

A COMMITTEE AT PRAYER

During a period of office as Vice-Convener of one of the Committees of the General Assembly, it fell to my lot to take the chair at two meetings of the main committee, and at several meetings of a sub-committee, and accordingly, I had the privilege - and I am sure that every Convener and Vice-Convener would agree that it is a privilege - of conducting the devotions. One or two people have been kind enough to suggest that I might commit these prayers to paper, and I am encouraged to respond to this suggestion by a request in a recent issue of the Church Service Society's Record for prayer material, though I do so with a considerable degree of diffidence. The request was for original prayer material, and it will be obvious that the greater part of these prayers will be found in The Common Prayer Book and the Book of Common Order of 1940. Such originality as there is, resides in the form rather than the content, and may well incur the reproach of the scholar, the theologian and the liturgiologist. If, in prayers constituting meetings, the interpolation of, on the one hand, the *Angus Dei* and part of the *Te Deum*, and on the other, the hymnology of seventeenth century Thomas Ken and eighteenth century Charles Wesley be called in question, my plea must be that I sought, on all occasions, to be relevant - to the times and seasons of the Christian year or to the particular circumstances in which we met. And I endeavoured to avoid what Rev. Stephen Winward has called "mechanical repetition, the besetting sin of the liturgical mind".

Here, then, are some of these prayers, for I did not commit many of them to paper, and some are reproduced from memory. The first two were offered on the occasion of meetings of the main committee, the others at meetings of a small sub-committee.

At a meeting in February, during Lent, hence the inclusion, in part, of the Lenten collect:-

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Almighty and ever-living God, who by Thy holy apostle hast taught us to make prayers and supplications for all men, hear us as we pray for the whole state of Christ's Church militant here on earth. We pray for the Church throughout the wide world, holy, catholic and apostolic. Where it is in want, supply it; where it is in error, correct it; where it is in bondage, deliver it; where it is weak, strengthen it; where it is strong, confirm and sustain it in all purity and truth.

Especially at this time do we pray for the Church to which we belong, the Church of our fathers, beseeching Thee that what we say and do, and the decisions which we take, within this Committee, may be for the upbuilding of that Church, for the strengthening of her life and witness, and for the advancement of Thy kingdom.

We acknowledge that we are unworthy to offer Thee this service, and we confess those sins of omission and commission wherein we have erred and strayed. Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness.

And, now, as within this place, we offer ourselves anew in Thy service, we remember with gratitude and affection, that great company of those who have served Thee here in time past, that company who serve Thee still, but on another shore, and in a purer light. Keep us ever in fellowship with them in the communion of Thy saints, and grant us, we beseech Thee, grace, so to follow them, as they followed Christ, that in due season, we too may be partakers of that fuller life in Thy nearer presence.

These our prayers we offer in the name of our only advocate and mediator, Jesus Christ, to whom with Thee, O Father, and the Holy Spirit, we ascribe, as is most due, all honour and glory, all might, majesty and power, world without end.

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At an April meeting, a few weeks after Easter (The second part of this prayer refers to a member of the Committee who had suffered a bereavement):-

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Almighty God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men, grant to Thy people that they may love the thing which Thou commandest, and desire that which Thou dost promise, so that, amid the sundry and manifold changes of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our loving heavenly Father, the strength and succour of the living, and the repose of the blessed dead, as we are privileged to meet here today, we remember an absent member, our friend and colleague,..... and his wife and family, who in these latter days have walked in the valleys and in the shadows. Vouchsafe to them an abundant measure of Thy sustaining love and mercy; comfort and strengthen them with the hope and triumph of the Easter story. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord.

Almighty and most merciful God, we come before Thy presence and acknowledge our sins. We remember with shame, the words and deeds which, in anger, in haste, in selfrighteousness, we have said and done, the words and deeds which, through thoughtlessness, through pre-occupation, through cowardice, we have not said or done. We confess these and all the ways in which we have fallen short of our high calling. But Thou, O Lord, who desirest not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live, grant us, we beseech Thee, pardon, absolution and remission of all our sins, time for amendment of life, and the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now, O Lord, as within this Committee, we consider the affairs of Thy Church on earth, and seek Thy blessing and guidance in our deliberations, we remember all those who have trodden this way before us, and who, having fought a good fight

and witnessed a good confession, have won home, and passed beyond our earthly vision. Grant that, in fellowship with them in the communion of Thy saints, and having them for an example, what we think may be inspired by Thy Spirit, what we say may echo Thy words, what we do may be governed and directed by Thy holy will, that, at the last, we may be reunited with them in Thy fuller service.

Hear these our prayers, in the name and for the sake of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth, and is worshipped and glorified, with Thee, O Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end.

