

# THE CASE OF MR JOHN GLAS

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## I

JOHN GLAS belonged to an ancient and honourable Scottish family which for several generations had close ties with the Reformed Church of Scotland. He was descended from William Glas, Minister of Dunkeld, a younger son of Alexander Glas, the laird of Pittintian in Strathearn, Perthshire. "Few families," says the late Sir James Balfour Paul, Lord Lyon, "have a longer or more widely spread connection with the Church than that of Glas of Pittintian."<sup>1</sup> John Glas was the fifth son in an unbroken clerical succession. He was born at Auchtermuchty on September 21, 1695, and was the only son of Alexander Glas, minister of that parish, and his wife Christian, a daughter of John Duncan, minister of Rerwick in Galloway. When John was between four and five his father was translated to Kinclaven, Perthshire. His early education was received at the Parish School, and later at the Grammar School, Perth, where he laid the foundations of his classical scholarship. Studious by disposition, and religiously inclined, he was destined for the ministry of the Church which had been served by so many of his forebears. In due time he entered St. Leonard's College, St. Andrews, where he graduated M.A. on May 6, 1713. His further studies in philosophy and theology were pursued at the University of Edinburgh.

Trained by his father in the orthodox Calvinist tradition, he early revealed a seriousness of mind and heart which seemed to fit him for the work of the ministry, but so high was his conception of the pastoral office that he hesitated to take the final steps. Not least of the reasons which held him back was his own spiritual uncertainty. While his studies had confirmed his faith in the doctrines of the Church, he lacked the assurance of peace with God. At last he yielded to the persuasion of his friends. His "trials" were duly sustained by the Presbytery of Dunkeld on May 20, 1718. According to Wodrow, Glas's father was dissatisfied with his son's trials, and "said to some that he was not pleased with him."<sup>2</sup> On March 4, 1719, Glas was *jure devoluto* appointed by the Presbytery of

<sup>1</sup> *Clerical Families*, quoted by J. C. Gibson, *The Baronies and Owners of Sauchie and Bannockburn* (1934), 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Analecta*, III, 323.

Dundee to the Church and Parish of Tealing, near Dundee, and two days later was ordained to his charge.<sup>1</sup>

Glas entered upon his ministry with an earnest desire to prove himself a faithful minister of Jesus Christ in his scattered parish of between seven and eight hundred souls. At this time spiritual religion was at a low ebb in Scotland. Such interest as did exist expressed itself not so much in evangelical zeal as in concern for the externals of religion, the maintenance of the Covenants and the National Establishment, the security of the Presbyterian polity, and the rights of the people as opposed to patronage. Glas was well-informed respecting these matters. He regarded himself as an orthodox Presbyterian and upholder of the National Church, believing that, as against Episcopacy on the one hand and Independency on the other, Presbytery was more in harmony with the New Testament. Ten years later (1729) he wrote: "I had looked a little into the episcopal controversy, and was fully satisfied, that in the word of God there was no foundation for prelacy, and that the presbyterians had the better of them by the Scriptures. . . . I had not then considered the controversy betwixt the presbyterians and them of the congregational way, but took up the common report against the congregational business, that it is mere confusion, and the mother of all the sectaries. . . . Thus I thought myself a sound presbyterian, and accordingly declared myself so, by subscribing the Formula."<sup>2</sup> Glas was determined to make the Word of God his sole rule of conduct, and, as he remarks, it never occurred to him that adherence to such a rule was ever likely to bring him into collision with the laws and standards of his Church.

Glas was not long settled at Tealing before he discovered the backward state of spiritual religion in his parish.<sup>3</sup> He also found considerable disaffection toward the National Church, especially on the part of those who inclined to Cameronian views. From the beginning of his pastorate this section gave him much trouble. As Glas did not manifest zeal in emphasising the binding obligation of the Covenants he was regarded as lukewarm. His first concern was the spiritual welfare of his parishoners. When asked why he did not preach against Episcopacy, as earnest ministers before him had done, he replied that "if they were once Christians, it were then perhaps time to speak of that." Both in his pulpit ministrations and in private catechising he endeavoured to instruct his flock in the truths of the Christian Faith. In the first year of his ministry he began a course of evening lectures on the questions of the

<sup>1</sup> Scot: *Fasti*, V, 370.

<sup>2</sup> *Cont. Narrative*, 138-139.

<sup>3</sup> The Kirk Session records reveal that there was great need for the exercise of church discipline.

Shorter Catechism.<sup>1</sup> At first Glas's preaching met with so little response that he was greatly discouraged, but his continued earnestness, his personal character, and pastoral kindness, began to make an impression. Gradually his reputation as a preacher spread, so that numbers from neighbouring parishes came to hear him.

The continued opposition of the Cameronian faction led him to make a careful study of the nature of Christ's Kingdom, and to review the vexed question of the Covenants in the light of Scripture.<sup>2</sup> Question 26 of the Shorter Catechism, "How doth Christ execute the office of a king?" set him seriously to think. His study led him to the conclusions afterwards embodied in his most important theological work, "The Testimony of the King of Martyrs," the main thesis of which is that the Kingdom of Christ is essentially spiritual, and as such is completely independent of State sanctions and control, as well as of the support of the secular arm.<sup>3</sup>

Naturally Glas's new point of view, which was reflected in his teaching, caused no little stir, especially among the ardent supporters of the Covenants. Glas had no desire to engage in public controversy, but circumstances forced the issue into a wider field. About this time the innocent action of Mr. James Traill, minister at Montrose, in subscribing a donation on behalf of an Episcopal Church in that town, brought down upon him the ire of the zealous supporters of the Covenants who denounced him as a traitor. The matter was taken up by the Presbytery and the Synod. So strong was the feeling aroused in Angus and Mearns that it seemed not unlikely that there might be a large secession to the Cameronians. The Presbytery attempted to avert this separation by appealing to the General Assembly for a renewal of the Covenants.

Glas was greatly concerned about this movement in favour of separation which he considered "the most effectual way to ruin the interest of the gospel in this country."<sup>4</sup> He felt he could no longer keep silent. "I thought myself bound no longer to forbear, and reckoned it my duty to give the people, as far as I had access, some information upon that point; even as I myself had been taught."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I have seen the original MSS. of these lectures.

