

Worship: Revealing what we really believe

ABSTRACT

This is the second of two articles that investigate the theology and practice of New Zealand Baptist worship from 1880-2001. This article examines the period from 1960. An underlying theme of the article is the relationship between worship and evangelism, the writer putting forward the case for giving primary position to worship, in the expectation that this will indirectly improve evangelistic endeavours. The charismatic movement which began in the 1960's brought much new life to Baptist worship, but also created controversy and initiated a renewed discussion about Baptist identity and Baptist worship practices. Some of this discussion is considered. A description of the practice of worship in this period is offered, based on personal interviews and church surveys. In the final section the practice and theology of New Zealand Baptist worship and its impact on evangelism is reflected on by considering notions of divine encounter.

Introduction

This essay is motivated by a concern that I have long had that we as Baptists in New Zealand have had a self defeating agenda in making mission/evangelism our number one priority. As long as Baptists have been in New Zealand we have failed to make any significant increase to the overall percent-

age of New Zealanders who identify with our movement. For all our evangelistic endeavour we have barely managed to keep the status quo. Perhaps some will take comfort from the fact that at least we are not in decline to the extent that some of the mainstream churches are – however that really is cold comfort. I wish to add my voice to a small but significant minority of Baptists who for more than one hundred years have argued that we have put the cart before the horse. By paying so much attention to evangelism for the sake of winning souls and yet neglecting worship through which those souls might be nurtured, exhorted and formed into robust disciple-making saints, we have kept the front door of the church open and forgotten to close the back door. In this essay I will reiterate the call voiced by many others with increasing frequency in the later part of the twentieth century. I will note what Baptists said about worship, what Baptists did as they gathered for worship and begin to explore the theological implications of our recent praxis.

What was said about worship?

During the last four decades of the millennium an increasingly lively discussion on the style and content of worship emerges in the writings of New Zealand Baptists. I am particularly interested in those voices which advocated a more considered approach to worship, seeing worship as an end in itself and not just a means to convert the lost. It is worth noting how several of these writers look to the past for insight into what it means to worship as Baptists or more generally as Free Church congregations. Some of the writers examine the tradition critically, wanting to retain the fundamental principles of non-conformity but questioning the absolute rejection of 'liturgical' styles of worship. Several probationary ministers ad-

dress the topic of worship in their theses quite directly. The charismatic renewal in the church is central to much of the discussion in these dissertations. Likewise, the *N.Z. Baptist* contributes to a lively discussion with some warmly endorsing and advocating the new freedom in the Spirit,¹ some warning of the dire consequences of leaning toward Pentecostalism,² others calling for a balance. The theological content of some of the new songs is a concern raised on several occasions. Some writers address the relationship between worship and evangelism, and an increasing awareness of the need to consider children's needs in worship is raised late in this period. There is an escalating reportage of dissatisfaction among laity and clergy about worship services, with complaints being various and at times contradictory.

The charismatic movement

It is perhaps the charismatic movement that has the single biggest impact on Baptist church life in this period. The Spirit breathes new life into the church but the change catalysed a crisis concerning Baptist identity. In light of all the change what does it mean to be a Baptist? Theology is often forged in the furnace of controversy. During times of change, the church needs to rethink what it believes and how it acts. It may be for this reason that in this period we also see a number of articles published which restate the founding principles of Baptist life.

At the beginning of the sixties Baptist worship was reasonably uniform; you could visit any Baptist church in the country and expect a similar type of service, - 'the hymn

1. For example F.D. Creighton 'Rise with the Tide.' *NZB*, December 1978, 9,12.

2. For example G.H. Morling, 'Pentecostalism.' *NZB*, June 1961, 142-4.

sandwich'.³ By the end of this period there is a significant diversity among the churches; all have been affected by the charismatic movement, but not all in the same way.

In terms of what was officially believed, the New Zealand Baptist churches were well suited to the charismatic renewal, in that they were theologically conservative, held to the spiritual competence of all believers⁴ and had an informal style of worship. The egalitarian ethos of Baptist church life fitted easily with the 'body life' ministry that was emphasised in the charismatic renewal. The gifts of the Spirit were given to all believers for the benefit of the body. The informality of Baptist church services was noted by many of the critics of Baptist worship patterns as a particular weakness. The informality did not mean that Baptist services were devoid of form. On the contrary there was, by now, a well-established standard pattern. It was the informal attitude, the lack of quiet reverence and respect for the task of worship, which irked the critics. The charismatic renewal brought new life to worship, but it did not address the underlying issues expressed by the critics of Baptist worship, charismatic, and traditional.

