

Whither Away ?

Some thoughts on the present position in Scottish worship and on the functions of the Church Service Society.

SELF-EXAMINATION is not only profitable for the individual soul, but it is also expedient and necessary for any body of Christians joined together for some common purpose or programme. It would seem to be timely for the Church Service Society to re-examine its functions and aims. Many of the Society's original purposes have been achieved, now that a *Book of Common Order* has come into use "by authority of the General Assembly." Moreover, such contingent requirements in public worship as forms and orders of divine service on the death of His Majesty King George VI. or on the Sunday before the Coronation of Her Majesty the Queen, are now issued by the General Assembly's Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion.

The Church Service Society has been manoeuvred into an observer attitude in relation to the Church's worship. This may explain the absence of the missionary zeal and strong leadership of its early days. We must ask : is there still a sphere for the Society's missionary and didactic leadership and enthusiasm ?

When the Church Service Society was founded in 1865, its purpose was set forth in Article V. of its Constitution : " the object of the Society shall be the study of the liturgies—ancient and modern—of the Christian Church, with a view to the preparation and publication of forms of Prayer for Public Worship, and services for the Administration of the Sacraments, the Celebration of Marriage, the Burial of the Dead, etc." All honour to those who created that liturgical interest and conscience in the Church of Scotland, now being expressed through the various publications of the General Assembly's own Committee. Yet, however much has been accomplished on an official level, the study of liturgical material remains a vital concern of this Society. With the right discernment, vision and enthusiasm, such study should result in valuable leadership and teaching in worship being continually contributed to the life of the Scottish Church through the activities of this Society.

The real test of every such body is whether or not it remains a missionary society, propagating a particular point of view; imparting information and instruction; and, in general, exercising stimulating, even provocative leadership. In this regard we of the Church Service Society to-day feel dwarfed by the stature of such men as Robert Lee, Thomas Barclay, Robert Herbert Story, George Washington Sprott, James Cooper, and John Kerr.

The Book of Common Order

In the first place, where do we stand in relation to the *Book of Common Order*? Liturgically, the Church of Scotland has travelled far since the publication of Doctor Robert Lee's Service Book for use at Greyfriars,—*A Presbyterian Prayer Book*, 1857, and since the First Edition of the Society's own Book of Prayers, *The Euchologion*, 1867. Such pioneer work delivered our Scottish Church from the slovenly and tedious tradition in worship into which it had sunk. The Church was made aware of its Catholic and Evangelical heritage enshrined in such great liturgical documents as *Knox's Liturgy* or *The Book of Common Order*, 1564, and *The Directory for the Publick Worship of God*, 1645. All these publications and others later form the ancestry and inspiration of *The Book of Common Order*, 1940.

But while grateful for the excellent form and contents of this service-book, one is much less satisfied about the manner of its use in the Church at present. The excellent sales of the book and its presentation to every regular Church of Scotland divinity student suggest that it is being more and more widely used. The greater dignity, order and liturgical correctness which this ensures, especially in the administration of the Sacraments, is an enrichment of Church life.

But is some use of this service-book not really a *misuse* of it? Provided "for the *guidance* of ministers," and implying "no desire to supersede free prayer," it would be regrettable if these forms of service became a "liturgy" in the wrong sense, a service-book used automatically and lifelessly by ministers liturgically ill-instructed or spiritually halt and lame.

"Liberty in the conduct of worship is a possession which the Church of Scotland will not surrender," the Preface to *The Book of Common Order* reminds us. Accordingly let

our ministry be adequately taught and instructed in liturgics, and therefore qualified to produce public devotions worthy of the many different occasions and circumstances that arise in Church life. It is the unintelligent, lazy use of this service-book that will most readily arouse an obscurantist but understandable reaction against "read prayers." The various service-books which culminated in *The Book of Common Order*, set out to improve the standards and dignity of public worship, not to make the conduct of worship easier for the ministers!

The question put by Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch might relevantly be put to every minister of our church who uses our excellent service-book: "understandest thou what thou readest?" One missionary and didactic task of the Church Service Society is to inform the Church of the source, meaning and significance of the liturgical material found in our service-book, and to work for a really intelligent and edifying use of that material.

