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## Jonathan Ranken Anderson's Critique of the Free Church of Scotland in the 1850s

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How the Free Church of Scotland of 1843 was transformed into the Free Church of 1893/1900 is one of the most difficult questions in nineteenth-century ecclesiastical history. Much has been written about this transformation, focusing largely on the union movement of 1853-1863, the effect of higher criticism, and the influence of the Free Church Colleges.<sup>1</sup> We largely concur with this analysis and regard much of the research that has been undertaken in recent years as very valuable.

However, there seems to be a missing step in this explanation. For these movements to have had such a harmful effect they must have been preceded by a very marked spiritual declension. In this paper we look at Jonathan Ranken Anderson's critique of the Free Church in the 1850s, and it is on this very point that his critique is instructive. Though at this historical juncture, we may regard parts of his analysis as greatly overdone – notably his sweeping condemnation of all Free Church ministers – yet he highlights factors that undoubtedly contributed to the transformation of the Free Church in the half century after the Disruption.

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<sup>1</sup> The literature and studies on this topic are extensive. The following are some of the helpful volumes that seek to analyse the drift which took place: Alexander Stewart and J. Kennedy Cameron, *The Free Church of Scotland 1843-1910* (Edinburgh, 1910); Alexander MacPherson (ed.), *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland (1893-1970)* (Inverness, [1975]); Duncan R. MacSween (ed.), *One Hundred Years Witness* (Glasgow, 1993); Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Church in Victorian Scotland 1843-1874* (Edinburgh, 1975); *ibid.*, *The Church in Late Victorian Scotland 1874-1900* (Edinburgh, 1978); A. C. Cheyne, *The Transformation of the Kirk: Victorian Scotland's Religious Revolution* (Edinburgh, 1983); Richard Allan Riesen, *Criticism and Faith in Late Victorian Scotland* (University Press

# The Alarm!

A

MAGAZINE FOR THE TIMES.

'Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain.'—JOEL ii. 1.

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[No. 2.]

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A Lecture by Rev. J. B. Dickson  
Paisley.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

GLASGOW:

ROBERT WILSON, 12 SOUTH STIRLING STREET.

*Left: The front cover of the second issue of The Alarm!, dated February 1855.*

We noted in a previous paper<sup>2</sup> that Principal John Macleod, in his sketch of the life of Francis Macbean, observes that Macbean, Archibald Cook, and Anderson were “of the set that at an early stage detected the working of leaven that was destined to revolutionize their Church”.<sup>3</sup> Anderson believed the Free Church of Scotland was in a condition of grave spiritual decline in the early 1850s. On the basis of material written by Anderson within a few years of his leaving the Free Church, and little more than a decade after the Disruption, we can identify six main strands in his assessment of this declension.

1. The withdrawal of the Holy Spirit;
2. Free Church evangelicalism was not the same as Old School Scottish Calvinism;
3. Free Church preaching was defective;
4. The influence of Morisonianism and Bonarism;
5. The Free Church attitude to money;
6. The Free Church was apostate.

We consider these six strands in turn. Our purpose is not to give a full discussion of each subject but simply to allow Anderson to state his case.

## **1. The withdrawal of the Holy Spirit**

In January 1855, just over two-and-a-half years after he left the Free Church, Anderson began a monthly magazine called *The Alarm!* which ran for eighteen issues. The first article in the first issue drew attention to his view that the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the church,

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of America, 1985); Kenneth R. Ross, *Church and Creed in Scotland: The Free Church Case 1900-1904 and its Origins* (Edinburgh, 1988); Nicholas R. Needham, *The Doctrine of Holy Scripture in the Free Church Fathers* (Edinburgh, 1991); James Lachlan Macleod, *The Second Disruption: The Free Church in Victorian Scotland and the Origins of the Free Presbyterian Church* (Tuckwell Press, 2000); Iain H. Murray, *A Scottish Christian Heritage* (Edinburgh, 2006), especially chapter 11, “The tragedy of the Free Church of Scotland”, pp. 367-396; Hugh M. Ferrier, *Echoes from Scotland’s Heritage of Grace* (Tain, 2006); Ian Hamilton, *The Erosion of Calvinist Orthodoxy* (1st edn., Edinburgh, 1990; 2nd enlarged edn., Fearn, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Roy Middleton, “Jonathan Ranken Anderson and the Free Church of Scotland, II”, *Scottish Reformation Society Historical Journal* (cited afterwards as *SRSHJ*), Vol. 5 (2015), pp. 211-318 (see pp. 261-262). For background to the present paper, see this and Roy Middleton, “Jonathan Ranken Anderson and the Free Church of Scotland, I”, *SRSHJ*, Vol. 4 (2014), pp. 134-274.

<sup>3</sup> John Macleod, *By-Paths of Highland Church History* (Edinburgh, 1965), p. 29.

which in turn had led to a decline in the power of godliness.<sup>4</sup> Anderson made precisely the same point in a letter to his congregation, written in September 1852. He wrote, “Now, the Spirit of God is, to a fearful extent, taken away from the present generation of both ministers and people”.<sup>5</sup> This was seen, said Anderson, in the fact that, “We hardly ever hear of sinners shaken in their security, moved to concern about the salvation of their souls, and constrained by heartfelt alarm to cry out ‘What must we do?’. We rarely find in the books that are published, in the sermons that are preached . . . evidence of that peculiar light which the Spirit of God communicates to the soul, and by which he reveals God in his infinite majesty, the Saviour in his abounding grace, the law in its spotless purity; sin in its unspeakable evil; hell in its dreadful torments and heaven in its endless joy. . . . The consequence of this departure is that the Lord Jesus is a stranger in the midst of this generation.”<sup>6</sup> Another manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s withdrawal is an unwillingness to defend the truth. In an article entitled “A Faithful Watchman” he wrote, “By many it seems to be thought that a watchman may be faithful, though he never raises his voice against those that are unfaithful”.<sup>7</sup>

Nearly a year later he adds, “We fear the instances are now extremely rare in which sound doctrine is taught; and even where it is, there is no spiritual unction, no pointed appeal, no close application, no convincing argument, no persuasive motive”.<sup>8</sup> Anderson’s analysis of the Free Church had become similar to that of the remnant of the Covenanters as they viewed the Established Church. He cites with approval the author of *Naphtali or the Wrestlings of the Church of Scotland for the Kingdom of Christ*, “We are confident that it has been both the sin and the misery of all apostatising churches that they had not resisted the beginnings of defection”.<sup>9</sup> In Anderson’s view, “the hardest and most difficult service that God called any of his ministers unto, excepting only Jesus Christ and his Apostles, hath been in endeavouring the reformation of backsliding or spiritually decayed churches”.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *The Alarm! A Magazine for the times*, p. 3 (cited afterwards as *Alarm*). The pagination in the *Alarm* ran continuously.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Ranken Anderson, *The Free Church of Scotland: Her Character and Proceedings in a Series of Letters* (Glasgow, 1853), p. 66 (cited afterwards as *Letters on the Free Church*).

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>7</sup> *Alarm*, p. 42.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>9</sup> 1693 edition, p. 198, cited in *Alarm*, p. 229.

<sup>10</sup> *Alarm*, p. 250.

## 2. Free Church evangelicalism was not the same as Old School Scottish Calvinism

This is Anderson's sweeping assessment: "The religion which generally prevails in this country under the name of evangelical – and the purest type of which it is said may be seen in the Free Church – is not [the] Christian religion; no more than the pompous and worthless system of Jewish Pharisaism was the religion of the patriarchs, of Moses, of the Prophets."<sup>11</sup> In Anderson's view an evangelicalism was in vogue, "which is greedily received by a thoughtless and giddy-headed multitude",<sup>12</sup> that was very different from historic Scottish Calvinism. "We have men called ministers," he observes, "bearing rule in what are called church courts, and almost worshipped by their followers, who do not understand the very rudiments of spiritual truth."<sup>13</sup> Anderson bewailed the passing of a former generation: "A faithful ministry has well nigh passed away, and there has arisen in its place a thing which is marked by egregious folly, and cold-blooded selfishness and overbearing haughtiness."<sup>14</sup> He lamented the passing of men he highly regarded, and contrasted them with the current leaders of the Free Church. Making a withering comparison he writes, "We have now no Dr. Love – no Kenneth Bain [Bayne] – no Neil M'Bride – no Dr. Balfour – no John Russell."<sup>15</sup> In their place has arisen a race as notorious for their folly, as these men were

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> These men were all old-school experimental Calvinists in the Church of Scotland, in Glasgow or the west of Scotland. For John Love (1857-1825), see *SRSJH*, Vol. 5, p. 219, f.n. 27. Kenneth Bayne (1767-1821) was the brother of Ronald Bayne, DD, of Kiltarlity, and was the minister of the Gaelic Church in Greenock. For further details of Bayne, see Hew Scott (ed.), *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* (8 vols., 2nd edn., Edinburgh, 1915-50), Vol. 3, p. 200 (cited afterwards as Hew Scott, *Fasti*). Neil MacBride (1764-1814) was the minister in Kilmorie on Arran. In 1812 a notable revival occurred in his parish. Both Love and Bayne assisted MacBride during the revival (for the Arran revival, see J. Kennedy Cameron, *The Church in Arran* (Edinburgh, 1912), pp. 108-112; *Narratives of Revivals of Religion in Scotland, Ireland and Wales* (Glasgow, 1839), No. V, Island of Arran – an account by Angus M'Millan of Kilmorie). Peter MacBride of Rothesay was Neil MacBride's nephew. For further details of Neil MacBride, see Hew Scott, *Fasti*, Vol. 4, p. 63; article by Donald Meek on MacBride in Nigel M. de S. Cameron (ed.), *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1993), p. 504 (cited hereafter as *DSCHT*). Robert Balfour (1748-1818) was the minister of St. Paul's in Glasgow. He was awarded a DD from Princeton College, New Jersey, in 1802. For further information, see Hew Scott, *Fasti*, Vol. 3, p. 463; *DSCHT*, p. 54. John Russell (1788-1850) was the minister of Dalsersf near Wishaw; see Hew Scott, *Fasti*, Vol. 3, p. 247.