In 1963 Reverend J. W. McNair presented his probationary thesis 'Corporate Worship in the New Testament'.⁵ In it he surveyed Acts and Corinthians to discern the 'distinctive New Testament emphasis.' Herein lies the beginning of a wider search for identity as the patterns of worship begin to change

3. See Roy Bullen's article on his retirement as he looks back on the effects of the charismatic movement. Roy Bullen, 'And Finally'. *NZB* (December 1989): 2.

4. Or 'the priesthood of all believers'.

5. J.W. McNair, 'Corporate Worship in the New Testament'. Unpublished Probationary Thesis, New Zealand Baptist Theological College, 1963.

in some churches. McNair concludes that the New Testament is far more concerned with principles than styles. He chose two principles for closer examination, namely, 'Unity' (which he determined is 'a central theme') and 'body life ministry'. Apparently there was a fear that the renewal movement might lead to division and that an overemphasis on spiritual gifts coupled with an already dominant individualistic piety of the Free Church might lead to self-centred worship. 'Selfishness and the gratification of personal taste' is perceived as the 'greatest weakness in our corporate worship.'⁶

In the same year (1963) R. L. Coup wrote a thesis entitled 'The Worship of God', in which he argues for 'all things to be done decently and in order'. This apparently was not the norm in his experience of Baptist worship, which is 'informal', 'homely', 'irreverent' and often 'inadequately prepared.'⁷ In a section under 'orders of service', a morning and evening order of service is offered. In what is implied to be in contrast to his experience of Baptist worship, Coup advocated: the occasional use of creeds, some form of lectionary, use of the Christian year and a variety of forms of prayer including free prayer, prepared prayer and 'liturgical' prayer. On the subject of 'Public Prayer and Church Praise', Coup comments,

One of the problems concerning 'Free Church' worship is the confusion of private prayer being made public prayer. Worship is a united act. It is not the sum total of a number of concurrent individual acts of devotion.⁸

6. McNair 9

7. R.L. Coup, 'The Worship of God'. Unpublished Probationary Thesis, New Zealand Baptist Theological College, 1963. 3.

8. Coup 13.

Coup's affirmation that prayer must be directed to God, not the congregation indicates that this was not always the case. Quoting an uncited source Coup writes,

Let us be true to our tradition of freedom of worship, insisting on the truth that where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. But true liberty in this realm is freedom to use, as well as not to use. Have we become enslaved all over again, conformists to our non-conformity?⁹

Coup argued for weekly observance of communion as a central aspect of worship to which believers and members only are welcomed. Coup did not address the charismatic renewal directly, as in 1963 its influence was just beginning to be felt. His insights are important, as they give some clues as to the style of worship in the period just prior to the renewal and to one stream of criticism that was expressed. Importantly we can see that even prior to the full manifestation of charismatic renewal there were voices being raised that called for more emphasis on worship for worship's sake.

The continuing search for a Baptist theology of worship

In 1965, John North's thesis was entitled simply 'Christian Worship'.¹⁰ North is motivated out of concern for the church, when he writes, 'At the present time there is much criticism of Christian worship'. In his thesis he looked back critically to the reformation routes of the Free Churches, to establish what he felt to be the need for an identity for modern Baptist worship.

9. Coup 14.

10. John North, 'Christian Worship'. Unpublished Probationary Thesis, New Zealand Baptist Theological College, 1965.

The Baptists of the seventeenth century were the extreme section of the Puritans and reacted violently against anything associated with Catholic or Anglican worship. Stressing the work of the Holy Spirit in worship they rejected the past in toto and would have nothing to do with traditional prayers. Many felt music to be dangerously worldly as well as other things which had aesthetic appeal.

The Bible, read in long passages, or expounded often at great length became the dominating feature of Baptist worship. Prayer was extempore and for a time there was freedom for those in the congregation to lead in prayer. Gradually it became the custom for the minister to lead and the practice of long prayers grew up. These prayers were often homiletic in nature and did not leave room for active congregational participation by responses.¹¹

North pointed out that the 'freedom' of the Free Churches has the potential to limit expression of worship just as much as the prayer book.

