

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

BRETHREN AND BAPTISTS IN SCOTLAND

At the quarterly communion on 1st March 1841 Elizabeth Mathie joined Clerk's Lane Church in Kilmarnock, having left the town's small Baptist Church to do so.¹ Her husband was a weaver,² one of the trades that had made Kilmarnock into an important industrial centre in the latter half of the previous century. The town had grown rapidly under industrialisation, and the Mathies lived in one of the lands (or tenements) on the north side of Kilmarnock into which much of the town's population was crowded. Elizabeth Mathie's social class was characteristic of Scottish dissenters, and of the others who joined Clerk's Lane in 1841. She was one of over 400 individuals from a variety of denominations attracted by the new minister, James Morison, who was preaching a modified Calvinism as part of his evangelistic and pastoral concerns. The day after Elizabeth Mathie joined the church, the Presbytery of Kilmarnock, meeting in Clerk's Lane, suspended Morison from the ministry of his denomination, the United Secession Church, because of his teachings. One of Morison's strongest supporters in the congregation during the troubles of the spring and summer of 1841 was John Stewart, a wealthy Kilmarnock clothier. Stewart had been influential in securing Morison as the church's minister, but he had come in contact with the emerging Brethren movement and in January 1842 he left Clerk's Lane to form a Brethren assembly.³ Some others left with him, among them Elizabeth Mathie, ten months after she had joined Clerk's Lane. Her action was that of a mature adult: she had raised a family and was in her early fifties. Stewart's personal character was spoken highly of on all sides and doubtless this was one of the factors that influenced her, but the dominant reason for her joining the Brethren can probably be seen in the attraction that Morison's Evangelicalism first had for her. Elizabeth Mathie is the first extant example in Scotland of someone with a Baptist background joining the Brethren.

BAPTISTS INTO BRETHREN

Morison represented in Scotland the new type of Evangelicalism that began to make itself felt in the early nineteenth century.⁴ The Brethren, present in Ireland and England from 1830 onwards, had a hand in shaping the new Evangelicalism as it emerged and were themselves a product of it. The turning point for the Brethren presence in Scotland was the revival of 1859-60 which was carried forward by a network of lay revivalists. There were only a very few Open Brethren assemblies prior to 1860, but in the decade after at least thirty assemblies came into existence, and by 1887 one source calculated that there were 184 assemblies. They were formed mainly in those Lowland communities which had known recent social and economic change. Some of them came into existence spontaneously, influenced by the revivalists' emphasis on Bible reading and as they discovered forms that would reflect their faith and practice. A number of the English revival evangelists were Brethren and they too had an influence in bringing the movement to Scotland.

As they began to make their presence felt in Scotland, the Brethren began to attract members from the existing denominations. This was particularly the case with the dissenting churches whose membership was most deeply touched by the activities of the revivalists. Scottish Baptists were particularly receptive to the new currents in Evangelicalism because of their history. This can be seen in the attraction Morison's theology had for them, for Elizabeth Mathie was not alone in being drawn to it.⁵ Revivalism had also affected Baptist growth and formation. Some seven churches, for instance, emerged spontaneously out of the small groups that were

BRETHREN AND BAPTISTS IN SCOTLAND

meeting for Bible study in the wake of the revivals.⁶ Another indication of the changes within Baptist churches was the gradual erasure of the Scotch Baptist system, partly under the impact of the new trends.⁷ But this was not the only way in which Scotch Baptists were affected, for some were also drawn into the Brethren.

The earliest of these movements was in 1860 in Glasgow where the leaders of a group of Scotch Baptists gradually felt their way towards a Brethren type of church. Joined by some others who had also been influenced by the 1859-60 Revival, they conducted Bible readings in the home of one of the members. They began to break bread in their hall in West Campbell Street, which they had used as a base for evangelism, and it became Glasgow's first Open Brethren assembly.⁸ In Helensburgh, where the 1859 Revival had made a deep impression, the introduction of Brethren ideas in the early 1860s caused serious dissension in the Scotch Baptist congregation.⁹ The largest movement from Scotch Baptist type churches into the Brethren, however, happened on Westray in Orkney.¹⁰ An itinerant evangelist, Rice T. Hopkins, held a series of meetings in the Baptist church on Westray in 1867, but when he returned the following year with another evangelist, J. A. Boswell, they taught Brethren ecclesiology in private meetings and discussions with church members. The practice of exhortation by the members had begun to be neglected in the church and the new views proved attractive to many with the result that some two-thirds of the congregation left to form a Brethren assembly.¹¹

Some Scotch Baptist practices anticipated later Brethren ones and clearly this was a point of contact between the two. But those Scotch Baptists who became Brethren had all been deeply influenced by nineteenth-century revivalism and this was probably the more significant factor, for a number of other elements within the Scotch Baptist tradition were as likely to prove inhibitors to Brethren influence. In the 1860s a proportionally greater number of Baptist churches were Scotch Baptist and therefore it is not surprising that it was they who were influenced. In fact Brethren assemblies being formed by former Scotch Baptists fit into a pattern in Scotland of large-scale transference to the Brethren when the Brethren were new to a district. The pattern is remarkably uniform and these defections closely follow the spread of the Brethren throughout Scotland.

The Brethren emerged spontaneously in the north-east of Scotland in 1871-3 out of the work of Donald Ross's Northern Evangelistic Society and the new movement drew into it a number of Baptists. At Banchory on Deeside the entire membership of the small Baptist Church went over to the Brethren and the assembly used the former Baptist chapel for its services. The Baptist churches at Inverurie and Kemnay were almost extinguished in 1871 when a number of the members joined with some converts of the Northern Evangelists in forming the assemblies in both places.¹² At Elgin in Moray the Baptist pastor, John Rae, came in contact with the new movement and left his charge in 1872 with the majority of his flock to commence an assembly.¹³

In the eastern and central Lowlands the Brethren were later in being established. Lochore was one of the new communities of west Fife which were created around the turn of the century when the Fife coalfield was opened up. A Baptist mission in Lochore was formed *circa* 1910 among the miners. Amongst the immigrant workers who associated with the mission were two miners who had been in Brethren assemblies in their native Ayrshire. They talked of Brethren practices with the result that most of the mission became Brethren and they erected their own building in 1913.¹⁴ At Ratho in West Lothian the Baptist church was so reduced in numbers owing to individuals leaving for the Brethren that in 1912 the pastor had to resign.¹⁵ This same church held an outreach *circa* 1920 in the nearby village of Kirknewton. It led to a regular gospel meeting in Kirknewton but the preaching