remarkable for their wisdom. The doctrines that are rife at the present day are represented by the metaphysical subtleties of a Candlish; the vagrant fancy of a Hamilton; the childish sentimentality of the Bonars; the evangelical rationalism of Tweedie; the magniloquent nonsense of Smeaton<sup>16</sup> and the babyism of these that belong to what Dr. Chalmers felicitously called ‘The infant school of Theology’.<sup>17</sup> Anderson believed that Free Church evangelicalism bore little resemblance to old School Calvinism; he writes: “We may be called proud, censorious, railing, and we know not what . . . but if we have truth on our side, and a good conscience, we can afford to take all the abuse heaped upon us. For the day is coming when modern evangelicalism, even in its highest forms, under its most plausible guises, and with its proudest supports, shall melt away before the piercing light of the God of judgment, as the mists do before the rising sun.”<sup>18</sup> In the first issue of the *Alarm*, he warned his readers that the popular religion led into the paths of the dead.<sup>19</sup> He later went on to speak of the “evangelical antichrist”.<sup>20</sup> The duty of the old School Calvinist in Anderson’s view was clear: “A great and arduous duty devolves on the Israel of God at the present moment – even to attack the stronghold of modern evangelical religion,

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<sup>16</sup> Anderson had written an extensive, and very critical, review of a lecture by George Smeaton in the fourth issue of the *Alarm*, pp. 57-61. The lecture under review was Smeaton’s introductory lecture on taking up the position of Professor of Divinity in the Free Church College in Aberdeen as assistant to Patrick Fairbairn; it had been published by him at the request of several ministers and friends who had been present when it was delivered. The lecture was entitled *The Necessary Harmony between Doctrine and Spiritual Life* (Aberdeen, 1853), and was doubtless behind Anderson’s comment cited above. In the review he says: “The style is extremely ambitious, and to a superficial reader, who is more taken up with sound than sense, may appear to indicate profound thought, extensive research, and considerable learning. But on close examination, it will be found to be a veil thrown over the most crude notions, shameful ignorance, and presumptuous trifling with spiritual things. Of true theology, we are bold to say, in this lecture there is none,” *ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>17</sup> *Alarm*, p. 212. Hamilton is a reference to James Hamilton; for biographical details see *SRSHJ*, Vol. 4, pp. 174-175, n. 128. Tweedie is a reference to William King Tweedie (1803-1863) who was a voluminous writer and, following the Disruption was minister of the Tolbooth Church in Edinburgh. He took a leading role in the denomination’s affairs and was successively convener of the Sustentation Fund Committee (1845-1847) and the Foreign Mission Committee (1848-1862); see James A. Wylie, *Disruption Worthies: A Memorial of 1843* (Edinburgh, 1881), pp. 481-488; William Ewing (ed.), *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1914), Vol. 1, p. 347, Vol. 2, p. 12 (cited afterwards as *AFC*); and *DSCHT*, p. 832.

<sup>18</sup> *Alarm*, p. 128.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 9, 98, 196.

and to expose the idols of silver and gold which are set up and worshipped in its temples.”<sup>21</sup>

Anderson reviewed the *Selected Portions from the Diary and Manuscripts of the Rev. Gavin Parker*<sup>22</sup> in the March 1855 issue of his magazine. The volume had been published seven years earlier in 1848. Parker was an old school Calvinist of whom he heartily approved.<sup>23</sup> In the review he cites Parker’s opinion of the popular evangelicalism in Aberdeen: “I have examined the popular religion of the place, from sermons published and heard. I find that it requires no teaching from the Holy Spirit to understand it – no power from the Holy Spirit to believe it – no special or saving influences from the Holy Spirit to profess and practise it. Therefore it’s not spiritual religion.” To which Anderson adds: “But is this description true of Aberdeen only? Alas! No. It suits almost the whole country: And yet there are few to proclaim the fact; and those few are hunted down, as the pests of society!”<sup>24</sup>

### 3. Free Church preaching was defective

In the introduction to his *The Free Church: Her Character and Proceedings in a Series of Letters* (which we have cited as *Letters on the Free Church*), Anderson makes his central allegation against the Free Church. “In her duly constituted courts, and through her acknowledged leaders, she has made known her mind. She has declared a thing to be the pure gospel of Christ, which is as different from it as darkness from light, confusion from order, what is of man from what is of God. The judgment of the Free Church is, in my view, clearly in favour of that species of ministry against which I have for years raised my voice.”<sup>25</sup>

Anderson then goes on in the most trenchant terms to lay out his case. He writes:

In proof of this, let me refer to her authorised periodical organs, to her most popular religious literature, and to the sermons of her most

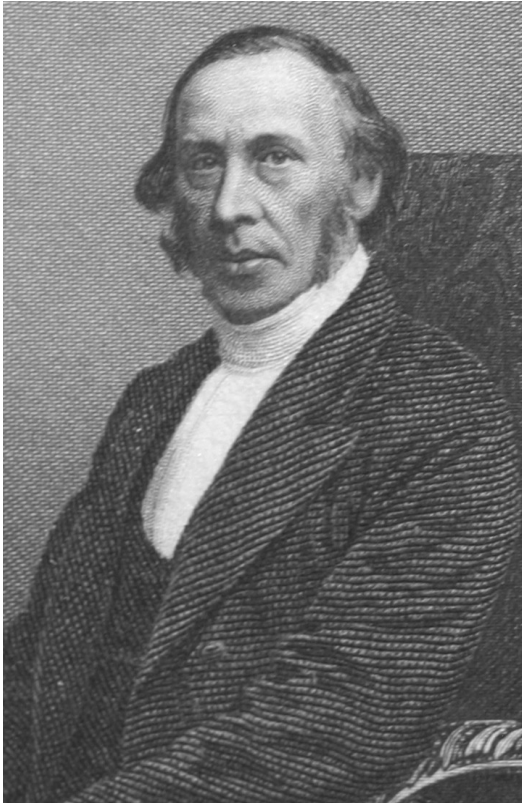
<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>22</sup> Susan Parker (ed.), *Selected Portions from the Diary and Manuscripts of the Rev. Gavin Parker, Late Minister of Bon-Accord Church, Aberdeen* (Aberdeen, 1848).

<sup>23</sup> For Gavin Parker, see *SRSHJ*, Vol. 5, pp. 218.

<sup>24</sup> *Alarm*, p. 44.

<sup>25</sup> *Letters on the Free Church*, p. xi. It is interesting to note that following the above statement, Anderson acknowledges that he has not taken these serious objections to the courts of the Free Church. He adds, “Nor does it matter to me, that this judgment was recorded, without any formal investigation of the charge that was brought against the ministry in question”.



*James Hamilton (left) and William King Tweedie (right).  
Two Free Church ministers whose writings Anderson critiqued.*

distinguished and applauded preachers. The reader will find precious specimens of what is taught as the gospel in the Free Church, if he will be at pains to look into the *Glasgow Examiner* of February 1 1851, containing sketch of a discourse by the Rev. J. Milne of Perth. He will find another in the *Free Church Magazine* of January 1851, in an article entitled "Streams in the Desert," by the Rev. William Arnot. The *Kelso Tracts* furnish other specimens, particularly one from the pen of the Rev. H. Bonar, entitled "Believe and Live," a great favourite with the Morisonians, and often advertised by them. The entire writings<sup>26</sup> of the same author, such as *Brief Thoughts on the Gospel*, *A Night of Weeping*, *A morning of Joy*, etc., are full of what I condemn. The contents of these books may be accepted as pure gospel, by a blind and carnal race of professed Christians. But when the true millennium shall arrive, one of the first things the men of that period shall do, will be to make a bonfire of such weak sentimental trash. Of the same sort are *Life in Earnest* and *The Mount of Olives*, by the Rev. Dr. Hamilton of London, works which, though sold in tens of thousands, are no more fitted to nourish the soul than pretty flowers, and brilliant shells, and party-coloured stones to feed the body. The theology of Chalmers,

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<sup>26</sup> This was written in 1852.



great though his fame be, will not stand the test of truth. A probationer in the Free Church of some promise, if not utterly blasted by his connection with that body, pronounced it to be just Butler's system of morals in a Christian dress, and points to the Rev. Mr. Tweedie of Edinburgh as the most perfect type of this species of natural religion. The Memoir of Macdonald,<sup>27</sup> by this author, who evidently did not understand the character and exercises of that eminent man, and that of Hewitson by Baillie of Linlithgow,<sup>28</sup> contain instructive illustrations of what passes current in the Free Church as gospel and Christian experience, but which all men of spiritual taste and discernment must loathe. The *Way-side Tracts*, for which some Free Church ministers have shown a great predilection, have only to be seen by a spiritual eye to be condemned as always puerile, often absurd, and sometimes positively erroneous.

