Together in Mission

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Study Leave Report 2012

STUDY LEAVE 2012

One of the great gifts the PCANZ gives its ministers is that of study leave. The opportunity to enjoy this gift, to engage in some study and reflection and to be refreshed is something few have. It is something I deeply treasure.

My study leave took place in two parts. For the first part, I attended a Missional Church Executive week in Chicago, USA in July 2012. The second part was spent at Westminster College, Cambridge, England, where I was part of the Cheshunt Sabbatical Programme and based there during the Michaelmas Term.

There are a number of thanks that need to be recorded at this point: to the Session and congregation at Knox Church, Lower Hutt – for their support, encouragement and prayers; to the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership and to the Margaret and Bill Best Travel Fund, who provided financial support; to PSDS for a ministers study grant; and to the Cheshunt Foundation for the opportunity to be at Westminster. There were a number of special individuals who prayed, helped with such things as mowing lawns and who took us to and from the airport - our most grateful thanks to you all.

This was the first time in over twenty years of ministry that Adrienne and I were able to travel together and to share in an adventure like this. It was wonderful. We saw it as a wonderful gift.

What a gift it was! To be able to read, reflect, interact and be part of the College community was a real gift. I had access to all the theological libraries in Cambridge and made use of these. Library staff were very helpful and I also was able to interact with both students and staff.

In addition, I made contact and met with a number of people who helped in my understanding – people like Chris Stoddard; Matt Stone; James Blamford-Baker; Michael Monogh; Martin Robinson; Phil Wall; Dale Male and Neil Thorogood. For your time, wisdom and generosity – thank you. There were others who offered wisdom on theological matters from afar – Graham Redding; Bruce Hamill and Jason Goroncy; others who offered some wisdom like Ed Masters; and my supervisor Kevin Ward.

This report covers a number of areas. It starts with a brief overview of the contemporary ground of our culture and society linked to that is a brief interaction with some statistics from the PCANZ; the United Reformed Church and the 2007 T.E.A.R. Fund Church-going UK survey.

Having set that scene, the report then moves into the area of *Missio Dei.*

Afterwards, moving into some more practical discussions, it looks at the Fresh Expressions movement and seeks to engage with that and the Missional Church.

The summary seeks to draw some threads together; asks some questions and offer some areas for continued reading, reflection and prayer. In many ways this study leave may be seen as initial steps in what is likely to be further reading, reflection and conversations on this subject in the months and years to come.

Table of Contents

The contemporary ground of our culture and society

Recognising that I had the opportunity to read and reflect widely during my study leave, I thought it important to place this within the current context of our culture and society. In so doing, I opted to read in this area – using books that helped paint the picture from a UK, USA and New Zealand perspective, so similarities could be noted.

Research and statistical analysis, both of our society and the church, together with a widening array of published material that is readily accessible, allows us to see both pictures and trends. Reading undertaken in this area had two parts. The first part was to look at some of the trends being written about within the church and the second was reading around the wider society and cultural changes.

What is very clear is that we have what has been described as a demographic bomb moving through western societies, as the generation known as the baby bombers begin to retire. That generation – maybe the largest in our history, has had and will continue to have a huge impact on society. As this group made an impact on society, a leading element of change was a strong dislike of institutions of any sort. Institutions of any kind were viewed with a deep cynicism. They were seen to stand against the growing values of personal freedom and individual rights. If it did not serve an individual's needs, they no longer belonged or contributed. This impacted the church. The pre-war generation saw going to church as part of belonging to society and attending church was a sign both to the church and society of their loyalty. Not so to this new generation. As with later generations, this was not a sign of a rejection of all things spiritual. Rather it shows that their search for meaning was wider than that of their parents.

While previous generations had shown teenagers leaving the church, they returned when they married and had a family and stayed. Yet research seems to show that baby boomers did not return to church in the same way previous generations had done and in addition, those that did return, dropped out once their children had left home (or sooner). Steve Hollinghurst's research[1] on church attendance in Britain in 2005 identified that, in past generations, church attendance increased after the arrival of children and continued to rise as the population aged, with the mid-fifties to early seventies having the highest attendance per head of population than any other age group.

Philip Richter and Leslie Francis, in Gone but not Forgotten[2], detail the result of their research from the Church Leaving Applied Research Project in Britain. They devote a chapter to exploring the significance of changing social values and what part they play in the leaving process. Some of the findings mirror that of Alan Jamieson in his book A Churchless Faith.[3] Jamieson makes the point that, just because someone has left church, it does not mean they have left the faith.

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[1] Rev Steve Hollinghurst is a researcher in Evangelism to Post-Christian Culture, Church Army Sheffield, cited in M. Collyer, "What Church for the Saga Generation?" Church Army, Discovering Faith in Later Life, March 2007, No 6, 5.

[2] Leslie Francis and Philip Richter, Gone for Good, London, Epworth, 2007

[3] A. Jamieson, A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond Evangelical, Pentecostal & Charismatic Churches, Wellington: Philip Garside Publishing, 2000.

David Kinnaman's You Lost Me[4] looks at why young Christians are leaving the church and rethinking faith. Provocative and challenging to many of the models around which we have based ministry in general (including youth ministry), he looks at dropout, disconnections and then how we might address these issues. He highlights three key learnings – rethinking relationships (intergenerational versus demographic); rediscovering vocation (rediscovering the theology of vocation) and reprioritizing wisdom (how we can live in but not of, the world that surrounds us).[5]

In short, one might easily agree with John Drane when he writes that, for the church to be meaningful to people's faith journeys, it needs to connect to every part and stage, and for faith to be more meaningful 'it has to connect more obviously with the issues of lifestyle with which we now have to wrestle, and that means it has to relate to this life here and now.[6]

In this part of the study, Stuart Murray's book Post Christendom[7] is a must read. He notes that we are experiencing a cultural turbulence as the long era of Christendom comes to an end. He goes on to say that important attempts to reconfigure the church and mission are often hampered by a limited understanding of the significance of this shift from Christendom to Post-Christendom. In seeking to define what he means, he writes, 'Post-Christendom is the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence.'[8] He notes that Post Christendom does not comprehensively describe that which will replace Christendom, nor does it mean post Christian – yet denominational non-viability is looking increasingly probable. Post Christendom is not the same as Pre-Christendom nor does it mean secular; it is not the same as postmodernity and will not be the experience of all Christians!

Murray says the Western world and Western culture have not been here before – so this is new territory. He notes a series of transitions that have taken, are taking or will take place in Post Christendom, as the Church moves from the centre of society to the margins; from the majority to the minority; from the settlers to the sojourners (aliens, pilgrims and exiles); from a place of privilege to a place of plurality; from a place of control to a place of witness; from maintenance to mission and from church as institution to church as a movement.

He traces the achievements of Christendom; the moves that shaped the Christendom shift; the heart of Christendom; the desegregation of Christendom and the legacy of Christendom. He goes on to talk about the Post Christendom world and, in relation to evangelism in this world, states the need to start further back than many models of evangelism have started in the past; that we will move from marking confirmation to marking conversation; that the need for contextual witness will be greater and the journey towards Christ will take longer. Against all that, he notes how the highest value is tolerance

[4] D. Kinnaman, You Lost Me, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 2011
[5] Ibid, p 201-2012
[6] J. Drane, After McDonaldisation: Mission, Ministry and Christian Discipleship in an Age of Uncertainty, Grand Rapids: Baker Bookhouse, 2008
[7] S. Murray, Post Christendom,
[8] S. Murray, Post Christendom, p19

which seems to go unchallenged. Yet this tolerance is not based on some mutual respect for deeply held convictions but rather a relativism that does not treat religious beliefs seriously. Rather, this tolerance requires those with religious convictions to restrict their significance to their private lives, to refrain from questioning the convictions of others and therefore to accept the denigration of all religious convictions. This is a powerful outline of the world in which we live.

Murray notes the three focuses of the emerging church: - refocusing on mission; reconfiguring community and refreshing worship – yet he still has lasting questions. While my study would include some reading on emerging church, but would not focus on that, I looked for questions that would be equally true of both Fresh Expressions and Missional Church. These were: is the demise of Christendom being taken seriously? Are we developing intergenerational strategies to pass on faith? Are we more concerned about style than core values? Can these movements move from the de-churched to non-churched and finally, can it incarnate the gospel beyond white, middle class and educated?

Stanley Grenz, in his book A Primer in Postmodernism[9], speaks about how we are in 'a cultural shift of immense proportions.' He goes on to note how we have seen the end of single, universal worldview; how we now have a celebration of local and particular, yet the world in the West has a gnawing pessimism, and that life is more fragile: and how this creates a culture that is both eclectic and dynamic.

David Lyon, in his now dated yet provocative book, Jesus in Disneyland,[10] writes about how 'postmodernity contributes to the further fragmentation of institutional structures and intellectual belief systems.' He notes five key areas: - the diffusion of information and communications technology; the growth of consumerism; globalisation; pastiche and ambiguity and finally life path experimentation. From a USA viewpoint, his work ties in well with that of Grenz.

Callum Brown, in The Death of Christian Britain[11], traces the church through history and makes a case that there was a sudden change in 1960s, from which time the church has been in free fall. Although writing from a USA perspective, Reggie McNeal, in Present Future[12], makes the case that the church in North America lost its influence because it lost its identity; and it lost its identity because it lost its mission.

Steve Bruce, in God is Dead[13] describes how there has been a long-term decline in power and therefore impact of religious beliefs and rituals within society. He states that this decline has been unchecked, and has now reached the point where it is irreversible. The faith community cannot reproduce itself from within. Alongside this, he writes that science and technology are orientating away from God and the mood is to follow that lead. He then goes on to say that this therefore reduces implicit religion and spirituality to nothing more than a comforting myth.

[9] S. Grenz, Primer in Post-Modernism
[10] D. Llyod, Jesus in Disneyland
[11] C. Brown, The death of Christian Britain
[12] R. McNal, Present Future
[13] S. Bruce, God is Dead

Stuart Murray, in another book looking at this, Church after Christendom,[14] highlights a number of key changes which he holds the church must understand as it engages in this world. He unpacks nine descriptions of people groupings in relation to the church, to belonging and to believing. He lists these as: believing and belonging; believing but not belonging; belonging and only partially believing; believing but no longer belonging; believing but belonging less intensely; believing and belonging intermittently; belonging but not yet believing; believing but not yet belonging; and neither belonging nor believing. He states that a failure to understand this will see a failure to engage with all of society. Then later in the same book he turns to a powerful question; 'Can the inherited church negotiate the transition into post-Christendom? Post-Christendom is new and it is a very different challenge.'[15]

In a similar vein, Brian Castle in Unofficial God notes that if 'the Church is considering new ways of being church….the emphasis needs to be on new ways of being the church and not simply on new ways of doing church.'[16]

John Drane in The McDonaldization of the Church writes these words of wisdom: 'there will be no one simple and universally applicable way in which we can reshape our churches to face the challenges of changing culture...much of our problem stems from the fact that, for the most part, the ways of being church that we now have match the concerns of only a certain kind of person, at a time when the culture is more openly diverse than it has ever been.'[17]

In contrast, Church Growth in Britain[18] traces the growth of the church in Britain from 1980 to the present. This book, which is drawn together from multidisciplinary studies and research, points out that, amongst the decline, church growth in places is still taking place. It is happening in mainline denominations – even though overall trends within the denomination is downward – and give as examples regions of London, in newer churches and among ethnic minorities. It would be interesting to look more deeply into some of this – especially in London. Having visited Holy Trinity, Brompton, and noting the continuing impact of the Alpha Course and HTB's church planting so far and its plan for the next decade, one might ask if there is more to this than meets the eye. Maybe greater attention to this part of contemporary British Christianity is called for.

Colin Greene and Martin Robinson in Metavista[19] put their years of research together around the theme of mission based on the notion of radical cultural engagement as they highlight the areas of Bible, Church and Mission for the church after postmodernity. This work takes seriously the differing worlds of North America and Britain and highlights it well. Having mapped the territory, in the concluding chapter they seek to paint a picture of a way forward. Greene writes how the church needs to live adventurously at the interface of three different and at times competing cultural narratives: the creational two-testament narrative of unity and diversity which the Bible recounts; the narrative of historical

[14] S. Murray, Church after Christendom
[15] Ibid, p100
[16] B. Castle, Unofficial God, p130
[17] J. Drane, McDonaldization of the Church, p59
[18] D. Goodhew, Church Growth in Britain
[19] C. Greene and M. Robinson, Metavisa

Christianity within which each and every individual should stand, and the wider cultural narratives which a truly global world make available to us.[20] From there he touches on the role of tradition, a new kind of ecumenism which would see inter-church initiative, interfaith dialogue and a new kind of seminary education all of which needs to embrace and integrate globalization while indwelling a counter-cultural story.[21] As an aside, having read a number of Robinson's books and having spent a day with him in Birmingham, and having seen the outworking of the theory, I think he is an extremely useful resource to be speaking into our New Zealand setting.

Kevin Ward, in an enlightening article 'It might be emerging, but is it church?'[22] asks some questions about emerging churches and, while touching on some sociological issues, draws the conversation back to the holy, catholic, apostolic church – finishing with what is often key: when is a church a church?

Maybe Stuart Murray should be given the last word here as he sums things up, 'Christendom is fading. We may grieve or celebrate its passing, but we cannot revive, restore or recover it. Post-Christendom is coming.'[23]

From here, I reflected on three sets of statistical information. In a number of the books I read in this section, reference was made to the T.E.A.R. Fund survey of 2007, 'Churchgoing in the UK'[24]. This is a most comprehensive work and one wonders five years on what the trends noted might now be showing.

Alongside that, I am grateful for the information provided by Rev Neil Thorogood, lecturer in Pastoral Theology at Westminster College. As part of his classes he shares statistical information about the United Reformed Church and compares this with the wider society and invites comment, reflection and discussion.

During his classes in the Michaelmas term, he noted that the statistics showed that regular attendance at worship within the URC was 20,809, which he extrapolated out to show an average of 14 attendees at each URC congregation. When looking back over a decade, he noted that the average congregation size declined 18.3% in 2006-11 and 11.3% in 2001-06. The number of children at main worship was 16,018 - 46.8% decline since 2002 BUT in 2011 they numbered 14,735 which may reflect a growing impact of Messy Church settings. In 2010, about 10% of URC's adult members were Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) and there were 10 BAME ministers.

It would appear, from some brief research, that the decline within the URC from the mid 1970's to the present is dramatic. Total membership fell from 192,141 to 63,680 yet the total number of congregations only dropped from 2080 to 1529 in the same period. The average congregation size went from 92 to 42. As in New Zealand, there is a significant gap between membership and attendance at worship. For that same period, while membership declined, attendance went from 55,145 to 20,809. This translates to an average attendance at each URC of 14 in 2012 compared to 131 in 1973-4.

[20] C. Greene and M. Robinson, Metavisa, p225.
[21] Ibid, p228-235
[22] K. Ward, Stimulus, vol 17, No 4, 2009,
[23] Stuart Murray, Church After Christendom, p. 7
[24] T.E.A.R. Fund

Perhaps one of the most telling statistics was the decline in the number of active ministers – from 1391 to 664. As Neil commented, this huge loss of institutional wisdom and heritage will be felt for many years.

Looking in from outside, it would seem that the training and formation of those for ordained ministry within the URC does not reflect the changed society of which the church is a part.. While one can appreciate that the URC has not chosen to follow the Anglican model of separate tracks for pioneer ministry training, the gap between the changed society and ministry training and formation seems wide.

During the term I was at Westminster, the URC was advising students of the difficulty it was facing in placing those completing their studies and it seemed to be suggesting the model going forward was of joining/amalgamating/grouping a number of churches together so that ordained ministry could be offered. Further to my week at the Missional Network's Executive Leadership Institute, my reflection was a technical solution was being given where an adaptive approach would have been better – perhaps that could include asking about the selection of those for training; the training itself; and the model/s of ministry required for the changed situation.

I then referred to the PCANZ statistics and Margaret Galt's paper associated with that, which now appears in a number of places, including the Strategic Directions paper of the Council of Assembly. The trends of the URC are similar to those of the PCANZ, although the decline is not as significant in the PCANZ.

The PCANZ figures show that in more than 60% of PCANZ parishes, fewer than 75 attend worship. Most people attending a Presbyterian Church worship in larger parishes: 60% worship in parishes with over 100 people. In 1951, the average parish had a total attendance of 308 at worship; while by 2008, the average parish had 86 attendees. Fifty churches have no children and more than half have fewer than 10 children – which is likely to make meaningful children's ministry difficult. 46% of parishes have no youth. When compared to the age range across all of New Zealand, all congregations have more members over 65 and fewer in the 25-45 age bracket.

The PCANZ figures should be read against the wider background of our society and maybe the last Census is as good as any place to start. Statistics New Zealand data from the 2006 Census shows nearly 270,000 more New Zealand residents professed No Religion in answer to the question on Religious adherence. This takes the No Religion percentage to 32.2%, or 1.3 million New Zealanders. By contrast the number of responses professing some variant of Christianity dropped to 52.9% (2.1 million), down from 57.3% in 2001. If these trends continue, less than 49% of New Zealanders will profess any adherence to Christianity by the next census – that to be carried out in March 2013.

The 2006 census reveals other changes within the religious makeup of New Zealand. Anglican numbers reduced by 30,000 (5.1%) to 555,000 New Zealanders, while Catholic numbers grew by 23,000 (4.7%) to exceed half a million (509,000) for the first time. If these trends continue then Catholicism will be New Zealand's biggest faith by the next census. Anecdotally, some of the Catholic growth is due to immigration, so there is no guarantee trends will continue at the same rate. Even if the trend does

continue, Catholic growth is not keeping up with the growth in New Zealand's population, which grew by 7.8% between 2001 and 2006.

The Presbyterian Church declined by 32,000 (7.7%) to fall to 385,000 census adherents - less than one tenth of New Zealand's population for the first time in a century. Baptists grew 11% to 56,000, exceeding the population growth rate. Pentecostals grew by 18.4% to 79,600, though there was considerable shuffling of members among the denominations. Orthodox churches grew by 38% to 13,200 adherents, helped along by immigration. Salvation Army (11,500) and Open Brethren (16,800) declined in adherents, while Seventh Day Adventists (14,000) and the Exclusive Brethren (2300) grew at just over the population rate.

When one looks at the information from the URC and the PCANZ over the period from 1993/4 to 2012, a few things stand out. There has been very little change in the number of congregations within the PCANZ over that time – a decline of only 5! Of the 415 congregations, 115 are Co-operative Ventures. The number of children associated with the PCANZ shows significant decline, and may reflect PCANZ's aging population The other significant point of difference is attendance is becoming far more concentrated than it once was – perhaps because of the shift away from rural and provincial areas to cities. Most people worship in congregations over 150 or so – but most congregations themselves are getting smaller. So the average figure does not give an accurate view of what is happening.

Before concluding, I read and reflected on the Reveal material from Willow Creek Church. In particular, Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal About Spiritual Growth.[25] This telling work looks at surveys from over 280,000 people in 1,200 diverse churches. Are people in our churches really growing closer to Christ? The book draws on stories from people of varying spiritual maturity, as well as pastors. If this is likened to taking the pulse of the spiritual health of the American church, there are some deep concerns. Once again, the trends provide the most important information. Move suggests that it is possible to measure spiritual growth, and provides an outline to do this. A few things could be seen as both a surprise and a wake-up call. Church activities do not predict or drive long-term spiritual growth - a significant number of people attending church for more than five years have not made a faith commitment and the longer they are there, the less likely they are to do so. Reflection on Scripture has the greatest impact on spiritual growth . Spiritually stalled and/or dissatisfied people account for one out of four church attenders. No one thing guarantees spiritual growth. The last and maybe most important point for those seeking a quick-fix:, leadership matters. These trends may provide helpful information for the church here as we engage in conversations which move from the attractional to the incarnational.

So how is the local church engaging with this changing world all-around it? Do we look back and remember when…and think the best days are behind us? In some places, that may well be true. Are we seeing the new opportunities that are before us? Are our leaders – at every level – equipped for this new future? What does this mean for the way we undertake some of the more traditional ministries in the local church? Can we run what we currently do and engage in something new as we seek to

[25] G.L. Hawkins and C. Parkinson, Move

transition? Or is it time for boldness? Or are we stuck in the moment and can't get out of it and are both unsure and uncertain about the environment we find ourselves in?

The figures can be read in a negative or positive way – either the future is bleak and we should hunker down; or we can envisage a future with many new opportunities and imagine or reimagine a counter-cultural life. The church is constituted by mission, so we need to think about that mission, both in terms of the life of the people of God as we live with one another; and the life of the people of God as we live in relationship to the world.

Missio Dei

In doing some preliminary reading for my study leave, it became clear that there were many writers, all quoting the same few theologians: Karl Barth; Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch. However, any deep reading of the wider range of their work was limited.

In addition, the work of Andrew Kirk and Christopher Wright was often mentioned. Kirk states mission is no longer thought of as the Church's activity overseas or in another culture. The mission frontier is not primarily a geographical one, but one of belief, conviction and commitment.[26] Mission is what the Christian community is sent to do, beginning where it is located. While fulfilled in different ways in differing circumstances, the obligations of mission are the same.

God's mission has become a popular place to begin enquiry into the nature of mission. Beginning from the Willingen conference the primary reference is to the purposes and activities of God in and for the whole universe. This scope means it covers a huge range and *missio Dei* has been used to advance all kinds of missiological agendas.

