

Sir Sandford Fleming and Presbyterian Worship

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The passengers, being anxious for an evening service, the captain and the Rural Dean requested our Secretary to conduct it. He consented, and used, on the occasion, a form compiled last year specially for surveying parties. The scene was unusual, and perhaps, therefore, all the more impressive. Our Secretary, dressed in grey homespun, read a service compiled by clergymen of the Churches of Rome, England and Scotland; no one could tell which part was Roman, which Anglican, or which Scottish, and yet it was all Christian. The responses were led by the Dean and the Doctor, and joined in heartily by Romanists, Episcopalians, Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians.¹

So wrote The Rev. George Grant, secretary for Sandford Fleming's 1872 expedition to find the best route for the railway across Canada. The service Grant used on Sunday, 21 July 1872 aboard the *Frances Smith* as it steamed across Lake Superior, had been written by three clergy from Ottawa: an Anglican, a Presbyterian, and a Roman Catholic. Commissioned by Fleming, it was designed for use by survey parties and other individuals far from the reach of regular Sunday worship services, who wanted and needed the life and hope worship brings. Fleming envisioned a service that could be led by the lead engineer on a survey team (or designate) with little or no preparation, and which would be acceptable to a wide range of Christian denominations.

The service began with a preamble:

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Though for the present we are deprived of the regular service to which we have each been accustomed, yet we know that wherever [people] meet for the worship of God there He will be to hear and bless them. He is the Father of us all, our constant Guardian and Protector. Let us, therefore, as is most fitting on this Holy Day of Rest, unite as one family in the solemn duty and precious privilege of worshipping Him; and let us beseech with earnest prayer our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the straight path of those who journey, and the unwearying salvation of those who sojourn, that He may bless us now assembled together in His Name.²

Recognizing that “travelling parties” were in unusual circumstances, the preamble invited those gathered to find a common faith commitment in God as the “Father of us all” regardless of denominational label. The invitation was to share in the common need to worship on the “Holy Day of Rest” and to pray in the name of “our Lord Jesus Christ” who was the salvation and path for all Christians. The writers of the service, who remained anonymous, urged worshippers to lay aside divisions that might, under different circumstances, have prevented such a diverse group of Christians from joining together in worship.

Following prayer, a psalm was to be read, followed by the Gloria Patri said as call and response. A hymn was sung, followed by a responsive prayer including the Lord’s Prayer said together, using “trespasses” not “debts.” A litany of praise was then read by the congregation as they stood; this was followed by a hymn. The service ended with the appointed reader saying the Aaronic blessing. The order of service invited the group to read the hymns if they felt intimidated at the thought of singing them. There was no expectation of a sermon being preached and the only scripture read was the psalms. The order of service was so seamless that Grant asserted it was impossible to identify the denominational heritage of the parts of the service. But this did not mean that the three authors had created a bland, in-offensive service that would not be used.

By 1877, the first edition was out-of-print and Fleming urged a second edition be produced. This expanded edition contained two orders of service and “a short litany,” consisting only of prayers. Following the service outlines were twenty-eight psalms in their entirety and a selection of seventy-two verses from Psalm 119. At the end of the book there were hymn words. The original seven-page pamphlet had grown into 124-page book. The preface to the second edition read,

Although this little work has been primarily prepared for the use of surveying parties, there is reason to think that it may be found adaptable to the circumstances of others, who may be thrown together in small companies or groups, in out-of-the-way places, where there is no settled ministry or where no clergyman may be present. It cannot be expected that a work of this character should receive the official sanction of any ecclesiastical or civil authority. It is nevertheless presented with the private sanction and the earnest approval of clergymen of diverse Christian denominations, and by them recommended as a seemly devotional exercise, under the circumstances referred to, until something better be provided.³

This was not the perfect model for church, but it was one that worked in the situation early settlers, railway surveyors, prospectors, and others opening up the Canadian west found themselves in on Sundays. If worship was going to happen, it would be led by lay people. If it was going to happen it would need to cross denominational lines, being open to the full spectrum of the Christian faith. This radically different approach to church was merely a stop gap until a more stable and traditional model of church could be established.

Spending time each Sunday in rest and worship was important, as Grant argued. Physical rest was needed by both humans and animals, for the other six days were packed with work. But if all that happened was rest from work then the fullest good of the day was not realized. Singing a hymn, praying together, listening to the scripture being read, would “do more than anything else to awaken old remembrances, to stir the better nature of all, to heal up little bitternesses, and give each that sentiment of common brotherhood that cements into one the whole party.”⁴ Sunday was important for the physical rest it provided, but it was even more important for the time to remember the greater purposes of humanity and to have the opportunity both to find and to offer forgiveness. In the process, group morale was raised through the nurturing of its spiritual life.