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One one occasion I simply used the words of the General Thanksgiving:-

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Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men; We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life, but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world without end.

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These are from two occasions when I used the third collect from Morning Prayer followed by other material.

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O Lord our heavenly Father, Almighty and everlasting God, who hast safely brought us to the beginning of this day: Defend us in the same with thy mighty power; and grant that this day we fall into no sin, neither run into any kind of danger; but that all our doings may be ordered by thy governance to do always that is righteous in thy sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lord, we our vows to thee renew;
Disperse our sins as morning dew;
Guard our first springs of thought and will,
And with thyself our spirits fill,
Direct, control, suggest, this day,

That all our powers, with all their might,
In thy sole glory may unite.
Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

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O Lord our heavenly Father, Almighty and everlasting God, who hast safely brought us to the beginning of this day: Defend us in the same with thy mighty power; and grant that this day we fall into no sin, neither run into any kind of danger; but that all our doings may be ordered by thy governance to do always that is righteous in thy sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

O Lord, save thy people: and bless thine heritage.
Govern them: and lift them up for ever.
Day by day: we magnify thee;
And we worship thy name; ever world without end.
Vouchsafe, O Lord: to keep us this day without sin.
O Lord, have mercy upon us; have mercy upon us.
O Lord, let thy mercy lighten upon us: as our trust is in thee.
O Lord, in thee have we trusted: let us never be confounded.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end.

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The Advent collect is used in this prayer from a December meeting.

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Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever.

Grant us, in our thinking and in our speaking, the vision, the wisdom and the charity which only Thou canst give, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

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And from a February meeting commencing with the collect for the fourth Sunday after the Epiphany.

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O God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright; Grant to us such strength and protection, as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

As within this place, O Lord, we seek to offer Thee our service, we remember those who, in their day and generation, gave their service here, and now rest from their labours, Grant that we may continue the work begun by them, to the glory of Thy name and the advancement of Thy kingdom.

These our prayers we offer, and ask the forgiveness of our sins, in the name of Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

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At a September meeting, simply the collect for the twelfth Sunday after Trinity.

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Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve: Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord.

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The following two prayers I deemed suitable for meetings at times other than special seasons of the Christian year. The first:-

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Praise to the holiest in the height,
And in the depths be praise,
In all His words most wonderful,
Most sure in all his ways.

We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee. We give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory. Glory be to Thee, O Lord most high.

We confess before Thee, O Lord, our many and grievous sins, our thoughtlessness of others, our forgetfulness of Thee, our transgressions of thought, word and deed against Thy holy law.

Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.
Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.
Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, grant us Thy peace.

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And the second; commencing with a prayer of Ignatius Loyola;-

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Teach us, good Lord, to serve thee as Thou deservest, to give, and not to count the cost, to fight, and not to heed the wounds, to toil, and not to seek for rest, to labour, and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do Thy will, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The task Thy wisdom hath assigned,
O let us cheerfully fulfil,
In all our works Thy service find,
And prove Thy good and perfect will.

Thee may we set at our right hand,
Whose eyes our inmost substance see,
And labour on at Thy command,
And offer all our works to Thee.

Give us to bear Thy easy yoke,
And every moment watch and pray,
And still to things eternal look,
And hasten to Thy glorious day.

Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto Thee, and dost promise that, where two or three are gathered together in Thy name, Thou wilt grant their requests, fulfil now, O Lord,

the desires and petitions of Thy servants as may be most expedient for them, granting us in this world, knowledge of Thy truth, and in the world to come, life everlasting, through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

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I usually closed the meetings either with the grace as found at the conclusion of the orders for morning and evening prayers, or one of the other Benedictions from the Book of Common Order. If a meeting fell at Eastertide I used the traditional Easter blessing - "Now the God of Peace who brought again from the dead...". The only original Benediction was - "The love of God enfold you, the might of God protect you, the grace of God go with you, now and always".

One of my minister friends to whom reference is made above suggested (albeit partly in jest) that I should write "A Liturgy for Vice-Conveners". In no way could these notes merit such a title, but they may serve to give an insight into the influence of Liturgy on one elder.

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CAP THIS

The scene - the vestry on a Saturday afternoon prior to "Communion Sunday". The occasion - a wedding. The denizens of the vestry - minister, bridegroom and best man. On a table in a corner of the vestry the church officer had set out the communion vessels to be cleaned for the following day - communion cups, patens, flagons etc - all with inscriptions on them, but too distant to be read by the bridegroom. The bridegroom looked at the vessels, magnificently misunderstanding their true identity, and said to the minister: "You never tell't us you was an athlete, sir!"

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