

A Critical Analysis of Joe Hasler's Approach to Culturally Relevant Mission in Contemporary White Working Class Britain

by

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Abstract

This work considers Joe Hasler's approach to mission and ministry in white working class outer estate areas in contemporary Britain. It considers Hasler's work in three areas with the intention of deciding its relevance to the working class in a globalised world.

Chapter one introduces the deficit of attention to culture in the Church's mission among the working class and highlights some recent urban mission approaches before introducing Hasler's work, outlining the areas to which this work will attend.

Chapter two considers Hasler's distinctive cultural approach to the working class. It briefly surveys a number of sociological views of culture and class before exploring Hasler's contention that a working class still exists today. Hasler's work is then compared with his opponents, namely Baker and Drane. It concludes that Hasler's identification of a distinctive working class culture remains valid.

Chapter three explores the question of whether Hasler presents a culturally relevant gospel to the working class, specifically in relation to his homogenous cultural approach. Hasler's distinctives of ministry among the working class are explored and then considered in relation to Baker's approach, which views the modern British city as a more hybrid environment. The implications of these approaches are then considered. It concludes that both Hasler and Baker have valid contributions to make, and specifically that a combination of the strengths and warnings from each approach might be a beneficial way to proceed.

Chapter four seeks to evaluate Hasler's faithfulness to his chosen inculturation mission methodology. It focuses on the extent to which Hasler's methodology might be described as *true contextualisation* by Newbigin and concludes that, in many areas, Hasler's approach is effectively authentic inculturation.

Chapter five concludes that to a great extent Hasler's work represents a coherent and culturally relevant methodology of ministry and mission in contemporary working class areas.

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May God use this work in some small way to help the Church become more relevant to those who have so often been forgotten, marginalised and side lined in modern Britain.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Jesus - Matthew 28:18-20)

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (Jesus - Luke 4:18-19)

The last of the privately owned houses in a road in a north-western Bristol suburb stands in stark contrast to the high-rise block of flats, which from this house is clearly visible. The distance between the house and the flats is broken only by a terrace of social housing, which is set back from the road and is separated from the house by a wide alleyway. The physical layout of this road serves, in many ways as a reminder of the stark differences in socio-economic terms between people in contemporary Britain, which Polly Toynbee outlines incisively.¹

It also serves as an unsettling reminder that after almost two years of living there, integration with the suburban community has been difficult, at times tense and at other times almost impossible. An example of this is the difficulty with which relationships have been built between my family and the families of those with children who attend the same school in a nearby suburb. Even though we live almost next door to some, it has felt like a great gulf divides when, both near the home and at the school gates, an effort is made to avoid both contact and conversation. The reasons for this are no doubt manifold, but this nonetheless serves to highlight the plethora of

¹ Toynbee, 2003

preconceptions and perceived differences in thinking, which contribute to this unease and indicate that the divide is not merely economic in nature.

There is a sense in which this unease is indicative of engagement between two different cultures and can be seen acutely in the life and mission of the local Anglican Church that attracts a predominantly elderly congregation, many of whom have been involved in white-collar work and are now retired, to its core activities and Sunday services. Certainly the church puts its prime location on the High Street to good use by opening for coffee every morning and holding community events, (it also holds a weekly free breakfast service for children), but this engagement with the community does not seem to translate into attendance at the services and *faith events* of the church. In many respects, there seems to be a profound disconnect between the government statistics that illustrate this is an area of deprivation², and the core attendance of the church.

This disconnect, whilst stark, should not surprise. Already in 1994 Davie stated that the churches represented “a minority of British people”, who were “Conservative in their voting habits”³, and that “some sections of the urban working class in Britain” had “been without any real contact with their churches for several generations”⁴.

Deprivation can be measured in numerous ways⁵ and in Britain today is likely to take into account exclusion in a number of forms.⁶ Due to the fact that deprivation is frequently found in urban areas,⁷ and that deprivation is synonymous economically with the working class, perhaps the

² Bristol City Council 2010, 32 & 51

³ Davie 1994, 2

⁴ Davie 1994, 106

⁵ Browne 2011, 420-422

⁶ Gordon et al. 2000, 54

⁷ Bristol City Council 2010, 3

work, findings and outcome of the Church of England reports *Faith in the City* (1985) and *Faithful Cities* (2006) are instructive. However, despite the 1985 *Faith in the City* report highlighting that the Church of England was not engaging with people who were not middle class,⁸ and making suggestions as to how "a growing number of people" that are "excluded by poverty or powerlessness" might be helped to share again "in the common life of our nation",⁹ this does not seem to be the case. In fact, over the last twenty-five years, the poverty gap in the UK has increased¹⁰ "despite the development of the regeneration industry and the investment of billions of pounds of public money",¹¹ and the issue of urban poverty is no longer considered to be a priority in the Church of England.¹²

The deficit of current prioritisation of this area can be seen in two more recent reports from the Church of England. The 2004 *Mission Shaped Church* report still did not consider in depth the specificity of mission in white working class areas.¹³ Instead, it ignored sub-cultures within white British culture and focused, rather on racial cultural diversity.¹⁴ The second report *Faithful Cities* in 2006 was "received with a mixture of criticism and disinterest", "despite the many strengths and insights".¹⁵ This does not appear to reflect Jesus' heart for the poor and marginalised as recorded in the gospels,¹⁶ and appears not to fulfil the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20.

The forgotten situation of the urban poor, predominantly those with poorly paid jobs rather than those who are long term unemployed, is one which Joe Hasler's work in outer housing estates in

⁸ Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas 1985, 5

⁹ Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas 1985, 359

¹⁰ Gordon et al. 2000, 68

¹¹ Newman 2010, 3

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Hasler 2006, 2

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Among others: Luke 12:16-21

different areas of the UK for over twenty-five years seeks to underline. Indeed, the translatability of the gospel into new socio-economic and cultural contexts has been an issue with which the Church has been engaged, more or less effectively, since Paul's missionary journeys. As such, the crossing of boundaries, physical, geographical and cultural in relating the gospel is an important theme that has developed in cross-cultural mission, but it is rarely considered in the British context, where for missional purposes, society is often viewed as one culturally homogenous unit and there is some reticence to speak of the working class, except in recent years to demonise the long term unemployed.¹⁷

Hasler's work approach is borne out of many years of practical experience in this area that makes it rewarding to consider in some depth. His concentration on culturally focussed congregations raises important and urgent questions as to how the Church may engage effectively in mission among people whom he regards as significantly different in terms of culture to the majority of the Church of England. Furthermore, he considers the specificity of ministry in white working class outer estates, taking seriously the need to consider how culture and sub-culture affect the way in which mission can take place.

The fact that his approach differs significantly from the mainly project based and collaborative, partnership work that has taken place in urban mission in recent years,¹⁸ makes it a rich and helpful source of study. Hasler takes an inculturation approach, much of which is similar to cross-cultural mission approaches that seek to enable and facilitate local leadership, rather than 'import' ideas and people.¹⁹ Furthermore, he seeks to gain a recognition within the Church of England not only that mission and ministry in such areas is distinctive, but also that the nature of mission and

¹⁷ Jones, 2011

¹⁸ Newman 2010, 7-8 and Baker 2009, 113

¹⁹ Hasler 2006, 20

faith may have something to contribute to the Church as a whole.²⁰

Hasler's work, however, raises important questions. Whilst it is outside the scope of this work to independently assess Hasler's observations of the distinctives of working class culture in any meaningful way; there is also a paucity of available research on this topic, his work will be explored and critiqued with a view to establishing the extent to which this approach and thinking contribute to culturally relevant mission among the white working class today. This will be achieved through three chapters that consider aspects of the key words in the title of this dissertation.

The first chapter will briefly examine firstly what culture is in its broad sense and then specifically what working class culture is from a sociological perspective, but also theological perspective (Newbigin). Secondly it will scrutinise and critique Hasler's approach to culture in relation primarily to Drane who asserts that it is more fruitful to tailor mission toward seven broader categories of people rather than traditional socio-economic groupings.²¹ This will include looking at Hasler's definition of the working class primarily along cultural lines rather than economic, in contemporary Britain. Indeed, sociologists are very much divided on how to define the working class since the dramatic changes that have taken place in Britain's class structure since World War 2,²² the 1960s when more advanced manufacturing industries predominantly in the south of England saw manual workers becoming more affluent,²³ and the *Thatcher Years* which finally enabled many more traditionally working class people to purchase their council-owned homes,²⁴ and sought in other ways to create a classless society. It has become all the more difficult to

²⁰ Hasler 2012, Interview on 06/03/2012

²¹ Drane 2000a, 59-60

²² BBC 2012b, Melvyn Bragg's Class and Culture Episode 2

²³ Browne 2011, 450

²⁴ Hanley 2007, 134-137

define due to the technological revolution, which has meant that many people who previously self-identified as working class, are now working in non-manual occupations that were formerly defined as middle class, and has left others long-term unemployed.²⁵

The second chapter will continue by studying the relevance of the gospel to the white working class context and ask the question as to what the distinctive connection points with the gospel that can only be found in working class culture are, and therefore how the gospel might be contextualised in the context. This will be explored in the framework of Hasler's correlatory approach as regards culture and spirituality and his part rejection of liberation theology as a helpful approach to mission in these areas. Hasler's homogeneous unit approach will be critiqued in relation to Baker's hybrid city values based approach. The place of the church building will be examined in the light of Hasler's approach to ministry that favours the home as a meeting place above the church building itself, and his view that the concept of sacred space is a key part of working class culture and spirituality. Finally it will attempt to answer the question as to what extent Hasler's approach is effective in communicating the gospel in a culturally relevant way.

The third chapter will analyse the missional coherence of Hasler's practice by relating the missional thinking of Hasler and Newbigin to one another. It will ask how Newbigin's suggestion that there is no such thing as a pure gospel without inculturation meshes with Hasler's approach. Furthermore it will ask the question as to if there anything lacking in Hasler's thinking, whether there is anything that Newbigin's methodology could benefit from Hasler's and how faithful Hasler is to the inculturation model.

Finally, the conclusion will seek to relate the areas that have been explored in the dissertation to

²⁵ Browne 2011, 450

the question as to what extent Hasler's approach and thinking contributes to culturally relevant mission that treats the poor with equality and takes seriously Jesus' mandate to preach the gospel to all, among the white working class today.

Chapter 2

A Distinctive Working Class Culture?

Traditional methodologies of classifying people according to social and economic status are increasingly irrelevant for understanding the spiritual yearnings of people today.²⁶

The opinion of Drane above, and that of others appears directly contrary to the view of Hasler. In view of the fact that Hasler does not shy away from defining the working class very specifically in a society where many are reticent to categorise and classify people in such a way, any study of his work will be incomplete without first considering his specific views on this subject.

Whilst it is outside the scope of this work to examine either culture or class in any comprehensive way, it will nonetheless be beneficial to briefly review several definitions of each and to come to agreement on working definitions. After preliminary definitions of culture and class, the question as to whether Hasler is right to identify a specifically working class culture will be explored. His work will be considered primarily in the light of Drane who considers class to be largely immaterial in the modern day.²⁷

²⁶ Drane 2000a, 59-60

²⁷ Ibid.

