounds that he 'did not believe in "restoration churches" but in the restoration of the Church'.⁽¹⁸⁾ For that reason I do not think that Dr Willmer is right to claim that Restorationists see themselves as 'the saving élite of history'; rather, they see the Church (all of it) as 'the sharp cutting edge' in the outworking of God's purposes.⁽¹⁹⁾ True, it is not always living as if that were so, which is why restoration is necessary, but it is a restoration, not a new departure.

Dr Willmer says that restoration teaching has affected Baptist churches, resulting in division and in a threatening of 'their traditional identity and values'. I suspect that this latter comment is actually irrelevant: the members of Baptist churches who are likely to be sympathetic to restoration principles are those whose self-perception of their identity would be Evangelical and/or charismatic, rather than denominational. As regards the alleged divisiveness of Restorationism, Dr Willmer recognises the truth in Walker's comments that the problem is not all on one side; whether division is perceived as resulting from Restorationism or from resistance to restoration depends on the perspective of the observer. Restorationists make it clear that they never initiate a relationship with a denominational Church; a covering relationship is established only when requested.⁽²⁰⁾ Dr Willmer interprets Walker as arguing that 'Restorationism merely exploits existing divisions', and therefore questions the ethics of division-exploitation. I read Walker rather differently: he concludes his account of the division at Romford like this: 'You could argue that Restorationists typically exploit such divisions. But... the work of division and separation had begun before Brian Smith took over', and he denies that the Restorationists did anything improper.⁽²¹⁾ He therefore recognises exploitation as a possible interpretation, but in the end rejects it.

Dr Willmer makes several comments on shepherding, which he finds questionable because of its 'paternalism', a word which Walker unfortunately introduces. It is a loaded word. Etymologically it simply means fatherly care, but has developed connotations of manipulation and patronisation. It is more profitable to look at the Restorationist practice of shepherding, which as Walker recognises, is usually quite laudable. Shepherding takes place within the context of a loving relationship, voluntarily entered into.⁽²²⁾ Arthur Wallis believes that any longer-standing Christian may disciple a new believer.⁽²³⁾ Shepherding consists largely in the giving of advice in a context in which questioning is possible.⁽²⁴⁾ Terry Virgo points out that shepherding is not intended to delve into the minutiae of everyone's life, but that Church members 'are grateful to be able to check out major decisions with their leaders'.⁽²⁵⁾ The goal of shepherd is the spiritual maturity of the saints, and part of what that is

increasing independence.(26) It is a system 'open to abuse',(27) but so are a lot of good things. David Tomlinson lists five safety factors for avoiding the potential pitfalls: (1) God's Word is the supreme authority; (2) Leadership is plural; (3) The goal of maturity is kept clearly in view; (4) Dialogue is given a high place; (5) The context is genuine relationship.(28) In my own experience of consulting a shepherding figure, my personal responsibility for 'weighing' whatever is said has been stressed; if, on weighing advice, I have decided not to follow it, the relationship has remained intact and the friendship as supportive as ever. Shepherding could be abused; as a rule it is not: Walker only has seven detailed complaints about the experience.(29)

Dr Willmer asks what kind of humanity is envisaged and produced by any given religious movement. Let me venture one or two answers for Restorationism. Restorationists themselves use two words to portray the kind of humanity for which they aspire - security and maturity.(30) My own observations bear this out; to know that we have a place in a community with those to whom we can look for guidance, encouragement, and correction is to feel the supportiveness of relationship which gives us security, and undoubtedly the love commitment of members of restored Churches to one another is unmatched by anything I have seen anywhere else. Maturity, too, is indeed a mark of this humanity; the spiritual understanding and the effectiveness in witness of a relatively young Restorationist believer would put to shame the silence and ignorance of many Baptists of long years standing. I suspect that the criticism of shepherding from traditional Church sources is actually motivated by embarrassment. For years we have been so inefficient in our nurturing of new converts, so lax in the practice of moral discipline, so laid-back in our training of people for sharing in the ministry of Jesus, that the supposedly Christian humanity which we have produced is actually indistinguishable from the world.

