

that it consisted of many who were noted for their godliness. In a day when there is a danger of merely academic attachment to truth, godly living as the fruit of Christian belief and experience must ever be part of our testimony. Today that may involve matters which many may consider minor such as Sabbath observance, reverence in worship, modesty in dress and manner. Titus 2, for example, gives us an indication of the kind of things included among those which become sound doctrine. These are matters of fundamental importance for the life of the Church of God. The glory of God is bound up with them.

We are not an exclusive, schismatic sect. We try to stand where the Church of Scotland stood in its best days, endeavouring to hold aloft the old battle-scarred banner around which a reformed and revived church will yet gather in Scotland. The Church's *History* states: "We can... honestly affirm that the body to which we belong separated from the Free Church not for division, but for union in the faith. It is no privilege to remain in a church, however large, that has cast overboard the truth of God. It is an unspeakable privilege to be a doorkeeper in a church, however small, that maintains a pure testimony for Christ". On the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the Church Rev. Neil MacIntyre wrote in a commemorative paper: "I am not going to refer to many other troubles we have had during these fifty years. If we, however, hold fast by the infallible Word of God and the testimony of the Free Presbyterian Church we may expect trials and opposition". The editor of the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* in 1933 commented on the first forty years in these words: "We have no reason to be proud of ourselves as Free Presbyterians but neither have we cause to be ashamed of the truths we stand for and if we, through grace, remain faithful to God He will not leave us in the future any more than he has done in the past". Let our motto be: "that in all things he might have the pre-eminence" (Colossians 1: 18), and let us keep in mind the great aim which should motivate us: the glory of God, the nurture of the people of God and the preaching of the Gospel to all.

THE FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

WHY IT EXISTS TODAY

Church Principles Lecture

24th February 2006

by Rev H. M. Cartwright, Edinburgh.

**(The Epistle of Jude was read and Psalms 19: 7-11 and
Psalm 80:17-19 were sung)**

I do not expect anything to be said this evening which is not already well known, but perhaps we can adopt the principle upon which Paul himself acted: "To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe" (Philippians 3:1). Peter also tells us that he wrote "to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance" (2 Peter 3:1). I am afraid that you may find this paper rather long and heavy going but I will appreciate your patient hearing. As it is our first meeting of this kind I am approaching the subject in a general manner.

The ultimate reasons for the existence of the Free Presbyterian Church are the reasons for which the Church was established by Christ: the worship and glory of God on earth; the nurture of the people of God; the proclamation of the Gospel to sinners. And in seeking to fulfil these purposes the Church must proceed according to the revealed will of the great Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ, and depending upon the presence and the power of His Holy Spirit. It is in that spirit and in order to these ends the Free Presbyterian Church must endeavour to contend for the principles which brought it into existence as a separate denomination, because these principles are necessary to a faithful discharge of its function.

There are three questions which we might ask:

1. Why are we Free Presbyterians?
2. Why did the Free Presbyterian Church come into existence in 1893?
3. Why does the Free Presbyterian Church exist today?

1. Why are we Free Presbyterians?

On the personal level various providential circumstances may account for our belonging to the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Some were born into the Free Presbyterian Church. Some can trace their pedigree back to those who adhered to the Church in 1893. Some married into the Free Presbyterian Church. Some through various contacts or providential turnings became acquainted with the Free Presbyterian Church and found their spiritual home in it. Some for various reasons have become Free Presbyterians on account of conviction. There is much to be thankful for when God in His providence gives us our being in, or brings us into, a Church where the truth of God is upheld. It is good when we can give a reason for our attachment to the Church to which we belong. We do not take to do with others but we desire to be able to give a reason for our own position before God in a matter so important as our ecclesiastical connection. The Free Presbyterian Church exists today, humanly speaking, because there are still people who are prepared to maintain it.

2. Why did the Free Presbyterian Church come into existence?

Most of our time will be taken up with this question because the Free Presbyterian Church continues to exist for the same reason for which it came into existence. The truths for which it contended in 1893 need to be contended for still. To explain its existence we must look at some historical and theological matters.

The Free Presbyterian Church is descended from the Church of the 16th Century Reformation and the 17th Century Second Reformation through the Disruption of 1843 which brought the Free Church of Scotland into separate existence. The term “Disruption” as applied to what took place in 1843 does not refer to the breaking up of the Church, although the Church was divided, but to the breach of the relation between the State and that section of the Church which held to the position of the Reformed Church in Scotland. It was the culmination of a conflict between the Evangelical Church of Scotland and the State which was making submission to the intrusion of ministers not chosen by the people or approved by the Church courts a condition of enjoying establishment and endowment.