<sup>2</sup> *Narrative*, 3.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.    <sup>4</sup> *Narrative*, 7.    <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

## II

## THE BEGINNINGS OF CONTROVERSY.

Meanwhile there had been a development in Glas's own thoughts respecting the nature and constitution of the Church. From a belief in the spirituality of the Church he had advanced to the view that such a Church was composed of true believers who possessed a real experience of saving grace and had been moved to separate themselves from the world. Unconsciously he had approximated to the principles of the English Independents who maintained the necessity of "gathered churches" as distinct from parochial congregations. It was his aged father who first told him that he was an Independent at heart, and who prophesied that like Ishmael "his hand would be against every man, and every man's hand against him." His father-in-law, Thomas Black, one of the ministers at Perth, also informed him that the purity of communion he desired was an unattainable ideal.<sup>1</sup> Glas replied that if he could find a dozen shepherds at the foot of Seidla-hill to join with him he would be happy.

His views excited surprise and evoked condemnation. Many of his friends advised him not to air his opinions too publicly. Glas felt he almost stood alone, but finding that some of his parishoners sympathised with him, he resolved to gather these into a little society, which was formed at Tealing on July 13, 1725, with a roll of nearly a hundred persons, including some from other parishes. The members "agreed to join together in Christian profession, to follow Christ the Lord, as the righteousness of his people, and to walk together in brotherly love, and in the duties of it, in subjection to Mr. Glas, as their overseer in the Lord."<sup>2</sup> It was also arranged that the Lord's Supper should be observed monthly. At a second meeting on August 12, the principle of Matt. xviii. 15ff was adopted in relation to discipline, and in December it was decided to institute a fund for the poor.

In adopting this "group" method of Christian fellowship Glas did not consider that he was acting inconsistently with his position as a minister of the National Church. But such was not the view of those who disagreed with him. In their opinion the formation of his society was really the establishment of an independent church within his parish, while he himself occupied the anomalous dual position of minister of a parochial charge and pastor of a "gathered church." It is not surprising that the epithet "Independent" was applied to him. This cry caused him to examine more closely the differences between Presbyterianism and

<sup>1</sup> *Account of the Life and Character of Mr John Glas*, x.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Independency, from which he was obliged to acknowledge to himself that his affinities were with the latter rather than with the former.<sup>1</sup> Not only some of his contemporaries, but later writers also,<sup>2</sup> have charged him with want of manliness in not resigning his living. That he was sensitive on this point is shown by his attempt at self-justification: "If upon the alteration of my sentiments I had dealt unfairly with the society to the privileges of which I had access by subscribing the Formula, and had covered myself, then I confess I was to be blamed."<sup>3</sup> He maintains that both his ministerial engagements and the Word of God required that he should declare the whole counsel of God, and that his native land had as good a right as any other to all Christ's institutions, and that he did not feel called upon to divest himself of his rights before the Church judicatories had pronounced his position to be inconsistent. To accuse Glas of unmanliness or dishonesty is to do him injustice, but it is difficult to appreciate his reasonings on this score both before and after the process of his case in the Church Courts. His after-history, however, shows that when the necessity arose he possessed courage to stand by his convictions at all costs.

The formation of the "ecclesiola" at Tealing gave a handle to Glas's critics who already disagreed with him on the matter of the Covenants, and from this time events moved quickly. Glas, with several other ministers, was present on a Fast-day occasion near Dundee when James Goodsir stoutly maintained the Covenants. He complained to John Willison of the unseasonableness of the utterance, and in his own sermon the following day dealt with "the mistaken notion of the nature of Christ's kingdom, as if it were of this world, and as if it were of this world, and came with observation, and as if his servants were to fight for him, taking him by force to make him king."<sup>4</sup> In a subsequent discourse at Dundee he declared that the setting up of any other Covenant than Christ's tended to divide God's people and to encourage association with those who were not true Christians. This sermon was construed as an attack on the Covenants. Among those who took exception to it was Willison who afterwards proposed to Glas that the question be discussed in writing.

About this time it seemed likely that Francis Archibald, minister of Guthrie, would secede to the Cameronians. Glas conversed with him during the Synod held at Montrose in October, 1725. Three months later Archibald wrote to Glas asking for further explanation of his views on

<sup>1</sup> *Continuation of Narrative*, Preface, 140.

<sup>2</sup> Bogue and Bennett, *History of Dissenters*, IV, 64.

<sup>3</sup> *Cont. Narrative*, 140.

<sup>4</sup> *Narrative*, 9.

the Covenants. In reply Glas penned the letter which kindled into flame the smouldering embers of controversy, and which later provided material for the charges brought against him in the Church Courts. This letter was intended to be private, and was not even sent to Archibald, as Glas requested a personal interview, which took place in a neighbouring manse. During the summer of 1726 the letter was circulated among a few friends. Though "given out with great caution," its contents soon obtained publicity. Glas was surprised to find that it had passed through many hands. Among those who read it was Ebenezer Erskine of Portmoak, who, though not personally acquainted with Glas, wrote expressing his appreciation.<sup>1</sup> Erskine remarks that he also had thought that "the Civil Constitution was too much blended with the affairs of Christ's kingdom which is not of this world, in these public engagements; as also that the way of forcing people to subscribe was not the way to make proselytes to Christ, the weapons of whose warfare are not carnal but spiritual."

Glas was not ashamed of what he had written. Once the secret was out he willingly allowed his principles to be published. It is noteworthy that Glas concludes his letter to Archibald by urging him to remain in and submit to the requirements of the National Church.<sup>2</sup>

During the next few months Glas made other pronouncements which aroused criticism, and Willison, in particular, threatened to oppose him publicly. It so happened that both Willison and Glas were due to preach at a Communion season in Strathmartine parish. When the two ministers met, Willison requested Glas to refrain from exciting dissension, but the latter said he could not conscientiously give an undertaking to remain silent should the circumstances require him to speak frankly. John Willison was a man of earnest piety, and his effort to avoid controversy seems to have been sincere, but Glas was not convinced of this. The two ministers parted without agreement. Glas realized that a crisis in his own career was approaching, but he was determined to confess his faith openly, regardless of consequences.

