

THE AUSTRALIAN CAREER OF JOHN ALEXANDER DOWIE

A paper prepared for the Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 10 August 1992

John Alexander Dowie spent only eight and half years of his astonishing ministry in Australia. Yet they were in some ways the most significant of his career.

It was during this time, that he developed a philosophy of ministry and leadership that would catapult him into international fame as a religious leader.

John Dowie was an enigma, a figure of great contrasts. He was a major contributor to the early development of Pentecostalism, yet he was also in some ways a major hindrance to its acceptance.

Some pioneer Pentecostal leaders trace their spiritual heritage to John Dowie, yet he himself was never a Pentecostal.

Dowie was so admired by many Australians that hundreds of them left their homes in this country to live in Zion City in Illinois, the theocratic city that he planned, conceived and brought to birth.

Yet when he returned here in 1904, he was vilified, scorned and abused by angry mobs in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide and had to flee for safety.

Dowie's preaching and teaching indicate a fervent love for Jesus and a longing for holiness and godliness, yet at the end of his life, he was demanding allegiance as Elijah the Restorer and the First Apostle of the Lord Jesus the Christ in the Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion.

John Alexander Dowie was born on 25 May 1847 in St Andrew's Parish, Edinburgh, Scotland just two months after the marriage of his parents John Murray Dowie and Anne Dowie (nee MacFarlane) in the Tron Church parish, in the same city.¹ It was later alleged that Dowie denied this paternity and claimed that he came from nobler stock.²

In 1851, John Murray's brother Alexander migrated to South Australia and established the successful South Australian Boot Factory in Rundle Street,

¹V.Chant, The Family Background of John Alexander Dowie. Plympton, S.A.: unpublished essay, Tabor College, 1991.

² The Bulletin, 3 March 1904, p.3; see also The Advertiser, 26 March 1904, p.10 - 'Referring to his name, he said he was known as John Alexander Dowie. That was not the name he ought to have. He was not going to talk on the subject in this city ... nothing would induce him to speak on the subject.' Hollenweger suggests that because Dowie knew he had been conceived out of wedlock, he may have come to the conclusion that John Murray was not really his father. Hollenweger, The Pentecostals, Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1988, pp. 117, 123

Adelaide,³ which ultimately became 'admitted by experts in the trade to be one of the best, if not the best, boot factory in Australasia'.⁴ Nine years later, John Murray Dowie and his family followed his brother to South Australia where John continued his trade as a cutter.⁵

The family were heavily involved in the activities of the Congregational Union. While Alexander's business 'took up all his attention', he still showed 'much practical interest in church work'.⁶ John Murray was a member of the Congregational Union and Home Mission Committee.⁷ He was a fervent advocate of evangelism and urged the Union to promote house to house visitation. He considered that 'no work was more needed'.⁸

E.S.Kiek notes that John Murray Dowie was a respected deacon and lay-preacher.⁹

It is not surprising, then, that young John Alexander took an interest in things spiritual. Indeed, from a very early age, he showed godly aptitude. He is said to have read the whole Bible through at six years of age and to have had a definite conversion experience at the age of seven.¹⁰ Kiek describes him as 'amazingly precocious' but points out that he loved to attend Bible study classes and Christian meetings and asked questions which would normally be beyond those of a child of his age. Indeed, Kiek claims, 'few, if any, could rival his intimate knowledge of the sacred text' and refers to his 'amazing command of Scripture'.¹¹

³ The Adelaide Almanac and Directory for South Australia Adelaide: Isaiah Boothby, 1872, p.115

⁴ W.F.Morrison, The Aldine History of South Australia, Sydney and Adelaide: The Aldine Publishing Company, 1890, p.808

⁵ The Adelaide Almanack Town and Country Directory and Guide to South Australia for 1868, Adelaide: Isaiah Boothby, 1868, p.7.

⁶ Morrison, p 807. David Hilliard notes that Congregationalists were particularly conscious of their 'special appeal to the commercial and trading classes' and that in the middle of the nineteenth century, 'the houses of Congregational businessmen dominated Rundle Street.' See 'The City of Churches: Some Aspects of Religion in Adelaide about 1900' in Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia, 1980, p.6.

⁷ The South Australian Independent and Presbyterian, Vol VI. January 1878, p.991

⁸ The South Australian Independent and Presbyterian, Vol VI, November 1878, p.16

⁹ E.S.Kiek, An Apostle in Australia, London: Independent Press, 1927, p.297

¹⁰ A.Darms, Life and Work of John Alexander Dowie, 1847-1907 Zion, Ill: Christian Catholic Church, n.d., p.2

¹¹ Kiek, 297f

At the early age of six, Dowie pledged himself neither to drink nor smoke.¹² During his later ministry, he was to become a strong temperance campaigner and a fierce opponent of the use of tobacco in all its forms.

When the family arrived in Australia, the young Dowie worked for the old established Adelaide firm of G and R.Wills.¹³

He was not a robust youth, and suffered from chronic dyspepsia, but was divinely healed at the age of sixteen.¹⁴ During this period, he sat under the 'faithful and able ministry' of Rev William Francis Cox of Hindmarsh Square Congregational Church.¹⁵

In 1867, after studying for the ministry in Adelaide¹⁶, he returned to Edinburgh to continue his education where he studied N.T. Greek under John Stuart Blackie, attended lectures by Lindsay Alexander and became acquainted with Thomas Guthrie.¹⁷ He also spent considerable time at the Edinburgh Infirmary visiting patients and listening to medical lectures. This experience, also, was to have a profound effect on him in later life, as the hopelessness of many of the patients undermined his faith in the medical profession.¹⁸

By 1872, at the urging of his father, he was back in South Australia where, on 1 April, he accepted the call to become pastor of the Congregational church at the tiny settlement of Alma, some 80 kilometres north of Adelaide. On 16 April, he was duly ordained to the ministry of the Congregational Union.¹⁹

¹² Darms, pp.3-4; E.Sheldrake (ed), The Personal Letters of John Alexander Dowie Zion, Ill: Wilbur Glenn Voliva, publisher, 1912, p.13

¹³ The Register, 11-3-1907. Note that both Sheldrake (p.14) and Darms (p.4) claim that Dowie worked for his uncle Alexander in the boot factory.

¹⁴ Darms, p.4

¹⁵ Kiek, p.297

¹⁶ Kiek, p.297

¹⁷ Carl Lee, 'God's Messenger', Leaves of Healing, Vol LXXXVIII, No 10, October 1951, p.77

¹⁸ Darms, p.4

¹⁹ E.Sheldrake (ed), The Personal Letters of John Alexander Dowie Zion, Ill: Wilbur Glenn Voliva, publisher, 1912, p.15. Note that Kiek suggests 1871 as the date for Dowie's appointment to Alma. See Our First 100 Years, the Centenary Record of the South Australian Congregational Union Adelaide: S.A. Congregational Union, n.d., p.25. Cox, on the other hand claims he was ordained to the Alma pastorate on 21 May, 1872, a date which is quoted by Dowie himself in Sin in the Camp, which he wrote in 1883. See F.W.Cox, Jubilee Record 1837-1887, The Congregational Churches of Australia Adelaide: Webb, Vardon and Pritchard, 1887. J.Cameron claims Dowie was called to Alma in May 1871. See J.Cameron, In Stow's Footsteps Adelaide: S.A. Congregational History Project Committee, 1987. This should probably read 1872. The dates in the text seem most likely as they are recorded in letters written at the time by Dowie himself.

Congregationalism was vigorous and active in nineteenth century Adelaide. South Australia was a colony of free settlers and the voice of non-conformism was heard more loudly than in other States.²⁰

Just under 25 years old, Dowie struck a handsome figure, with his dark hair and flourishing moustache. He did not find the work easy. It was obviously a far cry from the busy streets of Edinburgh. He had four preaching stations requiring him to travel several times a week on horse back journeys of between six and twelve miles. He prepared four 'original sermons' every week and kept up his studies. But his health was much better and at first he enjoyed his work.²¹ By July, however, the honeymoon was over. Dowie's comments on the situation are interesting, because they form a model of the kind of complaints he was going to raise more than once in other churches in years to come. In a letter to his parents, he wrote -

My church here has been cruelly neglectful from the beginning, though I would not even to you say it, and now I fear there is something like open opposition impending, on account of the too searching character of my preaching. Dissimulation, wicked hypocrisy and Pharisaic formalism have been unmasked; and only Divinely given wisdom can help me through ...

Never have I felt more keenly, in all my life, anything like the anxious, sharp sorrow that I have during these past few days. But thanks to the Lord, I begin to feel now the consolation of His gracious spirit aiding, enlightening and strengthening me. All must be well ...

