

Scottish Worship: The Heritage of the Past and the Needs of the Present ⁽¹⁾

THE Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church share the same heritage in worship as in other things and today face similar problems in worship, problems which they are trying to solve in different ways, but which it may be that neither of them has as yet solved wholly satisfactorily. In this situation each church may have something to learn from the experience of the other; and it might be helpful if members of both bodies worked together on current problems, pooling their approach and their experience—helpful not only in the immediate task of progressing towards a solution of problems in worship, but helpful also towards a closer understanding of each other and therefore towards the ultimate objective of unity.

These two bodies were united before, in the old Church of Scotland as it existed before the Revolution Settlement of 1690. In that church, that united church, there were indeed two parties, an Episcopalian party and a Presbyterian party, and each party had its periods of ascendancy: but they were two parties within one church, not two churches. We do, however, trace our ancestry, our heritage, even further back, to happier days before those two parties arose. For we both have our roots, or some of them, in the church of John Knox, a church in which, while there were no doubt different shades of opinion, there were not yet two parties. There was a period in the history of the Reformed Church in Scotland—admittedly a brief period—when the Episcopalian and Presbyterian parties had not yet arisen. And it was in that period that the history of Scottish reformed worship began.

The opinions of the Reformers on the principles and the practice of worship are now well known, thanks, in recent times, largely to the work of Professor W. D. Maxwell. Leaving aside other matters, and concentrating on the Sunday services, and more especially the Sunday morning service, what do we have? The ideal among the Reformers generally was that the Holy Communion should be the centre of public worship each Lord's day. That proved

⁽¹⁾ An Address given to the Annual Meeting of the Society at New College, Edinburgh, 24th May, 1957.

impracticable, mainly because in the unreformed church Communion had been so infrequent—once a year, at Easter, was the rule—and because the people, so long accustomed to infrequent Communion, could not be prevailed on to come frequently ; while of course the ministers of the Reformed Church on their side would not celebrate with few communicants—the action had to be a genuinely corporate or parochial one. Infrequent Communion is not, as sometimes thought, a protestant or puritan innovation ; it is the last survival of the corrupt medieval church.

But although there could not be an actual celebration every Sunday, or anything like every Sunday, the Reformers did what they thought the next best thing by adopting as the centre of the Sunday morning service those parts of a Communion service which did not directly concern the actual celebration. In England, the Prayer Book directions were explicit. The service was to be said up to and including the Prayer for the Church, concluding thereafter with some Collects and a Blessing. That is, it consisted of the Commandments, the Collect, Epistle and Gospel, the Creed, Sermon, Offertory and Prayer for the Church. In Scotland, likewise, in the Sunday morning service of the *Book of Common Order* there can be discerned the general structure of the first part of the Communion service, concluding, like the Ante-Communion service of the Prayer Book, with a long intercession after sermon. In England as well as in Scotland, actual celebrations were at that time extremely rare, and in both countries, therefore, this Ante-Communion service was the norm as the core of Sunday morning worship.

But it was not the whole of Sunday morning worship. In England, the Ante-Communion was preceded by Mattins, that is, a service consisting essentially of Confession of Sins, Psalms and Canticles, and Lessons from the Old and New Testaments. And in Scotland the Ante-Communion, to call it so, was preceded by what was known as the reader's service, consisting of Confession of sins, Psalms, possibly Canticles, and Lessons from the Old and New Testaments. In each country, therefore, the general structure was the same : in England it was the Ante-Communion preceded by Mattins (and contemporaries would no doubt have described it so, rather than as Mattins followed by the Ante-Communion) ; in Scotland the subordinate nature of the reader's service was perhaps more obvious, so that no one could doubt that the emphasis was on the Ante-Communion.

