

Title	Contemporary Worship Music at Seigakuin : An American's Perspective
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Citation	キリスト教と諸学 : 論集, Volume28, 2013.3 : 9-23
URL	http://serve.seigakuin-univ.ac.jp/reps/modules/xoonips/detail.php?item_id=4462
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CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP MUSIC AT SEIGAKUIN : AN AMERICAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Evert Osburn

Introduction

The theme of the 32nd Seigakuin University Chapel Service Roundtable Conference (第32回全学礼拝懇談会), held on February 8, 2012, was, loosely translated, “Ideal Methods for Maintaining & Improving the Seigakuin University Chapel Services-Focus upon Music” (全学礼拝の豊かな守り方——賛美の恵). As initial speaker at the opening session, I did a 35-minute PowerPoint presentation designed as a proposal for the utilization of contemporary worship music (CWM) at Seigakuin University in the upcoming academic school year and, if successful, subsequent years. The following is a description of the rationale behind the proposal and a call to give it further consideration at Seigakuin University & Schools.

Need for Change

The primary reason for suggesting that CWM be used at Seigakuin is evangelistic in nature. Changing times require changing thinking when it comes to effective evangelism, and this seems to be particularly true in the case of Japan. Christianity has always been a small, minority religion in Japan, but it appears that a potential crisis is in the making, with an already diminutive number of Christians further decreasing. In fact, the authoritative *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Johnson & Smith, Eds., 2009, p. 141) notes that Japan is the only country in East Asia in which Christianity has had a negative growth rate over the last decade. In 2010 alone, a net loss of 6,300 Christians

was recorded (28,600 gained, but 34,900 lost). According to the latest statistics available from the Church Information Service (CIS) in Japan, the number of Protestant Christian church members decreased from 564,127 in 2008 to 548,643 in 2009, a drop of 15,484 in one year, even though the number of churches actually increased by 51. Be it due to natural attrition or a host of other factors, the simple fact is that Christianity in Japan seems to be on a downward trend, and I believe we must face this with a sense of urgency when it comes to our evangelistic efforts.

To bring this closer to home, so to speak, consider the data regarding attendance at the weekly Seigakuin University chapel services. The average number of students attending any one of these services was 104, or 4.0% of the total student body, in 2011 (Seigakuin Christian Center, 2012). The ten-year (2002-2011) average percentage of the student body who attended the chapel services was 3.72. This means, of course, that over 96% of Seigakuin's students have not been attending chapel on any given day, and these numbers do not account for the fact that a portion of the average on any particular day consists of the same students, those who do attend regularly and not only for the purpose of writing class reports. Though it is highly commendable that Seigakuin University has from its inception emphasized and maintained its chapel system and requirements, and a number of students have become Christians as a result thereof, it appears that more can be done in an attempt to attract larger numbers of our "captive audience" on the Seigakuin Ageo campus.

Student Mindsets

Professors in America, like their counterparts in Japan, have noted the great change in university student mindsets over the years, particularly since the advent of the Information Age. Students in 2012 simply do not think like they did in 1992. Tom McBride and Ron Nief's "mindset questionnaires" of their students at Beloit College, Wisconsin, and subsequent results, initially done in 1998, have since become somewhat of a cultural phenomenon in university circles, with new lists having been created in the following years. American students of

the Class of 2009 (Class of 2013 in Japan), for example, having been born in 1991, identify more with websites than religions ; have never actually “dialed” a telephone ; have seldom ever “written” a letter ; have only known flat TVs ; have grown up with “friend” as an active verb ; and have happily watched as their communication and social needs have been compressed into computers and digital devices. The advent of the Internet and globalization, with attendant technologies and instant availability, has quietly changed the average American student’s thinking and lifestyle. According to McBride and Nief (2011), “the price of exposure to an endless stream of diverse information may be a lot of confusion and a lack of prolonged focus,” with many also displaying “lack of a set of firm principles that might guide their everyday lives” (p. 219).

