

THE RECORD

The Editor writes:

FREEDOM AND ORDER

The first of the *Articles Declaratory of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland* sets forth worship as the first of the distinctive activities of the Church. The second states that ‘its system and principles of worship ... are in accordance with “The Directory for the Public Worship of God”’ but acknowledges that that may ‘have been or may hereafter be interpreted or modified by Acts of the General Assembly or by consuetude.’ Acts of the General Assembly on the subject of worship are notably few. And for how long do fresh forms need to persist and by how wide a constituency do they need to be adopted before they become matters of ‘consuetude’?

When the Church Service Society was founded in 1865, the founding fathers were accused of ‘innovation’. As a result of their historical studies they had little difficulty in showing that the proposed changes were more closely in conformity with the Directory than the usages which had become characteristic of worship in Scottish parishes; and that these proposed changes found further grounding in the Book of Common Order of the Reformation era. When the General Assembly of the reunited Church authorised, in 1940, the publication of a new Book of Common Order ‘to express the mind of the Church with regard to its offices of worship’, they recognised at the same time that ‘liberty in the conduct of worship is a possession which the Church of Scotland will not surrender.’ The words ‘Common Order’ and ‘Directory’ have a somewhat peremptory or directive character about them, yet it is a curious fact that the Church of our sister nation south of the border adopts the rather less peremptory titles ‘Common Prayer’ and ‘Common Worship’ but has, at least in the past, sought to enforce a stricter conformity, at least in regard to words.

Canon Peter Moger of York Minster, on a later page, indicates that that traditional picture is no longer accurate and raises interesting and important questions in relation to the mutual relationship of liberty and order in the matter of worship. Although the Church of Scotland may have arrived at the present day

by a somewhat different route, it finds itself, or should find itself, facing not-dissimilar questions.

The founders of the Society set themselves two objectives: ‘the study of liturgies – ancient and modern – of the Christian Church’ and, based on that, ‘the preparation and ultimate publication of certain forms of prayer for public worship ... etc.’ That means that they did not suppose that an effective response to the needs of their day could be made on the basis of whatever bright ideas might be floated but needed to be undergirded by serious study. The original objective suggests that the intended study was to be historical and documentary. The criteria by which the serviceability of their study was to be judged are less evident. Likewise, the criteria by which a balance is to be struck between liberty and ‘common order’ call for serious consideration.

Perhaps the approaching close of the third half-century of the life of the Society is an appropriate time to consider devising for ourselves a programme of serious study with which to enter our fourth half-century. It would be less than gracious to the contributors to these pages and to the Society’s meetings and study days to suggest that little of significance has been done in recent years, but it may, perhaps, be suggested that it is somewhat lacking in cohesion. Perhaps we could devise a means of helping one another more to come to identify the contribution of history, theology, aesthetics, and psychology to the establishing of criteria by which the devising of forms of worship should be guided – always remembering that neither historical liturgies of faultless orthodoxy and aesthetic impeccability nor ‘modern forms’ of the same character can, in themselves, be guaranteed to generate that worship ‘in spirit and in truth’ which is called for by the One who seeks our worship.

J.C.S.