THE BAPTIST QUARTERLY

supply was drawn from nearby Brethren assemblies and in 1924 an assembly was formed out of the converts.¹⁶ The Brethren were relatively late in being established in the Falkirk area. A group who had been in contact with the Brethren in Camelon left the Baptist church in Denny. They travelled at first to Camelon before establishing an assembly in Denny in 1935.¹⁷

The incidence of former Baptists composing a substantial proportion, or even the entire membership, of new Brethren assemblies mirrors chronologically the spread of the Brethren throughout Scotland. Such Baptist defections involved a number of people and they tended to happen when assemblies were a new phenomenon in any one area. There are no records of assemblies being formed out of Baptist defections in Lanarkshire and Ayrshire where (along with Glasgow) the Brethren gained their earliest and most enduring strength, but where Baptists were poorly placed when Brethren assemblies were formed. This is not to say that larger movements only happened because of the novelty of the Brethren, for the pattern is not exact. Both Brethren and Baptists were fairly well established in Kilmarnock when William J. Grant, the Baptist pastor, resigned his charge in 1880 and left, along with a number of his flock, to join the Brethren assembly.¹⁸ Individual Baptists, such as the brothers, Michael and Edward Grant (both of whom were ministers),¹⁹ also joined the Brethren at other times. The point is rather that times of religious and social change were fruitful times for the planting of Brethren assemblies, and during these periods of flux Baptists were particularly likely to become Brethren.

BURDENS AND FREEDOM

There were several reasons why Baptists were likely to be drawn into the Brethren. Doubtless the actions of one particular influential individual had an effect. Certainly this is what happened in Elgin, for after John Rae left the area a number of individuals who had seceded with him returned to the Baptist church. Recalling the event later, one elderly Brethren man felt they just 'came out to John Rae'.²⁰ But it was possible to move easily from one to the other because many Baptists perceived Brethren ecclesiology and practices as continuing their own. At Lochore the Baptist mission, meeting in premises which had a shop-type front, was known locally as 'the Glory Shop', due to the revivalist activities of the members. The services were conducted by the lay members themselves and only occasionally was a Baptist pastor present to help. One elderly lady, who was a teenager at the time, could not recall any changes in the way in which they kept the Lord's Supper as Baptists to the way in which they kept it as an assembly.²¹ Not only, then, were many of the practices already close to those of the Brethren, but the Brethren obviously represented an opportunity to continue them in a way that would not have been possible if the mission had become a church supporting a pastor.

Brethren assemblies attempted to express some central strands in nineteenth-century Evangelical piety. The Brethren saw themselves as not being formed around distinctive doctrines and practices but around Christ. This, they felt, kept them free from the sectarianism that was inherent in the concept of a denomination. Henry Pickering's description of W. J. Grant's reason for leaving his church, 'Further light led him to gather alone in the Name',²² demonstrates this thinking. It was this that attracted John Rae. In a letter written sixteen months after the event, Rae stated that he had left Elgin Baptist church,

having been led to see that all sects and human systems were dishonouring to the Lord, and stood in the way of that full liberty to which the servant of Christ is called, in order that He only may

BRETHREN AND BAPTISTS IN SCOTLAND

lead and direct in His work. At that time I was enabled to cast myself wholly on His tender care and love, believing that He would provide for me and my family, whilst engaged in His work and walking in His way.²³

Denominational institutions were merely 'human' for Rae and the appeal of the Brethren for him was the way they enabled a direct dependence on faith in Christ. His description links the adoption of 'the faith principle' for Christian workers (the Lords's servant being directly dependent on Him for all means of support) with his move into the Brethren. Both were expressions of his piety and represented freedom from human control.

Events at Westray can also be seen as a move towards freedom. One member of the Brethren assembly in Westray later defended what had happened in an anonymous letter to the *Orkney Herald* in 1897 by stating that they 'were seeking to obey the Lord still further and give up the very unscriptural task of choosing and having ordained a man over them'.²⁴ Implicit in this account is the contrast between 'having a man over them' and the Lordship of Christ. In a letter written the year after the schism, J. A. Boswell reported how the assembly members had felt. He described Westray's evolution from an independent Haldane church into a Scotch Baptist church and, then its gradual acceptance of 'the one-man system' under the pastor, Henry Harcus:

The world slipped in, and the older Christians were groaning under the burden; but unable to see their way out of it. This I have heard from several of them, and one of these an old man of 80, who was one of three pastors who were appointed in the church, before one man took entire control.²⁵

Harcus's move from Westray tradition in becoming sole pastor is here 'the burden'. The way seemed blocked, but it was Brethren practices which offered freedom and the continuation of Baptist practices in a more scriptural form.

Metaphors of bondage and liberation are common in these accounts. After he had left the Baptist ministry in the 1920s, Michael Grant described his experiences in a booklet entitled 'Twice Delivered'. His first deliverance was from the burden of sin; his second deliverance was from the burden of clerisy.²⁶ Underlying this sense of liberation is the fact that Brethren practices were an attempt for greater purity of practice and this was also deeply attractive to some Baptists. At Lochore there were tensions over music. The musically talented Halliday family ran a small band that included several fiddles, a piano harp, a cornet, a trumpet and a mouth organ. The former Brethren members of the mission and those who had come to agree with them disapproved of the band. Matters came to a head one Sunday when Mr Halliday had invited from Dundee Miss Low, a soloist, and Miss Kelly, a woman preacher. In the morning meeting, which was evidently for spontaneous worship, Miss Low sang a solo and Miss Kelly got up to speak. At this point one of those in favour of Brethren principles stopped the proceedings and declared that 'women should keep silence in the church' and that 'there should be no singing like this, we'll have none of this music'. A special meeting was held later at which the principal individuals in the mission agreed that this was to be their future practice. After this some went back to Baptist churches and, although Mr Halliday made the transition to the assembly, eventually he and his family moved away.²⁷

THE BAPTIST QUARTERLY

ARGUMENTS AND INFLUENCES

Many Christians regarded the Brethren as heretical schismatics, and some Baptists shared this opinion. At Westray this view probably had an effect. When the Haldanes' views on baptism were being considered by the church in 1810, the members had waited on each other and the issue had been resolved without schism. In 1868, however, the Sunday after the new views were recognised as being 'thoroughly Plymouthistic', a sermon was preached by one of C. H. Spurgeon's former students to show their 'inconsistency with the Word of God', making a split inevitable.²⁸

