

The Church of Scotland - Article 3

Subgroups / schisms

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Church suffered major internal disruption and schism which led to the formation of new Scottish churches.

In 1732, some who objected to ministers being appointed by patrons rather than by congregations broke away to form the Original Secession Church. This ultimately became a four-way split as members disagreed over such matters as the taking of oaths and whether secular magistrates could have any say in the affairs of the church.

In 1761 further disputes about patronage led to the formation of the Relief Church. In 1847 these two groups came together to form the United Presbyterian Church.

Free Church of Scotland

The Free Church of Scotland was an evangelical Presbyterian Church which was formed in 1843, when approximately one third of the Church of Scotland's congregations broke away.

The disagreement that resulted in this schism centered round the appointment of ministers.

Many felt that because the Church of Scotland was an 'established' church, political and legislative interference could take place. This showed itself for example in the appointment of ministers where the rights of a congregation to choose a minister could be over-ridden by the patron of the parish.

Today's Free Church of Scotland is a continuation of this denomination after a major union in 1900, taking a more conservative position. It is found mainly in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland

This denomination split from the Free Church in 1893 because of changing attitudes to the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The Westminster Confession had been adopted in 1647 by the Churches of Scotland and England together as a 'subordinate standard', helping to interpret Holy Scripture.

It enshrined Puritan beliefs of the time and not all felt they could affirm it completely. The 1893 Assembly was being asked to make allowance for 'diversity of opinion'.

The denomination is most active in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

The Westminster Confession remains the 'subordinate standard' of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church, together with the allowance for 'liberty of opinion' where a belief is not any more seen as agreeing with the Bible.

The United Free Church of Scotland

The United Free Church of Scotland was formed in 1900, when members of the Free Church of Scotland amalgamated with the United Presbyterian Church.

Today's United Free Church is a continuation of the former denomination when the majority of its members united with the Church of Scotland in 1929. It is Presbyterian and evangelical.

The United Free Church remains opposed to the idea of an established church. They believe this promotes inequality between churches and damages inter-church relationships.

Although 'established', the Church of Scotland today emphasizes the place of other churches in Scotland and seeks to co-operate with them.

This is the third part of a series of articles sourced from the BBC on the Church of Scotland that will appear in The Parishioner over the coming months.