Robert and James Haldane and the Quest for Evangelical Union

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At their best Protestant evangelicals have always dreamed of union and worked to see it realised, but tragically it has remained an elusive dream in spite of good intentions and hard work. Already at the Reformation the danger of fragmentation was recognised and leaders such as John Calvin sought unity among the forces of Protestantism. This unitive thrust within Protestantism has appeared in subsequent generations, especially in times of revival and renewal. In the 17th century men such as Richard Baxter, John Dury and Amos Comenius worked long and hard for the visible unity of God's people. In the wake of the revivals of the 18th century in Britain and America there was a similar desire on the part of many Protestants for evangelical union. It seems that when the central concerns of the gospel are pre-eminent there is a hunger on the part of God's people to unite as far as possible in its interests.

The purpose of this article is to explore this tension between unity and division as seen in the lives of those remarkable Scottish brothers, Robert and James Haldane. The Haldanes lived at a time of significant spiritual awakening in Protestant churches in Britain. Born in the 1760s and converted in the 1790s, the Haldanes lived and worked at a time when Protestant evangelicalism was expanding rapidly in the wake of the Great Awakening of the mid-18th century. Both brothers were actively involved in many of the evangelical enterprises that emerged in this period and characterised it. They were both leading officers in the great evangelical army that was transforming so much of British society. Across denominations evangelicals united together to advance the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Yet active as they were in what has been called, to change the metaphor, "the evangelical empire", the Haldanes also contributed to its fragmentation. In many ways they exemplified the centrifugal and centripetal forces at work in late 18th and early 19th century evangelicalism, forces that at the same time united it and threatened its fragmentation. The Haldane legacy is an ambiguous one that shows both the union that evangelicals long for but also the divisions to which evangelicals are too often prone. For this reason I think that the Haldanes have much to teach evangelicals today.

By any standard the Haldane brothers are remarkable for what they were able to achieve in the course of their full and active lives. They were born (Robert in 1764 and James in 1768) into a wealthy family with aristocratic connections. The family estate, Airthrey, was what is today the location of Gleneagles Hotel in Perthshire. After being privately educated both brothers entered naval service, Robert with the Royal Navy and James with the East India Company in which he became a captain. After leaving the navy in 1783 Robert studied at Edinburgh University and then spent the next ten years attending to the family estate as a country gentleman. After a short flirtation with scepticism and radical politics (inspired by the French Revolution), Robert was

converted as was James shortly afterwards. David Bogue, the well-known Independent minister in Gosport in Hampshire, was instrumental in James's conversion and had a profound influence on both the brothers. The robust, experimental Calvinistic evangelicalism that characterised Bogue came also to characterise the Haldanes.

After their conversions the brothers sought to go to Bengal as missionaries along with several other like-minded men. Robert was particularly inspired by the example of William Carey and was willing to sell his estate and devote his life and fortune to this enterprise. Unfortunately the East India Company was unwilling to grant them permission to enter India, in spite of the pulling of many strings in high places. The Haldanes saw this disappointment as a providential indication that they were to focus their evangelistic concern on Scotland. From 1796 to 1800 the brothers undertook six evangelistic tours of the Highlands, Orkney, the west coast and the Borders. On several of these trips they were accompanied by such prominent English evangelicals as Charles Simeon and Rowland Hill. They preached in the open air and in whatever churches would welcome them. Wherever they went they had a significant impact, with many people being converted and a number of Sunday schools being established. They also met considerable opposition from moderate ministers in the Church of Scotland. They did not help themselves in this by occasionally criticising the non-evangelical preaching they often heard, and not surprisingly they were the object of a Pastoral Admonition passed by the General Assembly over Evangelical objections in 1799.

In order to facilitate their home evangelism the Haldane brothers established the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home in 1797. Soon afterwards they were establishing new churches where there were significant numbers of converts and they began to train evangelists. The principal church was at the Circus in Edinburgh where James became pastor. Founded in 1798 the church moved in 1801 to a purpose built Tabernacle on Leith Walk that seated 3,000 people. Until the founding of the Circus church the Haldanes remained loyal if somewhat critical members of the Church of Scotland. Even afterwards they did not see themselves as opposed to the Established Church, but only as supplementing its ministry and trying to reach people without Christ. Nevertheless the founding of the SPGH and what became known as the "tabernacle" churches was effectively the beginning of the Congregational denomination in Scotland. The Haldanes themselves also began to develop a number of distinctive views of their own, culminating in their conversion to what was then called the anti-paedobaptist position. Their conversion split their movement and was a boost to the emerging Baptist denomination in Scotland.