2.1 What is Culture?

Drane is right to point out that the Industrial Revolution was hugely significant for western society in a number of ways, not least in the way in which it has led to the primacy of process over relationship, in that people commonly define themselves by what work they do.²⁸ Indeed it is very common to ask someone what work they do as an opening introductory question.

As the basis of Hasler's work is that the working class, even though it is widely defined in an economic sense, should be primarily culturally defined, it is first helpful to consider what culture is. A widely accepted definition of culture is that of Banks et al.:

Most social scientists today view culture as consisting primarily of the symbolic, ideational, and intangible aspects of human societies. The essence of a culture is not its artifacts [sic], tools, or other tangible cultural elements but how the members of the group interpret, use, and perceive them. It is the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies; it is not material objects and other tangible aspects of human societies. People within a culture usually interpret the meaning of symbols, artifacts [sic], and behaviors [sic] in the same or in similar ways.²⁹

Similarly Kroeber and Kluckhohn define culture without explicit reference to economics. They define it as consisting of:

patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior [sic] acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts [sic]; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action.³⁰

Finally, a shorter description from Newbiggin summarises the assertions of a number of sociologists when he states: "human culture is simply the way in which human societies order their corporate life".³¹ Furthermore he helpfully reminds the reader that culture is at the core of humankind's

²⁸ Drane 2000a, 19-20

²⁹ Banks et al. 1989, 8

³⁰ Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952, 47

³¹ Newbiggin 1989, 185

being and that worldview is heavily constructed by culture.³² In doing so, he once again emphasises culture as a vitally significant aspect of human society.

2.2 What is Class?

Social classes do not exist merely in the mind of the sociologist: there are wide, measurable differences in life chances between social classes.³³

Despite the fact that class and culture have not been topical areas of study over the last years, the BBC Documentary: *Melvyn Bragg on Class and Culture* exploring the relationship between the two from 1911 to 2011, recently highlighted the close connection between "the two great forces which define and shape us".³⁴

Social class is "a form of stratification found in industrial societies, like contemporary Britain"³⁵ and

can be defined as broad groups of people who share a similar economic situation, such as occupation, income and ownership of wealth. Often, these criteria are closely related to each other and to other aspects of individuals' lives, such as their level of education, their status and lifestyle (for example, housing, car ownership and leisure activities), and how much power and influence they have in society.³⁶

Whilst Browne's definition is useful, it nonetheless places the primary emphasis on determining social class on economic criteria. He is not alone in doing so. Wesolowski & Slomczynski define

³² Newbiggin 1989, 35

³³ Browne 2011, 409

³⁴ BBC 2012a, Melvyn Bragg's Class and Culture Episode 1

³⁵ Browne 2011, 397

³⁶ Ibid.

class primarily economically: "large groups among which unequal distribution of economic goods and/or preferential division of political prerogatives and/or discriminatory differentiation of cultural values result from economic exploitation or political oppression".³⁷ Furthermore, "occupation or socio-economic group is the most common definition of social class used by governments, by advertising agencies when doing market research, and by sociologists when doing surveys", due to the ease with which this information is obtained and the fact that this gives a good idea about levels of skill, relative status and power.³⁸ Indeed, a wide range of occupational scales are used, but the three most common are NS-SEC - official statistics and surveys, SOC2010 and IPA scales for market research.³⁹

As helpful as these economic definitions are, and whilst class may well have originally arisen out of sharp economic division, and certainly continues to be related to economics, the class system of Britain has changed dramatically. Firstly, the period 1980 to the late 1990s was a period of class mobility defined in an economic sense when compared with the modern day, where class-mobility is unequal.⁴⁰ As such it could be argued that in contemporary Britain, economics is less of a defining factor in class than it has been in previous generations. Indeed, Browne's observation that most sociologists agree social class is composed of groups sharing the same economic situation, but disagree "regarding exactly which aspect of that economic situation is the most important in defining a person's social class",⁴¹ may be indicative of the fact that social class is much more than simply a matter of economics. Certainly, the aspects of class inequality that Browne highlights are not all products of economics.⁴² Hasler seems justified in defining the

³⁷ Słomczyński & Dubrow 2010, 209

³⁸ Browne 2011, 405

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Browne 2011, 444

⁴¹ Browne 2011, 399

⁴² Browne 2011, 417

contemporary working class in primarily cultural terms.

2.3 Explicit Working Class Culture?

Whilst in modern meritocratic Britain, in an economic sense it is often said that "the divisions between social classes are frequently quite vague - it is hard to say, for example, where the working class ends and the middle class begins",⁴³ and Browne is right to point out that there are no legal differences, restrictions on intermarriage, nor legal or religious restrictions of movement of people from one to another,⁴⁴ Hasler takes the view that in practice the situation is somewhat different. It is fruitful to explore a number of areas that may indicate whether a contemporary distinctive working class exists.

2.3.1 Inequality in Social Mobility

Most people would agree that few societies are really equal. [...] Inequalities exist in a wide range of areas of social life, such as in job security, leisure opportunities, health housing, income and the power to influence events in society.⁴⁵

One such area is that of social mobility, which, Browne rightly states is an important measure of "how open society is",⁴⁶ because it "refers to the movement of people up or down the social class hierarchy, either during the course of the individual's lifetime or compared to the social class into

⁴³ Browne 2011, 398

⁴⁴ Browne 2011, 398

⁴⁵ Browne 2011, 391

⁴⁶ Browne 2011, 443

which he or she was born".⁴⁷ Obstacles to social mobility include education, bias in recruitment to jobs such as judges and top civil servants and gender inequality.⁴⁸ Indeed, "Britain has one of the lowest social mobility rates in Europe. The chances of social mobility (compared to family occupation or income) have changed little since the early 1980s".⁴⁹

Hasler then, is rightly not unaware of the impact of economic situation, as he states that his methodology in working class areas incorporates insights from liberation theology.⁵⁰ Indeed, although quality of life in relative terms for the poor has increased due to a number of factors in recent years, the gap between rich and poor in modern Britain has only widened.⁵¹ Furthermore, a report for the Sutton Trust in 2009 concluded that the decline in intergenerational social mobility that occurred among those born between 1958 and 1970 has not been reversed,⁵² and the 2010 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report *Going for Growth* recorded "mobility in earnings, wages and education across generations in the UK" as being "relatively low".⁵³ The Ipsos Mori poll of two thousand people's views on social mobility and inequality confirms that this is not only a statistical truth, but that it is acutely felt by many people.⁵⁴ Whilst it may be the case that social divisions between classes are less defined than they were, it appears that there remain solid economic differences. Hasler's contention that there remains an identifiable working class in modern Britain,⁵⁵ whilst appearing to be contrary to much modern thinking, appears justifiable in the face of these economic statistics.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Browne 2011, 446

⁴⁹ Browne 2011, 447

⁵⁰ Hasler 2006, 101 and Browne 2011, 391

⁵¹ National Equality Panel 2010, 1

⁵² Blanden & Machin 2007, 20

⁵³ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2010, 183

⁵⁴ Sutton Trust 2009, Online

⁵⁵ Hasler 2006, 29

2.3.2 Self-Identification

A second area is that Hasler continues to use the term *working class* because, he asserts, that is how people speak of themselves.⁵⁶ Indeed, this indicates that people themselves realise that there is something distinctive about them. Moreover, at least in an economic sense, the work of Poly Toynbee and in a wider sense, that of Lynsey Hanley and Michael Collins (both self-identifying working class authors) would appear to support this hypothesis that some people do indeed self-identify as working class.

2.3.3 Cultural Distinctives

Hasler at no point denies the fact that the working class has undergone much change. He argues rather that it is identifiable primarily culturally rather than economically, through being able to trace its roots to the traditional working class.⁵⁷ Furthermore, he asserts that there is a distinctive worldview that is shaped by culture,⁵⁸ on the basis of over twenty-five years of observation in a number of predominantly mono-cultural white outer-city estates in various places. This culture he states, “persists, and changes, and still has a history and a narrative that cannot be ignored”.⁵⁹

Additionally, Hasler identifies a number of distinctives of working class culture that together form a culture⁶⁰ from the very aspects that Banks et al. and Kroeber and Kluckhorn identify in their definitions of culture. Moreover, Hasler asserts that these distinctives are helpful in exercising

⁵⁶ Hasler 2006, 33

⁵⁷ Hasler 2012, Interview on 06/03/2012

⁵⁸ Hasler 2000, 2

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Hasler 2000, 18

culturally relevant ministry. These include a proliferation of gossip in the street, the strict etiquette surrounding the borrowing of resources and the way in which friendships are built through participation in shared events.⁶¹ Hasler outlines a number of specifics of working class culture that may be considered in the following four areas.

2.3.3.1 Linguistics

Hasler observes distinctives of the language of people among whom he has worked and lived compared to other parts of contemporary society. An example of this is the use of *ain't* for *is not* and the dropping of h's and t's. Furthermore, he observes that story-telling is very important in working class culture, and this serves the function of establishing and reinforcing cultural norms, but it also useful for identifying those who hold, control and exercise power, as seniority is often the qualification to being the story-teller.⁶²

2.3.3.2 Physicality and Gender Distinction

A further distinctive is that of physicality: working class people are often more at ease with their physical bodies than others. He observes that this is manifested in working class men dressing to accentuate their masculine strength and notes that a young man may wear work clothes in a social situation with the intention of showing he is now a *man*.⁶³ Indeed, young males are expected to work as soon as is possible and are exonerated from household jobs because they are contributing

⁶¹ Hasler 2006, 17-18

⁶² Hasler 2006, 3-4

⁶³ Hasler 2006, 5-6

financially.⁶⁴

This last point stands in direct contrast to young women who are expected to do household jobs.⁶⁵ This perhaps stems from the fact that matriarchal networks are strong,⁶⁶ with the home being thought of as being the man's, but the woman very much in control of it for any practical purpose.⁶⁷ These strong matriarchal networks are further defined in motherhood being central to womanhood,⁶⁸ and the mother-daughter relationship being especially strong.⁶⁹ In terms of clothing, Hasler states that women dress to accentuate their sexuality.⁷⁰

The importance of physicality extends to areas other than the body. Hasler states: "the Cartesian dualism between the mind and body has only lightly touched working class culture".⁷¹ Indeed, at a funeral, objects affirming the identity of the deceased in this life are often placed in the coffin, friends or family members may well carry the coffin, and there are often protracted apologies from members of the extended family and friends who are unable to attend to pay their respects.⁷² Whilst these trends may be increasingly observed in other parts of society, especially since the 1989 Hillsborough disaster⁷³ and the funeral of Princess Diana,⁷⁴ Hasler observes them as being particularly prevalent among the working class.

