

GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRAYERS 1917

Colin R Williamson

In his preface, Cooper claims that he consents to a publication of this little book "with considerable reluctance" but after many requests. Produced by James Macle hose & Sons later that year, the 80 page volume is attractively presented. The contents are as follows:

Preface

Speech in reply to the address of the Lord High Commissioner

Holy Communion, St Giles' 23 May

Assembly Prayers 23 May

Prayers at Joint Meeting for Prayer and Intercession in the

U.F.Assembly Hall 23 May

Assembly Prayers 24 May

Assembly Prayers 25 May

Assembly Prayers 26 May

Service of Praise on the afternoon of Sunday 27 May (Pentecost)

at St George's to commend the Scottish Mission Hymn Book

Assembly Prayers 28 May

Assembly Prayers 29 May

Assembly Prayers 30 May

For some thirty years, the General Assembly had appointed a celebration of Holy Communion in St Giles' on the morning of the second day of its meeting. Cooper credits Boyd (Moderator 1890), Leishman (Moderator 1898) and Sprott with having devised the order. There had been little modification since 1898 "and I print it here as exhibiting a type of Communion Order fairly general among us, and possessing all the sanction which use at the General Assembly celebration can give to it".

The following aspects may be noted.

The gradual (Psalm 116) is the prose version pointed for chant

There is no sermon

The Nicene Creed is said after the words of institution and invitation and

immediately before the Great Prayer

The celebrant having partaken, the bread is distributed; only then is the cup taken and given. This may be a logical and proper sequence for a tradition in which, within living memory, the people had sat at table together.

The communion is followed by what amounts to a post-communion service of thanksgiving;

Exhortation to thanksgiving

Psalm

Prayers (Thanksgiving; oblation; intercessions; faithful departed)

Nunc Dimittis (chanted)

Blessing

The Service of Praise on the afternoon of Pentecost Sunday is coloured, like the rest of the devotional material by the sombre tones of the war. Indeed, the minister of St George's is specifically remembered. He had been reported missing and it was only later that it was learned that he had been shot dead in France on 28 April. The sermon text was Ephesians 5: 18-19. Five hymns from the Scottish Mission Hymn Book were sung. The service was designed to let "the clergy see the merits" of the book (yet this was now five years after its publication). The dismissal is worth quoting.

"Christ, Whose Name you celebrate on earth,
Grant you to sing His new song
amid the choirs of angels in Heaven."

Daily prayers in the Assembly follow a set pattern. At each session, after the psalm or paraphrase, there follows a reading from Revelation (what the Spirit says to the churches). Then the versicles and Gloria Patri:

Our help is in the Name of the Lord
who made heaven and earth
O God make speed to save us
O Lord make haste to help us.
Glory be

Thereafter, the prayers follow this order:

Supplication for grace (with confession)

Prayer for the General Assembly

for the Church's work to be reported upon at that session

for the King and the Lord High Commissioner
for the forces, the wounded, prisoners of war and all victims
of war.
The Lord's Prayer.

Cooper acknowledges that whilst the prayers themselves are partly original, he has drawn from several sources "too well known to be particularized". The one named source is the Office used in the Church of England at the beginning of the War of the Spanish Succession (1703). The present writer, recognised part of the Naval Prayer in one of the sets.

The compilations witness to very careful preparation. Here are prayers of adoration of the greatest dignity, prayers for the church showing profound concern for her work, and intercessions for those who were paying the price of war which reveal great compassion. We may well picture the solemnity of that Assembly where few remained unaffected by the war in their parishes and their own families.

The language is of its time. Proper and worthy then, it would be affected and unhelpful today. At times, language and circumstance combine to make the meaning almost obscure (Giving thanks for material help from overseas, " and as they are sowing to us now their carnal things, grant that we may give them to reap abundantly of the heavenly things whereof Thou hast made us stewards.")

The following, from prayers on 30 May, may serve to illustrate the quality of Cooper's devotion and indicate the importance of this little collection if we are to appreciate the mood of that time.

To Thy healing
we commend the sick and wounded;
to Thy sustaining grace the prisoners;
to thine infinite mercy,
and the cleansing Blood of Christ,
and His Presence in the valley of the shadow,
we commit the dying;
and in Thy gracious keeping, O God and Father,
we leave Thy servants who sleep in Jesus,
till the day of resurrection and reward.

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Cooper the Minister