

# Mission and Liturgical Worship

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# 1

## Introduction

*Can a liturgical church also be a missionary church? This blunt but vital question is at the heart of much debate within the churches today. It is no mere academic question.*

At a time of declining congregations and of financial pressures it is a question that needs to be addressed in every church every week. On the one hand, many in our churches value the richness of a liturgical inheritance and the worship of God that it inspires and serves. On the other hand, our hearts long for those who have little or no church contact to be able to worship God in ways that bring them into real encounter with him. This booklet is intended as a general introduction to the question of how a liturgical church can also be a missionary church. It raises many questions which it cannot begin to answer but it does so in the expectation that further booklets in this series will pick up and address some of the specific issues that we raise.

A common idea in the church today is that liturgy and mission do not naturally belong together. For many people, liturgy is thought to be about books (and dull ones at that), fixed words, constraints, inflexibility, and so on—and that is often how liturgy is experienced.

Mission, on the other hand, is associated with flexibility, engagement with culture and meeting people where they are. The conclusion is obvious: liturgy is a hindrance to mission and the best way forward will be to use as little liturgy as possible, simplifying it so that it does not scare away potential worshippers. There are, however, some hidden assumptions operating in this thinking:

*It is a question that needs to be addressed in every church every week*

- that most visitors and newcomers will find informality and lack of structure helpful and, conversely, that they will find a fixed framework stultifying and dull;
- that liturgy is inherently rigid and inflexible, requiring printed books or booklets;
- that the primary role of worship in a mission strategy is to provide attractive services for 'window shopping' visitors.

The advent of the Church of England's *Common Worship* services has raised the question of the relation of liturgy and mission in a very focused way. The stated aim of the Liturgical Commission in producing *Common Worship* was as follows:

The momentum for the revision of the ASB springs from a desire to have the best liturgy possible to meet new evangelistic opportunities and pastoral challenges.<sup>1</sup>

Such a claim is often met with amazement. 'Surely,' people say, 'either the Liturgical Commission do not understand that liturgy and mission cannot co-exist, or the Liturgical Commission have a very different understanding of mission from ours.' In fact the latter is probably near to being the case, and the Church of England's Liturgical Commission are not alone: not everyone shares the assumptions about liturgy and mission that we have outlined above. This booklet is intended to begin exploring some of the other, more positive, ways of understanding the relationship between the two.

# 2

## Liturgy Versus Mission?

### ‘Dumbing Down’ or ‘Riching Up’?

Jesus made it very clear that God is interested in a holistic response from us:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. (Mark 12.30)

Yet, in most discussion about worship and mission, the thinking is almost entirely about our minds. There is a rush to:

- simplify language;
- reduce complex ideas to one simple concept;
- reduce the richness of expression to statements understandable to those with no church background;
- remove any rituals, actions or symbols which are not immediately explained.

In its most extreme form this thinking reduces worship to a performance, in which the ‘service’ is designed entirely with ‘seekers’ in mind.<sup>2</sup> Immediately questions are raised. Is it possible to design worship for those who are, essentially, non-worshippers? The result may well be appealing but is it actually worship? What about the regular congregation of believers? Should there be some other act of worship to nurture and strengthen them—and if so, does this not separate seeker from believer in such a way as to prevent the seeker from ever encountering actual *worship*?

Paul the apostle tackles the issue of seekers in worship in 1 Corinthians 14. The particular question in his mind is how much speaking in tongues is appropriate when unbelievers are present. He is certainly keen to encourage the Christians at Corinth to consider the needs of the visitor, but his assumption is, nonetheless, that the context will be an actual act of *worship* and not a special presentation entirely for the benefit of the outsider. The expectation

is, to reapply John Wesley’s view of the Holy Communion, that worship is not only for the converted, but can itself be a ‘converting ordinance’—a tool of the mission-focused church.

Of course, this is often the problem—worship is seen as just one more tool among many, with evangelism as the primary aim. Whenever anything that is important in its own right is used as a means to another end, there is a distortion and a loss of integrity. Mission and worship are both important in their own right, and both derive from the nature of God himself. We will be truest to the nature of both when we do not try to subordinate either to a

mere sub-set of the other. Ironically, the most appealing aspect of true worship for the outsider is, surely, that our attention is fixed entirely on the Lord whom we worship, and not on the response of the visitor.

*What is comprehended  
may be less significant  
than what is  
apprehended*

A common fear about liturgy (and a criticism of much of the *Common Worship* liturgy) is that visitors will not be able to *understand* it. However, what is

comprehended may be less significant than what is *apprehended*: the ‘feel’ of the place and the people; the sense visitors get of whether what is going on is important to the participants—the sense that ‘God is truly among you’ (1 Corinthians 14.25).

The *Common Worship* baptism service has been much criticized for its supposed wordiness, and for using terms and images which are deeply biblical, but not immediately understandable to the visitor. Yet anecdotal evidence suggests that where the new service is being used creatively with symbol, action, movement and music, visitors are going away with a strong sense of God’s presence, of how important baptism is to the church, and of having been at something that was profoundly significant, even if they did not understand each and every word of it.

*They are seeking the  
experience of God and  
not merely teaching  
about him*

This should not surprise us. After all, which of us could honestly say that we have thoroughly comprehended all that our worship means and represents? One only has to think of how difficult it is to explain what Holy Communion is all about, and why it is so powerful, to see that we do not have to understand something in every last detail before God can meet us in it.

This expectation, that God will touch people and draw them to himself prior to absolute understanding, ought to be even more natural to us in the so-called postmodern context in which we find ourselves. As people abandon

the church, yet embrace other forms of spirituality, they are clearly looking for more than explanations alone. They are seeking the experience of God and not merely teaching about him. Surely this is part of the success of Alpha? What draws people is not just the teaching (which, depending on how it is delivered, may not be up to the best that Holy Trinity Brompton can offer). Rather it is the chance to learn about God in the context of experiencing what it is to belong to God, exemplified in the sharing of food and the chance to ask questions, to make friends and to find acceptance in one's spiritual quest.