⁶⁴ Hasler 2006, 13

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Hasler 2006, 8-10

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Hasler 2006, 5-6

⁷¹ Hasler 2006, 7

⁷² Hasler 2006, 6-7

⁷³ Drane 2000b, 80

⁷⁴ Drane 2000b, 79

2.3.3.3 *The Home and the Street*

Hasler emphasises the importance of the home in working class culture, stating that it is often an intensely private space and is often a sanctuary even from extended family.⁷⁵ This, he contrasts with the public nature of the street,⁷⁶ which, he asserts, “is a place where identities are formed, issues resolved and power exhibited”.⁷⁷ This is seen in the fact that it is the forum where relationships are made and broken, especially when resources are shared,⁷⁸ it is the primary place of socialization,⁷⁹ and the fact that flats are generally unpopular because of their “socially-closed” design.⁸⁰ When thought of, the Church is often considered somewhere in between home and street.⁸¹

2.3.3.4 *Work and Education*

Hasler identifies the expectation in working class culture that men should work full-time and that women should only work part-time. There are also definite thoughts regarding *men* and *women's* work, which remain largely unchallenged and consequently have an impact on social interaction in the community.⁸² Working class people, he observes, are not, however, unaware of the value of education.⁸³

⁷⁵ Hasler 2006, 41

⁷⁶ Hasler 2000, 11-12

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Hasler 2000, 13

⁷⁹ Hasler 2000, 14

⁸⁰ Hasler 2000, 13

⁸¹ Hasler 2000, 41

⁸² Hasler 2000, 14-17

⁸³ Hasler 2000, 6

2.4 Hasler's Opponents

The thinking of others would appear to disagree with Hasler's strict definition of the working class and his distinctives of the culture. Baker and Drane are two of these.

Firstly, Baker considers urban spaces to have changed radically in recent years. Whilst Baker helpfully highlights these changes in British urban society as well as in wider society, and these should certainly be borne in mind when considering Hasler's homogenous approach to mission in working class areas that will be considered in depth in the next chapter, the accusation that Hasler made of the *Mission Shaped Church* report⁸⁴ may also be levelled against Baker. In arguing that there is no such thing as a "pure identity" in "postmodern, post-industrial and globalised society",⁸⁵ he seemingly denies the very sharp divisions between groups within the hybrid community that he himself later identifies.⁸⁶ Hasler's identification of a specific contemporary working class culture is thus in some measure justified.

Secondly, it has already been noted that Drane approaches culture in a very different way to Hasler in that, whilst agreeing with Hasler that the Church needs to cater for diversity more,⁸⁷ Drane disagrees that the type of traditional methodology that Hasler employs is valid today.⁸⁸ For Drane, the situation in which the Church is often viewed as being solidly middle class is rightly more nuanced as he points out that there are some flourishing working class congregations. He continues:

⁸⁴ Hasler 2006, 2

⁸⁵ Baker 2009, 2

⁸⁶ Baker 2009, 5

⁸⁷ Drane 2000a, 58-59

⁸⁸ Drane 2000a, 59-60

though I do believe that inherited middle class values are part of the Church's problem [...] a more useful way of understanding people in relation to the mission of the Church will be to try and identify how they are dealing with the rationalization and meaninglessness of life.⁸⁹

This view is worthy of further investigation, because it appears to stand in contrast to Hasler in a similar way to Baker, as it seeks to regard people as defined primarily by the way in which they deal with contemporary life. As such and in contrast to Hasler, Drane identifies seven fluid categories of people to whom he feels the Church needs to relate in fulfilling its evangelistic calling.⁹⁰

Drane considers three categories that do not necessarily explicitly relate to Hasler's working class, but lend support to Hasler's argument that culturally-focused congregations are needed.⁹¹ These include *spiritual searchers*, motivated primarily by the desire for holistic self-fulfilment,⁹² *secularists* for whom a high level of education is important, who are often vocal against religion,⁹³ and finally *corporate achievers* who in the past formed the mainstay of mainline British churches, whose lives are dominated by career, are driven by insistent individualism, but ironically end up with little self worth.⁹⁴ This last category is composed of those for whom religious observance is more enticing than spiritual enthusiasm, who have most internalised commercial values and for whom spirituality is often used in a purely functional way.⁹⁵

Drane also considers a further four groupings that appear to have direct relevance to Hasler's working class. That which perhaps relates most closely to Hasler's definition of the characteristics

⁸⁹ Drane 2000a, 60

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Hasler 2006, 106

⁹² Drane 2000a, 69-71

⁹³ Drane 2000a, 76-77

⁹⁴ Drane 2000a, 73

⁹⁵ Drane 2000a, 74

of the working class is culturally conservative *traditionalists*. These are people who are fundamentally happy with their life and for whom the "world revolves around the people and places which are physically accessible to them".⁹⁶ He eschews this as a socio-economic grouping, but nonetheless states that it is often working class, blue collar workers struggling to make ends meet on a daily basis.⁹⁷ He emphasises that a sense of continuity is very important, and that the local is more important than the global. He characterises this group in many of the ways that Hasler outlines the working class: as being hardworking, loyal to traditional family values,⁹⁸ and finding stories and illustrations important.⁹⁹

Drane's comment that:

...when Christian clergy and others with a higher education end up working in churches composed of such people they can find it hard to handle what, to them, looks like fundamentalism but which in reality is a different style of community life, this time focussed around the Bible,¹⁰⁰

indicates that he feels it is necessary for clergy and Christian leaders to explore something of the *cultural language* that is spoken in these areas in order to see where God is working. Indeed, he emphasises this by stating that clergy thinking that their way of thinking is the *right* way has been part of the problem that Church does not connect well in these areas.¹⁰¹ He concurs in this respect with Hasler and also in highlighting the importance of rites of passage.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Drane 2000a, 66

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Drane 2000a, 67

⁹⁹ Drane 2000a, 69

¹⁰⁰ Drane 2000a, 68

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Drane's second grouping is the *desperate poor*; those who are marginalised because of primarily economic reasons, "from participation in education, work, community life and access to services and other aspects of life seen as part of being a full and participating member of mainstream society".¹⁰³ Despite some initiatives designed to decrease marginalisation, these have mainly involved individuals needing to step outside the structures of the day to achieve this,¹⁰⁴ Drane maintains that "without radical change, most churches never will become accessible to the poor" and that they never have been except in feudal societies of the Middle Ages.¹⁰⁵ Drane thus highlights a similar challenge to Hasler for the Church to engage in a culturally relevant way.

A third category of particular relevance to Hasler is Drane's *hedonists*, who come from a mixture of socio-economic backgrounds and deal with the *knock-backs* of life by partying etc.¹⁰⁶ He feels that the Church will have nothing to say to these people unless it engages with underlying concerns and adapts to serve them accordingly.¹⁰⁷ This category relates to Hasler's working class in the respect of the alcohol abuse in working class areas, and also in that physicality and the body is important.

Finally, the *apathetic*, those who give little thought to considering profound questions of life are also those for whom the schedule of regular weekly activities cannot be varied. For this group, intrusions into their life - significant events in the lives of loved ones, including death, lose their meaning in daily routine.¹⁰⁸ They also accept secularist arguments more easily to avoid further thinking.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Browne 2011, 422

¹⁰⁴ Drane 2000a, 62

¹⁰⁵ Drane 2000a, 61

¹⁰⁶ Drane 2000a, 63

¹⁰⁷ Drane 2000a, 66

¹⁰⁸ Drane 2000a, 78-79

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

In suggesting that mainstream Church really only caters for *corporate achievers* and that the Church needs ways to connect with *spiritual seekers* alienated by "bookishness", and *traditionalists* for whom oral communication is a primary means of communication, Drane concurs with Hasler that a particular cultural approach is taken by the Church that excludes those who are not, what Hasler would term, middle class.¹¹⁰ He further alludes to cultural distinctiveness when he states "*traditionalists* and *spiritual seekers* [...] are also more likely to feel more at home exploring ultimate meanings through their own shared stories of faith than through propositional truth claims of one sort of another".¹¹¹ Drane rightly concurs that this is an issue of culture when he states that "the thinking-leads-to-doing way is not only culturally alien to these people, but also leads to the kind of formality and predictability which they find hard to match with the rest of their experience of life".¹¹²

One of the strengths of Drane's groupings in comparison to that of Hasler is their fluidity,¹¹³ which could be seen to be more reflective of the way in which people move between them and can be made up of elements of several of them.¹¹⁴ In contrast to Hasler's thinking that regards working class culture as a homogenous unit, Drane reflects the way in which culture shifts and changes in the light of global forces and this is certainly to be considered carefully.¹¹⁵ This does not appear to be so overt in Hasler's thinking. Nonetheless, this is also a downfall of Drane's categories as they are vague compared to Hasler, which would make it difficult to tailor church and mission to these disparate and diverse groupings.

¹¹⁰ Drane 2000a, 81

¹¹¹ Drane 2000a, 82

¹¹² Drane 2000a, 81

¹¹³ Drane 2000a, 79

¹¹⁴ Drane 2000a, 80

¹¹⁵ Baker 2009, 126

Furthermore, although Drane and Baker, in contrast to Hasler, are right to take into account culture rather than economic definitions of people groupings, they nonetheless fail to take serious account of the importance that processes of culture and socialisation are at the root of how people deal "with the rationalization and meaningless of life".¹¹⁶

2.5 Conclusion

Whilst initially appearing to be so, Drane's approach is not mutually exclusive to Hasler. It is right to take into account the changes which have occurred in British society over recent years and to acknowledge that these changes will have an impact on the way in which mission and ministry is carried out today, indeed both Baker and Drane make this aspect clear. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account the static and non-transitory nature of many working class areas and to recognise the fact that culture is the root of thinking and acting in daily life in a profound way. This is further substantiated by the fact that there is little social mobility in contemporary Britain.

In the case of the working class, changes in wider society must certainly have affected the culture to an extent, as no culture is immune from outside influences, particularly in a globalised world,¹¹⁷ but Hasler's contention that working class culture is a primarily locally-based culture that continues to exist in a number of ways, including the distinctive dense-mesh networks of social

¹¹⁶ Drane 2000a, 60

¹¹⁷ Schreiter 1997, 27

interaction¹¹⁸ must rightly be taken into account when considering how culturally relevant mission might take place.

Certainly Hasler's distinctives contain some element of generalisation, but some element is necessary to say anything of substance. Nonetheless he makes useful observations about the distinctives of the culture that are likely more defined because of a lack of social, economic and physical mobility. Baker's approach is certainly worth bearing in mind because globalisation has had an impact on the working class, but it does not convincingly render Hasler's thinking redundant.

Hasler's approach to culture and the working class thus has more credibility than perhaps first thought because it emerges from a long period of observation in different areas and also because there is less social mobility than is sometimes assumed by the transient middle classes. It also takes seriously the impact of economics, tradition, values, social and geographical distinctives of those among whom he works, that together are indicative of a socio-economic class culture.

Baker's approach does however, raise questions vis-a-vis Hasler's thinking concerning the problems of a homogenous approach to mission that will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹¹⁸ Hasler 2006, 14-15

Chapter 3

A Gospel Relevant to the Working Class?

