

DIGNITY IN WORSHIP: ITS DEFINITION AND PRESERVATION IN AN ERA OF CHANGE

The Dr Robert Lee Lecture delivered in Greyfriars Tolbooth and Highland Kirk,
Edinburgh, on Sunday 13 May, 1984.

The subject of this lecture is 'Dignity in Worship': Its Definition and Preservation in an Era of Change'. By declaring my intention to define dignity, I have implied that the proper meaning of this word in the context of worship is not as self-evident as some might assume. By intimating my intention to explore the practical means by which dignity in worship may be preserved, I have implied that such dignity is eminently desirable. And by acknowledging the fact that ours in an era of change, I have implied, not that change is automatically to be deplored, but that it can sometimes expose the worship of God to potential dangers.

It is good that worship is, in our era, becoming increasingly liberated from the strait jacket of inertia and blind habit in which it has so often been imprisoned. My predecessor as Lee Lecturer was Professor Duncan Forrester of New College. Taking as his subject 'The Liberation of Worship', he pointed out how "easy it is for worship to become domesticated and tamed within a particular culture, and expression of the national spirit, a custodian of one people's ethos - and nothing more..... Sometimes worship which should be catholic in the truest sense, seems instead to have been imprisoned in the kailyard, incapable of seeing over the fence or sharing in the worship of the whole Church of God." ¹ What Professor Forrester has said is true as far as the regular worship in quite a number of churches is concerned. But the forces of liberation are gathering momentum. The medium of television, in particular, is widening people's horizons, enabling them to be instantaneously transported to what, by all their previous experiences of worship, are the most unlikely of settings. Whether it is grasped or not (and one suspects that more often it is not), at least the opportunity is there to acquire a knowledge and a sympathetic understanding of a whole variety of Christian traditions and styles. In this era of change, the liberation of worship is a reality in some places, and a practical possibility in many more, but a note of caution must be sounded, for if change is pursued, as sometimes it is, purely for its own sake, the need always to be doing or saying something fresh or startling will itself become a subtle means of imprisonment.

When I was inducted to my previous charge in Glasgow, its wise and experienced Interim Moderator told me that, in his view, the best way to kill off an evening service is to ground it upon gimmicks. Many a rut is full to the brim with the gimmicks or yester-year! Even the most imaginative of ministers cannot expect indefinitely to conjure up fresh and original forms of worship. If a minister happens to mount such a bandwagon, he may well attract initially a number of people who are always keen to have a go at things new, but as his mind gradually empties of worthwhile

fresh things to do and say, so will his pews empty of the very people upon whom he has made himself dependent - the ones whose insatiable appetite for novelty he has so incautiously whetted. The evening service of my Glasgow colleague was of the type which is so often unfairly maligned as a mere hymn sandwich. It was a conventional arrangement of hymns, non-responsive prayers, scripture readings and a substantial sermon, yet it was attended, on average, by about fifty worshippers - hardly something to complain about by today's standards, especially when one takes into account the fact that his is, in no sense, a 'gathered' congregation.

Change for change's sake can be nothing more than the killing of the goose which lays the golden egg. To vary the metaphor, if worship, and particularly evening worship, is tending nowadays to suffer from declining health, constant innovations can very well be symptoms of the disease rather than its effective remedy. Change, like many of the powerful drugs available to the medical profession today, has often potentially damaging side effects, and must therefore be administered with extreme care. But change there must be. Without the right drugs, many a patient will die; without the legitimate and necessary changes which have always come eventually - though sometimes a little late - worship, viewed as a human activity, would have expired long ages ago. But worship is, of course, no mere human activity, for it is the manifestation upon earth, through the Holy Spirit, of that worship offered by our Great High Priest before the throne of heaven, that worship in which all "who draw near to God through him" ² share by faith as members of his Body. This is why we must never despair of worship, for its evolution and growth are not ultimately at the mercy of a host of maverick individuals or of the collective folly of courts and committees. "When the Spirit of truth comes," said Jesus, "he will guide you into all the truth..."³ Let us never presume ourselves always to be so guided by the Spirit, for by our blindness, our enthusiasms and our partisanship he may often be quenched. But the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit has constantly undergirded the Church's life. As the Constitution of the Scottish Church Society affirms, "the Church is a divine society, called into being, commissioned and sustained, not by men, but by the power of God". This same constitution goes on to speak of "the sense of the living continuity of the Church from Apostolic times under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."⁴ No change that men can effect in worship, be it ever so drastic, can ultimately frustrate the Spirit of God.

