

REPORT
OF THE
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
WORSHIP

1 Introduction

The General Assembly in May 2009 approved the remit for the Board of Trustees in May 2009 as set out below:

1. *The General Assembly approve the process outlined in the Board's Report for fulfillment of its remit in relation to the worship, discipline and unity of the Church and instruct the Board to bring forward proposals to the 2010 General Assembly. They endorse the view that the consultation should be conducted in a free and open manner in which the expression of views on either side of the debate is permissible until the General Assembly pronounces on the matter.*
2. *The General Assembly instruct that if some departure from the status quo is to be recommended, the Board bring forward further proposals as to how this would be managed, with particular consideration given to the oversight of the range and nature of materials to be permitted.*
3. *The General Assembly endorses the Board's view that all efforts should be made to prevent any possible outcome from precipitating further division in the Church.*
4. *The General Assembly ordain that this matter be decided at a plenary meeting of the General Assembly in 2010 comprising all ministers with a seat in presbytery and an equal number of elders, subject to approval of presbyteries in accordance with Barrier Act procedure.*

The process outlined in the Board's Report to the 2009 General Assembly included a number of principles and bound the Board to come to the Assembly with an unequivocal recommendation within the four options set out below.

(A) Re-affirmation of the status quo with only inspired materials permitted in praise and no instrumental music permitted OR

(B) An arrangement to supplement the status quo whereby songs of human composition but no musical instruments would be permitted OR

(C) An arrangement to supplement the status quo whereby instrumental music but no materials of human composition would be permitted OR

(D) An arrangement to supplement the status quo whereby both songs of human composition and instrumental music would be permitted.

The principles which accompanied this set of options and which were endorsed by the Assembly made clear that the third and fourth options were permissive options - i.e. it would be permissible, under circumstances to be outlined, for some congregations to adopt uninspired materials of praise and instrumental music; it was never envisaged that a Kirk Session would be forced against its will to change the worship practice of the congregation(s) under its charge.

Following the May 2009 Assembly, the Board commissioned a number of papers on the topic of worship and circulated the papers to Presbyteries and thence to Kirk Sessions seeking feedback from both. The Board received the responses given to Presbyteries from Kirk Sessions and although the nature of the responses precluded the precision of a plebiscite it was evident that a clear majority of the Kirk Sessions affirmed support for Option A.

The General Assembly in 2010, recognising the divisive nature of the issue and the desire on all sides not to be rushed prematurely into a conclusion, agreed that the Board should hold a Plenary Conference prior to presenting a report to a Plenary Assembly. A Plenary Conference was held at Dingwall Free Church on 23 and 24 August. The Board has reflected the topics discussed at the Plenary Conference in its report.

Throughout the discussion the Board, with the endorsement of the General Assembly, recognised that officebearers were entirely free to express and promote views on worship at variance with the Church's practice as a means of ensuring that the Church could debate the scriptural basis of its position and that such views should not count against those who expressed them during the period of debate.

2 Plenary Conference

It was not the purpose of the Plenary Conference to determine what the Church should do. This was recognised by the Board as the function of the Plenary Assembly. It was however the aim of the Plenary Conference to provide a forum for discussion which would assist the Board in reporting to the Plenary Assembly.

In addition to the range of the four options, the Plenary Conference raised issues relating to: unity; the clarity of the vows; the concept of public worship; the scope of "inspired" materials; the underpinning legislation, namely the 1905, 1910 & 1932 Acts (see Appendix).

Unity

The Board recognised from the Plenary Conference that office-bearers and members of the Church are all anxious to preserve unity; that people sincerely hold to one of options A to D on biblical grounds, although clearly people are interpreting the Bible in different ways to arrive at differing conclusions. The Plenary Conference raised the issue of the importance of unity in itself and to what extent a commitment to unity should override issues like the form of worship issue. Does unity override the necessity of securing uniform agreement as to the nature of worship or is the nature of worship sufficiently clear that some inclusivist position in the name of unity should be rejected? Indeed given that there are officebearers who firmly believe that options A or B or C or D are biblically based, the Plenary Conference raised the issue as to which of the options A to D represents the unity option. The Board was aware that some might argue that the flexibility of the distinction between *public* and *non-public* worship and the wide scope of the concept of *inspired materials* meant that option A was a unity option; whilst others would argue that since options B to D were permissive rather mandatory then any of B to D were more inclusionist and unifying. The view taken by the Board in reaching its recommendation was that there was no single obvious unity option since the proponents of the various options held their views as views sanctioned by their own reading of scripture. The Board affirmed its commitment to unity and expressed the hope that whatever the outcome of the debate officebearers and members would seek ways of remaining united in the Free Church of Scotland.

