

Alexander Henderson and Worship

THE ter-centenary of the death of Alexander Henderson, the foremost Scottish Minister in the 17th century, was celebrated in various parts of Scotland in August, 1946. Articles dealing with various aspects of his work appeared in different newspapers throughout the land, but, so far as I have seen, little or nothing was said about his attitude towards the forms of worship used in the churches in his day, or regarding his work in preparing other forms which were expected to guide the devotions of the people in the Sanctuary for generations to come.

In 1641 there was published at Edinburgh a little work bearing the title "*The Government and Order of the Church of Scotland.*" The book, which was "Printed for James Bryson Anno MDCXLI", has no author's name attached, but it is known to have been written by Henderson. We learn from the opening "Address to the Reader" that the author intended his book to be a means of "making known to others the form of Government and the order of worship used by the Church of Scotland." Every one knows that the "order of worship" then in vogue in the Scottish Church was the *Book of Common Order*, sometimes called "John Knox's Liturgy", which had been introduced by the Reformers and which, so far as we know, was still being used in churches all over the land. In later years there was some controversy as to whether the use of this work was intended to be permanent, though one would have thought that the numerous editions published in the latter half of the 16th century and the earlier part of the 17th, (one of them as late as 1644), should have shown any unbiassed person that it was certainly intended to be something other than temporary. A favourite argument against the book by those who disliked "read prayers", and there were many such, was that those who used it were not obliged to use it as it stood, as Anglican clergy were bound to use the *Book of Common Prayer*. What such controversialists forgot was that, while such was the case, there was nothing in law or custom to hinder any one from using it *verbatim et literatim*, if he wished to do so. Henderson did not use the book as it stood. Indeed, it cannot be

said that such of his prayers as have survived show much agreement with those therein ; but he did not think that the book was of no value. Indeed, as will be seen, he thought very highly of it. He protests against the view that Scots ministers had no certain rule or direction for their public prayers, but that every man " following his extemporany fansie did preach and pray what seemed good in his own eyes ". He adds : " The form of prayers, administration of the Sacraments, admission of Ministers, which are set down before in their *Psalm-Book*, and to which the ministers are to conform themselves, is a sufficient witness (against the view put forward above) ; for, although they be not tyed to set formes and words, yet are they not left at randome, but for testifying their consent and keeping unity they have their directory and prescribed order " .

In 1867 there was published in Edinburgh, from a 17th century manuscript, a collection of " Sermons, Prayers, and Pulpit Addresses by Alexander Henderson ". These had apparently been taken down by a short-hand writer at St Andrews and Leuchars, in the year 1638. Who the writer was we do not know ; but we may quote the editor of the volume who says ; " That he was an ardent admirer of Henderson there can be no doubt, and we may fairly enough conjecture that he was led to wait on his ministry at this time, and take down every thing that fell from his lips, even to his very prayers Judging from the character of the MS. we should say that this unknown person was a man of intelligence and education, though not deeply skilled in the learned tongues " .

There are sixteen of Henderson's prayers preserved in the MS., and from the way in which these are placed it appears that it was his custom to have two prayers before sermon and one after at the Sunday morning service. At the afternoon service he had two prayers only, one before and one after the sermon. As we learn from the prayers which have been preserved, it was his custom to use the Lord's Prayer at the close of the second prayer in the forenoon, and after the first in the afternoon. In this he deviated from the *Book of Common Order*, which places the Lord's Prayer at the close of the intercessory prayer after the sermon, in which prayer, it may be added, the Creed is also used.

Henderson himself has left us a description of public worship, as he conducted it, and from this it is evident that in its main features he followed " Knox's Liturgy ". He

tells us that when the people had assembled, "so many of all sorts, men and women, masters and servants, young and old publike worship beginneth with prayer and reading some portion of Holy Scripture, both of the Old and New Testament, and after reading, the whole congregation joyneth in singing some Psalm". Although he does not say so, this was the Reader's service, which was in some ways quite distinct from that conducted by the minister. The prayer in this part of the service was taken as a matter of course from the *Book of Common Order*, and our present day practice of beginning public worship with the offering of praise is really a relic of the Reader's service. "This reading and singing", Henderson states, "do continue till the Preaching begin; at which time the minister, having prefaced a little for quickening and lifting up the hearts of the people, first maketh a prayer for remission of sin, sanctification and all things needful, joyning also confession of sins and thanksgiving, with special relation to the hearers. After which in the forenoon is sung another Psalm, and after the Psalm a prayer for a blessing upon the preaching of the Word. . . . After sermon he praiseth God and prayeth again for a blessing, joyning earnest petitions for the Church Universal and for the coming of the Kingdom of Christ. . . . The prayer ended, a Psalm is sung and the people dismissed with a blessing. In the afternoon either the same order in all things is followed or some part of the Catechisme is expounded".

