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Gladstone and the Baptists

GEORGE WILSON McCREE was the minister in charge of a mission hall attached to Bloomsbury Baptist Church from 1848 to 1873 and afterwards minister of Borough Road Baptist Church. What were his politics? According to his son and biographer, they were "summed up in THREE words and . . . those three words were *William Ewart Gladstone* . . .".¹ McCree, born in 1822, was typical of his generation of Baptists. To such men Gladstone was more than a party leader: he was thought to be a national institution, something like a repository of political wisdom and virtue. But McCree's outlook was not confined to Baptists. "To thousands of Liberals", wrote the editor of the *Baptist Magazine* in 1886, "—especially, perhaps, we may say to Nonconformist Liberals—Mr. Gladstone has been infallible."² Such attitudes were general among Nonconformists, but Baptists were as deeply imbued with "Gladstone-olatry"³ as any in the nation.

Esteem for Gladstone was justified by any standards. No-one else in British history has been four times prime minister, no-one else has formed a ministry after his eightieth year, no-one else, it is safe to say, has contrived to deal personally with 20,000 items of correspondence a year while in office.⁴ His career in parliament was extremely long: the duke of Wellington was Gladstone's oldest cabinet colleague, Asquith the youngest.⁵ In an age of oratory, he vied with John Bright as the greatest orator of the day; in an age of skilled debate, he vied with Disraeli and Chamberlain as the greatest parliamentary debater. He contrived to publish ecclesiastical treatises and Homeric studies, to have a fund of information on almost every topic under the sun and to maintain an enthusiastic spirit of intellectual inquiry even into old age. At the same time, Gladstone kept the common touch: domestic life was well known to be his delight, he relished the exercise of tree-felling and he retained to the end the commoner's plain prefix of "Mr".⁶ A general impression of such achievements and qualities could hardly fail to arouse a measure of admiration amongst those who, like the Baptists, found themselves members of the late nineteenth-century Liberal party led by Gladstone.

Yet the degree of enthusiasm among Baptists was remarkable in view of the contrast between their own Evangelical Nonconformity and Gladstone's High Churchmanship. The Baptists had no dealings with men whom they described at various dates as Puseyites, ritualists and sacerdotalists. Gladstone was consigned successively to each of these categories. But in strict truth Gladstone's High Churchmanship took none of these forms, because it antedated the Oxford Movement. His was a zealous Anglicanism before 1833. This religious position differed markedly from that of his home. He was brought up in an

Evangelical family at a time when denominational differences were treated as trivial in comparison with the unity of all true Christians in the gospel. His father attended both the old (English) Presbyterian and the new (Scottish) Presbyterian churches at Liverpool before building Evangelical Anglican churches; his mother frequently attended the church of the Rev. Thomas Raffles, the distinguished Liverpool Independent divine, and even consulted another Independent minister, the Rev. P. J. Charrier, over the choice of a clergyman for an Anglican church the family had built.⁷ Before going up to Christ Church, Gladstone read and appreciated Robert Hall's *Modern Infidelity Considered*,⁸ and at Oxford he was drawn towards the circle of undergraduates who attended the ministry of Henry Bulteel, a high Calvinist who was shortly to secede from the Church of England to join the Strict Baptists.⁹ Thus Gladstone had a variegated Evangelical background. By his second Christmas at Oxford, however, he had embraced the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, the teaching that a man is automatically a Christian after infant baptism unless he repudiates the baptismal grace then infused.¹⁰ He came to believe that the visible church catholic has a central place in the economy of salvation. Acceptance of apostolic succession, the real presence and prayers for the dead followed as he elaborated his position.¹¹ Nonconformists, in his eyes, were technically schismatics.¹² Gladstone's high view of the Church of England never faltered in later years. Nineteenth-century Baptists had no time for the bishops and ceremonies of the Church of England, and little place for the church in their soteriology. "With his theoretic High Churchism", declared the *Baptist Magazine* in 1894, "we have not the remotest sympathy."¹³ The ecclesiastical gulf between Gladstone and the Baptists was deep.

Gladstone's devotion to the Church of England led him to a second conclusion untenable by Baptists, that the state was right to recognise and endow the church—to make it a religious establishment. It was as a defender of the Church of England as established that Gladstone began his political career in the 1830s. At the same time, the Baptists were moving towards the adoption of the opposite conviction, Voluntaryism, the belief that a religion should never be accorded recognition by the state. They had long disliked the fact that the Church of England was in practice established. Before the 1830s, however, hardly any Baptists held in the abstract that all church establishments are, as a resolution on the motion of John Howard Hinton at the 1838 Baptist Union public meeting put it, "a violation of the law of Christ".¹⁴ This was the first occasion when the Baptist Union publicly avowed Voluntaryism. In the same year Gladstone set out his argument for the establishment of the Church of England in *The State in its Relations with the Church*. Gladstone contended that the state has a conscience which can perceive truth; it must then exert itself in support of the true form of religion.¹⁵ A Baptist reply was published in the following year. "To confute this theory", wrote Joseph Angus, then minister of the New Park Street Church and a

secretary of Stepney College, "it is only necessary that it be stated in plain language. It holds that the civil magistrate is bound to compel his subjects to support his own faith, however great the number of those who conscientiously reject it . . ." ¹⁶ Gladstone found even toleration of Dissenters difficult to justify on his own premises; Angus was one of the generation of Dissenters who wanted to go far beyond toleration. They were entirely dissatisfied with the status of being merely tolerated—of being second-class citizens. Angus, like many other Baptists, was soon to join in launching the Anti-State Church Society which aimed to put Voluntaryism into practice by political pressure for the disestablishment of the Church of England. The contrast between the disestablishmentarianism of the Baptists and the antidisestablishmentarianism of Gladstone was fixed for the whole of Gladstone's lifetime.