## Supermarket Versus Shop Window

One of the most misleading images of the relationship of worship to mission has been that of the shop window. 'Worship is the church's shop window' has been so often repeated that it has become almost unchallengeable.

But is it true? Is not the real window-shopping happening anywhere *but* at church, as our non-Christian friends observe us living the Christian life through the week and as they experience the difference that our faith makes to the way we live, and to the way we treat them and others? This is the true browsing and the real shop window.

We want to suggest a different model for understanding Sunday worship—the supermarket.<sup>3</sup> At a supermarket, the whole shop is one enormous shop window. They display there not just a selection of the goods but all of the goods—you can see immediately everything they sell. They may have *more* of them in the storerooms but they do not have anything *extra* there. They do not hide anything away.

There is, of course, the danger of overload. Some people do not like shopping in supermarkets for just this reason—there is too much choice. But for most people the shopping experience is enhanced by the choices.

The strategy works for the supermarket because your eye may be caught by something which you did not even know you needed (!) which you might buy on the spur of the moment. Even more significantly, you may spot something which you do not need today, but which you may need in a number of weeks or months. This is long-term 'advertising,' but it works.

Back in the church, however, we are still preparing 'shop windows,' still selecting just a few things which we think will be attractive to our visitors, things that we think they can cope with. We put these things, and little else, on display.

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windows'*

We want to suggest that the supermarket model is a more realistic version of the 'shop window' approach. It is, to a large degree, what *Common Worship* sets out to do. It does not 'dumb-down' the liturgy, not even for baptism, where we might expect lots of visitors. On the contrary it 'riches-up' the liturgy, displaying all the riches of the Christian gospel. It does so, not in the expectation that all visitors will immediately understand or engage with every bit of it, but in the hope that they will apprehend something of the enormity of what is happening. No one ever rehearses a football chant, and no one suggests omitting the singing of 'Happy Birthday to you' when young children are present, in case they will not know what to do. In these contexts, as in so many others in life, understanding does not precede participation; we only understand by beginning to take part. This is the

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theory behind enriching the liturgy rather than slimming it down. The hope is that visitors will connect with at least *something* (while the rest goes over their heads) and that if they do not connect with any of it today, they may take away an awareness that the Christian gospel has something to say about all of life's many aspects.

This is why it is so important that our worship engages with every aspect of life. A baptism is typically a time for reflecting on the joy of a new life—either the new life of a child, who is joining the church, or the new spiritual life of an adult. The temptation is therefore to make the entire service completely upbeat—to sing all the liveliest songs (we do not want the visitors thinking we are dull!), to be informal and welcoming, to put people at their ease, to make the Christian life seem appealing and attractive. But what about the member of the baptism party who, that very week (or in the weeks to come), has been made redundant, or who has heard bad news from the doctor? Such people need to pick up from the service the fact that God is also there in the difficult times; they need to engage with lament as well as with joy.

## Short-Term and Long-Term Mission Strategies

We have argued strongly above that we should think twice before assuming that the best mission strategy is to simplify the liturgy. But that is not to say that we should carry on without any consideration for the needs of visitors, as if they simply have to 'like it or lump it' while we carry on with self-indulgent liturgy. All worship should take account of the culture within which it takes place, and our visitors (as well as many of our regulars) bring cultural assumptions and understandings which require the liturgy to be flexible and inculturated, rather than fossilized and out of touch.<sup>4</sup> Both enrichment *and* simplification can be useful tools in a strategy for worship in mission mode.

Learning how to employ both techniques appropriately is part of developing an approach which considers the long term as well as the short term.

When most local church leaders think about worship as part of their mission or evangelism strategy the reality is that they are likely to be thinking about it in the short term—that is, ‘Here are some visitors. What can I do to make it as likely as possible that they will return next week?’ In fact, the things most likely to make them want to return are not the quality or content of the act of worship itself as much as the welcome and sense of being loved and respected that they pick up. This they will gain from those who greet them at the door, the way the notices are given out and what they contain, the sort of jokes that are used in the sermon, and so on. The worship can help or can hinder, but it does not stand alone. The key is hospitality, not just accessibility.

However, even if all these things are right, the odds are heavily against those visitors returning next week. There may be many reasons for this:

- they may have been visiting from some distance, and if they go back to church anywhere it will be near where they live;
- they may be at the very beginnings of a journey towards God, and the good impression they received at your church may not bear fruit in further church attendance for some months or years;
- they may have been at your church for a particular reason of their own—banns of marriage being called, hearing the name of uncle Fred being read out on Remembrance Sunday, being there for the flowers on Mothering Sunday, and so on. Their good experience will make them feel positive about the church, but it will not be enough, of itself, to make them immediately change their life pattern to incorporate regular churchgoing.

Whatever the reason, we need to acknowledge that in terms of worship and mission we need to have a strategy that takes seriously the *long* term as well as the short term aim.