One hundred and fifty Baptists transferred into the Brethren at Westray,²⁹ and at Lochore about sixty individuals were involved. These were the biggest movements, but these and the other smaller defections probably gained a certain infamy. Events at Westray left a residue of bitterness that lasted for many years. The anonymous defender of the Brethren in the *Orkney Herald* drew several replies that accused the assembly of a number of malpractices, but the main charge was of stealing their members from existing churches. 'Instead of going into the world and preaching the gospel to every creature', wrote one correspondent, 'the Plymouth Brethren go into churches and sow seed of discord and dissension.'³⁰ This same charge was repeated elsewhere by Baptists. In 1873 Alexander Burnet, a Baptist lay-preacher from Kemnay, accused the emerging Brethren movement in the north-east of proselytism in a pamphlet entitled *Plymouth Brethren is Antichrist*. Burnet's treatment of the Brethren is shown in his description of what happened with one Baptist at Braco in Aberdeenshire. According to Burnet, the Brethren

have there inveigled over a good, worthy, quiet man, who was a Baptist, one of the most exemplary individuals he was in the locality, and a man of influence in his way. They managed, however, to come round about him like water, and so bring him over. Everywhere they are alive and active, doing the devil's work. This unhallowed proselytism is with them *the thing much to be sought after*.³¹

Thinking like this made for strained relationships between Brethren and Baptists. It serves as a reminder that, when the Brethren emerged, contemporary Baptists and Brethren were often more aware of differences than similarities.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century Scottish Brethren became more suspicious of any association with other churches. The Brethren had protested against sectarianism and saw denominations as sinful expressions of it. Some went further and claimed that only complete separation from denominations and all they contained would ensure purity. Even in the moderate Brethren magazine, *The Northern Witness*, we find the editor, J. R. Caldwell, writing in 1880 that with those who teach heresy 'we have no more fellowship than with Baptist or Independent or Wesleyan Churches, in which we do not know what is taught',³² and in 1889 counselling individuals not to preach in or co-operate with other churches.³³

Baptist practices were regarded by the Brethren as being less than scriptural and they were included in the general condemnation of the practices of other churches.³⁴ This extended to Baptist practices that might be thought to be quite close to Brethren ones. In Inverurie one of the concerns of the emerging Brethren group was that Presbyterianism 'rendered inoperative the truth of the priesthood of all believers'. The assembly's eventual practice was for the order of service at meetings for worship and teaching to be spontaneous. In their discussions beforehand some of

BRETHREN AND BAPTISTS IN SCOTLAND

the older Christians (possibly those with a Baptist background) feared disorder if this were adopted. They suggested that something akin to the Scotch Baptist system should be adopted by appointing elders to regulate services. But others in the group demanded that it should be demonstrated that this was according to the mind of God and, when scriptural proof was not forthcoming, it was rejected. John Ritchie, the Brethren writer and publisher, who was then one of the group's younger members, made clear his contempt for such a compromise when he later wrote that it was 'a kind of half-way house between one-man ministry and the recognition of the priesthood of all believers guided by the Spirit of God'.³⁵

But, even while criticising Baptists in the struggle for purity of scriptural practice, the Brethren were simultaneously being influenced in a paradoxical manner by Baptist practices. F. F. Bruce has pointed out that Brethren often arrived at their practices by a sort of *via negativa*: 'their originators took note of what was customarily done in the churches from which they had withdrawn, and thought the safest course was to do something different'.³⁶ Baptist practices were treated in the same manner, even though it might hinder what might be a perfectly commonsense, not to mention biblical, arrangement. In one of the Kilmarnock assemblies in the 1930s the adoption of deacons in addition to the elders was proposed but, led by one individual who had joined the Brethren from a Baptist church, several members successfully opposed this course precisely because Baptists had deacons.

The clearest example of this inverse influence of Baptist churches on Brethren assemblies was in the practice of what might be thought to make them most similar - believer's baptism. There is evidence to show that in some cases the Baptist example of baptising believers had led emerging Scottish Brethren to adopt it. But Brethren were critical of Baptists for taking their name from it. This made baptism, they claimed, the basis of fellowship, instead of life in Christ, and this was to become sectarian. One writer mocked it in a review of James Douglas' biography of C. H. Spurgeon. 'There is as much scripture', he wrote, 'for the formation of a new sect on the ground of the belief of the other ordinance instituted by Christ - the Lord's Supper - the members calling themselves "Lord's Supperists!"'.³⁷ At first the mode of baptism had been a matter of toleration among the Open Brethren in Scotland. Although believer's baptism eventually became the accepted practice, not all individuals had adopted it initially as they evolved Brethren practices. But The Needed Truth party, who were active within Open Brethren from the mid-1870s, did demand that believer's baptism be made a condition of membership. Those who resisted them did so partly on the grounds that this would make them into Baptists. John Ritchie agreed with much of Needed Truth thinking and had himself developed strict views about receiving Christians from outside the Brethren, resisting to the point of schism the acceptance of W. J. Grant and his followers into the Kilmarnock assembly. But Ritchie was quite firm on this point. In 1892, when the Needed Truth (their preferred name for themselves is 'The Church of God') were in the process of dividing from the Open Brethren, we find him writing of baptism that 'it is not to be taken from its Divinely ordered place, and measure of importance, and made a basis of Church Fellowship, or a prerequisite to be regarded as "one of us". This would be - with or without the name - a *sect* of Baptists'.³⁸ The standard Open Brethren line, in theory at least if not always in practice, was expressed in the aphorism: 'baptism is not the gateway to fellowship', and in this they were much influenced by a desire to escape the accusation of being Baptists. Given the similarities between the two, a careful differentiation of their distinctives was inevitable, and it was the nascent Brethren movement, rather than established Baptist churches, that was more affected by this process.