One can see that the formation of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland was accounted for by regard to matters at the foundation and heart of the Church’s mission in the world and was only taking the Church back to its roots in the Bible and in the Reformation.

3. Why does the Free Presbyterian Church exist today?

The chief reason for its existence must be that the truths for the defence and propagation of which it came into existence in 1893 are still the truths of God and that an unreserved testimony to them is as necessary in today’s ecclesiastical and national context as it was then if the Church is to fulfil its function faithfully in the world. We continue to exist in order to bear testimony to a) “the Divine Authorship and entire perfection of all the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments” (*Deed of Separation, 14th August 1893*). In our day that includes contending for a version of Scripture based on a reliable text and translated accurately;

b) the Biblical theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the necessity for unqualified subscription to it on the part of officebearers and an intelligent acquaintance with its doctrine by members. No matters in the Confession can be treated as open questions;

c) the purity of worship authorised by Scripture, Psalms only without instrumental music;

d) the responsibility of the State to promote the Christian, Protestant religion of the Bible;

e) the wholesome church discipline of the Bible, exercised without partiality and in true love;

f) the necessity of lives lived in accordance with the principles of the Word of God - “the doctrine which is according to godliness” (1 Tim. 6: 3). We are duty bound in view of our privileges to live so as to commend the cause we represent: “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries...” (Phil. 1: 27, 28). There is nothing that can commend adherence to the faith once delivered unto the saints like the experience and practice which that faith truly possessed produces. One of the things that the more fair minded opponents of the Free Presbyterian movement had to confess was

First and Second Books of Discipline; and in particular we declare our belief in the absolute infallibility, inerrancy, and supreme authority of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; also in the whole doctrine of the Confession of Faith as approved of by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1647, and in the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, which are all founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God.

“We feel called upon, in the circumstances in which we are placed in the Providence of God, to assert anew (1) the duty of this nation, as a nation, to profess, own, and support the Protestant and Presbyterian religion; (2) that, in accordance with the Confession of Faith, the Book of Psalms is the only manual of praise in the public worship of God recognised in this Church; (3) that instrumental music ought to have no place in New Testament worship; (4) that to all those for whom Christ has purchased redemption, He doth certainly and effectually apply the same; and (5) that no one believes upon Christ to the saving of the soul without being regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

“Also, we protest against the Declaratory Act of 1892, and reject it wholly; especially because it denies (1) the sovereignty of the love of God; (2) that death has passed upon all on account of the sin of our first parents; and (3) the absolute necessity of the means of grace for the salvation of the heathen.

“And further, we protest against the power assumed by the Courts of the Church which has ceased to represent the creed and principles of the said Free Church of Scotland, by passing the Declaratory Act, inasmuch as by the said Act they have substituted for ‘the whole doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith’, what they may regard as ‘the substance of the Reformed Faith therein set forth’ thus largely dispensing with most solemn vows.

“On all these grounds, we, in humble dependence on God’s grace, and the presence and blessing of the Holy Spirit, for the advancement of His glory, the extension of the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour, and the administration of the affairs of Christ’s house according to His Holy Word, desire to adhere to all the doctrines of the Word of God and the principles and constitution of the Free Church of Scotland as held in 1843; and we renounce that General Assembly which has permanently placed upon its records the Declaratory Act of 1892, as well as all other Courts in subjection to the said Assembly”.

Had the Church not had a strong moderate element willing to concede illegitimate power to the State she might have been able to hold her ground, challenge the State and maintain her spiritual independence as a State-supported Church. But that was not how it was.

The Free Church claimed that she was the Church of Scotland free. She felt forced in 1843 to sever her connection with the State but carried with her everything that gave the Reformed Church of Scotland her character, including unqualified commitment to her Creed and the Claim that the State should support the Reformed Church in the unfettered performance of her spiritual and ecclesiastical functions. The original official testimony of the Free Church was decidedly in keeping with the position of the Church of the 1st and 2nd Reformations. The teachers in her New College were committed without qualification to Scripture and to the doctrine of the Confession (as is clear from the lectures given at the official opening of New College in 1850). She numbered in her ministry men whose names are among the most faithful and blessed in Scottish Church history. It would be pleasant to dwell on the remarkable achievements and harmonious spirit of the early days. These are well documented. But from within two decades of her independent existence a process of decline became manifest in the Free Church which gathered momentum until, after temporary setbacks, it culminated in the Declaratory Act of 1893 and the Union of 1900 which brought the United Free Church into existence - a body which was largely swallowed up in a union with the Church of Scotland in 1929 based on declaratory acts and articles undermining the old commitment to the Biblical truth of the Westminster Confession. There were disagreements, as in 1846 over membership of the newly formed Evangelical Alliance, which suggest early differences of opinion, e.g. as to the extent to which ministers committed to Free Church Standards could accept membership of bodies with a wider basis of agreement. But the most serious indication that all was not well emerged during the course of Union negotiations with the United Presbyterian Church between 1863 and 1873. It became evident to some that union could only be achieved on a basis which would compromise the position of the Free Church.

