

## THOMAS DOWGLASS (1806-57) —EVANGELIST

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Although some of the major figures among the early Brethren have received extensive biographical treatment, there remain a host of lesser leaders of whom relatively little has been written. Several among them displayed serious interest in the resurgence of charismatic phenomena associated with Irvingism,<sup>1</sup> but the only one to join the Irvingite movement was the evangelist Thomas Dowglass (1806-57). This article examines his career and concludes that it throws up at least one highly significant theme for further investigation by students of early Brethrenism, that of soteriology.

### Early life

Thomas was born on 21st September 1806, the oldest son of George and Frances Douglass [*sic*] of Magherally, near Banbridge in Ireland's County Down.<sup>2</sup> The family owned an estate known as Mount Ida, between Magherally and Dromore.<sup>3</sup> He matriculated at Exeter College, Oxford, on 20th March 1823; B.W. Newton was at Oxford from 1824 to 1831, and knew Dowglass by sight, describing him as having '*just passed*'.<sup>4</sup>

Leaving Oxford, Thomas joined the Army as an Ensign in the 16th (Bedfordshire) Regiment of Foot on 22nd April 1826, a commission

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1. This term is not used in a pejorative sense, but because it is difficult to know what else to call the movement; it did not adopt the title 'Catholic Apostolic Church' until 1849.

2. J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses 1715-1886*, vol.1 (London, 1887), p.381; Mrs D. C. Julian to author, 7th May 2000. Foster lists Dowglass's birthplace as Macherally, but no such place exists.

3. Angélique Day & Patrick McWilliams (eds), *Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland, vol.12: Parishes of Co. Down III 1833-8 Mid-Down* (Belfast, 1992), p.72.

4. H. H. Rowdon, *The Origins of the Brethren 1825-1850* (London, 1967), p.77; following Christian Brethren Archive, 7049, 'Fry MS', f.141.

having been purchased for him.<sup>5</sup> Like other gentlemen who entered the Army in this way, he appears to have followed the practice of being retained on half pay; this allowed him to avoid unwanted postings abroad and to jump the queue for the next attractive commission. He became a Lieutenant on 13th March 1827, and in June exchanged his position on half pay with an officer of the 2nd Regiment of Foot,<sup>6</sup> also known as the Queen's Own Royal Regiment of Foot.<sup>7</sup> His Army career was brief: a return dated 23rd December lists him as absent without leave, the last mention of his name in Army sources.<sup>8</sup> On 4th January 1828 he married Sarah Trist Prideaux (1803-89), at St. George's, Hanover Square, in London. Her father, George Prideaux, was an attorney in Totnes, Devon, and the family owned the manor of South Milton, a few miles west of Kingsbridge, also in Devon.<sup>9</sup> This passed in due course to Sarah, and the couple also had property nearby at Malborough, two miles west of Salcombe.

The newly-married couple travelled extensively on the Continent, their first child (Frances) being born on 13th October 1828 at Nice. At some point during these travels they reached Switzerland, where Dowglass was led to the Lord by the Genevan evangelical leader César Malan.<sup>10</sup> It seems probable that Dowglass was influenced decisively by the theology and practice of the groups of awakened individuals who met in Geneva; in particular, his writings show evidence of dependence upon Malan's presentation of Calvinist teaching. Malan held a strong doctrine of assurance, which he saw as

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5. 'Army Lists' (1827), p.175.

6. Public Record Office, WO25/69, Commission Book 1826-30, f.150; 'Monthly Army Lists, July 1827', p.84.

7. David Ascoli, *A Companion to the British Army 1660-1983* (London, 1983), p.151.

8. Public Record Office, WO12/2034, Muster Returns for 1827, 2nd Regiment of Foot; WO17/405, Monthly Returns for 1827, 2nd Regiment of Foot.

9. J. Brunton to author, 22nd September 1999; Mrs D. C. Julian to author, 7th May 2000.

10. A. Christopher Smith, 'J. N. Darby in Switzerland: at the crossroads of Brethren history and European Evangelicalism', *Christian Brethren Review*, 34 (1983), p.63.

an essential aspect of saving faith; alongside the Calvinist stress on personal election, he taught that the believer's salvation was already accomplished when Christ died; God announced to the soul its place among the saved by imparting the faith to believe this. Such faith was itself sufficient evidence of one's spiritual standing.<sup>11</sup> In Stunt's words, 'it was, at least in part, his attitudes and theology which significantly contributed to ... anxiety concerning High Calvinism ...'<sup>12</sup>

Such views, propagated during his visits to Britain in the 1820s, caused considerable dissension among British evangelicals but were taken up with enthusiasm by some of a more radical cast of mind, including Newton, who agreed with Malan that certainty of one's own spiritual standing was the key issue in personal religion.<sup>13</sup> Another such radical was Thomas Erskine, a lay theologian of Linlathen near Dundee; with Edward Irving and John McLeod Campbell, Erskine influenced the Church of Scotland to move away from strict adherence to the theology of the *Westminster Confession*. Erskine, who had also met Malan and admired the vitality of his personal faith, believed that 'Christ's death in itself and as such effects the justification or forgiveness of all men, regardless of faith, ... [and that] part of the essential content of faith is believing that this is so, believing that one is pardoned.'<sup>14</sup>

#### **Dowglass as a Brethren leader**

Returning to Salcombe, Dowglass began at some point to preach there—a common course of action for a radical evangelical to take, as the stories of the Brethren and Irvingite movements demonstrate.