Fleming’s concern for the spiritual life of survey crews and settlers and other isolated groups might be but an interesting footnote to his very full life. Sandford Fleming (1827-1915) came to Canada from Scotland as a teenager, becoming involved first in surveying railroads and then in the engineering of railways. In 1872, Fleming, now chief engineer for the Canadian Pacific Railway, and two friends from Halifax made their famous trip across Canada, seeking a route for the railway. Even more famously, it was Fleming who conceived of Standard Time as a way to

make sense of conflicting railway timetables. Fleming turned his scientifically trained mind to the question of time and how work in the world was changing. Fleming was also a man of deep faith, whose commitment to worship and whose energy and creativity carried him into the Presbyterian worship debates of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.⁵

Before exploring Fleming's interest in worship issues further, it is necessary to understand the nature and form of Presbyterian worship in the late-nineteenth century, in order to locate Fleming's contribution to the development of Canadian Presbyterian worship practices. Presbyterians in Scotland were fiercely proud of the free prayer tradition that had become the pattern of the Church of Scotland from the mid-seventeenth century. When individual clergy used prayer books or other forms of printed prayers in worship, they found themselves harassed and held up to scorn. Presbyterians had the *Directory for Public Worship*, written by the Westminster Divines in 1642-3, at the same time as the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. The *Directory* was not a liturgy, it was an outline of the elements to be included in a worship service along with how a service of worship should be conducted. The *Directory* contained no written prayers.

This antipathy towards set liturgical forms, argues Bryan Spinks, had its roots in four factors.⁶ First, a set liturgy was too much like Roman Catholic practice, and Presbyterians had little desire to be even the least bit like the Roman church. Second, any set liturgy in the seventeenth century would have required the approval of the government (the magistrate), placing the magistrate over scripture and the church, a violation of Reformed understandings of church-state relations. Third, Presbyterians, though legalistic in many ways, have always had an aversion to order being imposed. Finally, evangelical piety, the spiritual dynamism of one part of the Presbyterian tradition, viewed public prayer as a gift of the Holy Spirit, and therefore no set liturgy was required. Thus week by week Presbyterian clergy led their congregations in prayer extemporaneously. George Hill, Principal of St. Andrews University, Scotland, neatly summed up the Presbyterian view when he told his theological students in 1803:

The Church of Scotland, in adopting a Directory instead of a Liturgy, considers its ministers as [people] of understanding, of taste, and of sentiment, capable of thinking for themselves, who . . . may be

permitted to exercise their talents, with a becoming dependence upon Divine aid, in the sacred and important office of leading the devotions of Christian worshippers.⁷

Yet by mid-nineteenth century some Presbyterian clergy wanted to reform the worship life of the church to allow “a combination of free and liturgical prayer.”⁸ This movement located primarily in the Church of Scotland, found more traction after the Great Disruption of 1844 in which the Free Church of Scotland and Church of Scotland divided from one another. Part of this move towards a defined liturgy was driven by concerns for Presbyterian colonists in various parts of the world who had no easy access to Presbyterian clergy yet wanted to worship within the Presbyterian tradition. For these settlers a book of services and prayers would be extremely valuable. To that end, in 1863, the Church of Scotland published *Prayers for Social and Family Worship*. Social worship occurred when people from various households gathered together to worship the Triune God without the presence of a minister. When a minister was present, it was public worship. This was not the first time Presbyterians had produced a book to be used by lay people beyond the reach of a minister. In 1645 *A Supply of Prayer for Ships* was published; it took the *Directory* and added set, formal prayers to be used when no minister was available. As Spinks notes, “This suggests that conceived or free prayer was regarded as a *ministerial gift*, not a general one. Lay-led worship could, and should, use set prayers” (emphasis in original).⁹ If set prayers had a place in aiding social worship, maybe they also had a role in public worship. To this end, the Church Service Society worked within the Church of Scotland to produce a worship book. In 1867, the Society published the first edition of *Euchologion*, which went through seven editions in the next thirty years. Though not officially endorsed by the Church of Scotland, its publication was a major shift from the traditional Presbyterian opposition to liturgical forms. Opposition was still present, largely located in the more evangelical Free Church of Scotland. The work of the Church Service Society and the debate it provoked overlaps the time when Fleming’s interest in worship issues was most evident.

