

# X.

## REPORT

### OF THE

#### TRAINING OF THE MINISTRY & ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE

The heart of a Protestant State is its Church, and the heart of a Church is its pulpit, and the centuries which have elapsed since the era of the Reformation furnish us with more than one example, that so long as the pulpit retains its purity, the Church will preserve her vigour; and while the Church preserves her vigour, the commonwealth will continue to flourish; and that, on the other hand, when languor invades the pulpit, corruption sets in in the Church, and from the Church the leprosy quickly extends to the State; its pillars totter and its bulwarks fall.

*J.A. Wylie, History of Protestantism, Vol. 3*

#### **1. Maintaining a Pure Pulpit**

In this short quote from his epic work JA Wylie gives a solid reason for the maintenance of a Pure Pulpit; “so long as the pulpit retains its purity, the Church will preserve her vigour”. He also brings home to us the good of such a Pure Pulpit Church on the Nation and her people: “and while the Church preserves her vigour, the commonwealth will continue to flourish”. Alas, we know the opposite to be true in our day and age. A Pure Pulpit has almost vanished from the Church in Scotland, and we see the result in a Nation that more and more is turning from God to the hurt of her people.

For this reason it is the desire of the Committee to seek to continue and maintain, in its oversight, provision for a Pure Pulpit through the training of our men who, under God’s guidance and call, present themselves through their home Presbytery that, God willing, they would be made ready to occupy and fill such a Pulpit in preaching the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in its fullness and purity. We believe this is the desire of each Session, Presbytery, Synod and of course, of each annual General Assembly.

The maintenance of a Pure Pulpit is the constant daily challenge of ministers, elders and members. The members praying for and supporting their soul-shepherding ministers; the elders standing, in prayer for minister and people, between pulpit and pew to see that the feeding from the under shepherds is drawn from God’s Word alone; the minister casting himself day by day, and ever anew on the gracious Person of the sole Head of the Church, even Christ to keep himself and his pulpit pure “in feeding the flock”. In so doing we are all of us engaged together in this Gospel work for the ingathering of precious souls, for the upbuilding of the Church, and for the commonweal. And all of this, we trust, working together for the glory of God.

#### **2. The Cost of a Pure Pulpit**

##### ***1. To the Student***

First there is a man’s struggle with a call to the ministry. This can be intense as many know and can involve a lengthy period spent in seeking the mind of the Lord. The believed personal call to the heart and mind of a man that will not let him go until he is enabled to answer, yes it is of the Lord, or no it is not the Lord’s call to me. It will have him search and re-search his own hoped-for abilities to fulfil the course as he sees it. It will cast him on his pastor or another who is intimate with the Lord, and if he is wise he will seek one who knows him well. He will either see the mountains of difficulties or none at all.

If at this stage the answer is yes, he is confronted with the practicalities of his personal call to a “pure pulpit”. His home situation is taken into consideration for he has years of study with little or no income stretching ahead of him. It can mean one to two years gaining university entrance qualifications, followed

by a minimum of three years at university, and then his time in the Seminary; eight years unless he has an acceptable degree already which may reduce it to three. We trust it will cast him as never before on the Lord, and this will be seen.

### ***2. To the local Session***

It ought never to be an easy thing for minister and elders to make a decision on a man's call from God to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. The opinion of the Session is surely the most important of all; they know him, perhaps from a child or for the time he has been worshipping with them. They have watched him grow, they have noted his abilities or lack of them, they have heard him in prayer, they have seen him hanging on the Word, they have rejoiced or otherwise at his zeal for the Lord and his compassion for the lost or otherwise, they are aware of his family and background, they too have been spent in prayer seeking the mind of God for this man and the Church.

### ***3. To the Presbytery***

It must never be an easy thing for all the members of this man's home Presbytery. They may or may not know him well, but they want to know him better, by what his minister and elders say of him, and of what he can say for himself. Does he appear to have "a teachable spirit"? From the moment that his name appears on the agenda to the moment when they may commend him they have surely prayed for guidance as they have rejoiced that the Lord of His Church is answering prayer for labourers to come forward.

