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'FORGOTTEN IN THE GLORY OF GOD': THE VISION OF GEORGE BARCLAY OF IRVINE (1774-1838)

BRIAN TALBOT, CUMBERNAULD BAPTIST CHURCH

THE EARLY YEARS

George Barclay was born on 12 March 1774 in the small village of Kilwinning, Ayrshire. This small community was then three miles north of the much larger town of Irvine. His parents were described as being in humble circumstances, but with a reasonable standard of living within their community. This was an enthusiastic evangelical family who belonged to the Antiburgher branch of Presbyterianism in Scotland. This denomination was very rigid in its opinions, for example, in 1798 it declared its opposition to members attending lay-preaching and Sabbath-evening schools, 'saying that no Antiburgher could attend such without being subject to discipline'.¹ The significance of these prohibitions against new forms of Christian service in Scotland was indirectly to ensure that Barclay would be forced to go against many of the standards of his church in following the call he believed God had given him as a young man. In his earlier youth, though, the family in which he grew up was content to follow the standards of their denomination. The minister of their local church in Kilwinning, William Jameson, was the brother of George's mother. Jameson, who had been ordained on 6 April 1763 in the presence of the 112 members of the church, was the first minister of this new congregation in Kilwinning. A contemporary Antiburgher minister, Dr John Mitchell from the Wellington Street Church, Glasgow, described Jameson as a man with 'a patriarchal appearance. His voice was soft and sweet, and unaffectedly musical in its tones. His manner was grave and affectionately kind'. He died aged fifty-seven in the thirtieth year of his ministry in the one charge.² In this congregation George Barclay received a

¹ D. C. Lachman, 'General Associate Synod', in N. M. de S. Cameron (ed.), *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), pp. 354-5.

² 'Kilwinning (Antiburgher)', in R. Small, *History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church from 1733 to 1900* (2 Vols; Edinburgh:

firm grounding in Reformed theology which was retained throughout his life.

The sad loss of his mother when he, the only child, was seven months old deprived George Barclay of a potential maternal influence. According to John Leechman, Mrs Barclay had been 'an amiable disposition, obliging in her manners, kind to the poor, and her death was much lamented'.³ His father married again when his son was six years old and George's stepmother did her utmost to care for him as for her own children. She diligently assisted with his education in reading and writing and it was said that he could read the Bible when he was four years old. In his childhood George Barclay was reported to have spent much time in secret prayer and been most diligent in attending 'the sacramental services of the church' and in reading biographies of eminent Christians of earlier generations. However, it was also evident that 'the fear of God was not before his eyes' and 'those evils which prove us to be "transgressors from the womb" began to bud and blossom and bring forth fruit, even at that early age; and soon it became evident that he had entered the wide gate, and was treading the broad road that leadeth to destruction'.⁴ Readers of this narrative could be forgiven for assuming that this description included comments about this young man in his teenage years, instead of a child who had barely attained the age of six. It must, though, be stated that this description here was not untypical of the standards expected of children in Reformed households in this era. James Haldane's little booklet, *Early Instruction Recommended in a Narrative of the Life of Catherine Haldane, with an Address to Parents on the Importance of Religion*, told the spiritual journey of his young daughter Catherine prior to her death aged five or six, and commends a similar intensity in religious exercises.⁵ It may be

David M. Small, 1904), Vol. 2, pp. 281-2. Details of Mitchell's life are given in Small, Vol. 2, pp. 44-5.

³ J. Leechman, 'Memoir of the Late Rev. George Barclay', *Baptist Magazine*, 29.1 (January 1839), p. 1.

⁴ Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 1.

⁵ J. A. Haldane, *Early Instruction Recommended in a Narrative of the Life of Catherine Haldane* (Sydney's Press, N. P., 1820). A copy of this booklet is held in the Scottish Baptist History Archive, Glasgow. Another contemporary example concerned a daughter of Andrew Fuller, whose spiritual experiences were recorded prior to her death aged six years. A. G. Fuller, 'Memoir of Rev. Andrew Fuller', in J. Belcher (ed.), *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (3 Vols; Harrisonburgh, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1988 [1845]), Vol. 1, p. 52. More examples of such precocious piety are found in H. Sprange, *Children in Revival: 300 Years of*

possible that there was an expected and idealised pattern of behaviour required from the children of Christian homes in this period.

George was fairly average as a pupil in his local school and appeared to drift through school rather than applying himself to his studies as his family had expected. He in later life often referred 'with much contrition and considerable severity to his youthful follies', but an outgoing personality and an eye for a practical joke probably accounted for most of these events. John Leechman, his son-in-law, hinted that Barclay's later self-criticism was excessive when he noted that 'few are so faithful in diving into the depths of their depravity and bringing up thence reasons for penitence and humiliation as ... [George Barclay]'.⁶ It must be noted that these comments refer to the time prior to Barclay's leaving school on his thirteenth birthday to enter the world of employment. There is no reason to doubt that George was probably a normal, well-adjusted young person who grew up very familiar with the tenets of his Presbyterian faith. In these early years there was a clear acceptance of the standards expected by his family and local community and he was probably typical of many of the Protestant young people growing up in Kilwinning in the 1780s.