Fleming’s interest was not limited to aiding settlers and others beyond the reach of “the church bell” to worship God on a regular basis. He was also interested in the public worship led by ministers. As Fleming readily acknowledged, he had no formal theological training nor was he a leading lay person within the denomination,

I have, however, been a regular attendant at the services of the Church since my infancy, about three score and ten years ago, and during these years I have had opportunities of judging of the needs of my fellow worshippers under all circumstances, and of the merits and defects of the ordinary services of our congregations.¹⁰

Through these years of experience he had determined that “the ordinary manner of observing public worship in our congregations is in some respects imperfect and not always satisfactory to the worshippers.”¹¹ Fleming was also well aware of the worship debate taking place in other branches of the English-speaking Reformed tradition. He read widely on the topic of worship and his published writings show evidence of that reading.¹²

Fleming believed that “Divine service” had two parts. There was teaching, the minister through the sermon was solely responsible to preach and teach. This could be understood as God speaking to the congregation. There was worship, a shared responsibility of minister and people together, as the congregation spoke to God. In this dialogue between God and the congregation, it was essential that the people not be simply “passive listeners,” they needed to have “as full share as practicable in the act of worship.” This right to be actively involved in worship was one each worshipper shared with the minister.¹³

Fleming’s first publicly expressed his views at the April 1894 gathering of the Theological Alumni of Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, when he spoke on the topic of congregational prayer. It is almost certain that his life-long friend, The Rev. George Grant, now Principal of Queen’s University, was aware of Fleming’s views, and cognizant of the potential debate such views would create within the Presbyterian Church. Fleming’s paper on congregational prayer was published in *Queen’s Quarterly* in July 1894.¹⁴ Central to Fleming’s understanding was his idea that “congregational prayer is an essential part of public worship. Joint prayer is one of the principal objects designed by Christian people in coming together to worship God.”¹⁵ Carefully walking through the history of Presbyterianism worship, Fleming noted in early Presbyterianism the presence of a reader who read the prayers, scriptures and psalms, while the minister preached. Over time the role of the reader disappeared, leaving the minister to do everything. Yet there existed a tradition of read prayers, not just extemporaneous prayer. Free or extemporaneous prayer had two flaws, in Fleming’s view. First, it was very difficult to do well. Unless the minister was exceptionally gifted it lent itself to “crude unpremeditated

thoughts and imperfect utterances.” Ministers would do better, Fleming contended, to prepare their prayers ahead of time in their study, so that these dangers were avoided. Or even to use prayers written by other people and printed for a wider audience. Fleming’s logical extension of this point was, if prayers were being prepared or chosen ahead of time then the prayers used in worship could be printed for the whole congregation to use.¹⁶

Second, in what way, Fleming argued, could extemporaneous prayers, or prayers which were known only to the minister be congregational prayer. “The congregation at best can only follow the minister in prayer . . . the words spoken from the pulpit cannot be called in any correct sense the prayer of the congregation.”¹⁷ For the people in the pew to enter into the prayer, so it became the prayer of the entire congregation, they had to be able to follow along with the prayer. Otherwise they were merely the hearers of prayers and not participants in the prayers. To deal with this lack of meaningful participation by the congregation in congregational prayer, Fleming advocated the creation of a book of prayers for use in public worship. In the pew racks there would be a Bible, a hymn book, a prayer book and a Psalter. Fleming believed that the hymn book, the prayer book and the Psalter could be bound together. Each prayer in the book would have a number, and the numbers of the prayers to be used on a given Sunday would be placed on a prayer number board, just as were the numbers of the hymns that were to be sung on a particular Sunday. Members of the congregation could look up the prayer the minister was using and follow along making the prayer their own, a truly congregational prayer. Fleming dismissed the argument that the prayers in such a book would become stale and mere rote. The hymns in the hymn book did not become stale and mere rote by being sung more than once. In fact, no one wanted to have brand new hymns each week, the familiar and the known were good for congregational singing, it would also be good for congregational prayer. It would be left up to each member of the congregation to determine if they would pray out loud or silently as the minister read the prayers for the day. The potential of having congregants praying out loud along with the minister would have struck many Presbyterian clergy and lay people as novel. It does indicate the depth of Fleming’s commitment to making congregational a shared activity of the minister and the people. Not all prayers should be congregational prayers in this way, there were times when special prayers were needed, and ministers would need to lead these prayers extemporaneously. Like most of the other reformers of

Presbyterian worship, Fleming wanted a blending of free prayer and liturgical prayer.¹⁸

