

III.

REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATIONS

1. Introduction

We are living in a day wherein sadly, the vast majority of homes in Britain no longer possess a copy of the Bible, and sadly, where they do, in many instances, the Holy Scriptures remain a closed and neglected book. This absence of true spiritual ‘salt and light’, that both preserves and illuminates society, has now created a vacuum where many false religions – including wokeism, the new religion of the West – thrives.

We are reminded, however, that *there is no new thing under the sun* (Ecc. 1:9). From Satan’s early pronouncement, *Yea, hath God said* (Gen. 3:1), to *ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ* (Jude 4), right down to the godlessness of our present day, we as believers must by God’s grace ‘gird up the loins of [our] minds’ with spiritual truth to combat the enemy’s onslaught.

Towards that end, the Publications Committee are committed to the remit and responsibilities that have been laid upon them by the General Assembly, to both publish and promote sound biblical literature and information, whether through magazines, books and booklets, website, the circumspect use of social media platforms, the Spring Conference, etc.

In line with the pattern followed in previous years there follows a brief report on the various activities which the Committee have been engaged in during the past year.

2. Magazines

2.1 Editors

The Committee are grateful to Rev. David M. Blunt, editor, and to Rev. James Clark, Rev. Trevor Kirkland and Rev. Alasdair J. Macleod, assistant editors of the *Free Church Witness*, for their diligent labours in preparing edifying and stimulating material for the readership each month. Having been appointed in 2017 their initial four-year term has now come to an end.

The Committee are recommending to the Assembly that Rev. David M. Blunt be reappointed as editor of the *Free Church Witness* for a further four-year term. The Committee, having inquired of Rev. James Clark, Rev. Trevor Kirkland and Rev. Alasdair J. Macleod as to their willingness to continue in their current role as assistant editors, and having been assured that they are, have reappointed them for a further four-year term.

The Committee are grateful to Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod, editor of *The Explorer*, who intimated to the Committee last year that he would be standing down in May 2021, having completed his second four-year term, for his faithful labours.

Mr Macleod has been able to introduce the new editor of *The Explorer*, Rev. Thomas I. Budgen, to the work, and the Committee extends its best wishes to Mr Budgen as he commences his duties.

2.2 Production

The Committee are indebted to Donald Smith Graphic Design (Aberdeen), and HelloPrint (London) for their professional work in executing the graphic design and printing of the magazines and having an excellent working relationship with the editors.

The Committee are thankful to all those who contribute articles to the magazine, thereby reducing the work of the editors and contributing to collegiality, which is important to both magazines.

The Committee are grateful to Miss Anne MacAulay, who continues to prepare the Puzzles Page in *The Explorer* magazine, and to mark the entries sent in by the children each month.

The Committee editors depend greatly on the work of the proof-readers each month, and the Committee wish to extend their thanks to the current proof-readers of the magazines: (*Witness*) Mr Maurice Grant, Rev. Raymond Kemp, Mr Ewan Wilson, Mrs Marion Macleod (Knightswood); (*Explorer*) Mr Maurice Grant, Mrs Sandra Versteeg (Arran), Miss Sandra Mackay (Partick). They also thank Mrs Flora Roberts for her work as proof-reader of both magazines, and are grateful for the same work done over many years by the late Rev. John MacLeod.

The Committee wish to record their thanks to Mr Derek W. MacLean, who reads the Church magazines to tape for the visually impaired, and they commend this valuable work to the prayers of the Lord's people.

2.3 Circulation

The continuous year-on-year decline in the circulation figures for the *Free Church Witness/Explorer* and the resultant fall in magazine income meant that the Committee reluctantly had to introduce a 25% price increase effective from 1 January 2021, the last increase having been in 2012. There has been a drop in copies ordered in 2021 compared to the previous year in all categories: FC(C) Congregational-bulk (57), UK Subscribers (5), Overseas (10), and Retail Trade (12). This can be attributed to the combination of year-on-year decline in the numbers of members and adherents in our UK Congregations, coupled with the price increase. The attempt to move into the retail market has not been successful, due to a number of Christian booksellers having recently ceased trading or not being open to the public due to Covid-19.

The Committee have written to Kirk Sessions in order to establish: (a) the number of households in their Congregation; (b) the number of magazine subscriptions taken out by the Congregation; (c) whether these subscriptions are paid for by individuals or the Congregation.

Current restrictions have reduced the opportunities for evangelistic outreach during the past year, resulting in the stock of the *Good News* magazine not being fully distributed. The Committee, in consultation with the Home Mission Worker, intend that a new issue of the *Good News* magazine is to be made available before the end of 2021. The Committee are once again thankful for the continued support of the Home & Foreign Missions Committee and local Congregations in the purchase and distribution of this magazine for evangelistic purposes.

