

The Church and the World

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THE Church of God, according to the Bible, is the Body of Christ, "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all," and is also represented as the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit. It is of Divine institution and has Christ as its only Head, and is partly invisible and partly visible. The invisible part of it is the elect of God in heaven and on earth, the number of which is known only to God Himself, while the visible part are all who are in the Church on earth by a profession of religion. The great aim which God had in view in setting up a church in the world was His own glory in the salvation of sinners. This was to be done by means of the Gospel being proclaimed to perishing sinners. We learn from this that all who profess to belong to the Church of God should have a single eye to His glory, the good of never-dying souls, and the advancement of His Cause, and that everyone of them should be continually on their guard against anything in themselves, in the Church or outside the Church, which would militate against the end they ought to have in view. This watching ought to be continually accompanied with prayer to the Great Head of the Church that He would protect and advance His own Cause. This is all the more necessary when we consider that the Church is not only set up in a world that is hostile to it, but that the world is in the Church. This raises the question, What are we to understand by the 'World? Briefly the World may be referred to under two aspects, namely the non-professing world, and the professing world. The non-professing world may be reckoned as composed of atheists, infidels, persecutors, and all others who have thrown off even the appearance of religion, no matter how outwardly moral they may be in their walk and conversation. They declare openly by their attitude to religion that they are the enemies of the Church of God. The professing world is made up of all who are baptised, or who sit at the Lord's Table, and whose practice is not in accordance with their profession. This class ranges from the orderly man or woman who may pass as godly, even with most of the Lord's people, but who are strangers to religion at heart, to the one who is ring-leader at all the concerts and dances in the locality in which he resides and far beyond it, and whose hypocrisy in making a profession of religion, and, perhaps, holding an office in the Church is the scorn even of infidels. There are many things in which these two classes differ and many things in which they agree. They differ

in this respect, that while the non-professing world deceive nobody, for all will agree that they bear sure marks that they are of their father the devil, the professing world deceive many, including themselves. Another point in which they differ is that while the non-professing world has no religion to base their hope on, the professing world make their religion and their privileges the foundation on which they build for eternity, and say with the Jews of old, "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man." The points, however, in which they agree are more numerous. They agree in denying the existence of the true God, for the God which the professing world have is not the God revealed in the Scriptures. There is no holiness, justice or truth in Him, and He will connive at their sins. Again, they agree that the sinful vanities of this world, which draw the heart away from seriousness, are but "innocent amusements," and that all who find fault with such as indulge in them are "kill-joys" Further, they are agreed that a strict adherence to the Word of God as the only rule to direct us is an intolerable yoke. . This worldly element, having a profession of religion, is to be found: in the professing church in all ages. The Westminster Divines, in referring to the churches which are members of the catholic or visible church, say, "The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan."- Confession of Faith, chap. xxv. sect. v. This degeneration was, caused by the power of the professing world, so that often in the history of this world the Lord's people found themselves compelled to withdraw, when the discipline of the Church could not be exercised, and take up a separate position in, order to preserve the Church as pure as possible. The history of our native land affords several instances of this kind, and in every case the world retained its hold of what really belonged to the Church and was intended for the spread of the Gospel. In our dark day the Church of God is weak and despised while the World is strong and feeling itself in a position to issue a challenge to the Church. In the Free Church Monthly Record for December, 1940, there is an editorial entitled "The Challenge of the Hour," which purports to deal with the World's challenge to the Church. We have to confess that we have seldom seen a greater challenge to the Church than that article itself in the light of what it contains and in the light of other happenings to which we intend to draw attention. In the article in question there is the statement that "strict observance of the letter of the law, while denying its spirit, has always, been the chief characteristic of a decadent faith," Judaism under the dead hand of Pharisaic cult is given as the outstanding