Baptist worship is called free, yet may be as rigid as any set order of service laid down by a church council. The prayer may be not be read but may be as stereotyped in subject manner and words as any prayer book.¹²

This period of increased 'freedom' in worship ran the risk of actually being an illusion, whereby one restrictive form would be supplanted by another restrictive form with an even less adequate content. Recognising the potential for impotent worship, North recommends that Baptist pastors need training in liturgy.

The sermon in many ways is the easiest part of worship to prepare for. It is much more difficult to lead in prayer

11. North 14.

12. North 15.

without repeating oneself week after week and virtually forming one's own private liturgy. I believe we need far more instruction in the task of leading worship during theological training. Perhaps an inadequate view of worship led to the notion that no liturgical training was necessary and now our worship is still poorer. We don't expect that men are able to preach good sermons without any training. Yet we seem to expect that anyone can lead worship without training. We cannot expect the worship in our churches to improve if the minister cannot give a lead.¹³

Attitudes, theology and emphasis needed to be changed according to North. He noted that the attitude of 'getting something out of worship' is common among Baptists. Prayers of supplication are at length while 'praise and adoration is often lacking.' He contends that good worship derives from good theology and feeds back into good theology. North perceived a need for a greater view of God that worshippers might worship him with holy awe. He argued for a clear distinction to be made between worship and evangelism and wanted to make communion more central, on an equal footing with the sermon.¹⁴

The sermon for Baptists has become the centre and climax of worship. This can be dangerous if it leads to the view that all before is merely 'preliminaries'. Yet at the moment, if the sermon is not the climax, it is most certainly an anticlimax.¹⁵

The sermon must be viewed as part of the worship. North justifies the use of written prayers seeing them as analogous to singing written hymns.

13. North 16.

14. North 19,20.

15. North 22.

Throughout the seventies the theme of charismatic renewal dominated the discussion on worship. Whereas initially there were many voices critical of the movement by this stage we see some notable public figures warmly recommending the renewal and the change in worship patterns. Reverend F. D. Creighton in the Union Sermon of 1978, 'Rise with the Tide', endorsed the charismatic renewal. Worship 'needs to be free and spontaneous, less formal' and again 'we are being taught today a new depth of spontaneous worship by the Spirit.'

Dealing with one aspect of worship in particular, Reverend Geoff Pound in the May 1987 *Baptist* published an article on 'Public Prayer', in which he criticised the current state of public prayer in the churches. '[T]he ministry of public prayer is one of the weakest aspects in churches of the free worship tradition', he lamented, and called for thought out and prepared prayers. Quoting Charles Spurgeon, who was renowned for his excellent preaching and praying, Pound admitted 'I would sooner yield up the sermon than the prayers.'¹⁶

Worship and Evangelism

As one might expect counterpoints were made. Alan Bartlett of the Howick Baptist Church wrote in the April *Baptist* of 1986, that the 'emphasis on worship blunts our evangelism'.

The cutting edge of the church is evangelism. Unless we place a priority on evangelism, then we are never really going to meet the needs of the 98% [*sic*] of New Zealanders who don't darken the door of a church.¹⁷

16. Geoffrey Pound, 'Public Prayer: Off-the-Cuff Is Not Good Enough.' *NZB* (June 1987): 16.

17. Alan Bartlett, 'Evangelism.' *NZB* (April 1986): 7.

New attempts to make worship more evangelistic are reported on. One of the most radical at the time was the 'Sunday at Seven' service at Otumoetai Baptist Church, where a seeker style service was tried which was described as 'entertainment with a message'.¹⁸ The strong Baptist emphasis on evangelism has often persuaded churches to adapt their worship service to meet the goal of evangelism.¹⁹ At this stage there were a range of opinions as to how effective the evangelistic worship service was for the goal of evangelism. Was there a better way to do evangelism? Were there dangers in confusing evangelism and worship? Typically these questions were not answered theoretically. Rather, innovations were tried and then, maybe, evaluated.

Diverse expressions emerge and criticism increases

Two probationary theses are worthy of mention at this point, the first because it again gives voice to the age old concern that the reformers went too far in reforming worship and the second because it is indicative of a new style of liturgy called 'praise and worship'. Mark Pierson in *Play it Again Sam*²⁰ explored the importance of ritual in the formation of Christian faith.

