

1843 Disruption 2 - How the new church survived

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[0 : 00] The Tim Biggs' work and lecture on the disruption brings us to look at the survival of the church. We're going to be concerned especially this evening with the period that began on the 18th of May 1843, where last week we were concerned with the period that reached its climax on the 18th of May.

It was on that day that in the General Assembly gathered in St Andrew's Church on George Street in Edinburgh, the man elected to be moderator, Dr Welsh, stood up and opened the meeting with prayer.

But then he read a protest and explained in that protest the reasons why he and all who stood with him could not continue in that General Assembly.

One eyewitness, a judge, wrote a detailed account. As soon as his protest was read, Dr Welsh handed the paper to the clerk, quitted the chair and walked away.

Instantly what appeared to be the whole left side of the house rose to follow. Some applause broke from the spectators, but it checked itself in a moment. One hundred and ninety-three members moved off, of whom about one hundred and twenty-three were ministers and about seventy elders.

[1 : 26] Among these were many upon whose figures the public eye had been long accustomed to rest in reverence. They all withdrew slowly and regularly amidst perfect silence, till that side of the house was left nearly empty.

They were joined outside by a large body of adherents, among whom there were about three hundred clergymen. As soon as Welsh, who wore his moderator's dress, appeared on the street, and people saw that Principal had really triumphed over interest, he and his followers were received with the loudest acclamations.

They walked in procession down Hanover Street to Cannon Mills, where they had secured an excellent hall. They walked through an unbroken mass of cheering people, and beneath innumerable handkerchiefs waving from the windows.

But amidst this exultation there was much sadness and many a tear, many a grave face and fearful thought, for no one could doubt that it was with sore hearts that these ministers left the church, and no thinking man could look on the unexampled scene and behold that the temple was rent without pain and sad forebodings.

No spectacle since the revolution reminded one so forcibly of the covenanters. Writing fifty years later, one of the last surviving disruption ministers used a phrase that they walked out vanquished but victorious.

[3 : 09] Their struggle to win from the state a recognition of the rightful spiritual independence of the church had been defeated. Parliament had refused to accept their request.

And it was vanquished yet victorious that they walked down Hanover Street, if you know Edinburgh's new town. And there they went into this large hall.

It was actually a converted gas work. One might say a very appropriate place for a General Assembly to meet. But there they secured this large building.

It was... Oh, sorry. It was... It was packed with people. Some 3,000 people were screwed into the building.

But its low ceiling gave it very good acoustics. And every word could be read. Every word could be heard. It was... It was... For the... When the procession arrived in the hall, said an eyewitness, amid the most enthusiastic cheering, they found the space set apart for the public as full as the building would hold.

[4 : 21] For the leaders, seats had been provided on a raised platform. And when they took their places, the enthusiasm of the multitude broke out in irrepressible tears.

Dr. Welch rose and constituted the Assembly by prayer. After a brief reference to the past proceedings of the day, he said that according to the old practice, it was now his privilege to propose a moderator.

And that there was one man to whom not only they, but the whole country, he might almost say the whole world, looked as the man of all others who should occupy that seat.

He meant, of course, Thomas Chalmers. And Chalmers, by acclamation, was called to be moderator of the General Assembly. Chalmers then announced the first singing of that Assembly, and it was the psalm, the verses that we've just sung.

Psalm 43, O send thy life forth and thy truth. And many who, without being superstitious, were sensitive to the least token of God's providence, were greatly cheered.

[5 : 31] As Chalmers read those words, and as they began to sing, the sun broke through from behind a cloud, and through these skylights in the Cannon Mills Hall, great shafts of bright sunlight came shining through.

So great was the crowd there on the Sunday, when they met for public worship, that the preachers had to be carried in over the heads of the people.

The Assembly met there for the rest of that first week, and then for the whole of the next week.

Their meetings were characterised by remarkable harmony.

There was tremendous public interest in it. They had much to talk about. One obvious thing that they had to discuss was what name they were going to use for the new church.

There was talk of calling it the Free Protestant Church of Scotland. Some even suggested that it be called the Free Presbyterian Church.

[6 : 42] Others called it the Church of Scotland Free. But already the popular name for it was the Free Church, and quickly they decided that that was to be its name.

On the Tuesday, I think it was, just five days after the disruption, there was the great event, which is known as the signing of the deed of Domitian.

If you've ever been into the Free Church offices in Edinburgh, you may have seen the great painting, which is the original, from which this is a print.

My mind has gone blank. Who's the photographer? Octavius Hill, wasn't it? There was a man called David Octavius Hill, who was one of the very first photographers.

And 1843 was just after photography had come into existence. And what David Hill actually did was to take photographs of nearly all the men who were there in the assembly.

[7 : 56] And then from the photographs, he painted their portraits. To make this enormous great portrait, it must be 20 feet wide and about 10 feet high on the wall in Edinburgh.

But what they are doing there is signing a legal document renouncing their salaries, their positions, as Church of Scotland ministers.

What you have to remember, right through this story, is that up till 1843, ministers of the Church of Scotland were not paid out of the collection these were given by their congregation.

They were paid, in effect, by the state. And their mansions, their churches, were provided by the state, by state funds. The collections in Church went for the relief of the poor in the parish.

There was no other welfare agency in those places. So what these men are doing is signing away their wages, their salary, and their mansions.

[8 : 59] And the man who is actually portrayed in the picture, signing the deed of Domitian, is a man called Patrick McFarlane, who was ministered, I think, in Greenock, and he had what was the wealthiest church in Scotland.