It is to be observed that, while the reader's service stood alone when no minister was available (just as Mattins could of course be read by a layman in the absence of a priest), yet the reader's service was also the preliminary to the main service which a minister conducted when a minister was available. That this was so, and continued to be so as long as the tradition of the *Book of Common Order* prevailed, is illustrated by what happened in the cathedral of St. Giles on that fateful Sunday the 23rd of July, 1637. Before the new Prayer Book was used for the first time the *Book of Common Order* had been used by the reader—used, that is, for the reader's service, the normal preliminary to the main service. And what followed, from the new Prayer Book, read by the unhappy Dean of Edinburgh, was not Mattins, but the Ante-Communion. The accounts of the tumult which followed make this clear, for Jenny Geddes first became restive when she heard the word "collect". Now, had she sat patiently through the whole of Mattins, with its versicles and responses, its *Te Deum* and its *Benedictus*, until, nearly at the end of the service, the collect for the seventh Sunday after Trinity was announced? Not at all, for the Dean was not reading Mattins. He was reading the Ante-Communion. And Jenny Geddes had no objection to the Collect for Purity, which I imagine she had often heard before, or to the Lord's Prayer, or to the Ten Commandments—for these forms were acceptable enough to Scots of that era, the era before the Covenants; but then came the offending collect, which was the first point on which a critic could fasten.

We have, then, this period in which Englishmen and Scotsmen, Presbyterian and Episcopalian, were in agreement as to the content and the general structure of the Sunday morning service. But there followed a long period when they diverged from that standpoint, simply because different emphases developed in the two countries. In England, in the course of time, Mattins became the dominant element, and the Ante-Communion was depressed to a secondary position. Indeed, the superficial view is that the Ante-Communion simply disappeared, and that the normal Sunday morning service came to be Mattins *per se*. But that is an over simplification, for three elements from the Ante-Communion remained, tacked on to the end of Mattins. The first was the prayers after the third collect, which took the place of the Prayer for the Church or the great intercession. A second was the sermon, for which there was no

place in Mattins and which in practice followed after the the conclusion of Mattins, after the saying of the Grace. And the third was the offertory, or more strictly the collection, which followed on the sermon. When an Anglican minister, after concluding Mattins, goes to the pulpit to preach, and then, after his sermon, descends from the pulpit and goes to the Holy Table to receive the offering, his actions are a remnant, a survival, of the Ante-Communion service which used to follow Mattins. But if it was thus not quite true that the Ante-Communion completely disappeared, it would certainly be true to say that it was submerged.

In Scotland the development was quite different. There it was the equivalent of Mattins, that is, the reader's service, which disappeared, and what was left was the Ante-Communion, or rather, as things evolved, a mere shadow of the Ante-Communion. There emerged in Scotland, in the late seventeenth century and in the eighteenth century, a service consisting only of sermon, psalms and intercessions. There were no lections, no Lord's Prayer, no Creed, no participation by the congregation except in the singing of the psalms. While the ancestry of that service can, indeed, be traced to the Ante-Communion of the Reformers, the pedigree is not immediately obvious. It was hard to see any pedigree at all for a service which was to all appearances formless and shapeless.

It is well known how, when the revival of worship in the Church of Scotland set in in the nineteenth century, there was a strong tendency to look for a model to the Mattins which had by that time become the usual morning service in England. It is a familiar tale how that conception, that Mattins should be the norm, prevailed for a time even in the publications of this society.

But it appears now, in the middle of the twentieth century, that Mattins by itself in the Anglican churches and the Scottish equivalent of Mattins in the Presbyterian churches represented only a temporary aberration—though it is one of which we have not yet seen the last. The more profound developments of the last hundred years, in both churches, have been along quite different lines. Each church has returned to a renewed emphasis on the Holy Communion; that is what has lain at the root of all the changes recently made in worship. But each church expressed the renewed emphasis on Holy Communion in a different way.

In the Episcopal Church the great achievement was the recovery of the weekly Communion—an actual celebration of Communion every Sunday. At first the all but universal practice was a celebration every Sunday at an early hour, with a late celebration only once a month or on the great festivals, while Mattins retained its place as the eleven o'clock service. More "advanced" churches then went in for the displacement of Mattins altogether as a congregational service, and held at 11 o'clock a Choral Eucharist, sometimes known by exotic names like "high mass" or "solemn mass", a celebration at which few, or (quite illegally) even none, of the congregation communicated. More recently there has been a new fashion. The early said celebration and the eleven o'clock choral celebration are alike being laid aside in favour of a Communion, usually sung, at an hour like 9, 9.30 or 10—a celebration at which all present normally communicate. This service is sometimes called the "parish mass", a term doubly inappropriate in Scotland, because the Episcopal Church in Scotland does not have parishes and because such a service, so far from resembling the mass, is undoubtedly the closest approach in twentieth century practice to the ideal of the Reformers. The one difficulty seems to be that, whether by accident or for some reason of principle which remains obscure, this weekly congregational Communion has been generally adopted by churches where the ritual is elaborate, and Mattins therefore remains the refuge of the low or moderate churchman. However, the point is that these various experiments are all ways in which Anglicans have been expressing their recovery of the idea of a weekly Communion.