Perhaps it may seem to you that I have embarked upon a voyage on the strength of a false compass bearing. My subject is dignity in worship, concerning which, it would appear, I have said little or nothing so far. But this has been quite deliberate. In reflecting upon the subject of changes in worship, I have been dropping broad hints about my own personal standpoint and have betrayed what I hope has been a cautious open-mindedness, this being the principle which I endeavour to apply in my own sphere of service as an inner-city parish minister. And because my own personal theological and ecclesiastical standpoint will colour all that I have to say, I think it essential

that I should seek, briefly, to make it plain to you. Those who persistently trail excessively long coat-tails tend to be resented because of their habit of causing others to stumble. But those who keep their coat-tails firmly tucked down the seat of their trousers can appear so enigmatic that others do not know what they are really trying to say, or where they really stand. Let me attempt to trail my coat just a few inches. I find myself, by deep personal conviction, at the conservative-evangelical end of the theological spectrum. But I see this as in no way incompatible with my parallel love of well-ordered liturgical worship. I can attend a mass evangelistic rally and feel very much at home, even though I might find the 'showbiz' elements somewhat irritating and long for the electronic organ to blow a fuse. On the other hand, I can attend, and savour the beauty of, a very High Church form of service, even though I might sometimes prefer the sermon, if there is what could be called a sermon, to contain more biblical and doctrinal meat and exhibit a deeper fervour. Am I a rather schizoid animal? I trust not. Rather, as one who can feel very much at home in a wide variety of settings, I am deeply saddened at the massive walls of separation which, it seems to me, are thrown around the various camps in the vain attempt to defend the truth. The attempt is vain, because it is the Holy Spirit who guides the followers of Christ into all truth, and I am forced to confess that I must suspect his active presence among many traditions and groupings which are uncongenial even to one as eclectic as I. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches".⁵ These words refer primarily to the seven letters in Revelation, but they remind us also that we have often much to learn from others, even from others with whom we will have much to differ as well. I add just one other personal note at this point. I do not see myself as much of an innovator, and because the only worship in which I regularly participate is that of my own congregation, I have only a very limited and second-hand awareness of the innovations which have featured in worship elsewhere. It would be an impertinence were I to offer here a detailed critique of what is going on regularly in specific situations other than my own. The average parish minister is ill-equipped for such an undertaking. Instead I hope to lay bare some of the underlying theological and human considerations which must always be taken into account if the dignity of worship is to be preserved in this era of perhaps unparalleled change.

It is commonplace to point out that our present English word 'worship' is derived from the same Old English word as our current term 'worth'. The worship of God is the acknowledgement of his worth. We should observe at this point the parallel fact that the word 'dignity' is derived from a Latin word which means 'worth'. If it be asked why worship ought to be dignified, the answer is obvious - worship is 'worth-ship', and worth is dignity. In a perfect world, to refer to an act of worship as being dignified, would be to speak tautologically, for worship and dignity are semantically inseparable. Undignified worship is, however, a sad reality - a reality made possible only by the long-suffering grace of God, who is pleased to pour out his blessings in the wake often of would-be human worship which has fallen far short of what his worth is due.