The Brethren, though, also had an influence on Baptist churches. The flow of

ministers between the two had not been all one way. Prominent Baptists such as W. Graham Scroggie, minister of Charlotte Chapel, had a Brethren background and a number of lesser figures had also joined Baptist churches from Brethren assemblies. Brethren piety was also attractive to some within Baptist churches, and writers on Scottish Baptists have commented on these influences, seeing them as being sometimes a source of tension. Derek Murray has noted that Brethren teaching 'in the area of prophecy, has come to be accepted in some Baptist circles, leading to not a few arguments on the finer points of dispensationalism'.³⁹ The same writer also hints that the debates over Modernism which beset the Scottish Baptist College in the 1940s might have had an element of the Brethren distaste for man-made ministers behind them.⁴⁰ More recently David Bebbington has suggested that the Baptist practice of a weekly observation of the Lord's Supper 'must have been reinforced by the practice of the Brethren'. And Ian Balfour has noted that the location of worldliness in external tests was 'encouraged by Baptist leaders with roots in the Brethren'.⁴¹

A concentration in this paper on the dividing lines between Scottish Brethren and Baptists has been inevitable, but it would be a mistake to imagine that the only relationship they have had has been one of disagreement. By 1909 we find J. R. Caldwell wanting a return to former open practices and lamenting in a letter to a friend, 'Long ago we made no bones about it when I preached in Baptist Churches'.⁴² While the narrower attitude to other churches had often prevailed among Scottish Brethren, some had always felt free to preach in Baptist churches when the invitation was extended to them. If Baptists were asked to preach in Brethren assemblies, then it was probably rarely, but many Brethren heard Graham Scroggie at Keswick with pleasure and read his works with profit: a Brethren firm, Pickering & Inglis, published his books after all. The similarities of the two ensured that there could always be co-operation for those who desired it. When small Brethren assemblies closed, such as happened at Crieff in the 1940s and Maybole in the 1960s, the members often joined the nearest Baptist church; in Kirkwall Baptists had fellowship in the assembly prior to the establishment in 1959 of a Baptist cause in the town.⁴³ It was at a Baptist college that the Brethren missionary, John. S. Anderson, studied before going to Florence in 1880, and other minor examples of mutual help can be found.⁴⁴ Even on Westray the common passion of Brethren and Baptists for evangelism brought a temporary thaw. In 1904-5, when there was a revival in the Baptist church, the younger members of the assembly attended along with the other Christians on the island. The older members, who had been agonizing over the problem, later caused some consternation when they marched in *en masse* to the Baptist chapel.⁴⁵

BRETHREN INTO BAPTISTS

So far this survey has been confined to the historical perspective and it is time now to look at the contemporary position. The overall trend of church membership in Scotland is downwards and Baptists and Brethren have not been exempt from this decline. In 1933 the membership of Baptist churches was 22,900 but by 1960 it had dropped to 19,847 and to 16,632 by 1986.⁴⁶ Brethren figures are difficult to obtain, but one estimate in 1933 gave the Open Brethren 30,000 members and another source in 1960 estimated 25,000 members.⁴⁷ I estimate that at present there are about 12,500 Open Brethren assembly members. The statistical bases of these calculations for Brethren members are different and therefore they are not directly comparable, but nevertheless they suggest a sharper decline in Brethren membership than Baptist membership: the 1933 estimate gave Brethren more members than Baptists, while my

BRETHREN AND BAPTISTS IN SCOTLAND

TABLE 1: Summary of written responses: reasons for leaving an assembly

DENOMINATIONAL TRANSFERS

| | |
|--|---|
| Geographical convenience/choice of church/removal/job change | 8 |
| Married a Baptist | 3 |

DISCONTENTED TRANSFERS

| General: | | Personal: | |
|-------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| Young family/youth work | 8 | Personal | 2 |
| Negative features | 6 | Opposition to theological study | 1 |
| Exclusivism | 5 | Opposition to charismatic experience | 1 |
| Traditionalism | 4 | Married non-Brethren | 1 |
| Lack of teaching | 2 | | |
| No care | 2 | | |
| Legalism | 1 | | |
| Woman's role minimal | 1 | | |
| Poor outreach | 1 | | |

Note: respondents usually listed more than one reason; the number giving each reason is stated. This applies also to Table 2. Seven individuals were denominational transfers only, twenty-nine individuals gave at least one negative feature.

TABLE 2: Summary of written responses; reasons for joining a Baptist church

| LIFE-CHANGE/CONVENIENCE | | THEOLOGY/TEACHING/SERVICE | |
|-------------------------|----|------------------------------|---|
| Married Baptist | 3 | Evangelical theology | 8 |
| Nearest church | 14 | Teaching | 5 |
| | | Joining Baptist ministry | 3 |
| | | Closest to Brethren | 2 |
| | | Belief in Baptist Principles | 1 |
| | | | |
| BAPTIST ETHOS | | | |
| Freedom | 7 | | |
| Lively | 3 | | |
| Modern | 2 | | |
| Youth catered for | 6 | | |
| Fellowship/love | 4 | | |
| Service | 2 | | |
| Growth | 1 | | |
| Open communion | 1 | | |
| Charismatic sympathy | 1 | | |

THE BAPTIST QUARTERLY

1989 estimate gives the Brethren fewer members. One of the features of this decline in the Brethren has been the movement of individuals from Brethren assemblies into Baptist churches. It is difficult to estimate how large this movement is. The minister of one Scottish Baptist church has estimated that the congregation has about eighty individuals (some twenty-six per cent of the membership) with a Brethren background. This is probably an exception, but it demonstrates that a small but significant minority of Brethren have joined Baptist churches in recent times. The significance of the process, however, is not confined to the loss of actual numbers, but it is also an indication of the internal condition of Brethren assemblies and Baptist churches.

To examine this movement further, I distributed in 1988 a questionnaire to individuals who were known, either to myself or to others, to have once worshipped in a Brethren assembly and now worship in a Baptist church. The questionnaire offered room for written comments as well as asking specific questions. Questions 6-9 listed a number of features of Brethren assemblies or Baptist churches and the respondents were asked to indicate how much influence each feature had on their decision to change. There were six options offered: 0, which indicated no influence at all, and a scale of 1-5, which indicated various strengths of feeling with 1 the weakest and 5 the strongest. In analyzing these questions the replies were aggregated.⁴⁸ The respondents were informal contacts and thirty-six replies were received out of about seventy distributed (owing to the method of distribution it was impossible to keep an exact count). This sample should not therefore be taken as allowing definite conclusions, but it offers informative impressions. The fact that it was relatively easy to find eligible candidates for the questionnaire would confirm that a significant number of individuals is involved.

Thirty-one of the respondents were from the Open Brethren, by far the largest of the various forms of Brethren, and five individuals were from the moderate Glanton Exclusives. None was found from the divisions of the main Exclusive party or the Church of God (both of which are stricter) and certainly the impression is that individuals who leave either of these groups tend to join the Open Brethren. The fact that twenty-six of the respondents had left the Brethren within the last two decades might partly be a function of age, but this confirms impressions that these decades have seen a marked increase in the movement of Brethren into Baptist churches, with the peak possibly coming in the 1970s (though the 1980s had over a year to run at the time of the survey). While six respondents were under twenty when they moved, twenty respondents made their decision as adults before middle-life. In addition, about one third of the sample (eleven individuals) transferred in middle-life or after. The majority of respondents moved in adult life, suggesting that we are dealing with issues of substance in examining this movement.