This difference in constitutional theory (it was no less) was paralleled by the social distance between Gladstone and the Baptists. Gladstone moved among the rulers of the land. Baptists did so hardly at all. Their social circles intersected very little. Gladstone's personal contacts with Baptists, though they increased in the years after 1868, were relatively slight. At Oxford, he twice attended New Road Chapel, but not to hear Baptists: on one occasion the preacher was Rowland Hill, on the other Thomas Chalmers. ¹⁷ In the 1860s and 1870s, at meetings specially arranged by Newman Hall, a Congregational minister, for Gladstone to make the acquaintance of Nonconformists, he was introduced to the Baptist ministers Joseph Angus, William Brock and William Landels, and to the laymen Sir Henry Havelock (son of the hero of the Indian Mutiny) and H. M. Bompas (the first Nonconformist Wrangler at Cambridge in 1858). ¹⁸ In the 1890s Gladstone exchanged visits with J. J. Colman, the Norwich mustard manufacturer, originally a Baptist and still county treasurer of the B.M.S., but for nearly twenty years a Congregationalist. ¹⁹ From time to time in his later years, Gladstone invited leading Nonconformists to breakfast gatherings. Among them was Spurgeon, whom he also met on at least two other occasions—once when Spurgeon called to propose to Gladstone that all servants of the state should be excluded from parliament, once when Gladstone attended, in January 1882, an ordinary evening service at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. ²⁰ John Clifford conducted Gladstone to the hall of a public meeting, lunched with him at Dr. Parker's in May 1887 and chaired a political meeting for him in May 1888. ²¹ During part of Gladstone's first ministry, a Baptist, Henry Winterbotham, held junior office and was consulted by Gladstone on Dissenting opinion; during his second, another Baptist, W. S. Caine, entered the cabinet; and in the last fourteen years of his life, Gladstone happened to receive medical attention from Dr. Habershon, an elder of Regent's Park Church. ²² Spurgeon was also invited to Hawarden, Gladstone's home, but was too busy; Sir Morton Peto could not attend the gathering of Newman Hall to which he was invited; Alexander McLaren "shirked meeting with Gladstone more than once". ²³ Baptists

were occasional members of Nonconformist political deputations, although it was not usually Baptists who were to the fore. In the 1850s, it was the Quaker John Bright or a Unitarian like James Heywood; in later years it was Congregationalists—Morley and Baines, Miall and Richard, Dale, Illingworth and Guinness Rogers. Over the abolition of university tests in 1870 and 1871, however, W. S. Aldis (son of the Rev. John Aldis) and William Robinson of Cambridge were most prominent in negotiations with Gladstone.²⁴ This short catalogue, although no doubt incomplete, lists most of the dealings of Baptists with Gladstone in person.²⁵ Nearly all the meetings took place after Gladstone became prime minister. In the time before that—well-nigh the first sixty years of Gladstone's life—he and the Baptists were in worlds apart.

Ecclesiastical disagreement, divergence in constitutional theory, social distance—these factors should have been quite enough to ensure that Gladstone never became a hero to the Baptists. They had no occasion to take any interest in his career until his early Toryism, in part the political corollary of his High Churchmanship, had been modified sufficiently to allow him, in 1859, to accept the office of chancellor of the exchequer in a Whig government. Only then did he have a distant chance of displaying the liberal qualities of Whig ministers like Lord John Russell who had gained Nonconformist respect. Then, as throughout the century, Nonconformists as a whole were in uneasy alliance with the "liberal party", themselves more eager for reform than those bearing rule in the party. They scrutinised incoming governments for signs of sympathy for political advance. J. J. Colman, then still a Baptist, commented in a letter on the formation of the 1859 ministry. "The appointment", he wrote, "which perhaps Reformers would most object to is Mr. Gladstone's, but . . . I think we must . . . hope his position may induce in him a more liberal tone."²⁶ In 1861, even after a brilliant free trade budget, Gladstone still lacked any popularity out-of-doors.²⁷ It was not until 1864, when Gladstone had been in politics for over thirty years, that a declaration in favour of the principle of extensive parliamentary reform that would enfranchise many working men stirred popular enthusiasm for him. Nonconformists generally welcomed the decision, since most of them had long desired further parliamentary reform;²⁸ but it was among the politically conscious working classes that he became a hero, "the People's William". The chairman of the General Baptists, with their large working-class membership, went further than many of the more prosperous Baptists when he spoke of reform in his address for 1865 as the threshold of a new age.²⁹ Baptist support for Gladstone at this date was grounded on two facts: his allegiance to the liberal side in politics; and his preparedness to take the lead in a particular issue of general politics, reform.

By the time of his death, Baptists were looking back on Gladstone's work for religious equality from the late 1860s as the reason for Nonconformist gratitude to him. "As Nonconformists", said the *Baptist*