Fleming was not content merely to present these views at a conference of clergy, he wanted action. In 1897 Fleming sent a memorial, a formal request, to the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada asking that three worship books be produced. A book for family worship was needed to help busy households have some form of “family altar.” In the packed schedules of the modern world, parents often did not have time to plan family worship and a book of devotional exercises for households would be helpful. Fleming had some experience producing such a resource, having compiled *Daily Prayers for Busy Households* in 1879.¹⁹ The second resource Fleming wanted was a book for Social Worship, believing it was needed to respond to the situation on the prairies and in the north where people gathered to worship without the presence of a minister. In presenting his case Fleming made no reference to the Church of Scotland’s 1863 *Prayers for Social and Family Worship*. Such an oversight likely means that he was unaware of its existence, because he was familiar with most of the Scottish Presbyterian worship resources of the late-nineteenth century. Finally, Fleming wanted a prayer book produced for use in Presbyterian worship. Extemporaneous prayer had its place as did written prayers that could be followed by the congregation in a prayer book.²⁰

The General Assembly’s Committee on Conformity in Public Worship was not surprised by the Fleming’s memorial, for Fleming had been writing letters to the committee about worship since late 1895. In order to expand and frame the worship debate, Fleming gathered together his memorial, his letter supporting his memorial, other correspondence he had had with the committee, and the presentation made to the Alumni at Queen’s, along with worship-related material written by other Presbyterians, and had it published in 1898 as *Divine Worship in Connection with the Presbyterian Church in Canada*.²¹ Circulated first to all the ministers within the denomination, the book was interesting enough that in 1900, a lay person’s edition was produced. Entitled, *Divine Worship under All Conditions in Connection with The Presbyterian Church in Canada: Edition for Laymen*, the only difference between it and the previous edition was that the 1900 edition had an introductory note written by Fleming explaining the events leading to the laypersons’ edition.

Fleming’s willingness to broaden the debate to involve the entire church produced a reaction. Not everyone in the denomination was happy

with the development of written prayers. In 1901, The Rev. Dr. Robert Johnston, D.D., of London, Ontario published *Presbyterian Worship: Its Spirit, Method, and History*. Johnston challenged Fleming's underlying assumptions, eloquently defending a worship free from "the outward trappings of form":

Our free and untrammelled worship demands from the worshipper [their] best; it brings [them] face to face with . . . God, and forbids [them] . . . rest in any mere repetition of a familiar form; it requires of the minister a preparation of both mind and soul, and challenges [them] to spiritual conflict which [they] dare not refuse, while in addition to all this its very freedom renders it adaptable to all the varying circumstances in which a land like our own the worship of God must be conducted. It is suitable alike to the stately city church and to the humble cabin of the settler, or to the mission house of the far West; wherever [people] assemble for worship affords the possibility for seemly, orderly and reverent procedure. Is there any other form of worship suggested for which as much can be said?²²

This view was widespread in the denomination, growing from the strength of its Free Church heritage.

General Assembly responded to Fleming's 1897 memorial by splitting the request into three parts. A group began the production of a set of devotional exercises for family worship; they completed their work in 1919, held up in part by the denomination's cash crunch of 1912 and the distractions of World War I.²³ Fleming appears to have had no involvement with this group's activities. An Aids for Social Worship committee was established a year after Fleming's memorial to the General Assembly, with Fleming as secretary of the committee. The third issue, written prayers for Public Worship, was referred to The Committee on Uniformity in Worship. It was not until 1922 that the Presbyterian Church in Canada produced a *Book of Common Worship*. It was designed for the use of clergy alone, it was not put in pew racks so congregation members could follow along, making the prayers their own.²⁴

The Committee on Aids to Social Worship, established by the General Assembly in 1898, had seven members, three clergy from Halifax, three clergy from Ottawa, and Fleming as the only non-clergy member of the committee, who was living in both Ottawa and Halifax. Clearly Fleming was the key player in this project. Feeling an urgency to complete

its work the committee in early 1899 circulated a first draft of the *Aids for Social Worship* to the denomination for response. The preface read in part:

The want of suitable aids to worship on the Lord's Day is constantly felt in remote parts of the Dominion by those who are, for the time, cut off from the ordinary ministrations of the Church, and who desire to unite in the worship of God. The design of this manual is to furnish aids to social worship for those so situated. It may be found helpful to Pioneer-settlers, Explorers, Mounted Police, Volunteers on military duty, Travellers by land and sea, Visitors to sea-side resorts, and other persons. One complete service is submitted, which may be followed as it is given, but from time to time it may be found desirable to modify the words. To effect this end, other prayers are furnished, any one of which may be substituted at discretion, without changing the order of service.²⁵