[The language of a culture] must be learned in the way a child learns to speak, not by finding words to match one's existing stock, but by learning to think and speak in the way the people of the country do.¹¹⁹

Having established in the previous chapter that although much change has taken place in the class structure of Britain, Hasler's distinctive working class culture still exists in the UK, this chapter will attempt to explore how the gospel might be effectively contextualised in such a situation. As the preceding chapter has laid the foundation in exploring Hasler's distinctives of working class culture, this chapter will consider what implication these have for how the gospel might "come alive" in the culture, yet remain the same gospel.¹²⁰ Indeed, this is a question that cross-cultural missionaries have encountered throughout history; therefore Newbigin's statement about communicating the gospel in a cross-cultural context above has great relevance to the contextualisation of the gospel in contemporary Britain.¹²¹

This will be achieved by first looking at Hasler's suggestions for how the gospel might become more relevant to the working class and then critiquing this homogenous unit approach in the light of Baker's hybrid city, values based approach. It will seek to evaluate the extent to which Hasler is effective in engaging with, and communicating the gospel in a culturally relevant way.

¹¹⁹ Newbigin 1989, 56

¹²⁰ Newbigin 1989, 142

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

3.1 Hasler's Distinctives of Working Class Ministry

Hasler's contention that "it is no help to replicate the patterns of sub-urban Britain,"¹²² when undertaking work in working class areas is something with which Newbigin would appear to agree methodologically.¹²³ Certainly the impact that culture has on theology has increasingly been recognised¹²⁴ and the (colonial) notion that the gospel might be transplanted without cultural accommodation into a different culture has increasingly lost credibility in the world of cross-cultural mission,¹²⁵ in the light of the separation between Church and state, religion and culture that took place under the influence of the Enlightenment.¹²⁶ In modern day Britain however, where a thoroughgoing study of subcultures and the consequent impact on mission is much needed,¹²⁷ this remains an underdeveloped area. Contrary to this situation, Hasler feels that credibility would be lent to mission among the working class¹²⁸ if God could be seen through the eyes of the culture that will now be explored.

3.1.1 Place of Worship

Whilst Hasler observes that the home is often an intensely private space,¹²⁹ he simultaneously suggests, "we should explore the use of household rather than church buildings",¹³⁰ on the basis

¹²² Hasler 2000, 19

¹²³ Newbigin 1989, 149

¹²⁴ Hiebert 1973, Online

¹²⁵ Roxborough 2009, 4

¹²⁶ Bosch 1991, 275

¹²⁷ Drane 2000a, 59

¹²⁸ Hasler 2012, Interview on 06/03/2012

¹²⁹ Hasler 2006, 41

¹³⁰ Hasler 2006, 15

that social networks in less affluent areas are often based on kinship,¹³¹ the importance of family,¹³² and the fact that "an imposing building" may obstruct mission.¹³³ As such, he touches upon the home and street distinctive that he identifies in working class culture.

Whilst he is right to point out that "working class theology emphasises orthopraxis rather than orthodoxy" and the alien and public nature of entering into a church building that may be regarded as making a public statement that is then open to ridicule,¹³⁴ Hasler himself properly acknowledges the need for further study on the interrelationship between private and public space in working class culture.¹³⁵ Indeed, he argues that Church becomes *home* not *street*.¹³⁶ This is justified, particularly since he later mentions that he feels there is still a need for "sacred spaces",¹³⁷ and because those who make "the journey to publicly expressed belief" often see the church building as God's "house in this place".¹³⁸

Hasler indicates that this sense of the sacredness of the church building may extend beyond regular church-goers to others, who he states were horrified that a new church that allowed cake to be eaten in the building opened nearby.¹³⁹ Similarly he states that generally, suggestions for multiuse buildings are not met with great enthusiasm, and this consequently must have an impact on how church buildings might appear to have a number of rooms, like in a house, but at the same time remain sensitive.¹⁴⁰ These observations further suggest that Hasler's suggestion of "shrine[s]"

¹³¹ Hasler 2006, 12-13

¹³² Hasler 2006, 47-48

¹³³ Hasler 2006, 15

¹³⁴ Hasler 2006, 26

¹³⁵ Hasler 2006, 15

¹³⁶ Hasler 2006, 27

¹³⁷ Hasler 2006, 48

¹³⁸ Hasler 2006, 41

¹³⁹ Hasler 2006, 42

¹⁴⁰ Hasler 2000, 28

or "holy well[s]" instead of church buildings may not provide the same "space for refuge",¹⁴¹ that a church building with its rich placial¹⁴² connections does. Whilst Hasler is right that "what we need to escape from is the mentality of 'going to church'",¹⁴³ which has undoubtedly resulted in a dichotomy of faith and life, he does not appear to consider the impact that would result from such a change, and the fact that meeting in church buildings has been an important part of the Christian faith throughout the centuries.

Although Hasler argues that maintaining the parish expectations from tradition hinders actually being able to inculturate the gospel in culturally relevant ways,¹⁴⁴ a further more overt missiological implication of the abandonment of church buildings does not appear to have been considered by Hasler. He highlights the fact that "there is an historical class division issue that says that working class communities should not settle for second best because they are not so rich" and this applies to weddings and funerals, both of which need to be a "traditional proper job".¹⁴⁵ Although he makes a valid point about the unrealistic expectation that may be placed on the congregation to resource such work,¹⁴⁶ it is hard to image how this might occur if the church building is no longer available. As already mentioned, it is hard to visualise shrines or holy wells affording the same level of placial connection that churches where generations have been christened, married and buried provide. The impact of preferring homes to church buildings should therefore be considered carefully. Whilst it may have cultural relevance in some areas, the areas highlighted above necessarily limit its relevance.

¹⁴¹ Hasler 2006, 48

¹⁴² Bartholomew 2011, 2-3

¹⁴³ Hasler 2006, 49

¹⁴⁴ Hasler 2006, 44

¹⁴⁵ Hasler 2006, 42

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

3.1.2 Liturgy and Active Storytelling

A second area of consideration is connected with Hasler's observations about linguistics and storytelling.¹⁴⁷ Hasler's statement that social class has a distinctive impact on language use concurs with the findings of sociolinguists such as Trudgill¹⁴⁸ and Wardhaugh.¹⁴⁹ Indeed in stating that: "we are supposed to have liturgy in the vernacular. [...] Yet many of our liturgies do not have the syntax, narrative or metaphor of working class culture",¹⁵⁰ Hasler's message is similar to that of the Liturgical Movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁵¹ Hasler seeks to address this discrepancy between heart language and language of the liturgy through a variety of liturgical resources such as *Shouting for Lent*, which employs the use of shouting, something, which Hasler asserts "is a culturally natural expression".¹⁵² Certainly shouting is natural for spectators of football, who in the past were predominantly working class.¹⁵³ Furthermore, this service connects with Hasler's observation that the working class prefer the active parts of service such as singing and sharing the peace.¹⁵⁴

A further consideration is Hasler's contention that working class people identify well with stories, dreams and visions,¹⁵⁵ even if they do not necessarily read the Bible. Hasler's work concurs with that of Sample, who considers the more oral culture of the working class in the United States.¹⁵⁶ Hasler notes that the stories with which people most associate, include Peter's denial and Christ's

¹⁴⁷ Hasler 2006, 17-18

¹⁴⁸ Trudgill 2000

¹⁴⁹ Wardhaugh 2010, 361

¹⁵⁰ Hasler 2006, 53-54

¹⁵¹ Fenwick and Spinks 1995, 8-9

¹⁵² Hasler n.d., Online

¹⁵³ BBC 2012c, Melvyn Bragg's Class and Culture Episode 3

¹⁵⁴ Hasler 2000, 24

¹⁵⁵ Hasler 2000, 23

¹⁵⁶ Sample 1994, 3-5

birth into poverty, the suffering of Jesus, sharing the bread and the fishes and the pestered judge.¹⁵⁷ He is right to look at what implication this has for both liturgy and courses that retell the Christian story. He does so, through the Eucharistic thanksgiving prayer and through the Christian basic course entitled *Sound Convictions*,¹⁵⁸ both of which are tailored to highlight those aspects of the gospel with which the culture most naturally connects and to challenge in a gentle way ideas such as the humanity of Jesus and the Fatherhood of God that are less comfortable.¹⁵⁹

To further explore whether Hasler homogenous approach is culturally relevant to the working class it will be productive to consider a different approach.

3.2 Baker's Hybrid City Values Based Approach

It is fruitful to first consider a little of the background of Baker's approach, which is based on *Third Space* thinking, originally arising out of the eighteenth century natural science concept of hybridity.¹⁶⁰ Notably, it developed during the nineteenth century as a reaction against the poles of the western colonial effort "either to promote assimilation of the colonised to the norms and values of the West, or to ensure strict codes of segregation",¹⁶¹ and this also includes class.¹⁶² It is also based on reformulating "mainstream Christian realism",¹⁶³ which Baker argues, agreeing with MacIntyre,¹⁶⁴ is necessary because "the homogeneity of modernity [...] has been fragmented into

¹⁵⁷ Hasler 2000, 23

¹⁵⁸ Hasler n.d., Online

¹⁵⁹ Hasler 2000, 22

¹⁶⁰ Baker 2009, 13

¹⁶¹ Baker 2009, 14

¹⁶² Baker 2009, 16

¹⁶³ Baker 2009, 68

¹⁶⁴ MacIntyre 1981, 48

competing and disconnected discourses".¹⁶⁵ Hasler's approach is thereby challenged as Baker contends "[...] cultural anthropology functions in a monopolistic way by choosing an unnecessarily stark and binary analysis of indigenous histories and cultures".¹⁶⁶ Might Hasler's work be accused of similar "binary analysis"?¹⁶⁷

3.2.1 The Hybrid City

Baker, in contrast to Hasler, is a proponent of a values driven approach, which, as has been seen in the last chapter, regards the city context as one that is far from homogenous,¹⁶⁸ and thus takes a differing approach to cultural relevance in contemporary urban areas. He concludes that Douglass and Friedmann's definition of civil society, as "a society of households, family networks, civic and religious organizations and communities that are bound to each other primarily by shared histories, collective memories and cultural norms of reciprocity" is no longer relevant.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, Baker argues that hybridity is at the centre of the Christian faith,¹⁷⁰ and should therefore be at the centre of mission strategy in the city.¹⁷¹

Whilst arguing that the Church should engage with hybridity, as the "binary 'either/or' definitions" of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from the Enlightenment and Marxism are no longer valid,¹⁷² Baker nonetheless acknowledges that fragmentation has thus far been a part of this approach.¹⁷³ He uses the example of mixed housing in Wythenshawe near Manchester where new

¹⁶⁵ Baker 2009, 69

¹⁶⁶ Baker 2009, 16

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Baker 2009, 27

¹⁶⁹ Baker 2009, 53

¹⁷⁰ Baker 2009, 147

¹⁷¹ Baker 2009, 26

¹⁷² Baker 2009, 2

¹⁷³ Baker 2009, 113

residents' "lifestyles and use of services barely mesh with those of the existing local community".¹⁷⁴ He nonetheless terms this a hybrid community. In this way, there appears to be an inconsistency in Baker's work in so far that he states that the British urban environment is hybrid, and it is true to say that cultures do certainly influence one another increasingly in the contemporary world,¹⁷⁵ but he admits that the result of this mixing has had little effect on producing a hybrid culture, but has been fragmentation, of which social unrest has been indicative.¹⁷⁶