The 1870 Assembly resolved to ask Presbyteries to consider whether they saw any objection in principle to union on the basis of the Confession *as it was accepted in the negotiating churches*, with what the

majority considered relatively minor points not found in the Confession being left as *open questions* in the united church. The problem was that these points included the Establishment Principle against which the United Presbyterian Church campaigned and the double-reference view of the atonement which was at least tolerated within the United Presbyterian Church. The minority strongly felt, as Moody Stuart put it, that uniting on the basis of the Standards with an allowance for liberty of opinion on the subject of the power of the magistrate was altering the terms of subscription to the Standards of the Church, and so effectively altering these Standards themselves (Pamphlet: *The Union Overture*, 1870).

In 1873 a disruption of the Free Church was only averted when proposals for ministers being freely called from one denomination to the other under a mutual eligibility scheme were modified to the extent that U. P. ministers admitted to the Free Church would at least be required to be acquainted with and not declare any objection to distinctively Free Church positions - an accommodation which the anti-union party accepted under dissent. In the course of the debate Dr. Robert Candlish demonstrated the change that had taken place in the Church when he said: "I am not desirous of excluding from the Church those who believe that the doctrine of a national establishment of religion is within the four corners of the Confession; but I will not consent to exclude from this Church, as a branch of the living Church of Christ, those who are conscientiously of the opinion that that doctrine is not within the four corners of the Confession". William Nixon of Montrose contended that the majority were really changing the terms of subscription though leaving the same words, and departing from an important doctrine of the Confession, and he expressed the fear that they were witnessing the beginning of a drift and that one vital truth after another would be made an open question in the Church. George Smeaton claimed that the Mutual Eligibility scheme proceeded on the fallacious assumption that the two churches were identical in principle. He maintained that there were two points on which there remained an impassable gulf between the Churches: the duty of nations and their rulers to the Church of Christ; and the doctrine of universal atonement. Smeaton had no hesitation in alleging that the United Presbyterian Church, in line with the United Secession Church before it, not merely allowed but adopted in its documents a

Reformed Faith, that diversity of opinion is recognised on these points, and that the Church reserves the right to determine what these points are. The infallibility of the Scriptures is evidently one of these points, as we learn by the decisions of the General Assembly in cases already mentioned, and therefore diversity of opinion is recognised in the Church in this fundamental doctrine. The Confession of Faith has been set aside as the chief subordinate standard, and 'the substance of the Reformed Faith therein set forth' is substituted in its place". Commenting on this article, James Lachlan MacLeod in his *The Second Disruption* comments: "For a Church which was formally the same as that of Chalmers and Cunningham, this was a serious indictment. Given that the Free Presbyterians were frequently accused of being hasty in their secession in 1893, this paragraph indicates that they were in fact willing to tolerate a great deal of what they saw as doctrinal degeneration within their Church before they took what was for them the ultimate step of secession".

During the year following the passing of the Act there was hope that it might be repealed as the dissent entered against it had appealed to the 1893 Assembly to repeal it and overtures for repeal were sent up from several presbyteries. I cannot go through all the meetings which were held between the Assemblies of 1892 and 1893, some concluding that after all they did not need to leave on account of the Declaratory Act and others adhering to their declared intention to do so. When the 1893 Assembly failed to repeal the Declaratory Act and Rev. Donald MacFarlane had tabled his solitary protest, steps were taken to provide for adhering congregations throughout the country and a Presbytery was formed on 28th July 1893, which was divided into a northern and southern Presbytery with a Synod in 1896. There was, of course, a formal Deed of Separation adopted at a meeting of the Presbytery in Portree on 14th August 1893, but I would like to draw attention to a Bond of Union which was signed at a well attended meeting in the Music Hall in Inverness on 13th June 1893 and then in many other Highland communities and which sets out the basis on which the people of the Free Presbyterian Church covenanted together: "We, the undersigned ministers, elders, deacons, members, and adherents of the Free Church of Scotland, hereby bind ourselves to adhere to the principles and constitution of the said Church as these are set forth in the Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Claim of Rights of 1842 and Protest of 1843, and the

error may come to be openly tolerated and taught in the Church....”.