The respondents emerged in general as being dissatisfied with a number of features of the Brethren. In 1986 Nathan deLynn Smith interviewed fifty individuals who had left the Brethren in the USA.⁴⁹ He found that his interviewees commonly gave as reasons for leaving five negative features of the Brethren that they had identified: lack of positive leadership, lack of vitality, listless worship services, women's role marginalized, and narrowness. Question 7 in my questionnaire asked respondents, 'How much influence had these in your decision?' Eighteen individuals (half the sample) circled a 4 or a 5 in three or more of the options, indicating a high level of dissatisfaction. This feeling can be paralleled by many still within Brethren assemblies and contemporary Brethren writings can be found expressing it.⁵⁰ It appeared from respondents' written comments that some individuals had been through difficult and painful experiences prior to leaving. One respondent, who indicated a desire still to be in an assembly, stated, 'I cannot imagine going back to the gossip,

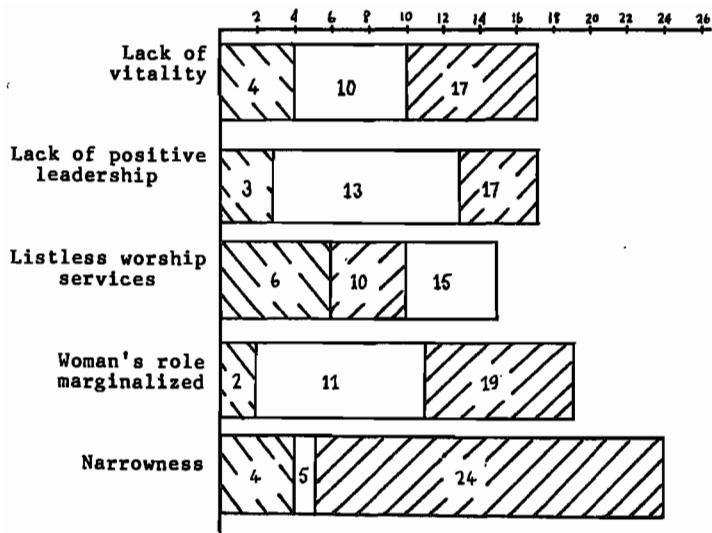


FIGURE 1. Comparison with delynn Smith (USA, 1986)

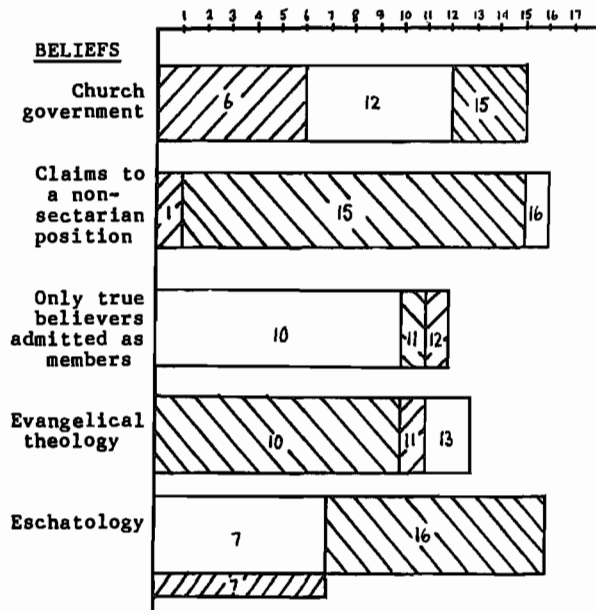
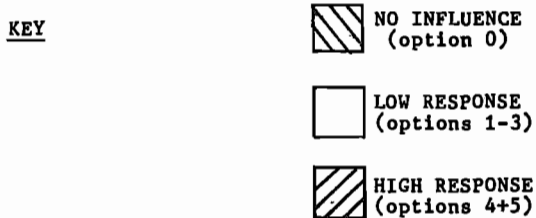


FIGURE 2a. Features of Brethren assemblies which made respondents reluctant to leave them: beliefs.

backbiting and legalism which hampered my worship.'

The chief source of dissatisfaction for respondents was their perception of narrowness in the Brethren, with twenty-four individuals indicating 4 or 5 (see figure 1). Several respondents commented on the limitations on Christian fellowship or, in the words of one, 'legalistic attitudes and unwritten but strict rules'. One individual who had an experience of charismatic renewal commented, 'I find the Brethren narrow and unwilling to accept scripture viewed in any new way or any change of doctrinal view'. It can be seen from this that for respondents 'narrowness' is closely related to the sense of conservatism and traditionalism that several also commented on, and it is probably also related to the poor quality of youth work or Sunday Schools that respondents claimed to have found in Brethren assemblies. Marginalisation of a woman's role emerged in question 7 as the second largest influence on leaving, with nineteen individuals indicating 4 or 5 (figure 1). Several respondents commented on the scope there was for women to pray publicly in Baptist churches. One individual commented, 'There is more scope in a Baptist church for the professional woman to use her gifts & more provision is made for the single woman.' Delynn Smith's other negative features were also rated highly by respondents as influencing their decisions. Lack of vitality, with twenty-seven individuals indicating 3-5, edged ahead of lack of positive leadership where twenty-two individuals indicated 3-5.

It is to the sense of dissatisfaction, then, that we must look for our primary reason for the present movement of Brethren into Baptist churches. The point becomes clearer when we look at the summary of written responses indicating reasons for leaving (see Table 1). Respondents usually listed more than one reason for leaving, but there were only seven individuals who transferred to a Baptist church because of a life-change only (what I have called 'denominational transference'), while the rest of the sample were what I have entitled 'discontented transference' (though four of these also had life-changes), because they identified at least one negative feature in Brethren assemblies. It should be noted, however, that the sample does show a small group who became Baptists because of life-changes and did so quite easily. As one such individual commented, 'I found virtually no difference in the baptist church from the assembly I worshipped in other than the full time pastor & Sunday morning worship.'