Kirk states that 'to assert God has a mission presupposes that we are speaking about a personal God with particular characteristics. ..if one takes the line that it is impossible to speak accurately about God…or if one prefers to use abstract and impersonal categories of the divine like ground of our being or the ultimately real, then mission would appear to be an inappropriate concept.' [27]

Mission is an activity which presupposes a personal subject. If it were not so, it would illogical to affirm that God is concerned about every aspect of life or to say that God is a lover of justice, or full of mercy or forgiving. Attempts to make sense of God by using impersonal terms often end up in vagueness or 'atheism by any other name.'[28] (As an aside here, this raises questions about some of our forms of inclusive language, especially those that relate to the Trinity, and is worthy of some deeper reflection.)

The trinitarian nature of God's mission is vital if we are to understand why God acts in the world. Throughout the breadth of the literature on this matter, *missio Dei* is said to have its heart in God's love for the universe he created and in particular for humankind, who bear His image. It is hardly surprising then, that as it has developed, trinitarian thinking has come to speak about the Trinity as community. The mission of God flows from the nature of God.

Love is usually singled out as the supreme quality of God, yet it needs to be understood in terms of all God's other attributes. Love is not to be understood theoretically. The New Testament reveals the most profound understanding of love in the form of God's action in the life of Jesus.

In other words, God is, in Godself, mission through and through. Sending and being sent are core to his nature. Love is un-calculating in its pursuit and no one falls outside its scope.

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[26] Kirk, What is mission?, p24
[27] Ibid, p25
[28] Ibid, p26

In contemporary mission thinking, no one contemplates grasping *missio Dei* without a thorough reference to the rule or reign of God - the Kingdom of God. Paul speaks of Jesus handing over the kingdom to the Father after he has destroyed every ruler and authority and power (1 Co 15:24). Here the kingdom is understood as life free from the reign of those things which enslave humanity; the kingdom is where humankind is no longer subject to destructive forces. The kingdom is where God's spirit is in control, so justice, peace and joy are experienced completely and permanently. At the centre of this vision of the kingdom is 'a lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered.' (Rev5:6) It is by the power of self-sacrifice of the triune God that hostile powers are overcome and God's word is able to be lived again in the power of creativity and service. 'According to the witness of the New Testament, the cross is the place where, to eyes of faith, the reign of God is manifested in what seems to be its defeat. This is the place where the meaning of the original gospel announcement is disclosed: the kingdom of God has drawn near. The church can hold and live by this faith because this Jesus, crucified in weakness, was 'designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead' (Rom 1:4)'[29]

Mission is so much at the heart of the Church's life that, rather than think of it as one aspect of its existence, it is better to think of it as defining its essence.[30] The church is therefore, by its very nature, missionary. If it ceases to be missionary, it has not so much failed in one of its tasks, it has ceased to be the church. The church's ecclesiology is bound up with its call to share and live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth and to the end of time. If it is not about this, it cannot consider itself either catholic or apostolic.

If the point comes when the church exists for its own sake, it has denied itself and has ceased to be the church. As Emilio Castro writes, 'mission is the fundamental reality of our Christian life. We are Christians because we have been called by God to work with him in the fulfilment of his purposes for humanity as a whole. Our whole life in this world is life in mission. Life has a purpose only to the extent that it has a missionary dimension.'[31]

Wright's recent works, The Mission of God and The Mission of God's People, have also been attracting attention. I read both of these books. They differ from the others mentioned in that he takes a Biblical Theology approach. Before moving on to the other writers, I want to offer a very brief overview of this work. Wright asserts that the Bible provides far more than a basis for mission – that there is a missional basis for the Bible. The whole Bible is generated by and, in the end, is all about God's mission. Wright's thesis is that. in order to understand the Bible, we need a missional hermeneutic. He starts with the Old Testament and from an understanding of who God is, and what God calls his people to be and do, Wright traces the mission of God and how the nations fit into God's mission.

Wright speaks about holistic mission and holds that this is the proper shape of Christian mission. For him, the mission of God can be summed up in the words of Ephesians 1:9-10; 'To redeem the whole of creation, broken by sin and evil, into the new creation population populated by the redeemed from

[29] Newbigin, Open Secret, p 49
[30] Kirk, What is Mission, p 30
[31] Castro, Freedom in Mission, p 62

every culture, through the cross and resurrection of Christ.' This indeed might summarize his book, The Mission of God. In terms of God's people, Wright aligns himself with the 1984 Anglican Communion statement on the five marks of mission – evangelism, teaching, compassion, justice and care of creation. (One might note at this point the PCANZ's five faces of mission and the re-ordering of those in the Council of Assembly's Strategic Directions Paper of 1012.) Wright then moves to three missional foci and links building the church (through evangelism and teaching); serving society (through compassion and justice) and caring for creation (through ecological concern and action). He links all these together through and by the lordship of Christ.

A few points of note: Wright has a strong Biblical approach, yet maybe not a strong trinitarian approach. His Christology overshadows any focus on the Trinity. His understanding of the need for the whole creation to be redeemed sets him apart from some, yet his emphasis on the centrality of the gospel may set him apart from others. Personally, I believe there is a great deal to commend Wright and his work. He offers a freshness and a depth that is both stimulating and rewarding.

In returning to the other writers I noted, I determined to read in depth as much as seemed reasonable of their writings. This took longer than anticipated but was well worthwhile. It is a very long time since I have had the opportunity to read in-depth like his. It is not my intention to engage deeply with the breadth of this reading, but to provide some overviews and at various points some more in-depth reflections. Broadly speaking, this could be considered a reading programme in the area of Missiology and Trinitarian Theology.

Mission as a Trinitarian activity – some introductory comments

From the Willingen mission conference, a theological shift happened in protestant missiology. While others had treated mission under the heading of ecclesiology, understanding it to be an activity of the church, a radical rethink was underway. Barth's Church Dogmatics, published after the Willingen conference, placed discussion of mission under the heading of the Trinity because it is dependent on the first sending, the sending by the Father of the Son and the Holy Spirit. As we will see, Flett raises concerns about this understanding and will seek to redefine *missio Dei*, so we are not left with what he defines as a 'second movement.' What Barth did do was state that mission activity is at the very heart of God. One must not lose sight of the world situation, post the second world war and the missionary context of China – which had seen the withdrawal from communist China.

Mission was no longer dependent on the church's endeavour, but was redefined as participation in the sending activity of the Triune God. This provided a number of important and profound theological implications. In moving the ownership of mission from the church to God, the language of *missio Dei* – the mission of God was developed. Second, *missio Dei* put mission at the heart of the Trinity. Third, the Church was seen to be missionary by its very nature and its mission was seen as a participation in the greater mission of God. This wide understanding of mission assumed something of a consensus in the later part of the twentieth century. It implied a move from the periphery of church and theological concerns – as the activity of enthusiasts in far-away places – to establishing mission as an intrinsic part of what it means to be both Christian and to be Church. 'Trinitarian theology points to the fact that God is in God's own self a life of communion and that God's involvement in history aims at drawing humanity and creation in general into communion with God's very life. So that mission aims primarily at the transmission of the life of the communion that exists in God.'[32] Mission is not some external activity imposed by church leaders as yet another demand, but rather must be a heartfelt spontaneous outworking of the inspiring, transforming life-giving work of the Holy Spirit.

A question naturally arose at this point: if mission belongs to God, and all Christ's followers are empowered by the Holy Spirit, what then is the role of the church? The traditional view had been that the church is both the means and the aim of mission, but the shift was from church-centred mission to mission-centred church. Into this conversation came J.C. Hans Hoekendijk. The Dutch missiologist said we no longer think in terms of God-church-world. Since God is at work in the world independently of the church, the world, not the church, is the centre of God's plan. He held the church could not assume it was part of God's mission, but rather should actively seek to discover its role in what he saw as a secular process.[33]

Hoekendijk's view was too radical for most, who held that the church was constituted by the Spirit (see Acts 2:41-42). As Bosch notes, the church, while called into being by God, is mindful of her imperfections and need of renewal. Jurgen Moltmann, seeing the need for the reform of the church in Germany, expressed the provisional nature of the church within a pneumatological framework. He writes of the church as a community which knows the Spirit as the giver of life, sees the Spirit's messianic history and

[32] Bria (ed) Go Forth in Peace: Orthodox perspectives on Mission, p3
[33] Bosch, Transforming Mission, p370 and 382-385

experiences the Spirit's charismatic power. The church is therefore missionary as it participates in the mission of God, sent into the world as the Father sends the Spirit. The church lives in the presence and power of the Spirit of God but does not separate the Spirit of life from the Spirit of Jesus Christ which he gave up on the cross and which descended in resurrection power on the first apostles.[34]

Since it is by the Holy Spirit that God is at work in the world, mission as *missio Dei* is a pneumatological paradigm of mission. Pope John Paul II declared that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of mission.[35]

The *missio Dei* paradigm, that the church participates in the activity of the Holy Spirit in the world, has also found widespread acceptance. Yet difficulties have arisen by the suggestion that the Spirit of God can bypass the church. Hoekindijk's secularization of mission was an example.

While various cautions can and should be noted, the Spirit of God is present and active everywhere but not every development is the work of the Holy Spirit. The need for discernment is therefore critical.

James Dunn writes that if mission is defined as finding out where the Holy Spirit is at work and joining in, then discernment is the first act of mission.[36] Discerning the Spirit or spirits requires much more than a few glib lines or some watered down description but a thorough ongoing work. That, of course, is if discernment is the first act of mission.

[34] Moltmann, Church in the Power of the Spirit, p11
[35] John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio (On the permanent validity of the Church's Missionary Madate (1990) – paragraphs 21-30 – available at www.vatican.va
[36] Dunn, 'The Christ and the Spirit: Collected essays,' vol 2: Pneumatology, p72

Justification of Mission

Christian mission calls all people to confess that Jesus is Lord, thus embracing Jesus of Nazareth as Christ and Saviour, placing all of life under his authority and preparing for his kingdom. This is a call to the most radical personal change, ultimately impacting every aspect of life.[37]

Mission has been justified in terms of compassion for the lost, or as a biblical mandate. Such approaches tend to emphasize mission as a human initiative in response to God's command. This understanding, that mission is solely on the basis of explicit commands in the Bible, makes mission a human act of obedience, easily separated from God's overarching purposes in history and fails to see mission as central to the entire story of the Bible.

By the mid-twentieth century, a Copernican revolution took place in the understanding of mission. Mission came to be understood as God's Mission (m*issio Dei*); that is to say, mission is rooted in the divine initiative and character. Mission is God's own undertaking and the mission of the church is participation in God's mission. God is a missionary. God and mission are rooted in the sending activity of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus's statement to his disciples, 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you' (John 20:21b) is the most explicit biblical basis for this understanding. As the sending will of God was realized in the sending of the Son, so Jesus now sends the church. Through God's sending of the Spirit, the church is empowered to become his agents of mission. Rightly understood, grounding mission in the *missio Dei* does not reduce the importance of scriptural commands, nor does it excuse Christians from the joyful and sacrificial obligation of mission work. Rather, it reframes our understanding of mission in terms of God's own character and prerogative. The mission of the church is embedded in the great drama of God's mission.

While this understanding of mission is often traced to the International Missionary Conference at Willingen, Germany in 1952, similar concepts from much earlier can be traced. For example, a theology of 'divine mission' which described the Father sending the Son and the Son sending the Spirit was developed by Augustine. It was developed later by Thomas Aquinas. Yet no parallel was drawn to the sending of the church.

Karl Barth's 1932 lecture called for grounding mission in the activity of God himself. He recalled that the term "mission" was first used in the ancient church to describe the sending activity of the Trinity. Karl Hartenstein, clearly influenced by Barth, built on the idea.

While the Willingen Conference was key, it is important to note the term *missio Dei* was not used at the conference. Rather, it appeared in Hartenstein's conference report. What was clear was a new understanding, in the light of a radically changing world. God's character and initiative displaced humanity as the centre of mission. Hartenstein wrote in the conference report, 'the sending of the Son to reconcile the universe through the power of the Spirit is the foundation and purpose of mission. The *missio ecclesiae* comes from the *missio Dei* alone. Thus, mission is placed within the broadest imaginable framework of salvation history and God's plan for salvation.'

[37] Ott, Strauss and Tennent, Encountering Theology of Mission,

What this was to mean and the practical implications of it proved far more problematic. My reading of developments suggests three main, yet different, understandings were developed. Hartenstein and fellow German, Walter Freytag, took a salvation history/eschatological approach. They saw mission as God's activity between the two comings of Christ, and that when the gospel was preached to all nations, Christ would return and establish His Kingdom in all its fullness. Hoekendijk saw God's mission as the fulfilment of the kingdom promises within history; mission is God's activity in the world to serve the world. A third group – mainly from America - argued that the church responds to God's activity in the present situation and aims for personal and social transformation. The central element is not the saving of souls.

Vicedom gives the most systematic approach I read in his book, The Mission of God. He offers this definition: 'The *missio Dei* is the work of God through which everything that He has in mind for Man's salvation – the complete fullness of His Kingdom of redemption – is offered to men through those whom He has sent, so that men, freed from sin and removed from the other kingdom, can again fully come into His fellowship.'[38]

In the 1950's, both leading German missiologists, Hartenstein and Freytag, died and what developed was an increasingly social and political understanding of mission as participation in God's acts of liberation in human societies. For Hoekendijk, for example, the church becomes one means among many that God may use to accomplish mission in the world. God could accomplish his purposes, apart from either the church or the gospel. The missionary task is therefore to look for God's work in the world; this was usually defined in terms of the struggle for justice and the participation in such movements. As the church serves the world, the world sets the agenda for the church. Such a view was exceedingly influential in the WCC Assembly at Uppsala in 1968.

It is important to note how, during this time, various German theologians opposed the secularizing of *missio Dei*. Through their own experiences of history, they were very aware of the dangers of associating God's will with human efforts and political movements. They rather placed the ultimate hope of the kingdom of God in Christ's return and wanted to maintain the very provisional nature of mission in this age as a sign of the coming kingdom.

It is also clear that evangelical critiques of these developments were strong, profound and insightful.

A clear debate arose around some fundamental questions: does *missio Dei* remain bound to the *donim Dei* (gift of God) in Jesus Christ and the need for grace, forgiveness and reconciliation with God? Or is *missio Dei* more to be understood in terms of God's general concern for the whole creation, *misso Dei mundo* (Mission of God in the world)? Various attempts have been made to try and harmonize these two views. Maybe at a deeper level, there remain two justifiable criticisms: the *missio Dei* concept seemed to allow mission to move quickly to business as usual and not to really engage in the changing world and some justifiable critiques. Secondly, the understanding of *missio Dei* became so vague that it could accommodate virtually all and any concept of mission.

[38] Vicedom, The Mission of God, p45

David Bosch

Many writers cited a few key references from David Bosch's magnificent work Transforming Mission, yet much of this work was not engaged with, nor was his important Witness to the World. I undertook to read both of these.

For an understanding of the shifts in Protestant thinking regarding the relationship between church and mission, tracing the history and contributions of the world missionary conferences are of prime importance, states Bosch[39]. Bosch himself provides an outline and summary of these conferences and many other writers only refer to his summaries – such is the regard in which he is held. Without wanting to cover this in any depth, a few comments are worth repeating.

Bosch starts with the first world missionary conference, which occurred in Edinburgh in 1910. The major concern of the gathering was the absence of missionary zeal or enthusiasm in the churches of the West. The relationship between church and mission was hardly mentioned. At the Jerusalem conference of 1928, the relationship between the older and younger churches received considerable attention, even if the division into two geographical areas – one Christian and the other non-Christian, remained unchallenged. This was the first gathering since the end of the First World War. The Tambaram event of 1938 sits on the eve of the Second World War.

In the years since Tambaram, there had been a growing move in emphasis from church-centred mission to a mission-centred church. This made clear that the church could be neither the starting point nor the goal of mission. God was and is at work and this precedes both church and mission[40]. Mission is not subordinate to the church nor is the church subordinate to mission. Both need to be seen and taken into *missio Dei*, which came to be seen as the overarching concept. The phrase *missio Dei* was originally used by German missiologist, Karl Hartenstein, in 1934. It was later popularized by Georg Vicedom in his book The Mission of God: an introduction to the theology of Mission.

After World War One, missiologists began to note the developments in Biblical and systematic theology. At the Brandenburg Missionary Conference of 1932, a paper by Karl Barth put forth the idea that mission was an activity of God himself, and although this was developed further by other theologians, Barth's influence was clear and crucial throughout. His influence on missionary thinking reached a peak at the Willingen Conference in 1952. It was here that the idea (although not the term) of *missio Dei* first surfaced clearly. Mission was understood to have its starting point in the very nature of God, so it was placed in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, rather than ecclesiology. The classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit, was expanded to include another movement: Father, Son and Spirit sending the church into the world. In terms of missionary thinking, this constituted an important innovation. The lasting image of the Willingen conference was mission as participating in the sending of God. Our mission can have no life of its own, and only in the hands of the sending God can it be truly called mission. The missionary initiative does not come from humankind, only from God alone.

[39] Bosch, Transforming Mission, p369
[40] Ibid, p370

So *missio Dei* is not primarily an activity of the church, but rather an attribute of God. As Moltmann writes, 'It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church.'[41] Mission is a movement by and from God to the world, and the church is an instrument for that mission. There is a church because there is mission, not vice versa.

Since Willingen, the concept of *missio Dei* has undergone various modifications. It was seen that since God's concern was for the entire world, this should also be the scope of *missio Dei*. It affects all people in all aspects of their existence. Thus, it takes place in ordinary human history, not exclusively in and through the church. 'The *missio Dei* is God's activity, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church may be privileged to participate.'[42]

There can be little doubt that with this wider understanding of the scope of *missio Dei* came a development contrary to the intentions of Barth and also Hartenstein (who first developed the term). Hartenstein had hoped to protect mission against both secularization and horizontalization and reserve it exclusively for God. This did not happen.

Those who supported a wider understanding of the concept tended to radicalize the view that *missio Dei* was larger than the mission of the church, even to the point of suggesting that it excluded the church's involvement. While it is one thing to propose that mission should not be a subset of the doctrine of the church, it is quite another to disconnect *missio Dei* altogether from a robust ecclesiology. It is one thing to see the Trinitarian basis for mission, yet another to fail to see that the church has been ordained by God to reflect the Trinity through redemptive actions in the world. Post Willengen, this is what happened. The world was God's stage, yet the church was sidelined. God's redemptive activity was more likely to be seen in political revolution or social movements than through the faithful witness of the church. It was now the world that set the agenda for the church and the church's role was, at best, to point out where God's shalom was emerging in the world. The result was aworld-focused rather than church-focused emphasis in the church's understanding of mission.

The evangelical opposition was headed by leading missiologists, such as Donald McGavran and Arthur Glasser. They stressed the traditional themes of evangelism, conversion and church growth. They raised important concerns about the secularization of the gospel and the tendency to reduce the mission of the church to social and political activism.

It is interesting to note that Lesslie Newbigin was one of the primary authors of the adopted document at Willengen, 'The Missionary Calling of the Church' which tried to ground the new emphasis of *missio Dei* in a strong ecclesiology. In the post-Willengen period, there grew a strong anti-ecclesiological emphasis – led by Johannes Hoekendijk. In response, Newbigin delivered his ecclesiology lectures, later

[41] Motmann, p64
[42] Bosch, p391

published under the heading, Household of God: lectures on the nature of the church. Bosch argues that the anti-church mood lasted until the WCC Nairobi in 1975.[43]

It is clear that God can work beyond and in spite of the church to accomplish His redemptive plans. Nevertheless, central to a biblical vision of God's mission is that God does, in fact, work in and through His church; and that it is central, not ancillary, to His mission. Indeed, the church is the only community Jesus Christ has specifically instituted to reflect the Trinity and to participate in His mission in the world.[44]

'So a biblical missiology must be built firmly on the foundation of Trinitarian theology. Furthermore it must be simultaneously God centred and church focused.'[45]

Mission has its origin neither in the official church, nor in special groups within the church. It has its origin in God. God is a missionary God, a God who crosses frontiers towards the world. God sent his incarnate Word, his Son into the world, and He sent his Spirit at Pentecost. Mission is God becoming a human-being, taking our humanity, moving into the world. It is the Triune God who is the subject of mission. We have moved from an ecclesiological to trinitarian missiology. [46]

The danger is that the doctrine of the Trinity might function only vaguely and abstractly in the church's theology and mission. Bosch then provides more detail on what is meant by a Trinitarian foundation for mission.

Mission has its origin in the fatherly heart of God. This is the deepest source of mission: there is mission because God loves humanity. Forty-six times in John's Gospel, Jesus says that the Father has sent him, adding in places it is for the sake of the salvation of the world. There are several parables which have the same theme. The ground or basis for this mission is God's love: 'For God is love; and His love was disclosed to us in this, that he sent his only Son into the world to bring us life.' (1 John 4:9) 'God so loved the world that he gave his only son (John 3:16).