Hostilities began on the following day. In a prayer after his sermon Willison petitioned that nothing might occur to disturb the fellowship of God's people. Glas was moved to ask William Thomson, the minister of Strathmartine, to find a substitute for himself on the Saturday, and himself asked a friend to take his place, but no one was willing. On the Saturday Glas, who had been somewhat uneasy over his attempt to avoid the issue, discovered that he must fulfil his engagement. Mounting the

<sup>1</sup> *Supplementary Volume of Letters, Appendix, 6.*

<sup>2</sup> The letter, dated Dec. 1725, is given in full in *Narrative, 11-25.*

pulpit he declared that he felt bound to confess his faith in Christ's own confession before Pontius Pilate (John xviii. 36-37). Christ, he continued, testified plainly that His Kingdom was not of this world, that it could not be advanced, or defended, by human policy, human eloquence, or worldly force and power. Paying a tribute to the fathers and martyrs of the Church who had opposed any earthly head of the Church not appointed by Christ, he yet maintained that "as far as they contended for any such national covenants as whereby Christ's kingdom should be of this world, his Church and the world mingled together . . . so far they were not enlightened."<sup>1</sup> Willison, who followed him in the pulpit, stoutly declared that the National Covenant was the glory of Scotland. He bemoaned that the martyrs were apparently so little appreciated. The opposition to the Covenants was also opposition to a National Church and a National confession of faith. He closed with an exhortation to pray for a revival of God's work through a renewal of the Covenants.<sup>2</sup>

The antagonists had crossed swords; the issue was now joined. It was generally felt that the controversy must be fought out in the arena of the Church Courts. Wodrow remarks, "This affair makes no little noise, and what will be the event I know not."<sup>3</sup> Such was the situation on August 6, 1726—the date on which the conflict definitely began. The next meeting of Presbytery, due a month later, was looked forward to with deep concern, not only by the parties most nearly affected, but also by all who were anxious to preserve the peace and unity of the Church of Scotland.

### III

#### PROGRESS OF THE CONTROVERSY.

The Presbytery of Dundee met on September 6, 1726. In his opening exercises Willison ventured to reprove those in the Church who were dissatisfied with the Covenants and had introduced novel doctrines. It was apparent to all present that his intention was to induce the Presbytery to take notice of the events at Strathmartine. Glas took exception to certain remarks made by Willison, and the Presbytery decided that at the close of the ordinary business both Willison and Glas should have an opportunity of expressing their minds more fully. The discussion which followed revealed the strong feeling existing among the brethren

<sup>1</sup> *Narrative*, 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-36; Wodrow, *Analecta*, III, 323.

<sup>3</sup> *Analecta*, III, 323.

present. A wordy duel ensued between Willison and Glas. Some of the brethren suggested that the dispute should be taken to the judicatories, but eventually an informal discussion of the differences was arranged. Willison desired the Presbytery to act in a judicial capacity, but this was refused. Glas outlined his sermon preached at Strathmartine, after which a heated argument took place between Willison and himself. Glas declared that Willison's manner made friendly discussion impossible and that he must decline to converse further with him, whereupon Willison was so incensed that he withdrew from the meeting.

Shortly afterwards Glas discovered that the movement was on foot to ostracise him by ceasing to invite him to preach at neighbouring Communion. This tended to excite public feeling and to fan the controversial flame.

When the Presbytery assembled in October Glas was requested to cease from speaking on the disputed subject. This he declined to do, saying that he was satisfied that his preaching was neither contrary to the Word of God nor inconsistent with the principles of the Establishment. He complained that the Presbytery had decided hastily, and that the injunction was likely to injure his ministry, for while he was debarred from speaking his opponents were free to criticise him.

On the following day the Synod opened in Dundee. Hugh Maxwell of Forfar (Glas's predecessor at Tealing) asked that a committee be appointed to deal with an important matter relating to the Presbytery of Dundee. The Committee of overtures was instructed to investigate and act. This committee decided to leave the matter to the Presbytery and not to introduce it to the Synod. The Presbytery, however, showed disinclination to take up the matter,<sup>1</sup> which was again deferred until the next Synod in April.

Meantime complaint was raised in the Committee of overtures regarding three anonymous letters in answer to 26 Queries addressed to Glas, by James Adams, minister of Kinnaird in Gowrie. Glas was suspected of the authorship of these letters, but this he denied, stating that however favourable the writer, whom he understood to be a minister outside the National Church, might appear to himself, he could not approve the answers. Now, however, he felt it incumbent upon himself to reply directly to Mr. Adams' pamphlet.<sup>2</sup> This he did in a series of sixty-three counter-queries.<sup>3</sup>

Attention was drawn to the Letters in the Presbytery of Dundee. Willison mentioned another writing<sup>4</sup> in which the Covenants were repre-

<sup>1</sup> Vide, Wodrow, *Analecta* (Nov. 1726), III, 357.

<sup>2</sup> *Queries Concerning the Lawfulness of National Covenanting*.

<sup>3</sup> Vide *Narrative*, 48-62.

<sup>4</sup> Presumably Glas's *Letter to Archibald*.



sented as incompatible with the nature of Christ's kingdom, and insisted that unless notice were taken of this antipathy to the Covenants, the Dissenters from the National Church would be confirmed in their attitude, while others would be induced to secede. The Synod was urged to declare the binding obligation of the Covenants. After some discussion a committee was appointed to draw up an assertory act. The Committee of overtures was requested to recommend that, as there were complaints of ministers and judicatories not showing sufficient regard for the Covenants, a pronouncement should be made that they were agreeable to the Word of God, the Confession of Faith, and the Formula. When the matter was introduced before the Synod the Moderator asked for an expression of opinion. Archibald's judgment was invited, and to the amazement of the brethren he declared that what Glas had said about the Covenants made his own position easier. He was accused of inconsistency, the Moderator remarking that apparently Mr. Glas had brought him round to his position. Glas retorted that if such were the case, it was evident that in this instance his principles had not promoted separation, but otherwise.