Question 6 asked, 'Which of the following features of the Brethren made you reluctant to leave them?' In evaluating the responses I have categorised the various features listed in the questionnaire into three groups: belief, practice and ethos. Most of the distinctive Brethren beliefs had very little or no effect with the majority of respondents apart from, possibly, assemblies being gathered churches that are evangelical in theology (figure 2a). The Brethren claim to non-sectarianism was felt to be false by some and one individual commented, 'it is only by a perverted use of language that the Brethren can claim not to be a sect' (and the word is not being used in a sociological sense here). Respondents showed more reluctance to leave Brethren practices (figure 2b): this is especially the case with the breaking of bread and twenty-two individuals indicated a strong reluctance to leave an assembly on account of it. A notable exception to this is the practice in assemblies of having no pastor, and twenty individuals indicated that this did not make them reluctant to leave their assembly. Only one feature of what might be called Brethren ethos was included, the Bible knowledge which Brethren are reputed to have, and in general respondents seemed to indicate that the reputation was justified by their reluctance to leave it (figure 2b).

A stronger indicator of feelings towards features of the Brethren could be seen in question 8 which asked, 'Which of the following features of the Brethren would you

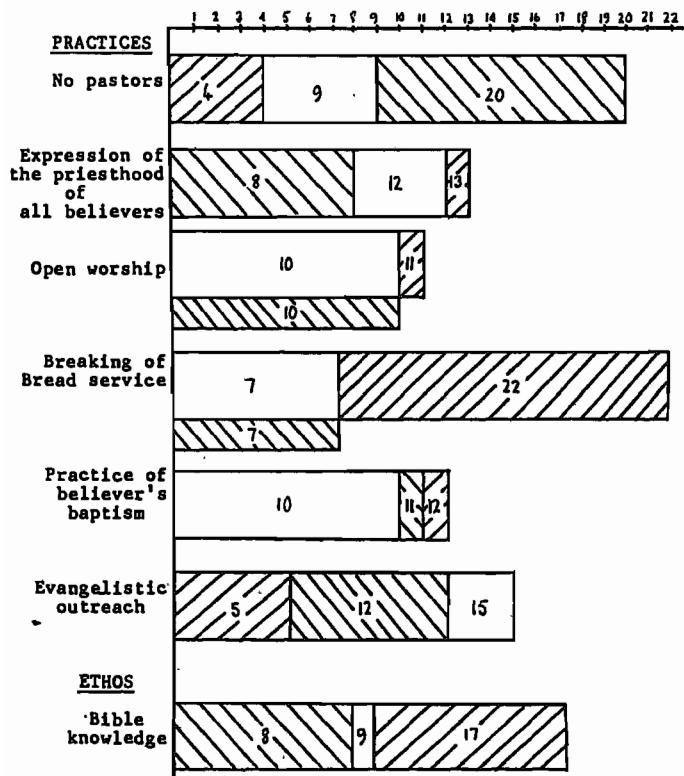


FIGURE 2b. Features of Brethren assemblies which made respondents reluctant to leave them: practices & ethos.

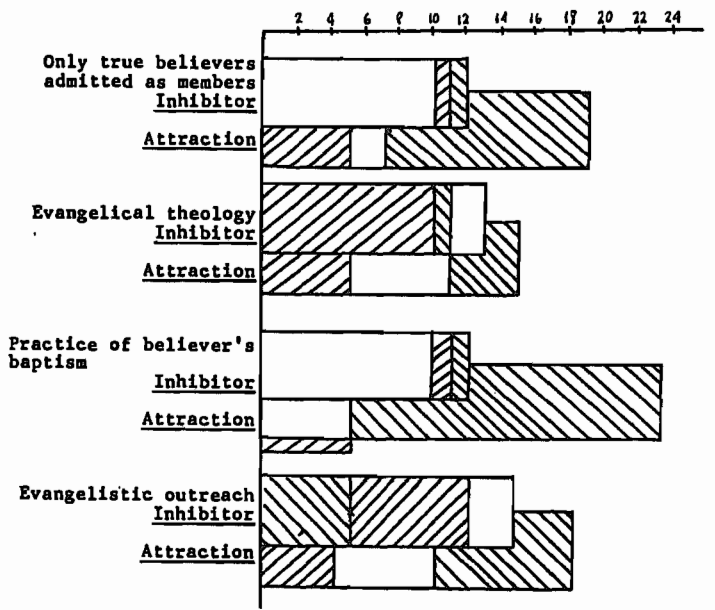


FIGURE 3. Comparison between responses in Question 6 (inhibitors in leaving Brethren) & Question 9 (attractions of Baptists): aspects of Brethren assemblies and Baptist churches which are identical or very similar.

THE BAPTIST QUARTERLY

like to see Baptist churches move closer to?' Again Brethren eschatology fared badly (twenty respondents indicated they had little or no desire to see Baptists adopt it), and one respondent commented that having attained a fuller knowledge of Brethren thinking since leaving, 'if I had known then what I do now about Brethren beliefs esp re. eschatology & Dispensationalism, I would have been out much sooner than I was.' There was a close correlation between responses here and in Question 6 (reluctance to leave) on practices and ethos. This indicates that, although having left the Brethren, there is still a strong feeling for Brethren practices, especially in the area of participative worship, among respondents. The exception again is the absence of pastors, a practice which twenty-two respondents did not wish to see Baptists copy. Obviously the fact that respondents had joined a Baptist church indicates they have possibly less strong feelings on this than continuing assembly members, but a 1978 survey of British assemblies found that nine per cent of those surveyed already had a full or part-time worker, while over a third of the others thought the appointment of one was a good idea,⁵¹ and these figures have almost certainly risen by now.

Question 9 tried to ascertain features of Baptist churches that attracted the respondents to them. Over half the respondents (nineteen individuals) indicated that the use of pastors was a strong influence in attracting them to Baptist churches. In addition to the features that the questionnaire offered, several features of what might be called Baptist ethos were listed by respondents: among them openness, life and vitality. In general, however, those features of Baptist churches that most closely matched Brethren assemblies - such as them being a gathered church and believer's baptism - were rated more highly than other features. But these features were stronger attractions in Baptist churches than they had been as inhibitors in leaving the Brethren (figure 3). This can be explained by the phenomenon, familiar to market researchers, that when an individual is strongly critical of something then he tends to feel negative about all its features, but when he is strongly attracted by something, then he feels positive about all its features. The perceived negative features of assemblies, such as narrowness, overshadowed characteristics of assemblies than respondents admired. In fact, most respondents liked a number of Baptist features, as is shown, for example, by the strong desire of nineteen individuals to see the breaking of bread service adopted by Baptist churches. It is this liking for some Brethren features which evidently attracted many of the respondents to Baptist churches because of their similar features. The exception here, however, is evangelism, which received a low response as an inhibitor in leaving the Brethren (figure 2b). It can be seen from figure 3 that the pattern of response to evangelism as an attraction in a Baptist church is not an extension of the pattern as an inhibitor in leaving an assembly (the general pattern in the other comparisons), but it is virtually reversed. This indicates respondents did not think that Brethren and Baptist evangelism was identical, but thought they were different. One respondent wrote, 'I find the general structure of a Baptist church more conducive to reach out in evangelism', and another individual commented, 'I find evangelistic outreach is greater & more efficient in the Baptist Church.'