Magazine obituary, "we are profoundly indebted to him for his efforts to broaden the bounds of freedom by his abolition of Church Rates and of University Tests, and his Disestablishment of the Irish Church."³⁰ At the time of these changes, Baptists were undoubtedly delighted that their special grievances were at last being remedied; and yet they had some reservations about Gladstone's position on some questions of religious equality. First there was the church rates issue. Nonconformists, along with all other inhabitants of a parish, had to pay a rate for the upkeep of their parish church, should a majority of parishioners at a vestry meeting impose one. Gladstone put forward bills in 1866 and 1868 to allow the church rate to be ended. Here, in the opinion of the *Baptist Magazine*, was a satisfactory solution of a constant irritant; but, it observed, the same suggestion was originally put forward by John Bright, the champion of Dissent, some years before. The credit should go primarily to Bright, not to Gladstone.³¹ Further, the bill that passed in 1868 was only a compromise. It did not abolish the collection of church rates entirely (as Nonconformists wished), but abolished only their compulsory collection: Gladstone the sincere Churchman hoped that church rates would continue to be contributed by Nonconformists in the countryside, where social pressures on them were stronger.³² Again, Gladstone's first ministry was responsible in 1871 for ending the university tests that had excluded Nonconformists from senior positions at Oxford and Cambridge; but the legislation was only a compromise. W. S. Aldis was the leader of an "Association at Cambridge for the Removal of Religious Disabilities from the Universities" based on St. Andrew's Street Baptist Church. The Association was pressing for a further university reform, the abolition of fellowships reserved for clergymen. It was Gladstone who insisted on the retention of such clerical fellowships in opposition to a deputation led by Aldis and backed by a Baptist Union resolution.³³ Gladstone was an obstacle to the removal of a limitation on religious equality. Gladstone deserved, and received, more credit for what Baptists called "his dignified and patriotic determination" to disestablish the Church of England in Ireland.³⁴ There were Dissenting grumblings, however, about the generosity of the disendowment provisions;³⁵ and, more important, disestablishment was thought to be not so much the work of Gladstone as the inevitable result of the spirit of the times, to which Baptists themselves contributed. "Religious equality", it was said, "is at length the watchword of the age . . .".³⁶ Gladstone's religious policies were not marked down to his credit as wholeheartedly as a later generation believed.

It was fully recognised that Gladstone did not share the Baptist conviction that religious equality was demanded by the Voluntary principle, but at the beginning of his first ministry there were high hopes that he would move towards it. At present, observed the *Baptist Magazine* in 1869, "he only sees 'men as trees walking'. But . . . he . . . is sure to make progress with such a man as John Bright for his 'guide, philosopher, and friend'".³⁷ Sanguine expectations were rudely

disappointed. Gladstone spoke firmly against the annual disestablishment motions of Edward Miall, the spokesman of militant Dissent. On Miall's motion in 1872, according to the *Baptist Magazine*, Gladstone gave vent to "the feeling of inexorable hostility which he feels towards Dissent", adding "a gratuitous and flippant sneer at the Nonconformists".³⁸ And Gladstone had committed two further crimes against the principle of religious equality. First, he permitted W. E. Forster to push through the Education Act of 1870, which made available extra state help for existing schools that gave denominational religious instruction (usually Anglican and sometimes Catholic) and enabled rates to be used to pay for the children of the poor at such "sectarian" schools.³⁹ Secondly, he was prepared to set up a university in Ireland that would soon have a Roman Catholic majority on its governing body.⁴⁰ The two issues—elementary education and the Irish university question—were connected, for in both areas the nation was to be asked to support denominational instruction, whether of the Church of England or of the Roman Catholic Church. Nonconformists were to pay for teaching from which in conscience they dissented. Most galling was the fact that local rates were to be used to inculcate church teaching. "The school-rate thus becomes, in effect, a church-rate . . .".⁴¹ Gladstone had helped abolish the church rate, only to reintroduce it in a new guise. Public confidence in the administration was said by the *Baptist Magazine* to be extinct by April 1872.⁴² Certainly at the election of February 1874, Baptist and other Nonconformist abstentions contributed to Gladstone's electoral defeat and his replacement by Disraeli.

During Gladstone's first ministry there occurred a number of other events that gave pause to many Baptists, especially to the more conservative theologically. Frederick Tryon, for example, minister of Cave Adullam Chapel at Deeping St. James, a seceder from the Church of England who preached there on Strict Baptist lines from 1838 to 1903, always spoke of Irish disestablishment "as the most cruel act of injustice to the Protestants of Ireland".⁴³ The act removed a Catholic disadvantage; and Tryon abhorred "Romanism and Ritualism". But anti-popery was not confined to Strict Baptists. The *Baptist Magazine* of the 1870s seldom failed to include on the one hand comments on the arrogant pretensions of the pope, especially in Germany;⁴⁴ and on the other full publicity for the insidious designs of Ritualist clergy who seemed bent on returning the established church to Romish ways.⁴⁵ Baptists were convinced not only that Catholicism imperilled souls, but also "that Protestantism is the . . . bulwark of our civil and religious liberties, while the tendency of Roman Catholicism is inimical to both".⁴⁶ History, past and contemporary, seemed to prove that the Roman Church was intent on securing absolute temporal power wherever she could.

Gladstone fell foul of Baptist anti-popery sentiment. In autumn 1866, it was known, he had visited the pope. Irish disestablishment and the endowment of Roman Catholic schools from the rates, both

favouring popery, had followed.⁴⁷ The minutiae of Gladstone's career yielded a large crop of actions that could be construed as pro-Catholic. He had supported the grant to Maynooth College, the Catholic seminary in Ireland; in 1871 he constituted the Roman Catholic bishop of Trinidad a body corporate in whom property could be vested; and he opposed measures for that Protestant panacea, the compulsory inspection of nunneries.⁴⁸ Then there were the occasions when Gladstone's government banned popular Protestant orators in areas with a high Irish immigrant population in (reasonable) fear of a breach of the peace. In April 1870, for instance, the leading Protestant lecturer, Mr. Murphy, who was shortly afterwards murdered by the enraged Irish, was prevented from lecturing in a public hall at Greenwich, and a "Popish mob" was allowed to assault him. "I have hitherto always worked and voted for Mr. Gladstone," wrote the local Baptist minister, "but his Government has endeavoured to stifle free discussion on Protestant questions here and elsewhere, and henceforth I shall oppose Mr. Gladstone to the utmost of my power."⁴⁹ This popular Protestantism was far more potent amongst ordinary Baptists than we might expect: as late as 1891, 30,000 Baptists are said to have petitioned parliament against an attempt, again by Gladstone, to permit the position of lord chancellor and viceroy of Ireland to be taken by Catholics.⁵⁰ In the early 1870s, the Irish university proposals, with their concessions to Rome, sealed Gladstone's record as a Roman sympathiser. By 1874 Gladstone's stock with nearly all Baptists was low because of his failure to push forward religious equality; and a large number of Baptists saw him as falling into some category between a secret Catholic and a dupe of the pope.