This has only been accelerated, so that students entering college today have always lived in cyberspace and are addicted to a new generation of electronic gadgets ; often listen to music on digital devices ; watch television everywhere but on a TV ; are very tribal, abhorring being separated from electronic contact with their network of friends ; and, surprisingly, do not even know or only have a vague idea of who Billy Graham is (McBride, 2012). At least in regard to the characteristics listed here, it appears that Japanese university students are very much like their American counterparts. We now live in an age of instant gratification, in an “entertainment society.” With laptops, iMacs, iPods, iPads, and iPhones, various forms of entertainment can be instantly accessed and/or downloaded via the Internet any time, any where, in the cyberspace world of YouTube, iTunes, Hulu, and Vimeo, with social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook enabling spontaneous (and constant) communication. Given these profound changes, the church in America and elsewhere has felt the need to adapt accordingly in order to appeal to the younger generation.

Importance of Youth Evangelism

Studies have shown that evangelism is most effective at younger ages. Howard Culbertson (2009) of Southern Nazarene University in Oklahoma asserts that 85% of American Christians accepted Christ

between the ages of 4 and 14, with another 10% between 15 and 30. The highly respected Barna Group did a study indicating that nearly two out of three Americans (64%) who accept Jesus Christ as their Savior do so before their 18th birthday, and another 13% do so while 18-21 years old (college age). Less than one in four (23%) became Christians after their twenty-first birthday (The Barna Group, 2004). With 77% of American Christians having become so by age 21, it is clear that evangelism is most efficacious when people are of school age.

The United Church of Christ in Japan (Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan/日本キリスト教団) affirms that students are a primary target for evangelistic efforts here as well. The General Secretary, Tomeyuki Naito (2012), discussing the latest statistics for the *2012 Kyodan Yearbook*, noted that there are three peak periods for Japanese who receive baptism in this denomination, of which Seigakuin is a part. The peak target groups are (1) students of junior and senior high school age, especially those who attend Sunday school and/or mission schools; (2) women in their mid-30s who are in the midst of childrearing; and (3) men in their 60s who have recently retired.

This information indicates that Seigakuin University & Schools has a golden opportunity in which to evangelize. Naturally, our organization is a mission school and has a proud record of fine evangelistic effort thanks to the vision and dedication of its leaders, teachers, and office workers for over a century. Yet, with the technological and social changes noted above, along with the difficulty of winning Christian converts in Japan in general, it becomes obvious that appropriate tools and methods for reaching the new generation must be developed and adopted.

Reaction of the American Church

The reaction of one American Protestant church to the changes in society and the mindset amongst young people was starkly brought home to me when I was in the United States in the summer of 2010 and attended Willamette Christian Church (WCC) in West Linn, Oregon. This 55-year-old evangelical church, starting in 1957 with 40 members,

has experienced phenomenal growth in the past decade. In fact, it has nearly doubled church service attendance in the last five years, going from 800 people to over 1400 (<http://www.willamettechurch.com>).

What is striking upon first going to WCC is the table near the entrance to the sanctuary hall. What awaits all who are about to enter is a basket of . . . earplugs! These are optional, naturally, but one can understand why they are made available, as there is a stage up in front of the sanctuary where all the accoutrements of a rock band are situated, complete with electric guitars, keyboard, drums, and large video display screens. WCC is an example of a church that has determined to use Contemporary Worship Music (CWM) in lieu of the traditional style of singing from hymnals. (See sample of the 2011 WCC Night of Worship at <http://www.willamettechurch.com/media/videos> ; Vimeo required.) The worship services always start with a 15- or 20-minute session of CWM, followed by fine expository preaching. The results speak for themselves.

