

- shared Mr Spurgeon's apprehensions' (J. W. Grant, *Free Churchmanship in England 1870-1940*, n.d. p.68). W. C. Johnson points out that the actual statistical decline of the London Baptist Association started in 1908, but even by 1925 the membership figure was only 106 lower (*Encounter in London*, 1965, p.46).
- 65 At an Evangelical Alliance meeting Spurgeon spoke on Galatians 1.6-9 and was clearly accusing his opponents of preaching 'another gospel' which, according to Paul, was to be roundly condemned. *The Baptist*, 2 March 1888, p.29.
- 66 Ibid, p.2.
- 67 Thomas D. Landels, *William Landels D.D. A Memoir*, 1900.

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## SPURGEON'S OPPONENTS

### IN THE DOWNGRADE CONTROVERSY

The dramatic finale of the Downgrade Controversy is the picture that most readily comes to mind when one's thoughts are drawn to that episode in Baptist history: the floor of the City Temple crowded with Baptist Union delegates, the gallery packed with visitors, some of the most distinguished names in Nonconformity among them; all awaiting a debate that promised to reduce the denominational organisation to shreds. As three o'clock approached, the members of the Baptist Union Council filed in, hardly leaving time for an excited murmur to spread through the ranks of assembled reporters before the meeting was called to order. According to the prior arrangement it was Charles Williams who stood up to propose the motion. It only required his announcement that J. A. Spurgeon would be the seconder for the momentous news to be conveyed to all corners of the building: a compromise had been agreed at the last moment and the unity of the Baptist Union was to be preserved. The response was loud and prolonged applause.(1)

Ever since that time perception of the controversy as a whole has been built up around this picture, summarised as the successful foiling of a bid by C. H. Spurgeon to divide the Baptist Union. But working backwards from the end to the beginning is suspect methodologically, and for this reason it is intended that the present article should concentrate on the first two phases of the controversy. For it is possible to divide it into three parts: from August to November 1887, when Spurgeon's 'Downgrade' articles appeared in *The Sword and the Trowel*, sparking it off; from November 1887 to February 1888, when Spurgeon's resignation from the Baptist Union altered its emphasis and increased its intensity and complexity; and finally February to April 1888, when attention was centred on confrontation and eventual compromise over the formulation of doctrinal declarations. In this discussion of each of the first two phases there is a central point. For

the first it is the importance of the introduction of Anglican-Free Church rivalry in breaking down the reluctance of many Nonconformists to engage Spurgeon in controversy; while in the second phase attention will be drawn to the very different viewpoints existing among those who shared an overall dissatisfaction with Spurgeon's activities: the unity of the City Temple was a comparatively late development.

The state of relations between Spurgeon and the Baptist Union out of which the Downgrade Controversy emerged dated back to the Union's meetings in Leicester in the autumn of 1883; a number of incidents took place there which nearly led to Spurgeon's resignation from the Union. This outcome was avoided, but the price was an unstable truce according to which Spurgeon was 'a seceder from the talk but not from the work'(2); while he ceased to attend the debating meetings of the Union, he continued to support its practical activities. Conciliating Spurgeon was a major preoccupation of denominational leaders during the ensuing years: on 17th January 1886 Charles Williams, at that time president of the Union, wrote to James Culross, principal of Bristol Baptist College, saying that it would help Samuel Harris Booth, the secretary, and himself in their efforts to reconcile Spurgeon if Culross would stand as vice-president.(3) It is likely that the same reasons governed the selection of topics for papers read at the Baptist Union meetings, for there was a notable absence of controversial topics between 1883 and 1889.(4) In this connection it is interesting to note that during the controversy a writer in *The Christian World* said that Spurgeon's presence in the Baptist Union had curbed freedom of speech there for many years.(5)

So when Spurgeon issued another of his occasional protests against the liberal trend in contemporary theology in the form of an article in *The Sword and the Trowel* entitled 'Another Word concerning the Down-Grade',(6) the response of Baptist leaders followed a pattern that had already had time to establish itself. They kept quiet, taking care not to introduce any element that might exacerbate the situation, and hoping that Spurgeon would once more calm down; in addition, they were ready to do their best to reassure Spurgeon about any specific grievances he might refer to them privately. An analysis of the press coverage of the early months of the controversy will show the manner in which this policy was foiled.

First of all, it is important to note that the press debate developed only gradually and along a few specific lines. The number of pages it takes up in the comprehensive collection of cuttings in the 'Spurgeon Scrapbooks' is a good indicator: the figure for August is only ten, whereas it was sixty in September, sixty-five in October and about a hundred in November in the wake of Spurgeon's resignation from the Baptist Union.(7) The negative reactions can be assigned to two main categories, those arguing that Spurgeon had greatly exaggerated the scale of the problem, and those from the liberal wing of Nonconformity, accepting that Spurgeon was substantially correct but arguing that the new theology was superior to the old.

Both of these were, however, sometimes combined with a third category, the dismissive and offensive. The most offensive line taken

by a few ignorant critics was a patronising attitude which Spurgeon termed 'that contemptuous pity which is the quintessence of hate'; (8) such people held that Spurgeon's defence of what they considered an archaic theology must mean that he was something of a simpleton. (9) Another minority took exception to Spurgeon's assuming a 'moral and religious dictatorship of the churches': 'What is very questionable, exceedingly doubtful, is the right which Mr. SPURGEON claims and exercises to affix upon other Baptist Ministers and also Baptist Churches his brand of theological heresy and spiritual deficiency'; (10) This did not gain any great currency because it was inaccurate: Spurgeon's views on authority in the Church were not discordant with the Congregational tradition, and he consequently did not seek to impose his theology on anyone. His pleas and suggestions were more influential than those of others because his name counted for more in the country than that of any other Nonconformist minister; this fact may have been inconvenient to his opponents in the Downgrade controversy but it can scarcely in itself be considered blameworthy.

The most plausible and durable of the dismissive responses to Spurgeon's articles were those that set Spurgeon's protest down to the pain he suffered during his frequent attacks of gout, or the malign influence of people in his circle. (11) These had their attractions for those who differed strongly from Spurgeon, for by presenting him as a victim they permitted them to adopt a far harsher attitude to the articles than to Spurgeon himself, at the same time reducing the need to work out a serious reply. The argument about health was one of the few to appear as early as August 1887, and it was also used by prominent men such as James Thew and Henry Leonard. (12)

But these reactions were somewhat sporadic and incoherent, and peripheral to the main development of the debate. More numerous and of much greater importance were those that come into the first category: their claim that Spurgeon was exaggerating influenced the entire course of the controversy.