In the Church of Scotland the renewed emphasis on Communion has been expressed in a different way. There may, indeed, here and there be a weekly celebration, but in general it is true that actual celebrations remain infrequent and that when they take place they are still great corporate, congregational or parochial occasions. The infrequent celebration, however, stands alongside the restoration of a genuine and unmistakable Ante-Communion as the normal 11 o'clock service, and in a wider sense the old domination of the pulpit is giving way to the prominence accorded to the Holy Table as the focus of worship. In these ways the Church of Scotland has expressed its renewed emphasis on the Communion.

Both churches are in effect accepting the slogan "The Lord's Service for the Lord's Day", and both are trying to

put into effect the ideal of the Reformers, the ideal from which both churches set out four hundred years ago. But while there is thus a certain agreement on principle, it seems that neither church has yet found the complete answer, neither has yet found a wholly satisfactory solution.

Few would contend, for example, that the present arrangements in most Episcopal churches are ideal. There is little to be said in theory for the early celebration with a handful of communicants, and less to be said for the late celebration at which many attend but few communicate. It would now be generally admitted that the biggest mistake the nineteenth century Anglo-Catholics made was to take over from the Romans the non-communicating high mass. However, while Episcopalians deserve credit for their success in going some way to overcome the medieval prejudice against frequent communion, the Presbyterians on their side have never lost sight of the ideal of a corporate, a congregational, a parochial action. The Episcopalians can undoubtedly learn something from the example of the Presbyterians in this particular, and at least one Episcopalian congregation has taken a leaf out of the Presbyterians' book by distributing Communion Cards before four Communions in the year—Christmas, Easter, Whitsunday and Harvest—so that these may be especially great congregational occasions. It is a problem common to the two churches whether there is a place for a limited number of special Communion seasons and at the same time a place for the weekly Communion at which only a few are present to communicate.

However, leaving aside such a major problem, there are also problems of detail. One concerns the lections. The Communion service of the Prayer Book cannot be considered to provide adequate lections for present-day conditions. If people are hearing Mattins and Evensong, or if people are reading the Bible for themselves, then the liturgical Epistles and Gospels are all they need in church ; but when those conditions are not being fulfilled, it is another matter. There must be many devout Episcopalians, regular churchgoers Sunday by Sunday, who hear nothing of the Bible except the same yearly round of snippets of Epistles and Gospels. It may not be so bad in a church where there is not a fixed lectionary, for there the Epistles and Gospels *may* represent a wider range—but again they may not, for I suppose there is nothing to prevent a minister limiting his lections to a few favourite passages. The

Danish Lutheran church provides a two-year cycle of Epistles and Gospels, and a two-year, or even a three-year, cycle would have much to commend it. But there is also the question of Old Testament lections. In some Presbyterian churches, an Old Testament lesson, as well as the Epistle and Gospel, is read within the Ante-Communion service, and this is authorized in the present *Book of Common Order* (1940). The same practice is followed in the liturgy of the Anglican province of India (which, it is interesting to note, has the most elaborate ritual of any Anglican liturgy) and also in the liturgy of the United Church of South India. This device is clearly very helpful. But it is plain that in this matter there is a problem, a problem common to Presbyterians and Episcopalians, still awaiting solution.

The second of the problems of detail relates to what is sometimes called praise, if that term should be thought fit to cover the wide range of intercession, confession, thanksgiving and meditation embraced by the Psalter and the Hymn books. The Anglican example may be taken first. The assiduous attender at Communion services may go through life without ever singing the *Te Deum* or the *Benedicite*, and even without ever singing a prose Psalm. And people who have been rudely deprived of their Mattins by an innovating clergyman have complained bitterly of the loss they have felt when they ceased to sing the familiar morning Canticles. As to the Psalms, there need be no difficulty, for a psalm can very suitably be used as the Introit for the Communion service. But, although there is no reason why a canticle should not be sung at some other point in the service in place of a metrical hymn, that happens very rarely indeed, and there must now be good Episcopalians who are quite unfamiliar with the *Te Deum*. On the other hand, of course, even those most devoted to their Mattins may not want to sing the *Te Deum* undeviatingly every Sunday, except possibly during Advent and Lent. But clearly there must somewhere be a point of balance, a point, if you like, of compromise, so that due provision is made for prose Psalms and Canticles. Presbyterians should be more fortunate, because there seems to be no reason at all why their Ante-Communion should not find a place for Canticles and Prose Psalms, as, indeed, the *Book of Common Order* recommends. The trouble, so far as the Presbyterians are concerned, is the prevalence of the notion that congregations are incapable of singing anything which