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11. S. C. Malan, *The Life, Labours, and Writings of Caesar Malan* (London, 1869), pp.246-7; N. R. Needham to author, 11th May 2000.

12. T. C. F. Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain 1815-35* (Edinburgh, 2000), p.113.

13. T. C. F. Stunt, 'Geneva and British Evangelicals in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 32 (1981), p.44.

14. N.R. Needham, *Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: his life and theology 1788-1837* (Edinburgh, 1990), p.120. Needham draws attention to the similarity between this and hyper-Calvinist teaching, which emphasised that everything had been settled in eternity (ibid. p.147).

Newton, who returned to Plymouth in 1831, became a close friend, and he and others preached there also. In due course Dowglass and his flock began breaking bread; Newton thought this meeting a very good work, and it was the first in Devon outside Plymouth.<sup>15</sup> We do not know when it began, but Dowglass's second child, Sarah, was born at Totnes on 24th November 1830 and christened in the parish church on 4th January 1831.<sup>16</sup> Presumably his adoption of Brethren beliefs and practices had not resulted in his immediate secession from the Establishment.

June and July of 1831 saw considerable interest generated by the preaching tour of the West Country undertaken by the high Calvinists Henry Bulteel, curate of St. Ebbe's in Oxford and formerly a tutor at Exeter College, and William Tiptaft, Vicar of Sutton Courtenay near Abingdon. A few months earlier, Bulteel had provoked a furore by a sermon preached before the University condemning the laxity of the contemporary Church of England and upholding high Calvinist teaching. God did not merely *offer* salvation, but *gave* it; there were no conditions to such a gift except the death of Christ, and even that might better be described as the effect or channel of God's eternal purpose of grace rather than its condition.<sup>17</sup> Faith in Christ was itself evidence of acceptance by God.<sup>18</sup> Nothing in the Scriptures gave any grounds for expecting reformation to come to the Establishment; rather, it would be cut off as unfaithful. Bulteel rejected the hope (held by many moderate evangelicals) that the gospel would spread throughout the world; God's purpose, he declared, was for ministers

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15. 'Fry MS', fos.141-2.

16. Devon Record Office, 57/4/2d. In the baptismal register the family were listed as resident at Totnes, so they seem to have moved around. The ceremony was performed by Richard Hill; could he be the same Richard Hill who became curate of West Alvington and South Milton, near Kingsbridge, in 1829 but seceded from the Church of England soon after and joined the Brethren at Plymouth? (cf. Donald M. Lewis (ed.), *Blackwell's Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730-1860*, 1 (Oxford, 1995), p.553, i, which has 'South Molton' for 'South Milton'.)

17. H.B. Bulteel, *A Sermon on I Corinthians II.12 Preached before the University of Oxford, at St. Mary's on Sunday Feb. 6, 1831* (Oxford, 1831), pp.6-7.

18. *Ibid.*, p.30.

to warn of coming vengeance, gathering out the elect from the apostate mass and leaving the rest without excuse for their unbelief.<sup>19</sup> Such notes, characteristic of radical evangelical proclamation at this time, would have generated considerable excitement and would have been regarded as fomenting a spirit of secession. Describing the West Country as a spiritually darkened area in which few preached the fullness of the gospel (a typical radical complaint), Tiptaft recounted how they had preached in the open air to large numbers. They spent ten days near Plymouth, preaching in Totnes and other towns in the locality.<sup>20</sup>

Their preaching resulted in the appearance in July of Dowglass's first published work, *To those who love the Lord Jesus, in sincerity, in the town of Totnes*. The title page, on which 1 John 5.19 ('We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lieth in wickedness.') is quoted, indicates his separatist inclinations, and Dowglass writes to strengthen the faith of those who had begun to meet as a group, apparently before the visit of Bulteel and Tiptaft:

My lot having been cast among you for some time past during which period it has been permitted us to meet frequently in the Lord's name for our mutual edification in those things in which is our chief desire to grow, each contributing for the good of the body the share of knowledge which the great head, thro' his spirit [*sic*], has seen fit to grant him: I cannot now take my leave of you, without endeavouring once more to lay before you the glorious truths we have so often considered and rejoiced in. Concerning the value of the simple truth we shall all be agreed but of its rarity in the present day, you may not

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19. *Ibid.*, pp.50-52.