Two major weaknesses in Spurgeon's articles, the acerbity of his language and the vagueness of his theological references, meant that they lent themselves readily to this kind of treatment. Spurgeon had difficulty in understanding the thought processes involved in arriving at theological positions that differed considerably from his own, and all too easily resorted to the darkening of motives. He did not tone down his language in response to the criticisms: indeed, it was a passage in his fourth article which caused the most bitter opposition:

Yes, we have before us the wretched spectacle of professedly orthodox Christians publicly avowing their union with those who deny the faith, and scarcely concealing their contempt for those who cannot be guilty of such gross disloyalty to Christ. To be very plain, we are unable to call these things Christian Unions, they begin to look like Confederacies in Evil. (13)

The accusation of vagueness was closely linked with that of overstatement - the two faults were bonded together in the opening paragraph of the first article:

A new religion has been initiated, which is no more Christianity than chalk is cheese; and this religion, being destitute of moral honesty, palms itself off as the old faith with slight improvements, and on this plea usurps pulpits which were erected for gospel preaching. The Atonement is scouted, the inspiration of Scripture is derided, the Holy Spirit is degraded into an influence, the punishment of sin is turned into fiction, and the resurrection into a myth, and yet these enemies of our faith expect us to call them brethren, and maintain a confederacy with them! (14)

Spurgeon confined the theological element in his articles to brief lists, such as this one, of the areas of departure from orthodoxy. The more radical of these were outlined clearly enough, but they were interspersed confusingly with more opaque references to the commoner deviations from Spurgeon's basis of communion. His later lists were a little more explicit than the one cited above, (15) but at no point did he expand them into even succinct theological discussions.

The greatest significance of these criticisms of Spurgeon's manner lay in the support they offered to the main criticism of his matter. The verdict of all three critical editorials that appeared in Nonconformist newspapers during August was the same: 'too gloomy'. (16) Among few groups has optimism been more *de rigueur* than among late nineteenth-century Nonconformists. Expounding the optimistic creed later on in the controversy, Joseph Parker, the famous minister of the City Temple, declared that talk of Downgrade showed unbelief in God's providence, and that to believe that the age was in decline was to be an atheist. (17) Measured up against this standard, the introduction of Spurgeon's first article alone sufficed to mark him out as deeply heretical, (18) and what followed contained nothing calculated to counter this affront to the representatives of mainstream Nonconformity -- for William Robertson Nicoll of *The British Weekly* and Hugh Price Hughes of *The Methodist Times* were two of the most influential journalists and leaders of political Nonconformity, and *The Freeman* was the leading Baptist newspaper.

But the acerbity, vagueness and pessimism of Spurgeon's first article did not together succeed in provoking a breach of the silence in which previous protests had been engulfed. (19) A crucial fourth ingredient was required and supplied, namely Anglican-Nonconformist rivalry, before reluctant critics could be persuaded to take up the gauntlet. This factor has never been accorded the importance to which it is entitled in the history of the Downgrade controversy. In his first Downgrade article Spurgeon provided the champions of the Church of England with a rare opportunity, of which they did not hesitate to make the fullest use. A lament on the condition of Nonconformity would in itself have been a sufficient occasion for some propaganda, coming as it did from Spurgeon, who was known and respected as no other Nonconformist, but Spurgeon included a paragraph which gave them a very substantial and gratifying basis for operations:

Let us not hide from ourselves the fact that the Episcopal Church is awake, and is full of zeal and force. Dissenting as we do most intensely from her Ritualism, and especially abhorring

her establishment by the State, we cannot but perceive that she grows, and grows, among other reasons, because spiritual life is waning among certain Dissenters. (20)

The first major Anglican propaganda article was in *The Church Times* of 12th August. (21) Others joined in, with varying blends of sympathetic understanding, dispassionate analysis, and plain gloating. (22) What was a rather incidental point in the context of the article was rapidly promoted in the Anglican imagination to emerge as its main theme:

When, therefore, in the columns of the *Sword and Trowel*, he recently published an article, which we reprinted in *Church Bells*, upon the growing strength and spirituality of the Church of England and the declension of the Dissenting bodies, it was felt that Nonconformity had sustained a blow that it would be difficult for it to ignore. (23)

There is ample evidence to show that the Anglican campaign was carried from the press into the country on no small scale. Two instances chosen from among many must suffice.

I am sorry to tell you that the High Church party here, who are strongly opposed to us, are making capital out of Mr Spurgeon's outrageous charges. In the parish magazine here the rector is publishing tit-bits from the Down Grade articles, much to the delight of the Church folks and the discomfiture of some of our own people... Mr Spurgeon is helping them and weakening us. We have enough to contend with as a rule; it is somewhat bitter and humiliating to see Mr Spurgeon unconsciously working for our opponents. (24)

Already, and especially in rural parts, we are suffering severely. But a few days ago, e.g., in this very district, a half-dozen pastors were doomed to the stab of an arrogant cleric, who used for his purpose Mr Spurgeon's sword, which, I need not say, in such hands proved a very 'cutting' weapon, and, though this happened in the presence of a mixed assembly of Churchmen and Nonconformists, we had no alternative but to submit in silence to the cruel thrust. (25)

The accusations of gloominess levelled at Spurgeon in *The Methodist Times* and *The Freeman* were both explicitly issued in response to this Anglican campaign. Of the three Nonconformist journals referred to above only *The British Weekly* responded to Spurgeon directly, and even this was briefly in an article on an allied subject. The author of *The Freeman's* later summary of the controversy underlined the importance of the Church of England's intervention in sparking off the controversy and influencing the way the lines of battle were drawn.

These articles were eagerly seized upon by the enemies of Nonconformists and their pungent statements freely used by the organs of the Church of England and the irreligious press. Bishops quoted them in their charges and the clergy of the Establishment in their sermons as revealing a decadence of

Dissent. With our ministers in every part of the land there was anxiety, chiefly among those who had for some time past felt the need of something being done to check a certain prevalent looseness in doctrinal statement, who, however, greatly regretted the form the attack was taking, not so much, perhaps, at the articles themselves as at the use which was being made of them by the enemies of Evangelical religion. (26)

This introduces a second crucial consequence of the Anglican intervention, the alienation of men who in varying degrees shared Spurgeon's concern over contemporary theological and spiritual trends but who attached a higher priority to defending Nonconformity against the Church of England. William Lockhart, a prominent member of the Baptist Union Council and a notable participant in the controversy, was among those thus affected. On 26th August he wrote Spurgeon a letter offering whole-hearted support, (27) but three months later a further letter explained a radical change in his outlook:

In my mind your statements became too sweeping and were as far as I knew not warranted by facts... For, explain as you will the last two articles (October and November) they are everywhere taken as charging Baptists generally with widespread unsoundness of doctrine... Churchmen and unattached Christians of all sorts stop me in the street and ask me if I am going to remain in this evil confederacy. (28)

In fact there are no grounds for considering the language of the later articles any more sweeping than that of the first, which he had approved; but Lockhart only became sensitive to it when he was made aware of the way it was being exploited, notably in the Church of England. In December and February he went on to lead the most uncompromising attacks on Spurgeon in the Council.