The second of these two misgivings, the suspicion that Gladstone was a tool of the Vatican, was completely dispelled by an article published in October 1874 in which Gladstone denounced the recent promulgation of papal infallibility. The new doctrine meant, said Gladstone, that a Roman Catholic places his "civil loyalty . . . at the mercy of another".⁵¹ English Catholics wrote indignant expostulations. Gladstone replied with a pamphlet, *The Vatican Decrees*, which went through 110 editions and was the most widely circulated of his writings.⁵² Baptists were reassured that Gladstone had no "latent leanings to the doctrines of Popery".⁵³ He was a Protestant champion, denouncing, exactly as they would wish, papal claims to authority over Englishmen. Baptists would have been less delighted had they realised that Gladstone's prime reason for inveighing against Vaticanism was his dismay that a new barrier, papal infallibility, had been erected against the eventual reunion of the Anglican and Roman churches.⁵⁴ But this Baptists did not know. Gladstone's standing rose greatly in their eyes.

1876 marked a second stage in the rapprochement. News reached England that Bulgarian unrest had been suppressed with ruthless violence by the Turkish authorities.⁵⁵ Russia seemed likely to intervene on behalf of the Bulgarians; Disraeli's Conservative government was

likely to go to the defence of Turkey, in continuation of Britain's traditional policy inherited from the Crimean War and beyond. War appeared imminent. Nonconformists were divided. Some like Bright advocated non-intervention, so that Britain should remain at peace; others demanded British help for persecuted fellow-Christians in Bulgaria, which might entail war against Turkey. Gladstone provided exactly what Nonconformists needed, a policy to which they all could rally, when he urged joint action by the European powers (which should avoid war) for the creation of a self-governing Bulgaria (which should give the Bulgarians security). Gladstone rallied the Baptists, amongst others, to a well-nigh unanimous support of his programme.⁵⁶ The "Bulgarian atrocities" agitation drew Gladstone and the Baptists together as never before. On the one hand the Baptists were delighted to find their own earnest opposition to Disraeli's Turkish sympathies reflected in a statesman. On the other, Gladstone came for the first time to respect the moral qualities of Nonconformity. In the following year he declared that "the cause of justice, the cause of humanity, of mercy, of truth, of right, for many millions of God's creatures in the East of Europe, found its best, its most consistent, and its almost unanimous supporters in the Nonconformist churches of the land."⁵⁷ This he always remembered.⁵⁸

The misgiving felt by Baptists about Gladstone's backwardness over religious equality remained, but was pushed into the background. From the opposition benches Gladstone was able to attack the Conservative government's Anglican-inspired hostility to religious equality: he argued in 1874, for instance, that endowed grammar schools should not be put under exclusively Anglican trustees.⁵⁹ Consequently Gladstone appeared more sympathetic to Baptist convictions than he had when in office. More important was the fact that the eastern question virtually monopolised attention from 1876. Baptist enthusiasm for Gladstone's eastern policy and their corresponding distaste for the British brand of chauvinism, "Jingoism", were sustained after the Bulgarian agitation and reinvigorated by Gladstone's Midlothian campaign of public speeches in the winter of 1879-80. At the 1880 general election, Nonconformists laid no stress on religious equality, since they wanted to ensure that the bellicose Conservative government was put out of office.⁶⁰ There seemed to be little pressure for legislation in favour of Nonconformists, except perhaps on the burials question. There could therefore be little justification for resentment at the fewness of the concessions to religious equality passed by Gladstone's administration of 1880. Baptists came to accept that Gladstone would not legislate for religious equality unless political circumstances demanded it.⁶¹ His establishmentarian prejudices were no longer an obstacle to admiration.

The harmony on fundamental political principles between Gladstone and the Baptists was probably most clearly demonstrated in the early 1880s. At the 1880 election, Gladstone directed all his powers of rhetoric to the denunciation of warmongering. On forming a cabinet,

he retained for himself the chancellorship of the exchequer in order to organise economies in national spending. And in 1884 he carried a new Reform Act. Peace, retrenchment and reform were the essentials of Gladstone's policy for the nation. Normal Baptist political attitudes at this time are well illustrated by Spurgeon. At the 1880 election, Spurgeon issued an address to the electors of Southwark urging support for the Liberal candidates. His four points of policy were expressed as questions. "Are we to go on slaughtering and invading in order to obtain a scientific frontier and feeble neighbours? . . . Shall all great questions of reform and progress be utterly neglected for years? . . . Shall the struggle for religious equality be protracted and embittered? . . . Shall our National Debt be increased?"⁶² Peace, reform, religious equality and retrenchment—these were Spurgeon's basic points. There was the addition to Gladstone's programme of the distinctive Nonconformist objective, religious equality, but otherwise Spurgeon's principles were those of Gladstonian Liberalism—peace, reform and retrenchment. Once reservations about Gladstone's churchmanship, in its pro-Roman and establishmentarian dimensions, had been overcome, Baptists enjoyed substantial agreement with Gladstone on matters of political policy.

