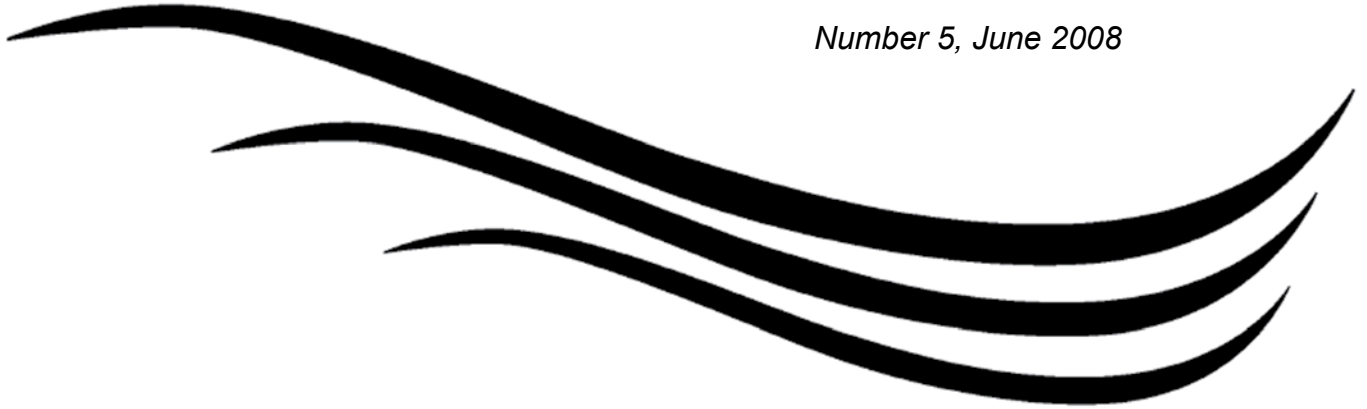


CANDOUR

News and Views for Ministers

Number 5, June 2008



Worship

Contents

Editorial	Amanda Wells	3
Essays		
Experimenting with emerging worship	Martin Macaulay	4
Contemporary and emerging worship	Mary-Jane Konings.....	8
Is God bored with our worship?.....	Darryl Tempero	12
Worshipping with aliens, widows and orphans	Diane Gilliam-Weeks	15
Navigating contemporary music	Peter Bristow	16
The shape of our worship	Denzil Brown	18
Worship: What, how and why?	Roy Pearson.....	16
AES column	Martin Baker	14



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

Noticeboard

Candour is a monthly magazine about ministry and leadership. For more information, contact:

Amanda Wells
Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
PO Box 9049
Wellington

The articles in *Candour* reflect the views of individual ministers or contributors writing in a personal capacity. They are not representative of the Church's official position. Please approach the author for permission if you wish to copy an article.

Contributions

We welcome responses to published articles. If you would like to write a piece replying to any of this month's featured articles, please contact:

Amanda Wells (editor) on (04) 381-8285 or candour@presbyterian.org.nz

Advertising

One-quarter page: \$80 plus gst (87mm x 117mm)

One-third page: \$95 plus gst (87mm x 160mm)

Half page: \$130 plus gst (184mm x 138mm)

Any artwork must be supplied electronically and in a high-resolution format. Measurements are indicative only and subject to layout requirements.

The next advertising deadline (for the July issue) is **1 July 2008**.

Glen Innis Vacancies

June 16 - 23	Homestead/Cottage
July 14 - 21	Homestead/Cottage
July 21 - 28	Cottage
July 28 - August 4	Homestead/Cottage
August 4 - 11	Homestead/Cottage

To enquire about vacancies, please email glen.innis@xtra.co.nz or telephone 06 855-4889.

Ministers are welcome to inquire regarding vacancies due to cancellations.

The Church Property Trustees have reluctantly decided to introduce a **refundable \$50 booking fee** for Glen Innis. This fee is payable to Margaret Black and refunded on arrival at Glen Innis. Changing your booking will require payment of another booking fee.

Caring for our Children is a new informative, practical study guide that will be distributed to all parishes by the end of June.

Written from a Presbyterian perspective, *Caring for our Children* contains important information on nurturing and protecting our children.

Caring for our Children was created for, and is free to, all parishes.

Additional copies available in late June from: angela@presbyterian.org.nz

Laurie Ennor notes that people are welcome to ask for a copy of his full Masters research topic on rural congregations, of which the chapter in last month's *Candour* was the conclusion. Laurie was incorrectly listed as "stated supply" - he actually has a five-year term at Malvern.

Ministers' Information Forms

Ministers' Information Forms are an essential tool for ministry settlement boards looking to make a call. They are also an effective way for ministers to record their achievements throughout their career - including any additional training they undertake.

Ministers are strongly encouraged to update their Ministers' Information Form every three years so that the information remains current. If you would like to update your Form please email Juliette on juliette@presbyterian.org.nz for a template. Alternatively, you are welcome to send additional information to PO Box 9049, Wellington.

Parsing worship

Amanda Wells

Worship is an interesting word. The more you think about it, the more you realise that the meaning with which it is invested by Christians can differ considerably from how it's defined outside church walls. But even we're not sure what it means sometimes.

For the Standing out workshops, I've asked someone at each venue to provide 15 minutes of worship. Most of these people have contacted me just before the workshop asking for some clarification. What exactly do I mean? What kind of thing am I after? My answers have been about setting the tone and acknowledging that we're here to serve God first, rather than to participate in a corporate seminar. "Just do whatever suits you best," I've said, "I have no real preconceptions."

The results have been fascinating. It's been a privilege to experience 15 (16 by the time you read this) very different styles of worship as I've travelled around the country. Each of them has been unique, and I suspect not all the practitioners would necessarily appreciate all of the other offerings. But I've found something in all of them, if not always what I expected. We need reminders of what we're here for, and there's nothing to remove nerves like the setting of today into its eternal context.

Though it's not really one of my gifts, I love singing, and I've enjoyed those who've offered musical worship elements. But as I look back, it's the spoken thoughts that stick in my head. Perhaps singing is about experiential emotion connected strongly to a particular moment, while arguments and words have a way of circling round your consciousness and growing in significance. I think about Jon discussing why Jesus bore scars after the resurrection; Shirley's gift of a polished stone and invitation to consider it deeply; Lyn reflecting on bridges both physical and symbolic. I remember something different about each of the 15 worship elements that I've been blessed to hear. That such a breadth of worship can be encompassed and sustained by our Church tradition is extraordinary and deeply encouraging.

I started wondering how non-church people view worship. It seems to me that the initial reaction of many in the church would be to define worship as a noun; it's a thing that happens, an event, an element in an order of service. But if you asked the person in the street, I'd suggest they would term it a verb; something you act

out towards a greater power, whether it be a god, money, a rugby team or a hairdresser. Perhaps these two perspectives represent a divide more significant than you might first presume; perhaps it would be better theology to switch them.

I'm not talking about how ministers might respond. I'm thinking about the people attending worship every week, who have had adopted a Christian mindset to the extent that it can become difficult to put yourself back into the head of the audience. During the Standing out workshops, I ask people to think of a hypothetical mission project and a message by which they might communicate it to its particular audience. The message needs to reach out to the audience, I tell them; it has to address and connect with the audience's needs. It's interesting the number of groups that develop some variation on the message "we care for you". As the workshops have gone on, I've started to think that this trend is symptomatic of the massive challenge facing the future church.

I know that worship isn't just singing. It's the outworking of your faith in your life. But if we primarily define it as something done on a Sunday, something that we do in our church context, our failure to connect can only deepen. I've received lots of interesting (and encouraging) feedback about the workshops. But of course, it's the more constructive comments that stick in my mind. Such as the suggestion that I might be advocating churches become merely social service providers. After considering that comment, I've tweaked some of my emphases and also attempted to address it directly. But without engaging with our communities, without actually being out there and serving them, how can we convey to them the love of Christ? Why would someone who has no connection with your church and whose head is full of negative (if incorrect) impressions ever cross the threshold on a Sunday morning?

The next issue of *Candour* will have the theme "What is a Christian society?" and will consider political and social themes especially relevant at this point in our election cycle. If you'd like to contribute, I'd be grateful to hear from you: the deadline will be 1 July. Just email candour@presbyterian.org.nz

Experimenting with emerging worship

Martin Macaulay, East Taieri Church, Dunedin

A few months ago I was sitting around a café table with a couple of other people discussing strategies for saying “no” to our children if they ask for something that we judged to be not in their best interests. The discussion moved on to how we felt when we asked God for something and the answer seemed to be “no” or “not right now”. Is God really good? One of the women at the table had lost her husband to cancer in the past year. She had two preschoolers, one born after her husband died. These were huge issues for her. She talked and cried. It was a privilege to sit with her and when I told her so, she said she was glad she had that time with us. She was a follower of Jesus but hadn’t been attending any church since her husband died. The setting for this conversation was The Living Room – one church’s experiment in emerging worship.

I use the term “emerging worship” as a label for what happens when people in emerging churches gather to worship God. Emerging churches are seeking to engage people influenced by postmodern culture. They critique their understanding and expression of the Gospel to discover where they have been unhelpfully influenced by modernism and where they need to change if they are to faithfully communicate the Gospel in a postmodern context. Some emerging churches dislike this label and prefer terms such as “missional church”, since they say they are already a church.

However, “emerging church” is widely used in the literature and helpfully conveys the sense of exploratory mission that is found in these churches.¹ Emerging worship can occur in a new church plant that is intentional about engaging with postmodernism, or in a new setting intentionally created within an existing church. Existing church services can incorporate elements of emerging worship, but this is a much more difficult route to follow. Graham Cray has considerable experience with planting new congregations for young people within the Church of England. He writes:

At a time of changing culture, which, I repeat, I believe to be the primary reason for a policy of planting youth congregations, the provision of “space” for people not like “us” will often, but not always, require the estab-

1 Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 41.

lishing of a new worshipping community, rather than attempts to change the old.²

Often there is nothing “wrong” with the old service. The worship there is helpful, meaningful, and appropriate for those who go.