is not in verse, and that prose items must therefore be left to the choir. That this is nonsense is demonstrated in the many small Episcopalian congregations, up and down the country, where there is no choir and where the people by themselves can tackle the Canticles, at least, quite competently. Nor need relief from the monotony of metrical singing be sought only in Anglican chants or other settings of Psalms and Canticles, for in the Communion service, at least, the *Nicene Creed*, the *Sanctus* and the *Agnus Dei* (all provided for in the *Book of Common Order*) could be sung by Presbyterian congregations as they are regularly sung by Episcopalian congregations. However, the whole question of the reconciliation of the demands of prose and metrical singing is clearly a second problem of detail which both churches have to face.

Both those problems can of course be partly solved if the evening service is of a different character from the morning service. In many an Anglican church, although Mattins has been banished, Evensong—however illogically—retains its place, and those who attend it have the evening Canticles and they have prose Psalms, including a precious thing like the 119th Psalm during the Sunday evenings in Lent. Equally, in some Presbyterian churches which have the Ante-Communion structure for the morning service, a different structure prevails in the evening. This would go some way towards solving the problem if the laity were all “twicers”; but most of them are only “onciers”, and whatever the future of the evening service it can hardly provide the entire answer to our problems.

Both these problems—of the lections and of the praise—point to the same conclusion, namely that we may perhaps have been a little too hasty in throwing Mattins overboard. Mattins provides both the lections and the variety of praise that we need. It should be recalled, too, that the content of Mattins has come to be the same as the content of the Ante-Communion, so that Mattins as so expanded, Mattins as it developed in the nineteenth century and as it is known today, is by no means indefensible. If the issue is Mattins *versus* Ante-Communion, then a preference for the latter is really somewhat doctrinaire. But leaving aside that issue, one can profitably consider Mattins in relation not to the Ante-Communion but to the Communion.

There would seem to be no hope of going back to the Reformers' practice of Mattins *plus* Communion, or reader's service *plus* Communion. Mattins *plus* Communion was,

and according to the English *Book of Common Prayer* still is, an extraordinarily cumbrous diet of worship, involving *inter alia* two confessions and two absolutions, four repetitions of the Lord's Prayer, the repetition of both the Apostles' and the Nicene Creed and the reading twice over of the collect for the day. According to the *Scottish Prayer Book*, however, all that duplication may be eliminated, and provision is made for the use before a Communion Service of nothing more than two Lessons, a psalm and two canticles. It is perfectly practicable to have this before the Communion, without unduly lengthening the service, especially if no time is wasted in singing metrical hymns. But this model, although sometimes used, and used very successfully, does not seem to commend itself very widely.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion, as a way out of our difficulties, that some method must be found of conflating the two services, or, if that savours too much of mere mechanics, then of adapting the Communion or Ante-Communion so that it contains more of the elements of Mattins. It is well to recall what those elements are, in the noble language of Cranmer's preface: "Although we ought at all times humbly to acknowledge our sins before God, yet ought we most chiefly so to do when we assemble and meet together to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his most holy word and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul". Can any one reading these words, agree to the casual abandonment of a service with such a content? On the contrary, one might suggest that that Preface could well be the starting point from which to think out afresh the content of the morning service. And if that Preface is thus a general guide, a particular guide as to method has been laid down by W. D. Maxwell: after commenting on the forms drawn up by the Reformers, he comments, "But if the forms were inadequate, the principles they were intended to express are living and imperishable. To those who inherit the Reformers' spirit the task yet remains to provide forms broad enough and deep enough for man's whole being to go out to God in adoration, praise and prayer and for God's grace to come to man without let or hindrance. To accomplish this requires a bringing forth from the Christian treasury of things both new and old". Much still remains to be done in working out the content, and perhaps to some extent even the structure, of the morning service.