On his thirteenth birthday George was apprenticed for seven years to a local cabinet-maker. He was, apparently, a diligent worker⁷ who completed his contract by the age of twenty. According to Barclay's own recollections of his youth he was not particularly interested in matters of faith from ages thirteen to sixteen, though he still attended the services in his local church. An event that was to have a marked impact on him was the conversion of one of his closest friends, who was also his cousin. After his friend had professed faith before the church in the winter of 1790, George's father urged his son to consider applying to join the church at the next communion. This advice was followed and because this young man was able to affirm the theological views of his denomination he was received into the membership of this local congregation. It is ironic that this step of commitment caused much concern in his conscience. The teenager realized that he had not exercised 'repentance towards God, and faith in Jesus Christ', which was 'an indispensable pre-requisite to church

God's Work in Scotland (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2nd edition, 2002). A fuller examination of a similar lifestyle in two Baptist families in Wiltshire, England, in this era is found in M. Reeves, *Sheep Bell & Ploughshare: The Story of Two Village Families* (St Albans: Granada Publishing, 1978), pp. 25-72.

⁶ Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 1.

⁷ G. B. Hossack, 'George Barclay of Irvine', *Scottish Baptist Magazine*, 90.4 (April 1964), p. 6.

membership'.⁸ He was led to spend much time in spiritual reflection and prayer that caused him to alternate between moods of elation and despair, before he finally attained a sense of assurance. The struggles through which he passed in these years and the joy caused by the blessing of Christian assurance that followed, led him in turn to preach much on the subject of assurance in his later ministry.⁹

A significant cause of Barclay's spiritual problems was the apparently High Calvinistic theology of his uncle, which contained inadequate preaching of the law of God.

His ministry though earnest and impressive, was deficient in proving the souls of men to be under sin, guilty, condemned and helpless, and as such directing them clearly and definitely to the dignity and death of the Son of God, as the only refuge from the wrath to come. It was, therefore, little calculated to arouse and convict the sinner, or to undeceive and unshelter the self-righteous[sic].¹⁰

There had been considerable debate in the eighteenth century over what had been called 'the Modern Question'. At the heart of this debate was the following question: Do the unconverted have a duty to believe the gospel? The problem here arose out of the logic of High Calvinism. It was argued that the belief that Christ died for the elect alone seemed to demand as a corollary that none but the elect alone have the power to repent and believe; and if not the power, then the duty to do so. Yet, on the other hand, the Bible appeared to commend the practice of seeking to convert the unbeliever by preaching the gospel, and experience indicated that on some occasions it achieved this end. This result came about following the demand to the unconverted to believe, assuming that they had the power to do so, or at least the duty.¹¹ Andrew Fuller, a leading Particular Baptist theologian, in his 1785 work, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, convincingly proved to many Christian leaders that a biblical understanding of God's grace does not diminish man's responsibility in any way. The

⁸ Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 2.

⁹ 'George Barclay, Irvine (1774-1838)', *Scottish Baptist Yearbook*, 1902, p. 24.

¹⁰ Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 2.

¹¹ Details of the debate on this issue can be found in G. F. Nuttall, 'Northamptonshire and The Modern Question', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 16.5 (1965), pp. 101-123; and within Particular Baptist circles in R. Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1986), pp. 72-6, 91-5.

struggles that both Andrew Fuller and George Barclay experienced over these difficult theological issues¹² provided common ground for their later partnership in evangelistic endeavours, both at home and overseas. The early 'English' Baptists in Scotland, and George Barclay in particular, would see Andrew Fuller as a mentor and friend.

Over a period of about four years Barclay wrestled with these weighty theological truths. He came to a place of full assurance of faith around the time of the completion of his apprenticeship at the age of twenty. He stated:

Now I began to enjoy God, and truly my fellowship was with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. Strict justice, as well as sovereign reigning grace, I contemplated in my redemption, and confided in it with equal comfort. God on the throne of his glory was as much the object of my trust and boast, as Jesus dying on Calvary. I think I may say with confidence, that the satisfaction of divine justice, and the security and shining of the divine glory in the salvation of sinners, through the sacrifice of the Son of God, have given me equal or superior satisfaction to what I ever enjoyed in the hope of my own salvation. It so arrested my attention – absorbed my thoughts, and satisfied my soul, that I have, for a season, as it were, forgotten myself in the glory of God.¹³

It was no surprise that one so thrilled with his faith desired to share it with other people. A new chapter was about to open in the life of George Barclay as he began to consider the possibility of serving as an evangelist or congregational minister.

TRAINING FOR MINISTRY

The desire to train for the pastoral ministry was made a matter of much prayer and fasting by this young man, as well as a time of serious self-examination. He was aware that his denomination required a full seven years of study for this vocation and the costs associated with such a decision were considerable. His cousin, whose profession of faith four years earlier part way through his studies had made such an impression upon George, had completed his training and was now about to enter upon his first pastoral charge. It was this relative that was the most influential person in encouraging George Barclay to commit himself to the preparation necessary for the Christian ministry. After consultation with

¹² Fuller, 'Memoir of Andrew Fuller', pp. 5-10.

¹³ Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 3.

his Antiburgher minister he moved to Paisley to start his studies for this new career, but due to financial difficulties he was compelled to withdraw from the course. His responsibilities towards his wife Janet, whom he had married in December 1796, the daughter of a Kilwinning farmer Robert Speirs, ensured that the traditional path to Antiburgher ministry had now closed for him. A new avenue for sharing his faith unexpectedly arose when he was invited to work with the Paisley Sabbath School Society. Training for a few weeks was deemed sufficient prior to this young man being placed as a teacher in one of their schools. This work was challenging, but also very enjoyable, especially now that Barclay had given up thoughts of Antiburgher ministry due to his financial constraints. He had retained, though, his passion for mission, avidly reading reports of mission work overseas, such as the BMS work in India,¹⁴ and also concerning home missionary activities, in particular that organised by Robert and James Haldane in Scotland.¹⁵ The breadth of his reading led Barclay to begin to question some of the narrow and rigid principles upon which the church of his youth was grounded, and fellowship with Christians from other traditions opened his eyes to recognise other valid forms of church life and practice.¹⁶

