

## EDITORIAL

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It seems to be a habit of mine to begin with an "Apology". So be it. This apology is for the lateness of the publication of this issue of "The Record". Much of it has been locked within the subtleties of my Word Processor since the Summer, and although it was my intention that it should be in your hands before the beginning of Advent, it was not to be.

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Liturgical life within the Church of Scotland is moving apace. The work on the new "Book of Common Order" is at last speeding on towards its conclusion. This book will more resemble the epoch-making 1940 "Book of Common Order" than its successor "The Book of Common Order (1979)". Perhaps it is right that it should, for it will provide orders for "Morning and Evening Worship"; orders for Baptism and the Eucharist as well as "Occasional Offices".

One rather distinctive feature will be the use of re-discovered "Celtic" prayers based on "Carmina Gadelica" particularly with the provision of both a "Morning" and an "Evening" order grounded within that tradition. At present I am working on the draft of a Eucharistic Order within the same tradition.

In addition, The Panel on Worship has agreed to the inclusion of a selection of "Collects" which, at the moment, is called: "Collects for the Celtic Saints". The writer's intention was to provide prayers which were both "localised" in that throughout Scotland there are cities, towns, villages and districts which owe their Christian heritage to particular "saints" without whose courage, devotion and prayer-life we, as a Nation, would have been impoverished.

If the new "Book of Common Order" is called "The Book of the Saints" by its supporters as well as its critics - So be it. We have much to be thankful for in our tradition. The fact that many of our towns and villages are where they are is due to the fact that the Celtic Saints braved wild seas and inhospitable terrain to establish small communities of worship and prayer. Many of the place-names, "Kil -", owe their very existence to our forebears in the unbroken chain of Christian worship.

Thus it is right that we should honour them.

It is also right that we should honour the "Reformers". Some of them were "heroes" - others, "anti-heroes". Nevertheless, within "The Book of Common Order" they too should be commemorated.

There are also "Saints" within the Catholic tradition, some of them - though not yet canonised by Rome - are worthy of remembrance. Although their "formal" recognition is yet to come, they too will be included within "The Book of Common Order". Perhaps this book (like the 1940 book) will be in the vanguard of all that is both worshipful and innovative.

In the meantime there are candles burning. There are candles in the streets of formerly Communist-dominated countries. There are lights of "Hope" burning on the altars of many churches. In my own School Chapel there is a candle which was lit on the 1st anniversary of the seizure of Terry Waite.

This candle is known as "The Hostages' Candle". Three weeks ago a former pupil of the School was released by Saddam Hussein - he was 19 years-old and he returned to his School Chapel to assist in the "carrying-out" of the coffin of his Housemaster who died suddenly after a short illness. This former pupil told me (as we awaited the arrival of 500 people in the Village Kirkyard) that he was upheld during his captivity by the picture in his mind of the "Hostages' Candle" burning on the altar of the School Chapel.

Throughout Advent many of our readers will have lit candles. These candles will have been important "signs" to our people.

Some of these candles will have been lit on "Advent Wreaths". The "Advent Wreath" is a significant "Reformed Sign". Although it is too late for this year, the fact that it belongs to our tradition may be important enough for its inclusion in this issue of "The Record" so that next year it may appear in as many of our churches as is possible.

The Advent wreath hangs from the ceiling - half way between heaven and earth.

It is made of evergreen foliage: In the darkness of winter there is still the promise of life.

The wreath is circular - a symbol of completeness - a symbol of both God as well as the world.

There are 4 groups of red ribbons hanging from the wreath. The ancients believed that the world had 4 corners or points: so it has - North, South, East and West.

Christmas isn't just about a baby being born at Bethlehem, surrounded as he was by all the myths and legends which attempted to put into words a mystery which can never be explained by language. Christmas is about God, being born as a man and venturing out on the adventure of Advent which could only lead to his blood streaming from a cross so we have the red ribbons dropping down from the wreath.

There are 4 red candles set in the wreath - one for each Sunday in Advent, each of them as red as the red-blood of poppies or of Jesus' blood.

On each successive Sunday, one of the red candles will be lit. On Christmas Eve the central white candle will be lit.

On Christmas Eve and over the Christmas season which stretches way into January, the candles will change colour - they will become white - the symbol of purity and joy. This morning the the first candle of Advent was/ (if an early service is held)/

will be/ lit - symbolising the fact that we are no longer children of the darkness but children of light.

Today, Advent Sunday, was the day when the greatest of all the Carol Services was held: The Advent Carol Service.

The Advent Hymn: Veni Emmanuel CH3 165

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(The Wreath: should be as large as possible. Florists' Shops have the bases for wreaths. They should be told that the wreath should be filled with evergreens and sprayed with a "preservative" liquid.

Within the "Oasis" base should be set 4 candle holders. Each will hold the 4 red candles. If the wreath is set upon a round piece of hardboard, then another candleholder can be placed in the centre, holding the larger white candle for Christmas Eve.

At 4 points in the wreath - between the candle-holders - there should be 4 groups of red ribbons, beginning with bows, the ends hanging down.

Wherever possible the "Advent Wreath" should hang from the church ceiling - and NOT placed upon a stand. In that way the link between "heaven" and "earth" will pictorially represented. Fishing nylon of 15 lbs breaking strain will support the wreath.

There are many ways of lighting the candles each Sunday. I adopted the tradition of having a child light the first one, a mother lighting the second, an Elder the third and the Session Clerk the fourth. How it is done is irrelevant. The fact that it IS done is vital.

We all need candles of "hope" burning in our lives and in the lives of our people. The world is dark enough without our being afraid to light candles. It may be hackneyed, but it is nevertheless true, that:

"It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness."

Graeme Longmuir.

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