In committee Glas questioned if the best people and wisest ministers favoured the proposed assertory act. He asked for a more precise definition of the term Covenants in the draft—if these were only the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant. Further, what was to be the precise affirmation—that the Covenants were asserted in so far as they were agreeable to the Word of God, etc., or that they were agreeable? In the end a decision to transmit the draft form was carried by a small majority. In the Synod Glas raised the same objections previously made in committee. Meanwhile the introducers of the form had deleted the plural "s" from the word "Covenants." After discussion it was resolved that the draft lie on the table until the next meeting, go to the presbyteries in the minutes, and finally be enacted in a full session of the Synod. A protest signed by several ministers was handed in to accompany the form of the act. These protesters included Hugh Maxwell (Forfar), John Willison (Dundee), James Goodsir (Monikie), and James Gray (Kettins), who were foremost in the opposition to Glas.

The controversy evoked a considerable epistolary literature both for and against the Covenants. Among their defenders was James Hog, minister of Carnock, who wrote a letter to a lady on the subject. To this letter Glas sent a long reply addressed to the same lady.<sup>1</sup> About the same time John Willison published his book, "The Afflicted Man's Companion," in the Preface to which he attacked the opponents of the Covenants.

<sup>1</sup> The letters of Hog and Glas are reproduced in Glas's *Narrative*, 69-84.

## IV

THE PROCESS AGAINST GLAS TO HIS DISPOSITION  
BY THE SYNOD OF ANGUS AND MEARNs.

The Synod met at Montrose on October 17, 1727. The following day the Committee of overtures dealt with the proposed assertory act referred to its consideration. At first the general feeling of the Committee seemed in favour of the act, but after correspondents from Aberdeen urged its inexpediency the enthusiasm died down. The Committee, however, accepted a proposal that notice be taken of any one who had spoken against the Covenants or expressed views contrary to purity of doctrine. Brought before the committee, Glas was examined respecting his teaching and ministry. Next day the Committee presented its report, and overtured the Synod<sup>1</sup> to instruct the Presbytery of Dundee to "make strict inquiry concerning the deportment of the said Mr. Glas," and, if sufficient cause were found, "to proceed against him, conform to the rules of this church, *usque ad sententiam* "; later, if a process were established, to apply to the Commission of Assembly for counsel, and then report to the next Synod at Brechin in April 1728, the investigation to be continued "until the said affair be absolutely finished."<sup>2</sup> The overture was accepted by a large majority. Before the vote was taken Glas said he considered the overture a slander upon himself, but that he hoped to be cleared in due time. The proposed assertory act and the protest were now withdrawn.

Glas realised that the issue would be pressed to a finish, but he had the inward satisfaction of having stood by his convictions.

On March 26, 1728, the Presbytery of Dundee, acting on advice from a committee of the Commission of Assembly, cited Mr. Glas and required him to subscribe his adherence to the Confession of Faith and the Formula of 1711, and to renounce in writing the errors of which he was accused. To the first demand he replied, "I am not careful to answer you in that matter, let the consequences be what they will "; and to the second, "If I were made sensible of any errors that I have vented or taught, I would reckon it my honour judicially to renounce them, but until that be, I must be excused from renouncing them." Further questioned, he said that while his faith was contained in the Confession he could not subscribe for two reasons: First, because, the Formula required him to affirm that the government of the National Church, by Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, Provincial Synods, and General Assemblies, is founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God, whereas examination of the matter

<sup>1</sup> Wodrow, *Analecta*, III, 449.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of the Synod of Angus and Mearns, Oct. 19, 1727.

had led him to the conclusion that the Presbyterian system as thus defined had not the warrant of Divine authority, though, at the same time, he did not disclaim the legal Church Establishment, "seeing, as he takes it, that establishment does not settle it upon the foundation of the Word of God."<sup>1</sup> Secondly, because the Westminster Confession (Part II, c. xxiii, para. 3) allows the authority of the civil magistrate in the maintenance of church order and doctrine, and in the suppression of heresies and abuses, with power to call and to attend Synods for that purpose—whereas he does not see that that such authority has the sanction of God's Word, or that the civil magistrate is called to judge or exercise the power of the keys in the sphere of Christ's Kingdom which is spiritual.

The report of the Presbytery was presented to the Synod at Brechin in April 1728. The first step taken was to submit to Glas a number of queries, answers, to which were to be returned in time for the next sederunt. These Queries are of primary importance for a full understanding both of the Synod's action and of Glas's personal beliefs.<sup>2</sup> Though Glas was given only a few hours in which to prepare his answers, the questions are so comprehensive and searching as to suggest careful preparation. It was evidently intended to bring the controversy to a head and to force Glas to state explicitly his own views. These Queries, which relate to such matters as the power of the civil magistrate in the sphere of religion, the use of the secular arm in defence of the Church, the nature of the Church, the qualifications for admission to Communion, the sanction for national covenanting, the place and authority of the local congregation, drew from Glas some significant statements. He maintained that the civil magistrate as such had no authority in the Church; that Christ's Kingdom required no secular support or civil sanctions; that none should be admitted to Communion without the consent of the congregation; that the churches of the New Testament were congregational churches, the members of which were those of manifest Christian faith and character; that "a congregation, or church of Jesus Christ, with its presbytery, is, in its discipline subject to no jurisdiction under heaven."

The Queries go to the roots of the differences between the recognised doctrines of the Church of Scotland and the views of Glas. Nothing is omitted which would leave room for compromise. The answers were frankly stated, without any dubiety.

The Queries and Answers were duly read before the Synod. Eventually it was found that Mr. Glas had resiled from his early principles and ministerial engagements, that he still adhered to his errors, and refused to be silent concerning them. Because his opinions "tend to make a

<sup>1</sup> Appendix to *Narrative*, 127.

<sup>2</sup> Appendix to *Narrative*, 129-134.

rent in the church of Christ and to overturn our constitution," the Synod considered it necessary to proceed to censure. The vote carried in favour of suspension until the next ordinary meeting of the Synod. Mantine steps were to be taken to recover Glas from his errors. If the efforts were successful the Presbytery was empowered to relax the sentence. On being called to hear the decision Glas declared his intention of appeal to the next General Assembly.