Vows

It was clear from the Plenary Conference that some people were confused as to what the Church intended in requiring the vow connected with worship and consequently people who had taken vows had different understandings of what they were committed to. Some considered that the vows bound them to option A and that any change in the practice of the Church would result in their being bound by a vow that the Church would no longer enable them to exercise. In such a situation they would either have to resign from office or record their conscientious dissent. Others considered that the vow only bound them to support whatever the Church at any time legislated the practice of worship to be. For them any change would not involve any violation of the vow since the vow was only a promise to uphold a practice which had changed from time to time over the years since 1843 and during that time vow takers had continued as officebearers. Some indicated that at the time they took their vows they enquired as to the meaning of the vows and were variously given the two types of position outlined above. In the light of this some thought that the Church's intention was unclear. The Board did not feel that any useful purpose would be served by further legislation in this area.

The Concept of Public Worship

The Plenary Conference recognised that the practice of the Church distinguished between "*public worship*" and other more informal gatherings, and that the practice expressed as Option A whilst applicable to "*public worship*" was not applicable to other less formal gatherings. The Board recognised that some people had difficulty recognising the distinction whilst others recognised the distinction and worshipped accordingly. Various suggestions were made including a reference to the Handbook on Worship produced in 2002 and to the notion that Kirk Sessions or ministers could so determine what was and what was not *public worship*. Some people thought that the distinction might better be expressed as "*Formal*" versus "*Informal*" since the public could be present at either. Others suggested that the ambiguities allowed for a degree of flexibility room which helped the Church to cope with the argument over the worship issue. The Board felt that *public worship* occurred when a Kirk Session or a superior court called God's people to assemble to worship him, in contradistinction to meetings called for testimony, fellowship and other purposes.

The Scope of “Inspired Materials”

The Plenary Conference also revealed unclarity and disagreement about the scope of “*inspired materials*”. Are they psalms only; psalms and other biblical songs; any part of scripture which can be sung; any scripture paraphrased, whether continuous passage or a selection of scriptural propositions? Where does a paraphrase end and a hymn start? It seems evident to the Board, having examined the Church’s historical position, that its general practice permits the use of inspired materials of praise other than psalms.

The Underpinning Legislation

A number of people felt that the underpinning legislation was unsatisfactory, especially the 1910 Act which could be construed as designating the elements of a different practice as evil and as such runs contrary to the practice of many officebearers taking part in worship in other Churches which deviate from the Free Church practice. The Assembly had the matter drawn to their attention in 1953 when they were asked to judge an appeal against a decision by the Synod of Ross. The Synod had sought to prohibit Free Church ministers from participating in worship involving hymns and instrumental music in other churches. The Assembly debated the matter, and upheld the right of Free Church ministers to participate in worship of this kind in other churches - thus moving against the spirit of the 1910 Act.

The Board believes that it would be useful, even if, and perhaps especially if, the Assembly accepts the Board’s draft deliverance to amend the legislation to promote unity by diminishing the degree of divergence between the proponents of Options A and any of Options B to D. The Board believes that the Church’s current practice is stated succinctly and unambiguously in the 1905 Act; the 1910 Act widens the issue to enjoin officebearers to believe that any contrary practice is evil and to take action against such. It is at variance with current practice permitted by the General Assembly – officebearers may, if they choose, conduct services and attend services in other Christian Churches where the form of worship differs and they do not feel under compulsion to preach of the evil of such divergent practice. The 1932 Act elaborates the position taken in 1905. Accordingly the Board recommends that the Church repeals the 1910 and 1932 Acts and relies on the 1905 Act as amended by the proposed deliverance to express the position of the Church.

Quality

During the debate some people expressed the view that the quality of praise was poor and in many cases far short of any reasonable standard. The Board has asked the Assembly to address this issue in the draft deliverance.

3 The Worship Issue

The Board does not feel that there is any useful purpose served in rehearsing the arguments set out in the papers commissioned by the Board and placed for some time on the Church’s website. The Board recognises that within the Church many members and officebearers, having the same regard for the scriptural authority of the regulative principle as their brethren who believe in Option A, nevertheless interpret the Bible’s teaching on worship as mandating practices consistent with options B, C or D. The Board believes therefore that there is no single position which can be described as the clear unity option but recognises that the majority of the Kirk Sessions support Option A. The majority of the Board, believing individually that Option A is the definitive Biblical position and that in this they reflect the view of the majority of the Kirk Sessions, take the view that Option A should continue to be the practice of the Church. (This view was not a unanimous view of the Board since a minority of the Board averred that Option D represented both a Biblical position on worship and was at least equal to Option A in offering a unifying way forward.)

