

Andrew Fuller and James Deakin, 1803.

JAMES DEAKIN was the first deacon of the first Baptist church in Scotland organised on the English model. The Scotch Baptists, organised about 1767 by M'Lean, all formed one connexion, with unpaid Elders; without an Elder to administer, the Lord's Supper was not observed. In Glasgow the Elder was James Watt, a doctor, whose work was wide and effective. In 1801 there was a separation, and a second church was formed, when John Taylor, Elder of the new Pen church in Paisley, ordained as pastor a graduate of the university, James Lister, with Deakin as deacon. Andrew Fuller approved the articles of faith and order, but when he came to Glasgow next year for the B.M.S., found that he was not welcome to preach under their auspices unless he approved all their proceedings—which he declined to do, as not a candidate for their pulpit.

In Liverpool the original church of the seventeenth century had on the death of Samuel Medley in 1799 given birth to three new groups. One of these called Peter Aitken, of Accrington, and on his death in 1801 turned its attention to Lister, who settled in 1803; in a long pastorate he saw successive chapels on Lime Street and Myrtle Street.

Haldane's society for the propagation of the gospel had sent out David MacVicar, who became Baptist, and built up a congregation at Bellanoch, near the Crinan Canal.

Fuller's letters refer to these events.

KETTERING,

April 5th, 1803.

DEAR BROTHER DEAKIN,

Your letter arriving just after our Church Meeting, I have not been able to lay it before the church, and as I am setting off a 3 weeks' journey to-morrow morning I shall not be able to obtain an answer from them for some time. Add to this, as they are utterly unacquainted with the removal of Mr. Lister, I think your brethren had better in this case accept of my answer instead of theirs. I will read the letter to them.

It grieves me that your connexion with us should occasion a separation with any who are the friends of Christ, especially as our distance is too great to be able to make you amends. If you think it desirable to be connected with your former brethren

and to drop your connexion with us, we should still esteem you and never refuse you our pulpit or Table, or rather the Table of the Lord. Do that which you think is right and most for your good.

Respecting Mr. L[ister]'s removal, he wrote me some months ago informing me of the separation of the members and of his despairing to stop at Glasgow. He also spoke of being under some previous engagement some time to visit Liverpool. I understood this to be an engagement prior to his being your pastor, but am not certain. I answered his letter by expressing my concern at what had taken place, and at his determination to leave his post, telling him that if he came into England he would find troubles in all places, and such perhaps as he had not been used to—that the people at Liverpool, I apprehended, were not of his sentiments—that they already had a minister (a Mr. Hassel), and it would be dishonourable for him to visit them, to unsettle them—that if he *must* leave Glasgow and come to England I should think his services would be more suited to Newcastle, where I knew there was a church, and a Mr. Fyshwick, who wished for a minister who should be able to take the charge of instructing four young men, not as missionaries, but as ministers for that dark part of the kingdom.

Such I well remember was the substance of my answer to him; but I never wrote to Mr. Fyshwick or any other person about him. I did nothing to persuade him to leave, but the contrary. I question whether all you have heard of his being invited to Liverpool and Newcastle were any more than my writing to him as above, which he might repeat to some amongst you. I cannot be certain, but I doubt whether he received any invitation for either of those places. Or if he did that it was after he had declared his determination to remove. We are not connected with the people he has gone to at Liverpool; they have separated on account of doctrine from the church in that place with which we are in connexion.

We always reckon it dishonourable for a church to tempt the pastor of another to remove where there is not just cause, as you know, and where such things are done should refuse giving him a *letter of recommendation*, which is ordinarily expected between churches in communion where a removal is favourable, both on the part of the pastor and people.

I cannot take upon me to judge, and I am persuaded our church would say the same, between Mr. Lister and you. There are cases in which removals are lawful. Mr. Carey was the beloved pastor of the church at Leicester and his loss was deeply felt; yet they did not dissuade him, but submitted to it as to the Will of God. I was thinking when I read your

letter, they might have said: "Surely Christ does not approve of pulling down one church to build up another!" Yet I cannot say that Mr. L[ister]'s case was similar to that of Mr. Carey. I wish much that Mr. Lister had stood his ground. I hope he may yet do *well* for Christ somewhere, but that had been doing *better*. Yet seeing he is removed, if I can do him good, or any other people by recommending him, I shall think I am serving the interest of Christ. You will present my brotherly love to the church, and to Bro. Begg, and to Mrs. Deakin, and all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Grace be with you!

