Phases of Order in Church of Scotland Worship

IN the worship of the Church of Scotland why has there not been a continuity of order comparable with that in the Church of England? Because post-reformation worship in the two Churches began under such different auspices and in such different ways. This was because the Reformation itself took place in Scotland under conditions utterly different from those in England. This contrast of spiritual experiences in the past is far from irrelevant to the problem of fostering unity between the two Churches to-day.

In England the Reformation did not take the violently revolutionary course it took in Scotland. It began to come a generation earlier, and the initial, fundamental change was accomplished pseudo-constitutionally through the abolition of the Papal authority by Convocation and Parliament in 1533. King Henry VIII, of course, had no spiritual ideals or motives whatever. He was an unscrupulous opportunist who wanted to be rid of Papal interference with his matrimonial affairs, and to control the Church in England himself. That Reformation was brewing suited him well. From the point of view of the common people this fundamental change came imperceptibly. It paved the way for future developments; but meantime the bishops and the parish clergy with whom they were familiar carried on under new management, as we might say. Nothing in the nature of revolutionary innovation was apparent at first. The spirit of reformation was indeed afoot and growing in the nation, prompted by the reading of the Bible in English. But it was only in the next reign, that of Edward VI, that the tide of Reformation swept over the whole Church, clergy and people.

In that reign the people rejoiced to hear worship conducted in their own tongue. The genius of Cranmer provided them with a Prayer Book (1st Ed. VI, 1548) whose theology satisfied them, but, more particularly, whose beauty of devotional language charmed them at the time, and as the years passed and the Protestant Church of England revived after the bloody interlude of Mary's reign, endeared to the hearts of succeeding generations the subsequently evolved prayer book in which much of his work survived.

In Scotland things were entirely different. The urge toward reform, drawing inspiration and support from both the Continent and England, was intensified by the corruption

rife among the monastic clergy and by the cruel tyranny of Cardinal Beaton. But the political situation was tense, and lent itself to exploitation in the name of religion. The course of the Reformation in Scotland was conditioned by the nation's difficult and dangerous position in the field of European power-politics. The minority of the Queen of Scots, and the interference and war-making of the English King, with a view to undermining French power by securing the girl Queen of Scots as the bride of an English Prince, made Scotland a field of conflict, where opposing factions of her own people were pawns, respectively, of the French and English monarchs who were in opposite religious camps. In such a situation the bitterness and violence of the rivalry between the two religious parties could not but grow. When eventually John Knox emerges as the great leader of the triumphant reformers, it is, from their point of view, " the Congregation of the Lord " victorious over " the Synagogue of Satan ". There could be no possible appeal to the spirit of compromise. There could be no maintenance of anything inherited from, or savouring of, the Roman past. The break was complete. The episcopal system itself was thrown overboard, and even the traditional observance of the festivals of the Christian Year was abandoned.

Before the actual accomplishment of the Scottish Reformation in 1560, and after it for a year or so, the *Second Prayer Book of Edward VI*, in whose compilation Knox himself had taken some small part, seems to have been sporadically used in Scotland. Thereafter Knox took charge, and introduced in 1562 the *Book of Common Order*, the first Scottish edition of the Geneva Service Book of that name, which he and others had compiled there in 1556. It had been a compromise between the *Second Prayer Book of Edward VI* and Calvin's Liturgy of the French Reformed Church. There is no point in making invidious comparisons between it and the *Book of Common Prayer*. We can simply say that it was the fate of Scotland to have, as the man who most deeply stamped her religious life at this formative period, one whose greatness lay in spheres theological and governmental, rather than liturgical.

The *Book of Common Order*, although it immediately came into general use and remained in use for about eighty years, going through numerous editions, gradually lost any hold it may have had on Scots ministers and people. By the time of the Westminster Assembly, 1646, it had finally passed from use, extempore prayer having become the fashion.

Picture then the *Book of Common Order* in general use during the first three quarters of a century after the Reformation, and remember that these years included the first Episcopal period, 1610-38. It would appear, however, that some ministers must have been departing from it, probably in terms of the latitude allowed by some of its rubrics. For Archbishop Spottiswoode, writing from London in 1615, where he was consulting with King James, says, " there is lacking in the Church of Scotland a form of Divine Service ; and the framing of public prayers is left to the ministers themselves." This cannot have been wholly true, but was probably an exaggeration of what was beginning to happen, calculated to encourage the King whose avowed intention was to establish the worship of the Church of Scotland on lines conformable with those of the Church of England.