Every congregation of God's people needs the opportunity to express its faith and identity through meaningful rituals and celebrations. Baptists are generally poor in their understanding of their roots and of the events that make possible their existence in the branch of the church to which

18. Phil Smith, 'New Style Sunday at 7.' *NZB* (November 1988): 3.

19. A good example of this is the Sunday night gospel service which prevailed in many Baptist churches in the mid part of the century.

20. Mark Pierson, 'Play It Again Sam', Unpublished Probationary Thesis, New Zealand Baptist Theological College, 1983.

they belong. There is room here for catechesis through ritual and celebration. We need to 'play it again ...and again and again,... ritual is the expression through myth, symbol and action of the faith and faith activities of individuals and communities, now and through history'.²¹

Significantly Pierson only gave minor attention to his criticism of Baptist worship. He gives a lot of room to recommending resources and practical ways that Baptists might enhance their worship in ways that are consistent with their established values, yet which draw on the rich variety of tradition within other denominations. Pierson's work and subsequent ministry has paved the way for many people to explore wider expression of worship within the Baptist framework of Free Church worship.

Stewart Hannah's monograph on 'Praise and Worship' points to the extent of change in worship patterns in some Baptist churches. Writing from a charismatic perspective, Hannah gives a Bible study on 'praise and worship', exploring the meaning of Hebrew and Greek words related to the subject of worship. It is interesting that he separated the two terms 'praise' and 'worship' at a time when praise and worship were often seen as separate parts of the service. It was common in churches that were charismatic in leaning to have a bracket of praise songs before the children's talk and a bracket of worship songs after the children were dismissed. Hannah's thesis also notes the move toward a managed style of worship where the worship leader controlled the 'show' from up front. It is noteworthy that there is no mention of things such as pastoral prayer, intercession, call to worship, invocation, confession or communion. Hannah's *ordo* revolved around lots of singing,

21. Pierson, quoting Sandra De Gidio, *Sharing Faith in the Family* (no further reference available).

with some room for creative ministry such as dance and drama and the use of spiritual gifts such as tongues and prophecy. Sermons still played a major part; they were typically just as long but the services were now getting to be upwards of ninety minutes in length so the sermon was reduced in significance by proportionality.

When Roy Bullen retired as the editor of the *Baptist* in 1989 he reflected on the changes he had witnessed as a result of the charismatic movement:

We have moved from the 'hymn sandwich' i.e., four hymns, two readings, two prayers and a sermon. What we used to call the 'shorts and the feature film' has now been reversed. Now the 'shorts' or 'preliminaries' seem to have taken centre stage and the visiting preacher finds himself called onto the stage 90 minutes after the opening.²²

Six months later, when Bullen was again the acting editor he wrote.

The glorious freedom in the worship that burst upon us in the 70's and 80's seems to have solidified into a ritual again in the 1990's. ... I find a general pattern of dissatisfaction over worship patterns... with no common thread to the complaints.²³

As the nineties progressed, the general dissatisfaction began to be expressed more particularly. Some letters to the editor expressed disquiet at the suspect theological content of the modern choruses, while respondents noted that many of the old hymns were also suspect on the same grounds. Reverend Arthur Metcalfe and Reverend Brian Smith (then Principal of Carey Baptist College) put on record their concern about the

22. Bullen, *And Finally*. 16.

23. R. Bullen, Editorial. *NZB* (July 1990): 2.

content of modern worship songs each citing examples of poor theology in popular songs. Metcalfe wrote 'the powerful thing about singing is that people can get a lot of teaching through songs. And if it's false teaching it's hard to eradicate.'²⁴ Smith contended that many modern songs are generic, that is, they could be sung to any deity.²⁵ He noted that some songs teach salvation by works and/or promote 'my' theology, that is: they portray a god whose primary purpose is to meet 'my' needs. The words we sing are important for 'they shape us', claimed Smith, and worshippers are being 'short-changed'; we are forming ourselves into distorted Christians. Several letters followed Smith's article, in the August and September *Baptist*, some of which supported his position and some which gave testimony to the positive impact of modern songs and worship styles.

