

EARLY BRETHREN LEADERS AND THE QUESTION OF CALVINISM¹

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Controversy is familiar territory for the Brethren. Their history is chequered with division and splits. Indeed, within two decades of its founding, the movement was torn irreparably into two factions—the Exclusives and the Open Brethren—allowing Ian Sellers to note of them: ‘They were rent with disputes over dispensationalism, the ordering of assemblies and Christology.’² In recent years however a different doctrinal issue is vying for pride of place in Brethren polemics: Calvinism.³

Brethren opposition to Calvinism

Although there is evidence to demonstrate that Brethren have been opposed to Calvinism for many decades,⁴ in recent years some among

1. An abridged version of this paper was originally presented at the 2008 Doctoral Colloquium of the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit in Leuven, Belgium.

2. Ian Sellers, *Nineteenth-Century Nonconformity* (New York, 1977), pp.10-11.

3. The Brethren are not the only group for which Calvinism is presently an issue of tension. See E. Ray Clendenen and Brad J. Waggoner (eds.), *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist dialogue* (Nashville, Tennessee, 2008).

4. One example comes from Iain Murray’s biography of A. W. Pink. Douglas Craig reports the following regarding his father who lived in South Wales: ‘I recollect my father telling me when I was a young Christian, reading Mr Pink’s *The Sovereignty of God*, of the time in the early 1920s when it first came into his hands and his initial reaction to it; bearing in mind that my father was among the “Brethren” and was thus steeped in Arminianism and Free-will teaching.’ Craig goes on to describe how his father came to agree with Pink’s Calvinism and embraced ‘the truth of sovereign grace’, despite the fact that Calvinist views were unpopular in his father’s circle. Craig states: ‘This so incensed the “Brethren” among whom he had spent all his spiritual life, that they excommunicated him from their fellowship; called him a “heretic” and he found himself in exactly the position experienced by Mr Pink—a fast closed door and in complete isolation’, Iain H. Murray, *The Life of Arthur W. Pink*, rvsd edn (Carlisle, 2004), pp.298-299. However, W.E.F. Naismith, whose correspondence with Pink is quoted extensively by Murray, became a highly-respected preacher within the

the Open Brethren have become more aggressive and alarmist in their opposition to Calvinism.⁵ Several examples will illustrate the point. First, the flagship magazine of the conservative Open Brethren in North America is *Uplook*. In the October 1999 issue, the magazine's editor and respected leader among the Brethren, J. B. Nicholson, Jr., wrote an editorial entitled 'Born by the railroad tracks: confessions of a zero-point Calvinist.' In the article, Nicholson rejected each of the five points of Calvinism.⁶

Second, in 2002 Dave Hunt published a book entitled *What Love Is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God*. A significantly expanded edition was released in 2004.⁷ The appearance of Hunt's book is significant as Hunt has been associated with the Brethren for many years. His teaching and writing ministry is appreciated by many Brethren, and thus Hunt has an influential voice among them.⁸ Yet *What Love Is This?* is an all out assault on Calvinism—more often

Brethren in the UK and had a series of articles published in a Brethren magazine setting out a Calvinist position: W.E.F Naismith, *Believer's Magazine*, vol. 65 (July, 1955), pp.159-60; (August), pp.180-1; (September), pp.205-6, 198; (October), pp.230-2; (November), pp.250-2; according to a note from the editor (i.e. Andrew Borland), who appeared to be in agreement with the articles' contents, the series attracted several critical letters, one of which, from a Scottish correspondent, was published: H[arry]. Morris to the ed., *ibid.*, (November, 1955), pp.244, 249.

5. I refer primarily to the more conservative groups of Open Brethren particularly in North America. Ross McLaren has explored the ties between Open and Exclusive Brethren in North America. See Ross Howlett McLaren, 'The Triple Tradition: The origin and development of the Open Brethren in North America', Vanderbilt University, Tennessee, M.A. thesis, 1982. The thesis was subsequently published in the *Emmaus Journal* in four parts: 4 (1995), pp.169-208; 5 (1996), pp.57-87 and pp.161-203; 6 (1997), pp.129-150.

6. J.B. Nicholson, Jr, 'Born by the railroad tracks: confessions of a zero-point Calvinist', *Uplook*, (October, 1999), pp. 2, 9.

7. Dave Hunt, *What Love Is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God*, 2nd edn (Bend, Oregon, 2004).

8. A number of Brethren assembly websites link to Hunt's ministry website 'The Berean Call.' For examples see: www.nlbchapel.org; www.oaklawnbiblechapel.org; http://southsidebiblechapel.com/Q___A.html. See also: <http://www.brethrenassembly.org/christian.html>; <http://www.plymouthbrethren.com/relsite.htm>; <http://Plymouthbrethren.wordpress.com> [accessed 28 July 2010].

than not through means of caricature, misrepresentation, and shoddy scholarship.⁹ It is noteworthy that Hunt's book against Calvinism was reviewed positively by *Uplook* magazine¹⁰ and is promoted at Brethren conferences.¹¹ Thus for many Brethren, Dave Hunt has defined Calvinism and raised awareness of the issue.

A third piece of evidence suggesting Calvinism is being actively opposed by Brethren comes through the publication of another respected leader among the conservative Open Brethren, David Dunlap. In the preface to his book, *Limiting Omnipotence: The consequences of Calvinism* (2004), Dunlap states of Calvinism:

These teachings have proven to be harmful to many Christians in undermining their confidence in the justice and righteousness of God. They have also been the source of divisions in local assemblies. My conviction is that Calvinism limits the glory of God by limiting His love, mercy, and grace, and by compromising His justice, righteousness and holiness.¹²

Dunlap proceeds to endorse a Dave Hunt-like caricature of Calvinism, suggesting it provides a faithful summary of Calvinistic teaching:

Calvinism makes God the author of sin and reduces man to a poor puppet of destiny. It robs Christianity of all morality and deprives heaven of holiness. It takes away the guilt of sin and lifts the blame of hell from the souls of men and lays it at the feet of God. According to this view the mass of men are dead—dead and damned through no fault of their own. They never had a chance. They were sinful before

9. I have critiqued Hunt's work in Mark R. Stevenson, 'Whose theology is this? Dave Hunt's Misrepresentation of Calvinism', *Emmaus Journal*, vol.15 (2006), pp.3-44.

10. Kevin Shantz, 'What love is this? by Dave Hunt: on Calvinism's misrepresentation of God', *Uplook* (July/August, 2003), p.20.

11. On 27 October 2007, I attended a seminar on the subject of 'Calvinism and Arminianism' at Bethany Bible Chapel in Toms River, New Jersey. The conference was advertised in *Uplook* magazine as 'a Biblically-based examination of these two controversial theological perspectives and how they affect a believer's walk and witness' (*Uplook* (August/September, 2007), p.6). The seminar proved to be essentially a polemic against Calvinism. The speaker, Mike Attwood, promoted Hunt's book as a 'helpful treatment of the subject.'