The proofs of godliness which he saw in persons of other denominations, and the accounts he read of their faith, and fruitfulness, and united exertions for the good of men, and the glory of God, freed his heart from a party spirit, and determined him to 'walk at liberty, and keep God's precepts'. At this period, too, his mind began gradually to recede from Presbyterian

¹⁴ *The Periodic Accounts relative to the Baptist Missionary Society* were published regularly after 1800 by John Morris of Clipstone, England, but the *Missionary Magazine* edited by Rev. Greville Ewing, the assistant minister of Lady Glenorchy's Chapel, Edinburgh, was the main source of mission information to Scots in the late 1790s. J. J. Matheson, *Memoir of Greville Ewing* (London: John Snow, 1843), pp. 81-6.

¹⁵ For example, *An Account of the Proceeding of the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home from their Commencement, December 28, 1797, to May 16, 1799* (Edinburgh: J. Ritchie, 1799).

¹⁶ One of the founder members of Kilwinning Baptist Church, James Neil, had attended Kilwinning Antiburgher Church as an adherent for several years, but would not join them due to their rigid rules, especially the prohibition on hearing preachers from other denominations. G. Barclay, *Memoirs of the late Mr James Neil, Shipmaster, Irvine* (Greenock: William Scott, 1822), pp. 47, 65-6, 79-81, 86-9.

principles and to embrace those denominated Independent or Congregational.¹⁷

The seeds of change in Barclay's ecclesiological views were to coincide with a new opportunity to train for Christian ministry, in the classes of Robert Haldane's Theological Academy.¹⁸ The initial suggestion of a friend that he should apply to Robert Haldane was rebuffed in early 1799, but following a three month illness in the autumn of that year there was a change of heart, which resulted in the acceptance of a place in the second class of students, following an interview with Greville Ewing, minister of the Glasgow Tabernacle Church.¹⁹

In December 1799 Barclay moved to Dundee to commence his studies under the supervision of the Dundee Tabernacle minister William Innes. He remained there until November 1800. There were regular opportunities for preaching, following his first public sermon at Dunkeld, Perthshire, in April 1800, that were perceived by this young man as a welcome break from his more formal academic studies. After fifteen months of further preparation under Greville Ewing in Glasgow he was appointed to work with the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home (SPGH) for the following year. Two offers of employment were open to him from Cambuslang and Kilwinning congregations. Barclay felt led to preach the gospel in his home district and accepted the call to the Kilwinning Independent cause in April 1802. Much to his disappointment this ministry saw little in the way of success. The size of the congregation steadily declined despite his most earnest endeavours. The next stage in his theological journey began when a friend expressed some doubts over the propriety of infant baptism. Intensive reading of various books and conversations with friends in different denominations led Barclay to conclude that 'believers in Christ are the only proper subjects, and immersion the only proper mode of Christian baptism'.²⁰ True to his

¹⁷ Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 5.

¹⁸ Information on this theological academy can be found in R. F. Calder, 'Robert Haldane's Theological Seminary', *Transactions of the Congregational History Society*, 13 (1937-39) (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprints, 1969), pp. 53, 59-63; *The Jubilee Memorial of the Scottish Congregational Churches* (Edinburgh: A. Fullarton & Co., 1949), pp. 67-72; W. D. McNaughton, *The Scottish Congregational Ministry 1794-1993* (Glasgow: The Congregational Union of Scotland, 1993), p. 283.

¹⁹ Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 6.

²⁰ Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 46. By contrast to Leechman's account, James Scott declares that Barclay, in his time as minister of the

convictions Barclay was baptised in October 1803 by Dr Charles Stuart of Edinburgh, a decision that was to lead to his resignation shortly afterwards from his Kilwinning congregation. It is important to note, however, that his baptism was not in one of the existing Scotch Baptist churches in Scotland, because the Kilwinning minister, like his later colleague Christopher Anderson of Edinburgh, was not convinced of the appropriateness of their form of church government or the sufficiency of their zeal for mission.²¹ His preparation for ministry had been completed, but it was neither Antiburgher nor Independent causes that he would serve. Instead, a new congregation began that would be one of the very first 'English'-style Baptist churches in Scotland with a 'pastor and deacons' model of leadership, in contrast to the plurality of elders found in the Scotch Baptist churches in Scotland. This decision was the first of a number of new initiatives undertaken by the Kilwinning Baptist minister, the pioneer of a new form of Baptist witness in Scotland.

KILWINNING/IRVINE BAPTIST CHURCH

There were twelve people that united together to form a Baptist church in Kilwinning on 12 December 1803. On that day George Barclay stated:

We met for prayer and fasting, with a view to this solemn and important matter. After spending some time in devotional exercises, several truths essential to be known, believed and experienced, in order to personal Christianity, were stated. We each of us professed our faith in these. We adopted this single and simple principle as the basis of our union – that the Bible contained the whole of religion, and that we determined to follow it wherever it might lead us. On this profession and mutual agreement, we gave to each other the right hand of fellowship, and agreed to walk together as disciples of Jesus, and as a church of God.²²

The last item of business conducted was the decision to look within the fellowship for individuals who were qualified to hold the offices of pastors

Independent congregation in Kilwinning, 'had no complaint to make concerning the attendances, for these had steadily increased, but no one had made an open confession of Christ' (J. Scott, 'Baptist Stalwarts of the Past: George Barclay', *Scottish Baptist Magazine*, 65.8 [August 1939], p. 4). It is difficult to assess the accuracy of Scott's opinion as no primary source was given for his assertions.

