

WORSHIP AND MISSION IN THE LOCAL CHURCH SETTING

After serving as a missionary in India for 40 years, Bishop Leslie Newbigin returned to live in England to find it was a different country from that which he had left. England had been the great missionary "sending" country, operating out of the context of Christendom. Upon his return home however, Newbigin observed that England had become a missionary environment. England needed a mission-station church as much as India.

Newbigin's observations can also be applied to New Zealand. Christians in New Zealand are now in a missionary environment.¹ Our congregations are only reaching a very small portion of our population. Estimates as to the number of Kiwis in church on a given Sunday run as low as 4%.² New Zealanders are not angry with or persecuting the church. The church in New Zealand suffers the far greater humiliation of being ignored. Kiwis are largely indifferent to the church and her gospel - Christianity is redundant.

In spite of this, people who have not made a Christian commitment do attend church worship services.³ The occasion might be prompted by crises, season (Easter, Christmas etc.) spiritual search, social and family expectation, passage of life (weddings, funerals, baptisms etc.) or by personal invitation. Therefore, can and should the worship service be an occasion for mission?⁴ Is mission integral or incidental to worship?

On one hand there are those who say that worship and mission are inextricably linked. Advocates of this view understand the worship event to be inseparable from the

evangelistic task of the church. You simply cannot divide the two functions:

*Nowhere does scripture say that seekers do not belong in worship. Nowhere does it say that seekers cannot be moved by observing God's interaction with believers. On the contrary, worship and evangelism are conspicuously linked throughout the Old and New Testaments.*⁵

Biblically there is a good case to be made for "Open Worship". Morgenthaler cites Israel as a worshipping people who were open to the stranger participating in their worship.⁶ While it seems that there is very little Biblical evidence pointing to Israel as a "going" missionary people, their witness on the whole seems to be in their *worship* of God and in God's *evident favour* towards them.⁷

One contemporary form of service in which worship and evangelism come together is the "Seeker Service", a service designed with un-churched people in mind. Popularised by Chicago pastor Bill Hybels, the Seeker Service is designed to eliminate the barriers that the un-churched encounter in many worship services. Barriers are represented by such things as religious language, unexplained ritual, old hymns with unfamiliar words, and vestments. While working to *pull down barriers*, the Seeker Service is also designed to *build bridges*. Familiarity is the name of the game. "The Seven Deadly Sins" become a series of messages on "Breaking Free from the Habits and Hang-ups that are Messing Up Your Life".⁸

In contrast to those who advocate the integration of worship and mission, there are others who say that they must be kept separate. Morgenthaler cites one attitude:

*Seekers can't relate to worship. It's offensive to them. Seekers and worship are like oil and water, they don't mix. Worship is a believers-only activity.*⁹

While this may be the view of some, my experience is that those who resist mixing worship and mission do so, not because of a commitment to exclusivity, or from a lack of openness to the stranger in their midst, or from a wish "to

deny unbelievers access to something that is potentially life-changing."¹⁰ Rather, I suspect most resistance comes from a genuine fear that something good and God-honouring will be lost and other things not good and not God honouring will be incorporated into the church if weight is given to both worship and evangelism.

D. G. Hart, is concerned about the lack of any sense of tradition, substance and truth in much new style worship. He laments the lack of historical continuity in the songs: "Gone are the hymnals that keep the faithful in touch with previous generations of saints." Speaking of mid-week worship planning meetings, he says:

It is virtually impossible to make the case that "Of the Father's Love Begotten" is a better text and tune than "Shine Jesus Shine". In our evangelistic zeal we are looking for programmes that will attract people. We think we have to put honey on the bitter lip of the cup of salvation. It is the story of the wedding of Cana all over again, but this time with a difference. At the crucial moment when the wine failed, we took matters into our own hands and used those five stone jars to mix up a batch of Kool-Aid instead.¹¹

Others are concerned with what they perceive is happening to the church when worship and evangelism are brought together. William Willimon tells how he would have once claimed that *relevance* is the primary purpose of preaching, but that he has now changed his mind:

I have come to believe that it [relevance] is our weakness rather than our strength. In leaning over to speak to the modern world, I fear we may have fallen in.¹²

Willimon asserts that much of value is lost in the translation of the gospel message into the modern culture. Christianity, he claims, is itself a culture and therefore the task of the church is to teach others the language of the faith:

One reason why this is doomed to failure, one reason why it inevitably ends up with our preaching less than the gospel of Jesus Christ, is that Christianity is a culture. So you

*cannot know Christianity by having it translated into some other medium like Marxism, feminism, or the language of self-esteem.*¹³

I suggest that both the above positions are unhelpful. It is not a case of either/or, but both. This has been recognised by some churches who initially emphasised seeker sensitive services:

*The seeker event...wasn't cutting it for some seekers that were coming. They said they were looking for something with a more "spiritual" feel to it.*¹⁴

Spreydon Baptist Church reports something similar. They commenced seeker sensitive services on a Sunday evening and initially they went "light" on praise and worship. Both seekers and Christians expressed a desire for "more worship". They added it and are convinced that seeing Christians worshipping is a powerful witness to seekers.¹⁵

I have no doubt that the church worship service can and should be an occasion for mission. Worship can be acceptable to God, and at the same time be a powerful witness to non-Christians who happen to be present. However, it's important to stress that worship must never be considered a tool for evangelism! We don't worship in order to win the lost. Worship is sincere adoration of God and must be in spirit and truth - in a word, authentic:

*So our question is not how to make worship more appealing....The question is how Christians worship together authentically. If we do, we can be assured that our partners and friends may also experience God in some way in and through our service of worship.*¹⁶

Mission can be facilitated within the context of authentic worship, without compromise. Yet, there are a number of essentials for the mission-station church at worship.