The vision had dramatically expanded beyond the 1877 book. A wide variety of people could find a use for such a book, even urbanites on holidays. As well, in some locations this book would be the only source for worship services for the foreseeable future. The book had to have enough range and variation in style for users to not be tired of it in a couple of months. While the vision had expanded beyond the earlier work, the parallels between this edition of *Aids for Social Worship* and *Short Sunday Services for Travellers* are striking. The first service from 1877 book was reproduced with the addition of a place for a sermon, or alternatively the reading of an extended portion of Scripture. "A Short Litany" from the 1877 book was also included. There were alternative prayers of invocation, confession, supplication, intercession, along with more opening sentences and concluding prayers. A collection of Special Prayers was included for use by people in particular situations: colonists, miners, prospectors, people travelling by ship, and those on military duty. Since it might be that no one present had led a "Divine Service," "it is deemed advisable to furnish somewhat minute explanations and instructions for the guidance of such as may desire them."²⁶

The Aids for Social Worship Committee acknowledged that not all of the worship material was of their own creation; a variety of sources were used in compiling the service book. The only printed source explicitly named was the 1877 service book. These prayers were most likely original creations by the three clergy who worked on the 1877 book. Another source for prayers was *Euchologion: A Book of Common Order*

that had been first issued in 1867 by The Church Service Society. *Euchologion* did not have the official endorsement by any Presbyterian denomination and was a step outside of the normal practice for Presbyterians. One of the leading figures in The Church Service Society was Dr. George W. Sprott who had grown up in Nova Scotia where his father had been one of the pioneering Presbyterian clergy. The younger Sprott had served as a minister in both Nova Scotia and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) where he had experienced what could happen when no direction was given regarding the order of worship.²⁷ Nearly 30% of the prayers in *Aids for Social Worship* were taken either verbatim or adapted from the seventh, and last, edition of *Euchologion*, published in 1896.²⁸ The Aids for Social Worship Committee also noted their use of unnamed Free Church sources. It has not been possible to trace the sources of all the prayers in *Aids for Social Worship*, and therefore it is impossible to determine which prayers the committee members wrote themselves.

The “Explanations and Instructions” for persons unfamiliar with leading worship services are intriguing. The service was to be “conducted reverently and devoutly,” with “hurry and confusion” being avoided. It was assumed that everyone attending the service had access to a copy of the service book, or could share with a neighbour. The “Reader” was instructed to announce the page reference for each prayer, and pause allowing people to find the prayer before beginning. While a “Reader” was necessary to lead the service, all worshippers were on an equal footing and “each person should have an opportunity of taking part in the Service as far as practicable.” This could be accomplished in a variety of ways. The Reader’s voice might be the only voice heard during prayer, but it was everyone’s responsibility to follow the prayer, which they had before them in their copy of the manual, “attentively and devoutly.” With the prose hymns of praise, the Psalms, and even occasionally the scripture readings (both the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes were printed in the book), the Reader was encouraged to invite the other worshippers to participate by reading the alternate verses. “All the worshippers should heartily join in the readings with a clear voice.” A second person could read the scripture readings, “A second voice is always desirable, as it destroys monotony and promotes interest in the service.” The instructions were optimistic about the willingness of small groups of people, usually dominated by men, to sing, “It is not expected that there will be much difficulty in respect to the singing of the Hymns introduced in the order of service.” Certainly this was not the experience of missionaries and

theological students on the prairies, who found the singing of the hymns one of the most challenging parts of worship.²⁹ If singing was not a possibility, the hymns could be read. Specific instructions were given on announcing the scripture readings. If no sermon was being preached, additional scripture readings should be read. The high level of participation expected on the part of the congregation is noteworthy; everyone was to be focussed on the purpose of the worship service: “the common worship of Almighty God.” All were to be “equally concerned in the solemn duty.”³⁰

The document having been circulated through the church, twenty-seven of fifty-two presbyteries responded formally to the committee. Three were opposed to the entire project “on the ground that it is unnecessary and opposed to the spirit of the Church,” the other twenty-four expressed support for the project while raising a range of amendments they wished to see made. The most significant criticism concerned the amount of responsive material in the service book. The Presbyterian desire for freedom from prescribed worship forms and a complete antipathy towards liturgy underlay this criticism. The committee explained that the responsive material was “introduced under the conviction that in some groups of [denominationally] mixed worshippers, composed wholly of lay [people], it would be found that the responses would provide an opportunity for all present participating directly in the service, and thus tend to promote a deeper individual interest in the solemn act of worship.”³¹ Because a broad range of denominations were represented among those gathered to worship God in the “remote settlements,” it was important to have a resource that rather than accommodating one denomination’s preferred style accommodated a range of worship styles. As the committee made clear, this worship book was not to be used by clergy, it was to aid lay people in conducting services when a minister was not present.³²

