

Reasons for Separation from the Free Church in 1893

Rev. James S. Sinclair

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AT a time when the religious world abounds with periodicals it may seem superfluous to add another to their number.

But seeing the majority of these are, as we think, conducted in the interests of a bad or defective theology, we trust our intention to recruit the ranks of sound periodic literature will seem justifiable. Our Magazine, as its name indicates, is published specially in the interests of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, and, in presenting our first number, we think it proper to state briefly the reasons we had for our separation from the present Free Church, and the principles and doctrines for, which we are especially called upon to contend. The first reason we give for our separation from the above Church, is her general declension from the doctrines of divine truth. No one that is acquainted with the history of the Free Church since the Disruption of 1843 can fail to observe that a great change has crept over her. In 1843 she stood forth as one of the pillars of evangelical orthodoxy, and as a willing martyr for the doctrine of Christ's Headship over church and nation. The teaching of her pulpits and the deliverances of her Assemblies were then in harmony with the principles of the Westminster Confession of Faith, whose whole doctrine she had sworn to defend. A considerable religious revival had preceded the Disruption, and when this event took place (an event which involved not a little self-sacrifice on the part of those who left the Establishment), many thought the millennium was about to dawn. But these fair anticipations were doomed to disappointment. For the greater part of the 53 years that have elapsed since then, her history has been one of declension and departure from her original position and standards. So early as 1852, the Rev. Jonathan R. Anderson, Glasgow, withdrew from her Communion for this, among other reasons, that Arminianism was tolerated in some of her pulpits. Not many years thereafter negotiations were entered into for union with the U.P. Church, a step that involved surrender of some very important doctrines of truth, and one that was only frustrated by the strong opposition of the conservative section in the Church. The latter threatened they would separate if union with the U.P. body would take place. The willingness to make open questions of important

doctrines at that time has produced its fruits in the subsequent history of the Free Church. The use of hymns and instrumental music in the worship of God has been allowed and widely practised within her pale for a number of years. The purity of New Testament worship is thus corrupted, and the presence and blessing of the Holy Spirit in the worship of God largely, if not wholly, lost. The Church also of late years, through majorities of her General Assemblies, has repeatedly passed resolutions in favour of the separation of Church and State, and, as a body, has practically abandoned her own testimony to the doctrine of the national establishment of religion. These resolutions are clearly subversive of the great truth that Christ is King of nations, and that nations, as such, are bound to recognise and support His Church. The declension and fall of the Free Church is also clearly marked out in the toleration she has extended to dangerous errors preached and published by ministers and leading professors in her Divinity Halls. In 1888, Dr. Marcus Dods affirmed in a paper read before the Pan Presbyterian Council, met in London, that there were "errors, inaccuracies, and immoralities" in the Holy Scriptures. Instead of being asked by the Assembly to withdraw and renounce this unwarrantable and pernicious error, he was shortly after chosen to be Professor of New Testament Exegesis in the New College, Edinburgh. Instead of receiving excommunication, he was exalted to one of the highest positions the Church could give, and has been at full liberty ever since to teach his erroneous views of truth to the prospective ministers of the Church. He was not long a professor when he announced in a sermon on "What is a Christian?" preached in St. Giles, Edinburgh, the startling view that a man may be a true Christian and not believe in the divinity of Christ. A mild caution from the Assembly was the only discipline for this serious dishonour to Christ and injury to the souls of men. Nothing was done to prevent the further propagation of similar errors. Professor A. B. Bruce, Glasgow, also in his book on the "Kingdom of God" charged the writers of the Gospels with imperfect narration. Luke was said to have toned down some of the severe expressions that fell from the lips of the Lord Jesus. Here was an impeachment of the infallibility of the Word of God of which the Holy Ghost is author. Dr. Bruce, also, attributed imperfect knowledge to Christ. The whole tone and tendency of the book was rationalistic, and instead of being adapted to convince gainsayers, was fitted to strengthen such in their infidel notions. Dr. Bruce, however, got off with a slight censure by the General Assembly.

