

Scottish Baptist College

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**The Glasgow United Evangelistic Association Noon  
Prayer Meeting,  
1874-1974.**



The Christian Institute, Bothwell Street, Glasgow  
Home of the Noon Prayer Meeting from 1879-1974

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## Abstract

This dissertation is a case study of the Glasgow Noon Prayer Meeting, held under the auspices of the Glasgow United Evangelistic Association from 1874-1974. The rise and fall of the meeting is placed alongside the wider social and religious background. In general, the meeting prospered in times of religious revival, and was also affected by social changes. Increased prosperity tended to have a negative effect on the meeting, as this led to more choice of activity, and less need for the missions which kept the meeting going. Various changes were introduced in order to widen the appeal of the meeting, but these were largely unsuccessful. The meeting was undergirded by the strong theological convictions of the participants, that prayer was important because God heard and answered prayer. Paradoxically, this could be said to have undermined the meeting, during periods when prayer is not answered.

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## INTRODUCTION

The focus of this dissertation is the study of the Glasgow Noon Prayer Meeting, which was in existence from 1858 to 1974. The purpose is to gain understanding of what sustained this meeting for more than a century, and what led to its closure. From this, we will seek to identify principles which will help to promote the practice of corporate intercessory prayer in the church today. This I believe, is a very important topic, since united corporate prayer has always been a vital factor in the life of the people of God in the Judeo-Christian tradition.<sup>1</sup> Concerning the practice of corporate prayer in our own denomination, David Bebbington wrote, ‘Such success as the Scottish Baptists have enjoyed is without doubt grounded in the priority which they have given to prayer’.<sup>2</sup> Writing in 1988, Bebbington estimated that 98% of the Baptist churches in Scotland had mid-week meetings for prayer and Bible study. However, in recent years many churches have stopped meeting corporately mid-week in favour of house-groups. Where church prayer meetings are still held, they tend to be the least well attended church meetings. Speaking of the wider church scene George Verwer, founder of Operation Mobilization wrote, ‘If there is any part of our church life that seems to be in trouble, it is the prayer meeting.’<sup>3</sup> It is therefore important to look at the topic of corporate prayer and its relevance for the church today.

### **Specific area of study, sources used, and aims to be achieved.**

The focus of this dissertation is a case study of the Glasgow Noon Prayer Meeting. The original meeting was started in the latter part of 1858 as one of many set up at that time to pray for revival.<sup>4</sup> From 1874 to 1974 it was held under the auspices of the Glasgow United Evangelistic Association.<sup>5</sup> The primary source material is the minutes of the monthly Directors’ Meeting of the Noon Prayer Meeting, 1886-1907, and the Annual Reports of the GUEA, 1875-1974.<sup>6</sup>

Although these records are incomplete, they give interesting insight into the running of the prayer meeting, its fluctuating popularity, and how it was sustained over the years.<sup>7</sup> In addition, wider sources are consulted to understand the prevailing social and economic conditions, as well as the religious and spiritual climate which influenced the Noon Prayer Meeting. The impact of individuals on

<sup>1</sup> See the brief survey in Peter Greig, *Red Moon Rising* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2003), 316-324.

<sup>2</sup> D.W. Bebbington (ed), *The Baptists in Scotland, a History* (Glasgow: Baptist Union of Scotland, 1988), 86.

<sup>3</sup> George Verwer, *Whatever Happened to the Prayer Meeting*, <http://www.georgeverwer.com/articles/prayerMeeting>, accessed 26 April 2007, 16.40.

<sup>4</sup> Clifford James Marr, ‘The 1859 Revival in Scotland: A Review and Critique of the Movement with particular reference to the city of Glasgow’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 1995, 139.

<sup>5</sup> From now on, this will be referred to as the GUEA.

<sup>6</sup> The GUEA Annual Reports were published in the early part of the year following the one to which they refer. I therefore refer to these reports as for a particular year, with the year of publication in parenthesis. For example, the First Annual report is referred to as the ‘GUEA Annual Report for 1874 (1875).’

<sup>7</sup> The bulk of the archives are held in the library and storage room of the International Christian College, Glasgow. This is because the College incorporated Glasgow Bible College, formerly known as the Bible Training Institute (BTI), which was part of the GUEA.

the meeting is also considered. The internal dynamics of the meeting are then studied, and the various changes noted, particularly as they influenced the primary purpose of the meeting, intercessory prayer. Finally, the theological assumptions underpinning the meeting are examined. All of this is undertaken with a view to gaining insight into how such a prayer meeting was sustained for more than a century, and what principles concerning united prayer meetings could be applied in today's context.

## HISTORY OF THE GUEA NOON PRAYER MEETING

In this chapter, a brief historical survey is presented. The Noon Meeting is set in the context of its historical precedents, and the fluctuating fortunes of the meeting are outlined, from its beginnings in revival, to its ultimate demise more than a century later.

### **Antecedents of the Glasgow Noon Prayer Meeting**

The practice of corporate prayer was common in the church in New Testament times, as is evidenced in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>8</sup> This continued in the early Christian centuries, but as time went on corporate prayer became increasingly formal and liturgical in nature.<sup>9</sup> This is reflected in the fact that today the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican churches all have highly developed liturgies which leave only limited place for lay participation and extemporary prayer.<sup>10</sup> The Free Church tradition on the other hand, has a history of non-liturgical prayer in which active participation of laity is encouraged. One early example of this can be seen in the Moravian prayer movement, which was instituted by Count Zinzendorf at his estate at Herrnhut in Germany, and which is said to have lasted for over a hundred years from 1724.<sup>11</sup> Further impetus to the practice of extemporary corporate prayer in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was Jonathan Edwards' call for Christians to unite in a 'concert of prayer' to promote revival.<sup>12</sup> George Whitefield and others also encouraged similar united prayer movements for spiritual renewal.<sup>13</sup> This resulted in prayer movements taking place both in the USA and the UK which had widespread impact well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century in these two countries.<sup>14</sup>

In the autumn and winter of 1857-58 there were many prayer meetings in the USA with a focus on praying for revival.<sup>15</sup> Of particular significance to the present study is the Fulton Street Businessman's Prayer Meeting in New York. This was started by Jeremiah Lanphier of the Dutch Reformed Church.<sup>16</sup> Mr Lanphier was an evangelist who was seeking a strategy to reach out to the business community of the city. He recorded in his journal how the idea of a Noon Prayer Meeting came to him.

As I was walking along the streets, the idea was suggested to my mind that an hour of prayer, from twelve to one o'clock, would be beneficial to business men who usually in great numbers take that hour for rest and refreshment.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> David Crump, *Knocking on Heaven's Door* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 180-195.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph A. Jongmann, *The Early Liturgy to the time of Gregory the Great* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1959), 97-108.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Harris, 'Extempore Prayer', in *Liturgy and Worship* (London: SPCK, 1954), 763-773.

<sup>11</sup> J.E Hutton, *A History of the Moravian Church, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition* (London: Moravian Publication Office, 1909), 211.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Foster, *Prayer* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), 211.

<sup>13</sup> David Bryant, *With Concerts of Prayer* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1984), 38.

<sup>14</sup> David Bryant, *With Concerts of Prayer*, 38.

<sup>15</sup> J Edwin Orr, *The Event of the Century* (Wheaton: International Awakening Press, 1989), 47.

<sup>16</sup> Orr, *the Event*, 53.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel Irenaeus Prime DD, *The Power of Prayer* (Aberdeen: George and Robert King, 1859), 12.

The first meeting was held on 23 September 1857, and after a slow start, proved to be so popular that it was decided to hold the meeting daily. Soon other churches started similar meetings, and after 6 months an estimated ten thousand businessmen were meeting each day in New York alone.<sup>18</sup> United prayer meetings spread throughout the country.<sup>19</sup> This led to revival of the Christian faith across the denominations in the USA over the next two years of 1857-58, which became known as the Revival of the United Prayer Meeting.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Glasgow Noon Prayer Meeting.**

Periodicals such as 'the British Messenger' brought news of these events to the Christian public of Britain.<sup>21</sup> Some of those involved in the revival in the USA came over to give first-hand reports to the churches in Scotland.<sup>22</sup> As a result, a number of prayer meetings sprang up throughout Scotland during the second half of 1858 and the opening months of 1859 to pray for revival.<sup>23</sup> One of these meetings was held daily at Noon in the Religious Institute Rooms in Glasgow.<sup>24</sup> These and other prayer meetings attracted a large audience during the period from 1859 to 1861, when the revival came to Scotland.<sup>25</sup> According to Marr, by the end of this period, all of the united prayer meetings ceased to function.<sup>26</sup> However, contrary to this, it appears that the meeting in the Religious Institute Rooms did continue, as attested to in the GUEA Annual Report for 1888.

The Noon Prayer Meeting has a history dating from the remarkable year of revival 1859, so that it has now been in existence without interruption for 28 years.<sup>27</sup>

A later retrospective on this meeting described it as having being 'large and vigorous,' in its early years, before declining to 'a gathering of eight to twelve persons' in the post-revival period.<sup>28</sup>

The Noon Prayer Meeting was given fresh impetus in January 1874 to prepare the way for the visit of the American evangelist D.L. Moody to Glasgow. During Moody's visit, 'it was a common experience for the church to be filled an hour before (the Meeting) began'.<sup>29</sup> The GUEA was formed as a result of Moody's visit, and the association took over the running of the Noon Prayer Meeting. It

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<sup>18</sup> Orr, *The Event*, 55.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Irenaeus Prime DD, *The Power of Prayer*, 19.

<sup>20</sup> Wesley Duewel, *Touch the World through Prayer*, (Bromley: Marshall Pickering, 1986).], 178.179.

<sup>21</sup> Clifford James Marr, 'The 1859 Revival in Scotland: A Review and Critique of the Movement with particular reference to the city of Glasgow,' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, 1995, Marr, 'The 1859 Revival', 253.

<sup>22</sup> I.A. Muirhead, 'Revival as a Dimension of Scottish Church History', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 20 (1988), 183.