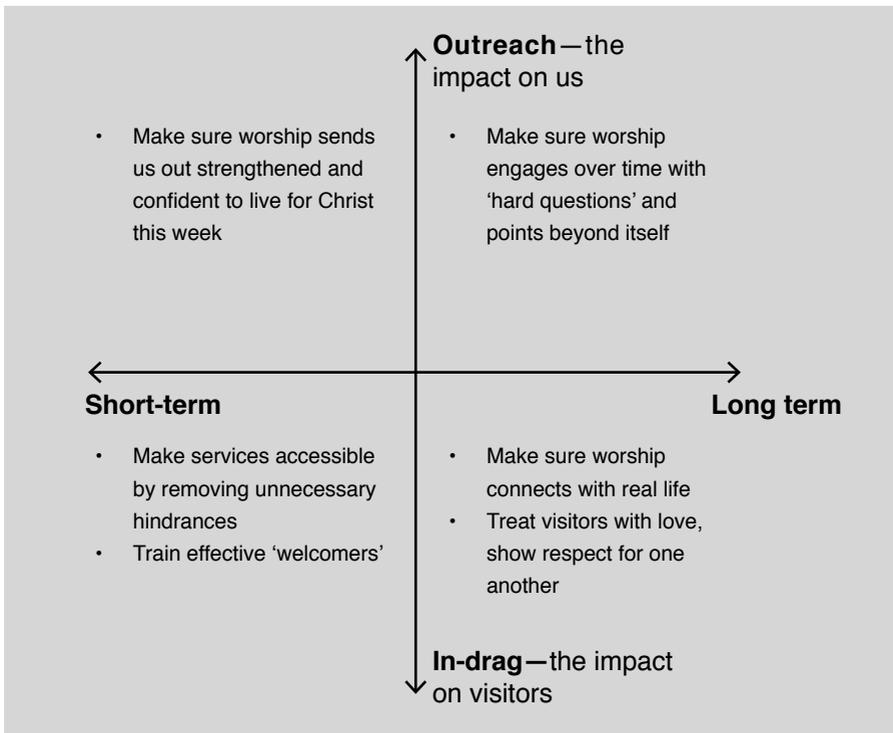
## Outreach and ‘In-Drag’

Much evangelism has been caricatured as being more to do with dragging new people into the church than with genuine willingness to reach out to others with the love of Christ. Christians are always faced with this dilemma. We want to meet people ‘where they are’ with the love of Christ in word and deed, but we also want them to be ‘where we are,’ within the body of Christ, the church. Much thinking about the role of worship in mission (including the

'shop window' model mentioned above) assumes that worship only operates when 'they' come to 'us.' But worship also has a role in forming Christians for mission 'out there.' By energizing and envisioning worshippers, by proclaiming the gospel, by shaping an alternative worldview and by modelling aspects of the kingdom, regular worship plays a significant part in the mission of a local church even before a visitor enters the building.

## A 'Mission in Worship' Strategy Grid

Strategic thinking about mission and worship needs to take seriously both the long and short terms *and* the two dimensions of outreach and in-drag. Putting the two together on a grid can help to focus thinking and to reveal the weakest areas in a church's strategy.



The top-left quadrant is what you might call the 'wow' factor in worship—the sort of worship that, in the short term, sends worshippers out full of excitement, glad to be Christians, and more likely to want to share that feeling with others.

The top-right quadrant represents worship which is able to produce long-term confidence in the Christian faith, which will assist in people's witness to friends, colleagues and family.

The bottom-right section represents worship in which even casual visitors get a glimpse of a God and a faith which is larger than the service attended.

A liturgical form of worship can be a great help in these right-hand 'long-term' quadrants, because the structure of the church's year and the careful attention to content in worship can help to make sure that we do not avoid the parts of the gospel that are harder to engage with.

The bottom-left is the easiest quadrant of the grid to address, and is often the place where thinking about worship and mission starts and *finishes*. A friendly welcome and simplified service booklets that are easy to follow are obvious starting points. But it would be a mistake to think that liturgy is of little help (or even a hindrance) for the short-term strategy with visitors, because liturgical worship can be a help here too.

- It connects with our whole being, body, mind and spirit.
- It gives us simple actions with symbolic meaning.
- It provides visual focus and stimulation.
- It gives us spoken words, which the outsider can join in with (unlike songs and hymns, which need a familiarity with the music for full participation).
- It may provide a structure or an order of service, which can help the visitor to know what will happen next.

So liturgy need not be, by definition, a hindrance to worship which is mission-aware. It may be impossible to provide worship designed entirely for seekers. But it is well worth planning for Christian worship which makes it possible for seekers to feel welcome and comfortable, able to join in with as little or as much as their conscience allows, and gives them a framework for beginning to engage with God. It is also important to consider the longer-term impact of our worship, both on those who visit and on the regular congregation. Together, these considerations can lay the foundation for liturgy which goes beyond making visitors comfortable to making a thoroughgoing contribution to the mission of the church.

# 3

## The Witness of the Worshipping Community

*Whenever and wherever God's people gather we gather as a missionary church. It is part of our identity, not just a separate activity.*

Our regular worship cannot be divorced from mission. God is a missionary God. He came into the world to save us, sending his Son and the Spirit. All our worship should reflect his nature and character and his agenda. There is a place for services or presentations specifically designed for those on the fringe, or for those with little or no church contact. In this booklet, however, we are concentrating on the missionary value of regular church worship, and on realising its potential. This is only an overview, which we hope will stimulate discussion in parishes and beyond.

In Acts 2 we read of the early church gathering together in the Temple courts and meeting together in homes to worship God, and daily there were those who joined them in faith (Acts 2.46f). Their witness and their worship were integrated. Worship that focuses on God, flowing out of faith, expresses relationship with God and articulates dynamic engagement with him. It is evidence of the reality of the living God. So our worship has the potential to bear witness, as part of the overall daily witness of the community.

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To that end it is good to consider how our services appear to occasional visitors, and how we can facilitate engagement with God in what we do—accepting that it is only by his Holy Spirit that people will truly be drawn to know him for themselves.

### Witnessing to the Nature of God

Apart from any service content, our starting point should be the type of community we are. The gathered community witnesses to the love of Christ in its actions. The love that was commanded by our Lord was to be a sign for others, a distinctive feature of those who followed him (see John 13.34–35

and Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17). So our times of corporate worship should be times when this fellowship (*koinonia* in the Greek of the New Testament) is evident. The casual attender is likely to want to find out more about the faith where such love and fellowship is demonstrated, finding this experience a contrast to the individualism and selfishness of the world. It will also transform a random collection of individuals into a loving and healing community, in which those who visit will recognize something of the grace and love of God. If it is not present then we dishonour the Lord, whatever liturgical form is or is not being used.