As to the preaching that is general in the Free Church, it may be tried any day, and in every place. In the opinion of ministers and their admirers, it is the best Scotland ever possessed: and some are so enthusiastic in their admiration of it, that they give thanks they live in the blaze of gospel light! But how happens it then that in Edinburgh, as I have heard from not a few, students of the least pretensions to spiritual discernment, declare they know not where to go to obtain food for their souls? How happens it that in Glasgow persons who count it a sin to leave the Free Church, say they have gone all over the city, and cannot find what they need and desire? How happens it that in Aberdeen, where there are not fewer than seventeen Free Churches, people of reputation and experience testify there is not to be found a living healthy ministry? How happens it that in whole districts of the country there is one sad and bitter cry, that the truth in purity and power is not to be heard in the Free Church?<sup>29</sup>

In a sweeping assessment of Free Church leaders he wrote: "We have looked into the writings of Candlish, and have not found the Gospel there. We have examined the lucubrations of Professor Smeaton, and have not found the Gospel there. We have examined the sermons of Milne and Buchanan and Miller and Bonar and Arnot – and the Gospel was not there."<sup>30</sup> He reserved, however, his most withering criticism for Thomas Guthrie. In the summer of 1854, it appears that a magician

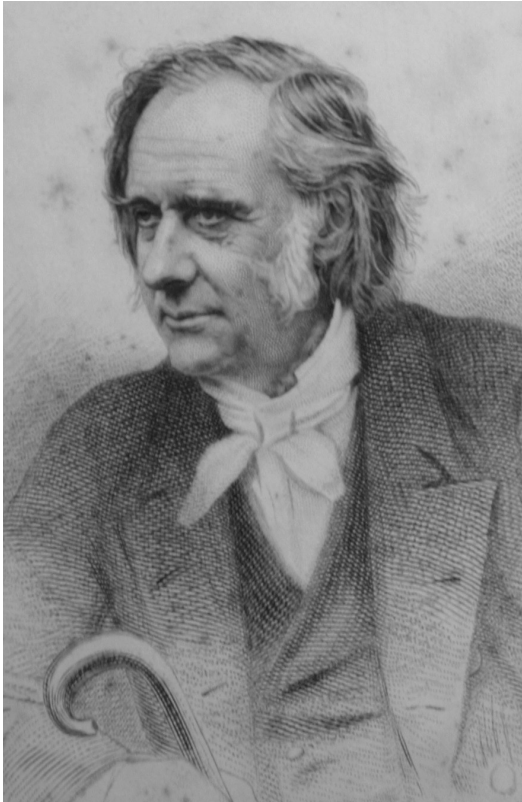
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<sup>27</sup> This is a reference to William K. Tweedie, *The Life of Rev. John Macdonald, Late Missionary from the Free Church of Scotland at Calcutta* (Edinburgh, 1849).

<sup>28</sup> This is a reference to John Baillie, *Memoir of the Rev. W. H. Hewitson* (4th edn., London, 1853).

<sup>29</sup> *Letters on the Free Church*, pp. xi-xiv.

<sup>30</sup> *Alarm*, pp. 18-182. This is a reference to reviews of sermons by these men in earlier issues of the *Alarm*.



*Thomas Guthrie, the Free Church minister of St. John's, Edinburgh.*

performed at a concert for the Ragged School Movement, which had been started by Guthrie.<sup>31</sup> After the concert, Guthrie gave a speech commending the magician, a man named Professor Anderson, who called himself the “Wizard of the North”. Jonathan Ranken Anderson was outraged: “We protest with all solemnity, against the whole affair, as a shameless outrage of the Christian religion. The word of God unsparingly condemns the world, and its lying vanities, and appeals to the consciences of those who, by grace, have been delivered from them. ‘What fruit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed; for the end of those things is death?’

Dr. Guthrie at his ordination vowed to know nothing among men, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. And yet here he is upholding and extending that, for the destruction of which the Lord Jesus suffered unto death: ‘He gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world.’”<sup>32</sup> It was doubtless with Guthrie in mind that Anderson observed, “A man, accordingly, may officiate at solemn religious rites today, and tomorrow preside at a ball, or perchance open a concert of music with a speech, or follow in the wake of singing men and singing women”.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> For a brief account of the movement, see the article by N. R. Needham, “Ragged Schools” in *DSCHT*, pp. 689-690.

<sup>32</sup> *Alarm*, pp. 22-24. The citation is on pp. 23-24. See also pp. 199-203 for an article by Anderson entitled “The Crying folly of Dr. Guthrie”, which details Guthrie’s appearance, along with actors and entertainers, on stage in a concert hall on a Saturday night. The event was designed to keep working-men out of public houses by providing them with entertainment. Anderson comments: “We have before us a stage; the actors; the audience; the performance; the time; the purpose; and we hold that the entire affair, and all concerned in it, are condemned by every line of the Gospel of Christ.” *ibid.*, pp. 202-203. In the sixteenth issue of the *Alarm*, dated April 1856, pp. 254-256, Anderson has a long and highly critical review of Guthrie’s book, *The Gospel in Ezekiel* (Edinburgh, 1856).

<sup>33</sup> *Alarm*, p. 213.

An aspect of Anderson's attitude to this group of ministers is, however, quite perplexing. He said frequently that Free Church ministers did not preach the Gospel. He refused to explain, even when asked, what he meant by that. He says there were those who said to him, "Show us where our error is". Anderson's reply was: "Show blind men what they call white is black – show deaf men what they call the language of Canaan is the language of Babel – show dead men what they call life is death! Oh, no, we have received another charge from him we serve: 'From such turn away', 'Let them alone; they be blind leaders of the blind; and if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch'".<sup>34</sup>

It seems from the available documents that Anderson maintained this approach for several years after he left the Free Church. However, once he began to publish his magazine the *Alarm* he detailed, for the first time in print, his opinion on what he regarded as defective in both Milne's preaching and those associated with him. In the April 1855 issue of that magazine, almost three years after the events of 1852, Anderson reviewed the published sermon of Milne's that had convinced him that his assessment of the Perth minister's teaching was correct. The sermon had been printed in the *Glasgow Examiner* of 1st February 1851. Milne's text was Mark 14:8, "She hath done what she could". The opening sentence of the sermon as reported in the newspaper is as follows: "That ministers when they visit their hearers, and anxious to know what they are doing for their souls or for the glory of God, generally received as answer, 'That they were doing what they could'. If one is doing all he can neither God nor man can require more. If any one does what he can God will set his seal to that person's salvation."<sup>35</sup> Anderson's response to this is trenchant:

Did anything more shocking ever come from the mouth of a man thought fit to occupy a pulpit in a Protestant Church? To us it sounds like blasphemy; and yet, from all we know of the poor creature that uttered it, we consider it quite in character. The supposition that any man does what he can is ridiculous; and by an obliquity of vision, very common in preachers of the modern school, what, in Mark 14:8, is a commendation for a special act on a singular occasion, is viewed as a general and absolute proposition. And what is it but undisguised Morisonianism, to say, that "if any one does *what he can*, neither God nor man can require more?". The claims of duty are here confounded with the ability of the

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<sup>34</sup> *Letters on the Free Church*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>35</sup> *Glasgow Examiner*, Saturday 1st February 1851, No. CCCLVI – Vol. VII, p. 1.

creature; and thus, if a debtor pay a creditor as much as he can, no law human or divine, can exact more!

But more monstrous still – “If any one does what he can, God will set his seal to that person’s salvation!” We know not where to find terms strong enough to reprobate such doctrine – it is abominable – it is heretical – it is damnable. To connect in any way, and under any view, what any one does, with a seal set to that any one’s salvation, is, in the most bare-faced manner to teach salvation by works, and to lay the great Creator under an obligation to give the choicest blessing of His grace to the fabrication of what at best, in the Scripture phrase, are filthy rags. Nor are these hasty expressions at variance with the preacher’s acknowledged principles – they are borne out by the whole tenor of the discourse, as the following passage will abundantly prove: “Remember ever that in human salvation man has his department and God has his. It is a universal principle that man must use what he has got before God will give him more. . . . Though the Ephatha could have made the grave fly open, nothing was done till man did his part; and the reason why we have so many festering lazarehouses is, that man does not his duty. Israel had to fight to dispossess the Canaanites, and when they ceased to fight God could do nothing.”<sup>36</sup>