Beyond Scotland Robert Haldane was particularly active. He sat on the committees of a number of key evangelical societies and like his brother he was a prolific author and did not shy from controversy, as we will see. He had a sharp theological mind that was put to good use when he visited Geneva in 1816-17 during an extended tour of the continent. There he lectured privately on Romans to a number of theological students who were wonderfully converted, to the chagrin of their rationalistic professors. Among these students were men who would subsequently become leaders in a revival of the Reformed churches in Switzerland and France – men such as Merle D'Aubigne, Frederic Monod, Cesar Malan, Henri Pictet and others.[1] Robert was particularly involved in the Apocrypha controversy that wracked the Bible Society in the 1820s. James also was involved in controversy, especially about his views on church

government and, towards the end of his life, on the atonement. Robert died in 1842 and James in 1851.

This brief biographical sketch gives us some idea of the significance of the Haldane brothers for understanding both the promise and the pitfalls of the quest for evangelical union. Using their lives as an illustration I would like us to go on to consider first the noble ideal of evangelical union, then the attempted realisation of evangelical union and finally the tragic failure of evangelical union. I trust that the result will shed some light on our own quest for evangelical unity today.

The *noble ideal* of evangelical union as illustrated by the Haldane brothers

By the end of the 18th century the ideal of evangelical unity was widespread. In the wake of the Great Awakening earlier in the century there was a desire for evangelicals to unite together to advance the gospel. In many ways George Whitefield epitomised this ideal in his willingness to associate with people from many denominations and his lack of concern for the particulars of church order. Although he had a considerable following he had no desire to establish a new denomination. These quotes illustrate his attitude:

> I truly love all that love the glorious Emmanuel, and though I cannot depart from the principles which I believe are clearly revealed in the book of God, yet I can cheerfully associate with those that differ from me, if I have reason to think they are united to our common head.

> Let my name be forgotten, let me be trodden under the feet of all men, if Jesus may thereby be glorified. Let my name die everywhere, let even my friends forget me, if by that means the cause of the Christ Jesus may be promoted. I want to bring souls not a party ... but to a sense of their undone condition by nature, and to true faith in Jesus Christ. But what is Calvin, or what is Luther? Let us look above names and parties; let Jesus be all in all. – So that he be preached ... I care not who is uppermost. I know my place ... even to be the servant of all; I want not to have a people called after my name.[2]

Or here is William Seward, one of Whitefield's closest associates, reporting on the revival in Wales:

> I told them that I did not desire them to leave [their] church but to attend it closely – and that I only wanted to bring them to Jesus Christ and then if they were fully persuaded in their own mind let each remain in the communion in which he was called. If he was called a Churchman let him remain; if a Quaker, a Baptist, or Presbyterian let him remain so.[3]

This was the sentiment that animated many evangelicals in Britain. Even where there was strong denominational loyalty and theological convictions there was often a warm-hearted affection for fellow evangelicals. In spite of his theological differences with Whitefield and his dislike of Dissenters, John Wesley advocated "a catholic spirit" in relationships between Christians. This unity was not easy to maintain and there were bitter theological controversies. The differences between Whitefield and Wesley split the Methodist movement and the Calvinist-Arminian controversy of the 1770s and 80s was very bitter. Within all denominations there were people who were very wary of the suspected compromises involved in associating too closely with people outside their

camp. Nevertheless there was still a strong evangelical consensus. People spoke of "the Gospel World", a world which, in the words of RH Martin, "for all its bickerings, was a cultural and ideological entity, rather like the 'left' in the modern political world".[4] Fundamental to this was a broad body of shared Protestant doctrine and an evangelical experience. With the obvious exception of the Wesleyan Methodists, most other evangelicals were broadly Calvinistic in their theology.