### ***4. To the Training of the Ministry Committee***

Adhering to the remit given them by the General Assembly, they will seek to know this man and the stage he is at in going forward in his studies. They will take into consideration his age, his level of education, his time in his home congregation, and what regulations apply to him. They have that solemn responsibility to set a course of study for him dependent on his experience and study level already gained or otherwise according to regulations. They may foresee a minimum of three years if he comes with a university degree, or of four should he be older and deemed through work experience and service to merit entrance direct to the seminary. They may have a potential student before them whom they know will have a good number of years ahead of him; they may see that he will struggle all the way, through university entrance qualifications, university and seminary. Some in the Committee, as with Session and Presbytery, will know what it is to struggle academically, but all will know something of the cost of being part of another layer responsible in the acceptance, encouragement and oversight of a man who has come maintaining that he has a call from God the Lord. Committee, Presbytery and Session, all have to answer to the General Assembly, but above all this gathering of men, to the Lord of the Church.

### ***5. To the purse strings***

There must of necessity be a financial cost in maintaining a Pure Pulpit. The Lord has given us, through the kindness and generosity of one of our congregations, excellent facilities for training our students at seminary level. That must be paid for. Our lecturers have expenses that must be seen to as well as the ongoing need to enlarge a library that will meet lecturers' and students' needs. At the moment there is the cost of helping our students study. This amounts to between six and seven thousand pounds per student per year.

### ***6. To the Vacant Congregation***

We all know that when we find that perfect church it will cease to be perfect should we cast in our lot with it. There is no such thing as a perfect minister or congregation. Seeking that Pure Pulpit we must remember that the one we choose to fill it will be standing there to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ with feet of clay; as he makes visits to homes and hospital these same feet of clay will carry him; and as he seeks to present Christ in the wider community he will do so on feet of clay. But then we who sit in the pew, in that vacant congregation or in the one with a pastor, it is our very own feet of clay that have carried us there. Within a large church, a large local session, a large congregation the individual is more easily

hidden, but when the church, session and congregation are small, individualism is more difficult to deal with. It is more prominent. In the last number of years, it has been exceptionally difficult for men who have completed their training at such great expense, yet for one reason or another have not received a call. We have students who have finished their course, been licensed by their Presbyteries and are waiting still. We urge and encourage those in vacant congregations to consider again our Probationers.

### **3. Prayer and a Pure Pulpit**

For those of us with feet of clay, the best way to get off our clay-bound feet is to fall on our knees and then we will find ourselves in the arena where the struggle is at the most intense; we will be found in the arena of prayer where our individual preference must disappear before the will of the Head of the Church despite the personal cost.

There can be no greater struggle and cost to each and every man, minister, elder and member than in the continued school of prayer. This is where the cost is at its greatest. This is where that Pure Pulpit we desire is truly maintained. As brethren, we pray for one another, and that the Lord would call and send His labourers to the harvest.

### **4. Committee Work**

#### ***Student***

Following an approach from the Home & Foreign Missions Committee the Committee agreed that Mr James Haram could be engaged in work within the Southern Presbytery (along with some theological reading under the supervision of the Seminary) during his final year of training. During the year, which should begin upon the close of the General Assembly, Mr Haram will be under the direct supervision of the Southern Presbytery. However, he will be available to give a reasonable amount of supply to vacant congregations outwith the bounds of the Southern Presbytery.

#### ***Admission***

The Committee received an Application for Admission from Rev. Ernest Trevor Kirkland. This will be the subject of a separate Supplementary Report.

#### ***Principal***

Our Seminary Principal, Rev. William Macleod, has intimated his desire to retire from this post that he has occupied quietly and conscientiously, and with consistent good work. We give him our sincere thanks and wish him God's richest blessing in the days ahead with a slightly less heavy workload. There will be another Supplementary Report to deal with a replacement for Mr Macleod.

#### ***Lecturers***

The Committee looked into the legislation covering the retirement age for our Lecturers in the Seminary. The Committee took into account the fact that the set retirement age for the pastoral ministry has been removed. It also took into consideration the particular nature of the work involved as a Lecturer and the need to ensure that the best and the most competent men are engaged in this work. To this end, the Committee agreed that the retirement age for Lecturers should be 75 years. However, it also felt that the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee should be able, if appropriate, to ask a Lecturer to continue in post longer and that any such continuance should be reviewed by the Committee every two years.

#### ***Legislation***

It has been nearly thirty years since the Legislation governing the training of our students was last revised. In the light of this, the Committee agreed to consider a potential revision of all the Legislation to bring it up -to-date.