The Board is, as the report already makes clear, aware that the worship issue has opened up questions about unity, vows, public versus non-public worship, the scope of inspired materials and issues around the legislative underpinning of Option A. With the exception of the legislation, the Board does not feel that any useful purpose would be served at this time in legislating further around the other issues listed although of course it may be necessary to do so depending on the determination of the Assembly.

4 The Barrier Act

Over the period of consideration the Board discussed at length a view expressed during consultation that, since a Plenary Assembly would include all ministers with a seat on Presbytery, together with an equal number of elders, any decision to change the status quo coming from such a Plenary Assembly may not require further recourse to Barrier Act procedure. The Board draws attention to this matter as one to be

resolved by the Assembly in the light of the advice which it will receive from the Assembly Clerk. Accordingly this matter is not addressed in the Proposed Deliverance.

JAMES M. FRASER
Chairman

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Board of Trustees, and thank the Chairman, members of the Board, the Chief Administrative Officer and his staff for their work.
2. The General Assembly, recognising the divisive nature of the issue dealt with in this report, affirm their commitment to unity and urge officebearers and members to find ways of continuing in unity after the Assembly has determined the issue.
3. The General Assembly, recognising that the majority of Kirk Sessions have not been persuaded by the arguments presented for change and therefore either support the current worship practice or have no desire to move from this practice, affirm that the practice of the Free Church of Scotland in public worship shall be to avoid the use of uninspired materials of praise and of instrumental music.
4. The General Assembly stipulate that public worship occurs when a Kirk Session or a superior court of the Church call God's people to assemble to worship him, in contradistinction to meetings called for testimony, fellowship and other purposes.
5. The General Assembly repeal Act I, Class I, 1910 and Act V, Class II, 1932.
6. The General Assembly amend paragraph 2 of Act V, Class II, 1905, by inserting therein (a) immediately after the word "enjoin" the words, "in respect of worship," and (b) immediately after the word "period" the words, "the practice then observed being to avoid the use in public worship of uninspired materials of praise and of instrumental music."
7. The General Assembly ordain that Act V, Class II, 1905 as thus amended be reissued as a new Act of this Plenary Assembly and that this new Act be given the status of a Class 1 Act.
8. The General Assembly encourage Presbyteries to focus on promoting improvements in congregational praise and in the quality of praise leaders.
9. The General Assembly instruct Presbyteries to organise a day of prayer within their own bounds, at a suitable date after the Church has determined the matter, to focus on maintaining the unity of the Church.

APPENDIX - ACTS ANENT PUBLIC WORSHIP

1. Act V, Class II, 1905 - Act anent Public Worship (No. 5 of Class II.)

Edinburgh, 25th May 1905. Sess. 5.

1. The General Assembly hereby recall resolutions authorising and sanctioning the use of uninspired hymns, of dates June 3, 1872; May 27, 1881 May 26, 1896; and May 24, 1897; and repeal Act of Assembly, of date 31st. May 1883, entitled "VII. Act anent Instrumental Music (No. 4 of Class II.)."

2. The General Assembly reaffirm the Disruption position of 1843 in respect of doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, and enjoin all their congregations to adhere to purity of worship, as that was understood and practised at that period, and so secure that the present practice of the Church be in accord with the terms of the Formula of 1846, "purity of worship presently authorised and practised in the Free Church of Scotland."

2. Act I, Class I, 1910 - Act anent Public Worship

Edinburgh 31st May 1910. Sess. 11.