<sup>23</sup> Marr, 'The 1859 Revival', 139.

<sup>24</sup> Marr, 'The 1859 Revival', 224.

<sup>25</sup> Marr, 'The 1859 Revival', 261.

<sup>26</sup> Marr, 'The 1859 Revival', 341.

<sup>27</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1888 (1889).

<sup>28</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1891 (1892).

<sup>29</sup> Glasgow United Evangelistic Association, *a Book of Remembrance, 1874-1924* (Glasgow: Offices of the Glasgow United Evangelistic Association, 1924), 15.

soon became a daily occurrence, and a Committee was appointed to draw up a monthly programme.<sup>30</sup> Five years after its re-launch, the meeting moved to the newly opened Christian Institute in Bothwell Street, Glasgow in 1879.<sup>31</sup> The 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Report in 1884 gives the numbers attending in the early years as 200 to 300, dropping to 100 in the later years of its first decade.<sup>32</sup>

Over the next 15 years, although the numbers seem to have maintained a reasonable level, there was always felt to be room for improvement. For example,

The attendance at this meeting, although not so large as it might be, and as we think it ought to be, has been on the whole encouraging.<sup>33</sup>

Various changes were made in an attempt to attract more interest in the meeting, including the introduction of the Noon choir as a regular feature.<sup>34</sup> The attendance at the meeting took a turn for the better towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary Report for 1898 indicated that ‘the Noon Meeting holds on the even tenor of its way.’<sup>35</sup> This same report noted with approval the participation of ministers of all denominations, and that the Saturday services for children led by the Christian Endeavour had been ‘very successful’.<sup>36</sup> There was a considerable improvement in attendance in the last 3 months of 1899, coinciding with an evangelistic campaign held in the city at this time.<sup>37</sup> The Director’s committee of 10 January 1900 records a ‘gratifying Report’ of increased attendances at the meeting.<sup>38</sup> However this was not sustained for long as the GUEA Annual Report for 1900 indicates.

How to sustain interest in and maintain attendance at a meeting that goes on day by day and the busiest hour of the day for a period of 26 years is a problem not easily solved.<sup>39</sup>

The writer puts forward various reasons for decreased attendance compared with the earlier years, including the ‘Novelty of new movement’ and ‘Mr. Moody’s potent personality.’<sup>40</sup> It also concedes that the earlier success was due to the fact that it was born in a time of revival, evidently referring to the period from 1859-61.<sup>41</sup> However, the Report also goes on to say,

But while making fullest allowance for these and similar explanations, it is still beyond question that the interest ought to be much greater than they are.<sup>42</sup>

So as the 19<sup>th</sup> century closed, the Noon Meeting was showing signs of waning popularity.

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<sup>30</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1879: Monday is devoted to hearing Reports of work at home and abroad; Saturday is set apart for the children. The other days are set apart for consideration of subjects of a practical and devotional character

<sup>31</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1879 (1880).

<sup>32</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1883 (1884).

<sup>33</sup> GUEA Report for 1885 (1886).

<sup>34</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1885 (1886).

<sup>35</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1898 (1889).

<sup>36</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1898 (1889)

<sup>37</sup> Minutes of the GUEA Noon Prayer Meeting Committee, 1 November 1899.

<sup>38</sup> Minutes of the Committee, 10 January 1900.

<sup>39</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1900 (1901).

<sup>40</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1900 (1901).

<sup>41</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1900 (1901).

<sup>42</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1900 (1901).

### **Twentieth century change in emphasis.**

As the new century got under way, the numbers at the meeting were in decline. The Minutes of the 1904 Directors' meeting gives evidence of this.

The small attendance at the Noon Meeting on most days and the apparent lack of interest does not necessarily imply that the spirit of prayer has decreased in the same proportion as the audiences.<sup>43</sup>

As a result of this, the decision was taken in April 1907 by the Committee to close the meeting except on Mondays during the holiday months of July and August.<sup>44</sup> Overall, though the numbers at the meeting remained more or less steady over the following years until the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the GUEA. The Book of Remembrance published to commemorate this event records,

Amid the ebb and flow of spiritual tides, the Noon Prayer Meeting ...has kept on its way throughout the intervening years, and has not only provided a common ground on the Lord's remembrancers of many religious persuasions can meet and beseech His blessing on their work, *but has also become in a spiritual sense, a city 'Exchange' where Ministers, Missionaries and Evangelists and other Christian workers can give Reports, compare notes, and arrange mutual help.*<sup>45</sup>

In this, it is recognised that there has been a change of emphasis over the years from a general prayer meeting for businessmen and the Christian public, to a place of fellowship and encouragement for full-time Christian workers of the city.

### **The second 50 years. 1925-1974.**

This change in emphasis is confirmed in the 1932 Report.

The Noon Prayer meeting continues to be a rallying point for missionaries, evangelists and Christian workers from in and around the City, and a source of inspiration and encouragement to all who attend.<sup>46</sup>

The main participants in its latter years were those involved in the various Mission Halls in Glasgow: the Seamen's Bethel, the Canal Boatman's Mission, Bethany Hall, Grove Street Mission, Wyndford Mission Hall, and Douglas Mission.<sup>47</sup> Traveling evangelists and overseas missionaries also attended, as well as Evangelical ministers from different denominations. Various Reports were given of the work of the different groups present. Mr David Simpson, who was converted in 1943 in the Seamen's Bethel, attended the Noon Prayer Meeting on a regular basis in the 1940s and early 1950s. He recalls an attendance of around 30-40.<sup>48</sup> Often, the speaker at the meeting was the guest preacher at the Tent Hall

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<sup>43</sup> Minutes of the Noon Prayer Meeting Committee, 1904.

<sup>44</sup> Minutes of the Committee April 1907.

<sup>45</sup> GUEA, A Book of Remembrance, 1874-1924, (Glasgow: Offices of the GUEA, 1924), 15. (*my italics*)

<sup>46</sup> GUEA Directors Report for 1932 (1933) .

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Carter, (Board member of GUEA from 1970-1984) interview by the author, (Erskine: November 2006).

<sup>48</sup> Mr David Simpson, (retired Glasgow City Missionary), interview by the author, (Glasgow, 2 May 2007)..

over the week-end. A popular speaker could attract 100-200 people.<sup>49</sup> However, attendances dropped off further in the 1960s. Two ladies who attended during this period recalled attendance of between 12 and 25.<sup>50</sup>

The Christian Institute in Bothwell Street, where the Noon Prayer Meeting had met since 1879, Glasgow was closed in 1974.<sup>51</sup> The Noon Prayer Meeting moved for a brief period to St George's Tron church halls in Bath Street, before the decision was taken to terminate the meeting.<sup>52</sup>

And so ended a prayer meeting which had survived for around 115 years. Born in a period of revival, re-invented and given fresh impetus by the visits of D.L. Moody, it was supported and maintained by a faithful group of evangelical ministers and mission workers until eventually it closed. Obviously, many factors are involved in the continuance and eventual closure of the Noon Prayer Meeting. The next chapter will examine some of the external factors which affected the rise and fall of this Noon Meeting.

### **Postscript:**

An interesting link between the Glasgow Noon Prayer Meeting and the original Fulton Street Noon Prayer Meeting is to be found in the minutes of the 7 November 1894 Directors' meeting.

A letter was read from Mr. Charles F Cutter of the Fulton Street Noon Meeting New York, sending greetings and asking particular details of the Glasgow Noon Prayer Meeting and Mr. Anderson was asked to reply.<sup>53</sup>

This confirms the fact that the Glasgow Noon Prayer Meeting took its original inspiration and pattern from the New York gathering, and that there was a recognised continuity between the meeting which started in 1858 and the revitalised meeting launched in 1874.

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<sup>49</sup> Rev John Moore, (Superintendent of the Tent Hall, 1952-1961), interview with author, (Erskine, November 2006).

<sup>50</sup> Jean Macleod (Secretary to the Scottish Evangelistic Council, 1950- ?), interview by the author, (Erskine, 5 January 2007) and, 5 January 2007.

<sup>51</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible\\_Training\\_Institute](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_Training_Institute), accessed 10.05.2007, 15:50.

<sup>52</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1974. (1975).

<sup>53</sup> Minutes of the Noon Prayer Meeting Committee, 7 November 1884.

## THE WIDER SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS PICTURE

David Bebbington observes

Not until the Lausanne Congress of 1974 that it (was) commonly admitted by evangelicals that the shape of their religion is influenced by their environment<sup>54</sup>

Clearly, the Noon Prayer Meeting was shaped and influenced by the wider social and religious context. Glasgow in the 1850s when the meeting began differed radically from the 1970s when it closed. One major change over this period was the size of the population of the city. The latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw an unprecedented rise in the population of Glasgow, due to rapid industrialisation, which was mirrored by the de-industrialisation and fall in population in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>55</sup> Another major contributor to change over the lifetime of the meeting was the three major wars in which Britain was involved, which had a huge impact on the social and spiritual climate of the country. Cycles of economic prosperity and depression over this period also left their mark. There were paradigm shifts in social, moral and spiritual values from the Victorian era through to the 1960s and beyond, which affected every aspect of life in the UK. The Noon Prayer Meeting was not immune to the impact of all of the above.

### **Social and economic factors**

The prototype of the Glasgow Noon Meeting, the Fulton Street Prayer meeting, was started to meet the needs of the business people of the city of New York in a period of economic depression. However, it continued after the initial crisis had passed, indicating that the economic situation was not determinative to its existence.<sup>56</sup> This accords with Bebbington's findings in his survey of Evangelicalism in Britain from 1730s-1980's that 'there is no consistent correlation between economic and religious cycles.' So although the Glasgow Noon Prayer meeting was subject to the vagaries of economic recession and prosperity, this was not ultimately what determined its state of health or survival.<sup>57</sup>

### **Improved standard of living.**

However, it is also true that the general improvement in standard of living tended to undermine evangelicalism.<sup>58</sup> It is acknowledged that Moody's first visit to Scotland in 1873-74 was his most successful.<sup>59</sup> One reason that his two subsequent visits made less impact has been attributed to the

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<sup>54</sup> D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Routledge, 1989), 272.