This was the world in which Robert and James Haldane moved after their conversions. In practice and in large measure in principle they were committed to the Whitefieldian evangelical ideal. They had a wide network of evangelical friends and acquaintances with whom they cordially worked. I have already noted the influence of David Bogue who himself epitomised the catholic evangelicalism of many Congregationalists. It was Bogue who pronounced the death of bigotry at the first meeting of the London Missionary Society in 1795. He said on that occasion:

> We have now before us a pleasing spectacle, Christians of different denominations, although differing on points of church government, united in forming a society for propagating the Gospel among the heathen. This is a new thing in the Christian church ... Here are Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Independents, all united in one society, all joining to form its laws, to regulate its institutions, and manage its various concerns. Behold us here assembled with one accord to attend the funeral of bigotry: and may she be buried so deep that not a particle of her dust may ever be thrown up on the face of the earth.[5]

Sharing the same outlook, it is not surprising to find the Haldanes going on preaching tours with Charles Simeon and Rowland Hill, corresponding with William Wilberforce and other members of the Clapham Sect, and fraternising with evangelicals in the Church of Scotland and in the Secession and Relief Churches. Andrew Fuller and other English Baptists were welcome guests at Airthrey when on deputation in Scotland for the Baptist Missionary Society. Indeed until Robert sold it, his home at Airthrey became something of a meeting point for evangelical leaders.[6] As we will see, in their extensive activities they operated across a broad evangelical front and not in a narrowly sectarian corner.

Behind their pan-evangelical activities was a principle of evangelical unity that both brothers maintained throughout their lives. In 1805 James stated that his aim in writing a book was "to promote love and union amongst Christians and consequently the success of the gospel in the world". He went on to say that: "we ought to love the image of Christ wherever we see it; and if we confine our love to our own party, we deceive ourselves. If we love the Lord Jesus we must love those who are guided by his Spirit".[7]

Fifteen years later he wrote in a similar strain concerning the basis of fellowship in churches:

> Into these societies believers only are to be received and from these societies (if they obey the Scriptures) no believer is to be excluded. The bond of union is the faith of Jesus and everyone who gives evidence of having received this precious faith is entitled to the privileges of Christian fellowship, although imperfectly instructed in many particulars... A church of Christ is a free school of *all his disciples*, and no man is warranted to exclude even the weakest and most ignorant.[8]

Robert makes the same point in his commentary on *Romans* when dealing with chapter 15, verse 7: "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God". He wrote: "The manner in which Christians are to receive one another to church fellowship is as Christ received them... Christ receives those who are ignorant of many things – indeed of everything but faith in him. ... If Christ receives his people notwithstanding their ignorance of many parts of his will, ought they to reject those whom He hath received?"[9] Robert was dealing here with the issue of church fellowship, but this was the principle upon which he and his brother sought to operate in all their activities. Towards the end of his life and long after he had adopted baptistic views, he turned down a request to support a Baptist cause on the grounds that it was too denominational. As his biographer and nephew wrote, "he altogether disapproved of any external ordinance being made a bond of union instead of faith in Christ and sound doctrine".[10]

The *attempted realisation* of evangelical union as illustrated by the Haldane brothers

The world of late 18th and early 19th century evangelicalism was characterised by a massive array of interdenominational activity, societies and institutions for almost every conceivable purpose. Committed as they were to the ideal of evangelical unity, the Haldane brothers actively sought to realise this ideal in practical ways. I would like to highlight four areas where the Haldanes tried to realise evangelical unity.

Foreign missions

Considering their original intention of going to India as missionaries it is not surprising that one of the societies with which the Haldanes were associated was the London Missionary Society, founded in 1795. Robert served as one of its directors from 1796 to 1804. Two years before its formation, the Baptist Missionary Society had been founded in 1793 as a denominational agency, but there were a number of Anglican and Dissenting ministers who felt that an interdenominational missionary society was needed. One of these was Melville Horne who articulated this pan-evangelical vision in his book *Letters on Mission*, published in 1794 after his return from a visit to Sierra Leone. In advocating foreign missions Horne called on missionaries to cooperate without sacrificing their convictions:

> I would not have him indifferent to his own peculiarities, whether they respect the doctrines he receives as truth, or the points of ecclesiastical polity he considers most friendly to religion; but I would have him thoroughly sensible, that the success of his ministry rests not on points of separation, but on those wherein all godly men are united.