1. The mission-station church is clear about its target.

Someone has said that the church is the only institution that exists for those outside of its membership.

Jesus “came to seek and to save those whom were lost” (Luke 19:10.) The mission-station church will also be seeking the lost.

Lee Stroble identifies four groups within the population; *church-going Christians, non church-going Christians, church-going non-Christians, and non church-going non-Christians.*

Fig. 1.

A Church-going Christians	B Non-Church-going Christians
C Church-going Non-Christians	D Non-Church-going Non-Christians

This is a useful schema for the New Zealand context. The church has always had “church-going Christians” - this is what church is! To speak of “non church-going Christians” may sound like an oxymoron, yet they are a reality. An increasing number of Christians are opting out of “fellowship” because they have had a bad church experience, or they simply do not relate to what happens at church.¹⁷

As stated earlier, non-Christians do attend church. John Clarke cites an English survey showing that among new Christians, for 70% of women and 74% of men, attending a church service was their first point of contact. Most people become Christians *after* they have started attending church.¹⁸ Some “non-church-going non-Christians” may be seekers, but the majority probably aren’t. They are, to be blunt, secular pagans.

These are broad categories and, of course, they are not four generic groups. Within each quadrant there are many diverse “cultures”. Mission-station churches will take seriously their call to reach groups B, C, and D and know who it is within these groups that they are targeting. They

need to be clear about who their congregation is best able to reach for Christ.

Jesus' own ministry focused (though not exclusively) on the "lost sheep of Israel" (Matt. 15:22-28.) He initially sent his disciples to the same target (Matt 10:5-6.) Later, Peter and Paul focused on separate people groups (e.g. Gal 2:7). Some churches, for example Saddleback Community Church, have profiled their target very tightly. Saddleback's target is "Saddleback Sam" and his profile is well known by the membership. (Apparently the Saddleback community is undisturbed by the non-inclusive nature of their targets as used by their pastor, Rick Warren. He says that he "has a file full with characters such as Dallas Doug, Memphis Mike and Atlanta Al.")¹⁹

2. The mission-station church understands the context in which it ministers.

Every church operates within a specific local context and in order for the gospel to be addressed to that situation, the church must understand the particularity of its context.

*You do it here like on any other mission field in the world. Indigenous Christianity engages the population you want to reach. That means using language they understand and adapting to their cultural lifestyles in all the ways you can.*²⁰

Paul practised contextualization. "To the Jews I became a Jew....To those not having the law I became as one not having the law...I have become all things to all people so that by all means I might save some" (1 Cor 9:20-22.) Jesus told his missionary disciples to "eat what was set before them" (Luke 10:8.) Missionaries have always striven to contextualize the gospel within the culture in which they operate. An example of this is the trend to build mosques for new Christians converted from Islam. Here Christ is worshipped in the familiar Islamic patterns of worship.²¹ The mission-station church should be no less

aware of the culture shared by those whom it is trying to reach. New Zealand culture is pagan and pluralistic and therefore general strategies (especially those that emanate from U.S.A.) seldom work: "the mission strategy of each congregation must increasingly be shaped by the values, needs and style of it's context."²²

We assume that missionaries going to another country will treat the culture/s with respect, learn the language, and strive to understand the symbols that are important to the people. As New Zealand becomes increasingly pluralised, learning the language of the culture becomes increasingly necessary.

We need to learn to: "exegete the culture God entrusts to us and to indigenize the faith language, music and style once again."²³ At the very least this will mean attuning our ears to what's happening in our world. Living and participating in the setting in which we minister is imperative. It will also mean engaging at a deep level with that culture. By listening to the culture we also learn (in time) to hear the underlying concerns, meanings and values of the culture.

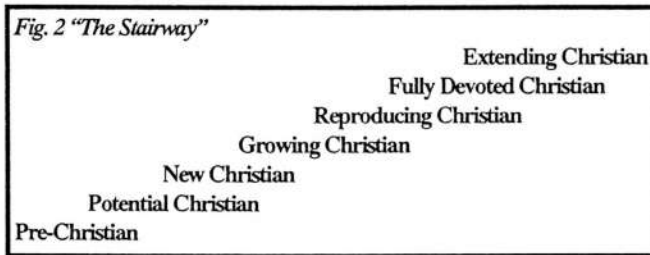
It is important however, not to misunderstand what we mean by "contextualizing". Maggie Dawn in *The Post Evangelical Debate* highlights the difference between being fashionable and being relevant. "Cosmetic" changes or concessions in worship, adopted as "bait", are not only dishonest, but fail to fulfil continuing expectations:

There are two ways of looking at cultural interaction....One is to take...the Gospel... and dress it up in the clothes of our culture. Culture is not so much engaged with, as made use of - it's the spoonful of sugar that makes the medicine go down...If we reduce this to superficial discussion about clothes and guitars, we will completely miss the point. To be relevant...we need... a genuine "placedness" in our cultural situation. We may then simply engage with the issues of spirituality as they face us, and thus contextualize truth in the culture in which we live.²⁴

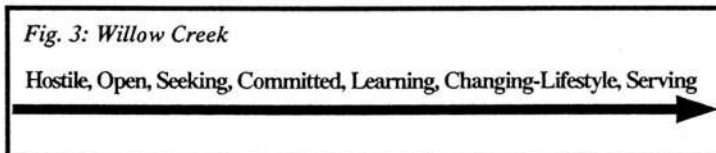
3. The mission-station church sees evangelism as a process.

In the early '70s, James Engel was telling the evangelical world that conversion was more than crisis and evangelism more than calling for a decision. There is a *necessary process* involved in a person coming to faith in Christ. Understanding where a person is in their spiritual journey will enable the church to assist them in that journey.

The idea of process is not new however. John Wesley recognised the order of salvation as having four stages: An awakening, enrolling, justifying, and sanctifying. Today *process* seems to be accepted evangelical wisdom.²⁵ The New Song Church speaks of "The Stairway to Fully Developed Followership" and illustrates it thus:



Willow Creek church has a model which looks like this:



As a consequence of understanding that there is usually a process involved in a person's journey to faith, the mission-station church realises that evangelistic impact is usually cumulative. Few people respond after one message and those who evangelise need to be multi-functional, taking people from where they are at, a step at a time on their journey.

4. The "mission-station" church invites people to attend services.

There seems to be unnecessary debate over whether the church should go to the world or invite the world to come to church. In fact, scripture teaches both "go and tell" and "come and see". When people made enquiry of the Lord he told them, "come and you will see" (John 1:39). Jesus' call to the weary was to "come" (Matt 11:28). Likewise, he offered an invitation to the thirsty to "come and drink" (John 7:37). The kingdom of God, Jesus said, is like a banquet where the servants go out and invite folk in (Luke 14). There is scriptural warrant for inviting people to come to church. Therefore, why do so few Christians invite friends to church? I believe that Don Carson is at least partly right when he says that the reason more people do not invite their friends to church is that they are embarrassed by what goes on there.²⁷ Raymond Fung echoes these sentiments:

*To some Christians, the idea of inviting... friends to worship is highly problematic and could be embarrassing. The worship services in some churches are often so uninviting and clannish, or so unintelligent and unintelligible, - or both - that we'd rather not invite others.*²⁸

If we can get past the hurdles (and we can!) then we discover that people will still come to church. This is especially true for Christmas, Easter, baptisms, and other special events. However, they usually need to be asked! It is essential that the "mission-station" church learn to invite outsiders to worship God with them. The intention is to expose our friends to authentic Christianity from the inside.

5. The mission-station church integrates newcomers.

In Australia (and I suspect the New Zealand experience is closer to Australia than America) a worship service is the first occasion at church for 80% of all attendees and the first occasion at church for all newcomers

(see note 3). Arriving at a church for the first time can be a daunting experience for Christians, let alone those who have not yet come to faith. Before they even hit the cultural barrier, there are often physical barriers to overcome. It's surprising how many church buildings still have difficult access for pushchairs and wheelchairs. Large, closed wooden doors that don't allow the attendee to get an early glimpse of the setting are another barrier. The mission-station church will "put itself in the shoes of the newcomer" and try to see afresh and rectify all the things that might make a visit difficult.

There are a number a small yet significant things that the "mission-station" church can do to make the newcomer welcome. The Australian National Church Life Survey shows that 57% of newcomers to a church were made to feel welcome by other attendees speaking to them and/or inviting them home for a meal. "Interestingly, attendees are more likely to be invited to a meal or welcomed immediately after the service in congregations which are growing than in stable or declining congregations."²⁹ The importance of relationships in attracting newcomers and making them feel welcome cannot be overstated.

Traditionally the church has welcomed those who profess faith. Increasingly, churches are welcoming folk before they find Christ:

We need to move the line of fellowship. People used to be allowed to cross the line into fellowship only after their conversion. Today, we must first invite people into the fellowship so they can process what being in fellowship is all about. " ³⁰

6. The mission-station church is exposed to Biblical teaching/preaching.

The mission-station church takes God's supernatural self-disclosure in the Word seriously. Jesus' own mission was to teach and preach: "I must preach the Kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose"

(Luke 4:43). His commission to the church was to do the same; "Go into all the world and preach..." (Mark 16:15).

Furthermore, the proclamation of the gospel and the believing of it by the unchurched is, according to Paul, the way by which they become members of the Church:

*For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.... For since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save save those who believe.*³¹

Moreover, the church must understand the Biblical record of God's dealing with his people as part of its own story.