<sup>55</sup> David Smith, 'The Culture of Modern Scotland as the Context of Christian Mission', in *Death or Glory*, (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2001), 15.

<sup>56</sup> J.Edwin Orr, *The Event of the Century* (Wheaton: International Awakening Press, 1989), 50.

<sup>57</sup> D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 114.

<sup>58</sup> D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 142.

<sup>59</sup> Brown, Calum G., *The Death of Christian Britain, Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001), 97.

fact that 'increasing secularisation provided other outlets for energies which had previously more limited but more serious goals.'<sup>60</sup> This went hand in hand with the rising standard of living. Despite this, throughout the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Noon Prayer Meeting continued to benefit from increased attendances during holiday periods, which were attributed at least in part to the absence of something else to do during the holidays.<sup>61</sup> However, as the 20<sup>th</sup> century dawned, there were more alternative activities for working class people to indulge in on a statutory holiday and they had more disposable income to spend on these diversions. This trend was checked during the period of the Depression following the Wall Street crash of 1929, and the austerity of World War 2 and its aftermath. But then in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when post-war austerity gave way to consumerism. 'Incomes rose, diversity and quality of goods increased, and leisure-time choice mushroomed'.<sup>62</sup> This inevitably impacted religious activities. The 1960s was also a decade of revolutionary change in social and moral attitudes in the United Kingdom.

Pop music, radical fashion and student revolt were witness to a sea- change in sexual attitudes and to the dismissal of conventional social authority.<sup>63</sup>

One important factor in the social revolution was the development of television.<sup>64</sup> This availability of home entertainment inevitably has had an impact on social activities of all kinds, including church attendance, which has been in decline since the mid 1950s.<sup>65</sup>

The general improvement in living standards and the increased welfare provision by the State during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can also be seen to have had an indirect impact on the Noon Prayer meeting. This is because the parent body of the Noon Prayer Meeting, the GUEA, ran a number of 'ameliorative schemes' which served the social needs of Glasgow's poor. The Sunday morning Free Breakfast, the Cripple League for handicapped children, and the Fresh Air Fortnight scheme, which provided holidays for city children, are examples of these.<sup>66</sup> The general rise in the standard of living post World War 2, coupled with the creation of public welfare facilities superseded equivalent services offered by the churches in general, and the GUEA in particular.<sup>67</sup> One indication of this is the drop in the number of those registered under the 'Cripple League.' In 1927 there were 1092 on the role, compared with 353 in 1953.<sup>68</sup> By the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Government welfare provision had more or less made the social programmes of the GUEA redundant.<sup>69</sup> Although this in itself did not lead to the ultimate closure of the Noon Prayer Meeting, it may be seen as a contributing factor, since it inevitably led to reduced activity of the Association. Another aspect of the changing social conditions

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<sup>60</sup> I.A. Muirhead, 'Revival as a Dimension of Scottish Church History', in *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 20, 1988, 195.

<sup>61</sup> GUEA Annual report for 1891 (1892).

<sup>62</sup> Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Pearson Longman, 2006), 231.

<sup>63</sup> Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain*, 224.

<sup>64</sup> Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain*, 227.

<sup>65</sup> William Storrar, 'A Tale of Two Paradigms: Mission in Scotland from 1946', in *Death or Glory*, 65, 66.

<sup>66</sup> George Mitchell, *Revival Man*, (Tain: Christian Focus, 2002), 105.

<sup>67</sup> D.W Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 143.

<sup>68</sup> GUEA Annual reports for 1923 and 1953.

<sup>69</sup> The Free Breakfast continued into the 1970's though, since there was still a demand for this among the homeless of the city. (Andrew Carter, Telephone interview with Board member of GUEA, 1970-1984.)

was that many families moved to new housing estates, and new towns, further disrupting the old established social patterns and order.<sup>70</sup> Neil Dickson notes that attendance at inner-city Glasgow Brethren Assemblies fell in the 1960s, as members tended to move out to the suburbs.<sup>71</sup> This shift of population was one of the factors which led to the eventual closure of the Tent Hall, according to Andrew Carter, a GUEA Board member from 1970-1984.<sup>72</sup> This same population shift inevitably affected the other missions which supported the Noon Prayer Meeting. The demise of Glasgow as a major sea-port and the closure of the Forth Clyde canal also led to the closure of the Seamen's Bethel and the Canal Boatman's Mission. Without such support from its key participants, the Noon Prayer Meeting could not survive.

### **The impact of the major wars.**

The 100 years of the Noon Prayer Meeting saw Britain involved in two world wars and other major military campaigns, including the Boer War. These events had both positive and negative effects on the religious life of the nation. The GUEA Annual Report for 1900, with reference to the Boer War, noted that there had been a 'perceptible quickening' in the Spirit of Prayer, attributed at least in part to the 'heavy tidings' from the South African battlefields.<sup>73</sup>

It would be interesting to read of similar response to the First and Second World Wars, but due to the incompleteness of the archive material, this is not possible. From other sources, it is seen that there was an initial surge in church membership in the period 1914-15.<sup>74</sup> This was followed by a fall in church attendance in the course of the war.<sup>75</sup> However, the GUEA annual report for 1919 simply notes that the Noon Prayer Meeting has 'held its way with much helpfulness and inspiration to many.'<sup>76</sup> The 1924 review of the first 50 years of the GUEA makes no specific mention of the fortunes of the Noon Meeting during the war years. Evidence for the spiritual climate during and after the Second World War is mixed. Brown reports that the period 1938-43 saw a fall of 22% in Church of Scotland membership.<sup>77</sup> Many came back from the war disillusioned with religion.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, there was a resurgence of evangelicalism after World War 2, as David Bebbington comments.

The legacy of World War 2 was a willingness to consider ultimate values in the population at large, and a preparedness to respond on the part of the churches.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society*, 231.

<sup>71</sup> Neil T.R. Dickson, *Brethren in Scotland, 1830-2000* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 331.

<sup>72</sup> Andrew Carter in interview by the author, November 2006.

<sup>73</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1900 (1901).

<sup>74</sup> Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707*, 161.

<sup>75</sup> Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 141.

<sup>76</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1919 (1920).

<sup>77</sup> Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707*, 161.

<sup>78</sup> David Smith quotes a prisoner of war, returning home in 1946 as saying that a 'glass cover' had been placed over the pulpit, so that he could no longer hear what the preacher was saying. David Smith, in *Death or Glory*, 23.

<sup>79</sup> D.W.Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 254.

One of the evidences of this was the ‘Tell Scotland’ campaign of 1956.<sup>80</sup> The general rise in evangelical activity and interest during this period helps explain the survival of the Noon Prayer Meeting in the post-war period.

### **Spiritual and religious factors.**

As early as 1888, there was the recognition that the general spiritual climate of society impacted the Noon Prayer Meeting.

Of the fact there can be no doubt that the Noon Meeting alternately influences and is influenced by the vitality of the Christian community in whose midst it is carried on.<sup>81</sup>

How far the Noon Prayer Meeting influenced the spiritual life of the city is an interesting question, but it is clear that the vitality of the meeting was affected by the wider religious climate.

The Noon Meeting was supported and maintained by evangelical Christians.

Its fluctuating fortunes therefore reflect the strength and weakness of evangelicalism in the country. By the 1830s, there was a growing conviction among evangelicals in Britain that their mission to convert the nation was failing, even though church attendance by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century was up to 35%,<sup>82</sup> which was a significant improvement on the previous century.<sup>83</sup> This led for calls for prayer for revival, stimulated by news of the evangelical awakening in America.<sup>84</sup> Thus the original Noon Prayer Meeting of 1858 was born in a climate of revivalism. The revivals of 1859-1861 reinforced the rising influence of evangelicalism in British society at this time.<sup>85</sup>

However, the prominence of evangelicals in society began to decline shortly after the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and was never to be repeated. Already by 1864, Shaftesbury was lamenting that ‘the Protestant feeling of the nation was not what it was.’<sup>86</sup> By the 1870s, there was the ‘Victorian crisis of faith’, partly influenced by the challenge of Darwinism to the reliability of the Genesis account of creation, and therefore to the trustworthiness of the Scriptures as a whole.<sup>87</sup> David Smith judges that the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was ‘a time when traditional Christianity seemed increasingly under threat.’<sup>88</sup> The visit of D.L. Moody to Scotland in 1873-74 was part of the attempt to reassert the evangelical influence in the country, and the revival of the Noon Prayer Meeting in 1874 was a component of this.

The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a mixed picture as far as church attendance is concerned.<sup>89</sup> The proportion of church-goers declined initially from 1905, but then rose again in the 1950s, and peaked in 1959 only 11% lower than at the start of the century. However there was another

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<sup>80</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 253.

<sup>81</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1887 (1888).

<sup>82</sup> D.W. Bebbington, ‘Mission in Scotland,’ in *Death or Glory*, 33.

<sup>83</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 108.

<sup>84</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 76.

<sup>85</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 107.

<sup>86</sup> Lord Shaftesbury, in Bebbington, 141.

<sup>87</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 142.

<sup>88</sup> David Smith, ‘The Culture of Modern Scotland’, in *Death or Glory*, 18.