2.4 Witness Content Review

The Committee are proposing to issue an inquiry to readers or Kirk Sessions to gather feedback so as to assess the most widely appreciated items of content in the *Free Church Witness*, so that a review of the Assembly's Editorial Policy for the magazine can be advanced. The existing Assembly policy is as follows:

Act XVIII 2017 — Act anent Revised Policy for Denominational Magazine outlines the current legislation as follows:

The material in the magazine and its supplement shall be fully consistent with the doctrine, worship, discipline and government of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing).

The magazine will contain a balance of theological, devotional, historical, ethical, practical and missionary articles. There shall also be comment on current affairs in Church and state, book reviews, Church news, occasional Gaelic articles and financial information. There shall be no letters section in the magazine.

2.5 Subscriptions & Distribution

The Committee are thankful to Mrs Elizabeth Nicholson (Snizort) for the efficient way in which she carries out her work as Subscriptions Secretary and the contact she maintains with readers of the magazines. The Committee are also thankful to Katrina MacKay (Ayr) for her willingness to take on the role of Magazine Distributor, and are encouraged that she is mastering the demands of this role with the deadlines involved.

The Committee would like to express its gratitude to Mr Donald A. Robertson, who kindly stood in as interim Magazine Distributor for the months of September and October 2020.

3. Publications

3.1 Booklets

Finding Out About Series

The *Finding Out About* series was launched in 2010 and is intended to provide instruction for our people on various important theological, doctrinal and practical issues. The initial five booklets are available for purchase on the denominational website.

At the time of writing the Committee are reviewing the draft text of 'Eldership' by Rev. John W. Keddie, 'Church Membership' by Rev. William Macleod, and 'Marriage' by Rev. Graeme Craig. 'Funerals' by Rev. James I. Gracie is awaiting the further consideration of the Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee. It is hoped that the assigned authors will shortly commence work on the draft scripts of 'Scripture/The Bible'; 'The Sabbath/Lord's Day'; 'God's Covenant'.

The Five Points of Calvinism	Rev. John W. Keddie	2010
The Lord's Supper	Rev. John Morrison	2011
Baptism	Rev. John Macleod	2015
Worship	Rev. James Clark	2015
Presbyterianism	Rev. David M. Blunt	2017
Eldership	Rev. John W. Keddie	
Church Membership	Rev. William Macleod	
Marriage	Rev. Graeme Craig	
Funerals	Rev. James I. Gracie	
Scripture - The Bible	Rev. John Morrison	
The Sabbath/Lord's Day	Rev. Jonathan Mattull	
God's Covenant	T.B.C.	

The Committee thank the authors who are preparing new booklets for publication and would encourage all ministers to promote all the booklets within their Congregations.

3.2 Books

History of the Division of 2000

The Committee are pleased to report that Rev. James Gracie and Mr Lindsay MacCallum have now completed, in draft format, the manuscript on *The History of the Division of 2000*. This fulfills the remit of the General Assembly of 2008 to the Committee, "to take the necessary action to have a draft manuscript prepared in popular format recounting the events leading up to and following the division of 2000." The manuscript comprises a total of twenty-seven chapters and three proof-readers are currently engaged in proofreading the text. The intention is that thereafter, as a precaution, the manuscript will be passed to the Legal Advice & Property Committee that they may seek advice from the Law Agent before proceeding to publication.

Subordinate Standards & Authoritative Documents of the Free Church of Scotland

Work on the project that would enable the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) to have the capability to readily provide, in both digitised and on-demand printed format, copies of the Subordinate Standards and

Authoritative Documents of the Church under the Church's own imprimatur is well under way. The Subcommittee, tasked with the remit, confirm that the main documents have now been digitised, with the text now needing to be proofread.

Principles, Beliefs and Practice of the FC(C)

Rev. Trevor Kirkland and Rev. Raymond Kemp are progressing with the text and reviewing the appropriate content to include within this document on the Church's principles, beliefs and practice. The plan is that the publication date will be determined by, and run parallel with, the completion of the twelve booklets in the *Finding Out About* series, to facilitate cross-referencing of topics.

The British Embassy to the Holy See: A Reappraisal

With the draft document having now been passed over to the Publications Committee for the purpose of publication, but with the original remit being retained by the Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee, the Committee are encouraged to report that they are in contact with the Protestant Truth Society, which has shown interest in the document. Helpful suggestions from the Society for improving the presentation of the document, such as the inclusion of an executive summary and the use of footnotes and/or endnotes, are currently being worked on.

