

PRESENTATION OF THE COLLEGE BOARD REPORT

Moderator, Fathers and brethren,

You will find the College Board report on page 115 of the Assembly papers, with the report of the College Principal attached as an appendix, and the deliverance on pages 120-121.

This is my last report as Chairman of the Free Church College Board. My association with the College Board began with its inception under the able Chairmanships of Dr Ian Maciver and his successor Dr Alan Macpherson. During my tenure of the Chair we saw the retirement of two Professors and the appointment of a new Principal; and while the Chairmanship was time-consuming and onerous, the responsibility was never a burden. Indeed, I count it as one of the greatest privileges of my career to date that I was able to assist both the Church and the College in this way.

In presenting this year's Report, there are three specific items which I wish to address: the importance of our College, the department of Systematic Theology, and, very briefly, the quinquennial review.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE COLLEGE

Cynicism always finds easy targets, and it is surprisingly easy for us to be cynical about aspects of our life as a Church, not least the College. The College is an expensive institution to run and maintain. The number of students is not terribly large, and at present not all the Chairs are filled. For the next session we will have only three full-time Professors in our College.

And yet, having served on the Board for these past four years, I am more convinced than ever that we need to maintain our College. Our ministers need to be trained somewhere, and we as a denomination owe it not only to our divinity students and potential divinity students, but also to all the congregations whose future pastors we are preparing, to ensure that the training they receive is rigorously biblical, unashamedly confessional, and conversant with all the changing trends in the cultures in which they will labour.

The Principal's Report details the statistics for degree programmes in the past academic session. This year 23 students were enrolled in degree programmes, and 11 students

were training for the Free Church ministry. On the surface it seems as though a large percentage of the Church's finances is being invested in a tiny number of the Church's people, out of all proportion to the allocation of funds elsewhere.

Yet this is not the whole story. Seventy-six people were registered in the part-time courses held on Saturdays, a number which, I am sure, could easily be doubled. These courses have now been running for over a decade, and have extended the College's resources wonderfully, enriching the lives of many of our people. A delightful German couple of Lutheran background who became members in my own congregation last year are enthusiastic part-time students of the College. It thrills me to know that the confessional theology which is the basis of all our learning and all our teaching is being distilled to a wider audience than ever before.

And who knows how wide that audience could become, through the imaginative use of technology and of other means. But the audience is actually as wide as the total number of people sitting in our churches and worshipping with us every Lord's Day. They are the ultimate beneficiaries of our College. As they hear the gospel proclaimed from our pulpits, our people are gleaning from what our pastors have learned. We must never think of the influence of the College merely in terms of the number of students at any given time. A College is a 'seminary', a seed-bed, where growth is nurtured and seeds developed so that they will cast their influence far and wide. 'The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from, and where it goes.' So is everyone who is trained in our College.

A core curriculum centered upon the biblical languages and our confessional theology is at the heart of all our learning, all our evangelism, all our spirituality and all our Church life. The relationship between Church and College is organic and symbiotic. The one feeds its life into the other. It ought to be inconceivable to us that either could exist without the support of the other. Neither ought to be a drain on the other; indeed perhaps we ought to stop thinking of Church and College as if they were parallel entities. The College is a vital ministry of the Church, an essential component of the Church's overall mission. Perhaps we need to think afresh in terms of the integration of the College within the Church's structure and not view it as something independent of its structure.

We ought to be able to say, unambiguously and unashamedly that our support of the College is unanimous, wholehearted and sincere. May the Lord grant it many more years of fruitful service to the kingdom of Christ.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

With this General Assembly, the Chair of Systematic Theology falls vacant. The last time it was vacant I was 14 years old. The Church had no difficulty filling it then, and it has been occupied with distinction for the past 33 years by Donald Macleod. It was my great privilege to make a presentation to Professor Macleod on behalf of the denomination at the closing ceremony of the Free Church College on 13th May.

I have spoken of Donald Macleod's work, faithfulness and legacy both in the College Board Report and at the closing ceremony of the College. I am almost running out of superlatives, but at the risk of repeating myself, and because this is the Court that appointed him to the post, it is only fitting that I should take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work that Donald has done for the Free Church as its teacher of theology over the generation that has gone by since his appointment as Professor. Almost all the current serving body of ministers received its theological training from him, and many more have been impacted by his erudition, his scholarship and his capacity for analysis, clarification and development of theological concepts. His international reputation has brought its own lustre to the denomination and to the College and since he is a commissioner in the General Assembly this year, it gives me great pleasure on behalf of the denomination to thank him once for his role as a preacher and teacher of theology. "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching" (1 Timothy 5:17). Professor Macleod, thank you.