These are cases in brief in which the Free Church failed to bear testimony to doctrines that lie at the foundation of the Christian faith. She has delighted to

honour men who have cast aside the Bible as the Word of God, and who treat it as a common book. In a word, she has become known throughout the world as the pioneer of heresy, and has earned the unenviable distinction of being foremost in undermining the foundation truths of the Gospel. The continued course of defection pursued by this once sound Church grieved the minds of many within her pale and caused questions of duty to arise. 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 of our separation. Departures, innovations, and errors prevailed on all hands, but 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: When, however, the Church, through a majority of her Presbyteries, and by the vote of the Assembly in 1892, passed the Declaratory Act, we felt that now not only the innovating majority, but all who remained in their fellowship would be involved by this Act in the guilt of past and present declensions. This Act was drawn up for the purpose of affording legal scope within the Church to those who were not prepared to accept the whole doctrine of the Confession of Faith. It cast the shield of its protection over men of erroneous views already within her fold, and opened a wide door for others like-minded who chose to enter. The Act professes to be an exposition of doctrines contained in the Confession of Faith, and also to indicate what views of truth may be held consistently with the maintenance of the Confession. This profession, we believe, is entirely misleading, for 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 Ghost 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 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. The fixed doctrinal constitution of the Church has thus been overthrown, and the creed lies at "the feet of an irresponsible majority to determine the same as it will." In a word, the Church has set itself not only above the Confession of Faith, but it has assumed a daring authority over the very word of God, and takes the place of the latter as the supreme arbiter of appeal. This is the essence of Popery. We, in fact, find in the Declaratory Act errors of Arminianism, Pelagianism, Voluntarism, and Romanism. We are commanded by the Word of God to "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness," and therefore we cannot have fellowship with a Church that adopts these errors as part of her creed and testimony. We are told by many in the Church that the Declaratory Act is a dead letter because they do not approve of it. But such persons must remember that the Act received the sanction of the Church Courts in regular form, and is now a standing law and constitution in the Church. If they are not personally compelled to accept it, the Church, of which they are a component part, has already accepted it. All past protests against the Act have been declared null and void by the Church, and no office-bearer can prevent his neighbour from accepting all the doctrines of the Declaratory Act. The private opinion of individuals is utterly useless to prevent the full operation of the Act. The Church of 1843 has no existence so far as the present Free Church is concerned. It is the Church that has adopted the Declaratory Act that now lives, and it is this Church we have felt constrained to separate from. As the Free Presbyterian Church our profession and confession are none other than those of the Church of Scotland from the beginning. We contend for all the principles of the Free Church as settled in 1843, and are, we believe, the true Free Church of Scotland. The addition of the word Presbyterian does not indicate any change in our attitude or principles as a Church. It serves, however, two purposes. It distinguishes us from the present Church calling herself Free, with which we might have justly contested the title, and it emphasises the fact that it was in consistently adhering to the principles of Presbyterianism that we were compelled to set up a separate jurisdiction. The following is a brief summary of the principles which we are called upon to emphasise at the present time :-(1) The perpetual obligation upon nations, and our nation in particular, to recognise, support,

and defend the Church of Christ, Presbyterian in doctrine, worship, and discipline; (2) The use of the Book of Psalms only as to the matter of praise in the worship of God; and as to the manner thereof, singing with the human voice to the exclusion of instrumental music; and (3) The whole doctrine of the Confession of Faith as it relates to the infallibility inspiration, and authority of the Holy Scriptures, the decrees of God, the atonement, man's total depravity, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the preaching of the Gospel.

In conclusion, we remark that this magazine will exist for the maintenance of these doctrines, and for bearing testimony against the erroneous tendencies of the times in which we live. We shall endeavour to combine with the magazine, a record of events among our own congregations, and also brief notices of current events of special religious interest taking place in Church and State. Our readers will excuse deficiencies in this number as it is our first. Above all other things, we would ask for the prayers and sympathy of all who fear the name of the Lord, that the magazine may, by His blessing, be an agent for spiritual good, and may prove helpful in advancing the cause of the Lord in our land and generation.