There was substantial discussion of the resource at the 1900 General Assembly. Because a number of presbyteries had not expressed their views regarding the resource, the committee was instructed to consult further with the church. Dr. John Scrimger, professor of Greek and Hebrew Exegesis at Presbyterian College, Montreal, seconded by the Clerk of the General Assembly brought a motion “That it be an instruction to the Committee to eliminate the responsive portion of the complete service and the litany from the book before sending it to Presbyteries for their opinion.”³³ This led to a “lively debate” between those pointing to the need for such a resource “for those beyond church bell and minister,” and those

who saw “in ‘forms’ the ‘thin edge of the wedge’” leading to the prescribed use of worship texts. The *Presbyterian Record* described the debate, “The interest centered in the speeches--pro and con--of a venerable Goliath of debate, and a youthful David of the eldership, with honours at least even for David.”³⁴ While the “venerable Goliath” was most likely Scrimger, it is impossible to determine who the “youthful David” was. The debate was so lengthy, the vote on the motion was delayed until the following day. In the end the motion to eliminate the responsive material was passed by the Assembly.³⁵

The Committee quickly began work on revisions. “A Short Litany” was removed along with changing all but one of the responsive sections to be for a single voice. One responsive reading, other than the psalms, remained, its continued presence justified because it came from an “ancient,” unnamed Presbyterian source. Four alternative orders of service were given, providing for variety. As well, the committee having heard the need for a burial service included one. In addition to the responsive psalms, ten metrical psalms were added.³⁶ Things happened between the assemblies of 1900 and 1901 to change the atmosphere around the revised service book. New people were added to the committee, including The Rev. John Pringle from Altin, British Columbia, who was spending his days visiting small groups of prospectors spread through a vast area of the north.³⁷ He saw a need for the book urging its approval. The revised book found its way into the hands of chaplains and others going to the Boer War. Here was a meaningful and immediate application for the book. When presbyteries were asked to respond to the revised service book, thirty-two did so, six were opposed to the book and twenty-six were in favour. Surprisingly, among those opposed were Bruce in Ontario’s near north, Melita in rural Manitoba, and Kamloops in the British Columbia interior, areas that would be expected to welcome the book. In total only three prairie presbyteries responded to the committee. This, however, does not necessarily mean Presbyterians on the prairies were cool to the service book, there are many reasons why presbyteries do not respond to requests from national committees.³⁸

The debate at the 1901 Assembly was somewhat contentious. The initial motion, “The Committee be instructed to complete the revision of the manual and submit it to the next General Assembly for its approval,” was amended by Mr. A. MacKay and Mr. F. A. MacLennan to read, “The Assembly disapprove of the book ‘Aids to Social Worship.’” The amendment was defeated and the initial motion passed.³⁹ Mr. A. MacKay

dissented from the decision of the Assembly, “I dissent against the finding of the Assembly on Aids to Social Worship, because the use of such a book, which calculated to kill the spirit of prayer and make worship formal, will foster a taste for liturgical services, and thus pave the way for the introduction of a liturgy into the Church.”⁴⁰ The perennial challenge of balancing extemporaneous prayer with written prayers, of balancing freedom of spirit with the beauty of a prepared liturgy, had raised its head, yet again.

When the Committee reported in 1902, only one presbytery was expressing reservations, not with the book itself, but with the “literary style.” The need for this service book was now widely recognized. Even before its formal approval by the Assembly, “urgent requests have been received from missionaries and from students working in outlying parts of the Dominion, for a number of copies of the Manual.” The committee anticipating approval had been shipping ten copies to anyone asking for it. In shipping multiple copies to individual congregations, the committee expected the members of these congregation to participate in worship “as far as was practicable.” The committee was correct in its anticipation of the Assembly’s action; *Aids for Social Worship* was approved.⁴¹ The committee’s final report ended, “It has come to the knowledge of the Committee, since their appointment, that the need for such a work is great, and they hope and believe that, with God’s blessing, this little Manual, in spite of its imperfections, will prove profitable to many, and eventually result in great benefit to the whole Church.”⁴²