My only fault is too great faithfulness and diligence - not sleepy half-heartedness in preaching or action ...²²

In November, just two members turned up for a monthly church meeting. Moreover, since he first arrived, the church had not been able to meet his stipend. So in December, he tendered his resignation, which was accepted 'with profound sorrow' by the members.²³

Early in 1873, Dowie moved to Sydney to take up the pastorate at Manly. Here, things looked much more promising. According to Dowie, although there had been just 25 or so worshipers when he first arrived, the church was soon 'filled to overflowing with a most earnestly attentive audience every Sabbath, especially in the evening.' This evidently represented about a hundred people. The new Sabbath School which he commenced had 70 scholars within three weeks of its opening. Indeed, everything seemed 'bright and prosperous' for the new minister.²⁴

²⁰ D.Hilliard, JHSSA, pp. 3ff

²¹ Sheldrake, pp. 15-16

²² Sheldrake, p.19

²³ Sheldrake, p.26

²⁴ Sheldrake, pp.30,42,50

Dowie was a passionate pastor. His love for his Saviour and his earnest desire to see his people unreservedly committed to him is indicated in the following letter he wrote to a young convert -

It rejoices me to know that you are growing in grace. Oh, keep very near to Jesus always. Get down very often in prayer, and you will rise in power to do and bear His will in all things. O that we loved Him more, and looked to Him more steadfastly! Blessed Lord, Eternal Saviour, Friend of sinners, Intercessor for us and in us, shed abroad the fire of sin-consuming love in our poor hearts! Jesus, Lord, come quickly; visit us with reviving grace and power!²⁵.

At the same time, from the earliest days of his ministry, Dowie displayed a continuing longing for bigger and better things. He was never satisfied with his achievements. The church may have been full, but it was not enough -

I sadly feel that I want more room, more population, to work upon; and cannot stay much longer here. Let us, meanwhile, do what lies to our hands to do with all our might. Keep up your weekly letter and do not be surprised if I am a little irregular. I have such heaps of work before me.²⁶

Dowie was also becoming increasingly concerned over social evils, especially alcoholism. He perceived what he called a 'terrible flood of moral evil'.²⁷ Unhappily, the churches were not addressing the real need. They were not preaching the gospel of mercy and pardoning love that would rescue men and women from evil. This could only be done through a baptism of the Holy Spirit. Yet at the same time, he himself felt terribly inadequate for the task. 'Oh, how miserably weak and empty of goodness and power do I feel! ... God give me more strength and fill me with grace!'²⁸

The Manly church continued to grow and by the end of 1874, the building was enlarged and improved. But Dowie continued to be critical of the established churches and began to denounce them more openly.

There was some talk of Dowie's returning to Scotland, but this did not eventuate. So he began to look elsewhere in Sydney and was soon considering the Newtown congregation. This was seen as being 'next to Pitt Street in importance in the opinion of many' and stood in the midst of a rapidly increasing population. Dowie saw it as a challenge, especially as it would require a 'high order of preaching'.²⁹

²⁵ Sheldrake, p.35

²⁶ Sheldrake, p.36

²⁷ Sheldrake, p.37

²⁸ Sheldrake, p.39

²⁹ Sheldrake, p.58

In February 1875, Dowie began at Newtown. It was a large building, with seating for nearly 1000 people, but only about 120 members.³⁰ There were some 350 to 450 on the Sabbath school rolls.

It was during this year, when Dowie was 28 years of age, that he fell in love with his uncle Alexander's daughter Jeanie. This was clearly a relationship which pleased the daughter more than the father. Alexander was concerned that the marriage of cousins might be detrimental. He was also worried about his nephew's ability to provide for his daughter. The wedding went ahead on 26 May, the following year, at the prestigious Brougham Place Congregational Church in Adelaide, with its esteemed pastor, the Rev Dr James Jefferis officiating. But for the next few years, there was to be ongoing antagonism between Alexander and his new son-in-law. The successful businessman continued to be concerned about Dowie's apparently impecunious state.³¹ As for Jeanie, in years to come, she was to be a valuable partner in the ministry, especially to the sick.³²

1875 was a hard year. In April 1876, Dowie wrote that he had conducted some 25 funerals, 20 of them for members of his own church. There had been a terrible time of sickness, with 'fevers of every sort'. Nevertheless, the church continued to grow.³³

Years later, Dowie claimed that this was the point in his life when he realised the truth of divine healing. He now recalled that he had buried some 30 of his flock, and conducted 40 funerals altogether. The cause of death is not specified. It was possibly measles or scarlet fever, or perhaps a combination of both as there were major epidemics of each along the east coast of Australia in 1875-76.³⁴

The large number of deaths caused Dowie great concern. Why were the sick not healed in 1875 as they had been in A.D. 75?

There I sat with sorrow-bowed head for my afflicted people, until the bitter tears came to relieve my burning heart. Then I prayed for some message, and oh, how my heart longed to hear some words from Him who wept and sorrowed for the suffering long ago, the Man of Sorrows and Sympathies. And then the words of the Holy Ghost inspired in Acts

³⁰ The Jubilee Souvenir of the Municipality of Newtown (c.1912, p.75) notes that the building 'seats easily 800 people.' The building still stands in King St, Newtown. Today it is the Church of St Helen and St Constantine, a Greek Orthodox church.

³¹ Sheldrake, p.73ff

³² Sheldrake, p.339

³³ Sheldrake, p.96

³⁴ See J.H.L.Cumpston, The History of Diphtheria, Scarlet Fever, Measles and Whooping Cough in Australia, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia Department of Health, 1927, p.513. In 1875, there were 1,541 deaths from measles in Victoria, 752 in New South Wales and 178 in Queensland. In the following year, there were 1,097 deaths from scarlet fever in New South Wales and 2,240 in Victoria.

10:38 stood before me all radiant with light revealing Satan as the Defiler and Christ as the Healer. My tears were wiped away, my heart was strong, I saw the way of healing, and the door thereto was opened wide, and so I said, 'God help me now to preach that word to all the dying round, and tell them how 'tis Satan still defiles, and Jesus still delivers, for "He is just the same today."

At that very time, he was urgently summoned to the home of a young lady who was dying.

The doctor, a good Christian man ... said, 'Sir, are not God's way mysterious?' ... 'God's way!' I said ..., 'How dare you, Dr. K ---, call that God's way ...? No, sir, that is the devil's work, and it is time we called on him who came to "destroy the work of the devil," to slay that deadly and foul destroyer, and to save the child. Can you pray, Doctor, can you pray the prayer of faith to save the sick?' At once, offended at my words, my friend was changed, saying, 'You are too much excited, sir, 'tis best to say "God's will be done."' ... Excited! The word was quite inadequate for I was almost frenzied with Divinely imparted anger and hatred of that foul destroyer.

Dowie prayed for the girl and she fell into a deep sleep. Later she awoke, completely recovered.

Lindsay records that there were no further deaths in the Newtown congregation from that time.³⁵ Years later, Dowie claimed that he 'went about laying on hands and saved thousands from dying' and that in the next twelve years, he was called upon to bury only five people.³⁶

While this may be true in a broad sense, there were clearly exceptions. In October 1877, he lamented the fact that there was much sickness among the people in Newtown, just as there had been in 1875. The Newtown death rate was higher than elsewhere and he feared another 'dread time of fever'.³⁷ Then, early on the first Sunday morning in November, 1885, he and his wife faced the reality of the death of their own little daughter, Jeanie. Before she died, Dowie realised there was 'no hope of recovery'. He preached that morning on 2 Samuel 12:23 - 'But now she is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring her back again? I shall go to her; but she shall not return to me'.³⁸ And Dowie himself, suffered from persistent nausea, probably a result of stress.³⁹

³⁵ Gordon Lindsay, The Life of John Alexander Dowie, Dallas: The Voice of Healing Publishing Co, 1951, p.26; Leaves of Healing, Vol XCVI, No 4, April 1959, p.30

³⁶ G.Lindsay (ed), The Sermons of John Alexander Dowie, Dallas: The Voice of Healing, 1951, p.28

³⁷ Sheldrake, p.160

³⁸ Sheldrake, p.320

³⁹ Sheldrake, p.218

In the same year, Dr John Ernest Moffitt, resident surgeon at the Ballarat Hospital, wrote to the *Ballarat Courier* reporting the case of a Mrs E. P(arker) who had suffered a spinal injury and been hospitalised for some eleven weeks, unable to walk, and at times unconscious. Another woman had encouraged her 'to take Christ as her Healer' and the next day she had walked from the hospital, evidently healed. Although Dowie is not mentioned in the article, he was indirectly involved.⁴⁰

The next year, he wrote to a friend describing himself as 'one whom the Lord has used for four years in the Ministry of Healing, and for nearly twenty years in the Ministry of Salvation through faith in Jesus'. This marks his healing ministry as beginning in 1882.⁴¹

Clearly, his ventures into the practice of divine healing were initially spasmodic, and with uneven results.

Dowie was not the first in recent times to promote the ministry of healing. Johann Blumhardt, a Lutheran pastor, began to do so in 1843 in the small village of Mottlinger, in Germany, and in 1852 established a 'faith home.' About the same time, in 1851, Dorothea Trudel acted on James 5:14f and anointed with oil some of her co-workers in the Swiss village of Mannedorf, on Lake Zurich. Their recovery projected her into a healing ministry, and she, too, opened several healing homes. In 1867, Otto Stockmayer launched a healing ministry in Switzerland and later wrote on the subject (Sickness and the Gospel). It may also be noted that the great Charles Spurgeon regularly prayed for the sick, with evident success.⁴²

In America, in 1846, Ethan O. Allen began to teach a correlation between Christian perfection and physical healing. He was followed by Charles Cullis, 'the single most important figure in the development of the divine healing movement in America.' After reading the life of Dorothea Trudel, he embarked on a ministry to the sick in 1870.