The General Assembly took up Glas's appeal on May 11, 1728. The document consisted of nine pages, and expressed his mind respecting the procedure of the Synod, which procedure he considered irregular and illegal in various particulars. He submits that neither the law of Christ nor the law of the Church warrants the Synod's sentence. He is not satisfied with the rules of the Church require a re-subscription of the Confession and Formula. He points out that the Episcopalian clergy who remained in the National Church after the Revolution were not suspended or deposed on account of the principles to which they still adhered. Glas's appeal was accompanied by a petition from the elders and parishoners of Tealing, testifying to the character and faithfulness of their pastor, and craving that the Assembly would give consideration to the needs and desires of the parishoners by removing the sentence against Mr. Glas and restoring him to his ministry among them.

The Assembly authorised the Commission to deal with the case.<sup>1</sup> On the 18th May Mr. Glas, with two of his elders, appeared before the Commission in support of the appeal, while representatives of the Synod were present in defence of the sentence. The matter was remitted to a committee, but as no agreement could be reached, the Commission took up the case. After prolonged consideration the question was put whether the sentence be confirmed or turned into a prohibition. The continuance of the suspension carried, but renewed conference with Mr. Glas was to be held with a view to settlement.

## V

At a committee of Synod on 11th June information was supplied that Glas had ignored the sentence of suspension by preaching both at Tealing and in neighbouring parishes.<sup>2</sup> Glas was cited to appear on July 30. This he did, and after discussion it was resolved to refer the matter once

<sup>1</sup> Acts Assembly, May 11th, 1728 (Index).

<sup>2</sup> " . . . as soon as he went home he preached and broke the sentence of suspension, and resolved, it seems to breake all squares with the Church, and set up upon his own leggs in the Independent way." Wodrow, *Analaecta* (June 1728) IV, 3.

more to the Commission. As there was not a quorum Glas protested against the proceedings, and stated that the meeting could not adjourn. He declined to attend the next meeting of the committee, but sent a letter renewing his objections. These the committee over-ruled, and proceeded to consider the points in Glas's Answers, which had not been judged by the Synod, his irregular practices on Sacramental occasions, and the relative matters contained in his recently-published *A Narrative of the Rise and Progress of the Controversy about the Covenants*.<sup>1</sup>

Early in September the committee approved a recommendation of its sub-committee "to request the presbytery of Dundee to consider Glas's practices in contemning the sentence of the church against him, form a libel thereon, lead probation thereof, and have that affair ripe against the meeting of the synod." Meanwhile the Commission of Assembly had received and approved the report of its own committee appointed to confer with Glas, and resolved to instruct the Presbytery, the Synod, and the committee to proceed according to the rules of the Church.

The case came before the Presbytery on September 5th and occupied its attention for more than a month. Asked if he had complied with the sentence of suspension Glas answered that he considered that the matter must properly begin at the Synod, but if the Presbytery intended to proceed, the facts must be cleared according to the rules of the Church. The Presbytery proceeded to draw up the libel, the substance of which was, that after suspension by the Synod, a sentence confirmed by the Commission, Mr. Glas had continued to preach and administer the Sacraments on various occasions, for which contravention he deserved censure. A copy of the libel, with a list of witnesses, was signed by the Clerk to be delivered to Glas, with a summons to appear before the Presbytery on the 18th inst.

When the Presbytery met on the appointed date, Glas stated that he had prepared answers to the libel, but requested that George Miller,<sup>2</sup> Town-clerk of Perth, might be allowed to represent him. The request was granted. Miller was a skilful lawyer, quick to take advantage of fine legal points.

Glas read a lengthy paper containing his objections: first, he dealt with the *matter* of the libel, and second, with the *manner* in which it was proposed to prove it. Again he maintained that there was no foundation for the sentences which he was charged with contravening; that none of the Courts had proved that his opinions were erroneous, or made any attempt to convince him of error.

The Presbytery, however, decided to sustain the libel. There was great

<sup>1</sup> Printed at Edinburgh, 1728.

<sup>2</sup> Miller was afterwards an Elder among the Glasites.

difficulty in securing the presence of the witnesses who were most unwilling to give evidence against Glas. Again and again the proceedings were delayed owing to the failure to respond to the summons. Ultimately the Presbytery requested the magistrates to compel the attendance of the persons cited. After two postponements the case was resumed on September 23. When the roll was called fifteen persons responded. Most of those called refused to depone, but four persons acknowledged having heard Glas preach since the month of May. The examination of witnesses was resumed on October 9. Twenty-two persons appeared, but not one could be induced to depone, most of them declaring that they could not conscientiously say anything to the disadvantage of Glas whom they respected as a faithful minister of Christ. Their refusal created a difficult situation for the Presbytery. Consequently it was decided to refer the matter to the forthcoming Synod.

The Synod met in Dundee on October 15. On the following day the report of the committee previously appointed to confer with Glas was called for. The committee of bills reported the necessary items, after which several brethren were instructed to confer with Glas to see if there was any possibility of his restoration, while other members were deputed to consider what grounds there were for future censure. Glas remarked that he could not understand the appointment of a committee for the purpose of reclaiming him, while another committee was authorised to draw up grounds of future censure.

When the Court met on October 17 a résumé of the case from the beginning was presented by the committee of the Synod.<sup>1</sup> From this report it appeared that Glas had not retracted the errors with which he was charged, and that there was little hope of his reclamation. The report was duly approved. The committee then proceeded to deal with the reference from the Presbytery to the Synod, the extract confirming the suspension by the Commission, and that of the Act of Commission, August 1728, declaring the case remitted to the Presbytery and the Synod. These papers showed : (1) that Mr. Glas had informed one member of the Commission by letter that he was still exercising his ministry and intended to continue doing so ; (2) that he had endeavoured to justify his contempt of the first sentence ; (3) that the depositions of the witnesses proved that on various occasions since his suspension in April Glas had publicly preached.

The Court found that not only had Mr. Glas refused to retract the errors of which he was previously convicted, but that he also held other errors contrary to the Confession of Faith and the Scriptures therein referred to, particularly, (1) that the religion of Christ cannot be defended

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Continuation of Narrative*, 229-231.

by arms (Answer to Query 3)—contra Conf. xxiii. 2 ; (2) that the civil encouragement given by the magistrate respects his good subjects as such (Answer to Query 6)—contra Conf. xx. 4, xxiii, i, 2, 3 ; (3) that the magistrate can punish none who carry as good subjects (Answer to Query 8)—contra Conf. xx, 4 ; xxiii, 2, 3.