Missionaries had to be "far removed from bigotry, and possess a spirit truly catholic". He went on:

> It is not Calvinism; it is not Arminianism, but Christianity that he is to teach. It is not the hierarchy of the Church of England; it is not the principles of the Protestant Dissenters that he has in view to propagate. His object is to serve the Church Universal.[11]

In the course of 1794 what was initially called simply "The Missionary Society" was formed. The founding committee included Anglicans, Independents, Presbyterians, and Calvinistic Methodists. At its inaugural meeting in September 1795 David Bogue

preached the "Funeral of Bigotry" sermon that we have already noted. His appeal for evangelical unity was greeted, according to the *Evangelical Magazine*, with a shout for joy. While the Haldanes were not involved in these proceedings they were enthusiastic supporters of the LMS and of its sister body, the Edinburgh Missionary Society. Robert was also particularly concerned with the state of Protestantism on the continent where he made several preaching tours. He supported the work of the Continental Society founded by Henry Drummond.

Home missions and church planting

Another pan-evangelical activity that engaged the interest of the Haldanes was itinerant preaching. In the late 18th century there was an upsurge of itinerant preaching in Britain. Whitefield and Wesley had established the pattern and there were many that followed in their train. When James Haldane founded the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home in 1798 with John Aikman and Joseph Rate he was clear as to its nondenominational character. The founding address said that "it is not our design to form or to extend the influence of any sect. Our sole intention is to make known the everlasting gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ". The new society was to be "composed of persons of every denomination, holding unity of faith in the leading doctrines of Christianity". Those involved in the SPGH would be required "to endeavour to strengthen the hands of all faithful ministers of Jesus Christ of whatever denomination, and as far as they [could] discourage all bitter party spirit, wherever they discover[ed] it among Christians".[12] In practice the Haldanes worked with a wide variety of like-minded evangelicals.

When it came to establishing churches they did so on a non-sectarian basis. There were in England at the time a number of what RH Martin calls "borderland churches" which inhabited the border between the Church of England and Dissent. Examples are Rowland Hill's Surrey Chapel, Union Chapel in Islington, the two Whitefield tabernacles at Spa Fields and Tottenham Court Road and those churches in the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. A number of these churches eventually became Congregational. In Edinburgh Lady Glenorchy's Chapel had a similar broad Calvinistic evangelical ethos even though it was attached to the Church of Scotland. The churches that were planted as a result of the work of the SPGH evangelists initially were established on this basis. They were intended to be preaching centres from which evangelism would be done in a town or district. There was no thought, initially at least, of competing with the established churches. As Deryck Lovegrove has written:

> Though the new buildings soon acquired a quasi-denominational character, serving as homes for congregations of "tabernacle people", their existence, especially in the early stages of the movement, represented a genuine expression of the undenominational spirit. The substance of the message preached from their pulpits, as in the open air, was biblical and conversionary, and as such devoted little thought to the weightier matters of church order. [The tabernacles provided] a visible focus of unity and acheivement.[13]

Nevertheless, in spite of their intentions, or perhaps because of them, the Haldane movement was not looked upon favourably by the "moderates" in the Church of Scotland. The rise of itinerancy, and with it lay preaching, threatened the tradition of an educated ministry as well as impugning the spiritual condition of the national Church. Their fears seemed confirmed when the Haldanes established a seminary for training

itinerant evangelists and when James was ordained as minister of the Circus church in Edinburgh. Some senior evangelical figures, such as John Erskine, shared some of the moderates' concerns. This was the background to the Pastoral Admonition and Declaratory Act of the General Assembly in 1799 warning congregations about the SPGH and forbidding its evangelists to preach in parish churches.

Literature publication and distribution

From the beginning the Haldanes were concerned about the publication and distribution of Christian literature. Their itinerant tours of Scotland had revealed the desperate need for the distribution of cheap Christian literature and not least of Bibles. Initially they published their own literature, but with the establishment of the Religious Tract Society in 1799 and the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804 the Haldanes could join forces with other evangelicals in making Christian literature widely available. In many ways the Bible Society was the pan-evangelical society *par excellence*. The simplicity of its aim of circulating the Bible to as many as possible commended itself to a wide range of people. Whereas denominational concerns prevented some Anglican evangelicals and Baptists from involvement in the LMS, the Bible Society was supported by people from all denominations. Robert Haldane sat on the committee of the Bible Society until the split over the Apocrypha and thereafter sat on the committee of the Edinburgh Bible Society.