²¹ B. R. Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity: The Origins of the Baptist Union of Scotland* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), pp. 115-17.

²² Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 47.

and deacons. On 31 December George Barclay was formally set apart to the pastoral office, with another unknown person appointed as a deacon.²³ This body was duly constituted on Sunday 1 January 1804, the occasion of their first celebration of the Lord's Supper. This was a group of dedicated individuals who knew that the path they had chosen would be a hard one to follow, but who were determined to go where their settled convictions had led them.

Although small in number this body of people showed great zeal in their determination to promote the gospel they professed. Evangelistic meetings were held in a variety of hired premises in the district to allow as many people as possible to hear their message. Barclay spoke frequently in the open air and conducted various preaching tours wherever a potential congregation could be found. From the start of this new body in Kilwinning one of the two Sunday services was held in Irvine, the neighbouring town, due to its greater population and because some of the older church members lived in that place.²⁴ A decision was taken in 1822 to move the church to Irvine, where they worshipped in 'The Albert Rooms', a building later used as an Artillery Hall, and then in the twentieth century as the 'Tivoli' Cinema. The congregation grew slowly but steadily throughout Barclay's ministry with up to 200 members added during his thirty-six year pastorate.²⁵ From these small beginnings small shoots of growth began to emerge elsewhere in Scotland. In 1805 Barclay met with a small group of Baptists meeting in the Cordiner's Hall, Edinburgh. This congregation had arisen from the contacts between English Baptist students at Edinburgh University and members of James Haldane's Tabernacle Church. In April 1805 Barclay baptised two of their number, one a man called Thomson,²⁶ the other Archibald Smith, who was to rise to prominence as co-pastor of the Edinburgh Tabernacle with James

²³ Note here only one deacon. This was not unique in the 'English' Baptist Churches. They chose to appoint only individuals identified with the gifts for that particular ministry. The first congregation of this movement in Glasgow also had only one deacon, James Deakin. Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, pp. 118-19.

²⁴ Barclay, *James Neil*, p. 87.

²⁵ 'Origin and History of Irvine Baptist Church', 1925 (?), p. 1. MS in the Waugh Papers, Bundle 2, Scottish Baptist History Archive, Glasgow.

²⁶ H. Anderson, *The Life and Letters of Christopher Anderson* (Edinburgh: W. P. Kennedy, 1854), pp. 25-6. Probably John Thomson who also attended the Edinburgh Tabernacle Church until his retirement from that church in June 1820 over the exercise of church discipline. J. Thomson to A. Smith, 23 June 1820, Waugh Papers, Bundle 3.

Haldane, once the latter had adopted Baptist principles in 1808. Smith was to become secretary of the first Baptist Union of Scotland in 1827.²⁷ It was through these Edinburgh contacts that Barclay's lifelong friendship with Christopher Anderson was to develop. In fact, George Barclay was in practice seen as the senior pastor of the 'English' Baptist churches in Scotland in the first decade of the nineteenth century. He was present at the ordination and induction of new pastors in this tradition, for example, giving the charge in November 1829 to James Paterson, the pastor of the 'English' Baptist congregation that met in a hall in Inkle Factory Lane, Glasgow, prior to their church being built in Hope Street.²⁸ Entries from the diary of Christopher Anderson in this period reveal the prominent position of the Kilwinning minister.²⁹ After his congregation had been firmly established, Barclay's attention began to turn to addressing other perceived spiritual needs in his native land.

HOME EVANGELISM

There had been individual Scotch and 'English' Baptists engaged in Highland Mission in the early years of the nineteenth century.³⁰ However, the first organisation established for this purpose in 1808 was the Scotch Itinerant Society (SIS), whose leaders were Christopher Anderson of Edinburgh and George Barclay. Anderson was the treasurer and the main contributor to its funds, Barclay was its secretary and figurehead. The introduction to the first printed Journal of itinerant work under the auspices of the SIS included the following statement:

[The SIS had its] origin in the mutual agreement of two friends, who resolved to do 'what they could', not merely in their own little circle, but in the dark and most destitute parts of their native country. Their ability to support others, as it respected pecuniary means, was, but very limited

²⁷ See the documents from this Baptist Union in the Waugh Papers.

²⁸ For example, Anderson, *Christopher Anderson*, pp. 25-7. Fuller information on Paterson and his congregation are given in B. R. Talbot, 'Contrasting Interpretations of Baptist Identity in Nineteenth Century Scotland: The Contributions of Rev. Francis Johnston, Rev. Jonathan Watson and Dr James Paterson', an unpublished paper delivered at the Third International Conference on Baptist Studies, at the International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, 2003.

²⁹ For example, Anderson, *Christopher Anderson*, pp. 25-7.