<sup>89</sup> Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001), 6.

steep decline in the 1960s, during which ‘confidence in evangelistic campaigns waned among the less conservative Scottish churches’.<sup>90</sup> Steve Bruce comments,

All (the indicators) point to declining involvement with religious organisations and declining commitment to religious ideas. And the trends in the data have been regular and consistent for between 50 and 100 years.<sup>91</sup>

This concurs with Brown’s conclusion is that ‘It took several centuries to convert Britain to Christianity, but it has taken less than 40 years for the country to forsake it.’<sup>92</sup> Given this background, it is not surprising that the Noon Prayer Meeting struggled to survive in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

On the other hand, since the 1960s, a new wave of spiritual renewal has made its impact on the churches in the UK.<sup>93</sup> In general, however, this was resisted initially by conservative evangelical Christians, and thus probably did not impact the Noon Prayer Meeting in a significant way.<sup>94</sup>

### **The impact of individuals.**

The original Noon Prayer Meeting began through the vision of one individual, Mr Joseph Lanphier. The Glasgow Noon Prayer Meeting also owed its existence and continuation to various individuals. As indicated in the Introduction, Charles Finney encouraged the concept of Christians uniting to pray for revival during his 1859 visit to Glasgow.<sup>95</sup> This would undoubtedly have helped boost attendances at the many revival prayer meetings in the city at that time. 15 years later, in 1874, it was D.L. Moody’s visit that revived the languishing Noon Meeting. He considered the Noon Prayer Meeting to the ‘backbone of his work.’<sup>96</sup> The report for 1900 attributes the increased attendance at the Noon Meeting during these visits to ‘Mr. Moody’s potent personality.’<sup>97</sup> This indicates the importance of strong leadership and example in relation to prayer. It is also clear that attendance at the Noon Meetings was boosted when popular speakers were featured. For example, the report for 1885 noted that

The Rev E. P Hammond has kindly presided during his visit to the city, and has succeeded in throwing new life and interest into it.<sup>98</sup>

Special speakers addressed the meetings during 1887, including Dr Pentecost of Brooklyn, Rabbi Rabinowitz, a well-known Jewish convert, and Mr. Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission.<sup>99</sup> The GUEA Annual Report for 1895 again gives evidence for the positive effect individual speakers had on the attendances.

<sup>90</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 253.

<sup>91</sup> Steve Bruce, *God is Dead*, (Oxford : Blackwell, 2002), 73

<sup>92</sup> Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 1.

<sup>93</sup> Donald Cameron, ‘Charismatic Movement’, in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1993), 164.

<sup>94</sup> Tom Wilson, quoted in Neil Dickson, *Brethren in Scotland, 1838-2000* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 355.

<sup>95</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1888 (1889.)

<sup>96</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1886 (1887).

<sup>97</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1900 (1901).

<sup>98</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1885 (1886).

<sup>99</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1897 (1898).

It cannot be said .... that there has been any appreciable improvement during the year, either in the attendance or the interest manifested in the (Noon Prayer) meeting, *except on special occasions when notable strangers have been announced to speak.*<sup>100</sup>

The report for 1899 indicates a greater attendance during the last 3 months of the year, due partly to the 'high level of expository excellence' of the preachers, including Charles Haddon Spurgeon.<sup>101</sup> Among those cited in the Book of Remembrance to celebrate 50 years of the GUEA are Dr R.A. Torrey, who came in 1903, and 'Gypsy' Smith during his campaign of 1923.<sup>102</sup> In later years this same pattern was seen though on a smaller scale. The week-end speaker at the Tent Hall would be invited to stay until the Monday to speak at the Noon Meeting.<sup>103</sup> Sometimes a well-known local preacher would be invited, and the topic of the sermon discussed afterwards over lunch at the Christian Institute in Bothwell Street.<sup>104</sup> This could boost the attendance to 100 or sometimes even 200.<sup>105</sup> The negative aspect of such large gatherings to hear the popular preachers was that it inevitably reduced the time available for prayer.

## CONCLUSION

Clearly the Noon Prayer Meeting was 'shaped by its environment'. Born in a period of revival of the Christian religion, given new impetus and focus by the visits of D.L. Moody, it was subject to the ebb and flow of social and religious currents over the course of the 115 years of its existence.

The general rise in the standard of living gave increased choice of leisure activities, and less demand for the social services provided by the GUEA. The upheavals of the war years had a mixed impact on the spiritual climate. The demise of the mission halls which were the back-bone of support for the Noon Prayer Meeting in its latter years led inevitably to its ultimate closure.

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<sup>100</sup> GUEA Annual Report, for 1895, (my italics).

<sup>101</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1899 (1890).

<sup>102</sup> A Book of Remembrance, 1874-1924, (Glasgow: GUEA, 1924).

<sup>103</sup> Frank Waddleton, (Assistant Superintendent of Tent Hall 1970-1972), interview by author, (Erskine: 4 November, 2006).

<sup>104</sup> Rev. Peter Donald, interview by author, (Erskine, 4 November, 2006).

<sup>105</sup> John Moore, interview by author, (Erskine, 4 November, 2006).

## THE DYNAMICS OF THE MEETING

In this chapter, the way the Noon Meeting was structured, and how it developed and changed over the years will be examined. How the meeting was promoted, and who attended will be investigated. The issues of participation and the role of preaching in the meeting will be considered. Some preliminary conclusions will be drawn, which will be expanded in the closing section of this dissertation when we will seek to draw principles which can be applied in our current situation.

### **The original pattern of the New York Prayer Meeting**

The way the Fulton Street New York Prayer Meeting was structured is as follows.

A Prayer Meeting is held every Wednesday from 12 to 1 o'clock in the Consistory building in the rear of the North Dutch Church, corner of Fulton and William Streets...It will continue for one hour; but it is also designed for those who find it inconvenient to remain more than 5 or 10 minutes, as well as those who can spare a whole hour. Necessary interruption will be slight because anticipated.<sup>106</sup>

Note that the time, place and organisation of this meeting were designed with the business people of the city in mind. The time limit of one hour and the freedom to come for a shorter period were aimed at maximising the attendance of those who worked in the city. An eye-witness described how the meeting he attended was led by a lay businessman who opened the meeting with a hymn, prayer, bible reading and word of comment. There then followed a time of prayer for specific requests which had been given to the chairman on pieces of paper. Others contributed prayer requests from the floor, and several also reported answers to prayer. An occasional verse of a hymn was sung during the meeting, between other contributions. The meeting was closed with a hymn and prayer.<sup>107</sup>

### **The pattern of the Glasgow Noon Prayer Meeting.**

The original Glasgow Noon Prayer Meeting of 1859 was set up to pray for revival, and was modeled on the New York Prayer Meeting, whose structure has been described above. Elements of the original pattern persisted when the GUEA took responsibility for the meeting from 1874. A chairman was responsible for the conduct of the meeting, which was to last one hour.<sup>108</sup> The chairman gave a few appropriate devotional comments before throwing the meeting open to the public for prayer requests or other contributions. The main focus of the Noon Meetings in the early days was prayer. Written prayer requests could be handed to the chairman by those

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<sup>106</sup> Edwin Orr, J., *The Event of the Century* (Wheaton: International Awakening Press, 1989), 54.

<sup>107</sup> Samuel Irenaeus Prime DD, *The Power of Prayer* (Aberdeen: George and Robert King, 1859), 27.

<sup>108</sup> The minutes of the Noon Prayer Meeting Committee of 7 Sept 1885.

present, or sent in by post. Controversial subjects were to be avoided. Participants were free to come when they could and go when they had to.<sup>109</sup>

The practice of receiving prayer requests from individuals continued to be a prominent feature of the Noon Prayer Meeting in the early years. The Annual Report for 1876 stated that they were receiving requests for prayer from other parts of the country.<sup>110</sup> That this practice continued is seen in the report for 1890.

The number of prayer requests continues to be sent in large numbers, indicating a wider appreciation of the value of the prayer meeting than only those who are able to attend.<sup>111</sup>

The personal nature of these prayer requests is seen in the following extract from the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Report.

The requests for prayer sent in are as varied as the varying circumstances of human need:- sometimes a mother requests prayer for a prodigal son; or for sick, suffering, widows and orphans. Notes of thanksgiving are received from time to time.<sup>112</sup>

It was recognised by the Directors that this was an important element in the continuing existence and relevance of the Noon Meeting, for in their 1891 enquiry into how to extend the influence of the Noon Meeting they included a recommendation on how to deal with the requests for prayer which they received.

That requests for prayer be asked for and be handed to the chairman on entering so that he may have sufficient time to arrange them.<sup>113</sup>

However, this aspect of the meeting also waned in popularity as time went on. The 1901 annual report continues to complain of lower attendance than formerly. Among the suggestions to increase interest was to encourage people to 'send prayer requests and thanksgiving for answers.'<sup>114</sup>

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was to see a shift in emphasis from personal prayer requests to prayer for the work of the participating mission organisations.<sup>115</sup> John Moore, superintendent of the Tent Hall, and chairman of the Noon Meeting from 1952 -1961 told of the 'excitement and joy at hearing of conversions' from the various mission organisations present during this period.<sup>116</sup>

### **Innovations and Changes**

The 1886 report makes reference to complaints that the prayer meeting was considered to be rather dull and boring by some.

The attendance has not been so large as the Directors would like to see it, and complaints are sometimes heard of the want of liveliness. To these one often feels inclined to reply in the

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<sup>109</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1895 (1896).

<sup>110</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1876 (1877).

<sup>111</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1890 (1891).

<sup>112</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1895 (1896).

<sup>113</sup> Minutes of the Noon Prayer Meeting Committee of 14 October 1891.

<sup>114</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1901 (1902).

<sup>115</sup> The eye-witnesses I interviewed about the meetings in the 50s-70s all mentioned praying for the different missions represented.

<sup>116</sup> John Moore in interview by the author, November 2006.

words of Mr. Moody's ready rejoinder to one making a similar complaint and asking him to suggest a remedy, 'Be more lively yourself'<sup>117</sup>

As well as this response, various changes were introduced to increase the appeal of the meeting to a wider audience. These met with varying degrees of success, and also inevitably changed the nature of the meeting itself.

