

Abstract

At the Disruption of 1843, over a third of the ministers and perhaps half the lay membership left the Established Church of Scotland and formed the Free Church of Scotland in protest against what they viewed as unwarranted state interference in Church affairs. The preparation for the creation of the new Church had begun in November 1842. To mobilise popular support, leaders of the new Church, including the celebrated Thomas Chalmers, promoted the formation of local associations and the appointment of financial collectors throughout Scotland. Chalmers's Sustentation Fund scheme was especially innovative. Under Chalmers's plan, the new Free Church was to be a Scottish national Church, providing churches, ministers and schools in every district of the country, with wealthier regions subsidising the poorer and more remote ones. In response to the deficiency of preachers, the Free Church appointed itinerant preachers, and employed lay catechists and divinity students. The headquarters in Edinburgh also circulated architectural designs for inexpensive churches and church building proceeded rapidly. A national system of Free Church primary schools was created and a theological college was erected. The Free Church members encountered difficulties; for example, landlords often refused to sell the new Church sites for churches, forcing some congregations to worship in the open-air. However, the various programmes for building the new national Church were successful in part because the Free Church leadership was highly effective in inspiring lay support, and in enlisting active lay participation. The achievements of the Free Church within its first five years were remarkable, especially as these achievements took place during the severe economic downturn of the 1840s. This thesis provides the first detailed account of the organisation arrangements and

fund-raising methods that led to the rapid formation of the national Free Church,
with its national system of education and its active overseas mission.