Indeed in proposing a hybrid, values based approach as a means to seeking a decrease in fragmentation, he fails to consider what has been demonstrated in the last chapter; that despite "the velocity of cultural change in the past thirty years,"¹⁷⁷ social class, as it is in the United States, is still a defining factor in exclusion.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore the working class still exists in a modified form and culture and class still play a significant part in effective mission. Moreover, Baker rejects the idea that "kinship-based networks of space have been superseded by associational flows based on urban forms that stress individualism and mobility",¹⁷⁹ but then goes on to argue that "it is [...] more accurate to propose that human social forms, for increasing numbers of citizens, are in fact hybrid expressions of local, associational, global and virtual 'forms' of community".¹⁸⁰ Likely this is true for many mobile middle class people, but the situation, as identified by Hasler is somewhat different for the working class who, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, are more locally rooted and less socially mobile.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁴ Baker 2009, 5-6

¹⁷⁵ Schreiter 1997, 27

¹⁷⁶ New Scientist 2011, Online

¹⁷⁷ Baker 2009, 27

¹⁷⁸ Walzer 1995, 261

¹⁷⁹ Baker 2009, 52

¹⁸⁰ Baker 2009, 53

¹⁸¹ Browne 2011, 447

Whilst it is therefore difficult to see the validity of Baker's assessment, particularly in the light of the definitions of culture and specifically the more static working class culture outlined in the first chapter, it nonetheless merits further exploration. If Baker is right in his assessment of the modern city, then Hasler's non-hybrid approach, focusing on a homogenous cultural grouping, is less effective at presenting a truly culturally relevant gospel and may be open to the same dangers as that of interest-based groupings as suggested by Moynagh.¹⁸²

Indeed, Baker looks at the work of Sandercock and correctly observes that "the fear of the Other is the main pastoral problem [Sandercock] identifies in the postmodern city".¹⁸³ If this is the case then Hasler's homogenous approach may be seen to contribute further to the isolation and segregation of working class communities in the outer estates. Baker highlights this is an important consideration,¹⁸⁴ and this must not be dismissed easily when considering Hasler's approach.

3.2.2 Local and Ecumenical?

Certainly, Hasler's approach is locally rooted in that it takes good account of that which is observed in the local culture with which the gospel can naturally relate. What is less clear is that Hasler takes into account the "global forces",¹⁸⁵ of which Baker, whilst holding contextualisation important,¹⁸⁶ might be said to favour.

¹⁸² Moynagh 2001, 190

¹⁸³ Baker 2009, 25

¹⁸⁴ Baker 2009, 25

¹⁸⁵ Baker 2009, 126

¹⁸⁶ Baker 2009, 137

In order to further consider this issue, Newbigin's work may prove beneficial as it offers insight into the tension between contextualisation and remaining ecumenical in the sense of being open to other influences.¹⁸⁷ He proficiently makes his point regarding the importance of the catholicity of mission by referring to the "great movement of foreign missions in the 150 years from 1800" and noting the beneficial effect in opening "the eyes of European Christians to the extent to which Christianity has become domesticated within Western culture" that the resultant "ecumenical movement" had.¹⁸⁸ He further notes: "the rise of various forms of Third World theologies has challenged this domestication".¹⁸⁹

Whilst Hasler's methodology aligns itself well with Newbigin's assertion that the gospel must be continually reinterpreted, at least in the outworking of Hasler's thinking, the challenge of remaining ecumenical is something that he does not appear to consider in depth. In this way, whilst highlighting the danger of domestication that may be a result of contextualisation, Newbigin can be seen to raise the question as to what extent Hasler's homogenous approach is successful at being "truly ecumenical".¹⁹⁰ An examination of Hasler's approach in this respect, in addition to the cultural distinctives explored above, is necessary.

A number of factors in Hasler's thinking are indicative of his homogenous approach. Firstly, Hasler's suspicion of regeneration projects that seek intentionally to integrate middle and working class people in residential areas, such as that of the Joseph Rountree Foundation,¹⁹¹ which acknowledges similar inadequacies,¹⁹² is on the basis that they appear to have little long-term

¹⁸⁷ Newbigin 1989, 152

¹⁸⁸ Newbigin 1989, 144

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Newbigin 1989, 152

¹⁹¹ Rowlands et al. 2006, 5

¹⁹² Rowlands et al. 2006, 75

benefit and lead to social disintegration, with working class people finding it more difficult to find friends.¹⁹³ Secondly, Hasler's ministry focus is on the more respectable working class as opposed to the long term unemployed.¹⁹⁴

Thirdly, Hasler is very keen in his ministry to seek independence rather than forced dependence.¹⁹⁵ He argues "any Christian community that does not" share ministry with neighbours, recognise spiritual gifts, and has its own indigenous leaders, "is not a church but a mission field".¹⁹⁶ Whilst cultural dependency is indeed to be shunned, it could be argued that the Church is always a mission field as people are re-evangelised continually.

Fourthly, Hasler's observation that networks are multiplex, dense and locally based when compared to middle class loose mesh, globally based networks¹⁹⁷ is useful in that the approaches taken to mission in other cultures need to be adapted with this in mind, but further denotes his homogenous approach that may be charged with lacking proper attention to the fact that outer city estates are subject to greater outside influence than in the past.

A further, important fifth area that displays this thinking is the entirely contextual training of leaders.¹⁹⁸ Hasler argues that the homogeneity of selection and training in the Church is a justice issue "whereby one culture dominates another" which creates and sustains "a kind of enforced dependency".¹⁹⁹ On this point Hasler rightly states the need for missionaries to be well aware of

¹⁹³ Hasler 2012, Interview on 06/03/2012

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Hasler 2006, 7

¹⁹⁶ Hasler 2006, 47

¹⁹⁷ Hasler 2012, Interview 06/03/2012

¹⁹⁸ Hasler 2006, 48

¹⁹⁹ Hasler 2006, 49

the sociology and culture in which they are working.²⁰⁰ Although Hasler declares that they do not necessarily need to be working class themselves,²⁰¹ he nonetheless highlights the need to identify potential leaders, which he suggests should be self-supporting missionaries rather than vicars,²⁰² preferably from within the existing relational structures of the context.²⁰³

Whilst there is much value in such an approach, there is however, a danger with such schemes as *Go-local*, *Grow-local*, which is being piloted in the Diocese of Bristol,²⁰⁴ that exposure to outside culture will not be achieved. Indeed, stepping outside one's own culture allows one to regard one's own culture critically. Newbigin correctly states, that cultures "are not morally neutral".²⁰⁵ As such, a necessary part of mission is reflecting on our own human culture and allowing the gospel to speak into that culture. Whilst Hasler's approach no doubt results in leaders who are thoroughly immersed in the culture, it is difficult to see how the critical engagement with culture that is a necessary part of mission,²⁰⁶ might take place if there is little exposure to different cultures.²⁰⁷

Although Hasler to some extent recognises the benefit of these leaders being hospitable to other cultures, and he is right to do so if his own desire for the Church is that the various cultures and sub-cultures of Britain might genuinely engage with one another in an open way,²⁰⁸ there appears to be limited evidence that this takes place in practice.²⁰⁹ As such the avenues that can be pursued

²⁰⁰ Hasler 2006, 16 & 47

²⁰¹ Hasler 2006, 47

²⁰² Hasler 2006, 44-47

²⁰³ Hasler 2006, 48

²⁰⁴ Hasler 2012, Online

²⁰⁵ Newbigin 1989, 14

²⁰⁶ Newbigin 1989, 96

²⁰⁷ Newbigin 1989, 35-36 & 151

²⁰⁸ Hasler 2006, 20

²⁰⁹ Hasler 2012, Interview on 06/03/2012

to challenge existing assumptions in the way that Newbigin rightly advocates²¹⁰ appear to be limited.

3.2.3 The Values Based Approach

Baker's lack of consideration of the specifics of how mission might take place among different people who are shaped not only by values defined by recent trends in urbanisation and globalisation, but perhaps more greatly by the socialisation processes of the culture and subculture in which they grew up, stands in stark contrast to Hasler's pragmatic approach.

Although Baker's hybrid city approach does not adequately take into account the distinctive qualities of local communities, might Baker's values based approach, which focuses on identifying values within existing organisations, projects and other ventures in a community and then seeking ways in which to co-operate and develop partnerships with them,²¹¹ be a more culturally relevant way of working among the working class? Does it provide a more culturally relevant methodology of mission in the contemporary urban space that is both able to facilitate genuine engagement and work with, rather than against the current thinking of postmodern society that there is no such thing as ultimate truth?²¹²

Baker gives an example of this type of work that has taken place among black majority churches in the Moss Side/Chorlton areas of Manchester who have set up an umbrella organisation to combine existing "community-based organisations", mostly without "an explicit church-based

²¹⁰ Newbigin 1989, 36

²¹¹ Baker 2009, 126

²¹² Chang 2000, 19

identity" to assist in sharing resources more effectively as well as applying for and attracting grants.²¹³ The premise, in contrast to Hasler's approach, "is not based on cultural purity [...] but on racial and ethnic diversity [...] through an appeal to non-judgemental inclusivity that prioritises a contemporary emphasis on emotional and physical connection".²¹⁴

Certainly Baker's approach is potentially a more interdisciplinary²¹⁵ basis for mission, with less potential to be triumphalist, whilst maintaining its prophetic edge,²¹⁶ in a post-Christendom society where old methods of evangelism are largely unwelcome. In its focus on bringing the Kingdom of God one step closer through co-operation it enables the sharing of resources, something that Hasler highlights as a culturally relevant action within working class culture, although this sharing is usually limited to family and friends.²¹⁷ Furthermore, it may be argued that this is a biblical principle in the respect that in the Book of Leviticus God is concerned that provision should be made for the poor,²¹⁸ Jesus is clearly concerned about the same subject in Luke's Gospel,²¹⁹ Paul concerns himself with the poor in Galatians,²²⁰ and the sharing of resources, albeit within the Church is something that was a part of the Early Church.²²¹ Moreover this method keeps the avenues of communication and interchange open between different groupings in the urban environment, potentially facilitating the genuine two-way exchange that Hasler desires²²² and Newbigin states is vital²²³ in mission engagement.