In the years after 1876, Baptist loyalty to Gladstone wavered only once—in 1886, when Gladstone proposed to give Home Rule to Ireland. The cause of wavering was generally anti-Catholicism. Irish Baptists were fearful that Home Rule meant Rome rule, and it so happened that the editor of the *Baptist Magazine* had lived in Ireland. Even before Gladstone announced his plan, the *Baptist Magazine* insisted that "the Nonconformists of England will be recreant to their principles if they do not resist the handing over of their Protestant brethren in Ireland to the tender mercies of the intolerant Romish hierarchy".⁶³ Several letters of thanks for this declaration were received, no letters of objection.⁶⁴ Protestantism was widely thought to be at risk. Some Baptists had other reasons for becoming Unionists in opposition to Home Rule. Arthur Mursell, son of James Philipppo Mursell of Leicester, was an admirer of Joseph Chamberlain, who broke with Gladstone in 1886; H. M. Bompas, the Cambridge Wrangler, thought Home Rule a breach of Liberal principles; and Sir Henry Havelock, now Havelock-Allan, thought it a threat to the unity of empire.⁶⁵ But Spurgeon vividly expressed the ultimate fears of most Baptists who would not follow Gladstone in 1886 when he declared that Home Rule "would bind the Protestants hand and foot, and deliver them over to the Papists to cut their throats".⁶⁶ It was thought wise to exclude the Irish question from discussion at the Baptist Union assembly of 1887. When Richard Glover of Bristol arranged an informal session during the assembly to discuss Ireland, however, the weakness of Unionism amongst Baptists was revealed. Despite an impassioned appeal by the pastor of the Waterford Baptist Church and a closely reasoned argument by Bompas, only some eight to twelve out of several hundred voted, in effect, against Home Rule.⁶⁷

Even Spurgeon's first student for the ministry disavowed Spurgeon's alarm.⁶⁸ And at the 1892 general election that turned on the Irish question, only fourteen Baptist ministers signed an address against Home Rule, compared, for example, with thirty-eight Wesleyan ministers.⁶⁹ The bulk of Baptists trusted Gladstone's policy because it was Gladstone's. R. L. Everett, a farming M.P. from Suffolk, was typical of Baptists in urging Home Rule on the ground of justice for Ireland—an echo of Gladstone's morally-charged oratory.⁷⁰

Gladstone's power over Baptists was in large part an effect of this oratory. At an 1886 election campaign meeting where Gladstone was due to attend, a young Baptist minister declared himself a strong opponent of Home Rule. "But when Mr. Gladstone began to speak", an observer noticed, "the Unionism seemed to count for very little, and as he went on making point after point our Baptist friend shouted and cheered with the most enthusiastic of Gladstonians. He was not converted, but the spirit of the speaker was so thoroughly in harmony with his own that he was carried away by sympathy and admiration."⁷¹ John Clifford analysed in his diary his own feelings after hearing Gladstone less than a year later. "His manner most earnest. The trend of his mind majestic, penetrating, victorious and irresistible. He is a commander of men. Plain of speech and simple, clear and aggressive. The moral momentum immense. It was a contest. The hearer felt he was witnessing a fight for righteousness, for humanity, for God."⁷² As a critic observed, Gladstone always assumed that the highest moral and religious forces were on his side of any given question.⁷³ This went down well with a sermon-habituated people like the Baptists. Gladstone spoke as a Christian should. Here was a religious bond between Gladstone and the Baptists.

Gladstone displayed other Christian qualities. There was respect for Gladstone as, in the words of Charles Williams of Accrington, "a sincere minded, high-souled and really gifted man",⁷⁴ even in the late 1860s when his churchmanship was still suspect among Baptists. When in 1890 Gladstone insisted that Parnell should be dropped as leader of the Irish parliamentary party following his conviction for adultery, Baptists responded warmly to what they saw as Gladstone's preference for principle over party interests.⁷⁵ Gladstone displayed Christian characteristics in private as well as in public life. Details of his domestic arrangements were precisely as Baptists would wish: over his bedstead, for instance, hung the motto, "Christian, remember what thou hast to do".⁷⁶ He was known to have favourite hymns, "Rock of Ages" and "Dies Irae", and even sent the admiring Baptist minister at Wincanton a postcard bearing his own Latin translation of "Rock of Ages".⁷⁷ It was little wonder that the Baptist missionary F. C. Spurr should write to suggest to Gladstone that he should conduct a series of revival services in the London Agricultural Hall. But Gladstone declined. "It would expose me," he replied, "with justice, to the charge of ostentation which some think already attaches to me".⁷⁸ And Baptists were delighted with the special relationship that was undoubt-

edly forged between Gladstone and one of their own number, Spurgeon. Gladstone believed that McLaren's sermons exhibited "much rare power", but Spurgeon he honoured for his maintenance of what he called the "searching preaching" that makes moral demands of its hearers.⁷⁹ Gladstone's visit to the Tabernacle in 1882 was long fresh in his memory.⁸⁰ Two years later Gladstone wrote a warm letter to Spurgeon for his fiftieth birthday acknowledging his great gifts as a preacher.⁸¹ During Spurgeon's last illness, Gladstone sent good wishes for his recovery. Spurgeon summoned the strength to add a postscript to his wife's reply, thanking Gladstone for his "word of love" which was that of a man who had "been into the King's Country, and seen much of his Face."⁸² The letters were published after Spurgeon's death, revealing the extent of the recognition the two men accorded to each other's faith; but even before that, Gladstone's link with Spurgeon gave Baptists a sense of special affinity, religious rather than political, for the Liberal leader.

Gladstone was also esteemed for his Christian apologetic. He wrote several articles to stem the tide of unbelief, notably against T. H. Huxley, the eminent man of science, over the morality of certain biblical passages. Gladstone's book *The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture*, published in 1890, was among the most popular works of the period to criticise the bolder pretensions of the higher criticism of the Bible. Baptists welcomed such writings. "Whatever might be Mr. Gladstone's political and theological views," declared the Rev. J. C. Jones of Spalding in a sermon about an article by Gladstone on the atonement, "he was to be thanked by the community for bringing forward his thorough evangelical sentiments."⁸³ His "evangelical faith" was again spoken of by the *Baptist Magazine* after his death.⁸⁴ They were right so to speak. "I desire", Gladstone wrote privately in the 1890s, "to say at this moment I am . . . closely an adherent to the doctrines of grace generally and to the general sense of St. Augustine . . .".⁸⁵ The kernel of Gladstone's piety was carried forward from his early days of uncomplicated Evangelicalism. Baptists enjoyed an increasing awareness of the common ground they shared with him as Christians.