Moreover, there is a vital place in the Church for experiment in forms of worship. Individual ministers and the Society as a whole should be energetically engaged in the collection and study of liturgical material, both ancient and modern, and in the construction of new and varied forms of worship, at once loyal to the Church's past and related to present-day needs. New ventures in churchmanship, such as the South India United Church, produce new expressions in liturgy, worthy of keen attention.

One of the most valuable insights of the Reformation was to see the heresy of regarding any form or order of public worship as absolute and final. Like every other aspect of the Church's true life, her liturgy is *in via*. The tension of this interim age lying between the Ascension of Christ and His Second Coming affects the Church's liturgical expression. It must be ever old, ever new, and dynamic, not static. Liturgical expression must reflect a living faith in God the Holy Spirit Who has yet many things to impart to the Church. It is in experiment in worship that a Society of this kind may exercise active leadership.

Liturgy and Theology

That ultimately theological considerations demand a measure of freedom in liturgy should direct our attention to the relation between the modern liturgical movement and the Church's theological outlook and activity. It may

be that the Church Service Society has been a pleasant retreat for liturgical experts and non-experts who have stood aside from the Church's theological debates and developments.

When the Society was launched in 1865, Schleiermacher, Feuerbach and Biedermann had all contributed to the watering down of the faith, and Ritschl and Troeltsch were appearing on the theological horizon, the last named finally to conclude that no religion, not even Christianity, is universally and eternally valid. Little wonder that the "New Theology" aided and abetted a trivial and humanist atmosphere in public worship.

In contrast, the leaders of the liturgical revival nearly a century ago were theological reactionaries in the better sense—believing men who adhered to the Reformers' robust doctrinal position, anchored to the whole Catholic faith as enshrined in the historic creeds. For example, Doctor Robert Lee, first Professor of Biblical Criticism and Antiquities in the University of Edinburgh though he was, proposed "Government" and "Doctrine" as further sections in his *Reform of the Church of Scotland*, after he had dealt with "Worship." At its inception, the Church Service Society could claim a theological vigour which was lost in later years.

The theological climate of the Reformed Churches has been transformed in the last two decades, notably through the teachings of Barth, Brunner and their school. It is regrettable that so little of that theological revival has been reflected in the liturgical activity of the Church Service Society.

Here is another field of mission and teaching: to bring the Theology of the Word to bear upon our views of worship, and upon our liturgical expressions. The exhilarating conception of Crisis as of the impact of the Eternal Word in the Church's preaching and sacraments, imparts a new reality and power to the occasion of corporate worship, which inevitably affect its form and order. Again, the fresh theological approach to the Old Testament and to the liturgical tradition of Israel is most significant for the Church's forms of worship to-day.

The Society must surely find its way back into the main stream of the Church's life, and allow invigorated theology to result in invigorated liturgy. Public worship is the most vital expression of the Church's faith, the expression affecting the outlook and views of the ordinary

Church member. Therefore our worship must embody and proclaim our living doctrine, the whole Gospel. One of the greatest liturgical reformers in the whole history of the Universal Church was John Calvin, *the theologian*. Is there not a clear indication that the Society must recruit more theologians into its ranks, if it is to exercise further liturgical leadership in the Church?

The Christian Year

One of the best handmaidens of doctrine in the regular worship of the Church is a discerning observance of the Christian Year. The use of the Church Calendar ensures that in sermon, prayers and praises alike, every great fact of the Faith is presented to the worshipping congregation at least once each year. It would seem to be just here that the work of the Church Service Society has borne abundant fruit. Credit for this achievement must, of course, be shared with the Scottish Church Society, which, founded in 1892, gave as one of its twenty-two special objects, "the observance in its main features of the Christian Year." The greater festivals of the Church are all observed in most Scottish congregations, and in *Prayers for the Christian Year*,¹ the General Assembly's Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion has given us an excellent set of services.