Echoes of Grace – the late Rev. Hugh M. Ferrier

The Committee are pleased to announce that they were able to acquire, at a considerable discount, the remaining stock of nineteen copies of the above book from Tentmaker Publications, who have just ceased trading.

3.3 Storage, Distribution & E-commerce Retail Sale of FC(C) Books

The Committee are currently seeking to identify someone who will be responsible for overseeing and administering the storage, distribution and e-commerce retail of the Committee's stock of FC(C) publications.

3.4 Self-Publishing

Denominational Emblem/Logo

In consideration of the Committee's desire that our denomination has its own official emblem or logo, and the request of the General Assembly of 2020 that "the Committee pursue this matter and endeavour to bring suitable design proposals for the consideration of the 2021 General Assembly", the Committee circulated to Kirk Sessions a number of designs which might provide the basis for a denominational emblem, including the burning bush emblem on the cover of the *Witness* magazine, the historic burning bush emblem, and the burning bush emblem commonly used on letterheads, requesting that Sessions indicate which of these options they prefer or suggest further alternatives as soon as possible.

Imprint

In consideration of the Committee's desire that our denomination has its own official imprint, and the request of the General Assembly of 2020 that "the Committee bring suggested names for the consideration of the 2021 General Assembly", the Committee circulated to Kirk Sessions their preferred title of *George Wishart Press*, with the alternatives of *Disruption Press* and *Patrick Hamilton Press*, requesting that Sessions indicate which of these three options they prefer or to suggest further alternatives.

4. Website & Social Media

4.1 Website

The Committee thank Rev. David M. Blunt, Editorial Overseer; Rev. Andrew R. Allan, Website Digital Content Editor; and Rev. Bert Pohl, Technical Overseer who continues to maintain a keen interest in the working of the site to realise its full potential.

The Committee thank all those who continue to provide written and audio materials for the website. When

the new website becomes fully operational, with the recognition of the need for regular and fresh content, the Committee urges Ministers, Interim Moderators, Presbytery Clerks, Standing Committee Conveners and other contributors to forward to the Website Digital Content Editor material in a form suitable for a wider audience and which is ready for uploading.

4.2 Working Party – New Website Construction

The Committee can confirm that work on the new website is now nearing its final stage of completion. An overrun on the initial planned delivery date was caused by migration issues arising from the transference of data from the old website. This resulted in turning the project from a simple design and development endeavour, into a time-consuming process of data formatting and entry.

Based on the Committee's feedback, Mr Sam Gerdt has made various design changes, with most of the intricate functionality of the website having been implemented and tested. He will also be providing some WordPress training sessions to those who will manage the site.

The Committee are especially thankful to Mr Gerdt for his professional expertise and the conscientious application of his talents towards the construction of our denominational website. They also thank Rev. Greg MacDonald, Rev. David M. Blunt and Mr Christopher Reeder for their liaison with Mr Gerdt throughout the project.

4.3 Social Media

The Church's Facebook page currently has 1,316 followers, compared with 1,224 (2020). The Church's Twitter account currently has 797 followers compared with 809 (2020).

When material is uploaded onto the Church's website, Facebook and Twitter highlight this material and are effective vehicles for increasing website traffic.

The Committee thank Rev. David M. Blunt, Social Media Overseer; Mr Derek W. MacLean, Digital Content Editor (Facebook platform); and Mr Alastair Manderson, Digital Content Editor (Twitter platform) for the day-to-day running and maintenance of these platforms.

5. Spring Conference

It was with much regret that the Committee decided earlier this year to cancel the annual Spring Conference for the second successive year, due to Covid-19 restrictions. It is planned (D.V.) to hold the Conference next year, on the subject of 'Revival', with Rev. Maurice Roberts (Retired) to speak on *The Principles and Necessity of Revival* and Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod (Snizort) on *Twentieth Century Revivals in the Western Isles*. The Committee would encourage all ministers to promote attendance at the Conference amongst their local Congregations.

6. Publications Committee – Presbytery U.S.A.

The Publications Committee of the Free Presbytery of the United States give thanks for the prayers and encouragement of the denomination. They continue to produce their periodical, *The Master's Trumpet*, on a quarterly basis. In an effort to encourage Psalm-singing, in 2019 they produced a digital album, *Grave Sweet Melody*, which consists of sixteen selections from the *1650 Scottish Metrical Psalter*. Additionally, they are currently working on a recording of a reading of the Psalter in an effort to promote memorisation of the metrical Psalms.