The challenge of this in practical terms is to assess how loving and welcoming we are when we gather. How do we treat casual visitors? Are we loving towards those who are marginalized in other contexts? Do we put up invisible barriers by making welcome only some of the surrounding community—making others feel as if they do not belong? 'It is as difficult for the average man or woman in the street to enter a church, as it is for the average member of the Mother's Union to enter a betting shop.'<sup>5</sup> Is that so for our church? Does our whole church life foster a culture of welcoming and loving attentiveness to others? How welcoming are we towards any who have special needs? Does our liturgy, or our church lay-out and facilities, demand the separation of disabled people? Do our PA systems include a loop system for deaf people?

## The Gospel in Our Services

### i) A Service of the Word

The development of *A Service of the Word* and *Patterns for Worship* (1995) has been a major step for the Church of England. The history of this is well recorded,<sup>6</sup> and the need for the church's mission to be served by liturgy was an important factor. The call for flexible, culturally relevant services, expressed in such reports as *Faith in the City* (1985), meant that earlier work done on family services paved the way for an authorized flexible form.

With the ministry of the word as central to the structure, the reading of the Scriptures and the preaching is clearly a focal point for potential engagement with the gospel. But the rest of the service is not merely window dressing or just the setting for the sermon. The preparation enables a welcoming and God-focused start to the service. The greeting and call to worship bring us into an awareness of God's presence with us, and the privilege we have in Christ in being able to approach him with confidence and freedom. The prayers of penitence enable real engagement at the deepest level of our being, aware of our need for

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the love, mercy and forgiveness of God, prompting praise and thanksgiving in response to the realization of God's grace—all expressing the gospel. The way we respond to the ministry of the word is flexible, enabling a considered choice of word or action which will facilitate head and heart engagement with Scripture, and with the Spirit working through the words by his power.<sup>7</sup> Then we turn to prayer, ensuring an opportunity to bring before God both personal and community concerns, putting the whole of life into his perspective.

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Holistic worship is supported by *Common Worship*, with encouragement to use actions as well as words, and creative and dynamic approaches to every section of *A Service of the Word*. Building confidence in using action, symbol, and symbolic or participatory involvement, is something which may take some time and some teaching and experimentation. But

enabling love of God in heart, mind, soul and strength is a good aspiration for our worship, and is realized in a more holistic expression.

So the structure of *A Service of the Word*, with all its flexibility of language and form, endeavours to provide for worship that is accessible, relevant, and truly dynamic.

## ii) Morning and Evening Prayer

The orders for Morning and Evening Prayer on Sunday in the main *Common Worship* volume (pp 29ff) are, technically, simply two possible outworkings of *A Service of the Word*. They have, as their basis, the traditional Office<sup>8</sup> pattern of the regular reading of Scripture and the opportunity to respond in praise and prayer. With a natural movement from Old Testament to New Testament, climaxing in a gospel canticle, the message of the saving work of Christ is inherent in the form. The gospel canticle at Morning Prayer is the Benedictus, and at Evening Prayer is the Magnificat, in line with tradition. Both are songs from Luke's infancy narratives that speak of the saving work of Christ. The creed which follows the gospel canticle declares the basic beliefs of the faith community. So with the reading and preaching of the Word and with the liturgy of the Office there is the element of proclamation.

## iii) 'Family' Services

The pressure for 'family services' developed largely because of the need to integrate fringe families, whose initial contact was through a baptism enquiry or some other pastoral contact with the church.<sup>9</sup> Services were needed that provided for children as an important and integral part of the church, rather than either sending them out, or expecting them to be seen but not heard.

The trend towards the integration of children now manifests itself in All Age Worship, recognizing the body of Christ in all ages.

Such services have a definite place in discussion about missionary and evangelistic liturgy, as they often attract the more fringe members of a church community. Parade services for uniformed youth groups, services for high days and holidays (such as Harvest, Mothering Sunday, and Christingle at Christmas time) and regular monthly Sunday services, are often family services. Linked into a wider programme of outreach to young families or other activities such as parent and toddler groups, they can be invaluable for helping to overcome the reticence that young parents and carers may have at bringing children into the church (or coming into it themselves).

A lively approach, which is vibrant and welcoming can draw in the most reluctant contacts. This is aided by having a 'mix-and-match' approach to services that is flexible and yet structured, and is creative and readily adaptable to the context.<sup>10</sup> The pertinent question is then what shapes the content of the service. The service needs to minister to those deepening in their faith who attend regularly, and be accessible for the generally unchurched. If it is always catering for the first-time hearer of the gospel it can have the effect of keeping large sections of the church feeding on milk alone. Much good material is now available to help keep such services rich in content, whilst still being accessible in style (see Chapter 5).

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#### iv) Witness in Baptism and Holy Communion

These two sacraments express the heart of the gospel message—the atoning death of Christ, his resurrection from the dead, and the new life we have in him through faith.

Both are linked with the proclamation of the good news in Scripture, baptism by our Lord's command to make disciples and baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28.19f), and Communion in its remembrance of what Christ has done for us, and in Paul's declaration in Corinthians that whenever we 'do it' we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again (1 Cor 11.26).

Both are linked to the continuing life of the church, which witnesses to the reality of the faith in this day, in this generation, and to God's work in the heart of the believer and in his gathered community.

## a) Baptism

Whenever the church holds a baptism service it not only celebrates the new life in the Spirit of the candidate, but of the whole body of Christ, of which they now become a member. The service is rich with significance, every phrase and action drawing together the biblical imagery that is used to describe the amazing truth of the gospel.

