

The History of the Truth in Modern Times (continued.)

Dowieism -1866

29th July 2026

Introduction

Dear Brethren and Sisters of the Lord Jesus.

After the Re-Establishment of the Truth under the Divinely and Providential hand of God, using the person known as Doctor John Thomas in 1847, the newly uncovered pearl of great price was received with enthusiasm. In Britain for example, Dr. Thomas, in 1848 delivered 270 lectures in two years and distributed 1100 copies of *Elpis Israel*. In 1849, Dr. Thomas lectured in Aberdeen, and was also publishing a magazine *The Herald of the Kingdom and Age to Come* every month. One of the attendees of his lecture took home a copy of the magazine and gave it to her granddaughter, who then subscribed to the magazine. In 1852, her younger brother by the name of Robert Roberts chanced upon it, and discovered that the Doctor had published a book by the name of *Elpis Israel*. Upon obtaining and reading the book, the young man was convinced and the following year at the age of 14 was baptised in the River Dee, into the saving Name of Jesus Christ – convinced by the lucid and accurate exposition of the Gospel of the Kingdom and the things to do with the Name of Jesus Christ, as explained in the book *Elpis Israel*. There were no formal Ecclesias as such then, just those who had been baptised, meeting together in agreed local meeting rooms. As things were still relatively new, there was only a loose organisation, and there was no Statement of Faith either, apart from the list of the First Principles of the Oracles of God published in *Eureka*.

Going to church in those days was not just popular, it was fashionable believe it or not. Churches were booming memberships growing. It was the rise of Evangelism, with preachers such as Spurgeon, Irving, and Dwight L Moody. People were inclined and interested in these things. Not much else to distract them. How times have changed!! The Victorian times back then were times when there was great sympathy for the teachings of the Bible, and the Bible was found in most houses, and even read by the head of the house. Half of the population went to church every Sunday, and a quarter of them went to non- Church of England, that is Quakers, Methodists and Baptists. And of course, in such a fertile environment the Truth also flourished and grew.

Seven years later, Robert Roberts met his wife- to- be Jane, who was also “in the Lord” and fellowshipped at a meeting in Edinburgh. Officiating at the wedding at the house of the bride’s father, in Edinburgh in 1859, was a man named George Dowie. It can be seen from these chain of events the personal connection between Robert Roberts and George Dowie, and the esteem the younger man had for him.

The ecclesia of Edinburgh was formally established in March of 1853, at the home of this George Dowie, just one year before fourteen-year-old Robert Roberts was baptized in Aberdeen. But it is worth noting that a certain ‘Reverend’ William Glenn Moncrieff baptized some of the early members which did not portend well, as time would prove. Originally the seed sown in Edinburgh, by Dr Thomas was cared for by a John Forman, and progress was promising – evidenced by the knowledge Bro Roberts wife received, but sadly he died after the formation of the meeting there, leaving this George Dowie, James Cameron and William Laing “in charge” as they saw it. Bear in mind this new movement of Truth-Holders had no name, no

organisation and we repeat, no Statement of Faith. George Dowie soon recognized the unique opportunity before him, and became the self-appointed leader of the movement in Britain, calling it “the Baptized Believers”. Brother Robert Roberts received some of his first lessons and experience in ecclesial work from this congregation in Edinburgh, but he described in his book *My Ways and My Days*, [please see this book on our website, and can be easily down loaded and read] how he noted a lack of interest amongst these people, for the hard work Brother John Thomas had made from separating the Truth from “sectarian darkness”, as well as displaying some level of hostility towards him, the leaders in Edinburgh, who felt Dr. Thomas required too much knowledge of the Scriptures for baptism. Additionally, many members were allowed to come in with their worldly ideas, and various doctrines and associations from the churches they had left intact.

Meanwhile Robert Roberts was writing up his Twelve Lectures he had given. Entitled the *Twelve Lectures on the Teaching of the Bible as Opposed to Popular Religious Belief* he expanded this into a book calling it *Christendom Astray*. This book gave a definition of the Gospel as opposed to Falsehood and heresy, and thus brought him into a direct collision course with those who once regarded as friends.

George Dowie published a magazine entitled *The Messenger of the Churches* which advocated his false doctrines as he attempted to enlarge his power and influence over the community he had captured. Bro Thomas in America wrote to Bro Roberts warning him of this pervasive corruption in the midst in October 1864, from which it appears that the UK members were a little slow on the uptake with regards to this swiftly growing leaven in their midst- he writes:...with regard to those blind leaders of the blind—Duncan, Dowie, Fordyce

and Co. When the truth is in question, the benefit of all doubts should be given to it, not to those whose influence with respect to it is only evil and that continually. You erred in giving them any benefit of doubt in the premises; but I rejoice that you have seen the error, and will no more send inquirers after the truth to inquire at such Gospel nullifiers as they. I have a copy of your letter to Dowie. It is straightforward and to the point. We can have no fellowship with men holding such trashy stuff as the April number of the falsely-styled Messenger of the Churches exhibits

Forthright and to the point as usual!

In this magazine *Messenger of the Churches* George Dowie who claimed to be a Brother of Christ, published articles proposing that Israel had no part in the Divine plan, and the degree of knowledge required for baptism. These challenges became known as the Tudor heresy, named after William Tudor.