### **Weekly Programme of the Meeting.**

The revitalised Noon Prayer Meeting of 1874 was held daily, with each day having a different emphasis.<sup>118</sup>

Monday is devoted to hearing reports of work at home and abroad; Saturday is set apart for the children. The other days are set apart for consideration of subjects of a practical and devotional character.<sup>119</sup>

The Monday report sessions were particularly well-attended and appreciated.<sup>120</sup>

However, it emerges that time for prayer was often being limited by other activities. The 1891 Directors' meeting brought various suggestions concerning how to revive the flagging interest in the Noon gathering. Mondays were to continue to be given to reports and prayer; alternate Thursdays were to be set apart for special subjects bearing on 'practical Life and Work'. Another suggestion was that 'an occasional day of praise and testimony would be interesting and profitable'<sup>121</sup> Here again we see that the purpose of the Noon Meeting has been progressively broadened in scope, due to it being extended to a daily occurrence. By the 1890s, attendance over the summer months tended to be low, and 'appropriate modifications' were made to the programme over this period, presumably by decreasing the frequency of meeting.<sup>122</sup>

Attempts were made to ensure adequate time was set aside for prayer, as seen in the Report for 1895.

Mondays were given over to reports, and in Wednesdays *the second half hour was reserved entirely for prayer*. On the other days, the meeting is thrown open at 12.30, and individuals were given 5 minutes if they wanted to take part.<sup>123</sup>

The fact that it was specified that the second half hour on Wednesdays was to be reserved for prayer shows that on the other days, time for prayer was being squeezed out. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century dawned, the Noon Meeting was continuing to meet daily.

The pattern for the week's meetings was: Mondays, reports, Wednesdays: Bible training Institute students, Friday: foreign missions. Tuesdays and Thursdays: exposition of scripture.<sup>124</sup>

As has already been noted, the attendances in the early 1900s were not considered satisfactory.<sup>125</sup> As a consequence of this, in 1907 the Directors decided to reduce the frequency of the meetings in July and

<sup>117</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1886.

<sup>118</sup> The GUEA Annual Report for 1874 (1875).

'The Noon Prayer meeting, *held daily in Ewing Place Church*, has been a source of unspeakable blessing.' (*my italics*).

<sup>119</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1879 (1880).

<sup>120</sup> GUEA Annual report for 1883 (1884).

<sup>121</sup> Minutes of the Noon Prayer Meeting Committee of 14 October 1891.

<sup>122</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1890.

<sup>123</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1895 (1896). (*my italics*).

<sup>124</sup> GUEA Annual report for 1901.

August to once a week on Mondays, and to 3 times per week from September, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.<sup>126</sup> By 1920, the meeting was back to a daily occurrence, from Monday to Friday, according to the Annual Report for that year.<sup>127</sup> It seems though that from 1945, the Noon Prayer Meeting was held only once a week on a Monday.<sup>128</sup>

Over the years, as the frequency of the meeting changed, so the focus of the gathering altered. The initial popularity of the Noon meetings resulted in their being held on a daily basis. However, because of the need to sustain such a gathering over a long period, other elements besides prayer were introduced. When the numbers attending the daily gathering declined, and the frequency of the meeting was reduced again to once a week, the original pattern and focus had inevitably changed. Those who attended were mainly full-time Christian workers, who reported on their evangelistic and mission work, and who supported one another in prayer.

### **The chairing of the meeting.**

In 1885, the Noon Meeting Directors' Committee submitted certain recommendations concerning the chairing and conduct of the meetings in order 'to secure an increased attendance. One aspect concerned timekeeping of the meeting.

Captain Hatfield said he had heard complaints of want of punctuality in closing the meeting and it was agreed to call special attention of chairmen to this matter.<sup>129</sup>

This is an important part of the chairman's responsibilities, especially if the meeting was to continue to attract business people during their lunch break. The difficulty in sustaining a daily prayer meeting is also seen in the problem of finding chairmen who were available at noon for a whole week at a time. This led to the recommendation that a different chairman be asked to preside each day, and each would be asked to chair the meeting once a month at the most.<sup>130</sup> This change was adopted, but apparently didn't produce the desired result, as two years later it was agreed that the same Director would preside each day for the whole week. The continuity thus engendered 'seemed to have worked satisfactorily and with benefit to the meeting.'<sup>131</sup>

Further insight into the changing pattern of the meeting itself is seen in the next recommendation of the committee.

b. That Chairmen be instructed to confine the preliminary exercises, including the reading of Scripture, within a quarter of an hour, so that by 12.15 the speaker may be free to begin his address.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1901 (1902).

<sup>126</sup> Minutes of the Noon Prayer Meeting Committee, April 1907.

<sup>127</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1920 (1921).

<sup>128</sup> The Annual Report for 1945 said that 'Public meetings for united prayer are held at mid-day on week-days. *The meeting held on Monday, known as the Noon Day Prayer Meeting, is a rallying centre for (Christian workers) in and around the city. (my italics).*

<sup>129</sup> Minutes of the Noon Prayer Meeting Committee, 7 September 1885.

<sup>130</sup> Minutes of Noon Prayer Meeting Committee, 14 October 1885.

<sup>131</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1887 (1888).

<sup>132</sup> Minutes of Noon Prayer Meeting Committee, 14 October 1885.

Evidently time for prayer was being limited by both the chairman's 'preliminary exercises', and the obligatory visiting speaker. Time for prayer in the second half of the meeting was also limited by the fact that others present could also speak, although the chairman was to strictly control the subject matter and time.

c. That Chairmen be requested to restrict the speaker to 15 minutes, so that the meeting may be thrown open by 12.30 and to carry out the rule limiting subsequent speakers to 5 minutes each; also to prevent the introduction of controversial topics. A timetable to be placed on desk for guidance of Chairman.<sup>133</sup>

Thus it is evident that the nature of the meeting had changed from the original purpose of primarily being focused on prayer.

### **Guidelines to visiting speakers.**

Given that one of the attractions of the meeting was the speakers and their subjects, the Directors varied their instructions to speakers concerning the topic or Bible passage in order to maximise attendance. In 1885, The Directors introduced a system of consecutive reading through the Bible, which was found to be 'most profitable.'<sup>134</sup> However, the 1888 Report indicated that since the meeting was currently tending in the 'direction of degeneracy,' the practice of the consecutive reading of Scripture was abandoned in favour of giving speakers the freedom to choose their own subject.

This has two obvious advantages: it is in most cases easier for the speaker, and more interesting for the meeting, when he comes with a subject which presumably has been especially lying on his heart.<sup>135</sup>

We could interpret the phrase 'being easier on the speaker' to mean that he could use something he had preached elsewhere, as well as being a subject he would be enthusiastic about. In 1891, it was recommended that one entire week each month be taken by one speaker.<sup>136</sup> Undoubtedly, the presence of visiting speakers boosted the attendance, but inevitably reduced the time available for prayer. The tendency for the preaching of the word to dominate the meeting continued right until the end. For example, Frank Waddleton commented that there was often there was not enough time for prayer in the 1960s and 1970s, since speakers and reports took up the time.<sup>137</sup> Peter Donald informed me that told me that there was little or no prayer at the last meeting, which consisted of the exposition of scripture, followed by a discussion about the topic of the sermon.<sup>138</sup>

### **The Noon Day Choir.**

Although there is no direct reference to singing in the early period of the Glasgow Noon Prayer meetings, it is probable that singing would be a feature of such a gathering especially after 1874,

<sup>133</sup> Minutes of Noon Prayer Meeting Committee, 14 October 1885.

<sup>134</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1884 (1885).

<sup>135</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1887 (1888).

<sup>136</sup> Minutes of the Noon Prayer Meeting Committee, 1891.

<sup>137</sup> Frank Waddleton, Interview by the author, (Glasgow, November 2006).

<sup>138</sup> Rev Peter Donald, Interview by the author (Glasgow, December 2006).

since D.L. Moody was accompanied by singer Ira Sankey. At some point though, a choir was started, which became a feature of the meetings. The first mention of this is found in the Report for 1884.

The NOON MEETING CHOIR consists at present of 64 members, principally ladies, who are responsible for leading the praise at the daily noon meeting in the Christian Institute. The leader is Mrs. W. M Oatts, who has since the beginning of the work, given her much valued services. She and five other ladies take turn in presiding at the organ, and each member of the choir attends on one or more fixed days so that regular service is ensured.<sup>139</sup>

The Annual Report for 1887 credits the singing of hymns and the presence of the choir to the greater spirit of praise and thankfulness in the meetings.<sup>140</sup> However, the Report for 1890 laments that though the choir was 'unequaled by any in the city' and the meetings had been well advertised, the attendance was 'disappointing'<sup>141</sup>. Despite this, it was still thought that the presence of the choir had a positive impact on attendance. Among the Directors recommendations for the revitalising of the meeting in October 1891 was 'that every effort should be made to have a choir of not less than 6.'<sup>142</sup> The modest number is indicative of the difficulty of maintaining such a commitment on a daily basis. In the Report for 1892, appreciation is expressed for the ladies of the choir, which forms 'one of the brightest and most attractive features of our daily gatherings.'<sup>143</sup> In 1889, reference was made to the new hymn book recently introduced, which was hoped would 'help to enliven the meeting.'<sup>144</sup>

Although the introduction of a choir probably helped maintain or even increase the numbers attending the meeting, there was a further inevitable reduction in the time available for prayer at the gatherings as a consequence.

### **Other suggestions.**

Over the years, further attempts were made to encourage increased attendance. For example, the Annual Report for 1883, missionaries working in different parts of the city were asked to bring reports of their work.<sup>145</sup> This proved to be of lasting benefit to the meeting in the long-term, and probably ensured its ultimate survival, for as already noted, it was the representatives of the missions who worked in and around Glasgow who were the main supporters and participants in the latter years of the meeting.<sup>146</sup>

In 1891, it was proposed that 'An occasional day of praise and testimony would be interesting and profitable, say every 2-3 months.'<sup>147</sup> Another suggestion was that 'a box be placed near the door for receiving practical questions bearing on doctrine, life or work, which would be answered on alternate Thursdays.'<sup>148</sup> It is not clear if these suggestions were implemented, but the Annual Report for 1900 indicates something of the difficulties felt by the Directors in relation to the meeting.

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<sup>139</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1884 (1885).

<sup>140</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1887 (1888).

<sup>141</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1890 (1891).

<sup>142</sup> Minutes of the Noon Prayer Meeting Committee, 14 October 1891.

<sup>143</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1892 (1893).