But when we examine this supposed achievement more closely, the success is found to be more outward and formal than deep-seated and real. How does the Church of Scotland observe the Christian Year? Does our present Scottish Christian Year not tend to be somewhat bogus? Christmas has won a notable place, aided by the commercial world which focusses attention on that festival from late October until 24th December! Yet a large number of our "Christmas Services" are held in the latter part of the Advent Season before the actual Feast of our Lord's Nativity. Moreover, we are suffering from what must be called the fetish of the Christmas Eve Midnight Service. This may be a useful observance in some parishes, although with less point for us than Christmas Midnight Mass has for a Roman Catholic Christian. From a doctrinal and evangelical point of view, it is surely much more important to observe the whole duration of the Christmas Festival, 25th Decem-

¹ Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1952 (Second Edition, revised and enlarged).

ber to 5th January, and to follow it with the great missionary occasion of the Epiphany.

“Easter” is the other portion of the Christian Year we appear to favour, meaning by “Easter,” Lent and Passiontide as well, and indeed the whole Spring season when Easter eggs are seen in the shops! The large number of parishes holding Holy Week Services is encouraging, although the advertised topics of some of these “missions” are difficult to relate either to penitent contemplation of our Lord’s Passion or to spiritual preparation for our Lord’s Resurrection.

In most congregations, to Christmas and Easter, half understood and inaccurately observed, are added Whitsuntide and S. Andrewstide, and possibly All Saintstide, Advent Sunday and Trinity Sunday, provided such “heavy” doctrine is not held to be embarrassing. So we claim to follow the Christian Year! Do we? Is this not a sphere where the Church Service Society could exercise a real teaching role and enlightened leadership, in order to make our Scottish Christian Year more authentic and correct.

The battle for the main Christian Festivals was fought and won by our predecessors several decades ago. What more have we accomplished? We have still to reach a rythmical, evangelical observance of the *full* Christian Year in the Church of Scotland. A great deal of instruction is required to effect an intelligent use of *Prayers for the Christian Year*. If the modern theological revival were brought into more direct relation to the Church’s worship, we could with point and value arrange public worship round the clear-sighted evangelical purpose of the Church’s Calendar.

Year by year, the Advent Season with its unique atmosphere of Judgment would lead us naturally on to the Nativity and the Epiphany. The Lenten Fast, spiritually interpreted but followed out more fully, would bring prepared and instructed congregations to watch by the Cross on Good Friday and to worship at the Empty Tomb on Easter Day. Having worshipped the Reigning Lord at the Ascension, and prayed anew for the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Church would be carried on in necessary spiritual sequence to worship the Glorious Majesty of the Triune God in the great Festival of the Holy Trinity.

I should also plead for the observance of such great occasions as the Conversion of S. Paul, Candlemas or the Purification, the Annunciation, S. Columba’s Day, the

Transfiguration, S. Michael and All Angels, All Saintside, and S. Andrew's Day. At one time, this Annual published a very useful *Scottish Ecclesiastical and General Calendar*, and I suggest that the time has come for that to be a yearly task for the Society once more. A Scottish Calendar, laid out according to the Christian Year, and including all the significant Saints' Days and other Church observances, would greatly enrich Scottish worship. Then we might be nearer to an intelligent, evangelical and spiritual observance of the Christian Year.

Scottish Worship To-day

If these criticisms of our somewhat inadequate observance of the Christian Year are valid, what is to be said about the general standard of public worship in our churches to-day? Thanks to the efforts of our predecessors in this Society and to other influences, public worship has improved enormously from the doldrums of a century ago. It has been greatly enriched in dignity and devotion, seemliness and order, liturgical material, psalmody and hymnody. The Reformed or Calvinist conception of corporate worship has been re-examined and worship has moved back into the main stream of Evangelical and Catholic faith and practice. "Other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours."

Yet, must we not admit with shame *our* dissipation of part of what our fathers gained so recently? Reverence? When the change of posture was proposed in Scottish churches, and congregations adopted standing for the praise, it was anticipated that for the prayers, worshippers would either kneel or select some other seemly and reverent attitude. In fact, the change of posture has resulted in too many resting and lounging during the prayers as mere listeners. The Church Beautiful was recovered as an aid to worship, but too little originality has developed in church design, now marked by a mania for the "side pulpit" and the Victorian type of Anglican chancel. The revival of the Daily Service in the great churches was another expression of reverence for God's House, but that institution passed its peak in interest and support two or three decades back. Many of our churches are now open on week-days, but, alas, seldom used for either private prayer or public worship between Monday morning and Saturday evening.