There were two aspects even of churchmanship that made for mutual respect. Gladstone never had time for Erastianism, the belief that the state should control the church. "Away", he once declared, "with the servile doctrine, that religion cannot live but by the aid of Parliaments!"⁸⁶ Baptist disestablishers entirely concurred. "His denunciation of Erastianism", said the *Baptist Magazine* of another article, "is as hearty as the sturdiest Nonconformist can desire . . .".⁸⁷ Secondly, there was an affinity in denominationalism. The generation of Baptist leaders to the fore in the years when Gladstone was at the centre of public life—Spurgeon, Angus, Brock, Landels, McLaren, J. H. Millard, Charles Williams—these were men convinced that Baptists had something important in common and less to divide them, and so were eager to organise denominational life. "I profess to be a

denominationalist," said Charles Williams in 1878, though adding, "I hope to God I may never be a sectarian."⁸⁸ Gladstone's devotion to the Church of England was analogous. "I believe", he wrote to Spurgeon, "that both you and I belong to the number of those who think that all conscientious convictions, once formed, ought to be stoutly maintained, and who would therefore be called strong Denominationalists."⁸⁹ While recognising their common Christian ground, Gladstone and the Baptists could agree to differ about which denomination was right, since both parties believed it important to hold that one denomination was right.

There was therefore a strong religious bond between Gladstone and the Baptists that undergirded their political loyalty to him. Furthermore, there was a similarity in their weighting of the relative claims of religion and politics. For Gladstone, politics was a duty demanding full attention over sustained periods, but religion came first. As his son recalled, he would be absent from Westminster whenever he could, almost invariably excluded public affairs from Saturdays and Sundays, set aside two or three hours for general reading each day and always spent six months of the year at his Flintshire home.⁹⁰ Politics was by no means an obsession for Gladstone. On the other hand, daily attendance at church, daily prayers in the home and a wealth of theological reading absorbed much of Gladstone's time. Politics was a Christian responsibility, but should not interfere with affairs of faith. Spurgeon's position was very similar. "Every God fearing man", he wrote in the *Sword and the Trowel*, "should give his vote with as much devotion as he prays."⁹¹ On the other hand, "in proportion as the preaching becomes political and the pastor sinks the spiritual in the temporal, strength is lost, not gained".⁹² Christians should participate in politics, but a congregation was put at risk if politics entered the sphere of religion. There should be no confusion of religion and politics. McLaren, Brock and Williams believed precisely the same. Baptists under such leaders admired Gladstone as a politician, but even more as a Christian who showed his religion in his political life and put his religious life first.

But Gladstone was admired by more than one generation. New leaders were coming to the fore in Gladstone's later years—pre-eminently John Clifford. According to Clifford's sermon on the Sunday after Gladstone's death, Gladstone had shown that the political realm was not Satan's: "it is the consecrated man who consecrates anything".⁹³ God could be served as much in political as in spiritual ways. Similarly, George White from the chair of the Baptist Union in 1904 argued, from the example of Gladstone, that if we make politics a part of our religion, then moral principles will be supreme in national life.⁹⁴ For John Clifford and George White the distinction between the sacred and the secular, religion and politics, was to be abolished—a suggestion that would have dismayed Spurgeon, or Gladstone himself. Enthusiasm for Gladstone's success as a Christian in politics made many Baptists at the turn of the twentieth century far more sanguine than

earlier generations about the potential influence of Christianity in politics. Gladstone, even after his death, was a force among the Baptists.

NOTES

¹ C. W. McCree, *George Wilson McCree: his life and work*, London, 1893, p. 167.

² *Baptist Magazine*, 78, May 1886, p. 231.

³ *Ibid.* For the bond with Nonconformists in general, cf. D. W. Bebbington, "Gladstone and the Nonconformists: a religious affinity in politics", *Studies in Church History*, ed. D. Baker, 12, 1975.

⁴ H. J. Leach, ed., *The Life of Mr. Gladstone told by Himself*, London, 1893, p.266.

⁵ Sir E. W. Hamilton, *Mr. Gladstone: a monograph*, London, 1898, p. 108.

⁶ Cf. *Baptist Magazine*, 77, July 1885, p. 329.

⁷ S. G. Checkland, *The Gladstones: a family biography, 1764-1851*, Cambridge, 1971, pp. 27, 31. J. E. Ritchie, *The Real Gladstone: an anecdotal biography*, London, 1898, p. 9. *British Weekly*, 29th October 1891, p. 5.

⁸ Entry for 17th February 1828, *The Gladstone Diaries*, ed. M. R. D. Foot, 1, 1825-1832, Oxford, 1968, p. 165.

⁹ Entries for 15th November 1828, 29th March 1829, 28th June 1829, *ibid.*, pp. 211f, 234, 248. Cf. H. H. Rowdon, "Secession from the Established Church in the Early Nineteenth Century", *Vox Evangelica*, 3, 1964, p. 81.

¹⁰ Entry for 29th December, 1829, *The Gladstone Diaries*, 1, p. 276.

¹¹ *The Prime Ministers' Papers: W. E. Gladstone: 1: Autobiographica*, ed. John Brooke and Mary Sorensen, London, 1971, p. 143. G. W. E. Russell, *Mr. Gladstone's Religious Development*, London, 1899, pp. 43, 51.

¹² W. E. Gladstone, "The Place of Heresy and Schism in the Modern Christian Church", *Later Gleanings*, London, 1898, p. 280.

¹³ *Baptist Magazine*, 86, September 1894, p. 468.

¹⁴ Minutes of the Baptist Union, 1833-1842, p. 147.

¹⁵ Cf. A. R. Vidler, *The Orb and the Cross: a normative study in the relations of church and state with reference to Gladstone's early writings*, London, 1945.