For Barth, his understanding of the role of the second person of the Trinity in the doctrine of the Trinity is very significant. Barth wanted to move beyond any mere speculative interpretation for a foundation of mission on the Trinity. In holding a strong Christology that included incarnation, cross and resurrection, Barth wants to compel us to take history seriously and so God's mission as historical involvement in the world. 'On the cross God revealed that he took the world seriously, in that he judged the world. He not only judged the world, however; on the Cross as well as in the incarnation and resurrection, he claimed the world for his Kingdom, he reconciled the world to himself. Mission thus indeed has a Trinitarian basis but in such a way that it has a Christological concentration because it is precisely Christology that accentuates God's entrance (his mission) into the world.'[47]

[43] Bosch, Transforming Mission, p388
[44] Tennent, Invitation to World Mission, p59
[45] Op Cite
[46] Bosch, Witness to the World, p240
[47] Bosch, Witness to the World, p241

The trinitarian foundation of mission is further manifested in pneumatology. The Spirit does not replace Christ – rather the Spirit's presence is the presence of Christ. The mission of the Son is continued in the mission of the Spirit and made concrete by the mission of the disciples in the world. 'As the Father sent me, so I send you.' Then he breathed on them, saying, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' (John 20:21-22)

Barth brings christology, pneumatology and missiology into this closest possible relationship. Jesus' baptism reveals the missionary character of his ministry.

Karl Barth

Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics stand as a monumental work which many point to, when discussing the topics of the Trinity and mission and missio Dei. I read parts of this work and found it rewarding! Any reading of Barth in this area will have to hold to his insistence of beginning and staying with no other foundation than God in his self-revelation. Barth challenged, and continues to challenge, the church to re-orient all of its thinking to the event of the triune God's self-revelation. Any brief reading of Barth's life will show that theology was his life's work. His multi-volume Church Dogmatics represents his academic life's work. Barth views all the church's proclamations from the underlying assumption that they all must be underscored by God's self-revelation alone. Revelation is his starting point. For Barth therefore, humankind cannot reach God or indeed say anything about God from our own starting point. Barth wants us to see that theology needs to be from a point of being open to God's self-revelation. Although one might suspect Barth's God to appear distant, Barth sees Christianity as a relationship between humankind and God and he speaks about this relationship as an encounter between an 'I' and 'Thou'. The first word of communication in this relationship is, however, from God. If I understand Barth, he states God shows himself to us humans, and theology is and always must be disciplined by this event of self-unveiling.

(It is worth noting that Barth's starting point was to stand against what he saw as the varied theological starting points in areas like science, and philosophy, which he held were more like attempts to speak about humanity than about God. While my notes do not contain a reference for this, I do like it; 'Barth's theology could be summarized as placing God-in-His-self-revelation at the focal point of his theology.')

From this starting point, he attempts to grapple with the Trinity at the beginning of his work. One of the first points he makes in his trinitarian thought is the unity of the economic and the immanent Trinity. Barth is concerned to present the doctrines of the distinct persons of the immanent Trinity in direct relation to what is perceived in revelation of the economic Trinity. Barth does not want a doctrine of the distinct persons of the Trinity to be mere theory, but a logical result of what we must say about who God is, in His self-revelation attested to in Scripture.[48]

For Barth, you cannot start a trinitarian discourse by choosing between God's immanent being and his economy (scripture and history). To speak about God's self-revelation in the man Jesus is always already to speak about who God is 'in Himself'[49]. This unity between the immanent and economic Trinity is highlighted even more in Barth's discussion of God as revealer, revelation and revealedness. For Barth, God is the 'who', the 'what', and the 'what effect' of his revelation. In other words, whatever we know of God, we know because God initiates this disclosure, it is God whom we meet in it, and it is God who enables us to see it. Barth puts it succinctly, "God reveals Himself. He reveals Himself through Himself. He reveals Himself. If we really want to understand revelation in terms of its subject, i.e., God, then the first thing we have to realise is that this subject, God, the Revealer, is identical with His act in revelation

[48] Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics: I.I The Doctrine of the Word of God, second edition, eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F.Torrance, trans. G.W. Bromiley (New York, NY: T&T Clark Ltd., 2003), 479

[49] Allan Torrance, 'The Trinity,' in The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 72-91.

and also identical with its effect." For Barth, Jesus is God, and God is the agency at work in Christian faith that opens the Christian's mind and heart in order to see this revelation and in order to make the confession of Christ's Lordship and divinity. With Barth, there are no gradations of divinity in this self-revelation; you have God's immanence 'all the way down' in the economic relations of the Trinity.

What set Barth apart was that, rather than starting with how we can come to know God as Trinity, he points out theology must begin with recognition of God's revelation of himself to sinful humanity. It all begins with revelation.

Barth's argument, that mission must be understood as an activity or attribute of God himself, was first proposed in a paper given at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932. Mission was understood to derive from the trinitarian nature of God: the Father sends the Son; the Father and the Son send the Spirit; and the Trinitarian God sends the church into the world as a dynamic embodiment of divine love towards creation.

By placing the doctrine of the Trinity at the head of his Dogmatics, Barth was doing something unique in terms of theological method. He was saying that any methodological approach must be completely and utterly subservient to God in His self-revelation. By starting with the doctrine of scripture, or humanity's ability to know, or the teaching office of the church, or any other such starting point, the Church fails to hear the One who reveals Himself. God is known only in this self-revealing, because this One is the one revealing, the thing revealed, and the possibility for its reception. Any other starting point gets off on the wrong foot, precisely because it risks theological knowledge apart from this divine enablement. If God's self-revelation is the starting point, and the possibility, for all theological reflection, then any other foundationalism must be rejected.

The substantive work of J.G. Flett, The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth and the nature of Christian Community, adds to the debate – albeit in terms of raising questions about the relationship of *missio Dei* and the doctrine of the Trinity. Flett holds that there is a problem in terms of the church's relationship to the world being consequent on treating God's own mission into the world as a second step, alongside who He is in Himself. With God's movement into his economy ancillary to his being, so the church's own corresponding missionary relationship with the world is ancillary to her being. In other words, this dichotomy between church and mission underlies the problem of the church's relationship with the world.[50] Flett holds that within the understanding of *missio Dei*, the problem of the relationship between church and world is contingent on an account of God's own life whereby his movement into the world is a second step alongside his eternal being. 'In other words, *missio Dei* illustrates well that the cleavage of the church from mission derives from a cleavage within God's own life.'[51]

Missio Dei provided a theological justification for the missionary act by placing it within the Trinitarian being of God. This was well summed up by Bosch, 'mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God.'[52] The Father sends the Son and the Spirit is sent into the

[50] Flett, The Witness of God, p3-4
[51] Ibid, p4
[52] Bosch, Transforming Mission, p389-90

world, all this revealing the sending nature of God. God remains active in the world as he sends his community into the world to participate in this mission. For Bosch, this was a decisive shift. Hoedemaker sees *missio Dei* as both pivotal and confused.[53] What is clear is that *missio Dei* was and is a concept capable of accommodating an ever-expanding range of meanings. Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder say *missio Dei* 'is the very mission of God, in creation, redemption and continual sanctification'.[54] As such then, everything that the church did could now be seen as mission. This led Stephen Neil to state, 'If everything is mission, nothing is mission.'[55] Maybe one of the most telling comments comes in an article by Jacques Matthey in the International Review of Mission, where he writes '…*missio Dei* did not really solve any of the major missiological challenges which shocked Protestants from the beginning of the last century.[56] Wolfgang Gunther, writing in the same journal, is even more cutting, writing, 'with the impending threat of all missions being ejected from the collapsing colonial empires, the *missio Dei* formula came as a relief: God's mission, not ours! ….business as usual.'[57]

Despite these concerns, as Matthey points out, 'if we were to lose the reference to *missio Dei*, we would again put sole responsibility for mission on the human shoulders and thereby risk, missiologically speaking, believing that salvation is gained by our own achievements.'[58] Flett sums it up this way: 'The Copernican turn of *missio Dei* is not something from which the Christian community can depart. Any other conception of the ground, motive and goal of mission apart from *missio Dei's* Trinitarian location risks investing authority in historical accident and human capacity.'[59] '*missio Dei* provides a Trinitarian illusion behind which all manner of non-Trinitarian mediations operate with sanctioned impurity. The Trinitarian formula is pure preamble.'[60]

While noting the history, Flett correctly points out that Barth never once used the term *missio Dei*; never wrote the phrase 'God is a missionary God' and never articulated a Trinitarian position of the kind expressed at Willingen. This stands in contrast to Bosch's oft quoted summary.[61]

Flett proposes a redefinition of *missio Dei*. Flett states, 'In popular perception, *missio Dei* places mission within the being of the triune God. While true, it only used the doctrine to distance the act from the politically compromised forms that Western mission took during the late ninetieth century.'[62] He goes on: 'Sending provided a trinitarian façade for a universal principle guiding creation, and God's mission became a pattern of breaking down and building up, with the church a mere postscript alongside this historical progress…while resulting forms may look different, every approach to *missio Dei* draws on an

[53] Hoedemaker, The People of God, p 165, 171
[54] Beavens and Schroeder, Constants in Context, p288
[55] Neil, Creative Tension, p81
[56] Matthey, God's Mission Today, IRM 92, vol 4, (2003) p581
[57] Gunther, History and Significance of World Mission Conferences in the 20th Century, IRM 92, vol 4 (2003), p530
[58] Matthey, God's Mission Today, p 582
[59] Flett, Witness of God, p9
[60] Op Cite
[61] Bosch, Transforming Mission, p389-393
[62] Ibid, p287

identically flawed Trinitarinism, that is, the missionary act is predicated on a cleavage of God's being from his act.'[63]

While stating this, Flett is very clear that mission must not be reduced to a contingent enterprise. While traditional accounts of *missio Dei* abstracted God's essence from sending, Flett holds that this is not an inevitable consequence of *missio Dei*. Rather, they highlight the dichotomy between church and mission, and the concomitant difficulty with forming a connection between the church and the world corresponds to a dichotomy within God himself.

Flett writes that 'God is a missionary God because he has determined himself to be for and with the human. The plenitude of the Father begetting the Son in the unity of the Spirit means that an above and below in an outward-turning history belongs to the One God's perfect life. The Father's begetting the Son is a deliberate act, not a second step alongside who God is, in and for himself, but the determination of his own life. This act belongs to God's life from and to all eternity, for it is the nature of his perfect splendour that he is this living God. It is not possible to go behind this act…we cannot go behind God's apostolic mission in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit to find the pristine noneconomic God.'[64] He goes on, 'The resurrection reveals the Son of man to be the Son of God from all eternity; it reveals his declarative perfection from all eternity. The knowledge of God is a differentiated fellowship of action in which the antithesis between God and humanity is not resolved into a bland third thing. It is a living encounter in the history of the one Son, a uniting in which there is neither confusion nor separation, but genuine meeting. Given that this fellowship belongs to God's own life from eternity, neither the divine nor the human can be considered in isolation. While this fellowship of the divine and human in Jesus Christ is exhaustive, it has a definite character. Jesus Christ is the true witness. That is, the unity of this fellowship is expressive, and it cannot be understood apart from this outward encompassing movement…the reality of the parousia is what gives it its missionary character…because his acting for the human is not a second step beside his own life, God does not cease to act in relationship to the human in the twofold form of Jesus Christ's objective completion and the Spirit's subjective accomplishment of reconciliation.'[65] 'The act of the Spirit in subjectively realizing reconciliation in the human takes the form of impelling the community into the world, following after her Lord…God calls human beings to become his witnesses. It is life under, with and by the promise of the Spirit in which the Christian community is conformed and conforms to the realism of Easter. Only as she follows this leading is she the Christian community…the Christian community is necessarily a missionary community because this expressive existence in intentional movement for the world is the nature of the very divine and human fellowship that belongs to God's own being from and to all eternity. The Christian community is a missionary community, for if she is not, then she is not a community of God's reconciliation.'[66]

In discussing the orientation to the Kingdom of God, Flett says, 'God's mission is borne by neither the church nor the world, but by his own living action with respect to his creation. The Christian community

[63] Bosch, Transforming Mission,p287
[64] Flett, Witness of God, p288
[65] Ibid, p288-289
[66] Ibid, p290

is the result of and exists within God's call, which means she exists in service to this mission. The community's solidarity with the world rests in this de jure calling of all creation to God; the distinction from the world is the de facto living with, in and by the promise of the Spirit, living according to hope of the kingdom…at every stage, the concrete form of the Christian community is that of the missionary community intentionally moving into the world proclaiming the kingdom of God.'[67]

Gods' act, in reconciling the world to Himself, is not a second step alongside his being, in and of himself. There is no breach in the being and act of God, so there can be no breach in the being and act of his community. So the Christian community is a missionary community - mission directs the form of witness. As Barth writes, 'As the community called out from the world, she is emphatically called out to it. And the genuineness precisely of that being called out stands or falls with the fact that there is no interruption between it and the being called out to which infallibly follows, that is, that her being sent off from the world and her being turned toward the world take place in a single movement.'[68] While it has this definitive task, it is clear the *missio Dei* cannot be reduced to a set of programmes. 'Missionary methods often fall prey to this trap because it is a constant temptation for the community to settle in this way rather than be a body broken open to press toward the final parousia and the universal revelation of the kingdom of God…since creation possesses no inherent capacity to facilitate or retard the communication of the gospel, the community is totally free with regard to the particular forms the community's witness takes in the world, not with regard to her definite service of witness.'[69]

Flett states the Christian community must offer an answer to the question 'Who is Jesus Christ?' As Newbigin suggests, this is only answered in the end as the whole of creation confesses his name[70] and mission drives toward the fullness of this confession.

For Flett then, a revised *missio Dei* concerns first the doctrine of the Trinity, and second the community that lives in fellowship with this God – not arising as a second question alongside who God is, in and for himself, but within that question – mission is necessarily and must become a central concern of dogmatic theology. With few exceptions, he notes mission is absent from the all-encompassing theological system, so it would seem mission is not essential when speaking about the fundamentals of the Christian faith. He states, the absence of mission has deleterious consequences for the doctrine of God.[71] If the community is Christian only insofar as she is missionary; if the missionary act is the concrete form of divine and human fellowship here and now; then the lack of reference to mission at every level of the teaching ministry of the church is a frightful abrogation of theological responsibility. Jesus Christ's call for the community to be his witnesses cannot be relegated to some derivative status. Mission is located in the Trinity - it must again return to being central to the teaching ministry of the local congregation. The entire community is to hear of the commission of her being and the declarative

[67] Flett, Witness of God, p292
[68] Barth, CD IV/3.2,764
[69] Flett, Witness, p294
[70] Newbigin, Christ and Cultures, Scottish Journal of Theology, 31, no 1, 1978, p10
[71] Flett, Witness, p296

nature of Christian fellowship, to repent and intentionally move into the world, developing missionary forms as she learns the obedience required by the Spirit.[72]

Flett concludes his work with 'Mission is the abundant fellowship of active participation in the very glory that is the life of God and to all eternity. It is life in the community of reconciliation moving out in solidarity with the world in active knowledge that God died for it too. It is the response of doxology as we follow the Spirit's lead as captives in the train of the living glorious Lord, the lamb that was slain.'[73]

[72] Flett, Witness of God, p297
[73] Op Cite, p298

Lesslie Newbigin

In both the writings of those involved in Missional Church and those involved in Fresh Expressions, the name Lesslie Newbigin features strongly. That one person should be able to transcend both sides of the Atlantic and two very different cultures is worthy of note in itself!

Newbigin is regarded as one of the important pioneers in formulating a Trinitarian missiology. Educated at Cambridge, he went to India as a missionary and eventually served as a bishop in the Church of South India. Returning to England in 1974, he was a lecturer in the Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham and even pastored a United Reformed Church. He was very active in writing and was key in the Gospel and Culture movement until his death in 1998.

Returning home to England in 1974 after missionary service in India for nearly 40 years, Newbigin took up the challenge of trying to envision what a fresh encounter of the gospel with late-modern Western culture might look like. In Foolishness to the Greeks, he posed the question: 'What would be involved in a missionary encounter between the gospel and this whole way of perceiving, thinking, and living that we call 'modern Western Culture?'[74]

Newbigin's missiology was largely formed by the mission theology that took shape within the International Missionary Council (IMC) conferences of the 1950s through the 1970s. Perhaps the most significant of these conferences was the one convened in Willingen, Germany in 1952. There, the conference recognized that the church could be neither the starting point nor the goal of mission. 'God's salvific work precedes both the church and mission. We should not subordinate mission to the church nor the church to mission; both should, rather, be taken up into the *missio Dei*, which now became the overarching concept. The *missio Dei* institutes the *missiones ecclesiae*.'[75] When discussing the paradigm shift that began at Willingen, Bosch writes: 'Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another 'movement': Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. As far as missionary thinking was concerned, this linking with the doctrine of the Trinity constituted an important innovation. Willingen's image of mission was mission as participating in the sending of God.'[76]

While the Trinitarian foundation for mission theology was later formulated as the *missio Dei* by Karl Hartenstein, Newbigin developed his own expression in The Open Secret. Central to Newbigin's understanding of mission is the work of the Triune God in calling and sending the church, empowered by the Spirit, into the world to participate fully in God's mission. Newbigin saw the church to be the creation of the Spirit: it exists in the world as a 'sign' that the redemptive reign of God's kingdom is present; it serves as a 'foretaste' of the eschatological future of the redemptive reign that has already

[74] Newbigin, Foolishness of the Greeks, p1
[75] Bosch, Transforming Mission, p370
[76] Ibid, p390

begun; and it serves as an 'instrument' under the leadership of the Spirit to bring that redemptive reign to bear on every dimension of life.[77]

The British version of the Gospel and Culture movement was initiated by Newbigin in Britain during the 1980s and came to be known as a 'programme.' He had been asked by the British Council of Churches to plan a major national conference pursuing Christian engagement with contemporary Western culture. It was shaped largely by his writings during that period: The Other Side of 1984 , Foolishness to the Greeks, and The Gospel in a Pluralist Society. I read all of these.

The Other Side of 1984 was a published essay that Newbigin prepared for the British Council of Churches conference held in 1984; thus, the name of the book. Newbigin presents two major themes. First, that Western culture is in crisis because it has too closely tied itself to an Enlightenment worldview. He argues that those in the West believe that science and technology holds the answers to unlimited progress, and, in the West, scientific explanations have replaced dogmatic explanations. This shift to a world dominated by science and technology did not lead to a rational and meaningful world, but instead led to a crisis of meaning and purpose which can only be remedied by a serious reaffirmation of faith. Second, the loss of influence the church has had upon the culture was, Newbigin stated, because the church's voice has been marginalized, because it had surrendered its place in the public sphere and retreated into the private sector. Newbigin's desire was not to have the church return to a position held during the time of Christendom: he simply believed that faith must always be involved in the dialogue with other patterns of thought.

Foolishness to the Greeks sees Newbigin provide an analysis of the central features of Western culture. He asks the question: what would be involved in a genuinely missionary encounter between the gospel and Western culture; especially a culture that has fragmented life into the artificial distinctions between facts and values, public and private lives, and particulars and absolutes? Newbigin places Christian truth claims in constant dialogue with modern issues. He interacts with the tensions between the truth of Scripture and science, politics, and the institutional church. In each case he asks, what must the church claim to know, do, and be, in a post-Christian culture?

In The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, Newbigin continues the theme of contextualizing the gospel in a postmodern, pluralistic culture. He writes about the necessity of shaping the gospel within culture and yet insisting that the gospel cannot endorse everything in culture. The work of contextualization is not something set aside for individual Christians alone but, for Newbigin, it is at the core of the mission of the church. Describing the congregation as 'the hermeneutic of the gospel,' he underlines the nature and purpose of the renewed communities of God's people. He further emphasized the importance of developing missiology within a Trinitarian theology: 'The mission of the Church is to be understood, can only be rightly understood, in terms of a Trinitarian model.'[78]

I discovered that Michael Goheen wrote his PhD on Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology and it finds its way into a fine book – As the Father has sent me, I am sending you and also in a further work, A Light to

[77] Van Gelder, Missional Church and Denominations, p3
[78] Newbigin, Gospel in Pluralist Society, p118

the Nations. Goheen seeks to provide a summary of the significance of the lasting influence of Newbigin on mission theology. He writes: first, Newbigin's work has served as the catalyst for bringing the issue of mission in Western culture to the forefront of the agenda of mission studies. The appearance of his book The Other Side of 1984 marks a major milestone for a missiology of Western culture. With unusual skill, the book crystallized a number of issues which have stimulated vigorous discussion. The stream of books and articles written by Newbigin since that time has continued to focus the issue for many people. The Gospel and Our Culture movements in Britain, North America, and New Zealand, the Missiology of Western Culture project headed up by Wilbert Shenk, and a growing stream of publications on the issue bear witness to the stimulus that the work of Newbigin has produced in the last couple of decades.

Second, Newbigin played an active and central role in the International Missionary Council and the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches. After serving as a missionary in India for twenty-three years, Newbigin took the post of general secretary of the IMC and then director of CWME of the WCC. His influence was formative for many of the discussions throughout since 1948. Newbigin was shaped by the theology, missiology, and ecclesiology of the early ecumenical movement. Yet, when there was a dramatic challenge to that paradigm, Newbigin was able to appropriate many of the insights of the new challenge. His flexibility, along with his commitment to tradition, makes his insight for the current ecclesiological discussions significant.