example of this. The writer then goes on to say, " ... it is a sobering fact to recognise that those ecclesiastical bodies that' began their separate existence merely as a protest: against some doctrinal error or other have; generally speaking, drifted into the probably more' deadening error of regarding purity of faith as an acceptable substitute for rectitude of conduct!" These words are familiar to us, and several instances of their use by Free Church writers in an endeavour to injure the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, could be traced in the pages of the secular press. They seem to be stereotyped in the minds of a certain class of writers, and serve as useful instruments in venting their malice against a Church which has been honoured by God in bearing witness on His side in a dark day indeed. "Rectitude of conduct" among the office-bearers and members of the Free Presbyterian Church can bear favourable comparison with that of office-bearers and members in the Free Church. In the latter Church ministers have been known, on various occasions to preside over secular concerts, without as much as being mildly rebuked by their ecclesiastical courts, while ministers of ,the former Church have never been seen or heard of displaying such irresponsible frivolity. Without multiplying instances of this kind it can safely be left to the judgment of every unbiased individual to decide which of these two denominations is the more recklessly irresponsible in regard to rectitude and consistency of conduct, and also to say where is the World to be found which challenges the Church. Further in reference to the article quoted we should like to know how the writer of it discovered that secular concerts on the Lord's Day is a less heinous sin in the sight of God than the sin of leaving our young men "to the doubtful morals of our streets and country roads." Whatever may be said in regard to the difference in degree of heinousness between these two forms of sin we have no difficulty in deciding which of the two is more subtle in deluding precious immortal souls for eternity. Satan and the world have long since agreed that concerts, whist drives, dances, picture houses, and cinemas shall be put in the category of "innocent amusements," while it nevertheless remains true that if drunkenness and immorality have slain their thousands, these have slain their tens of thousands. The challenge of the professing world to the Church of God is equally manifest when those who make a profession of religion lower the standards by which they should be guided. "Those of our Gaelic-speaking readers who may be in the habit of listening-in to the Friday night weekly Gaelic broadcast sermons would probably have felt no surprise when the Church of Scotland ministers made no distinction in their preaching between

the universal compassionate benevolence of God to all His rational creatures, "causing His sun to shine on the evil .and the good alike," and His special distinctive gracious love to His own elect people. Our readers, however, must have been surprisingly disappointed to find the same true relative to the broadcast Gaelic sermons by Free Church ministers. As one would expect, these necessarily brief broadcast Gaelic sermons are generally characterised by grammatical accuracy, purity of diction, and literary distinction, while there is a coherent, consistent, and consecutive logical allusion to the text throughout. When it comes to the question of doctrine, however, no distinction is made between the converted and the unconverted, but all listeners are addressed as if they were already the manifest elect people of God without exception. For anything proclaimed doctrinally in these sermons the Scripturally recorded passage, "marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again," might as well have never been written. Such indispensably essential doctrines of man's salvation as the Fall and consequent ,universal total depravity, man's guilt and consequent curse and condemnation, his just exposure to the wrath of God, supernatural conviction of sin, Divine effectual calling to evangelical faith, repentance, new obedience, and sanctification, are all invariably conspicuous by their absence. This glaring anomaly .and guilty inconsistency in the preaching of the ministerial representatives of such a professedly evangelically orthodox denomination as the Free Church of Scotland, seems to manifest clearly a reversal of the apostolic inspired statement "we please not men but God." There is a grave danger that in this lamentable attitude there is an itch for carnal popularity at the expense of the honour of evangelical truth, and the consequent glory of God involved. Truly this ought not so to be. In the January, 1941, issue of "The Free Church Monthly Record," there appeared an editorial suggestion that if only Free Church ministers would take advantage of the opportunity afforded, by the presence of so many soldiers all over the country, to engage in ardent activity, in the way of evangelistic campaigning, "the Free Church might yet be instrumental in Scotland's spiritual reviving. May we respectfully assure ·the writer of that editorial comment that until the Free Church will fearlessly, faithfully, and courageously, begin to preach ,the whole doctrinal council of God the Holy Spirit will not honour their efforts, however painstaking, laborious; and pleasing to men they may be. Only "them that honour Me I will honour." Let there, consequently, be a penitent return to the proclamation of Law, by which alone is produced definite convicting knowledge of sin, and let the three R's of a full-orbed Gospel be fearlessly and