He had been wise enough in 1610 to be content with the introduction of Bishops, and not to impose the use of the *Book of Common Prayer*, or tamper with the *Book of Common Order*, but to bide his time. In 1616, however, he decided to act. At the Assembly of that year, held in Aberdeen, he caused his Commissioner, the Earl of Montrose, to issue the royal instructions that, among other things, " a Liturgy be made and Form of Divine Service which shall be read in every Church in common prayer ; and, before preaching, every Sabbath by the Reader where there is one ; and, where there is none, by the Minister before he conceives his own prayer." This last clause is suggestive of what must have been happening.

The Assembly duly appointed a committee for that purpose, which soon produced a form of service quite unlike either the *Book of Common Prayer* or the *Book of Common Order*. The prayers were of inordinate length and comprehensiveness. They alone would take more than an hour to read at a reasonable rate. One cannot help surmising that their purpose was to discourage any additional extemporization on the part of the minister. Nothing came of it. If one peruses this service in Dr. Sprott's " Scottish Liturgies of James VI " one cannot but say, " little wonder."

Eventually, in 1619, " A Book of Common Prayer and administration of Sacraments, with other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of Scotland " was produced. It more or less combined the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Book of Common Order*, with the former predominating. But it was never brought into use, because the troubled state of the Church, following on the ratification of the Perth

Articles, in 1621, was inauspicious for any liturgical reform. After the death of James VI, in 1625, the endeavours of Charles I and Laud to order Church of Scotland worship were progressively disastrous.

During this first Episcopal period Presbyterian malcontents, especially in the south-west of Scotland, were subject to the influence of English Independents. It was natural that between anti-Episcopal elements north and south of the Border a kinship of spirit and purpose should grow up. Influence came also from Ulster, where numbers of Presbyterians had found freedom to worship according to their lights. This extraneous influence was all against liturgical forms, and in favour of extempore prayer.

What, more than anything else, however, fomented the objection to the reading of prayers, and indeed to the use, for purposes of worship, of any book whatever, was the ill-advised attempt of Charles I, in 1637, to force upon the Church of Scotland the so-called " Laud's Liturgy ", which provoked " the Bishops' War " and resulted in the reintroduction of Presbytery ; and in connection with which the Jenny Geddes incident occurred at its first introduction. The popular notion that this lady took action because the Dean of Edinburgh was "reading" prayers is of course erroneous. For the *Book of Common Order* had been in regular use in St Giles, as elsewhere, for three generations, without overt objection, and had been used by the Reader that very morning. It was the supposedly romanizing innovations in the new book to which she took exception. The fact thus remains that, whereas at the time of the Reformation, the reading of prayers in set form had been natural and taken for granted, objection to this practice had steadily grown. Was it because the *Book of Common Order* lacked any winning character, such as Cranmer's work undoubtedly had, or was it because Independents from South of the Border were influencing Scots Presbyterians ? Probably both causes worked together. Otherwise one might have thought that, with the restoration of Presbytery, in 1638, the use of the *Bock of Common Order* would have continued. But now, although some ministers must have been using it, prejudice against the reading of prayers had become general, and was so rooted that it lasted for more than two centuries. The most that happened was that the Assembly of 1640 passed an act declaring that the reading of prayers was " not unlawful ",—which indicates that some

ministers at least must have maintained the use of the original book.

Symptomatic of the rooted objection to the reading of prayers is the fact that a man as highly esteemed as Samuel Rutherford emphatically condemns the practice. Alexander Henderson, originally an Episcopalian but now an ardent Presbyterian, and probably the most powerful and influential minister in the Church of Scotland at this time, is less emphatic but nonetheless explicit. In his book, "Government and Order in the Church of Scotland", 1641, he protests against the view that Scots ministers are following their "extemporary fancy" in their public prayers; but he gives his opinion that "they are not tied to set forms, but have the *Book of Common Order* as their sufficient guide." The degree of abhorrence with which set forms were regarded is evident from the fact that the Creed, the Gloria, and even the Lord's Prayer were considered as savouring of popery and were disused. The Directory of Public Worship, 1648, actually had to *enjoin* the saying of the Lord's Prayer. It can be imagined how people of such prejudices and predilections would regard the re-establishment of Episcopacy by the restored Charles II, and, with it, the obligatory use of the English Prayer Book. The years 1661 to 1689 were a reign of terror to ardent Presbyterians. But in 1690 the Revolution Settlement gave them finally the long-contested field. By this time their antipathy to set forms could not but be stronger than ever. The result is that, onwards to the Disruption of 1843, liturgical worship was a thing not to be contemplated in the Church of Scotland.