The early 1880's saw a blossoming of books on divine healing. Carrie Judd Montgomery wrote The Prayer of Faith (1880), which was widely distributed. In 1881, Cullis published More Faith Cures; or, Answers to Prayer in the Healing of the Sick. In the same year, William Boardman issued The Lord That Healeth Thee and A.B. Simpson experienced divine healing. In 1882, the year Dowie began his public healing ministry, Andrew Murray became convinced of the veracity of divine healing and A.J. Gordon published his first treatise on this subject, The Ministry of Healing. This was soon followed by R.L. Stanton's Gospel Parallelisms: Illustrated in the Healing of Body and Soul (1883) and The Atonement of Sin and Sickness

⁴⁰ *Ballarat Courier* 2 March 1885, p.2; *Record* 1887, p.22f.

⁴¹ Sheldrake, p.328. Carl Lee, Overseer in 1951, claimed that it was in 1884 that Dowie entered 'fully upon that enlarged ministry' - Leaves of Healing, Vol LXXXVIII, October, 1951, p.77.

⁴² P.G.Chappell, 'Healing Movements' in S.Burgess and G.McGee (eds), Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988, pp.353ff. Following details on the healing movement are mainly from this source. See also E.Blumhofer, The Assemblies of God, Vol 1, Springfield: GPH, 1989, pp.26ff

by R.Kelso Carter(1884). In 1885, Maria Woodworth Etter began to pray for the sick publicly.

It seems improbable that Dowie was seriously influenced by this movement. The year 1875, when he first committed himself to a belief in divine healing, preceded most of these writings and activities. And even in 1882, when he began his public healing ministry, there is little likelihood that he would have been aware of them. His own ministry of healing began independently.

However, it was not long before this situation changed. In 1885, he was invited by William Boardman to attend the London International Conference on Divine Healing, to which he responded with a letter affirming his desire to preach the message of divine healing around the world within three years.⁴³ Later, in 1888, after crossing the United States, he intended to visit England, `where he planned to meet others who had come to know the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Healer as well as the Savior (sic) of men.'⁴⁴

Certainly, he was to take a more radical stance, by opposing the use of medicinal care completely, whereas most of the other advocates of healing saw any valid form of care for the sick as appropriate.⁴⁵

In his Newtown days, however, Dowie was clearly more stirred by other problems. The liquor industry continued to arouse his ire. So, too, did gambling and smoking. He also found himself at frequent odds with Roman Catholicism and Spiritualism. He was regularly critical of the press. He was also still much concerned over the `languid state' of the churches, including his own.⁴⁶

He soon began to realise that to be outspoken on these issues might endear him to many people, but it would not win him friends among the leaders of either community or church.⁴⁷

By October 1877, Dowie was planning yet another move. This time, it was not to a new Congregational Church, but to something different altogether. He would found his own Free Christian Church. In a long letter to his wife, he explained how he would never again accept a denominational church. He would be truly independent, something which the Congregational Union, for all its proclaimed liberty of creed, did not allow. Indeed, the spirit of popery was to be found even there.⁴⁸ Moreover, over the previous five

⁴³ Hollenweger, p.116

⁴⁴ Carl Lee, `God's Messenger', Leaves of Healing, Vol LXXXVIII, No 10, October, 1981, p.77

⁴⁵ Blumhofer, p.32; M.Mintern, `The Founding of the Christian Catholic Church', Leaves of Healing, Vol XCVI, No.4, April 1959, p.27 - `I took my last medicine in 1902.'

⁴⁶ Sheldrake, p.98-106

⁴⁷ Sheldrake, p.134 - `I was never popular anywhere with our ministers as a whole.'

⁴⁸ Sheldrake, p.138, 188ff

years, only 535 new members had been added to the 43 churches in the Union, which Dowie saw as a cause for 'humiliation and shame,' especially since he believed that at least 100 of these had been the result of his own ministry.⁴⁹

Clearly this was the kind of decision that caused his father-in-law constant concern. Much of Dowie's correspondence to his wife at this time is actually defending himself against charges of irresponsibility from his uncle Alexander. Dowie's approach was simple - the Lord would provide.

Again, it is interesting to reflect on Dowie's motives for such change. As he saw it, there were basically three. One has already been mentioned - the desire for freedom to minister as he saw fit. The other was 'a holy passion for the misguided, ignorant, uncared for, and perishing thousands who are in the bondage of Satan in our cities'.⁵⁰

The third was what might be called a constant sense of destiny. Dowie clearly believed he was made for greater things. Constantly through his letters and comments in the Newtown years, there are hints of dreams of greatness.⁵¹

Dowie resigned from the Congregational Union at the end of 1877 and began independent meetings. The next few years were to see some evident successes and some equally evident disappointments.

Meetings were commenced in the Theatre Royal and within four weeks, over 1000 people were gathering to hear Dowie preach. But the venue was costly, and they were forced to move to the Protestant Hall, and then to the Masonic Hall where Dowie felt himself surrounded by a group of several hundred 'loyal and devoted people', most of whom were converted through his ministry. However, the winter weather did not help attendances here, and the place was clearly unsuitable for their purposes.⁵²

Money was in short supply and Dowie's father had to come to the rescue to save their furniture from being sold. Gradually, however, Dowie was able to assemble a committee of loyal supporters who took over responsibility for the financial affairs and the position improved.⁵³

⁴⁹ Sheldrake, p.217. The source of Dowie's figures is not known. Recorded statistics for the decade suggest an average growth over the decade of just over 500 members per annum. Congregational membership in NSW rose from 9,253 in 1871 to 14,328. See W.W.Phillips, 'Religion' in W.Vamplew (ed), Australians: Historical Statistics, Broadway, NSW: Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Associates, 1987, p.421. In South Australia, Congregationalism declined from 5.3% of the population in 1861 to 3.7% in 1901. See D.Hilliard, JHSSA, p.6.

⁵⁰ Sheldrake, p.139

⁵¹ eg Sheldrake, p. 111, 112, 175

⁵² Sheldrake, pp.206ff, 237ff - following details also from this source

⁵³ Financial embarrassment was to prove an ongoing problem to Dowie. When Wilbur Voliva came from the USA to lead the Zion work in Australia, he found a few people in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide who claimed Dowie owed them

For the first time, members of the new church found themselves being called 'Dowieites' - a factor which annoyed Dowie, who only wanted his name 'hidden behind the One Great Name of Christian, which alone God's people should bear.'

By 1879, he was preaching in the large Victoria Theatre, in Pitt Street, Sydney. Here again, crowds of 1,000 people regularly attended his Sunday services, until at times, it was difficult to find a seat. Moreover, a large number of these were men between twenty and fifty and many free thinkers were drifting into his meetings, some to stay.⁵⁴

Not only were Dowie's preaching gifts 'extraordinary',⁵⁵ he was also a prolific writer and pamphleteer. In addition to his voluminous letters, in 1877, he wrote Rome's Polluted Springs, a reply to Catholic Archbishop, Dr Vaughan. In 1879, he published The Drama, the Press and the Pulpit. There were 2,000 copies printed of each.⁵⁶ In 1882, Spiritualism Unmasked was issued. In the main, these were the substance of lectures he had delivered in the Victoria Theatre in mid-1879.

Dowie told his father that he had written twenty tracts and distributed some 200,750 copies by late 1879⁵⁷ and to an anonymous critic, he replied that there was a weekly average of 6,000 leaflets given away, of which 89,500 were 'direct appeals to the heart and conscience to accept God's gift of pardon, peace and life in Christ', 79,250 dealt with social evils and 42,000 were addressed to Roman Catholics, setting out the errors of their faith.⁵⁸

During his three years of independent ministry in Sydney, Dowie made two major errors. The first was to offer himself as a candidate at a by-election for the seat of East Sydney in the New South Parliament. There were four candidates - Dr Arthur Renwick, Robert Tooth, T.D. Dalveen and John Dowie.⁵⁹

money and the debts were settled. See J.Taylor, Wilbur Glenn Voliva Zion, Ill: Zion Historical Society, n.d., p.6

⁵⁴ The popularity of lectures by rationalists and free thinkers has been well-documented by historians of the nineteenth century. See e.g. G.M.H.Clark, A History of Australia, Vol IV, Carlton, Vic; MUP, 1978, p.366f, 385, 399; J.Roe, Beyond Belief, Kensington, NSW: NSW University Press, 1986, pp.40ff; I.Breward, Australia - The Most Godless Place Under Heaven?, Mitcham, Vic; Beacon Hill Books, 1988, p.34. Dowie would have seen some of them joining his church as a significant achievement.

⁵⁵ Kiek, p.297

⁵⁶ Sheldrake, p.253

⁵⁷ Sheldrake, p.224

⁵⁸ Sheldrake, p.253

⁵⁹ Sydney Morning Herald, 16 Dec 1879, p.3

Both Renwick and Dowie were seen as Temperance campaigners. Tooth, on the other hand, was both a Catholic and a supporter of the liquor industry.

Dowie had been a late entrant into the election. His supporters saw a seat in Parliament as a short cut to prominence in the community and possibly to the success of the new church. While Dowie was away in Adelaide, they proposed him as a candidate⁶⁰.