20. Tiptaft to William Keal, 27th July 1831, in J. H. Philpot (ed.), *The Seceders* vol.1 (London, 1930), p.167. High Calvinist influence in the West Country predated Bulteel and Tiptaft: Grayson Carter has noted the influence of Robert Hawker (1753-1827) on many seceders from the Church of England (Lewis (ed.), *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography*, 1, p.538, i), and Stunt points out that at Bulteel's insistence, Newton heard Hawker preach shortly before his conversion at the beginning of 1827 (Stunt, *Awakening*, p.196). It appears that many early converts at Plymouth were drawn from what had been Hawker's congregation (untitled review of Brethren writings by G. T. Stokes in *Quarterly Review*, 73 (1866), p.14).

all be so fully persuaded as I have declared myself to be in the first page of this letter.<sup>21</sup>

Although a layman, the urgency of the situation required him to speak out when there were so few to tell the glad tidings.<sup>22</sup> The true gospel had been almost swallowed up by such errors as works-righteousness and belief in human ability to accept or reject a universal offer of grace; but far more dangerous were those teachers, ‘looked upon as the religious portion of our country’, who preached Christ as the way to salvation but whose doctrine fell short of the apostles’ gospel. They denied that baptism conveyed regeneration, rejected the idea of Christ’s personal return to reign on earth, and held false views of the Spirit’s work. Dowglass’s radical credentials are established here by positions such as his condemnation of the characteristic evangelical denial of the regenerating virtue of baptism. But this comprehensive attack on moderate evangelicals did not preclude him from acknowledging many of them to be brethren in the Lord,<sup>23</sup> but he condemned their manner of stating the gospel to the repentant sinner on the ground that it showed that they did not admit the sufficiency of faith for salvation. They made faith the condition or cause of salvation rather than seeing it as the evidence of God’s love for the believer. Insistence on the necessity of self-examination led the individual to look within himself for visible evidence of spiritual life, which amounted to attempting to walk by sight rather than by faith. They were thus guilty of relying on the fruit of belief rather than on belief itself, or rather on its object—Christ. Such teaching required anxious souls to seek assurance in a way in which it could never be obtained, for no human being was holy enough to have confidence in

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21. [T. Dowglass], *To those who love the Lord Jesus, in sincerity, in the town of Totnes* (Totnes, 1831), p.7. I assume that this is not to be identified with the group meeting at Salcombe; the two towns are too far apart for the group to have moved, and the Salcombe group evidently continued to exist. His reference to taking leave of them implies another move.

22. *Ibid.*, pp.7-8. Other radicals also attacked moderate Evangelical gospel preaching (e.g. Erskine, in Needham, pp.250-1).

23. *Ibid.*, pp.7-11.

his own spirituality; rather, with increasing knowledge of Christ came deepening awareness of one's own unworthiness.<sup>24</sup>

There was, however, another way of preaching the gospel which brought more immediate peace to the soul:

The way in which I would declare the Gospel, not only to the repentant sinner, but to every being under Heaven, is: 1st. shew him that the Father, foreseeing the fall of that perfect creature he was about to form, of his infinite mercy and love, prepared a way by which he might escape the just wrath of an offended God; and that his only begotten Son's taking upon himself our nature; living a life of righteousness in our stead, and dying to atone for our sins was that way: 2nd. that the Son Jesus Christ had fulfilled his part, in having lived, and died, and risen again: 3rd. that the Holy Ghost was a witness to us, in the word of truth of these things. And then, proving to him that this salvation is prepared for all who seek it, by forsaking their sins, and believing the testimony of the Spirit concerning it; I would call upon him to 'repent and be converted ...'<sup>25</sup>

Faith could be regarded as sufficient evidence of acceptance with God because of the parallel insistence on salvation as God's work from start to finish: it was the Spirit who called effectually, who enabled sinners to believe, and who preserved believers in the faith of Christ.<sup>26</sup> Thus faith was not the means, but the evidence or testimony, of one's justification.<sup>27</sup> Against those who taught that salvation depended on our fulfilling certain conditions, Dowglass asserted that it was finished in Christ; belief in Christ, apart from any internal evidence such as good works, could be taken as sufficient evidence of being saved because only those effectually called by the Spirit were enabled to believe, and only those whose salvation was secured were effectually called.<sup>28</sup> Nothing more was needed: those who accepted the witness of the Spirit concerning Christ's person and work and the

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24. *Ibid.*, pp.12-15.

25. *Ibid.*, p.18. The clarification in the first line was aimed at moderate Evangelicals who refused to preach the promises of the gospel except to those who were sincerely penitent.

26. *Ibid.*, 18-19. Such an insistence is also found in Erskine.

27. *Ibid.*, p.33.

28. *Ibid.*, pp.24, 28, 31.

way of salvation, and did not also believe themselves to be saved, were guilty of making God a liar by accusing the Spirit of bearing a false record—an approach adopted by Malan in dealing with inquirers.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast with moderate evangelical practice, Dowglass advocated preaching election to young believers as an integral part of the gospel. It was wrong to hold back on doing so for fear of offending the world: God's truth would not injure believers, whereas suppressing the truth (out of a misplaced belief that it was our responsibility to convert the world) would injure the cause. The preacher's business was to declare the truth, and the Holy Spirit would apply it to the hearts of the elect; the world's enmity to such teaching only served to prove its truth.<sup>30</sup>