Actually, Willamette Christian is just one of many American Protestant churches who have fully adopted CWM as means of furthering evangelistic efforts, particularly focusing on appealing to the younger generation. Grossman (Nov. 2011), referring to a study of 14,000 congregations, states that nearly 50% of all Protestant churches in America now use electric guitars and drums in their worship services, up from 35% in 2000. Indeed, some of the largest, fastest growing churches in the United States now use CWM. For example, Rev. Rick Warren's Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, the fifth-largest Protestant church in America with 20,000 members, runs several worship services simultaneously, all with a different genre of music. Only one of these services incorporates hymnals and is called "Traditions," with a piano and a song leader. Saddleback's music pastor, Rick Muchow, remarks, "The Bible does not have an official soundtrack. . . . There are all kinds of different churches for different kinds of people. We don't worship music, we worship God" (cited in Grossman, Nov. 2011, pp. 1-2).

Speaking on the lessons to be learned from the success of the top American megachurches, sociologist Scott Thumma implores churches

to “Make it appealing, then make it challenging” (cited in Grossman, Sept. 2011, p. 2). One way many Protestant churches have chosen to make their worship services more “appealing” to young people, especially in the last twenty to thirty years, is through Contemporary Worship Music (CWM).

Contemporary Worship Music in America

CWM is generally characterized by the following :

- Performed in an informal setting
- Employs a worship music leader
- Has a worship band (electric guitars, keyboard, and drums) (The latter, drums, are deemed by Hunt [1993a] as perhaps the single biggest factor that separates contemporary from traditional music instrumentation.)
- Uses projected lyrics and video clips, often with PowerPoint
- Has simple music and lyrics
- Allows for free expression of praise from individuals in the congregation ; personal choice is underscored (Adele, 2012).

Expanding upon this, Westminster Theological Seminary’s Professor John Frame (1997), asserts that CWM, speaking the language of today, often consists of one-stanza choruses rather than the multiple-verse poetry of traditional hymnody; has tunes that tend to reflect the popular “soft rock” style of the early 1970s ; tends to utilize short texts from Scripture ; uses texts that are much simpler than normally found in hymnals ; and places far more emphasis on praise.

Though not without its critics (cf. Frederick, 2007 ; Webster & Jones, 2006), CWM has been undeniably successful in attracting younger people to the church in recent decades. In a landmark study on the role music and the arts play in American religion, Princeton Professor Robert Wuthnow (2005) comments,

Some of the nation’s fastest-growing churches attribute their success to what leaders enthusiastically refer to as contemporary

worship. . . . Contemporary worship lives up to its name. It incorporates musical instruments and lyrics unheard of in churches a generation ago and makes use of new communication technologies such as home-produced videos and the Internet. It is meant to attract people with little interest in historic approaches to worship. (pp. 151-152)

Hunt (1993b) stresses the importance of targeting specialized audiences as a means of effective evangelism. Regarding music, he points out that radio stations have “long recognized that specialization is necessary for survival” (p. 71). Though Hunt realizes that the preaching and discipleship programs in a church are vital, he emphasizes the drawing power of different music styles. CWM, then, may be seen as the “hook” that at least gets young people in the door of the church. Indeed, if no one comes through the door, the rest is moot.

Concerning the primary virtues CWM has for a church, Frame (1997) sets forth that it is profoundly God-centered, is preponderantly scriptural, and has a freshness and contemporary feel about it that tends “to communicate especially vividly with young Christians and unchurched visitors” (p. 40). Hunt (1993b) notes that it simply adds variety to the service, something which is of great value in and of itself, while Wuthnow (2005) concludes, “If young people feel more comfortable with guitars and drums than with an organ, then it makes sense to adjust the service in this way” (p. 160). In light of all this, might it not be a good idea for Seigakuin University to consider utilization of CWM, at least on occasion, in its regular chapel services?