Scripture is therefore not a record of isolated and unrelated mighty acts of God, but a sustained and integrally unified narrative. From beginning to end there is a single plan of salvation... He is the leading player in the Biblical drama of redemption. His saving work is its central theme.

and

*This perspective calls for the kind of lively and earnest exposition of a passage that opens the door to its meaningful implementation in the daily experience of the Christian community. The sermon as monologue is then no obstacle to true worship....*³²

Therefore, what we know of God and how he deals with his people is the substance of what we have to offer - the gospel. As a consequence of neglecting this reality:

*The fact that this Word is now so silent, that it has so small a part to play in the church's worship...goes a long way to explaining why God...is also a stranger to the church.*³³

The recovery of Biblical teaching/preaching must begin with a deep appreciation of exactly what preaching is. In the Old and New Testament, and in the theology of the reformers and their heirs, preaching has always been a priority for the health and welfare of the church.³⁴

Preaching is as necessary for the Christian faith as breathing is for the life of man. Without the preaching of

*the gospel there is no faith. For this reason the New Testament does not make any difference in principle between missionary and congregational preaching....*³⁵

The mission-station church addresses from scripture the needs and concerns people have in their lives. The greatest need everyone has is their need of the Saviour, and unless the answer to that need is constantly held before people, addressing other concerns is little more than applying band-aids to life-threatening wounds. We must not, however, neglect to present the Biblical answers to all of life's concerns.

George Hunter speaks of three levels of concern in people's lives; the lower level of natural and material concerns, the middle level of the immanent spiritual realm affecting crops, business, health, career, etc. And the higher level of the transcendent spiritual realm, affecting ultimate issues of purpose.

Hunter suggests that modern Westerners operate within a dualistic framework, the lower level being dealt with at an empirical and scientific level, the upper level being the realm of the spiritual and the middle level is largely left to chance.

*Traditional churches largely confine their focus and themes to the ultimate or higher theological matters, (though prayer for the sick is a widespread exception).*³⁶

It is the middle level issues that are the present concerns of westerners however. And it is precisely at this level that Biblical preaching and teaching needs to aim.

*I suggest that...churches have clear Biblical warrant for ministering within the middle level, and for beginning with the seekers' felt needs and driving questions.*³⁷

7. The mission-station church is a contagious people of faith.

Folklore has it that some things are "easier caught than taught". Christianity can only be "caught" from contagious, credible Christians. The church needs to

provide a climate where worship is observed as a vital reality in the lives of the worshippers.

Stereotypes of what the "typical" Christian is like abound. My guess is that two of the most prevalent characters of the Christian are the old-fashioned, irrelevant, traditionalist (as in the video of "Mr. Bean" singing Hallelujah in a cold cathedral) or the "nutter", (as highlighted in reports of the bizarre activity of the Christian "fringe".) Vibrant congregations engaged in heartfelt worship have the opportunity to kill those stereotypes! The un-churched are able to "sniff out" a phoney! Likewise, a genuine, warm, hospitable and vibrant faith is contagious! "What a delight if the ambience of our gatherings is playful, happy, perhaps even joyful!" ³⁸

8. The mission-station church is relationally strong.

The necessity for strong relational structures is imperative in a mission-station church. In his book *The Emerging Church*.³⁹ Bruce Larson focuses on the importance of relational structures for an effective evangelistic church:

*The Church...ought to be the place in which man begins to find God's answer for him in terms of a deep, loving, meaningful, relationship with significant others in his life.*⁴⁰

When Christ called his disciples and when he sent them out with the great gospel commission, he emphasised the relational aspect of discipleship; "Then he appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach",⁴¹ "Go therefore and make disciples.... and I am with you always".⁴² A vital relationship with Christ and loving relationships between Christians are essential to the witness of the church at worship.

REVIEWS AND EVALUATIONS

If mission can happen within the context of authentic worship, without compromise, then how well is the church

doing in facilitating this? This was the question I had in mind as I ventured out to three different church services. I attended these worship occasions in order to observe and evaluate how they compared with the eight criteria for a mission-station church. The observations that are made simply represent one person's experience on one night. I would be the first to concede that they are not necessarily representative of the congregation and that my opinion is largely subjective. In as much as they did or did not affect me, we can gauge how effective they might be in reaching me. At the end of each review and evaluation I have given the service a grading in each area. One represents poor and five represents excellent.

Service No. 1

When Jesus commanded his disciples to take the gospel "to the ends of the earth", he had Dunedin in mind. Heart of Scottish Presbyterianism, it seems only fitting that the first service I should take in is at a Presbyterian Church. This is a 7 o'clock evening service. The church is built of solid stone block, - it emanates a history. The service speaks of tradition, replete with choir, robes, processions, organ music and a set order of service.

On the night I attend, it is a fine autumn evening. There's no obvious car-park so I park on the street, about 100 metres down the road. While crossing the street to the church building I am looking for an entrance way. How do you get in? There is a large wrought iron and stone fence along the front of the building. The entrance gates are around the corner from the main street, but no signs point the way.