³⁰ Fuller details on Baptist Home Mission Work in Scotland in this period are given in chapter five of Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*.

indeed; yet a commencement was made, in reliance upon the bounty of the Shepherd of Israel.³¹

George Barclay had informed his congregation when accepting the pastoral office that he would undertake itinerant preaching tours in other parts of Scotland. Regular visits to Perthshire, Ayrshire and Galloway and a long northern tour as far north as Dingwall in 1810 indicate the scope of his itinerant ministry.³² Aware of their limited finances, Andrew Fuller persuaded English Particular Baptists in London to provide a small amount of aid for the work in Scotland. The July 1808 minutes of 'The Baptist Society in London for the Encouragement and Support of Itinerant Preaching' record that 'They had thereupon resolved that a letter be written to Mr Fuller informing him that if Messrs Anderson and Barclay will make personal application that the committee will attend to their cases.'³³ In the period 1808 to 1812 George Barclay received regular donations of money (usually £5 each time), in addition to tracts and copies of the New Testament.³⁴ The first agent employed by this society was Alexander McLeod, a former Haldane preacher from Dunkeld who had adopted Baptist principles in 1807. He was employed to serve in Perthshire.³⁵ The second and most successful agent was Dugald Sinclair, a former member of the Bellanoch 'English' Baptist Church, a church-plant from the Glasgow congregation of this network in 1805, under the pastoral leadership of Neil McVicar, a former Haldane preacher. After being trained for the ministry at Horton Baptist College, Bradford, Sinclair was employed in 1810 to serve in the Western Highlands, prior to his emigration to Canada in 1831. An account of his commissioning service on Saturday 9 June 1810 in Barclay's meeting-house in Kilwinning was recorded in Sinclair's Journal:

³¹ D. Sinclair, *Journal of Itinerating Exertions in some of the more destitute parts of Scotland* (6 Vols; Edinburgh: Andrew Balfour, 1816), Vol. 1, p. 3.

³² P. Waugh, 'Home Missions and The Highlands', in G. Yuille (ed.), *History of the Baptists in Scotland* (Glasgow, Baptist Union Publications Committee, 1926), pp. 69-70.

³³ 'The Baptist Society in London for the Encouragement and Support of Itinerant Preaching', 21 July 1808, MS in the possession of the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

³⁴ 'Baptist Society in London', Minutes 21 July 1808 to 9 April 1812. The aid probably continued beyond this time, but the minutes apparently have not survived.

³⁵ For details on McLeod see Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, pp. 124-6. See also D. E. Meek, 'Evangelical Missionaries in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Scottish Studies*, 28, 1987.

'I was, last night, solemnly set apart for the work of the Lord, as an Itinerant, by prayer, in Brother Barclay's meeting-house in Kilwinning. Messrs [Christopher] Anderson, Barclay and [Peter] McFarlane were present and engaged the service.'³⁶ McFarlane, the least well-known of these ministers, had been sent from the Kilwinning church to Horton Baptist College to train for Christian ministry. He had chosen to accept a call from Rawden Baptist Church, Yorkshire in 1809.³⁷ Barclay and his congregation were central in the work of this society.

It was, though, a struggle for the SIS to survive. The printed accounts for the years 1808 to 1815 reveal a deficit every year apart from 1814.³⁸ It was to get worse: from 1816 to 1824 the amount owed to the society treasurer was £147, with other debts incurred as a result of evangelistic work in Falkirk and Aberdeen.³⁹ The solution came with a merger with the home evangelisation body led by Robert and James Haldane. 'The Baptist Evangelical Society for Scotland, especially the Highlands', had begun its work in June 1823 with a strong committee and agents for collecting funds based both in Scotland and England. George Barclay was asked to lead the new body as its secretary.⁴⁰ In 1827 this society merged with the Baptist Highland Mission, the evangelistic agency of the Scotch Baptists in Scotland, to form the 'Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland'. Barclay was appointed to serve on its committee.⁴¹ Although the Kilwinning minister took a less prominent role in the leadership of Baptist home mission work in Scotland after 1827, there can be no doubt that he, together with Christopher Anderson, was instrumental in placing this work on a very strong footing. Other Baptists would build on the solid foundations that George Barclay had erected.⁴²

³⁶ Sinclair, *Journal of Itinerating Exertions*, Vol. 1, p. 7. For details on Sinclair see D. E. Meek, 'Dugald Sinclair', *Scottish Studies*, 30, 1991; and Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, pp. 121-4.

³⁷ *Northern Baptist Education Society Report, 1805-1806* (Rochdale: J. Hartley, 1806), p. 57; *Report, 1809-1810*, pp. 162-3, 169.

³⁸ See Table 4.1, SIS Accounts, Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, p. 141, and in more detail in Sinclair, *Journal of Itinerating Exertions*, Vols 1-6.

³⁹ *The Freeman*, 27 May, 1863, p. 332.

⁴⁰ 'Baptist Evangelical Society for Scotland, especially the Highlands', *Baptist Magazine*, 25.5 (May 1825), p. 216.

⁴¹ *Report of the Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland* (Edinburgh: J. & D. Collie, 1929), p. 2.

⁴² One of the most successful former members of his Kilwinning Church was John Gilmour, who was directed to church-plant in Aberdeen from 1822 to 1830 after completing his training at Horton, prior to his emigration to

BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY

The vision of George Barclay extended beyond the borders of his native country. He was one of many Scottish ministers across the Protestant denominations that generously supported the work of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS).⁴³ He was passionately convinced that Baptists working together could achieve far more than working as isolated individual congregations. Too often internal differences within Baptist ranks were allowed to get in the way of effective Christian service. There is no better example of Barclay's conciliatory skills than that exhibited in his work with the BMS.⁴⁴ Andrew Fuller, the BMS secretary, had preached for the first time in Kilwinning in 1805 during his third collecting tour in Scotland. He appears to have highly esteemed George Barclay, and on the two succeeding visits in 1808 and 1813 he was accompanied by him when preaching and collecting funds for the society in the south-western counties of Scotland.⁴⁵ This friendship was maintained until Fuller's death in 1815. Barclay's involvement in the work at Serampore was summed up by his son-in-law and successor as pastor in the church at Irvine, John Leechman:

He was also the correspondent of [William] Carey, and [Joshua] Marshman, and [William] Ward ... and in all the trials and triumphs of the Baptist Mission he ever took the deepest interest. The Serampore brethren especially shared his confidence and regard; and as several of his own family were privileged to reside for a season at that loved spot, where the 'first three' lived, and laboured and died ... in that spot his interests and attachments, in his later years, were so concentrated that he seemed to live as much at Serampore as he did in Irvine.⁴⁶

Canada where he was even more influential in home mission work. P. R. Dekar, 'The Gilmours: Four Generations of Baptist Service', in P. R. Dekar & M. J. S. Ford (eds), *Celebrating The Canadian Baptist Heritage* (Hamilton, Ontario: McMaster University Divinity College, n.d.[1984?]), pp. 41-53.