The entry upon the scene of the Church of England profoundly affected two Nonconformist groupings. Those who would have chosen silence as the best way to avoid a debate within Nonconformity highlighting its internal tensions and risking their exacerbation - which was what Spurgeon was after - were stirred into voice by the raising of a different question, namely the relative susceptibility to theological and spiritual decay of the Established and Free Churches. Others, nearer to Spurgeon theologically, would have been prepared to brave the consequences of an internal debate on their basis of communion, but believed that this must be put to one side and ranks closed to face the common enemy. This factor was of crucial importance in giving Spurgeon the wide-scale debate he had been looking for, but the price for him was high: he had become, to a considerable extent through his own doing, prime witness to the one party and principal traitor to the other in an argument in which he had no interest.

It was this desire to show that Spurgeon's assessment of the condition of Nonconformity was excessively gloomy that was responsible for making the *number* of those who had ceased to be evangelical such a prominent issue in the first months of the Downgrade controversy. (29) Guinness Rogers put it well when he said that it was not a question of theology but of arithmetic. He and others who took

this line did not deny that there were theological limits to fellowship in the Baptist and Congregational Unions, excluding those who denied the fundamentals of the faith, nor that in a few cases these limits were exceeded. But they considered that the numbers transgressing the limits were far too small to justify Spurgeon's action in exposing entire denominations to Anglican derision.(30) Like Spurgeon, but for different reasons, they left the important prior question of the definition of evangelicalism behind them virtually undiscussed; but then they parted company with him, convinced that the matter of the scale of the heresy must be resolved before considering what to do with whatever amount of it there turned out to be. So their discussion centred on numbers and evidence, as if the principal difference between the sides was a matter of facts and statistics. If they had paid more attention to the definition of evangelicalism it would have become apparent that the real gulf that separated them from Spurgeon was over the interpretation of the facts rather than the facts themselves: there were very different views on what was and what was not acceptable.

The second main category to which the early responses to Spurgeon's protest can be assigned was the preserve of the liberal wing of Nonconformity. Considering the things Spurgeon condemned more praiseworthy than otherwise, its representatives readily admitted that such views were held, but opposed Spurgeon by denying that this was a bad thing. Its manifesto did not appear until Spurgeon's second article had been published in the September issue of *The Sword and Trowel*; fittingly, it was *The Christian World*, for twenty years the focal point of liberal Nonconformity, that led the way:

We fully admit Mr SPURGEON's right to be taken quite seriously when he enters the arena in defence of an old - and, as we venture to believe, a discredited - theology, and we have not the least desire, by explaining away his words, to avoid disputing the ground with him.

Broadly stated, Mr SPURGEON's charge against the modern ministry of Dissent - and especially of Independency - is twofold; first, that it preaches an essentially different set of doctrines from those he himself holds, and then that it palms them off as 'the old faith'. An analysis of many a modern sermon would, we fear, show a good deal of trimming, and a balancing of opposite opinions in a way that is confusing and unsatisfactory to the hearer. It is time this should cease. We are now at the parting of the ways, and the younger ministers especially must decide whether or not they will embrace and undisguisedly proclaim that 'modern thought' which in Mr SPURGEON's eyes is a 'deadly cobra', while in ours it is the glory of the century. It discards many of the doctrines dear to Mr SPURGEON and his school, not only as untrue and unscriptural, but as in the strictest sense immoral; for it cannot recognise the moral possibility of imputing either guilt or goodness, or the injustice of inflicting everlasting punishment for temporary sin. It is not so irrational as to pin its faith to verbal inspiration, or so idolatrous as to make its acceptance of a true Trinity of divine manifestation cover polytheism.(31)

Correspondents followed the editorial lead; of the several Baptists among them, James Thew of Leicester, a member of the Baptist Union Council, (32) was the boldest:

Assuming his right to make these charges, divesting them of the insulting terms in which they are made, why shall we hesitate to say in the main they are true? Some brethren have amiably suggested that the difference is only in statement. It is nothing of the kind! It is - on the points raised - a radical difference of opinion. Mr Spurgeon mentions the Fall, Atonement, Inspiration, and the future. I 'scout' none of them, but I do no more hold them as Mr Spurgeon does than I expect him to understand how it is that I do not. I *hope* I love the Holy Book, but I do not read it as Mr Spurgeon reads it. The God of Mr Spurgeon's theology is not my God. There is no name to me like the name of Jesus; it was among the first on my lips - may it be the last; but Mr Spurgeon's doctrines concerning Jesus, alas! come nigh to robbing me of Him altogether. (33)

Even stronger statements of this kind were made by liberal Congregationalists. (34)

In September Spurgeon was eager to respond to his Nonconformist critics in the hope that the scope of the discussion would develop, and his article commented on nearly all the points raised during the previous month. In October he attempted to prove his case by citing several assessments of the current theological situation that were similar to his own, and by making the most of *The Christian World's* manifesto and correspondence. (35)

Spurgeon found this type of response the most congenial, for it gave him ammunition to use against the majority of his critics, those claiming that he was exaggerating. But his attempts to wrest the course of the debate back from their hands were not particularly successful. He did little to correct the basic weaknesses of his first article, his slight progress so far as vagueness was concerned not being matched by any at all in the quality of his language. His attempted rebuttal of the charge of pessimism carried little conviction when preceded by the claim that 'instead of being guilty of exaggeration, we should have been justified in the production of a far more terrible picture'. (36) Furthermore, he did not comment at all on the Anglican-Free Church question, although there was no repetition of the language that had given rise to it. His private reply to Lockhart's complaint on the subject was brief and significant: 'I cannot help how people read my papers. I have said only the truth'. (37)

Neglecting the cause, he addressed the symptom, namely the 'arithmetical' question, in his third Downgrade article: 'Let it be noted that we have never made an estimate of their number or strength; we have said "many", and after reading the consoling letters of our optimistic brethren we try to hope that possibly there may not be so many as we feared'. (38) The following month he attacked the theme with greater conviction: 'Whether the Down-Grade evil has operated on few or many is a question which may be waived; it has operated manifestly enough upon some, and they glory in it'. (39)



But this was too late, for this was the article in which Spurgeon announced his resignation from the Baptist Union, and the controversy was precipitated into a new phase.