Entering into the foyer, there are two women greeting at the door. One is busy talking to someone, but the other woman gives me a broad smile, an order of service (which includes the music and words to the hymns) and opens the solid wooden doors to the sanctuary. Folk arriving come in at the side and back of the auditorium -

and providing the congregation is not packed to the back, this allows the newcomer to quickly "case out" the place. A quick glance around to get my bearings, and I decide to slip into an empty pew behind where most of the congregation is seated. The other thing that I notice is the first six rows or so are covered with white cloth. The Order of Service tells me that we are participating in a sung communion service.

Everyone is sitting silently and still. The congregation (about 30 adults) appears to be "middle class establishment" and my guess is that the average age tonight would be 50 yrs. The organ is playing.

The service commences with the choir (who have entered in from the back) singing a very beautiful rendition of an American folk hymn. They proceed to the front and take their place in the stalls.

The service follows a set order: Call to worship, Approach, Listening, Response, Communion, Dispersing. Within the structure ample space is given to hymn singing, prayers, responsive readings, confession and pardon, reading of scripture, sermon, quiet, offerings, and commitment to continued service.

Both in the welcome and invitation to participate in worship, I am assured of welcome and acceptance, regardless of denominational allegiance. An invitation to a cup of tea after the service is offered.

There is not a great deal of participation, and what there is is predominantly male. Those who lead worship, read scripture, speak the sermon, and head the procession are all male. The choir appears to have an equal mix of male and female and the servers at communion are a carefully balanced group of six men and six women.

The minister is personable and articulate. The reader of scripture is exceptional; making good use of pauses, giving emphasis in the right places and projecting just enough personality into the direct speech to make it "come alive". Clearly he has put time into preparation. The

organist and choir are well polished.

Being a stranger to a communion service in this denomination, I don't know what to expect. However, I am able to follow the service without "getting lost".

The sermon is relatively short (about 10 - 15 minutes) and centred on a passage of scripture that the minister thinks is "not a good text", because of its depiction of a woman's role. He brings a particular reading to the text and applies it to men and women.

The service concludes with the threefold amen. The minister goes out a door at the side and the front of the church. The twelve servers on communion follow him. The choir proceeds out the back. This leaves maybe twenty people sitting alone in the auditorium. Once the Final Voluntary is over, I sit for a short time. One or two folk move to talk to one another and I start out. The minister is now at the door. We shake hands, smile at each other, and I slip out into the warm autumn air.

Analysis of the mission content of this service.

As already mentioned, the congregation on this night seemed primarily upper middle-class, white, and an average age of about 50 years. If this is the church's target, then they are probably pitching their service at about the right level.

The church building is right on the edge of the university and one might presume that this context would be an obvious "mission field". In this case there was little in the service that spoke to the immediate context of the church. The liturgy, language, choir, and vestments spoke of an unchanging church that placed a premium on tradition and denominational form. There appeared to be no university students present on this night.

The service did not draw any line as to who was "in" and "out". The person in process would have been comfortable in the service. In fact, a very open invitation was given to people to participate in communion. One

gained the impression that this church recognised the journey of faith principle.

Whilst an open invitation was given to the congregation to meet for coffee after the service, I found it difficult to take up the offer. A large number of the congregation had disappeared out the back with the minister, and although I shook his hand while leaving, there was a certain awkwardness about it. I'd suggest that the "tradition" of the minister shaking hands at the back be either replaced by, or supplemented by one or two greeters that could kindly and unobtrusively invite the newcomer to supper.

At a very basic level, I didn't feel that this congregation was working to integrate newcomers. Nobody spoke to me after the service and it seemed that all "key" people in the church had scurried out the back. Because there was no chance to "touch base" with the people, I didn't have the opportunity to judge how contagious and relational their faith might be.

I was aware of an approach to scripture that was far less than it should be in a mission-station church. After the reading of scripture one little word was added before the customary "This is the word of God". The word was "In". The minister announced the sermon as that time "when one person has the opportunity to say what they think the word of God might be saying". And the sermon itself was based on a text that we were told was "not a good text. Perhaps it was good for the people at the time it was written, but it is not good for us". The whole approach to scripture left one with the feeling that this church was "hedging its bets". I appreciate that not all visitors may be so alert to the treatment of scripture. However, since it is through "the foolishness of the message proclaimed" that people are converted, I believe this church is making too many concessions at this point.

Target	2
Context	1
Process	5
Invites	1
Integration	1
Biblical truth	1
Contagious	1
Relational	1

Service No. 2

This "alternative" group styles itself as "a fresh attempt at what Christians call worship". The venue is a hired lounge in the heart of Otago University campus and opens 8 pm once a month.

I arrive late (wandering in about 8.15 pm after having turned up earlier at 7 pm. Silly me, - I should have realised this is not church as usual!) Being late isn't a problem as the first twenty minutes or so are given over to getting settled in. The lounge is warm - an open fire is blazing, lights are dimmed, music is playing. There are about thirty people here tonight, mostly in their twenties and thirties. My guess is that there are a number of students. Folk are seated in lounge chairs or on the floor, in small groups. Coffee tables are scattered around with the candles on them providing some of the light.

I take a spare chair at one of the tables and the people there nod and smile. Pink sheets giving information about the group and tonight's programme are scattered on the table. Good - reading the pink sheet gives me something to do.

