

TOWARDS 2015

The Third Half-century of the Society 1965-2015

A further Compilation by the Editor

If, like the Church of Scotland as a whole, the Church Service Society had passed its peak by 1965, it was still riding high. Of the Service held on Friday, 21st May 1965, in the Kirk of the Greyfriars, Edinburgh, *The Annual* of the following year recorded with a notable air of satisfaction:

The handsomely printed *Order of Service* was a model of dignified biblical church worship, incorporating the liturgical principles for which the Society has ever striven throughout the years.....The Occasional Sermon by the President of the Society¹, the Rev. Dr. Stuart Loudon, was worthy of this unique event. With Eucharistic opening there followed the solemn prayer of Commemoration, in which humble thanksgiving was offered for the founders and leaders of the Society, many of them mentioned by name; and for all who by their courage and devotion had enriched the worship of the Church in the past hundred years. It was a memorable service which fittingly marked a notable occasion, and reminded all present of the heritage of the past, and the challenge of the future.²

The present Editor, then a very junior member of the Society, can testify to the considerable impression made on him, particularly by the sermon, 'The Church: Bride and Body Mystical'. It was printed as the first item in the same issue of *The Annual*. Although that impression has personally remained an important and formative influence, it would require deeply rose-tinted spectacles to maintain that it has taken deep hold of the mind and spirit of the church. But if the Society has, perhaps inevitably, shared, at least until recently, in the numerical shrinkage in numbers of members and ministers in the Church, the record of these years testifies to a continuing willingness to endeavour to apply its principles in changing times.

One can hardly doubt that changes in the technology of communication in the past generation are of a significance comparable to that of printing in the mid-15th century. When this Society was founded print was the accepted medium for the widespread dissemination of its message. To what extent the new technology will replace print may be a matter of dispute, but just over a decade ago *The Record* highlighted this announcement, giving it a page to itself:

After receiving a substantial legacy from the late Professor J.K.S Reid, the Council

is keen to develop a Church Service Society website to reflect liturgical interests and developments. Plans are still at an early stage, but there is a requirement for an 'Editor' to co-ordinate the website.³

Since then the website has been launched and relaunched after re-design but one suspects from the absence of any evidence to the contrary on the site itself that the task of editing is undertaken by our indefatigable and omnicompetent Secretary.

An attractive moving banner of five pictures heads the website (though one may doubt whether the toothless ruin of a cathedral set in a graveyard conveys quite the right introductory impression.) However it is to the five clauses referring to the purposes of the Society that attention is drawn here as they provide a convenient framework for some consideration of our third half-century. They assert that the purpose of the Society is to –

engage with the theology of worship as indispensable for the evaluation and interpretation of liturgies;
examine fresh patterns of worship and explore the creation and enhancement in which we gather;
foster an interest in the history of liturgy;
raise awareness of liturgical development in the world church;
enable leaders and people together to participate more deeply in the mystery of faith through, movement, symbol, ritual and sacrament.⁴

These interests and concerns have all been reflected to a greater or lesser extent on the pages of its periodical publications, but these publications have themselves undergone several changes.

In 1967 David Hodges vacated the editorial chair of *The Annual* which he had occupied since 1942 - over two thirds of its life span. Near to the beginning of his tenure he was also for ten years Secretary of the Society. The new Editor was Ian Moir, lecturer on Christian Origins in New College. In 1969 it was reported to the A.G.M. that the circulation ran to 1130 copies including those going overseas and that there was a very satisfactory balance in the General Fund. What proved, however, to be the last issue of *The Annual* appeared in the following year but contains no hint that it was reaching the end of its life. The first issue of its successor, *Liturgical Studies* (renamed *Liturgical Review* after one year) gave as reason that the Council felt that "the time had come to secure more efficient publishing arrangements and distribution."⁵ The location of the new Editor and the fact that his senior and distinguished colleague in New College, Professor T.F. Torrance, was elected Vice-President in 1968 and President two years later, coupled with the choice of the Scottish Academic Press as publisher seems also

to be indicative of an intended change of emphasis in a somewhat more academic direction.