He was signing away the biggest salary of all. You'll see Chalmers up in the lectern there. Down here you'll see Hugh Miller, who I mentioned last week, the editor of the Witness newspaper.

Here you'll see, I think this is supposed to be Alexander Dutch, the missionary in India. It's a poetic license to have his picture there because he was actually in India at the time.

But he too joined the free church and many others of them can be listed. They signed away their rights.

The other General Assembly, still meeting up in St Andrew's church, responded immediately by declaring all their churches vacant.

[10 : 06] There were, it seems, let's put the picture back up again, there were, it seems, at that time, about 1,195 clergymen in the Church of Scotland.

There's no clear agreement on how many entered the free church. A free church publication a couple of years after the disruption claimed that 474 had entered the free church.

The latest biography of Chalmers gives the figure of 454. But it was that sort of proportion. Anyway, just over a third of the ministers, something like 40% of men who had been ordained more recently, since 1830, over half, significantly over half, went with the free church.

There were regional variations as well as age variations. In the south of Scotland, where there were wealthy parishes that were very much controlled by the lords and the gentry, there were, understandably, fewer men who were committed to the free church cause.

Down in this area, in the Synod of Dumfries, only 19% of the ministers left. But up in the Synod of Ross, 75% of the ministers left.

[11 : 40] In the Presbytery of Edinburgh, 59% of the ministers left. And in the city of Aberdeen, every single parish minister joined the free church. It's interesting that of those reckoned as evangelical clergy, and something just over half, the ministers of the Church of Scotland were, one way or another, counted as evangelicals in 1843, some 260 stayed in the Church of Scotland, for various reasons, but almost 500 less.

Those at the time reckoned that it was remarkable that, considering the pressures upon them and the cost of joining the free church, it was remarkable that such a large proportion stood firm.

100% of the foreign missionaries joined the free church. As far as the ordinary people went, it's hard to tell, no exact figures, of course, are available, but it's reckoned that something like 40% of the members of the Church of Scotland joined the free church.

In some areas, especially in the Highlands, virtually the entire population joined the free church.

And when, in the coming days, people liked to ridicule the free church buildings, which were hastily put up, as we'll see in a moment, as the new kirk, the kirk without a steeple.

The free church response was that the Church of Scotland was the kirk without the people. The first assembly there meeting in the Cannon Mills Hall.

[13 : 25] Well, listen to one description of it. This is Chalmers writing to his sister a few weeks after the assembly. You would have been struck with the contrast presented by our outgoing clergy between their anxious and woe-begone aspect before they had taken their decision, and their perfect relief and light-heartedness after it.

Never was there a happier assembly, with a happier collection of faces than in our free church, with consciences disburdened and casting themselves without care and with all the confidence of children on the providence of that God who never forsakes the families of the faithful.

Left behind in St Andrew's Church, the Rump Assembly, the Church of Scotland, acted in abject surrender to the government.

They declared that the Veto Act, the Act back in 1834, which had given congregations the right to refuse to have a minister intruded on them by the patron, they declared that the Veto Act always had been null and void.

They installed all the ministers who had been deposed by the Church because of their rebellion against the General Assembly or because of discipline in some cases, whose cases had been dealt with by the civil courts.

[14 : 49] But they failed to answer the protest, the statement of why the free church men were leaving. Twice they tried to agree on some answer, but it's the fact that they gave no reply to the reasons that had been given by the free church.

There were then, that week in Edinburgh, two assemblies in Edinburgh. Thomas Chalmers' biographer sums things up well. The church was rent asunder.

What had divided them? It was no difference as to the doctrines of Christianity, for the creed and confession of both were identical. It was no difference as to church order or government, for the form of worship and methods of rule and discipline were in each instance the same.

The disruption sprang solely and directly from the terms and conditions of the connection imposed by the state upon the church.

The state demanded that the church submit totally and without limit to the sentences of the civil courts. On the broad and general ground that such submission was essential to the union between church and state, the evangelical clergymen looked on this demand as repugnant to the whole spirit and contrary to the very letter of the ancient constitution of their church and the laws that linked them to the state.

[16:27] They said it would be unlawful and inexpedient to comply with it and unable to submit to such a relationship between church and state.

They withdrew from the establishment. As far as the free churchmen were concerned, it was the state, not the church, that had violated the constitution, but to put it bluntly, broken the law of the land.

And they regarded themselves as the true church of Scotland disrupting itself from the state. That's why this strange word disruption was used.

There have been many secessions in church history, sadly many in Scottish history. A secession is when one part of the church breaks away from the other.

But the free churchmen said that if, and they would have liked it to have been the case, if every single member of the church of Scotland had agreed with them and stood with them, there would still have been a disruption that day.

[17:31] Not a disruption ending in there being two churches, but a disruption in which the church broke its links with the state because it could not in all conscience submit to the way the state interpreted them.

Of course, in one sense, in a very real sense, that is playing with words because the disruption was a secession. It was a splitting of the church.

But it's called the disruption because as far as the free church men were concerned, it was essentially a breaking of the relationship between the church and the state.

But for how long would there be two churches? It was an awesome task that faced them.

There had indeed been other secessions in the past, but they'd been more at first. And they had grown up as there were enough people to pay for a minister so they could get a minister and build a new church and start a new congregation.

[18:36] Here was a great company. Of ministers and people bereft by the stroke of a pen, of salaries, churches and mansists. How could they possibly continue?

How could they possibly be fed? How could they possibly carry on? It was for that reason, the harsh realities of the task facing them, that many people said, oh, before the disruption, it won't come to anything.

They talk a lot, but when it comes to the point, they won't do anything. It was agreed that the secession, this was the popular opinion, would not exceed twenty ministers, or forty at the most, and that the church could well afford to lose these fiery and restless spirits.

