

Preface

AMONG those Churches of the Lord Jesus Christ which follow the Presbyterian rule and order, Liberty of Worship has been esteemed a most precious privilege and inheritance; and while they have been both fearless and faithful to uphold it, against the intrusion of superstitious and burdensom ceremonies, they have also been diligent to seek, in the Public Services of Religion, the golden mean between a too great laxity and a tyrannical uniformity. Such things as are of Divine Institution they have observed in every Ordinance; and other things they have endeavoured to set forth “according to the Rules of Christian Prudence, agreeable to the general Rules of the Word of God.”

Although the Books of Common Order, which were prepared for the Reformed Churches, at the beginning, in all countries, contained both prayers and other forms, yet were those books not so much imposed by way of inflexible regulation, as they were offered and accepted as profitable Aids to Worship; and they not only permitted but encouraged the exercise of Free Prayer. In a like spirit the Directory for Worship, adopted at a later time by the Church of Scotland, for the sake of unity with their brethren in the Church of England, so far from establishing an invariable form of Public Worship, expressly provided for a liberty of variation; and it did not in any way prohibit the use of prepared orders and prayers, conformable to

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the general directions given therein.

The same wise and blessed liberty is maintained in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America even to this day. Accordingly it seemed good to the General Assembly of 1903, hearkening to the desire of many pastors and churches, to appoint a Committee of Ministers and Ruling Elders who should prepare, “in harmony with the Directory for Worship, a Book of Simple Forms and Services, proper and helpful for voluntary use in Presbyterian churches, in the celebration of the Sacraments, in Marriages and Funerals, and in the Conduct of Public Worship.” This work has been continued, in faithful obedience, and in humble reliance on the Holy Spirit, through nearly three years of patient labour, and has been submitted, in its progress, to two successive Assemblies. The principles by which the work has been guided were approved, and its completion was ordered. This having been done, so far as God enabled us, in the Book herewith presented, its publication is now “Authorized by the General Assembly, for Voluntary Use in the Churches.”

This Book of Common Worship is, therefore, not to be taken in any wise as a liturgy imposed by authority. Not is it a substitute for the Directory for Worship, but rather a supplement to it, wherein the instructions of the Standards are followed on all essential points, and aid is offered, to those who desire it, for the conduct of the Public Services of Religion with reverence and propriety. We have studied earnestly to embody the truths of our Holy Religion in the language of orderly devotion, to the end that by the Sacraments, the stated Ordinances of the Lord’s Day, and all the ordinary and occasional offices of the Church, men may be both instructed and confirmed in the faith of Jesus Christ. We have searched the Holy Scriptures, the usage of the Reformed Churches, and the devotional treasures of early Christianity, for the most noble, clear, and moving expressions

of the Spirit of Praise and Prayer; and we have added to these ancient and venerable forms and models, such other as might serve, under the guidance of the same Spirit, to give voice to the present needs, the urgent desires, and the vital hopes of the Church living in these latter days and in the freedom of this Republic.

Concerning the manner in which the difference Services are ordered and arranged, and the best way in which they may be used to edification, a few suggestions are offered in the pages immediately following this Preface; and throughout the Book, the careful reader will find that the words of guidance which precede the various parts of the services are designed, not only to mark their spiritual significance, but also to enable all the People to join in the Acts of Worship, that all things may be done decently and in order. The longer and more important rubrics are transcribed from the Directory for Worship of this Church, which disapproves alike a “confirming Ministers to set or fixed forms of prayer for public Worship,” and of permitting that important service to be disgraced “by mean, irregular, or extravagant effusions.” It is to be remembered, therefore, that the forms here offered are to be used only “if the Minister so please,” as a help in Common Worship, and not without a constant care and diligence, by “acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures, by meditation, by reading the best writers on the subject, and by a life of communion with God in secret, to endeavour to acquire both the spirit and the gift of Prayer.”

In the Treasury of Prayers many things have been gathered together which may be not only useful, from time to time, in the conduct of Public Services, but also profitable for reading and study, for use in private devotion, and in that revival of Family Worship which is greatly needed in all our Churches. It is hoped, therefore, that the whole Book, having been prepared with a sincere wish to advance saving knowledge and

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true piety, may be received, studied, and used, by earnest members of this Church and by faithful Christians elsewhere, in the spirit of candour, simplicity, and brotherly love; devoutly meditating upon the real meaning of the Christian faith, and endeavouring to adorn the Gospel of God our Saviour in all things. And to this end we pray that the Holy Spirit will accompany and bless this Book with His ever-present Grace; that wherever it is used the hearts of men may be truly drawn and led to the Throne of the Divine Mercy; and that all the people may find comfort, joy, and strength as they unite in the Common Worship of God who is revealed in Jesus Christ our adorable Redeemer.

THE ASSEMBLY'S COMMITTEE

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- John De Witt
- Charles Cuthbert Hall
- John Clark Hill
- W. Beatty Jennings
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