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By this time Spurgeon had triggered off a debate of sufficient amplitude to buoy up his hopes that it would not subside without substantial results. In particular, he looked to the meetings of the Baptist Union in Sheffield in October for some kind of initiative. To his dismay he discovered that, notwithstanding the Downgrade's domination in private discussion, the denominational leaders, headed by the secretary, Samuel Harris Booth, were refusing to abandon their policy of silence.(40) The few exceptions to the general silence at Sheffield, all unpleasant for Spurgeon, contributed to his decision to resign, but the silence itself was the dominant factor.(41)

Silence is naturally not an easy reaction to document, and it has been left on one side while the vocal responses to Spurgeon's protest have been documented. It became obvious only at Sheffield. Its explanation is the one that has already been advanced in the introduction to this article: it takes two sides to make a controversy, and so by not taking up the challenge denominational leaders hoped that the whole affair would die down. There were different motives at work: for some the prospect of engaging in public controversy with Spurgeon was distressing,(42) but more frequently the overriding concern was that a debate which might endanger the unity of the Baptist Union should be avoided. The idea that the Sheffield meetings were an unsuitable occasion for discussing the matter was certainly also present, but had this been the dominant consideration some announcement would have been made about steps to be taken. It follows from this analysis that Baptist leaders had not realised that the silence of Sheffield would be followed by Spurgeon's resignation.(43)

That was a serious blow to the policy of silence, leading a number of influential Baptists to declare against it, yet it was only one in a series of factors that combined to overwhelm it. This sequence began with the dramatic expansion of the debate that followed the introduction into it of Anglican-Free Church rivalry; this meant that Spurgeon had some justification for finding anomalous the contrast between the public silence on the Downgrade and its dominance of private conversation at Sheffield; and it has been seen that he made this the immediate occasion for his resignation. Even after this, when Dr Booth balloted the members of Council to find out whether they wanted to hold a special meeting to consider Spurgeon's withdrawal or preferred to wait until the regular meeting in January, the majority decided to wait: the resignation was not seen as a threat that required urgent attention.(44) The policy of silence was finally broken by a small group of ex-presidents of the Baptist Union led by Dr Joseph Angus, the Principal of Regent's Park College, who summoned Council under a rule that allowed five members to do this by written request.(45)

The Baptist Union Council was composed of a hundred members. Of these eight or ten can be considered to be supporters of

Spurgeon.(46) Among the remainder it is possible to discern three approaches to the situation brought about by Spurgeon's resignation, although it would be too much to speak of different parties. Firstly, there was what may be called a conciliatory position, disapproving of Spurgeon in much, but convinced that some kind of statement of the Union's evangelicalism was necessary in response. Secondly, some took what could be called an intermediate position, desirous of peace and not convinced that the controversy need continue. Thirdly, there were those who took up a hard-line stance, holding that Spurgeon's charges could not be substantiated, and that in essence their response should be to present Spurgeon with the alternatives of retraction or censure. The central phase of the controversy, between Spurgeon's resignation and Council's third 'Downgrade' meeting in February 1888, was mainly the story of the interaction of these three, with Spurgeon thrown onto the defensive.

The ex-presidents of the Baptist Union were the nearest thing to a recognised leadership the denomination had. Dr Angus had the full support of at least six of the twelve members of this group for his conciliatory approach.(47) Angus' proposal for a declaration of faith by Council was not simply a quick reaction to the crisis Spurgeon had brought on, for he had previously believed that some kind of affirmation of the Union's evangelicalism was necessary.(48) He and three others drew up the declarations; these were unanimously approved by a committee made up of the officials and ex-presidents on 12th December, the eve of the Council meeting.(49) But Council, as Charles Williams, one of the ex-presidents supporting Angus, explained, had other ideas:

The proposal of Drs Angus and Underhill was to send a deputation with the declaration of belief which, it was hoped, might satisfy Mr Spurgeon respecting the Evangelical character of the Baptist Union. But the majority of the Council refused to be led by their leaders, and impatiently put on one side this declaration, and sent a deputation empty-handed.(50)

The rank and file did indeed show their independence. Angus presented his declarations and concluded his argument by saying that there was a danger of division throughout the denomination, in societies, associations and in churches. He failed to impress his audience, many of whom were not yet convinced of the seriousness of the situation. The consensus of the meeting was in favour of the second of the three approaches, the feeling being that the problem would prove tractable and peace could be restored without resorting to extraordinary measures. It was thought that the crisis might have been avoided, that it was about misunderstandings rather than substantial issues, and that the thing to do was to restore Spurgeon to the Union, though not by means of a creed. Council members had not seen the declarations in advance and they came as a complete surprise to many. They bore a family resemblance to creeds, which were both unfamiliar and unpopular among nineteenth-century Baptists. This was considered a sufficient reason for postponing a decision about them. Thus circumstances were ideal for Samuel Vincent, the ring-leader of the 'revolt', who was a rather mild and conservative minister from Plymouth. His amendment, which scored a resounding

triumph, appointed three officials and a respected ex-president, who collectively became known as the 'four doctors', as a deputation to go to the south of France to deliberate with Spurgeon on 'how the unity of our denomination in truth and love and good works may be maintained', (51) and thereafter to consult with the ex-presidents on the formulation of resolutions for the next meeting of Council. (52)

The documents prepared for their meeting by the two sides reveal the nature of the gulf between them: for the deputation the threat to the unity of the Baptist Union came from Spurgeon's resignation and charges, and the answer to it was therefore to get him to withdraw them both or to (attempt to) substantiate the latter; while for Spurgeon the threat came from those disloyal to the evangelical faith, and the answer lay in defining that faith in terms which would show such people that they should not be in the Baptist Union. (53) The meeting itself, which took place in London on 13th January 1888, did nothing to bridge the gulf. This outcome was predictable, for John Clifford, the dominant member of the deputation, (54) tended towards the most confrontational approach to the controversy as it developed after Spurgeon's resignation. This was the most complex of the three positions and demands the most detailed examination.

It developed from the more negative reactions to Spurgeon's articles, those holding that the general suspicion of Nonconformity to which his language had largely contributed eclipsed whatever element of truth was embedded in the vague and offensive accusations. The resignation affected this approach in several ways. It focused attention more exclusively on Baptists; it added considerably both to the discrediting of the denomination by outsiders and to the desire to vindicate it; and it led to the introduction of a second line of debate, concerning the rights and wrongs of the resignation itself, which intermingled with the previous debate about Spurgeon's charges and evidence, to the increase of the considerable confusion that already prevailed.

There were two main facets to the response to Spurgeon that was issued under the combined influence of these factors: in the first place there were general denials of the charges; the offensive corollary of this was a challenge to Spurgeon to name the individuals he was attacking. Before the resignation the accent had been on the 'numerical' question; the change to outright denial was feasible because all attention was now on Baptists who, as a body, were theologically more conservative than Congregationalists. But even then it was necessary to take Spurgeon's charges *en masse*, with specific references concentrating on his allusions to the most radical and rare divergences and on his vaguest and most offensive language. (55) Anti-Nonconformist propagandists made the most of the same passages, and those who thought that the exposure of Nonconformity to slander was a more serious matter than any theological problems they believed existed naturally homed in on these expressions, while failing to make the effort required to understand Spurgeon's theological message. It was also in the interests of many of them *not* to have the theological issues spelt out, for fear of their divisiveness; and Spurgeon's lack of clarity, whether or not it was consciously exploited, proved helpful in this respect. It is significant that it is possible to distinguish between

the attitudes of sympathisers and opponents to this fault which both identified: it was the former who drew attention to Spurgeon's lack of theological definition with friendly intent, whereas the latter concentrated on the breadth of suspicion created by his lack of discrimination.

