



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

The Present Struggle for the Gospel in Scotland, Part 3.



A report on the split within the Free Church of Scotland which has seen a remnant withdrawing from what was once the Free Church of Scotland and reconstituting itself as The Free Church of Scotland Continuing.

Report of first Sabbath in Grimsay, North Uist, by Donald Morrison.

"I am a member of the Free Church of Scotland congregation in North Uist and Grimsay. Last Sunday I was one of the office bearers who was in attendance at Grimsay Free Church in order to give support to my minister, Rev James Gracie, as he prepared to preach to us at 12.30pm. As many are aware, the events of that day became national headlines in the press due to the actions of some. I write in order to clarify what happened on that occasion and to set the record straight. It was reported in the Scotsman (25/1/00) that: "Worshippers had been driven to gain access by force after an elder and two others had locked themselves in the church and refused to open it". This statement is untrue. I was one of those "two others", and am therefore in a position to record what actually happened that day.

It is true that the front door of the Church was locked. However, the reason the church front door was locked was because the elder from Lochmaddy had the key in his possession and would not be at Grimsay until approximately 12.00 noon. Our service was due to start at 12.30pm and this would have left him plenty of time to open the church for the congregation to get into the building. Nobody had informed any of the office bearers that the Rev Iain Macaskill was going to take a service at 12.00 noon in the Grimsay church. Our other elder who was present had the key for the side door of the church which was open with ourselves inside the church. At approximately 11.30am, three men arrived in a lorry and attempted to open the front door. This door was obviously locked. By the time we got out of the building, they had gone up to the lorry and returned with a battering ram, sledge hammer and crow bar which were all placed at the front of the church door. We sought to explain to the men that we did not have the front door key, the reason for this being explained above. They shouted that they were going to get into the building and I invited Hector Stewart and his brother Donald Stewart (brothers of the Rev Kenneth Stewart) to enter the church through the side door and sit in the church until the key arrived. This they were more than welcome to do but they declined to do this and restated their wish to enter the church by the front door.

I then received a tirade of abuse from several other men who had gathered and fearing a confrontation that they might later regret, I withdrew. I then sent for the police to attend in case the situation might get out of hand. The Rev David Meredith has since questioned my wisdom for involving the police in a "local matter". I received advice from Northern Constabulary that very morning that should there be any problems at the church, I was not to hesitate in phoning for assistance. I believe that it was in everybody's best interest



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to have the police in attendance. When I appeared back at the front door it had been forced open. I entered the lobby of the church and saw that the inside lock was hanging by its screws. It had obviously been forced open. I was then accosted by Hector Stewart who said, "Get in there (pointing into the church) or get out". I replied, "I am fine where I am" to which he replied, "If you don't get out of this church, I'll have someone physically man-handle you out". This threat was uttered in the presence of four others. One of those was Alasdair Macleod (Laxay) who I believe to be on the F.L.A. Committee. He made no attempt to defuse the situation. Hector Stewart then entered the main body of the church and came out with another man from the congregation. With these two men in front of me, I thought it better to withdraw totally and without comment I left the church. The door was then closed behind me and somehow locked shut. We then waited for our people to arrive in the car-park and thereafter worshipped in a home down from the church.

The above is a true and factual account of what happened. Following on from this, I wish to make the following points.

(1) The Rev David Meredith issued a press release saying that we refused to open the church. I have contacted Mr Meredith and he "can't recall" who gave him the information. He then went on to say that it was most probably second-hand information. Yet on the strength of this, he issued a statement on behalf of the church which has turned out to be factually incorrect. Surely any good press officer would not want to create a wrong impression with a story which turns out to be untrue and which could have been proved to be untrue if he had checked up on his facts.

(2) The Rev Iain Macaskill admitted on the Gaelic radio on Monday morning that he was sitting in his car and was beckoned over to the church once the door had been opened. I find it hard to believe that a minister of the Gospel is prepared to allow and condone such actions, when if he had been present outside the building, he would have heard everything and seen that no-one was kept out of the church, and instructed the men to have kept the 'carnal weapons of warfare' away from the house of God. He could have seen and prevented the incident escalating as it did. He must have seen the instruments and should have instructed the men to remove them from the front of God's house. The situation in Uist could have been easily avoided if Mr Macaskill had revealed his true intentions to Mr Gracie and his office-bearers. Had we known the intention of forced entry we would not have sought to have had a service in Grimsay, so as to avoid such a confrontation on the Lord's Day. Will Mr Macaskill condemn the unruly actions of the men who arrived at the church? Indeed the Rev I D Campbell has condoned their behaviour! (Gaelic Radio 25/1/00).

Donald Morrison, Benbecula.