Contemporary Worship Music at Seigakuin

The Apostle Paul wrote: “I have become all things to all men, so that by all possible means I might save some. I do this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.” (1 Corinthians 9 : 22-23, NIV)

I believe that the top priorities at Seigakuin University are (1) Christian education, (2) evangelism, and (3) holistic care for our

students. As such, Seigakuin's chapel services must be *student-centered*, being specifically designed to best meet their needs. This entails using styles of worship our students like, though I may personally have different preferences. Employing CWM is one way of doing this. Realizing that, in today's Internet-connected, entertainment society, if something is either boring (つまらない) or difficult (むずかしい), odds are that students will, if given a choice, simply reject it. Since popular music does have a wide appeal to the younger generation, it seems that CWM is tailor-made to attract students to the chapel services who would otherwise come only under duress, and sometimes not even then.

This being the case, I suggested at the 32nd Seigakuin University Chapel Service Roundtable Conference that the school seriously consider using CWM, as per the proposal that follows.

Proposal for Utilizing Contemporary Worship Music at Seigakuin

1. Hold CWM chapel services on occasion (e.g., once or twice a month at first, perhaps weekly later).
2. Continue traditional worship services, but blend with CWM on some days (cf. Hecoeks, 2001, on the advantages of blended worship services). *Variety* is essential.
3. Appoint a music director and/or program organizer for this purpose ; possibly even a pastor or chaplain of music.
4. Have more gospel concerts (e.g., Ronnie Rucker, Japanese gospel groups) and perhaps some Christian music video concerts with a message.
5. Get more students, teachers, and office workers involved, tapping into what I believe is a "hidden reserve" (or is it reserved people who are hiding?) at Seigakuin.

Considering what CWM music to use, there are a number of sources that can be referred to. For example, at the end of his book, Frame (1997) includes a "CWM Song Book" of over 150 popular songs, some of which have already been translated into Japanese. He also mentions some American CWM artists who are quite popular, among whom is my favorite, Michael W. Smith, whose music is available online and at Christian bookstores in Tokyo.

One example of a CWM song by Michael and his wife, Deborah, that Frame (1997) mentions is “Great Is the Lord,” a phrase from Psalm 48. This is a classic example of a fine CWM song of praise with fairly simple lyrics. Another, more involved song, is “Secret Ambition” (Smith, 2004 ; first performed in 1988). (See video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cz2oKm36gpQ>) (See Appendix for English and Japanese lyrics.)

Michael W. Smith’s “Secret Ambition” is an example of CWM that could be used as a springboard at the beginning of a chapel service for moving into an explanation of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His sacrificial, salvific mission for mankind, as the lyrics refer to both. Students would most likely be drawn to the message initially through the music video and would then be eager to learn more about just precisely what the song means, opening the door for a talk on Matthew 5-7 and/or the salvation message.

Another possibility, one which fits perfectly into the blended-style of traditional and contemporary worship, is to make use of tools like *I Worship* (2002), professionally made music videos done in a contemporary style but with transposed lyrics from traditional hymns, such as “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name” (「あまつみつかいよ」, No. 248 in Vol. II of the Japanese Hymnal), that may be sung along to. (See sample at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBv_e4CLWX4) Actually, the *I Worship* system and others like it are designed for use with computers and projectors so that the needs of a particular church can be fully met, with options allowing for stand-alone video, music, or lyrics, or any combination thereof. This flexibility lends itself well to the Japanese worship service context and could thereby prove to be successful as one means by which blended worship services might be conducted at Seigakuin University.

Naturally, what has been mentioned here is just the tip of the iceberg, as a plethora of CWM songs, videos, and presentation tools are available. The point is simply that they *are* available and are worthy of consideration for use at some Seigakuin chapel services as a means of appealing to a broader spectrum of our students than the 4% we have been reaching up to now. Though a significant step in the right

direction has been made this academic year, with some CWM (piano, string guitar, projected lyrics) being employed on occasion by talented teachers and office workers, there remains work to be done in order to realize the full potential of CWM on our campus.