The submission of all the rest was counted on. It was not in human nature, it was said, to quarrel with its bread and butter. one gentleman undertook to eat all above forty that should leave the church.

He said, I'll eat every minister over the number of forty who leaves the church. And Mr Blakey said, we question if any South Sea cannibal ever performed a greater feast than this.

[19:49] Well, that was with hindsight, of course, he could make a mock of it. The government's expectation was that it would peter out and that most would go back sooner or later.

Others were more positive. One, a student in one of the secession churches, a man called John Cairns, described in a letter to his brother the disruption.

He apparently, John Cairns, was seen at the head of the procession leaping up and down and throwing his hat in the air. He says to his brother, it was truly a noble sacrifice and the very best results may be expected to the cause of true religion in our country.

Men were beginning to forget that there was such a thing as soundness of conscience or strength of faith to grasp invisible blessings and sacrifice earthly good for their sake.

Hence the party was scoffed at, produced and maligned in a way that nothing could justify but the supposition that they were knaves. This indeed their opponents did not scruple to assert.

[21:01] But he says, I can hardly expect, having been at the General Assembly, I can hardly expect to see a similar scene again for it was a wonderful sight.

all the pictures were drawn though of the men gathered together in the General Assembly enjoying the excitement, the adrenaline flowing of the decision having been made.

It perhaps was very different when they went home from Edinburgh at the end of that second week. we know a little of some of the men as they returned to their homes.

For instance, Andrew Boner writes in his diary, Monday, May the 29th, I returned to Collis, that's a parish up near Perth, country parish, where I preached yesterday in the open air to about 500

people at the end of the village of Kinrossi.

I spoke upon the Church of Philadelphia from the letters in Revelation and then upon Hebrews chapter 12 see that ye refuse not him that speaketh.

[22 : 15] In Glasgow, Robert Buchanan was the minister of the Tron Church, the church where Thomas Chalmers had been minister, where Alexander is the minister now.

He was one of the leading free churchmen. He returned to Glasgow late on the Saturday night at the end of the General Assembly and he'd been informed that his church and St John's church had been barred to the now free church ministers.

He'd hoped that he might have one last Sunday in his own church before he left but no, it was locked against them. So the City Hall in Glasgow had been hired, the biggest building in Glasgow. He wasn't sure what was to happen but that morning he walked with an anxious heart from his house in Richmond Street to the principal entrance of the City Hall.

The large, eager, anxious crowd which at that early hour thronged the street told him that the excitement and enthusiasm he had witnessed in Edinburgh during the previous three days were not confined to the actual scene of the disruption.

[23 : 27] There were hundreds of people outside the hall who just couldn't get in. The packed congregation inside sat through a service from eleven o'clock till one o'clock but when people arrived at one o'clock hoping to get in to the two o'clock service they found that many of those who had been at the first service preferred to remain in their seats in order to get the second service as well.

That was Glasgow. St Luke's Church in Edinburgh where Robert Murray McShane had worshipped as a student and where Alexander Moody Stewart, some of his books have been published by the banner, was minister.

That was one of the new church extension charges. That is, it was a new church that had been built during the 1830s. It actually had been paid for by its own congregation who had raised every penny of its cost.

For no less than six years after the disruption the congregation were able to keep their building. But although 98% of the congregation and all the elders together with the minister had joined the free church, they too were eventually deprived of the building which they paid for themselves by a court order.

But on that first Sunday after the disruption, they were able to worship in their own church. Up in the highlands, in Perintosh, when John MacDonald, a famous minister, returned from the assembly, the free church congregation, or the now free church congregation, met at the burn, in that open air site where last summer there were some open air services held as well.

[25 : 17] that Sunday was the first of a hectic year of Sundays and weekdays. William Hanna writes, never in the history of the Christian church were so many sermons delivered, so many prayer meetings held, so many addresses delivered by the same number of ministers within the same period of time as by the outgoing ministers during the twelve months which elapsed from the disruption to the General Assembly of 1844.

There was an enormous outburst of meetings, services, preachings, praying. Not only were there services to be held, there were collections to be gathered.

So much of the success of the free church which is the subject of our talk tonight really is due to Thomas Chalmers. Thomas Chalmers' battle cry was organised, organised, organised, organised. And his suggestion, there had already been set up a machinery for what has become known as the Sustentation Fund. If sustentation isn't a word you use every day in other connections, it really means support.

It's a fund for the support of the ministry. Thomas Chalmers' fund. Thomas Chalmers set up this fund. It was actually modelled on the sort of fund that he'd set up to raise money for the church extension campaign in the 1830s.

[26 : 49] Every parish was divided into districts of a few houses. Each district had its own agent or collector and he would go every week to every house in his district that was prepared to support and he would collect perhaps no more than a penny from each house.

And all of these pennies collected from every house in the parish, in the supporting community, every week were gathered together. One of Chalmers' great phrases was the power of little.

And he said, yes, we want big contributions from wealthy people, but he would use mathematics to show how much money could be raised by a penny given every week by a large number of people. Some of you, especially from the north of Scotland, will have been familiar perhaps in your earlier years with the sustentation collectors still going round from house to house.

I don't know if they do it still anywhere today, but that was Chalmers' great system. What happened to that money was that it was brought into a central fund in Edinburgh.

[28 : 00] And from that, every minister who was accepted into a free church congregation was guaranteed what was called an equal dividend. And if you like, a guaranteed minimum salary.

If congregations were more wealthy, they could give a supplement to their minister. But it was a way of the church as a whole supporting their ministers.

