

THE RESOLUTION OF
SOLEMN THANKSGIVING

At the four hundredth anniversary of the Scottish Reformation the Ministers and Elders of the Church of Scotland convened in General Assembly call the Church and people of Scotland to remember with thanksgiving their Christian inheritance and summon them to return to God in repentance and faith.

The General Assembly give thanks to Almighty God for the Gospel of His sovereign grace and love given to us in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, for those who brought the Faith to Scotland and founded the Church here, and for all who remained loyal to Christ in days when faithlessness and corruption had weakened His Church.

The General Assembly give thanks for the Reformers who, in face of scorn and persecution, cleansed the Church and set it free from papal authority, restoring to the people the Bible in the common tongue, the two Sacraments in their scriptural simplicity and worship in which all could join with faith and understanding.

The General Assembly give thanks for the new opportunities and responsibilities given to the whole membership of the Church by the Reformation and for the faithful work and witness of the Eldership throughout the years.

The General Assembly give thanks for the work of the Reformers in striving for freedom and in stirring men's consciences to care for the poor and educate the people, thus endeavouring to bring both Church and Nation under the Lordship of Christ.

Remembering the years of conflict which followed the Reformation, the General Assembly give thanks for the relationship which has been established in Scotland between Church and State.

Lamenting the bitterness of the controversies and separations within the Church that marred its Christian witness, the General Assembly nevertheless give thanks that many divisions have now been healed and that there is a growing concern for unity among the Churches. They reaffirm the obligation of the Church of Scotland to seek and promote union with other Churches in which it finds the Word to be purely preached, the Sacraments administered according to Christ's ordinance, and discipline rightly exercised.

While humbly confessing unfaithfulness, disobedience and neglect of opportunities during these four hundred years, the General Assembly give thanks for the influence of the Reformed and Presbyterian witness, not only upon Scottish life and character but also in the new world, in the Commonwealth and in many countries within the mission of the Church to all men everywhere.

Believing that the present day offers a great challenge and opportunity, and depending upon the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, the General Assembly reaffirm their belief in the Catholic Faith and in the great truths of the Gospel recovered through the Reformation. They solemnly renew their obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, sole King and Head of the Church, in the spirit of these words from the Scots Confession:

"As we beleeve in ane God, Father, Sonne and haly Ghaist, so do we maist constantly beleeve that from the beginning there hes bene, and now is, and to the end of the world sall be ane Kirk; that is to say, ane company and multitude of men chosen of God, who richtly worship and imbrace Him by true faith in Christ Jesus."

In that assurance they pray for God's blessing upon Scotland, and send their greetings to those who call upon His Name in every land.

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THE DEVELOPMENT of the OFFICE
of LORD HIGH COMMISSIONER.

This short account is mainly a condensation, made with his kind permission and help, of the book by The Rev. Dr. Stewart Mechie, Senior Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History at Glasgow University, entitled "The Office of Lord High Commissioner" (The St. Andrew Press 1957). Dr. Mechie's co-operation is gratefully acknowledged, and those interested are referred to the book itself. For a very readable account of the development of the Church of Scotland since the Reformation reference is made to John Buchan's short essay "The Kirk in Scotland" contained in his book "Men and Deeds" (Peter Davies, 1935).

The first General Assembly of the Church of Scotland met in 1560, and within a very few years the first traces of the Office which later became that of the Lord High Commissioner are to be found. Both the Catholic Queen Mary and the Protestant Regents who governed after her abdication (1567) in name of the Young King James VI, questioned the right of the General Assembly to meet without the royal summons. To this an answer was given, almost certainly by John Knox himself, "Take from us the freedom of Assemblies and take from us the Evangel". But the Assembly was willing that the Crown should know what was being done, and contact for this purpose was kept up through members of the Privy Council or nobles who were present; or else meetings were arranged between Commissioners of the Crown and others from the Assembly.