Advantages of Utilizing Contemporary Worship Music at Seigakuin

The prospects for CWM at Seigakuin are significant, with distinct advantages, such as . . .

- Increased attendance at regular chapel services
- Increased interest in Christianity and University courses on Christianity, with attendant opportunities for effective evangelism
- Making full use of the tremendous facilities made available to us by Seigakuin Church
- Awakening dormant talent amongst students, teachers, and office workers
- Becoming a model for other schools, the Seigakuin Schools at the Komagome Campus in particular
- Significant public relations value resulting in recruitment advantages
- Corollary benefits for Seigakuin Church

Should even two or three of these benefits be realized through the implementation of the proposal made herein, it would be a very positive step in the right direction.

Conclusion

By “becoming all things to all men” and using Contemporary Worship Music in some of our chapel services, we may increase the effectiveness of the evangelistic effort on the Seigakuin University campus. CWM is but one of a number of possible change agents that could be employed, though, and it must be emphasized that what is being promoted here is not an “either/or” but a “both/and” proposition. Traditional worship services certainly have their place, and CWM should not be used as a replacement for these ; rather, it ought to be utilized in conjunction and coordination with traditional services, along with other means of appealing to the younger generation. Nevertheless,

it is important for us to realize the urgent need to change in order to reach more students while they are still at an age at which they may be open to Christianity. Utilizing Contemporary Worship Music is one way of “making the most of every opportunity” (Ephesians 5 : 16, NIV) we have to evangelize at Seigakuin.

Carpe diem! - Seize the day!

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Appendix

Secret Ambition
by Michael W. Smith
(1988)

Young man [Jesus] up on the hillside
Teaching new ways
Each word winning them over
Each heart a kindled flame
Old men [Pharisees] watch from the outside
Guarding their prey
Threatened by the voice of the paragon
Leading their lambs away
Leading them far away

Chorus : Nobody knew His secret ambition.
Nobody knew His claim to fame.
He broke the old rules steeped in tradition.
He tore the Holy Veil away.
Questioning those in powerful position
Running to those who called His name
(But) nobody knew His secret ambition
Was to give His life away [on the Cross].
His rage shaking the temple
His word to the wise
His hand healing on the seventh day [the Sabbath]
His love wearing no disguise
Some say, "Death to the radical!
He's way out of line!"
Some say, "Praise be the miracle!
God sends a blessed sign,
A blessed sign for troubled times! "

Chorus : No, no. No, no.
I tell you nobody knew
Until He gave His life away.

Secret Ambition

秘められた使命

マイケル・W・スミス

(1988)

丘の上に その若者 [イエス] は 立ち
新しい道を 説いた。
その言葉は 勝利を得
皆の心に 炎を燃え立たせた。
傍観する年寄りたち [ファリサイ人] は
自分の獲物を 守ろうと
聖者の声に おびえたち、
自分の羊を 追い払い、
はるか遠くへ 散らばした。

[コーラス]

誰も 彼の 秘められた使命を知らず、
誰も 彼の 聖なる主張を知らなかった。
しきたりに深くはまった古き律法を変え、
聖なる神殿の幕を 真っ二つに裂いた。
権威者たちに 義務を 問い、
求める者のもとへ行き…
けれど、誰も 自分の命を捧げようとしている [十字架の死]
彼の秘められた使命を知らなかった。

怒りは 神殿を揺り動かし、
その言葉は 聴き者に聞かれた。
安息日に 癒やしの手は 置かれ、
彼の愛を隠すものは 何もなかった。
ある者は、「革命者には死を！
反逆者！」と言い、
ある者は、「奇跡をほめたたえよ！
艱難の時に神から送られた
恵まれたしるしだ！」と言う。

[コーラス]

ノー、ノー。ノー、ノー。
言わせてください。
若者が 自分 の命を捧げるまで
誰も 彼の秘められた使命を 知ることはなかったことを。

(Eri Noro-Griswold, Trans.)