Whereas the maintenance in all respects by this Church of her historic position, as the Church of Scotland Free, ought to be made abundantly clear, and any misunderstanding regarding the same prevented; Whereas evil effects arose from the introduction of uninspired materials of praise at variance with the Scriptural principles and usage regulating her worship, as also of instrumental music, by the late prevailing party in her judicatures; and Whereas, on the secession of that party in October 1900, neither of these innovations remained within her borders, and they are now authoritatively

proscribed by Act of Assembly, 1905, entitled, Act anent Public Worship (No. 5 of Class II.); and Whereas, further, the peace and harmony of this Church ought to be safeguarded against disturbance in all time coming from attempts to introduce these and similar innovations, the General Assembly (with the consent of Presbyteries) do, therefore, resolve to embody in this present Act, the Act XV. of Assembly 1707, entitled Act against Innovations in the Worship of God, that thereby the better knowledge and observance of the same may be secured, the terms whereof are these :- “ The General Assembly of this Church, taking into their serious consideration that the purity of religion, and particularly of Divine worship, and uniformity therein, is a signal blessing to the Church of God, and that it hath been the great happiness of this Church, ever since her reformation from Popery, to have enjoyed and maintained the same in a great measure, and that any attempts made for the introduction of innovations in the worship of God therein have been of fatal and dangerous consequence: Likeas, by the 5th Act of the Parliament, anno 1690, and 23rd Act of the Parliament, 1693 years [C. 22 in Claim, Declaration, and Protest, and 38 in the Record Edition of the Acts of Parliament], and the Act lately passed for security of the present Church Establishment, the foresaid purity and uniformity of worship are expressly provided for; and being well informed, by representations sent from several Presbyteries of this Church, that innovations, particularly in the Public Worship of God, are of late set up in some places in public assemblies within their respective bounds, and that endeavours are used to promote the same, by persons of known disaffection to the present establishment, both of Church and State, the introduction whereof was not so much as once attempted, even during the late Prelacy; and considering also that such innovations are dangerous to this Church, and manifestly contrary to our known principle, (which is, that nothing is to be admitted in the worship of God but what is prescribed in the Holy Scriptures), to the constant practice of this Church, and against the good and laudable laws made since the late happy Revolution for establishing and securing the same, in her doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, and that they tend to the fomenting of schism and division, to the disturbance of the peace and quiet both of Church and State: Therefore, the General Assembly being moved with zeal, for the glory of God, and the purity and uniformity of His worship, doth hereby discharge the practice of all such innovations in Divine worship within this Church, and does require and obtest all the ministers of this Church, especially those in whose bounds any such innovations are, or may happen to be, to represent to their people the evil thereof, and seriously to exhort them to beware of them, and to deal with all such as do practice the same, in order to their recovery and reformation; and do instruct and enjoin the Commission of this Assembly to use all proper means, by applying to the Government or otherwise, for suppressing and removing all such innovations, and preventing the evils and dangers that may ensue thereupon to this Church.” And the Assembly declare that they ratify and approve the said Act XV., 1707, thus hereinbefore expressed as setting forth the permanent principles regulating the purity of worship maintained by this Church, and asserting the fatal and dangerous consequence of attempts to innovate upon the said purity of worship, and that the historical references thereof are to be held as illustrative of the godly zeal of their forefathers in maintaining these principles, - not necessarily, however, with full approval of their methods, and the injunctions contained therein are to be implemented in accordance with the declarations contained in Act XII., 1846. Accordingly, the Assembly prohibit the practice of all such innovations in Divine worship within this Church, and require all the ministers of this Church, especially those whose congregations may happen to be in danger of being contaminated thereby, to represent to their people the evil thereof, and seriously to exhort them to beware of them. They enjoin Presbyteries, where innovations are represented as having taken place, in the order and form of Public Worship, confirmed by Acts of Assembly, and presently practiced in this Church, to adopt such course as seems best fitted for restoring uniformity within their bounds, and decree that orders of Presbytery, issued to that effect, are to be obeyed, until reversed or modified by the Superior Courts. Further, they instruct and enjoin the Commission of this Assembly to use all proper means for suppressing and removing all such innovations, should they appear in connection with any of the congregations, and for preventing the evils and dangers that may ensue thereupon to this Church.

3. Act V, Class II, 1932 - Act anent Requirement at Ordinations and Inductions.

Edinburgh, 30th May 1932. Sess. 10.

The General Assembly enact and ordain that at Ordinations and Inductions the presiding Minister shall, prior to putting the appointed questions to the Ordinand make the following intimation, namely: “It is my duty to explain to you, and also to the Congregation here present, with reference to that part of the question which will be put to you as to ‘Purity of Worship as presently practised in this Church’ that, in 1910, the General Assembly reaffirmed the legislation of the Church as to uniformity in public worship going back to the year 1707; and that, in accordance with that legislation, it is the present practice of the Free Church to avoid the use in public worship of uninspired materials of praise as also of instrumental music. Such present practice determines the purity of worship to the maintenance of which the Ordinand pledges himself.