Among their larger projects, the Committee are in the midst of producing a new Greek New Testament Reader Edition, which will be a printing of the Received Text with footnotes to assist students and readers in translating the text. They are also making progress on a new version of the *1650 Scottish Metrical Psalter* with notes from John Brown and selections from David Dickson's notes on the Psalms. The Committee maintain a website through their publishing arm, The Grange Press Trust, at www.grangepress.com.

The Committee request prayer for these efforts, particularly requesting that the Lord would continue to provide volunteers and finances for these projects. Without the Lord's provision and blessing all will be in vain.

7. Annals of The Free Church of Scotland 1900-2000.

As a result of Covid-19 restrictions there has been no opportunity recently for a meeting between representatives of both the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) and the Free Church of Scotland. However, it is hoped that a meeting can be arranged for later on this year. Similar restrictions prevented access to the returns from the 1921 Census, which would have been expected to have been released by the National Records of Scotland at this time. These returns should provide further significant information on the early post-1900 ministers and their families to enable Mr Maurice Grant to update the database.

The Committee have decided to dissolve their Sub-committee on the *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, with the intention that Rev. David S. Fraser, with Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod, be added to the membership of the Working Group on the Annals, alongside Mr Maurice Grant.

8. Media Officer

It was with much sadness that the Committee learnt of the sudden death of Rev. John MacLeod, *Tarbat* last December. Along with the many additional duties he carried out on behalf of the Church, he served as Press Officer from 2000 to 2016, and subsequently as Media Officer. His professional dedication and his mature years of knowledge and experience will be sorely missed. The Committee express their sincere condolences to his widow and family at this time.

Following Mr MacLeod's passing the Committee were very grateful to Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod for stepping in as Acting Media Officer; Mr Macleod previously acted as the Church's Gaelic Media & Communications Officer.

The Committee are recommending to the General Assembly the appointment of Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod to the role of Media Officer.

JOHN N. GILLIES, *Convener*
DAVIDE RATTI, *Vice-convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Committee on Publications and thank the Committee and especially the Convener, Vice-convener and Clerk;
- 2.1 The General Assembly thank Rev. David M. Blunt and Rev. Murdo A.N. Macleod for their work as Editors of the *Free Church Witness* and *The Explorer* respectively. They note that Mr Macleod is now relinquishing the editorship of *The Explorer* and express their deep gratitude to him for his lengthy service in this role;
- 2.2 The General Assembly reappoint Rev. David M. Blunt as editor of the *Free Church Witness* magazine for a further period of four years;
- 2.3 The General Assembly welcome Rev. Thomas I. Budgen as the new editor of *The Explorer* magazine for a period of four years;
- 2.4 The General Assembly note that Rev. James Clark, Rev. Trevor Kirkland and Rev. Alasdair J. Macleod have been approved by the Committee as assistant editors for a further four years and have indicated their willingness in principle to serve in this capacity;

- 2.5 The General Assembly thank Mr Donald Smith of Donald Smith Graphic Design for his work on the design and layout of the *Free Church Witness* and *The Explorer*;
- 2.6 The General Assembly thank all those who write articles for the Church's magazines;
- 2.7 The General Assembly thank Miss Anne MacAulay for her work in providing the puzzle page for *The Explorer*;
- 2.8 The General Assembly thank the proof-readers of the magazines for their work;
- 2.9 The General Assembly thank Mr Derek W. MacLean, who reads the Church magazines to tape for the visually impaired, and they commend this work to the prayers of the Lord's people;
- 2.10 The General Assembly note the continued drop in subscribers of the *Witness/Explorer* magazines and encourage the Committee to persevere in implementing a strategy to increase the circulation of the denominational magazine and report thereanent to the next General Assembly;
- 2.11 The General Assembly note that, despite Covid-19 restrictions curtailing outreach opportunities to distribute the last issue of the *Good News* magazine the Committee hope to print a new issue before the end of 2021. They thank all those who contributed articles, the Home & Foreign Missions Committee, and Congregations that support this work, and pray that it would be used for the furtherance and extension of Christ's kingdom in our land;
- 2.12 The General Assembly note the Committee's intention to assess the most widely appreciated items of content to be carried in the *Free Church Witness* magazine, so that a review of the Assembly's Editorial Policy for the *Witness* can be advanced. They approve the Committee's proposal to issue an inquiry to readers or Kirk Sessions to gather feedback;
- 2.13 The General Assembly thank Mrs Elizabeth Nicolson for her diligent work since taking over the role of Subscription Secretary in September 2020;
- 2.14 The General Assembly thank Miss Katrina MacKay for her diligent work since taking over the role of Magazine Distributor in November 2020, and Mr Donald Robertson who acted as interim Magazine Distributor for September and October 2020;
- 3.1 The General Assembly note the Committee's ongoing efforts to expand the current range of booklets available in the *Finding Out About* series, and urge them to press ahead with the finalisation of the current titles at various levels of completion and make them available on the denominational website both in booklet and in pdf format for downloading. They thank the authors involved in the preparation of these booklets for publication;
- 3.2 The General Assembly note that the task of preparing the draft manuscript on the *History of the Division of 2000* has now been completed, and encourage the proof-readers as they undertake their work on this project;
- 3.3 The General Assembly note that the Sub-committee has made considerable progress in digitising the *Subordinate Standards & Authoritative Documents of the Free Church of Scotland* and encourage them as they commence the exacting task of proofreading the underlying texts;
- 3.4 The General Assembly note the ongoing progress being made in the preparation of a handbook on the *Principles, Beliefs and Practice of the FC(C)*;
- 3.5 The General Assembly note that the Committee is in contact with the Protestant Truth Society who