Chalmers argued strongly against leaving it to congregations simply to pay their own minister. He said, if you do that, the minister will be at the mercy of the congregation.

If they don't like what he says, they won't pay him. We want ministers who are free, not only from the interference of patrons, so that they've got to please a patron, we want them to be free from the tyranny of populism.

One might take issue with Chalmers' arguments there, or say that there are other factors that might be equally relevant, but that was the theory. Ministers were paid basically from their central fund.

[29 : 06] And the other point was that Chalmers hoped and intended that there would always be some extra. When every minister had been given this minimum payment, there would be some extra.

If there was a lot extra, there could be an extra bit paid to every minister, but the main use of that extra was to pay for new ministers to support evangelists and church planters, especially in the slum areas of the cities.

Chalmers had outlined this plan at the convocation when the evangelicals had met together to discuss what they should do a year before the disruption. They were saying, well look, it seems the state's not going to give in to our demands or our requests.

We're going to have to do something, but how can we possibly jump out of this great ship of the Church of Scotland? And Chalmers at the convocation had described this system and said, look, it is possible for us to survive.

It is possible to support the ministry. And he described this system. And one of the ministers stood up afterwards and said, we were afraid of jumping overboard from the great ship of the Church of Scotland, but Dr.

[30 : 18] Chalmers has just described the lifeboat. And so well as he described it, that many of us wish we had been in the lifeboat rather than the ship long ago.

The first equal dividend paid in 1843 was £105, which wasn't a vast amount, but was, I think, in comparison to other salaries at the time, fairly reasonable.

In the first three years of its existence, the Free Church raised nearly £1,000,000. Now, it's very difficult to draw comparisons, you know, financially.

I was trying to work something out on this to give you some idea how much a million pounds would be in today's money. All I can say is that if ministers were paid about £100 a year in 1843, the equal dividend for ministers in the Free Church, the basic salary of a Free Church minister this year, has been £10,000, which unless my maths has totally deserted me, is £100 times £100.

Is that right? Yeah. So in the first three years, the Free Church raised something like £100,000,000. It was an awesome amount in their days anyway.

[31 : 43] But the well-oiled machinery that Chalmers had devised and set up had a lot to do with it. There were also... Yeah, hang on. This is another impressive diagram.

thing. Um... Oops. No. You have to apparently give her the push things we offer to go to...

Yeah. That's right. I know. There's the supplementation fund. You see, in the first year it raised about £60,000.

By 1890, it was raising about £180,000. That may not look much of an increase to us, but I think we have to remember that there was virtually no inflation during those years.

Certainly nothing like the inflation of today. By the way, one book I was reading that was written in 1943 talked about the first dividend being £103,000, and then in a very helpful footnote said £103 in 1939 values would be £249.

[32 : 54] Today, £10,000 inflation. So that's not the subject of tonight's talk. Not only did they need to pay their ministers, of course, they had also to build churches for them to worship in.

Again, Chalmers had everything so efficiently done. There had been a committee working before the disruption, and they produced plans for a standard, simple free church building.

It came in three different sizes, depending on the size of the congregation. The plans were all drawn up, built as specifications, and they were sent to all the ministers so that very simple churches could be built.

One, in fact, had been built on Lothian Road in Edinburgh, even before the disruption. St. George's, the big wealthy church on Charlotte Square, of which Robert Candlish was the minister, had built its own disruption church even before the disruption, and it too was one of these plain, simple church with outer steeples.

There's another interesting sample of free church of Chalmers organising, even in this very picture, of the disruption, signing of the deed of Domitian.

[34 : 08] Do you see down here, below the platform, there is a set of what we call communion plates. Do you see the large plate there and the cup?

Apparently, I was reading this in one of the accounts, apparently, some trader, what's the word, somebody who marketed, produced, communion plate, had a set, especially brought there to the free church assembly.

You can see if you look closely that it's in a box. There was a sample. This is the name of the firm that will supply it. So here, in the very first days of the assembly, there's evidence, even in that little detail, of being well organised.

And you may like to take note, next time we celebrate communion, that our communion set is exactly like that, for our communion set was originally, originally belonged to Ferentrosch free church, which had five sets.

So many were the people who gathered there for communion. So there's one link with the disruption there. The ten years conflict, says one writer, was followed by the ten years rebuilding.

[35 : 16] That's what we've been, that's what the free church had to engage in. But in those ten years, there were major problems. Perhaps the most visible and obvious was what became known as the refusal of sites.

people who were not allowed, they were not given to the people who were given to the parish. The whole of a parish might be owned by one landowner. And in many places, these were the very people who'd been the biggest opponents of the evangelicals through the preceding years, the patrons who wanted the right to present the minister of their choice to the parish.

church. So it was in such places that the free church found that they were not allowed, they were not given anywhere to worship. In the towns, they found it easier to buy other sites, and there were also congregations of other denominations that would let them use their buildings.

But in places like Duttall, which is the parish that Carbridge is in, if you know that, just south of Inverness, and in an unnamed place where this very romantic picture was produced, very evocative of biblical scenes, there was evidence that the church was refused a site.

But it wasn't always as romantic as that. Down in the south of Scotland, in the parish of Cananby, the local landowner refused a site.

[36 : 50] Thomas Guthrie went there to preach in February 1844. And he writes to his wife, Well wrapped up, I drove out yesterday morning to Cananby, the hills white with snow, the roads covered ankle-deep in many places with slush, the wind high and cold, thick rain lashing on, a typical Scottish day, and the esk by our side all the way, roaring in the snow flood between bank and bray.

