

P R E S I D E N T I A L A D D R E S S

T H E
N E W B O O K O F C O M M O N O R D E R :
A N A R R A T I V E

delivered to members of The Society on 23 May 1991

by

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A stroll through our archives reveals the curious fact that "the gallant Chaplain to His Grace the Lord High Commissioner" was responsible for what is described as a great improvement in The Society's constitution. The Chaplain was The Revd Dr Fisher, and the improvement he advocated was the admission of ladies to The Society. He argued for their acceptance as members on these grounds:

- "1. The Annual Breakfast would be more popular.
2. Being conservative, ladies would inspire confidence.
3. They would remove the reproach of Romanism".

This (not-so) gallant Chaplain to His Grace has no similar improvement to propose. Instead, I wish to share with you something of the work in which I have been much involved recently as Secretary of the Panel on Worship, and Secretary of its Liturgical Committee. I mean the work of preparing a new "Book of Common Order".

THE PROPOSAL

In 1987, the Panel asked The General Assembly to "note that the "Book of Common Order, 1940" will shortly be out of print and acknowledge with gratitude the value of the book to the Church over nearly five decades." In the ensuing discussion, tribute was paid to the book; but criticism of its successor, the "Book of Common Order, 1979", was also expressed. It was clear that The Assembly preferred the former to the latter. Eventually, a motion proposed by The Very Revd Dr Andrew Herron and seconded by The Very Revd Professor James Whyte was accepted by The Assembly, namely that the "General Assembly instruct the Committee without delay to proceed with the production of a new "Book of Common Order."

THE PREPARATION

The Panel set to work at its first meeting after the Assembly in June, bearing in mind that in the preparation of the new book it was to follow the "1940" model rather than that of "1979". Discussion papers were commissioned from various members of the Panel for a day Conference in September, where the general principles governing the book, and an outline structure and table of contents were explored. The drafting of the material was remitted to the Liturgical Committee, which has been busy with the task ever since. I need hardly say that the work has been arduous and time-consuming, but it is now nearing completion.

Certain difficulties were apparent from the outset. The Panel was aware that it could

"no more devise living worship than build a tree."²

Creative activity is not generally the hallmark of committees, and the Panel is no exception to the rule. In the course of its proceedings no Cranmer emerged, to propose to the committee incomparable prayers and liturgies which would be immediately acceptable. Cranmer, you will recall, was the chairman of the committees which produced the Edwardine Prayer Books: it is clear that the committees simply and thankfully accepted his drafts and gave them their imprimatur. We had no Cranmer, and had to rely on the protracted and painful process of hammering out drafts, levelling and receiving criticism, and undertaking revision. But eventually, the principal services, forms of prayer, and other worship material did materialise. And we are now nearly at the stage of publishing the book.

THE STATUS

But what sort of book was it to be ? Within the Church of Scotland tradition, it could not be a Prayer Book, to be used word for word, week after week and season after season. We have always valued free prayer and liberty in the conduct of worship too highly for that.

But these two things, free prayer and liberty in the conduct of worship, are perhaps not as spacious as some people's practice seems to suggest they are. From the very beginning, this Society has maintained a particular understanding of the meaning of free prayer which is worth recalling. At the second meeting of The Church Service Society, held in Glasgow on 21st March 1865, a Report was read and adopted and ordered to be printed. This Report was by way of being a sort of foundation document of The Society, a stall setting out its wares, both to explain to the public its ideas and to attract new members. Amongst other things it said that the

"privilege of free prayer is not to be taken to mean simply each clergyman's liberty to lead the devotions of his congregation according to his own idea or fancy, or as his spirit may be moved to pray. It most legitimately may have the higher meaning, that each clergyman of a Church which, like ours, is a National branch of the Church Catholic, is at liberty as a minister of the Church Catholic to use whatever is the recorded devotion of that Church he finds most suitable to his congregation's need. His own fountains of devotion may soon run dry, but those of the whole Church are not easily exhausted."