Dowie agreed to stand and campaigned enthusiastically on several issues. He defended the National system of education against denominational (mainly Catholic) schools; he advocated land reform, to make ownership more equitable; he argued for limiting liquor licences; he declared he had no pecuniary interest in standing for parliament; he saw the need for better public services, especially of water and gas; he wanted Chinese immigration restricted; he saw the need for taxation reform; finally, he felt that his habits of life qualified him as a worthy candidate.⁶¹

But Dowie was unpopular with the community at large, a fact acknowledged by his church secretary and prime supporter, Thomas Hutchinson, who in proposing him as a candidate, admitted that Dowie 'had made himself obnoxious to a certain section of the community, because he had rebuked iniquity in high places, and therefore ... was not liked'.⁶²

Dowie himself felt that he was betrayed. He had been assured of support from both the Temperance Platform and the Protestant League, but they both abandoned him. Had they voted for him, he would have been elected. He was not defeated, but sacrificed.⁶³

Furthermore, he was scurrilously attacked by his opponents who mocked him and used his personal financial position against him.⁶⁴

In the final analysis, Dowie was never in the race. The votes were - Renwick, 4,663; Tooth, 2,748; Dowie, 147; Dalveen, 28.⁶⁵

Dowie admitted that this loss seriously affected attendances at his services. Even faithful supporters like Hutchinson fell away for a short time. Meetings were now being held in the International Hall, which was too small and

⁶⁰ A letter which Sheldrake dates 3 September, 1880, refers to him standing for the seat of South Sydney for an election due to take place in November of that year. It is not clear whether this is referring to another by-election after the East Sydney loss, which seems unlikely, or to an earlier attempt to gain a seat in Parliament, in which case, the date of the letter is wrong. See Sheldrake, p.257ff.

⁶¹ SMH, 13 December, 1879, p.3

⁶² SMH, 16 December 1879, p.3

⁶³ Sheldrake, p.266, 270f

⁶⁴ SMH, 16 December, 1879, p.3

⁶⁵ SMH, 18 December 1879, p.5

cramped, but which was apparently all they could afford. They were hopeful of soon acquiring a property of their own.⁶⁶

The second problem Dowie faced involved money. A friend named Holding promised him a sum of 21,000 pounds for the establishment of the work in Sydney. In spite of the improbability of this happening, Dowie believed Holding to be honest and trusted him to provide the money. Dowie's dreams of a tabernacle where they could establish a true church and share the Lord's table blinded him to reality. Also, there was, in Dowie's mind at least, a strong bond of affection between the two men, whom he addressed in one letter as his 'best beloved'.⁶⁷

Holding went to England, ostensibly to get the money. Meanwhile, malicious rumours were being circulated that Dowie had already received (and misused?) it. So he left Sydney, in an attempt to visit England himself, but stayed in Adelaide, where letters from Holding continually delayed him. Finally, news arrived of Holding's death. It was with great surprise and considerable outrage that Dowie later met him in Melbourne, posing as a Salvation Army officer.⁶⁸ The whole episode undermined Dowie's credibility and was a factor in the closing of the Sydney work. It was no wonder that Dowie later described Holding as 'a clever scoundrel, with forged credentials, a smooth tongue, great simplicity of manners, and most accomplished hypocrisy'.⁶⁹ But the matter was to hang over Dowie for a long time. Some fifteen years later, a correspondent to The Bulletin gleefully retold the tale.⁷⁰

For a short time, Dowie was associated with the Salvation Army in Adelaide.⁷¹ Then, in Melbourne, in 1882, he sought employment with a Temperance organisation. The move was unsuccessful and, 'Once more,' he wrote to his wife, 'I have to write the discouraging word "failed"'.⁷² Then he was invited to take over the pastorate of the Collingwood Tabernacle, an independent church in Melbourne, Vic, while the minister, C.M. Cherbury, was taking leave of absence. Dowie gladly accepted.

Although himself a strong advocate of temperance, he became concerned that unconverted temperance speakers were being allowed the use of the church. Again, this brought the church into conflict.

By the time Cherbury had returned at the end of the year, however, Dowie also attracted a measure of support. So much so, that he was accused of being unwilling to hand the church over again. He did leave, but again, took

⁶⁶ Sheldrake, p.283; SMH, 31 January 1880, p.1

⁶⁷ Sheldrake, p.258

⁶⁸ Sheldrake, pp.303ff

⁶⁹ J.A.Dowie, Sin in the Camp Melbourne, Vic: Henry Cooke, 1883, p.8

⁷⁰ The Bulletin, 3 March 1904, p.15

⁷¹ Sheldrake, p.302f

⁷² Sheldrake, p.397

to the pen, this time writing a whole book defending his actions at the Tabernacle.⁷³

In February 1883, Dowie again began his own church, the Free Christian Church, in Fitzroy, an inner suburb of Melbourne with services in the Town Hall. Probably, some of Cherbury's congregation followed him. About 100 people attended the first meetings.

By the end of 1884, Dowie finally saw the realisation of a dream - the Free Christian Tabernacle was built, a large building in Johnston St, with seating for some 3,000 people.⁷⁴

Crowds began to attend the services. He later declared -

I moved to Melbourne ... and tens of thousands flocked to me. I built the Free Christian Tabernacle in Melbourne, capable of seating 3,000 persons, and every day thousands were turned away. I also held many open-air meetings.⁷⁵

Lindsay claims that at least once, as many as 20,000 people attended an open air rally.⁷⁶

It was now that Dowie began to preach more consistently on the subject of divine healing. Health has always been a common concern and there have always been those who have tried to profit by it. In times of uncertain medical care, in particular, people may be more open to experimentation in alternative treatment. Certainly, in the press of the day, health remedies were strongly advertised.⁷⁷

Dowie's preaching about healing began to attract people, and as a result, several notable cases of healing were recorded. A young married woman named Lucy Parker was blind in one eye, the result of cancer. She was pregnant and it was feared that she would not survive childbirth. After healing prayer at the Free Christian Tabernacle, sight was restored to her

⁷³ J.A.Dowie, Sin in the Camp, Melbourne: Henry Cooke, 1883.

⁷⁴ This building no longer exists, but in 1885 it occupied numbers 52-80 of Johnston Street, which gives an indication of its size. See Sands and McDougall's Melbourne and Suburban Directory for 1885 and 1888. When Wilbur Voliva came to take over the work in October 1901, the numbers had dwindled, but rose again under his leadership. Apparently the Free Christian Tabernacle had been disposed of, because in May 1904, the building containing the Atheneum and Hibernian Halls was purchased for \$165,000 and became the Central Zion Tabernacle, seating some 1,600 people. The sign 'Zion' was said to be readable from a mile away. See Darms, Wilbur Glenn Voliva, Zion: Zion Historical Society, n.d., p.5f.

⁷⁵ The Register, 11 March 1907

⁷⁶ Lindsay, 1951, p.76

⁷⁷ In the 3 May 1906 edition of The Bulletin's 44 pages, for example, some 35 health remedies were advertised - ranging from Hudson's Eumenthol Jujubes to Carter's Little Liver Pills to Dr Ricord's Essence of Life to Dr Williams' Pink Pills.

eye and later, her baby was born normal and healthy. A sixteen year-old boy, crippled from tuberculosis in the bones, recovered.⁷⁸

In December 1887, 3,500 copies of a Record of the Fifth Annual Commemoration were published which included over 70 testimonies of healing.⁷⁹

Soon Dowie formed the International Divine Healing Association. Branches were formed in various parts of the world.⁸⁰

Dowie was careful to insist that divine healing was very different from spiritist or occult healing.⁸¹

His own understanding of it is clearly outlined in the following extracts from an address to a ministers' conference in the US -

First: That Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, and being so, is unchanged in power.

Second: That disease like sin, is God's enemy, and the devil's work, and can never be God's will (Act 10:38).

We do not present our theories. Jesus did three things. He taught, he preached, he healed. This is the divine order, and the kingdom can only be extended by that three-fold ministry.

Divine healing points to a still more beautiful thing - holiness of life (Is 35). If you defile your body by any nicotine poison ... then you sin against God and your own soul. To pollute the body with alcohol is a sin. The doctrine of divine healing comes with great force to them that are sick, causing them to quit sin.

That Christ is the healer does not depend on any human testimony; it rests upon the word of God ... We need to get back to the old church lines, as laid down in the New Testament.

We teach what is recorded in the 12th chapter of First Corinthians, that the Gifts of Healing are in the Holy Spirit, like all other Gifts of God⁸²

Dowie also continued to attack the liquor interests. There is little doubt that he enjoyed polemic and controversy. The temptation to denounce and pour scorn on the views of those with whom he disagreed seemed irresistible.⁸³

Because of his outspoken opposition to the use of alcohol, there was some lobbying resulting in a by-law forbidding street meetings. Dowie saw this as

⁷⁸ Lindsay, 1951, p.75

⁷⁹ Sheldrake, p.343; The Age, 17 December 1887, p.9

⁸⁰ This We Believe Zion, III: Christian Catholic Church, n.d., p.5

⁸¹ Sheldrake, p.329

⁸² Lindsay, Sermons, pp. 98-104

⁸³ See for example his 'First Reply to Robert Ingersoll' and his 'Reply to Ingersoll's Lecture on Truth' in Lindsay, Sermons, pp.79-97

preventing him from obeying God's commands to go into the 'highways and byways' to preach the Gospel, and said so publicly. Then he promptly advertised and organised a street procession! He was duly prosecuted. Dowie attended a meeting of the Council and unsuccessfully endeavoured to persuade them that the charge was ultra vires. On 20 April, 1885, The case was tried before four magistrates. Dowie conducted his own defence claiming that he had only been exercising common rights to the use of highways; that the procession had been orderly and in accordance with the distinct commands of Scripture in Luke 4:21 and Mark 16:16; that he had already held street meetings for two years in Melbourne without let or hindrance; that there was no such restriction in other States; and that the new law was ultra vires. His arguments were overruled and all four magistrates found him guilty. He was fined five guineas with three guineas costs⁸⁴.