It began to concern some that Baptist worship services were not suitable for children. In September of 1995 Reverend Dianne Bollen published an article in the *Baptist* entitled 'Worship Family Style'.²⁶ In this article and in a follow up one in November, 'Is there a Place for R-Rated worship?', Diane argues for all-age and all-stage worship.

We need to take seriously what it means to avoid segregated worship. We need to critique what we dish up on a Sunday as worship and do some long hard thinking about how we can begin to worship as a community of faith that reflects a constituency of all ages and stages.²⁷

24. Arthur Metcalfe, 'Lift Jesus Higher'. *NZB* (November 1995): 7.

25. Brian Smith, 'Theology off the Wall'. *NZB* (July 1995): 11.

26. Dianne (Xanthia) Bollen, 'Worship - Family Style' *NZB* (September 1995): 11.

27. Dianne (Xanthia) Bollen. 'Is There a Place for R-Rated Worship?' *NZB* (November 1995): 6.

Athlyn Watt, in May 1997, gave some advice on how to run all age worship.²⁸ At about this time a seminar was hosted by Carey Baptist College on the same theme, featuring input from Bollen and Watt.

Also in the May 1997 edition of the *Baptist* is an article by Mark Pierson, 'New Worship for an Emerging Culture'.²⁹ In this article Pierson introduces a new two-week intensive course that he and Mike Riddell were shortly to run at Carey College on the subject of 'Mission and Worship in the Emerging Church'.³⁰ Then is reported the stories of three churches who are experimenting with different models of worship hoping to engage with the culture. Cityside Baptist, an inner-city church; Graceway, a church aimed at GenX; and 'Bread & Breakfast', a post-institutional home church. Here then is evidence that the need for innovation has begun to take practical expression.

Michael Coleman wrote his probationary thesis in 1996 entitled 'A Reflection on Baptist Spirituality'. His thesis is interesting for the way in which it tries to critique the tradition and offer a new synthesis of Free Church, Catholic and charismatic approaches. In it he traces the history and origin of Baptist spirituality from the seventeenth century and critiques it from a biblical perspective. His basic argument at this point is that modern exegesis has brought into question some of the

28. Athlyn Watt, 'Worshipping as Families'. *NZB* (May 1997): 7.

29. Mark Pierson, 'New Worship for an Emerging Culture'. *NZB* (May 1997): 8.

30. This course has been run several times in New Zealand and internationally. The content of the course has been published in a book and CD set. Mike Riddell, Cathy Kirkpatrick, and Mark Pierson, *The Prodigal Project: Journey into the Emerging Church* (Trowbridge: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 2000).

assumptions with respect to Baptist spirituality. As Baptists desire to guide their faith and practice in accord with the Bible, it follows that the critique of these assumptions needs to be taken seriously and worship practices re-evaluated in the light thereof. Coleman notes that traditional Baptist worship has focused on the cross and the Word with little emphasis on the sacraments. Charismatic Baptist worship has drawn attention to the aspects of Spirit and experience. Coleman calls for a balance in worship. 'Rational faith ended up over-riding the mystery of faith, and just as the rational must never replace mystery, the word should never replace the sacrament.'³¹ Thus a balance between liturgy and free prayer, cross and Spirit, body and mind, Word and sacrament are needed for holistic Christian worship.

The diversity of Baptist worship is evident in the publication of a new resource for the emerging alternate worship movement. *The Prodigal Project*, written by two New Zealanders, Mark Pierson and former Baptist Mike Riddell, and an Australian 'emerging church' leader, Cathy Kirkpatrick, was compiled to offer guidance and resources for people in the alternative worship scene. All three authors have been involved in alternative worshipping congregations and want to see a reform of church worship. They support the need for alternative churches where Christians and seekers are encouraged to find new ways of worshipping God. The philosophy of this emerging church is expressed in the following quote:

A fundamental commitment of most alternative worship groups is to the participation and inclusion of the people. There's a desire to get away from a 'front' and a group of leaders who perform worship on behalf of everyone else,

31. Michael Coleman, 'A Reflection on Baptist Spirituality', Unpublished Probationary Thesis, Carey Baptist College, 1996, 12.

with a passive audience consuming it all.... Unless it is the 'work of the people it will be deficient in some way. On the other hand there will always be delegated roles within worship.³²

Riddell, Pierson and Kirkpatrick call for, and model, different styles of worship leadership. In their terminology, the worship leader is to be a 'curator'. This term emphasises the facilitatory role of the curator and the task of enabling the community to determine and express together its own unique style of worship.