- have shown interest in the document *The British Embassy to the Holy See: A Reappraisal*. They encourage the Committee in its ongoing communication and collaboration with the Society to advance the progress of this document for publication;
- 3.6 The General Assembly note with thankfulness that the Committee were able to acquire the remaining available copies of *Echoes of Grace* by the late Rev. Hugh M. Ferrier, which is now out of print;
 - 3.7 The General Assembly note the Committee's efforts to identify someone who will take on the responsibility of overseeing and attending to the administrative functions related to the Committee's stock of FC(C) publications;
 - 3.8 The General Assembly note the efforts of the Committee to identify a suitable design for a denominational emblem or logo to serve for the Church's use, and encourage the Committee in their work towards this end and pray that the Lord will give them guidance as they bring forward their proposals to the next General Assembly;
 - 3.9 The General Assembly note the efforts of the Committee to identify a suitable publishing imprint to serve for the Church's use on its own official publications, and encourage the Committee in their work towards this end and pray that the Lord will give them guidance as they bring forward their proposals to the next General Assembly;
 - 4.1 The General Assembly thank those who presently operate the Church website, especially Rev. Bert Pohl as Technical Overseer, Rev. David M. Blunt as Editorial Overseer and Rev. Andrew R. Allan as Website Digital Content Editor;
 - 4.2 The General Assembly thank all those who continue to provide written and audio material content for uploading to the denominational website. They recognise that the Digital Content Editor is not responsible for either sourcing or rewriting content material for the website, and urge Ministers, Interim Moderators, Presbytery Clerks, Standing Committee Conveners and other contributors to submit material in a form suitable for a wider audience and which is ready to be uploaded to the website;
 - 4.3 The General Assembly note with satisfaction that the work in rebuilding the FC(C) denominational website is now nearing completion. They thank Mr Gerdt for his professional expertise and diligence in this field and his liaison with the Website Working Party. They also thank Rev. Greg MacDonald, Rev. David M Blunt and Mr Christopher Reeder and all the members of the Working Party. They encourage the Committee in their ongoing oversight of the project and note that any necessary training will be given to those with the responsibility of managing the website;
 - 4.4 The General Assembly are encouraged that the Church's Facebook page and Twitter account are maintaining their following. They thank Rev. David M. Blunt, Social Media Overseer; Mr Derek W. MacLean, Digital Content Editor (Facebook platform); and Mr Alastair Manderson, Digital Content Editor (Twitter platform), for the day-to-day running and maintenance of these platforms and pray that the dissemination of Scripture through these social media platforms may be a blessing to many and promote the cause of Christ;
 5. The General Assembly regretfully note that the 2021 Spring Conference had to be cancelled as a result of Covid-19 and look forward to the Conference resuming in 2022. They urge ministers to promote the Conference and encourage their people to attend;
 6. The General Assembly note with satisfaction the several projects currently being undertaken by the

Publications Committee of the Free Presbytery of the USA. They commend this work to the prayers of the Lord's people and pray that volunteers and finances will be forthcoming to assist in the furtherance of these projects;

7. The General Assembly note that due to Covid-19 restrictions it was not possible for talks to take place with representatives of the Free Church in regard to the *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, but express the hope that a meeting can be arranged later in 2021;
8. The General Assembly note with sadness the passing of Rev. John MacLeod, *Tarbat* and pray that the Lord will raise up others to continue in this work. They thank Rev. Murdo A.N Macleod for stepping in as acting Media Officer and approve the Committee's recommendation by appointing him to the role of Media Officer for the Church.