⁴³ B. Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792-1992* (Edinburgh, T&T. Clark, 1992), p. 20. J. C. Marshman, *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward, embracing the History of the Serampore Mission* (2 Vols; London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1859), Vol. 2, pp. 328, 332-7.

⁴⁴ The information in this section is largely taken from Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, chapter four, 'The "English" Baptists', 1796-1852.

⁴⁵ 'George Barclay, Irvine (1774-1838)', p. 29.

⁴⁶ *Baptist Magazine*, 29.2 (February 1839), p. 48.

In 1831 Barclay's youngest and only surviving son, William Carey, joined his illustrious colleagues at Serampore. He had been trained as a printer, but was also used as a preacher after showing remarkable fluency in the Bengali language. The young Barclay's career was cut short in June 1837 by his untimely death on the mission-field. George Barclay's youngest son had died as an infant and Robert Barclay, the second son had died earlier in 1822 aged twenty-three.⁴⁷ Two of Barclay's three daughters, Margaret and Janet, were loyal members of the Irvine church until their deaths in 1885 and 1888 respectively.⁴⁸ There was, however, another link between Barclay and the work in Serampore. John Leechman, who had studied at Bristol Baptist College and later as a Ward student at Glasgow University, was commissioned for missionary service by Christopher Anderson in July 1832 at Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh. Leechman was an able scholar and well suited to the post of lecturer in the Serampore College. In India during 1833 he married Mary Barclay, the other daughter of George and the brother of William Carey Barclay. The climate in India had an adverse effect upon Mary Leechman's health, and after consultation with their colleagues this couple returned to Britain for good in 1837.⁴⁹ The Leechmans also wished to assist the attempts in Britain to resolve the conflicts between the Serampore missionaries and the home committee of the society. George Barclay had been a faithful partner, fund-raiser and activist in the work of the BMS. It was, however, in the resolution of conflicts between 1815 and 1837 within this mission agency in which he would make his greatest contribution.

The controversy within the BMS had arisen in 1815 after the death of its secretary Andrew Fuller. Details of the controversy are complex but have been explained elsewhere.⁵⁰ The key point was that traditional supporters in the Northamptonshire Association and Scotland wanted existing arrangements to continue, whereas influential London Baptists, for example Joseph Gutteridge, wanted to control BMS operations through the new committee in the metropolis. It was a recipe for a disastrous confrontation. William Carey in October 1817 gave a warning about the dangers of this situation in a letter to John Ryland, a Baptist minister and a senior member of the BMS committee: 'I beseech you not therefore to

⁴⁷ Leechman, 'George Barclay', p. 48.

⁴⁸ *Irvine Baptist Church 1803-1978. 175 Years of Christian Service* (Irvine: Irvine Baptist Church, 1978), p. 14.

⁴⁹ 'George Barclay, Irvine (1774-1838)', pp. 30-31.

⁵⁰ Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, pp. 57-67.

attempt to exercise a power over us to which we shall never submit'[sic].⁵¹ After twelve uneasy years the partnership was broken in 1827 and reconciliation was not effected until December 1837. The burden of raising funds in this interval primarily fell upon the shoulders of Anderson and Barclay in Scotland and Samuel Hope, a Liverpool banker known for his philanthropic activities. Hope had been described by John Dyer, the BMS secretary, as 'the great stay of the Serampore mission'.⁵² Tireless work by these men to bring about a resolution of the conflict between the missionaries and the home committee finally began to bear fruit in 1837. The last major public event in which Barclay participated before his death was the BMS committee meeting in London during December 1837. The reunion of the two parties had been a pressing goal for this stalwart supporter of the Bengal mission. John Leechman, Barclay's son-in-law, emphasised this point in the obituary written for his father-in-law:

To accomplish this desirable object he visited London in December 1837, as one of the deputation to the Society; and none rejoiced more than he at the amicable agreement that was thus, in the Providence of God, so happily brought about. He considered it a peculiar honour to have been instrumental in any degree, in helping forward this auspicious event. The writer recollects with what pleasure he frequently quoted the words of Isaiah, and applied them to this subject, 'And thou shalt be called, The Repairer of the breach, The Restorer of paths to dwell in;' and often did he rejoice that they were applicable to him and others, who were honoured to promote this union.⁵³

It has been suggested that Barclay was the leader in bringing about the work of reconciliation.⁵⁴ This opinion is plausible due to Barclay's strong relationship with the Serampore missionaries, especially through his family ties, that put him in a unique position to negotiate an appropriate settlement with the London BMS committee. He had believed that strength lay in unity rather than in division and had sought to demonstrate it through his Christian ministry both at home and elsewhere in the Baptist cause. It was, therefore, natural that his conciliatory skills should be utilised in the resolution of this conflict.

⁵¹ Carey to Ryland, 1 October, 1817, cited by Stanley, *Baptist Missionary Society*, p. 59.