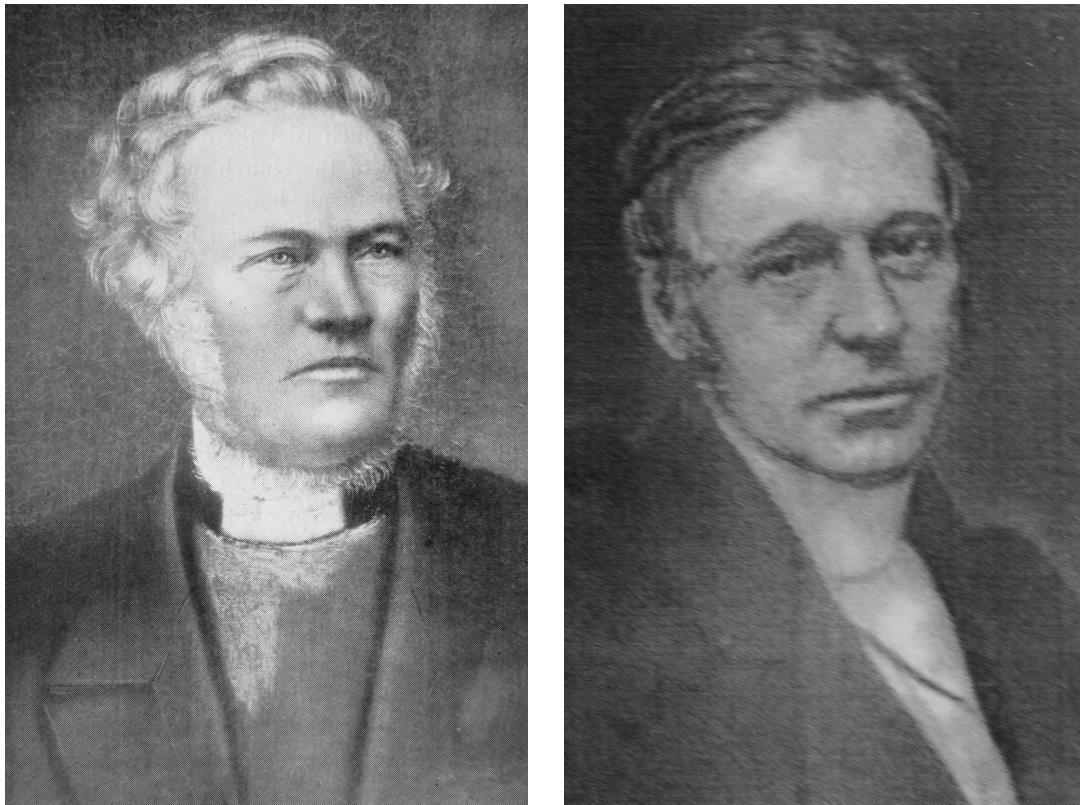
Anderson then makes an understandable application of this to his own case: “We leave these startling statements to speak for themselves. And now what will be thought of the so-called Free Church of Scotland, whose leaders, in their infatuated determination to uphold such a preacher as this, perpetrated a series of acts, the most iniquitous and oppressive that are to be found on record. For this, a large and influential congregation has been broken up and scattered: for this, a faithful minister of Christ has been cast out and persecuted: for this, the people in a whole county have been forbidden to hear the Gospel preached: for this every art, which worldly policy could devise, has been employed, to silence all testimony for the truth.”<sup>37</sup> In fairness to Milne, it should be added, that the sermon in the *Glasgow Examiner* is a report of his address written by a journalist who appended these words at the foot of the article: “We forwarded the outline of the discourse to the preacher as usual, but it was not returned when we went to press.”<sup>38</sup> As we noted in a previous paper, the sermon by Milne was part of a long-running series of articles in the *Glasgow Examiner* on “Our Scottish Clergy”. The articles

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<sup>36</sup> *Alarm*, p. 63. The further citation from Milne’s sermon is from the *Glasgow Examiner*, *ibid*.

<sup>37</sup> *Alarm*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>38</sup> *Glasgow Examiner*, *ibid*.



*Walter M'Gilvray (left) and Alexander Cumming (right).  
Two ministers whom Anderson regarded as preaching similar errors to those of John Milne,  
the Free Church minister of Perth.*

gave a summary of the preacher's career and then an outline of a sermon. Anderson himself had appeared in the series three years earlier in January 1848. He would, therefore, know by personal experience the journalist's level of accuracy when he produced his outline of the preacher's sermon.<sup>39</sup>

The type of teaching which Anderson critiqued in Milne was in his view not an isolated occurrence. He highlights several instances in the *Alarm* of which we will mention just two. The first was in the May 1855 issue of the *Alarm*, when he reviews another sermon in the *Glasgow Examiner* series. This time the preacher was Alexander Cumming, then the Free Church minister of East Gorbals in Glasgow and another member of the Bonar-M'Cheyne circle of ministers.<sup>40</sup> The text of his

<sup>39</sup> For further details to the background of the series, see *SRSHJ*, Vol. 4, p. 175, and f.n. 129.

<sup>40</sup> Alexander Cumming (1804-1880) was ordained as a Church of Scotland minister at Dunbarney in 1834. He signed the Act of Separation and Deed of Demission at the Disruption, and was translated to East Gorbals in 1853. For further details see *Memorials of the Ministry of the Rev. Alexander Cumming* (Edinburgh, 1881); *AFCs*, Vol. 1, p. 130.

sermon was 2 Chronicles 5:11-14 and Anderson critiqued the whole sermon at length and drew special attention to the following sentence, “Observe here, that when the people and priests did their several parts, God did his”. With regard to this remark he comments: “This is the doctrine of Mr. John Milne of Perth, and it is becoming pretty rife in the Free Church. But it is rotten to the core – outrageously at variance with our Calvinistic Standards, and with the whole tenor of the word of God.”<sup>41</sup> Two years earlier, in a letter to John Bayne at the time of Cumming’s translation from Dunbarney, Anderson comments: “We have got another Minister of darkness in this poor city, Cumming of Dunbarney. He entertained them on Sabbath evening with anecdotes, and one very long one about Columbus. Oh, the misery of spiritual guides that are blind.”<sup>42</sup>

A further instance to which Anderson focuses critical attention is an address by Dr. Walter M’Gilvray, the minister of Free Gilcomston Church in Aberdeen.<sup>43</sup> The address deals with the way in which a man or woman is saved.<sup>44</sup> Anderson describes M’Gilvray as perhaps the most popular preacher of the Free Church in Aberdeen and asserts that his address uses language with which an Arminian would readily concur. He then focuses on the following assertion by M’Gilvray regarding the sinner seeking salvation: “He believes that if he performs his part, the Lord will not withhold his blessing. And, accordingly, this is the very ground on which the sinner and the believer are alike encouraged to put forth their best efforts in the way of helping themselves.”<sup>45</sup> Anderson concludes his review in these terms: “For our part, we are constrained to write utter condemnation on the whole strain of this man’s lucubrations,

<sup>41</sup> *Alarm*, p. 80. The entire review is on pp. 78-80.

<sup>42</sup> *Letters from Rev. Jonathan Ranken Anderson, Glasgow, to Mr. John Bayne, Dunblane, commencing January 1851 and ending 1858*, letter dated 7th January 1853, p. 66 (there are two copies of this MS. collection of letters in the Free Presbyterian Church Library in Glasgow; the citation is from the single volume rather than the two-volume set).

<sup>43</sup> Walter M’Gilvray, DD (1807-1880), was born in Islay, studied at Glasgow University and was ordained to St. Mark’s in Glasgow in 1835. He was translated to Hope Street Gaelic Church in Glasgow in 1842. His exertions at the time of the Disruption affected his health and in 1846 he was sent as a Deputy of the Free Church to Canada. After labouring there for two years he returned to Free St. Mark’s in Glasgow and was translated to Gilcomston in Aberdeen in 1854. For further biographical details, see *AFCS*, Vol. 1, pp. 228-229.

<sup>44</sup> Walter M’Gilvray, *The Process of Salvation; or God’s Sovereignty, and Man’s Duty* (Aberdeen, 1856).

<sup>45</sup> *Alarm*, p. 270.

and to warn all who wish well to their souls to flee from him, and from the church which holds him up as an accredited and faithful preacher of the Gospel.”<sup>46</sup>

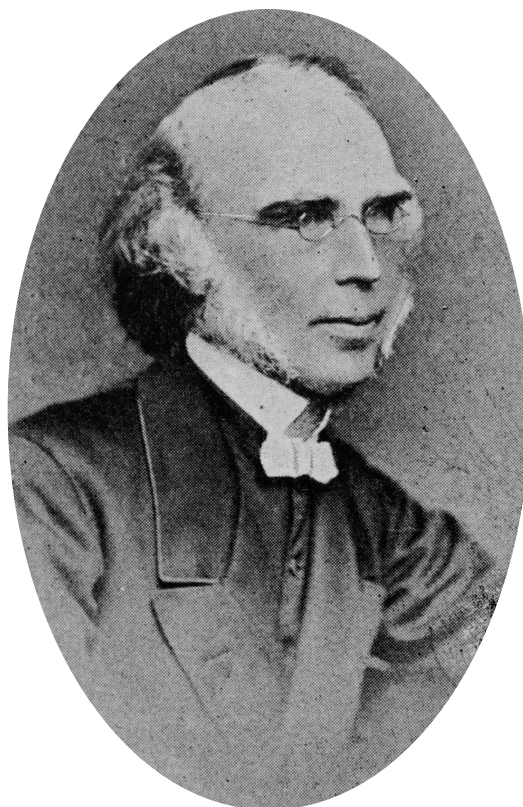
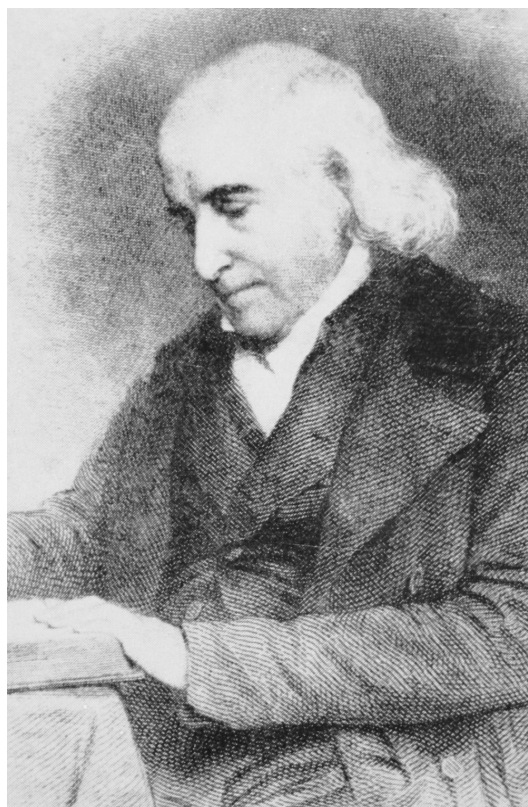
In the editorial to the September 1855 issue of his magazine, Anderson printed an extract, sent in to him by a reader, from the writings of the Secession father, Ralph Erskine, that was in outright opposition to Milne’s teaching. The extract was as follows: “If any poor deluded soul be expecting that God will justify him, and accept him, and show favour to him, because he does what he can; and because he performeth this and the other good duty, and hath a good heart to God, meaneth well, and the like; it is evident the man knoweth not himself, he knoweth not the purity of God’s law, and the impurity of his own heart, otherwise he would fear to think of standing upon that ground before God.”<sup>47</sup>

The type of preaching of which these men were examples, that stresses man’s own activity in salvation at the expense of emphasizing God’s grace, appears to be why Anderson was so critical of John Milne and his circle. Whilst the addresses by Cumming and M’Gilvray were published after Anderson left the Free Church, that was not the case with respect to Milne’s sermon. As Milne had subscribed to the Westminster Standards, it seems rather strange that instead of critiquing him in the way he did, Anderson did not raise a case against him in the Church Courts.