12. David Dunlap, *Limiting Omnipotence: The consequences of Calvinism* (Port Colborne, Ontario, 2004), p.12.

they had sinned.... To preach the gospel to such is not only useless, but cruel. It is an insult to the helpless dead, a mocking of the lifeless lips with offers of the Bread of Life.¹³

It is apparent that what many of these Brethren writers understand as Calvinism is in fact some form of hyper-Calvinism.¹⁴

Fourth, it should be noted that opposition to Calvinism among the Brethren is not limited to North America. David Gooding of Belfast, a respected Brethren teacher and professor emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, gave a series of lectures entitled 'The Glorious Gospel of the Blessed God' at the 1995 Brethren conference 'Rise Up and Build.'¹⁵ On questions of the will and the doctrine of election, Gooding advanced a decidedly Arminian interpretation.¹⁶ Two other Brethren authors from Northern Ireland, John Parkinson and James Crookes, have published books strongly opposing Calvinistic doctrines.¹⁷ Furthermore, a Brethren missionary to France, Dudley Ward, published an anti-Calvinist book called *Programmed by God or Free to Choose? Five-Point Calvinism under the Searchlight* (2008).¹⁸ Finally, it is worth noting that some leading

13. *Ibid.*, p.12. Dunlap is here citing Robert McClurkin, *Election* (St. Catharines, Ontario, 1978), p.2. It is worth noting that McClurkin was an itinerant teacher among the Brethren.

14. See Stevenson, 'Whose theology is this?', p.20.

15. The conference was held in Lexington, Kentucky. Gooding's lectures are available for purchase through Gospel Folio Press, www.gospelfolio.com.

16. In an e-mail exchange with David MacLeod of Emmaus Bible College, Gooding stated: 'For myself, I would have to confess that the strong Calvinist system of theology seems to me to be shot-through with logical fallacies... As far as I am aware, my own attitude to Calvinist doctrine does not come from any particular source, but is my own personal response: first of all to the study of Scripture, and then to the writings of teachers from both sides of the debate.' David Gooding to David MacLeod (15 October 2004).

17. John F. Parkinson, *The Faith of God's Elect: A comparison between the election of scripture and the election of theology* (Glasgow, 1999); James L. Crookes, *Chosen in Christ? A dialogue concerning free will and human responsibility as they relate to the redemptive purposes of our sovereign God* (Kilmarnock, 2005).

18. Dudley Ward, *Programmed by God or Free to Choose? Five-point Calvinism under the searchlight* (Eugene, Oregon, 2008).

Brethren teachers who actively oppose Calvinism, such as Mike Atwood and William Burnett,¹⁹ emigrated from the United Kingdom to North America.

Clarifying Terminology

The goal of the present study is to demonstrate that such opposition to Calvinism as illustrated above represents a significant departure from the theology of the early Brethren leaders. It is not within the scope of this paper to inquire how and when the theological shift from Calvinism to non-Calvinism took shape. The material presented here is a sample of evidence that will be more fully explored in my forthcoming thesis on Brethren soteriology.

It is notoriously difficult to sort through the theological variations that claim the term ‘Calvinism.’²⁰ Therefore it may prove helpful to lay out some general categories which outline the various positions of the Anglo-Calvinist tradition. Of course the attempt to categorize theological viewpoints always holds the danger of oversimplification. Individual proponents are typically more nuanced than summary statements allow. Nevertheless notable distinctions appear on the spectrum of beliefs regarding divine sovereignty and human freedom,

19. See, for example, William Burnett, ‘A praying church is a powerful church’, *Precious Seed*, vol. 61.2 (2006). Burnett writes: ‘Unfortunately, in these days when the rising tide of hyper-Calvinism is creeping over the church at large, many have lost their fervency in prayer and have ceased pleading with God on behalf of the lost. Hyper-Calvinism has dried the tears that once were shed over lost sinners, because if God has already made up his mind about the destiny of men, we do not need to pray for souls, and in fact, we need not get passionate about the gospel. This thinking is foreign to the teaching of the word of God’, available at www.preciousseed.org [accessed 30 July 2010].

20. Timothy Stunt notes that by the 1820s at Oxford University, ‘there had for many years been a widespread suspicion of anything which could be labelled as “Calvinist”’. In practice this was a pejorative term applied not only to those whose teaching concerning election and predestination was too emphatic but also to anyone who seemed too extreme or “peculiar” in his piety or enthusiasm’, Timothy C. F. Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession: radical evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain 1815-35* (Edinburgh, 2000), p.213.

and some attempt to sketch those distinctions will help bring a measure of clarity to the present study.

What follows is largely drawn from Bruce Hindmarsh's study of English evangelical theology in the mid-eighteenth century. Some modifications have been incorporated, most significantly in distinguishing between high Calvinism and hyper-Calvinism, whereas Hindmarsh blends these two categories into one.²¹ The positions outlined by Hindmarsh were still operative in the nineteenth-century theological milieu out of which the Brethren movement emerged.

1. **Evangelical Arminianism** taught that election is conditional, based on God's foreknowledge of human choices, the atonement is unlimited and universal in scope, and final salvation is contingent upon sustained faith and co-operation with sanctifying grace. The free offer of the gospel was based on Christ's universal atonement for every person—original sin and inability having been removed by common grace.

2. **Moderate Calvinism or Hypothetical Universalism**²² believed in unconditional election based upon God's sovereign will, and irresistible grace. However the atonement is *unlimited* at least in terms of provision; it is ultimately efficient only for the elect. Final perseverance was seen as a corollary of election, but the process of sanctification was still necessary. Like Arminianism, the free offer of the gospel was linked to universal atonement.²³

3. **Strict Calvinism** maintained unconditional election, based on an infralapsarian (or sublapsarian) scheme of divine decrees, and irresistible grace. The atonement was particular, limited to the elect.

21. D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition: Between the conversions of Wesley and Wilberforce* (New York, 1996), pp.124-125. Hindmarsh's work is also summarized in Jonathan D. Burnham, *A Story of Conflict: The controversial relationship between Benjamin Wills Newton and John Nelson Darby* (Carlisle, 2004), pp.54-55.

22. See Jonathan D. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the softening of Reformed theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2007).

23. Burnham suggests that 'moderate Calvinism' was held by the majority of English evangelicals: *Story of Conflict*, p.55.

Final perseverance and the process of sanctification were affirmed. The free offer of the gospel was based upon the general sufficiency of Christ's death for sinners whose duty it is to repent and believe.

4. **High Calvinism** based unconditional election on a supralapsarian scheme of divine decrees. In addition, high Calvinism typically viewed justification as eternal, with Christ's righteousness imputed to the elect from eternity before the actual exercise of faith. This feature often produced some form of theological antinomianism.²⁴

5. **Hyper-Calvinism**²⁵ mirrored high Calvinism at most points with the exception that hyper-Calvinists were unwilling to offer the gospel freely to all people. They took divine sovereignty to such an extreme that they denied it was the duty of all sinners to repent and believe the gospel, thus the restriction of gospel preaching. While high Calvinism is often equated with hyper-Calvinism, it is clear that not all high Calvinists placed such limitations on preaching. An important example for our study is the Oxford Evangelical and high Calvinist Henry Bulteel.²⁶

It should be evident from the categories outlined above that the focus of the present study is on Calvinistic soteriology. Calvinism proper, or what might be called Confessional Calvinism, is not limited to soteriology but embraces the totality of the Reformed tradition.²⁷ Nevertheless, for most English evangelicals in the

24. Antinomianism (lit. 'against law') 'so stresses Christian freedom from the condemnation of the law that it underemphasizes the need of the believer to confess sins daily and to pursue sanctification earnestly. It may fail to teach that sanctification inevitably follows justification.' W. R. Godfrey, 'Law and gospel', in Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (eds), *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1988), p.379.

25. See Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity, 1689-1765* (London, 1967). For nineteenth-century hyper-Calvinism see Iain H. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The battle for gospel preaching* (Carlisle, 1995).

