

Lord Lyon King of Arms Speech—General Assembly 2023

Rev Canon Dr Joseph Morrow

Moderator and Commissioners,

I am honoured to be addressing you today. It has been some 50 years ago, around this time, since I last spoke to the General Assembly. I then stood at the bar of this Assembly to make a petition to the then “Fathers and Brethren” to allow young people to participate in the governing structures of the Church – (how deluded was I?)

I was at that time President of the National Council of Youth Fellowships, which was a vibrant network of young people throughout the Church.

After my presentation, I was asked at the bar: What did I think young people would bring to the government of the Church?

The question I have been asked to address today is:

What do the ceremonial aspects of the Lord High Commissioner and this General Assembly bring to the Church?

As you are aware, the ceremonial for the Lord High Commissioner is simple in its nature and sends out messages about our common life together, both as Church and as State.

The so-called power of civil life and the love of Christian discipleship are often seen to be opposition to each other – but that is not true.

The ceremonial aspects of the General Assembly are not about power, but rather about reminding us of the relationship between Church and State in Scotland, and above all about the supremacy of Jesus in the life of the Church.

The ceremonies that we carry out around the Lord High Commissioner at General Assembly time are concerned with values: the values of respect, hospitality and generosity.

As the National Christian Church in Scotland, you express – through these ceremonies for the General Assembly and the Lord High Commissioner – the relationship and influence that you have with the Sovereign and with the State in general. That influence should never be under estimated.

Part II of the Accession Council is one of the first acts that any new Sovereign has to complete. The new Sovereign makes a declaration and takes and subscribes to the Oath

relating to the security of the Church of Scotland by virtue of Article 25 of the Act of Union 1707. The Oath has been taken by every monarch since George I in 1714.

The presence of the Lord High Commissioner and the simple ceremonial around his or her presence, physically manifest in the separate gallery in which the Lord High Commissioner sits, clearly confirms the historical and present division of powers between the Church and State in Scotland. This Church is self-governing and its supreme authority is the General Assembly under Jesus Christ.

This is reinforced annually by the presence and ceremonial of the Lord High Commissioner. The State and the Assembly come together on such occasions in ceremonial activity to celebrate the influence this Assembly has, not only within the Church, but within the wider aspects of Scottish life, and the respect which its views have and are held within Scottish society in general. By the Sovereign and the State.

The ceremonies we carry out in a simple form are not about redundant aspects of Assembly life; they are about placing the Church and this Assembly at the centre point of influence and values within the structures of our wider society.

These ceremonies, often expressed with colour and precision are about the story-telling of our Scottish history, as a Church and as a country, both past and present and into the future. I commend them to you as visible and living examples of how the Church influences the world around it.

Thank you for the kindness and generosity you have shown by listening to me.

Thank you.