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<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* Ian R. MacDonald has a somewhat different assessment of M’Gilvray to Anderson; he speaks of him as the “able and scholarly minister of Gilcomston Free Church . . . a Gaelic speaker and a high Calvinist”, see Ian R. MacDonald, *Aberdeen and the Highland Church (1785-1900)* (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 201. M’Gilvray was the author of several books, one of which is a series of *Expository Lectures on the Epistle of Jude* (Glasgow, 1855). Charles H. Spurgeon’s comment on the volume is: “Vigorous, popular addresses by a Free Church divine,” *Commenting and Commentaries* (Banner of Truth, 1969), p. 197.

<sup>47</sup> *Alarm*, p. 130.



*John Brown (left) and James Morison (right).*

*Brown's Amyraldianism had a marked influence on Morison, who eventually became an Arminian and leading minister in a new denomination – the Evangelical Union.*

#### **4. The influence of Morisonianism and Bonarism**

James Morison (1816-1863)<sup>48</sup> was a student in the United Secession Church.<sup>49</sup> He was one of John Brown<sup>50</sup> of Edinburgh's favourite students. On the day of his licence Brown spoke of him as "the hope of

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<sup>48</sup> The most detailed account of Morison's career and the discipline case against him by the United Secession Church is William Adamson, *The Life of the Rev. James Morison* (London, 1898). A further account of the case against him, and the denomination he was instrumental in forming, is Fergus Ferguson, *A History of the Evangelical Union from its origin to the present time* (Glasgow, 1876). Morison's Evangelical Union united with the Scottish Congregational Union in 1896. The histories of Scottish Congregationalism are also helpful for reflections on Morison's life and influence; see James Ross, *A History of Congregational Independency in Scotland* (Glasgow, 1900); Harry Escott, *A History of Scottish Congregationalism* (Glasgow, 1960).

<sup>49</sup> The United Secession Church was formed by the union in 1820 of the New Light sections of the Burgher and Antiburgher Seceders.

<sup>50</sup> John Brown (1784-1858) was the grandson of John Brown of Haddington and the son of John Brown of Whitburn. His theological tutor was George Lawson of Selkirk. After two earlier pastorates he became in 1829 the United Secession minister at Broughton Place Church, Edinburgh. Five years later he was also appointed Professor of Exegetical Theology, a post he filled in addition to his pastoral duties. Besides holding strong



their Church”.<sup>51</sup> Morison became engrossed in the labours of Charles Grandison Finney and began to question the doctrine of a definite atonement. By 1839 he was reading Finney’s *Lectures on Revivals* and writing to his father, “get Finney’s Lectures on Revivals and preach like him. I have reaped more benefit from that book than from all other human compositions put together.”<sup>52</sup> It did not take long before Morison’s Amyraldianism degenerated into Arminianism.<sup>53</sup> He was ordained to the Secession charge of Kilmarnock in September 1840. By March the following year, he was before his Presbytery because of the teaching contained in an enormously popular tract that he had written entitled, *The Question, What must I do to be Saved? Answered*. Morison urged on unbelievers their ability and obligation to repent at once. The influence of Finney was unmistakable. His Presbytery suspended him and the suspension was confirmed by the United Secession Synod in 1841.

Anderson was convinced that similar views were finding a footing in the Free Church. Writing in the last issue of the *Alarm* he comments, “. . . we have not condemned the Free Church until by her public acts, through her chosen leaders and without one dissenting voice in all her borders, she set up on high what may be called Milnism – identical in its features with Morisonianism – and attempted to put down the truth of God, and pour contempt upon those who maintain it”.<sup>54</sup> In the conclusion to his book, *The Free Church: Her Character and Proceedings in a Series of Letters*, Anderson says of the Free Church, “she is so careless about her members, so reckless of orthodoxy, and so heedless of purity, that her people may at times amuse themselves with the mummeries of

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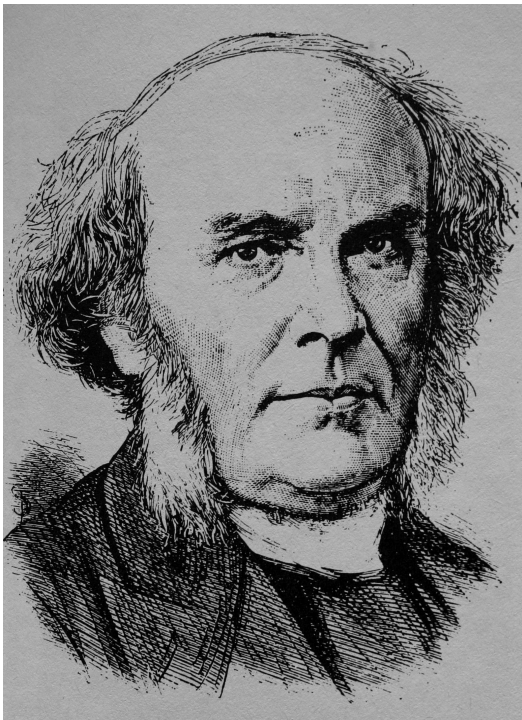
voluntary views, Brown also held an Amyraldian view with respect to the extent of the Atonement. For biographical information on Brown see John Cairns, *Memoirs of John Brown DD* (Edinburgh, 1860); Robert Small, *History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1904), Vol. 2, pp. 407-408, Vol. 1, pp. 456, 438; *DSCHT*, pp. 100-101; *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (afterwards cited as *ODNB*).

<sup>51</sup> Fergus Ferguson, *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>52</sup> Cited in Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism – Popular evangelicalism in Britain and America 1760-1865* (Westport, Connecticut, 1978), p. 98. See also Fergus Ferguson, *ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Morison was an Amyraldian at the time of his trial. Two years later he became an Arminian, “. . . about the year 1843 he brake through this last fetter of limitation, and declared that as Jesus died for every man, so did the Holy Spirit strive with every man, according to the measure of light which each one might enjoy, honestly and earnestly seeking His salvation”, Fergus Ferguson, *ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>54</sup> *Alarm*, p. 286.



*Horatius Bonar.*

a popish chapel, or listen to the heresies of what are called the new-view men or Morisonians, or do what is right in their own eyes; and not a creature will open his mouth against them – no elders will be sent to speak privately to them – no Kirk-Session will sit in judgment upon them, and suspend them from church privileges”.<sup>55</sup>

Bonarism was a term coined by Anderson to describe the teaching of Horatius Bonar (1808-1889).<sup>56</sup> He draws attention to the fact that before the Disruption, whilst he was still in the Established Church, Bonar had been taken to task for one of his “Kelso Series” of

tracts called *Believe and Live*. Anderson observes: “if we have been rightly informed he was obligated – in order to save his orthodoxy – to alter, or in some way modify the language of that tract. Nevertheless the Morisonians, till this hour, claim it as on their side, and freely advertise it as a most valuable production.”<sup>57</sup> Anderson admitted that Bonar’s writings had an air of evangelical sentiment and spiritual vitality. He did not question Bonar’s sincerity in the opinions that he held. Nevertheless he was persuaded that Bonar ought to be shunned as an exceedingly dangerous teacher.<sup>58</sup> Bonarism, according to Anderson, was certainly “not Calvinism; it may not be Arminianism, and therefore, like Puseyism in England, it seems to demand a distinctive title”.<sup>59</sup> Anderson detailed several characteristics of Bonarism that he believed were finding root in the Free Church. They were as follows:

<sup>55</sup> *Letters on the Free Church*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>56</sup> Though Horatius Bonar wrote several full-length biographies of other ministers, there is no detailed account of his own life. Following his death a short memorial volume was produced, *Horatius Bonar DD – A Memorial* (James Nisbet, London, 1889). See also *Disruption Worthies* (Edinburgh, 1877), pp. 39-46; *DSCHT*, pp. 84-85; Donald M. Lewis (ed.), *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography* (2 vols., Oxford, 1995), Vol. 1, pp. 117-118; *ODNB*.

<sup>57</sup> *Alarm*, p. 138.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p. 140.