Similarly, we ought never to lose sight of the fact that according to the constitution of our Church, the minister's liberty in the conduct of worship is subject always to the Presbytery and to his Ordination vow to "uphold the doctrine, worship, government, and discipline of this Church"; and subject also to the promise enshrined in the Formula signed at every Ordination and Induction:

"I promise to observe the order of worship and the administration of all public ordinances as the same are or may be allowed in this Church."

These provisions do not allow the free and easy latitude which some seem to think is theirs by right; they are not free to do what they want, but free only to conduct worship in a recognizable though unspecified Church of Scotland manner. Perhaps the Minister of Dirlton, who was also for many years the Treasurer of this Society, The Revd John Kerr, had it about right when in his Lee Lecture of 1908 he said,

"Our position, so far as I understand it, is to hold the balance between the rigidity of the Anglican service and the ravings of an unfettered style of⁵ worship that is liable to all kinds of abuse." !

But to return to the new Book of Common Order. If it was not to be a Prayer Book, was it to be a Directory, giving general guidance as to how the Church of Scotland organized and structured its worship, listing the elements that belong to a full act of public worship and setting them in a framework of an ordered sequence, and in some sense at least providing a norm for the orderly conduct of public worship ? Or was it to be a Service Book, offering Orders of Service and of Prayers which could be used both as they stood, that is to say verbatim at the service, and as models for ministers to follow ? It is clear that the original Book of Common Order in 1564 made provision for both these practices to be pursued, and it seemed to the Panel that this was the way to proceed.

THE CONSTITUENCY

But now a further consideration arises. Was the new book to be a ministers' book or a people's book ? John Knox's book, you remember, was in the hands of the people, bound up with the Psalter and popularly called "The Psalm Book". It went through some 70 editions in just over 80 years; but when it was superceded by The Directory for Public Worship", there was longer a need for a book to be in the people's hands, and the practice of a people's book ceased. But the idea was never quite lost. It was the purpose of this Society to place a cheap edition of their Euchologion in the hands of congregations; "and then", says the record with relish and supreme optimism, "we shall have responses." !⁶

If the new book is to be used as more than a model, should it be in the hands of the people at least on those occasions when it is being used word for word ? It is obvious that if the book were to be in the hands of the people, it would be desirable to make it possible for the people to

participate as much as possible, whether by providing a substantial part for them to say in the service (the people's part) or to make much more of the material responsorial. Should there in that event be two books, a minister's book containing all the material, and a people's book containing the people's part with appropriate explanatory and connecting rubrics ? The Uniting Church of Australia has done this most successfully, and the Panel may well follow its example. In the first instance, however, only a minister's book will be produced; and then, when it is in print, the decision as to whether a people's book should be prepared will be made.

THE SOURCES

The next question to be discussed was the question of sources: where should the Panel go to find appropriate material for the new book ? The obvious starting point was our own tradition, both our authorized books (such as the three versions of the Book of Common Order [1564, 1940, 1979], together with their accompanying books, Prayers for the Christian Year and The Ordinal and Service Book for Use in the Courts of the Church) and our own unofficial books (such as our own Euchologion), together with the wealth of devotional material that is our rich inheritance. But we were mindful also of the First Article of the Declaratory Articles which describes the Church of Scotland as "part of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church", and we felt it right to claim our heritage here too, and to be free to make use of the whole range of Christian experience from whatever source.

One of the saddest criticisms levelled against the Panel is that in its work it is aping Anglicanism, or even still, Romanism. As recently as the 1990 General Assembly, objection was made to the use of "Nunc Dimittis" in the new Annual Covenant Service, for no reason other than that it was said to be an Anglican practice which should not be followed by the Church of Scotland. This is sad, not only because it betrays a total ignorance of our own tradition (whether it be United Presbyterian, United Free, or Church of Scotland), in which our Service Books for generations now have used this and many other similar phrases; but also because it shows a deficient understanding of the Church of Scotland as part of the Church Catholic. Of course, there are practices and phrases from other Churches which we do well to avoid. I always think, for example, that the Anglican "Here ends the second lesson" sounds anaemic against our more robust "May God bless this reading of his holy Word", and would be sorry to see our practice superceded by the other (as it sometimes is !). Similarly, I enjoy the story told in

one of the earlier records of our Society of a

"clever Englishwoman (who) once went into one of our parish churches, and the whole service was so much like what she heard in England, with some differences, that she was very surprised. When she came out she was asked what she thought of it, and she said she preferred Scotch broth to mock turtle".⁸

Our new Book of Common Order must be recognizably Scottish, and to that end it will include material from the Celtic tradition; but it will first be Catholic, reflecting the Christian spirituality of the whole Church.