While not designed to be used by clergy, “this little Manual” was the only Canadian Presbyterian worship book available until 1922. There is strong evidence that some clergy used it in conducting worship services. A well-worn copy owned by The Rev. Angus Sutherland (my wife’s grand-father), a student minister in The Presbyterian Church in Canada from 1915 to 1919 and an ordained minister from 1920 to 1928, has marginal notations at a couple of points. An opening prayer for evening services is inside the front cover. A prayer for use by soldiers on the front lines has been modified to be prayed by those at home remembering soldiers overseas. Poignantly, the burial service has been amended so it could be used for the burial of a child.⁴³

For over thirty years Sir Sandford Fleming, a lay person, sought to aid lay people beyond the reach of the church bell to worship the Triune God. Aware that survey crews would be away from the reach of ministers, he urged the development of an ecumenical service book, a remarkable

achievement in its own right. Catching a vision for what this could mean not just for survey crews Fleming had the book expanded and its goals broadened. Fleming knew that worship matters. In the worship of God, these small, scattered gatherings of Christians found their lives enriched, the struggle of their lives given meaning, and they were reminded of a community of faith that reached beyond the realities of their present situation. Fleming's commitment to aiding people to worship highlights the Reformed understanding that human beings find their highest calling and true meaning in the worship of the Triune God.

The debate created by Fleming's desire for a more formally liturgical, less free worship style points to the tension that exists within the Reformed tradition over balancing freedom and form. While the worship debates of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries may use different language, the substantive issue remains the same, how to balance freedom and form in worship?⁴⁴ But what drove Fleming to raise these concerns must not be lost. By limiting clergy freedom in worship Fleming believed that all worshippers would be able to participate in the worship life of the congregation. Fleming wanted congregational prayer to be truly the prayers of the whole congregation, the community of faith gathered in prayer.

Finally, Fleming's deep interest as a lay person in the worship of the church highlights the central Reformed doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Fleming had integrated his faith and life into one. Not only was he a Christian when he designed railroads and bridges, and organized time, he was also a systematic thinker about matters of Christian worship. By bringing his finely trained mind to the worship debate, Fleming marked out a path for other lay people to become deeply engaged in significant dialogues about the faith and life of the church.

Endnotes

1. George Grant, *Ocean to Ocean: Sandford Fleming's Expedition through Canada in 1872*, rev. ed. (Toronto: The Radisson Society of Canada, Ltd., 1925), 28.
2. *Short Sunday Services for travelling parties being a simple devotional form of prayer and praise for the use of Christians on the Lord's Day*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: Dawson Brothers, 1877), 7.
3. *Short Sunday Services*, 2nd ed., 3-4.

4. Grant, *Ocean to Ocean*, 132.
5. As Mario Crete writes in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 14 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), "Fleming has not been well served by historians." L.J. Burpee's *Sandford Fleming: Empire Builder* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1915) was the first biographer of Fleming, and his work remains the best overall account of Fleming's life. Lorne Green's *Chief Engineer: Life of a Nation-Builder* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1993) does not add much to Burpee's work. Clark Blaise's *Time Lord: The Remarkable Canadian Who Missed His Train, and Changed the World* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2000) has attracted a great deal of attention and gives a good overview of Fleming's scientific understanding. Fleming's faith appears in this account, but as a substrata.
6. Bryan Spinks, "The Origins of the Antipathy to Set Liturgical Forms in the English-Speaking Reformed Tradition," in *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present*, ed. Lukas Vischer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 67-76.
7. George Hill, *Theological Institutes* (Edinburgh, 1803), 294; cited in Henry Sefton, "Revolution to Disruption," in *Studies in the History of Worship in Scotland*, eds. Duncan Forrester and Douglas Murray (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1984), 74.
8. Douglas Murray, "From Disruption to Union," in *Studies in the History of Worship in Scotland*, 86.
9. Spinks, "The Origins of the Antipathy to Set Liturgical Forms in the English-Speaking Reformed Tradition," 79.
10. Sandford Fleming, "Letter on the Subject of Family, Social, and Public Worship," in *Divine Worship Under all Conditions in Connection with The Presbyterian Church in Canada, Edition for Laymen* (1900), 1.
11. Fleming, "Introductory address to Presbyterian Laymen," in *Divine Worship Under All Conditions*, iii.
12. Letter from Sanford Fleming to Dr. Laing, #2, 26 November 1895, and Letter from Sanford Fleming to Dr. Laing, #3, undated, in *Divine Worship*, 103-105, 105-109. Letter #2 lists three Scottish Societies working on Presbyterian worship, including The Church Service Society, discussing their various worship service publications. Letter #3, outlines the history of worship developments in Scotland, and ends with a seven item bibliography.
13. Fleming, "Introductory," in *Divine Worship*, iv-v.