Now we are approaching the point at which the word 'dignity', in the context of worship, may be defined. Dignified worship is that which, as closely as possible, reflects the worth, the worthiness of God. The dignity of true worship is not grounded in what we do, or in what we are, either as its leaders or its participants; it is grounded in the being and acts of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is a fact which can be overlooked. There is a tendency on the part of some people to equate dignity with pomp and ceremonial. For such, a 'dignified' service will be one which features flowing robes and stately processions, mellifluous speaking and highbrow organ and choral music. The dignity of the occasion may not be thought of as in any significant way marred by the inner motivations of those taking part, nor may the actual words uttered be thought to matter all that much, as long as they are considered suitable to the occasion, in other words, provided they are either platitudinous or innocuous. And as for the music, whether it is performed to the glory of God or to the glory of man will be held to be of little consequence. This is not to argue that pomp and ceremonial are always incompatible with true worship; all we are acknowledging here is that there is such a thing as a humanly-grounded and aesthetically excellent dignity which is not to be confused with that which is grounded in God. The impressive state funerals of two recent Soviet presidents had much that was dignified about them, but not the kind of dignity which is our concern here.

If pomp and ceremonial are potentially dangerous, so can be the many kinds of special service which are held in some or all of our churches. Worship, to be true worship, and therefore to be dignified, must be centred on God. He is the object of our worship; the service is, or should be, devoted to him and to him alone. In a true act of worship men and women are led, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, to the Father's throne of grace. By Word and Sacrament they feast upon the risen and living Lord, and then are sent back into the world as his servants and evangelists. From a marriage to a parade of uniformed organisations, from a quarterly Communion to a Sunday School prizegiving, worship can become detached from God, so that, no matter how 'dignified' it may appear on the surface, it has, in effect, ceased to be worship in the true sense of the word. If a wedding service is centred around the bride; if a parade is centred around the flags and uniforms; if a Communion is centred around the desire to earn an attendance mark; if a Sunday School service is centred around the desire to watch our wee Johnny collecting his prize, then whatever dignity is present in the occasion, it is less than that dignity which alone benefits the worship of God.

I am arguing that, in the context of worship, dignity is in no sense to be thought of as the automatic product of impeccably executed words, music and movements. Indeed, it should be recognized that the more elaborate and theatrical a service, the more vulnerable it will be to the kind of human or mechanical errors from which

even the most experienced and best-rehearsed are not immune. The failure of a microphone, the announcement of the wrong hymn, the advent of a cipher in the organ, or the sudden fainting of someone right in the middle of a crowded pew, can irreparably disrupt the kind of dignity which is dependent upon human or mechanical perfection. Flawlessly executed pomp and ceremonial can greatly enhance the dignity of worship, but sometimes an equally moving, and far less vulnerable, dignity can be attained through the conscious endeavour to keep worship as simple as possible. Simplicity is a very different thing from slovenliness, ill-preparedness, or the slipshod use of language or music. Simplicity involves relaxed and economical movements, the kind of flexibility which can respond in an unembarrassed or unembarrassing manner to mishaps such as those outlined earlier, and the kind of preparedness which is open-ended enough to permit a considerable degree of spontaneous rearrangement in the face of the unanticipated. Simplicity involves also the employment of correct, but also culturally authentic, language and music, delivered or performed in a natural and unostentatious manner.

But just as pomp and ceremonial may exist for their own sake, and in no way ensure a true dignity in worship, so may simplicity become a fetish, if it is pursued as an end in itself, thereby robbing God of the dignity, the 'worth-ship', which is his due. For example, Dr. David Read, one of the contributors to the newly-published 'Studies in the History of Worship in Scotland' writes of those who, despite violent objection "to what they called 'ritual' in public worship found a release for their liturgical instincts in the ceremonies and rites of fraternal organizations....⁶ One suspects that, for such, the desire for simplicity in worship is grounded upon rather dubious foundations, but that if the beliefs and practices of such fraternal organisations are as compatible with Christian faith and worship as is unconvincingly maintained by those 'in the know', there should be a real impetus, from that quarter, towards a more liturgical approach to worship. But the reverse, as Dr Read points out, is often the case, and one cannot help wondering why.

What all this boils down to is that dignity in worship, while concerned, of course, with what is done and said, is more fundamentally influenced by how and why things are done and said. Whether highly elaborated, or simple and unadorned, "all things", in the words of Paul, "should be done decently and in order."⁷ Paul was writing, of course, to a situation in which the speaking of tongues in worship had got out of hand. He warned his readers that "God is not a God of confusion but of peace."⁸ But his words are equally applicable to the kind of situations with which we today are more likely to be familiar. If, by over-elaboration, by an obsession with simplicity, or by the use of gimmicks or shock-tactics, we allow what we are doing to supplant the true Object of our worship, then the dignity which alone befits worship will be absent. Dignity is centred around God - who he is, what he does; it is destroyed when we put ourselves and what we do in God's place.