<sup>144</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1888 (1889).

<sup>145</sup> GUEA 10<sup>th</sup> Annual report for 1883 (1884).

<sup>146</sup> See p 7 above.

<sup>147</sup> Minutes of Noon Prayer Meeting Committee, 7 October 1891.

<sup>148</sup> Minutes of Noon Prayer Meeting Committee, 7 October 1891.

How to sustain interest in and maintain attendance at a meeting that goes on day by day and at the busiest hour of the day for a period of 26 years is a problem not easily solved.<sup>149</sup>

The 1901 Annual Report continues to complain that the attendance was ‘meagre and unsatisfactory’ compared to what it once was. Further suggestions were given to increase interest, including encouraging others to attend, coming prepared to take part briefly, and sending prayer requests and thanksgiving for answers.<sup>150</sup> However, in this report there is also a sense of resignation that changes in the internal dynamics in themselves won’t produce results.

The Prayer Meeting is usually the smallest and worst attended meeting in connection with any organisation.—chiefly because anything in the nature of popular attraction or display is alien to the spirit of a devotional meeting and would mar its true purpose of waiting on God.<sup>151</sup>

This indicates the tension that inevitably exists between trying to make the meeting more attractive and keeping the focus on the original purpose.

### **Publicity.**

The main avenue for promotion of the meeting was through the annual reports to the members of the GUEA. These reports almost invariably extolled the benefits and blessings of the meeting, lamented the poor attendance, and exhorted members to come and to bring others with them. For example, in the first annual report,

The NOON PRAYER MEETING has been *a source of unspeakable blessing*. The attendance, though very cheering indeed, is still small enough to show that the advantages of such a meeting are very much underestimated by the great majority of Christian people in Glasgow.<sup>152</sup>

Those who had ‘received refreshing’ through the Noon meeting were exhorted to make it known to fellow Christians, and to encourage others to attend.<sup>153</sup> Ministers in particular were asked to attend as much as possible, and to encourage their flocks to follow their example.<sup>154</sup> However, these Annual reports often contain a note of disappointment at the poor attendances, for example ‘It would greatly help if the ministers of the gospel were to look in a little more frequently.’<sup>155</sup> The same was repeated the following year.

Many who are seldom present could no doubt come one day in the week were they to look upon it as a regular engagement not to be easily set aside. The Noon Meeting is the centre of the work and the Directors earnestly express the hope that a greater number of the friends of the Association would make an effort to come occasionally.<sup>156</sup>

There was a tendency to put a positive ‘spin’ on the benefits of the meeting to those who attend.

Sometimes, like David and his men, they might ‘come weary and refresh themselves there’ at another time they might be like ‘Jonathan, Saul’s son, who went forth to David into the wood, and strengthened his hands in God.’<sup>157</sup>

<sup>149</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1900 (1901).

<sup>150</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1899 (1900).

<sup>151</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1900 (1901).

<sup>152</sup> GUEA Annual report for 1874 (1875).(my italics)

<sup>153</sup> GUEA Annual report for 1876 (1877).

<sup>154</sup> GUEA Annual report for 1876 (1877).

<sup>155</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1879 (1880).

<sup>156</sup> GUEA Annual report 1886.

<sup>157</sup> GUEA Annual report 1886.

As will be discussed in the next section, this could have the opposite effect on those who would attend the meetings without experiencing such immediate and obvious personal benefits!

In 1891, the Directors put forward these further recommendations concerning how to publicise the meeting.

- a. That a small card is printed for use of directors and others to inform others of the meeting
- b. That pulpit intimations be prepared and sent to various ministers quarterly.
- c. That 5000 gospel tracts ( including Noon Prayer Meeting subjects) be circulated monthly to the houses in the West End- Denniston, Crosshill and among Christian workers.)
- d. That short suitable notes reports of conferences and other special events in the Noon Meeting be furnished from time to time to the newspapers.<sup>158</sup>

This shows that the Directors were using the printed media to make the Noon Prayer Meeting known to as wide an audience as possible. There is no evidence from the subsequent reports however, that these measures brought any significant increase in numbers attending. In 1895, yet further recommendations were brought to the GUEA by the Directors concerning the promotion of the meeting, including,

That deputations from the Association be appointed to visit the several presbyteries of the city and bring the Noon Meeting under their notice as a place where the Lord's people could meet on common ground to unite their prayers for the furtherance of the Lord's work.<sup>159</sup>

Following on from this, the Noon Prayer Meeting committee reported a 'very satisfactory' visit advocating the interests of the Noon Prayer Meeting to the United Presbyterian and Free Church presbyteries.<sup>160</sup>

However, despite the increased effort to publicise the meeting, the long-term decline in numbers attending was not arrested. This indicates that although publicity was important, it was not the primary element in the success of the Noon Meeting.

### **The Participants at the Noon Prayer Meeting.**

The original Noon Meeting was aimed at business men and those who worked in the city centre. In the early years, it was actively supported by 'Ministers and laymen of all denominations.'<sup>161</sup> The Report for 1878 indicated that more men than women were attending. 'Many businessmen take advantage of it with great regularity, and gladly testify to the good they receive.'<sup>162</sup> As time went on, however, while members of the business community continued to be involved, gradually more full-time Christian workers attended. The 1924 report indicates this shift.

Amid the ebb and flow of spiritual tides, the Noon Prayer Meeting ...has kept on its way throughout the intervening years, and has not only provided a common ground on the Lord's remembrancers of many religious persuasions can meet and beseech His blessing on their work, *but has also become in a spiritual sense, a city 'Exchange' where Ministers,*

<sup>158</sup> Minutes of the Noon Prayer Meeting Committee, 14 October 1891.

<sup>159</sup> Minutes of the Noon Prayer Meeting Committee, 14 October 1895.

<sup>160</sup> Minutes of Noon Prayer Meeting Committee, 4 December, 1895.

<sup>161</sup> GUEA report for 1885 (1886).

<sup>162</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1878 (1879).

*Missionaries and Evangelists and other Christian workers can give reports, compare notes, and arrange mutual help.*<sup>163</sup>

This set the pattern for the Noon Prayer Meeting for the remainder of its existence, with more 'Full-time Christian workers' being involved and less business people coming during their lunch-break. It is also true that the original wide participation across the denominations narrowed down to mainly those from conservative evangelical churches. By the end of its existence, the participants were mainly Christian workers with city mission organisations.<sup>164</sup> Workers of the Scottish Evangelistic Association also attended, as did representatives of the Scottish Bible Society and the Colporteurs Association.<sup>165</sup>

### **Active and Passive Participation.**

It is difficult to imagine how a large number of people who attended in the earlier period could actively have participated in the prayer meeting. Where hundreds were present, only a small percentage could individually pray out loud in the time available. Clearly though, the Directors were anxious to encourage as many as possible to participate. A comment in the first Annual Report was to encourage the active participation of those who attend to prevent the meeting from 'falling into the hands of the few'.<sup>166</sup> These are common themes which recur in Annual Reports in subsequent years as well, and indicate some of the difficulties which lay ahead of the meeting.

.It is very desirable that those friends who do come occasionally should take part; their doing so would greatly enliven the meeting which has a tendency to become monotonous when the same voices are heard from day to day.<sup>167</sup>

The smaller numbers which attended the latter phase of the Noon Meetings existence, sometimes as few as 12, would be able to take part audibly in a way that earlier participants could not.<sup>168</sup> However, it seems that our Victorian predecessors didn't have a problem with this, judging from the account of the Prayer meetings at Spurgeons' Metropolitan Tabernacle, with over 1000 people in attendance.<sup>169</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

The original pattern, taken over from the New York Prayer Meeting altered over the years for various reasons. The focus changed from being primarily a prayer meeting, to a mixture of preaching and prayer. Singing and a choir were introduced to enliven proceedings. Time was given over to reports and discussion of topics of interest. Various forms of publicity were used to increase attendance. The make-up of those attending also changed as time went on. The original concept of a prayer meeting at a suitable time and place for business people who worked in the city centre ended up

<sup>163</sup> GUEA, *A Book of Remembrance, 1874-1924*, (Glasgow: Offices of the GUEA, 1924), 15. (my italics).

<sup>164</sup> Andrew Carter, Interview by the author, (Glasgow, 28 November 2006).

<sup>165</sup> Jean Macleod and Mary Knox, Interview by the author, (Glasgow, 6 January 2006).

<sup>166</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1874, (1875).

<sup>167</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1886 (1887).

<sup>168</sup> Jean Macleod- ( Secretary to the Scottish Evangelistic Council in the 1950s), interview by the author, (Glasgow, 5 January 2007).

<sup>169</sup> Spurgeon, C.H., *Only a Prayer Meeting.*, (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1901), 27-30. (His instructions for such gatherings included the following. Prayer should be brief; *Persuade all to pray aloud*; Encourage sharing of prayer requests).

being a meeting place for those involved in full-time Christian ministries. There was always a tendency for prayer to be squeezed out of the meeting, in an attempt to keep it attractive and relevant.

## THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF THE NOON PRAYER MEETING.

### INTRODUCTION

In this final section, we will attempt to understand the theological understanding of prayer of those who were involved in the Noon Prayer Meeting.

Foundational in their thinking was the belief in the power of united prayer. .

There are special promises to two of you who shall agree touching anything that ye shall ask; and to Him who is everywhere present, the place where prayer is wont to be made is yet one of special interest<sup>170</sup>

This is based on Jesus' words to His disciples Mt 18:19-20

Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

This was also behind the concern to maintain the numbers attending the meeting. The Annual Reports almost invariably encouraged increased attendance, and the Directors frequently discussed

How to make the Noon Prayer Meeting a more effective means of grace for Spiritual life and work; how to increase attendance and how to extend its influence over a wider area than at present.<sup>171</sup>

According to this way of thinking, there is a direct link between 'increasing attendance', and 'extending the influence' of the meeting. The Annual Report for 1892 expressed the view that

If it were only realised how fruitful beyond all other kinds of Christian work is that of labouring fervently in prayer those vacant spaces would soon be filled with 'the Lord's remembrancers.'<sup>172</sup>

The experience was that when more were present and participated, 'the spirit of prayer seems to be more abundant.'<sup>173</sup> On the other hand, there was a recognition that large numbers were not essential.