There is a third reason for focusing on the work of Newbigin. Not only has he provided an impetus for renewed reflection on the issue of mission in western culture and been an active participant in the ecumenical movement, Newbigin has also paid close attention to ecclesiological questions throughout his long and distinguished career as a recognized leader in the context of three settings: as a missionary in India; as an ecumenical leader in a global context; and as a missionary to the West. A glance at his bibliography reveals at once the interest that Newbigin has had in ecclesiological issues in his published work. His record as a missionary, bishop, ecumenical administrator and pastor all testify to his commitment to the local church. Indeed, it is his vast experience in struggling for a missionary church in many different contexts that has nourished his deep and valuable theological reflection on ecclesiology. It is precisely the missionary ecclesiology developed by Newbigin that has been foundational for and formative of both his work within the ecumenical movement and his call for a missionary encounter with Western culture.[79]

For Newbigin, one of the key texts from the New Testament relating to Trinitarian missiology is John 20:21-22 where Jesus says, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit.' This he saw as demonstrating the continuity between the Father's mission and Jesus' mission and the ongoing mission of the Holy Spirit in the life and witness of the church. He writes, 'a fresh articulation of the missionary task in terms of a pluralistic, polytheistic, pagan society of our time may require us likewise to acknowledge the necessity of a Trinitarian starting point.'[80] Newbigin was clear that the Trinity was the only authority by which we can

[79] M.W. Goheen, 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you'; J.E. Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology, p22

[80] Newbigin, The Relevance of Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission, p32-34

proclaim the gospel. A question that arises is if, for many Christians, the Trinity is not well understood, how can it be the starting point and basis for our proclamation? And if not, what gospel are we proclaiming?

It may be that as long as the church lived within the Christendom model, the question, "By what authority do you preach the gospel?" was never asked. The domesticating of Christianity saw cultural, institutional and pragmatic authority replace the Trinity. With the collapse of Christendom, those responses have been discredited. We cannot state that following Jesus can be built upon a pragmatic, cultural or institutional footing. Neither can the Christian message be conformed or shaped into a relativistic post-modern worldview. Yet, being countercultural is not some new technique to be learned: rather, it is fundamental to who we are and the message of the gospel.

Newbigin's best overall understanding of Trinitarian mission is to be found in Open Secret. Following the opening chapter on the mission of the triune God, he devoted three chapters to his theology of mission: Proclaiming the Kingdom of the Father: Mission as faith in action; sharing the life of the Son: mission as love in action ;and then Bearing witness of the Spirit: Mission as hope in action. He followed these with chapters on contemporary issues from a Trinitarian faith perspective. It is perhaps disappointing that this work, while giving broad outlines, was not worked out further by Newbigin.

Newbigin's work was also considered important in that it was informed by his own cross-cultural experience in India. He was forced to face issues as he sought to communicate the gospel in a Hindu setting. He discovered that there were very few natural shared assumptions from which he could build bridges. Upon his return to England, Newbigin discovered he needed to go through the same process. In the time he had been away, concepts of culture and gospel had become quite radically divorced from one another. Any concept of the gospel stood out against the culture which had, by and large, rejected such ideas as either obsolete or at best irrelevant. [81]

At the heart of Newbigin's thesis is a critique and response to the Western Church's captivity to a culture that he describes as modernity. He comes with two questions: 'How is the church to communicate the gospel in such a way that it genuinely takes root in the culture to which it is addressed?" and, secondly: "How may confidence in the gospel be recovered in a cultural setting in which questions of religious meaning have been relegated to the sphere of private and subjective opinion?"[82] Building on his earlier work, he traces some of the cultural assumptions which define modernity to the period of the Enlightenment. In these assumptions, Newbigin notes that Descarte and Locke established a philosophical foundation in which the only propositions which could be regarded as really true were those which could be shown to be scientifically provable. This Newbigin understands to be the crisis confronting contemporary culture. In Foolishness to the Greeks he writes that this becomes clear in the division between the public and private world and in the corresponding division between those ideas which are commonly accepted as facts and those which are considered to only have the status of values. 'The public world is a world of facts that are the same for everyone…the private world

[81] Walker (ed) Different Gospels, Interview with Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, p30
[82] Peterson (ed) Witness to the world (Gospel, Mission and Culture: The contribution of Lesslie Newbigin by Paul Watson, p37

is a world of values where all are free to choose their own…and therefore to pursue such courses of actions as will correspond with them.[83] He pointed out that the amount of truth actually accepted and so established by this method is severely limited. While able to do some things, Newbigin stated, it will always be unable to deal with the most significant questions of human identity and purpose – questions such as "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" This scientific approach to questions of what is and what is not true tends to investigate how things work, rather than why they work.

Closely connected to facts and values is the parallel distinction between knowing and believing. Newbigin held, in the area of science, you can know certain things to be true but when it comes to religious knowledge, you can never know things to be true in the same sense. 'While the theory that the cosmos began with a Big Bang is considered fact, any suggestion that the Bible may be right is positing the existence and involvement of a Creator in the act or process of creation can only ever have the status of an extra-curricular opinion.'[84] He wrote, 'We are pluralist in respect of what we call beliefs but we are not pluralist in respect of what we call facts. The former are a matter of personal decision; the latter are a matter of public knowledge.'[85]

This world of division between facts and values, knowing and believing, pointed to something deeper: the triumph of reason over revelation. These things were worked out in what people talked about as the public and private world, with little if any connection between the two. All this, in terms of Western culture, sees religious knowledge as nothing more than a private opinion or belief or set of beliefs, which cannot claim any public truth. Newbigin noted, 'It follows that in a culture like ours, the church and its preaching belong to the world of values…the church is not generally perceived as concerned with facts, with the realities which finally govern the world and which we shall in the end have to acknowledge whether we like them or not. In this cultural milieu, the confident announcement of the Christian faith sounds like an arrogant attempt of some people to impose their values on others. As long as the church is content to offer its beliefs modestly as simply one of many brands available in the ideological supermarket, no offence is taken. But the affirmation that the truth revealed in the gospel ought to govern public life is offensive.'[86]

To this challenge, Newbigin responds by stating that scientific knowledge is not as objective as its proponents make it out to be; and also, religious knowledge is not as subjective as opponents claim. Newbigin is influenced and impacted by the work of Hungarian Michael Polanyi's Personal Knowledge. Polanyi states complete objectivity is a delusion and is, in fact, a false ideal.[87] Newbigin uses the idea of personal knowledge to defend the idea that our knowledge of God – although personal – is nevertheless real knowledge. He goes on to develop this understanding and calls it personal indwelling. 'In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus defines for his disciples what is to be their relation to him. They are to dwell in Him. He is not to be the object of their observation but the body of which they are a part. As they indwell him in his

[83] Newbigin, Foolishness of the Greeks, p35-6
[84] Walker, Telling the Story: Gospel, Mission and Culture, p 40
[85] Newbigin, Gospel in Pluralist Society, p27
[86] Ibid, p7
[87] Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, p18

body they will both be led into fuller and fuller apprehension of the truth and also become the means through which God's will is done in the life of the world.'[88]

The theological key to understanding Newbigin lies in his understanding of the Bible as the source of the true understanding of reality. 'The presupposition of all valid and coherent Christian thinking is that God has acted to reveal and effect his purpose for the world in the manner made known in the Bible.'[89] His commitment to the world – the metanarrative – contrasts with post-modernists, who say there are many stories but no overarching truth. Newbigin holds that all human beings find their purpose in the biblical story of creation, fall and potential redemption, of which they are all inextricably a part. In terms of how this universal message is to be communicated, Newbigin holds it is only by means of the ongoing life of the believing congregation that this understanding of reality can be made visible and comprehensible to others. 'I have come to feel that the primary reality of which we have to take account in seeking Christian impact on public life is the Christian congregation. How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.'[90] This is a radical missionary challenge for the church in the West. Newbigin calls for a fundamental re-orientation of the cultural assumptions within the church, in order that it might demonstrate once more in its life and worship an alternative plausibility structure, based on the revelation of the gospel and lived out authentically in the lives of Christian congregations.[91]

All this is rooted in his understanding of the gospel as what he calls public truth. He first used this phrase in The Other Side of 1984. 'The idea that the gospel is addressed to the individual and that it is only indirectly addressed to societies, nations and cultures, is simply an illusion of our individualistic post-Enlightenment culture.'[92] As it is public truth, it must be lived out and proclaimed to the world.

Newbigin's challenge is to raise many questions about the way in which Christians think and act in the areas of mission, evangelism and apologetics. His thoughts about the role of the Scriptures in reaching a foreign culture with the gospel came from his own experience in India. His commitment to the idea that the Bible is the only true source and agent of cultural transformation and gospel communication presents a radical challenge to those methods which, in the end, may be said to have allowed cultural assumptions to determine the limits and modes of gospel communication. He holds the West has been all-too-successful at domesticating the radial demands of the gospel. It has done this through implicit commitment to cultural ideals of human autonomy and reason – so the human mind is the final arbiter of truth - and by an over-individualistic and private concept of truth. This has led to the church keeping the gospel bound up it its own subculture. Newbigin's gospel-culture relationship wanted to ensure Biblical revelation takes precedence over cultural assumptions.

[88] Newbigin Gospel in Pluralist Society, p99
[89] Ibid, p8
[90] Ibid, p227
[91] Newbigin, Truth to Tell, p17ff
[92] Newbigin, Gospel in Pluralist Society, p199

His commitment to revelation over reason is also played out in his approach to apologetics. Newbigin opposed apologetics that traced its way back to the gospel's inherent reasonableness. He saw this as a departure from the primacy of revelation. He notes that the gospel, at one level, is inherently unreasonable. The message of the gospel revolves around the fact that the true authority of all things – the ground of human hope is, in fact, a crucified man. No amount of brilliant argument can make this sound reasonable to the inhabitants of the reigning plausibility structure.[93] Secondly, he states that no grounds can be found on which the gospel can be defended, other than those of the gospel itself. 'Every claim to show grounds for believing the gospel which lies outside the gospel itself can be shown to rest ultimately on faith commitments which can be questioned.'[94] As he writes in Proper Confidence, 'To look outside of the gospel for a starting point for the demonstration of the reasonableness of the gospel is itself a contradiction of the gospel, for it implies that we look for the logos elsewhere than in Jesus.'[95] This remains a challenge to contemporary apologetics – do we introduce people to the person of Jesus Christ, or merely engage them with the content of his teaching?

Newbigin sees the local congregation as vital in mission. While he recognizes the importance of one-to-one evangelism, alongside this, he places an emphasis on the witness of the congregation as a body. 'Although it may seem simplistic, I most deeply believe that it is fundamental to recognize that what brings men and women and children to know Jesus as Lord and Saviour is always the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit, always beyond our understanding or control, always the result of a presence, a reality which both draws and challenges – the reality who is in fact the living God himself. And God's presence is promised and granted in the midst of the believing, worshipping, celebrating, caring congregation. There is no other hermeneutic of the gospel.[96] For Newbigin, what encourages people to come to faith more than anything else is the indwelling of the gospel by a congregation. Evangelism from this standpoint is part of a more integrally-related authentic discipleship than any programme. The implications are quite radical. It speaks about a move away from teaching people some method for sharing the gospel. Newbigin is commending a more holistic discipleship by increasing indwelling the Bible as the revelation of the gospel for every area of life – it is better to able to live out and articulate God's perspectives on issues such as work, leisure or marriage. We need to be helping people make connections between the gospel and various issues of life. It is often in these contexts that real opportunities for evangelism occur. This also raises questions about one-off events where all the evangelistic eggs are placed in one basket. Newbigin d challenges us to a longer-term view, where both the content and the context are seen as important. We need to expose people, not only to the reality of the gospel through the spoken word, but also to the lives of people who have been changed by it. If the gospel is realistically modelled by the ongoing life of the congregation, we need to be developing many different longer-term strategies in which church and non-church people can mix. As Newbigin writes,

[93] Newbigin, Gospel in Pluralist Society, p232
[94] Newbigin, Religious Pluralism, p236
[95] Newbigin, Proper Confidence, p94
[96] Newbigin, Evangelism in the City, p5

'the reigning plausibility structure can only be effectively challenged by people who are fully integrated inhabitants of another.'[97]

In reflecting on this reading and the depth of thought the various writers have, I had a few questions which I shared with Rev Dr Graham Redding, Rev Dr Bruce Hamill and Rev Dr Jason Goroncy. Their comments were very helpful to this 'bear with very little brain'!

In an email, Graham commented, 'As I understand it, worship and mission constitute two sides of the one coin and therefore cannot be separated, either conceptually or chronologically. It all forms part of the *missio Dei*, insofar as the Father not only reconciles the world to himself through the Son, in the power of the Spirit, but also draws us into a life of eternal worship through the Son and in the power of the Spirit. Mission is not just about sending; it's also about homecoming. It has both a descending and an ascending movement (cf Isaiah 55:10-11), which is (or should be) vividly expressed in Christian worship.'[98] I had not read anywhere the thoughts about mission not just being sending, nor the link of mission and worship, so clearly outlined as here.

Bruce wrote, 'A key text for me on this is, of course, "As the Father sent me, so send I you". The mission of the church corresponds in some way to the mission of Jesus. As Jesus' life embodies the desires and life of Abba who calls him on by the power of the Spirit, so our life embodies the life of Jesus who sends us into the world to participate in his work of reconciliation by the power of the same Spirit. Jesus makes disciples: so do we. Jesus forgives sins and calls us to do so also. Jesus takes up his cross, and calls us to do so also, taking on, as he did, the social order of the world in a way that confronts it with the difference which is the kingdom/realm of God. His commitment to non-violence, enemy-love, etc, confronts and disturbs a world structured by violence. The religious and political leaders realise that he will undermine their world if they do not kill him (one man must die for the people).
Our imitation of Jesus is both Spirit-enabled and participatory. We don't simply copy him consciously but are formed inwardly (in-formed) with the mind of Christ and, inasmuch as this takes place, we participate not just in Jesus but also in the life of God and are conformed to it. You could say (and I would) that missional participation is salvation (Theosis). To go through a process of being 'saved' and becoming part of the life of the church and therefore, of the life of God, is to become missional.
You mention somewhere the question of whether the life of God is missional. I think this is what the text above is saying. Jesus' life is defined by the sending of the Father. Inasmuch as he is the divinely human life and the human form of divine life, then divine life is missional. However I am not sure that there is any reduction involved here. 'Sending' is a broad metaphor to capture the fact that his salvation/life originates from Abba and is in total obedience to that Father…So is God missional? I suspect the answer is yes and no. The mission of the God to redeem creation is not necessary for God and therefore to God-in-Godself: however, this mission nevertheless truly expresses the life of God-in-Godself and as a part of that life mandates the claim that God is missional...
Our missional life is also, in a sense, worship, and in a sense the outflowing of worship, depending on

[97] Newbigin, Gospel in Pluralist Society, p228
[98] Redding, email 5.11.12

how we are defining worship. The church that is 'for Jesus' in worship is 'for the world' as he is. The church that receives his life, receives the ability to give their lives away for others in missional life.[99]

Jason referred me to an unpublished article by David Congdon from Princeton Seminary. Congdon writes about a missionary God who commissions a missionary God and says theology must become missional or perish. I found this extremely helpful. Having laid out his argument exegetically, historically and dogmatically, he summarises with five points why this should be so. Missional theology upholds many of the dogmatic insights of the so-called radical Barthians (Bruce McCormark and Robert Jenson); it rescues mission and evangelism in a post-colonial era; it can mend the divisions between more conservative and more liberal approaches to the task of theology; it is thoroughly ecumenical and lastly, takes pneumatology with utmost seriousness. He concludes by saying '…it begins by recognizing that we serve a missionary God – the God who was, is and will also be the sending and the sent God and we serve this God as a missionary church sent by the Father to witness in faithful obedience to the incarnate Son in the power and love of the Holy Spirit.'[100]

I think the theological depth of Congdon's work would be an asset to the Missional Church conversation.

[99] Hamill, email, 15.11.12

[100] Congdon, unpublished paper Why I think Missional Theology is the future for theology or why I think theology must become missional or perish, p15

Trinitarian Grounding of Mission

While much is written theologically on this area, I want to explore – albeit very briefly - the Biblical statements regarding the sending activity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and then to consider some implications for the sending of the church.

Sending by the Father

Noting orthodox theology which sees the Father as the universal Lord, Creator, Judge and lover of humanity, whose character of holiness demands justice and righteousness, we see that the Father's love and compassion moves him to provide a way of redemption and reconciliation.

The Father's sending activity is grounded in his character. He sends various messengers and events to bridge the gap; to reveal himself, to communicate his will and to accomplish his purpose. These acts are usually linked to purposes of grace and the restoration of his relationship with his people. It is also clear he sends in order to judge and to demonstrate his holiness. In the Old Testament, we read of God sending prophets, and that God speaks through them, although not always do the people listen (Jer 7:25-6; 25:4;29:19; 3515; 44:4-5). We read in 2 Chronicles 'The Lord, the God of their Fathers sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling places.' (2 Chron 36:15) and this idea is repeated in other places – see Judges 6:8; 1 Sam 15:1-2; 2 Sam 12:1; 2 Kings 2:2-6; 2 Chron 25:15; Is 48:16; Jer 19:14; Hag 1:12; Zac 6:15; Mal 4:5. It is through the prophets that God sends his Word, which is to accomplish His sovereign purposes.

God sends Joseph to Egypt (Gen 45:5-8) to save his family; sends Moses to deliver the people (Ex 3:12-15; 7:16; Num 16:28) : sends judges to deliver and rule Israel (Jud 6:14) and sends Saul on a mission of destruction (1 Sam 15:18-20).

God also sends angels to achieve his purposes – including guidance, protection, revelation and destruction (Gen 19:13; 1 Chron 21:15; 2 Chro 32:21; Dan 6:22; Luke 1:19, 26; Acts 12:11; Rev 22:6)

God also sends thunder, hail and fire (Ex 9:23; 1 Sam 12:18) snakes (Num 21:6) and disease (Isa 10:16).

In all these, God the Father is always purposeful. Even the very idea of sending demonstrates that God takes the initiative. From the Fall onwards, although humankind seeks to hide, escape and deny God, God the Father exercises grace and mercy. He sends John the Baptist to prepare for the coming of his Son (Mat 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27) – with which the sending activity of God the Father reaches a climax.

Sending of the Son

There are numerous statements in the New Testament describing the sending of the Son into the world. If we look at the Synoptic Gospels, we note only a few explicit statements about Jesus being sent, but what we do see is a reflection of the broad themes in Jesus' ministry. Jesus was sent to preach the kingdom (Luke 4:43) and as such to call for repentance and proclaim that the kingdom is near (Mat 4:17). This preaching was at times accompanied by miracles and deliverance from demons – which

showed the healing and liberating power of God's presence (Mat 4:23; 9:35; 12:28). Jesus was sent to Israel (Mat 15:24). Although it was Gentiles who sought him, Jesus' ministry was primarily to Israel. When we look at statements in which Jesus says 'I came…' a range of purposes emerge.

Jesus came to fulfill the law (Mat 5:17) –showing that Jesus' own understanding was in line with salvation history. Jesus came to create division (Luke 12:49; Mat 10:34-35). Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 5:32; 9:56 and Luke 15). Jesus came to live his life as a ransom (Mat 20:28; Mark 10:45).

One of the most crucial passages to understand Jesus' mission is Luke 4. This has been variously interpreted from a largely spiritual to a more literal and political understanding. However we understand Luke 4, Jesus' concern for the poor, the outcast and the marginalized are emphasized by Luke. Equally, Jesus' miracles, healings and casting out of demons were powerful signs that the kingdom had come and the power of sin and evil were defeated in the person of Jesus.

John's gospel frequently speaks of Jesus being sent by the Father. Andreas Kostenberger and Peter O'Brien note 'that the fourth Gospel's primary focus is the mission of Jesus; he is the one who comes into the world, accomplishes his work and returns to the Father; he is the one who descended from heaven and ascends again; he is the Sent One, who, in complete dependence and perfect obedience to his sender, fulfils the purpose for which the Father sent him.'[101]

John's Gospel is built from the very beginning around the understanding that Jesus is the eternal Logos, the Word became flesh who was sent into the world to demonstrate God's presence, to do the will of the Father and to save the world (John 1:1-18). Jesus speaks about being sent by the Father (John 5:23; 6:29; 7:18; 8:16; 10:36; 11:42; 12:45; 17:18; 20:21a). Jesus existed before the world began and will return to the Father once his work on earth is complete (7:33; 16:28).

John shows Jesus was sent to do the will and work of the Father (John 6:38; 4:34; 5:30; 8:29; 9:4); that Jesus came to teach the truth (18:37b); that Jesus came to give fullness of life (10:10) and, above all, that it was the will of the Father that Jesus complete the work of salvation (3:16-17; 6:39; 12:47).

Kostenberger summarizes four key areas as basic to sending in John's Gospel: bringing glory and honour to the sender; doing the sender's will, working his works and speaking his words; witnessing to the sender and representing him accurately; knowing the sender intimately, living in close relationship with the sender and following his example.[102] What seems to be missing is accomplishing the work of redemption so that salvation and eternal life will be available to all who believe.

Paul understands the sending of the Son primarily in terms of the purpose of redemption (Acts 13:26; 28:28; Romans 8:3-4; Gal 4:4-6). Redemption leads to a new relationship with God, namely being adopted as sons and daughters of God –no longer mere subjects. What we see is that the Trinity is active in redemption and sending. The Father sends the Son for redemption; then the Spirit to empower the believer and convict the world.