- (a) It was a religion of sentimentalism “woven out of a plentiful store of evangelical phrases, ill understood and vaguely applied. In looking out for that which serves to give coherence, we think we find it in the assumption that believers in Christ are to be dealt with as men that are forgiven, and have the assurance of forgiveness”. This, in Anderson’s view, was not a faithful account of the Christian life. He adds, “We regard it as, at bottom, identical to the dreams of the Morisonians”.<sup>60</sup>
- (b) It stressed the work of Christ for believers at the expense of the work of the Holy Spirit in them. “A skilful instructor,” said Anderson, “never sets these two things over against each other, but combines them in beautiful harmony, and according to the analogy of faith.”<sup>61</sup>
- (c) It did not “give a fair and scriptural representation of the divine character. We have in it no trace of fellowship with Him who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all – who is a God of vengeance, and by whom all actions are weighed – who deals with men in the capacity of lawgiver, ruler and judge, and whose wrath burns against the workers of iniquity.”<sup>62</sup>
- (d) It was deficient in its views of the Person of Christ. Anderson commented: “We dislike exceedingly the title by which the Bonar School speaks and writes of the Lord Jesus – calling him ‘The Crucified One’. We know of no scripture that warrants this. He is the Living One, the Holy One, the Just One, He was dead but is alive again, and lives for evermore. We are inclined to refer this language to a sickly hankering after what is fitted to move the natural feelings.”<sup>63</sup>
- (e) It was defective in its doctrine of conversion. Anderson provides the following quotation from Bonar’s book, *The Night of Weeping*: “For what is our conversion but a turning of our back on the world, and bidding farewell to all that the heart had hitherto been entwined around.”<sup>64</sup> Anderson added,

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<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>64</sup> *The Night of Weeping* (Kelso and London, 1846), p. 28, cited in *Alarm*, p. 142.

“Such may be the view of Dr. Bonar and his disciples, but certainly not the conversion of those who are turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God”. He then directed readers of the *Alarm* to the *Shorter Catechism* definition of “What is effectual calling” for a more biblical view of conversion.<sup>65</sup>

- (f) It had embraced a highly defective eschatology, namely Premillennialism.<sup>66</sup> Horatius Bonar was a convinced premillenarian and was the leader of a group in the Free Church who held a similar position. Bonar edited between 1849 and 1873 one of the United Kingdom’s leading prophetic journals, the *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy*. This journal played a central role in the latter half of the nineteenth century in advancing the premillennial position.<sup>67</sup> Horatius Bonar and his brother Andrew first heard the millenarian message from Edward Irving, when he lectured during the week of the Church of Scotland General Assembly in 1828. Andrew Bonar says, “I myself felt the first thrill of interest in this subject – when Edward Irving was preaching in this city. He had lectures at seven in the morning during the time of the General Assembly, and for two or three years in succession, on prophetic subjects. We used to go at six in the morning to get a good seat.”<sup>68</sup> Horatius Bonar was a speaker at the first

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<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

<sup>67</sup> See Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism – British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (University of Chicago, 1970), pp. 84-87. See also the interesting article by Crawford Gribben, “Andrew Bonar and the Scottish Presbyterian Millennium”, in Crawford Gribben and Timothy C. F. Stunt, *Prisoners of Hope: Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1880* (Milton Keynes, 2004), pp. 177-202.

<sup>68</sup> Andrew Bonar, *Sheaves after Harvest* (Pickering & Inglis, undated), pp. 43-44. This autobiographical insight is given by Bonar, in an address that he gave in 1888, to a conference in Edinburgh entitled *The Hope of the Lord’s Return: the importance of the Doctrine of the Second Advent as a Motive and Help to Holiness*. In the same address he makes the quite remarkable statement, “Our Professor in the Divinity Hall was Dr. Chalmers, and we sometimes told him our thoughts on these subjects, and the opposition shown to us. He would most kindly say: ‘Oh, gentlemen, there is no harm in studying that subject; go on, and make up your own mind. I have not arrived at a conclusion yet; I am looking into it;’ and I am glad to say that before he died he ranked himself with the Premillennialists,” *ibid.*, p. 44.

Mildmay Second Advent Conference in 1878.<sup>69</sup> Rather surprisingly, after Irving had been deposed in 1833 for Christological error, Bonar edited in 1850 Irving's volume, *Last Days: A Discourse on the Evil Character of these our Times proving them to be the "Perilous Times" of the Last Days*. Anderson's trenchant comment on Bonar for acting as Irving's editor is as follows: "He ventured to re-publish a volume of the late Edward Irving, containing the foul heresy for which that gifted but eccentric man was deposed from the ministry. To be sure, in the nefarious deed, he had the countenance – so at least we are told – of some of the great names in the Free Church. But this does not alter the character of the act, nor lessen the guilt of him that perpetrated it. And, as we judge, a heavy account awaits all who had a hand in bringing again to the light of day opinions which ought for ever to have been buried in oblivion."<sup>70</sup>

Though John Milne of Perth would eventually become a premillenarian, he did not hold these views at the time Anderson opposed him. His change of view did not occur until after he returned to his old charge after his missionary labours in India in 1857.<sup>71</sup> Bonar writes of him: "He lived latterly very much under the power of that blessed hope (the premillennial advent of Jesus Christ). He did not speak much of it to those who differed from him; for he thought that the Lord only could give them the seeing eye, and that their seeing how it

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<sup>69</sup> For details of the Mildmay Second Advent Conferences, see Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, pp. 145-147; Harriet A. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (Oxford, 1998), p. 23.

<sup>70</sup> *Alarm*, p. 138.

<sup>71</sup> Milne went to India in 1853, two years after the death of his wife, Robina Stuart. In India he met the woman who would become his second wife, Barbara Nicholson – the only daughter of Simon Nicholson of the Bengal Medical service. Miss Nicholson was a convinced premillenarian. In a letter to Horatius Bonar from Calcutta, dated 4th August 1853, Milne writes: "Miss Nicholson, I find, is one of you; and I was amused to find that she was quite afraid of me, for she thought I was a regular David Brown man (a postmillenarian). Dear Horace knows how far I am from that, though not just quite so far as he would like, and sometimes hopes to see me. It seems our friend --- of --- had written to --- the missionary, giving a bird's-eye view of their future minister" (i.e. of Milne); among other things he said this: "He is a friend of the Bonars; he is *no* millenarian," Horatius Bonar, *Life of the Rev. John Milne of Perth* (London, 1869), pp. 463-464, see also p. 472. Barbara Nicholson had been converted under the ministry of Milne's predecessor in Calcutta – John MacDonald (junior), the son of Dr. John MacDonald of Ferintosh, *ibid.*, p. 344.

comforted and strengthened him would impress them more than words. Yet he often said that he could not understand how people did not see the premillennial advent in scripture, and that, since he had got the key, he had found his way into many an obscure text. This was after his return from India; for, in the earlier part of his ministry, he was somewhat opposed.”<sup>72</sup>

Anderson concluded his criticisms of Bonarism with this severe observation: “What will be thought of the Free Church that affords to this man, and his coadjutors, the most ample scope for poisoning the wells of public instruction and for causing the people to err through the wine of their spiritual fornication?”<sup>73</sup>

## 5. The Free Church attitude to money

A frequently recurring strand in Anderson’s case against the Free Church concerned the attachment to money of those leading its affairs. The leading article in the December 1855 issue of the *Alarm* has the title “The religion of money”. It began like this: “A new form of superstition has arisen among us. . . . In the Church of Rome we have the religion of power. . . . In Puseyism we have the religion of sense. . . . But in Free Churchism we behold something diverse from both these branches of Antichrist . . . we behold the religion of money.”<sup>74</sup> Anderson continued, “Free Churchmen are not ashamed to hold up their idol to public view, nor slack in calling upon men to worship it”.<sup>75</sup> The Rev. Andrew Gray of Perth declared that the Sustentation Fund was “the lifeblood of the Free Church”.<sup>76</sup>

Anderson tells of a man belonging to the Established Church entering a splendid Free Church with the desire to hear a simple Gospel sermon and, to his disgust, hearing an harangue on the Sustentation Fund.<sup>77</sup> He was scathing of Robert Buchanan’s<sup>78</sup> attempt to force up

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<sup>72</sup> Horatius Bonar, *ibid.*, pp. 390-391. The views of the Bonars and their circle of premillennialists got them the nickname of “The Evangelical Light Infantry.” See John Macleod, *Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh, 1943), p. 278.

<sup>73</sup> *Alarm*, p. 143. See also *Letters on the Free Church*, p. xii.

