

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN PUBLIC WORSHIP AND AIDS TO DEVOTION PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ENGLAND

[On 5 October 1972 the Presbyterian Church of England united with the Congregational Church in England and Wales to form the United Reformed Church. The Revd Norman Leak was Convener of the Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion of the P.C. of E. for its final three years and was previously its Secretary. It therefore seemed appropriate that he should be asked to write a short account of the Committee's activity in the last decade. – Ed.]

In 1968, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of England having given authorization for its use, the Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion published a revised Service Book. This replaced the Presbyterian Service Book of 1948. The revision had taken ten years to complete. Draft services had been presented to the Committee and then revised by the Committee over and over again and then presented to the Assembly in batches for its comment and, if necessary, given further treatment. Once the last batch had been approved, the series of services was brought together for final editing and printing. By this time the first complete services had been floating around in pamphlet form for several years whilst the climate of liturgical thought had been swiftly changing. What had once seemed improvements on earlier services now appeared, to those still left on the committee, disappointingly out-of-date. True there were two services with the 'You' form of address to God, but the remainder, whilst less wordy and archaic, still were formal and traditional. An Anglican present at a recent Induction Service said that it resembled a seventeenth-century heresy trial. He missed the note of joy and celebration. Ten years before we might have considered our work an achievement. Now we had little pride in it and watched its emergence with relief rather than gratification.

Noticeable in the new book were the shortening of prayers, their more direct language and their setting-out in print, wherever possible, in short sentences – to make them easier to read. Some sections of worship included in the earlier book were omitted from this one on the grounds that they were adequately covered in other publications – for example, Prayers with the Choir (issued earlier in pamphlet form); Christian Festivals (covered in Prayers for the Christian Year of the Church of Scotland and Prayers and Services for Christian Festivals by J. M. Todd) and Children's Services (to be found in many different manuals). The Lectionary printed was the new lectionary prepared ecumenically by the Joint Liturgical

Group. A Service of Healing was subsequently published in pamphlet form.

The Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion has always had in its membership representatives of different schools of liturgical thought. Predominating has always been the group which sees the Eucharist as the central and normative act of Christian public worship, and even the first order of non-sacramental worship follows the structure of a eucharist-without-communion. There are included, however, in addition to the classical communion service (as found in the Book of Common Order) two additional orders which allow in the one case for the flexibility and spontaneity of another tradition in our Church, a tradition that still favours a Directory rather than a Service Book, and in the other case for a practice found in the Presbyterian Church of Wales (which shares our book), and also in Congregationalism, of celebrating the Lord's Supper after a benediction, which has closed the 'normal' service, and the withdrawal of non-communicating persons.

A move to make Adult or Believers' Baptism the normative sacrament of initiation, whilst making provision for those who wished to observe the sacrament of Infant Baptism, was defeated. The Church, on the whole, was not ready for such a change of practice. There is now, however, a growing insistence that we examine the possibility of a form of Dedication of Infants. The Assembly of 1972 'recognizing that some parents have difficulty in taking or cannot be expected to take the vows required from those who present children for baptism' welcomed 'the experimental use by some ministers of services of Thanksgiving or Dedication' and expressed 'the hope that the appropriate department in the U.R.C. would give urgent consideration to the issues raised by such a service'.

Having reached the point of publishing the Service Book, the Committee felt that the climate of liturgical thought was in such a state of flux and uncertainty that its main function should be, certainly for a time, to stimulate the thinking that was being done throughout the Church. To this end it prepared a Symposium of papers produced for the Committee at different times by various members. These had been to some extent provoked by the Uppsala Conference Report on Worship (World Council of Churches) which asked whether there should be changes in language, music and ceremonies, whether lay people should take part in leading worship, whether there should be more silence and whether the celebration of the Lord's Supper should be confined to church buildings. Also behind the publication of the Symposium lay the conviction that at a time like the present, particularly with a union of the Presbyterian Church of England with the Congregational Church of England and Wales imminent, anything produced should be occasional and ephemeral, until the

Church knew what it wanted. We set out to be a gadfly to the Church rather than a safe poet-laureate producing 'official' books of worship of balanced and careful composition.

