

## Free Church of Scotland - Statement

A Plenary Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland met on November 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 2010 to discuss and resolve the issue of sung praise. The Free Church, for the last 100 years has been committed to the avoidance of uninspired materials of praise and musical instruments, following what it believed was the historical Reformed position on "purity of worship" and the Regulative Principle. Over the last five years though, some Free Church ministers and office bearers have questioned whether this position is the only scriptural one. After the Assembly asked the Board of Trustees to set up a process for resolving the issue, it was agreed that the matter would be concluded at a Plenary Assembly to be composed of every minister plus an equal number of elders.

After extensive debate, and upon a vote being taken, the finding of this assembly was as follows:

### **FINDING OF ASSEMBLY**

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Board of Trustees, and thank the Chairman, members of the Board, the Chief Administrative Officer and his staff for their work.
2. The General Assembly, recognising the divisive nature of the issue dealt with in this Report, affirm their commitment to unity and urge officebearers and members to find ways of continuing in unity after the Assembly has determined the issue.
3. The General Assembly, recognising that, after consideration of the Biblical and theological questions and widespread consultation throughout the Church on the question of the form of worship presently practised, there are equally conscientious and Biblically grounded but differing views on the subject, ordain and enact in the following terms.
4. The General Assembly hereby repeal Act V, Class II, 1932; Act I, Class I, 1910; Act VI, Class II, 1910; Act VII, Class II, 1910; Act V, Class II, 1905; Act of Assembly, of date 31st May 1883, entitled "VII. Act anent Instrumental Music (No. 4 of Class II)"; and resolutions authorising and sanctioning the use of uninspired hymns, of dates 3rd June 1872; 27th May 1881; 26th May 1896; and 24th May 1897.
5. The General Assembly declare that purity of worship requires that every aspect of worship services, including sung praise, be consistent with the Word of God and with the whole doctrine of the Confession of Faith approved by previous Assemblies of this Church.
6. The General Assembly ordain that every service of congregational worship shall include the singing of Psalms.
7. The General Assembly ordain that, with regard to the sung praise of congregations in worship, each Kirk Session shall have freedom, either to restrict the sung praise to the Psalms, or to include paraphrases of Scripture, and hymns and spiritual songs consistent with the doctrine of the Confession of Faith; that each Kirk Session shall have freedom whether to permit musical accompaniment to the sung praise in worship, or not.
8. The General Assembly advise that, notwithstanding the foregoing, no Kirk Session should agree to a change in sung praise or musical accompaniment against the wishes of the minister of the congregation, and that a visiting minister, presiding at a service in a congregation where the aforementioned freedom to use uninspired materials of praise and musical instruments has been exercised, may exercise that freedom or not as he sees fit.
9. The General Assembly ordain that in meetings of Church Courts the use of uninspired materials of praise and of instrumental music shall be avoided.
10. The General Assembly appoint a Special Committee (using consultants as required) to investigate the feasibility and desirability of producing a recommended list of paraphrases of Scripture and hymns and spiritual songs consistent with the Word of God and the whole doctrine of the Confession of Faith, and whether the Free Church ought to produce a praise resource supplementary to the Psalter, and to report to the 2011 General Assembly."
11. The General Assembly instruct this Committee to investigate, collect and, if necessary prepare from within the resources of the Church appropriate portions of Scripture, other than the 150 Psalms, in a form which accurately renders the thought of the original and is suitable for singing in public worship. The Committee is empowered to seek the cooperation of others with the requisite linguistic, theological, literary and musical skills and is required to report progress to the 2011 General Assembly.
12. The General Assembly instruct Presbyteries to organise a day of prayer within their own bounds at a suitable date after the Church has determined the matter, to focus on maintaining the unity of the Church.

It should be pointed out that the Assembly was conducted in a spirit of genuine friendliness and fellowship and, whilst there were several dissents from the finding, there was a lasting atmosphere of brotherliness amongst the commissioners. It should also be pointed out that this finding does not force any congregation to change their form of worship but leaves the matter to individual kirk sessions.

It is earnestly hoped that, whilst there will inevitably be disappointment amongst many who remain committed to the previous position held since 1905, there will nonetheless be a respect for the finding as that of the highest court within the Free Church, together with an eagerness to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" throughout the denomination.