I'm feeling a bit self-conscious, but it's not too long before a woman introduces herself and we exchange pleasantries. It's 8.20 and the louder music begins to play. Slides are projected on to a wall. Someone says hello, explains what is expected to happen tonight and invites us all to participate *if we feel so inclined*.

Everything's very laid-back.

No pressure.

Relax.

Feel free...whatever takes your fancy.

Between the various sound tracks, people do participate. A guy plays a violin, another tells a story. A woman reads a poem, a couple take turns to read scripture. Someone else tells us what his year has been like. The theme tonight has to do with *journey, roads, travel*.

Slides continue to be shown and tracks are played over what's happening.

Multi-layered.

To wrap up we are invited to take one of the cut-out foot prints that lie on the floor and write something about our own journey on it. A poem, message - whatever. It's not a trick. We're told that no one will be asked to show what they've done.

10 minutes for this, and we are invited to get another cup of coffee or help ourselves to some just-served mulled wine. Another woman introduces herself and we have a pleasant 5 minute conversation. She tells me something about her own journey.

Someone finishes off with a few necessary announcements, an invitation to contribute financially by putting something in the watering can - and then introduces the blessing. A Celtic benediction track. There's a half hour or so left to catch up with one another, or just sit

- whatever takes your fancy.

No pressure.

Analysis of the mission content of this service.

My understanding is that this congregation is aiming at the university student population and people that have given up on or are struggling with the traditional church scene. Everything that they have arranged, from the venue through to the serving of mulled wine, seems to have been done with this target in mind.

They are also doing a good job at contextualization.

The music, the casual dress, the imagery, the poetry and songs - all are surface indicators of a cultural understanding that runs at a deeper level. I get the impression that the values of the target culture are in fact shared with those who organise the programme. They are connected with the language, customs and values of the people they hope to reach. There is no evident leadership - everything appears very democratic. There is no "front" - action might commence from in front or behind you. Women play as prominent a role as men. The laid-back, no pressure atmosphere allows anonymity or involvement.

I'm equally convinced that this congregation accepts the idea of conversion as process. The evening that I was there just happened to focus the theme of journey, and various contributors shared how their own spiritual pilgrimage is in process.

I can't comment on how effective the congregation is at inviting others into the group. My guess is that those who are invited along will come because of existing relationships and networks, rather than thorough advertising.

They are certainly inclusive. On the night that I attended effort was made by at least two people to talk with me. I would have shared a poem if I hadn't hesitated and lost the moment - but at least this indicates that the integrating factor is strong!

There was no sermon, although there were scriptural readings, and biblical text displayed. Writing of her experience of alternative worship, Maggie Dawn says:

*Noticeable was the absence of a sermon or homily - although what I learned from these programmes stayed with me much longer than from the homily style teaching.*⁴³

This was church, and not just a softener for the "real thing" to be delivered later. Therefore I assumed that the lack of Biblical teaching ministry was typical. If this is the case, I believe it will be detrimental to the evangelistic and spiritual growth goals of the church.

Without doubt, this group is contagious and strong relationally. If they could encourage the males to be a little less self contained and a little more friendly then that would be even better.

Target	5
Context	5
Process	5
Invites	3
Integration	4
Biblical truth	1
Contagious	4
Relational	4

Service No. 3

Even before I got out of my car I hear the hand-clapping, foot-stomping beat of the chorus:

We're gonna take the land,

We're gonna take the land,

We're gonna take the land for Jesus!

Revival's in the air at this Pentecostal church. As I approach the entrance there are a number of young people "fooling around" outside. Dressed in multi-layered tees' and sweats' and wearing back-to-front baseball hats and beanies, they're obviously not quite ready to come in yet. The place has a super-casual air about it. People are coming and going from the main auditorium. Some are milling around the coffee pots and water cooler at the back (there's even a Coke dispenser.)

I edge in the back and slink into a seat. I'm trying hard not to be noticed, and seem to have achieved my objective.

A young woman is leading a rousing song session and the whole auditorium is swaying, pulsating to the beat:

We're gonna take the land,

We're gonna take the land,

We're gonna take the land for Jesus!

What power is driving them? They just keeps going and going and going....

Eventually, when we do finish, there's hooting and hollering and applause - lots of applause. Then the beat picks up again and we're into another round:

We're gonna take the land,

We're gonna take the land,

We're gonna take the land for Jesus!

This place doesn't know luke-warm. You're either drinking coke and chatting about yesterday's footy match, or you're one hundred percent into the worship.

There's a guy near me, eyes closed, thrusting his hands up and down, flicking his fingers and bending back and forward. I pretend to ignore him, but keep shooting glances out of the corner of my eye. If they had a TAB at the back I'd have bet that he'd soon loose balance and fall over. I'd have lost my money. There's another young man crouched down low in a foetal position - weeping. Nobody seems to mind or be alarmed, this is obviously regular fare.

A male vocalist begins to sing:

Not power

nor glory

no titles

or praise...

... we seek your face.

Another song's playing now:

Holy....

Holy....

Holy....

Holy.... Is.... The.... Lord....