Question 5 asked, 'What was your main reason for joining a Baptist church?' Table 2 lists the reasons that were offered. For some it was geographical convenience. Four respondents claimed that the form of church was not particularly important for them, and one of them commented, 'We went to the nearest "live" church which happened to be Baptist; the form of government does not really matter - it might have been Church of Scotland or Episcopalian or Methodist'. But of the fourteen individuals who listed geographical convenience, thirteen also consciously or unconsciously mentioned a concern with doctrine (for instance in the phrase 'nearest evangelical church'), and this was also explicitly mentioned as a reason for

BRETHREN AND BAPTISTS IN SCOTLAND

joining a Baptist church - reinforcing what was noted in the previous paragraph about the concern for correct beliefs and practices. Baptist ethos was also given as a reason for joining and a number of respondents pointed to features such as contemporaneity, freedom, or spiritual life. These are the reverse of the narrowness that respondents found in assemblies and the written comments show that freedom - in evangelism, for women, for youth, or freedom in a general sense - was what many respondents had found in Baptist churches. One respondent gave as a reason for joining a Baptist church: 'To worship in an atmosphere devoid of friction & mere traditionalism', while another simply stated, 'freedom of choice'. One individual, who had been an assembly member for thirty years and an elder for about half of that time, commented, 'My Christian experience has been much happier and more fulfilled. I believe I have grown spiritually and my personal witness has been more effective.'

The Brethren, as they emerged in Scotland, had a strong emphasis on the purity of doctrine and practice. But the demand for purity was also associated with a deep conservatism. In changing social and cultural conditions, they have found it hard to adapt, consequently there is much dissatisfaction within assemblies as is shown by the movement of Brethren into Baptist churches. Scottish Baptists, on the other hand, have expressed some satisfaction with their position relative to other Scottish churches.⁵² Formerly some Baptists found increased freedom in the Brethren to continue aspects of their faith and joined, or even formed, Brethren assemblies. But now some former Brethren are finding membership of a Baptist church a liberating experience. Many of these individuals, it would appear, have left behind some of the features of the Brethren - such as dispensationalism, narrow attitudes to the world, and dislike of pastors - which were formerly seen as introducing tensions into Baptist churches. They have chosen to join Baptist churches because they can continue aspects of their faith free from the constrictions that they were aware of in the Brethren.

THE FUTURE

Having surveyed Brethren and Baptist relations, both in the past and in the present, I would like to offer a prognosis by way of conclusion.

Small numbers of individuals will continue to move between Brethren assemblies and Baptist churches. They have a number of essential features in common and individuals will continue to move freely between them for convenience, through marriage, or for opportunities in Christian service. A number of Brethren have become Baptist pastors and at present one Scottish Brethren assembly has a former Baptist pastor serving in a full-time teaching ministry.

The present large-scale movement of Brethren into Baptist churches will continue for a while. Movement between Brethren and Baptists is an indicator of social and religious change. At the moment Brethren are finding it hard to cope with such change, whereas Baptist churches seem to be doing rather better and, as long as assemblies resist change, the movement will continue. Recent research (1988) has shown, however, that there is an increasing number of assemblies in Scotland that are growing through evangelism,⁵³ and if this trend continues it may prove to be an important factor in arresting the present large-scale movement. Whether the majority of those moving will continue to go between the two or whether the flux will be away from them both into new Christian movements will depend partly on how clear their vision is of what the times demand. When a church fails to respond to the call of faith, its people feel restricted, but 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.'

There will be increased co-operation between some Brethren and Baptists. Their

THE BAPTIST QUARTERLY

common Evangelicalism now seems to many Baptists and Brethren to be of more importance than the issues that have historically divided them. There are now at least two independent churches in Scotland whose original membership was drawn largely from both Brethren and Baptists, and both Baptists and Brethren co-operate in joint ventures, such as the 'There is Hope' campaign in Edinburgh. Such mutual strengthening will aid the continuing presence of Brethren and Baptists in Scotland.