The practice of worship

The last four decades of the millennium saw the practice of Baptist worship change and diversify significantly. At the beginning of this period, there was a certain familiarity about the *ordo* in most Baptist churches. By the end of the century the range was extensive. To get an idea of the diversity and commonality of current patterns of worship, I undertook some primary research.

In September 2000 I sent questionnaires to thirty Baptist churches. I asked each church to supply a profile of their church, four orders of service for November 2000 and to complete a questionnaire relating to each service. Some follow up phone-calls were made to clarify information and the results were tabulated. Seventeen churches completed their questionnaires. A reasonable broad cross section of Baptist churches responded including three small churches (<50 members), eight medium churches (50-100 members) and six larger churches (100+ members). There were thirteen from the North Island, four from the South Island, four urban, four suburban,

32. Riddell, Kirkpatrick and Pierson, *The Prodigal Project*, 127.

four provincial and five rural town congregations. As well as the surveys, I also had informal interviews with twenty Baptist pastors and attended seven different services at six Baptist churches (apart from my own church) in December 2000 and January 2001. Whilst no firm conclusions can be made from such a small sample the data collected remains theologically interesting.³³ If this sample is representative and indicative of the wider Baptist scene, then it will allow some insight into the current tensions between our official ecclesiology/theology and liturgical practise.³⁴

Here then is a description of the Baptist worship scene in broad brush-strokes, allowing that there will be exceptions to almost every trend that I point to. The sermon remains centre-piece of most Baptist worship, taking 27 minutes of an average 85-minute service. Typically the sermon is the climax near the end of the service with a song following. In comparison to mainstream and 'catholic'³⁵ churches that use lectionaries, New Zealand Baptists use very few Bible readings liturgically.³⁶ The limited sample indicates a leaning towards readings from the Pauline corpus (ten readings), with a number from Psalms (five) and fewer from the gospels (four). In the service sheets supplied and services observed, the psalms were

33. Full data was collected for 75 services. Counting interviews and church services attended, I had sufficient contact with 35 churches to get a feel for what normally happened at those churches. This represents approximately 15% of New Zealand Baptist churches.

34. If the picture I paint is not accurate for some churches, I think that the analysis will still apply for those who feel that their own church's liturgy is similar to that which I describe.

35. Here I use the word 'catholic' as does Martin Marty to refer to Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Orthodox churches. Martin E. Marty, *The Public Church* (New York: Crossroads, 1981).

36. The Bible is primarily read homiletically i.e., to be preached from or as 'proof texts' in a sermon.

usually read to encourage worshippers to 'enter into worship more fully'. Other psalmic themes such as lament, intercession, and confession were not used. The Pauline passages were generally the primary text for the sermon. Two of the four gospel readings were just one verse long and used in a single audiovisual meditation.³⁷

Most of the worship consisted of singing songs, which were sourced from a variety of hymnbooks and contemporary collections. This emphasis on hymnody is consistent with most analyses of Baptist worship across the centuries. Apart from sermon and songs, other liturgical material is scant. There were just two responsive litanies, the Lord's prayer was used once responsively, the Apostle's Creed was used once and an alternative creed on one other occasion. It is unclear how many of the services were started by formal calls to worship; these were recorded on just 6 occasions. There were three prayers of confession noted.

In some of the churches I investigated there was a good deal of variety in terms of media used to enhance worship. The use of visual material, such as projected images meant that worshippers were able to engage another sense of perception and one in which the worshippers were more familiar in their workaday world. The use of creative ministries, dramas, dance, solos and the like, was limited, yet provided some opportunity for a variety of people and gifts to be involved in the worship. The danger with visual media and creative ministries is that they may encourage passivity in the worshipper and make the worship service more like entertainment.

37. My suspicion is that the trend toward Paul is widespread in Baptist and evangelical churches and this correlates to the general conservative theology of these churches. This is worthy of further investigation.