To return to the Communion Office itself, there are one or two matters of practice on which there is disagreement, and again the disagreement is not wholly between one church and the other, but between different schools of thought which do not coincide with denominational boundaries.

One is the matter of the position of the celebrant. Presbyterian practice is, I suppose, invariable—the celebrant stands all the time behind the Holy Table facing the people. Episcopalian practice, however, is not, invariable. The old posture was of course the north side of the table, in days when the table was not a fixture but was movable and was set lengthwise in the chancel for a celebration. When the table became a fixture against the east wall, the position was re-defined as the north side or end, and this remained the usual practice until the second half of last century. Since then it has become almost extinct. It was superseded by the eastward position, the celebrant standing with his back to the people except at certain points when he must turn to face them and at other points when he is directed to kneel; this is still the prevailing practice, and indeed in the Romanizing wing of Anglicanism there is a noticeable reluctance to face the people at any point or to obey the rubrics which enjoin kneeling at the Confession and the Prayer of Humble Access, so that the posture is less variable than ever. But in very recent years there has arisen a new fashion, in imitation of the Presbyterians, but also in imitation, so it is said, of the Pope: and in a few Anglican churches you will find the celebrant standing behind a table which has now been moved forward from the east wall. This development is obviously of some importance from the point of view of unity. Yet it may be that many Episcopalians feel that there is something more impersonal about the eastward position, that the eastward position makes clearer the unity of priest and people, makes it clearer that the priest is merely the spokesman of the people, and that on the other hand there is something more sacerdotal about the Presbyterian—or papal—position: to put it differently, it can never be distracting to look at the celebrant's back, whereas it may be distracting to look at his face. The last word has not yet been said on this matter of posture, which thus seems to be another matter on which members of the two churches could profitably enter into discussion.

The other matter of practice which has to be mentioned is perhaps a more delicate one. In the Presbyterian churches

the individual cup has been introduced, as a modern innovation, on the grounds of hygiene and convenience, though it appears to a simple layman to be directly contrary to scripture and to the practice of all the centuries of the church's history, if not indeed destructive of the very nature of the sacrament. But in the Episcopal church there is an exact parallel in the individual wafer. It cannot indeed be called a modern innovation, because it is presumably a revival of medieval practice, and in modern times it has been borrowed from the Church of Rome, even to the extent of ornamenting the wafers with symbols of one kind or another—an utterly revolting practice. But the use of the individual wafer, like that of the individual cup, is advocated on the grounds of convenience—no crumbs on the carpet and that kind of thing ; and, equally with the individual cup, it seems to be destructive of the nature of the sacrament and to be completely indefensible theologically. The suffering Episcopalian laity who have to put up with this kind of thing could enter into a very sympathetic discussion with Presbyterians who disapprove of the individual cup.

The general picture is that at present neither church is wholly set in its ways, in neither is usage entirely stereotyped or practice entirely uniform. The situation is thus more or less fluid, and therefore offers a most promising opportunity for reaching agreement through the discussion of common problems. To put it differently, it is healthy and promising that there is disagreement within each church as well as between the churches, and that the lines along which opinions form are not the lines which divide one church from the other.

And—a final and most important point : while there is so much disagreement on detail, there is a very large measure of agreement on principle, and above all on eucharistic doctrine. The trouble is that we know far too little about each other's services and standards. At an Episcopalian Youth Fellowship a few years ago an address was given by a Presbyterian minister about the differences between the two churches, and when he came to speak about the Communion he introduced his statement of the Presbyterian case by remarking, " Now, in our service we have an epiclesis ". He was not aware that in every Communion Office compiled for the Scottish Episcopal Church there has been an epiclesis. On the other hand, very few Episcopalians seem to be aware that the Scottish *Book of*

Common Order contains a liturgy which represents precisely the same eucharistic doctrine as the liturgy in their own Prayer Book. Whatever views may be held by individual clergy and laity in the Episcopal church, and perhaps also in the Church of Scotland, the doctrines officially implied in the *Book of Common Order* and those implied in the *Scottish Book of Common Prayer* suggest that there is, at this central point, evidence of real agreement. Surely, if we have agreement on the substance of the liturgy we have gone a very long way indeed towards unity. The words of the late Dean Perry should be kept in mind: "When the great time comes for a reunion that will give to Scotland one church, at once Catholic and national, the Scottish liturgy may play an important part in shaping the worship of the Scottish people at the sacrament of unity".

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