When he refused to pay the fine, he was imprisoned. After 30 days, he was released and promptly took to the streets again. And again he was imprisoned. Seven of the church members joined him there and hundreds of others expressed a willingness to suffer prison if necessary. After two days, there was such public concern that the Governor of Victoria, Sir Henry Brougham Loch, ordered his release.⁸⁵

More trouble was to come. In September 1885, Dowie arrived at the Tabernacle to find his office demolished as the result of an explosion. According to reports from neighbours, the blast had occurred just after he had left the previous night. There was evidence of it being a deliberate attempt on his life, which he believed was provoked by his temperance preaching. In a letter written at the time, he noted that he had felt a premonition of death on him during that day, and that he had gone home early, although there were four people waiting to see him, which was 'an unprecedented thing'. Clearly he saw the hand of God in this.⁸⁶ Years later, he claimed that there were some 20 or 30 people waiting to see him, and that he had actually heard a voice saying, 'Rise! Go!'⁸⁷

In spite of the problems, things were still going well over all for Dowie. He had founded his own church; hundreds of people were attending his meetings; his preaching was growing in effect; there were significant results in the healing ministry.

Yet there was still a restlessness in his spirit. Part of this was a growing conviction that the time for preaching the gospel was short.

Earthquakes are among the latter day signs; and in every sense there are earth tremors about - who can tell the moment when the

⁸⁴ Sheldrake, pp.322ff

⁸⁵ According to a statement attributed to Dowie in The Register, 11 March 1907, these two periods were 25 days and five days respectively. See also The Age, 4 May 1885, p.5; 20 June 1885, p.12; 24 June 1885, p.7

⁸⁶ Sheldrake, p. 325f

⁸⁷ Lindsay, 1951, pp.79ff

unquenchable fires of hell ... will burst forth into conflagration? ... What if the Bear of Russia, and the Eagle of France, and possibly other powers .. sweep down upon Australia and India, if they can? ... A Tory Government holding power for seven years, as it may do, will probably plunge the Empire into war after war in every part of the world ... Oh, what Seas of Blood the nations are nearing! ... Now let us continue the cry, 'The Bridegroom cometh!' We must tell men everywhere to be ready ... for His coming; and we must be sure we are ourselves.⁸⁸

But it was more than this. There was also a sense of compulsion in his heart that he had not yet arrived at the place of true calling. In 1886, he told his wife of a strange encounter with God where he was sleeping only four hours a night and experiencing 'a fresh baptism of Power from on High' for witness and service.

Wave after wave of Holy Power has come upon me, and it remains. All else seems trivial compared to this. Christ is unspeakably dearer, clearer, and nearer to me in all things ... If you are like Sarah of old, we shall have a glorious future here and hereafter.⁸⁹

Then there was a growing concern for humanity. His faith in Christ, he wrote to a friend in 1888, forbade him from being narrowed down to a denomination or sect⁹⁰.

Certainly, there were plenty of opportunities. Dowie believed there was a score of places open to him at the time. He was being pressed to go to England⁹¹.

Looking back on these days, he later wrote—

Then suddenly, the earth seemed to be vocal. I could hear the wail of pain and the cries of the dying from all continents, swelling up from all the cities and hamlets and villages and solitudes. I could hear the cry of suffering coming up from all the earth ... and I knew it was right to leave the lovely Australian land, and go forth on a pilgrimage carrying leaves of healing from the Tree of Life to every nation I could reach.⁹²

Finally, he came to a decision. He would resign from the Free Christian Tabernacle and sail for America! There were long meetings for prayer, both with office-bearers and people, and amidst many tears, his resignation was accepted, to take effect from 19 February 1888. Meanwhile, the Fifth Annual Commemoration of Dowie's ministry of healing took place in

⁸⁸ Sheldrake, pp.332f

⁸⁹ Sheldrake, pp.334-335

⁹⁰ Sheldrake, p.338

⁹¹ Sheldrake, p.340

⁹² Quoted in Lindsay, 1951, p86

December 1887, during which over 70 people testified to having been healed⁹³.

After an 'All-night of Prayer and Teaching' in January 1888, Elders Joseph Grierson and John S. Wallington were ordained to lead the work⁹⁴.

A few days after his last meetings, the church presented him with a cheque for 100 pounds and an 'address' to mark the occasion of his departure to America and Europe to engage in 'the Divine Healing Mission' to which the Holy Spirit had called him. Part of the address read—

We ... beg to present this testimonial as a very small token of the love and appreciation borne toward you for your untiring and devoted zeal in bringing very many in these lands from darkness into God's marvellous light, and for the promotion of Divine Healing. You have been made the Divine Agent in doing many mighty works. The Lord has, in a most manifest manner, heard your prayer of faith, and raised up many, in some cases more than ten thousand miles distant. Truly the Lord has made you a chosen vessel, in leading hundreds, by your teaching from His Holy Word, to the sanctification of spirit, soul and body. We cannot even estimate the number blessed under your ministry, - eternity alone will reveal them - but we know that hundreds, who have been both saved and healed, regret, as we do, your departure from these shores. The loss of your spiritual exhortations, your kindly counsels, and your faithful prayers, will be deeply felt throughout Australasia; but your Church and people have felt, from the date of your letter of the 16th April 1885, to the London International Conference on Divine Healing ... till now, that the Holy Spirit was leading you to visit America and Europe, to preach Christ as the Saviour and

Sanctifier of the spirit, soul, and body, and we submit to the will of the heavenly Father, and pray that you may be used to a far greater extent than you have been, and that, if it be His will, you shall return again to this land.⁹⁵

An elderly man who had been healed of a cancer in the face, presented Dowie with a new Bible.

At midnight, on Saturday 3 March, 1888, the family boarded the Maranoa, where hundreds of friends sang and prayed with them before they sailed.

They journeyed via New Zealand, where successful meetings were held in Auckland and the groundwork laid for the later formation of a branch of the Christian Catholic Church.⁹⁶

Sixteen years later, John Alexander Dowie returned to Australia. In the intervening period, he had become an international figure.⁹⁷ The Christian

⁹³ This also indicates that Dowie's healing ministry only began in earnest in 1882.

⁹⁴ Sheldrake, pp.342ff

⁹⁵ Sheldrake, pp.345f

⁹⁶ James Worsfold, A History of the Charismatic Movements in New Zealand, Julian Literature trust, 1974, p.86.

Catholic Church which he founded in Chicago in February 1896, with 500 members⁹⁸ had rocketed to an estimated 40,000 members world-wide.⁹⁹ Not only had he established a new church in America, but he had built a small city as well - a theocratic community where there were no taverns, no vaudeville theatres, no doctors, no chemist shops, no places of gambling and certainly no smoking or drinking. The new Tabernacle seated some 8,000 people. Citizens came from all over the United States and from overseas as well - including a large contingent from Australia.¹⁰⁰

During the period, Dowie adopted the practice of baptism by triune immersion. He also became an American citizen.¹⁰¹

And on 14 May, 1902, he and his wife suffered the horrific tragedy of the death of their 21 year-old daughter Esther, who was burned to death in a fire caused by an upturned lamp fueled by alcohol.¹⁰²

Notwithstanding, the healing ministry continued with great effect, with dozens of crutches and braces and the like being mounted on display as 'trophies captured from the enemy'.¹⁰³ Land was available on an eleven hundred year lease - on the assumption that the return of Christ would occur within one hundred years to be followed by a 1000 year millennium.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ American journalist, Fred Leroy, in a syndicated report, wrote of Dowie, 'As a preacher, Dowie is a failure to all except those who believe in him. He has a rasping voice, a pompous air, delivers a disconnected sermon, becomes extremely radical, at times offensively so, and yet withal he is at the present time a wonderful success and one of the world's prominent men' - the Independent Times, January, 1904.

⁹⁸ Carl Lee, 'God's Messenger' in Leaves of Healing, October, 1951, p.77

⁹⁹ Jabez Taylor, The Development of the City of Zion, Zion, Ill; Christian Catholic Church, n.d., p.4

¹⁰⁰ J.Taylor, Wilbur Glenn Voliva, Zion: Zion Historical Society, n.d., pp. 5,6.

¹⁰¹ Darms, Dowie, pp. 9,13.

¹⁰² Lindsay, 1951, pp214ff. Lindsay argues that Esther's death was a factor in the aberrations in Dowie's thinking in the following years, especially his rising fury against alcohol.

¹⁰³ See Lindsay, 1951; Darms, Dowie, pp.7ff; P.Cook, Zion City, Illinois: John Alexander's Democracy, Zion: Zion Historical Society, 1970; This We Believe, Zion: Christian Catholic Church, 1987; J.Taylor, The Development of the City of Zion, Zion, Ill: Christian Catholic Church, n.d., p.4; Leaves of Healing, Vol XCVI, No 4, April 1959; Vol CXXII, No 1,2, January-February, 1986; R.Ottersen, Peace to Thee!, Zion: Christian Catholic Church, 1986, p.9.