26. Burnham writes of Bulteel justifying a preaching tour 'on the grounds of obedience to the command of Christ to proclaim the Gospel to all people': *Story of Conflict*, p.70.

27. The substance of Confessional Calvinism is articulated in the Reformed confessions, particularly the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards.

nineteenth century, ‘Calvinism’ was primarily a soteriological concept.²⁸ However the terminology used in the literature is not uniform. For example, early Brethren theology is often dubbed ‘moderately Calvinistic.’²⁹ Yet many Brethren held some version of particular redemption (often with their own nuance). Thus ‘moderate’ may embrace strict Calvinism in the above taxonomy; the term ‘moderate’ in this case appears to be intended to distinguish the Brethren from high or hyper-Calvinism; it may also have reference to the tone and relative emphasis placed on Calvinism among the Brethren.

Historians’ assessments

Before examining the views of individual Brethren leaders on the question of Calvinism, it worth noticing how historians have summarized the distinguishing features of the early Brethren. When it comes to theology, it is remarkable how frequently the movement is described as Calvinistic in its doctrinal orientation.

Additionally, Confessional Calvinism has a strong ecclesiological component as embodied in the various Reformed churches. Its theology is marked not simply by a commitment to predestination or to the so-called five points, but also to an overarching covenant theology, the five *sola* statements of the Reformation, and typically an amillennial eschatology, an emphasis on the sacraments as the means of grace, and the regulative principle of worship. Calvinism also touches piety, philosophy, politics, ethics—as Abraham Kuyper argued in his *Lectures on Calvinism* (1899), it is a full-orbed worldview. The Brethren were never Calvinists in this fuller sense of the term.

28. While soteriology was primary, other concepts could be connoted by the term ‘Calvinism.’ Robert Dann argues that for Evangelical Anglicans, Calvinism ‘was a package containing several other components. A Calvinist would emphasize the authority of Scripture (in contrast to the authority of the Church), the need for conversion (in contrast to the administration of the sacraments), the distinction between the Church and the World (in contrast to the traditional mingling of saint and sinner at Holy Communion). Calvinists thus claimed, and often received, the epithet “Evangelical”’, Robert Bernard Dann, *The Primitivist Ecclesiology of Anthony Norris Groves: A radical influence on the nineteenth-century Protestant church in Britain* (Great Barrow, Chester, 2007), p.33.

29. William Blair Neatby, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren*, 2nd edn (London, 1902), p.230.

The ‘first major history of the Brethren movement’³⁰ appeared in 1901 by Blair Neatby. In a chapter entitled ‘The Theological Position of Brethrenism,’ Neatby wrote, ‘the theology of the Brethren is the ordinary theology of Evangelicals of a firmly but moderately Calvinistic type.’³¹

For Brethren historian Harold Rowdon, a Calvinistic understanding of the gospel was one of the common theological convictions that marked the movement. He writes:

Although certain convictions, such as the supreme authority of Holy Scripture, the evangelical gospel with a Calvinistic complexion, and the expectation of a pre-millennial, personal return of Christ, were held firmly and universally, other matters of a practical as well as a doctrinal nature remained subjects of discussion.³²

In a later work describing Brethren identity, Rowdon makes an intriguing comment regarding Calvinism’s status through the history of the movement.

At the level of theology, the earliest Brethren were Calvinists to a man. In the process of time they adopted the dispensationalist approach to Scripture...and greatly modified their Calvinism. Eventually, it became little more than a memory, maintained by a few, rediscovered by some, but largely a thing of the past.³³

Peter Embley, in his 1967 thesis ‘The Origins and Early Development of the Plymouth Brethren’, suggests that since the majority of founders and earliest adherents of the Brethren had been members of the established church in England and Ireland, there was an affinity between Brethren and Anglican Evangelicals. Embley identifies the theological affinity as ‘the moderate Calvinist theology

30. Tim Grass, ‘The quest for identity in British Brethren historiography: some reflections from an outsider’, in Neil T.R. Dickson and Tim Grass (eds), *The Growth of the Brethren Movement: National and international experiences: essays in honour of Harold H. Rowdon* (Carlisle, 2006), p.14.

31. Neatby, *History of the Plymouth Brethren*, p.230.

32. Harold H. Rowdon, *The Origins of the Brethren 1825-1850* (London, 1967), p.227.

33. Harold H. Rowdon, *Who Are the Brethren and Does It Matter?* (Exeter, 1986), p.35.

of both Christian groups.’³⁴ In a later article, Embley summarized Brethren views as follows: ‘Theologically, the early Brethren were moderate Calvinists—Anglican seceders of High Calvinist convictions usually became Particular Baptists—strongly anti-Erastian, and were endowed with considerable prophetic interest and a not unconnected missionary zeal.’³⁵

In his work on the ecclesiology of the early Brethren James Callahan writes: ‘Evangelical and Calvinistic in soteriology, the Brethren functioned as the nagging conscience of British Christianity that, according to the Brethren, had departed from biblical fidelity in ecclesial doctrine constitution, and practice.’³⁶ Callahan argues that the emerging principles of Brethren ecclesiology were ‘a consistent byproduct of Calvinistic soteriology.’³⁷ Burnham concurs and links the Brethren doctrine of separatism to ‘the movement’s inherent strict Calvinism: as the “elect” body of Christ, they became convinced that they should gather for worship only with those who could be likewise identified.’³⁸ Similarly Grass has argued that ‘some form of Calvinist

34. Peter L. Embley, ‘The Origins and Early Development of the Plymouth Brethren’, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1967, p.1. Embley further claims: ‘If the Plymouth Brethren gained the majority of their earliest adherents from the established church, it is equally clear that they gained most of their doctrines and ecclesiastical practices from those sections of the church which might be generally described as Calvinistic Dissent’, *ibid.*, p.27. Again he wrote: ‘As regards Calvinist doctrine, although Brethren universally accepted the doctrine of eternal punishment and the doctrine of unconditional election, there seems to have been a good deal less explicit emphasis on them in worship and hymnology than among, for example, the Particular Baptists’, *ibid.*, p. 205.

35. Peter L. Embley, ‘The Early Development of the Plymouth Brethren’, in Bryan R. Wilson (ed), *Patterns of Sectarianism: Organisation and ideology in social and religious movements* (London, 1967), p.214.

36. James Patrick Callahan, *Primitivist Piety: The ecclesiology of the early Plymouth Brethren* (Lanham, Maryland, 1996), p.xi.

37. *Ibid.*, p.43.

38. Burnham, *Story of Conflict*, p.85.

theology was a controlling factor in the ecclesiology of most major thinkers among the Brethren.³⁹

The entry on the Brethren in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* includes this statement: ‘Their teaching combines elements from Calvinism and Pietism and emphasis has often been laid on an expected Millennium.’⁴⁰ The entry on the Brethren in the 1879 *Cyclopædia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* concludes: ‘As to the remainder of their creed, they seem to agree most with the Calvinistic system, and are said to be zealous in good works.’⁴¹ Also writing in 1879, church historian William Blackburn could say of the Brethren, ‘Many of them are Calvinist in theology.’⁴² Other examples could be multiplied⁴³ but the evidence cited above is sufficient to show that historians have recognized Calvinistic soteriology as one of the doctrinal distinctives of the early movement. This observation reinforces our thesis that present hostility to Calvinism among the Brethren is a departure from its theological roots.