It was the Declaratory Act which occasioned the formation of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Those who formed themselves into the first Presbytery of what became the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland gave as one of their reasons: “By the Declaratory Act(1892), the Church, as a whole, has become involved in the guilt of the past backsliding which, as we have said, was the source of our sincerest grief, in a way which was not involved before this Act became law”. That the Church as such became involved in that guilt by the adoption of the Declaratory Act seems to be acknowledged by Dr Donald Munro, one of my predecessors in Ferintosh Free Church, a fellow student of Neil Cameron, when he said of himself and the others who remained in the Free Church between 1893 and 1900: “We adhered to the Subordinate Standards before the Union only as individuals, or as a minority”. The first article in the first issue of the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* in 1896 explains the separation from the Free Church thus: “The first reason we give for our separation from the above Church is her general declension from the doctrines of divine truth.... For the greater part of the 53 years that have elapsed since [the Disruption] her history has been one of declension and departure from her original position and standards”. After describing how consciences had been tried over a period as to whether or not to remain in the Church amidst these declensions the writer states: “At length, however, the crisis came when the case for separation seemed no longer doubtful. In 1892 the Church passed the Declaratory Act. This Act is the formal reason for our separation.... it seemed the duty of the ministry, so long as the constitution was intact, to remain in the Church, and to protest by every means in their power against the prevalent declension.... the doctrines of the Declaratory Act are not only not in the Confession, nor are consistent therewith, but are clearly subversive of its teaching. Such doctrines as those of eternal election, the imputation of Adam’s guilt to his posterity, the total depravity of man, the necessity of the almighty irresistible grace of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, and the absolute need of the declaration of the Gospel for the salvation of sinners among all nations, are virtually denied. It is also, by implication, asserted in this Act that the doctrine of national establishments of religion involves intolerant and persecuting principles. And lastly, the closing section of the Act declares that certain points of doctrine in the Confession do not enter into the substance of the

doctrine of universal atonement irrespective of any distinction between elect and non-elect.

Even in 1873 more was at stake than the Establishment Principle. There was the doctrine of atonement. And there was the whole question of the terms of subscription and the degree of commitment to the Confession of Faith involved in ordination vows. 20 years passed before Union negotiations were formally resumed, and when they were, although the same and even more fundamental issues were involved, there was no doubt as to the successful outcome of the negotiations. Death had removed most of the Disruption ministers and the noted men who had halted the first Union movement. The mind of the Church had become accustomed to the idea of open questions which made it possible for men to dwell together in one ecclesiastical body who held fundamentally different views of Scripture and of the extent of commitment to the professed creed required for ordination and of the doctrine of atonement and of the establishment of true religion and of the principles of Scriptural worship. Men were gradually familiarised with the idea propounded by Alexander Whyte of St. George’s Edinburgh that they should leave questions of Criticism to the experts and that people holding different academic views of Scripture could yet maintain the same great doctrines of the Gospel, of the Confession, and of the Puritans, as he himself professed to do.

There were five particular points at which the decline in the Church’s attachment to her ancient Biblical standards registered itself between 1873 and 1893. These are important to us as explaining why the Free Presbyterian Church came into existence and indicating what she must contend for today. During these twenty years there was ample evidence of the changed attitude of the Church in her official acts i) to the Establishment Principle, ii) to the Doctrine of Atonement and Calvinistic doctrine in general, iii) to Scripture, iv) to the sacred and binding obligation of Creed Subscription and v) to the constituent elements of Public Worship. We can only refer to each of these matters briefly.

i) *The Establishment Principle* William Cunningham provides a succinct exposition of the Establishment Principle: “that an obligation lies upon nations and their rulers to have respect in the regulation of their national affairs, and in the application of their national resources, to the authority of God’s Word, to the welfare of the Church of Christ, and to the interests of true religion” (*Historical Theology*, Vol. I, p. 391). The Free Church

in 1843, while regretfully abandoning the establishment as then constituted, maintained the Establishment principle. The Protest of 1843 states: “while firmly asserting the right and duty of the civil magistrate to maintain and support an establishment of religion in accordance with God's Word, and reserving to ourselves and our successors to strive by all lawful means, as opportunity shall in God's good providence be offered, to secure the performance of this duty agreeably to the Scriptures, and in implement of the statutes of the kingdom of Scotland, and the obligations of the treaty of Union as understood by us and our ancestors, but acknowledging that we do not hold ourselves at liberty to retain the benefits of the Establishment while we cannot comply with the conditions now to be deemed thereto attached”. Thomas M’Crie in his *Statement* argues from Scripture that magistrates were appointed guardians of both tables of the law, that even heathen monarchs were required to support the institutions of the true religion, that O.T. magistrates did not confine themselves to purely civil matters, that there are principles to be derived from Old Testament institutions ordained by God which are of abiding application, that what is enjoined upon rulers by divine precept God promises they shall perform in the way of homage to the Redeemer and service to His Church in New Testament times, that what is promised is the countenancing of Christianity in a national way, that the whole Bible is our rule and that there has been no New Testament abrogation of what is the law of nature and of the Old Testament with regard to magistrates, that what Christians are bound to pray for in 2 Timothy 2.1 magistrates are bound to promote, that Revelation 11.15 promises that the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ and Revelation 21.24,26 says that they shall bring their glory into the Church.