⁵² 'The Necrologies of John Dyer', *Baptist Quarterly*, 23.7 (1950), p. 309.

⁵³ *Baptist Magazine*, 29.2 (February 1839), p. 49.

⁵⁴ 'George Barclay, Irvine (1774-1838)', pp. 30-1.

It was not only in support of the work overseas that the BMS utilised the gifts of George Barclay. It was this Scottish Baptist minister, together with John Saffery,⁵⁵ minister of Brown Street Baptist Church, Salisbury, another dedicated supporter of this society, that the BMS invited to visit Ireland in 1813, with a view to building up the Baptist cause in that land.⁵⁶ The reason for this visit to Ireland had been an appeal by an Irish Baptist minister to Particular Baptists in England for colleagues to assist them in their work.⁵⁷ The matter was handled by the BMS committee who decided that a six week tour by two respected ministers would be the best means of assisting the Baptists in Ireland. The official history of the Baptist Irish Society, written in 1845, described the purpose of their visit in this way:

[These] men admirably adapted, by their sound judgement and holy zeal, to ascertain the wants of a country, and to suggest measures for its highest welfare, were requested by the Committee of the Baptist Missionary Society on its behalf, and to collect donations from the few friends of Christ in that country, desirous of the diffusion of the light of life among the heathen. These honoured brethren were also encouraged to examine the state of Ireland with a view to measures being devised for the extension of the gospel of Christ among its inhabitants.⁵⁸

In the October 1813 issue of the *Baptist Magazine* John Saffery reported their findings from Ireland. He was convinced that the desire to help the Irish Baptists was growing, but requested that, 'something more may be done by our denomination in that part of the United Kingdom'. The report commended at least seventy Episcopal clergymen and the Methodists who were 'faithfully labouring for the salvation of men and their number is

⁵⁵ Details of Saffery's life and work can be found in B. R. Talbot, 'John Saffery (1763-1825)', in M. A. G. Haykin (ed.), *The British Particular Baptists 1638-1910* (3 Vols; Springfield, Missouri: Particular Baptist Press), Vol. 3, 2003, pp. 42-83.

⁵⁶ This was not Barclay's first trip to Ireland. He had been in Ireland with Christopher Anderson collecting funds for the BMS as early as 1808. D. E. Meek (ed.), *A Mind For Mission. Essays in appreciation of The Rev. Christopher Anderson (1782-1852)* (Edinburgh: Scottish Baptist History Project, 1992), p. 20.

⁵⁷ J. Thompson, 'Baptists in Ireland, 1792-1922: A Dimension of Protestant Dissent' (D. Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1988), pp. 35-6 for details.

⁵⁸ A. G. Fuller & J. Belcher D.D., *The Baptist Irish Society: Its Origin, History and Prospects* (London: Baptist Irish Society, 1845), p. 2.

daily increasing'. In contrast to these encouragements Irish Baptists were struggling desperately.

The Baptist Churches are few and small. They are in danger of Arminianism on the one hand, and Sandemanianism on the other; so there is much to deplore; yet there are those in their communion who are desiring and praying for better days.⁵⁹

In order to encourage those Irishmen who wanted to address the situation, Saffery and Barclay requested that English and Scottish Baptist ministers should go over each year and spend a week or two with each Irish Baptist church. In addition a special Baptist society ought to be established to take responsibility for the work.⁶⁰ Saffery renewed his appeal for a mission society dedicated to the work in Ireland, in a letter written in December 1813 and published in the January 1814 issue of the *Baptist Magazine*.⁶¹ These two men were content to help shape this society at its inception, but would play no further official part in its affairs. They must, though, take a great deal of credit for both assessing the state of the Baptist cause in Ireland and contributing to the establishment of a society that would strengthen the witness of Irish Baptists.⁶²

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

To George Barclay is reserved the honour of being the first Scottish Baptist minister to send a theological student to train for the pastoral ministry at a Baptist College. He had been extremely grateful for the provision for his own training by Robert Haldane, and sought to provide opportunities for the next generation of ministers. The Baptist College he chose was Horton, near Bradford. Barclay directed four men from his own congregation to that institution and in association with 'English' Baptist colleagues in Scotland encouraged many more individuals to apply for

⁵⁹ *Baptist Magazine*, 5.10 (October 1813), pp. 432-4.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Baptist Magazine*, 6.1 (January 1814), pp. 21-2.

⁶² It is also important to highlight the excellent work done in Ireland by Christopher Anderson in support of this and other causes. See D. E. Meek, 'Christopher Anderson, The Scottish Highlands and Ireland', in Meek (ed.), *A Mind for Mission*, pp. 17-24.

places. In total twenty-two Scots gained places between 1806 and 1837.⁶³ The Kilwinning/Irvine men were Peter McFarlane (1806), David Gibson (1815), John Gilmour (1816) and William McMillan (1836). Gibson, an itinerant worker with the SIS, had his application for entry deferred in 1815; William McMillan died in the college in 1838 of a chill brought on by a lack of heating. McFarlane settled in Baptist pastorates in England after his college studies.⁶⁴ Gilmour was the most successful Kilwinning student, sharing his pastor's enthusiasm for theological education. In Canada in the 1830s he shared a vision for a Baptist College, and saw the Canada Baptist College, Montreal, established in 1838. This institution closed in 1848, but enough had been achieved to ensure that 'others caught Gilmour's vision'.⁶⁵ George Barclay had convinced 'English' Baptists in Scotland of the benefits of theologically trained ministers in the early part of the nineteenth century, but members of the other Baptist networks in Scotland were also convinced of its merits by the 1830s.