The Synod now proceeded to vote whether the suspension be continued and the case referred again to the Commission, or that the Court proceed to further censure. The latter carried. When Glas was summoned and asked if he had anything to say he replied that he was ready to receive the sentence whatever it might be. The charge was accepted by the Court as proven. Asked if he would consent to suspend preaching until further conference, Glas declined to give such an undertaking. Therefore, in accordance with an Act of Assembly, August 5, 1648 : “ If any suspended minister, during his suspension, exercise any part of his ministerial calling, that he be deposed,” the Synod proceeded to take the final step. The question being put, deposition carried. “ And therefore the Synod did, and hereby do, in the name of the Lord Jesus, the alone King and head of the Church, and by virtue of the power and authority committed by him to them, actually depose the said Mr. John Glas from the office of the holy ministry, prohibiting him and discharging him to exercise the same, or any part thereof, in all time coming, under the pain of the highest censure of the Church.”<sup>1</sup>

The sentence was by no means unanimously approved. Among the dissentients were James Marr, minister of Muroes, George Fleming, minister of Lundie and Fowlis, William Lyon, minister of Airlie, and William Thomson, minister of Strathmartine, who later presented their reasons for dissent.

Called to hear the sentence Glas stated he was convinced that the Synod had no warrant from Christ for their decision. He disavowed any contempt of authority, but in obedience to Christ he was resolved to continue his ministry. Further, he intimated his intention to appeal to the next General Assembly.

A protest, signed by four Tealing elders, was handed in. They said they could not regard the relation of pastor and people as “ in the least measure loosed,” and that they were determined to stand by Mr. Glas’s ministry. Several others associated themselves with this protest, including Francis Archibald, minister of Guthrie, and George Miller, Town-clerk of Perth, who said that he represented many dissentients both in Tealing and other parishes.

The following day the four ministers who had given notice presented their grounds of dissent :<sup>2</sup> 1. The manner in which the Answers to the

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Continuation of Narrative*, 235.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 240-241.

Queries had been extracted and used as grounds for the suspension and deposition of Mr. Glas ; 2. The failure to take sufficient time in endeavouring to reclaim Mr. Glas ; 3. That in an unprecedented case like this the Synod ought to have referred it to the Superior Court ; 4. The injurious consequences likely to arise in the district most closely affected ; 5. The charge of contumacy was not fully and clearly proven ; 6. That the sentence was passed by a comparatively small number of the members of the Synod, there being many abstentions from voting.<sup>1</sup>

## V

## THE FINAL STAGES OF THE PROCESS.

Glas lost no time in formulating his appeal to the highest Court of the Church. The two documents containing his appeal are dated October 25 and 26, 1728, a little more than a week after his deposition. Nearly eighteen months, however, elapsed before the case was finally decided. Glas had many friends, not only in Angus, but throughout Scotland, some of whom lent him strong support. Moreover, there was reluctance on the part of Church leaders to take extreme measures against a highly-respected minister. The appeal was taken up by the General Assembly of May 1729, and referred to the Commission, as was also the appeal of Francis Archibald, who had likewise been deposed by the Synod of Angus and Mearns on January 29, 1729, on grounds similar to those adopted in the case of his friend and colleague, John Glas.<sup>2</sup>

Glas's appeal urged that as the sentence of the Synod was the first of its kind in the history of the National Church, it was too grave a responsibility for the Synod to assume without reference to the superior Court, and that the whole process had been carried through in an unusual manner, with many defects of procedure. The appellant desires to be satisfied : (1) If there be any law of the Church for a process upon error by inquisition ; or, (2) if there be a law for deposing ministers of the Congregational way ; (3) if there is any rule requiring re-subscription of the Confession and Formula, and excluding anyone, against whom no fundamental error or serious misconduct can be charged, who refuses to re-subscribe ; (4) if the Protesters who were deposed, yet continued to exercise their ministry, were not held to be ministers of this Church after the Revolution ; (5) if in view of these grounds the laws of the Church

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Adam Philip remarks, " It must be said that their reasons of dissent are somewhat startling, and detract seriously from the moral sanction of the sentence." *The Evangel in Gowrie*, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> *Acts of Assembly*, May 5th and May 12th, 1729.



warrant a sentence of deposition, except for neglect of duty, scandalous living, erroneous teaching, or contumacy. As negligence and scandalous living are not charged against him, he desires to know "if he be tried and purged out as erroneous by due course of ecclesiastical process, or if he has been contumacious in not appearing."<sup>1</sup>

Further, the appellant expresses his conviction that the sentence is unwarranted by the Word of God and contrary to the authority of Christ. He believes this sentence is without precedent in the National Church, that a minister be deposed merely on account of opinions not affecting fundamental truth, but which happen to differ from those of his brethren. He holds that the difference between the Presbyterian and Congregational systems is quite consistent with Christian forbearance. As the prosecution had been conducted in a manner contrary to established procedure, and the sentence passed despite the dissent of many influential brethren, he thinks himself entitled to seek redress from the Supreme Court of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

Wodrow states that when the Commission met Glas was present, and that the affair was sub-committed to prominent Church leaders about Edinburgh who "seem to favour him."<sup>3</sup> He considers that the support of leaders like Professor William Hamilton<sup>4</sup> only encourages Glas to persist in his obduracy. "He seems buyed up with the hope of being protected by leading men, and that keeps him from all temper. He goes to preach publicly everywhere, and disseminat his principle. This is grievous to the Ministers of that country. However, the matter is still put off from time to time, and his affair is referred to the Commission in March."<sup>5</sup> Writing to Hugh Maxwell in February 1730 Wodrow expresses his impatience at "the delays and off-puts in the matter of Mr. Glass," and states as his opinion that "your Synod ought to be supported in what they have done, and our discipline preserved. The soft measures we are fast running into, in processes of ministers, will be improven to disadvantages in other cases."<sup>6</sup>

On March 11, 1730, Glas appeared before the Commission to whom he read a lengthy speech explaining wherein he differed from the National Church. He proceeded to defend his views by numerous references to the Scriptures, and re-affirmed the positions he had taken up on previous occasions. With regard to the charge that he had continued to minister after he had been forbidden to do so, he expressed surprise that this was considered the most serious charge, and that contumacy was more censurable than the holding of Congregational principles. There was nothing

<sup>1</sup> *Cont. Narr.*, 247.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 241-252.