uniformly proclaimed, and then the hope expressed in that editorial statement will, we feel sure, be well on its way to fulfilment. An opportunity in this connection, to make a good start is afforded by the fifteen minutes' Gaelic broadcast. Further, let the Free Church seek to realise that it must unmistakably repent of the great sin against the Holy Ghost involved in the fact that their denomination has been more consistently, more uniformly, and more conspicuously guilty than any other denomination in nominal Christendom in belittling and misrepresenting His Divine operations in raising in this land, at a critical hour in its history, the distinctive Scriptural testimony of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Their characterisation of the spirit and motives behind our testimony as Judaist legalism is a criminally presumptuous arrogating to themselves of exclusively Divine prerogatives for which the Free Church must yet render an account to God, and of which it will have manifestly to repent if it is to become instrumental in Scotland's reviving. No other denomination in nominal Christendom has so fervently and feverishly opposed the spreading of the God-glorifying Scriptural testimony of our Church as did and as, does the Free Church by insisting, wherever possible, on setting up opposition services against us. If we were guilty of preaching heretical doctrines, or belying sound doctrine by inconsistent practice, then the Free Church's opposition tactics would be justified, but in the absence of-such causes, it is clearly manifest that this satanic opposition is the outcome of sheer denominationalism run riot-the Free Church right or wrong. Loyalty to evangelical truth must take precedence of mere denominationalism. In saying this we are not to be understood as underestimating the value and preciousness, in these times of prevailing soul-ruining errors and heresies, of denominationalism. Denominationalism, till the time of the establishment of the Millennium, is indispensable in witnessing against error, and Scriptural discipline is indispensably necessary to the maintenance of a Scriptural purity. To belittle either denominationalism or a Scriptural Church discipline, as some Moody-and-Sankey decision-card evangelistic campaigners do, is to allow a carnal" broadmindedness" to blur and obliterate our spiritual vision, and to let indiscriminate charity and tolerance undermine the very foundations of the Christian Church. The question now remains to be considered, How is the challenge of the World to the Church to be met? In the Free Church Monthly Record for September, 1940, the Editor, as Senior Chaplain to the North Highland Area, appeals to his readers for, among other things, "indoor games, wireless sets, portable gramophones and records" in order to "lead the lonely

soldier out of the path of temptation and to foil the efforts of those who prey upon him body and soul." While we consider the end in view a laudable one indeed we must consider the means proposed 'to be used, and that by a minister of such an orthodox church as the Free Church claims to be, one -of the most serious challenges which was ever offered to the Church of Christ. Those who make use of such carnal weapons cannot say with the Apostle Paul, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." In the whole volume of God's Word there is nothing to countenance the use of such carnal weapons to counter-act sin, and those who make use of them manifest that they are not of God but of the devil, however exalted their station may be in the Church or anywhere 'else. Those who held honoured places in the Church of Christ in other days, and whose memory is savoury because of their faithfulness and the measure of success which was given them in the vineyard never resorted to such weapons of warfare against the powers of darkness. In reading their lives one finds instead an increasing faithfulness in declaring the whole counsel of God, and an ever-increasing diligence in the use of Scriptural means, a growing knowledge of their own insufficiency, and a more frequent resorting to God to plead for manifestations of His saving power. Let all who truly fear the Lord be found in that condition and they shall be able to meet the World's challenge, whether it comes from the non-professing world or from the professing world, and be honourably carried through. Truly we ought to do everything in our power for the men of the services. Their bravery, the dangers which they face, and the temptations with which they are continually surrounded call loudly to us to help them, but such as think that they are helping them by presiding at concerts for them or providing facilities for vain amusements, are actually committing the unnatural deed of a father who for bread would give his son a stone, for fish would give him a serpent, or for an egg would offer him a scorpion.