Before moving on to consider aspects of emerging worship, I should acknowledge that simply creating a new worship service such as a café church is not a magic solution for reaching postmodern people. We need to ask deeper questions about our understanding of truth and our expression of the Gospel. Our evangelism, spiritual formation and serving in mission also need to be critiqued.

Better events and new worship styles are not the answer. Our pluralistic, postmodern and post-Christian culture is not only event-savvy; I believe it’s largely weary of Christian events. This culture doesn’t need churches that major in offering the right kind of worship service or performance event. What this culture desperately needs to see is God’s story and kingdom as morally good, plausible, and embodied in communities.³

Having acknowledged that we need more than emerging worship, I now want to consider some aspects of this kind of worship.

Preaching and apologetics

Begin with local story. Since everyone already has some experience of God, the sermon in emerging worship can begin with their story. In New Zealand, it is a big step for postmoderns to participate in Christian worship. The people who come to our new worship setting will come because God is at work in their lives. This means that even before we attempt to present anything we can invite people to share the story of their spiritual experiences. In our preaching, we then can move from local story to the grand Biblical story of salvation. Propositions can be offered after exploring the faith of those present. The propositions and the Christian metanarrative provide a

2 Graham Cray, *Youth Congregations and the Emerging Church* (Cambridge, England: Grove Books, 2000), 18.

3 Tim Conder, *The Church in Transition: The Journey of Existing Churches into the Emerging Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006) 104.

framework for the people we invite to make sense of their experience of God so far.⁴

Our preaching might begin with the voices of the congregation, while the preacher listens and learns. For example, in exploring the topic of God's loving forgiveness, we could ask the parents how they feel when their child is naughty and ashamed of his or her behaviour. After listening to the ways they express forgiveness to their children, we could show the Nooma DVD "Lump" to explore how God shows forgiveness to us.⁵

Character of the preacher

The character, attitudes, and personal style of emerging worship leaders will be increasingly important in a post-

modern setting, especially for those who present or preach. "Our message will be a life: words plus deeds. Words of faith without works of love will not survive;

no one will listen. A rhetoric of integrity — words integrated with deeds — will carry the day."⁶ To be fair, many modern preachers also have emphasised the need for integrity of life and belief, but this is even more crucial for the emerging generation, which can detect hypocrisy more easily. In such a context, we must reflect integrity and humility

Humility must be part of our character. Humble sensitivity to other viewpoints is a strength of postmodernism, and emerging worship will connect with people if we exhibit this. We must approach the Bible with humility since no reader has the definitive understanding of the text. This will help communicate a humble openness to exploring the viewpoints of those people who come to the worship setting.

Our listeners today can detect a sales pitch in a second. Consequently, we must be honest, open, and humble enough to allow our weaknesses as well as our strengths to shine through. The apostle Paul modelled such preaching, assessed by some as being "unimpressive and his

4 Duncan MacLaren, *Mission Implausible: Restoring Credibility to the Church* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2004), 68.

5 Rob Bell, *Nooma 001 Rain* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 1-25.

6 Brian McLaren, *Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 88.

speaking amounts to nothing" (2 Corinthians 10:10), yet he used weapons not of this world that "have divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4). Humility and weakness do not mean that we lack confidence and power. It simply means that the confidence and power are located in Christ and not in us.

Dialogue not monologue

Just as the sermon might begin with the congregation speaking, so it should end in dialogue. This could take the form of the preacher receiving questions and comments and even opening the topic up for discussion. This is difficult in a larger group, but emerging worship settings are often quite small.

Dialogue also can occur among the members of the congregation. This is facilitated by seating the congregation around tables in the style of a café. The

preacher could walk among the tables while speaking and then leave groups to discuss issues together. Such interaction among members of the congregation is consistent with the need for life transformation to occur within community.

Creating an experience

While a modern sermon might be composed of several suitably alliterated, carefully argued, propositional points, emerging preachers seek to use a variety of images, metaphors, and stories to lead the congregation into an experience of something new. If the experience is to be more than fantasy, then it must be based on the truth. "The Good News of Jesus can be presented at both the intellectual and the emotional levels... both are equally valid. What is important is that we don't get one out of balance with the other."⁷

Emerging worship looks for creative ways of capturing people's imagination and bringing them into a new experience. Examples include using music, food, and aromas of other cultures such as the Middle East to transport people from our Western culture; using dress-up clothing to help people step into a different setting; and, showing video footage of life in poverty-stricken areas to raise concern for the poor. The congregation could be invited to do something such as bending a bruised reed until it

7 Pete Ward, *Worship and Youth Culture: A Guide to Alternative Worship* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1993), 24.

breaks, or more traditional actions like washing one another's feet, or communion.

Participation rather than performance

Emerging worship aims for people to participate rather than watch a performance. "Spectator worship has always been and will always be an oxymoron."⁸

Participation begins by emerging worship being planned and promoted by a whole team but not just the minister. Emerging churches encourage the involvement of many people. "Create a large team — a community — to plan and design these gatherings," says Kimball. "This will turn your worship from highly controlled, linear 'shows' for consumers to colourful community-owned gatherings involving many voices, hearts, and minds."⁹

Participation continues when people arrive. One emerging church challenged people to ask themselves, "When I come through the door of the church, what am I bringing as my contribution to worship?"¹⁰ Everything that happens from the time the first person arrives is the gathering of the community and the call to worship. Sharing food plays an important part in this.

Imaginative ways to foster participation during the service can be found. "Stations" can be created for all kinds of activities and responses. Three simple examples of stations are: writing prayers, lighting candles, placing flowers on a mesh cross as an image of individuals coming together to create Christian community.

Involvement of children

Many of the components of emerging worship will be appropriate for children, including sharing food and participating in activities. Parents can feel reluctant to attend more traditional Sunday worship, because their children are active and are not used to sitting quietly in church. Emerging worship can communicate that active children are welcome by offering a range of active games and activities related to the theme. For example, the Living Room that I mentioned in the introduction that week had one piñata filled with lollies and another filled with rubbish.

8 Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 49.

9 Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 103.

10 Pete Ward, *Selling Worship: How What we Sing has Changed the Church* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster Press, 2005), 172.

Ancient future worship

At first it might seem surprising that the emerging worship, like other worship traditions, is interested in liturgies, icons, and worship styles from centuries past, but aspects of pre-modern worship that are relatively free of the rationalism and individualism of the modern world can be attractive to postmodern people who recognise the importance of suprarational ways of knowing and the importance of relationships and community. Kimball, Webber, and others describe this interest in early Christian traditions and appreciation of the Jewish roots of Christianity as "ancient future worship."¹¹

Christian art is available on the Internet and can be projected as part of the worship setting on the occasions that it helps communicate the theme of the day.¹² Early creeds and liturgies provide resources.¹³ The Bible contains passages that provide insights into Jewish and early Christian worship. For example, Psalm 136 suggests a congregational response and can be read aloud in that way.

Ancient worship was often more experiential than that of modernity. Lighting candles, reciting creeds, kneeling in prayer, viewing icons, mosaics and stained glass, hearing bells, and smelling incense created a multisensory worship gathering. When people visit museums today, they are treated to all kinds of interactive learning opportunities from earthquake simulators to archaeological digs. Truth and knowledge are not simply displayed and presented; they are experienced. Emerging worship seeks to do this. Creative ideas are available from other churches experimenting with this kind of worship.¹⁴

A holistic Gospel

Emerging worship, like the best of any worship tradition, seeks to present and experience the holistic gospel of

11 Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 149; Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 34.

12 See, for example, Gustave Doré Art Images, "Art Collections," <http://dore.artpassions.net/> (accessed February 4, 2008).

13 B. J. Kidd, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church*, vol. 2 (London: SPCK, 1923), 1-337.

14 Steve Taylor, "E~mergent Kiwi," <http://www.emergentkiwi.org.nz/> (accessed February 4, 2008). See also Jonny Baker and Doug Gay, *Alternative Worship: Resources from and for the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 19-153. This book includes an interactive CD of resources.

the kingdom of God. This includes: forgiveness of sins, deliverance from evil, social justice, environmental concern, provision of new meaning and purpose, and being adopted into God's family.

Fostering community

Emerging worship aims to meet people's hunger for relationships and a sense of community. One way of achieving this is by sharing communion together in the context of a full meal around tables. Including a full meal in worship also has practical advantages. A worship service at five on Sunday evening becomes a good option if busy parents know that their family will be fed. When they get home, young children are ready for bath or bed.

It is hard to develop community with people seated in rows of chairs facing the front. Rearranging chairs around tables allows for more interaction. Circles of chairs on their own probably would be too much like an encounter group for New Zealanders to feel comfortable; but a café table and chairs, or a coffee table with armchairs around it, is less confrontational.

Providing choice for worshippers

People are at different stages in their spiritual journey, and they have different personalities and preferences. Emerging worship aims to provide choices so that people can experience God in different ways in worship. Some people may want to try them all, while others only try one or two. For example, when considering God's call to care for the poor, the worship planning team might provide a number of opportunities for response from which worshippers can choose. Some may wish to walk through to the prayer chapel for quiet prayer for those in need. Others may want to go to a table where they can sign up to support offshore mission. A third option could be to take off their shoes and leave them behind to be sold and the money given to the poor. Others may choose to go to a fourth location to sign a letter petitioning our local member of parliament to address the needs of the poor in our area.

Emerging worship can be quite simple, using elements that we are familiar with in creative ways to engage post-modern people.

The **Parish of Mount Pleasant/Heathcote/Ferrymead** seeks expressions of interest in negotiating a 2/3 ministry for a fixed term of five years.

The parish is situated in Christchurch on the Mt Pleasant hill and takes in the growing Ferrymead business, café and leisure area and the Heathcote valley.