Henderson's prayers cannot be called liturgical, but are rich in scriptural phrase, and, although they would be regarded as rather long at the present day, it is not so long since they would have been regarded as being of moderate length. It appears to have been his custom to round off his prayers with an ascription of praise to the Holy Trinity and to have done the same with his sermons. Baillie tells us that among Henderson's "other good parts was one, a facultie of grave, good and zealous prayer, according to the matter in hand". His scriptural quotations, it may be said, were sometimes taken from the Authorised Version, sometimes from the Genevan, but more often they appear to be direct translations from the original.

It will be noticed that Henderson, in his description of the Scots service of his time, speaks of the minister "having prefaced a little for quickening and lifting up the hearts of the people", before he began his prayer. This is a feature

which has almost entirely vanished from the Scottish service, although it still holds a place in that of the Church of England. The "Preface" was a short address on the lines of the Exhortation before the Confession in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Such a "Prefatio" existed in some ancient Gallican liturgies and the custom of using such prevailed in some places up to our own day. Latterly, instead of the prayer it was the first psalm that was sung, that was "prefaced". A book better known in our fathers' day than in ours, "*The Devotional Psalter*" by Dr Smith of Biggar, was largely made up of such "prefaces".

The first one in the MS. mentioned was delivered at the Communion in St Andrews on "Sunday 21 Octob. 1638". It runs to about 2,500 words and was used before the first prayer in the service. It concludes thus; "When ye come to His house, ye may meet with Himself there and His Son Jesus Christ, and let us now in His Name draw near to the throne of grace and beseech the Lord that He would hear us in all things and in every thing needful for us. And let us also crave a blessing from Him and the assistance of His Spirit to His word that is to be spoken to us at this time, and to all the rest of His ordinances". This, it may be said, is by far the longest of the "prefaces", the others being much shorter.

At the forenoon service on the Lord's Day following the Communion there were two "prefaces". One used before the first prayer began thus: "It were very meet, yea not only were it meet, but it is also necessary for us to consider what the Lord has been doing to us and to consider what we have been doing with the Lord our God". This "Preface" runs to about seven hundred words. The other is much shorter and could not have taken two minutes to deliver. Occasionally one finds an item of special interest in a "preface". In 1639, as we learn from Baillie, there was a specially good harvest in Scotland. In a service taken by Henderson at some time in September of that year we find him saying in the "preface": "Beloved, ye have been thir (these) days by gane exercised about your harvest, and the winning of your corns. And therefore I exhort you now, that ye would give the Lord thanks and praise Him for that, that He has bestowed such a seasonable and such a fruitful harvest of corns upon you and beseech Him yet to continue it". Unfortunately the prayer which followed this "preface" is not given and so we do not know how he dealt with the matter. One

thing evident is that, as was the case with the contemporary Anglicans, thanksgiving did not bulk largely in the prayers then offered in public worship. The element of thanksgiving in the *Book of Common Prayer*, it has been said, is "astonishingly meagre", and the same thing seems to have been true in Scotland. In England the General Thanksgiving was added at the revision of 1661, but even to this day, north of the Tweed, one sometimes feels that the element of thanksgiving is somewhat scanty in the prayers offered in the Sanctuary.

As a specimen of the language used by Henderson in his prayers of illumination we may quote the following; "Lord to this end let Thy Word be spoken and accompanied by Thy awin Spirit, that so we may know that it is not the word of man, but the Word of the living God; that so it may bring out fruits in us and may change our hearts within; and then renew our lives without, that so our life may be honour to Thee, exemplary to others and comfortable to ourselves, through Jesus Christ, our Lord".

Speaking of the intercessions Henderson says that earnest petitions are offered "For the Church Universall and for the coming of the Kingdom of Christ, for all the afflicted Churches, for the Churches in his Majesty's Dominions, for the Church of Scotland, Ministry and People, for the King, the Queen, the Prince, and their whole Royall Progeny, for all members of that particular Congregation, as well absent in their lawfull affairs as present, for all that are afflicted among them in body, minde or means." The intercessions came after the sermon, as they do in almost all liturgies, ancient and modern, Orthodox, Roman and Reformed. The Church Service Society some fifty years ago, at the leading of men like Dr Cameron Lees and Dr A. K. H. Boyd, departed from this ancient usage, and in *Euchologion* placed the intercessions before the sermon, despite the protests of scholars like Dr Sprott and Dr Leishman.