At the very time that our Committee was engaged on this task, the Congregational Church's Worship Committee had for the first time produced a booklet of Communion Services based on the premise that the Eucharist is the chief service of Christian worship and also in the conviction that the congregation ought to be encouraged to participate as fully as possible. They also wished to discourage the idea that the Communion is an optional extra tacked on to the end of a 'normal' act of worship. They too, reacting to the Uppsala Report, had produced a Symposium of papers which turned out to be complementary and supplementary to ours. The two were issued at the same time (we had cross-representation on both committees) and were commended to the congregations of both Churches for study. Amongst the papers were: The Crisis of Worship, Secularization and Secularism, Radical Theology and Worship, Experimental Worship, Early Features of Christian Worship (Speaking with tongues, Anointing with oil, Foot-washing, The Pax, The Agape), The Use of Silence, The Practice of Meditation, Spontaneity in Prayer, Comment from the Pew, Group Worship Construction, The Early Church and the Eucharist and Agape, Possible New Styles for the Eucharist, Praying for People and, significantly, Why Worship?)

During these last ten years we have been encouraging congregations to send to us copies of new-style orders of service which they have used, but we have not yet felt able to produce a collection of these. So many of them are one-off efforts for a particular occasion and non-repeatable. Nevertheless it may become possible eventually to produce something like *Worship Now* (The Saint Andrew Press). Thought has been given to the presence of children in morning worship but, no conclusions having been reached, it was left to the United Reformed Church to continue the discussion.

We have also been concerned about the use of the Bible by church members. Whilst there are plenty of books in existence on reading the Bible, none seemed exactly to suit our purposes. We wanted to make available small, easily understood manuals, graded to meet the needs of different types of people. They should set out suggestions for the use of the Bible in private devotion, in Church and in study. It was decided that such a venture ought to be undertaken by an ecumenical body concerned with Christian Education.

In the meantime we have continued to issue aids to devotion – Occasional Prayers (for use by ministers and elders in the vestry, in church courts and in visiting homes), The Meaning of Infant Baptism (for preparing parents), For Those Who are Ill, A Holy

Week leaflet (recently converted to A Lenten Leaflet) and an Intercession Guide. The last two issued jointly each year with the Congregationalists.

Throughout the years of the committee's existence it has felt itself bound to work within the framework (not to say straitjacket) of the existing formulations of Doctrine by the General Assembly. In the early years the committee occasionally found its draft services being sent back by the General Assembly for revision after opposition on doctrinal grounds. This meant long delays in reaching final products. We, therefore, began to submit our texts for comment to the Doctrine Committee before we submitted them to the General Assembly. Sometimes we held joint sessions to discuss particular subjects. It is of interest that in the United Reformed Church the two committees have been merged into one Committee on Doctrine and Worship.

At the General Assembly in 1971 and 1972 we departed from the usual pattern of committee-reporting and exposed the Assembly to experimental sessions. In 1971 we prepared a service using visual media, dialogue and contemporary music and after the service allowed the Assembly time to make comments. This produced the best debate on worship that we have ever had in the Assembly. In 1972 we took as our theme 'Music in Worship' and presented this theme with illustrations involving the participation of members of the Assembly. This, thanks to the lively leadership of Dr. Erik Routley, was voted the most refreshing session of the Assembly and must have sent delegates home prepared to try out new music and new words when, previously, they had been hesitant. For the last two years packs of selected material for hymnody have been circulated from time to time to congregations willing to subscribe to the scheme and in time we may have a collection of material which has found general acceptance and can be put out in more permanent form. We welcome 'Songs for the Seventies' and await with interest the publication of the Revised Hymnary, in the work on which we participated. Will the United Reformed Church accept this hymnary, will it prefer to produce its own, or will there be a variety of usage throughout the new Church? These questions await an answer.