In his discussion of democracy and theocracy, Dr Willmer confuses two distinctions current amongst Restorationists. One is the distinction between democracy and leadership responsibility; the other between theocracy and structures of human devising. By juxtaposing democracy and theocracy he contrasts the democratic procedures of a Baptist Church Meeting with the allegedly theocratic nature of leadership by apostles and prophets. In this he is, to some extent, following Walker, who interprets Restoration teaching in this way - wrongly, it seems to me.

The only place where Walker makes this distinction when alluding to the words of one related to Restorationism is his statement that at Dales 1976 'democratic methods were compared unfavourably with the theocratic arrangements of God'.(31) This, however, is not a quotation but an allusion; and it refers to Ern Baxter, not to a British Restorationist. The word 'theocracy' is in fact very rare in Restorationist writings, and rightly refers to 'God's order'(32) - a far more frequent phrase. Leadership by apostles and prophets is theocratic, not because it is undemocratic, but because it is God's order; that is, it is Church polity based on 'the clear principles laid down in Scripture'.(33) Conversely, Church government by democracy is untheocratic, not because everyone has a say, but because it is of

human invention. Dr Willmer claims that 'Restorationism aims to work with a model of Church as direct and visible theocracy'. However, he appears to have set up a man of straw merely to knock it down again, because he goes on to show how Restorationism sees the rule of God as mediated through apostles and prophets. Restorationism in fact aims at theocracy in the specific sense that it aims to be the Church structured according to New Testament principles; that does not mean the direct rule of God: it means apostles and prophets, which are 'the key foundational ministries of the Church'.(34) This does not mean that leaders are remote or autocratic; as Mike Pusey once said: 'You are not a leader if no-one is following you'. Moreover, Restorationists recognise that every person has to choose his or her own shepherd, and 'wise shepherds will always be listening to their flock'.(35) Dr Willmer is evidently not too happy with the Baptist practice of Church Meeting. Perhaps he would prefer that portrayed by Terry Virgo, which might be described as a consultative assembly for feeding into, and calling in question, eldership decisions.(36)

Finally, Dr Willmer correctly expounds Walker's defence of Restorationism as sect and the Restorationists' own rejection of that label. He goes on to reject Walker's notion that a sectarian form of Christianity is better equipped to stand against the pressures of secularisation, since even sects make some compromise with the world. At this point we are involved in a debate as to what compromise with the world involves; Walker would define it in terms like 'rationalism' and 'moral relativism', whereas Dr Willmer sees the preservation of sacred tradition as an expression of modernity. It is virtually a case of playing different language-games: which side one comes down on depends on one's presuppositions. Here I can but confess my own prejudice and declare my sympathy with Walker; the rationality, which, as Dr Willmer rightly says, God endorses, can so easily turn into the rationalism which is a contemporary expression of what the Bible would call unbelief; conversely, while I find it impossible to defend relativism as true, I cannot deny the fact of relativity. Knowing, then, the provisionality of the modern western worldview, it is at least as reasonable, in the event of a clash with a Biblical worldview, to want to uphold the latter. Some statements made by people in some of what Walker calls 'broad churches' are, to me, scarcely recognisable as Christian at all. There is bound to be some compromise with modernity in Restorationism: that is unavoidable as long as we remain in this world in which we see only in part, but at least Restorationism strives to avoid it where other expressions of Christianity have embraced it all too easily. At least Restorationists take Scripture as their starting-point and final authority and are motivated above all by the desire to be obedient. (Incidentally, I do not attach much credibility to the words allegedly spoken by John MacLauchlan which Dr Willmer quotes, since they are taken from one of the very few scare stories which Walker was able to unearth).

To say that Restorationism accepts the place which the world offers to the Church leaves too many questions unanswered; if it is true, why does Restorationism face so much hostility? The Restorationists certainly see it as the mission of the Church to tackle the world head on: the vision for large churches in the big cities is envisaged as a challenge to the powers of this world,(37) and these

words of Tony Morton do not sound like accepting the proffered niche: 'To leave the Church in an active but isolated corner on Sundays might suit politicians, but it can't suit committed Christians. We are called to stand for justice and truth - racial, sexual, economic, medical and educational justice and truth'.(38)

Dr Willmer's comments on sectarianism lead into an interesting discussion on walking by faith, a needful reminder of the indispensability of humility as we live as sinful people before a holy God in a world in which, as yet, we see through a glass darkly.