The *tragic failure* of evangelical union as illustrated by the Haldane brothers

Noble as the ideal of evangelical union was, and hard as the Haldanes worked to see it realised, in the end they failed. They were not alone. By the 1830s it was becoming apparent that earlier enthusiasm for evangelical union was waning. The Dissenters in England were agitating for their civil liberties. In 1828 the Test and Corporations Acts were repealed, but that was only the beginning of a long process of redressing English Nonconformist grievances. Not surprisingly, among Congregationalists in particular, there was a growing sense of denominational identity and the establishment of a number of denominational institutions, not least the Congregational Union in 1833. Independent churches on the borderland of the Church of England and Dissent became more distinctively Congregationalist, as did interdenominational agencies such as the London Missionary Society, the Village Itinerancy Society and the Home Missionary Society. In Scotland Dissenters challenged the advocates of the establishment principle in what became known as the Voluntary Controversy. In both England and Scotland clergy in the established churches responded to this recrudescence of Nonconformity by reaffirming their own distinctive principles. It was noted at the time that Anglican evangelical clergymen were distancing themselves from their Dissenting brethren. It was not until the founding of the Evangelical Alliance in 1841 that a measure of cordiality was restored to relationships between evangelicals inside and outside the established churches. But the unity promoted by the Alliance was both more modest and negative than that of a few decades before. It was more modest in that it did not seek the visible union of churches and it was more negative because it was reactive to the growing threat of Catholicism, both of the Roman and Anglican varieties. The

Haldanes were not immune to these developments. There are four areas where we can see tensions that led to the failure of their dream of evangelical union being realised.

Political tensions

In spite of sharing so much in common theologically and spiritually, many British evangelicals were divided on politics. In the early 1790s they had very differing views on the French Revolution. Someone like David Bogue initially welcomed the Revolution as a great boost for religious as well as political liberty, as did Robert Haldane.[14] Anglican evangelicals and to a lesser extent Church of Scotland evangelicals saw the French Revolution and radical politics as deeply subversive to the established order of which they were part. Writing to William Wilberforce in 1792, Thomas Robinson, the vicar of St Mary's, Leicester, said:

> I am sorry to observe that among the numerous class of dissenters, whose aim is to abolish every national establishment of religion among us, there are many of real piety. I know not how they can reconcile their conduct with the Scripture injunction to obey the magistrates & follow after peace ... [T]hey seem to think, that while they are opposing our Church they are doing God service and promoting the cause of his truth.[15]

Even the revered John Newton who had many close Nonconformist friends, among them the Haldanes, thought that "all the Dissenters, even the orthodox not excepted, are republicans and enemies of government".[16] Not surprisingly many evangelical Anglicans were somewhat wary of associating too closely with Dissenters in pan-evangelical enterprises. Later in the 1820s and 30s when the established position of the Church of England and the Church of Scotland was being challenged, political tensions again undermined evangelical union.

The Haldane brothers, particularly Robert, were affected by the climate of political suspicion. Before his conversion Robert Haldane had flirted with radical politics, but after his conversion it seems that what political views he held were kept to himself. However, this did not prevent his opponents from using his former radicalism against him. When with his brother he applied to the East India Company for permission to go to India as missionaries, his politics were one of the reasons his application was rejected. At the time it was feared that missionaries were subversive to civil order. One leading moderate minister in Glasgow wrote to Lord Dundas, the Lord Advocate, saying "that the whole of this missionary business grows from a democratical root". This was the light in which the Haldanes' home missionary efforts were viewed as well.[17] It was against this background that Robert Haldane sought to answer his critics on this point by protesting that he had never entertained the idea of subverting the established church, and avowing his submission to the state as commanded by Scripture.[18] While evangelicals within the established churches supported the right of the Haldanes and others to engage in itinerant preaching, some were nervous about their politics and less than enthusiastic in their co-operation.

Ecclesiastical tensions

It was in the realm of church life that the Haldanes' attempt to realise evangelical union came to nought. In spite of their desire to establish churches that were simply evangelical and non-denominational, the Haldanes ended up establishing a new denomination and dividing their own church. The problem was that, as they sought to

make the church as biblical as they could, they inevitably alienated those who disagreed with them. What they saw as a sincere pursuit of an apostolic ideal of church life was seen by others as a restless love of novelty and innovation for its own sake.