The congregation seeks a warm, caring pastoral ordained minister who is able to relate to people across a range of theological beliefs, communicate a gospel message for the 21st Century and motivate and encourage others to think and explore their theology. Expressions of interest can be made to the nominator, The Rev Yvonne Smith y.smith@rangiruru.school.nz after June 1st 2008.

Tired of the rain in Taranaki
Fed up with Wellington's wind
Sick of the traffic in Auckland
Had enough freezing down South

Could God be calling you to Sunny Hawkes Bay?

Waipawa, Central Hawkes Bay

A full time position exists for a Pastor with a heart for evangelism, encouraging and facilitating lay leadership and outreach into the wider community at historic

Waipawa Co-Operating Parish

For more information contact the Nominator:

Rev I Pimm (06) 858-8461
pimm.ian@xtra.co.nz

2 Willow Grove
Waipukurau

Expressions of Interest sought by;
31-07-08

Contemporary and emerging worship

Mary-Jane Konings, Dunedin

Nailing down just what people mean by those two phrases above is an interesting exercise in itself. In one sense “contemporary worship” can mean all the worship that happened last Sunday, but usually it refers to a particular style and set of convictions about authentic worship for today. Emerging worship has the sense of being experimental or alternative. It has a similar set of values but also its own story and some subtle differences.

Music is a defining feature of contemporary worship. Historically, the contemporary worship phenomenon emerged from the “Jesus Movements” in North America in the 1960s and, in New Zealand, the “Charismatic Renewal Movement” during the 1970s and 80s. The function of music in services, the style of songs, their performance, the explicit theology of the lyrics, and the theology implied by these aspects distinguish “contemporary worship” from traditional worship in practice, and theological background.

Churches who advertise themselves as offering “contemporary” worship generally mean they are using contemporary praise and worship music, that is, music with a beat, in a broad rock or pop genre.¹ Drums and a bass guitar set the groove or “feel”², and the songs are led by amplified vocalists. Contemporary worship music is mostly scripturally based lyrically. Other indicators are informality, use of contemporary language, involvement of lay people and use of visual technologies such as data projectors.³ These are some of the external indicators, but there is of course more to it than that. Frame writes that contemporary worship:

*is generally understood to be a form of worship that is more “seeker-friendly” than traditional worship models, placing more emphasis on evangelism in worship. [It] tends to avoid historic liturgies and old-fashioned language in order better to communicate with modern people.*⁴

Contemporary worship leaders believe contemporary worship music is a musical “vernacular” understood by a segment of unchurched society that includes a wide variety of people and so makes the worship accessible and

relevant to a significant group of irregular church goers⁵ and that it facilitates “heartfelt” worship, that is, an experience of transformation which may be understood as a psychological shift in experiences of guilt, fear, or doubt to freedom, joy, and faith.⁶ Songs are arranged in “sets” or brackets rather than used individually. They are arranged and performed in a familiar way, using typical band instrumentation and amplification.

Contemporary worship music takes a significant part of the service time and repetition of phrases seeks to reinforce the theological content of the service. This is an important role as creeds and formal prayers are seldom used. Theologically, contemporary worship music is influenced by evangelical and Pentecostal theologies. Evangelical churches that place a high priority on mission tend to view “contemporary worship” as an outreach tool.⁷ Concerns about being relevant and authentic are often heard. The music is an important part of a desire to facilitate a transformative encounter with God in worship. In some reformed evangelical congregations, this “heartfelt” dimension is shaped and intentionally limited by a specific understanding and expectation that worship should be inherently and explicitly biblical, Christ-centred and facilitated by the Holy Spirit.⁸ While contemporary worship is a global phenomenon, churches in New Zealand have their own particular “take”, depending on their size, leadership, and context.

Underpinning the use of contemporary worship are different models of worship, which understand the presence of God in different ways. A Temple-experience model is based on an analogy with climbing up to the Temple in Jerusalem, entering through the gates singing praise and worship and moving through the temple into the holy of holies to encounter the presence of God. The worship

5 “Costa Mesa, South Barrington, and Rome: The Rise of Contemporary Worship” in Plantinga, Rozeboom, and Calvin Institute of Christian Worship., *Discerning the Spirits: A Guide to Thinking About Christian Worship Today*. 42-43

6 Miller, “The Emotional Effects of Music on Religious Experience: A Study of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Style of Music and Worship”.

7 Wren, *Praying Twice*. 158

8 R. Dawson, “Notes for Worship Leaders”, 2006 (unpublished)

1 Ibid. 5ff

2 Wren, *Praying Twice*. 130-1

3 Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music*. 47

4 Ibid. 8

music can be understood as sacramental, and there is a corresponding reduction in the sense of the importance of communion. Another model is a structured, liturgical model based on the Eucharist. Contemporary worship music emerges from a context of the first model, but reformed worship is structured by the second.

Emerging Worship

“Emerging worship” describes a diverse movement of experimental or alternative worship. This movement dates from the late 1990s and can be characterised by a rejection of many elements of both traditional and contemporary worship, and a conscious engagement with postmodernity. Authors who contribute in this area include Anderson,⁹ Webber,¹⁰ Taylor,¹¹ and Kimball. Emerging worship features a holistic focus on engaging the whole person, using multi-sensory avenues but may also include eclectic elements from ancient church traditions such as candles and icons. It is a small, diverse movement, featuring a variety of expressions of worship, including a wide range of worship music. It may include songs from the contemporary worship music genre, but re-interpreted for the context, such as being used as background music, or presented with alternative arrangements.

Dan Kimbell represents a particular expression of emerging worship which defines itself as “Emergent”. He defines “Emergent Church” as mindset rather than a model, given the plurality of forms informed by a post-modern framework.¹² For Kimball, emergent worship focuses on experiencing God in worship, through a variety of means, illustrated by his use of the phrase “worship gathering” to distinguish emergent worship from contemporary or traditional “worship services”. Kimball defines the following as distinguishing characteristics of worship gatherings; organic design rather than linear, participation rather than observation, attention to the creation of sacred space, a multi-sensory approach, a freedom of movement

9 Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006).

10 Robert Webber, *Worship, Old and New* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1982), ———, *The Younger Evangelicals : Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2002).

11 Steve Taylor, “A New Way of Being Church : A Case Study Approach to Cityside Baptist Church as Christian Faith “Making Do” In a Postmodern World : A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand” (2004).

12 Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003). 14-15

in worship, and a revival of liturgy.¹³ The focus is on experiencing God and the defining feature is the intentionally interactive nature of worship.

There are numbers of emerging worship “experiments” within the church in New Zealand, often nurtured with the stability and support of older congregations. Some congregations are experimenting with “café” worship once a month, sometimes as a reinterpretation of a traditional reformed framework and sometimes with a conscious rejection of liturgy.

Both contemporary and emerging worship should be understood within the context of church history and tradition as a whole. Questioning the status quo of worship, and attempts to reform worship are not novelties, and regarding them as “the latest fad” is perhaps as unhelpful as an uncritical adoption.

How might the Contemporary and Emerging Movements help us?

Alister McGrath writes “what Christians believe affects the manner in which they pray and worship; the manner in which Christians pray and worship affects what they believe”¹⁴, a translation of the often cited *lex orandi, lex credendi*. The relationship between worship and theology is historically dynamic and complex, and yes, I think it does matter. Most authors tend to judge matters based on their own worshipping tradition. Even as eclectic an author as Marva Dawn falls into this trap. Contemporary worship has its critics. Questions are raised about the appropriateness of using popular music in church, the theological lightness of the lyrics, the focus on personal experience, the development of “Jesus is my boyfriend” songs, whether trying to use worship as an evangelistic tool is appropriate, is worship significantly altered by a consumer ideology?¹⁵ Somewhat closer to home, people complain about the endless repetition of inane songs and a lack of intellectual challenge. Emerging worship is also subject to criticisms, with concerns raised about the intentional engagement with postmodernism, the lack of sound teaching, an obsession with novelty, and the extent to which it panders to individualism and consumerism.

13 ———, *Emerging Worship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). 73 ff

14 Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology : An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Malden, MA ; Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2001). 140

15 P.S. Jones, *Singing and Making Music* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R, 2006). 43, 186, 200

Is worship broke and if it is, can we fix it?

I think there are some real issues. We each bring our own baggage and our perceptions. Worship is a bit like education; everyone is an expert because we've all been to church and we've all been to school. Our initial worship experiences, be they positive or negative, are formative, and it is only later as we process those in the light of some (hopefully good) theology that we grow into an understanding of what it is we are about.

First things first – who is worship for? God calls us to worship him, in a covenantal relationship, and fully aware that we can only worship as God calls us and in the way that God provides. There is nothing we can do in worship that is acceptable to the Father, except what we offer in Christ through the Holy Spirit. This is both freedom and responsibility. Worship isn't about what we like or don't like. Stylistic preferences on all sides of the debates deserve to be questioned and challenged. There is too much written as a critique from a personal bias or a lack of understanding of what contemporary worship and emerging worship are trying to do. A theology that is heavy on grace tends to allow more freedom in the worship arena. A theology that takes a positive view of people tends to welcome all contributions in worship. That's not to say that contemporary worship and emerging worship should be adopted uncritically either. There must be a balance between openness and evaluation to both traditional and newer forms of worship.

How should we think about worship?

For some, worship is a practical ministry, "another activity of the church"¹⁶. It may be a surprise how broadly liturgical studies covers historical, ethical and anthropological approaches.¹⁷ A variety of practical aids to worship practice such as "The Worship Sourcebook"¹⁸ are available. A rising interest in theology and the arts has seen the development of organisations such as "Theology Through the Arts" project¹⁹ and the "Calvin Institute

of Worship"²⁰. There are important conversations about worship happening in missiology which we should keep an eye on – for example, what does orthodox worship look like, and would we recognise a heresy if we saw one?²¹

Often found in writing about worship are criteria based on enjoyment, musical competence, familiarity with one tradition or another, social place, beauty or excellence.²² Criteria like these misconstrue the purpose and practice of worship, and are thus inadequate. This is not to say that experience in worship is irrelevant. Jonathon Edwards recognised the move of God in the fresh delight his people took in their worship and wrote that the religious affections have a part to play in drawing us to Christ and being transformed.²³ It is not in worship itself but in the one who is worshipped that delight must be found.²⁴ To place too much weight on human experience is to risk idolatry. However, some account of human experience must be given, as it is humans who are created for and called to worship. To dismiss experience is to provide an account of worship that is less than fully human. The objective reality of worship cannot be described or determined solely on the evidence of emotion, but a full account cannot be made without some reference to an affective response.