During the first Union movement leading Free Churchmen, including Robert Candlish, began to assert that the Establishment of religion was merely an inference from the Confession and not explicitly stated in it, and that it was a secondary matter, which ought not to prevent union with the U. P.s although their ministers had the freedom to reject much, if not all, of the 23rd Chapter of the Confession on the Civil Magistrate. This position was adopted, not because Candlish, for example, was able to refute any of the strong statements made in former years by himself and other Free Church leaders regarding the Scriptural basis for Establish-

in Glasgow Mr MacAskill said: “We are assembled here tonight in defence of most vital doctrines of grace, given very specially to our church to maintain and defend, which by her own action are now very seriously endangered.... And if this Declaratory Act becomes part of our constitution, what remained of our former principles is wholly obliterated, and anyone who pleases may pronounce the funeral oration of the once noble Free Church of Scotland”. After that, Mr MacAskill went into the United Free Church in 1900 and he was quoted as saying that the Free Presbyterian movement was “the most mischievous movement of modern times and calculated only to do most serious harm to the cause of truth and godliness in our beloved Highlands”. Another speaker at the Oban meeting was the divinity student Neil Cameron. He said: “The Confession of Faith is famous for the perspicuity of its statements. This Act will become as famous for its sophistical statements.... Further, it must be noted that this controversy is more than a dispute between two parties of men; it is a controversy between these men and the God of Eternity.... There are many in the Church waiting anxiously for the first General Assembly, and if this Act is passed they will separate from these men; for the Church of the Declaratory Act will no longer be the Church of Scotland Free”. Mr Cameron and some of his fellow students were to the fore in organizing the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

At these meetings two resolutions were passed: 1. “This meeting recalls with gratitude to Almighty God the fruit of the labours of the Westminster Assembly of Divines embodied in their Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as well as the many blessings enjoyed by the Free Church whilst loyal to the Scriptural truths taught in these documents; asserts the continued adherence of those here present to the great Scriptural Doctrines of the Confession of Faith and its sufficiency to be as heretofore the chief Subordinate Standard of Doctrine in the Free Church”; 2. “This meeting therefore deploras the modifications of the Doctrines of the Confession proposed in the Free Church Declaratory Act: (a) because no Scriptural ground has been shown for the modification now proposed; (b) because the Act, where not expressly opposed to the Scriptural teaching of the Confession, is so indefinite and ambiguous in its Language that it will cover opinions subversive of that teaching; and (c) because the last clause of the proposed Act places a dangerous power in the hands of the General Assembly and opens a door whereby fatal

in the light of such sayings as that of A.B. Bruce, *The Kingdom of God*, (1889) p. 102: "The generous eye of heaven may detect traces of faith in the hearts of benighted heathen dimly groping after the true God, where narrow-souled men judging by dogmatic tests would discover none". The fourth article, as set over against Confessional teaching, with its qualified description of fallen human nature and its reference to needing merely the aid of the Spirit, was regarded as modifying the Confessional doctrine of the ruin made of human nature by sin, and again this suspicion was verified by the later assertion of James Denney [Professor of Systematic Theology in the F.C. College, Glasgow, 1897], in *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, p.199, that the Westminster Divines came at least perilously near to a doctrine of human depravity which excluded the very possibility of redemption and left nothing in man for even redeeming love to appeal to. The fifth article suggests that the Confession affirmed principles inconsistent with liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment. The final article leaves it to a majority in the Church to decide which teachings of the Confession entered into the substance of the Reformed Faith. The Declaratory Act was seen as giving formal legitimacy within the Free Church to the course of declension against which they had been protesting and depriving them of any basis on which to resist that declension.