The eighteenth century in Scotland is thus blank where liturgical worship is concerned. In England Matthew Henry produced "Helps to Prayer," in which scriptural texts are arranged under the headings Confession, Thanksgiving and Intercession. But it is of no liturgical significance. In Scotland Willison published "Prayers and Meditations", 1750, probably intended as models for other ministers. Apart from these there are no manuals for the use of ministers, even in their studies, let alone in their pulpits.

In 1802, however, we find the first manual confessedly designed for the use of ministers: "The Scotch Minister's Assistant", by Dr. Robertson of Kiltearn. This was followed in 1822 by a book from the pen of John Logan, of "Paraphrases" fame, containing sermons and prayers for use at a communion season. These two volumes are valuable as showing us in form, and in some detail, the kind

of worship in vogue at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

As for the whole of the preceding century—when the ordering of public worship was in the hands of individual ministers, supervised by Presbyteries concerned mainly with theological and political orthodoxy—it was almost inevitable that the language of the prayers in church should be redolent of theological instruction and disquisition. It would of course show varieties and vagaries according to the foibles of individual ministers. But it must never be forgotten that the general principles set forth in the Directory of Public Worship, 1648, would be observed. This manual, with its voluminous directions regarding prayers, was bound to have largely determined their content, and, to a certain extent, their language and their order. Remembering this, and also the large use of the psalms in prayer, as well as in praise, we might dare to say that a vague sense of liturgy might be latent in the hearts of some worshippers. Be this as it may, apart from the peculiarities of individual ministers, there would be prayers of simple, scriptural fervour, and dignity, even beauty, of devotional tone. In general a characteristic type of prayer would mark Church of Scotland services ; with turns of phrase handed down from mouth to mouth through generations of ministers, all comprising a sort of devotional dialect, and even to some extent a rudimentary, oral, floating liturgy. But in an age when controversy after controversy distracted the Church, and schism after schism rent it, the minds of ministers and people could hardly be expected to be directed towards the nature, content and form of public worship. With that generalization we turn from the eighteenth century to the post-Disruption period.

After the Disruption of 1843 the Established Church of Scotland settled down to a difficult, though comparatively peaceful period of self-determination. We soon see the tide beginning to make toward a more conscious order in her services. Almost at once appears Liston's "The Service of the House of God according to the Practice of the Church of Scotland". Here, however, the emphasis is still inclined to be on preaching. Next, Anderson, the minister of Cults, proclaims his purpose in the title of his book, "The Improving of the Taste and Order of Public Services of Religion".

Whether these books were causal or symptomatic of the concern at this time for the manner of public worship in the Church of Scotland, such concern was obviously growing.

In the early 1860's Dr. Lee of Greyfriars, Edinburgh, emerges as the leader of a definite movement toward liturgical reform. His services caused a great stir and drew large congregations. His book, " Reform of the Church of Scotland in Worship ", and his manual of services called, " The Order of Public Worship ", speak for themselves.

We must not forget, in passing, that the middle of the nineteenth century witnessed in the Church of Scotland a great upsurge of liturgical scholarship, resulting largely from the work of Dr. Sprott of North Berwick. His outstanding books on " Knox's Book of Common Order ", on " Worship in Covenanting Times ", and on " The Scottish Liturgies of James VI " inspired others to follow him. In due course Thomas Leishman, H. J. Wotherspoon, James Cooper and others carried on the work in this field.

Meanwhile the movement towards liturgical reform comes to its focus in the formation of the Church Service Society, now approaching its centenary. The production by our Society, in 1868, of " The Book of Common Order ", commonly known as *Euchologion*, was epoch-making, and marked a historic turning point in Church of Scotland worship. It provides complete orders of service for five Sundays and for the administration of the Sacraments. If the form of these is typical of the best that is current at the time, striking advances in Order must have been made during the previous generation. *Euchologion* went through twelve editions in the ensuing half-century, being revised, and largely re-cast, in 1890. This revision tended to be away from Presbyterian Order, dating from the Reformation, which had been ante-Communion in design, toward the Anglican form of Matins. Such change has been regretted and adversely criticized by modern liturgiologists like W. D. Maxwell. But anyway, *Euchologion* did more than anything else to establish the norm of Church of Scotland worship in Victorian and Edwardian days. This, mark well, was the influence of a Society of like-minded ministers and laymen working on their own authority, without official sanction, and in defiance of prejudices rooted for two and a half centuries in the minds of a great section of ministers and Church members.