Your affectionate brother,

A. FULLER.

P.S.—I am told your old friend Mr. Edmonds, of Bond Street, is become an Arminian; I mean in the esteem of a part of his church; that they have on this account separated and taken the New Jerusalem Chapel. I am going to Birmingham the 18th inst.

Query: Would it not have been better if I had preached for you when at Glasgow—and if you had approved of me, invited me to the Table? If not there had been nothing the matter. Is it not strange that I could be admitted without any confession, or professed union into Mr. Ewing's pulpit, but where I was *rearer* of a sentiment, there I could not? Had I gone amongst you in that way, without any formal union and merely as a stranger of whom you hoped well, perhaps the brethren at Paisley and others at Glasgow would not have separated. But I may be mistaken in them. I am grieved to have been the occasion of division among you.

KETTERING,

February 25th, 1804.

MY DEAR BRETHREN,

I heard with concern of the dismissal of Brother Begg [of Edinburgh], and of another separation of members with him; but knew not the cause. I do not know how it is, but there is something about the Baptists in your country that seems to tend to *divide* and *scatter*, on almost every difference that occurs. Thereby their enemies are furnished with reproach, and even good people of other denominations are prejudiced against their baptism. It is remarkable that in all the primitive churches, though we read of many disorders and some great errors, yet there is no account that I recollect of a single separation unless it were of individuals for some pernicious doctrine or wicked practice. I mean no reflection on any of you who are left, nor

indeed on any in particular; but on the general practice (for such it is become), of dividing on almost every difference. In order to enjoy and walk in Christian fellowship, it is not enough to be united as Baptists, nor yet in the mere *theory* of Christian doctrines; you must love each other for Christ's sake; and bear and forbear in innumerable instances, without thinking of parting any more than man and wife. I have been now nearly 22 years pastor of the Church at K—— and though we have excluded many for misconduct, there has not been a single separation, on account of such things as divide you. No member with us thinks of separating. If one or more think different in a case of discipline, or the like, from the majority of the Church, they are heard patiently and candidly, and frequently by conversing we come to be of one mind; but if not, the lesser number submits to the greater, and they agree to forbear with each other. Thus we think we fulfil the Divine direction of "*submitting* one to another in the fear of God." If every one will have his own will and way, there is an end to Christian fellowship. Bear with me my dear brethren while I thus write: all is for love to you.

With respect to your question about administering the Lord's Supper as *disciples of Jesus*, I should not be able, I own, to prove it sinful. But as the administration of it by an elder is the general practice and cannot be wrong, that is to be preferred. To do otherwise would not only draw upon you many reflections from other Christians, but might tend to divide you among yourselves: If, therefore, there be a person which the Church thinks suitable, though perhaps not "eminently so," I should say, let him be your elder. And with respect to his ordination, if there were any Minister connected with you within reach, it would be lovely and proper to invite him on the occasion; but if not, I do not think a church should omit it on that account. Every church, I conceive, is competent to appoint and ordain its own officers. Have a meeting of fasting and prayer—and if you had presbyters or elders, he should be ordained by the laying on of their hands—but as you have not, let the members of the Church lay hands on him, while one of their most aged brethren prays over and lays his hands upon him. In some such manner I suppose Mr. Barclay, of Kilwinning (the person perhaps to whom you allude) has lately been ordained over 12 members.

I would add, however, that if I were the Elder so ordained amongst you, conscious to myself that I was not "eminently" suited to the office and fearing lest I should be at any future time a hindrance to the gospel, I would say to the Church to this effect: "I am not insensible, my brethren, of the good

opinion which your choice of me implies; and I am willing so long as no one more suitable can be found, to do you all the good I can; but as I do not consider myself as eminently qualified for preaching the gospel, should you hereafter be able to find another to whom God has given greater gifts, only treat me in a respectful and brotherly manner on the occasion, and I trust I shall cheerfully give place to him, for the sake of promoting the cause of Christ and your good."