#### **Secession from the Church of England**

Thomas's third child, Ellen, was born at Mount Ida in County Down on 5th June 1832, so the family were evidently seeking to maintain their Irish estate; in October 1834, Dowglass was recorded as serving as a Justice of the Peace in County Down, in itself significant because early Brethren usually eschewed civil or political office.<sup>31</sup> However, there is no record of his being active among Brethren in Ireland; doubtless his heart lay in Devon. His fourth child, George, was born at Salcombe on 3rd November 1833, and christened at Malborough on 22nd January 1834. The ceremony was conducted not by a clergyman, but by one of the leaders from the Plymouth assembly, Percy Hall, and it was performed not in the Church of England but in what later became an Irvingite congregation—presumably the group

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29. *Ibid.*, p.39. Francis Sitwell, who was to become an Irvingite Apostle, was converted in Geneva about 1827; he learned through Henry Drummond and his clergyman brother Spencer, as well as Malan, that his sins were forgiven for Christ's sake and that he would be making God a liar if he did not believe (Bodleian Library, Oxford, Room 132, CAC3.18, F. Sitwell, 'Letter written by Mr. Francis Sitwell to his Sister Mary' [c.1834], pp.11-13). Like Malan, Sitwell still believed in limited atonement at this point.

30. *Ibid.*, pp.28-31.

31. Day & McWilliams, p.72.

which Dowglass had founded.<sup>32</sup> Dowglass had evidently seceded by this time.

Dowglass was on the platform at a meeting for prophetic study at Plymouth in September 1834, along with Newton and two other leaders who had resigned from the Anglican ministry, Henry Borlase and James Lampen Harris. A summary of its conclusions was provided by Newton and Borlase,<sup>33</sup> but its significance lies more in demonstrating his continuing involvement with Brethren than his developing theological views: it is impossible to determine these from the report as it did not represent an outline of what was said during the meetings.

### **Conversion to Irvingism**

In view of Hall's interest in, and advocacy of, Irvingite gifts, it might be thought that he was the link between Irving and Dowglass, but Irving's disapproval of the 'slough of love' at Plymouth and his frosty response to Hall's resignation of his naval commission had cured him of Irvingite sympathies.<sup>34</sup> It was family influence which moved Dowglass to consider Irving's teaching. Although he was described as one of the Brethren's best preachers,<sup>35</sup> his sister Frances had always denied his right to preach and teach without the Spirit; through her Dowglass learned of Irvingism, and eventually he went to visit Irving in London. After an interview with him he embraced both the teaching and the work associated with it. The most authoritative annalist of the Catholic Apostolic Church, H.B. Copinger, believed that this could have happened in June 1834.<sup>36</sup> If so, Dowglass would

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32. Devon Record Office, 57/4/2f. The entry was extracted from the baptismal register of the Catholic Apostolic Church in Salcombe, but provides a rare glimpse of early Brethren baptismal practice.

33. B. W. Newton & H. Borlase, *Answers to the questions considered at a meeting held in Plymouth on September 15, 1834, and the following Days; chiefly compiled from Notes taken at the Meeting*, 2nd edn (Plymouth, 1847).

34. 'Fry MS', fos.256-7.

35. Present writer's collection, E. Trimen, 'The Rise and Progress of the Work of the Lord' (Typescript, c.1904), Lecture 11.

36. London, British Orthodox Church Library, [H.B. Copinger], 'Annals: The Lord's Work in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries' (unpublished typescript, n.d.), f.46,

have met Irving before the Plymouth meeting; it is ironic that Newton, who was violently antipathetic towards anything which smacked of mysticism or Irvingism, should thus have shared the platform unwittingly with someone who held Irvingite views.

At some point Dowglass also visited Dr John Thompson, who became the movement's 'Pillar of Pastors',<sup>37</sup> at Southampton. Thompson advised him to return to Devon and preach the universal love of God, for which, according to Copinger, Dowglass was 'cast out' by the Brethren.<sup>38</sup> To make sense of this charge, we must examine a pamphlet which he had printed in 1835 for private circulation, *Man's responsibility for the gift of a Saviour, and the responsibility of the church for the gift of the Holy Ghost*.<sup>39</sup> This was intended as a testimony to his new views, and he did not undertake to answer all possible objections to them. He reiterates his earlier conclusions, presenting reconciliation with God as something already effected; Christ's work is as complete before we believe as after, and the only ground of our hope. Lack of power in gospel preaching is due largely to ignorance of the completeness of Christ's work. Nobody now is under condemnation on account of their sin, but if they do not believe the gospel then they are under the second condemnation.<sup>40</sup>

In the work of Jesus on the Cross, then, every man is interested; he has not to seek for a Saviour; he has not to reconcile himself to his

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following Trimmen, Lecture 11; 'Fry MS', f.142. Dowglass and Irving could not have met in London *after* the Plymouth meeting, since Irving had by then left London on his last journey.

37. *A primus inter pares*, responsible for transmitting the concerns of the Pastors to the Apostles and the determinations of the Apostles to the Pastors.

38. Copinger, 'Annals', f.46; Trimmen, Lecture 11. The reason given for Dowglass's excommunication is a typical one given by early Irvingites for the churches' rejection of those who pioneered the work.