We must now turn our attention to understand a new development. How is it that, during the past half-century, the ordering of public worship, and all that the Church Service Society stood for and sought to accomplish, has come to be the official concern of the General Assembly, through its Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion ?

In 1849 the General Assembly had appointed an *ad hoc* committee to provide forms of worship for groups of Scots scattered abroad, who had no minister, and were at a great disadvantage in comparison with their Anglican brethren who had all that they required in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Ten years later this committee was erected into a standing committee of the General Assembly, the Committee on Aids to Devotion, under the convenership of Professor Crawford who had been the convener of the *ad hoc* committee. It soon prepared *Prayers for Family Worship*, a notable production indeed. The committee's remit, however, had made it quite clear that it was not to be concerned with public worship, but only with private. Nevertheless, such interest in public worship was being evinced at this time that, in 1863, a special committee was appointed by the General Assembly "to examine into the state of worship in the Church of Scotland." Its report in the following year provided an informative survey. But it concluded with the stated opinion that, while the Assembly had every right to lay down the law for ministers and congregations in their methods of worship, legislative measures were unnecessary and inexpedient. The Assembly agreed.

It was at this stage, and obviously because nothing official regarding forms of worship was going to be done by the General Assembly, that the Church Service Society was formed, with the object of guiding the movement toward improvement in worship on sound lines, and keeping forms of worship true to Scottish Reformed tradition. As we have seen, this Society became widely influential. It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of this. For, in contrast with what had happened in the seventeenth century, when forms of worship had been imposed from above by ecclesiastical and political authority, with disastrous results, we now see forms initiated by ministers and people themselves, and introduced from below; a striking example, surely, of the democratic character of the Church of Scotland.

It is the attitude of the General Assembly, however, that is so interesting. Remembering the bitter story of the seventeenth century, and realizing that prejudices and passions born of that bitterness subsisted even at the then present time, the General Assembly of the nineteenth century preferred, in the field of worship, to let sleeping dogs lie, to give as wide a berth as possible to waking ones, and on principle to abstain from imposing forms of worship, or enacting regulations thereanent. This historically explic-

able attitude made the very existence of the Assembly's Committee on Aids to Devotion precarious. Indeed, in 1907, there was a motion to abolish it and hand over its work to the Committee on Life and Work. But this was defeated.

It required a crisis to bring the work of the Assembly's Committee into prominence. That crisis was the First World War. The motive of helping the people spiritually in their anxieties and sorrows gave new life to the committee. When peace came this new life found expression in more comprehensive work, and in the production of forms of worship suitable to the needs and temper of the new age. *Euchologion*, as we can readily understand, was by now outdated, and belonged to an era gone for ever. In 1923, accordingly, the General Assembly's Committee on Aids to Devotion produced *Prayers for Divine Service*. This notable book was inspired by *Euchologion*, of which it is an abreviation and adaptation, in accordance with the then current liturgical scholarship and taste.

We come now to something crucial. *The General Assembly permissively authorized the use of this book in churches.* Its doing so is an epoch-making development. It shows that the public worship of God, as the great, spiritual obligation of the Church, and as the source of spiritual vitality in every congregation, has at last again, and at the time almost imperceptibly, become the sacred, official concern of the General Assembly. " At last again ", because, in the field of worship, no precedent so important had been seen for close on three hundred years ; not since the General Assembly had ratified the " Westminster Directory of Public Worship " in 1648.

After the Union of the Churches in 1929, the Public Worship Committee of the former United Free Church was combined with the Aids to Devotion Committee of the former Established Church. In due course the " Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion " set to work to provide a Service Book for the united Church. It did so in 1940, under the traditional title, *The Book of Common Order*. This book, again permissively authorized for use in churches, has become the recognized standard of Order in Church of Scotland worship, and has proved widely influential in Presbyterian Churches throughout the world.

This, necessarily sketchy, story of the phases through which the Church of Scotland's attitude to the ordering of worship has passed since the Reformation, thus comes round full circle. We end with the consciousness that the Church

of Scotland has entered, as have Churches of all denominations, on a period of liturgical revival. Of late it has been widely noted that a marked renewal of interest in Liturgy is one of the many accompaniments of the Ecumenical Movement.

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