Different attempts were made to involve the people of God in the act of worship and to discern the voice of the Spirit in the *koinonia*. Open times of prayer and prophecy were noted in a number of services, with observers reporting that these times were very helpful.³⁸ A number of observers volunteered that they found it difficult to get their congregations to pray in such times and some seemed to have given up on trying. It appears that those churches that were accustomed to open prayers and had a history of participation were more likely to find that open prayer times worked for them. Open prayer times³⁹ are one avenue of encouraging participation. However, many factors limit the amount of participation, including the expectation of a 'nice prayer', the power relations in the church, the attitudes of the leadership to such prayer, the giftedness and experience of the pray-ers. Where the practice of free praise or 'singing in the spirit' is used it can be difficult to gauge the level of participation; yet this does allow for a wide range of people to be involved under certain circumstances.

A few of the churches, especially those who identified themselves as post-modern or generation-X churches, used creative ways to involve people in worship. Here it appears that the media was chosen with the message in mind. That is, the question was first asked, 'What is an appropriate way for the people to respond to God at this point?' and then, 'What is an appropriate way to creatively facilitate that response?' Simple activities such as lighting a candle or writing on a wall

38. About 25% of all services included an open prayer time with about 80% of churches having at least one open prayer time in the month surveyed.

39. Including times where there is an expectation of the use of charismatic gifts such as prophecy.

or more complex activities such as making a stained glassed window all allowed and encouraged participation across the diversity of ages and stages of worshippers present.

The theology of worship

What we say about worship and what we do when we gather to worship indicates our deeply held beliefs about God and the world. Sometimes our theology from worship is at odds with our officially held doctrine. What we believe is both expressed and informed by the way we worship. Thus worship *ordos* may reveal some of the deepest held theological assumptions and commitments of a religious community. While acknowledging diversity within the Baptist expressions of worship today, a number of the churches studied displayed certain commonalities that suggest underlying theological assumptions and commitments. While there is more to Christian faith than the community's worship service, it is generally hoped that the gathering for worship will be the highpoint of the Christian's week. It is therefore hoped that the theology expressed in worship will be of the highest standard and consistent with the 'official' second-order doctrinal theology. A substantial difference between the two requires explanation or adjustment.

Worship and evangelism have in common the fact that they both involve the divine-human encounter. The former is about the initiating of a relationship; the latter is to do with enhancing that relationship. I contend that too much attention has been given to the forming of the divine human relationship to the detriment of its ongoing development. This is self-defeating, for a relationship that is not nurtured soon fizzles out and dies. On the other hand a maturing relationship with

God has the potential to form a solid basis for mission activity. I further contend that when people encounter God in worship that engages their whole being they are more likely to believe that they can engage with God in the Monday to Saturday world.

The theology derived from worship that I wish to explore in this section is that of encounter. I will arrange my reflections around questions that investigate the way congregations expect to encounter God. How is the Spirit encountered in worship? What is the role of the worship leader in facilitating such an encounter? Is the encounter an individual or communal experience? What role does the Bible play in encountering God? The answers to these questions reveal something of our underlying beliefs and commitments and may indicate the way we expect to see God at work in the world as well as in worship.

How is the Spirit encountered?

It seems that for the most part of the twentieth century the Spirit of God was encountered in Baptist worship services primarily through singing songs and listening to sermons. Of course other elements of the services such as communion, intercessory prayers and silence, when and if they were employed, were also vehicles of encounter. On the whole, these activities were led from the front and any participation from the congregation was guided participation and the congregation tended to be passive receptors of the Spirit's activity. In the mid-part of the century, when the worship service was lead by the pastor and lay involvement was minimal, there was little opportunity for the Spirit to be encountered in the body-life ministry of the church. The charismatic movement brought

renewed emphasis to the classic Baptist ecclesiological principle of the priesthood of all believers. With the advent of times of prophecy, glossolalia, free prayer and praise, the laity had a new opportunity to contribute to the worship service and the Spirit was encountered in and through a wide range of people with a diversity of gifts and perspectives. However, as has been noted by several commentators, the new movement became stylised and the traditional 'hymn-sandwich' liturgy was replaced with the charismatic 'chorus-burger' liturgy. In many cases the expectation is that the Spirit will be encountered because of something the leaders do in the worship service.

What role do leaders play in worship?

