

Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland

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Reasons assigned by Rev. Donald Macfarlane, Raasay, Rev. Donald Macdonald, Shieldaig, and others, for forming themselves into a separate Presbytery, to be called the Free Church Presbytery of Scotland.

“Thou hast shewed thy people hard things: thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment. Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth.” - PSALM lx. 3, 4.

WE feel that, in taking the solemn and weighty step of refusing to own the jurisdiction of the Courts of the Church which calls herself the Free Church of Scotland, and in forming ourselves into a separate Presbytery, we ought to place on permanent record a brief statement of the reasons that have led us so to act.

In the Disruption of 1843, and for several years thereafter, the Free Church witnessed a good confession before the world. In this we rejoiced, for we considered her confession to be the testimony of Jesus Christ. But in the measure in which we were made glad by this testimony and confession, we could not but be grieved by what we consider' to be very serious backslidings within recent years from the attainments of her early days. She has practically been for years holding in abeyance one of her own distinctive principles - we mean the crown rights of the Redeemer as King of Kings and Lord of Lords; she has ceased to bear that testimony for the simplicity and purity of public worship which characterised the Presbyterian Church in Scotland from the Reformation downwards; but, above all, she has recently proved unfaithful to that trust which, in common with every branch of the Church of Christ, she had committed to her, namely, the keeping of the oracles of God.

These declensions, to which we shall again refer, were the source of the sincerest grief to us, and would of themselves have afforded a satisfactory reason -for our ceasing to co-operate with office-bearers who had thus betrayed their charge, were it not that we considered our constitution to have been intact before the passing of the Declaratory Act. The immediate cause, then, of our separation has been the passing into law of the Declaratory Act of 1892, and the re-affirming of the same by the General Assembly of 1893.

1st. - By this Act we consider that the constitution of the Church has been altered and vitiated where we ought to hold it most sacred and inviolable. Under cover of a desire to maintain purity of doctrine and the peace and unity of the Church, this Act gives the Church-that is, in the last resort, the General Assembly-a power with respect to its standards that it by no means possessed in its original constitution. The General Assembly-the supreme court of the Church-consists of a certain proportion of the office-bearers of the Church. Each of these office-bearers vowed to assert, maintain, and defend certain well-defined and fixed standards of doctrine. The obligations thus entered into lie upon every office-bearer of the Church, whether a member of the supreme court or not. The Assembly, consisting of a portion of the office-bearers of the Church, was bound to act according to the individual obligation of its members; and so long as this principle was recognised, and only so long, did the Church stand in a righteous relation to her standards, and thus also could the liberties of dissenting minorities be secured. But now, seeing the Declaratory Act (1892) states that there are matters of doctrine in the Westminster Confession of Faith-without specifying what these are-on which diversity of opinion is recognised in the Church, and that, in every case which may arise, it lies with the Church-that is, with the General Assembly-to draw the line between what does and does not "enter into the substance of the Reformed Faith" set forth in the Westminster Confession - a power is given to the General Assembly to determine, at its pleasure, what the fixed standards of the Church are. For years this principle has been acted on by a majority within the pale of the Free Church; but there is a great difference between individuals, however numerous, tacitly assuming and acting on a principle, and the authoritative recognition of that principle in the laws of the Church. In this connection it does not improve matters in the least, but rather renders them worse, that this power is granted to the General Assembly while as yet the questions and formula remain unaltered. For while, by question 2, every office-bearer still vows to assert, maintain, and defend the whole doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith as received by former General Assemblies of the Church, the General Assembly has power given to it by this Act to absolve from doctrinal obligations, to an indefinite extent, as many as choose to accept of such relief. Believing that the government of the Church by a supreme representative court is in accordance with the mind of Christ, we felt ourselves warranted in calling upon office-bearers to promise obedience to it, as an institution of Christ in His own house, so long as it stood in a righteous relation to its scriptural standards. But when the supreme court is placed in an unrighteous relation to its standards, we consider that we are no

longer warranted thus to act, and we feel justified in saying that the constitution has been vitiated where it ought to have been held more inviolable.

2nd. - *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 in which it was not involved before this Act became law.* It is as though the repeated resolutions of Assembly in favour of Disestablishment, by which the Church had practically ceased to testify to the duty of our nation to recognise and support the Protestant and Presbyterian religion, had received authoritative sanction under the Barrier Act. It is as though the use of uninspired hymns and instrumental music in the public worship of the sanctuary-each of them equally unwarranted and unconstitutional-had received constitutional sanction. It is as though the findings of Assembly in two well-known cases with regard to the infallibility and inerrancy of Holy Scripture-findings by which the doctrine is treated as one not entering into "the substance of the Reformed Faith"-had received final and authoritative confirmation under the constitution of the Church. The importance of the doctrine of the infallibility and inerrancy of the Scriptures cannot be over-estimated, and the Church of the living God is, in a special manner, in this age of unbelief, called upon to confess it before men. It is a doctrine frequently insisted upon by our Lord and His apostles, it is abundantly established by the Word of God throughout, and is the only safeguard of Protestantism. Yet some of the most responsible office-bearers and teachers in the Church claim a right, which has been by her allowed, not only not to hold, but even to disclaim the holding of any such doctrine. Before this Act became law, these several defections were a source of profound sorrow to us; but the constitution was yet untampered with, and this alone justified our remaining in connection with a Church in which such defections prevailed. But now that, by reason of this Act, so great power is vested in a majority of the General Assembly, whereby they justify themselves in all their findings anent the cases referred to, we could not any longer acknowledge the courts of the Church without involving ourselves in her guilt.