In April 1836 there was a representative gathering of Scottish Baptists who were concerned to enhance the opportunities for training for prospective Baptist evangelists and ministers within their native land.⁶⁶ They had been deeply concerned that out of the thirty Scots who had completed their studies at Horton, only six had returned to work in their native land. The Baptist Academical Society had been established to advance this issue in 1837. There was little progress in the first seven years, but with the establishment of the second Baptist Union of Scotland in 1843 a commitment was made to provide adequate theological training under its auspices. George Barclay, now in his final years, had been unable to attend the meetings of this body, but he had indicated his support and was listed until his death as a corresponding member of the Academical society.⁶⁷ Other younger men could now take forward the work that had been promoted so successfully by George Barclay over the previous three decades.

⁶³ For further details see Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, pp. 147-50 and Appendix 2 'Scottish Baptists sent from Scotland to Horton Baptist College by 1837', p. 346.

⁶⁴ Details of all these men can be found in the annual *Northern Baptist Education Society Reports*, 1806 to 1838.

⁶⁵ Dekar, 'Gilmours: Four Generations of Baptist Service', pp. 44-6.

⁶⁶ For further details see Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, pp. 215-20.

⁶⁷ *First Report of the Committee of the Baptist Academical Society* (Edinburgh: R. Marshall, 1838), p. 1.

MOVES TOWARDS BAPTIST UNION

The last major initiative in which George Barclay played a significant part was the attempt to form a union of Baptist churches in Scotland in 1827.⁶⁸ In March that year⁶⁹ an anonymous circular was apparently sent to every Baptist congregation in Scotland inviting them to participate in moves towards the establishment of closer ties between the three streams of Baptist witness in Scotland. The 'English' Baptists led by George Barclay and Christopher Anderson had held, since the inception of their movement, close ties with English Particular Baptists. The Scotch Baptists also, within the framework of their own movement had regular fellowship with colleagues in England. The third group of Baptists, a network of pastors and churches associated with Robert and James Haldane, did not have such strong ties with other churches outside Scotland, but had seen the benefits of merging their home mission agency with the one promoted by 'English' Baptists in 1823. The enthusiastic responses from many churches led to a meeting being held in the Elder Street Baptist Chapel, Edinburgh, in April 1827. A decision was taken by those individuals present to invite churches to send official delegates to a further meeting at the same venue in Edinburgh on 13 June that year to constitute the first union of Baptist churches in Scotland. George Barclay had represented the Irvine church at each of these gatherings, but at the June meeting was appointed interim secretary of the Baptist Union prior to a more permanent arrangement being made.⁷⁰ Unfortunately this union did not survive and had ceased to function by 1830 at the latest, however, the decision to appoint Barclay as its figurehead for the first few weeks or months of its existence speaks highly of the regard his colleagues had for him. The Irvine minister had consistently been a bridge-builder throughout his ministry. This tribute, therefore, by his Baptist colleagues in Scotland confirms that aspect of his ministry.

⁶⁸ The details of this initiative are found in Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, chapter six, 'The Attempts to Form a Baptist Union of Scotland, 1827-1842'.

⁶⁹ Anonymous Circular, *To The Baptist Churches of Scotland*, 18 March 1827, Waugh Papers.

⁷⁰ *Circular from the Committee of Proposed Baptist Union*, 4 May 1827, and *To The Baptist Churches in Scotland*, 22 June 1827, Waugh Papers.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GEORGE BARCLAY

On 20 July 1838 George Barclay died at his home in Irvine, having served in one church for thirty-six years. He was a Baptist by conviction who had left a numerically strong denomination in Scotland to found an 'English' Baptist Church. The uniqueness of the ecclesiology of his congregation was such that there was no other similar cause that could send a minister to represent it from amongst the existing Baptist churches in Scotland. However, this small group of devoted Christians maintained a faithful witness under his inspiring leadership and saw a steady growth in churches holding to their theological principles in Scotland. A statistical survey in 1843 found that 'English' Baptist causes comprised 64% of all Baptists in Scotland,⁷¹ and by the end of the century almost all Baptist churches in Scotland had adopted the 'pastor and deacons' model of church leadership promoted by George Barclay.

The Irvine minister, together with his colleague Christopher Anderson had founded the first Baptist home mission agency that in time inspired other colleagues to join them in forming the Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland in 1827, an organisation that was astonishingly successful in its evangelistic work in the nineteenth century. Barclay was also a leading figure in the BMS, both in promoting its activities in Ireland and in supporting its workers in India. His enthusiasm for theological education was infectious, linking with the Horton College to train a generation of Scottish Baptist theological students. By the time of his death in 1838, almost all Scottish Baptist leaders were convinced of the importance of adequate training for the pastoral ministry, even the great majority of Scotch Baptists who had opposed it at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The least successful of the initiatives in which he participated was the attempt to establish a union of Baptist churches in Scotland, but the fact that 45% of Scottish Baptist churches had participated in the 1827 union, a figure not matched until 1869 at the launch of the present Baptist Union of Scotland,⁷² indicates something of the strength of his influence in support of this cause. George Barclay, in conclusion, was probably the most influential minister in Scottish Baptist ranks in his lifetime, establishing a pattern for ministry that continues to the present day.

⁷¹ F. Johnston, *The First Yearly Report of the Baptist Union of Scotland* (Cupar: G. S. Tullis, 1843), pp. 18-20.

⁷² Talbot, *Search for a Common Identity*, Appendix 4.2, 'The Proportion of Churches Affiliated to the Scottish Baptist Association or the Baptist Union of Scotland', pp. 357-8.