The main problem for the policy of general denial was the radical response to Spurgeon that had emerged in the early stages of the controversy, which agreed with Spurgeon on both the magnitude and prevalence of theological change. Conservative commentators, not least Spurgeon himself, made much of the more warlike statements of *The Christian World* and James Thew. Realising this, the radicals moderated their language: much as they appreciated confronting Spurgeon, the maintenance of unity was paramount. At times this involved manoeuvring of dubious propriety, which showed up in some inconsistency in *The Christian World*. (56)

The trend towards denying Spurgeon's charges reached its peak at the time of the Baptist Union Council's 'vote of censure' against Spurgeon in January 1888, although even then exponents of the more conciliatory approach curbed it somewhat. The 'vote of censure' arose from the Union delegation's report to the ex-presidents of the Union following its meeting with Spurgeon. The ex-presidents considered the first draft of this resolution, prepared by William Landels, (57) too forceful and told him to produce a milder version; this criticised Spurgeon for making charges without producing evidence but did not overtly commit Council to a particular opinion concerning the unrevealed evidence. At the meeting of Council, J. G. Greenhough, the leader of the liberal group, maintained that not one of Spurgeon's charges was true, and regretted that they had not stated this in their resolution. (58)

Both the demand for names and the refusal to comply with it were of complex motivation. One point which is clear from contemporary evidence, if not in subsequent historical accounts, is that the names were not secrets that Spurgeon's opponents wanted to be let in on. In that same meeting of Council in January 1888 Greenhough apparently said he thought he 'knew every man included among the suspected'. (59) Spurgeon had provided a transparent hint in the reference in his October article to Baptist ministers in the correspondence columns of *The Christian World*. Just four had had letters on the Downgrade published: Greenhough himself, Roger Littlehales, Henry Leonard and James Thew - and there was even an unmistakable reference to a phrase from Thew's letter. (60) The very insistency of the demand for names was itself an indication of confidence that Spurgeon did not have any embarrassing surprises in reserve.

The complications begin when it is asked why the defenders of the Baptist Union did not themselves mention a few names and vindicate it from the charges by vindicating the people concerned. It can be assumed that the memorable illustrations of the advantages of martyrdom recently offered by the Ritualist lawsuits in the Church of England and the repercussions of the trial of Robertson Smith in the Free Church of Scotland were familiar to all concerned in the Downgrade Controversy. *The Christian Commonwealth*, in recalling

Nonconformity's own most celebrated instance, the 'Rivulet' controversy of 1856, in which T. T. Lynch had leapt from obscurity to hero status merely by being 'named', wrote: 'One thing is certain, that if names were stated, then such a commotion would be created as never has been witnessed in our own time'.(61) Both the demand for names and its refusal must be understood in the light of this. Another consideration that may be presumed to have weighed with some of Spurgeon's opponents was the fact that many of the more conservative members of the Union would have reacted adversely had too much attention been drawn to some of the ideas that were now to be considered acceptable.

Further complication arises because certain of the arguments about 'naming' were more a part of the debate about Spurgeon's resignation than that about his charges.(62) It started when Spurgeon sought to justify his resignation by arguing that the Baptist Union had no doctrinal basis and was powerless to preserve itself from errors.(63) The reply centred on the constitution's provision for revision of the membership list by Council: 'The constituencies and lists of members may be revised by the Council, and their decision shall be duly notified to the persons concerned, who shall have the right to appeal to the Assembly'.(64)

In his speech at the December meeting of Council Dr Angus recalled two occasions on which that right of revision had been exercised for doctrinal reasons.(65) The right to expel did therefore exist, though without a theological basis to define its use, and a reason for the call for names was to demonstrate this to be the case. J. A. Spurgeon came to his brother's aid with the argument - which he mentioned at the Council in January - that naming names was actionable for libel; but to this also there was a reply - the danger was averted if the reasons for expulsion were withheld.(66) It is hardly necessary to observe that this constitutional provision held out no attractions for Spurgeon, who believed himself to be engaged in a major ideological struggle.

The demand for names put Spurgeon in a difficult position, in which his opponents believed he quite deserved to be: acceding to it promised to bring disastrous consequences, but resisting it exposed him to numerous accusations - of cowardice, having no evidence, failing to follow the procedure laid down by Christ, unjustly slandering a denomination.

Spurgeon's comments on the 'vote of censure' in the February 1888 edition of *The Sword and the Trowel*(67) were as inflammatory as any of his previous contributions to the controversy. When Council reassembled on 21st February, Greenhough said that he might have accepted a declaration two months before, but too many things had since happened; and W. P. Lockhart reacted by moving an amendment censuring Spurgeon for the offending article and demanding that he withdraw the statements before they considered his proposals. But its defeat by 23 votes to 16(68) was the end of the road for the hardline approach, leaving the way finally clear for the consideration of the proposed declarations. This subject was to dominate the final phase of the controversy.

Angus emphasised in presenting his case in Council in February that there was nothing credal about his declarations,(69) but he still did not have an easy time. Richard Glover, a former president of the Union, expressed a fear that Spurgeon would nevertheless use the declaration as a creed, and embarked on a detailed denunciation of these. He moved an amendment to the effect that no profession of loyalty to the gospel was necessary beyond the two ordinances, and that creeds were both harmful and useless. This was a formidable challenge for Angus to face. It was after this that John Clifford proposed the approach around which the entire opposition to Spurgeon was soon to rally: he stressed that the declarations were not binding and expressed the opinion that a few changes would make them satisfactory for all. He agreed with Angus that a declaration proclaiming the Baptist Union's evangelicalism was needed, but wanted it to be sufficiently non-credal and broad in its doctrinal statements to ensure that no member should consider himself excluded by it. Angus and Glover both agreed to withdraw their motions if Clifford could deliver what he promised. He produced a new introduction couched in decisively anti-credal terms,(70) and rewrote the clauses on sin and future punishment. Angus accepted the new introduction but took exception to Clifford's version of the two doctrinal clauses. The objection to Angus' sentence on the fall had been that it excluded evolutionists; the objection to Clifford's was that the fall was left out altogether. Angus protested that the fall was universally believed in. Clifford agreed to a compromise, 'The fallen and sinful state of man'. The main change Clifford proposed for the clause on future punishment was the replacement of 'the Eternal Blessedness of the righteous and the Eternal Punishment of the wicked' by 'final retribution for the wicked'. After a debate in which different ideas were expressed as to what was the majority view on the question, it was agreed that Angus' version be reinstated, but with the integration into the main clause of the footnote observing that interpretations other than the usual one had not been a bar to fellowship. The declarations were then accepted by 35 votes to 5. The minority were supporters of Spurgeon, including James Spurgeon, who considered the changes unacceptable. On the other side Greenhough abstained, unhappy with the clause on future punishment, but the majority was nonetheless impressive.