²¹³ Baker 2009, 114-115

²¹⁴ Baker 2009, 117

²¹⁵ Baker 2009, 108

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Hasler 2000, 12-13

²¹⁸ e.g. Leviticus 19:9-10, Leviticus 25

²¹⁹ Luke 16 among others

²²⁰ Longenecker 2010, 211

²²¹ Acts 2:44-44

²²² Hasler 2006, 106

²²³ Newbigin 1989, 124

Hasler is however, discerningly cautious regarding values driven approaches, noting that many are of necessity project based and often quickly become professionalised.²²⁴ In order to engage with outside groups, those of working class culture must therefore operate according to the norm of another culture, which results in ownership being taken out of local hands.²²⁵ He contends that many such projects result in the disenfranchisement of local people in favour of non-indigenous professionals,²²⁶ and that an outside agenda often yields few results.²²⁷ This is an area of which cross-cultural mission is increasingly aware and important in urban mission.²²⁸

Baker is himself nonetheless, not uncritical of the dangers of a project based approach. He identifies, in a similar way to Hasler,²²⁹ a missionary neo-colonial approach, and observes that the regeneration industry "arriving in a new area and telling the existing residents and organisations how they should improve themselves and their lives (smoking, healthy diets)"²³⁰ is often unsuccessful. He offers, as a counter to this project the example of the Eden Project, an independent white-led charismatic church project started in Manchester during the 1980s where volunteers agree to live and work in communities.²³¹ The volunteers function as a community within a community,²³² and are "residents first, Christians second".²³³ This approach means that Hasler's point that those coming as missionaries from outside the context need to learn something of the culture, has the potential to be fulfilled as both existing and new residents begin to share life together.

²²⁴ Hasler 2006, 21

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Hasler 2006, 22

²²⁷ Hasler 2006, 24

²²⁸ Greenway & Monsma 2000, 76

²²⁹ Hasler 2006, 20

²³⁰ Baker 2009, 113

²³¹ Baker 2009, 117

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Baker 2009, 118

Although this does not necessarily involve identifying leaders from within the context as it currently stands, it could certainly be adjusted to do so and therefore Hasler's approach can be of relevance here. In this way, Baker's contention that "the construction of a local performative theology", pragmatically based that needs to be "locally rooted, yet understands the nature of the global forces impinging on its locality",²³⁴ might be a genuinely useful reminder of the need to address the possible imbalance of Hasler's approach, making it more culturally relevant for the fragmented hybrid city, in which cultural division nonetheless continues to exist.

3.3 Conclusion

Hasler's work is insightful in making the gospel relevant to the working class in the way that he identifies cultural distinctives that form natural *connection points* between culture and gospel. Whilst it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of his approach in any measureable way, many of the approaches that he takes and the resources that he has produced appear to be relevant to the culture and its spiritual concerns - even more widely across Drane's categories as explored in the previous chapter.

The main contention with Hasler's approach is the way in which it views the culture as one homogenous unit. Contrary to this is Baker's approach, but this is not without criticism, as has been seen. Specifically, having identified the fragmentation of society in the city, Baker then suggests that his values based approach may be the answer to this fragmentation, but without considering the specifics of different cultures in the hybrid city in the way that Hasler does.

²³⁴ Baker 2009, 126

Whilst on first consideration the approaches of Hasler and Baker appear to be mutually exclusive, the benefits of combining the two approaches and holding them in balance may prove to be a more effective and culturally relevant way of approaching mission in working class areas. This would, carried out in a sensitive way, taking into good account the dangers of professionalisation and the consequent disownership that is prevalent in project based approaches, create an arena for genuine two-way engagement between the local and the more global in a way in which neither of the two approaches seem capable in isolation.

The next chapter will continue to build upon and to explore many of the issues touched upon and raised in this chapter, specifically how faithful Hasler is to the inculturation model of mission and what importance Newbigin's thinking that there is no pure gospel without inculturation is to Hasler's model. This will also further assist in determining the relevance of Hasler's approach to mission among the contemporary working class.

Chapter 4

Authentic Inculturation? The Missional Coherence of Hasler's Approach

True contextualisation happens when there is a community which lives faithfully by the gospel and in that same costly identification with people in their real situations as we see in the earthly ministry of Jesus. When these conditions are met, the sovereign Spirit of God does his own surprising work.²³⁵

Whilst the first chapter has shown the need for culturally relevant mission and the second chapter has explored the cultural relevance of Hasler's approach to white working class culture, Hasler's approach has not yet been critiqued in the light of the inculturation mission methodology on which it is based. Whilst the array of differing methodologies serve as a reminder that there is no one single set of principles that can be universally applied to this area,²³⁶ it is nonetheless helpful to consider the methodological basis of Hasler's approach with a view to not only deciding to what extent he remains faithful to the methodology that he chooses, but also consider whether Hasler's approach is a valid mission approach for the context concerned. This will be achieved primarily through exploring Hasler's work in the light of Newbigin as he considers the question of *true and false contextualisation*.²³⁷

²³⁵ Newbigin 1989, 154

²³⁶ Bevans 2002, 139

²³⁷ Newbigin 1989, 142

4.1 True or False Contextualisation

In agreeing with Bosch that authentic evangelism is always contextual,²³⁸ Hasler considers Costas' three aspects of authentic evangelism, that "evangelism is a witness that takes place in a given social and historical context"²³⁹, "evangelisation is God's initiative"²⁴⁰ and "evangelisation involves persons and communities working for the transformation of their respective life situations".²⁴¹ Hasler thereby sets the scene for his later substantiation of the inculturation approach that he takes.

After a thoroughgoing examination of the various models of contextual theology, Hasler demonstrates his preference for adopting a cultural rather than an economic approach to mission, concluding that that he prefers to follow an inculturation model taking the insights from Bevan's synthetic model.²⁴² Bevan's model attempts to stand in the middle ground, holding in balance present cultural experience and change with scripture and tradition,²⁴³ taking as justification the gradual formation of the biblical books and doctrine,²⁴⁴ but also remain open to the influence of Liberation theology²⁴⁵ in that it takes into account the changing socio-economic situation of the context and seeks to let Christianity and the context engage with one another in such a way that gives priority to the emergence of ideas.²⁴⁶

²³⁸ Hasler 2006, 56 and Bosch 1991, 417

²³⁹ Costas 1989, 21-22

²⁴⁰ Costas 1989, 23

²⁴¹ Costas 1989, 30

²⁴² Hasler 2006, 101

²⁴³ Bevans 2002, 88

²⁴⁴ Bevans 2002, 88-89

²⁴⁵ Hasler 2006, 89

²⁴⁶ Hasler 2006, 101-102

Newbigin's work on contextualisation has been chosen as a means against which to evaluate Hasler's work because, it too considers how the truth of the gospel might be proclaimed in a society where there is plurality and diversity. To what extent Hasler's approach converges with Newbigin's thinking on *true contextualisation* to result in a valid approach to inculturation for the context will now be explored.

4.1.1 Engagement with Context

If the gospel is to be understood, if it is to be received as something which communicates truth about the real human situation, if it is, as we say, to 'make sense', it has to be communicated in the language of those whom it is addressed and has to be clothed in symbols which are meaningful to them.²⁴⁷

A major area that Newbigin considers in his work on *true and false contextualisation* is that of engagement with the context. In the statement above Newbigin makes clear the importance of attending to and engaging with context.

This is in part, due to Newbigin's assertion of the inevitability of culture in the equation of mission. Rooms also agrees with this.²⁴⁸ The missionary does not come with the pure gospel and then adapt it to the culture where she serves: she comes with a gospel that is "already embodied in the culture by which the missionary was formed".²⁴⁹ Newbigin's position is further strengthened by his appeal to the story of the Bible, the majority of which he rightly argues has a particular setting in Hebrew culture, but at no point demands Hebrew culture to "become the world's culture".²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Newbigin 1989, 141

²⁴⁸ Rooms 2011, 8

²⁴⁹ Newbigin 1989, 144

²⁵⁰ Newbigin 1989, 144-145

Furthermore, he asserts that it is clear from the fact that not only Jewish believers, but indeed Early Church gentiles were given the Holy Spirit too (Acts 10:45), that a prolongation of the culture of Jesus' day is clearly not required of all believers today.²⁵¹ He further substantiates this point by referring to the time between the Ascension and the second coming, stating that this has not yet been and will not be characterised "by the universal application of an unchanging pattern of personal and social behaviour as laid down in the faith and practice of Islam", but rather "in the life of a community which remembers, rehearses, and lives by the story which the Bible retells and of which the central focus is the story told in the New Testament".²⁵²

In this way, Hasler's disagreement with Bosch's *kernel and husk* metaphor for the gospel,²⁵³ which argues that there are supracultural aspects of the gospel that stand in isolation to culture and can be communicated in all cultures,²⁵⁴ echoes Newbigin's stance. In this respect, Hasler's focus on the need for contextualisation, on the specifics of culture "even when these cultures are not defined through skin colour" and his call that "we begin the analysis of the cultures we work among",²⁵⁵ as an important consideration in mission is an echo of cross-cultural mission thinking and finds strong support in Newbigin's work. An exploration of the specifics of Newbigin's methodology on engaging with the context will now follow.

²⁵¹ Newbigin 1989, 145

²⁵² Newbigin 1989, 147

²⁵³ Bosch 1991, 454

²⁵⁴ Hasler 2006, 92-93

²⁵⁵ Hasler 2006, 106

4.1.1.1 Diversity of Interpretation in Changing Contexts

Firstly, Newbigin highlights that a commitment to *diversity of interpretation in changing contexts* is perhaps the key aspect in determining *true contextualisation*²⁵⁶ when he states, "although event and interpretation are [...] indissolubly linked, this does not mean that there is only one interpretation".²⁵⁷ Newbigin substantiates this view by helpfully noting that the acts of self-revelation as recorded in the Bible were "always addressed to men and women in particular contexts and called for specific contexts within and appropriate to those contexts", and required the continual re-appropriation and reinterpretation of "the originally given revelation" in their own specific and changing contexts.²⁵⁸ This is a view with which Bevans and Schroeder also agree.²⁵⁹

Newbigin concludes that debate over interpretation has always been a characteristic of the gospel²⁶⁰ and that "we are required in each generation afresh, guided by the original witnesses, to interpret the events of our time in the light of what has been disclosed in those particular events through which God chose to reveal and effect his purpose".²⁶¹ Moreover, he argues that is "of great positive significance that Jesus did not write a book to record in unchangeable form the revelation which he brought" because these events were never subject to just one interpretation,²⁶² and "it is not an unfortunate accident, but of the very heart of the gospel, that we do not know exactly what Jesus said and did".²⁶³ Indeed, "it is of the essence of the matter that he [...] communicated the secret to a community which was then sent out [...] to carry the secret

²⁵⁶ Newbigin 1989, 148

²⁵⁷ Newbigin 1989, 94

²⁵⁸ Newbigin 1989, 63

²⁵⁹ Bevans & Schroeder 2004, 396

²⁶⁰ Newbigin 1989, 94

²⁶¹ Newbigin 1989, 95

²⁶² Newbigin 1989, 94

²⁶³ Newbigin 1989, 94-5

into the life of the world, always re-appropriating and reinterpreting it in the light of new circumstances".²⁶⁴

Indeed, Hasler prefers a similar methodology to that of Newbigin in this respect and this appears to a large extent to be the underpinning of Hasler's polycentric church approach.²⁶⁵ Moreover, an example of this is Hasler's agreement with Bevans, who outlines a number of distinctives of this model of contextual mission, including the fact that it "does not ignore the complexities of social and cultural change",²⁶⁶ instead promoting creative on-going dialogue between faith and culture, which is important in inculturation,²⁶⁷ in which it has been seen that Hasler's approach engages.²⁶⁸

In this way, both Hasler and Newbigin take seriously the importance of the story in the Christian faith, particularly the fact that the story is as yet unfinished.²⁶⁹ The implication for both of them is that human culture thereby has a crucial role to play in the gospel message of the day in so far that "the Christian faith, rooted in the Bible" will form the interpretation of the gospel message in any given culture.²⁷⁰ In this way, Hasler's work can be seen not only to be in strong agreement with Newbigin, but also to stand in Christian and biblical tradition.