Calvinism among early Brethren leaders

In this section we examine a number of the influential early Brethren and their theological convictions vis-à-vis Calvinism. We will

39. Timothy George Grass, ‘The Church’s Ruin and Restoration: The Development of Ecclesiology in the Plymouth Brethren and the Catholic Apostolic Church, c.1825-c.1866’, PhD thesis, King’s College London, 1997, p. 192.

40. ‘Plymouth Brethren’, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1997), p.1302 ii.

41. J.H. Worman, ‘Plymouth Brethren, or Darbyites’, in John M’Clintock and James Strong (eds), *Cyclopædia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, vol. 8 (1879) rpt (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1970), p.306.

42. W. M. Blackburn, *History of the Christian Church from Its Origin to the Present Time* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1879), p.646.

43. See for example, Sellers, *Nineteenth-Century Nonconformity*, p.10; Ian McDowell, ‘The influence of the “Plymouth Brethren” on Victorian society and religion’, *Evangelical Quarterly*, vol. 55:4 (1983), p. 211; Peter J. Lineham, ‘The significance of J. G. Deck 1807-1884’, *Christian Brethren Research Fellowship Journal*, no.107 (November 1986), p.15; Ian S. Rennie, ‘Aspects of Christian Brethren spirituality’, in J. I. Packer and L. Wilkinson (eds), *Alive to God: Studies in spirituality* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1992), pp.192, 203-6.

examine five prominent first generation leaders: John Nelson Darby, B. W. Newton, Anthony Norris Groves, J. G. Bellett, George Müller; and one second generation leader: C. H. Mackintosh. The first five are selected for their impact on the movement from the early stages; whereas Mackintosh is selected due to his popularity as an author and thus wide general influence when Brethrenism had been firmly established. Representatives from both Open and Exclusive streams are found here, although that distinction for our topic is not crucial at this point in the history of the movement.

John Nelson Darby

Darby was involved very early in the development of the Brethren movement and quickly became its most energetic and recognized leader. His creative theological mind coupled with a forceful personality and tireless activism significantly shaped the movement's doctrinal distinctives.

Darby's Calvinistic sympathies come to the fore in a pamphlet published at Oxford in 1831 entitled 'The doctrine of the Church of England at the time of the Reformation, of the Reformation itself, of Scripture, and of the Church of Rome, briefly compared with the remarks of the Regius Professor of Divinity'.⁴⁴ The tract was written in connection with a controversial sermon delivered by Henry Bulteel, curate of St. Ebbe's in Oxford. Bulteel, an enthusiastic high Calvinist, delivered the university sermon at St. Mary's in February 1831. The sermon was a bold articulation of Calvinistic doctrines and a rebuke of the Established Church on several points, not least for its departure from the Calvinism of the Thirty-Nine Articles.⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, the sermon sparked no small controversy in Oxford and beyond. The official university response was written by Dr. Edward Burton, Regius Professor of Divinity and Canon of Christ Church. Burton

44. W. Kelly (ed.), *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* [hereafter *CW*], vol. 3 (Sunbury, Pennsylvania, 1972), pp.1-43.

45. H.B. Bulteel, *A Sermon on 1 Corinthians 2.12 preached before the University of Oxford at St. Mary's on Sunday February 6th 1831* (Oxford 1831). For a more extended discussion see Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant secessions from the via media, c. 1800-1850* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 252-283.

charged that Bulteel had confused justification with salvation, which Burton argued was based on human free will, obedience and repentance. Burton also argued that the English Reformation was inherently Lutheran and not Calvinistic. By all accounts, the Regius Professor's response was disappointing.⁴⁶

Darby, never one to spurn controversy, added his pamphlet to the others that quickly emerged in response to Burton's remarks. In order to demonstrate that the roots of the English Reformation were in accord with Calvinistic doctrines, Darby assembled numerous quotations from the likes of Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr which strongly endorsed a Calvinistic view of predestination. Darby revealed his own convictions when he wrote, 'For my part, I soberly think Article XVII to be as wise, perhaps I might say the wisest and best condensed human statement of the views it contains that I am acquainted with.'⁴⁷ A portion of Article XVII to which Darby refers reads as follows:

Predestination to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. Wherefore, they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God, be called according to God's purpose by his Spirit working in due season: they through Grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by adoption: they be made like the image of his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.⁴⁸

46. See Burnham, *Story of Conflict*, pp. 67-68, and Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession*, p.255.

47. [Darby], *CW*, vol. 3, p.3.

48. Since this statement comes so early in Darby's literary career, at a time when a number of his theological views were still being developed—indeed, when he had not formally left the Church of England— it might be wondered if his settled and mature doctrinal convictions reflected a different approach to the one stated above. We are, however, not left to wonder. In letter dated March 23, 1880, some fifty years after his early endorsement of Article XVII, he wrote: 'As to Article XVII, I quite admit that

Darby's theology is further revealed in a letter dated October 23, 1861. The letter is a response to a correspondent's inquiry over the issue of free-will. Darby answered: 'This fresh breaking out of the doctrine of free-will ministers to the pretension of the natural man not to be entirely lost, for that is just what it amounts to.' He added further that free-will is 'the dogma of the Wesleyans, of all reasoners, of all philosophers', but for Darby this doctrine 'completely changes the whole idea of Christianity, and entirely perverts it.'⁴⁹ Instead he believed that the human heart was so corrupt and the will so recalcitrant 'that nothing can induce him to receive the Lord, and to forsake sin.' Regarding the Wesleyans, Darby charged that 'their confidence in their own strength makes confusion in their teaching, and leads them not to recognize the total ruin of man.'⁵⁰

For Darby, advocates of free-will denied the necessity of grace in conversion. It was incomprehensible to him how sinners, of their own fallen accord, could embrace Christ. Thus he concluded, 'Arminianism, or rather Pelagianism, pretends that man can choose, and that thus the old man is ameliorated by the thing it has accepted. The first step is made without grace'.⁵¹ Darby's equating of Arminianism with Pelagianism shows how much he disdained Arminian doctrine.

God's predestination is secret to us, but the seventeenth Article is not: it is very plain, and I think very good.' (*Letters of J.N.D.*, vol. 3 [Kingston-on-Thames, n.d.], p.70). In another letter to the same recipient, also dated 1880, Darby describes an unnamed Anglican vicar as being 'upon ordinary evangelical Arminian or semi-Arminian ground.' He then adds, 'I suspect the seventeenth Article tries him, and it is really a very wise statement as I remember it' (*ibid.*, p.71. See also [Darby], *CW*, vol.9, p.300).

49. [Darby], *Letters*, vol.1, p.314.

50. *Ibid.*, p.315.

51. *Ibid.*, pp.315-316.