20 <http://www.calvin.edu/worship> accessed 5/09/2007
Their mission statement is "The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship aims to promote the scholarly study of the theology, history, and practice of Christian worship and the renewal of worship in worshipping communities across North America and beyond."

21 Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002).

22 Hughes Oliphant Old, *Themes and Variations for a Christian Doxology : Being the Clinton Lectures, Delivered Spring Semester, 1989, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1992). 4

23 Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections*, Elizabeth-Town [N.J.] : Printed by Shepard Kollock, for , no. 237, Queen-Street, New York, M,DCC,LXXXVII. [1787]. ed. (New York: Robert Hodge, 1787). 123. Edwards defines affections as inclination, will and heart.

24 Old, *Themes and Variations for a Christian Doxology : Being the Clinton Lectures, Delivered Spring Semester, 1989, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa*. 6

16 Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985). 1056

17 J. D. Crichton, "A Theology of Worship," in *The Study of Liturgy*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright Cheslyn Jones, Edward Yarnold SJ (London: SPCK, 1987). 5

18 Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. and Faith Alive Christian Resources., *The Worship Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Calvin Institute of Christian Worship : Faith Alive : Baker Books, 2004).

19 <http://www.theolarts.org/project.html> accessed 5/09/2007. TAA asks "What can the arts give theology?"

One way of articulating a theology of worship starts with answering two questions – what is this worship saying about God, and what is it saying about us? For example – some lyrics in contemporary worship music fall into what I call a “Jesus is my boyfriend” category. Personally, I don’t have a problem asking God to “hold me close”, and there are precedents in Christian tradition, including some hymns.²⁵ But I can understand why my husband is a bit reluctant to sing this phrase with any enthusiasm, and the increasing feminization of worship is making Sunday morning church a difficult place for many men to be. A sense of intimacy in worship is valid but it needs to be nuanced by a Biblical theology that holds the transcendence of God in tension as well. A Biblical framework for relationships, instituted and constituted by the covenantal relationship that God invites us into, provides both a source and a guide for accuracy, or truth. However, it requires much more of both leadership and congregation to engage hearts and minds in worship, and to critically reflect – is this how we are to respond to God’s call to worship? What is God doing in and through our worship? What is the next step?

There’s a genuine need for more theological thinking about all kinds of worship, not just the ones we like or dislike, the ones we are familiar with, or the ones we don’t comprehend. We cannot rely solely on the work done by our predecessors who also struggled with the same sorts of questions. The very existence of contemporary and emerging worship tells us something. The attempt to be relevant and authentic, and to take the role of experience seriously, is shaping worship and theology, worshippers and theologians. For some, these attempts are where they find God, in a way that they cannot in a liturgical setting.

Bibliography

Anderson, Ray S. *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2006.

Bevans, Stephen B. *Models of Contextual Theology*. Rev. and expanded ed. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002.

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship., and Faith Alive Christian Resources. *The Worship Sourcebook*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Calvin Institute of Christian Worship : Faith Alive : Baker Books, 2004.

Crichton, J. D. “A Theology of Worship.” In *The Study of Liturgy*, edited by Geoffrey Wainwright Cheslyn Jones, Edward Yarnold SJ. London: SPCK, 1987.

Edwards, Jonathan. *A Treatise Concerning the Reli-*

²⁵ E.g. Charles Wesley’s ‘Jesus, Lover of my soul, Let me to Thy bosom fly.’

gious Affections. Elizabeth-Town [N.J.] : Printed by Shepard Kollock, for , no. 237, Queen-Street, New York, M,DCC,LXXXVII. [1787]. ed. New York: Robert Hodge, 1787.

Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985.

Frame, John M. *Contemporary Worship Music*. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1997.

Jones, P.S. *Singing and Making Music*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R, 2006.

Kimball, Dan. *The Emerging Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.

———. *Emerging Worship*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.

McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology : An Introduction*. 3rd ed. Malden, MA ; Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.

Miller, Mandi. “The Emotional Effects of Music on Religious Experience: A Study of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Style of Music and Worship.” University of Canterbury, 2001.

Old, Hughes Oliphant. *Themes and Variations for a Christian Doxology : Being the Clinton Lectures, Delivered Spring Semester, 1989, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1992.

Plantinga, Cornelius, Sue A. Rozeboom, and Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. *Discerning the Spirits : A Guide to Thinking About Christian Worship Today*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2003.

Taylor, Steve. “A New Way of Being Church : A Case Study Approach to Cityside Baptist Church as Christian Faith “Making Do” In a Postmodern World : A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.” 2004.

Torrance, James. *Worship, Community & the Triune God of Grace*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996.

Webber, Robert. *Worship, Old and New*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1982.

———. *The Younger Evangelicals : Facing the Challenges of the New World*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2002.

Wren, B. *Praying Twice*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.

Is God bored with our worship?

Darryl Tempero, Hornby Presbyterian Community Church, Christchurch

I have a challenge for you. I think over the years I have heard every criticism of worship there is to hear. In fact, I'm so confident in that I will give a Moro bar to anyone who thinks they can give me a criticism I haven't heard.

The wider Church I have grown up in tends to disagree a lot, particularly when it comes to "worship", and most of the time when people use the word they mean singing. A whole raft of books have been written on "worship wars", and many of us have no doubt heard these before: "there are too many 'I' songs, it's all about 'me', it's an individualistic approach to our worship; it's culturally irrelevant - no one sings in our culture anymore; there is always tension between Charismatic styles and expressions versus more conservative; contemporary songs versus traditional music; the emerging church or 'alt worship' styles of worship - how it's the best way ahead now; a criticism of the theology, depth and focus of the songs we use; the musical style of songs are very different from our culture; the lack of other art forms used rather than just songs; repetitive and un-engaging liturgy - written or aural..." and on the list goes. Sometimes it's a little more subjective: "it's not quite what I was looking for; it didn't move me; it was boring..."

It makes me wonder if God is bored with our worship.

It's tempting to enter into these debates and say things like: "that Isaac Watts¹, he has a lot to answer for!" Maybe people don't sing in our culture anymore, but tell that to the students on the banks of Carisbrook, people at a party using Playstation "Singstar"² or at the recent U2 concerts where 60,000 people sang their hearts out. It's tempting to want to try and resolve these challenges, because one can be left with a feeling that we're in a no-win situation. All these wars do is divide local congregations and national denominations.

But that's not what this article is about. I wonder if we are missing something? I wonder if these conversations begin at the wrong starting point, and the simple fact that we can't resolve these issues point to the fact that the issue is a deeper one.

1 Composer of "When I Survey (the wondrous cross)," 1707.

2 A karaoke game where participants sing along to a pop song & video clip and are measured on how well they sing.

One writer I have found very helpful unpack this for me is James Torrance. He identified an aspect of our worship that could contribute to a sense of dissatisfaction with our worship - it's unitarian³. Unitarian worship is about what we do - we sing, we listen, we give, we pray. Yes, we respond to God, but it's secondary not primary to what worship really is. Because our predominant understanding of worship is about what we do, that means we evaluate our methods, practices and tools, and our focus is always on what we do, and not deeper issues of what is really happening. Not only do we argue about what we do, and the right way to do it, and maybe we can get bored and tired with it because at the end of the day it doesn't meet our expectations - and it never will while we think this way.

He (and others) suggests our understanding of worship needs to be more Trinitarian:

*Christian worship is, therefore, our participation through the Spirit in the Son's communion with the Father, in his vicarious life of worship and intercession.*⁴

Vicarious means "in the place of another". Jesus is our mediator, our high priest, and like the High Priest in the Old Testament, he goes before the Father as our representative.

When we talk of the worship leader in many of our congregations we are usually referring to the service leader or the song leader. When we read Hebrews 8:

¹ Now the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ² a minister [leitourgos] in the sanctuary and the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up.

Leitourgos means "a public servant", or minister. In the New Testament it is used of Christ, as a "minister of the sanctuary" or "worship leader" in the Heavens. John Calvin said once "Christ is the great choirmaster who tunes our hearts to sing Gods

3 James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community & The Triune God of Grace* (Illinois: IVP, 1996), p20.

4 Torrance, pg 15 & 20.

praise⁵” and in Hebrews 2:12 “I [Jesus] will sing your praise in the great congregation.”

Jesus is the worship leader, as our high priest, the only one who can come before God. Some may argue we worship Jesus as our King of Kings, which is true. The suggestion here is that we don’t throw that out, but that it needs to be balanced with an understanding of the role of Christ as our priest. Christ is both the object of our worship, and the leader and mediator of our worship.

The Old Testament imagery of the High Priest gives some clues to this, in that this person represented the nation before God. Access to God was through this person, and as the writer to Hebrews describes Christ is in that role today. Our access to God is through Christ, in the Spirit. It’s like Jesus our mediator, reaches down and lifts us to participate in the very life and communion of the Godhead.

If we think about worship this way, it gives us something we can help people participate in. We either join worship, or we don’t. If that’s the case, I wonder if the term “joining worship” is a misnomer. You can’t use the word “worship” with an adjective – if you do, you misunderstand what worship is. We either join worship, or we don’t.

Jesus is interceding for us all the time, going “into bat” for us as our intercessor. He worships in our place – the only one who can enter God’s presence, but he reaches out his hand, and as a gift offers to lift us into that worship, into the communion between him and the Father.