As an example of Henderson's intercessions we may quote from a prayer used at a communion service in 1638. "Bless all who are in places of authority, for Christ's sake, especially our King's Majesty; fill him with wisdom and counsel from Thee and give him a love to truth in his heart and with a resolution to obey it, that so there may be a blessing upon him and upon his people over whom Thou hast set him. Let not his authority and power be exercised against these who are just and religious, but against the

wicked and profane. And Lord incline him to take such a course as may be most agreeable to Thy will, and may serve most for establishing Thy truth into⁽¹⁾ this land ”.

It is customary nowadays to conclude the prayer of intercession with a thanksgiving for the faithful departed. There was no such element in Henderson's prayers, nor does he make any reference to such in his description of Scottish worship. I have noticed, however, that he always closes his intercessory prayer with a reference to the heavenly home, and the hope that those present may attain thereunto. Thus in a prayer used on the “ Sabbath before the Communion ”, we find the last prayer concluding as follows ; “ Let us not think to have peace in the world and not to be at friendship with Thee, but make us to be labouring to be enrolled among these clouds of witnesses that has (sic) gone before us, and to walk in Thy ways ; that so that may be a presage (foreshowing) to us, that we shall hereafter be partakers of the inheritance with them, purchased to all of us by Jesus Christ ”.

HOLY BAPTISM.

According to Henderson no one other than “ the Pastor who preacheth the Word hath the power of the Ministration of the Sacraments ”, a position, it may be said, held by Knox and his fellow Reformers. Notice had to be given to the pastor by the father of the child, “ that a word may be spoken to him in season ”. Baptism was to be administered at one of two times ; “ After sermon on week dayes, and after sermon in the afternoon on the Lord's Day ”. The pastor was to remain in the same place where he had preached, and a large basin and a fair linen cloth were to be provided. The custom seems to have been to have the baptismal basin attached to a ring which was affixed to the pulpit, an arrangement not altogether unknown to-day, though there is no doubt that even then medieval fonts were used ; as also basins, often of silver, placed on convenient stands.

“ The Father or, in his necessary absence, some other man who is reputed godly, presenteth the child to be baptized. The action is begun with a short and pertinent prayer, next, some words of instruction touching the Author, nature, use, and end of this Sacrament, the duties to be performed in the one time, of the person to be baptized

(1) “ Into ” is still used in Fife as the equivalent of “ in ”.

and of the parent or viceparent. Thirdly, he that presenteth the childe maketh confession of the Faith into which the childe is to be baptized, and promiseth to bring up the children in that faith and in the fear of God. Fourthly the Minister being informed of the name of the childe baptizeth the childe so named, by sprinkling with water, *Into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost*. Lastly, the Minister concludeth, as well the publike worship for that time as the action, with thanksgiving for the Word and Sacraments, and with prayer for a blessing, and with such petitions as he useth at other times after sermon, and in (the) end dismisseth the congregation with the blessing ”.

This order set forth by Henderson follows in large measure that of the *Book of Common Order*, though there the “short and pertinent prayer” comes immediately before the act of baptism. It is as follows: “Almighty and everlasting God, who of Thine infinite mercy and goodness hast promised unto us that Thou wilt not only be our God but the God and Father of our children, we beseech Thee that as Thou hast vouchsafed to call us to be partakers of this Thy great mercy, in the fellowship of faith, so it may please Thee to sanctify with Thy Spirit and to receive into the number of Thy children this Infant, whom we shall baptize according to Thy Word, to the end that he, coming to perfect age, may confess Thee onelie the true God and whome Thou hast sent, Jesus Christ, and so serve Him and be profitable unto His Church in the whole course of his life, that after his life is ended he may be brought as a livelie member of His bodie, unto the full fruition of Thy joyes in the heavens where Thy Sonne our Saviour Christ reigneth world without ende, in Whose Name we pray as He hath taught us saying, *Our Father*”. The person who presented the child had to make “confession of the Faith into which the childe is to be baptized”, and from the *Book of Common Order* we learn that this was given in the words of the Apostles’ Creed, which the minister sometimes expounded, though apparently Henderson did not give such an exposition. It will be noticed that the baptismal formula differs a little from the usual, the words used being: “Into the Name”, instead of “In the Name”; and the definite article is omitted before “Son” and “Holy Ghost”. In the *Book of Common Order* (1615 edition) the words are “In the Name of the Father, of the Sonne, and of the Holy Ghost”. Henderson says nothing about the posture of the person

presenting the child ; but from other sources it would appear that the parent or sponsor knelt, while " holding up " the infant.