When speaking of numbers attending the Noon Prayer Meeting, we need to guard against the tendency to forget that however encouraging it may be to see large assemblage, Christ's presence is assured where two or three are gathered in His Name, and His promise stands good to two who shall agree as touching anything they shall ask.<sup>174</sup>

This emphasis on the continued validity of united prayer even when numbers are small obviously helped to sustain the meeting during the leaner periods of its history.

In addition to belief in the power of united prayer, the underlying theological beliefs which motivated the original Noon Prayer Meeting in New York is summed up in the words of Samuel Irenaeus Prime, writing in 1859.

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<sup>170</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1886 (1887).

<sup>171</sup> Minutes of Noon Prayer Meeting Committee, 14 October 1891.

<sup>172</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1892 (1893).

<sup>173</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1876 (1877).

<sup>174</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1888 (1889).

It is a solemn as well as a blessed privilege to pray; that God is willing to give His Spirit to them who ask Him; and that believing prayer is sure to be answered.<sup>175</sup>

As will be seen, these core theological convictions were also held by the organisers of the Glasgow Noon Meeting.

### **i. Prayer is a privilege which brings its own blessing**

The Participants of the Noon Prayer Meeting were convinced that prayer was a great privilege. The promoters of the Meeting regularly drew attention to this.

Many have felt it a precious privilege to have the daily opportunity of approaching the mercy seat with their petitions and that it is good to draw near to God.<sup>176</sup>

It was often said that the meeting was ‘a source of very great blessing to many’ and those who attended regularly were said to ‘gladly testify to the good they receive.’<sup>177</sup>

It is undoubtedly true that many found attendance at the meeting, which was frequently referred to as ‘the Rest at Noon’, as a positive and beneficial experience.<sup>178</sup> However, the decrease in attendance over the years indicates that the actual experience of many attending did not always correspond to this expectation.<sup>179</sup> This is the danger of a theology of prayer which emphasises the benefits to the participants.

### **ii. Christians have a responsibility to pray for others.**

The participants of the Noon Prayer meeting were aware of their responsibility to pray for others. They saw themselves as ‘the Lord’s remembrancers’.<sup>180</sup> This term comes from the Revised version of Isaiah 62:7:

Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, take ye no rest, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

Although this term can also mean those who ‘make mention of the Lord’ (KJV), the context lends itself to the interpretation of ‘intercessors’, those who remind God of His promises to His people in prayer. Charles Spurgeon makes reference to this in a sermon on prayer published in 1891, showing that this was a term known and used in Christian circles at this time.<sup>181</sup> We can therefore conclude that the participants of the Noon Prayer Meeting saw themselves in the prophetic tradition of Old Testament

<sup>175</sup> Prime, Samuel Irenaeus, *The Power of Prayer* (Aberdeen: George and Robert King, 1859), iv.

<sup>176</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1889 (1890).

<sup>177</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1878 (1879).

<sup>178</sup> See for Example the GUEA Annual Reports for 1882 (1883), 1888 (1889), and 1893 (1894).

<sup>179</sup> See for example the reference to the complaint of ‘want of liveliness’ in the meetings, in the GUEA Annual Report for 1885 (1886).

<sup>180</sup> GUEA Annual Reports for 1886 (1887), 1888 (1889), 1893 (1894).

<sup>181</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, ‘A Call to Prayer and Testimony’, <http://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/2189.htm>, accessed 19.04.2007.

intercessors<sup>182</sup> This is one factor which would have motivated them to keep the meeting going, even when the numbers were dwindling.

### iii. God will answer prayer for the Holy Spirit to come in revival.

The original motivation for the Glasgow Noon Prayer Meeting was the belief in the need to pray for revival.<sup>183</sup> Scotland had witnessed a number of 'revivals of religion' from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century onwards.<sup>184</sup> These were considered to be Sovereign works of God, a 'spontaneous outbursts of divine favour.'<sup>185</sup> However, due to the writings of Jonathan Edwards and others, the idea of praying for revival came into vogue among Christians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1839, James Douglas issued a pamphlet promoting revival where he wrote:

Where no revivals are expected, none are likely to take place, for men will only pray for blessings which they hope to obtain.<sup>186</sup>

Charles Finney was an influential exponent of this view. According to Finney, 'Revival is not a miracle....it is a purely philosophical result of the right use of constituted means.'<sup>187</sup> One of these means was the united prayer of Christians. In a sermon in Glasgow in 1859, Finney outlined his theology of prayer for revival in which he emphasised the importance of 'unity, faith and expectation that God was going to pour out His Spirit, as He had promised'.<sup>188</sup> This went against the traditional Calvinistic view of revival as a Sovereign work of God, and was considered by some to be heretical.<sup>189</sup> However, this was the view that prevailed in the many prayer meetings which were established in the latter half of 1858 and early 1859, which were 'characterised by incessant and earnest pleading for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>190</sup> These prayers were answered initially at least, since there was a period of revival in Glasgow which lasted from July 1859 until August 1861.<sup>191</sup>

In the years that followed, prayer for revival continued to be part of the motivation for those who attended the Noon Prayer meeting, as is reflected in a number of the subsequent GUEA Annual Reports. The Report for 1880 reminded the members of the GUEA that 'revivals are born of prayer' and 'where there is prayer there is power.'<sup>192</sup> When the spiritual climate was cooling off, there was recognition for the need for 'a mighty breathing of the Spirit of God on our meeting.'<sup>193</sup> The hope for a more general revival remained on the agenda, as the 1892 Annual Report indicates a 'desire to see the Lord's work revived in our midst, and extended in other lands'.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *They cried to the Lord, the Form and theology of Biblical Prayer*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 270-280.

<sup>183</sup> Marr, 'The 1859 Revival in Scotland', 95.

<sup>184</sup> Kenneth S. Jeffrey, *When the Lord walked the Land* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 2.

<sup>185</sup> Jeffrey, *When the Lord walked the Land*, 3.

<sup>186</sup> James Douglas, 'The Revival of Religion', in *When the Lord walked the Land*, 253.

<sup>187</sup> Charles Finney, 'Revival Lectures', in Jeffrey, *When the Lord walked the Land*, 15.

<sup>188</sup> Charles Finney, 'The Prevailing Prayer Meeting', [http://www.PPM\\_glasgow.htm](http://www.PPM_glasgow.htm)

<sup>189</sup> John Kent, *Holding the Fort* (London: Epworth Press, 1978), 28.

<sup>190</sup> Marr, 'The 1859 Revival in Scotland', 139.

<sup>191</sup> Clifford James Marr, 'The 1859 Revival in Scotland', 305.

<sup>192</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1880 (1881).

<sup>193</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1889, (1890).

<sup>194</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1891, (1892).

Thus the belief that God would send revival in response to the united prayers of His people was clearly a key factor in the Noon Prayer Meeting. However as we have already noted, the prayer meetings waned as the revival died down.<sup>195</sup> Thus paradoxically it can also be argued that the belief that prayer automatically brings revival contributed to the long-term decline of the Noon Prayer meeting, for as the years went on without a fresh revival taking place, all but the most committed lost heart and stopped attending.

**iv. When we pray in faith, God is sure to answer.**

Another element in the theology of those who attended and supported the Noon Prayer Meeting was that ‘the Lord will give His praying people whatsoever they ask in faith.’<sup>196</sup> This is seen in the language of the Annual Report for 1887.

Throughout another year prayer has been made daily without ceasing, unto God at noon, in this hall, for the various departments of the Associations work, and constantly have notes of praise mingled with the supplications to Him who has heard our cry and *vouchsafed His blessing*.<sup>197</sup>

The concept of believing God to fulfill his promises is explicitly referred to by C.H. Spurgeon in his book which describes the prayer meeting held about the same period at his church.

Prayers in which you take to God one of the many precious promises which He has given us in His word, and expect it to be fulfilled.<sup>198</sup>

Thus the underlying assumption of the Noon Prayer meeting was prayer changes things. This is based on the Biblical evidence that ‘Prayer can change God’s mind’<sup>199</sup>

The responsiveness of God to intercession raises problems for our theology, but is consistent with what we encounter in scripture.<sup>200</sup>

This conviction was central to what motivated the Noon Prayer Meeting participants. This is also seen in the way D.L. Moody laid great emphasis on prayer as the foundation for the success of his evangelistic campaigns, as has already been noted. The first Annual Report of the GUEA also reflects this belief.

If the work is to go forward, Christians of every denomination must rally round this common centre, and unitedly plead for our city.<sup>201</sup>

The promoters of the GUEA Noon Prayer Meeting clearly believed that united prayer was vital for the progress of the gospel in the city.

It is however, of utmost importance that there should be in a city like Glasgow a common rallying place where those who love the Lord Jesus may meet daily for mutual edification, and plead for the divine blessing on the city, our native land, and the world at large.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Historical Overview, 4.

<sup>196</sup> Samuel I. Prime, *The Power of Prayer*, (Aberdeen: George and Robert King, 1859), iv.

<sup>197</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1887 (1888), (my italics).

<sup>198</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, *Only a Prayer Meeting*, 32.

<sup>199</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *They cried to the Lord*, 276.

<sup>200</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *They cried to the Lord*, 280.

<sup>201</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1874, (1875).

<sup>202</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1875 (1876).

The united prayer meeting was regarded, at least in theory, as ‘the Centre of the work of the Association, the heart whose pulsations are felt at the heart of the various departments.’<sup>203</sup> This explains the fact that the meeting was kept going eventually by those directly involved in mission and evangelistic work in the city and beyond, meeting together to pray for their work. As these works themselves began to diminish, the motivation to pray for them also waned.

As well as praying for revival and the success of evangelistic work, those who attended the Noon Prayer Meeting also believed in the efficacy of intercessory prayer for individual needs. This is reflected in their practice of encouraging prayer requests to be submitted to the meeting.