[101] Kostenberger and O'Brien, Salvation to the Ends of the Earth, p203
[102] Kostenberger, The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel, p191

Sending the Spirit

The sending of the Spirit continues the one-time sending of the Son. In John's gospel, the sending of the Spirit is related to the ministry of the disciples in the world, and this begins with the teaching ministry of the Spirit (John 14:26).

The ministry of the Spirit continues with the Spirit bearing witness to Jesus through the disciples. (John 15:26-27). When the Spirit is sent, he will also have a ministry in the world, convicting the world in relation to sin, righteousness and judgment, which are all related to the person of Jesus Christ (John 16:7-11).

In John, there are clear parallels between the sending of the Spirit and the sending of Jesus, in particular to bear witness to the truth. Luke, by comparison, links the sending of the Spirit to the reception of the Spirit by the first disciples: they are not to leave Jerusalem until they receive the Spirit (Luke 24:49). When they have received the Spirit, they will be empowered to be witnesses of Jesus to the ends of the world. (Acts 1:8)

As the Spirit is sent, the gospel is spread with both power and conviction. In the book of Acts, each time believers are filled with the Spirit, some form of proclamation occurs. Paul also makes reference to the fact that he preached the gospel, not in word only, but in the power and conviction of the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:19; 1 Cor 2:4; 1 Thess 1:5).

The sending of the Church

The purpose of Jesus calling the disciples is to send them. We read in Matt 10:1-42; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6 of Jesus sending the twelve and, in Luke 10:1-20, sending seventy. When we review what we find in the sending of the twelve, we note that the ministry of the disciples imitates the ministry of Jesus. The disciples are given authority to heal; cast out demons and even raise the dead; to go to Israel; preaching the kingdom is at hand; serve in dependence on the Father's provision; they will face opposition and the Spirit will speak through them.

This mission seems to be preparation for greater ministry that will follow Pentecost. However, both the sending of the twelve and the seventy is a limited sending – a one-time sending. They return and resume following Jesus. They do not undertake mission of their own initiative. It is only post-resurrection, and once they have received the Holy Spirit, that the sending takes on a new dimension.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus came Pentecost and the church. The resurrected Jesus sends the disciples into the world. The scope of the sending is enlarged as they are sent as Christ's witnesses – not only to Israel but to the ends of the world. The duration of their sending is extended until the end of the age (Mat 28:20). The message of the sending is extended to include forgiveness of sin, and the power for their sending is granted as they receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

The sending of the church is linked to the sending activity of the Trinity. It is not by human authority but rather through the authority of the Triune God who, as Father sends the Son, as Son redeems and as Spirit empowers. The Triune God is at work in the Father adopting believers as children through the

redeeming work of the Son and by sending his Spirit into their hearts (Gal 4:4-6). The Father opens doors for the gospel (1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 2:12) so the mystery of the Son can be spoken (Col 4:3) and the Spirit can confirm the message and convince the hearers (Rom 15:19; 1 Cor 2:4). Without the sending, the universal invitation of salvation to all cannot be undertaken.

The sending of the church is most evident in Jesus' words in John 20:21. Being sent by Jesus makes one Jesus' representative, which in turn makes one directly a representative of the Father (John 13:20). In Kostenberger's four point summary of Jesus' sending in John's Gospel, he says, 'All these aspects of what one sent is required to be and do, are applicable to the disciples as they are sent by Jesus.'[103] Kostenberger and O'Brien summarize, 'As Jesus did his Father's will, they will have to do Jesus' will. As Jesus did his Father's works, they will have to do Jesus' works. As Jesus spoke the words of his Father, they have to speak Jesus' words. Their relationship to their sender, Jesus, is to reflect Jesus' relationship with his sender.'[104]

Without the sending activity of the Trinity, there is no mission, for there is no gospel. The core of the gospel is that the Father so loved the world that he sent his only Son into the world. The same Spirit of God who moved over the surface of the waters at creation now moves the church into the world to reach all peoples and nations as she witnesses to Jesus Christ.

Newbigin writes, 'Thus even the most elementary form of preaching of the Gospel must presuppose an understanding of the triune nature of God. It is not, as we have sometimes seemed to say, a kind of intellectual cap-stone which can be put on top of the arch at the very end; it is, on the contrary, what Athanasius called it, the arch, the presupposition without which the preaching of the Gospel in a pagan world cannot begin.'[105]

There are therefore a number of practical implications from this biblical justification of mission. First, as Videdom writes, 'Mission is the work that belongs to God. This is the first implication of *missio Dei*.'[106] We need to be clear: this is not some sort of excuse for the church not committing herself to God's mission. It does, however, help the church see that she is part of something bigger than herself. 'We are not engaged in an enterprise of our own choosing or devising. We are invited to participate in an activity of God which is the central meaning of creation itself. We are invited to become, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, participants in the Son's loving obedience to the Father.'[107]

As the mission of the church flows directly from God, the church should therefore proclaim the gospel both boldly and with humility to all people, in all places.

There is a very helpful book by Francis DuBose, God who Sends, that should be read by those wrestling with the need to cultivate a missional theology. Rather than engage deeply with the sending language, some introductory words of encouragement to read DuBose's book should suffice!

[103] Kostenberger, The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel, p91
[104] Kostenberger and O'Brien, Salvation to the Ends of the Earth, p222
[105] Newbigin, The Relevance of Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission, p36
[106] Vicedom, Mission of God, p5
[107] Newbigin, The Relevance of Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission p83

Is the concept of mission something that has been imposed upon Scripture as a result of our own background and history, or does the Bible speak consistently regarding the missionary nature of God and his mission? DuBose examines the sending language found throughout Scripture and suggests that it is more than some simple descriptive word – rather, it reveals the missionary nature of the Triune God, as well as the very essence of the church. The redemptive activity of God, his relationship to the world, and his dealing with mankind is described in Scripture by the word sending. In fact the word sending is the 'sum and substance of God's creativity and activity.'[108] The entirety of redemptive history exhibits itself as a history of God sending others to participate in the *missio Dei*. Darrell Guder sums it up: 'Mission is the result of God's initiative, rooted in God's purposes to restore and heal creation. 'Mission' means 'sending,' and it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God's action in human history. God's mission began with the call of Israel to receive God's blessings in order to be a blessing to the nations. God's mission unfolded in the history of God's people across the centuries recorded in Scripture, and it reached its revelatory climax in the incarnation of God's work of salvation in Jesus ministering, crucified, and resurrected. God's mission continued then in the sending of the Spirit to call forth and empower the church as the witness to God's good news in Jesus Christ.' [109]

The volume of the sending theme evident throughout Scripture ought to prompt the church to examine more closely the theological implications of such language. It undoubtedly illustrates the sending, missionary nature of the Triune God. The mission is ultimately the mission of God the Father, who has sent the Son, who has sent the Spirit, who has sent the disciples – this must give the Church's mission both its power and its authority. In A Sense of Mission, A.C. Winn writes: 'If the sense of having been sent defines who Jesus is, from henceforth it must define what the church is.'[110]

We are sent as Jesus was sent. We are not left to our own devices to determine the nature of mission. In essence, mission is continuing the ministry of Jesus. The power of mission is the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. While the church now has many more resources than did the first Christians, it is absurd to think that the kingdom can be advanced, apart from God's enabling power.

Our involvement in mission is participation in the purposes of God. To quote Newbigin again, 'The truth that the church is itself something sent into the world, the continuation of Christ's mission from the Father, something which is not so much an institution as an expedition sent to the ends of the earth in Christ's name, has been grasped with new vividness.'[111] I wonder if we have grasped this? By being God's vehicles of mission, our lives take on a deep significance with history. Ultimate victory is assured for the purposes of God, as Christ has overcome the world (John 16:33). The forces of evil cannot stop it. The assurance of this truth, the wonder of the privilege of participation, and the sweetness of his fellowship in service should propel us, as his people, to gladly commit ourselves anew and with total abandon to God's mission.

In all this reading, two keys questions continue to arise:

[108] Vicedom, The Mission of God, p9
[109] Guder, The Missional Church
[110] Winn, A Sense of Mission,
[111] Op Cite, p12

Does the *missio Dei* remain bound to the *donum Dei* (gift of God) in Jesus Christ and the need for grace, forgiveness and reconciliation with God?

Or

Is the *missio Dei* more to be understood in terms of God's general concern for the whole creation, *mission Dei mundo* (mission of God in the world)?

Mission-Shaped Church

The Fresh Expressions movement – for it is that – has come to a degree of prominence within the Church of England and in other denominations, with the publication of the ground-breaking report, Mission Shaped Church in 2004. The report begins with analysis of the cultural context of the Church of England's mission. It moves to outline the history of church planting and from there to a description and analysis of a number of Fresh Expressions of Church. This is followed by a theological framework for the Church of England in mission. It proposes a new and complementary form of evangelism that would work alongside the parish. The introduction states, 'It is clear to us that the parochial system remains an essential and central part of the national Church's strategy to deliver incarnational mission. But the existing parochial system alone is no longer able fully to deliver its underlying purpose. We need to recognize that a variety of integrated missionary approaches is required. A mixed economy of parish churches and network churches will be necessary, in active partnership across a wider area, perhaps a deanery. In addition, our diverse consumer culture will never be reached by one standard form of church…'[112]

The subtitle of the report is 'church planting and Fresh Expressions of church in a changing context.' While church planting within the Church of England has a history – indeed the report that was a forerunner to this was called 'Breaking New Ground: church planting in the Church of England' – fresh expression is something new. The report sees Fresh Expressions of church as manifestations of church planting, but also evidence of the attempts of many parishes to make a transition into a more missionary form of church.

The report states a Fresh Expression of church is '…a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church. It will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples. It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.' Using more traditional language, it is a church plant or a new congregation; it is not a new way to reach people and add them to an existing congregation.

One of the central themes of the report is the recognition of the changing nature of the missionary context and how this requires a new enculturation of the gospel within society. The theology and practice of enculturation or contextualization is not always well understood in terms of mission in the West. It states, 'Enculturation is central to this report because it provides a principled basis for the costly crossing of cultural barriers and the planting of the church into a changed social context. Church has to be planted, not cloned. At the same time, any principle based on Christ's incarnation is inherently counter-cultural, in that it aims at faithful Christian discipleship within the new context, rather than cultural conformity.'[113]

The report lists five values for missionary churches and adds one additional element – and takes for granted this as being true for any church, congregation or initiative within the Church of England; to

[112] Mission-Shaped Church, pxi
[113] Op Cite, pxii

proclaim afresh the faith of the Scriptures and the creeds. This is not a value of the church says the report, but the foundation upon which the church is built. The five values listed are as follows:

- A missionary church is focused on the Trinity. Worship lies at the heart of the missionary church and to love and know God as Father, Son and Spirit is its chief inspiration and primary purpose. It worships and serves a missionary God and understands itself to share in the divine mission.
- A missionary church is incarnational.
- A missionary church is transformational. A missionary church exists for the transformation of the community that it serves, through the power of the gospel and the Holy Spirit.
- A missionary church makes disciples. A missionary church is active in calling people to faith in Jesus Christ and is equally committed to the development of a consistent Christian lifestyle appropriate to, but not withdrawn from, the culture or cultures in which it operates.
- A missionary church is relational…it is characterized by welcome and hospitality.[114]

The report understands that any Fresh Expressions of church that emerge within the Church of England or come under its umbrella, have an adequate ecclesiology. While not attempting to provide a full theological underpinning, it does want to suggest theological principles that should influence the Church of England. It is worth taking note of this work, as it may provide reference points for Fresh Expressions.

It starts with Salvation History and quotes from another paper, Eucharistic Presidency (1997) when is says, 'Any theology of the church must ultimately be rooted in the being and acts of God; the church is first and foremost the people of God, brought into being by God, bound to God, for the glory of God.'[115] It goes on to speak of God as Trinity and that the mission of God itself expresses God's relational nature. The mission of God as creator, through Christ, in the Spirit, is to bring into being, sustain and perfect the whole creation. 'The Church is both the fruit of God's mission – those whom he has redeemed and the agent of his mission – the community through whom he acts for the world's redemption…it is therefore of the essence (the DNA) of the church to be a missionary community. Apart from worship, everything else is secondary to this. This sets the standard by which the Church tests all its activity.[116]

Relating to church planting, it quotes Tim Dearborn, 'It is not the Church of God that has a mission in the world but the God of Mission who has a church in the world.'[117] This means that church planting is not church-centred; rather, it is to be an expression of the mission of God. Mission comes from the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit. The Son Himself, through incarnation, atonement, resurrection and ascension, is the sole foundation of the Church. We are stewards of a gospel that tells what he has done.[118]

The Son of God has expressed this mission in terms of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is divine activity where the church is a human community. Kingdom agenda and values are often more radical

[114] Mission-shaped church, p81-82
[115] Op Cite, p 84
[116] Op Cite, p85
[117] Ibid
[118] Op Cite, p86

than the church really allows. In bringing the Kingdom, God is on the move and the church is always catching up; we join God's mission and that means we should not invite God to join ours.

It is the work of the Spirit to empower the Church to preach and embody that gospel in ways appropriate to each cultural context. The mutual ministries of the Son of God and the Spirit of God are essential to a Christian understanding of the relationship between gospel and culture.

The diversity of creation, through Christ, with its diversity of human cultures and communities, gives a further indication of the appropriateness of diversity in expressions of church. This dialogue between the eternal Word and human culture has been going on since the creation of the world. 'Hence conversion ought not to involve the transfer of individuals from their native culture to the culture of the Church, so much as the conversion of their culture enriching the cultural life of the church.'[119]

The incarnation of God in Christ is unique. God in Christ entered the world, taking on a specific cultural identity. The revelation of God for all cultures was embodied in one particular culture. The incarnation of divine love in a world of sin leads to the cross. The incarnation should never be separated from the cross.

'A truly incarnational Church is one that imitates, through the Spirit, both Christ's loving identification with his culture and his costly counter-cultural stance within it. His announcement of, and promise of, God's kingdom cannot be separated from his call to repentance, as the price of entry. Following his example, his church is called to loving identification with those to whom it is sent, and to exemplify the way of life to which those who repent turn. Otherwise its call to repentance is reduced to detached moralizing.'[120]

The report goes to examine the incarnation and cross as a missionary exchange. Here, incarnation and cross combine to provide a model for the practice of mission and the planting of the Church. It notes that the concept of incarnation in Western Anglicanism is mainly identified with only one part of the incarnation. It identifies with the concept of identifying with others, being accessible and accepting them, but is weak in relation to the radical cost to the Son. The Son's self-emptying, from one perspective, involves a great and costly change. In Philippians, Paul also insists that it is the revelation of the true nature of the living God. That being so, it must also be the nature of his church. The church is most true to itself when it gives itself up, in current cultural form, to be re-formed among those who do not know God's Son. In each new context, the Church must die to live.[121]

In the New Testament, the resurrection is both a unique act of God in history, providing the basis for and of Christian hope, and a power released into the world. Due to this, our work for Christ is not in vain but is potentially of eternal value. The first part of the harvest of the last day, the promised new heaven and new earth, is in the world now. Churches can be pointers to God's promised future. They are to be sources of hope, imperfect local pilot plants of God's future world.

[119] Mission-shaped Church, p87
[120] Op Cite, p88
[121] Op Cite, p89

In terms of the Spirit, the report notes that, while the New Testament centred on Christ and this may be regarded as a gift from the past, the work of Spirit points to the creative and reconciling work as God's gift to us from the future that is already prepared for us. The Spirit brings into being, in and through the Church, anticipations of things that Scripture promises for the Last Day. It is a future in which justice comes to the poor, peace to the nations and all visions of race, culture and national identity disappear, as we discover we are all family together and we worship our God forever.

The Church takes its missionary form through receiving the gifts of the past and future. At a time of substantial change, the Church of England needs to learn from the Spirit to be more an anticipation of God's future than a society for the preservation of the past. Perhaps our greatest need is a baptism of imagination about the forms of the church.[122]

It notes, in the Church of England, a lack of engagement with the work and developments in terms of gospel and culture. This has been due to its assumptions about Christendom, which has blinded imaginations about the form of the church. Hence, little relevance has been seen in enculturation (as the Roman Catholics have phrased it) or contextualization (as evangelicals phrase it) to the local church. Yet, any theology concerning the nature and shape of the church in a new missionary context must address the appropriate place of culture in shaping the church. It speaks of a three-way conversation that needs to take place. Those partners are: the historic gospel, revealed in Scripture and embodied in the catholic creeds; the Church, which is engaging in mission, with its own particular culture and history: and the culture within which the gospel is being shared.[123] The report notes that attempts at enculturation struggle with the danger of syncretism.

Building on this, there is an underlying assumption – that is, that the church is God's community with a divine mandate to reproduce. The report states that churches are created by God to grow.[124] Seeing the church as the reproducing community helps it to realize that its task in each generation is necessarily incomplete. The Church is also called to be a foretaste of the coming Kingdom. It is more an imperfect anticipation of God's future world than a preservation of earlier cultural forms.[125]

The report goes back to the four classic marks of the Church, enshrined in the Nicene Creed as 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic.' It lists various points under each of those headings and notes that study of each must not be so complex that the importance of them is diminished. As a way forward, it presents the four marks as being like four dimensions of a journey, none of which exists without reference to the others. It also makes the point that, while the Church of England stands within this mainstream of historic Christianity, there are also Anglican distinctives and lists these under headings of The Declaration of Assent; The Lambeth Quadrilateral; The Dominical Sacraments; Episcopacy; A National Church and A Shared family.

[122] Mission-shaped church, p90
[123] Op Cite, p91
[124] Op Cite, p93
[125] Ibid

The report ends with the words: 'Christian theology reflects upon experience in the light of God's revelation in Christ. At any significant time of cultural change, both the new context and the resulting Christian mission raise new questions. Some old methodologies fail, many familiar patterns change. But new discoveries are made and new patterns of ministry and mission begin to emerge. There is continuity and discontinuity. The working group believes that we are at such a time in the mission of the Church of England.'[126]

From this report, many things have developed. A Fresh Expressions movement that has seen, within the Church of England, the development of Pioneer Ministers – together with new patterns for selecting and training these folk; substantial numbers of publications, conferences, workshops, and consultations; resources have been poured in with some regional staff appointed in various dioceses. Also, financial resources have been set aside to cultivate Fresh Expressions.

The Fresh Expressions website, www.freshexpressions.org.uk is great place to read articles and blogs about where Fresh Expressions is currently at. Even a simple glance will show developments and moves since the Mission-Shaped Church paper was produced. An example is the area of values or principles that lie behind Fresh Expressions. From the report that listed four, the website now states, and I quote:[127]

If (as part of a group or with a friend) you are thinking about starting a fresh expression, you might discuss the list of principles and select three:

- one that most reflects your passion and gives you a buzz;
- one that would be most difficult for you to practice;
- one that is important but most easily forgotten.

Keeping the three principles in mind would help you to build your fresh expression on scriptural foundations. Might the result be more long lasting? Principles that can help inspire Fresh Expressions

God is revealed as community-in-mission

The Trinity has a community dimension. Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate so closely to each other that they are also (in ways we don't fully understand) one person. But they are not inward-looking. Their love and energy flows outward - creating the universe, keeping it going and saving the world from sin. The Trinity has the feel of community-in-mission. So should Fresh Expressions. They are Christian communities with love and energy to serve others.

God believes in creative experimentation

God has built experimentation into the fabric of creation. Civilization is the history of experiments that worked. If experimentation is a vital part of being human, should it not be part of church as well? Many

[126] Mission-shaped church, p102
[127] Fresh Expressions website, accessed 1 January 2013

Fresh Expressions start as experiments, and we pray that they will continue to be filled with the Spirit of creativity.

God works through communities

God works through communities – Israel in the Old Testament, the community of disciples round Jesus and home-based churches in the New Testament. Baptism is a sign of entry into God's community. Building community is an essential part of Fresh Expressions.

God immerses himself in human culture

To save the world, God immersed himself in human culture. He became a human being in Jesus, whose daily life was shaped by the culture in which he lived and served. The sacraments remind us that God remains involved in everyday life - in water, and in bread and wine. Fresh Expressions seek to be part of, and to fit into the day-to-day lives of the people they are called to serve.

God seeks to transform society

Jesus did more than just live in a culture and serve people. He called people to change how they lived. He proclaimed the kingdom of God – the reign of God that transforms individuals and society. Fresh Expressions are in the business of personal and social transformation.

God wants people to become disciples of Jesus

During his lifetime, Jesus created a community of disciples and told them to make other disciples. This has always been a central task of the church, and it is fundamental to Fresh Expressions. Fresh Expressions seek to help people become mature followers of Christ. They need to avoid being 'discipleship lite'.

God has put dying to live at the centre of his kingdom

Jesus died so that human beings and creation could have new life. Dying to live, celebrated in Holy Communion, is part of the Fresh Expressions journey. Christians may have to allow their preconceptions of what church should be like to die, so that new forms of church can come alive.

God grows church through reproduction

In carrying out the Great Commission, the church has always spread by reproducing itself – not reproducing clones, but Christian communities that have distinct identities while keeping something of a family likeness. Fresh Expressions are the church reproducing yet again. But, just as Jesus had to leave the church before it reproduced, those who pioneer a fresh expression might also have to move on so that reproduction can more easily take place.

