

EDITORIAL

Paul Beasley-Murray

An overview

Christian worship, declared Karl Barth, 'is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in life'. Worship is the occasion when we men and women become truly alive; when we humans, made in the image of God, begin to fulfil the very purpose of our existence by relating to the God who made us. It is the moment when we are caught up into heaven itself and join with the multitude around the throne, singing the praises of God and the Lamb.

Or is it? If the truth be told, worship is not always glorious. Far too often worship is dissatisfying, frustrating, downright disappointing. God does not break in, boredom breaks out. What's more, it is not just traditional services with Bach chorales and Monteverdi vespers which people find boring. The so-called contemporary services with their praise songs can be equally boring. That's why many people - not least our young people - no longer go to church. Church - worship - is boring.

All the more reason, therefore, for us in this issue to focus particularly on worship. We have before us three very different contributions. John Bell, a prolific song writer, tackles the theme of change in worship. The new wine of the Spirit needs new wineskins. Geoff Colmer reflects on worship from the point of view of a former professional orchestral player. Music enables worship to capture our emotions. Ian Green shares some of the fruits of research underlying a Master's degree and reflects on worship and church design. Worship is deeply influenced by place.

A preview

The next RBIM day conference is scheduled for 19 November at Melton Mowbray. Robert Warren, National Officer for Evangelism in the Church of England, will be tackling the theme of From Maintenance to Mission. In his book *Building Missionary Congregations*, he writes: "A church effectively engaged in mission will see that participating in the *missio dei* will involve shifting emphasis from a focus on the life of the local church, and a concern

to keep everyone in it happy (which too easily passes for 'pastoral concern') to a concern for the world in its needs, joys and struggles." In other words, if churches today are to be effective they must shift from maintenance and 'keeping people happy' to engagement in mission. Indeed, it is more than a question of effectiveness - if churches today are to survive, they must shift from caring for themselves to caring for those who do not belong to them. Churches must become 'missionary' congregations.

I find it fascinating to note that this re-discovery of the word 'missionary'. As far as cross-cultural overseas work is concerned, the term 'missionary' is no longer in fashion. 'Missionary' societies have renamed themselves as Action Partners or Inter-Serve or Latin Link. The Church Missionary Society became the Church Mission Society. Missionaries are now 'mission partners'. But just as the term 'missionary' has begun to be dropped from overseas work, a new trend emerges: the term 'missionary' is applied to mission in the UK - and helpfully so. It underlines the fact that the UK has become the new missionary frontier.

The following RBIM day conference will take place in Chelmsford on 3 February. John Perry, the Anglican Bishop of Chelmsford, will speak on 'The church as a sign of community'. If the church is not community (*koinonia*) it is nothing. Community in terms of fellowship is more than being friendly. Most churches, thank God, are not like that apocryphal church which was 'Gothic in architecture, arctic in temperature and where the deacons walked up and down the aisles like polar bears!

I hope that most local churches would be characterised by a certain degree of warmth, which in itself can be winsome. But fellowship (community) is more than warmth. Fellowship (community) is something which goes much deeper. Fellowship is about being real with one another, it is about loving others - warts and all.

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