If it is possible to sum up our experience in England – which is probably similar to that in Scotland – it would be as follows:

1. The co-existence of a fairly traditional Service Book with wide experimentation in congregations with new forms and styles of worship.
2. A growing observance of the Christian Year, encouraged by the new teaching-aids for Family Church (Partners in Learning) and by the Calendar and Lectionary of the Joint Liturgical Group.

3. Attempts to write new Creeds. I suspect the Statement of Faith of the United Reformed Church, which is to be printed separately so that worshippers may possess copies, will gradually take the place of the Nicene and Apostles Creeds in public worship.
4. Experimentation with evening worship, its timing and its form. There are doubts expressed, however, about the wisdom of making evening worshippers the 'guinea-pigs'.
5. More frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper. Many congregations celebrate monthly and on festival Sundays, a very few even celebrate weekly. New orders and styles are being tried – the St. Mark-in-the-Bouwerie order, the Taizé Liturgy, William Barclay's order and others which have appeared in various publications.

The birth of a new Church – the United Reformed Church – should mean that out of a mingling of traditional and formal Presbyterianism with independent and informal Congregationalism comes a less inhibited determination to adventure in worship forms.

In the answers to a questionnaire sent out by one of our congregations to its members, I suspect that we have a fair reflection of the attitudes of our people. The only area of worship in which there was a large majority in favour of change was in the area of music. They wanted more modern hymns and the use of instruments other than the organ, but not recorded music. There was a very small majority in favour of the use of the Authorised Version of the Bible; the NEB ran a close second and the other versions, perhaps because they were not so well known, were not in the running. The respondents were almost equally divided in their attitude to the use of silence in worship; they were against responsive prayers and prayers and addresses by layfolk, but strongly in favour of scripture reading by layfolk in public worship. They clearly wanted the sermon in its traditional form and position in the service and were against a split sermon, a dialogue sermon or a dramatized sermon; they did not even favour discussion of the sermon. Only a handful voted for a shorter service; a large majority wanted the present length retained and wanted 11 a.m. and 6.30 p.m. as the times of worship. It is not clear whether this voting took place after exposure to changes for some time or in ignorance of what could be done and what it was like, nor is it known, of course, whether any experimentation was done well or badly.

Writing about his experience in using the 'St. Mark-in-the-Bouwerie' liturgy for communion, a minister says: 'It is difficult to assess how much of the value of the service for us has come from the actual text and how much from the basic change in seating, bringing

people into an "in-the-round" arrangement and making them sit close to one another . . . the passing of "The Peace" has been effective, although we are still not sure that we have the best way of doing this . . . we clearly have problems in passing the elements from hand to hand arising from the use of trays of glasses instead of the common cup.' (This is common practice in the Presbyterian Church of England, but, thankfully, not universal.)

Another correspondent writes: 'All experimental worship must arise in the local situation and be the natural outcome of the local fellowship and its service to the community. I am driven to the conclusion that (forms of worship) are only effective when they have been absorbed by a local group and then regurgitated. Better still are acts of worship which have their beginning, middle and end in the local situation.' He also comments, in relation to a 9.30 a.m. 'free', non-liturgical discussion and meditation type of service, 'because of the time of day, no one expected a service in the normal form . . . if you do this sort of thing at 11 a.m. or 6.30 p.m. the atmosphere is strangely different. They are then deliberately experimenting and not worshipping.'

One wonders if the U.R.C. will produce its own Service Book or content itself, in this time of flux, with the production of sacramental services and services for use in the Councils and Synods of the Church and, for the rest, simply give advice on material available from many sources. Has the time come for a swing away from a Service Book back to a Directory for Public Worship (as in 1898 and 1921) which provides skeleton outlines, suggestions and sources? A new chapter opens – what will it bring? Will there be a wide variety of practice as many traditions from ultra-independent to ultra-traditionalist merge in one Church. The influence of English, Welsh and Irish non-conformity, as well as the different strands of Scottish Presbyterianism, left its mark on the former Presbyterian Church of England. Now the further influence of Independency is added. We await the outcome with interest.

NORMAN LEAK, Didsbury, Manchester