39. The only known copies of this and *To those who love the Lord Jesus ...* are in a bound volume inscribed with his daughter Catherine's married name (see n.59 below); I wish to thank Edwin Diersmann of Overasselt in the Netherlands for furnishing me with photocopies.

40. [T. Dowglass], *Man's responsibility for the gift of a Saviour, and the responsibility of the church for the gift of the Holy Ghost* (Totnes, 1835), pp.4, 6f.

God by faith or obedience, but, being reconciled by the work of the Son, he is called upon to believe the testimony of the Holy Ghost concerning it. Of which while he remains in unbelief he is under condemnation, not because his debt is unpaid to the Father, who imputes no sin unto him, but because he believes not in the Son, who has freed him from penalty.<sup>41</sup>

It is not surprising that Brethren should have distanced themselves from Dowglass, since they would have been uneasy with such views. The Scottish triumvirate who was propagating them had also moved towards denial of the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. While many Brethren would have agreed with Erskine, Campbell and Irving that Christ died for all, and some later Brethren criticized contemporary evangelical understandings of substitution, they would not have gone so far as to say that human beings are already reconciled to God and have only to believe this. Neither would they accept the Irvingite Christology with which this soteriology was closely intertwined: this stressed Christ's identity with fallen humanity and his role as representative and example to the point of asserting that he possessed a fallen human nature whose inclinations had to be overcome through the power of the Holy Ghost. Indeed, one of the most potent weapons in Darby's armoury against Newton at Plymouth in 1845 would be the accusation that the latter had been teaching what amounted to an Irvingite Christology. Not only was this soteriology linked with what Brethren considered to be a heretical Christology, but it also came to be regarded as one of the principal factors in the outbreak of the 'manifestations' of tongues, healing and prophecy which appeared in Campbell's parish at Row near Helensburgh and among Irving's congregation in London from about 1830. Initial Brethren interest in these fairly quickly turned into opposition, largely because they could accept neither the soteriology nor the Christology to which the manifestations testified. This would have provided another reason to disapprove of Dowglass's views.

For Dowglass human responsibility extended beyond the area of salvation to include that of ecclesiology. Just as we are responsible

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41. *Ibid.*, p.12.

for what we do with God's gift of a Saviour, so too the Church is responsible for what it does with God's gift of the Spirit. God's purpose is to reveal himself by the Church, and human apostasy and unbelief, the consequences of which are evident in the Church's divided condition resulting from the loss of the Spirit's presence, can no more hinder this than human action can assist it. Our part, as with salvation, is to submit to God's work and cease from our own. That included not choosing our own ministers, since it was God who set Apostles and others in the Church.<sup>42</sup> While Brethren might have agreed with this, the claim that Apostles had indeed been restored to the Church and that they were the instruments by whom God was bringing out a ministry according to the Spirit to replace that appointed according to the flesh would have been too much for them to stomach.<sup>43</sup>

Darby's reaction can be ascertained from the surviving part of a passionately-worded letter, apparently written in an attempt to reclaim Dowglass.<sup>44</sup> Darby alleged that the Irvingites were led by lying spirits, and opposed the movement because of its Christology, its denial of substitutionary atonement, and its false prophecy. Self-confidence had resulted in Dowglass's being misled, and Darby prayed for the deliverance of the people at Salcombe, for whom he considered Dowglass responsible. What is very clear, and borne out by his other writings on the subject, is Darby's opposition to Irvingite claims— 'I scarce know how to tolerate the mention of their pretensions'—and to the way in which they frightened and threatened their hearers into accepting them.<sup>45</sup>

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42. *Ibid.*, pp.13-24.

43. The most detailed bibliography of Catholic Apostolic writings, also compiled by H. B. Copinger, lists another work by Dowglass dating from 1835, a six-page pamphlet entitled *Acts xvi 30.31*. No copy of this is known, but from its title we may infer that it was a presentation of the gospel.

44. Manchester, John Rylands University Library, Christian Brethren Archive, CBA5540(406), Darby to Dowglass, undated.

45. Darby repeats the same charge in 'A Letter to a Clergyman on the Claims and Doctrines of Newman Street', *Collected Writings* (ed. W. Kelly), vol.15 (Kingston-upon-Thames, n.d.), pp.32f.

Newton responded to Dowglass's change of views in an article which appeared in April 1835, 'The Doctrines of the Church in Newman Street'.<sup>46</sup> Newton insisted upon the need to weigh Irvingite claims to spiritual gifts, testing them for doctrinal soundness: 'Infallible truth in doctrinal statement is the least we could expect from a Church under direct Apostolic government ...'.<sup>47</sup> In this article, he adduced the same doctrinal reasons as Darby had done for rejecting them. Demonstrating that Irving's Christology, to which the gifts testified, was erroneous, Newton concluded that infallibility was lacking, adducing as further evidence the movement's denial of substitutionary atonement.<sup>48</sup> An appendix listed instances of unfulfilled prophecies, drawn from the writings of Robert Baxter, an influential Irvingite prophet who had caused a sensation by publicly renouncing the Irvingite gifts.<sup>49</sup>

Newton preached against Irvingism in Independent and Methodist chapels throughout Devon and Cornwall, earning the 'hatred' of the Irvingites, whom, he recalled, solemnly cursed him in public.<sup>50</sup> Soon after Dowglass defected, Newton lectured on the subject at Salcombe, an exercise in damage limitation which saved two-thirds of the Brethren there from following him.<sup>51</sup> But what of the other third? The reference in the Catholic Apostolic baptismal register to Percy Hall's having conducted the baptism of Dowglass's son implies a continuity between the group gathered by Dowglass and what would later become the Catholic Apostolic congregation in Salcombe. Thus it must have been the Brethren who had to find a new meeting-place, even though they were in the majority.