In 1578 we find the Assembly asking the young King's Council to send some of its number "as commissioners from His Hiennes to assist the Assembly with their presence and counsell". Lord Herries and the Abbot of Deer, who came in response to this request, regarded themselves as observers rather than members of the Assembly, thus foreshadowing the modern position. From this time onward the presence of one or more Royal Commissioners at Assemblies was common, but not invariable.

The formal origin of the present office may perhaps be traced to July 1580, when the King's letter was presented to the Assembly at Dundee, giving authority to the Prior of Pittenweem and the Laird of Lundie to assist with their presence and counsel.

Throughout the reign of James VI, and for most of that of his son Charles I, the central theme of Scottish history is the royal attempt to increase arbitrary power, and the national resistance to this which was led by the Church.

The main bones of contention were matters of ritual and episcopal government, the Kings trying to impose their views, and to govern the Church and influence Parliament through a subservient hierarchy. But the right to summon Assemblies was also an important point, and here King James got his own way. It was enacted in 1584 that no assembly should be held without his commandment; and even when the Act of Parliament of 1592 established a full Presbyterian system, it was laid down that the King or his commissioner, if present before the dissolving of the Assembly, should appoint time and place for the next one. This power was often used both to defer Assemblies and to change their meeting places. King James was present himself in about nine different Assemblies and sometimes spoke and voted. Otherwise he was usually represented by one or more officials or members of the Council. The last royal appearance was in 1602, since when no Sovereign has attended the General Assembly in person.

After James VI succeeded to the English Throne as James I (1603) his added prestige enabled him to press his ecclesiastical policy harder on his Scottish subjects. Full Episcopacy was reimposed in 1610, and Assemblies, at which the Royal Commissioners were now usually noblemen, met less frequently till 1618, after which the King ceased to summon them altogether. This year was also the last which saw more than one Commissioner: on all subsequent occasions there has been one only for each Assembly.

Charles I, who succeeded in 1625, allowed no Assembly to meet for many years. The attempted introduction of the Service Book of 1637 finally united practically all Scotland against him in the National Covenant, and he eventually agreed to the calling of a Parliament and a General Assembly. James, Marquess of Hamilton, Commissioner to the 1638 Assembly in Glasgow Cathedral, had an impossible task, and after a few days declared the Assembly dissolved. But dissolve they would not; and proceeded in the absence of a Commissioner to overturn the innovations of the last thirty years and more. It is notable, however, that the Assembly next year re-enacted the principal Acts with a Royal Commissioner present.

Annual Assemblies now became the rule, and Commissioners, usually noblemen, were appointed by the King in 1641, 1642 and 1643 though not in 1640. At the 1643 Assembly, the last to which Charles I appointed a Commissioner, the office was held by Sir Thomas Hope of Craighall, Lord Advocate, who was also the last commoner to be appointed till 1924.

Although annual Assemblies continued, the outbreak of the Civil War prevented a Royal Commissioner being present, except that Charles II in 1651, during his brief sojourn in Scotland, appointed the Earl of Balcarres. In 1653 the Assembly was forcibly dissolved by Cromwellian soldiers, and did not meet again till 1690.

The Restoration of 1660 resulted in the reimposition of Episcopacy, but after the Revolution of 1688 the Church again became Presbyterian and has remained so ever since. At every Assembly since 1690 the presence of a Royal Commissioner has been an invariable rule. Until Mr. James Brown was appointed under the first Labour Government in 1924, the Commissioner was always a nobleman, sometimes re-appointed several times, the greatest number being in the case of Robert, Lord Belhaven and Stenton, who was commissioned twenty eight times over a period of thirty six years from 1831 to 1866.