<sup>74</sup> *Alarm*, p. 179.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> As we have seen in previous papers, Buchanan took a leading role in dealing with Anderson’s case in the Glasgow Presbytery and in representing that court before the General Assembly. In addition to being the minister of the Tron Church in Glasgow,

giving to the Sustentation Fund by a quarter. “We have never heard,” said Anderson, “. . . a proposal to elevate by one fourth the character of the ministry in learning, in diligence, in godliness. . . . The reason is obvious; it is not learning that is sought but Money; it is not diligence in winning souls for Christ that is wanted – it is Money; it is not fear of God that is required – it is Money.”<sup>79</sup>

Anderson’s contention was that the Free Church was obsessed about the Sustentation Fund. “You cannot take up a paper in her interest, but you will find it full of reports of Synods, Presbyteries, etc., about the Fund. The Fund, nothing but the Fund! The existence of the church and a gospel ministry, the continuance of gospel ordinances in the land, all these . . . depend on the Fund. Your purse or your life, says the Highwayman. Your purse or your soul, says the Free Church priest in his rounds with his elder or deacon.”<sup>80</sup> A shortfall in the Fund, according to the convener of the Sustentation Committee, is a sign of decay of spiritual life.<sup>81</sup> Writing in his diary in 1854, Anderson observes, “I was utterly disgusted by a letter from C. J. B. (Charles J. Brown, the minister of New North Free Church in Edinburgh) in the *Guardian*, urging people to make the increase of the Sustentation Fund matter of prayer! Oh, what will this poor society of begging friars come to? I suppose to purgatory at last.”<sup>82</sup> In the May 1856 edition of the *Alarm*, Anderson cites a document written by Alexander Cumming in which he asserts: “Indeed, we do not regard any right impression as having been produced on those reclaimed from non-attendance on ordinances, unless they seem improved in their provident habits, and an anxiety about the salvation of their souls, *so as to be willing to pay for their seats, and contribute to the Sustentation*

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Buchanan was appointed the convener of the Sustentation Fund Committee, the central fund of the Church in 1847, a position he held until his death in Rome twenty-eight years later. Norman L. Walker says that he, along with Hugh Handyside, a secretary of the Sustentation Fund Committee, “traversed the whole country addressing meetings and urging upon the consciences of his hearers the duty of giving more liberally for the support of the ministry”, *Chapters from the History of the Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1895), p. 57. The *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland* state with regard to Buchanan’s convenership, “. . . it would be difficult to say how much that fund, and the Church which benefited by it, owed to the weight of character, calmness and firmness of its convener”, Vol. 1, p. 108. Anderson saw things somewhat differently; he described Buchanan as “the comptroller-General of the Free Church Treasury”, *Alarm*, p. 180.

<sup>79</sup> *Alarm*, p. 180.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>81</sup> *Letters on the Free Church*, p. 81, f.n.

<sup>82</sup> *Diary of the Late Reverend Jonathan Ranken Anderson, Minister of the Gospel in Glasgow*, Vol. 4, 1854, p. 255.

*Fund.*”<sup>83</sup> Writing in the conclusion to his book, *The Free Church: Her Character and Proceedings in a Series of Letters*, Anderson asserts that in the view of many in the Free Church, “The Sustentation Fund is the barometer by which her condition is ascertained as prosperous or adverse”.<sup>84</sup> He went on to suggest that the Free Church be renamed as “The Sustentation Fund Corporation”.<sup>85</sup>

Anderson was also critical of Alexander Duff, the Free Church missionary statesman, for introducing the “Religion of Money” into missions. In the February 1856 issue of the *Alarm* he reviews a speech made by Alexander Duff at the seventh annual conference of the Evangelical Alliance and subsequently published with the title, *The Claims of Christian Missions and their relation to the unity of the Church*. Anderson writes:

The department of missions, like every other belonging to the Church of God, has been taken over by men who afford growing evidence that they need themselves to be taught what are the first principles of the oracles of God. For the sake of illustration, and to render our remarks more pointed and definite, we shall confine ourselves to the Scheme of Foreign Missions, got up by what proudly calls itself the Free Church of Scotland, a Scheme which, in wealth and importance, ranks next to the Sustentation Fund – that splendid but miserable prop of the Religion of Money.

We are every day becoming more deeply convinced that the so-called Free Church is little else than a huge temple of idols, and that the various schemes which she has framed stand no higher than as so many altars on which are laid the offerings of those that frequent the temple. The all-engrossing object of interest to the priests is how they may increase the number of shrines, add to the hosts of their worshippers, and procure the means of upholding and perpetuating the entire system. To call such a thing a Church is an egregious blunder, evincing a total ignorance of what that word imports.

As has been hinted the great altar in the Free Church temple bears the inscription “to the Sustentation Fund”. And so high is the place which it holds, that a proposal was gravely made to lay tax upon all the lesser altars till it should be sufficiently replenished – and the men who live by it have enough for themselves and families to eat and drink. The second

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<sup>83</sup> *Alarm*, p. 272 – emphasis Anderson’s.

<sup>84</sup> *Letters on the Free Church*, p. 80.

<sup>85</sup> *Alarm*, p. 143.



in importance is the altar on which are laid the offerings to “the Foreign Mission Scheme”, of which the great advocate is Dr. Duff.

He quotes him as saying in his speech, “Oh, bestow thy gifts that the heathen may be converted”. He concludes:

In this crusade – worthy of such men as Peter the Hermit, or Tetzal the Dominican, or any Friar that goes out to beg for his order; but one on which it never entered the heads of the men of other days to despatch a simple-minded Schwartz, a devoted and prayerful Brainerd, an accomplished and zealous Martyn – in this crusade, we believe Dr. Duff has done incalculable mischief.<sup>86</sup>

Anderson’s critique of the Free Church “Religion of Money” extended to the disapproval of publishing details of what each congregation gave to each of the denomination’s funds; “Let not thy right hand know what thy left hand doeth”.<sup>87</sup> He considered the publication of congregational giving in this way to be “bare-faced and unrelenting importunity”.<sup>88</sup>

Anderson’s assessment of the Free Church had become similar to that of the Church they had left at the Disruption. In a pamphlet circulated by the Establishment shortly after 1843, they made this claim: “. . . when a minister of the Free Church comes among you, probably it is to claim some arrears of your penny-a-week subscriptions. Let your toils and your honourable struggles to support yourselves and your families be what they may, your money, if you belong to the ‘Free Church’ must be forthcoming. Money! money! with the Free Church is everything.”<sup>89</sup> This assessment is further confirmed by MacLaren’s research into the post-Disruption years in Aberdeen, when he writes: “The Kirk Sessions themselves were continually pressed by the central committee operating the fund and occasionally found themselves receiving directives concerning the direct utilisation of the congregational finances.” An instance MacLaren cites is a directive to the Trinity Free Church Deacons’ Court regarding the use of church door collections; it

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<sup>86</sup> For Anderson’s review of Alexander Duff, *The Claims of Christian Missions and their relation to the unity of the Church* (London, 1853), see the *Alarm*, pp. 221 -224. The citations are on pp. 221-222, 223, and 224.

<sup>87</sup> *Alarm*, p.181.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *The Established Church of Scotland: the truly “Free Church” and friend of the people* (Edinburgh, 1844), cited in A. Allan MacLaren, *Religion and Social Class: The Disruption years in Aberdeen* (London, 1974), p. 104.

read: "In the circumstances in which the Church is now placed, the main and primary object of the ordinary church door collections must necessarily be the supplementing of Ministers' stipends, it being for the most part more expedient that the relief of the poor members of the Church should be provided for by occasional and extraordinary appeals . . . [and] no sum whatever (even for objects that are highly laudable in themselves) ought to be paid out of funds arising from ordinary church door collections."<sup>90</sup>

## 6. The Free Church was Apostate

The culminating point of Anderson's case against the Free Church was his assertion that it was apostate. His experience in Church courts, where not a single individual supported him, either at the Presbytery or in the General Assembly, led him to conclude that there was not a single faithful minister or elder of the Free Church. He wrote: "She has not in any of her courts, so far as their proceedings are reported, a single individual that has the courage to testify for the blessed God and true godliness."<sup>91</sup> "We know not a single individual among the chief actors of this body of men that, in the judgement of charity, can be regarded as an enlightened, upright and consistent witness for God."<sup>92</sup> "There is not within the bounds of the Free Church one man of courage and honesty enough to rebuke this awful perversion of holy things, nor to deliver himself from being a partaker of other men's sins."<sup>93</sup>

In a letter to his congregation, dated 21st June 1852, he writes: "The whole body, from the elders up to the General Assembly, have tacitly or expressly recorded their approbation of a kind of preaching which I have been constrained to condemn."<sup>94</sup> Anderson posed the

<sup>90</sup> MacLaren, *ibid.*, p.133, citing *Trinity Free Church Deacons' Court Minutes*, 12th June 1848.

<sup>91</sup> *Alarm*, p. 116.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*, p. 213. Anderson on occasions realised this was an overstatement. In his letter to Mackintosh Mackay, he writes, "I do not deny there are faithful ministers and godly people in the Free Church. But not less must be conceded to the Church of Rome at certain periods in her history; else it could not be said, as it is in scripture, 'Come out of her my people'", *Letters on the Free Church*, p. 12. "I have reason to know that there are in the Free Church, ministers that would fain have a testimony maintained against its corruptions, whilst they themselves are left to enjoy their possessions without trouble and reproach. But this is a wretched policy, utterly unworthy of a cause which ought to be upheld as publically as it is assailed," *ibid.*, p. 51 note.

<sup>93</sup> *Alarm*, p. 256.