At this point I wish to raise three questions. First, is it fair to deny that Restorationists are open to judgement as of now? At an Antioch Ministries conference at which I was present last year frequent frank admissions of past mistakes were made, and Terry Virgo has written: 'Though we rejoice in what we are experiencing there is certainly no room for complacency'.(39) Second, does openness to the judgement of the eschaton undermine the assurance that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus? Yes, the surpassing glory of what shall be will indeed be breathtakingly surprising, but what we already know of the firstfruits of the Spirit is a foretaste of glory divine. Third, does walking by faith remove the need for moral judgement? Dr Willmer suggests that to live by faith is to be released from the need to be right where others are wrong or to be alive where others are dead. It is, of course, true that comparison of ourselves favourably with others is never a healthy exercise. Awareness, on the part of those who are now Restorationist leaders, of the poverty of the Church to which they belonged drove them back to the New Testament in quest of a better and more authentic expression of Kingdom life. The question really is: are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? The question about the best possible expression of the Kingdom in the Church for the sake of the world today is one that is worth asking. The desire to be right and to come to life where once we were wrong and dead, because we have heard the challenging and life-giving Word of God, is laudable.

In the end only one question really matters: is God at work in the Restoration movement? Or better: is God indeed restoring His Church today to the beauty of the bride adorned in readiness for the Bridegroom's coming? Even if we cannot go all the way with Restorationist eschatological confidence, we ought still to face the possibility that it is God's policy to blow apart the structures in every generation and do a new thing, by-passing the monuments to His work in previous generations. It is too easy to dismiss some aspects of Restoration as un-Baptist. Perhaps we ought to measure our cherished Baptist traditions against the touchstone of Scripture; if the emergence of new religious movements is 'a means which the Holy Spirit uses to promote aspects of truth that have been lost or neglected',(40) maybe we are the people who need to heed Dr Willmer's plea for openness to judgement; surely openness to judgement entails readiness for change.

NOTES

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| 1 | A. Walker, <i>Restoring the Kingdom</i> , 1985, p.25. | |
| 2 | <i>Ibid.</i> , p.22. | 3 <i>Ibid.</i> , p.128. |
| 4 | <i>Ibid.</i> , p.22. | 5 <i>Ibid.</i> , p.128. |

- 6 H. Thompson, 'The Kingdom of God Has Come', *Restoration*, Jan/Feb 1986, pp.2-7.
- 7 In G. Coates' song, 'Being myself in the Lord', *Songs and Hymns of Fellowship*, No.35.
- 8 D. Matthew, *Church Adrift*, 1985, p.226.
- 9 T. Virgo, *Restoration in the Church*, 1985, p.38.
- 10 E. Vincent, *Something's Happening*, 1984, p.74.
- 11 R. Trudinger, *Built to Last*, 1980, 1982.
- 12 Virgo, op.cit., p.155.
- 13 A. Wallis, *Rain from Heaven*, 1970, p.124.
- 14 Matthew, op.cit., p.43.
- 15 B. Jones, 'Suddenly All Heaven Broke Loose!', *Restoration*, Jul/Aug 1983, p.19.
- 16 Vincent, op.cit., p.176. 17 Walker, op.cit., pp.22,261.
- 18 Virgo, op.cit., p.146.
- 19 P. Greenslade, 'The Sharp Cutting Edge', *Restoration*, Mar/Apr 1985, p.8.
- 20 Walker, op.cit., p.162; Virgo, op.cit., p.138.
- 21 Walker, op.cit., p.271
- 22 Walker, op.cit., pp.136, 146, 151-2.
- 23 A. Wallis, *Living God's Way*, 1984, p.7.
- 24 Walker, op.cit., pp.152, 173. 25 Virgo, op.cit., p.88.
- 26 Walker, op.cit., pp.105, 173; Virgo, op.cit., p.87.
- 27 Walker, op.cit., p.175.
- 28 D. Tomlinson, 'Is Discipling Biblical?', *Restoration*, Jul/Aug 1980, pp.3-4.
- 29 Walker, op.cit., p.285.
- 30 Virgo, op.cit., p.87; Vincent, op.cit., ch.11; Trudinger, op.cit., p.142.
- 31 Walker, op.cit., p.80.
- 32 B. Jones, 'Apostles Today - For Tomorrow's Church', *Restoration*, Sept/Oct. 1985, p.31.
- 33 A. Wallis, 'Springs of Restoration', *Restoration*, Jul/Aug 1980, p.22.
- 34 D. Brown, 'The Prophetic Ministry', *Towards Leadership* 9, p.2.
- 35 Virgo, op.cit., p.94. 36 Ibid.
- 37 W. Richards, 'God on the Move', *Restoration* May/June 1987, p.27.
- 38 T. Morton, 'Empires and the Kingdom', *Restoration* May/June 1987, p.26.
- 39 Virgo, op.cit., p.157. 40 Walker, op.cit., p.213.