We have sought to define dignity in worship. Now we must pass on to the question of its preservation. The liberation of worship in this era of change has given rise to a wide variety of contrasting theories and practices. As a peg upon which to hang our thinking in this area, we may consider the situation of a new minister. In any normal congregational situation, he will find himself face-to-face with factors which are little to his liking, or foreign to his training or previous experience, but concerning which, in the short term at least, he can do little or nothing. The internal geography of the building will facilitate some styles of worship and militate against others: the problem faced by Robert Lee in this place, until a fortuitous fire! The technical competence of organist and choir, and their degree of willingness or ability to try out new ideas, will either help or hinder. The style of the previous ministry, and the current expectations of the congregation, will be ignored at the new minister's peril.

Let us think first of the geography of the building. There is a tendency, in some quarters, to disparage the conducting of almost the entire service from the pulpit. If a new minister has strong views along these lines, he may well decide not to use the pulpit except for the preaching of the Word. But he may, as a result, make himself almost completely invisible to quite a large number of the congregation, if the building is so constructed and furnished that the pulpit is the only station at which he and the whole congregation can have a clear view of one another. The new minister may go further than this by pressing very hard for a rearrangement of the internal furnishings in order to facilitate the conducting of the worship from one or more stations on the floor of the chancel, despite the fact that, for example, he may not be seen at all by the people occupying side galleries or the pews at the very back. This is not to deny for one moment the inherent value of the minister circulating, as appropriate, among the chancel furnishings, or that many magnificent and totally satisfactory liturgical rearrangements have been effected over the years. This Kirk of Greyfriars, in which we are gathered tonight, is eloquent testimonial to what can be achieved. But in some other cases the basic structure of the building has not been such as to encourage the use of other stations than a central pulpit. Also in 'Studies in the History of Worship in Scotland', Professor James Whyte writes of how the traditional Scottish T-shaped church, with the pulpit in the middle of the long wall, usually the south, is "expressive of a congregation gathered round Word and Sacrament."⁹ He points out that the concept of the congregation gathered round Word and Sacrament is now a very powerful factor in Roman Catholic and Anglican church design. Yet he names two instances in which, in the Church of Scotland, such an arrangement was replaced (in his view, most unhappily) by a re-orientation towards a chancel set in the east aisle. Thus, in his words, have "many of our simple parish churches suffered at the hands of those who were without any respect for the earlier tradition of church building".¹⁰ Surely no present-day architect, designing a completely new church building, would dream of furnishing the chancel area in a manner that appeared to fence the people out or to render the minister invisible to significant portions of the congregation.

But what, you may ask, is the connection between the visibility of the minister and the dignity of worship? Surely it is not the minister the people have come to meet? For a start, just as a solid alter screen in the Middle Ages was a powerful expression of a remote God who could only be approached through the human mediation of the priest, so today the invisible minister is expressive of a God who has distanced himself from his people - in other words, of a 'god' who is other than the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Far from making the minister less obtrusive, his invisibility, and his resultant quasi-priestly role in the worship, has the effect of elevating him to a mediatorial position, which is not only unscriptural and alien to the Reformed tradition, but something which, as we have seen, even the Roman Catholic Church has been trying very hard to tone down in the wake of Vatican II.

Dignified worship is worship in which God is accorded his rightful place and worshipped as the one whom he truly is. The God with whom we have to do in the Christian Church, is the God who has made himself personally present through the Incarnation, and who thereby has entered into the midst of our world of suffering and shame, and by the Cross and Resurrection won the decisive victory over sin and death. Christ is ever-present, in the midst of those who gather in his name ¹¹, and, through the Ministry of Word and Sacrament, freely offers himself to those who approach him in faith and trust. Of course the minister must not obtrude himself, but if he keeps himself hidden from some or many of the worshippers, he may become surrounded by an aura of mystique which is totally foreign to worship as we now understand it, and an irritation to those among the congregation for whom the worship would be little different were he to be conducting it from his bath, his voice relayed to the church by a powerful radio microphone.