The LORD'S SUPPER.

In the days of Henderson the Lord's Supper was ministered at " a large Table decently covered, so placed as that the communicants can best sit about it and the whole congregation may both hear and behold ". On the Lord's Day preceding the celebration public warning had to be given and a day of preparation appointed, either the last day of the week " or at least toward the end of the week ". On the Communion Sunday the " Preface, prayers and preaching . . . are all framed to the present matter of the Sacrament, and the duties of the receivers afterwards ". After the sermon came what later generations called the " fencing of the Table ", all " ignorant, prophane and scandalous persons " being debarred from receiving. After this the minister came down from the pulpit and " sitteth down with the people at the Table, where the bread, standing before him in great basins, fitly prepared for breaking and distribution, and the wine in large cups in like manner, he first readeth and shortly expoundeth the words of Institution, showing the nature, use and end of the Sacrament, and the duties of the communicants. Next he useth a prayer of the Inestimable benefit of Redemption and for the means of the Word and Sacraments, particularly of this Sacrament, and prayeth earnestly to God for His powerful presence and effectual working, to accompany His own Ordinance, to the comfort of His people now to communicate ".

The Elements thus being sanctified by the Word and prayer, " the minister sacramentally breaketh the bread, taketh and eateth himself and delivereth to the people. . . . These that are nearest the minister having received the bread, do divide it from hand to hand among themselves : when the minister delivereth the bread according to the commandment and example of Christ, he commandeth the people to take and eat saying : *Take ye, eat ye, this is the body of the Lord which is broken for you ; Do it in remembrance of him.* After all at the Table have taken and eaten, the minister taketh the cup and, drinking first himself, he giveth it to the nearest, saying : *This Cup is the New Testament in the Blood of the Lord Jesus, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins ; drink ye all of it, for as often*

as you do eat this Bread and drink this Cup, ye do shew the Lord's death, till He come. . . . the minister also, continuing in his place, after the giving of the Elements, doth either by his own speech stir up the communicants to Spirituall meditations of faith, of the great love of God in Christ, and of the Passion of Christ, and to holy affections of love, joy, godly sorrow, thankfulness and whatsoever may concern them at that time; or causeth to be read the history of the Passion or some other part of Scripture, which may work the same effect".

"After all at the Table have received the Cup, they rise from the Table and return in a quiet manner to their places, another company cometh to the Table during which time of removing of the one and approaching of the other, the whole congregation singeth some part of a Psalm, touching the Passion, or the love and kindnesse of God to His people, as *Psal 22* or *103*, etc."

"After the last company hath received, the minister, rising from the Table, goeth to the pulpit where, after a short speech tending to thanksgiving, he again solemnly giveth thanks to God for so great a mercy, and prayeth as on other Sabbaths. The prayer ended, all joyn in singing a psalm of praise suitable to the occasion and are dismissed with the blessing".

From this description it will be seen that Henderson, following the custom of the Church Catholic, was as celebrant the first to communicate, and that what we may call the actual Communion Service, including the reading of the "warrant" and the Prayer of Consecration, was taken at the Holy Table. Another point to note is that he seems to have had the assistance of a Reader, for he mentions that when the minister did not "by his own speech stir up the Communicants to Spiritual Meditations", he caused the "history of the Passion" to be read. In the MS already noticed there are preserved twelve addresses which evidently had been used at the Communion Table before the people communicated. They are much shorter than what became customary in later days and could not have taken more than a few minutes in delivery. There are also two "conclusions", which were used after the last group of communicants had been served. These are longer than the table addresses, running to about a thousand words. The Prayer of Consecration, as George Gillespie the contemporary of Henderson called it, was not long when compared with those commonly used. What may be called the "con-

secratory" part of it is as follows: "Lord, we beseech Thee to sanctify these means to us, whilk we are to be about, that so they may represent Christ to us and we may remember the bitterness of His Passion, that thereby we may be assured of the pardon of our sins: And grant, Lord, that now by faith Christ may be made ours and we may be made His; and so let ane union be made up now that sall never be dissolved again. . . . Let not our souls go empty away".