There, that's right, a turn of the road brought me in view of a site which was overpowering and would have brought the salt tears into the eyes of any man of common humanity.

There, under the naked branches of some spreading oak trees, at a point where a country road joined the turnpike, stood a tent, around or rather in front of which were gathered a large group of muffled men and women, standing in the middle of a road junction in other words.

Some, a few sitting, most of them standing, some with little children, some venerable widows cowering under the scanty shelter of an umbrella. On all sides, each road was adding a stream of clad men and muffled women to the group, till the congregation had increased to between five and six hundred, gathered on the very road.

During the psalm singing and the first prayer, I was in the tent, but finding that I would be uncomfortably confined, I took up my position on a chair in front, having my hat on my head, my codrington, presumably that was his raincoat, close buttoned up to my throat, and a pair of bands, the white minister's tabs, which were wet enough with rain, even before the service was well over. [38 : 36] The rain lashed on heavily during the latter part of the sermon, but none budged, and when my hat was off during the last prayer, some man kindly extended an umbrella over my head.

I was so interested, and so were the people, that our forenoon service continued for about two hours. At the close, this is rich, isn't it? This is preached for two hours.

At the close, I felt so much for the people. It was such a sad sight to see the old men and women and children, and pale and sickly, and others apparently near the grave, all wet and benumbed with the keen wind and cold rain, that I proposed to have no afternoon service.

But this met with universal dissent, and one and all declared that if I would hold on, they would stay there on the road till midnight. So we met again at three o'clock, and it poured on almost without intermission during the whole service.

And that over, shaken cordially by many a hand, I got into the gig and drove here in time for an evening service, followed through rain in heaven and the wet snow on the roads by a number of the people.

[39 : 47] I hope that the Lord will bless the word, and with spiritual grace, make up to the people for their bodily sufferings. The factor, in one place, a servant of the local landowner, had the gall to write to his landowner, advising him not to give the free church a site for the building.

It is well known that when the weather is at all tolerable, the peasantry, and especially mountaineers, find a great charm in out-of-doors worship, he wrote.

It's such places, and another famous one just north of Cananby was One Lockhead, where there's the highest village in Scotland, 1,500 feet up, and where for some four years the people were refused a place for worship and had to meet in the open air.

That was another such case. There were these denials of sight. In the island of Mull, the congregation met at Lockdon Head in a gravel pit that was tidal, and the tide came in.

The only benefit was that it sometimes cut the sermon short. The minister of the small isles, rum and egg and muck, was deprived of his manse and of his church, and ended up buying a small boat, which was called the Betsy, and he sailed around and preached to his people on the boat.

[41 : 18] Hugh Miller has a little book called The Cruise of the Betsy. One reason why the landowners were being so obdurate was what we touched on last week.

Remember that this was a time of rebellion and revolution. There were uprisings in Ireland. There were revolutions on the continent. And there was a genuine fear that the free church would just degenerate into a revolutionary movement.

Now, that problem, that concern, was very much in the mind of Thomas Chalmers. In his first address in the free church assembly, Chalmers had said this, Still more resolutely do we disclaim all fellowship with men who lift a menacing front against the powers that be, disdain government and manifest the spirit of contention and defiance.

There is on our part an utter absence of sympathy with the demagogue and agitator of the day. On our banner, in golden letters, may be seen and read of all men this inscription, That you are no anarchists.

And one of the pieces in his first address that received the loudest cheers was when he said, You, the free church, you are for peace, law and order, not tumult, turbulence and confusion.

[42 : 47] But it's significant that Chalmers felt the need to make such strong statements, for that partly explains the reasons why outrages like that congregation, they'd met originally in Cananby, they'd met in a field, but the owner of the field had got an interdeck banning them from meeting in his field. And the only place they could meet was on the high road.

In Strontean, in the most beautiful part of the Scottish Highlands, there was a similar landowner, he was an Englishman, Sir James Riddle, and he refused to give the free church people any site where they could worship.

They were reduced to worshipping on the beach. The land between low tide and high water mark technically belonged to the crown, and it was below the high water mark that the congregation met, until in about 1846 and 1847, an iron church, a floating church, was built on a barge from in Glasgow and towed round to Loch Sunat. And it was moored, the best place to moor it was right

outside the windows of Sir James Riddle's house.

But with great humility, the congregation moored it the next bay along. And if you know Stronte, and that's why the free church is so far outside the village today, because when eventually they built a church, were allowed to build a church, it was above the bay where the iron church had been moored away from Sir James' house.

The congregation were taken out on little boats along fixed lines and climbed aboard the church. And you could tell how big the congregation was before you went on board by how low it was in the water.

[44 : 35] One just hopes they didn't have too much deep theology. But that endured for a number of years. In fact, the church was eventually blown ashore in a gale, and the congregation still worshipped in this shore-blown barge. And when eventually a church was built, some 20 to 30 years after the disruption, the old iron church continued to be used as a local schoolroom.

Johnny McMaster, who was an elder in Stronte, and when I was interim moderator of it a few years ago, he'd been to school in the iron church. In 1847, though, Parliament acted.

A free churchman in Parliament, Mr. Fox Moore, raised this whole outrageous matter of people being treated so cruelly in a supposedly Christian country.

And a parliamentary committee, rather like these public hearings of committees that we've seen recently on the coal mines and so on, it meant to consider these things. And Thomas Chalmers, Thomas Guthrie and others came down to give evidence. And they were grilled by, you know, what we might call right-wing Tories, trying to demonstrate that these free church men were dangerous revolutionaries. And they had real tense battles there in the committee's debate.

But the free church won the day, and the government let it be known to the landowners of Scotland that free church men were dangerous revolutionaries.