14. Fleming, "Congregational Prayer: An Address to the Theological Alumni of Queen's University, 25 April 1894," *Queen's Quarterly* 2, No. 1 (July 1894): 1-10.
15. Fleming, "Congregational Prayer," in *Divine Worship*, p. 90. In his view of congregational prayer Fleming was in line with Calvin who understood prayer to be the "common task" of all who had gathered to worship.
16. Fleming, "Congregational Prayer," in *Divine Worship*, 90-93.
17. Fleming, "Congregational Prayer," in *Divine Worship*, 90, 92, 93.
18. Letter from Sanford Fleming to Rev. Dr. Laing, #1, 26 November 26, 1895, in *Divine Worship*, 99-102.
19. Sanford Fleming, *Daily Prayers for Busy Households* (Montreal, 1879). I have not seen a copy of this 70-page book. Burpee in his biography of Fleming, *Sanford Fleming: Empire Builder*, lists this title in the Fleming bibliography.
20. *Divine Worship*, iii-viii, 1-21; *Acts and Proceedings of The Presbyterian Church in Canada* (hereafter *A&P*) (1897), 55; and *A&P* (1898), 66.
21. *Divine Worship in Connection with the Presbyterian Church in Canada*, (Montreal: The William Drysdale Co., 1898). The 1900 edition was published by The Westminster Company, Limited in Toronto.
22. Robert Johnston, *Presbyterian Worship: Its Spirit, Method, and History*, (Toronto: The Publishers Syndicate, Ltd., 1901), 162-163.
23. *The Book of Family Devotions (approved and commended by the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada)* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1919), viii.
24. *Book of Common Order for use in Church Services and Offices* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1922).
25. *Aids for Social Worship: Short Sunday Services being simple forms of Prayer and Praise for the use of Christian on the Lord's Day when they are at a distance from Regular Church Services submitted by The Special Committee of the General Assembly* (Toronto: The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1899), 3.
26. *Aids for Social Worship* (1899), 3-4.
27. Murray, "From Disruption to Union," 81-88.

28. The Church Service Society, *Euchologion: A Book of Common Order*, (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1896), 43-284. Examples of prayers from *Euchologion* found in *Aids for Social Worship* are:
- Prayer, *Euchologion*, 56-57; Prayer #6, *Social Worship*, 38-39.
 Prayer, *Euchologion*, 72; Prayer #8, *Social Worship*, 68-69.
 Prayers #1, 3, *Euchologion*, 253-254; Prayers #8, 9, *Social Worship*, 40.
 Prayer #2, *Euchologion*, 257; Prayer #5, *Social Worship*, 49.
 Prayer #5, *Euchologion*, 272-275; Prayer #5, *Social Worship*, 77-80.
 Prayer #4, *Euchologion*, 280; Prayer #3, *Social Worship*, 100.
 Prayer #9, *Euchologion*, 282; Prayer #5, *Social Worship*, 102.
29. Peter Bush, *Western Challenge: The Presbyterian Church in Canada's Mission on the Prairies and North, 1885-1925* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer Pub. Ltd., 2000), 80-81.
30. *Aids for Social Worship: Being Short Services Prayer and Praise for the use of Christians* (Toronto: The Westminster Co. Ltd., 1900), 233-239.
31. *A&P* (1900), 287.
32. *A&P* (1900), 288.
33. *A&P* (1900), 48.
34. *The Presbyterian Record*, July 1900, 199.
35. *A&P* (1900), 48, 61.
36. *Aids for Social Worship*, 3. The Committee made no changes to the book after late 1900. The 1902 edition of the book, was the revised edition produced following the 1900 Assembly with a one-page synopsis of the process leading to the approval of the book glued inside the title page.
37. Bush, *Western Challenge*, 171-172.
38. *A&P* (1901), 284.
39. *A&P* (1901), 57.
40. *A&P* (1901), 57.
41. *A&P* (1902), 69, 306. In an ironic twist, the motion to approve *Aids for Social Worship* was moved and seconded by the Clerk of the General Assembly and Prof. Scrimger, the same people who demanded the removal of the responsive material from the book.
42. *A&P* (1902), 306.

43. Copy of *Aids for Social Worship* (1900), in the possession of the author.
44. See “A Common Reflection on Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Today,” in *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present*, 285-286.