The gospel message is expressed in the words of the service, especially in the prayer over the water, and the promises made and faith affirmed. It is expressed in the act of baptism with the pouring on of water, or the going down into water and emerging again. And it picks up other biblical metaphors related to conversion, such as putting on clean or white clothing, or being given a lighted candle.

It may be true that much of this richness is lost on the first-time attender, perhaps part of the baptism party. However, it is present in the liturgy, and it carries the truths from generation to generation at the heart of the church's life. If even a little of this message is conveyed to a casual attender it is a witness to Christ—the supermarket principle mentioned earlier. They may come back when they want more of what they saw. The experience of accessibility will begin with the hospitality shown, and in the effort made to help people feel comfortable in a strange environment. This can include informal and personal welcome, provision of orders of service that are easy to follow, simple involvement in the service (such as the godparents sharing in the signing of the cross), and songs and prayers in which it is easy to join.

## b) Holy Communion

The eucharistic liturgy is again packed full of the gospel message, and is an occasion for meeting with our living, saving Lord. The service celebrates his specific salvific work on the cross, and its validation in resurrection and ascension. It also tells the wider story of God's work, looking back to the time of the Exodus and forward to the heavenly banquet as part of our future hope. The sense of storytelling is itself part of the Passover pattern, instituted that there should be a regular retelling, through word and action, of God's mighty acts.

In terms of witness this is the true story to which we, in our generation, bear witness. We are both part of the story and the custodians of the story, not for our sakes alone, but to take this story to all the world. It is the place where the body of Christ is identifiable, meeting together with God and with one another, being built up and sent out as those

who know Christ and the good news of his saving love, and are committed to following him, empowered by his Spirit.<sup>11</sup> It has a message for us and for all humankind.

The issues that are raised over its suitability as a service for those who do not yet believe in Christ are many. Perhaps key among them is Paul's teaching that 'he who eats the bread and drinks the cup in an unworthy manner, is guilty of eating and drinking damnation on himself' (1 Cor 11.27–29). There is clearly a duty to protect and care for those who do not yet understand the measure of the power inherent in this simple act. There is also a concern over the very complexity and richness of the message that Communion contains. Colin Buchanan helpfully gathers together some of the concerns that were expressed as the Parish Communion Movement gained ground.<sup>12</sup>

Yet alongside this is the importance of welcoming and nurturing those who are at an early stage of their journey of faith, however unformed it may as yet appear. As a declaration and presentation of the eternal and awe-inspiring gospel truths, an invitation to dwell in Christ and Christ in us, and an opportunity to respond in simple faith, the service of Holy Communion is hard to beat. Many have found it a place of life-changing encounter.<sup>13</sup> Even those who are limited to receiving a blessing, rather than the bread and wine, testify to the love and support that they gain through the act of individual prayer for them at the rail.

As the heart of Christian worship, its witnessing potential is enormous. This bears further examination, as other publications have helpfully covered (see details in Chapter 5). An encounter with God, in the context of a Christ-centred, gospel-centred, cross-centred, salvation-centred liturgy, points to Communion as a potentially missionary activity. Graham Cray underlines the power and significance of Communion as a liturgy that 'provides the secure context for this risky, life-changing, encounter with the risen Christ.' He warns against de-mystifying it, making it so accessible that it loses its *raison d'être*. He says that it is likely that unbelievers will be present, because these days tentative attendance is likely to precede commitment. For those who come along

'there must be a sense of encounter, an experience of God, creating a hunger for God, being able to see that God is among you, and demonstrating Christ is among us by being a community of love, proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes again.'<sup>14</sup>

Again, accessibility is fostered by a personal welcome, through the care of the whole congregation, and by helping those who are new to know what to do so that they do not feel embarrassed. Those ministering can look out for new faces before the service and invite them to participate in receiving communion, or explain about a special prayer of blessing. The material and approach in different parts of the service can be chosen with care to be relevant to the local community.

In general there will rarely be a congregation of total ‘insiders’ at a Communion service and ‘outsiders’ at what we perceive to be more user-friendly services. So rather than reject the potential of Holy Communion as a focus for the gospel message, perhaps we should strengthen this understanding of its role. It can be a blessing for believer and enquirer alike. Eucharistic table discipline is then a matter of pastoral and missionary importance, bringing those who come to Christ at the table to a fuller knowledge of what he has done for them, so that they can come to receive with a worthy, humble, and thankful faith.

The missionary element is also evident in the final act of the Dismissal, in which we are sent out into the world, having been encouraged, strengthened and inspired for the task of living out our faith day by day. Holy Communion is integral to building up a missionary church.

## v) Services for the Local Community

Inviting particular groups to come and join the regular congregation on a specific occasion helps them to feel noticed, valued, and understood. Any community undertaking such services will need to look at their local area, identify different groups, learn about their concerns and way of life, and work out how God’s message relates to that particular context. This will build on friendships that church members make through the workplace, or social or sports clubs, or institutions of the area. Whether a city centre cathedral or backstreet local church, the potential is enormous.

Services can be linked to particular themes or festivals, such as

- St Luke’s Day for healthcare professionals;
- Rogation Sunday for those working on the land, ministering to farmers, farm labourers and supporting livelihoods;
- Awareness days such as World Aids Day, cancer awareness cam-

paigns, Seafaring Sunday or Homelessness Sunday, for ministry to particular groups of people;

- The Commemoration of the Faithful Departed (2 November) for those who have been bereaved over the past year.

In times of local or global disaster the church can also serve the community, sharing the love of Christ. Recent examples are seen in special prayers and services following rail crashes, foot and mouth disease, the attacks on the World Trade Centre, and in more local times of crisis.

Some services relate to the official standing of the church (in the Church of England) such as services for new mayors, or Remembrance Sunday services. In the ecumenical climate of our time these opportunities are unlikely to be confined to Anglican ministry.