### **Dowglass as an Irvingite Evangelist**

The scene now shifts to London where, on 2nd January 1835, Dowglass was ordained as an elder for the Irvingite congregation at

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46. *Christian Witness*, 2 (1835), pp.111-128.

47. *Ibid.*, p.119.

48. *Ibid.*, pp.120ff.

49. *Ibid.*, pp.126\*-128\* [*sic*].

50. 'Fry MS', f.142.

51. *Ibid.*

Newman Street.<sup>52</sup> Later that year he and Richard Trimen, a native of Salcombe who had joined Irving's church in 1832, were chosen by prophecy as two of the five 'Pillar-Evangelists' in London, Dowglass being the central pillar—evidence of the regard in which he was held as an evangelist.<sup>53</sup> From the beginning of the Irvingite movement, the Tabernacle was seen as typifying the structure of the Church as restored under Apostles; the five pillars at the entrance came to be regarded as typifying those whose ministry it was 'to prepare the way, and to give access, to the several rites symbolized by those in the Holy Place'.<sup>54</sup> He would thus have been responsible for receiving converts into the churches.

Dowglass was ordained to this position on 17th May 1836,<sup>55</sup> holding the rank of Angel-Evangelist *ex officio* until his death. As such, his duties were to preach the movement's message wherever a way was opened and to oversee the activities of its Evangelists; he was also to determine when new members were sufficiently instructed in the movement's teachings to be handed over to the pastoral care of a local church.<sup>56</sup> Not surprisingly, in view of the testimony to his preaching already noted, he was described as very able, gathering many 'to the Standard of the Lord' in London and beyond.<sup>57</sup> Baptismal registers for Irvingite churches in London list many instances of Dowglass conducting baptisms—of adult converts as well as infants and children; some took place at what are described in

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52. Copinger, 'Annals', f.66.

53. Copinger, 'Annals', f.66; Trimen, Lecture 11. Richard Trimen remains a shadowy figure: it seems probable that he and Dowglass would have known each other in Salcombe, but there is no corroborative evidence. Two of his sons, Roland (1840-1916) and Henry (1843-96) became famous in the fields of entomology and botany respectively, while Edward (1839-1928) was a Catholic Apostolic Priest-Evangelist.

54. [J.B. Cardale], *Readings upon the Liturgy and other Divine Offices of the Church*, vol.1 (London, 1879), p.260. The five Pillar-Evangelists were attached to the Seven Churches in London, which were seen as a kind of demonstration model of what the Church should look like, corresponding to the Seven Churches in Revelation 2-3.

55. Copinger, 'Annals', f.71.

56. R.A. Davenport, *Albury Apostles* (London, 1973), p.229.

57. Trimen, Lecture 11.

the register of the Southwark church as ‘(Five) Pillar Services’<sup>58</sup>, which were probably evangelistic. I have not come across any other mention of such services, and it seems probable that they quickly died out; references to them are all dated between November 1836 and July 1837.

Although his fifth child, Catherine, was born at Salcombe on 14th June 1835, it appears that by the time of her baptism (at the Irvingite church in Newman Street, London, on 6th December) the family were residing at Mount Ida.<sup>59</sup> Within months, they were back in London: Dowglass is recorded as baptizing there on various dates from June 1836. In spite of the impact of his defection, Dowglass does not appear to have played much part in the establishment of the Irvingite church at Salcombe; he was conducting baptisms in London on a fairly regular basis until 1840 at least.<sup>60</sup>

#### **Dowglass’s later writings**

Little is known of Dowglass’s career after this. Newton records that at some point, he lost property in Ireland (presumably the estate at

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58. Public Record Office, RG4/4201.

59. Public Record Office, RG4/4249, Newman Street baptismal register 1832-40. It is intriguing to note that Catherine’s middle name was Newton, implying continuing respect on Dowglass’s part for his former colleague in the gospel. In 1859 she married Edward Cardale, son of the Catholic Apostolic Church’s chief apostle, J. B. Cardale (Devon Record Office, 57/4/2b, copy of marriage certificate).