[46 : 03] And they had real tense battles there in the committee's debate. But the free church won the day, and the government let it be known to the landowners of Scotland that their continued refusal to give sites for churches would not be tolerated. By and large, that was the end of the matter. In a few cases, it was as late as the 1870s before land was given in Ardnarmurken, down the road from Strontien, in Kilhoen. A site for a free church was not given by the local landowner until 1875, over 30 years after the disruption. For all that time, the congregation had met in a barn.

Some were continuing the agitation about sites after 1847. But Thomas Guthrie, the man who'd written that account of the service in the road at Camdenby, said, we have fought long enough. Let us spend the rest of our days ploughing and sewing. It's interesting that two of the most resolute political opponents of the free church, Lord Aberdeen and Sir James Graham, before they died, both said that no part of their public life gave them more pain than their share in the proceedings that led to the disruption. They had no conception, they said, of the strength of convictions of the people, and they had been miserably misinformed. Many individuals suffered persecution for their commitment to the free church. Many a servant or a farm labourer was dismissed because they joined the free church. Ministers were thrown out of their manses. There's a very moving sort of romantic picture of leaving the manse. The minister, by the way, in the picture is supposed to be modelled on Thomas Guthrie. And there were cases from as far apart as Tung in Sutherland and Coburn's path in Berwickshire, of ministers who had to live in very poor, inadequate cottages and died very soon after the disruption. Perhaps you might say, well, ordinary people lived in butt and bends and survived. But there is, of course, you know, in hardship, apart from absolute things, it is relative, isn't it? And if you've lived all your days in a, in a comfortable, warm house and thrown out and live, as one minister did, in a, in a loft where his breath froze on his blanket every night, then that is real hardship.

The free church had to provide not only new churches for over 600 congregations immediately after the disruption, but also manses for 600 ministers. Thomas Guthrie, as we've mentioned already, he set up a manse fund. And between 1845 and 1846, he raised 116,000 pounds. If you want to multiply that by a hundred in today's terms. And that in the midst of a period when the church was raising the incredible sums for sustentation and for all sorts of other causes.

And that figure was in addition to money that individual congregations raised. Another need for the free church was to build schools and to pay school teachers. Something like 212 school teachers throughout Scotland had been dismissed for joining the free church at the disruption. Schools were built and school teachers were paid for. Teacher training colleges were started.

Murray House College in Edinburgh was a free church teacher training college. And of course, in addition, the free church had to set up a training college for ministers. And what's now a new college on the mound began meeting in George Street in Edinburgh until it moved to the mound in 1850.

[50 : 18] Originally, the plan was to have a free university with lectures in philosophy and arts as well as in theological subjects. But eventually it settled down to being a theological college.

And within a few years, the free church had two other theological colleges in Glasgow and Aberdeen. Another of the problems facing the free church in those early days was the shortage of ministers.

I've said that 474 ministers left in 1843, but immediately there were over 600 congregations. And within two years, there were 831 congregations in places ranging from Shetland to St Kilda to Berwickshire to Wigtonshire. The free church coped with the great shortage of ministers by setting aside ministers from their own churches for six month periods in which they were sent out on the road to preach.

Especially this was necessary in the highlands where there was a great shortage of men who could preach in Gaelic. One highland minister says that between the disruption in 1843 and May of 1844, he spent one week with his family.

Well, the free church was wrestling with these problems and triumphantly wrestling. Just to draw things to a close now, I'd like to invite you to come and visit the free church general assembly.

[51 : 54] We saw them gathered in their first general assembly there in the Tanfield Hall. And that big gathering. Every year the general assembly meets.

And the free church assembly had some extra meetings in those years. It met again in Glasgow in October 1843. And in 1845, it met in Inverness. No small feat in the days before a railway to Inverness.

But they travelled up there to the Highland capital. And 5,000 people crammed into the assembly rooms in Inverness to witness the general assembly.

On the opening evening, John MacDonald of Ferintosh, who was a moderator, preached in Gaelic. And when he gave out his text, there was quite a stirring among those who spoke Gaelic.

Those who could only speak English soon questioned and find out why the people were stirred. It was because he'd given out of his text the verse in the book of Acts.

[52 : 54] The men that have turned the world upside down have come here also. And John MacDonald preached on that. The general assembly doesn't fail to take itself seriously then or now.

Every year, the general assembly publishes a rather grandly printed volume of Acts of the general assembly of the Free Church of Scotland. This is the one for 1846.

And all the figures and the motions and decisions of the assembly. In those days, it also published this little pocketbook called The Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly.

It includes all the detailed reports. This much of it is the reports that were written and given to members of the assembly to read.

And this much at the beginning is literally a word-for-word account. It's a sort of Hansard of the General Assembly. This is actually one for 1889. But I've got a number of them there that I liberated from a disused free church some years ago.

[54 : 05] It's a quarter. And it's fascinating. You can read the things that made the assembly laugh. You know, so-and-so said this as this. Brackets laughter. Or cries of...

Cries of dissent. Even sometimes cries of rubbish. But it's a fascinating insight into the assembly. It's difficult when you look at the pictures of these men.

Chalmers and Candlish here. And some of these others. They're such great men. And when we read that they spoke and addressed the assembly.

For instance, that Inverness assembly. Thomas Guthrie spoke and gave a speech that lasted for over two hours. Thomas Chalmers arrived.

There's Guthrie. Uh... Chalmers arrived and spoke. His speech was of great length, says Robert Buchanan. Too long for his strength. Exceeding two hours. Perhaps too long for a lot of other people's strength as well.