The many requests for prayer which continue to be sent in week after week give evidence that those who ask us to join with them in supplication are sure of blessing flowing to them in response. and many are the requests sent to us to return thanks for answers which have been manifestly vouchsafed.<sup>204</sup>

They believed that individuals are important to God, and that Christians have a duty and responsibility to ‘bear one another’s burdens’.<sup>205</sup> This ‘success oriented’ theology of prayer is relatively easy to promote in a period where there are obvious answers to the prayers offered, as in the early years of the meeting. An attempt to offer an explanation for lack of apparent answers to prayer is found in the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual report for 1888.

While therefore we cannot say that the Noon Meeting has been in all respects what we could have wished, we must not too hastily conclude that much blessing has not resulted from it. We fear there is too great a disposition to wait upon man and too little of the spirit that waits upon God only.<sup>206</sup>

This indicates something of the difficulty of maintaining the belief in the efficacy of believing prayer, when the answers are not immediately forthcoming.

### **Belief in the importance of preaching in the Prayer Meeting.**

The Noon Prayer meeting almost invariably had at least part of the time devoted to Bible teaching and preaching. This stems from the Protestant belief that all acts of worship have to be informed by, and conformed to Scripture.<sup>207</sup> It is also based on the belief that the Bible is useful to stimulate prayer.<sup>208</sup> The problem is that the Prayer Meeting can become another Bible Study. In the course of the history of the Noon Meeting, we have noted how preaching tended to predominate time-wise, at the expense of time for prayer. Even C.H. Spurgeon, ‘the Prince of Preachers’ warns

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<sup>203</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1884 (1885).

<sup>204</sup> GUEA Annual Report 1888 (1889).

<sup>205</sup> Ga 6:2

<sup>206</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1888 (1889)

<sup>207</sup> Mary Catherine Hilbert, OP, ‘Preaching’, in *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987), 795.

<sup>208</sup> There are many direct exhortations in Scripture concerning prayer, for example 1Th 5:17 There are many promises about Prayer in Scripture, for example Mr 11:24 ;There are many examples of prayer in Scripture. Mt 6-12.

against allowing 'hymn, or chapter or sermon to supplant prayer.'<sup>209</sup> In discussion with Rev Dr James Gordon on this subject, he suggested that the reason that Bible Study takes over a prayer meeting is that 'we need a book between us and God'<sup>210</sup> This could be one factor in preaching tending to reduce the time available for prayer at the Noon Meeting.

## **CONCLUSION**

The participants at the Noon Prayer Meeting were motivated by their understanding of the theology of prayer. They believed that united prayer was more effective than the sum of individual prayer. They saw prayer as a privilege which brought its own blessings, and that they had a responsibility before God to pray. They believed that their prayers changed things and brought revival, conversions, and blessings to individuals. They believed in the importance of the Bible to inform their prayers. This is what enabled the meeting to continue for over a century. On the other hand, the fact that tangible results of prayer were not always immediately seen or experienced could be a contributory factor in the decline of the meeting.

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<sup>209</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, *Only a Prayer Meeting!*, 27-30.

<sup>210</sup> Dr James Gordon, interview by the author, (Paisley, December 15 2006).

## CONCLUSION AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The focus of this dissertation has been the Noon Prayer Meeting of the Glasgow United Evangelistic Association, which was in existence for over a century. The model for the original meeting was the Businessmen's Noon Prayer Meeting in Fulton Street, New York, which was established in 1857, and which inspired many others in the US and throughout the world in subsequent years. The Glasgow meeting prospered during times of spiritual revival and evangelistic activity, particularly in the period 1859-61, and at the time of D.L. Moody's visits to the city between 1874 and the early 1890s. The focus and nature of the Noon Meeting changed from being primarily a Prayer meeting for businessmen in the city, to being a place for Christian workers to meet to listen reports of each other's work, and to hear and discuss sermons. The Noon Meeting was not immune to the wider social and economic changes which took place over its lifetime. Given the unprecedented nature and pace of change over this period, it is almost incredible that this united corporate prayer meeting survived at all. One of the reasons for the persistence of the meeting was the theology of prayer held by the participants.

Since the purpose of this dissertation was to gain understanding of the practice of corporate intercessory prayer, with a view to promoting its practice in the church today, I will now attempt to draw some conclusions from the present study.

### 1. The Spiritual climate.

The first conclusion concerning corporate prayer is that it is dependent on the overall spiritual climate in the churches for its success. The original prayer meeting of 1858-1859 was one of many which were commenced immediately preceding a time of revival, and then sustained during the period of revival. The meeting was revitalized at the time of the Moody visits, and received a boost at the time of special evangelistic activity, for example in the last three months of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At such times, the meetings were well attended and flourished. At other times, the meetings tended to languish.

From this we can conclude that such united prayer meetings inevitably reflect the ebb and flow of the spiritual vitality of the wider Christian church. It would be unrealistic to expect such a meeting to maintain the same level of support and popularity at all times. Some sense that we are in a period where there is once more 'a hunger for renewal through corporate prayer, (and) for revival in the land.'<sup>211</sup> We need to be sensitive to this, and open to respond appropriately.

### 2. Leadership.

United prayer meetings require good leadership to initiate and sustain them. The New York Prayer Meeting would not have taken place but for the vision and leadership of Lanphier. The Glasgow Noon Meeting would not have started had it not been for church leaders who believed in praying for revival. It would not have taken new life had it not been for Moody's emphasis on united prayer in

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<sup>211</sup> Donald Cameron, 'Charismatic Movement', in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1993), 165.

1873-74. Thus new united prayer movements need strong leadership who can inspire and enthuse others to pray. This is one of the main responsibilities of the pastor of a local church- to inspire his people to pray.

### **3. The Numbers Game.**

We can also conclude from the study of the Noon Prayer Meeting that while numbers are an important indicator of the popularity of a meeting, large numbers are not necessary to sustain a meeting over a long period of time. Given the long history of the Noon Prayer Meeting, it is not surprising that a high level of attendance was not sustained. The other factor concerning numbers is that paradoxically the attempts to increase the attendance inevitably reduced the time available for prayer. A popular speaker who drew the crowds would be expected to preach for longer than the time usually allocated to the visiting speaker. Ultimately, only '2 or 3' meeting together are needed to constitute a 'united prayer meeting'.<sup>212</sup> Therefore if our numbers are low at our united prayer meeting, this in itself shouldn't be a reason for discontinuing.

### **4. The Target Audience.**

The original Fulton Street Prayer Meeting was targeted to meet the needs of the Businessmen of New York. The time, place and regulation of the meeting was designed with this group in mind. Similarly, the 1858-59 revival prayer meetings in Glasgow were established at a time and place to suit the business community who wanted to pray for revival during their lunch break. The same can be said for the re-launched meetings from 1874. From this we can learn the principle of 'studying the best time and place to suit the 'target audience' for the prayer meeting, and to organise the meeting in such a way as to facilitate their participation.

### **5. The Need for Flexibility**

Another principle which can be learned from the experience of the GUEA meeting is that flexibility and openness to change is needed in order to sustain a prayer meeting in the long term. The various changes of frequency and format which were introduced helped to keep the meeting going. In our current climate, where the pace of change is faster than ever, we need to remain flexible and willing to change as appropriate.

### **6 Keep Focused on Prayer.**

A prayer meeting needs to retain prayer as its primary activity. Other activities can tend to displace this in practice. The chairman's remarks, the preacher's sermon, the choir's contribution, the opportunity for contributions and questions from the audience conspired to squeeze out the central activity of the Noon Prayer Meeting. This is an easy mistake to repeat.

### **7 The Theology Factor.**

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<sup>212</sup> Mt 18:20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

In order to inspire people to pray, we need a robust theology of intercession. We need to promote a 'high' view of prayer, and the necessity of it, encouraging the belief that the Lord can and does answer prayer, while at the same time recognizing the reality that not all prayers are answered. This requires regular Biblical teaching on this theme, and encouraging one another by sharing answers to prayer. Related to this there is the need to promote the benefit of prayer for the participants, while giving a realistic view that these are not always directly experienced in the prayer meeting.

### **8. The Need for Review.**

In the first period of its existence, there was a Board of Directors which continually monitored and reviewed the state of the meeting. The absence of minutes of such meetings after the Tent Hall took over from 1912 may indicate that this oversight was less vigorous, as the Superintendent of the Tent Hall had many other responsibilities. It could be argued that this was one of the reasons for the long-term decline and eventual demise of the meeting. Related to this is the need to recognise when a prayer meeting has run its course. It is significant that while the united prayer meeting was struggling to survive, there were vibrant prayer meetings taking place in the Tent Hall itself.<sup>213</sup> It is also interesting to note that the demise of the Noon Prayer Meeting was at a time when the charismatic renewal movement was beginning to make an impact on the churches in Scotland. The Scottish Churches Renewal Movement was formed in 1975 to promote teaching on this.<sup>214</sup> In recent years it has been the charismatic churches that have led the way in praying for revival. New Prayer initiatives have come into being, for example 'Prayer for the City', and the 24/7 Prayer Movement which give hope that the spirit of Prayer which inspired the Noon Prayer Meeting is still very much alive.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Noon Prayer Meeting provides us with a model of a united prayer meeting which stood the test of time and survived for more than a century. This should inspire those who believe in the importance of corporate intercession by Christians to emulate their example and commitment. We need to take the principles which motivated the organisers and participants, and apply them to our current context. The social and religious climate needs to be taken into account, and we need to be flexible in our approach, willing to change as necessary while retaining as much as possible the focus on prayer. We need to 'keep in step with the Spirit'<sup>215</sup> in order to learn from the past while not being bound by it, and to be open to the new initiatives which the Spirit is inspiring in these days.

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<sup>213</sup> GUEA Annual Report for 1953 (1954).

<sup>214</sup> D.E.N. Cameron, 'Charismatic Movement', in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1993), 164.

<sup>215</sup> Gal 5:25.

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