The early years of William and Mary were not without their difficulties, due to the Commissioner intervening in the business of the Assembly or dissolving it suddenly when it seemed to be taking action contrary to the King's wishes. There was also trouble about whether the Assembly itself or the Crown should appoint the day of the next Assembly. Actually since 1694 there has been an Assembly annually: and the first of Queen Anne's reign (1703) was also the last in which the Commissioner (James, Earl of Seafield) dissolved the Assembly without its own consent. Next year this old matter of dispute was adjusted, and an arrangement came to whereby first the Moderator dissolved the Assembly and then the Commissioner also dissolved it. This practice continued till 1926.

Charles II never revisited Scotland, nor did the sovereigns who followed him. They were represented by Commissioners to the Parliament whenever that body met. These Commissioners were virtually Viceroys, and were surrounded with quasi-royal pomp and ceremony. From 1690, when General Assemblies began to meet again, the Commissioner to the Assembly was a different nobleman, and one of lesser rank. When the Scottish Parliament disappeared as a result of the Union with England, such regal state as there was remained attached to the

Commissioner to the General Assembly. This in great measure continues to this day; together with the style "His Grace", which was that accorded to the King before "His Majesty" became customary.

During the eighteenth century there was a general desire not to upset the working arrangement arrived at after the Revolution. This makes it impossible to date exactly the establishment of the principle that the Assembly could carry on with its business if the Commissioner was absent, or to say when he himself ceased to take part. The present custom of an address by the Lord High Commissioner at the opening and before the dissolution of the Assembly reminds us of the days when he was an active participant. The title "Lord High Commissioner" also reached its present form gradually: and the first word is only there by custom, in a sense, since the actual Commission calls him "Our High Commissioner". The arrangement by which he resides in Holyroodhouse dates from 1834, since when it has been almost invariable: we know, however, that in 1850 and 1851, when Holyroodhouse was undergoing extensive repairs, he lived and held his levees at 120 George Street.

It was left to the twentieth century to define certain things that had long been established. The Royal Warrant of 1905 granted the Lord High Commissioner precedence next to The Sovereign (and Consort) and before even the Royal Family: strictly this precedence is only effective from the time the Assembly opens, but is accorded by custom the preceding day, from the time His Grace arrives at Holyroodhouse.

The Articles Declaratory of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland, enacted by Parliament in 1921 and by the General Assembly in 1926, clearly define the Church's independence in its own sphere, and the Plan of Union, on the basis of which the United Free Church returned to the Establishment (1929), stated that "neither the Sovereign nor the Lord High Commissioner, as such, is a constituent member of the Assembly". It would thus be wrong for His Grace to enter the Assembly: he appears only in the Throne Gallery, except on those few occasions, the first of which was in 1910, when the Commissioner of that year was also a member of Assembly duly commissioned by a Presbytery as an Elder of the Church. The Assembly can and does continue its business when he is absent from the Gallery.

In the years since the first World War it has been common for a Lord High Commissioner to be appointed twice, sometimes oftener. Since 1924 Royal Princes have been appointed on four occasions, and the others appointed have sometimes been commoners and sometimes noblemen. The full list since 1911 is as follows:-

1911, 12, 13, 14	Lord Glencomer
1915	The Marquess of Aberdeen and Temair
1916, 17	The Duke of Montrose
1918, 19, 20	The Duke of Atholl
1921, 22	The Duke of Sutherland
1923	Lord Elphinstone
1924	James Brown, M.P.
1925, 26	The Earl of Elgin and Kincardine
1927, 28	The Earl of Stair
1929 (May & Oct.)	H.R.H. The Duke of York (later King George VI).
1930, 31	James Brown, M.P.
1932	Sir Iain Colquhoun of Luss, Bart.
1933, 34	John Buchan, M.P. (later Lord Tweedsmuir)
1935	H.R.H. The Duke of Kent
1936, 37	Lord Kinnaird
1938, 39	Sir John Gilmour, Bart.
1940, 41	Sir Iain Colquhoun of Luss, Bart.
1942, 43	The Duke of Montrose
1944, 45	The Marquess of Linlithgow
1946, 47, 48	George Mathers, M.P. (later Lord Mathers)
1949	H.R.H. The Duke of Gloucester
1950	Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Cunningham of Hyndhope
1951	George Mathers, M.P. (later Lord Mathers)
1952	Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Cunningham of Hyndhope
1953, 54, 55	The Duke of Hamilton and Brandon
1956, 57	Walter Elliot, M.P.
1958	The Duke of Hamilton and Brandon
1959, 60	The Earl of Wemyss and March.