As Baptist worship tends to be lead from the front it appears that the flow of grace is via the worship leader and the preacher, who function in a pseudo-priestly fashion as channels of grace. In saying that worship leaders and preachers act as pseudo-priests, I mean that they do so in an indirect way. For example, rather than confer absolution, the leader would typically invite the congregation to appropriate the forgiveness of God directly. The worship leaders and preachers provide most of the raw material for the worship, the script of words, movement and songs. Very little creative material comes directly from the congregation during the service. If the worship service is taken as a prime source for understanding Baptist theology there is actually little evidence to suggest that Baptists understand the church to be a 'priesthood of all believers'

or that God may be encountered 'charismatically' through the operation of spiritual gifts within the body.⁴⁰

Is God encountered individually or communally?

My experience of Baptist communion services indicates that on the whole we tend toward a non-sacramental Zwinglian view of communion, in which communion is simply a memorial meal. When communion is a mere memorial, it is easier to view it as an individual encounter rather than a communal 'remembering' of the body and blood of Christ. When communion is seen as an event that constitutes the community as the gathered body of Christ, the celebration of the meal is necessarily communal. Baptist worship practices emphasise the individual encounter with God in parallel with the Baptist emphasis on individual conversion. The way we distribute the elements may lead to an individualised style of communion. Typically in Baptist worship the elements are passed from one to another, this being done without mutual acknowledgment, a word being spoken or even eye contact. Practices such as retaining the cup and drinking together (as was the case in some churches I surveyed) signify that the communal nature of communion is not completely lost.

What role does the Bible play in the encounter of God in worship?

There is evidently very little expectation that God will speak through the Bible directly. God is encountered indirectly through the Bible when the Bible is interpreted and applied by

40. By 'spiritual gifts' I mean the whole range of ways that the Spirit of God ministers to the body of Christ through the gifted participation in the liturgy.

the preacher or used exhortatively by the worship leader. Put positively, Baptists emphasise the current application of the Bible and strive to make the teaching of the Bible relevant for today. Baptists tend to focus on the present experience of the Spirit, rather than on the historical continuity of the faith. For similar reasons creeds are seldom used. The down side of this is that the story of faith is not rehearsed in worship. The story is remembered neither through creed nor Bible reading, nor rehearsed through the church year, nor expounded through the sermon (which tends to focus on current application of cognitive propositions derived from the text). Without the story of Christ being consistently retold in the worship service it is difficult to see how these services could claim to be Christ-centred. Likewise, with so few Bible readings in the services, it is difficult to claim that Baptist worship is Bible-based.

The relationship between the way we worship and what we believe is dynamic. It seems that the Baptist belief in the importance of evangelism has shifted the way we worship too far in a utilitarian direction. Worship has been conceived of as a tool for evangelism and, as a result, Baptist church worship services have adopted the *ordo* of evangelistic events. The Baptist emphasis on personal conversion is reflected in some of the liturgical practices and in turn reinforces an individualistic piety. Our current worship practices suggest that for New Zealand Baptists, *ecclesia* is the gathering of individuals rather than the coming together of the body-corporate. When this is pushed to the limit, 'Church worship' is taken to be a spiritual experience manufactured by experts and consumed by passive worshippers. This is obviously at odds with historical Baptist expression of theological and ecclesiological self-identity. We think we believe in the priesthood of all believers, the fellow-

ship of the Spirit and the body of Christ, yet our worship practice reveals our true commitments.

Encountering God in worship facilitates the encountering of God in the mission context

If our worship practices testify to our lack of confidence in these biblical truths (which all concern the way we encounter God, not just as the church gathered but also as the church scattered) perhaps we should not be surprised that we have a diminished expectation in terms of encountering God outside of the church service in the Monday to Saturday world. If we are taught to rely on the expert worship leader to facilitate our encounter with God how will we ever expect to encounter God or help others to encounter God? If we are encouraged to worship God as individuals instead of as relational persons in community, how will we learn to cooperate with one another in the mission of the church into the world? How will the world discover that we are Christ's disciples if we haven't learned to truly engage with and love one another? And if our development as Christ's disciples, in the primary formational environment of the church gathered to worship, is not biblically based and thoroughly Christ-centred how do we expect to live as Bible-based and Christ-centred Christians in the world? If in the service of worship we are not rehearsing the Christian life in all its fullness how do we expect to live it in the world and have any credibility in terms of inviting others to join us? Let us make the worship of God our number one priority, in the hope that as we learn to encounter God more deeply we will be better able to help others do the same.

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