The Annual's report of the A.G.M. of 1969 indicates that the Centenary Fund had reached £721, a sum which, it was judged, would "secure an annual yield sufficient to establish the Fund on a working basis. The intention was to establish an annual Centenary lecture to be delivered by an eminent liturgical scholar. The first of these, given by Professor J.J. von Allmen of Neuchâtel in October 1970, appeared in the first issue of *Liturgical Studies* under the title 'The Celebration of Christian Marriage'⁶ It may be thought worth revisiting in the light of current debate about same-sex marriage though it can scarcely be said to offer support to its proponents, nor, indeed, unqualified support to its antagonists.

The second lecturer was the Irish scholar, Professor John M. Barkley, and his subject, 'The Theology of Liturgy', addressed directly the first of concerns enumerated above. A paragraph near to the end reads thus:

The Christian Gospel proclaims that the Eternal has revealed himself in act, in time and space, in Christ Jesus. Consequently the commemoration of God's mighty acts in history must always have a central place in Christian worship. At the same time, the Logos, the Word, has an ontological meaning as well as an incarnational and historical, together with a soteriological and eschatological. In a theology of liturgy all these meanings must find full and balanced expression for, as St John says, it is 'from his fullness' we all receive 'grace upon grace' (1.16) In other words, in worship man must come face to face with the being of God in his acts and the acts of God in his being. Worship is corrupted when man is confronted by 'a god of his own making' and when he treats this as the ultimate. The guideline of Christology in the theology of liturgy, therefore, is that the person and work of Christ, and this alone, is normative.⁷

In the same issue, Bryan Spinks, later to be President of the Society (1992-94) appeared for the first time on the Society's pages on the subject "Luther and the Canon of the Mass." Although he re-appeared in the *Liturgical Review* several times with articles usually related to Luther, his Centenary Lecture for 1992 on Calvin's doctrine and liturgy of Baptism does not appear to have been published by the Society. However, his Presidential Address, entitled 'Towards a Holistic Shape of the Eucharistic Liturgy' occupied the first place in issue no. 30 of *The Record*; and his lecture marking our 150th anniversary occupies a similar place in this issue.

After the Centenary celebrations at Assembly-time in 1965 the Society's next meeting was the autumn conference of 1965. There, Dr Alek Sawyer, Vice-Convenor of the

Assembly's Committee on Public Worship and Aids to Devotion, (though never, apparently, involved in the governance of the Society) took up one aspect of 'fresh patterns of worship'.in speaking on 'The Language of Worship'

'The Church needs constantly to be reminded that age is no guarantee of the worth of anything, nor is tradition unchangeable or unchallengeable. The Church can never live in the past, and this applies as much to the language and the forms which we use as to any other aspect of her life.'⁸

Nevertheless, he contrived to omit all mention either of the New English Bible, of which the New Testament had appeared in 1969, or of the use of 'you' in addressing God although that usage was becoming increasingly evident. The omission appears to have been rectified to some extent by the fact, mentioned in *The Annual's* report on the meeting that "a large number of members shared in the lively discussion, during which the New English Bible received prominent mention."

It was further dealt with when Stuart Loudon returned to 'The Language of Worship' in the last issue of *The Annual* in a reprint of s paper contributed to Societas Liturgica. Not unsympathetic to the need "for a language 'contemporary' in an updated sense, and noting *Contemporary Prayers for Public Worship*, edited by Caryl Micklem as "an impressive printed venture in this realm", he goes on the suggest that

the language of Christian worship must clearly indicate faith in transcendent reality. This consideration alone will discard the pedestrian, mundane and commonplace in language. The assignment to revisers of liturgical form is accordingly much more exacting than is admitted by those too easily demanding a 'contemporary language' which they themselves fail to identify, define or describe. No individualistic approach to the problems can satisfy. What momentarily can be called 'contemporary' but is untested as to its ephemeral and passing quality is of little help. The whole question is one agonising aspect of renewal in the Church of God. Careful and painful experiment is necessary until a vernacular English, more appropriate than any hitherto employed, is achieved for the language of worship.