In connection with Prof Macleod's retirement, it was also my pleasure to present to him the festschrift edited by Malcolm Maclean and myself in his honour. Published by Mentor, *The People's Theologian* is a collection of writings on subjects relating to historical theology, systematic theology and theology and the church; the primary areas of interest in Professor Macleod's own life and writings. Together with a biography and bibliography, personal appreciations and assessments, it is hoped that this collection of writings will make a contribution to academic scholarship as well as being a fitting tribute to Donald

Macleod himself. Of the making of this particular book there were occasions when I thought that there would be no end, but the product is now available at a discounted price for the remainder of this month, and I trust that the fathers and brethren will all have secured their copy.

The Chair is vacant; but filling it again has proved remarkably difficult. The College Board followed the legislation governing such appointments, sought nominations from Presbyteries, and invited the four nominees for interview. Only one of these, Dr James Eglinton, accepted the invitation to interview, and interviewed exceptionally well. The Board would have had no hesitation in recommending him as their nominee for the post of Systematic Theology Professor. However, Dr Eglinton subsequently indicated that he was not willing that his name be presented to the Assembly.

Dr Eglinton, as many of you know, is currently a Probationer of the Church, who is continuing his role in Theological University in Kampen (Netherlands) as postdoctoral research fellow. We wish him every blessing in that role, and we look forward to the publication of the fruits of his research on the historic relationship of Scottish and Dutch Calvinisms. Dr Eglinton described himself to me in email correspondence as 'a son of the Disruption'; and we ought to be proud that the wind carries some seeds very far, and that some of our best graduates have found fruitful spheres of service in different parts of the academic world. Perhaps in the Providence of God their different locations will enable the Free Church College to develop its own connectionalism with centres of Reformed learning and spirituality; there is no reason why Scottish and Dutch Calvinism could not connect in the future as well as in the past, and I wish to take this opportunity to send James Eglinton the greetings of this Assembly, and our prayers for his developing academic career.

The Board is delighted that Professor Donald Macleod is willing and able to continue teaching as lecturer in Systematic Theology for the coming academic session. Much as though that is appreciated however, it can only be an interim measure until a full-time appointment is made. It would be advantageous to both the Church and the College that an appointment be made next year, but that may require some serious discussion by the Board on the manner of College appointments in general, to facilitate this appointment in particular. Currently we are locked in to a system where our only option is to seek Presbytery nominations and invite nominees for interview. We cannot prepare candidates,

headhunt candidates or invite candidates to apply for these posts. We cannot offer candidates anything other than a full-time professorship, although not every theological seminary slavishly follows that model.

Clearly the Board will require to discuss this matter further, and we are seeking the Assembly's authorisation to empower the Commission of Assembly to deal with any proposals which the Board may bring to it that could lead to an appointment being made next year, and so avoid a prolonged vacancy in this strategic department of our College.

QUINQUENNIAL REVIEW

This brings me naturally to refer to the review of the College. As the report indicates, last year's Assembly ought to have appointed a committee to carry out a quinquennial review, but due to an oversight this did not happen. The Board felt it was the natural locus for progressing this matter and authorising that a review committee be set up this year.

I was a member of the quinquennial review committee which led to the formation of the College Board. The task was a very pleasant one, but it requires certain things in order to work. It requires openness without prejudice and frankness without suspicion. I think for too long - and I can say this as the retiring Chairman of the Board - the College has felt unsupported by the Church and isolated from it. I don't know why that should be. The College staff are ministers of the Church; if they feel isolated and unsupported it is because none of us is very good at supporting and encouraging one another.

A Professor in our College ought to be able to say as assuredly as any minister in any charge, or any missionary in any overseas posting, that he is supported by his colleagues throughout the denomination. It is time to move beyond the rhetoric of isolationism, and to affirm, unambiguously and publicly that the Church is absolutely committed to the principle of training her own ministers. What she cannot be committed to is the idea that such training can never evolve or that new methodologies can never be explored. We support our Professors, but we must encourage research, and provide opportunities for networking, conference speaking and academic involvement outside our own circle; or else what do we have Professors for? We want to encourage students to attend the College, but more than a prospectus and a good website is necessary for that; we need to encourage face-to-face contact between the current core of staff and students and any

potential students we may recruit. We think we know where the College is at the present time, but do we know where the Church or the College, the Assembly or the Senate, want the College to be in ten years' time?

Too much discussion concerning the College has been financial; but in many ways that is the least of our problems. The core difficulty facing us is not financial but aspirational. Supporting the College does not mean merely rubber-stamping everything that goes on in it at the present time; it means recognising that a Reformed College must always be reforming.

With that end in view, I welcome a review of our structures for ministerial training and theological academic development at the present time. I know that the leadership of the College welcomes it too. I hope that the Senate will in no way regard this review as intrusive and inquisitorial, but as helpful; and that it will make a realistic appraisal of where we are at present and where we hope to be in the future.

Fathers and brethren, thank you for the privilege given to me over the last four years to Chair the College Board. I have great pleasure in presenting its Report.