OUTLINE OF OPENING AND CLOSING PROCEDURE OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Opening of Assembly

Moderator takes Chair.

Lord High Commissioner enters Gallery and bows.

Praise and Scripture reading.

Moderator constitutes Assembly with prayer.

Sit.

Brief formal business.

Moderator proposes his successor.

Acceptance and entry of new Moderator. His Grace and all will stand.

Retiring Moderator welcomes him and bestows ring of office, and leads prayer of consecration.

New Moderator takes Chair, bows to Assembly and Commissioner.

Sit.

Purse Bearer hands down the Commission, which is read by the Clerk and recorded.

His Grace only remains seated.

Queen's letter to the Assembly treated similarly. His Grace remains seated.

Lord High Commissioner's address.

Moderator's reply.

Assembly proceeds to business.

Closing of Assembly

Act passed appointing date and place of next Assembly.

Moderator gives his address to the Assembly.

Lord High Commissioner's address, ending with promise to inform The Queen of date and place of next Assembly.

National Anthem.

Dissolution by Moderator, naming date and place of next Assembly.

Prayer, Praise and Benediction.

DATES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OFFICE OF LORD HIGH COMMISSIONER

- 1560 First General Assembly: contact with Crown through members of Council present at Assembly.
- 1578 The Council sent Commissioners to Assembly as observers.
- 1580 First record of Royal letter giving authority to Commissioners.

- 1584 Episcopal government and King's sole right to summon Assemblies declared.
- 1586 King James VI present at Assembly for the first time.
- 1592 Parliament approved a Presbyterian system, but Crown retained right to appoint Assembly meetings.
- 1602 King James VI present at Assembly for the last time.
- 1610 Full Episcopal government restored.
- 1618 Last General Assembly till 1638, and last occasion when more than one Royal Commissioner was appointed at a time.
- 1638 General Assembly continued to sit after the Commissioner dissolved it. Presbyterianism restored.
- 1639-53 Assembly met annually.
- 1643 Last Commoner appointed Commissioner till 1924.
- 1644-53 No Royal Commissioner owing to Civil War, etc., except in 1651.
- 1653 Assembly dissolved by English troops.
- 1660-1 Restoration of King Charles II and of Episcopacy.
- 1688-9 The Revolution, and final establishment of Presbyterianism.
- 1690 First General Assembly since 1653: Royal Commissioner appointed for each Assembly henceforward.
- 1694 General Assembly at least annually from this date.
- 1703 Last occasion on which Commissioner dissolved Assembly against its will.
- 1704 Assembly dissolved first by Moderator, then by the Commissioner, from this date until 1926.
- 1707 Parliamentary Union with England.
- 1834 Lord High Commissioner resided at Holyroodhouse from this date.
- 1843 The Disruption: Free Church of Scotland separated.
- 1905 Royal Warrant according Lord High Commissioner precedence next to Sovereign.
- 1910 First occasion when Lord High Commissioner was also member of Assembly commissioned by a Presbytery.
- 1921 Articles Declaratory of Church's Constitution enacted by Parliament.
- 1924 First Commoner appointed since 1643.
- 1926 Articles Declaratory enacted by General Assembly.

- 1927 Beginning of custom whereby Commissioner undertakes to inform
Sovereign of date of next Assembly, and Assembly is dissolved
by Moderator only.
- 1929 First Appointment of a Royal Prince. Declaration that neither
Sovereign nor Lord High Commissioner, as such, are members of
Assembly. Reunion of United Free Church with Church of
Scotland.
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