¹⁰⁴ M.J.Mintern, 'Fifty Years Nearer the Rapture' in Leaves of Healing, October, 1951, p.74. In a Christmas sermon in December 1903, in Shiloh Tabernacle, Zion, Dowie was reported as saying, 'Within 100 years Christ will return again to this very spot to reign for ten centuries. I, whom you know to be the prophet Elijah, will come back with Him, and that is why I have made all leases in Zion City run for 1,100 years. At the end of Christ's reign the world will smash up, the bad

There had also been a shift in Dowie's perception of himself. Somewhere he acquired the title 'Dr', although he does not seem to have earned it in an academic sense.¹⁰⁵ He was later to add more controversial designations.

In 1896, when one of his associates suggested he was a modern apostle, Dowie replied -

I say to you from my heart, I do not think that I have reached a deep enough depth of true humility; I do not think that I have reached a deep enough depth of true abasement and self-effacement, for the high office of an apostle ... In becoming an apostle, it is not a question of rising high, it is a question of becoming low enough ... Power in the church is shown in this, that a man gets lower and lower, and lower and lower, until he can put his very spirit, soul and body underneath the miseries and at the feet of a sin-cursed and a disease-smitten humanity and live and die for it and for Him who lived and died for it. That is what I understand by the Apostolic Office.¹⁰⁶

Yet in 1901, Dowie declared that he was Elijah the Restorer and in 1904 that he was the First Apostle of the Lord Jesus the Christ in the Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion. He had special robes prepared, which reputedly took 40 women three months to make.

Part of the 'Elijah Declaration', written in his own hand, reads -

As Elijah the Restorer, God has sent me to you and to all the World, with Authority to advise

First, A Message of Purity (Malachi 3)

Second, A Message of Peace (Malachi 2:6)

Third, A Message of Power (Matthew 17:11)

More than two thousand of Zion's [illegible] will carry these words to every Continent saying, PEACE BE TO THIS HOUSE!¹⁰⁷

Wilbur Voliva, his American associate who had come to Melbourne in 1901 to take over the leadership of the church was an efficient organizer. Although, in Dowie's absence, the work had declined, under Voliva's

will be burned in hell fire and the good will be called to their reward ... All Zion knew I was a prophet before I announced it and I had hard work keeping them from exploiting the fact before I was ready.' See the Chicago Record-Herald, 26 December 1903. It should be noted that it is unlikely that Dowie would have used some of the terminology contained in this statement. So its authenticity as a direct quotation is probably questionable. However, see also Australian Christian Commonwealth, 13 May 1904, p.4; Darms, p.13

¹⁰⁵ Dowie was not poorly educated. His treatise on drama, for instance, indicates an extensive knowledge of the Greek playwrights. Schools were established in Zion City with solid curricula which included church history and systematic theology. Similarly, as an evangelical, Dowie took the opportunity to attack liberal theology. Hollenweger, pp.117, 123.

¹⁰⁶ Lindsay, 1951, pp.155f

¹⁰⁷ A copy of the Declaration was printed in the Quiz, 23 October, 1901, p.14.

supervision, it soon regained its strength. By 1904, the year of Dowie's 'visitation' in Australia, there were some 1300 members in the Melbourne congregation.¹⁰⁸

Voliva promoted the visitation well. Furthermore, news of Dowie's new roles had also preceded him to this country. When he arrived in Sydney in February 1904, there was a mixed reaction to his coming. From the moment he set foot on the wharf he was greeted by a crowd both of his own followers and of those who came to jeer.¹⁰⁹

By this time, Dowie was a balding, portly 57-year old, with a kindly face and clear, warm eyes over a long, bushy, white beard. In some ways, his appearance was not unlike that of the traditional image of Elijah.

He began his visit with two meetings on Sunday 14 February in the newly completed and imposing Town Hall. Week night meetings were also proposed, together with early morning prayer meetings, 10.30 am teaching meetings on divine healing and healing services at noon each day when 'those who are seeking the Lord for Healing will pass into the Prayer room and the General Overseer and Ordained Officers of the Christian Catholic Church in Zion will conduct a Prayer service of one hour, laying hands upon as many as are prepared for that ministration.'¹¹⁰ A contemporary report states -

The Rev J.A.Dowie arrived in Sydney by the Sonoma on Saturday last, and preached twice on Sunday in the Town-hall. He wore a surplice of blue, white, yellow and purple. He was accompanied on the platform by his son (Mr Gladstone Dowie), several officers from Zion City, and two personal attendants, members of Zion Guards, wearing the uniform of police. Mr Dowie delivered short addresses. Some amusement was caused when he made an appeal for offerings to pay the cost of the meetings in Sydney. He questioned the audience as to whether such a thing fair or not, and there were loud cries of 'Yes, yes,' and 'No, no.' He was perfectly surprised at anybody answering in the negative, and said he would keep them in fine order - he meant the element that had answered 'No.' He then called upon those who would like to retire before free-will offerings were taken up to do so, and there was a ready response from a large number, especially in the rear of the hall.¹¹¹

There were continued interruptions to the meetings in Sydney and the final service had to be closed early.¹¹² American newspapers carried reports - 'Dowie forced to flee from mob ...'; '... Meeting in Sydney, New South

¹⁰⁸ Taylor, Voliva, p.5

¹⁰⁹ B.Chant, Heart of Fire Unley Park, S.A.: Tabor, 1984, p.20

¹¹⁰ From newspaper advertisements of the Sydney meetings

¹¹¹ From an unidentified news clipping c. Feb 1904

¹¹² Chant, 1984, p.20

Wales, is Broken up by a Crowd of 5,000 men ...'; `... howling multitude ...';
`... Dowie flees ...'.¹¹³

However, there was a bright side as well. Dowie sent the following cable home -

Enthusiastic receptions at Auckland and Sydney. Ten thousand attendance today at City Hall and Sydney deeply stirred. Australia awake everywhere. All glory to God alone. Overseer Jane Dowie is well. I am informed that she addressed crowded intelligent audiences in Adelaide in city hall this afternoon. Many are coming to Zion City from Australia this year. See Zechariah 10. Love to all. Zion, pray for us. Dowie.

The same sort of thing occurred in Melbourne, where meetings were held in the Exhibition Building. Again, the press reported that meetings were broken up by a mob and that Dowie asked the US Consul for protection.

Dowie cabled from Adelaide -

Read Psalms 124th and 125th. We continued the visitation in Melbourne until Friday 4th. The authorities surrendered to riotous rabble, and the commissioner of police and the secretary of State declared their inability to preserve order, and refused adequate protection at the Exhibition Building today. We held ten meetings in Zion Tabernacle during the week and God blessed them. A brutal mob surrounded us Monday afternoon, grossly insulted Mrs Dowie, seized the horses' heads, and tried to cut the traces and overturn the carriage ... Their newspapers - the Southern Cross, The Argus and The Age - were full of lies, which encouraged the disorder. The powers of hell united in church, in State, in press, secret empire and criminal populace. The Masons were especially mad because of our exposures. The lawless one will soon be revealed. We will begin the visitations here March 29. Mizpah. Pray for us. Love to Zion. Dowie.¹¹⁴

The Bulletin, cynical about religious matters in general, found in Dowie a continuing source of fun. A front cover cartoon on 10 March showed him teaching Abraham how to raise money. In the same issue, he is seen flying 'Zionwards', accompanied by angels singing, 'We want Dowie!' A week later, he is portrayed ejecting a Methodist clergyman from his meetings. Signs outside the building proclaim, 'Millions are relieved of everything immediately' and, 'Diseases cured while you wait [No limit to the time you may wait].' The following week, Dowie goes down in a chariot of fire. A couple of weeks later, he arrives in heaven, only to see Peter smoking.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ These and the following reports are quoted from an album of news clippings held by the Zion Historical Society in Shiloh House, 1300 Shiloh Boulevard, Zion, Dowie's former residence which is now a museum.

¹¹⁴ Chicago Tribune, 13 March 1904

¹¹⁵ The Bulletin, 10 March 1904, p.7, 18; 17 March 1904, p.22; 24 March 1904, p.15; 14 April, 1904, p20

In Adelaide, his old home town, there was great interest in his visit. Some 25,000 tickets were issued for his meetings! Six thousand people thronged to the Jubilee Exhibition Building for the first meeting on Sunday 21 March. The crowd was basically orderly, being partly composed of 'prominent business men, stock-brokers and other hard-headed citizens' who 'desired to hear what Elijah had to say.'¹¹⁶

A newspaper reporter described the first meeting as follows -

Punctually at the time appointed the prophet mounted the platform, attended by his suite. He was attired in a long, flowing black gown, with a white surplice and a beautiful purple stole, while his lawn sleeves were like those of a bishop. His high, round, shining forehead, his flowing hair, and his streaming grey beard gave him a patriarchal aspect, and it was manifest that he had spared no pains to dress his part effectively, and to look as much like the conventional idea of Elijah as possible ...¹¹⁷

On the platform with Dowie were some interesting people. There was W.G.Voliva, the American who had been sent to Australia in October 1901 to rebuild the work, which had declined since Dowie's departure three years earlier. C.Hawkins, who was in charge of the work in Adelaide, and J.S.McCullagh, Voliva's assistant, and leader of the Sydney branch, and their wives, were also there. Both these men were later to turn against Dowie and publish a booklet exposing what they called the 'Zion City Mockery.'¹¹⁸

Dowie's wife, Overseer Jane Dowie and his son, Gladstone were also on the platform. So was Colonel Carl Stern, in his uniform of black and gold, as leader of the First Regiment of the Zion Guard in Zion City.