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Haddon Willmer's response

I am grateful to Jonathan Bayes for his response to my article on Restorationism and to the Editor of the *Quarterly* for inviting me to say something further. A number of Jonathan's points I would readily accept, but some of his distinctions do not affect the critical points I was pursuing. There may, for example, be a difference between restorationists seeing themselves as 'the saving élite of history' and seeing all the church, of which they are the signally restored part, as the 'sharp cutting edge of God's working' in the world. Under both wordings, however, the church puts itself in the centre of historical

development. And that I wanted to question, because I think its ethical correlates are not in keeping with the spirit of Christ.

I agree that all churches have long been divided, latently if not blatantly, so it is unfair to accuse many restorationists of initiating divisions in Baptist churches. It is a question of the ethics of exploiting church divisions, not of causing them. Jonathan denies that anything improper was done in the case quoted by Walker. How can we judge that? Is there any recognised ethic in the broad stream of evangelical free protestantism about what is proper or improper? There is some etiquette amongst churches in the episcopal traditions and at superintendents' level, but where new religious movements are formed we are closer to the methods of commercial competition, if not the jungle. I wanted us to behave in a more truly Christian way, paying attention to points where our behaviour is shady and trying to see how it should be different. That involves developing a church ethic for our situation (is that taught in our theological colleges?), and leads beyond it into theology, and the psychology of spirituality, with questions like: Why should we find it so difficult as Christians to give up some of our favourite ways of exploiting the divisions that exist in churches?

The problem cannot be met by saying that a 'covering relationship is established only when requested'. These relationships are frequently kept secret from church members who ought to know because they are directly affected. If they are disclosed, there is an immediate uncertainty about loyalty, which exacerbates division. Covering is being accepted from people who as restorationist leaders are aware of 'the poverty of the life of the church to which they [formerly] belonged', and whose normal rhetoric is fairly scathing about other churches. Restorationism produces people capable, without the least trace of irony, of writing to an evangelical journal: 'The house church movement is the only church that has any spiritual leadership... their ministry is life-transforming through the power of the Holy Spirit' (*Third Way*, December 1987, p.32). How can the relation with an ordinary Baptist church be expected to work out, if some of the leaders accept covering within the terms of an ideology like that? Those to whom 'belonging to the Baptist family' means much, though it never gave them the illusion of belonging to the perfect church, will properly ask whether such leaders are able to make a go at that Baptist belonging. It is hard to see how they could, because it is hard to serve two masters. To have a low view of a whole group of Christians (a denomination) and then to be available to cultivate individuals and companies within it, even to the point of leaving, seems an essentially divisive stance in inter-church relationships. I am glad to see signs that house-churches are changing, consulting other churches, joining councils of churches. That must betoken or engender a change in ethic which I would do nothing to delay. The house church scene is variable and as a young movement fluid, so no defence - nor criticism - made at present need apply to every house church for ever.

My criticism of shepherding implies no desire to defend or applaud the pastoral care offered in Baptist churches. I am not impressed by any defence of shepherding which uses a logic like Mr

Nicholas Ridley's when he argues that, because it is widely admitted the present rating system is imperfect, only fools and troublemakers will see anything wrong with his poll tax. I see no reason to accept that we must choose either present Baptist practice or shepherding. There are other ways. An alternative ecclesiological model could be developed in terms of friendship. In friendship there is a non-hierarchical reciprocity which has a very different emphasis from shepherding. Freedom and equality are characteristic of friendship: now one, now the other may be the leading or caring partner. Friendship ruins hierarchies and tidy arrangements, but liberates and supports people for life. When Jonathan puts the best face he can on shepherding, he brings out the points where it is most like friendship. That way of arguing should not be used to bolster an hierarchical and managerial structure but rather show that such a model is unnecessary for the church. He missed my distinction between political and business organisational forms as analogies for understanding how our churches work. They provide a valuable index of the kind of Christianity and humanity we are making for and of ourselves. And I continue to worry about the choices we are making.