In this ecumenical age it will be nothing short of tragic for the future of Christendom, if some of these problems, are not solved by the separated confessions examining them together.⁹

Almost half a century has passed since Dr Loudon wrote and not a little has been achieved by those who have come together across confessional boundaries to produce a common lectionary and an agreed translation of several ancient prayers, canticles and credal texts, but nowhere, it seems, has their work met with unqualified acceptance by

ecclesiastical authorities or liturgical practitioners. No one acquainted with the Church of Scotland would expect total conformity, but the Society was interested to learn from Bishop Maurice Taylor, in a paper entitled 'What is good liturgical language?'¹⁰ given after the A.G.M. of 2003, of the problem of gaining agreement in Rome not only to variations agreed by the Bishops' conferences in different parts of the English-speaking world to take account of local tradition but to the original translations by the International Commission for English in the Liturgy (ICEL) of the Latin of the new, post-Vatican II rite.

Along with 'fresh patterns of worship' in the enumeration above are bracketed 'the creation and enhancement of the spaces in which we gather'. From its first issue *The Annual* had carried a notable stream of illustrated articles on church furnishing and on church buildings, often describing 'restorations', mainly of medieval buildings. A few years before the centenary Professor James Whyte of St Andrews, a member of the Council, had challenged the prevailing 'chancelising' orthodoxy in favour of a more distinctively Reformed plan, and in 1968 *The Annual* carried a short article on St Columba's, Glenrothes, the first building to be erected on Professor Whyte's precepts and inspired by the 1592 kirk of nearby Burntisland. The most notable assertion of this kind of outlook to be brought before the Society came in the Centenary Lecture given in November 1997 by Professor Bernard Reymond, of the University of Lausanne on 'The Reformed Worship Buildings: Architectural and Theological Meanings'. The text, with profuse illustrations, and an appreciative response from Professor Whyte, occupied (with a review of *Common Ground*) occupied the whole of the 1998 issue of *The Record*. He states his intention thus:

My main thesis is that the reformed worshipping congregation is firstly a choral congregation, and only secondly a hearing congregation. I think it is possible to show in a convincing way that the ground plan of the reformed concept of a church building is, accordingly to my own terminology, 'a reformed choral square'. It means that the congregation are shaped more or less in a square around the communion table.¹¹

Apart from the 'Cooper' issue of 1995 photographic illustrations had been absent from the pages of *The Record* since it replaced the *Liturgical Review* in 1982.

As had not been the case with *The Annual*, Douglas Murray, who had been appointed Editor of the *Liturgical Review*, only two years previously, announced its demise in the final issue: "Due to ever increasing costs the Church Service Society and the Scottish Academic Press have come to the inescapable conclusion that publication cannot continue."

In the Issue No.1 of *The Record* the new Editor, William Neill, minister of North Leith, describing it as a 'rather homespun publication, explained that,

in order to keep costs to a minimum the material is being typed, photographically reduced by half, then printed by offset litho. There will be three issues each year. ... (It) will address itself more immediately to the needs of the ordinary parish minister. It will seek to encourage and maintain all that the Society recognises as being central to true Christian worship, while at the same time endeavouring to....demonstrate....that....the development of entirely fresh forms may take place in the context of a continuity with, and faithfulness to, all that has gone on in the past.¹²

In a letter from the President in the same issue he adopted a characteristically positive attitude.

These financial worries were somewhat inhibiting: we had no room for manoeuvre. We could not easily popularise *Liturgical Review*: we equally could not afford to produce anything more for the Society. It looks as if we could now do something for the Society and function again as a Society. We hope to be able to send you three times in the year.¹³

That hope was realised for the five years during which William Neill remained as Editor, as was also the intention of doing something more for the Society. There was a notable increase in the sharing by members of materials designed for use on special occasions, especially the many for which no models were provided by the Church itself. It may be judged to be of rather uneven quality. That might have been improved and the service of the Society to its members enhanced had there been set up a group to discuss with the writers of such prayers and services what they had written. That was the practice of the Society in its earliest days. It may be that poetry cannot be written by a committee but the experience of the present writer on the Committee on Public Worship was that it was certainly beneficial for prayers to be spoken in public. Notable contributors of such materials were Gerald Jones, and Dr W.G. Young, a returned missionary who brought to his work experience as a bishop in Pakistan.