The meeting began with the singing of the hymn 'Jesus Shall Reign', a favourite of Dowie's, which Dowie 'gave out with a clear resonant voice, and with good enunciation verse by verse in the old Methodist style'. He then read from both Isaiah and Matthew, the latter passage dealing with the words of Jesus about Elijah. The Apostle's Creed was read and it was announced that Dowie would pray for the sick each day between twelve and one o'clock. Dowie preached on the text, 'Wisdom is justified of her children.'

The press report continued -

The address was of a purely evangelical character, and contained nothing objectionable to anyone. For the most part it was listened to with attention, but occasionally there were rude and discourteous interruptions ... The shuffling beginning again, Mr Dowie added - 'In Chicago for two years I have preached regularly to 7,000 people, and have never been interrupted for a minute. There are people about the hall this afternoon trying to give the signal to others by shuffling their feet. All their brains are in their toes. I will try to be kind, but I must

¹¹⁶ The Advertiser, 21 March 1904. Following details also from this source.

¹¹⁷ The Advertiser, 21 March 1904

¹¹⁸ The Downfall of Dowie! Hawthorn, Vic: J.H.Edmonson, n.d.

remind them that it has been written that Jehovah has no pleasure in the legs of a man.'

The General Overseer went on to emphasise the power of the unassailed testimony to the virtue of religion ... When he had called on those in Zion Tabernacle who had been healed by faith to rise to their feet, 6,000 persons stood up. This was an up-to-date question, and they could prove the divinity of Christ today by such testimony. He referred to the healing of the centurion's servant and the raising to life of the son of the widow of Nain ...

At this point, there was an interruption as a policeman tried to remove an interjector, and Dowie pleaded for respect and courtesy from the people of Adelaide, his wife's birth-place. Finally, he closed with 'the solemn assertion that he preached no other gospel than that of salvation by the healing and cleansing power of God through Jesus Christ.'

After the meeting, a sizable crowd paraded through the streets seeking to make fun of Dowie, but he eluded them.

There was continued disorder in the meetings. At the Adelaide Town Hall, on Monday 22 March, the meeting had to be abandoned. The newspaper headlines, modest by modern standards, but bold for the time, summarise succinctly what happened -

DOWIE IN ADELAIDE

RIOT IN TOWN HALL

A WILD RABBLE STOPS THE MEETING

GREAT DISORDER IN THE STREETS

POLICE INJURED AND WINDOWS BROKEN

YORK HOTEL BESIEGED BY A VAST CROWD

MR J.DARLING'S HOUSE DAMAGED

NIGHT MEETINGS ABANDONED¹¹⁹

A huge crowd gathered for the meeting, until finally, the attendants closed the doors. Many with tickets could not gain entry, and thousands of others thronged outside.

Taking their cue from Dowie's frequent description of smokers and drinkers as 'stinkpots', someone smashed a bottle of 'sulphurated hydrogen' which resulted in a repulsive odour spreading through the building. Another 'stinkpot' soon followed.

After the meeting got under way, some of the crowd broke into the patriotic song 'Sons of the Sea, all British born, Sailing every ocean, laughing foes

¹¹⁹ The Advertiser, 23 March, 1904, p.5. Following details from this source.

to scorn ... ' which had been sung in Melbourne the week before in an attempt to break up a meeting there - and against which Mrs Dowie had lodged a complaint with the police that it was 'rude and vulgar'.¹²⁰

Outside a crowd estimated at between 10,000 and 15,000 had gathered, mostly of boys and youths. All the city's police force assembled in an attempt to control the mob. Only by the use of mounted policemen could they hold the crowd back from the entrance.

There was some scuffling, with police suffering minor injuries. By nine o'clock, things were growing nasty. Two Town Hall windows were broken. Then a tram car passed, and several windows in the tram were smashed by a youth from the crowd. The lad was arrested.

Meanwhile, inside, seats were being overturned and people were running about the hall. There were constant interjections and heckling. Dowie appealed for the right to speak, but without success. There were cries of, 'Dowie is a fraud!' and, 'Flap your wings, Elijah!' and 'You call us all stinkpots!' and 'We'll hang old Dowie on a sour apple tree.' Finally Dowie closed the meeting. While the police diverted attention, he slipped out unobserved.

The crowd then moved to the York Hotel, assuming Dowie had returned there, and there was more violence. Windows were broken, and more 'stinkpots' smashed. A knife was thrown at a policeman who was trying to remove a disorderly youth. Fortunately no harm resulted. When there was no sign of Dowie, some of the crowd went to the home of his brother-in-law, Mr J. Darling, J.P. Again, windows were smashed, but Darling courageously addressed and dismissed the mob.

Dowie returned to the hotel late that night, when most of the crowd had dispersed.

As a result of these events, Dowie announced that there would be no more night meetings, but that afternoon services would continue. The newspaper reported this under the heading 'Message from Elijah.'

Dowie continued to denounce the use of alcohol (which he called 'liquid fire and distilled damnation') and the smoking of tobacco. He fulminated against the eating of pork. He lamented the coldness of the churches.¹²¹ He attacked Freemasonry and other lodges. And he proclaimed the validity and efficacy of Divine Healing.

Two of the men arrested were fined and Dowie publicly announced that he would pay for the damage to both the Town Hall and the York Hotel, which he did.¹²²

¹²⁰ The Bulletin, 10 March 1904, p.13

¹²¹ He claimed that Victorian Methodists, for instance, had only increased by one member in the previous year - The Advertiser, 22 March 1904, p.5. In this, he may well have been right as the number of Methodists in Victoria declined from 180,272 in 1901 to 176 662 in 1991 - W.W.Phillips, 'Religion' in Australians, 1987, p.422.

¹²² The Advertiser, 24 March 1904, p.6

The next day, the afternoon meeting was quiet and orderly. Several hundred people attended, and there were no major problems.

Letters began to appear in the press both attacking and defending Dowie. Even some who disagreed with Dowie's teaching and beliefs, nevertheless deplored the refusal to allow him freedom of speech. The editor of The Advertiser was particularly outspoken -

There is no valid excuse whatever for the disorderliness which prevailed in the streets of Adelaide on Monday night and broke up Mr Dowie's meeting in the Town Hall. The conduct of the disturbers of the public peace both inside and outside the building and later on at the York Hotel and certain private residences merits the strongest reprobation. There should be no attempt to palliate what was a glaring offence against public decency and a menace to individual rights that ought to be held sacred and inviolable ... Mob law and licence constitute the most terrible kind of tyranny ...¹²³

Methodists lamented his attacks on the church, and complained that Sabbath-school classes and regular church services had been abandoned on the first Sunday of Dowie's visit by people 'prompted by nothing higher than vulgar curiosity.'¹²⁴

Dowie's Adelaide meetings came to a sudden end. On Friday 25 March, he made reference to the fact that not only was King Edward of England subject to the King of Kings but that everybody knew he had 'no religion to spare.'¹²⁵

This was ill-taken by the good citizens of Adelaide. The Mayor, Mr L. Cohen, wrote to Dowie warning him against repeating such statements. Then, he conferred with his Council and they informed Dowie that he could no longer use the Town Hall because of his 'disloyal utterances concerning his Majesty the King.' A similar letter from the Superintendent of Public Buildings forbade him the use of any building under Government control.¹²⁶

A columnist in The Bulletin was not slow in pointing out the hypocrisy behind these actions -

¹²³ The Advertiser, 23 March 1904, p.4; 24 March 1904, p.6; 25 March 1904

¹²⁴ The Australian Christian Commonwealth, quoted in The Advertiser, 25 March 1904, p.4

¹²⁵ Dowie reaffirmed these sentiments after his return to America - 'I said that the King of England had no piety to spare ... that if he was saved it would be by the skin of his teeth ... Call him defender of the faith? What faith has he to defend?' - Unidentified news clipping, June 1904.

¹²⁶ The Town Clerk's letter read as follows: 'I have the honor, by direction of the Mayor of Adelaide, to inform you that he has cancelled the remainder of your engagements at the Adelaide Town Hall. This action has been taken in consequence of your disloyal utterances concerning his Majesty the King, as reported in the press yesterday afternoon and morning. The balance of the hire paid will be refunded to you on application to the city treasurer's office.' See The Advertiser, 28 March 1904, p5. See also

Elijah Dowie blasphemed and blackguarded throughout Australia with a certain degree of impunity until in Adelaide, he dared to say something about King Ned. It was a very harmless something, too - a mere remark that if Christ came to earth again King Ned would soon have to take a back seat, a statement that all Christians should believe. But Respectability turned on Dowie in horror for this ... Dowie insulted Christianity and took up a hog attitude on most other subjects ... But a whisper that the King is not as great as Christ was a different business; it brought the respectable classes down on him like an avalanche, and he was at once a lost prophet.¹²⁷

And a large cartoon showed Dowie running before King Edward's chariot, as 'in a previous state of existence' he had done before King Ahab.¹²⁸

So Dowie was forced to leave his old home-city, and, according to one report, still fleeing the mob, had to hide in a small boat before boarding his vessel the Mongolia.¹²⁹ He was never to visit these shores again.