Henderson did not apparently believe in definite consecratory words being used in prayer, for in one of his Table addresses he says: "We do not pray that Almighty God would sanctify this bread and wine by His Word and Spirit that it may be the body and blood of Christ, but we say only that when it is sanctified by the Word and prayer, then it is the Sacrament representing the body and blood of Christ to them who believe: And to those who have faith we may say so. So, after the bread and wine is sanctified, we have warrant to say, 'This is My body broken for you', 'This is the cup of the New Testament in My blood, shed for the remission of the sins of many'; but we have no warrant to pray that God by His almighty power would sanctify the elements to be the body and blood of Christ". There can be little doubt that this was called forth by Henderson's opposition to "Laud's Liturgy"; but it may be noted that he does not quote the words of that book correctly. What the Liturgy said was in a way quite different; for the concluding words of the petition for sanctification of the Elements reads, "that they be *unto us* the body and blood of Thy most dearly beloved Son". The doctrine behind such an expression, asking as it does that the Elements may be "to us" the Body and Blood of Christ, seems to be in no wise different from that enunciated by Henderson, that after the Elements had been "sanctified by prayer" one can say regarding them, "This is the Body of the Lord, which is broken for you" This Cup is the New Testament in the Blood of Christ".

We learn from John Row that at this time there had grown up a belief that the prayer of consecration in the *Book of Common Order* was defective, and probably what was believed to be lacking in print was supplied in practice. It is at least worthy of note that in the Westminster Directory, of which Henderson was one of the leading compilers, the following is part of the consecration prayer; "Earnestly to pray to God, the Father of all mercies and

the God of all consolation, to vouchsafe His gracious presence, and the effectual working of His Spirit in us : and so to sanctify these Elements both of Bread and Wine and to bless his own Ordinance, that we may receive by faith the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, crucified for us, and so to feed upon Him ; that He may be one with us and we with Him ; that He may live in us and we in Him and to Him, who hath loved us, and given Himself for us ”.

THE WESTMINSTER DIRECTORY.

As is well known the “ Directory for the Publick Worship of God throughout the three Kingdoms ” was drawn up by a small committee of the Westminster Divines, with whom were associated the commissioners from the Church of Scotland. Unfortunately, no minutes of this sub-committee exist ; but we learn from Baillie that the most important sections of the Directory, those on Prayer, Preaching and the Administration of the Sacraments, were prepared by the Scottish commissioners, of whom Henderson was decidedly the leader. Baillie gives us some interesting information about the proceedings of the sub-committee. For example, he tells us that there was some debate whether it were “ good to have two prayers as we use before sermon, or bot one as they (the English) use. If in that first prayer it were meet to take in the King, Church and Sick, as they do, or leave these to the last prayer as we ”. The result was a compromise. Directions for one long prayer before the sermon were given, this prayer to include the intercessions, but a paragraph was inserted stating that the minister might defer “ some part of these petitions till after his sermon ”, if he thought it better to do so. So too with the Lord’s Prayer. Apparently the English had it at the end of the last prayer, as had the *Book of Common Order*. Henderson, as we have seen, used it immediately before his sermon. While the Directory suggests that it should come at the end of the concluding prayer, the matter is left open for any minister to use it elsewhere if he wished.

Commenting on Henderson’s attitude to these things, the editor of his Sermons remarks : “ By referring to the directions there (in the Directory) given in regard to this point, the reader will be struck with the similarity of method, matter, and to some extent also of language there prescribed, and those of Henderson’s prayers for the King and other members of the royal family which occur in this volume ”.

It is not generally known that Henderson himself on one occasion endeavoured to draw up forms of prayer for use in the congregations of the Church. In 1641 he was Moderator of the General Assembly, and as such laid before the members what Baillie calls a "notable motion for drawing up a Confession of Faith, a Catechisme, a Directorie for all the parts of Publick Worship and a Platforme of Government wherein possiblie England and we might agree". The General Assembly approved of the proposal and promptly laid on Henderson himself the burden of providing what was required. It seems that, owing to various circumstances, he did not get on very well at his labours, and it was not until the Westminster Assembly had sat that the required works were completed. Writing to Baillie some nine months or so after the Assembly of 1641 Henderson states that he had tried his hand at drawing up a Directory; but that he had found himself unable "to sett down other formes of Prayer than those we have in our Psalme Book, penned by our great and divine Reformers". "Psalm Book", it should be said, was the name given in the 17th century to the *Book of Common Order*, which was usually bound up with the old Scots Psalter.

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