When the Circus church was established in 1799 its pattern of church life was similar to that with which most Scots were familiar. As the minister James Haldane's position in the church was comparable to that of the minister in Presbyterian churches. The church was Congregational in polity for largely but not entirely pragmatic reasons. At this point there is not much evidence that Haldanes' had very distinct views on church polity except that they, with the other organisers, were concerned that the new church take church discipline seriously.[19] One of the lessons learned from their itinerant tours around Scotland seems to have been that discipline was too lax in the Church of Scotland. Other than that and the monthly observance of the Lord's Supper, the Circus church was not all that unusual. As I have already indicated it was basically intended to be an Edinburgh version of the Whitefieldian churches in England. The Haldanes' biographer sums up the situation in this way:

> For a long time after the formation of the Tabernacle Church, questions of ecclesiastical [order] never seemed to impede the hallowed object to which its pastor had consecrated his life. To use his own language, "It was, in fact, no separation from the Establishment. It was merely another place of worship for preaching the gospel without regard to *forms* of external arrangement or Church order, and where the pastor and many of the members showed their catholic spirit by going to the Sacrament of the Established Church. Add to this that the preaching was almost entirely addressed to the people of the world."[20]

That is how the church began, but whatever the original intention I suggest that the concern for church discipline indicated that the seeds of a more distinctive church polity had been planted and in time would begin to grow.

The first area in which James Haldane began to develop a more distinct ecclesiology was in relation to the Lord's Supper. By 1802 he was advocating the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. Considering that at the time in Scotland the Lord's Supper was observed in many churches only annually, this was quite an innovation. Haldane had already concluded that the Lord's Supper was not a sacrament, but he had not altered its monthly observance at the Tabernacle. When weekly observance was introduced it met with considerable opposition. In a pamphlet on the subject Haldane said that:

> From the time of the formation of the church, I should have esteemed it a privilege to have shewed forth [our Lord's] death as often as I commemorated his resurrection. I thought, however, this would have been inexpedient.[21]

Some accused Haldane of having kept his views secret, but he protested his integrity. A further development in James' thinking that proved more divisive was in regard to eldership. Influenced by reading the works of the 18th century separatists Glas and Sandeman, James persuaded the church in 1806 to adopt a plural eldership. These elders were understood not to be ruling elders in the Presbyterian sense, but rather as fellow pastors with James. This innovation was not appreciated by many and it was noted ruefully by some critics that when James was not preaching the attendance dropped considerably.[22]

But these developments were relatively minor compared to what happened over the issues of mutual exhortation and believers' baptism. In 1808 James had come to the

conclusion that Christians should have the opportunity in the regular worship meetings of the church to mutually exhort one another. Until then there had been mutual exhortation in some midweek meetings, but its introduction into the Sunday services caused a storm. Many people left the church over this. Many of those who stayed considered what was often said unedifying. But James was adamant. His convictions on mutual exhortation were closely related to his views on preaching and Christian ministry. Having repudiated the clergy/laity distinction he believed that every member of the church, or at least the male members, should have opportunity to speak for the edification of other members. In this way those who had a particular gift for preaching could be recognised and set a part for training and ministry.[23] Many of the Haldanes' associates who disagreed with them on this issue considered it, in the words of one of them, John Aikman, "destructive, both of the pastoral office and of all order in the house of God".[24] If that is how some in the Haldane circle felt it is not difficult to think what fellow evangelicals in the Presbyterian churches felt.

It was the issue of believers' baptism that finally split the Haldane movement and destroyed any pretence of evangelical union. Hard on the heels of the mutual exhortation controversy was first James' and then Robert's change of view on baptism. In a letter to his friend John Campbell, the minister successively of Whitefield's Tottenham Court Road Chapel and Kingsland Chapel in London, James confessed to having for some time entertained doubts about infant baptism. It was when asked to baptise a child in 1808 that he felt he could not conscientiously do so, even though he had not at that point come to clear conclusions. James did not want the issue of baptism to divide the church, but in fact it did. About 200 people agreed with James and stayed with him while many others departed to other churches.[25] The division at the Tabernacle spread through the Haldane movement with most churches choosing to maintain the practice of infant baptism. This was in effect the beginning of the Congregational denomination in Scotland.