God affirms cultural diversity

When the Spirit came at Pentecost, the ethnic groups gathered in Jerusalem did not start speaking the same language; the disciples were empowered to speak in different languages. This was a Godly

affirmation of cultural diversity. Fresh Expressions respect cultural variations when they take different forms to fit different contexts.

God values unity across diversity

When Christ returns, all ethnic, class, gender, age and other barriers will be destroyed. People will live in unity. Inherited and fresh forms of church make something of that unity real today when they affirm, support and have fellowship with one other - the 'mixed economy'. Fresh Expressions are called to exist in the fragments of society so that they can connect those fragments up.

Do we need such a long list? There are three reasons for a longer list: It underlines the breadth of biblical support for Fresh Expressions; it helps a wider range of Christians to connect with Fresh Expressions; it provides a 'menu' from which Christians can select principles that most speak to them.

This is based on two important biblical principles, both found in 1 Corinthians. First they assume that when the gospel is preached in a new community, God grows a church, not just wins some individual Christians. Paul says that he planted the gospel seed, others watered it, but God gave the growth and what he grew was the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 3:6-9). He also says that, when the new believers were baptised, they were all baptised 'into one body' (12:13) The second principle is that, just as God's Son entered our world to win us, so Christian missionaries need to enter the cultures they are trying to reach (9:19-23), so that new believers only have to face the stumbling block of the cross (1:18-25), and not the stumbling block of church culture as well! They can then become agents for change within their culture rather than be drawn out of it into a church culture, which may be alien to them.

Another point worth noting at the outset has been the support that the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, has offered to this movement. It could be argued that he had a history as a church-planting bishop. Back in 1993, he both encouraged and blessed the planting and building of 'Living Proof' – a community project that was about a new way of being church – something that George Lings wrote about in his first edition of Encounters on the Edge booklets.[128] He supported the Lambeth Trustees and Lambeth Partners in establishing Fresh Expressions. His address to the General Synod in 2003 is often quoted: 'Mission, it has been said, is finding out what God is doing and joining in. And at present there is actually an extraordinary amount going on in terms of the creation of new styles of church life. We can call it church planting, 'new ways of being church' or various other things; but the point is that more and more patterns of worship and shared life are appearing on the edge of our mainstream life that cry out for our support, understanding and nurture if they are not to get isolated and unaccountable…All of these are church in the sense that they are what happens when the invitation of Jesus is received and people recognise it in each other. Can we live with this and make it work?'[129]

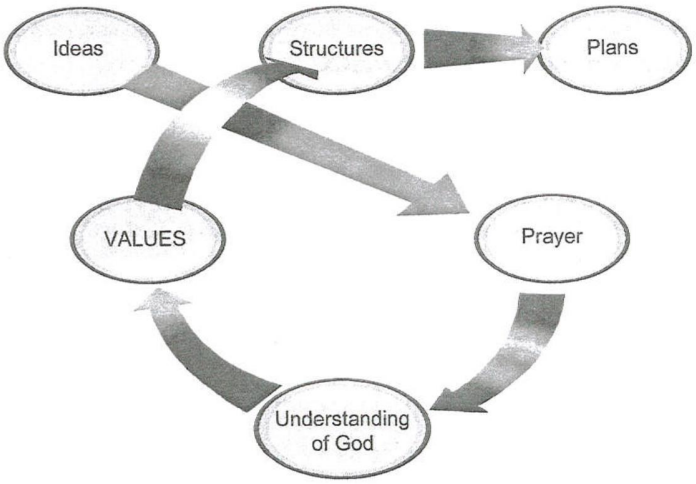
Williams used the term 'mixed economy' of old and new in the Anglican family. (It was a term he borrowed from the world of economics – where mixed economy refers to an economic system in which

[128] Living Proof, Encounters on the Edge 1 (Church Army Sheffield Centre) 1999
[129] Rowan Williams, Presidential Address to the General Synod, July 2003 (see www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/sermons_speeches)

both State and Private sectors direct the economy.) Williams saw how the term could be applied to both the parochial system and new forms of church. He said that 'in Wales we used to talk about the mixed economy church – that is one which is learning how to cope with diverse forms and rhythms or worshipping life…tearing up the rule book and trying to replace the parochial system is a recipe for disaster…in all kinds of places it is working remarkably. It is just that we are increasingly aware of contexts where it is simply isn't capable of making an impact, where something has to grow out of or alongside it, not as a rival but as an attempt to answer questions that the parish system was never meant to answer.' [130]

In the same year as Mission-shaped Church was published, Groove Booklets produced Mission-shaped Church: missionary values, church planting and Fresh Expressions of Church by Paul Bayes. Bayes came into his role as National Mission and Evangelism Adviser for the Archbishops' Council, two weeks before the report was published. Bayes' work is not a précis of Mission-shaped Church: instead, he wants to encourage a way of reading and implementing Mission-shaped Church. It is a way he calls 'values-based and not bandwagon-driven'.

Bayes notes that church leaders care deeply about mission yet, at times, that can not only motivate people, but also make them worry. They become anxious and 'this makes for anxiety; anxiety gives birth to haste. What will solve our problems now?'[131] Most careful teaching about promoting change will often be prefixed that prayer and values come long before you change a single structure. He states that mixed economy thinking assumes that all church should be shaped for mission – yet what it looks like is beside the point. The question is, is that the shape for mission, in that context? He holds that the answer to that question is to be found in the church's foundational values. Values are the vital building block preventing anxious haste from collapsing our hopes. He demonstrates this with a diagram.



[130] Rowan Williams, Presidential Address to the General Synod, July 2003 (see www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/sermons_speeches)
[131] Bayes, Mission-shaped Church, p4

For Bayes then, prayer and theology come first. He argues that, for mission-shaped church, the primary missionary value that we are to look to is God as God is, in the life of the Trinity. This incarnational value leads to a principle and a method –what he calls double listening: listening to God and listening to the cultural context. 'Double listening involves an asceticism, a discipline of the heart.'[132]

Referring to the report on church planting, "Breaking New Ground", Bishop Graham Cray states that the major reason why one in ten of Church of England church plants failed was that they were not plants but clones; they bore insufficient resemblance to the receiving community and they never took root.[133]

Bayes notes some discussion around the word 'parochial' – the root word for parish. Noting the general dour understanding, he pleads for an understanding of parish that speaks of God's love for the world. It is to this sense of the word "parish", both visible and invisible, that mission-shaped church points, through its transformational value. He further suggests a third way of understanding parish and parochial – going back to biblical roots. Following Ralph Neighbour, he speaks about *oikos* – social household, networked and meaningful relationships, yet notes that the scriptures go further and speak about *paroika* – a strange land (Acts 13:17) and *paroikos* – a resident alien (Eph 2:19 and Acts 7:29). Enculturation is the necessary call of the God of mission to his church – but the peculiarities of a peculiar people of God remain.[134]

Bayes goes on to speak about the relational church. He quotes from Josephine Bax's report, The Good Wine – commissioned to look at spiritual renewal across the Church of England in the mid 1980's, '…it was not just friendliness but the fruit of a deep commitment to Christ and each other…the sense of the presence of God…(that) is very attractive to many incipient Christians. They come looking to God to meet their needs and to fulfil their humanity. They stay to worship when they catch a glimpse of God at work in the body of Christ.'[135] The relational value will also impact leadership. Bayes notes the over-emphasis on the pastor/teacher gifting in those selected and trained for ministry. He looks to Ephesians 4 to balance out this gifting and also notes entrepreneurship and the importance of the heart. Yet he states giving skills and training is not what mission-shaped church is about – missionary values form missionary leaders. He also devotes space to speak about the role of Bishops within this framework.

Bayes concludes by asking, what should we do? How do we move from the page of mission-shaped church to the stage? He notes various resources that are available, but emphasises the importance of beginning with values, not structures. 'And only local church leaders and members can lay that foundation, where the five missionary values of a mission-shaped church become the air a church breathes. This will happen in one way only – as a result of cheerful, relentless, constant, focused, long-term repetition of these values by the church's leadership, at every opportunity, convenient and inconvenient, until people get them.'[136]

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[132] Bayes, Mission-shaped Church, p16
[133] Graham Cray, presenting Mission-shaped church to General Synod, Feb 2004, quoted in Bayes, Mission-shaped Church, p16
[134] Bayes, Mission-shaped church, p19
[135] Bayes, quoting Bax's The Good Wine, p13-14
[136] Bayes, Mission-shaped church, p25

Having read the theology and theory, I then spent some time looking at the outworkings. I am grateful for the suggestions made by Dave Male, from Ridley Hall. Dave is the director of Pioneer Ministry Training there.

Thirst Café is a Fresh Expression operating on Fridays from St Philip's Anglican school in Cambridge. (For a good overview, go to: http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/stories/thirst) It operates in a way one might associate as a cross between a playgroup and small group. There are questions about this, and other Fresh Expressions, as to whether it is a destination or a door way. Here, there are links to the local parish church and opportunities to explore faith beyond this setting. Key leadership is essential and without that, one wonders what might happen – yet those same questions remain with more traditional forms of church and ministry. While the official start date of Thirst is 2007, it grew out of relationships of talking with mums, who were dropping children off and picking them up from school.

James Blamford-Baker is an Anglican Vicar of St Andrew's, Histon, just out of Cambridge. They began Essence three years ago, in an attempt to offer mothers a space to explore their spirituality alongside the Christian narrative. As quite a large village church – about 250 attending on a Sunday - they had contacts through their children's work but they had remained just that, contacts without relationship. Having looked at a number of options, they decided to invent something of their own that would connect with people. The driving issues they identified in putting Essence together were the attitude of consumerism, the importance of story and the desire for spirituality. Consumerism meant whatever they did, it had to be good: quality invitations, great hospitality and a fully staffed crèche. Story meant that they would have to give space to listen to people's stories as well as finding appropriate ways of speaking about the Christian story: a café-style layout with interactive time for input, questions and discussion has worked well. Spirituality meant creating space for God to speak: from the start, James said they have used an upper room for 10 minutes of silent prayer, often stimulated by a picture, icon or some creative display.

In telling the story, James said they were very clear that Essence was building a congregation for the un-churched and de-churched - as well as a few churched. This new development was not to get people to come on Sunday; Essence was their 'church'. The intent is missional; seeking to engage with the questions that people bring. James mentioned that issues like communion and baptism have arisen and, at this point, they don't have answers as they explore what that means in this new setting. The 'congregation' is continuing to change as people cycle in and out, as it is very much aimed at an age and stage of life. Again, this raises questions of destination or doorway and Essence is a destination. What happens to the people and the questions post-Essence is a work in progress. What is clearly an ongoing matter is leadership, and James admitted there is a strong reliance by folk on him.

Back in 2010, Matt Stone had his MA Thesis on Fresh Expressions published as part of the Grove Booklet series. Subtitled "safety nets or fishing nets?", he researched six Fresh Expressions and writes about his discoveries. Matt was, at the time, training for ministry within the United Reformed Church. He is currently in full-time ministry in a parish just out of Norwich. I emailed him to discuss his research and met with him to talk about this, together with his reflections now that he is parish ministry. I am grateful for his time and insights.

Matt spoke about how his research showed that, while Fresh Expressions may help disenchanted churchgoers and the de-churched, the un-churched were for the most not present. In some cases, Fresh Expressions used a format that is service-based. In others, simply renaming a children's programme or other event or restyling or repackaging something was not always something that was fresh! Matt wondered if part of the domestication of Fresh Expressions sees a shift from a mission-shaped approach to a church, to a mission-flavoured approach. There is a risk that disenchanted churchgoers start Fresh Expressions to meet their needs, rather than the needs of those outside the church. Matt noted that the Fresh Expressions that were part of his research showed a very high turnover of people. This could reflect that people have felt these places are open and have come and taken part without any obligation; or, does it reflect an inability to connect and create community or is it just another example of the contemporary consumer culture we are seeking to reach?

Matt concluded that many Fresh Expressions were primarily safety nets, but with fishing nets around the edges. Yet he noted it was too early to evaluate this fully. In terms of learning, Fresh Expressions seem to grow primarily by networking and those in leadership need to have high skills in this area. Second, networks need to be embedded in the community of faith by welcome and friendship – hence an intentionality around creating community. And third, those in leadership need to be responsive and flexible, seeing discipleship as a journey which is never static.

From our conversation, some things which are also worthy of note are: it is clear that issues of leadership are critical; sustainability has seen the frequency of Fresh Expressions being determined by the people required to lead; burnout of leaders is real; financing - both short and long term - is not easy to work through; discipleship seems to be neglected; sacraments and church structure and discipline are provocative matters; intentionality of vision versus pragmatic practice. The connection between the institutional church and Fresh Expressions is a sensitive issue. While the model of mixed economy is a clear desire, completion, silo mentality and competition for resources as real issues.

Matt also commented that churches that want to engage in a programme approach – be that around children or youth ministry, Alpha etc – or Fresh Expressions – can quickly discover a fundamental gulf between these and what might be called the worshipping community; there is often no path between them. There is rarely room for journeys of faith to develop and grow and rarely an easy transition from one to the worshipping community of Jesus followers.

In seeking to gain other stories, I was helped by the Sheffield Centre, which was set up by Church Army as a Research Unit. They publish a quarterly report and it is a very helpful and informative document. Each report has a particular theme or focus. In addition, they publish "Encounters on the Edge" – stories of Fresh Expressions and other new developments in missional expressions of church in the UK. For more details, please see websites.[137]

I wanted to meet with some folk and to hear first-hand about the work, the trends, the horizons and what lies ahead. Due to funding issues, staff were not able to meet me without me paying for their time, based on a scale they had developed. The cost was prohibitive for me, at that point. Reading their

[137] www.churcharmy.org.uk/sheffieldcentre and www.encountersontheedge.org.uk

reports, one has a greater sense of the work being done, together with the challenges and opportunities.

one of the key points of what they are noting are the trends. There are some that are worth noting: Fresh Expressions can quickly grow and then plateau; leadership capacity; natural size of a grouping; relational fringe and lack of resources (widest possible definition of resources) to reproduce.

Some engagement with the critique of Fresh Expressions only duplicating a consumer society or choice as the highest value could also be tackled. A study of the perception that many Fresh Expressions draw disassociated and dissatisfied white, educated, middle-class people, who were on the fringe of the church anyway, would also be interesting.

I also attended a Fresh Expressions day conference hosted at HTB in London. Keynote speaking was the retiring Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. For a full report, please go to the Fresh Expressions website.[138] The morning was devoted to engagement with Rowan and he spoke of missional opportunity and belonging. Methodist President, Martyn Atkins, called for an 'evolving and real theological narrative' for the inherited church – as well as Fresh Expressions. Bishop Graham Cray spoke about following the missionary Spirit. He is the Archbishops' Missioner and leader of the Fresh Expressions team. He said it is an ideal moment to take stock of what has been achieved and what lies ahead. He spoke about seeing what God is doing and joining in. He saw this as a gift of the Holy Spirit and went on to describe this gift: as a gift of faith – empowered to take a risk of faith; an incarnational gift, a gift of contextual mission – as we take seriously the uniqueness and complexity of each context; a gift of discernment of missional imagination – as we learn to allow the Holy Spirit to direct us; a gift of diversity – as appropriate to context; a traditioned gift - not a rewriting of the claims of Christ to make them more amenable to a consumer age, but a more faithful embodiment of the historic gospel for our times. It is a gift which honours inherited church approaches for their faithfulness to the gospel and seeks to complement them by equivalent faithfulness; a vocational gift - it cannot be exercised without pioneers; an ecumenical gift and an international gift. Finally it is a gift of hope - it demonstrates the life of the Spirit through the church, showing that the Church is not condemned to inevitable decline because of the average age of many of its congregations. The Holy Spirit is restoring faith in the power of the gospel here and now!

While all the speakers were great, some of the real critiques of the Fresh Expression movement were not addressed. For example, the point about white, educated, middle-class was not addressed; nor was there time given to the clear concern about the relationship of the Fresh Expression and the Parish Church – the mixed economy model Rowan Williams has promoted. Indeed at times, the clear separation of the two was more clearly promoted and celebrated than the affirmation of the body of Christ.

However, there are those who have offered critiques of Fresh Expressions. It is important to note these and to seek to listen to what is being asked, and consider the underlying matters that might promote.

[138] www.freshexpressions.org.uk

Davison and Millbank's For the Parish begins in its introduction by stating that, 'This book is written in the belief that an important choice is offered to the Church of England: to embrace her historic mission to evangelize and serve the whole people of this country, or to decline into a sect.'[139] From this bold assertion, it goes on, 'On the frail foundation of only nineteen pages devoted to theology in Mission-shaped church report, a massive redirection of mission and ecclesiology has been effected.'[140] By the time we get to the opening words of the first chapter, the flavour of the critique is clear, 'Mission-shaped church is a flawed document.'[141]

The main critique they offer is that Fresh Expressions is not intended to be an outworking of the local church, but rather an independent entity. It is not open to all, but is rather for special interest groups and has a consumerist criterion for membership. They suggest that there is little discussion about the biblical and theological foundations on which the report is based. They argue that to suggest that the church can be divested of her inherited practices, structures and disciplines and go on to be re-expressed with little or no sense of loss is far from the truth.[142]

Davidson and Millbank suggest that the Mission-shaped Church contention, that you can change the practices of the church, its forms of life, to fit with surrounding culture, which is based on the understanding that you can separate the outward form from the inner message (or essence), is flawed. They hold that form and content are more closely bound. If' content' is what the church is about - her message, purpose, identity - then 'form' is the way this is lived and embodied; the practices and disciplines that flow from that. While these may be distinguished, they cannot be separated .[143] They fail to note, however, that the practices did, at some point in time, begin and have been developed, adapted and have emerged into what is their current form. To suggest otherwise is to deny history!

Going further, they state that a Fresh Expression must be tailored to a specific situation so that, when that situation changes, it will lack wider resources. They doubt it can change or adapt so believe it will simply fold when it has run a relatively brief course; or turn into something more like a parish church. In contrast, they say the parish church is committed to the longest possible time scale.[144] Davidson and Millbank note that the parish church, with its deep rooted commitment to people and place has resources to minister in good times and bad; war and peace and to adapt as the locality changes. One might ask if they are referring to the building/s or to the people. In addition, they note that a change in our practical forms of life means a change in the theology that goes with it.

At times there are sweeping statements like, 'Christian identity is formed and matures in the context of a common life of Christian practices'[145] yet gives no indication as to what those practices are!

[139] Davidson and Millbank, For the Parish, pvii
[140] Ibid, pviii
[141] Ibid, p1
[142] Davidson and Millbank, For the Parish, pviii
[143] Davison and Millbank, For the Parish, p2
[144] Ibid, p9
[145] Ibid, p14

Davison and Millbank level the claim that Mission-shaped Church is intellectualist because it treats faith as a set of ideas that we can understand (having in the paragraph prior declared it theologically thin and its philosophy lightweight). Christian belief, they say, comes down to so many propositions. They also say Mission-shaped church writers hold that faith is bound up in practices, structures of relation and forms of life, but these are secondary. Expression in culture is key. Yet they hold that this undermines itself in that the more fluid the cultural expressions are, the more need there is for stable concepts behind them. Davison and Millbank use post-liberalism to provide a different approach, stating that faith cannot be reduced to a string of propositions which float freely in relation to our practices. We can only know what statements mean in relation to the practices that go along with them. The practices are fundamental to understanding the ideas.[146] The Authors of Mission-shaped Church think of a kernel of the faith in largely abstract and propositional terms. This lies behind any particular embodied form and can be translated from one to another very easily. They dismiss lightly the wise mythos of the inherited church – those insights from spiritual exercises and ways of life, without which it is impossible to understand the truth of doctrine. Drawing heavily on Karen Armstrong's The Case For God, Davison and Millbank argue that fundamentalist Christians and New Atheists both hold that they know what God is like – one group believes and knows exactly what God is like; the other knows what God, in whom they do not believe, is like. They hold Fresh Expression writers belong to this group, while in contrast those who deny that we can pin God down in our thoughts are more likely to value disciplines and traditions: these emerge as an indispensable part of how we know what we know about God. This is the orthodox, traditional and historic approach.[147]

Moving forward, they argue that faith is to be found in the practices of the church and the forms of her common life and that this a matter of meditation; and much of what is at stake in Fresh Expressions writings is the denial of mediation. They go on to speak about Mission-shaped Church being ill at ease with the involvement of the Church in salvation – either as part of the means or as part of the goal – but, more than that, they state that Mission-shaped Church seems ill at ease with the Church, full stop. Quoting Martyn Percy, … 'church' – as an institution – emerges as the problem…For it is the church…that is held to have masked or corrupted an arrangement of people and ideas that should be fairly simple, and in some way ways quite virginal. For this reason, I note with interest that very few participating within the Fresh Expressions movement add the rider 'of church.' The second part of the phrase has been quietly, innocently and unconsciously parked by most adherents.'[148]

Davison and Millbank critique Mission-shaped Church in terms of ecclesiology. They note most of the main images of the Church in the New Testament present a vision of what salvation looks like in its final achievement. The ecclesial shape of salvation is made clear in images of church as Body, Bride, Temple, People of God, New Israel and New Jerusalem. By contrast, Fresh Expression literature has almost no sense that the goal of salvation is an ecclesial one and mission-shaped church rejects church-shaped salvation and this leaves a hole in the report. Although there are many communal images, they state

[146] Davidson and Millbank, For the Parish, p22-23
[147] Ibid, p25-27
[148] M. Percy, 'Old Dogs for New Tricks?' in Nelstrop and Percy, Evaluating Fresh Expressions, p28-9

they hardly receive a mention in Mission-shaped Church and go on to say, 'for them, the church does not figure as part of the goal of salvation. At best, the Church is simply part of the means.'[149]

Davison and Millbank hold that the church and salvation are communal and communal life is the area of corporate ethics. Fresh Expression writers overlook this in the Bible and in the theological tradition and hold that this has far-reaching consequences. 'If we deny that salvation is church-shaped in its fulfilment, then we deny that the church is salvation-shaped in the days of her pilgrimage on earth. For the Pauline Epistles, salvation is reconciliation within the Body of Christ. This means that the church here and now should be reconciled and reconciling…when salvation loses this ecclesial dimension, it is a very different thing…As an example, the Pauline vision of a salvation-shaped Church requires that the local church be mixed and harmonious in the face of difference and enmity. In contrast, Fresh Expression thinkers are comfortable with homogeneous and segregated congregations.'[150]

They then move to critique the distinction between Church, Kingdom and Mission. Davison and Millbank hold that the distinction of Church/Kingdom is fundamental to much of the report. Kingdom is the goal and Church a helper in the process. When Kingdom is the goal, the church is left simply as the means. In quoting John Hull – who is often considered a critic of Mission-shaped Church - they believe, on this point, he is quite representative of Fresh Expressions thinking when he writes that mission that pays attention to the Church is 'a mission that is essentially shaped by the interests and concerns of the Christian Churches' – and consequently weakened and inauthentic. Against this, they hold that the New Testament message is that the Church is the principal form that the coming Kingdom takes.[151] They reflect a concern for the mission-as-an-end-in-itself approach – stating that, when mission is cast in these terms, it becomes an idol. They quote the Westminster Shorter Catechism in noting the chief end of humankind is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever so, far from the Church and worship being for the sake of mission, it is mission that is for the sake of worship and the Church.[152]

They are critical of the reduction of the church to a means – the role of an instrument rather than an agent, and note that what is particularly missing is the sense of salvation as incorporation into the Church. 'If salvation is not seen as ecclesial – if membership of the Church is not part of what salvation looks like in the end – then it is no surprise that the work of the Church is strictly preparatory for something that goes on between the sinner and God, in the isolation of the sinner's heart.'[153] They note that the congregations of Fresh Expressions are assembled on an opt-in basis. Logically, the atomized individual comes first and the community second. Davison and Millbank believe that there is an overlap of means and end and that the church is part of both the goal and also part of the means.