60. Trimen was ordained as Angel for Salcombe on 1st May 1836, by the Apostle John Tudor, but resumed his former work (as a Pillar-Evangelist?) in January 1839 (Copinger, ‘Annals’, f.71; London, British Library, X203/482, S. Newman-Norton, ‘A Biographical Index of Those Associated with the Lord’s Work’ (Typescript, c.1972), fos.85, 111), which implies that the congregation did not flourish. A group must have been gathered together, however, since Angels were ordained when there was a congregation of which they would take charge. In the 1851 Religious Census for Devon the only Catholic Apostolic congregation listed is at Plymouth (Michael J. L. Wickes, *Devon in the Religious Census of 1851: A Transcript of the Devon section of the 1851 Church Census* (Appledore, Devon, 1990)). At some later date, however, the church must have been refounded, since it was in existence as late as 1928 (Cf. the list of Catholic Apostolic churches in D. Tierney, ‘The Catholic Apostolic Church: a study in Tory Millenarianism’, *Historical Research*, 63 (1990), p.314).

Mount Ida), and categorizes him as ‘worldly’,<sup>61</sup> one of the severest criticisms which Brethren could level at another Christian and deriving much of its force from their own unworldliness. However, he continued to be active not only as a preacher but also as a writer. In 1850 he wrote a series of four tracts *On Redemption*, *On Regeneration*, *On the Elias Ministry*, and *Christian Mission*. The first reiterates his belief in redemption as a fact, accomplished whether or not we believe it.<sup>62</sup> The second shows how far his thinking had moved from that of earlier years: the Spirit is received through the sacraments, and repentance, faith and conversion are no substitute for baptism.<sup>63</sup> The third defends the Catholic Apostolic claim to a restored apostleship; interestingly, like Darby he regarded apostasy as inevitable at the end of each dispensation.<sup>64</sup> The fourth interprets the task of the Church and its ministry in terms of the restoration of its true constitution and standing, for which Apostles are necessary.

In 1852 he compiled *A Chronicle of certain Events ... Between 1826 and 1852*, intended for members of the Catholic Apostolic Church and outlining the movement’s early development. It makes no mention of the Brethren, nor of his connections with Salcombe; as with other such works by Catholic Apostolic writers, little individuality is evident, the content following a conventional pattern. His conclusion is that the work is to be accepted as from God, since it was neither planned by man nor reliant upon human methods.<sup>65</sup>

The following year saw the appearance of *The Book of Job, an Allegoric History of the Christian Church*. In it, Dowglass interprets the biblical text allegorically, for example treating Job’s friends as the three main divisions of the Church (Protestant, Roman and Greek),

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61. ‘Fry MS’, fos.142, 375.

62. [T. Dowglass], *On Redemption* (London, 1850), p.5.

63. [T. Dowglass], *On Regeneration* (London, 1850), pp.4f. However, he had condemned those who denied baptismal regeneration in his first published work.

64. [T. Dowglass], *On the Elias Ministry* (London, 1850), p.8.

65. [T. Dowglass], *A Chronicle of certain Events ... Between 1826 and 1852* (London, 1852), pp.43f.

whose characteristics are traceable in the speeches assigned to them.<sup>66</sup> Protestantism (represented by Zophar) is attacked for boasting of its biblical knowledge and doctrinal purity; Dowglass singles out Calvinism for particular condemnation, accusing it of teaching divine favouritism.<sup>67</sup> One cast out for advocating belief in the universal love of God could scarcely take any other view, but this criticism shows how much his soteriology had changed since the days when he held high Calvinist views.

His last work appeared in 1856: *An Appeal to English Churchmen*, a work noteworthy for its hierarchical, almost mechanical, concept of grace: ‘Certain means are appointed by infinite Wisdom for the attainment of a certain end; and can it be supposed that any of these means may remain unemployed, or others be substituted, and yet the end be accomplished?’<sup>68</sup> Truth declared by revelation is laid up in the Church as a storehouse; a priesthood is appointed to minister in accordance with that revelation, and the laity receive grace through the appointed channels—conditional upon their obedience.<sup>69</sup> While the Church of England has creeds and articles of religion, they are inadequate as a guide to truth since they are capable of being interpreted in contradictory ways; even the bishops cannot agree among themselves, while the priests under them refuse to remain in subjection. The laity, like their clergy, choose for themselves the line which they will follow, and so churchmen as much as dissenters are guilty of holding their faith on the ground not of Church teaching but of private opinion.<sup>70</sup> His point is, of course, that another ministry—the apostolic—is needed to bind the church into a unity, as the living exponent of doctrine and discipline:<sup>71</sup> ‘the experience of every age has found the great evil to be the want of a centre of unity; and the endeavour of every successive experiment has

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66. [T. Dowglass], *The Book of Job. An allegorical history of the Christian Church* (London, 1853), p.15.

67. *Ibid.*, p.20 (on Job 13.4-18).

68. [T. Dowglass], *An Appeal to English Churchmen* (London, 1856), p.23.

69. *Ibid.*, pp.5f.

70. *Ibid.*, pp.7-10.

71. *Ibid.*, p.11.

been to provide a substitute for that which had been lost.<sup>72</sup> He is aware that many will reject his claims, but just as the truth of the gospel is only recognized by those who know their sinfulness, so the truth of his message will only be recognized by those who mourn over the church's condition.<sup>73</sup> In this work we have come a very long way indeed from his early insistence on personal faith and assurance of salvation, and from Brethren belief in a unity centred on Christ, of which the Lord's table is the primary expression.