We have also failed to fulfil the promise of the Renaissance of Worship in the field of church music. In con-

gregations where they were chanting the Authorized Version of the Psalter a generation ago, to-day the prose psalms are no longer heard or are sung virtually by the choir alone. Do sloth and lack of interest account for the present day Scottish worshipper finding chanting so difficult? How often are the canticles to be heard?

What, then, of the use of the Metrical Psalter? It is not to Scotland's credit that few of the psalm tunes frequently sung are much over a century old. When are we to revive a wide use of those fine tunes original to our various seventeenth century Scottish Psalters, such as *Martyrs*, *Abbey*, *Bon Accord*, *Aberfeldy*, and *Caithness*? Are the grand Double Common Metre tunes of the Anglo-Genevan Psalters to become forgotten by continued disuse? The real heritage of Metrical Psalmody is sadly neglected in the Church of Scotland, but the Church Service Society could exercise influence and leadership at this very point.

In regard to church music, it is regrettable that no school of genuinely Scottish or at least Reformed Church music has grown up. Is there a Scottish tradition in church music? Great festival occasions are usually marked by a surfeit of music by purely Anglican composers like Stanford and Wood, even to the neglect of the classical masters. Our congregations are unfortunately not being made familiar with the splendid examples of our Reformation heritage included in the *Church Hymnary (Revised)*, the lovely tunes of Louis Bourgeois; the robust and heroic "Fear not, thou faithful Christian flock" (Hymn 217); and the Lutheran battle-song "A safe stronghold our God is still" (Hymn 526).

Our choice of praise could surely be truer to the noble Protestant *Deo Soli Gloria* outlook. Why is the choice so often narrowly confined to the alien and feeble traditions of the Wesley and Moody revivals? Could one not oftener hear the plainsong settings included in our hymnary? More use of the medieval and French church melodies would deepen our sense of the *Una Sancta Ecclesia*. We have a rich and worthy hymnary in our Church, largely unknown, and the Church Service Society could profitably familiarize the Church with the rich treasury of church praise found in the *Revised Church Hymnary*.

Where do we go from here?

These very rambling observations have all pointed in one direction—suggesting that the Church Service Society has

still a vital missionary and teaching role to fulfil in the life of our Church. This role can perhaps best be fulfilled in the Divinity Halls, among the men preparing to enter the ranks of the ministry.

Speaking to the Society in 1890, the Rev. Dr John Macleod of Govan said: "I think a very great deal of importance is to be attached to the suggestion which has been made as to the need in our Theological Colleges of greater attention being paid to the matter of worship. . . . A very great result in the movement which has led to the formation of this Society would be accomplished by the institution of a Lectureship on the subject of Worship." This hope has hardly yet been realized. Liturgical training is, of course, included in the departments of Practical Theology in our four Divinity Halls. Moreover, one is appreciative of the liturgical courses given in the Post-Graduate School of Theology at New College, Edinburgh; and of the Baird Lectures of 1953, by the Rev. W. D. Maxwell, devoted to the subject of the Scottish Tradition in Worship.

Yet, the subject of Public Worship could surely be given greater priority of emphasis in our theological training. The establishment of a specific lectureship in Liturgical Studies, or the occasional appointment of a liturgical scholar to one of the Church Chairs of Practical Theology, would be welcome evidence that the Church accords this subject the place it deserves. Let this Society be the conscience and goad of the Church in this important issue.

My plea for renewed missionary zeal in the ranks of the Church Service Society springs from a deep conviction that there is much still to be done to make our Scottish Church worship more worthy of the Divine Majesty we approach in the Divine Service of God's House. The life of the Church is in her worship: let that worship reflect the Glory and Beauty of the Triune God to Whom it is offered.

In conclusion, let the echo from an honoured voice in the past recall us to our opportunities and responsibilities. Addressing the Society during his Moderatorial Year, 1907, the Very Rev. Dr J. E. Mitford Mitchell said: "I do not think that the work of the Society is nearly at an end, and I have been thinking lately very much that we would need to go in for a more active crusade in regard to the work of the Society. . . . I hope that the members of this Society, especially the younger ones, will be missionaries on this subject, and study liturgical works."

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