WILLIAM B. SCOTT, *Convener*  
ANDREW ALLAN, *Vice-convener*

### SEMINARY REPORT

This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme. 1Tim.1:18-20

When the Division came on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2000 we had sought, as best we could before God, to be faithful to our calling. As a result, our brethren regarded us as suspended from the ministry of the Word and sacrament. Feeling our call from God and being convinced in our consciences that we had acted according to the Constitution of the Free Church of Scotland and the Holy Scriptures we sought to re-organise ourselves as the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), continuing in the old paths and maintaining what had been distinctive of the Free Church in her best days. Since that day our former brethren have moved further and further so that today if the ministers of our youth were to return from the dead they would be shocked and feel themselves total strangers in the modern Free Church of Scotland. They would, we believe, feel at home amongst ourselves as we have sought to remain Reformed in doctrine, worship and practice.

The task which faced us in January 2000 was immense. Many predicted our quick demise. However with the help of God we continued to provide gospel ordinances for those who associated with us. But then came a new challenge. Several gifted young men presented themselves before our Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries claiming a call to the Christian ministry. Initially, we thought it best to use existing colleges and our first student was sent to the Reformed Presbyterian College in Belfast. However, on further reflection, we thought it best to develop our own training within our own Church. Five gifted men were identified and agreed to become Lecturers while continuing to minister in their own congregations, and the October 2002 Commission of Assembly appointed these, with a Co-ordinator, to form the Faculty of the Free Church Seminary. A wonderful work was done by the Lecturers, with limited resources and great pressure on their time. The students all profess that they have received an excellent training. With the passing of the years all but one of the Lecturers have changed. God has raised up others in the place of those who have either retired or moved abroad to new spheres of service. One of our present Lecturers was a student of the Seminary.

Now after twelve years the time has come for a change in the Co-ordinator/ Principal. Someone new, with fresh enthusiasm, will, God willing, be appointed by this Assembly. The need for training men continues. A Church is always best to train her own ministers if at all possible. In this way the students remain integrated in the Church and are less likely to acquire alien traditions and theologies.

We have had no new students attending classes over the last two years. Our last two graduates have not, at the point of writing this Report, received calls to congregations within the bounds of our own Church. This summer it is expected that Calum Smith will complete his course. James Haram is also expected to complete his studies at the Seminary but it has been decided that he serve for a further year as an assistant evangelist while doing further reading directed by the Lecturers. Murdo Maciver is expected to do a further year of studies. At the moment there is one possible private student entering next year and one possible overseas student who will study by distance learning. There is a continuing group of five or six private students who are studying the whole or parts of the course by distance learning. There have been two interesting developments this past year. One was the production of a Seminary Handbook which will be given to new students or prospective students and will of course also be available online. We thank Rev. John Keddie and Rev. Harry Woods for this. The other was the production of the first issue of the Free Church Seminary Journal. For this we have to thank Rev. Maurice Roberts, the editor, and again Mr Woods for the technical aspects of the production. The articles are written by the Seminary staff. The Journal will be available free online and hopefully hard copies can be bought though Lulu.

Remember our Seminary in your prayers. Pray also to the Lord of the harvest to raise up labourers for the harvest fields and also pray that he will provide them with fields in which to labour and the finance to maintain them there.

WILLIAM MACLEOD, *Principal*

#### **PROPOSED DELIVERANCE**

1. The General Assembly receive the Report of the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee and thank the Committee, especially the Clerk for his diligent efforts throughout the year;
2. The General Assembly express their appreciation of the dedicated labours of Rev. William Macleod, Principal of the Seminary, over the past ten years;
3. The General Assembly express their appreciation of the work of our Lecturers in seeking to train our students throughout the academic year;
4. The General Assembly note that a revision of the existing Legislation governing the Training of Candidates for the Ministry is to be undertaken and encourage the Committee in this work;
5. The General Assembly resolve that Lecturers in the Seminary shall retire at 75 years of age unless the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee request that the Lecturer continue longer; this continuance to be reviewed every two years by the Training of the Ministry & Admissions Committee. The General Assembly repeal Act VI, 1979, para.12;
6. The General Assembly covet the prayers of the Church for all our students, particularly those who have been licensed yet remain without a Call.