A metaphor that may help unpack this further is one of an “embrace”. Millard Erickson (and others) describe the Trinity as a “society”, bonded together so closely by love that they are actually one: “Each person of God in embrace with each other – reaching out to each other in love, giving of each other, in a love so perfect and powerful it can create the universe.”⁶

Using metaphors to describe God always has its shortcomings, but I wonder if this is a helpful image of worship. Imagine for a moment an embrace between a husband and a wife. Their three year old boy sees what’s going on and runs over and pushes his way in between the couple’s legs and wants to be part of the action.

5 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion Vol 1 & 2*, Ed John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), II.15.6.

6 M.J. Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), p58.

What would happen if the father blocked off the toddler, and prevented him from entering into the hug, leaving him standing outside just looking. How does he feel? Isolated, excluded, unwanted, rejected, confused, unsure of his identity, and probably really upset.

Now imagine his dad opens one side of the embrace, bends down, reaches out a hand, picks his son up and lifts him into the middle of the hug. Now how does he feel? No doubt he has a sense of belonging, of acceptance, of joy, peace, security, fulfillment, and the list goes on. He doesn’t have to do anything – he simply accepts his father’s hand. He is not motivated by those needs being met, in fact he isn’t even aware he has those needs, but he does know the difference between “in” or “out”. He simply wants to be part of the embrace, and then there are blessings as a consequence of being there.

Now as he grows older, more independent, and more sophisticated, he may not want to be part of his parents’ embrace – and isn’t that the way we are with God? The more independent we are, the more sophisticated, the less we want to be part of God’s embrace.

I find this image helpful for understanding worship. Jesus lifts us into the expression of love that is already there. In Christ we find our identity, security, and calling. The more we realise our fallenness, and sinfulness, we are in a position to respond to the offer of Jesus to lift us, in the Spirit, into the embrace between the Son and the Father. To worship is to be lifted into the embrace of God, not because of our actions, but because of our responding to the gift that Jesus offers.

To rely on our songs, or methods, or styles, or the “right” way to do things is to fall back to a human attempt to reach God. Those things are important, but they are secondary to us understanding that worship is not about what we do, but about joining Christ.

If we simply have a shift in attitude and perspective towards this understanding of worship, it puts paid to all the arguments about how we do things and allows us then to ask questions like: what are helpful ways to express ourselves while in the embrace of God? What tools are available to us (eg. what songs, music, art, etc)? What journey best helps our faith community recognise the hand that is extended to us? We can take comfort that the Reformed journey of worship (gathering, proclamation etc) serves this image well.

I suspect that by engaging in conversations about worship at this level potentially unites us all as a church, and then

the “tools” become less controversial but still important depending on the context we find ourselves in. For example, what style of music should we have? Maybe the style that effectively serves the most vulnerable amongst us, which could be people from any age group. What most effectively serves our community may not be the most effective for yours.

Understanding our context for planning a journey like this is critical for helping people understand what it is we are joining. Some emerging church literature has helped us focus on context and use models like “curator” describing our role as service leaders. Someone who works hard at the context rather than the content, and allows people on the journey to participate in and discover God. In our Reformed context we can do well do reflect on this, but some ask if this term is too passive. Reflecting on this I wonder if it’s a case of “both/and.” It’s important to have people trained in word and sacrament, at the same time acknowledging that we are a priesthood of all believers. Would the term “professional curator” help? One who helps people understand the environment and the journey of worship - rather than being completely prescriptive on one hand or completely passive on the other?

As a professional curator, we recognise where people that we serve are at. We don’t offend them by holding their hand when they don’t need it, nor do we leave it all up to them to find out for themselves. We are motivated by love for people and have a desire to see them lifted into worship.

The journey is like jazz - it has freedom and even spontaneity, but as one person said it only works because the musicians are following a regular, predictable, repeated chord structure. Without this structure, the music would be chaos. Meaningful spontaneity and creativity happen with structure⁷.

If we follow the “journey”, the path followed by those gone before us, not only do we join something much bigger than ourselves, but we are released to explore other forms of creativity and other forms of expression that serve our context effectively.

Another important aspect of this image of worship is that of our relationship with each other. To remain with the metaphor, imagine trying to lift up into the embrace two

pre-schoolers who are fighting and squabbling. Very difficult. Interesting that Jesus prayed that we would be one, as he is one with the Father. Conflict and tension within our relationships are always going to have a deterrent effect on our worship expression.

Related to that, much has been said about “permission giving” in the church, particularly in the 1990s. While we are a priesthood of all believers, I wonder if the desire to give permission has in some cases created more problems with lay leaders who don’t understand their role, and ministers without the skills or training in leading them? Conflict arises as the desire for “control” of the worship service is expressed. The model of a “team of curators” with the minister as leader both helps people participate and contribute but also keeps everyone in the same space, working together on the same journey. Sure some may focus on aspects of the journey, but all understand the intended destination and how we get there together.

Is God bored with our worship? The question doesn’t really make sense. God may be bored with some of our attempts at worship or may grieve over some of our conflict about worship expressions, but we can know for certain that Christ’s hand is extended constantly for us to accept, and be lifted into the eternal love that transforms us and enables us to join God in His mission.

Bibliography

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion Vol 1 & 2*, Ed John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960).

M. J. Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity*, Grand Rapids, (MI: Baker Books 2000).

James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community & The Triune God of Grace* (IL: IVP, 1996).

The Worship Sourcebook, (Grand Rapids: Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Faith Alive Christian Resources and Baker Books, 2004).

⁷ *The Worship Sourcebook*, (Grand Rapids: Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Faith Alive Christian Resources and Baker Books, 2004), p24

Worshipping with aliens, widows and orphans

Diane Gilliam-Weekes, Upper Clutha Presbyterian Parish, Central Otago

Assignment: write about designing worship for “non-church” people. OK, in trying to do this I’m going to assume that by “worship”¹¹ in this issue of *Candour* we’re talking about creating times and spaces where people can tune into and respond to God’s²² wavelength in the company of others with their body mind and spirit. What it looks like, what it sounds like, even what it smells like, will depend on who you’re trying to serve and what’s keeping them away from your church now.

First seek to understand

My experience in the Upper Clutha is it’s better to have a group of people in mind before beginning to design anything. Why: because first impressions matter and you may only ever get one chance. You might be surprised at what they’d find helpful in tuning in with God. And you might be knocked out to learn what and even who they find unhelpful. It also pays to reflect on what God might already be doing in their lives and getting in on that. [apologies to Eugene Peterson].

Of course it goes without saying that designing worship for a bunch of 16-year-old boys is going to be very different from young families with toddlers; different again for alternative life style new-agers or comfortably off retirees who’d rather play golf on Sunday morning.

If this part of the process bothers you or if you’re afraid you’ll have to operate out of your comfort zone, you might be better off delegating the task to someone else. If this part of the process bothers your church and people are fearful of anything going on that they can’t understand or control, then you’ve got some major culture change to work on before going further. Help your church [or at least your session or parish council] fall in love with the particular people you want to reach.

Next build a team

My experience is you can’t do a lot without a team of people who really love those for whom you’re trying to design worship. If they love them, they will respect them and efforts will be more about facilitating worship than controlling how people worship.

1 I take it as a given that all of life can be an act of worship whether in community or in solitude.

2 And I take it as a given that Christian worship is about connecting with God as Creator, Incarnate Redeemer and Holy Spirit.

Praying and dreaming together as a team, you create a vision for the kind of time and space most helpful for the group you’re trying to serve. You develop a set values around what you’re trying to achieve that need to be shared by everyone in the team. Be patient; this part of the process can take up to six months. And remember, as the great desert survival test demonstrates, teams are much more likely to make sound decisions. In recruiting our teams, we found that heart is far more important than age status or experience.

Be logical

It pays to examine your motives carefully. There are plenty of effective ways to serve and build bridges with the community. And there are many good tools for intentional evangelism with people outside your church. Designing worship may not be what you’re really trying to accomplish. If you’re looking for a way to get to know people, Mainly Music or hanging around in the pub might be a better bet. If you looking to connect with highly spiritual people who don’t follow Jesus, maybe a lunch once a month where everyone can each share their faith perspective as friends will work better.

But if you’re really keen to create effective times and spaces for people to tune into God’s wavelength together, then it’s logical to design worship for, or even better with, those your trying to serve. And remember there already are great models out there. Google it or find out who else has been serving the group you’re targeting. It would be crazy to set up worship for university students without looking at Studentsoul.

Be open

What if your research reveals the most effective time and space for a particular group to tune into God’s wavelength is for them to listen to a Joy Cowley poem and then sit on the floor in silence for half an hour at 7.30 at night surrounded by candles ending in prayer, discussion and food? What if it’s jumping up and down to loud electronic music? What if it’s hearing a three-minute Jesus-story contextualised for their lives and the rest of the time spent in spirited conversation or doing interactive drawing on the story with free muffins and coffee and music playing in the background?

If you’re just wanting to be invitational

We also found it’s possible to make any flavour of cor-

porate worship friendly and welcoming and comprehensible to strangers – if existing worshippers are committed to hospitality. I don't think it's necessary to throw the baby out with the bathwater. It may be counterproductive to mess with a service that's effectively nourishing and equipping people who already see themselves as followers of Jesus and morph it into something for people who've never entered a church in their lives or have been alienated from the Christian community.

Sometimes what has stopped people from coming to your church is they were sure you'd all be a pack of judgmental, boring, control freaks.

Above all, pray to be open to God's guidance in these things and don't be afraid to fail or make a fool of yourselves. People outside the church are generally grateful that you care about them at all.

Navigating contemporary music

Peter Bristow, Forrest Hill Presbyterian, North Shore

Michael Frost stood, reading out the lyrics to a popular contemporary worship song in the most lascivious voice he could muster, and it really did sound like a love song expressing some fairly hot emotions (though as the Goons would say; "it's all in the mind, you know.") All of a sudden my mind yelled, "Hey, hang on a darn minute, that's a Delirious song! Ooooh...") He was using it to demonstrate a sub-genre of worship music being branded as "Jesus is my boyfriend". When it comes down to it, a lot of songs are about "me" and my relationship with God, and in the process can lose the grand view of God's awesome attributes and His great plan for the whole of humanity.