But this is not all that must be said against ministerial invisibility. While the actual prayers are in progress, of course, it does not matter whether he can be seen or not, but it must be remembered that he is responsible for leading the whole act of worship. How can he effectively call to worship a people from many of whom he is physically obscured? And he must consider also the fact that he is not only their leader in worship, but their pastor. His prayers, whether wholly prepared, wholly extempore, or a mixture of both, should be suited to the situation and needs of that particular congregation on that particular occasion. If, for example, during the opening praise, he observes, among the congregation, someone with a special pastoral need whom he was not expecting to be present, he may feel led to modify or amplify the intended wording of a prayer, not in order to 'preach' at the person, but in order to make the prayer as personally relevant to him as he can. By the same token, from the point of view of the people in the pews, if they know that the minister can see them all as he calls them to prayer, they will more easily sense that the prayer is their own personal prayer as a consciously-united family worshipping together, not something generalized and impersonal, such as an unknown visiting minister might offer. The Holy Spirit may, and does, wonderfully guide the minister as he prepares his prayers in his study, so that, in all kinds of unforeseen ways, they are exactly what is required for his people,

but the Spirit may also impel the Minister to quite a considerable degree of flexibility during the course of a service. A service of worship is an offering to God in which all present should feel that they are participating. If the regular minister of a congregation leads its worship week after week without reflecting his personal awareness of the ever-changing circumstances of his people, and without responding significantly to what he may learn from what he can see of his people as they worship, he may be running away from his responsibilities as a pastor, and insofar as the worship fails to be the vehicle through which this unique gathering of people are enabled personally to approach the living God, it will be lacking in a true dignity.

Having seen how a new minister will have to come to terms with the geography of a building, we consider now his relationship with organist and choir. The quality of the music can make or mar a service of worship. If the music is bad, or badly performed, the service will be permeated with a deeply ingrained indignity. But it is important to recognize that the question of whether music is good or bad is hard to settle in any absolute sense. The fact that Gilbert and Sullivan would not exactly go down well at Bayreuth, does not mean that there is no context at all in which their music is acceptable. This is where the all-important question of context and taste must be taken into consideration. Thinking of the Royal Mile here in Edinburgh, we have, within close proximity, St Giles' Cathedral and Carrubber's Close Mission. The hymns of Moody and Sankey would be as incongruous in the typical St Giles' service as would Orlando Gibbons or plainsong at Carrubber's. Yet each style of music is what I would regard as authentic within its own appropriate context. While I say this as someone who has a passionate love for serious baroque and classical music, honesty compels me to admit, without a hint of shame, that I enjoy singing many of the Moody and Sankey types of hymn, even though I am perfectly well aware of the fact that musically they cannot possibly stand comparison with the contents of the Church Hymnary. In the right setting, however, such hymns have a dignity which massively transcends their lowly musical pretensions. In recent years it has been brought to light that some of the founding-fathers of the Scottish Church Society and the Church Service Society were not averse to the use of Moody and Sankey-type hymns. I have it on good authority, for example, that Dr James Cromarty Smith of Coatdyke, a High Churchman with strong sympathies for Evangelicalism and the Temperance Movement, and, incidentally, the first Church of Scotland minister successfully to introduce weekly Communion, could happily juxtapose Moody and Sankey and the Te Deum in the same evening service! What has happened to this catholicity of spirit which characterized many of our forebears? A true catholicity is inclusive, not exclusive. No one is asking St Giles' and Carrubbers to sit down together and thresh out a common liturgy and hymnody. All I plead for is a recognition of the intrinsic dignity inherent across a wide spectrum of the Church Catholic, and a charitable disposition towards those whose style of worship is very different from our own.