See.... The.... Com....ing of.... the King.....

Holy.... Is.... The.... Lord....

We're singing it over and over and over again. When the song leader signals that this is the finale, the percussions keep rolling, the keyboard rises and falls on a series of chord sequences and again everyone keeps clapping and shouting:

Praise you Jesus!

Hallelujah!

Thank you Lord...

This wave of exuberant praise falls away and the pastor comes forward. Again, cheering and clapping - even a few wolf whistles! I'm reminded of the earlier song:

Not power

nor glory

no titles

or praise...

...we seek your face.

The pastor is very personable - matey.

"Are you happy tonight?"

"Yes!"

Are you glad to be here tonight?"

"Yes!"

"Well - we're gonna do something about that!"

Another round of applause! This man doesn't need notes, he's a natural with a crowd. The pastor keeps chatting, telling us of what God's going to do in this place. Several times he interrupts his patter to remind us that revival's just around the corner.

*It won't be long before we're going to have to buy that
factory next door and bash a hole in the concrete wall in
order to accommodate the overflow.*

More applause.

It transpires that the pastor is not preaching tonight.

*I thought brother Sam was preaching, and he thought I was,
so I think we'll just invite people forward for prayer and
ministry - come and get a special touch from the Lord.*

Nobody seems to mind. On the contrary, people start to pour forward and soon the front of the auditorium is packed with people waiting for that "special touch from the Lord". The pastor calls a number of helpers out to pray with the people and as the music continues to play the prayers get to work.

People in the auditorium start to chat to one another and mingle around. A few remain quiet with their heads bowed. A young man approaches me and thrusts out his hand. He pumps my arm enthusiastically.

"Giddy, are you new here?"

"Well, yes I am..."

"Do ya live locally?"

"Yes, yes I do..."

"Go to church?"

"Yes, yes I do"

"What one?"

"Ah, Baptist actually..."

"O yea - Baptist. Hey, if you're looking for a real on fire church then you've found it!"

I thank him for the information and we stand looking at one another for a few seconds. It's obvious we've run out of conversation. He looks around, spots someone else and is soon enthusiastically pumping their arm.

Analysis of the mission content of this service.

Now here's a church that is hard to know what to do with. It does so much right and so much wrong!

I don't know whether this church deliberately targets a particular people group. Perhaps it's more a case of "birds of a feather flock together". My guess is that the bulk of this congregation are a lower socio-economic grouping and that vigorous intellectual pursuit is not high on the agenda.

Having a good time is high on the agenda and thus the people who come to this church mean to have a good time. Church is a party!

Certainly at first glance they do very well at contextualizing their worship occasion. The laid back casual atmosphere, coke machine, contemporary instruments and sound, the "user friendly" pastor, and clapping and cheering all seem to be perfectly natural activities (if perhaps a little hyped up). I can see the appeal this has to the large number of teens and twenties present. There's nothing happening here that mightn't happen at a concert.

I hesitate to give the service full marks for contextualization however. Along-side the familiar, there are also things happening that, to the outsider, would seem quite bizarre. The swaying, rocking worshipper, the sobbing lad in the foetal position, the intermittent shouts of "Hallelujah", and people falling over on the floor when being prayed for make this happening uniquely religious.

My overwhelming impression on this night is that the idea of process is simply not part of this church's thinking. You are either "in" or "out". Even the conversation that I had at the end of the service left me with a sense that I wasn't "on fire".

My guess is that this church has no qualms about inviting anybody and everybody to their service. The people are obviously proud of the church and suffer no embarrassment about what happens there. There is an infectious enthusiasm about the people that spills over. This in turn would help any newcomer to integrate well with the congregation (given that these were "your type of people".) One gets the impression that if you were lonely, then you needn't be so for long.

On the night that I attended, there was little that highlighted this congregation as theologically Christian. The songs were about "God", victory, and "seeing his face", but little Christian content, if any, was heard. The issue was compounded by the fact that nobody spoke that evening. Whilst I'm sure Biblical content would get strong verbal affirmation, I am left to wonder whether in practice it really matters.

Enthusiastic, contagious singing and strong relationships seem to be top of the agenda. From the easy way people mix and talk, to the relational chat style of the song leader and pastor, it seems that here the medium is the message.

Target	4
Context	3

Process	1
Invites	5
Integration	4
Biblical truth	1
Contagious	4
Relational	4

SUMMARY

Out of a possible score of 40 the first congregation attains 13, the second 31, and the third 26.

Fig. 4: Grading Summary

Service No. 1	= 13
Service No. 2	= 31
Service No. 3	= 26

Out of a possible combined score of 15 in each category, Target and Process have the highest aggregate (11 each,) followed by Contextualization, Invitation, Contagious and Relationship (9 each). The big casualty in all services was Biblical truth, scoring a total of 3 out of a possible 15!

Fig. 5: Totals out of Possible 15

Target	= 11
Context	= 9
Process	= 11
Invites	= 9
Integration	= 9
Biblical Truth	= 3
Contagious	= 9
Relational	= 9

Sharpening the dull blades.