There may be sections of the community not covered by any of these, that form a clearly discernible group with which the church can make contact, and which it may serve—anybody from poets to professors, council workers to car parts manufacturers. The ministry needs to build on the day by day witness of being salt and light within a community. So it also needs to go hand in hand with the building up of a missionary congregation.

Alongside these go the regular ministry of the pastoral services for those in the community. Baptism, marriage, funerals, and associated rites, meet a human need that goes beyond the Christian meaning with which they are invested. Consequently they are widely requested and used by the local community, whether church-goers or not. The contacts, statistically, are more likely to be unchurched people. These services therefore operate right on the fringe of belief. They also operate at times when people are asking questions about the nature of life and death, and about the borders between the finite and infinite, the material and the spiritual. As such they open up enormous opportunities for being real about the message of the gospel, even though they are also times when great sensitivity is needed because of the vulnerability of those who approach the church for them. They should primarily be seen as forms of ministry and service rather than evangelistic opportunities. However, wherever God is glorified, and his love is proclaimed in Christ, God will be at work through his Word and by his Spirit.

*Wherever God is glorified, God will be at work through his Word and by his Spirit*

## vi) Services for the Younger Generation / Generation X / 'Alternative Worship'

The Alternative Worship approach concentrates on using forms of communication which are relevant to the subcultures of young people. It is therefore a fluid liturgical provision—using video, image, symbol, ritual, music, and multi-media presentations. A service may be held at a regular time, but its content is usually a specially designed one-off format.

*Alternative worship engages the whole person, and liturgical elements can aid this holistic approach*

Youth culture and liturgy may seem strange companions, but alternative worship has been a point of contact with many young people. It is a good example of worship that is 'riched-up' rather than 'dumbed-down.' Liturgy is often a feature, along with candles, incense, chanted psalms and traditional elements that carry a sense of awe and

reverence, expressing the mystery of the wonder of God making himself known to humankind. The worship engages the whole person, not just the mind, and liturgical elements can aid this. Interestingly it is the very counter-cultural nature of rich and varied forms of worship that is the attraction to the younger generation. The use of all the senses takes them beyond the mundane to an experience which brings them closer to God. Many of these services use Communion as a focal point—often in a shocking way. The drama of the service and the telling of the story can come over more powerfully in the action of the Lord's Supper than in a sermon of words for a sound-bite generation.

However missionary such services turn out to be, those who run them caution against them being set up as evangelistic, for then they run the risk of not being genuine worship. It is in being real worship of God that they focus on him and offer a life-changing encounter for believer and non-believer.

## vii) Different Ways of Being Church

Motivated by a concern for mission, some churches have adopted more radical approaches to their whole structure which fundamentally alter the pattern of worship as well as its content and style. These come outside the focus of this booklet, but are important to note. For example, the small group structure of the Cell Church movement affects the nature of worship both in the groups and when they all meet together.<sup>15</sup> In a different way, the focus, content and style of worship is changed in churches which use the prime gathering time on Saturdays and Sundays for seekers,<sup>16</sup> deferring the regular congregational worship to mid-week meetings. Whether adopted in whole or in part, this approach raises important issues.<sup>17</sup>

# 4

## The Challenge of the 21st Century

*People's perceptions of the church are often the barrier to their attending, or even to seeking faith at all.*

For some the church is

...an exclusive and out-of-date club with strange practices and rituals and dull services. Bishops and clergy [are] seen as white-haired, middle class men, who wear dresses and are always after your money.<sup>18</sup>

For others the perception is of a rather odd bunch of people who do not relate realistically with life, who can be fanatical and judgmental, who are best left alone to get on with what they want to do.

Part of the wider challenge to the church that this presents is how our liturgy can help to overcome such perceptions for the occasional visitor. How can we enable people to come into the presence of the living God in a way that is relevant but also awe-inspiring? Worship, being a two-way, dynamic encounter with almighty God, is by its very nature an unusual occupation. It is a different order of activity from doing the shopping, going to a football match or watching TV. Part of the difficulty we have in making worship accessible is holding a balance between the ordinary, with which people feel familiar, and the extraordinary, which expresses the life-changing, awe-inspiring, glorious event taking place. So how do we decide exactly what activities to put into a service that will do justice to the engagement they should facilitate, and are accessible to the casual visitor at the same time?

*Worship is, by its nature, an unusual occupation*

### Accessible Worship

Many aspects of the liturgical provision that we have, both verbal and non-verbal (ceremony, ritual, architecture and art, dress, symbolism and music), are not ordinary in the world's terms, precisely because they are striving to fulfil the task of expressing that which is beyond us. Perhaps it is therefore

not surprising that those on the fringe find much of it strange. We can jump to a response that deals with the externals. 'They' do not like churches:

- that are always asking for money, so abandon the collection;
- that have boring services, so jazz them up and add attractive, fun activities;
- whose ministers are white-haired middle class men in dresses, so have services led by youthful leaders in casual dress—preferably without a public school accent; and so on.

These changes may well be of value and may affect the response. However, an increasing number of younger people and fringe church members are not satisfied with worship that aims to be like their usual world. They respond better to worship that leads them to experience and know something of the otherness of God. In our postmodern world we cannot assume that people do not want a taste of the mystery and majesty of God that more liturgical forms of worship can express, as well as the sense of his accessibility and intimacy that we value as part of the gospel. So worship must be accessible, but not ordinary.

The challenge is to identify which aspects of our traditional worship have become empty distractions, and which aspects foster and encourage a recognition and engagement with God. A simplistic response of stripping it of all traditional elements may be a counterproductive move that also strips it of its depth and attractiveness to outsiders and church members alike. This leads us to looking at the relationship between culture and liturgy.