The conservative weekly *Word and Work* identified the pivotal idea of the meeting, and disliked what it found: 'The ruling desire was compromise. The aim of the majority was, not to find exact words to express a definite orthodox faith, but rather to discover language plastic enough to cover antagonistic beliefs'.(71) But there was little opposition in the entire spectrum that separated this newspaper from *The Christian World*, which had some reservations.(72)

It is apparent, however, that the general satisfaction was associated with considerable ignorance, for late nineteenth-century Baptists were beginners when it came to creeds and doctrinal statements, many getting no further than a superficial distaste for them. Although Spurgeon appreciated the distinction between a basis of union and a mere historical document, concentrating his criticism on the changes Council had made on this point, even he was wide of the mark in supposing that Angus' version had amounted to an authoritative basis.(73) Supporters of the Council declarations too must have been a

little taken aback by some conservative reflections on the declarations published shortly afterwards. F. G. Marchant said that Clifford's introductory statement, to the effect that the doctrinal beliefs of the Union must be determined by those of the churches, meant that if a church became openly Unitarian the Union must admit Unitarians as part of its doctrine.(74) James Douglas pointed out another weakness, that it was a *non sequitur* for Council to disclaim authority to formulate a new theological standard, as it had had the authority to frame the original one.(75) Neither of these objections can be dismissed. Furthermore, there is evidence of haziness concerning the status of the declarations persisting in the highest quarters. S. H. Booth, the secretary of the Union, who might therefore be supposed to have been an authority on the subject, nevertheless asked his president, James Culross, whether the declaration they were to debate in Assembly was to be legislative or merely historical.(76)

The other thing to become apparent after the passing of the Council's declaration was that it had failed to satisfy all the varieties of opinion that existed in the denomination. It did not satisfy Spurgeon, and consequently it could not satisfy his supporters either, whatever their personal view of its merits, for their aim was to obtain a doctrinal basis that would serve as a platform for Spurgeon's eventual return to the Union. J. A. Spurgeon tabled an amended version which combined all the strongest elements of Angus' various efforts with a few additional features, the most significant being the omission of the note to the effect that alternative views on future punishment were no bar to fellowship.(77) After many months of controversy Spurgeon's opponents finally had to face up to the fact that they were not far from a major split in the denomination.

As the *dénouement* of the Union Assembly approached, unity was at last secured among Spurgeon's opponents. Their overriding concern was to make a united stand for the Union in face of the threat presented by J. A. Spurgeon's amendment. There were still differences as to the relative importance of their two other emphases, the vindication of the Union from Spurgeon's charges, and the affirmation of its evangelical character, but these were no longer in competition, and the text of the motion passed at the Union assembly combines the two:

That the Report of the Council, with the exception of Clauses I, and II, and the word 'But' in Clause III, of the Declaration of the Council, be adopted, and that in reference to so much of it as relates to recent discussions respecting the evangelical character of the Union, the Assembly places on record its judgement that there has been sufficient vindication by the Declaration of the Council and otherwise of the evangelical character of the churches of the Union and of their pastors, and that additional tests of membership are unnecessary, inasmuch as the Council and the Assembly have ample power under the Constitution to determine all questions of membership, and therefore can deal with the case of any church or person that may not hold evangelical sentiments.(78)

As well as reflecting the concerns of both the major groupings among

Spurgeon's opponents this motion testified to the precipitancy with which J. A. Spurgeon had settled for the compromise - he had clearly been preoccupied with the alterations in the Council's declaration, for he would not otherwise have seconded the motion in this form.

But the crucial point about it was that it brought the Baptist Union successfully through the crisis without squarely addressing the fundamental question that underlay so much of the confusion and mutual recrimination of the Downgrade Controversy, that of the nature of 'evangelical sentiments'. The consensus that had existed on this earlier in the century had been increasingly stretched as the liberal revolution in theology gathered pace, and so far as a few of the most theologically alert and combative conservatives were concerned it had broken down altogether. Spurgeon, much the most prominent of these, tried to draw attention to this fact, but his message came across too much as from an outside critic rather than an involved reformer, and his standards appeared too strict, and he thus failed to gain the sympathetic co-operation of much concerned conservative opinion within Nonconformity - people who instead tended to form the moderate or conciliatory wing of his opponents. Furthermore, he was met with a wall of silence from those who did not want the development of a broader evangelicalism to be disturbed. He reacted by increasing the forcefulness of his protests, in ways that alienated potential supporters, until he made the breakthrough that led to the wall's disintegration. The key factor in this was the introduction of Anglican-Nonconformist rivalry. But it did not serve Spurgeon's purposes: he discovered that he had provoked a confrontation in which he was cast in the role of traitor and treated accordingly. His resignation helped make this polarisation irreversible and still more acrimonious, the righteous indignation of each side feeding off that of the other. An effort was needed on both sides to halt the vicious spiral. While Spurgeon persuaded his supporters that personalities should be avoided, his own grievances among them, it was John Clifford who on the other side interpreted Joseph Angus' campaign for a declaration of the Baptist Union's evangelicalism in a way that commanded the support of the majority of the Union's governing Council, thus providing them with an alternative to continued condemnation of Spurgeon. The focus was at last brought onto theological themes, but even then the confrontation and final compromise proceeded without the underlying issues concerning the nature of Evangelicalism and the establishment of limits of communion being seriously addressed. A reasoned theological debate never looked like getting under way. In terms of a comparison between potential damage and that actually inflicted on the Baptist Union, the Union had much cause for relief, if not satisfaction; but were marks to be awarded for the content and conduct of the controversy, they would not be very flattering to either side.

#### NOTES

- 1 *Word and Work*, 27th April 1888 (in Spurgeon Scrapbooks, hereafter cited as SS, DG Va 3); *Christian World* (hereafter CW), 24th April 1888 (in SS, DG IVc 145). The Spurgeon Scrapbooks, which belonged to Spurgeon himself, are located in the Heritage Room of Spurgeon's College. The contents of most of these are now being