On all these issues both brothers said that they did not intend to divide the church or the movement. Perhaps because he was a pastor James was seemingly the more flexible of the two in the application of their convictions. As their biographer says, James's views "were never intended by him to have been prematurely forced into practice at the risk of fomenting division". But that is what happened. Somewhat naively both brothers believed that they should be able to state their views plainly and then work through their application in the life of the church. Writing to John Campbell, James said:

> If we are all acting on conviction and both desiring to know the will of Jesus in this and in all other respects, I have no apprehension of disunion. Of one thing I am sure, that all who love the Lord Jesus should, so far as they are agreed, walk by the same rule and mind the same things; and if it be improper for Baptists to be in fellowship in the same Church, it must be equally improper to have occasional fellowship in private.[26]

But this ideal did not work out in the life of the Tabernacle or in the wider Haldane movement. Perhaps the reason for this was in part the inability of both brothers to see that in churches there will always be loose ends. In his book *A View on Social Worship* in which he propounded some of his convictions on the nature of the church, James made these revealing comments:

> The religion of Jesus in its doctrines, precepts and institutions, is one connected whole; in proportion as one part is overlooked, the force of all is weakened ... The genuine and sincere union is absolutely impracticable while professors neglect to inquire, to understand and to practise the directions of God's word respecting social worship... The apostles were most anxious to promote unity of sentiment as well as of affection in all the saints.[27]

James then went on to propound his views, hoping that his readers would agree with him but warning them of the danger of resisting the conviction of truth. Such an approach to changing the church is not calculated to maintain harmony and keep people on board. For the Haldanes the issues were black and white and had to be accepted in total or not at all. In an article on the Haldanes, Deryck Lovegrove describes well the difficulty of their approach to changing the church while maintaining its unity:

> In their quest for purity of order the innovators showed that they were prepared to jettison any realistic chance of harmony for the sake of adherence to the letter of Scripture. Still more destructive was the missionary zeal with which they pursued that goal. In spite of their awareness of the dangers of Glasite intolerance, the Haldanes failed to apply to their own context the historical lesson it offered concerning obsession with detail, and the resulting sequence of strife, debility, and ultimate irrelevance.[28]

That said, it is interesting to note that there were limits to the Haldanes' innovations. For example, they opposed the novel ideas about the restoration of the miraculous charismata propounded by Edward Irving, as well as the premillenialism that was gaining acceptance in some circles.

Theological tensions

However much the Tabernacle was divided on church practises, it was united in its essential evangelical doctrine. This was not the case in the wider evangelical movement in Great Britain nor even within the Haldane movement itself. There were two doctrinal issues that the Haldanes were particularly concerned about which made them, depending on your views, either unhelpful dividers or stalwart defenders of evangelicalism. Either way the involvement of the Haldanes in theological controversy was the cause of some tensions that strained the unity of the movement.

In the 1820s Robert Haldane was at the centre of a massive controversy within the British and Foreign Bible Society concerning the Apocrypha. The details of the controversy need not concern us, except to say that it involved objections by Robert and other Scottish members of the Society to the inclusion of the Apocrypha in continental editions of the Society's Bibles. Robert had discovered this when in France in copies of the French Bible of which he had actually underwritten the costs of publication. The argument of the London committee was that the Society's Bibles would only be acceptable in predominantly Roman Catholic countries if they included the Apocrypha. Robert and others thought that this was an unwarranted compromise that God could not bless. Moreover it contravened the fundamental principle of the Society that said it existed for the circulation of the Scriptures alone. Since the Bible Society was the evangelical society *par excellence*, Robert's protests were seen by some as unnecessarily dividing evangelicals, but by others as defending a fundamental pillar of evangelicalism. Robert himself saw his stand as a necessary one against a false liberality that tolerated departures from the truth in the name of love. As he put it:

> Bigotry has had a long and gloomy reign, and over the greatest part of the world is still enthroned, but among Protestants it has in most cases lost its sway, and is daily declining in influence. Its rival has mounted the throne and in the opposite direction threatens to do equal mischief. A spurious liberality has succeeded to intolerance, and aims at promoting to propagation of divine truth by compromising its distinguishing attributes.[29]

It seems to me that Robert Haldane was justified in his behaviour and as John Macleod pointed out, it was largely because of him that the Apocrypha is not in our English Bibles.[30]

The other theological issue that attracted the attention of the Haldanes was the doctrine of the atonement. Towards the end of his life James Haldane was involved in a controversy over the doctrine of limited or definite atonement. Like his brother, James was a thorough going Calvinist all his life. By the 1830s there was a considerable shift taking place in British evangelicalism away from the Calvinism that had characterised non-Wesleyan evangelicalism to a highly modified Calvinism. Among other things the traditional understanding of limited atonement was being challenged, not least within the Congregational churches that had emerged from the Haldane movement. In a series of pamphlets and books James locked horns with a number of antagonists, including the eminent Glasgow Congregationalist Ralph Wardlaw. Again our concern is not with the details of the controversy, but with the fact that James thought he had to do battle on this point. While he rejoiced that true Christians united in evangelistic efforts and missions, he regretted that sometimes the "promoting of union among believers" was "at the expense of zeal for the truth". While no doubt many saw James as a troubler in Israel, he saw himself as a defender the historic doctrine of the atonement against theological innovators.[31]