In Darby's voluminous literary output, he does not manifest a fixation on Calvinist doctrines.⁵² He did defend them when necessary, but for Darby those doctrines seemed to be settled; his attention was focused more on developing issues related to ecclesiology and eschatology. Nevertheless, he did clash with people over Calvinism. W.G. Turner relates the following account of a dispute Darby had with the American evangelist D.L. Moody in Chicago:

Mr. Darby was invited by D.L. Moody to give a series of Bible readings in Farwell Hall. These were attended by many lovers of the Word of God, but unfortunately suddenly came to an abrupt end as the two clashed over the question of the freedom of the will. Mr. Darby held to what Mr. Moody considered extreme Calvinism on this point, affirming that so perverted was man's will he could not 'will' even to be saved... Mr. Moody insisted that man as a responsible person was appealed to by God to turn to Him and would be condemned if he did not... The controversy became so heated one day that Mr. Darby suddenly closed his Bible and refused to go on.⁵³

This account is verified in a letter from Darby dated March 1874. The letter reads in part:

As to the work at Edinburgh [where Moody had been preaching], I dare say there may have been conversions, and one must bless God for that. But Moody before he came to England denied openly all work of grace in conversion, and denounced it as diabolical in his own pulpit. I hear he has got on in this subject, that M.'s tract did him good, which is in a great measure a *résumé* of brethren's teaching; the author not concealing in his intercourse with others where he learned it. But some of Moody's false doctrine was taught in his public ministrations at Edinburgh, according to R. and M.'s account, which no doubt is correct, for we discussed it at Chicago, and he held it there, namely, that no man is condemned for his sins,

52. Many of Darby's exegetical comments supporting a Calvinistic view of salvation are cited in R.A. Huebner, *God's Sovereignty and Glory in the Election and Salvation of Lost Men* (Jackson, New Jersey, 2003). Huebner, who died 18 February 2008, was a modern champion of Darbyite theology.

53. W.G. Turner, *John Nelson Darby* (London, 1944), pp.21-22. The account is also found in H.A. Ironside, *A Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement* (1942) rpt (Neptune, New Jersey, 1985), p.81, and J.F. Findlay, Jr., *Dwight L. Moody: American evangelist, 1837-1899* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1969), pp.126-127.

but for not coming to the refuge—sins are all borne and put away for everybody.⁵⁴

Particularly fascinating is Darby's comment that Moody has 'got on in this subject [the doctrines of grace]' through 'M.'s tract,' which Darby calls 'a *résumé* of brethren's teaching.' He also claims that 'M' openly got such teaching presumably from Darby or the Brethren.⁵⁵ In the Appendix, we examine the possible identity of 'M' and his tract.

H. A. Ironside claims that after the clash with Moody over Calvinism, Darby had a similar conflict with a prominent leader of the Exclusive Brethren in North America, F. W. Grant—although unlike the Moody affair, this was a private disagreement.⁵⁶

In an earlier letter dated November 1872 from Springfield, Illinois, Darby vents his frustration that the American churches were resistant to his Calvinistic understanding of the gospel. He wrote of having 'to insist on the first principles of grace' and claimed that 'no one will have it as a rule in the American churches' except some 'old school Presbyterians.'⁵⁷

Two final points of interest on Darby's Calvinism come from B. W. Newton, to whom we will turn next. Darby visited Oxford at a time when, according to Newton, evangelicals at the University were divided into two parties, the 'High Calvinists led by Bulteel and another more Arminian led by Sibthorpe.'⁵⁸ Thus when Newton had

54. [Darby], *Letters*, vol. 2, p.259.

55. In the letter immediately preceding, Darby had also evaluated the negative effect of Moody's doctrine, but added 'I am told that Mr. M[oody] is clearer as to grace through ——'s tract. It is a great mercy for him if it is so, and I thank God', *ibid.*, pp.257-258.

56. Ironside, *Historical Sketch*, p.81. John Reid's account in *F. W. Grant: His life, ministry and legacy* (Plainfield, New Jersey, 1995), pp.57-63 is not altogether reliable as Darby and Grant differed on the doctrines of election and atonement more than Reid suggests. According to Ironside, Darby also clashed with the American Methodist leader Daniel Steele over 'the doctrines of grace', Ironside, *Historical Sketch*, p.82.

57. [Darby], *Letters*, vol.2, p.193.

58. Christian Brethren Archive, John Rylands University Library of Manchester, B.W. Newton, Fry MS, p.236.

opportunity to speak to Darby privately, he put two questions to him that were evidently much debated at the time. The first was whether or not Darby would let the gospel be preached to sinners simply as sinners. Darby's positive response assured Newton he was no hyper-Calvinist.⁵⁹ The second question related to the extent of the atonement and Newton was pleased that Darby did not 'universalise the Atonement.'⁶⁰

As Darby's views developed, his position on the atonement became more nuanced. He made a crucial distinction between propitiation and substitution. Propitiation is Godward and thus in the work of Christ there is 'an adequate and available sacrifice for sin for whoever would come.'⁶¹ But Darby did not believe that Christ bore, as a substitute, the sins of all people. He wrote, 'I can address all, and declare to them that this satisfaction [for sin] has been made... But I cannot say to all that Christ bore their sins, because the word does not say it anywhere. If He had borne *their* sins, they would certainly be justified.'⁶² Darby explained how this impacted his preaching, 'I can say to all, that propitiation has been presented to God. They have but to look there, and going to God by that blood they will be received; they have nothing to wait for. They will not go unless the Father draw them, but this is a matter of sovereign grace, with which I have nothing to do in my preaching—in my teaching, yes, but not in my address to unconverted souls.'⁶³

It is reasonable to conclude that Darby was a strict Calvinist who saw a particularity in the atonement but did not share the hyper-Calvinist refusal of a universal gospel offer.

Benjamin Wills Newton

The conflict between Darby and B.W. Newton that eventually led to the severance of the Brethren movement into Exclusive and Open

59. Darby also rejected the doctrine of reprobation. See *Notes and Jottings from Various Meetings with J. N. Darby*, 1 vol. edn (Kingston-on-Thames, n.d.), p.355.

60. Fry MS, p.236.

61. [Darby], *CW*, 29, p.287.

62. [Darby], *Letters*, vol.1, p.98.

63. *Ibid.*

branches has been well documented.⁶⁴ Indeed, Newton and his teaching would become the focal point of the controversies in the 1840s that resulted in the unhappy division, and Newton himself would leave the Brethren. Nevertheless, Newton was an important leader in the formative years of the movement. In the influential assembly at Plymouth, Newton was a key leader. In fact, early on Darby appointed Newton as the presiding elder at Plymouth.⁶⁵ In these early days, Darby and Newton shared a number of common doctrinal convictions, including Calvinism.⁶⁶

Born into a Quaker family, Newton experienced an evangelical conversion as a student at Oxford in the early part of January 1827.⁶⁷ At Oxford, Newton developed a friendship with Henry Bulteel, whose Calvinistic views influenced Newton,⁶⁸ and sparked significant controversy at the University as described above. That Newton also embraced a Calvinistic view of salvation is clear from several of his letters to his mother. For example, in a letter dated September 3, 1827, Newton reveals his predestinarian beliefs by quoting a sermon from the missionary Henry Martyn on the sovereignty of God in salvation. He urged his mother to read the sermon for in it she would find his 'principles and feelings portrayed fully and accurately.'⁶⁹ He

64. For a book length treatment see Burnham, *Story of Conflict*.

65. *Ibid.*, p.81. Regarding the open ministry at Plymouth Newton wrote, 'I was to sit at the head of the table and rule, and anyone was allowed to speak who thought fit to do so; and if he did not speak to edification I was to silence him', Fry MS, p.261.

66. Burnham, *Story of Conflict*, p.xv.

67. See Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession*, pp.194-200.

68. Fry MS, p.138. In 1827 Newton could speak of his delight 'sitting under the ministry of my darling Bulteel', Fry MS, p.125.