We must, however, be more eclectic still, and draw on material not only from the past but also from the world-wide Church of today. The ecumenical movement has widened all our experience, liturgical as well as theological, and our fellowship in the world-church cannot be gainsaid. It is right, therefore, that the new book should contain, for example, versions of the creeds, canticles, and the Lord's Prayer which have been approved for use in all the English-speaking Churches of the West, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Reformed.

Whatever the source of the material, whether supplied by members of the Panel or drawn from the wealth of the Church's resources, the Panel's principal concern is to ensure that everything offered for use in worship was founded on Holy Scripture. The Church of Scotland's allegiance to the Scottish Reformation means that she receives "The word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as its supreme rule of faith and life", and the Panel would add, the supreme rule of worship.

THE LANGUAGE

Consideration for inclusive language is given throughout the new book. Language about people is inclusive: "mankind", for example, becomes "all" or "all people", "the family of man" becomes "the human family" or "humankind". In prayers and in rubrics, pronouns are italicized, and in the Form and Order for Holy Baptism, the italicized pronoun used throughout is "she".

The Panel has also been sensitive about language about God, and wherever possible has avoided the use of "male-dominated" language to describe God. Traditional metaphors like "Father", "Judge", "King" remain, though they are used sparingly, as are references to God's might and power. This does

not always make for elegant composition, but it is an honest attempt to fulfil an undertaking given to the General Assembly in 1986 and in 1988 to use inclusive language wherever possible, though not to the extent of altering Scripture or changing classical texts.

So far as language in general is concerned, the attempt has been made to ensure that it is simple, fresh, relevant and beautiful. The watchword has been: "Reverence to God, respect for the people", and "the people" includes the clergy who will be the primary users of the book. Care has been taken to make the speaking of the prayers as easy and as rhythmical as possible, so that during acts of worship there should be no unnecessary strain either in saying or in hearing them. They are mainly set out not in prose paragraphs, but in short lines, like verse. I at least have been conscious of the criticism made against the 6th edition of Eucholegion" in 1888 by certain members of our Society, namely that the material was too doctrinal in tone and expression, some of it, particularly the confessions, was unreal in character, and that if the prayers were

"brought by careful and repeated revision to a higher pitch of simplicity, dignity, and beauty the result might be a service-book which numbers of ministers would at once adopt, and which the Church itself might find expedient to recognize."¹⁰

You might think it poetic justice that the people who made these criticisms were themselves made responsible for the Services of the Fifth Sunday in the 7th edition of Eucholegion, with what results you can all see for yourselves.

THE BASIC PRINCIPLE

When we come on to the content of the new book, the Panel has been guided by several leading principles, the primary one being the recognition that the Church in its worship on earth reflects and in a measure repeats what Christ does in heaven. Christ offers himself continually and perfectly to the Father. But his people are in him and he is in them. In him we have access to the Father, and by his Spirit dwelling in us we approach continually nearer to the perfection and maturity that is in Christ. Our worship flows from our fellowship with the Father through the Son in the power of the Spirit.

When we make our offering of sacrifice and praise, we do so in the strength and joy of the presence of the crucified, risen, and ascended Lord. It is his life and it is our life that we offer, which is why the Panel in the 1979 book, concentrated so much on the Divine Service, the Sacrament of Holy Communion. In the Sacrament of the Supper we realize to the greatest extent possible for sinful human beings what may be called the full potential of worship. The Church's instinct has always been to keep the Sacrament central and fundamental, and even when there is no Action, still, in our tradition at least, the service has been eucharistic in its structure and order. The 1990 General Assembly may have been right when it pronounced that "the Church of Scotland does not accept a celebration of Holy Communion as the normal form of Sunday worship" and instructed the Panel to present the new book in such a way as to reflect this. But "normal practice" is not the same thing as "the norm". It is the normal practice for most motorists to travel on motorways at more than 70 mph, but the norm remains 70. And most congregations in the Church may not have as part of their normal practice a celebration of Holy Communion every Sunday, but the norm nevertheless remains. Both of these, the normal practice and the norm, are reflected in the new book.