Personal tensions

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the positions that the Haldanes took, it must be said that there were personal tensions between them and those around them that did nothing to help the maintenance of unity. James was warmly liked by many, but Robert seems not to have been the easiest person to work with. Certainly some of his associates were pretty bitter after falling out with him. After the split in the Tabernacle over baptism Robert closed the Glasgow seminary and withdrew his financial support from many of the churches he had built. Greville Ewing – the seminary tutor, an early associate and later a leading Congregational minister in Glasgow – fell out with the brothers and was never again on good terms with them. Even more to the point, his daughter, Janet Matheson, mentioned the way her father had been treated in her biography of him[32] which drew a response from James. William Orme, later an eminent Congregational minister in London, likewise complained about the high-handed way the Haldanes had treated him.[33] The problem seems in part due to Robert's authoritarian personality and in part due to the way he financed and really controlled what happened in many of the tabernacles. This abrasive tendency can also be seen in the way in which, in controversy on some of the issues mentioned above, Robert would get very personal in his criticisms. For example, in the Apocrypha controversy he attacked the integrity of Daniel Wilson, a leading evangelical Anglican who later became the first bishop of Calcutta.[34] Needless to say this approach to personal relationships did not help to build evangelical unity.

There is always something inspiring about the story of a movement of God, however imperfect the instruments he uses. It is a reminder that God can move today in different circumstances and yet accomplish the same purpose of extending his kingdom. The story of the Haldanes is one such story that is largely forgotten today, but is worthy of being retold. But the story of the Haldanes has some important lessons to teach us, particularly that evangelical union is a noble ideal which every Christian should strive to see realised. When God is at work advancing his kingdom many of our differences seem relatively minor. Within churches and between churches Christians should accept one another as Christ has accepted them and so bring praise to God. While on many issues we must have our convictions, on the big issues of the gospel – righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit – we can be one as we strive together for the faith of the gospel. But the story of the Haldanes also teaches us that there are many pitfalls to avoid. We must guard against an obsession with the relatively minor issues of church order. We must not expect complete agreement on everything in the life of the church. We must maintain good relationships with brothers and sisters who disagree with us. We must beware of a love of controversy for its own sake. We must remember that Christians are at different levels of understanding and maturity. We must discern on what issues it is worth taking a stand and then contend for the faith in love and with a generosity of spirit. Like Robert and James Haldane we are very fallible human beings, but also like them we can be used by God to advance the kingdom of his Son.

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The other book on revival is one that everyone should run out and buy. In ***Revival Sent By God*** (IVP 2000) **Raymond Ortlund** contends that revival can be found in the Old Testament as well as the New. While in the technical sense the Bible does not have a word for revival, Ortlund says that the 'Bible's ideas are full of revival theology', but accepts that much more biblical work needs to be done on the subject. Ortlund defines revival as 'a season in the life of the church when God causes the normal ministry of the gospel to surge forward with extraordinary spiritual power' (p. 7). After the introduction the book falls into two parts. In the Part One ('What God can do') he expounds the classic Old Testament passages on revival (Isa.64; Psalms 85 and 126, Hosea 14, Joel 2, and Ezekiel 37) and what expositions these are! In very fine prose Ortlund explains these passages with sharp exegetical insight as well as applying their message with in a fresh and relevant way. He has a firm grasp of systematic and biblical theology and illustrates and confirms his points from a wide range of historical and contemporary authors. For ministers who are growing weary and are tempted to give up I would warmly commend the exposition of Psalm 126.where he powerfully applies to preachers and workers the imperative of sowing with tears so that we can bring in the harvest with joy. In Part Two ('What we must do') Ortlund addresses the issues of repentance, prayer and humility. The book ends with an appendix containing an address by Francis Schaeffer entitled 'The Persistence of Compassion' in which he appeals for Christians in times of declension not to become shrill and angry, but rather to persistently display love and compassion to others. Every Christian and every minister of the gospel would benefit greatly from meditating deeply on these chapters. This is a book that will not only help you better to understand what revival is and to pray for it, but also to help you persevere in the tough environment in which we find ourselves today.