- transferred to ring-binders, with the MS letters and other documents separated from the newspaper cuttings. These last make up the bulk of the material, and the binders containing the cuttings from the six volumes of the special Downgrade series have been numbered in accordance with the former volumes of the Scrapbooks. Handwriting evidence shows that the compilation was done by Joseph Harrald, and the work was evidently started in 1878, the year in which Harrald became Spurgeon's shorthand secretary (A. Harwood Field, *The Revd Joseph William Harrald*, 1918, 41-3). The absence of earlier cuttings books in the Heritage Room, and the presence of a rather motley collection of earlier cuttings in vol.I suggest at the least that there was a lack of continuity in earlier collecting. J. C. Carlile's claim (*C. H. Spurgeon, an interpretative biography*, 1933, p.121) that Spurgeon began his cuttings books in 1855 may simply be an unwarranted inference from C. H. Spurgeon *Autobiography* (I, pp.303-4, revised edition 1962), which uses a scrapbook Spurgeon's wife compiled before their marriage while vaguely saying 'The habit of preserving newspaper and other records of his career was continued by Spurgeon to the last'.
- 2 Spurgeon to Booth, 30 March or 25 April 1887, quoted by Booth at the Baptist Union Council on 13 December 1887 and reported in CW, 15 December 1887 (in SS, DG IIb 113). Letters of both dates were mentioned, and the passage quoted is not specifically attributed.
  - 3 E. A. Payne, 'The Downgrade controversy: a postscript', BQ 28, 1979, p.151. The letter is in Bristol Baptist College.
  - 4 A list of papers read in previous years was a regular feature of the *Baptist Handbook* during this period, e.g. 1888, p.29. Selection of topics and speakers was the responsibility of the officers (*Baptist Union Minute Book 1887-9*, hereafter MB,, 190), and it is not difficult to see the secretary, Samuel Harris Booth's characteristic caution behind this absence of the controversial. The Minute Book is in Baptist Church House, and I am grateful to the Revd Douglas Sparkes for permission to use it.
  - 5 26 January 1888 (SS, DG IIIa 24). There was one major hiatus in this policy, a controversial sermon by James Thew at the autumn assembly of 1885; but this was under the responsibility of the BMS rather than the BU.
  - 6 *The Sword and The Trowel* (hereafter ST), August 1887, pp.397-400.
  - 7 SS, DG i & ii. The six Downgrade volumes of the SS contain a comprehensive collection of cuttings from over ninety journals.
  - 8 ST, September 1887, p.462.
  - 9 E.g. R. Littlehales in CW, 15 September 1887 (SS, DG Ia 31-2); J. Drew of Margate in *The Freeman*, 17 February 1888 (SS, DG IIIc 111).
  - 10 J. G. Greenhough in CW, 8 September 1887 (SS, DG Ia 17). Greenhough, a Leicester Baptist minister, was a member of Council and the leading representative of the liberal wing of the denomination.
  - 11 An example of the latter is *The Freeman*, 24 February 1888 (SS, DG IIIc 141).
  - 12 'Publicola' in *The Baptist*, 12 August 1887 (SS, DG Ia 1-2); Thew in CW, 22 September 1887 (SS, DG Ia 51); Leonard in CW, 15 September 1887 (SS, DG Ia 32).
  - 13 ST, November 1887, p.558. The reference is to the Congregational

Union as well as the Baptist Union.

- 14 ST, August 1887, p.397.
- 15 E.g. ST, November 1887, p.559.
- 16 *British Weekly* (hereafter BW), 5 August, *Methodist Times* 18 August, *The Freeman* 26 August (SS, DG Ia 2, 9-10).
- 17 Perhaps feeling that this was going a little far, he allowed that there might be 'momentary collapses' - 'Mr Spurgeon and the Baptists', *Christian Commonwealth*, 3 May 1888 (SS, DG Va 26-9)
- 18 'No lover of the gospel can conceal from himself that the days are evil. We are willing to make a large discount from our apprehension on the score of natural timidity, the caution of age, and the weakness produced by pain; but yet our solemn conviction is that things are much worse in many churches than they seem to be, and are rapidly tending downward'. ST, August 1887, p.397.
- 19 His sermon 'Israel and Britain. A note of warning', preached on 7th June 1885 and published in the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 31, 1885, p.313ff., contains a protest if anything stronger than those of Downgrade (n.b. pp.322-3) but drew only one sympathetic reply from a Nonconformist minister. See Robert Ivey Osborne to Spurgeon, MS letter in Heritage Room, Spurgeon's College (MS letters there are at present not indexed).
- 20 ST, August 1887, p.397.
- 21 SS, DG Ia, 5-6.
- 22 E. g. *Record*, 2 September 1887, and *Fireside News*, 16 September 1887 (SS, DG Ia 37-8).
- 23 *Church Bells*, 14 October 1887 (SS, DG Ib 103). Spurgeon's article was reprinted in its issue of 19 August (SS, DG Ia 9).
- 24 George Hill in *The Freeman*, 9 December 1887 (SS, DG IIb 108). The writer was a Leeds Baptist minister.
- 25 In *The Freeman*, 17 February 1888 (SS, DG IIIc 115). The author is described as 'a respected country minister'.
- 26 20 April 1888 (SS, DG IVc 132). *The Freeman* mentions the 'irreligious' as well as the Church of England, although in a subsidiary place. Other papers scarcely mentioned them at all in this context, and it is clear that the Church of England was overall by far the more important consideration.
- 27 MS letter in the Heritage Room, Spurgeon's College.
- 28 Lockhart to Spurgeon, 15 November 1887, MS letter in the Heritage Room, Spurgeon's College.
- 29 In September three journals organised surveys of prominent Nonconformists. Two of these, the *British Weekly* and the *Congregational Review*, phrased their question in a way that made the numerical issue the prime one. BW, 9 September 1887 (SS, DG Ia 20); *Congregational Review*, October 1887, 934.
- 30 Rogers' comments are in his *Present-day Religion and Theology, including a review of the Down Grade Controversy*, 1888, pp.14-16. This is the only contemporary extended treatment of the Downgrade controversy and it is dominated by the Anglican question.
- 31 CW, 1 September 1887 (SS, DG Ia 11).
- 32 E. A. Payne's statement that he was not on Council at this time is incorrect. *The Downgrade Controversy*, 1955 typescript, 24.
- 33 In CW, 22 September 1887 (SS, DG Ia 51).
- 34 E.g. W. F. Adeney, newly appointed tutor at New College, London, in *Congregational Review*, November 1887, 1058-9.
- 35 ST, September 1887, pp.461-5; October 1887, pp.509-15. The

- documents quoted were a July 1887 circular by the secretaries of the Evangelical Alliance; a paper by the President of the Gloucestershire and Herefordshire Association of Baptist Churches, published in that association's June 1887 report; and a paper on 'Scepticism in Ministers' by Dr David Brown, Principal of the Free Church College, Aberdeen, published in *The Christian Age* of 14 September 1887.
- 36 ST, September 1887, pp.461, 463-4.
- 37 19 November 1887, in reply to Lockhart's letter of 15 November; both MSS are in the Heritage Room, Spurgeon's college.
- 38 ST, October 1887, p.510.
- 39 ST, November 1887, p.559.
- 40 T. H. Stockwell in *The Baptist*, 4 November 1887 (SS, DG IIA 8); *Christian Commonwealth*, 13 October 1887 (SS, DG Ib 97; it is to be hoped that this page, currently missing, will be found before the present work is completed). 'Dr Booth, the secretary, was vehement in his desire that the matter should not be introduced at the late meetings of the Union. I had it from his own lips'. W. R. Stevenson in *Derby Daily Telegraph* (in SS, but unfortunately no longer to be found in its former place); the cutting is undated.
- 41 Spurgeon, letter in *The Baptist*, 23 December 1887 (SS, DG IIB 130).
- 42 E.g. William Landels, *The Rev. C. H. Spurgeon and the Baptist Union*, 1888, p.21.
- 43 There are several reasons for this ignorance: (i) the hint in the October edition of *The Sword and the Trowel* was too veiled; (ii) Spurgeon's denial of a report in *The Scotsman* which mentioned his imminent resignation along with some embellishments; (iii) the absence of private consultation and warning, in contrast to 1883.
- 44 BW, 18 November 1887 (SS, DG IIA 31).
- 45 BW, 25 November 1887 (SS, DG IIA 34). The other members of this group were E. B. Underhill, Frederick Trestrail, S. G. Green, J. T. Brown and Charles Williams.
- 46 They never amassed this number of votes, but all were not always present. The six known to me by name are William Cuff, James Dann, David Davies, William Olney, C. B. Sawday and James Spurgeon.
- 47 See note 45. Only two of the others, William Landels and Richard Glover, at any time argued prominently for a tougher line.
- 48 Report of Council meeting in CW, 23 February 1888 (SS, DG IIIc 123).
- 49 *The Freeman*, 16 December 1887 (SS, DG IIB 116); 'Special Meeting of the Council, Tuesday 13th December, 1887', p.2, in MB, p.166.
- 50 Charles Williams in *The Baptist*, 10 February 1888 (SS, DG IIIb 89).
- 51 'Special Meeting of the Council, Tuesday 13th December, 1887', p.5, in MB, p.166.
- 52 This account of the December Council meeting is based on *ibid.*, pp.1-5; CW, 15 December 1887 (SS, DG IIB 113-4; and *The Baptist*, 16 December 1887 (SS, DG IIB 121-2). The deputation consisted of Culross (president), Clifford (vice-president), Booth (secretary) and Alexander McLaren.
- 53 The two documents are to be found in Charles T. Bateman, *John Clifford M.A., B.Sc., LL.B., D.D., Free Church Leader and Preacher*, 1904, pp.145-6; and *Baptist Union of Great Britain and*