<sup>3</sup> *Analecta*, IV, 71.

<sup>4</sup> Professor of Divinity at Edinburgh.

<sup>5</sup> *Analecta*, IV, 71.

<sup>6</sup> *Correspondence*, III, 458.

in what was called his contumacy but what followed from his principles. Consequently, if such principles did not merit censure, surely the person who held them and practised them was less censurable than one who believed but did not practise them! If the grounds on which he was forbidden to preach were insufficient, how could a sentence based upon these reasons excuse him from fulfilling his obligation to the law of Christ?

The case aroused much interest. Both opponents and sympathisers were well represented at the session. "The ministers of Angus," says Wodrow, "wer well coveened, and had taken pains to gather the members of the Commission."<sup>1</sup> Professor Hamilton stood foremost in defence of Glas, and, according to Wodrow, several of the "Marrow Brethren" in the Synod of Merse, Gabriel Wilson of Maxton, Thomas Boston of Ettrick, Henry Davidson of Galashiels, influenced by Hamilton, had spoken strongly against the action of the Synod of Angus and Mearns, while "the flaming instructions from the Presbytery of Jedburgh, they say were drauen up by Mr. Ricarton, the author of 'The Sober Enquiry' and 'The Politicall Disputant,' who is thought to favour the Marrou."<sup>2</sup> The Brethren from the Merse differed on this matter from the "Marrow Men" in Fife who were keenly opposed to Glas on account of his attitude to the Covenants and the Establishment. Wodrow thinks this difference may "be the occasion of a coldness among the Marrou bretheran," and may even create division in the ranks of the "Twelve Representers."<sup>3</sup>

The case of Mr. Glas furnishes some curious instances of the interaction of parties. We find friends and colleagues taking opposite sides in the dispute, while sometime opponents were united on this particular issue. Among the Marrow Brethren Gabriel Wilson, Thomas Boston, and Henry Davidson were opposed to the deposition of Glas, whereas James Hog and the Erskines favoured severe measures. Professor Hamilton and James Smith, both men of liberal views, ranged themselves on opposite sides in the discussions. It is unlikely that Hamilton had any deep sympathy with Glas's peculiar views, but he was even less in sympathy with the effort to drive out of the Church of Scotland a man of earnest spirit and independent judgment like John Glas. His championship of Glas was supported by the party which regarded him as leader, but it was not strong enough to overcome the influence of the ministers of Angus and James Smith who had lined themselves against Glas. Smith had no love for the extreme Covenanting party, for during his Moderatorship in 1723, when a member of Assembly spoke of "our Covenanted work of Reformation," he had declared from the Chair "that the Church was not now upon that footing."<sup>4</sup> It is impossible to analyse the motives

<sup>1</sup> *Analecta*, IV, 111.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 126.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 126, 135.

<sup>4</sup> John Howie, Preface to Shields' *Faithful Contendings* (1780), page x. Note.

which induced men to take sides in the case of Glas, but the division of opinion was clearly marked not only in the Commission, but also in the Church at large.

The discussion in the Commission was keen and protracted. Among the reasons urged by Hamilton in favour of a lenient policy was the offence which an adverse decision might have upon the Independent brethren in England, but, says Wodrow, "After his keenest reasoning, he could not get his friends in England gratified."<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that many members reasoned against deposition and voted against it, the Commission on the 12th March decided to confirm the Synod's sentence. Duncan Forbes of Culloden, the Lord Advocate, pleaded on behalf of Glas, craving indulgence for a minister of high character and conspicuous ability. The vote carried "simpliciter" that Mr. John Glas be deposed from the office of the ministry. The majority was very small "and came within six or seven."<sup>2</sup> Wodrow remarks that "Mr. Glass's deposition was carried out by Mr. Smith's interest in the Commission, contrary to Pr. Hamiltoun."<sup>3</sup>

Sentence was accordingly pronounced, on the grounds that in contravention of his vows when licensed and ordained to adhere to the doctrines and principles of the National Church, (1) Glas had departed from the said doctrines and principles in several particulars and had admitted doctrines and tenets directly opposed to those of the Church, to which he tenaciously held, refusing to be silent concerning them, and had impugned the doctrines and principles at the bar of the Commission; (2) he had continued, in contempt of the Church judicatories, to exercise his ministry after being suspended and later deposed therefrom, and had followed divisive and schismatical courses by setting up one meeting-house in the parish of Tealing and another in the town of Dundee, and by preaching and baptising in various parishes endeavoured to make proselytes, which charge Mr. Glas had not denied, though such courses tended to promote disorder and division.<sup>4</sup> In his "Remarks on the Sentence of the Commission," Glas states that though expressed so as to appear as little different as possible from the Synod's sentence, that of the Commission was not so much a confirmation as a new decision.<sup>5</sup>

## VI

However regarded, the Commission's deposition of Glas brought to an end a case which had troubled the Church Courts for over three years. That there was reluctance to take extreme measures is shown by the

<sup>1</sup> *Analecta*, IV, 187.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 111.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 262.