¹⁶ Joseph Angus, *The Voluntary System: a prize essay, in reply to the lectures of Dr. Chalmers on church establishments*, London, 1839, p. 183. Despite their differences, Angus sent a copy of *The Voluntary System* to Gladstone, subsequently corresponded with him on a variety of topics and in 1859 obtained Gladstone's support for his candidature as an examiner at London University. Joseph Angus to W. E. Gladstone, 25th November 1839, 24th March 1859, 28th March 1859, Gladstone Papers, British Museum [hereafter B.M.] Add. MSS 44357, f.44; 44391, ff.240, 249.

¹⁷ Entries for 25th March 1829, 24th October 1830, *The Gladstone Diaries*, 1, pp. 233, 326. W. E. Gladstone, "The Evangelical Movement: its parentage, progress and issue", *Gleanings of Past Years*, London, 1879, 7, p. 231.

¹⁸ Newman Hall to W. E. Gladstone, [15th November 1864], [15th February 1875], Gladstone Papers, B.M. Add. MSS 44188, ff.27, 120v. Newman Hall, *An Autobiography*, London, 1898, p. 274. For Bompas, cf. A. S. Wilkins, *Our National Universities*, London, 1871, p. 342n.

¹⁹ H. C. Colman, *Jeremiah James Colman: a memoir*, London, 1905, pp. 401, 405.

- ²⁰ H. S. Curr, "Spurgeon and Gladstone", *Baptist Quarterly*, 11, 1942, p. 49. *Freeman*, 13th January 1882, p. 21.
- ²¹ J. G. Rogers, *An Autobiography*, London, 1903, p. 223. Sir James Marchant, *Dr. John Clifford, C. H.: life, letters and reminiscences*, London, 1924, p. 80. *The Times*, 10th May 1888, p. 7.
- ²² A. W. W. Dale, *The Life of R. W. Dale of Birmingham*, London, 1898, pp. 278ff. W. E. Gladstone to John Bright, 25th November 1871, *Correspondence on Church and Religion of William Ewart Gladstone*, ed. D. C. Lathbury, London, 1910, 2, p. 143. John Newton, *W. S. Caine, M.P.: a biography*, London, 1907, pp. 110f. *Freeman*, 27th May 1898, p. 292.
- ²³ Curr, "Spurgeon and Gladstone", p. 49. Newman Hall to W. E. Gladstone, 18th [February 1875], Gladstone Papers, B.M. Add. MS 44188, f.122v. E. T. McLaren, *Dr. McLaren of Manchester: a sketch*, London, 1912, p. 211.
- ²⁴ W. S. Aldis to Algernon West, 30th November 1870 (telegram); W. S. Aldis to W. E. Gladstone, 22nd December 1875, Glynne-Gladstone MSS, St. Deiniol's Library, Hawarden. I am grateful to Sir William Gladstone, Bart., for permission to quote from this collection.
- ²⁵ A more precise list may be practicable when publication of Gladstone's diaries is completed.
- ²⁶ Colman, *Colman*, p. 206.
- ²⁷ J. E. Ritchie, *Modern Statesmen, or sketches from the strangers' gallery of the House of Commons*, London, 1861, p. 73.
- ²⁸ *Nonconformist*, 18th May 1864, p. 398.
- ²⁹ *General Baptist Yearbook*, 1865, pp. 4ff.
- ³⁰ *Baptist Magazine*, 90, June 1898, p. 283.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 58, June 1866, p. 353.
- ³² Olive Anderson, "Gladstone's Abolition of Compulsory Church Rates: a minor political myth and its historiographical career", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 25, 1974, p. 195.
- ³³ Neville Goodman, *Clerical Fellowships*, London, 1875, p. 12. W. S. Aldis, *University Tests*, Cambridge, 1870, pp. 7f. *Cambridge and University Journal*, *Isle of Ely Herald and Huntingdonshire Gazette*, 10th December 1870, p. 6.
- ³⁴ *Baptist Magazine*, 60, June 1868, p. 377.
- ³⁵ Ritchie, *The Real Gladstone*, p. 212.
- ³⁶ *Baptist Magazine*, 60, April 1868, p. 245.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 61, February 1869, p. 100.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 64, August 1872, p. 538.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 63, February 1871, p. 101.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 65, April 1873, p. 123.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 63, May 1871, p. 314.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 64, April 1872, p. 237. For the "Nonconformist Revolt" of 1870-4 over education, cf. Dale, *Life of R. W. Dale of Birmingham*, pp. 266-99.
- ⁴³ M. J. Tryon, *A small Memento of Frederick Tryon*, London, 1904, p. 2.
- ⁴⁴ E.g. *Baptist Magazine*, 65, May 1873, p. 220.
- ⁴⁵ E.g. *Ibid.*, 65, June 1873, p. 267.
- ⁴⁶ *Baptist Magazine*, 61, March 1869, p. 164.
- ⁴⁷ Ritchie, *The Real Gladstone*, p. 101.
- ⁴⁸ *Mr. Gladstone exposed! by a Nonconformist*, London, [1891], pp. 6f.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- ⁵⁰ *Christian World*, 12th February 1891, p. 118.
- ⁵¹ W. E. Gladstone, "Ritualism and Ritual", *Contemporary Review*, 24, October 1874, p. 674.
- ⁵² H. W. Lucy, *The Right Honourable W. E. Gladstone: a study from life*, London, 1895, p. 240.
- ⁵³ *Baptist Magazine*, 66, November 1874, p. 691.
- ⁵⁴ Malcolm MacColl, "Mr. Gladstone as a Theologian", *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, ed. Sir Wemyss Reid, London, 1899, p. 260.
- ⁵⁵ Cf. R. T. Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation, 1876*, London, 1963.
- ⁵⁶ *Baptist Magazine*, 68, October 1876, pp. 466f.