They move to discuss what they call the flight to segregation that Mission-shaped Church promotes. They hold that the local church should be a mixed economy, because the gospel is one of reconciliation, with God and with one another, quoting Ephesians 2:14-16. Mission-shaped Church, they say, is a

[149] Davison and Millbank, For the Parish, p45
[150] Ibid, p49
[151] Ibid, p51
[152] Davison and Millbank, For the Parish, p54-55
[153] Ibid, p55

recipe for segregated congregations. Noting the motives beyond homogeneous congregations as noble, it is assumed people will more readily come if the church experience could be made comfortable enough. This means setting aside the expectation that converts will have to mix and meet with people different from themselves. Segregation is in conflict with the Christian gospel. They hold the vision being put forward is one of unity-in-diversity. They criticized the idea of mixed economy as put forward by Rowan Williams, saying that while some say it can justify too much diversity, paradoxically, it allows for too little diversity. They discuss the homogeneous unit principle, tracings its history from Donald McGavran and quote Martyn Percy, 'homogeneous unit principle as subsequently widely discredited by theologians and also widely condemned by missiologists for its focus on pragmatism and its willingness to sanction narrowly constituted groups (on the basis of age, gender, race, class, wealth, etc.) as 'church', which of course legitimizes ageism, sexism, racism, classism and economic divisiveness.'[154]

There are some important points made here for Fresh Expressions to grapple with, yet that could also apply to the parish model that Davison and Millbank uphold. In many Church of England parishes, there already exists the very thing Davison and Millbank are in opposition to - separate congregations, meeting at different times - all expressing ageism, classism and economic divisiveness. They seem to turn a blind eye to an existing situation within the parish model and yet offer some justifiable critiques of what is proposed in Mission-shaped Church. One could go further and suggest that many parish churches do not reflect the community of which they are a part, so have developed over time into a homogeneous unit. Even those that are more representative still face the challenge of avoiding either the segregation or silo approach to ministry that exists, more often than not, as the default setting for most church practice It could be argued that segregation is practiced in many churches.

They respond to the three justifications made from Mission-shaped Church and then move to discuss the influence of the church growth movement. They quote material over thirty years old that notes churches will grow if you find out what people want and give it to them. There is no engagement with more modern material and it seems they are setting up a straw man in the discussion.

Davison and Millbank address a point of difference: where they see the world as vacuous, selfish and lost – in short, fallen; they hold that Mission-shaped church wants to close the divide between the experience of church and culture. This leads them to raise questions about the radicalness of conversion – where a moment of conversion needs to be a whole-of-life conversion. They believe that the salvation spoken about in Mission-shaped Church is an impoverished account , which ought to be understood as the turning of the whole of life to God.[155] This is an important point which could have been developed further, especially f discussion about the homogenous unit principle. For some time, questions have been asked about whether the people who 'come to faith' within homogenous units –youth ministry is one example – understand this as a whole life journey (and if those in leadership of both these groups and the church do likewise).

While justifiable cases can be made, using Jesus' parable of the sower and the seeds (see Matt 13), that not all 'conversions' go the distance – the real question being asked is about the radicalness of

[154] M. Percy, Old Tricks for New Dogs in Evaluating Fresh Expressions, p38
[155] Davison and Millbank, For the Parish, p88

conversion. If we reduce conversion to something less than what Jesus calls us to, then is this really Christian conversion? Do we lower the bar in order to make conversion more palatable and acceptable?

Davison and Millbank hold that Fresh Expressions' appeal to contemporary trends is mistaken. They note that it fails to judge what is valuable and what is corrosive about these trends. While Fresh Expressions is worried about the Church distancing itself from the world, they see that the danger is that the church will simply join the world in its flight from geography, history and tradition into the vitality of choice, network and an atomized individualism.[156]

Davison and Milbank move from a critique towards a theology of mission and mediation. While claiming that their valuing of meditation will produce a more generous, cosmic and material understanding of the Trinitarian life in which we are all caught up, this chapter (p119-143) totally fails to engage with *missio Dei* and provides a very weak understanding of Trinitarian Theology. Despite their critique and criticism of Mission-shaped Church for its lack of substance and lack of depth theologically, in this chapter, the authors fail to make any note of or reference to one of Britain's most profound mission thinkers, Lesslie Newbigin.

In the final part of the book, Davison and Millbank move to show the importance of the parish and its rightful place in the mission of the church. The picture painted depicts a romantic ideal more than any current reality. If the world of the parish really did exist as these chapters suggest, then Mission-shaped Church would never have been written!

Missing from the book is any real discussion about evangelism – its purpose and place; any real grappling with contextualization and a way forward; and any real possibility of change. I was left with the words of U2 ringing in my ear I am stuck in a moment and I can't get out of it.'

While at times this 240-page book seems to move between a rant and romantic historical novel of the parish, there are some quite profound challenges to Mission-shaped church and Fresh Expressions which could be missed or dismissed. For example, questions like:

- What is our ecclesiology and does it matter?
- What is the Kingdom of God?
- What is conversion and what does this involve?
- Are homogenous units the beginning and the end when it comes to mission and ministry?
- Are 'knowing' and 'believing' things that an individual does by themselves or are they communal?
- Is Christian belief mainly a matter of ideas and words, or is it something that involves shared activities and forms of life?
- Do we accept that human beings are basically atomized individuals, or do we hold on to a more communal setting for human identity?
- Is choice ultimate human good?
- Is freedom everything?

[156] Davison and Millbank, For the Parish, p93-118

- Are we consumers or producers, or both and more than either?

Martyn Percy devotes a chapter in his book Shaping the Church – the promise of implicit theology to a critique of Fresh Expressions. He notes how the very idea of targeted or niche church seems to have captured the attention of most denominations. What lies behind this is the homogeneous unit principle. It was originally described by Donald A. McGavran who suggested that, for mission and evangelism to be most effective, people need to hear the gospel in their language and see it lived within their culture. It is positively healthy for churches to appeal to people of a similar culture - from youth congregations, to churches for specific ethnic groups, to churches for deaf people. Critics complain that this is a betrayal of the reconciliation which lies at the heart of the gospel. Christ breaks down every dividing wall, making humanity one (Ephesians 2.11-22). Church should reflect this. 'Niche church' panders to a consumerist rather than a kingdom worldview.

Percy engages with the difficulty of getting underneath the rhetoric ofFresh Expressions and notes that there seems to be a fascination or obsession with being new and alternative. He believes that this is not a new development, but rather one which reflects a sub-culture 'within British evangelicalism which has an established tradition of continually re-inventing modish associational models of church.'[157] Percy traces this and reflects that this tradition tends to derive its ecclesiology from biblical roots that either alleged a pre-institutional state of the church; or, that the configuration, organization and ethos derive from a biblical grammar and theological construction of reality which assume that the shape and identity of the New Testament Church could easily be agreed. He states, 'this in part, accounts for why many Fresh Expressions resemble small church 'home groups' – or early versions of House Churches – but with slightly enhanced ethos and sense of identity.'[158] What follows from this is that the church as institution emerges as the problem. In addressing this matter, he traces some movements within the church over the past 40 years and asks: as people have moved between these expressions of church - (everything from early charismatic renewal to church growth to healing ministries to third and fourth waves of the Holy Spirit to Alpha to Pensacola to cell church to Fresh Expressions) - have folk been at the cutting edge of what God has been up to, or might it reflect an associational church culture that is absorbed and captivated by what is new, fresh and alternative, or maybe more –the elevation of the individual in relation to God, so religion and faith have become consumable commodities that constantly require updating, some discarding and regular replenishment?[159]

Percy then considers a little deeper the underlying matters highlighted by these questions. He starts by looking at the two main religious economies that reflect English church-going habits: the market model – which assumes voluntary membership; and the utility model, where membership is ascribed rather than chosen. While they seem to be in tension, he holds they arguably depend on each other. If that is true, he asks about some of the tension and ambiguity that Fresh Expressions presents. While using language of outreach and engagement, it is in places composed by in-reach: 'it would seem that many Fresh Expressions are made up of Christians who are weary of the church as an institution, but still

[157] Percy, Shaping the Church, p69
[158] Ibid, p70
[159] Ibid, p71

desire fellowship and individual spiritual sustenance. This suggests that the Fresh Expressions movement, despite its claims to the contrary, is a form of collusion with post-institutionalism that is so endemic in contemporary culture….belonging together in a body with higher purposes places demands on individuals and groups, including those of duty and service; this is discipleship. Demand-led groups, in contrast, may just service people's desires for more meaning and fulfilment, whilst vesting this in language of purpose, connection and even sacrifice.'[160]

This is a valid critique that requires some serious engagement. What Percy is hinting at is a dumbing-down of the gospel so that it becomes nothing more than a technique for self-improvement and personal happiness. While one would suggest that his description of discipleship certainly requires attention and much more depth than given here, it is true that questions of discipleship do not feature in early thinking and planning in some Fresh Expressions. This reflects a lack of theology over pragmatism.

Percy gives an illustration to back up his hypothesis and makes the point that, while rhetoric in churches may speak of extensity – the reality or actuality, in missiological terms, it is more like dispersed intensity. They are not the same. 'Dispersed intensity lacks the complex social engagement that can really only come about through dense and reticulate institutional structures that emerge out of churches that are committed to deep local extensity.'[161] This points to a mixed economy model rather than an either/or model.

Percy then offers an eight-point critique or comment for the majority of Fresh Expressions. First, with the local church under pressure from both inside and outside, the proliferation of Fresh Expressions movements may threaten the relationship between religious and social capital…and if Fresh Expressions turns out to be an expression of post-associational-ism, trouble lies ahead. Second, he questions whether Fresh Expressions collude with pluralism and individualism, so that faith becomes privatized and becomes the property of a sect that sees itself as engaged with but apart from society. Third, Fresh Expressions may represent a conservative, therapeutic and individualist retreat from the world, while cloaked in a rhetoric that emphasizes the very opposite. Fourth, much community building is directed inwards, rather than outwards. Fifth, one can conceive of Fresh Expressions as a brand – but not a product – when, in fact, it is not clear what is being sold. Sixth, the rhetoric of alternative is dependent on a docile but larger host body to support the implied contrast. Seventh, Fresh Expressions is a curiously bourgeois phenomenon. And eighth, Fresh Expressions is somewhat Janus-like in its missiological outlook - is this movement the new highway to mission, or rather a series of new intricate cul-de-sacs?[162]

He offers some ecclesiological reflections. His reflections suggest 'that many examples of Fresh Expressions are symptomatic of contemporary culture, which has typically adopted the rhetoric of new, alternative and fresh, which in turn is rooted in increasing individualism and the inward turn to

[160] Percy, Shaping the Church, p72
[161] Ibid, p72-73
[162] Ibid, p73-75

fulfilment and personal enhancement.'[163] He goes on to say that it appears that Fresh Expressions are a form of faith that exists for those who don't like religion. One of the things he points out is the language of Fresh Expressions itself and the issues that this raises. While some focus on Fresh, Percy asks a deep question in regard to Expressions when he says, 'does it have sufficient density to be church?'[164] The newness of Fresh Expressions means that it is a work in progress, and it is yet to have some neat and settled identity; thereby allowing it to point in several directions at the same time. What can be a Fresh Expression is almost limitless, yet he is right to ask about the ecclesiology upon which it is based. It may in fact be better to say that there are various ecclesiologies and that they may not always be compatible with each other.

He asks a number of questions, including, 'can this type of new post-institutional model really Christianize and convert society?' and follows it up with ' is there a danger of weaning a generation of spiritual consumers who are resistant to religious demands?'[165] These are profound questions and they need to be engaged with. One suspects that Percy would say 'no' to the first and 'yes' to the second. While one might say it is too early to tell to his first point, it is not clear that this lies at the base of all Fresh Expressions. And that adds weight to his second question.

As he concludes, Percy wonders if we might want to adapt G.K. Chesterton's quip: that the church has not been weighed and found wanting by many in the Fresh Expressions movement; but rather, it has been found too difficult and not really tried. Many Fresh Expressions therefore constitute a perfect fit for post-institutional culture that does not want to invest in complex organisations and infrastructure for the common good.[166] Percy does think that Fresh Expressions can make a modest and positive contribution to the mixed economy of church life. In terms of implicit theology, Fresh Expressions can be seen as a form of faith that expresses contemporary 'secular' pre-occupations with pragmatism, growth, freshness, alternatives and newness…then again Fresh Expressions represent a serious attempt to engage with contemporary culture.[167]

While at Westminster, through a student, Phil Wall, I was introduced to a very recent book, Church for Every Context by Michael Moynagh. I had read some of his previous books and was aware of his long term connection to Fresh Expressions. This 450-page work is about an introduction to theology and practice. Dave Male spoke of this book very positively and others I engaged with thought this might become a type of text book within the Fresh Expression movement. I also had the privilege of spending some time with Mike. I think his book is worthy of multiple re-reads, as there is a depth to it that I appreciated.

Moynagh opens Part Two with a chapter which asks about the purpose and nature of the church. He notes that, whereas the traditional approach to evangelism begins with the current church and asks how people can be encouraged to belong, new contextual churches go to where people are and ask what

[163] Percy, Shaping the Church p75
[164] Ibid, p76
[165] Ibid, p77
[166] Ibid, p78
[167] Op Cite

church should appropriately look like in their context.[168] He notes the concern around the language of church and believes the way forward is to determine what is the purpose of church, what is the essence of church and from there to discuss what mature church involves.

He holds that the church as God's visible people has its purpose in relation to the kingdom of God, which was central to Jesus' ministry. In Luke 4:17-19, Jesus identified with Isaiah's vision of the kingdom. His his teaching was about the values of the kingdom, and so challenged the assumptions of his society from a kingdom perspective, and demonstrated the power of the kingdom through his miracles.[169] He notes the spectrum in how theologians understand the relationship between the church and the kingdomAt one end, there are those who hold to a church-shaped kingdom: this view was assumed in the church-centred approach to mission, common in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Underlying this assumption is the view that the church is both the gateway and vehicle of the kingdom. He notes John Hull's criticism of Mission Shaped Church: 'we looked for a mission-shaped church but what we found was a church-shaped mission.'[170] He notes Roger Walton's caution about the church-centric approach: the assumption that the church in mission is always the carrier of Christ, bringing him to the world, but rarely if ever, a recipient of God through the world.[171] Moynagh notes the risk with church-shaped mission is that horizons shrink away from the kingdom to the church and, with that, holistic mission is reduced to something less than God's vision for the whole of creation. At the other end of the spectrum is the world-shaped kingdom perspective where, rather than narrowing the kingdom to the church, it is expanded to the world. He quotes Hiebert, stating 'conversion and church are means therefore, not of entering the kingdom, but of recognizing the kingdom's silhouette in the world.'[172] While believing this view had its heyday in the 1960's and 70's, it still continues. While some are eager to reject church-shaped kingdom, there is a real danger of sliding too far in the other direction, and the church is seen in a very reduced role. 'The church is to do more than embrace visible signs of the kingdom: it is to critique their absence and point to salvation in Christ.'[173]

Moynagh moves to discuss the kingdom-shaped church. He says that "kingdom-shaped church" is shorthand for the church's life being read back from the kingdom, which is partly present in the world and the church, but will fully arrive when Christ returns. Thanks to the work of the Spirit, foretastes of the kingdom exist in the world – and exist because the Spirit is at work. In addition, anticipations of the kingdom also exist in the church. As it comes from the future, the kingdom shapes the church through Jesus, who embodies the kingdom and reigns over it: 'The church is called through the Spirit to live the story of Jesus, at the centre of which is his death and resurrection. It does this whenever it takes up the cross in evangelism, sacrificial service and in its corporate life. The church is to be a sign, foretaste and instrument of the kingdom in its Jesus-centred life.'[174] He warns that this relationship cannot see the prioritising of the kingdom at the expense of the church, for belonging to the church is an essential part

[168] Moynagh, Church for Every Context, p99
[169] Ibid, p100
[170] Hull, Mission-shaped Church, p36
[171] Walton, Have we got the *mission Dei* right? P42-3
[172] Hiebert, Evangelism, Church and Kingdom in The Good News of the Kingdom, p156
[173] Monynagh, Church for Every Context, p102
[174] Ibid, p103

of the kingdom. And at the same time the kingdom-shaped church warns against elevating the church at the expense of the kingdom's presence in the world. 'Though the church offers the kingdom to the world, it receives gifts of the kingdom from the world…thus mission is not one-way traffic from the church to people outside.'[175] This clearly makes listening to the context a crucial factor throughout a church's life; not just to discern where and how the church might be born.

His three views can be summed up as follows: the Church-shaped kingdom sees, through the Spirit, the church makes the kingdom present; the world-shaped kingdom sees the kingdom is present in the world and the church points to it; and the kingdom-shaped church sees the kingdom, though present in the world, is distinctively present in the church.

When he explores the essential nature of the kingdom-shaped church, Moynagh identifies a distinction between what is the essence of the church, and what is good for the well-being of the church. Theologians are far from agreed on what compromises the essence of the church. Some say that being sent by God to serve the world is the defining feature of the church. Within Fresh Expressions movement, Martyn Atkins argues that people are first the product of God's mission and then participants in it.[176] Such an understanding is reductionist – God is reduced to mission. While mission is of the essence of the church, it is not the essence of the church. In the same article, Atkins argues that the church partners with the God of mission by being forged into a loving community embodying the kingdom – so reducing community to mission, rather than an end in itself. Countering that, there has been a growth in the concept that community is the essence of the church, especially drawing upon social conceptions of the Trinity. Ian Mobsby argues this, saying the church participates in the communion of the triune God; 'The Holy Trinity is beckoning the emerging Church to model a way of being a spiritual community that reflects the very nature of the Trinitarian Godhead.'[177] This approach implies that community is more important than mission. Mission flows out of community but is not central to the church's life. This is the very point that Flett is making; he holds that it is possible to base a theology of the church on the social account of the Trinity and omit the missionary act as immaterial to being the church.[178]

Moynagh, drawing on some work by Bob Hopkins and George Lings, sees the way forward as viewing the church as four sets of relationships, centred on Jesus: to the Godhead, between members of the local church, to the world and between each part and the whole body. Take any one away and the church would be less than fully church. These four sets of relationships are essential to the being of church.[179] These sets of relationships, while being distinct, are also deeply intertwined. This four-relationship approach differs from what might be called the four historic marks of the church – One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. That approach sees things defined in terms of practices. While suggesting that relationships provide for a richer account of the church's fundamental nature, he points out that content is not unimportant. He holds that practices exist, for the sake of the four interlocking sets of

[175] Monynagh, Church for Every Context, p104
[176] Atkins, 'What is the essence of the church?' in Croft (ed) Mission Shaped Questions, pp16-28
[177] Mobsby, The becoming of G_D, p 68
[178] Flett, p207
[179] Moynagh, Church for Every Context p 106

relationships that comprise the church – they are servants of those relationships. Moynagh adopts a very high view of the pastoral attributes required for this to be worked out – maybe unrealistic. He does make important points when he says, 'It often happens that when practices no longer serve relationships, they are felt to be lifeless. Worship may feel dead rather than energizing the relationship with God. Or practices may hinder community by seeming inauthentic. Practices must then evolve so that they can continue their serving role.'[180] We would all agree – and note, easier said than done!