69. *Ibid.*, p.109. Sermon XIII on 1 Corinthians 1:1-3 in, *Sermons, by the Late Rev. Henry Martyn, B. D.*, 1st American edn (Boston, 1822), pp.226-246. In one relevant portion of the sermon, Martyn stated: 'Whatever there is good in his people is God's own gift and work, and could therefore never induce him to make choice of them... The holiness of the elect is the effect, not the cause of their election. There is, therefore, no cause existing in ourselves to render us the objects of his choice... Election must be called an act of that sovereign power whereby the Almighty God acts according to the purpose of his own will, without thinking fit to render an account of it to his creatures' (pp.229-230).

was careful to reassure his mother that he had not fallen into extreme Calvinism. He declared, 'I am ready to shake hands with any who preach Jesus Christ as the only name given under heaven whereby we can be saved—not by works but simply by believing in his name.' He then added, perhaps in order to distance himself from the perceived antinomianism of high Calvinism, 'Works follow as an effect—faith (which God only can bestow) is the cause.'⁷⁰ As a postscript, Newton reassured his concerned mother: 'Don't think I would press the belief in election as necessary on any one.'⁷¹

Newton's Calvinistic convictions continued to deepen. A few weeks later he spoke of the heartfelt pleasure it would bring him to see all his friends and relatives 'sincere converts to those doctrines which I am more and more convinced are more precious than life to the soul which can receive them.' He then lamented how the Established Church abhorred such principles, 'The Church of England would indeed be an Apostolic Church if its members and pastors believed the Articles by which they profess to be guided. But alas! how different is the fact.'⁷² Newton no doubt had Article XVII ('Of Predestination and Election') specifically in view for he had cited this article in his previous letter.⁷³

At the close of the same year, Newton traced the development of his evangelical convictions for his mother in a letter dated December 30, 1827. The tone of this letter is somewhat evangelistic as Newton sought to persuade her to leave the Quakers and embrace the gospel. Newton described his new faith as 'the free unmerited gift of God.' He asked, 'Did I deserve the gift [of faith] more than others? No! in

70. Fry MS, p.109. In the same sermon by Henry Martyn that revealed Newton's own principles 'fully and accurately' there is an explicit rejection of antinomianism. Martyn declared: 'Holiness is that to which [believers] are led, both by the electing love of the Father, and by their union to the Son...Concerning the necessity of holiness no humble Christian will pretend to raise doubts, since it is so expressly declared, that without holiness no man shall see the Lord: though some, who affect to be advocates of grace, have fallen into the Antinomian heresy, professing to know God, but in works denying him', *Sermons*, p.233.

71. Fry MS, p.111.

72. *Ibid.*, p.114.

73. *Ibid.*, p.111.

no wise. Freely then has he given it to me because it was his good pleasure, therefore he hath elected me to salvation.' He closed the letter marvelling at God's grace: 'To think that he should have chosen me, so vile and sinful!'⁷⁴

Two weeks later, Newton became even more forthright in his Calvinistic assertions. It is worth repeating a portion of his letter at length.

The more I read, the more I think, the more I pray, the more strong does the conviction become that the light of Christianity is almost quenched in this Island and consequently in the world. The study of Ecclesiastical History has enlightened me more than I can describe, and proves irrefragably to my mind that Arminianism is nothing more than varnished Pelagianism.

A few lines later he added:

Does any one ask me 'Are you saved?' I answer 'Yes.' Does he enquire 'Why?' Because I believe on Jesus Christ, therefore I am regenerate, therefore I am sanctified... 'Who gave you this belief?' God, for 'No one can come unto me except the Father draw him.'... 'How do you know that you shall continue to the end?' Because I keep not myself, but Christ keepeth me.

Such is the doctrine which I find in the Bible. Such is the doctrine of Augustine, Luther, Ridley, Latimer and all those holy men who bled for their Holy Faith. Such is the doctrine of the inestimable Articles of our Church. But where is that doctrine now? Is it [*sic*] not become a laughing-stock for fools to scoff at? Nevertheless the counsel of God standeth sure.... No greater blessing do I ask than that I may, in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation be endued with grace to hold up the standard of Gospel Truth.⁷⁵

Newton's most explicit declaration of his Calvinistic views comes in a letter to his uncle dated 15 August, 1828. The purpose of the letter is to provide for his uncle 'a written statement of my religious sentiments—at least those which are considered peculiar.' By 'peculiar' Newton makes clear that he means 'Calvinistic'.

74. *Ibid.*, pp.127-128.

75. *Ibid.*, pp.143-144, dated 13 January, 1828.

It is not willingly allowed by many, but yet I cannot but think, that the grand fundamental doctrine which characterizes the system of those called Calvinists, is this: 'That man is dead in trespasses and sins.' And you will please to observe that we use the term *dead* in its fullest and strongest import, understanding it to mean, that man has so completely lost that spiritual life which Adam possessed, that he is not only unable to love God, but incapable of any movement of soul towards Him—in a word, as absolutely deprived of power to perform the functions of spiritual as the dead body is to discharge those of Animal Life.⁷⁶

Newton goes on to affirm God's sovereign grace in salvation and in final perseverance, but he is also careful to distance himself from high Calvinist antinomianism by clarifying that those who are justified are 'enabled to walk religiously in good works.'⁷⁷ He then quotes approvingly from John Newton, 'If any persons have contributed a mite toward their own salvation, it was more than we can do... We needed sovereign irresistible grace to save us or we had been lost for ever.'⁷⁸

Clearly then Newton was a strict Calvinist, but he never adopted the high Calvinism of his Oxford acquaintances. Years later Newton wrote of his association with Bulteel: 'There was great blessing until a very High Calvinism was developed and then I broke my connexion with it. I remember dining with a set of three persons who were discussing the certainty of Wesley being damned.'⁷⁹

Anthony Norris Groves

In his history of the Brethren, Tim Grass notes that Anthony Norris Groves, 'had significant contact with most of the early leaders and centres, exercising considerable influence, especially in the area of

76. *Ibid.*, p.148.

77. *Ibid.*, p.149.

78. *Ibid.*, p.150.

79. *Ibid.*, p.96. The story is also recalled on pp.135 and 139. On p.135 Newton uses the term 'hyper-Calvinism.' Burnham however suggests that 'Newton's memory on this issue was partly influenced by his involvement in controversy concerning hyper-Calvinism among the Strict Baptists', Burnham, *Story of Conflict*, p.59, n.100.

personal lifestyle. Furthermore, his life and thought epitomize much that was distinctive about early Brethrenism.⁸⁰

As a young man of nineteen, Groves moved from London to Plymouth in order to practice dentistry. Shortly after his arrival in Plymouth he experienced something of an evangelical conversion. However his widow, in her memoirs of Groves, downplayed the experience. She wrote, 'It was [at Plymouth], also, he was able to profess himself a disciple of Christ...but his entrance into the full liberty of gospel light did not take place till some time after, in Exeter.'⁸¹ Significantly Timothy Stunt understands Mrs. Groves's comments to reflect 'her disapproval of the Arminianism of the circle with which Groves was then associated.'⁸²

In Exeter, Groves adopted more Calvinistic views through the influence of friends such as William Caldecott and especially Bessie Paget, of whom Groves could say, 'I look up to her, and love her now as my mother, in the things of God.'⁸³ In the same connection, Groves wrote of Miss Paget: 'Dearest B. had, for some time, sunk the keen controversialist in the tender and kind friend.' In a footnote to this rather obscure sentence Harriet Groves comments, 'This refers merely to his Arminian views, from which she was at last the means of delivering him.'⁸⁴

80. Tim Grass, *Gathering to His Name: The Story of Open Brethren in Britain and Ireland* (Carlisle, 2006), p.12.

81. [Harriet] Groves, *Memoir of the Late Anthony Norris Groves, Containing Extracts from his Letters and Journals*, 2nd edn (London, 1857), p.3.

82. Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession*, p.119. Stunt adds the circle 'included Robert Lampen, a clergyman, who was later noted as an important opponent of Calvinism in Plymouth.'

83. Groves, *Memoir*, p.40.

84. *Ibid.* In his recent biography of Groves, Robert Dann asserts: 'The majority of early Brethren, including Groves himself, had a decidedly Calvinistic theology', Robert Bernard Dann, *Father of Faith Missions: The life and times of Anthony Norris Groves* (Waynesboro, Georgia, 2004), p.304, n.16. For further discussion of the historical context of Groves's Calvinism see Dann, *Primitivist Ecclesiology*, chpt. 2, 'A Calvinistic Evangelical Anglican', pp.31-72.

Some years later, after Groves had set out on his missionary endeavours, he wrote back to his friend William Caldecott confessing, 'I adore God's electing love in choosing such a wretch to be the partner of His Son's throne.'⁸⁵ In the same letter Groves took pains to distance himself from the antinomianism of high Calvinism. He wrote:

I cannot be content that the exceeding greatness of His grace in redeeming me without price, when I was in my sins, yea, before the world was, should be a reason why I should be indifferent to His least instruction, because I am safe: the very thought seems dreadful to me, as well as so hateful, that I would not even name it, did not some seem to think you show your confidence in the freeness of your justification, by the indifference you manifest to all the precepts of Christ.⁸⁶

Yet to reassure his friend that he had not abandoned Calvinism, Groves went on to add:

Do you think your old friend is from a superlapsarian [*sic*] Calvinist become an Armenian [*sic*]? believe it not; the doctrines of grace, in all their fullness, freeness, and particularity, were never dearer to me than now; but because they are dear, I would desire to disentangle them from that web of selfishness and sloth by which they have too long bound the Church, till we are afraid to use God's words, or if we use them, introduce them by an apology.⁸⁷

John G. Bellett

Another important leader from the earliest days of the Brethren was John Gifford Bellett (1795-1864). Bellett's brother George spoke of differing with John in the 1820s over doctrinal points. George wrote, 'his views had become more decidedly Calvinistic, and the friends with whom he associated in Dublin were all, I believe, without exception, of this school.'⁸⁸ Proof of John Bellett's Calvinistic views

85. 'Coast of Malabar, Oct. 22nd, 1833', *ibid.*, p.249.

86. *Ibid.*, p.250.

87. *Ibid.*, pp.250-251.

88. George Bellett, *Memoir of the Rev. George Bellett, M.A.* (London, 1889), pp.41-42, cited in Max. S. Weremchuk, *John Nelson Darby* (Neptune, New Jersey, 1992), p.237 n.25. Weremchuk comments, 'Darby was certainly one of the Dublin friends mentioned above.'

may be illustrated through two of his essays. The first, simply entitled ‘Man’ reveals his belief in total depravity and inability. Bellett repeatedly states that man ‘is incorrigible and incurable’.⁸⁹ He further writes:

It has been said, ‘Man is prone to evil, and this arises from the impotency of the will, which, when it turns to evil, is rather passive than active. Through the grace of Christ alone is it free.’ Very just... Man has shown himself to be in full bondage to sin, so that he will go in the way of it, in defiance of every argument and every influence which may be used with him.⁹⁰

As a result of man’s bondage to sin, Bellett repeatedly insists that if there is to be any salvation ‘sovereign grace and power must come in.’⁹¹

The second essay relevant to our topic is one simply entitled ‘Election’. It reveals Bellett’s Calvinistic views of predestination. Bellett argues that the doctrine of individual election to salvation is meant to be a source of joy and encouragement to the Christian. He writes:

The truth of the divine foreknowledge of us, of God’s having elected us personally and predestinated us to most blessed destinies, is rather for the saint *as he walks in uninterrupted grace before God*. It is for the *joy of his heart*... For it tells us... that we were the subject of the divine counsels—when God was *all alone*—before the foundation of the world; before the activities, so to speak, of creation began, we were before His thoughts.⁹²

George Müller

89. J.G. Bellett, ‘Man’, in *Miscellaneous Papers* (London, n.d.), pp.104, 105, 107, 108.

90. *Ibid.*, pp.104-105; the quotation is from a work by the Venetian cardinal and theologian, Gaspar Contarini (1483-1542), *Ad Paulum III.. duae epistolae* (Florence 1558), cited in L. von Ranke, *The Ecclesiastical and Political History of the Popes of Rome during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*, tr. by Sarah Austin (Philadelphia,1841), vol i., p.104.

91. *Ibid.*, pp.107; cf. pp.104, 108.

92. J.G. Bellett, *Showers upon the Grass* (London, 1865), p.103.

Perhaps the most widely-recognized leader of the early Brethren besides Darby is George Müller. Unlike Darby however, Müller is remembered not primarily for his association with the Brethren, but for his remarkable life of faith—particularly in connection with his orphanage work. Nevertheless his impact on the Brethren has been profound.⁹³

In his autobiography, Müller relates how he came to embrace the doctrines of strict Calvinism and the positive affect they had on him. He writes:

Before this period [when he came to accept Scripture alone as his standard of judgment] I had been much opposed to the doctrines of election, particular redemption, and final persevering grace. But now I was brought to examine these precious truths by the Word of God. Being made willing to have no glory of my own in the conversion of sinners, but to consider myself merely an instrument; and being made willing to receive what the Scriptures said, I went to the Word, reading the New Testament from the beginning, with a particular reference to these truths. To my great astonishment I found that the passages which speak decidedly for election and persevering grace, were about four times as many as those which speak apparently against these truths; and even those few, shortly after, when I had examined and understood them, served to confirm me in the above doctrines. As to the effect which my belief in these doctrines had on me, I am constrained to state for God's glory, that though I am still exceedingly weak, and by no means so dead to the lusts of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, as I might be, and as I ought to be, yet, by the grace of God, I have walked more closely with Him since that period. My life has not been so variable, and I may say that I have lived much more for God than before.⁹⁴

C.H. Mackintosh

Charles Henry Mackintosh (1820-96) was a second-generation leader among the Brethren. As a writer Mackintosh was far more lucid than

93. See for example, Timothy Larsen, "Living by faith": A short history of Brethren practice', *BAHNR*, vol.1.2 (1998), pp.67-102, reprinted in *Emmaus Journal*, vol. 12.2 (Winter 2003), pp.277-315.

94. *Autobiography of George Müller, compiled by G. Fred Bergin* (1905) rpt (Denton, Texas, 2003), pp.33-34.