- Ireland, *Agenda for adjourned meeting of Council, 2.30 pm, Wed, 18 Jan. 1888*, p.1. A copy is preserved in an as yet unindexed ring-binder in the Heritage Room, Spurgeon's College.
- 54 My reasons for saying this are (i) McLaren was absent from the meeting; (ii) the preparatory correspondence (in 'Council of Baptist Union re withdrawal of Rev. C. H. Spurgeon', MB p.176) shows that Booth, who was by nature a lieutenant and organiser and not a leader, refrained from taking initiatives without consulting the other members of the delegation; (iii) Culross was the possessor of the sort of character which naturally recoils from confrontation; and (iv) Clifford, a combative and skilful debater, was largely responsible for drafting the preliminary document (Charles T. Bateman, *John Clifford...*, p.145).
- 55 An example of this is William Lockhart's letter to Spurgeon, in which he said that he knew of only one Baptist minister who even approached ridiculing the atonement, and of only one recent case of a Baptist minister crossing over to Unitarianism. 15 November 1887, MS letter in the Heritage Room, Spurgeon's College.
- 56 E.g. *Christian World's* comment on the declaration Angus proposed to Council in February 1888: 'It was a specious attempt to minimize or hide what are really serious divergencies, and to make the Christian public believe that there is no substantial difference between the new theology and the old. The dishonesty of this was vigorously denounced by Mr GREENHOUGH and others...', 1 March 1888 (SS, DG IIIc 128). It then said that the declaration passed was as good as anything that could have been formulated, its only reservations being on the future punishment clause. But the theological content of the two versions was very similar, with that passed being if anything more 'dishonest' as it covered an even greater variety of theological opinion.
- 57 The story of the 'vote of censure' was revealed some months later in a letter from David Davies to William Landels, published in *The Freeman*, 26 October 1888 (SS, DG Vb 114). The final text of the resolution has been published in Sir James Marchant, *Dr John Clifford*, 1924, p.160.
- 58 *Daily Telegraph*, 19 January 1888; CW, 19 January 1888; *The Freeman*, 20 January 1888 (SS, DG IIIa, 10, 19, 21).
- 59 *The Freeman*, 20 January 1888 (SS, DG IIIa 19). *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 January 1888 (SS, DG IIIa 8) has the less confident rendering 'most'.
- 60 ST, October 1887, p.513.
- 61 26 January 1888 (SS, DG IIIa 27-8).
- 62 This distinction is important for analysis though both participants and historians have lost it in the confusion of the controversy.
- 63 ST, November 1887, p.560.
- 64 Quoted in G. D. Evans, *The 'Down Grade' Controversy, Rev. C. H. Spurgeon and the Baptist Union*, n.d., p.7. This point was first made in *The Freeman's* article on Spurgeon's resignation, 4 November 1887 (SS, DG Ic 145).
- 65 *The Freeman*, 16 December 1887 (SS, DG IIb 116). Both cases involved ministers who had adopted Unitarian views.
- 66 This discussion is based on *Daily News*, 19 January 1888, and *The Baptist*, 20 January 1888 (SS, DG IIIa 7, 13).
- 67 Pp. 81-3, 91.

- 68 'Minutes of adjourned Meeting of Council... Tuesday, 21st February 1888...', in MB, 194; CW, 23 February 1888, and *The Baptist*, 24 February 1888 (SS, DG IIIc 123-4, 132-3). These three sources are used for the entire account of the meeting.
- 69 The most credal of the clauses of the December and January versions was dropped. The sources for these three versions are, in chronological order: 'Special Meeting of the Council, Tuesday 13th December 1887...', pp.3-4, in MB, 166; *Agenda for adjourned meeting of Council* (18 January 1888); 'Minutes of adjourned Meeting of Council... Tuesday 21st February, 1888...', pp.2-4, in MB, 194.
- 70 The relevant part is: '(I) That the doctrinal beliefs of the Union are, and must be, determined by the doctrinal beliefs of the Churches and Associations of which the Union is composed; (II) That the Council of the Union therefore disclaim altogether any authority to formulate a new and additional standard of theological belief as a bond of union, to which assent shall be required'; 'Minutes of adjourned Meeting of Council... Tuesday 21st February, 1888...', p.5, in MB, 194.
- 71 2 March 1888 (SS, DG IVa 2).
- 72 1 March 1888 (SS, DG IIIc 128). Even the conservative *The Baptist* was supportive - 24 February 1888 (SS, DG IIIc 130).
- 73 Spurgeon to Booth, in *The Baptist* 2 March 1888 (SS, DG IVb 67).
- 74 In *The Baptist*, 23 March 1888 (SS, DG IVb 59-60).
- 75 In a London Baptist Association meeting reported in *The Baptist*, 30 March 1888 (SS, DG IVb 67).
- 76 E. A. Payne, 'The Down Grade Controversy: a postscript', BQ 28, p. 155, using letters from Booth to Culross of 28 March and 14 April 1888.
- 77 It was published in *The Freeman*, 30 March 1888.
- 78 'Minutes of Meetings of Council... Monday, 23rd April 1888, at 2.30 p.m.', p.15, in MB, 202.

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#### BEQUEST

Miss Margaret Killip, for many years a missionary with the BMS, was a genealogist whose interests centred upon the Baptist Churches of Cumbria, Durham and Northumberland. In her will she left her papers to the Society, and they are now deposited in the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford. She also left a most generous gift of £2000, which we acknowledge with great gratitude. It is to be used entirely at the Committee's discretion, but preference will be given to publishing research about Baptists in the north of England.

ROGER HAYDEN