Dowglass died in London on 27th July 1857.<sup>74</sup> His widow returned to Salcombe, where she died in 1889; the family continued to have close links with the area, a relative (William Prideaux Dowglass) coming to Salcombe as a curate in 1887 and living with family there.<sup>75</sup>

### Conclusion

Certain themes in this account recur in early Brethren history and deserve further investigation.

#### *1. Radicalism.*

Brethren were in touch with, and likely to be influenced by, the more radical expressions of evangelical faith. Among these we may include the Genevan evangelicalism which Malan did so much to spread in England during the 1820s, as well as the eschatologically-driven expectancy seen among Irving's followers. We should not necessarily blame Malan for Dowglass's separatism, though; if there is a Genevan catalyst to this, it may have come from Henry Drummond, who was widely believed to have been responsible for setting the *Réveil* on a separatist course from 1817, or from Robert Haldane, both of whom were influential upon Genevan evangelicals.

Radical evangelicalism is a dauntingly complex phenomenon for the historian; in spite of some excellent recent research, more work

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72. *Ibid.*, p.24f.

73. *Ibid.*, p.25.

74. Copinger, 'Annals', f.120.

75. John Taylor, in the *Centenary Programme of Salcombe Rugby Football Club* (Salcombe, 1988), p.12.

remains to be done. A balanced assessment must take account not only of the separatist impetus but also of the fluidity of the radical scene, in which one could be aligned with Brethren or Irvingites without separating from the Church of England, and in which alignments and allegiances could and did change. Continuing work on Brethren history needs to take account of this dimension.

### 2. *Evangelism.*

Dowglass evidently saw himself as an evangelist throughout his Christian life, even if his methods and message changed somewhat. In seeking to understand ecclesiological concerns of early Brethren, we should not lose sight of their evangelistic zeal. Examination of this seems to have lagged behind investigation of their conception of mission, their practice of 'faith mission' and their disapproval of missionary societies (although it is hard to separate the two). Further investigation of the approaches to evangelism espoused by radical evangelicals would not only increase our understanding of them but also enable us to sense something of their heartbeat.

### 3. *Soteriology.*

One issue has not generally been discussed in detail, and that is the thinking among early Brethren concerning soteriology. Some form of Calvinistic teaching seems to have been fairly generally accepted among them, and in this they were united with some of the circle which gathered around Irving in the prophetic conferences at Albury from 1826-30. While belief in limited atonement was dropped, and belief in election radically modified, by Irving's circle, the fundamental Calvinist stress on divine initiative remained.

Space has not permitted a comparison, but I suspect that Darby's robust doctrine of assurance would bear comparison with that of Malan, especially in view of Darby's Genevan links. In 1866, the Irish writer G.T. Stokes condemned Brethren for what he saw as their denial of the generally received doctrine of the atonement, and alleged that their insistence in gospel preaching that there is nothing the awakened soul needs to do except believe amounted to hyper-Calvinist antinomianism.<sup>76</sup> Sandemanian teaching concerning faith as

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76. *Quarterly Review*, 73 (1866), pp.30, 36.

intellectual assent may also be important for purposes of comparison: the possibility of indirect Sandemanian influence upon early Brethren thinking is borne out by the suggestion that some of the separatists in Geneva adopted Sandemanian views concerning mutual exhortation in the meetings and the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, as a result of influence of Robert Haldane.<sup>77</sup> From the high Calvinist side, the Strict Baptist J.C. Philpot criticised Brethren for what he saw as their failure to speak about the Spirit's work in conviction of sin, leading many into a false peace: this arose from their setting aside the Mosaic law as a ministration of condemnation, but also from their holding a Sandemanian view of faith.<sup>78</sup> Since 'they consider it quite an unscriptural practice to ask for any account of a person's experience, it fits in admirably with those who have none.'<sup>79</sup>

It seems probable that a strong doctrine of assurance was as important in the emergence of many early separatist groups as was eschatology; it was certainly a recurring issue in radical critiques of moderate evangelicalism. As we have seen, soteriology was one point at which Dowglass parted company with the Brethren, whose thinking may well have moderated somewhat as the movement developed. Irvingite thinking on assurance also seems to have moderated, since we do not find the stress on it in later works which is so evident in Irving and the *Morning Watch*. Early Brethren soteriology would thus appear to be an area worthy of further research, against the backdrop of that of other radical evangelicals. A book or thesis cries out to be written on Brethren evangelistic proclamation—a topic of unquestionable contemporary relevance.

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77. K.J. Stewart, 'Restoring the Reformation: British Evangelicalism and the "Reveil" at Geneva 1816-1849 (Ph.D. Diss., University of Edinburgh, 1992), p.162 (published as *Restoring the Reformation* (Paternoster Press, 2006)). Such practices were evident among other separatist groups such as the Walkerites in Dublin and the 'Western Schism' in Hampshire (cf. H.H. Rowdon, 'Secession from the Established Church in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Vox Evangelica*, 3 (1964), pp.76-88).

78. J.C. Philpot, 'Editors' Review: The Christian Witness', *Gospel Standard*, 8 (1842), pp.80f.

79. *Ibid.*, p.83.