In such a case an Elder who should have conducted himself worthily need not be deposed from his office, but a colleague admitted. Such an Elder, if the Lord bless him, may grow in gifts and there may be no occasion for which I have mentioned; but yet were I in his place I would make such a proposal. His humility, if it be genuine, will not sink but raise him in the esteem of his brethren.

I shall think of Mr. M'Viccars, and if I can do him any good, I will. My health is comfortably restored. I lately saw a member of the Church at Liverpool, where Mr. Lister preaches, and enquired into the measures which they took to obtain him. He said that their late Minister, who died with them and who was acquainted with Mr. Lister (his name I think was Aikman), strongly recommended Mr. L. to be his successor—that they wrote Mr. L. (I think he said) *before* he was chosen your pastor, that he then declined, that they never applied to him after, nor he to them, till your connection was dissolved, when he informed them he should comply with their former request so far as to pay them a visit. This, so near as I can remember, was his statement. He assured me that they had acted in that business with the strictest honour.

With a tender concern for your best interests,

I am, My dear Brethren,

Affectionately yours,

A. FULLER.

P.S.—I would not have a *public* ordination, but merely a meeting of the church; tho if a few individuals who love you were admitted as spectators, it would do no harm.

KETTERING,

April 24th, 1804.

MY DEAR BRETHREN,

I feel much for Brother D[eakin]'s scruples and for you on their account. His tenderness of conscience endears him to me and I hope will do the same to you, though at present you may feel the inconvenience. A man who possesses and acts on such principles is worthy of the highest esteem even though in some things he should be mistaken.

Let me entreat both him and you to consider whether, in requiring *express* authority from Scripture for every particular relating to the formation and organisation of Christian churches, you do not require what God has not been pleased to give us; and whether many things of this kind be *divine institutions in the same sense as the Jewish ceremonial was, and as Baptism and the Supper still are?* If they be, might we not have expected to find them somewhere instituted and enjoined as they are? Should we not have had a *pattern* like that of Moses for making the Tabernacle? But all that we have on these subjects is incidentally introduced in the Acts and the epistles. This, indeed, is sufficient to mark the outlines or general principles of all our proceedings, but that seems to be nearly all. A great deal is left to be filled in by reference and analogy, which is not the use in positive institutions. The principles upon which the apostles proceeded in forming and organising Christian churches appear to me, not those by which Moses built the Tabernacle or Solomon the Temple, in which every minutia was prescribed and no room left for discretion, but rather those by which the seventy elders were chosen. They appear all along to have acted from *the nature and fitness of things*. They did not choose deacons till they felt the want of them, Acts vi., and enforced the measure not by saying these offices are a part of the model which we received from Christ, but: "It is not *reason* that we should leave the word of God and serve tables." They were inspired, I allow, in all their measures, but it was not with that kind of inspiration which expressly revealed that thus and thus they should act, but that which furnished them with *holy wisdom* to judge of the fitness of things as they occurred. Now in such a system of things far less regard is paid to modes and forms than in cases of positive institutions. The general character of the O.T. church is that of an army going forth to battle. The former had to go through a vast variety of forms and punctilious observances, all tending to impress the principle of implicit obedience to the word of command, yet are not required to be so attentive to the mechanical as to the mental; not so much to a minute attention to forms as to the *spirit and design* of them. If Christ has clearly revealed His will in any case, or if apostolic example will clearly bear us out, we are safe to follow it; but where it is not so we must be contented with *general principles*.

With respect to the case in hand, I would submit to your consideration and that of Brother D[eakin] the following things:—

1. A church certainly has power to *judge* those that are within itself. 1 Cor. v. 12. But the power of deposing would

seem to imply that of appointing. I believe they have never been known to be separated in practice. In all those societies or churches where the people do not invest, they are now at liberty, I believe, to judge.