## Worship and Cultural Issues

Cultural factors can affect how comfortable people feel when they encounter the forms used in worship. Culture will also affect the way we understand ourselves and our environment, and the way we express ourselves. We must therefore take this into account in our liturgy, by identifying the culture of those whom we serve, and recognizing the points at which it is helpful to be culturally relevant, and the occasions when it may be more appropriate to offer that which is counter-cultural.

In identifying the prevailing culture we also need to recognize that there are usually subcultures which characterize smaller groupings within the larger group. For example in one congregation we may have people from different countries, races, and social groupings, each of which have distinctive cultures. Within those groups there are further subcultures related to age, interests, com-

mon values, peer group identity, shared experience and other uniting factors. Even within a clearly defined sub-group there will be variations in personal preferences, personality, past experience, expectations, upbringing, and so on, which make a single relevant liturgical form somewhat elusive.

The whole area of liturgical inculturation is looked at in other Grove publications, but broadly speaking Christianity can relate to the culture of its context in three different ways.<sup>19</sup>

- Christian rites from other places and times can be transplanted (or imposed), largely unaltered from the form they took at their point of origin.
- Such rites can be adapted in minor ways to be more acceptable in the new context.
- The culture of the new context can pervade the Christian rites, so that it is possible to positively identify the local culture within the liturgy.

When assessing how inculturated our weekly Sunday worship is, or a special service that we are planning, it is helpful to consider which of these three approaches we are taking. The problem is partly that our concern for the safeguarding of Christian truth makes us nervous about allowing the cultural context to influence our practice, for fear of syncretism distorting and corrupting the Christian message.

The forms in *Common Worship* give flexibility to allow for, and positively encourage, culturally relevant worship. Identity is maintained through adherence to set structure and associated notes. Doctrine is protected by adherence to authorized forms in key areas, for example in the Prayers of Penitence, Creeds and Affirmations of Faith, Eucharistic Prayers, and set words for the central acts in the occasional offices. The choices made in both verbal and non-verbal aspects of liturgy can therefore reflect the culture of those who are worshipping, making it more accessible for them and easier for them to engage with God.

## The Way We Communicate

When speaking of culture it is easy to neglect assessment of the way we think and communicate. For some people, words and rational patterns of thoughts are predominant, yet for others picture, story and action are as important or more important than the written or spoken word. Even ways of making decisions about worship, and ways of expressing a point in speech, can vary for

cultural reasons. The *Prayer Book* principle of worship in the vernacular now means more than just using modern vocabulary.

So identifying the prevailing methods of communication in a community, and using these in making choices in how different elements of the service are expressed, can make worship more accessible. For example, we can encourage fuller engagement with God and realization of his involvement in our lives by the use of the visual, or of story, testimony, or activity such as active forms of participating in confession, or intercessory prayer, or an act of recommitment.

## An Accessibility Check-List

When trying to assess and improve the accessibility of our worship these questions may be of some help.

### How Can We Positively Welcome Those From the Local Community?

- How welcoming are we as a church?
- How is God's love, and his desire to save and to heal, expressed among us?
- What is the cultural mix to which we are ministering?
- What is the prevailing culture of our congregation (not necessarily the same as the above)?
- What different cultures are associated with our local ethnic, social or age groupings?
- What special needs do we need to meet to make our church truly accessible?

### What Forms of Communication Would Best Enable Worship of God in Our Area?

- What are the world-views of groups in our community?
- Are there common underlying concepts which the language needs to express?
- Is there a distinctive vocabulary and manner of speech that validates anything said?
- Is the language of the culture wholly verbal and spoken, or are

other forms of communication used? If so, what are they?

- Is the language of the liturgy (verbal and non-verbal) inclusive and accessible to the groups identified, or does it create barriers?

## How Does the Liturgy Relate to the Local Community?

- In the choices made in the liturgical provision?
- In the way the Word is read, and the way it is expounded? What teaching modalities are most appropriate for the cultural grouping? Are the concepts and propositions accessible? Are the illustrations relevant?
- In the ethos and atmosphere created?
- In the music?
- In the visual aspects of the setting and the visual aspects of the liturgy?
- In what it teaches by its form and method as well as its content?

## What is the Effect of Our Liturgy?

- Does it express the worship of the particular people gathered?
- Does it express the worship of the whole person—heart, mind, soul, strength?
- Does it express the nature of Christ's body?
- Does it constrain or liberate worship?
- Does it oppress or liberate the individuals in their relationship with God?
- Does it develop spirituality?
- Does it encourage the indwelling of God's word, and the indwelling of his Spirit?

# 5

## Mission In Liturgical Worship—Conclusion

*Worship should be primarily a God-focused activity, important in its own right, and not merely a tool of evangelism.*

However, we are in a dynamic relationship with a missionary God, so during worship we can expect him to meet with any who are open to him, both those who already know him, and those who have had little or no previous exposure to church. We who share God's love and concern for all people want this to be reflected in our worship, as well as in the rest of our lives.

Within the forms of liturgical worship—its words, actions, symbols, and use of the senses—a whole plethora of truth is conveyed to our whole beings, body, mind and spirit. It is rich beyond the words, and beyond the superficial observation of what is going on. Within this richness there is that which nurtures and expresses worship for the established believer and for the newcomer. Newcomers may not understand the full richness, but they are exposed to it—as in a supermarket they are offered more than they need on any one occasion. There is a place for presentations of the gospel, and for these being in church as well as outside it. However, to be mission-focused the regular worship need not become a gospel 'presentation' at the expense of worship that engages the whole person

*Liturgical worship is rich beyond the words, beyond the superficial observation of what is going on*

over a long period of time. Missionary worship can involve 'riching-up' as well as 'dumbing-down.'

Liturgical worship is not at odds with mission. Indeed its forms, both in regular services and on special occasions, are based on and express the truths of the gospel. The congregation also witness, being the gathered people of God, making up the body of Christ, giving tangible evidence of the love of God, and the power and life which he has given to those who love him.

