

No. 69 O Lord my God to thee

Arcadelt

The Oxford Easy Anthem Book

No. 33 O Lord, I will praise thee

Gordon Jacob

No. 34 All from the sun's uprise

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THE WORSHIP BOOKS

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Now 25 years on in my ministry, I have responded to the Editor's invitation to talk about books by looking at the shelf that sits beside my desk, where my most used books are kept, and by trying to assess what devotional and liturgical books have been most valuable to me and, I hope my congregations in our worship Sunday by Sunday.

Beside the Bibles, Hymn Book and Concordance are ranged the three Books of Common Order, each the cause of controversy and opprobrium when it was issued. I have come to respect these books and their compilers, because they give to worship a dimension both of time and tradition, and of the world-wide communion of saints. I have devised my own forms of service for sacraments and ordinances, but these are not always appropriate, and I am diffident about subjecting my congregation to my own personal liturgical prejudices, formal or informal. That is why there are a number of other books which sometimes I use directly, but more often draw upon to take me out of a devotional or linguistic rut. Perhaps a prayer, a phrase even, will stimulate a new line of thought which may be helpful to the congregation. These books are also useful when we invite our various organisations to help plan an act of worship. They provide suitable material, and arouse discussion about worship, which is always valuable. If people begin to care about worship and know about it, this will promote effective Christian education and spiritual development. Above all it can help people to be devotionally articulate.

I suppose that the great shift in worship over the last 25 years has been the move away from Authorised Version language. I don't just mean from the cadences and familiar phrases which were adopted in the formulation of prayer. I mean from the symbols and allusions that could be assumed to 'ring bells' in the worshippers, and not need any development or explanation. Sad to say, one cannot now assume that many folk who come to Church services, especially special

services, are able to make the connections with Biblical phrase and symbol, and so we have to use different language, or explain the references. This is not true everywhere, but it is my experience.

This is of course does not mean that we cannot introduce or reintroduce worshippers to Biblical language. Most folk need to learn a language to express their devotion, and the great quarry of Christian devotion is the Book of Psalms. I am grateful for 'The Psalms - A New Translation for Worship' published by Collins in 1977, which I use for Scripture Sentences before our first prayer at Morning Service, and which I distribute to house groups and study groups for responsive, or unison reading. The language is clear and flows naturally. It is poetic, not pedestrian, and provides the building-blocks for personal devotion.

I have found it very useful to introduce, within the Children's Address, some of the great prayers of the past, either prayers of the Church, or prayers of individuals. These are also printed in our Parish Magazine, and we hope to build up a repertoire of great prayers, both for personal use, and for use in our worship, where they can be read by children - or adults - or said together. I miss a good anthology of great prayers and rely largely on the 1950 version of 'Student Prayer' (S.C.M.) and the even older 'Chain of Prayer.'

What about the other publications of our own Church of Scotland Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion? I realise that they cannot win! So do they. But their attempts to provide material and also to trigger creative thought are valuable and intelligent. Their recent 'Prayers for Sunday Services' (1980) attempts to offer material for 16 services and prayers for the Christian Year, and while it is true that there is less content in this latter section than in the 1951 version, which I still find useful, I have come to believe that perhaps we should use shorter prayers and be more generous with silences if we are to encourage our folk to contribute their own prayers to the worship of the Church.

The booklet 'New Ways to Worship' contains some gently provocative essays on aspects of worship, and some less useful orders of service on various themes. I find these less valuable than home grown attempts by groups within the congregation to build their own services on themes of their own choice, quarrying their material from the general literature available. We are at present trying to build up a library of material, devotional, poetic, dramatic, and factual, which groups within our congregation can use when creating acts of worship on the theme of, perhaps, a study group's discussions, or a 'burning issue'. Some awareness of the wider tradition of Christian Worship is always helpful, as of the wider context, too.

In such a Library I would place three books that have been very important to me. The first is 'Contemporary Prayers for Public Worship' (S,C,M,) edited by Caryl Micklem. It is biblical, economic in words, and avoids 'purple passages' and cleverness. It has interesting orders for sacraments and ordinances and some material for the Christian Year. I find it is much more useful than the second book, 'More Contemporary Prayers'.

I would also commend 'Worship Now' - The St. Andrew Press publication along the same lines. Though now 10 years old it stands firmly within the Presbyterian tradition, and is certainly intelligible to the point of being occasionally banal. But it is aware of the need of groups who may wish to worship, and has a simple order for a House Communion that is helpful.

The third such book is perhaps less accessible. It is the Worship Book of the Presbyterian Churches of the United States. I enjoy its refreshing intercessions, almost bewildering in their variety. I have found most triumphant, especially at the funeral of a young person, its Burial order, boldly called 'Celebration of the Resurrection' and I use its Agape order at our short meals after great Christian festivals. It is a good-tempered book, and its style is contemporary without being trendy.

I would also offer 'Prayers for Contemporary Worship'. It again has material gathered by our Public Worship and Aids to Devotion Committee, and is consequently rather anonymous - but it is eminently usable by congregations. I am irritated that we only have the first and fourth Sundays in Advent noted, but realise it is not meant to be a complete liturgy.

As congregations become linked, and ministries become fewer, it is very important that other folk should be encouraged to contribute to the leading of worship. This will mean that the minister will have to take time to teach, guide and discuss a whole area or work often regarded as purely ministerial. But it is my experience that most folk who are willing to lead worship want to learn about it, and so come to participate in a way that enables them, whether in pulpit or pew, to share more fully in the work which is worship, to draw satisfaction from doing so, and to contribute something special towards its completeness.

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