²⁶⁴ Newbigin 1989, 95

²⁶⁵ Hasler 2006, 106

²⁶⁶ Bevans 2002, 89

²⁶⁷ Shorter 1988, 11

²⁶⁸ Bevans 2002, 90

²⁶⁹ Newbigin 1989, 12

²⁷⁰ Newbigin 1989, 13

4.1.1.2 Holistic Ministry

Secondly, Newbigin's emphasis on the need for *holistic ministry* when he states "the gospel is addressed to human beings, to their minds and hearts and consciences",²⁷¹ is an area that Hasler also identifies as a necessary part of his strategy for working class ministry.²⁷² Specifically, Hasler's suggestions regarding the use of shouting outlined in the last chapter, as well as his focus on the physical, tactile and symbolic in worship,²⁷³ including at funerals²⁷⁴, which Drane identifies as also being of increasing importance more widely in contemporary British society,²⁷⁵ are examples of this. Convergence between Newbigin and Hasler in this area is thus demonstrably strong and it appears the approach that Hasler takes on this issue seems a good starting place from which culturally appropriate worship, that seeks to avoid the cultural domination that was prevalent in colonial mission, can develop.

4.1.1.3 Open to Other Contexts

A third important element of Newbigin's focus on engagement with the context is his focus on being *open to other contexts*. Although Hasler states his intent to take into account "insights from other people's contexts",²⁷⁶ and he takes as the basis for his thinking Bevan's synthetic model, which emphasises complementarity compared to his anthropological model with its focus on uniqueness,²⁷⁷ the extent to which Hasler's approach is truly open to other influences on a practical level has already been considered in the last chapter. It is however, fruitful to note that

²⁷¹ Newbigin 1989, 141

²⁷² Hasler 2006, 7 & 48

²⁷³ Hasler 2012, Interview on 06/03/2012

²⁷⁴ Hasler 2000, 6

²⁷⁵ Drane 2000b, 86

²⁷⁶ Bevans 2002, 88

²⁷⁷ Bevans 2002, 90

although Bevans states that for those "who actually construct a contextual theology, the synthetic model would hold that while it might be ideal that the theology comes from the ordinary subjects of a particular culture, that is not always possible nor is it necessarily the best procedure",²⁷⁸ Hasler's practical approach is less clear on this.

4.1.1.4 Liberation Theology

Fourthly, an area in which agreement is again less discernably clear is in Newbiggin's argument that *Liberation theology*, which takes as its starting point that the church should identify with the poor and contends that theology must be done from below, from the people, not from above,²⁷⁹ is flawed. Whilst Hasler is likewise cautious in his observation that "the language of poverty, oppression, solidarity and justice" is not a part of everyday life in working class areas,²⁸⁰ in contrast to Newbiggin, rather than considering the influence of Liberation theology to be fundamentally unsound, Hasler asserts it nonetheless to be of some use in his methodology for contextualisation.²⁸¹

Although Newbiggin is not unaware of and does not deny the validity of hermeneutical questions that arise from Liberation theology,²⁸² he nonetheless convincingly argues that the pattern set by Jesus was not to "side with the poor against the rich" but rather to meet "everyone equally with the same unlimited mercy and the same unconditioned demand for total loyalty",²⁸³ he risks his

²⁷⁸ Bevans 2002, 91

²⁷⁹ Newbiggin 1989, 149

²⁸⁰ Hasler 2000, 20

²⁸¹ Hasler 2006, 95

²⁸² Newbiggin 1989, 149

²⁸³ Newbiggin 1989, 151

methodology not taking sufficient account of the context, even though, as has been seen, he states that this is important, as he argues against "attending to the aspirations of the people" and "offering solutions to the problems as the world sees them".²⁸⁴ Instead, he argues mission efforts "must [...] attend with open hearts and minds to the real needs of people in the way that Jesus attended to them, knowing that the real need is that which can only be satisfied by everything that comes from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4)".²⁸⁵

Nonetheless, Hasler is justified in not rejecting its importance completely and to consider that Liberation theology in part may be helpful in mission in working class areas.²⁸⁶ Moreover, Hasler's suspicion of projects, especially those which are run from outside the context, which are prone to impose from outside, stems from his preference for the much more grass-roots Liberation theology rather than the development model of contextual theology.²⁸⁷ Indeed, Schreiter, a proponent of a hybrid approach like that of Baker discussed in the last chapter, nonetheless "stresses the need for churches to devise pragmatic solutions within local contexts that focus on the theme of reconciliation and the need to establish inclusive processes of dialogue and exchange, [...] which start from the standpoint of suffering and exclusion".²⁸⁸ Hasler would no doubt disagree with this statement in its primary focus on suffering and exclusion,²⁸⁹ but it nonetheless demonstrates the importance that Hasler is concerned to attach to recognising the socio-economic situation in his methodology.²⁹⁰ Furthermore, the Catholic Church enjoyed among the working class in England in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries considerable

²⁸⁴ Newbiggin 1989, 151

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Hasler 2006, 101

²⁸⁷ Hasler 2006, 63

²⁸⁸ Baker 2009, 142

²⁸⁹ Hasler 2000, 20

²⁹⁰ Hasler 2000, 101

growth under the influence of the Archbishop of Westminster, Henry Edward Manning,²⁹¹ who was accused of being a socialist because of his work for social reform.²⁹²

Newbigin helpfully notes, with reference to Romans 15:23, that Paul's criterion of mission seems to be different to that of many modern day missionaries in that Paul "has, in his own words, 'fully preached the gospel' and has left behind communities of man and women who believe the gospel and live by it".²⁹³ This is in some measure similar to Hasler's emphasis on identifying natural leaders²⁹⁴ and enabling local leadership. Newbigin's starker rejection of Liberation theology also lays his approach more open to the danger of the type of disempowerment of the local people to which it has been seen in the last chapter, Hasler is averse.

Therefore, whilst differing in approach and reasoning, both Hasler and Newbigin can be seen to reject Liberation theology to a greater or larger extent as a source for contextual theology. In this way Hasler's approach is in partial agreement with Newbigin, but is justified in placing greater emphasis on Liberation theology due to the context.

4.1.2 The Importance of the Gospel

Whilst recognising the importance of culture in contextual theology, Newbigin is nonetheless concerned to ensure that the gospel is afforded primacy over human culture,²⁹⁵ as he notes that

²⁹¹ Leslie 1921, 497

²⁹² Lemire 1894, 210

²⁹³ Newbigin 1989, 121

²⁹⁴ Hasler 2000, 8-9

²⁹⁵ Newbigin 1989, 141

human cultures "are not morally neutral".²⁹⁶ Furthermore Newbigin's work raises the question of how far the gospel should "be 'at home' in a culture", and how far it should resist the type of "domestication" that Newbigin highlights occurred under the missionary De Nobil in India regarding the caste system,²⁹⁷ stating:

true contextualisation accords to the gospel its rightful primacy, its power to penetrate every culture and to speak within each culture, in its own speech and symbol, the word which is both No and Yes, both judgement and grace. And that happens when the word is not a disembodied word, but comes from a community, which embodies the true story, God's story, in a style which communicates both the grace and the judgement.²⁹⁸

Indeed, Newbigin is concerned to note that "what comes home to the heart of the hearer must really be the gospel, and not a product shaped by the mind of the hearer".²⁹⁹ Considering this point through the lens of cross-cultural mission he gives the example of the "self-portraits" that churches established by colonial missionary efforts "are eager to shed".³⁰⁰ He goes on to state whilst undoubtedly the colonial power's "presentation of the gospel was "very much 'coloured by their culture' [...] we applaud in the younger churches a synthesis of nationalism and Christianity which we deplore in our missionary grandparents".³⁰¹ Newbigin's contention, however, is that the missionary should recognise that the message is already culturally conditioned, even though this may not be immediately apparent to the missionary, and to be alert to the fact that those cultural emphases are there.³⁰²

²⁹⁶ Newbigin 1989, 14

²⁹⁷ Newbigin 1989, 142-144

²⁹⁸ Newbigin 1989, 152

²⁹⁹ Newbigin 1989, 141

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Newbigin 1989, 143

³⁰² Newbigin 1989, 142

Newbigin further argues that Christians are called to understand modern thought in the light of the biblical story, not vice versa.³⁰³ He continues:

of course it is always required of us that we listen sensitively to both the desires and the needs of the people, and that we try to understand their situation. But neither these desires and needs, nor any analysis of the situation made on the basis of some principles drawn from other sources than scripture, can be the starting point for mission.³⁰⁴

Indeed, he is right to state that Christian faith "is not something whose truth can be demonstrated by reference to human experience in general. Rather it is that by the acceptance of which all human experience can be rightly understood".³⁰⁵

In stating that the "world's questions are not the questions which lead to life"³⁰⁶ he contends that the Church's faithfulness to God is the key to people beginning to "ask the questions to which the gospel is the answer".³⁰⁷ In this way, he argues that the plausibility structure of the Bible needs to replace the reigning plausibility structure of the culture.³⁰⁸ This is a view that Shorter commends.³⁰⁹

It is helpful to consider Hasler's work in the light of Newbigin's stark warning against "something else" being "put at the centre, a moral code, a set of principles, or the alleged need to meet some criterion imposed from outside the story". He states that a marker of *true contextualisation* is "where there is a believing community whose life is centred in the biblical story through its worshipping, teaching, and sacramental and apostolic life".³¹⁰ Indeed, Newbigin's suggestion that

³⁰³ Newbigin 1989, 85

³⁰⁴ Newbigin 1989, 153-4

³⁰⁵ Newbigin 1989, 6

³⁰⁶ Newbigin 1989, 119

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Newbigin 1989, 99

³⁰⁹ Shorter 1988, 270

³¹⁰ Shorter 1988, 148

it should be the Christian story that provides a new lens through which to view the world,³¹¹ as opposed to the cultural one with which people have been raised, obviates the question as to whether this is a characteristic of the communities with which Hasler is involved. Furthermore it demands to what extent Hasler's approach enables and facilitates the community to embody "God's story",³¹² but at the same time communicates the prophetic³¹³ "grace and the judgement" that the gospel demands,³¹⁴ or whether Hasler's approach risks instead creating communities coming "adrift in the ever changing tides of history", which "become one more piece of driftwood on the current".³¹⁵