<sup>4</sup> *Remarks on the Sentence*; appended *Cont. Narr.*, 339 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Remarks, etc.*, 341.

repeated attempts to induce Glas either to retract or cease from proclaiming opinions inconsistent with his office as a minister of the National Church. Glas ascribes the responsibility for the Commission's act to those who were "concerned to shew zeal for the national covenants," and who, unable to effect their purpose themselves, secured the support of others whose interest it was to gratify them in this matter.<sup>1</sup> "I shall not deny, but there were men of very different ways in many things, and upon different views concurring in this deed against me; but all of them in this thing, were one way or another influenced by the spirit of persecution."<sup>2</sup> He concludes by expressing the hope that he will "be enabled heartily to pray that it may not be laid to the charge of any one person that has acted in it."<sup>3</sup>

There was undoubtedly a small party antagonistic to Glas, determined to use every means to secure his condemnation. The great majority, however, were unwilling to take drastic action against one whom, in spite of his doctrinal and ecclesiastical aberrations, they held in high esteem for his personal integrity. Had it not been for his combativeness Glas might have been allowed to remain unmolested by the Church authorities.<sup>4</sup> He was a born controversialist and a doughty fighter, determined to wage the conflict to the bitter end. He himself admits that he foresaw the final outcome of the controversy, yet he was not prepared to save both the Church and himself much anxiety and trouble by quietly withdrawing his connection. He claims that his views were not inconsistent with his position as a minister in a National and comprehensive Church, but it is difficult to understand why he clung so tenaciously to an institution which he considered as having no warrant in the Word of God. In principle he was an out-and-out Independent, and his continuance in a National Presbyterian Church necessarily involved a compromise which must have eventually led to anomalies injurious both to the Church of Scotland and to himself. He could not carry out his Congregational principles without coming into conflict with Presbyterian order and procedure. Had he remained in the National Church he would have caused great trouble to the Church Courts, for his disposition was such that he could not have pursued his course in a quiet and unobtrusive way.

<sup>1</sup> *Remarks, etc.*, 338-339.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

<sup>4</sup> Gabriel Wilson and Henry Davidson adopted Congregational principles and formed an Independent Church at Maxton. When Davidson offered to resign his parochial charge the Presbytery requested him to remain. This irregularity continued for twenty years without interference on the part of the Church authorities. *Vide, Scot, Fasti*, II, 177, 185; Robert Hall; *The History of Galashiels*, 195-196.

## VII

It may be doubted if the Commission would have deposed Glas merely on account of his Congregational views. At this time the old antipathies between Presbytery and Independency had almost died out, and there was considerable friendliness between the Scottish Presbyterians and the English Independents. But it must be remembered that Independency had no place in Scotland. The attempts previously made to introduce it had failed. Congregationalism was regarded as something peculiarly English, and it was not anticipated that it would be replanted in Scotland. Glas was the "Father of Scottish Congregationalism," but he had no connection with Independency in the South. Indeed, at a later time he accuses the English Independents of thinking more of their good relations with the Church of Scotland than of interesting themselves in the small Independent churches of his own connection.<sup>1</sup> Glas's practices, if not his theories, were bound to arouse opposition. But there was no desire to renew the controversy with Congregationalism as such. Many were disposed to overlook Glas's personal opinions had he shown himself amenable to the counsel of the Church Courts. Their attitude is reflected in Wodrow's letter to Hugh Maxwell. Writing a month before Glas's case came before the Commission, Wodrow suggests that the Synod may have considered the inadvisability of deposing a man on account of Congregational principles, thereby giving offence to "our brethren of these sentiments in England and New England": He trusts that Glas has been deposed not on account of his Independent views but "for his disorders in what they think a Scriptural, regular, and well-constituted Presbyterian Church; his departure from her, his contumacy and divisive courses, and venting and spreading schism and innovations in a peaceable and united society, contrary to his solemn vow and subscription."<sup>2</sup>

The situation was aggravated by Glas's publications expounding his tenets and commenting on the proceedings in the Church Courts. Still more serious in the eyes of orthodox Churchmen must have seemed the development of a Church order among the Glasite societies at Tealing and other places. Mr. Glas exercised a pastoral oversight in these societies, but later he was joined by Francis Archibald of Guthrie as his colleague. On July 21, 1728, two months after the Commission confirmed the suspension of Mr. Glas, Glas and Archibald were accepted as joint-pastors in Tealing and Guthrie, while deacons were appointed for special duties.

The case had gone too far to be withdrawn unless Glas submitted to the judicatories. It was recognised that the Church of Scotland could

<sup>1</sup> Unpublished letter which I have seen.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondence*, III, 459. Cf. *Analecta*, IV, 187.

not overlook the affront to her authority. The patience of the Church Courts was tried to its utmost limits. Glas regarded his deposition as a grave injustice, but there was no other course that the Commission could take. The introduction of Church order into his societies justified Wodrow's opinion that Glas was resolved "to breake all squares with the Church and set up upon his own leggs in the Independent way." This action could scarcely be construed otherwise than as "divisive courses." The Church was obliged in her own interests to express not only disapproval, but also stern censure, and to deal severely with the offending minister.

Nine years after the event described the General Assembly of 1739 revoked the sentence of deposition, "and did restore him to the character and exercise of a minister of the gospel of Christ; but declaring, notwithstanding, that he is not to be esteemed a minister of the established church of Scotland, or capable to be called and settled therein, until he shall renounce the principles embraced and avowed by him, that are inconsistent with the constitution of this church."<sup>1</sup> This "very curious act," as Dr. John Cunningham describes it,<sup>2</sup> has been generally approved.<sup>3</sup> Very significant is the fact that the overture for the reversal of the previous decision came from the Synod of Angus and Mearns. It was represented that Glas's peculiar principles were not inconsistent with his being a minister of the Gospel, and it was further urged that such action had already been taken in the case of Mr. Archibald.<sup>4</sup> It is also noteworthy that the very Assembly which restored Glas was that which "prepared the way for the deposition of the Erskines," which seems to justify the statement that "when the Church of Scotland became harsher towards the founders of an opposition Presbytery, it became lenient towards Congregationalism."<sup>5</sup> Glas himself had made no application for such recognition—indeed, it is questionable if he greatly appreciated the step. Certainly he never responded to the friendly gesture. By this time he had moved much further from the Church of Scotland in sympathy, outlook, and practice, and henceforth his ministry was confined to the churches of his order. For forty-four years he laboured, honoured and beloved by the Glasite communities which by this time had extended beyond Scotland to England, Wales, and America.

<sup>1</sup> *Scots Mag.*, I (1739), 233.      <sup>2</sup> *Hist. Ch. Scotland*, II, 455.

<sup>3</sup> Vide Stanley's remarks in *Lectures on Ch. Scot.*, 131.

<sup>4</sup> *Annals of General Assembly (1739-1752)*, 10, 383; Wodrow, *Analecta*, IV, 187 f; Cunningham, *op. cit.*, II, 455.

<sup>5</sup> Agnew: *Theology of Consolation*, 241-242.

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