⁵⁷ Speech of 12th November 1877 at Holyhead, H. J. Leach, ed., *The Life of Mr. Gladstone told by himself*, p. 151.

⁵⁸ E. G. W. E. Gladstone, "The Place of Heresy and Schism in the Modern Christian Church", *Later Gleanings*, p. 288.

⁵⁹ *Baptist Magazine*, 66, August 1874, pp. 97f.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 72, May 1880, p. 234.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 83, April 1891, p. 182.

⁶² Election leaflet circulated by Spurgeon, 19th March 1880. Cited by A. R. Meredith, "The Social and Political Views of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 1834-1892", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1973, pp. 65f. I am grateful to Dr. Jeremy Thornton for directing me to this source.

⁶³ *Baptist Magazine*, 78, April 1886, p. 184.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 78, June 1886, p. 277.

⁶⁵ Arthur Mursell, *Memories of my Life*, London, 1913, pp. 153, 158. H. M. Bompas, "Nonconformists and Home Rule", *Fortnightly Review*, new series, 52, July 1892, pp. 9ff. *Liberal Unionist*, 1st June 1889, p. 192.

⁶⁶ *The A.B.C. of the Irish Question: election number of the "Liberal Unionist"*, [June 1892], p. 17.

⁶⁷ The vote was in fact on a resolution condemning the Unionist government's Irish coercion policy. *Baptist Magazine*, 79, June 1887, p. 280. *Freeman*, 29th April 1887, p. 263.

⁶⁸ C. H. Spurgeon to T. W. Medhurst, n.d., *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography . . . [edited] by his wife and private secretary*, 4, 1878-1892, London, 1900, p. 127.

⁶⁹ *The Times*, 7th July 1892, p. 6.

⁷⁰ R. L. Everett to editor, *The Times*, 23rd January 1891, p. 14.

⁷¹ J. G. Rogers, "Mr. Gladstone and the Nonconformists", *Congregational Review*, April 1887, p. 371.

⁷² Sir James Marchant, *Dr. John Clifford, C.H.*, p. 80.

⁷³ Thomas Macknight, *Ulster as It is*, London, 1896, 2, p. 213.

⁷⁴ *Preston Guardian*, 7th November 1868, p. 3. Cited by J. H. Lea, "Charles Williams of Accrington, 1827-1907", *Baptist Quarterly*, 23, 1969, p. 187.

⁷⁵ *Baptist Magazine*, 83, January 1891, p. 38.

⁷⁶ J. Brown to editor, *British Weekly*, 25th June 1894, p. 219.

⁷⁷ Ritchie, *The Real Gladstone*, p. 212. *British Weekly*, 21st June 1894, p. 134.

⁷⁸ *Christian World*, 5th March 1891, p. 194.

⁷⁹ Colman, *Colman*, p. 406. W. T. Stead, *Gladstone, 1809-1898: a character sketch*, London, [1898], p. 79.

⁸⁰ Colman, *Colman*, p. 428.

⁸¹ W. E. Gladstone to C. H. Spurgeon, 18th June 1884, private, *Correspondence*, ed. Lathbury, 2, pp. 344f.

⁸² C. H. Spurgeon to W. E. Gladstone, Gladstone Papers, B.M. Add. MS 44513, f.68.

⁸³ *British Weekly*, 6th September 1894, p. 309.

⁸⁴ *Baptist Magazine*, 90, July 1898, p. 339.

⁸⁵ *The Prime Ministers' Papers: W. E. Gladstone*, 1, p. 152.

⁸⁶ W. E. Gladstone, "On the Functions of Laymen in the Church", *Gleanings of Past Years*, London, 1879, 6, p. 8.

⁸⁷ *Baptist Magazine*, 86, September 1894, pp. 468f.

⁸⁸ *Freeman*, 1st November 1878, p. 551. Cited by J. H. Lea, "Charles Williams of Accrington, 1827-1907", p. 184.

⁸⁹ W. E. Gladstone to C. H. Spurgeon, 18th June 1884, private, *Correspondence*, ed. Lathbury, 2, p. 345.

⁹⁰ Viscount Gladstone, *After Thirty Years*, London, 1928, p. 5.

⁹¹ *Sword and the Trowel*, April 1880, p. 191.

⁹² *Ibid.*, July 1876, p. 305.

⁹³ G. W. Byrt, *John Clifford: a fighting Free Churchman*, London, 1947, p. 126.

⁹⁴ George White, "The Nonconformist Conscience in its Relation to our National Life", *Baptist Handbook*, 1904, pp. 106f.

D. W. BEBBINGTON

Reviews

The Cambridge Bible Commentary: The books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah. J. D. W. Watts. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975. x, 190pp. £3.90.

This commentary, written by a Baptist scholar who is currently Professor of Old Testament at Serampore College, India, continues the format of earlier volumes in the series. The New English Bible text is given in full, with footnotes, and is divided into sections with the commentary accompanying the relevant passage. A brief outline of the history of prophecy and the political history of Judah from the fifth to the seventh centuries B.C. is also included in an introduction.

The main emphasis of the book concerns the relationship of the prophecies and the cult. With the possible exception of Jonah, the prophecies are treated as prophetic liturgies designed for use in public worship. Joel, Obadiah, and Zephaniah were composed for the "day of the Lord", regarded as the climax of the royal Zion festival held at the New Year. Since the pronouncement of Yahweh's judgment is thought to have occupied a prominent position at this festival, the importance of judgment in the prophecies, as well as the giving of destinies (Joel 3:1) and even the remnant concept (Obad. 17) are called upon in support of this association. Yet there is little real evidence in any of these passages requiring a link with the Temple or the New Year festival. Furthermore, is it possible that those canonical prophets who criticised the practices and teachings of official Yahwism, were able to gain acceptance by the cult for their message? The prophets differed so sharply from the Temple teachers that they can hardly have been closely identified with the religious establishment.