Again in 1865, Bro John Thomas wrote to Bro Roberts:

They (these men) acknowledge so much of the truth as to give currency to the thinking of their unenlightened brains with the ignorant and weak. ... For over thirty years I have been engaged in ferreting out the truth to the obedience of which I was brought by ' the testimony of God ' some fifteen years ago. In those days, the current periodicals were as destitute of allusion to the Gospel of the Kingdom and the Name, as though such things had not been revealed in the world. Now, however, the phrases are in the mouths and articles of a multitude of talkers and scribblers. This shows that the subject commands attention; and in this I rejoice. But when I perceive that these ' heavenly things ' are made only a vehicle for ' earthly things ' of the most ' sensual and demoniac ' description, I am both chagrined and mortified. Had I the authority and power, I would very

soon suppress, without one warning, much less three, such twaddling sheets as The Messenger, with you; and The Banner, Harbinger, World's Crisis, Voice of the West, etc., with us. The public head is crazed enough with nonsense without putting into it more than is already there. If their publishers understood the truth and were loyal to it, they would pursue a different course. They need to be taught the first principles of the oracles of God—to learn instead of to teach, for which they have neither the knowledge, faith, nor aptitude. But I have neither the authority nor the power, and therefore the evil which is rampant will have to grow till the Lord's apocalypse, 'who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God'—every man, of course, who has earned it by faithfulness in the truth."

Despite the one-time friendship that had existed, Robert Roberts in his autobiography describes a gradual “unbridgeable gap” developing, as Dowie and Co. stated that the doctrine of immortal souls and doctrine of eternal torments was not a matter of fellowship. One David Watson even stated that opinion on these subjects had never been asked! Additionally saying *We allow great liberty of conscience in such matters, which are not essentials*. Bear in mind, that in their fellowship was still the churchman Reverend Glen Moncrieff. This Edinburgh based movement now known as “the Baptised Believers” were an amalgamation, a liberal ‘christian’ sect who held some principles of the truth, while at the same time holding other doctrines that were completely subversive of Biblical truth. However any question, though ‘warmly debated’ was killed off for the sake of keeping the peace, retaining numbers, *crushed with an overweight of music, personal kindness, brotherly love, and indifference to the truth of the oracles of God.*

Matters came to a head in 1866. A 'Discussion' took place at the Union Hall, South Bridge, Edinburgh, over three Sundays in April and May. The whole 'discussion' was recorded in shorthand by a W. Norrie, and was annotated Robert Roberts and has been preserved to this day. Therein it can be seen that the whole thing was a fudge.

Later George Dowie told Robert Roberts, "*The difference between you and me is this; you believe the dead are annihilated and require to be made over again, and I do not. I don't believe in re-creation.*" *He further said he believed in the resurrection of all heathens, Hottentots, Esquimaux, and he did not deny that his belief was that the devil was a supernatural being in heaven.*

It became obvious that this large group, which were influential were very much astray from the Gospel Truth which had recently been uncovered. They focussed on numbers, on keeping the peace, fellowship was a loose concept, they were reluctant to adopt a statement of faith for fear of excluding those of other persuasions. They continued in their so-called fellowship with that Reverend Glen Moncrieff who they described as nourishing their church until he died in 1891. They allowed belief in a supernatural devil, that Israel would not be restored, that the Holy Spirit can be possessed now, prayers could be made for the dead, that the Kingdom of God exists now, that Jesus pre-existed before he was born, and the book of Revelation was understood to relate to events yet future.

It sounds very much like modern Central Christadelphianism today! Only even more false doctrines are allowed, tolerated and permitted – for the sake of peace, - "Jesus will sort it all out when he comes!" is their defence.

Robert Roberts took action. He took the matter before his home Ecclesia in Birmingham, and laid the facts before them. The Ecclesia passed a resolution.

That the ecclesia, having heard read to them, and having considered the report of a discussion on the bearing of the immortality of the soul on the one faith, which took place on Sunday, April 8th; Sunday, April 15th ; and Sunday, May 6th (1866), among those in Edinburgh, styling themselves ' Baptised believers in the Kingdom of God,' and meeting in Union Hall, 98, Southbridge, the ecclesia considers it their duty, as witnesses of the truth, to disavow, and does hereby disavow and refuse all connection with the said so-called ' Baptised believers in the Kingdom of God.'; and requests the Secretary to write to George Dowie, the Secretary of the community in question, apprising him for the information of himself and the said community of this their solemn decision."

A major issue with what is today called Dowieism is that the Truth is only defined in positive statements, the elements that are to be believed in. The idea of points of non-belief being defined was regarded as unnecessary and not required. It was true that in the Apostles' day, things were simpler as there was no competing false Christendom then in existence. But ever since then the Gospel Truth has suffered attack after attack upon its foundations "for the sake of peace" The Apostle Paul did warn though that false teachings would be presented as the Gospel, and would become "another gospel" (2 Corinthians 11:14, Galatians 1:6) that after his departure grievous wolves would enter in among them, not sparing the flock. He said: *Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.* Acts 20:29,30, and 2 Timothy 4: *And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*

And so history repeats itself again, and again. It is not just the signs of the times we are to watch, but to watch and look out for the purity of the Gospel in word and practice, and not tolerate compromise.

Positives which came about as a result of the division in 1866 were the work of putting together a constitution, which defined all the elements of essential belief and understanding of the gospel. It was a time of strengthening the things which remained. And so it must now be exactly the same. Exactly 150 years later, the Defenders of the Faith known as The Apostolic Ecclesia were bolstered by the union of like-minded and faithful Believers in Africa, who had also experienced a journey of purging themselves from corruption. But as with all positives, there is a negative. Without watching, and remembering the work of the Apostles and the pioneer brothers such as John Thomas and Robert Roberts among others, we also can be drawn away after perverse things.

Brother Terry

Post Script.

I am no authority on these events, was not there, and have been totally dependant upon the writings of Robert Roberts, booklets on Dowieism, and other articles which have come into my possession. My job is simply to collate and present in an abbreviated way. Apologies therefore to those who are familiar with the subject, as you will notice small sections which I have borrowed here and there.