In 1905, Dowie was partly paralysed as the result of a stroke. Two years later, in April, 1906, his own associates in Zion felt they could no longer accommodate his increasingly irrational behaviour, and deposed him as General Overseer. Just twelve months after that, on 9 March 1907, after a time of illness, he fell asleep.¹³⁰

However, his influence lingered on. The Melbourne branch of the Free Christian Church, now the Christian Catholic Church, continued and today a small congregation still exists in that city.

As a pioneer of the ministry of healing, he was possible without equal. One writer says,

A.B.Simpson's lifelong associate Kenneth Mackenzie identified Dowie as 'unquestionably the apostle of healing in his day.' At the peak of his ministry from 1894 to 1905 he was known by more people throughout America than any other propagator of the message of divine healing in the nation's history. His periodical Leaves of Healing enjoyed the largest circulation of any publication of the movement ... No individual within the healing movement has ever reached so many people worldwide with the message of divine healing as John Dowie.¹³¹

Some of the pioneers of the Pentecostal movement had their interest in the things of the Spirit awakened by Dowie. Although Dowie was never himself a Pentecostal, he expressed strong belief, not only in divine healing, but in all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In his charge to the Christian Catholic church at its founding on 22 February, 1896, he declared,

¹²⁷ The Bulletin, 7 April 1904, p12; see also Quiz, 1 April 1904

¹²⁸ The Bulletin, 7 April 1904, p.18

¹²⁹ The Bulletin, 21 April 1904, p.12

¹³⁰ Chant, 1984, p.22.

¹³¹ Chappell, Dictionary, 1988, pp. 366f

We shall teach and preach, and practice (sic) a Full Gospel ... May this Church be endowed with the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit, with the word of Wisdom, the word of Knowledge, Faith, Gifts of healing, Workings of Miracles, Prophecy, Discernings of Spirits, Divers kinds of Tongues and Interpretation of Tongues, and with the gift of Love which is the crown of all ...¹³²

Dowie was recognised not only as being a prophet in the general sense, but also as exercising gifts of prophecy. He foresaw the link between smoking and cancer, for example¹³³ and he foretold the preaching of the gospel through radio and television¹³⁴.

Moreover, Dowie saw the need for being baptised in the Holy Spirit and hence, empowered for service. He spoke of his own experience of a 'fresh baptism of "Power from on High"', which he believed was given to him for witness and for service.¹³⁵

'If we are the only Witnesses,' he once wrote, 'if the Holy Spirit does not witness for us and back up our Witness, where shall we be?'¹³⁶

A significant number of his followers took seriously what he said and, when the new Pentecostal movement started, they found a congenial spiritual home there.¹³⁷

The third General Overseer of the Christian Catholic Church was Michael Mintern, an Australian who migrated to Zion in 1905.¹³⁸ Twenty years later, another member of the Mintern family, R.A.Mintern, joined the newly-formed Pentecostal Church of Australia.¹³⁹ Another significant Pentecostal leader was John A.D.Adams, a New Zealand barrister, who after meeting Dowie, later joined the congregation at Good News Hall, North Melbourne, Australia's first Pentecostal church.¹⁴⁰

Dowie's character and personality will continue to fascinate. There is little doubt that he began his ministry with a sincere and genuine desire to serve his Lord faithfully and effectively. There is a passion for Christ evident both in his personal and his public printed statements.

¹³² Ottersen, Peace, pp.14,16

¹³³ 'The Five Porches of Bethesda' quoted in Chant, 1984, p.281

¹³⁴ I have found reports of these prophecies in two sources.

¹³⁵ Sheldrake, p.334

¹³⁶ Ottersen, p.13

¹³⁷ Chant, 1984., pp.23f

¹³⁸ Taylor, Voliva, p.40f.

¹³⁹ The Australian Evangel, July 1926, p.10.

¹⁴⁰ Chant, 1984, p.105; Worsfold, p.86; Good News, February to May, 1928. It is interesting to note that many of the early Pentecostals in America, South Africa and Sweden can trace their origins back to Dowie.

On the other hand, he was also reactionary and defensive, enjoying the lists and jousting enthusiastically with his opponents.

Probably, he was too introspective and too analytical of his own views and behaviour as well as those of others.

Was he ambitious? Or did he have a heart bigger than one city or even one country could contain?

Was he a charlatan, or did he genuinely believe he was a prophet and an apostle?

Was he as strong a leader as events suggest or was he too easily swayed by the opinions of others?¹⁴¹

He was enterprising, determined, persistent, aggressive, yet also gentle, compassionate and caring. He was clearly misunderstood.

One of his most renowned addresses was 'The Five Porches of Bethesda.' This sermon reveals both sides of his character. On the one hand he thunders against 'liquid fire and distilled damnation' and throws scorn on those 'unmitigated stinkpots' who smoke and chew tobacco.

Yet on the other, with gentleness and obvious sensitivity, he tells how there is healing for those who come to Christ in faith -

Of all the lessons God has taught me, I think none is as sweet as this, that when I pray, and step down into that Fountain with the sick and the suffering, then I rest. I rest in God. You with whom I have prayed know how still we are. The teaching is over, the pleading is over, the decision is over and the Fountain is open. In quiet faith we step down and into the Fountain in the name of the Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with the will of God our heavenly Father; and we go beneath that cleansing stream, and we are well again ...

Is not that Fountain open to you? Oh I am glad it is flowing freely! It is more than a Fountain, it is a River, the River of Life, and in the midst of it, and on either side of it, is the Tree of Life 'bearing twelve manner of fruits,' and 'the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.' The River is the Holy Spirit, Christ is the Tree of Life, and the leaves of the tree are His words, for it is written, 'He sendeth his word and healeth them.' It is for you. Come now!¹⁴²

One thing is very clear. In spite of his protagonism and his extravagance, he never suggested there was salvation or redemption through him. He might have been an apostle and a prophet, but he never claimed to be a saviour. Even in his worst times, he still pointed people to Jesus Christ.

¹⁴¹ For example, he pointed out that he accepted both the roles of Apostle and Prophet at the instigation of others - see Chant, 1984, pp. 17ff. There is also evidence that at one point, some of his actions late in life were strongly influenced by his wife and son and some of his associates, including Carl Stern, although later, the family seems to have become alienated from him. See J. Taylor, *Voliva*, p.6. So Lindsay argues that it was Dowie's failure to consult others which was a major problem - Lindsay, 1951, pp.197ff.

¹⁴² Lindsay, *Sermons*, pp.40-49.

On 22 February, 1896, at the founding of the Christian Catholic Church, Dowie gave this charge to his people -

I charge you in the sight of God who preserveth all things that live, before Jesus, the Christ, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed the Good Confession, that you keep this Commandment: `Follow after Righteousness, Godliness, Faith, Hope, Love, Patience, Humility and Purity in all things, be faithful unto death, continuing steadfastly in the Apostolic Doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers; follow the Christ fully. I charge you in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ...¹⁴³

Then followed this prayer -

Our God and Father, in Jesus' Name we come to Thee, believing that we are, and that we shall be kept in the Fellowship and in the Love of God, our Father, of God the Son, and of God the Holy Spirit. Give us grace to keep us unspotted from the world, united in heart, in tender sympathy, in earnest work for Thy Church, and for the salvation, healing, cleansing and the blessing of multitudes in this city and land and throughout the world, and in generations to come ...

Wherein we differ, led us differ in love from our brothers and sisters in the Christ who are in other parts of Thy fold, and bring Thy people into unity that there may be one fold, with Jesus, the Christ, Thy Son as our One Shepherd.

Give unto Thy servant, the General Overseer of this Church, the grace he needs; keep him humble, faithful, pure, hopeful, loving, wise, and give him strength in spirit, soul and body that he requires for this work. For Jesus' sake. Amen ...

May this Church be divinely endowed with the nine Gifts of the Holy Spirit ... With that love let these gifts be exercised and this Church go on to the glory of God the Father, in the Name of the Lord Jesus, the Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let all the people say Amen.¹⁴⁴

Dowie's detours into the byways of invective against his opponents and their views indicates he may have lost something of the spirit of unity he advocates so strongly here. But there is nothing to suggest that he ever departed from his commitment to the preeminence of Christ or to the proclamation of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit

There is no doubt that John Alexander Dowie had his faults. But, to paraphrase what one man wrote about the Zion movement when he left it to become a Pentecostal - `We know how earnestly he wished to serve the Lord Jesus.'¹⁴⁵

10,927 words

¹⁴³ Ottersen, p.15

¹⁴⁴ Eppersen, p.16

¹⁴⁵ The Australian Evangel, July 1926, p.10; Chant, 1984, p.24.

About Dr Barry Chant

Barry Chant is Senior Pastor of the Wesley International Congregation in Sydney, Australia. He is a regular speaker at church services, seminars, conferences and conventions. Hundreds of thousands of his books have been sold around the world. He has degrees in arts, theology and ministry, a diploma in education and a PhD in history. He was the initiator and former president of Tabor College, Australia.

Terms of Use

You are welcome to read, download and print this document without cost. If you want to pass on copies to others or use them in your local church Bible study group or Christian fellowship, please acknowledge the name of the author (Dr Barry Chant), the copyright date and the source of the material (www.barrychant.com).