The good news is that a newer wave of artists are bringing those more elevated themes back into contemporary worship music; artists who come from a wide cross section of spiritual and denominational backgrounds.

On a wall of the Christian bookstore where my wife works is a growing, bewildering range of CDs featuring worship music from a wide range of sources. The familiar favourites, Parachute, Hillsongs, Vineyard, and Integrity, are side by side with newer combinations like Planetshakers and the growing stable of Passion and independent artists. There are also an emerging number of artists releasing albums and tracks on iTunes before their music ever reaches your local bookshop. Among some of these, a theme of social justice is finding a place alongside the more usual songs of praise and personal commitment.

There is a sameness in the musical style that is somewhere in the middle of the contemporary/rock genre with

various excursions out to the fringes of funk, hip-hop, country, punk and even techno – though of course there are so many sub-genres of popular music, each with its own tribe, that it's hard to say exactly where any particular album fits on the bumpy rock continuum of genres.

As well as more alternative kinds of artists like Sons of Korah and the Iona outings, new music is pouring in from both sides of the Atlantic. A strong movement is coming via the Passion movement lead by Louie Giglio (check out his amazing DVDs) that seems to operate on the North American side of the Atlantic and the Soul Survivor movement, lead by Mike Pilavachi, which is strong in the UK and has already had quite an influence here in New Zealand.

So Graham Kendrick is no longer the best thing coming out of Britain for worship music. Artists like Stuart Townend ("In Christ Alone") and the Fellinghams ("You are my Anchor") have been influencing the music some of us have been using for the last eight or so years. Keith Getty is a young Irish man who has been writing a new hymnody in the modern musical idiom and he has a number of CDs under the title "Irish Hymns", which include a rousing update of "Your Hand O God has Guided." For the observant, there have been a number Spring Harvest songbooks reaching New Zealand shops, which as well as being a useful compendium of recent worship works, contain some vibrant arrangements of traditional worship music (aka hymns.) Many have also experienced some influence from the UK Vineyard contributions which include "Come, now is the time to worship". There are other artists like Martyn Layzell, whom we've used

for a great song about the cross, and Brenton Brown, who wrote “Over all the Earth”, who have fuelled our creativity and variety. And, of course, there’s Delirious, rocking young peoples’ socks off for about 14 years...and some not so young.

The newer British artists include Matt Redman (“Heart of Worship”) and Tim Hughes of Holy Trinity Brompton (“Here I am to Worship” and “Happy Day”) and his protégés Ben Cantelon, Al Gordon and Lex Buckley. As well, from across the Irish Sea comes Robin Mark, whose two “Revival in Belfast” albums have provided music of hymn-like structure with a Celtic feel. This year has also seen the first release from a Belfast team called Bluetree, who carry a clear theme of outreach and a concern for justice (this we’ve picked up online as it hasn’t even arrived in NZ shops yet, but they have a wonderful song, “God in this City” which is a challenge to our role as alternative communities in the urban environment. We’re already singing it on Sundays at FHPC.)

On the North American side of the great pond, worship music has been a thriving industry for a number of years. One only has to consider Integrity Hosanna and Vineyard Music to see that level of commercialism. However, the most stunning contribution to the worship music scene has come through the Passion movement. The artists that have been a part of this movement have included Englishmen Redman and Hughes and Englishwoman Lex Buckley; but also the charming melodies and strong words of Chris Tomlin (though you need to transpose his music down to be within the reach of congregations) and the quirky style of David Crowder and the raw challenge of Charlie Hall. Some of these artists are best used by a band more at ease in rock styles, but we’ve successfully used a number of Tomlin’s songs in corporate worship for a wide age range, using guitar, piano, organ, trumpet and drums. Chris Tomlin has recently adapted “Amazing Grace” by inserting a chorus that he has written – quite stirring.

A recently released artist we’ve enjoyed using is Matt Maher, a Catholic worship leader from Arizona via Newfoundland. His song “Your Grace is Enough” is already a favourite. He is one of a number of artists who are beginning to bring social justice themes into their music. In his punky “Look Like a Fool”, there is a bridge that’s taken straight from Matthew 25 and Isaiah 58.

More on the margins are artists like Robbie Seay, who leads worship at an Emerging Church called Ecclesia Houston lead by his brother Chris. I’d also include the previously mentioned Charlie Hall, whose music and lyrics are a challenge, but not impossible for a skilled rock worship team.

Then in our own backyard and across the ditch there is a wealth of good contemporary music of the more usual praise-type. Parachute Band, Form and Brian Platt right here in Aotearoa NZ; and Hillsongs, Planetshakers and Christian City Church music from Australia. However, our feeling is that some of the more local resources have not moved much beyond a now fairly predictable lyric and music style.

Perhaps the best thing to do is to research the possibilities on the web. Some great websites to try include worship-

together.com, worshipcentral.com and worshipmusic.com as well as parachutemusic.com and survivor.co.uk. They have more than music, often including pod-

casts, video interviews and samples of what you might be looking for. Worshiptogether will give you regular access to free sheet music for quite current, even new, music. If you’re happy to pay, there are now a lot of ways to buy the sheet music online, which will save you buying a book from which you may use as little as 20 percent of the content.

Forrest Hill has built up an extensive worship library and because of the web we’ve stopped buying so many worship songbooks. We’re still old fashioned enough to be buying whole albums instead of only the tracks we want on iTunes – but then we just love listening to whole albums at a time. Our current repertoire ranges from the 3rd edition of the Church Hymnal to the yet-to-arrive music of Bluetree, through a whole lot of widely varying resources in between. And, of course, there is the wide range of jazz, ambient, remixed classical, rock and pop music that we use in other ways during the service to bring a pause in the sermon, provide background for Communion and for times of reflection.

What you choose and how you use it will have to do with the sense of mission your particular community of faith works from and the resources you have for playing it, but whatever you choose and however you use it, have fun expanding the possibilities for your church.

The shape of our worship

Denzil Brown, minister emeritus, Wellington

At an impressive gathering marking the 150th anniversary of one of our notable parish churches, the preacher in the service of Holy Communion that followed the old forms said: “my mother has Alzheimers’s disease. She cannot remember who she is, who we are, or where she came from, though occasionally there are flashes of memory”. “I sometimes wonder,” he said, “if the church of today is suffering from such an ailment.” We cannot remember who we are or what is our story, so it is easy for our people to turn away from one another when they encounter the pressures and challenges of discipleship in our time. But there are moments when we do remember and are held back from losing the plot altogether. One of these moments is when we all, of different persuasion, gather under the Lord’s command to do this for his recalling.

When Paul said “I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you” he was not speaking of his own ideas on worship. He was being faithful to what he had “received”. And the strength of early church worship lay in the Spirit infusing with life in the present moment what they, in turn, had received from the Lord, in the past.

How did the early Church worship?

Jesus “as was his custom” went regularly to Sabbath worship in the synagogue and his disciples went with him. In Luke 4 we are told on this Sabbath he was invited to read and preach on the lectionary reading for the day. Under Jesus’ ministry, that reading conveyed new power: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”.

After the death of Jesus, the disciples continued to worship in the synagogues, but they added to it: the action of Jesus in the Upper Room. Early on the first day of the working week, before dawn, they would gather in private homes which had a room large enough for them to meet together and there celebrate the Lord’s Supper (Acts 2). When some decades later they were driven out of the synagogues, they continued to meet early on the Sunday morning, but now they began with the pattern they knew from synagogue: worship followed by the service of the Upper Room.

Three stages in the service

This gave them a threefold movement in worship. First the Approach, involving singing psalms of praise or adoration to God and prayers of Confession.

Then came the service of the Word: Old Testament readings to which they added either part of a letter from Paul and/or one of the Gospel fragments being circulated at the time, and apostle or a disciple would then expound the word.

The climax was the Upper Room where intercessions were shared for all people, and bread and wine brought and gifts of money brought for sharing with the needy. Having set apart some of the bread and wine, they offered the great prayer of thanksgiving for creation and redemption in Christ and, having blessed the bread and broken it, received the bread and wine that Jesus had declared to be his body and blood given for their salvation. They were then sent out into the world to serve Christ.

This became the basic shape of worship in churches both of the East and of the West, though the manner might vary from stark plainness to rich ceremonial. Yet the purpose was and is the same.

It continued pretty much like this for 1000 years, but as the Western church became wealthy and powerful as part of the political establishment, it suited powers that be for the Sunday sacramental services to be imperial Latin, including the Scriptures, and the action at the Lord’s Table set in a far off chancel unable to be heard by the congregation, who received communion as such only on Easter Day.

The Genevan Reformation and Sunday worship

Luther Calvin and Knox never intended to found new churches, but to re-form the church in which they had been nurtured. They thought of themselves as loyal members of the church catholic, “the Kirk” as the Scots called it. They considered they were helping the church to go back to the Biblical pattern approved by the early church Fathers whose teaching they highly respected. This involved worship in the vernacular language of the people, open access of all to the Scriptures, also in the vernacular, and regular weekly preaching from the Scripture by ministers of the Word and sacrament.

One thing Calvin found difficult to restore; he wished to restore Word and sacrament together as the basic diet of worship as in the early church “at least once in every

week". However, the governing magistrates of Geneva who became the first Reformed Church councils had become used to communicating only in the bread and then only at Easter. They resisted Calvin, who reluctantly agreed to the Lord's Supper being celebrated monthly and in some places quarterly. He never gave up teaching frequent communion and on his death bed with the pastors of Geneva gathered about him urged them to finish the reformation by restoring weekly communion as soon as possible.