Since our worship centres upon Christ and his worship, it is clear that worship must be designed to promote the glory of God rather than to procure benefits for his worshippers. The doxological note must sound through all our worship, giving it a tone of joy, of freedom, of delight. Alongside this principle, there is the thought that while public worship is a converting ordinance, with the outsider always in mind, it has a primary role to play in the edifying of the Body of Christ, a building up of the Church, much in the manner of St Paul's expressed wish when he said, "I want us to be encouraged by one another's faith when I am with you." Here, too, there is room for a positive note to be struck, echoing the dynamic joy of the presence of Christ and reflecting the boundless energy of his Spirit.

In the preparation of material that is simple, formal, reverent, consistent, and structured, the Panel has been aware that it is providing a service-book for a Church which contains within it many shades of opinion and belief. In spite of what people may say, the Panel on Worship is not The Church Service Society; and indeed, it may be fairly claimed that its membership represents a cross-section of the whole Church of Scotland. It is this broad representation that in part makes the work of the Panel so challenging and difficult: every point of view has to be considered and, if

possible, accommodated. This I hope does not mean that we end up with a book which is so full of compromise as to be diffuse and bland. It is a fresh book, practical, relevant, and immediately useful to a wide constituency within the Church.

THE CONTENTS

The Table of Contents, which was published in the Panel's Report to the 1990 General Assembly, reflects this concern. The Panel's aim has been to provide as comprehensive a book as possible, building on the 1940 book's breadth of material. It begins with a short section of Prayers for Preparation for Worship, which in part reflect the use of the Orthodox Churches. A selection of Scripture Sentences for general use follows, succeeded by Orders of Service for Morning and Evening Worship. Most of these services are new, though one or two are taken from the Panel's recent book for Kirk Session Teams, "Worshipping Together". One of the Morning Services contains material from the Celtic tradition, and another is based on a Service from India. An attempt has been made to provide freshness and variety in the services, and especially in the Evening Services, a note of relative informality has been introduced.

The next section comprises Forms and Orders for Holy Communion. The principal Order follows a more or less classical pattern, with resolutions of such questions as the placing of the Creed, the Peace, and the Intercessions which will not please everybody! The Eucharistic Prayer stands in its proper form and in its proper place, but others are offered at the end of the Service to allow for variety and frequency of celebration. Each one of these additions is of a different character, one for example, based on the Genevan Service Book, reflecting our own Reformed tradition; one from the world Church (English Language Liturgical Consultation); and one from the Celtic tradition. There will also be Orders of Service to be used with the house-bound, and when children are present.

The Liturgical Committee debated long about the provision that should be made for Holy Baptism and its related Services. It was eventually decided that since there is but one baptism, there should be but one Form and Order of Service for Baptism, whether for infants or for adults, with the Service for infants being normative. Of course this means that the rubrics will have

to be especially clear, and there will have to be built in to the Service alternatives to enable the Sacrament to be celebrated whoever the candidates are. The insights of the French Reformed Church's Liturgy, published in a booklet by the Panel in 1986 are retained; and the image of burial with Christ in baptism is given a significant and perhaps a heightened place. Baptism of adults as a separate rite is provided for, though it is made clear that the norm in the case of adults is Baptism and Confirmation followed by Holy Communion. A Service of Reaffirmation of Baptism and Public Profession of Faith provides yet a further opportunity for Baptism to be seen in its central and fundamental role in the life and worship of the Church and in the experience of the individual Christian.

Orders of Service are offered for Christian Marriage, one following the recognizable pattern of the 1940 and the 1979 books, and one following a eucharistic structure. There are also Orders for the Blessing of a Civil Marriage, and for Thanksgiving for Marriage (with the renewal of marriage vows).