In the period leading up to the passing of the Declaratory Act in 1892 there was great activity amongst those opposed to it. Prior to the passing of the Declaratory Act a number of public meetings were held throughout the country to acquaint people with the danger and arouse them to action. We have the record of a typical one held in Oban on 13th April 1892. Two speeches are of particular interest. One was by Rev. M. MacAskill, Dr Kennedy's successor in Dingwall. Amongst other things he said: "I believe, since the days of the Reformation, there has been no question at all equal in importance to the questions that are now being agitated within this Free Church.... The question of Disruption times was a very great question.... These questions, great and important as they were, were nothing in comparison with the questions that are before us here this evening, and other questions that will shortly be before us.... The questions today are these:- Bible or no Bible, Atonement or no Atonement, Salvation for a perishing world on the basis of the finished work of Christ, or Salvation by works". At a similar meeting two months earlier

ment, but partly on account of the influence of the more pluralistic and secular view of the State which had developed in society, partly on account of the desire for union with the anti-establishment United Presbyterian Church, and partly on account of the drive for the disestablishment of the Church of Scotland which seems to have arisen largely from sectarian jealousy which made these same leaders resent the abolition of patronage in 1874. Robert Buchanan maintained that it was Utopian to expect the State to meet the Church's Claim, and he and his fellows were in the forefront of the move to have all churches equal before the law as voluntary societies. John Kennedy, however, claimed that "the prospect of success does not determine the question of duty". The minority did not accept that the changed circumstances of the Church or the changing outlook in the nation justified the abandonment of what had been confessed as a necessary Scriptural truth, intimately bound up with the glory of Christ. Their concern was for the religious life of the State as well as for the temporal well-being of the Church.

By the 1890s the possibility of the establishment principle being a serious obstacle to Union had ceased to be considered by the vast majority in the Free Church, who had themselves largely adopted anti-establishment principles or considered that this, and even matters which might seem much more essential to the being of the Church, could be open questions on which each could hold his own views. The Church had become accustomed to the will of a well-managed majority determining the Church's action irrespective of the protests of a minority, latterly largely confined to the North, whose restatement of the old arguments on the basis of the Constitution was treated with increasing impatience and contempt.

ii) *The Doctrine of Atonement and Reformed Doctrine in general*. In 1841 the United Secession Synod deposed James Morison for teaching that "election comes in the order of nature after the atonement". The United Secession Church was agitated throughout the 1840s by controversy over the orthodoxy of the views of Professors Balmer and Brown, who were charged with teaching that Christ's atonement had a general and universal as well as particular reference. The Synod exonerated these men whose position was summed up by Balmer: "so far as the requisitions of law and justice are required, He has removed all the obstacles to the salvation of all"; a doctrine which Brown said was intended "to lay a

foundation for unlimited calls and invitations to mankind to accept salvation in the belief of the Gospel; or so as to remove all the obstacles in the way of man's salvation except those which arise out of his indisposition to receive it"; a position which was considered by their accusers as equivalent to saying "that Christ has not died for the elect only, or made satisfaction for their sins only, but that He has died for all men, and made atonement or satisfaction for the sins of all men". It was this United Secession Church which united with the Relief Church in 1847 to form the United Presbyterian Church, with which the Free Church was seeking union.

During the movement for union between the Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church in the 1860s and 1870s there were those in the Free Church who maintained and those who denied that the United Presbyterian Church held doctrine identical with themselves on the nature, sufficiency and extent of the atonement. By the time of the second Union movement the United Presbyterian Church had adopted a Declaratory Act (1879) which declared "that, in accordance with the practice hitherto observed in this Church, liberty of opinion is allowed on such points in the Standards, not entering into the substance of the faith, as the interpretation of the 'six days' in the Mosaic account of the creation: the Church guarding against the abuse of this liberty to the injury of its unity and peace". Under this Act teaching on the atonement radically different from that of the Confession was tolerated and it is probably not unfair to suggest that this had become the characteristic teaching of United Presbyterian pulpits. By the 1890s such doctrine was also common in the Free Church. During the first Union controversy the Union leaders maintained a general silence on the alleged divergence from Confessional doctrine on the atonement in the United Presbyterian Church, and practically ignored the complaints of the minority over the tolerance of a double reference view of the atonement in the United Presbyterian Church. By the time of the second Union movement "jealousy for the Calvinist doctrine of limited atonement had largely departed from the Free Church" (Kenneth Ross, *Church and Creed*, p. 80). There was growing and increasingly open hostility to the Calvinism of the Confession from men who wanted to win the age to the Gospel by adapting the Gospel to the age.

iii). *The Doctrine of Scripture* I am afraid that we have to concur in

ple by no means invalidates the principle or should silence criticism of the abandonment of it.

The conflict between those in the Free Church who were promoting change in the areas to which we have just referred and those who endeavoured to keep the Church to its moorings in the Word of God and the Confession of Faith reached its climax in the controversy leading to the Declaratory Act of 1892. A Declaratory Act is not meant to introduce anything new but simply to declare or explain the existing position on some matter. The Declaratory Act of 1892 claimed to be explanatory but was really intended to explain away some aspects of the Confession of Faith which were only too clear for some to accept. It was intended "to remove difficulties and scruples which have been felt by some in reference to the belief required" of licentiates and officebearers. While professedly explaining doctrines of the Confession which were clear enough, or only too clear, the Act did so in deceptively orthodox sounding language which opened the door to un-Confessional and anti-Confessional views of such matters as human nature, the divine decrees, the atonement, salvation apart from the knowledge of Christ. As Rev. J. S. Sinclair says in his articles on the Declaratory Act: "The Act, instead of casting light upon the doctrines of the Confession, does its best to shroud them in obscure and ambiguous language. The language, however, while tending to obscure the Calvinism of the Confession, is a fit vehicle for expressing the doctrines of Arminianism".