<sup>94</sup> *Letters on the Free Church*, p. 26.

question, “where was a gospel ministry to be found in the Free Church? Is it in Edinburgh? We know of Free Church people – still retaining, it is true, some little judgment, and not stupefied by the wine of fornication that has mastered others – who complain that in that city a faithful ministry is not to be got. Is it in Glasgow? We have heard of Free Church adherents who testify that they have sought all over the city, but in Free Churches the truth is not to be found.”<sup>95</sup> “How happens it that in Aberdeen, where there are not fewer than seventeen Free Churches, people of reputation and experience testify there is not to be found a living healthy ministry?”<sup>96</sup> The force of Anderson’s assertion that a Gospel ministry was not to be found in Edinburgh, Glasgow or Aberdeen, is only fully appreciated when a list of ministers is drawn up detailing those who ministered in these places at the time he wrote. Among the Edinburgh ministers were James Begg, Robert Gordon, Charles J. Brown, William K. Tweedie, Thomas M’Crie Junior, Robert Candlish, Thomas Guthrie, Alexander Moody Stuart, Thomas Brown, and Sir Henry Moncrieff. The ministry in Glasgow included David Brown, Robert Bremner, John Bonar, Robert Buchanan, Alexander Somerville, William Arnot, and James Gibson: whilst Alfred Edersheim, David Simpson, and Alexander Dyce Davidson were ministers in Aberdeen.<sup>97</sup> It appears that Anderson regarded none of these men as preaching the Gospel. Indeed, he seems to have viewed the Free Church ministry as largely unconverted: “For how can men open up to others a word which they do not themselves understand? How can they preach a law, which has never come in power to their own souls? How can they tell of heart plagues, which they do not feel? How can they guide to a Saviour they have not found? How can they describe a conflict in which they are not engaged? How can they warn of a hell, which they do not dread? How can they invite to a heaven, which they do not love? The great majority of ministers appear to be men as entirely ignorant of true Christian religion, as those that never heard of it, and are utterly unfit to be guides and examples to others.”<sup>98</sup>

Anderson’s assessment of the type of Church members that were in the Free Church is equally scathing. He asks, “What is the character

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<sup>95</sup> *Alarm*, p. 181.

<sup>96</sup> *Letters on the Free Church*, p. xiv.

<sup>97</sup> For full details, see *AFCS*, Vol. 2. For the Edinburgh Presbytery, see pp. 2-12; for the Glasgow Presbytery, see pp. 90-104; for Aberdeen, see pp. 172-176.

<sup>98</sup> *Letters on the Free Church*, pp. 67-68.

of her membership? Is it spiritual? The idea is preposterous. The more blind a man is in spiritual things, the more worldly in his spirit, the more carnal in his affections, the more worthless in his character, the surer he is to meet a ready and welcome reception into this degraded and loathsome society.”<sup>99</sup> “In vain do we enter their courts and expect to find ought to make us exclaim, ‘How amiable are thy tabernacles!’. For in finance, they are like the Exchange; in manners, like a bear-garden; and in behaviour, the world might put them to blush. In vain do we turn to their pulpits with the expectation of hearing the pure and simple doctrines of the Gospel: the people are, for the most part, mocked with childish conceits, old wives fables, pretty baubles; and not infrequently ranting nonsense or something worse.”<sup>100</sup>

Anderson caused an outcry in the Highlands when he criticised John Kennedy of Dingwall. He wrote a long review of a published sermon of Kennedy’s called *The Lord’s controversy with his people*<sup>101</sup> in the seventh issue of the *Alarm*, dated July 1855. Anderson asserted that Kennedy did not display “any skill in handling the deep things of God, it is rather rude and clumsy. Nor that it is fitted to do any good, it is a feeble and pointless attack on the enemy. But so far as concerns the higher elements of the Christian ministry – massive theology, correct exegesis and warm spirituality, it is a total failure; though it carries an air of faithfulness likely to impose on the unwary.” He concluded by adding: “We know not in what class of preachers the writer of this discourse is disposed to place himself. Nor is it of any consequence. For us it is very apparent, from the whole tenor of his observations, that in divine things he has yet everything to learn.”<sup>102</sup> Three months later Anderson acknowledged, in the introductory page to the October 1855 issue, the storm he had caused. He writes, somewhat defensively: “A great outcry has been raised in some quarters by the manner in which a certain class of ministers in the North are spoken of in No. vii of our Magazine. We think it gross injustice to throw upon us the blame which, if there be any incurred in the matter, is due to Free Church ministers, also in the North. We simply reported what was told to us – and told not in secret, but as a well known fact – that the men we named are held and treated by few of their own brethren as

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<sup>99</sup> *Alarm*, p. 117.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>101</sup> John Kennedy, *The Lord’s controversy with his people* (Dingwall and Edinburgh, 1854).

<sup>102</sup> The review is in *Alarm*, pp. 105-109. The citations are on pp. 106, 109.

Strong Men.”<sup>103</sup> Anderson viewed the Free Church as not believing what it professed to believe – heterodoxy pervaded everything. A secular spirit had led to an almost total absence of concern for the safety of the soul.<sup>104</sup> He concluded from all this that the duty of a Christian was to leave such a body. He observed: “We do marvel that any man with a spark of light in his soul, or truth in his conscience, can continue a day in such a place.”<sup>105</sup> In June 1852, three weeks after he left the Free Church, Anderson wrote to his old congregation with this exhortation: “I believe that there are to be found within the domain of the Free Church those that belong to the visible church, though I am pretty sure they will not long be there, but be constrained to hear the voice of their King and Head, ‘Come out of her, my people’.”<sup>106</sup>

It was this last point of Anderson’s case against the Free Church that led to such strong opposition to him. There were many conservative ministers who would have agreed with some aspects of his other criticisms. His views, however, that no single individual had the courage to testify for the blessed God and godliness, or that the Gospel was not being preached in any Free Church in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Aberdeen, were understandably regarded by Free Churchmen as both unfair and inaccurate. Robert Rainy,<sup>107</sup> writing part of William Cunningham’s biography, details Cunningham’s and the Free Church leaders’ view of Anderson: “He took very high ground in point of orthodoxy, but still higher as regards the true exposition and enforcement of genuine religious experience; distinguishing ‘the precious from the vile’ in a way which, as his people believed, and as he himself was thought to believe with them, was not approached except by a very select few in any of the Churches. This spiritual arrogance grew upon him, and at last he took to running down publicly some of his brethren in the ministry, including some who were looked upon as among the most useful ministers of the day.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *Alarm*, p. 146.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 101, 84, 210.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>106</sup> *Letters on the Free Church*, p. 24.

<sup>107</sup> Robert Rainy cannot be regarded as being unbiased in his assessment of Anderson. As was seen in *SRSHJ*, Vol. 5, p. 251, he debarred from the Lord’s Table Anderson’s supporters in his first charge at Huntly. He viewed them as excessively religious and narrow-minded.

<sup>108</sup> James Mackenzie and Robert Rainy, *Life of William Cunningham DD* (London, 1871), p. 389.

Anderson concludes his book of letters, written shortly after he left the Free Church with this paragraph: “The illusion of the Free Church may last for a while, but it will one day be dispelled. A few throughout the country begin already to see that her professions are large, but her performances small – her name great, but her works worthless – her demands exorbitant, but her benefits stunted. In due time her real character will be made manifest to all men; and then the truth which is now despised will be honoured, the people that are now reproached will be esteemed, and the cause that is now persecuted will be established.”<sup>109</sup>

Had Jonathan Ranken Anderson lived another few years and seen the revival of 1859-1860 and the strong Arminian influences at work in that movement, which marked it out as quite different from the revival prior to the Disruption but which drew little adverse comment from the leaders of the Free Church;<sup>110</sup> or had he lived to see the Free Church attempting a union with the United Presbyterians who rejected the Establishment Principle; or had he seen the Free Church supporting the Moody campaigns with Horatius and Andrew Bonar taking a leading

<sup>109</sup> *Letters on the Free Church*, p. 84.

<sup>110</sup> In addressing the Free Church General Assembly in May 1860, as the incoming moderator, Robert Buchanan said, “Two years ago, our Assembly was deeply stirred by the intelligence of what God was doing in the United States of America. One year ago, the impression was deepened . . . the pregnant cloud had swept onwards and was sending down on Ireland a plenteous rain. This year, the precious showers have been and are even now falling within the limits of our own beloved land. We as a Church, accept the Revival as a great and blessed fact. Numerous and explicit testimonies from ministers and members alike bespeak the gracious influence on the people. Whole congregations have been seen bending before it like a mighty rushing wind,” *Proceedings and Debates in the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1860), pp. 9ff., cited in J. Edwin Orr, *The Second Evangelical Awakening in Britain* (London, 1949), p. 58. An Arminian evangelist active in the revival was Richard Weaver, a Methodist revivalist and former coal miner. Weaver, who was a capable soloist, used his talent to great effect, not hesitating to interrupt his own flow of rough eloquence to burst into song in the midst of a sermon. He preached in Robert Candlish’s and John Milne’s pulpits. In a letter dated 17th May 1861, Milne says of him: “The Revival had begun and made some progress before Mr. Weaver reached us; but we all felt that he helped us not a little. I felt my heart drawn to him at once, as a man of special gift and grace, and whom God had peculiarly trained for an important service,” R. C. Morgan, *Life of Richard Weaver* (London, n.d.), p. 114. Before Weaver began to preach to a vast open-air congregation in Glasgow, he sang a hymn. Whilst singing, Weaver heard the ministers on the platform saying, “This might do in England, but it will never do in Scotland”. They were wrong. Before Weaver finished he had the congregation joining with him in the chorus; see James Paterson, *Richard Weaver’s Life Story* (London, n.d.), pp. 131-132. James Paterson, the editor of *Weaver’s Life Story*, was the minister of the White Memorial Free Church in Glasgow.

part;<sup>111</sup> or had he lived to read the debates in the Robertson Smith case or to peruse the higher critical books written by professors in the Free Church Colleges, he would doubtless have felt that his severe analysis of the spiritual condition of the Free Church of Scotland in the 1850s had been vindicated and that these events were the outworking of the leaven that he had identified.

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<sup>111</sup> On 16th April 1874, at the Convention with which Moody and Sankey concluded their evangelistic campaign in Glasgow, Andrew Bonar joined Ira D. Sankey in a duet, accompanied by the choir, in singing the hymn, "I am trusting Lord in Thee". See John Hall and George H. Stuart, *The American Evangelists, D. L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey in Great Britain and Ireland* (New York, n.d.), p. 125.