[55 : 06] You know, and you think, wow. You know, how solemn. How awesome it must have been. It's intriguing to come across this. Robert Buchanan, we saw, is the minister of the Tram in Glasgow. One of the free church leaders.

He was sitting next to Candlish at that Inverness assembly. He's writing a letter to his wife as he went along. We are now once more in the assembly hall, and the business is proceeding.

There will be nothing of much interest till Guthrie comes on. Until then I pause. Guthrie has come on. He spoke, I should think, for I did not mark the time, about two hours.

Candlish, who can never sit idle, set himself, as the speech proceeded, to record the number of jokes. He made out no fewer than 106.

The house was absolutely convulsed. And yet all his wit told with inimitable skill on the furtherance of his cause. It's interesting.

[56 : 08] Maybe there are different temperaments and characteristics, but don't let anybody tell you that these great men of old had no sense of humour. And don't let anybody tell you either that, oh yes, of course they had a sense of humour, but they never let it intrude into their church matters.

I'm not sure that, well, I think it was characteristic of Thomas Guthrie, who was an incredibly lively preacher, that he should have 106 jokes. I think when he said jokes, it means witticisms and things that made people laugh.

But a tremendous liveliness there in the assembly. What did they talk about? In those days the assembly met for 10 days. It's interesting, reading the blue book here and the acts of the assembly, they spent a lot of time in what they called conference.

Not passing motions, but simply discussing issues. Things like the qualifications for a school teacher in a free church school. Things like Christian union, union with other churches.

They would have a conference on that. They also, though, and we read, they dealt with many important issues. Much time was given in those early free church assemblies to hearing deputations from other churches.

[57 : 28] Churches all around Britain and all around the world sent deputies to come and address the free church assembly and give them greetings. Some names that you may know crop up in these old records.

Dr. Merle d'Aubigny, whose history of the Reformation in England, the Banner of Truth, published. He came to the free church assembly and encouraged them greatly. César Milan, one of the great leaders of the reformed church in France, came.

Free church deputies or delegates went to reformed churches around the world. As early as the end of 1843, William Cunningham, who was one of the professors in the new college, went to America and Canada.

There he formed good relationships with the American Presbyterians. He met Charles Hodge, the great theologian of Princeton, and he travelled to Canada. When he came back, Cunningham said two things across the Atlantic exceeded his expectations.

The Niagara Falls and Dr. Hodge. Some Americans, who were greatly sympathetic to the free church cause, suggested that the entire free church, ministers and people, should emigrate to the expanding USA.

[58 : 43] Like the Pilgrim Fathers had done beforehand. Intriguing suggestion. So they spent time in their assembly, talking, listening to the delegates from other churches, discussing possible union with other churches.

For right from the beginning, the free church made clear cause that they felt the great imperative to unite where at all possible with others of like mind.

They spent time discussing those big problems that we've talked about. Refusal of sites, raising money for the ministers, building mansys and so on. To these, sometimes they gave attention to emergency concerns.

I don't know if you know your history of the 19th century. You probably know about the Irish. Such things can be reliable.

It was totally or largely ineffective. There were problems. Next week, we're going to try and assess the free church's progress and lessons from a little bit more objectively.

[60 : 15] But even then, reading some of these books, it's clear that we may marvel at the amount of money they raised. But, you know, they were human beings. And there's some evidence of a reaction against too much asking for money, too many demands, too many collectors coming and knocking on the doors.

And especially in the poorer districts, or the districts where the free church could not quickly supply a full minister, there's some evidence of people falling away. Not only, though, did the general

assembly deal with sustentation and education and contacts with other churches, they had a range of outreach things as well.

Home missions. The free church was powerfully concerned, as we saw last week, with the slum population of the growing cities.

A royal commission on religious instruction in the 1840s reported that in Edinburgh, one third of the population had no fixed connection with any Christian church.

They thought that was terrible. These days, what is it, 9% of the population are church members? But in those days, only 66% of the population. What's happening to that other third?

[61 : 35] And probably 75% of the lower classes were sunken in ignorance and irreligion, as it was put. There in those burgeoning slums and tenements of the Gorbals in Glasgow, that's where that picture is, or the Westport in Edinburgh, the free church tried to plant churches.

Thomas Chalmers gave up all his committee work to devote the last couple of years of his life to a church planting work in the worst slum in Edinburgh. Robert Buchanan's church in Glasgow planted a daughter church, which planted a daughter church, which planted a daughter church, which planted a daughter church.

And there was a whole string of free churches in the poorest inner city area of Glasgow. And the motivation was expressed by Chalmers. Who cares about the free church compared with the Christian good of the people of Scotland?

Who cares about any church but as an instrument of Christian good? For be assured that the moral and religious well-being of the population is of infinitely higher importance than the advancement of any sect.

Thomas Guthrie devoted much of his energy to what was called ragged schools, giving education to the poorest children. His statue is in Prince's Street Gardens, commemorating that work.

[63 : 05] Sadly, again, it has to be said that Chalmers' vision of reaching the poorest and spreading gospel churches on every street corner in the slums failed to be realised.

Increasingly absorbed by its own needs and increasingly dominated, perhaps, by middle-class aspirations, the free church did not become a major influence on the urbanised working classes.

But many continued to be passionately concerned. I told you that all the foreign missionaries joined the free church. The free church was faced with a problem.

Dr Keith said, speaking about Jewish missions at that first assembly, we're in a very different circumstance than we expected, and people keep saying to me, what are you going to do about your foreign mission plans?

My answer has invariably been, and I trust that to it you will warmly respond, carry them on, more vigorously than ever. And the free church did that.