# 6

## Resources

### Worship and Mission

Robert Warren, *Being Human, Being Church* (Marshall Pickering, 1995)  
Robert Warren, *Building Missionary Congregations* (CHP, Board of Mission, 1995)  
J G Davies, *Worship and Mission* (SCM Press, 1966)

The following come from a North American context, but offer challenging reflections:

Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down* (Eerdmans, 1995)  
Thomas Schattauer, *Inside Out: Worship in an Age of Mission* (Fortress, 1999)  
Patrick Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism* (Fortress, 1992)

### The Role of Holy Communion in Mission

Pete Ward (ed), *Mass Culture: Eucharist and Mission in a Postmodern World* (BRF, 1999)  
Stephen Cottrell, *Sacrament, Wholeness and Evangelism: A Catholic Approach* (Grove Evangelism booklet Ev 33)

### Worship and Culture

David Holeton (ed), *Liturgical Inculturation in the Anglican Communion* (Alcuin/Grow Joint Liturgical Studies JLS15)  
Bradshaw and Spinks, *Liturgy in Dialogue* (SPCK, 1993) chapters 2, 9  
Michael Perham (ed), *The Renewal of Common Prayer* (SPCK/CIO, 1993) esp. chapter 5, 'The Liturgy in its Social Context'  
Roy Joslin, *Urban Harvest* (Evangelical Press, 1982)

### Alternative Worship Resources

The *alternativeworship.org* site: [www.alternativeworship.org](http://www.alternativeworship.org)  
For creative worship materials: [www.the-scriptorium.org](http://www.the-scriptorium.org)  
From The Collective in Bradford: [www.altworship.org.uk](http://www.altworship.org.uk)

## Other Resources for Worship Related to Young People

Draper, B and K, *Refreshing Worship* (BRF, 2000)—a very interesting and helpful book, with good resource guide.

Simon Heathfield, *Rave On: A Worship Guide for Youth Groups* (CPAS, 1994) with sessions for leaders and groups on worship, and resources and ideas.

## All Age Worship

Anne Barton, *All-Age Worship* (Grove Worship booklet W 126)

Graystone and Turner, *Church For All Ages* (Scripture Union, 1993)

Susan Sayers materials—a larger number of useful resources

Useful website: [www.familyworship.org.uk](http://www.familyworship.org.uk)—Resources and discussion site provided by Ichthus Christian Fellowship

## Notes

- 1 *GS Misc 459 Liturgical Revision 1995–2000* (a briefing paper for new Synod members in 1995).
- 2 This is the approach of the well-known Willow Creek Community Church in the United States, whose principles and practices have been enthusiastically embraced by many in the UK.
- 3 There is a risk, in using this ‘supermarket’ terminology, of sounding as if the Christian faith is a product requiring some sort of ‘hard sell.’ The supermarket model shares this weakness with the ‘shop window’ model. Neither model is a complete description of what worship is about; both are helpful only to the extent that they are concerned with how one group of people ‘share’ something they have with another group of people who do not yet have it. We are not advocating a crude ‘consumerist’ approach.
- 4 See chapter 4 for more on this.
- 5 Bishop Jack of Sheffield, quoted in Church Army, *Encounters on the Edge* (No 6, The Sheffield Centre).
- 6 Trevor Lloyd, *A Service of the Word* (Grove Worship booklet W 151); Paul Bradshaw (ed), *Companion to Common Worship* (SPCK, 2001).
- 7 The potential for more dynamic engagement with preaching is something to be encouraged: see T Stratford, *Interactive Preaching: Opening the Word and then Listening* (Grove Worship booklet W 144); J Leach, *Responding to Preaching* (Grove Worship booklet W 139).
- 8 ‘Offices’ are simple services of Scripture, psalms, canticles and prayers, that have punctuated the day with worship throughout the history of the church.
- 9 See Michael Botting, *Reaching the Families* (CPAS/Falcon, 1969) chapter 4.
- 10 The first family services proved to be the forerunner for a *Service of the Word and Patterns for Worship*. See CPAS *Family Worship Book* (1971, revised in 1975) and Michael Perry (ed), *Church Family Worship* (CPAS/Hodder & Stoughton, 1986; expanded music edition 1988).
- 11 Colin Buchanan, *The Heart of Sunday Worship* (Grove Worship booklet W 121) chapter 4.
- 12 *op cit*, chapter 3.
- 13 For example the famous eighteenth century evangelical, Charles Simeon, marks Communion as his time of conversion.
- 14 Graham Cray in P Ward (ed), *Mass Culture: Eucharist and Mission in a Postmodern World* (BRF, 1999) pp 74–94.
- 15 See Bob Hopkins (ed), *Cell Church Stories as Signs of Mission* (Grove Evangelism booklet Ev 51) and Phil Potter, *The Challenge of Cell Church* (BRF/CPAS, 2001).
- 16 See, for instance, Paul Simmonds, *Reaching the Unchurched: Some Lessons from Willow Creek* (Grove Evangelism booklet Ev 19) and Martin Robinson, *A World Apart: Creating a Church for the Unchurched* (Monarch, 1992).
- 17 See above, Chapter 2
- 18 From *The Times*, 1st March 2000. Ruth Gledhill commenting on a report by Jayne Ozanne, entitled ‘Hopes and Dreams for a Future Church.’
- 19 David Holeton (ed), *Liturgical Inculturation in the Anglican Communion* (Alcuin/GROW JLS 15) p 15.

It is frequently suggested that liturgical worship hinders mission by making worship less accessible to newcomers. There is a rush to simplify, with the result that worship is 'dumbed down' and the congregation are not properly fed.

This study argues that collective worship is not like a shop window but a supermarket. Everything should be on display, and the richness of liturgical worship can actually help the missionary task. It looks at how this can happen in particular services, and includes a check-list for accessibility and further resources to engage with the issues.

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