Along with many middle-aged Christians, I am intimidated by a sentence like: 'the spiritual understanding and the effectiveness in witness of a relatively young Restorationist believer would put to shame the silence and ignorance of many Baptists of long years standing'. There is a truth here ; but there is also an untruth which I refuse to swallow. Yes, I am shamed but I also remember that when I was young I put the middle-aged to shame. The young always do that, and the middle-aged always suffer it, and Christ is not to be identified with one or the other, though he is somewhere around in the strange learning process of life. I do not wish to discourage the young (professionally I spend much of my time doing the opposite), but what in many circles passes for their effectiveness in witness does not always impress me by its spiritual understanding. I am dismayed by their bad theology or complete lack of theology. Churches need more effective spiritual growth, but setting up simple and intimidating contrasts which offer inadequate models will not help.

Jonathan gives a precise account of what restorationists say about democracy and theocracy in church order. My point was a reaction to what some baptistic Christians were saying long before restorationism: the church is really a theocracy because God rules here, or ought to. Thinking thus, they got embarrassed about the church meeting, which is hard to run in an efficient, honest and friendly way without coming to resemble other democratic meetings in our culture - not surprising, since we learned democracy partly through our forebears' church meetings. Some Christians are so hostile to the world and its wisdom, so concerned that the church should be obviously different, that they are prepared to run the church meeting badly, to subject it to clerical manipulation, or even to dispense with it, so as to achieve theocracy without democracy. This syndrome was observable before restorationism appeared; restorationism attracts some Baptists because it seems to realise what they have been looking for. But, then or now, it is not a good development when church leaders cloak directives or demands to the church meeting in terms of what 'the Lord has given us to bring to you', the hearers' choice is to submit or be seen to resist God. It

is a scandalous tactic and evidence of spiritual ill, but it is used. There are enough gullible and vulnerable people around to give the theocrats a following.

Restorationism interested me because it raised afresh long-standing issues in evangelical and baptistic religion, to which we repeatedly give inadequate answers, condemning our children's children to go over the same debilitating ground. These chronic difficulties come because we are still deeply sectarian and do not learn much from other traditions, Christian or secular. We will not risk pluralism. We believe the Gospel is adequately available to us within the evangelical tradition, and we persevere within these narrow confines, regardless of problems. We have Christianity without the benefit of lateral thinking. It is not surprising that we lose people from our tradition, as they find help for living in faith from sources which receive no welcome, recognition or understanding in our churches.

Jonathan suggests that restorationists speak not of theocracy but of 'God's order' for the Church. If I had seen that clearly, it would have made my original argument less complicated, but not altered my worries. There are difficulties about claiming that 'God's order' of 'apostles and prophets' is a church polity based on 'clear principles laid down in Scripture'. Whether there is a clear New Testament model of 'God's order' for all time, expressed in specific offices, is doubtful. Men (and sexism should be a major issue in any discussion of restorationism) acquire titles like 'apostle' or 'prophet', but is the substance the same as in the New Testament? An ecclesiology which appeals to the New Testament not for a model church order but to find the way of the Gospel in Christ has more clear challenge and hope. It involves us, however, in being more agnostic, experimental and pragmatic over details of church order: we must live reverently with the distance between our orderings and God's will.

Jonathan's comments on the implications of being a sect take us into the conflict of world-views. I am sceptical about the very existence of 'the modern western world-view'. Are there not many world-views in our culture? Does the Bible have a world-view? If we should hear and live the Gospel, might we find that it sifts all world-views, including the so-called biblical one. Jesus is hard to pigeonhole in these terms. Could not the living history of Christianity be told in terms of the teasing conversations of Jesus with all sorts of world-views and philosophies? The Bible does not teach one true world-view but it gives us glimpses of the word of God entering into friendly, critical and creative conversations with many sorts of people. The simple contrast between the biblical and the modern world-view may not be so deeply founded in the Bible itself as is often being argued today. The church should not be docile or acquiescent in the contemporary world. One form of wordly acquiescence it should fight is the practice of focusing issues in simplistic and sloganising polarisations.