Darby and was thus able to mediate ‘Darbyite theology to the wider world.’⁹⁵ Mackintosh is important to our study because he marks something of a transitional attitude toward formal theology that would subsequently mark the Brethren. Unlike many of the earliest leaders Mackintosh was not formally trained in theology.⁹⁶

In terms of soteriology Mackintosh was a strict Calvinist, however he did not wish to own the label ‘Calvinist’ because of other theological baggage connected with its system. For example, in an article entitled ‘One-sided theology’, Mackintosh strongly rejected the hyper-Calvinism of one of his correspondents who could not see ‘the rightness of calling upon the unconverted to “come,” to “hear,” to “repent,” or to “believe”.’⁹⁷ His problem was not with the five points of Calvinism (‘we believe these five points, so far as they go’⁹⁸) but with the notion that the points of Calvinism are an adequate summary of the whole of biblical teaching. In his view, Calvinism left out far too much—specifically Brethren distinctives in ecclesiology and eschatology. He wrote:

There are wide fields of divine revelation which this stunted and one-sided system does not touch upon or even hint at, in the most remote manner. Where do we find the heavenly calling? Where, the glorious truth of the Church as the body and bride of Christ? Where, the precious sanctifying hope of the coming of Christ to receive His

95. Grass, *Gathering to His Name*, p.151, n.27.

96. Coad says Mackintosh was ‘no theologian, and certain isolated sentences in those books which referred to “the heavenly humanity” of Christ (and thus verged on formal heresy), brought him much hostile notice from the more prejudiced opponents of Brethren’, F. Roy Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement* (1968) rpt (Vancouver, 2001), p.208.

97. ‘One-sided theology’, in [C.H. Mackintosh], *Miscellaneous Writings of C. H. Mackintosh: Elijah the Tishbite*, vol. 5 (New York, 1898), p.166, first published in *Things New and Old*, vol.19 (1876), pp.10-16. Very similar is a letter reproduced as, ‘On the sovereignty of God, the responsibility of man, and the heart of God as revealed in the gospel’, in C.H. Mackintosh, *Short Papers reprinted from "Things New and Old"*, vol. 2 (Sunbury, Pennsylvania, 1975), pp.264-272. Since the content of this piece is so similar to ‘One-sided theology’ it is probably the actual letter Mackintosh sent to the correspondent referred to in ‘One-sided theology’.

98. ‘One-sided theology’, in [Mackintosh], *Miscellaneous Writings*, vol.5, p.167.

people to Himself? Where have we the grand scope of prophecy opened to the vision of our souls, in that which is so pompously styled 'the faith of God's elect?' We look in vain for a single trace of them in the entire system to which our friend is attached.⁹⁹

Mackintosh also objected to the hermeneutics that generally characterized Reformed eschatology wherein the dispensational distinction between Israel and the church was ignored. 'The whole body of prophetic teaching subjected to a system of spiritualizing... whereby Israel is robbed of its proper portion, and Christians dragged down to an earthly level.'¹⁰⁰

It is interesting to note that while first-generation Brethren leaders rejected the notion that formal theological education was a necessary qualification to preach the gospel, in Mackintosh we see an hostility to formal and systematic theology. He could say: 'You can no more systematize the truth of God than you can systematize God Himself. Let us abandon, therefore, all systems of theology and schools of divinity, and take the truth... For ourselves we desire to be taught exclusively by scripture, and not by any school of divinity.'¹⁰¹ One final point worth noting is Mackintosh's rejection of 'the repulsive doctrine of reprobation',¹⁰² characteristic of high and hyper-Calvinism. He wrote: 'There is no such thing in Scripture as any decree of God consigning a certain number of the human race to eternal damnation.'¹⁰³

These objections to Calvinism notwithstanding, Mackintosh embraced the doctrines of grace, but he always sought to be balanced in his presentation of them. When emphasizing the universal love of God for all people, he added: 'Do we then deny or call in question the grand truth of predestination, election, or effectual calling? God

99. *Ibid.*

100. *Ibid.*, p.168.

101. 'On the sovereignty of God', in Mackintosh, *Short Papers*, vol.2, pp.267-268; cf. 'One-sided theology', in [Mackintosh], *Miscellaneous Writings*, vol.5, p.168.

102. 'One-sided theology', in [Mackintosh], *Miscellaneous Writings*, vol.5, p.172.

103. *Ibid.*, p.170.

forbid. We hold these things as amongst the fundamental principles of true Christianity.¹⁰⁴ He continues:

The mistake lies in supposing that because God... is sovereign in His grace and mercy—because He has chosen from all eternity a people for His own praise and glory... that therefore God cannot be said to love all mankind... and, moreover that the glad tidings of God's full and free salvation ought not to be proclaimed in the ears of every creature under heaven.

The simple fact is that the two lines, though so perfectly distinct, are laid down with equal clearness, in the word of God; neither interferes, in the smallest degree, with the other, but both together go to make up the beautiful harmony of divine truth and to set forth the glorious unity of the divine nature.¹⁰⁵

For Mackintosh, election and predestination were important subjects to be taught to believers, but they were never to hinder the evangelist from preaching the gospel to all people.¹⁰⁶ When it came to the issue of the will Mackintosh agreed with Calvinists that the Bible taught 'man's utter powerlessness—that he will not, and cannot, come if left to himself—that it is only by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit that any one ever does come—that, were it not for free, sovereign grace, not a single soul would ever be saved.'¹⁰⁷ But he emphatically denied that man is therefore not responsible before God. Rather he believed the Bible 'taught with equal force and clearness... the solemn and weighty truth of man's responsibility.'¹⁰⁸ He was quite happy to embrace the tension between these two strands of biblical teaching. His position on the matter was this: 'To attempt to reconcile divine sovereignty and human responsibility is gratuitous labour. They are reconciled already, being both set forth, with equal clearness, in the divine word.' Characteristic of his approach, he then added: 'It is wonderful how simple everything becomes when we

104. 'God for us,' in [Mackintosh], *Miscellaneous Writings*, vol. 2 (New York, 1898), pp.3-4.

105. *Ibid.*, p.4.

106. 'The great commission, Part III', *Things New and Old*, vol. 20 (1877), pp.64-65.

107. 'Responsibility and power', *Things New and Old*, vol. 17 (1874), p.57.

108. *Ibid.*, p.59.

fling aside the dogmas of one-sided theology, and come like a child to holy scripture.¹⁰⁹

Mackintosh's balance is also seen in his concern to avoid the antinomianism that resulted from 'an unhallowed traffic in the doctrines of grace, without any godly care as to the application of those doctrines to our practical conduct.'¹¹⁰ In his view however, antinomianism came through an abuse of the doctrines of grace. Properly applied those doctrines are the foundation of godliness. He maintained that 'the holy superstructure of a devoted life' is 'erected on the solid foundation of our eternal election and perfect acceptance in a risen and glorified Christ at God's right hand.'¹¹¹

Conclusion

Our study has shown that soteriological Calvinism was a firm conviction among the prominent leaders of the early Brethren movement. They were strict Calvinists who rejected the extremes of both high and hyper-Calvinism, and although they were not preoccupied with the doctrines of grace, neither were they afraid to profess their allegiance to those doctrines as precious truths of the faith. With Mackintosh we see a new attitude emerging. Although he accepted the basic tenets of Calvinism, he eschewed the Calvinist label not only to distance himself from the abuses of hyper-Calvinism that were common in his day,¹¹² but also in an attempt to reject the wider Reformed system of theology which contradicted important Brethren distinctives. Mackintosh's attitude is a logical outgrowth of the development of Brethren ideals, but later writers would abandon all vestiges of Calvinism, perhaps taking Mackintosh's attitude to its logical conclusion. Be that as it may, it should now be obvious that the spirit of antagonism toward Calvinism that currently runs through the movement is, for better or worse, a departure from its origins.

109. 'On the sovereignty of God', in Mackintosh, *Short Papers*, vol.2, p.264.

110. "'Accepted" and "Acceptable"', *Things New and Old*, vol. 17 (1874), p. 249-250.

111. *Ibid.*, p. 249.

112. See Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism*.