In the last issue of that period (15), the President indicated that the resignation of William Neill, foreshadowed a year previously, was now imminent in consequence of his translation to a parish in Ayr.

By the next issue Graeme Longmuir, Chaplain of Strathallan School, whose earlier ministry had been south of the border. His location out of one of the big cities and relative inexperience of the Church of Scotland were to some extent compensated for

by the fact that the Secretary of the Society, Colin Williamson was close at hand on the other side of the Earn. The number of issues of *The Record* reduced to two but without reduction in the annual number of pages and in due course the appearance of the journal began to improve. So it was for five years. Then an unexplained gap in 1992 and 1993 after which in the very slight first issue in 1994, there is the (significant?) listing of an Editorial Board of three members. A year later a new and glossy cover led to a significant improvement in appearance further aided by the development of word-processing equipment widely available to individuals.

The important issue containing Professor Reymond's lecture proved to be Graeme Longmuir's last (1998). Since that time, financial and other constraints have led to the issue of only one number each year on a somewhat erratic time-table but the close involvement of the present writer until the present, as well as the absence of historical perspective makes much comment inadvisable save, perhaps to suggest that the unplanned result has been a publication somewhat similar in character to *The Annual*. What then caused the Council some concern was the loss of ongoing contact with members and of a platform for relatively ephemeral materials. After the failure of *Worship Now* to establish itself in 2001-02, the present Secretary's enterprise in preparing and issuing *Versicle*, largely distributed by electronic means, seems to be meeting a felt need. His other major venture, the Society's web-site, has been mentioned but not its important inclusion of an enterprise conducted in association with the University of Edinburgh, the publication with audio samples of the University's reassembling of the 16th century Wode Psalter with the significant light it sheds on early post-Reformation worship.

One other venture of the Society should also be mentioned – the publication of the Chalmers Lectures for 2010, the 450th anniversary of the Scottish Reformation under the title *A Useable Past? : Belief, Worship and Song in Reformation Context*. The Preface explains,

The Society was pleased when the lecturers suggested or agreed that it might publish the lectures. The first lecture (in the order in which they are printed) may seem not to deal with the Society's main field of interest, but, as Professor Hazlett has pointed out, the Church's worship and song arise out of her belief – and that has been notably the case in our tradition.

At the launch of *The Record*, Stewart Todd has declared the intention to publish occasional papers. It may be thought that this publication, which was only made possible with the generous assistance of the Drummond Trust and the Strathmartine Trust, goes some way towards realising that intention, not otherwise realised

Under the title ‘Uncommon Order?’ raises questions as to whether the Church has ever had any strictly common order and whether it should seek such. Consideration and discussion of such questions must surely set part of the agenda for the Society as it enters its next half century and indeed it already has a group studying the issue of training for leadership of worship which produced on these pages in 2012 a series of short reviews of books from its reading list and which can scarcely escape the question or order.

(Endnotes)

- 1 *The Annual*, 36, 1966, pp.3-7
- 2 *ib.* pp. 47,48
- 3 *The Record*, 39, Spring 2004, p.39
- 4 The Church Service Society, www.churchservicesociety.org
- 5 *Liturgical Review* I p.i
- 6 *ib.* pp.1-17
- 7 *Liturgical Review* III 1 pp.1-15
- 8 *ib.* p.13
- 9 *The Annual*, 40, pp.28,29
- 10 *ib.* 39, pp. 4-16
- 11 *ib.* 34, pp.
- 12 *Ib.* 1, p.1
- 13 *Ib.* 1, p.2