[64 : 11] You know, in India, Alexander Duff had gone out as the pioneer missionary, and then with one or two colleagues, he'd started a school, and he'd gathered at tremendous cost and difficulty a library and teaching rooms.

Some months after the disruption, a German businessman appeared with a letter from a court in Scotland authorising him to seize all this property and library, everything, and to expel Dr Duff and the missionaries from the building.

The Church of Scotland had no missionaries, but it deprived those men of their buildings. They started again, and they worked again. Most important of all, though, was the free church's concern for real spirituality.

The state of religion was a recurring theme in those general assemblies. Not only did they hear reports on home mission and foreign mission, not only did they deal with other churches and all the practical details of church life, but from the very beginning, they devoted a large amount of time to what they called religious exercises, exercises of humiliation and prayer, challenging their people about their sins and failings, and urgently pointing them to the need for repentance and for renewal and revival in the power of the Holy Spirit.

They appointed a committee on religion and morals whose main job was to send ministers or representatives around the whole church regularly to examine the state of religion.

[65 : 52] And if there was revival, if there was a work of conversion going on, then the whole church wanted to hear and rejoice in that work. And if there was none, then the whole church wanted to pray and be stirred by it.

The General Assembly was characterised by devotion and by an eager concern, not just that it should survive, but that God would work in them and among them, and that Scotland should be gripped by the Gospel.

Thomas Chalmers died in 1847, and the man who, according to many, was the evil genius leading so many misguided people into the wilderness, was, even those few years after the disruption, recognised as a man of stature.

It is said that 100,000 people lined the streets of Edinburgh as the cortege took Chalmers' body to the Grange Cemetery. By 1863, the Free Church was a large, thriving church, amazingly successful, world famous, with men in its teaching and leading pulpit positions who are still justly well-known today, men like William Cunningham, James Buchanan, James Bannerman, Patrick Fairburn, and a host more.

They were the first themselves to say that it wasn't a perfect church. Was it a little proud and arrogant at its success? Was it a little backward-looking, glorying in the great days of the disruption?

[67 : 34] Was it really a united church? Was it really serious in trying to reach the whole population with the gospel?

Perhaps next week we'll have a few minutes to look at those issues and to ask in perspective, was the disruption a good thing to do? And what real connection is there between the free church then and the free church of today?

And what lessons should be uppermost as we commemorate 1843? But for now, we'll start.

I don't know what's going on. Has anybody got a question? Last week we had a couple of minutes for questions. Last week we had all the complex causes of the disruption.

Here we've got all the complex detail of the free church after the disruption. Maybe there was something you didn't quite understand or something that you're interested in that I didn't mention. Any questions?

[68 : 41] Quillings? Yeah, sure. When they went to other countries.

Well, they went... Yes, it's an interesting thing. They went naturally to the Presbyterian churches, but they were also supported by the Episcopalian churches, by Methodist churches, by Baptist churches.

And in... I mentioned delegates from other churches coming to the assembly. The free church assembly had letters from men like Edward Bickerspeth, who was an Anglican, an Evangelical Church of England clergyman, giving his full support to the free churches and its movement.

John Angel James, who was the leading Congregationalist minister in England at that time, he attended the free church assembly and fully supported them. So they had links not just with Presbyterian churches that were like them, but...

Or they travelled, the delegates travelled, you know, right, they went as far as Carolina, they went to Princeton, they went to Boston, they went to New York, they travelled.

[70 : 03] And considering the travel was so much more difficult, you know, these were the days before any widespread railroads, they travelled enormous distances, Canada, and to the colonies.

I didn't mention, it was on that chart, that this was a time, of course, of massive emigration, and very quickly they were sending representatives to Australia and New Zealand and not to New Zealand, so it hadn't been fabulous.

Yeah, yeah, that's right. I think there were just some steamships, so that helped a little bit, but, yeah. And New Zealand, of course, was virtually a free church colony. Though they didn't all go and settle in America, there was a whole group, I think largely from Sky, who, with their ministers, sailed first of all to Nova Scotia, and when that didn't work out, perhaps there were too many Lewis people in Nova Scotia, but the Sky ones went to New Zealand instead, and, I think it was at the South Island of New Zealand, but its roots were largely a free church.

It was virtually a free church colony, but that's another story. Right. Any other questions, comments? Blinded you tonight.

Yeah. Yeah. There is. I think it has to be said that the bulk of the evidence, or the bulk of the easy, available evidence, is from most of the accounts of the disruption were written from the free church side.

[71 : 31] And there is a sort of an element of glorification and almost of romanticism, you know, about the way the disruption is presented.

You know, that picture, I can't find it though, the picture of the minister in the boat preaching, you know, on the multi-children's shore. That may have happened, but, you know, it all, they had very good publicity, and naturally, they were heart and soul in the cause.

And it's very hard when you're immediately involved to be totally objective. But, yeah, there's lots of sources. Nearly all these men, like Buchanan, Guthrie, Candlish, had large biographies written about them as soon as they died.

And all their letters and their diaries were put in these massive books. And they're a real wealth of material. There are all the newspapers. In the Free Church College in Edinburgh, there are all the issues of the Witness newspaper.

And if you want to, you can wade through. And then there are these things, which are primary sources as well. So, yeah, there's a sort of... All Thomas Chalmers' correspondence is now a new college library in Edinburgh, and has quite recently been, what's the word, collated and indexed and so on.

[72 : 48] So, tremendous other resources there. No. That's right. And they spoke, you know, ministers were allowed to preach for two hours, and when they stopped, the congregations pleaded to go on, you know, it was...

Good days. But, I must stop.