In answering this question it is helpful to note that Newbigin's approach is one with which Hasler, to a large extent, appears to agree, at least in principle as Hasler agrees with Bevans that he does not believe that primacy should be given to the culture, because although context reveals something of God, there would have been no incarnation if the contextual revelation had been sufficient.³¹⁶ Furthermore he argues that whilst God's presence may be seen in human culture and is therefore to be affirmed, this revelation alone remains insufficient and demands the intervention of the gospel.³¹⁷

In this way Hasler does not call for the primacy of the context, but instead for a renewing of the mind by the gospel message that he claims is necessary for transformation, although in interview with Hasler, he stated that he was less concerned with maintaining 'doctrinal purity' in the first instance and more concerned with there being a genuine conversation between the gospel and

³¹¹ Shorter 1988, 38

³¹² Shorter 1988, 152

³¹³ Bevans & Schroeder 2004, 398

³¹⁴ Newbigin 1989, 152

³¹⁵ Newbigin, 148

³¹⁶ Hasler 2006, 94

³¹⁷ Ibid.

working class culture.³¹⁸ This appears to be a position that both Allen³¹⁹ and Bevans and Schroeder³²⁰ support. Hasler's examination of Niebuhr's Christ and Culture models (Christ against Culture, Christ of Culture, Christ Above Culture and Christ and Culture in Paradox)³²¹ and his subsequent conclusion that a further category should be added: Christ Transformer of Culture, is immensely helpful in understanding Hasler's particular approach, however. Whilst Niebuhr's third category of Christ Above Culture is already a synthesis of his first two models,³²² and Niebuhr's fourth category Christ and Culture in Paradox hold them together in tension,³²³ Hasler combines these categories focussing not on tension or synthesis per se, but rather that an encounter with the gospel of the risen Christ is able to both challenge and affirm different aspects of human culture in the same way as Shorter asserts.³²⁴ In this sense, Hasler sees Christ as the transformer of culture, which suggests that he takes a similar view to Newbigin on this issue.

As such Hasler can be seen to broadly be in agreement with Newbigin, in that Hasler too, rightly calls for a balance between the primacy of the gospel and the reality of context,³²⁵ and his choice to focus on correlating both message and context is one which is not alien to Newbigin and is likely to result in a less confrontational approach to inculturation that has the potential to simultaneously value and challenge the culture.

³¹⁸ Hasler 2012, Interview on 06/03/2012

³¹⁹ Allen 1912, 137

³²⁰ Bevans & Shroeder 2004, 398

³²¹ Hasler 2006, 69-76

³²² Hasler 2006, 73-74

³²³ Hasler 2006, 75-76

³²⁴ Shorter 1988, 39

³²⁵ Hasler 2006, 94

4.2 Conclusion

Newbigin's consideration of what the characteristics of *true contextualisation* are, is helpful in determining whether Hasler's approach is faithful in terms of seeking to inculturate the gospel in the working class context. Indeed, Hasler's detailed consideration of a number of different models of contextual theology in the latter half of his book *Crying out for a Polycentric Church* is a cogent and well-considered presentation of his mission methodology.

In undertaking a thorough review of the context and its implications on spirituality, such as Schreiter commends,³²⁶ Hasler thereby places a differing emphasis on the importance of Liberation theology, thus commendably and carefully tailoring his approach to the specifics of the context. Furthermore, this attention to context is a key component of the criteria that Newbigin identifies as necessary for *true contextualisation*.

Newbigin and Hasler both rightly agree that the gospel is always contextually expressed and that the gospel should be reinterpreted in *language* that results in genuine communication. Despite this, perhaps Newbigin's greatest challenge to the approach of Hasler is Newbigin's insistence on the primacy of the gospel over context. Newbigin's approach appears initially to be at odds with his insistence that in the inculturation effort, the primacy of the gospel must be guarded,³²⁷ but he is right to point out that this tension between gospel and context is far from new and has been a part of Christian life back to the Early Church³²⁸ (1 Corinthians 11:17-22, 33-4, Galatians 2:11-14).³²⁹ Whether Hasler accords the gospel rightful primacy and whether it is truly in practice able

³²⁶ Schreiter 1985, 143

³²⁷ Newbigin 1989, 144

³²⁸ Newbigin 1989, 148

³²⁹ Kirk 1999, 77

to bring both judgement and grace in the culture, is a little more contested, at least in the outworking of his thinking. In this respect he is perhaps a little less faithful to the inculturation methodology that he has chosen as the basis for his approach. Despite this, his somewhat less open approach both in terms of the culture being challenged by the gospel in practice and allowing working class culture and faith to be challenged by other contexts, certainly is a bold attempt at contextualisation. It can be seen to be justified in that Bevens issues a warning that an "inbuilt danger" of the synthetic model is the "danger of 'selling out' to the other [...] dominant culture".³³⁰

In conclusion, Hasler's approach is a genuine attempt to retell the gospel story in a way that is relevant to the culture and in a language that the people will understand, which aligns itself closely with many of the aspects that Newbigin identifies as *true contextualisation*. Nonetheless, Hasler's approach may benefit from being further balanced in some measure with Newbigin's focus on the whole and catholicity and with his attention to ensuring that the culture does not become domesticated within the culture, thus diminishing its power to challenge the areas where challenge is needed.³³¹ As such, Hasler's methodology seems to be a genuine attempt at an authentic inculturation of the gospel in the working class context.

³³⁰ Bevens 2002, 94

³³¹ Carson 2008, 98

Chapter 5

Conclusion - Towards Culturally Relevant Mission in Contemporary White Working Class Britain?

Certainly Baker and others are right to point out that there has been much change in British society over a period of time and particularly since the 1980s. Undoubtedly, the working class as it existed in Victorian Britain and later no longer exists in the same form. The influences of globalisation, a raising of economic, social and living standards for all has occurred, and there has been a period of increased social mobility, meaning that there is some difficulty with a closely defined working class in the modern day.

Although it is outside the scope of this dissertation to assess this thoroughly, Hasler is nonetheless justified to state that the working class still exists in a recognisable form with roots traceable to the old working class in terms of culture. Hasler's reasonably detailed definition of the distinctives of modern working class culture certainly regards it as an homogenous unit in a way in which few others do, although it is noticeable that those who do so are generally those who would self-identify as working class, thus lending support to Hasler's conclusion.

Furthermore, whilst Drane's seven categories of people for the church to relate to evangelistically are helpful in considering the different elements within society, and he makes some interesting suggestions as to how the Church might approach these people in mission, he fails to be specific because of the broad nature of his categories. He fails to identify the continuing impact that socio-

economic status has on spirituality.³³² Hasler's approach is arguably of more relevance in a society where social mobility has decreased and socio-economic differences are in many ways increasingly more pronounced than in the recent past.

Moreover, Baker notes that even in areas of regeneration, there is little mixing between the transient commuter population and those whose community is based on a geographically local level, which leads to a fragmentation of society. Baker's insight here is one that relates to Hasler's *dense-mesh principle*. Hasler contends that working class people relate on a day-to-day level more to the local than the global (they meet each other each day at the local shops, messages and information is exchanged by face-to-face interaction and may be relayed by numerous routes through a dense network of local interaction). When this is contrasted with commuter populations who make frequent use of social media, which is not locally-based, as a primary means of relating to one another it can clearly be seen that this difference will have great implications on the methods by which the gospel can be effectively shared. This stands even if the rather strictly homogenous definition of the modern working class that Hasler applies is denied.

Hasler's work, whilst drawing distinctions which others find uncomfortable to draw, nonetheless makes a bold attempt at genuinely correlating working class culture with the gospel message and doing it in a way which empowers local people in mission among themselves. This is a real advantage of Hasler's approach and counter-balances project based approaches that disempower. In many respects Hasler's thinking does seem to lead to Newbigin's *true contextualisation*. In doing so, Hasler inevitably makes some generalisations, but does however, provide some useful pointers for thinking about how mission in working class areas might take place. Newbigin and Drane rightly assert that it is necessary to retell the gospel story in each and every place. Newbigin states

³³² Drane 2000a, 58-59

that in order for this to take place, account must be taken of the culture and the language of the people must be used. This is where Hasler's pragmatic approach is advantageous in that rather than regarding British culture as one homogenous cultural unit, it rather identifies cultures and sub-cultures within, which have arisen from historic, economic and social contexts.

Hasler's approach however, does raise some questions. Firstly, Hasler has not resolved the tension between his feeling that the home should be the primary place of meeting and the fact that he states that the home is often a private place in working class culture. Furthermore, the importance of the church building in working class culture and Hasler's desire for shrines to replace buildings seems somewhat inconsistent.

Secondly, Hasler's approach may be regarded as entrenching division between different strata in society when contrasted with Baker's hybrid city approach, and it certainly needs to be considered whether it falls into the same danger as ministry exercised according to the homogenous unit principle of which traditional ministry in Britain is accused by Hasler. In focussing tightly on one section of the community, others may be alienated. This is what Hasler levels against the Church in Britain at the moment, and he is right to do so; the Church of England itself has even recognised that it has tailored itself to the middle class masses and has thought little about sub-cultures. Moynagh sees little difficulty in tightly focussed interest-group congregations, but in doing so ignores the need for the catholicity of the Church and for the Church to be a place that is a genuine community of all believers. Although not an interest group approach, Hasler's culturally focussed congregation approach may suffer from this as well. The value of outside influence, which brings different perspectives, both in training leaders and in the life of the congregation is vital if the Church is to grow in their experience of who God is and to be able to relate this to others.

Thirdly, whilst the premise of Hasler's approach is that each and every culture and subculture within the Church should be valued for the contribution it can make to the wider body of Christ and I would want to affirm this, I wonder how this works in practice. Training leaders completely locally, with little recourse to other contexts raises the question of how relevant this is in a culturally diverse country, not least what implication this has for creating churches genuinely welcoming to all. Baker's insistence that theology needs to be "locally rooted, yet understands the nature of the global forces impinging on its locality"³³³ is relevant in this respect.

Fourthly, it has been seen from Newbigin's work, that Hasler's approach must be wary of lending too much emphasis to context over gospel.

In conclusion, I would want to say that Hasler's work is extremely helpful and a valid form of contextualisation when compared to Newbigin's distinctives, but there is a possibility that it is not able to be as culturally relevant as possible as it focuses too strictly on the homogenous unit, which agreeing with Baker, is a rare thing in a modern globalised society. Indeed, I agree with Schreiter that "hybridity has to be embraced more consciously in contextual theologies: we need to recognize that most of our attempts to reach an ideal point will always be but approximate".³³⁴

Nonetheless his approach offers a much-needed starting place for mission among the working class in the UK that takes the commands of Jesus seriously, and as such deserves a wide readership and further study. Although it was not within the remit of either of Hasler's works to consider how his findings regarding cultural distinctives of the contemporary working class might apply to evangelistic outreach, his approach nonetheless is a very good starting point for much-

³³³ Baker 2009, 126

³³⁴ Schreiter 1997, 27

needed thinking about how culturally relevant mission with *true contextualisation* might take place in culturally diverse modern Britain and further work could be fruitfully carried out in this area.

Appendix

CD containing MP3 Sound Recording of an Interview with Joe Hasler conducted by Richard Kellow
on 06/03/2012

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