We cannot here go into the errors of the Declaratory Act and I would draw attention to the helpful articles on the subject written by Rev. J. S. Sinclair in the first volume of the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* and reprinted in the Church's *History*. But we may just glance at the objections raised to each article of the Act. The first article suggests that the Confession did not adequately proclaim the love of God and it traces God's gift of Christ to a general love for mankind rather than to His particular love for His own. The second article, denying the fore-ordination of men to death irrespective of their own sin, was regarded as unnecessary as an explanation of Confessional teaching and as introducing doubt regarding the doctrine of the decree and the doctrine of man's condemnation in Adam. Conservative fears regarding the tendencies of the third article affirming the salvation of those who die in infancy and of those beyond reach of the ordinary means of salvation are understandable

Use of Organs” stated that “the worship of God is the most sacred thing with which His creatures have to do. It is more sacred than the government of the Church, more sacred even than Christian doctrine, for these are, in a sense, merely instrumental in bringing us into proper relations to God; and if it is true in anything whatsoever that God's will must be the only rule, it is especially true of His own worship”.

From the time of the Reformation worship in the Scottish Church was governed by the Regulative principle, which James Bannerman (*Church of Christ*, I, p 326) summarises neatly: “The sinner may not dare to approach to God, even for the purpose of worshipping Him, except according to the express manner which God has laid down”. The 1707 General Assembly's “Act against Innovations in the Worship of God” is significant mainly for its assertion of the ground for opposing innovations: that they are “dangerous to this Church and manifestly contrary to our known Principle, (which is, that nothing is to be admitted in the worship of God, but what is prescribed in the Holy Scriptures)”.

By the later nineteenth century the prevailing principle in the Free Church was that what was not specifically prohibited was permissible. The Relief Church sanctioned the use of hymns in 1794, the United Presbyterian Church published a hymn book in 1851, and a small selection of hymns was approved by the Church of Scotland in 1861. The 1869 Free Church Assembly approved in principle the use of hymns and paraphrases in public worship and the first collection was sanctioned in 1872, by 213 votes to 61, with a much larger hymn book being approved in 1881. The United Presbyterian Synod authorised the use of organs in 1872 and the Church of Scotland in 1876 after bitter controversies. It was not until 1883 that the Free Church Assembly authorised the use in public worship of instrumental music, again on the spurious ground that in the Standards there did not seem to be any prohibition of the use of instrumental music. As in the early Church, the abandonment in the Free Church of the exclusive use of unaccompanied psalm singing in favour of human compositions accompanied by instrumental music commonly went with a more general departure from orthodoxy.

Those who accuse us of condemning the worship of almost the whole of Christendom besides ourselves forget that the position we maintain was once held by Reformed Churches generally throughout the world, and that the almost universal declension of the Church on a particular princi-

Professor Cheyne's assessment in his *The Transformation of the Kirk*, p.37: “All the major Presbyterian denominations of Scotland helped to bring about the nineteenth-century revolution in attitudes to the Bible, but it was the Free Church which played the leading part”. In less than 50 years the Free Church descended from affirming that the Bible is Divine revelation inscripturated by Divine inspiration which secured its inerrancy and infallibility and authority, to tolerating the view expressed by A.B. Bruce that "Revelation is one thing, Scripture another though closely related thing - being in truth its record, interpretation and reflection", on to the idea that the Word of God is only contained in Scripture. Under the influence of German theology and rationalism and the desire to win the age to the truth by accommodating the Church's view of the truth to the spirit of the age, an increasing body of the ministry of the Free Church entertained and then advocated liberal views of the nature of Scripture. H.F. Henderson in his *The Religious Controversies of Scotland*, p. 214, asserts that it was seen by some amongst those whom he describes as the more intelligent members of the Free Church that the critical movement “arose from the new intellectual conditions of life at the present day, how in every department of human knowledge the methods and tests of historical science are being rigorously applied, and how the theory of evolution requires of everything that exists an account of its origin and development”. I cannot linger over the contribution made to the changed views of Scripture by the Free Church professors A. B. Davidson (1831-1902), William Robertson Smith (1846-94), Marcus Dods (1834-1909) and A. B. Bruce (1831-99). I may just give you a flavour of their approach. A. B. Davidson, who was Rabbi Duncan's assistant and successor, maintained that “the books of Scripture, so far as interpretation and general formal criticism are concerned, must be handled very much as other books are handled” and yet that the facts in the history of redemption are untouched by the most advanced critical theories. William Robertson Smith distinguished between Revelation and the Bible and claimed that while there was such a thing as supernatural revelation the record of it was not supernatural or infallible and so could be criticised without the substance of revelation being affected. Marcus Dods, in his inaugural lecture as professor, described the doctrine of verbal inspiration as a theory “which has made the Bible an offence to many honest men; which is dishonouring to God, and which has turned