The eight mission factors that I have outlined for worship are evangelistic cutting blades for the church. The blades are not as sharp as they once were, some are downright blunt. We desperately need to sharpen the blades, and the context of a worshipping community is one area where the church should and can cut it.

Fred Brunell

NOTES:

1. Space does not allow for us to put the case, but Newbigin's books, such as *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* and *Foolishness to the Greeks* have been seminal in producing a flood of literature in support of the thesis. Moreover, of recent times there has been a stable of books and articles discussing the future of the church in a post-modern age. Most of these build on and support the case.
2. Figure cited at Church and State symposium at Otago University, August 1997.
3. *The Australian National Church Life Survey* showed that 67% of first occasion church attendees attended a worship service by invitation, 10% attended baptism /wedding /funeral, 6% Christmas/Easter. I am making the assumption that there is not too much differences in the percentages between New Zealand and Australia. Most certainly the Australian experience would be closer to New Zealand's than the American experience. One of the difficulties in transposing American church attendance expectations into a New Zealand context is the enormous difference in cultural acceptance of the church. Figures in New Zealand have been quoted at 4.8% Sunday attendance. In the USA some states are reaching 60%.
4. Mission is used in this essay as synonymous with evangelism. It is recognised that mission is wider than evangelism, incorporating other purposes of the church - e.g. social and justice concerns etc.
5. S. Morgenthaler, *Worship and Evangelism: Inviting unbelievers into the Presence of God*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1995, p 81.
6. A good place to begin a profitable Bible study on the subject would be with these texts; Deuteronomy 26:10-11. Numbers 15:14. 2 Samuel 22:50. Psalms 18:49. 57:9-10. 67:5-7. 86:9. 96:3-10. Isaiah 66:19, Acts 10:34-35. Rom 15:9-11. 1 Corinthians 14:23-25. Revelation 15:4.

7. Morgenthaler p 84.
8. J. Clarke, *Evangelism that Really Works*. SPCK, London, 1995, p 45.
9. Morgenthaler p 84.
10. D.G. Hart, "Post Evangelical Worship," *Calvin Theological Journal*, No. 30. 1995.
11. Ibid.
12. W.H. Willimon. "This Culture is Overrated," *Leadership*, Winter 1997.
13. Ibid.
14. Morgenthaler p 78
15. Reported to me by an attendee at Spreydon's 1997 Church Leadership Conference.
16. Raymond Fung, *The Isaiah Vision. An Ecumenical Strategy for Congregational Evangelism*, WCC Publications, Geneva. 1992, p 14.
17. A comprehensive analysis of this trend within the New Zealand context has been completed by Alan Jamieson in *Churchless Faith...Church Outside the Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches of New Zealand*, unpublished PH.D. thesis, University of Canterbury, 1998. Books such as *Exit Interviews*, *Churches that Abuse* and *Recovering from Churches that Abuse* further bear witness to this problem.
18. Clarke p 45.
19. R. Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1995, p 171.
20. George Hunter III quoting Tom Wolf, leader of Church on Brady - *Church for the Un-churched*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1996, p 55.
21. Reported in *Mission Frontiers: The Bulletin for the United States Centre for World Mission*, Vol. 19, July - October 1997.
22. Alan J. Roxburgh. *Reaching a New Generation. Strategies for Tomorrow's Church*, Inter Varsity Press, Illinois, 1993, p 65.
23. Hunter, *Church for the Un-churched*, p 67.
24. M. Dawn (ed), *The Post Evangelical Debate*, Triangle, Great Britain. 1997, pp 44-45.
25. See J. Drane, *Evangelism For a New Age*, Marshall Pickering, London. 1994, pp 201ff; G. Hunter, *How to Reach Secular People*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1992, p 76.
26. These two diagrams have been simplified from models shown in Hunter, *Church for the Un-churched*, pp 154ff.
27. Don Carson, *The Gagging of God. Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, Inter Varsity Press, p 306.
28. Fung p 13.
29. Peter Kalder, John Bellamy, Sandra Moore, *Mission Under the Microscope: Keys to effective and sustainable mission*, Openbook, Australia. 1995.
30. Ibid.
31. 1 Cor 1:17-21

32. G.J. Spikeman, *Reformational Theology, A New Paradigm for doing Dogmatics*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1992, pp 128, 454.
33. D.F. Wells. *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*, IVP, 1994, p 149.
34. For an excellent and full treatment of this position see Klaas Runia's *The Sermon Under Attack*, Paternoster Press, Australia, 1983.
35. Runia p 24.
36. Hunter, *Church for the Un-churched*, p 160.
37. Ibid.
38. D.J. Lawson, *Hungering for the Future. Whispers of Hope for a Church in Mission*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1997.
39. B. Larson, *The emerging Church*, Word, Waco, 1976, p 78.
40. Ibid p 94.
41. Mark 3:14.

Announcing.....

Snapshot 99

The Historical Society wants to gather a photographic record of N.Z. Baptist Churches as the turn of the Millennium approaches.

For every congregation we want a photograph of

1. your place of worship, inside and out.
2. any other church buildings
3. your ministry team
4. anything else of importance

It is essential that all photographs are labelled and dated. A record will be made available on CD.

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