3rd. - *By the Declaratory Act (1892), additions are made to our confession and profession of faith which we regard as not in accordance with the Westminster Confession of Faith or with the Word of God.*

For while in clause I., in the treatment of the love of God, the sovereignty of God is acknowledged in respect of His purpose to save, it is, in effect, denied that that

sovereignty is manifested in respect of His love-contrary to the doctrine of the Scriptures (Rom. ix. 13; John xiii. r; Ephes. v. 25; Heb. xii. 6; Rev. iii. 19). The statements made in the Act as to how the love of the Father and of the Son is manifested might be taken in a scriptural sense; but these statements must be understood in the light of the statement made as to the manifestation of the love of the Spirit, and when thus understood we must conclude that the expressions used in respect of the love of the Father and of the Son are used in an unscriptural and unconfessional sense; for, in accordance with Titus iii. 4-7, it is in the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the soul which was dead in trespasses and sins that the love of the Holy Spirit is manifested, and not in his "striving" only.

Again, this subject is of the greatest importance, inasmuch as it affects the doctrine of the atonement. The teaching of the Word of God about this doctrine is that "Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish." The Confession of Faith is in perfect agreement with this doctrine when it says that "to all those for whom Christ purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same."

We are bound to read the statement in the Declaratory Act about the love of Christ in the light of the statement made as to how the love of the Spirit is manifested, and if we do so, we are driven to the conclusion that Christ loved and gave Himself for a people to all of whom He doth not effectually apply the redemption He hath purchased; and thus, the teaching of the Word of God, on this fundamental doctrine, is seriously departed from.

Again, we consider that the Church has not kept the faith when it states in clause I. b. "that this Church does not teach, and does not regard the Confession as teaching, the fore-ordination of men to death irrespective of their own sin;" for as the word "death" is here used without explanation, the statement runs counter to the Word of God which says that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin ; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned;" and again that "by one man's offence death reigned by one." In these passages the apostle used the word "death" - the wages of sin - without further explanation, and declares that death has passed upon all on account of their relation to the

first Adam. We acknowledge that this is a great mystery; yet it is a mystery which the Church is bound always to conserve. This mystery the Declaratory Act, so far from conserving, irreverently invades and practically explains away.

Further, in denying the indispensable need of the Gospel for the salvation of the heathen, the Church makes a profession for which it cannot give any Scripture proof—a profession which we consider to be contrary to the Confession of Faith, and to the Word of God in such places as Prov. xxix. 18, Romans x. 14, 15, and Eph. ii. 12.

In addition to these evils which we have particularised, we consider that a shallow and unscriptural view of sin and of the work of the Holy Spirit pervades the Act throughout; but we do not feel called upon to discuss these and other defects in detail. We have seen that, through the Declaratory Act, a profession is made in the name of the Free Church on matters pertaining to fundamental doctrines which is not in accordance with the Word of God. A very important purpose which a Confession of Faith serves is the displaying, by the Church as a whole, of a banner because of the truth. A banner is displayed in the Declaratory Act, but not because of the truth. With the Church that displays this banner we cannot co-operate. The Church, as a Church, "most earnestly proclaims, as standing in the forefront of the revelation of grace," certain doctrines which we have seen to be inconsistent with truth; and, for anyone after that to say that the Declaratory Act lays no new burden upon any within the Church, were tantamount to saying that those disagreeing with its statements form no part of the Church at all, or else have no interest in what testimony the Church as a whole should maintain.

We are called upon at this crisis to assert and act upon a fundamental principle of Presbyterianism. All the congregations of our Church, on a principle different from that of Independency, form but one Church, and are members one of another, having "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." When the Church has erred from the faith, we refuse to shelter ourselves in a species of Independency, as if congregations might be free, while the Church, as a Church, is involved in guilt.

Only that, as a Church, we might continue to testify for the infallibility and inerrancy of Holy Scripture, for the sovereign love of God, for the scriptural doctrine of the fall of man and its effects, for the headship of Christ over the nations, for the purity and simplicity of the public worship of the sanctuary, which, with such great and manifest blessing, characterised the Presbyterian

Church of Scotland from the Reformation downwards, have we been compelled to take the last step of separation. By continuing as we were, we should not merely not be able, as a Church, to bear testimony for these doctrines and principles, but should ourselves be seriously involved in, and partakers of the guilt of those that reject and renounce them.

We repudiate the allegation so often made that, by taking this step, we have ceased to be Free Churchmen; on the contrary, we assert that we have been compelled, in order that we might righteously claim to be Free Churchmen, to renounce the jurisdiction of the courts of a Church which, by passing the Declaratory Act (1892) into law, has ceased to be the true Church of Scotland Free.

We desire to humble ourselves before the Lord because of our coldness of heart in matters that so deeply pertain to His glory. We acknowledge our utter unworthiness to display that banner because of the truth, which His Church in Scotland was so long honoured to bear. But although, in ourselves, we be but as the offscouring of all things, yet we dare not keep silent in such a day of rebuke and blasphemy. In the Lord our Righteousness alone we desire to trust. We look to His blood to justify and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, to His strength to support us, and to His Spirit to animate, guide, and comfort us.

We pray God that He would grant an outpouring of His Spirit, not only upon ourselves, but also upon our beloved countrymen, that they might awake to the command, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown," and that they might be taught to love and value the unspeakable privileges of which they are in danger of being despoiled for generations to come.