inquirers into sceptics by the thousand - a theory which should be branded as heretical in every Christian Church". He had also suggested that belief in the historicity of the Resurrection was a matter of indifference, that belief in substitutionary atonement or even in Christ's divinity was not essential to Christians, and that there was defective morality in the Old Testament. The death of Christ was not propitiatory but a manifestation that there were no bounds to the love of God which he came to express. A. B. Bruce imputed untrustworthiness to the Gospel writers and his mind is revealed in the report of an occasion when a group of students were discussing whether in view of the omnipotence of God a noble heathen like Socrates could be denied salvation. Bruce closed the debate with the emphatic assertion : "God *couldn't* damn Socrates". That these men were given positions in the Free Church shows how changed was the attitude to Scripture tolerated in the denomination.

iv) *Creed Subscription* The comprehensiveness which developed in the Free Church between 1873 and 1893, which allowed contradictory views to be held and professed by ministers and elders on the Establishment Principle, the nature of the Atonement, the nature of Scripture, Purity of Worship and other significant doctrines, revealed the changed attitude to the binding nature of the Creed which they had subscribed in solemn vows as the confession of their own faith. The struggle was over the principle that the Church ought to be committed to a definite Creed confessed as Scriptural and not subject to a periodic redefining by General Assembly majorities of what must be confessed as fundamental. The authority of a creed depends on its appeal to and conformity with the Word of God. Creed subscription imposed upon office-bearers who have been taught to know their creed and required to profess it as the Confession of their own faith in the form of solemn vows made before God and men is the Church's basic guarantee of the nature of the message which will be proclaimed in its name and the doctrine that will be taught within its borders. The Creed subscribed must be comprehensive enough to make the Church's testimony clear on all matters of dispute affecting the honour of God, the salvation of the sinner, and the accomplishment of the Church's task in the world, and should not exclude any truths of which the Church has become convinced and for which it has had to contend in the course of controversy. A fixed creed is also necessary for the true liberty and unity of the Church and its officebearers.

The watchword of the later pro-unionists was that the Church should maintain unreserved commitment to the fundamentals of the faith and allow as much liberty as possible on other points. By 1892 the Church was ready to put the Church's creed in the hands of a majority in the Assembly. Probably the most dangerous article of the Declaratory Act of 1892 is the last: "That while diversity of opinion is recognised in this Church on such points in the Confession as do not enter into the substance of the Reformed Faith therein set forth, the Church retains full authority to determine, in any case which may arise, what points fall within this description, and thus to guard against any abuse of this liberty to the detriment of sound doctrine, or to the injury of her unity and peace".

As Kenneth Ross acknowledges, "once concession to anti-supernaturalism had begun, it had a momentum of its own and carried the New Evangelists to a point where even so cardinal a doctrine as the divinity of Christ could not be unreservedly affirmed". Robertson Nicol (*Life and Letters*, p.349) wrote to Denney in 1901: "Bruce I have no doubt went further latterly than anything he published, and in his article [on 'Jesus'] in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* clearly shows to my mind that he had abandoned the contention that Jesus was sinless. Christ he believed to have been a very good fellow, almost as good as Sandy Bruce, though less enlightened". Marcus Dods, who felt that his early inoculation with Calvinism would preserve him from injury through contact with modern thought, so that he would not lose what had lain at the foundation of his faith finished up saying: "One who can believe in God should be very thankful. Very often, I may say commonly, I cannot get further than the conviction that in Christ we see the best that our nature is capable of, and must make our own" (*Later Letters*).

v) *Purity of Worship* Care with regard to doctrine and practice cannot be divorced from concern for the worship of God, and when Christian Congregations gather in worship it is imperative that they be governed in their approach to God by the principles which He has revealed in His Word. Worship is more comprehensive than sung praise and purity of worship is something relating to more than the materials to be used in praising God. But that does not mean that sung praise should be thought of apart from the context of approaching God in worship, or that it should be a matter of indifference what materials we use to praise Him or how we present these praises to Him. James Begg, in his pamphlet on "The