NOTES

- 1 'Communicants' Roll Book; or Names Designations, etc of Members belonging to Clerk's Lane Congregation, Kilmarnock 1840-1950', p.14.
- 2 Census of Great Britain (1851).
- 3 Neil Dickson, 'Scottish Brethren: Division and Wholeness, 1838-1916', *Christian Brethren Review Journal*, 42, 1990.
- 4 D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 1989, p.75.
- 5 D. B. Murray, *The First Hundred Years: The Baptist Union of Scotland*, Dundee, 1969, p.32.
- 6 J. M. Gordon, 'The Later Nineteenth Century', in D. W. Bebbington, ed., *The Baptists in Scotland*, Glasgow, 1988, p.60. For an example, cf. Cambuslang, George Yuille, ed., *History of the Baptists in Scotland*, Glasgow, 1926, p.188.
- 7 D. B. Murray, 'The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in Bebbington, ed., *The Baptists ...*, p.24.
- 8 Henry Pickering, 'Brief Record of Author's Life', in J. R. Caldwell, *Epitome of Christian Experience*, Glasgow n.d., pp.xi-xii.
- 9 Yuille, op.cit., p.192.
- 10 The church on Westray was not in correspondence with the Scotch Baptists, but it had a similar organisation and J. A. Boswell called it a Scotch Baptist church in *The Latter Rain*, September 1869.
- 11 Henry Harcus, *The History of the Orkney Baptist Churches*, Ayr, 1896, p.94.
- 12 Alexander Burnet, *Plymouth Brethren is Antichrist*, Aberdeen, 1873, pp.12-13, quoted in William Reid, *Plymouth Brethrenism Unveiled and Refuted*, Edinburgh, 1875, p.31.
- 13 *The Latter Rain*, 1 June 1873; cf. H. A. Ironside, *A Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement*, Grand Rapids, 1942, p.72.
- 14 'How It Started: Lochore', *Believer's Magazine*, July 1989.
- 15 Yuille, op.cit., pp.127-8.
- 16 Letter to author, April 1989.
- 17 Letter to author, April 1989.
- 18 G. G., 'W. J. Grant, M.A., Kilmarnock', in Andrew Borland, ed., *The Bible and its Doctrines*, Kilmarnock, c.1930, p.98.
- 19 James Anderson, ed., *They Finished Their Course*, Kilmarnock, 1980, p.78.
- 20 F. F. Bruce, *In Retrospect*, Glasgow, 1980, p.6.
- 21 Mrs Annie Thompson, interview with author, November 1988.
- 22 'Our Contributors', one of a series of supplements to *The Witness* during 1931.
- 23 John Rae, *The Latter Rain*, 1 June 1879.
- 24 'One Who Ought To Know' (pseudonym), 'The Plymouth Brethren and the Baptists', *The Orkney Herald*, 10 February 1897.
- 25 J. A. Boswell, *The Latter Rain*, 1 September 1869.
- 26 Michael Grant, *Twice Delivered*, Kilmarnock, c.1936.
- 27 Mrs Thompson, interview 1988.
- 28 Harcus, op.cit., pp.66-73, 94.
- 29 Boswell, op.cit.
- 30 'Ex Animo' (pseudonym), *The Orkney Herald*, 17 February 1897. See also correspondence in March-April 1897.
- 31 Burnet, op.cit., pp.12-13, in Reid, op.cit., p.31.
- 32 J. R. Caldwell, 'Exclusivism', *The Northern Witness*, 12, 1882, p.154.
- 33 J. R. Caldwell, 'Editor's Note', *The Witness*, 19, 1889, p.142 ('Northern' was dropped from the title in 1888).
- 34 Cf. Alexander Marshall, 'A Statement for Leaving the Baptist Denomination', *The Witness*, 5, new series, 1895, pp.77-81.
- 35 John Ritchie, 'Revival Times and Work in Aberdeenshire', in Charles Ross, ed., *Donald Ross*, Kilmarnock, c.1903; reprinted 1987, pp.159-60.
- 36 Bruce, op.cit., p.7.
- 37 Alexander Marshall, 'C. H. Spurgeon', *The Witness*, 3, new series, 1893, p.42.
- 38 John Ritchie, *Believers' Magazine*, 1892, p.124.
- 39 Murray, *The First Hundred Years*, p.144.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p.109.
- 41 D. W. Bebbington, ed., *The Baptists in Scotland*, 'Introduction', p.3; I. L. S. Balfour, 'The Twentieth Century Since 1914', p.78.
- 42 J. R. Caldwell in a letter to Alexander Marshall, quoted in John Hawthorn, *Alexander Marshall*, Glasgow, n.d., p.137.
- 43 Robert Rendall, letter to G. C. D. Howley, 9 April 1956, Orkney Archive, D27/8/1.
- 44 For Brethren co-operation, cf. 'Loan of hall to a Baptist', *The Witness*, 38, 1908; for Baptist co-operation, cf. Bebbington, *Baptists in Scotland*, p.106.
- 45 Katherine M. Gordon, in letter to author, 30 November 1988. Mrs Gordon's help with material relating to Orkney Baptists is gratefully acknowledged.
- 46 Bebbington, *Baptists in Scotland*, pp.338-9.
- 47 John Hight, *The Scottish Churches*, 1960, p.37.
- 48 Occasionally respondents did not answer a question. This should probably be interpreted as a nil response, but I have not counted it in my analysis.
- 49 Nathan delynn Smith, *Roots and Renewal*, Pasadena, 1986, pp.47-65.

BRETHREN AND BAPTISTS IN SCOTLAND

- 50 Cf. Brian Mills, 'The Present Position', in *Christian Brethren Review Journal*, 37, 1986, pp.27-9.
- 51 Graham Brown and Brian Mills, 'The Brethren' Today, Exeter, 1980, p.20.
- 52 Cf. Balfour, in Bebbington, *Baptists in Scotland*, p.67.
- 53 Partnership Survey of Brethren Assemblies, 1988. To be published by the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship in 1991.

NEIL DICKSON *School teacher and Open Brethren assembly member, currently researching the history of the Brethren in Scotland.*

ed. M. Griffin, *The President Speaks: Annual Addresses Delivered to the National Baptist Convention of America, 1898-1986*, National Baptist Convention of America, Incorporated, 1987

Records of black Baptist churches in the USA date back to the late eighteenth century, but it was not until 1836 that the first regional association of black churches - the Providence Association in Ohio - was founded, and four years later the American Baptist Missionary Convention, the first general body of black Baptists. The Civil War led to a breakdown of national organizations and it was not until the founding of the Baptist Missionary Convention (1880), of the American National Baptist Convention (1886, not 1856 as here recorded), and the National Baptist Convention (1893), that national bodies re-emerged, which in 1895 merged to form the National Baptist Convention.

Dr Griffin, the historian of the National Baptist Convention, in compiling this collection, has made available a very useful collection of material illustrative of the developing opinion of the leadership of that convention, embracing both presidential accounts of their stewardship of their office in 'States of the Union' type assessments, and fascinating examples of black exhortation and preaching. The addresses of eight presidents are each preceded by a useful biographical sketch of the man concerned. Some twenty-eight addresses are included, one more than the years covered, with two for 1916, Edward Jones's to the unincorporated convention and that of Elias Morris, the former president, to the incorporated convention, the pages of self-defence to this day reflecting the height of the tension that split the body at that time.

The existence now of four different black conventions in the USA calls for some explanation. As indicated, the first split occurred in 1915: the issue concerned the convention's control of its Publishing Board, and in particular the vesting of its property in the name of the Convention rather than the Board and its officers. Those who were most closely related to the Publishing Board, successful in the law suit over the Publication Board's property, formed the unincorporated body, whilst the other part of the convention learnt from this experience the desirability of becoming incorporated under the laws of the District of Columbia, as the National Baptist Convention, USA, Incorporated.

In 1961 a further split took place over the strong leadership exercised by J. H. Jackson over the incorporated body and the Progressive National Baptist Convention was formed by a group of younger leaders. More recently, in the years 1986-8, the unincorporated convention has itself sought incorporation, again because of disputes over the ownership of the publications wing of its work, so that it is now the National Baptist Convention of America, Inc. Once more this has been at the expense of a split with the founding of the National Baptist Missionary Convention, the most recent body of black Baptists to come into being. However, the two original black bodies, now working together in a number of areas, enjoyed a join assembly in 1988.

JHYB