Calvin, however, achieved one thing: that even when the eucharistic elements are not present and shared, he urged the shape of the principle morning service should follow the pattern of prayer in the liturgy of Lord's Supper. It involved the three stages of: the Approach, the service of the Word, the response to the Word (or Upper Room)

This had, and has, two major benefits. First, that it ensures all aspects of prayer are included in worship and the congregation is not shortchanged by some dimension of prayer being missed out. (For many years the first question of the presbytery visitation meeting with the parish minister was: "produce your order of service. Are all the elements of worship included?") Second, the service has shape, and movement. It is a kind of staircase to God. And the people are not dependant on the components of the service being at the whim of the minister without regard to the importance of common worship.

The three moments in common worship

Part 1: The approach to God: The prayer of Adoration or Praise (often today confused with the prayer of Thanksgiving), looks beyond our personal concerns to our acknowledging who God is, "the one in whom we live and move and have our being". In some respects it is the liturgical version of the famous answer to the first question in the Shorter Catechism: "Mankind's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy God forever".

In the light of whom God is, and calls us to be, we come to Confession. If we are to avoid a trivial view of sin, it is important that we recognise sin is falling short of our "awesome" God's loving purpose for us. Further we also live in a society that fails to put God first. So too we acknowledge that communally too we are involved in this falling away, for which we need the assurance of forgiveness and restoration of Christ to being a new life.

Following that assurance, it is appropriate to ask for God's Grace for living the life of faith and witness, particularly in the light of our journey together through the Christian

year. Just as we also need to reflect on God before we begin our daily Scripture readings, so this approach to God and our confession makes us more open to hearing God speak to us through the Word read and preached.

Part II: Traditionally those of the Reformed church tradition have attached much importance to the reading of the OT and NT scriptures and to the preaching of the Word. Our theological education of the ordained ministry has had a considerable focus on that concern to "hear the Word of God".

The great advantage of the lectionary use at this stage is it safeguards the minister from limiting his or her people's exposure to the riches of the scriptures to those passages known and familiar to the preacher. There is also a deep satisfaction to know we are part of a worldwide consideration of the passages of the Sunday lections. At the same time we need not be so bound to the lectionary we cannot present on occasion, say, a series of sermons on a key theme of faith and life particularly relevant to our time and place.

Part III: Is the Response to the Word. Often the sermon is followed and very appropriately by:

An **affirmation of faith**, in the form of one of the historic creeds or one of the excellent and well expressed affirmation various churches have developed.

The **intercessions** present an opportunity for us to look beyond our own personal concerns. In this we fulfill God's purpose for us as we pray for others: for the universal church and our local church and parish; for our world and our nation; for our local community; for those in particular need and, in a few moments of silence, for those things much on our own hearts.

You can tell a good deal about a congregation as you listen to the intercessions – the prayers of the people: Are they really concerned for the whole of God's world or just their own concerns and those of people like themselves?

It is good for intercessions to be simple and clearly focused. I find a versicle and response after each clause is helpful for congregational participation. And it's best for such responses to be familiar, simple and Scriptural, rather than composed for each Sunday.

Concluding the intercessions gives an opportunity to look beyond the church here to the great community of the people of God, the communion of the saints, with whom

we still have fellowship in the risen Christ in this world and in the next.

In gratitude to God for God's goodness and grace to us we now bring our **offerings**. (In the early church, these consisted of both money and of bread and wine to share with one another and the needy.)

The climax of the service is the **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Dedication** (as in the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving of the Lord's Supper) with gratitude for God's goodness in creation, and in our redemption in Christ, in the many gifts we enjoy day by day and thanks for what might be a special occasion at worship, gathered up in dedication of our offerings and ourselves to the glad service of our Christ in the world.

(Sadly many churches content themselves with the brief act of praise in our prayers of Approach and omit the prayers of Thanksgiving, so appropriate as the conclusion of our act of worship.)

If the **Lord's Prayer** has not been used following the intercessions (or earlier) this is a traditional and appropriate place to gather up the service.

Our Westminster form of church government says it is the duty of pastors "**to bless the people from God**". The people of God go out in the name of the Lord.

This basic structure of worship helps us to respond to the perceptive questions of the preacher, quoted at the beginning of this article, who was asking if the church has lost its ability to remember who we are and where we have come from.

If we have little awareness as Presbyterians today by reformed church standards and norms, no way of running the tape measure over ourselves as to our worship, then we are in corporate confusion. Ecclesial Alzheimer's?

Brief reflections

Here are some brief reflections on possible responses to the above:

The pattern discussed above is a frame work, not a straight jacket. Within it there can be – and is in practice – a wide variety of style and theological persuasion.

Hymnology and songs of praise (and the opportunities and challenges these present) is important. They are not

touched on here as they merit an article of their own.

Is an order of service the enemy of spontaneity? Those big congregations of charismatic churches don't have orders of service. But in fact their structure of worship generally follows "a high degree of predictability". And at the same time many churches using service books and bulletins increasingly make room for elements of spontaneity.

(c/f Introduction to Christian Worship, JF White, p. 45)

The arrival of powerpoint presents the church with significant opportunities. But the whole service may be taken over by this mode of communication. While attendees may be happy with it as religious spectacle, if this is all they know about worship, they may be unable to relate to worship in other Presbyterian congregations. The powerpoint must be our servant, not our master.

Should our worship be geared to attract those currently outside the church, so they should understand it all if they were to find their way in on a Sunday morning? Join any organisation and you have to learn its ways. It takes a little time for our teenagers to learn to drive – but it's worth while. What really counts is the warmth and perceived geniuses of the fellowship offered to the newcomer.

The above pattern of worship is common to virtually all Presbyterian churches service books and is in sympathy with the structure of worship back to the early church times. It is "where we have come from". It has order, spiritual movement, a theological logic and belongs to us all. It is fitting way, if the Spirit is in our hearts and minds, to respond to the traditional call at the beginning of Presbyterian worship: "let us worship God".

Worship: What, how and why?

Roy Pearson, St Andrew's & St Philip's Presbyterian, North Shore

When asked to write about worship, I thought why me? I don't have any answers, I am struggling with questions about worship, with how we do worship? With both the theology of worship and the practice of worship. And then I thought, well, perhaps I can share my journey so far, perhaps others may glean something from my journey and perhaps, just perhaps, someone reading this will be able to tell me the answers to my questions. And so I begin.

For me the journey began in Vanuatu standing in a raised pulpit two storeys (literally) above the congregation, out of breath from the climb up the stairs, in 40-plus temperatures wearing long trousers, long shirt sleeves and a tie, thinking, "why?!" And the answer given to me by my Ni-Van friends was "because this is what the missionaries told us to do". And so this question remained with me for my three years in Vanuatu. Why? And it has followed me to my ministry on the North Shore; why do we do it this way? Why? And so far the answers have been very similar to those given in Vanuatu: "we have always done it this way."

Having been called to bring the younger generation back to church (almost all of congregation, at my induction, have had more wedding anniversaries than I have had birthdays), I suggested that some changes were needed. But what changes? And here is where my journey began. If I were to be writing a doctoral thesis, I would put myself at the stage of having done enough research to be able to define the question. I have yet to do the research to answer the question. And from this position I share my findings.

What is worship? Well, I believe that worship is our whole life, but for the purposes of this essay, I will define worship as "a service of public worship" - or what we do on Sunday morning.

Traditionally, we gather, we have a call to worship, a hymn, a prayer of adoration and confession, a hymn, readings, hymn, sermon, offering, prayers of intercession, hymn, benediction. Or these in some other order. But these are the traditional elements of a service. I read with interest that the *Directory for Worship* (1995) states that the elements of worship are: prayer, Scripture read and proclaimed, baptism, the Lord's supper, self offer-

ing, and relating to each other and the world. Singing is included under the section entitled prayer. It states "song is a response which engages the whole self in prayer."¹ It continues, "throughout the ages and from varied cultures, the Church has developed additional musical forms for congregational prayer. Congregations are encouraged to use these diverse musical forms for prayer."²

And so what does this mean? As I looked at the *Directory for Worship*, I found the freedom to do anything. And so I began to look at what others were doing.

Last week I preached my sermon in two parts, Part A was before the offering and the scripture readings, and part B was after these. For this sermon I did not preach from the pulpit, and I did not read my notes, I preached from memory. And the result was that the younger members loved it. Even some of the older members made favourable comments. I'm yet to hear a negative comment on last week's service. Now my great question, why? This is why.

I'm blessed to have a number of university professors in my congregation as well as a number of school teachers from primary school to secondary school, and so I have asked them, "what are the keys to teaching", "how do I get my message across" - we are the "teaching elder" after all. And their comment was this: "even in an hour-long lecture, people can only pay attention for 5-8 minutes before they tune out; they tune in later, and for each person this is different, and so at the end of the hour everyone has tuned in and out and is in a different place. So every 10 minutes or so you need to stop, have a break, a joke, or something to allow everyone to refocus."¹ And so last week I broke my sermon into two parts and it was a success. Would I do this again? Yes, perhaps not with the offering in the middle. However, it did work with last week's theme.

Now as I look around some of the larger churches in New Zealand I find the same sort of thing. Most non-denominational churches do not have Scripture readings, but yet you find them in the middle of the sermon. Almost as if

¹ Professor Dr Gary Bold, in a verbal conversation, Gary teaches physics and has won the PM's teacher of the year award, and teaches the lecturers how to lecture. He guides my preaching style, I am eternally grateful for his feedback.

the preacher is breaking up the sermon with a reading. I watch children's TV and find the same thing, High 5 have short segments all relating to a main theme. The news is short segments; no longer do we sit and listen the way we used to. So my first learning is that sermons need to be multi-segmented.