2. The concern which the apostles and elders had in ordination might be, not on account of their presence and the imposition of their hands, being necessary to its *validity*, but merely to direct the churches, which were then in an infant state, *that they might do everything in a proper way*. If a number of churches were formed in Hindostan, some one or more of the missionaries would certainly be present in setting them in order and ordaining elders over them, because it would not only be lonely, but they would not be able to conduct it properly without them. But it would not follow that their presence and assistance rendered the whole *valid*. If they were sufficiently acquainted with Christianity to do all with propriety and it were inconvenient for the missionaries to attend, though it would be a matter of regret on both sides, yet the validity of it would not be thereby affected. The ordinations of which mention is made in the N.T. and in which apostles, or other persons deputed by them were concerned, have every appearance of their presence being necessary for *direction* rather than for *validity*. Paul and Barnabas ordained elders over the churches which had been raised by their preaching, Acts xiv. 23. Timothy was left at Ephesus (1 Tim. i. 3) for what? To do that which if done without him would not have been valid; or that which would not have otherwise been done right? He was left there to "charge some that they preached no other doctrine," but if the Ephesian teachers had been of themselves attached to the truth, we cannot doubt but that Timothy would have been well pleased to be excused. Titus was left in Crete to "*set in order* things which were wanting, and to ordain elders" (Titus i. 5). Wherefore? Surely not because their being *in order* of their own accord would have been invalid! The reason of Timothy and Titus being employed in ordaining elders was to prevent improper characters intruding themselves upon the churches. Hence the qualifications of both bishops and deacons are laid down (1 Tim. iii) and a charge given to "lay hands suddenly on no man, so as to be partaken of other men's sins," i.e. not to concur in the ordination of any man of whose character there had not been a sufficient trial. This *reason* still exists to prove the general propriety of the elders of other churches uniting in an ordination. But this is a very different thing from its being necessary to its *validity*. If the person ordained be not only well known in his own church, but is ordained *with the hearty concurrence of the elder or elders* of other churches, and

who would have cheerfully been there if it had been within their reach, he has everything, I conceive, that ought to satisfy him.

3. If a church have no power to invest with office [or so much] as to judge without the concurrence of the elders of other churches, our presbyterian brethren are ri[ght so far as] I see, in objecting to congregational church go[vernment], and we are wrong in maintaining it.

4. If a church be not competent to appoint [its own] officers, it will be difficult if not impossible to say who [is competent;] Apostles and Evangelists we have none: And as to the presbytery or elders, it would be very difficult to prove them to be the elders of *other churches*. Paul, we know, was one of them (compare 1 Tim. v. 14 with 2 Tim. i.). The rest might be the elders of the church of which Ti[mothy was] a member. I think the spirit of the apostolic prac[tice was for] the Elders of sister churches to be present and ap[prove the] ordinations; and it is brotherly, and useful in m[any cases,] but I am not able to prove it to be literally lai[d down in the] New Testament.

5. The passage you refer to (Acts xiii. 1-3) proves [that if] the laying on of hands was not confined to the [presbytery,] it is ascribed to the same persons as "fasted and[prayed," and] was done by them. Or if it were admitted [that the] church laid hands on Paul and Barnabas *by their elders*; yet as they would do it in behalf of the whole, it was properly a church-act.

6. Supposing the laying on of hands by the elder or elders of other churches to be necessary, it is so only to express their concurrence. The hand is only the sign of the heart. Now, Brother D[eakin] has the thing signified though not the sign. If he esteem me as a brother and an elder, he knows he had my hearty concurrence. I would not reason thus in positive institutions, but in cases like this I conceive it to be just. If the *spirit* or *design* of things be preserved, all is right. Where Christians were together they saluted with a holy kiss, but when at a distance they saluted by letter. (2 Cor. xiii.)

My Christian love to Brother D[eakin] and to you all.

I am, Your affectionate brother,

A. FULLER.

[Part of this letter has been carefully cut out, presumably for the sake of an autograph on the back: the words in square brackets are mere conjectural restorations.]