Our hypothetical new minister awaits, a little impatiently, the resumed consideration of his musical predicament. I have been in the happy position, through my ministry, of always having had a competent and co-operative organist, and a choir which has been an asset rather than a liability. But the situation can be very different for others, not merely in the rural areas. The new minister may discover that the organist has always been the one to choose the praise, principally because he or she is only capable of playing a bare minimum of tunes; the instrument on which they are performed may be a leaky harmonium incapable of generating sufficient volume adequately to give a positive lead to the congregation; the choir may be in the habit of regurgitating at frequent intervals, the most appalling of anthems; the pace of the congregational singing may be so slow that most people have no alternative but to take a breath in the middle of each line; the organist's choice of voluntary may be wholly unsuited to the worship of God - it would be interesting for example, to know in how many churches Dvorak's Humoresque was played this morning! Over the past ten years I have had the privilege of worshipping in the company of several assemblies of Christian Brethren, none of whom employed instrumental music or choirs. This old Brethren tradition is slowly dying out, but where it persists, the singing, even of a small company, is usually vigorous and inspiring. I am convinced that it is far more dignified to have no instrumental music at all than to have a bad instrument, an incompetent player, or, worst of all, both, but such a solution to the problem would be unlikely to be accepted by the vast majority of congregations within the Church of Scotland.

A new minister will have to work sensitively within the situation as he finds it. Probably the music, if it is of poor quality, will grate on his ears far more than on the ears of those who have never regularly known anything better. It may be that after a few months the problem will not seem quite so pressing. On the other hand, he may have the astuteness correctly to sense that the great majority of the congregation are privately as appalled as he is, and would be prepared to back him to the hilt in a showdown with an obstinate organist who has long held them to ransom with the standard threat - so useful in all areas of church life - that if it weren't for him, there would be nobody willing to do the job. Often the calling of such a bluff can produce the most surprising of talents from some hidden recess among the congregation or the community! Or if the minister has himself some genuine musical competence, especially at the keyboard, he may be able, for example, to gather together a group of young people with whom he will prepare a special service of praise, incorporating a blend of old familiar material properly performed, and new material from other sources. It may be possible, through the Sunday School or the Women's Guild, to widen the awareness of significant groups in the matter of what is possible to them in the way of Christian praise. Given a situation where the music and singing in worship leave much to be desired, the minister may well feel that the best way of bringing about a much-needed improvement will involve the long-term raising of his people's expectations, and the carefully controlled fostering of a spirit of dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs. But his task will not be easy. Seldom is it the

case in a congregation that the really incompetent folk are the thoroughly nasty ones whom everyone else would be only too delighted to see the back of. When kindly, obliging people, totally blind to their own personal limitations, are found occupying positions of responsibility to which they are wholly unsuited, the minister may feel, for the time being at least, that he is stymied. His most sensible course of action will be to commit the problem to the Lord, and then to get on with something else that he can do something about.

The third problem area confronting our new minister is the style of the previous ministry and the current expectations of the congregation. Sometimes he will have a relatively straightforward task, as when he is faced with picking up the pieces left behind by an impatient, insensitive, or down-right idiotic Evangelical, High Churchman, ecclesio-politician, heretical thinker, or wild experimenter. Such a congregation will be longing for a change, and will respond, sometimes with the most terrifyingly uncritical acceptance, to a major shift of direction, but provided always that it is effected with manifest love, dedication and sincerity. But other situations can be very different. The worship-pattern of the previous ministry, whether high or low, conventional or eccentric, dignified or undignified, is what the people have come to accept as the norm, and what they will expect their new minister slavishly to adhere to. This is the kind of situation in which, I fear, many an interim moderator fails badly. It is surely his duty to become thoroughly versed in the worshipping ways of the congregation, and in particular in any idiosyncracies, and to advise the vacancy committee, that, if the congregation is determined that these shall remain under a new ministry, this fact must be made abundantly clear to the likely candidates well before a sole nominee is selected. The interim moderator should be thoroughly familiar with the manner in which the Sacraments are dispensed, and other special services ordered, and be in a position himself to advise candidates accordingly. Vacancy committees are notoriously incompetent when it comes to the question of how the worship has been conducted in the past. The only time many people ever bother to sit up and take notice of such things, is when someone does something radically different from what they are accustomed to, and if that someone is an unsuspecting new minister, doing in all sincerity what he believes to be for the best, the results can be catastrophic. If the interim moderator has an onerous responsibility, so has the prospective new minister, of course. If he is not prepared to change things gradually, and in so doing to take the people with him at every step, but rather has the intention of effecting sweeping changes right from the start, sheer prudence, let alone the morality of the situation, would surely dictate that he must leave the vacancy committee in no doubt as to his intentions. There must be a full and frank disclosure on the part of both sides. If minister and people find themselves at loggerheads, then no matter how dignified precisely the same order of service might be in a different setting, all possibility of true dignity will be lost in theirs.