Now I also said that I did not preach from the pulpit, and that I memorised the sermon. This was done for two reasons; firstly, people now want to relate to the minister and the pulpit is seen as a barrier, people want to feel that the minister is one of them, not the great learned clergy. And so for this reason, I choose not to preach from the pulpit and I choose to wear what the majority of the congregation are wearing. When I started, most men wore suits and ties, so did I, now most people wear open necked shirts, so this is what I do. In fact this is why we first started to wear the Geneva gown; it was what the common educated man wore. And so in my preaching I am trying to be relational, trying to relate the Gospel to the people around me.⁴

Secondly, to get the notes out from under my face. In doing this, I have been told that the message comes across better if I don't read my notes; it seems more "real" if I use my own words. And so last week, while having a full transcript, I had it on a music stand off to one side - there if I needed it, there to prompt me, but out of the way enough so that I did not read it. As an aside, I have found that if the notes are in front of me I default to reading them. So in removing them, or placing them just out of reach, I can't read them.

This means that I must have my sermon finished early enough in the week so that I can take the time to memorise it. So my self-imposed deadline is Tuesday 12 noon. (It helps that I have Fridays off and therefore can work Mondays)²

But all this is semantics, akin to shuffling deck chairs on the Titanic. I could include music here as well: I don't believe that changing music styles or changing preaching styles will create a contemporary service. Allow me to explain: in my congregation, the grandparents come while their children and grandchildren go to other churches, and in cross-generational visits I have asked why? (great question – I love it). The answer comes back, "it's not one thing? It's the whole package!"

Now, what is being said is that the underlying assumptions

² I want to thank the Rev Andrew Norton for challenging me to try a notes free sermon presentation, I have not quite got there yet, but am getting close.

need to change; just changing the structure or the style of songs and sermon won't attract the younger crowds. Now hear this, the underlying assumptions need to change. What I have found from my teaching friends is this: the way we learn, the way we gather, the way we process information has radically changed in the past 40-50 years, in a way that has not happened for 400 years or more.

In the 16th century, a well-educated man would collect enough information in his life-time to fill one edition of the Sunday Star-Times. In the 18th century, he would have collected enough to fill seven days worth of New Zealand Heralds. Now we have all the information in the world on our computers in our homes.

So what is the radical change? It is this; we have changed from being receptors to filterers. Allow me to explain. For some 400 years or more we were taught to learn, to remember information, to save away information in our heads, to collate and store. Education relied on an expert learning all there was to know and passing that information on.

But now all the information in the world is available to us in our homes, on the internet, and we no longer have the ability to store this, so we filter what we need and delete what we don't need. Last year my year eight daughter brought home an assignment in which the question was "what are the causes of World War 1?" but what got me were the instructions, "you must have quoted at least five different sources". Clearly here she was being taught how to filter information, how to process which source is reliable, which source is trust worthy. And how to choose.

The movement has been from the experts telling us, and us believing them, to multiple sources of information and that we must filter. For the younger generation, this means that any minister who stands in the pulpit and proclaims to be the expert is immediately filtered, along with other sources. In my congregation, people listen to Benny Hinn, Brian Tamaki, Lloyd Geering, Hour of Power, Credo Dollar and Joyce Meyer, they read Daily Bread, the Word for Today, and a whole stack of other sources, and from these they filter, they choose what to believe and what to ignore.

We all do this, don't we. I often say, "who filters your news for you? TV3, NZ Herald, Stuff.co.nz, who?" People of my generation (I have not yet turned 40) distrust any authoritative source; we want to verify the information by other means, ask questions like, "does it work in practice". For example, this week I have read two articles, one in the paper claims that house prices will continue

to fall, and other from a real estate agent claiming that prices will not fall and we should buy now. Someone is wrong, who? The “expert” real estate agent, or the novice media?

People have moved from the position of trusting and believing whatever the “experts” say to filtering all information and believing only what passes through the filters. So where do these filters come from? From ourselves. Here is the radical change; the final judge of information has shifted from an external source, “The Encyclopaedia of Britannica” or the preacher, or the PHD holder, to an internal source, ourselves. We have become the final judge of all information, we choose what to believe, we choose what is right, we choose. Never before in our history has this been the case, never before have we had enough information to make these decisions. Never before.

My brother was diagnosed with an illness, I searched on the internet and posted him the results, he went to the doctor and the doctor read with interest the information I had found and proclaimed “well, I see you know more about this than I do”. With the information at our finger tips, we are now the experts, on every subject, all the time. We can find any number of people who will agree with us, support our arguments, simply by typing in a few words to Mr Google.

As preachers, as teachers, how do we adjust to this radical change, that until now, we have not even noticed was happening. We no longer can stand in the pulpit and proclaim “the Bible says” or “thus saith the LORD” because our people no longer respond to such claims. I wonder if this is why people tune out every five to eight minute, to filter what has been said. Perhaps we need more filtering time in our services. I always play a reflective musical piece at the end of the sermon, which allows time for people to process, filter and respond to the material presented.

Here is where my research runs out on me. I had a very interesting conversation with a school principal last night. They have replaced parent/teacher interviews with triangle meetings involving parents, teachers and the pupils, and right from year one (five year olds), the child is having input into the learning process. The interview revolves around the child telling the parent(s) what they have learnt, and the child setting education goals for the next term. Personally I have been to these interviews with my own children and found them to be helpful, motivational, and a wonderful experience all round. And the parent/child conversation continues after the meeting has ended. The five year old is being taught that they are the person in control of their learning, that they set the

learning goals and get rewards for achievement them, the teacher and parent become mentors guiding the process.

Never before has the basic way we think, the basic way we process information, changed so radically in such a short time. And to be honest, we need to radically rethink all we do in church. And we need to do this urgently. Just changing the music style, the order of service, the preaching format will not achieve the required results; what we are talking about is a radical change in the basic assumptions we have had for hundreds of years. The world we were trained for no longer exists.

Because we filter information, in order to get our message across we need to either tap into existing filters or build new ones. To build new filters requires a processing of filtered information, so we need to first tap into existing filters. There is a classic Bible story that uses this technique very well; I’m sure we all know of Nathan’s sheep story to King David (2 Samuel 12) and so in preaching we are to tell more stories; in fact Jesus did this. I would almost suggest that traditional exegesis should be outlawed, in that beginning with a text or an authority is the wrong starting point (which means that any Scripture readings should be after the sermon, or during it, never before).

I do need to point out that exegesis needs to be done during sermon prep, but delivering your sermon in an exegetical manner will no longer pass the filters.

We need to start with something that our audience can accept, can relate to, that will get through the filters; either a story or an experience they can relate to. To this end, I have replaced the call to worship with a very short reflection on a media event. For example, think about the way we are currently treating China, with our calls to boycott the Games, with the treatment of the Olympic flame, and what about the free trade agreement; it is almost as if we are saying to China, you will shape up before we deal with you.

What if God did this to us? What if God said you need to have your house in order before I’ll come and visit. What if God said, before I love you, you need to be perfect. Come let us worship the God who accepts us as we are.

A spongy big end

In one of the courses I was studying overseas, each lecture would finish with a five minute wrap-up time. On the whiteboard, the lecturer drew two columns. One was the “plus” column. And the other was the “delta” column. For the plus column, students were invited to give feedback on the aspects of the two-hour lecture they had valued. This included a response to the value of the readings associated with the lecture, the discussions that took place and the material that had been presented. In the delta column, students were invited to make suggestion about the things that could be changed to improve the event. Maybe it was the culture, or perhaps it was because many of the students were paying so much to be there, but by the end of the five minutes both columns would be full.

The lectures themselves were about developing effective organisations. The wrap-up exercise was an illustration of how essential it is to incorporate learning as an integral part of the everyday operation of the organisation. Effective organisations ensure that they have the ability to both absorb (that’s where the sponge comes in) and process both positive endorsement for what they are doing and also criticisms, critiques and suggestions for how things can be improved.

I wonder about our capacity to lightly receive 99 compliments and spend a week wallowing in a single criticism. But how do we improve, as ministers and as a Church? One of my favourite definitions of insanity is based around the belief that by repeating the same action over and over again I can somehow change an outcome.

I wonder if some of the issues we are attempting to respond to now, especially those which relate to our declining influence and size as a church, are reflective of our inability to be a learning organisation. We have at times sought endorsement for our organisational conservatism through claims to our traditions, our reformed doctrine or even to Scripture. Sometimes we have done this with little regard to the outsider or any great interest in the situation in life of those for whom the church and its message hold little significance. As an example, I think of those hours spent planning our mission activities in front of a church whiteboard, brainstorming with other church members about what we think “they” need.

We work within a church whose existence is premised on forgiveness, grace and love. While we might seldom live up to the ideal, those values can make an effective internal critique very difficult. How hard it is to address situations where a minister’s ineffectiveness within the life of

a congregation is manifest in fewer numbers at worship or a congregation that has experienced unabated decline for years. It is difficult to speak about these things.

None of us want to point the finger or be heavy handed here. But whether our ecclesiology places our church in the service of the poor, or the lost or the imprisoned, can we really countenance a situation where our wealth accumulates while our capacity to reach out, embrace, welcome, invite or proclaim, declines?

In my personal experience, the times when I have received the most constructive help and critique have been when I have sought this engagement from competent people and agencies that have been outside my own church and relationship circles (almost everyone within these circles is either too nice or too used to us). On one occasion I enrolled for a 10-week evening copy-writing course and on another occasion took study leave that involved an intensive course on developing preaching skills. Both involved accepting some most disturbing and unsettling criticism. While I found it difficult at the time, these two events were very helpful in skill development but also broke some bad habits and poor practice. As ministers and as a church we need to know that we have become bland, boring tedious, repetitive and dull - just as we need to know how to do things better. There is nothing easy or painless in this.

There have been some quite unhelpful and perhaps false dichotomies used to analyse our situation. Travelling around, I find the biggest differences are not described on the liberal-conservative spectrum but are more associated with cultural differences. Just as in ecology, our ecclesiology should express a grave concern for mono-cultures. Not only are they bland to look at, but they are also most vulnerable to disease.

I do, however, like the “plus” and “delta” analysis. We need to celebrate the good things, but we also need to front up to the changes that need to be made.

Thank you again for your prayers and words of encouragement



Martin