The provision for funerals is, the Panel believes, a rich one, with the Funeral Service itself, together with Services for Still Births and Neo-Natal Deaths, for the Funeral of a Child, for the Funeral of a Young Person, and for the Burial or Scattering of Ashes.

Occasional Services, or what in other traditions are known as Services of Benediction include a Service for Healing, An Annual Covenant Service, a Service for a Festival, Remembrance Day Service, a Service for Harvest Festival, and a Service for the Ordination and admission of Elders. There will also be a section of Prayers for Dedications as well as Prayers for the Christian Year, and a series of Collects commemorating the saints, both Catholic and Reformed. A short Daily Service will be provided in such a way as to make it possible to be used either as a Daily Office or as a Service of Public Worship in the parish Church. Ascriptions and Benedictions round off this section, usually in the language of the "Revised English Bible".

One matter remains to be mentioned.

The Panel was exercised to know what lectionary to follow. As you know, the Church of Scotland is represented on the Joint Liturgical Group by two members of the Panel, and it was the JLG's lectionary which was used in

the 1979 book and as the basis for the Church of England's Alternative Service Book, 1980. But that lectionary has proved in use to be somewhat deficient, not least in that it makes provision for only a two-year cycle of readings. Some of us have been using this lectionary since 1976 when it was first published. To be reading the same passages of Scripture in worship for upwards of fifteen years is beginning to appear as a restrictive practice ! The JLG decided to expand the lectionary, and last November published a selection of readings on a four-year cycle, using each of the four Gospels in turn as the core for each successive year. This is very attractive in that it both retains much of the valuable JLG Calendar, with its nine Sundays before Christmas, its nine Sundays before Easter, and its Sundays after Pentecost, and it offers a wide variety of Scripture material, covering far more of the Bible than was possible under the two-year scheme.

But the Panel felt that in fact, four years was too long a span for a scheme to run. And in addition, a Gospel a year means that you do without St John's Gospel for three years before its turn comes up. That was seen to be fatal: three years without a significant diet of St John seemed impossible. The Panel, with regret, since it is active in the work of JLG, decided to depart from the JLG Lectionary, and consequently from the JLG Calendar, and turned instead to the Revised Common Lectionary, which runs on a three-year cycle, and is used in most of the English-speaking churches in the west. The fact that the Church of England has declared its intention both to run with its ASB lectionary until the end of the century, and not to adopt the Common Lectionary thereafter but to follow one of its own devising means, sadly, that the two established Churches in Britain will be following different lectionaries. But this disadvantage is offset by the benefit that the Episcopal Church in Scotland will be following the Common Lectionary, and the Roman Catholic Church will be following a three-year lectionary which is very closely akin to the Common Lectionary. This means that for the first time the three historic churches in Scotland will be following substantially the same lectionary, and this is surely great gain. We may be out-of-step with England; but we will be in-step with our fellow-Christians in Scotland, and with the rest of the English-speaking Church.

The new Book of Common Order will soon be before you. It is not a book of The Church Service Society, and there may well be things about it that members of this Society will not like, though I hope these will not be many. But it is a book for the whole church which, if it is to be accepted and used

by the whole church has to avoid on one hand liturgical fundamentalism and on the other liturgical anarchy. When it is published I hope that its evangelical catholicism will commend it for your use.

NOTES

- 1 The Revd John Kerr,
"The Renaissance of Worship",
(Edinburgh, J Gardner Hitt, 1909), p 12
- 2 RCD Jasper (Editor),
"Getting the Liturgy Right", (JLG)
(London, SPCK, 1982), p 3
- 3 The Revd John Kerr, supra, p 58
- 4 The Revd James T Cox,
"Practice and Procedure in the Church of Scotland", 6th Edition
edited by The Revd DFM Macdonald,
(Edinburgh, 1976), p 574
- 5 The Revd John Kerr, supra, p 26
- 6 ibidem p 44
- 7 "Uniting in Worship",
Uniting Church Press,
(Melbourne, 1988)
- 8 The Revd John Kerr, supra, p 144
- 9 English Language Liturgical Consultation,
"Prayers we have in Common", 1990
- 10 The Revd John Kerr, supra, p 97
- 11 Romans 1:12

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