I conclude with a subject very dear to my heart and to the hearts of many others - dignity at the Lord's Table. From the earliest years of my ministry I have always found depressing the much fuller congregation which invariably assembles on a Communion Sunday, for I cannot help but think that if the service were really to mean all it should to all those present, they would attend Church every Sunday, not just when in parliamentary terms, the whips have been chasing after them. The singing seems always, in proportion, far less enthusiastic than on a normal Sunday, and the congregation far less receptive spiritually. Because of our virtually meaningless system of human book-keeping, the Lord's Supper, far from being the liturgy of the faithful, has become, in many cases, a well-nigh sacrilegious let-out for the lethargy of the unfaithful. Worse still, in many a congregation, we send out long-suffering elders, Communion after Communion, to people whose manifest contempt for the Lord's Table is such that they could almost paper the walls of a small room with their unreturned cards. Where is the dignity in this? It is buried deep beneath our pussy-footing reluctance to administer the caring, but strict, godly discipline which marked the Church of our forefathers. But perhaps we cannot put the clock back. If we choose, rather, to throw the doors open to all and sundry, on the understanding that Holy Communion is what has been called a 'converting ordinance', that is another matter. If that were accompanied by a scrapping of the card system, then perhaps the vast majority of those present would be there for the right reason, not to get their name ticked off in a spurious communion roll, but simply in order to seek more fully to know, love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ within the fellowship of his people. Dignity would be restored to the occasion, and if it could be accompanied eventually by a phasing-out of the individual cup, the dignity of the occasion would be enhanced even more. Professor Forrester writes of the individual cup as "that symbol that the neighbour was seen as a source of infection rather than fellowship"¹² The clattering of the trays and the tinkling of the glasses as they are often clumsily deposited in their clips, is a whole world removed from the blessed communion of the Upper Room. Thank God that the common cup yet survives, and pray God that many more will come to recognize the true dignity which it always imparts to our worship.

On the subject of 'Dignity in Worship : Its Definition and Preservation in an Era of Change' there is much more that could be said, and, indeed, much more that needs to be said. But I hope enough has been said to demonstrate that dignity is always possible, even throughout a church as healthily diverse as the Church of Scotland. Dignity is not the prerogative of one strand or tradition; it can be found in all, it can be absent from all. But where it is found, there men and women of any strand or tradition should be prepared fully to share. In that preparedness to worship together wholehearted in the midst of our legitimate diversities, we will be enabled to celebrate the true catholicity which is ours in Christ.

NOTES

- 1 Liturgical Review, May 1981 pages 8-9 Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh.
- 2 Hebrews 7, 25 RSV
- 3 John 16, 13 RSV
- 4 The Scottish Church Society Report, 1972-1980 page 2.
- 5 Revelation 2, 7 etc. RSV
- 6 Studies in the History of Worship in Scotland, page 138 T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1984
- 7 1 Corinthians 14, 40 RSV
- 8 1 Corinthians 14, 33 RSV
- 9 Studies in the History of Worship in Scotland, page 149.
- 10 do. do.
- 11 Matthew, 18, 20.
- 12 Studies in the History of Worship in Scotland, page 159.

Rev. WILLIAM G. NEILL,
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A DIP IN THE ARCHIVES.

Mr Sprott, presenting the report of the Editorial Committee to the Annual Meeting
at St. Giles, 25th May, 1871 :-

"The Society will not prosper if it is content merely to enrol the names of
those clergymen and laymen who have a general interest in the improvement of our
services. It must try to make its influence AGGRESSIVE, or its work will not be
done."

C.R.W.