Moynagh says this approach – four interlocking relationships expressed through practice – is the essence of the church. He suggests it is faithful to the church's New Testament origins; the church began with people encountering the Lord, encouraging each other and telling others about their encounters with Jesus. Practices grew out of these encounters. Second, it fits with how church is actually experienced. In noting Nicolas Healy, he warns against blueprint ecclesiologies which reflect on the church through abstract models, so producing a disjoint between what is experienced and what is described. Third, the emphasis on the social nature of the church is in line with contemporary understanding of human nature – that humans are primarily social beings. Fourth, practices cannot define the church because Christians are unable to agree about those practices. Fifth, focusing on the four sets of relationships has affinities with other relational conceptions of the church – but is broader. Sixth, relationships cannot be separated from the practices that embody them, but this approach encourages practices to be tested against the bar of relationships, thus allowing room for diversity.

Moynagh says that such an understanding of church provides some guidelines as to whether something can rightly be described as a church. As to the question of maturity, he asks who decides what maturity looks like. When asked in relation to Fresh Expressions, the question has wider implications: what should any embodiment of church aspire to? Providing a starting definition, he suggests Ephesians 4:13 where maturity is understood to be attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. This involves at least two things; maturity is a relational quality. If church comprises four interlocking sets of relationships, then growth into maturity will involve growth in each of these relationships – with God, with the wider church, with the world and within the fellowship. Drane notes: 'the nature of maturity is being redefined as a quality that will enable us to live in the future rather than the past. The old maturity was characterized by nostalgia; the new maturity is marked by innovation. The old maturity valued tradition and rationality; the new maturity centres around imagination and creativity. The old maturity found a home in religious performance; the new maturity prioritises values and spirituality.[181] Drane does go on to state that future orientation must be deeply grounded in Biblical tradition. Secondly, maturity should be judged according to the purpose of the church; if the church's purpose is to be a sign, firstfruit and instrument to the kingdom, then maturity should be evaluated in relation to the kingdom.

Having outlined the essence of church, Moynagh addresses the question of mission as a first step for the church. As we have already seen, this is a huge area, and this chapter touches on key areas, but generally lacks depth. I would recommend a prior reading of Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder,

[180] Monynagh, Church for Every Context, p110
[181] Drane, 'What does maturity I the emerging church look like?' in Croft (ed) Mission-shaped questions, p92-93

Constants in Context: a theology of mission for today; Stephen Holmes The Holy Trinity: Understanding God's Life plus Barth's Church Dogmatics and Flett's The Witness of God to gain an understanding of the depth of the issues here.

Having given a brief summary of *missio Dei,* Moynagh goes on to ask what the place of mission is, and seeks to answer this by considering the place of mission in the divine life. He begins with the immanent Trinity – there is the view that divine mission is a consequence or outward expression of the Trinity – so it is reduced to a second step. The church gathers to worship and then mission flows out into the world; worship is the prime corporate activity of the church and mission is of secondary importance. While Rahner tried to overcome this by declaring the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity,[182] the fundamental issue of the second step remains. Holmes suggest that mission should be seen as a divine attribute – and like them all, is bound up with the other attributes but cannot be equated to any one of them. Yet Homes reduces mission to sending and so reduces the mission of God. In addition, divine attributes of God are set within various traditions. To add to or to reduce those needs to be a conversation rather than a pronouncement.

Barth offers a third way – as outlined by Flett. Barth's doctrine of election sees divine mission to the world belonging to God's eternal nature. It is the very nature of God, from all eternity, to be for human beings. God does not have to reduce his divinity to become human. Mission, then, is more than a single attribute of God and must be far more than sending. Mission is the whole of God – in the sense that all the divine attributes have a missionary purpose. This makes divine giving – not sending – the heart of mission: sending into the world is what happens when God gives himself to the world. Mission cannot be a second step for the church. The church does not have a mission: the church is missionary by nature, just as God is missionary by nature.

He then turns to the question what is the nature of mission. Following Flett's emphasis on divine self-giving as being in line with a great deal of contemporary theology, Moynagh notes that God the Father does not cling to his divinity, but empties himself of it all for the Son. The process is eternal – divinity never runs out because the Father has an infinite supply. What is emptied out is given – hence self-emptying and self-giving are interchangeable terms.

If self-giving typifies the life of the Trinity, it is not surprising that self-giving is at the heart of the divine missions to the world. God's decision to be for humanity is reflected in the creation of the natural and human orders. This continues in the mission of salvation. Eternal self-giving within the Trinity is reproduced in the life and death of Jesus. The church corresponds to the divine self-donation when it, too, gives itself in mission – when it generates new entities that reflect the self-giving character it has received from God.

This then leads to: what is the goal of mission? The traditional understanding of the goal of mission is that it is to save souls, undertaken overseas by experts called 'missionaries.' As we have noted *missio Dei* calls us to see this in broader terms – God's mission has the world in view. Such width and breadth of understanding has produced a multiplicity of views about what is the purpose of mission, polarised

[182] Rahner, 'Trinity in Theology' in An Encyclopaedia of Theology, vol 6

around either evangelism/discipleship at one end around social/ecologically at the other end. In addition, in some places these things are undertaken as individuals and in others, as whole communities. Yet even in saying this, children are often side-lined. It is very clear the current dichotomy must change.

So how does the church share in God's mission? Moynagh suggests it is by participation: 'The church is drawn into the self-giving mission of God by the Spirit, who enables the church to receive the offer of grace. The way grace is received is for the church to obey Christ's command to give itself to the world.'[183] He goes on, 'Being drawn into the missional flow of the Trinity enables the church to embody the missionary God in its life. Mission is the manner in which grace is received and the recipient made like the giver. Worship is the supreme context in which this exchange, this covenant, takes place. To receive grace is not just to have a happy experience or to say a heartfelt thank you to Jesus. To receive grace is to donate oneself to a missional God. This takes concrete form when worshippers, enabled by the Spirit, dedicate their lives to mission as they are drawn into the Trinity. Worship must therefore connect with individuals' missional lives. It is only as worship and the practice of mission are linked together that this receipt of grace by offering one's life back to God in missional service can be explicit and make sense to those involved. Thus worship can never be a self-contained zone separate from the church's mission, let alone a priority over mission. If God is missionary in his essence, to worship God is to worship the One who engages in mission from all eternity. Worship must clearly express that the church is being drawn into God's missional life of self-giving to the world.'[184]

In conclusion, he states that as mission is not the result of who God is, but is who God is, mission will be central to the church. Second, participating in the Spirit's outward movement will discourage over-reliance on attractional approaches to mission. Third, by giving itself to people where they enact their concerns, the visible church will be immersed in a variety of social and political settings. Fourth, when the church recognises the Spirit's presence in the world it will be attentive to its context. Fifth, Christians will not adopt an imperialistic approach to starting new churches.

Moynagh devotes the next chapter to challenging the view that the church gathers for worship and disperses for mission. He notes that both Hauer was and Newbigin leave a gap in their theology – a gap between the church and the world. He holds that gap must be filled by being communities in mission. He argues that *missio Dei* is communal in nature - that God should be seen as a divine communion-in-mission and this should be echoed in the local church. He pleads for communities of mission in everyday life.

He then asks why the church should have many shapes. He notes how a cultural blizzard (without defining what this means) has transformed the landscape and how the church needs to engage with the world as it now exists. Church he states, no longer has the option, if it ever had, of relating to people as if they were all the same. It has to engage with each of them appropriately, a task that has been described as contextualization. It assumes that the church can change according to the situation – so churches will look different because they are engaging with different people. This raises the question of

[183] Moynagh, Church for every context, p131
[184] Ibid, p132

how much can be conceded to the context. While the question of contextualization has been understood in some parts of the church around contextualizing the gospel – and the development of local theologies, here the issue is how far churches should be shaped by their surrounding cultures – and there is widespread agreement that, if a church is to serve its context, it must connect to it.

I also want to comment briefly on Fresh Expressions of the Church and the Kingdom of God – part of the Ancient Faith, Future Mission series from the Church of England. Rowan Williams' contribution is excellent and tackles some of the more challenging issues Fresh Expressions face in terms of the transformation of society.

Evaluating Fresh Expressions, in the same series, draws together a dozen contributors to provide some analysis and critique of the Fresh Expressions movement. While touching on some key areas, it is overall a lightweight approach. Maybe that should not be surprising in that it offers reflection after only four years, and one wonders what the same people might write a further five years on.

Mission Shaped Evangelism by Steve Hollinghurst is a breath of fresh air. This subject matter is lacking overall in other material published and he tackles it extremely well. He remains true to the nature of evangelism and the lessons learnt from foreign mission and understanding the cross-cultural nature of evangelism required for the realities of today's world. The final chapter dealing with mission-shaped Christianity for Post-Christendom World is worth the price of the book alone!

I also would want to acknowledge Grove Books – based at Ridley Hall, especially Susanne Thompson, the Business Manager, who was a great help in linking my area of study to the resources and subject material they have.

Missional Church

My own introduction to Missional Church came from reading the book Missional Church – a vision for the sending of the church in North America. It seeks to ask what a theology of the church would look like, that took seriously the fact that North America is now itself a mission field? Written by a team of six missiologists - Lois Barrett, Inagrace T. Dietterich, Darrell L. Guder, George R. Hunsberger, Alan J. Roxburgh, and Craig Van Gelder - the book is the result of a three-year research project undertaken by The Gospel and Our Culture Network. It examines the culture and notes, even in the North American setting, the loss of dominance of the church in society. They seek to take seriously the church's missional vocation and draw out the consequences of this theology for the structure and institutions of the church. A work of theological depth, it is a good starting place for the conversation.

It is important to note that this work took seriously the cultural shift in North America, at a time when it was not to the fore in much church and theological thinking. Into this post-Christian world, the mission field is very much the neighbourhood. The important background link here is the work of Lesslie Newbigin and the Gospel and Our Culture Network. A network began to take shape in the mid-1980s and by the early 1990s, under the leadership of George Hunsberger, the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) was publishing a quarterly newsletter and also convening a yearly consultation. By the mid-1990s, it developed its own voice beyond the influence of Newbigin.

Aside from Newbigin's work, there were other books which I read to help set the scene. George Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, eds., The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America came out a year before Darrel L. Guder, ed., Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America. The former received little in the way of serious engagement, while the latter is quite a scholarly work, which is now seen as foundational in the missional conversation. Craig Van Gelder, ed., Confident Witness — Changing World: Rediscovering the Gospel in North America is a great follow up to the Missional Church and builds on this very well. Darrel L. Guder, The Continuing Conversion of the Church is another important book in this early conversation, while Lois Y. Barrett, ed., Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness should also be considered an important must-read.

While the Gospel and Our Culture Network did not – from my reading - offer a precise definition for 'missional church,' they do provide what they refer to as 'indicators of a missional church.' The indicators are an effort to identify what some of the key aspects might be that contribute to the church's unique ability to better understand, and therefore connect with, the diverse cultures within the North American context.

1. The missional church proclaims the gospel.
   What it looks like: The story of God's salvation is faithfully repeated in a multitude of different ways.

2. The missional church is a community where all members are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus. What it looks like: The disciple identity is held by all; growth in discipleship is expected of all.

3. The Bible is normative in the church's life.
   What it looks like: The church is reading the Bible together to learn what it can learn nowhere else – God's good and gracious intent for all creation, the salvation mystery, and the identity and purpose of life together.

4. The church understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord. What it looks like: In its corporate life and public witness, the church is consciously seeking to conform to its Lord instead of the multitude of cultures in which it finds itself.

5. The church seeks to discern God's specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all of its members. What it looks like: The church has made its "mission" its priority, and in overt and communal ways is seeking to be and do "what God is calling us to know, be, and do."

6. A missional community is indicated by how Christians behave toward one another. What it looks like: Acts of self-sacrifice on behalf of one another both in the church and in the locale characterize the generosity of the community.

7. It is a community that practices reconciliation. What it looks like: The church community is moving beyond homogeneity toward a more heterogeneous community in its racial, ethnic, age, gender, and socio-economic makeup.

8. Peoples within the community hold themselves accountable to one another in love. What it looks like: Substantial time is spent with one another for the purpose of watching over one another in love.

9. The church practices hospitality. What it looks like: Welcoming the stranger into the midst of the community plays a central role.

10. Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future. What it looks like: There is a significant and meaningful engagement in communal worship of God, reflecting appropriately and addressing the culture of those who worship together.

11. The community has a vital public witness. What it looks like: The church makes an observable impact that contributes to the transformation of life, society, and human relationships.

12. There is a recognition that the church itself is an incomplete expression of the reign of God. What it looks like: There is a widely held perception that this church is going somewhere – and that "somewhere" is a more faithfully lived life in the reign of God.

One final note from the writings of the Gospel and Culture Network: Darrell Guder emphasizes the importance of having congregations formed by hearing the Bible 'missionally.' He points out that when

missional renewal is happening, different kinds of questions are brought to the Bible. He writes: 'Congregations are open to being challenged, to looking hard at their deeply ingrained attitudes and expectations. The missional approach asks, How does God's Word call, shape, transform, and send me and us? Coupled with this openness is the awareness that biblical formation must mean change, and often conversion. Christian communities may discover that their discipling will require repentance and that their way of being church will have to change.'[185]

There is a huge number of books published relating to the missional church. While at times the author's own 'take' on missional church does suggest a huge variance in understanding, some brief commentary on those I read is in order.

Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost's The Shaping of Things to Come, published in 2003, saw them build upon the twelve indicators first offered by the GOCN by adding three additional overarching principles that may provide the direction for what it means for a church to be missional. They state, 'The missional church is incarnational, not attractional, in its ecclesiology. By incarnational, we mean it does not create sanctified spaces into which unbelievers must come to encounter the gospel. Rather, the missional church disassembles itself and seeps into the cracks and crevices of a society in order to be Christ to those who don't yet know him. The missional church is messianic, not dualistic, in its spirituality. That is, it adopts the worldview of Jesus the Messiah, rather than that of the Greco-Roman empire. Instead of seeing the world as divided between the sacred (religious) and profane (nonreligious), like Christ, it sees the world and God's place in it as more holistic and integrated. The missional church adopts an apostolic, rather than a hierarchical, mode of leadership. By apostolic, we mean a mode of leadership that recognizes the fivefold model detailed by Paul in Ephesians 6. It abandons the triangular hierarchies of the traditional church and embraces a biblical, flat-leadership community that unleashes the gifts of evangelism, apostleship, and prophecy, as well as the currently popular pastoral and teaching gifts.'[186]

Hirsch and Frost believe the missional 'genius' of a church can only be unleashed when there are foundational changes made to the church's very DNA, and that means addressing fundamental issues like ecclesiology, spirituality, and leadership. It means there must be a complete shift away from a Christendom way of thinking, which, as mentioned above, has been attractional, dualistic, and hierarchical. While an important book, for me it raised more questions than answers. For example, a strong case can be made that the church should be attractive – that the changed and changing lives of those that are following Jesus is attractive to those seeking and/or investigating faith. Hirsch and Frost do not address this.

Alan Hirsch, in The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church, describes the current form of church in two simple ways. A missional church is one that goes to where people are, to engage them on their own cultural turf; while an attractional model expects people to leave where they are and come to join the church culture. He then contends that the attractional, institutional church that in large part is the creation of the church growth movement, has created a spectator Christianity that is largely

[185] Guder, 'Biblical formation and Discipleship' in Treasure in Clay Jars, p70
[186] Frost and Hirsch, Shaping of things to come, p12

irrelevant at reaching 85 percent of the culture. These sweeping generalizations fail to deal with some of the real issues and one is left thinking this is nothing more than an attack on the model of church. While Hirsh moves on to engage with theological reflection and what he calls missional theology, this book adds little to effective missional engagement.

ReJesus, from Frost and Hirsch, has the stated intent of de-cluttering Jesus. I was left wondering that if they are not interested in any Christological propositions, what methodology is involved here. They seem to want to call people to follow a captivating messiah, but don't tell us what he did, why he did it or where he thought he was going. This solely Christological approach leads to a very individualistic faith, and the missional conversation is about avoiding turning inward.

I was reminded of these words from Newbigin, 'The concern for mission is nothing less than this: the kingdom of God, the sovereign rule of the Father of Jesus over all humankind and over all creation. Mission… is the proclamation of the kingdom, the presence of the kingdom and the provenience of the kingdom. By proclaiming the reign of God over all things, the church acts out its faith that the Father of Jesus is indeed ruler of all. The church, by inviting all humankind to share in the mystery of the presence of the kingdom hidden in its life through its union with the crucified and risen life of Jesus, acts out the love of Jesus that took him to the cross. By obediently following where the Spirit leads, often in ways neither planned, known nor understood, the church acts out the hope that it is given by the presence of the Spirit who is living foretaste of the kingdom.'[187]

Of far greater value than Hirsch and Frost is a series of books by Craig Van Gelder. The Church between Gospel and Culture, edited by van Gelder and Hunsburger, is a series of essays heralding the arrival of a new era. One needs to ponder and reflect on the significance of what these authors have to say about culture, our era and the massive change that is upon the Christian Church. At times I did find myself frustrated, in that many contributors assumes a problem in the Church, yet fail to reveal it; while terms like "a deep uncertainty, malaise, and despair in the Churches" and "a certain dis-ease in our congregations" left me wondering what this means. Also, some of the terms used were not defined –' kingdom categories', 'forces that bring death', 'God's coming shalom', which distracted from this important work.

In The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit, Van Gelder shares concerns that many churches take a functional approach to ecclesiology. In developing his missional ecclesiology, Van Gelder states the church is the redemptive reign of God implemented in a fallen world. Furthermore, it is the Spirit which carries out the redemptive purposes of God through the church as the Spirit empowers it for ministry. After describing the church from a redemptive, Trinitarian theological perspective, he then uses the second half of the book to give practical advice about what the church is, what the church does, and how the church should organize to best live out its missionary nature.

In The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit, Van Gelder writes that the premise of this book is to encourage churches to recognize the ministry of the Spirit in the midst of

[187] Newbigin, Open Secret, p64

constant congregational change. He believes that God's intent is often to use change, either directly or indirectly, to move a congregation in new directions of meaningful ministry under the leading of the Spirit. He goes deeper and says his desire is for congregations to understand that the Spirit-led ministry of the church flows out of the Spirit-created nature of the church. In other words, being precedes doing. Van Gelder does an excellent job of showing that when a church begins with its nature, or essence as a Spirit-created community, growth and development are the natural outcome.

The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry is a collection of eight papers presented at a consultation held at Luther Seminary in December of 2005. The premise is that every context should be seen as a missional context, and every congregation as a missional congregation that is responsible to participate in God's mission in that context. The book does not promote any method or model of ministry but encourages congregational expressions to enter a discernment process, with the Spirit, to identify the theological foundations and insights in order to develop the capacity for ministry engagement. For all the contributors, context does matter. They speak about congregational formation (the shaping of a concrete Christian community), spiritual formation (corporate and personal attention to initiatives of God) and missional formation (local church's identity and agency in its encounter with the immediate context).

In Shaped by God's Heart: The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches, Milfred Minatrea offers an introduction to the missional church conversation. The book is organized in three sections. Part One is titled, 'The Church in a New and Changing World' where he discusses the difference between being 'mission-minded; and 'missional.' This is a helpful contribution. He then presents the core of the book as nine practices that he has observed in studying missional churches. The final part is about structures and strategies for becoming missional. While the observations about practice are helpful, the question of context is given very little place and the final section sounds quite programmatic in its approach.

What was to become a key work in missional leadership, Alan J. Roxburgh' and Fred Romanuk's The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World, offers a realistic approach to leaders who are struggling with what it means to be a missional church in a local context. They caution against adopting business models and church growth techniques. Instead they continually emphasize the importance of recognizing that the church is a spiritual entity, lead and empowered by the Spirit. The goal of spiritual leadership therefore is to discern where and how the Spirit of God is working in the context of the local church.

Ed Stetzer and David Putman, in Breaking the Missional Code, start from the premise that the church is a community created by God to be sent as a missionary into a local context and to do this effectively means that the church must break the 'missional code' of their context. Personally, I found this to be a very disappointing book.

Patrick Keifert, in We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era, maintains that when it comes to serious missional commitment, there are no quick fixes and real change is shaped by Scripture, the Holy Spirit,

and attention to each other. He agrees that, as a result of vast cultural changes, the church is in desperate need of recapturing its missionary nature. However, what sets this work apart is that Keifert lays out a long-range plan of spiritual discernment and transformation for a local congregation.

The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community, by Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, uses stories to illustrate the power of incarnational community. It contains some helpful comments on combating consumerism, living out our mission in the context of an entire community, and what it means to practice biblical hospitality, yet it is weak overall.

The most significant contribution that Reggie McNeal, in Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church makes to the missional church conversation is his attempt to establish a new way of measuring success in the church in the United States. He notes that the standard measures have been growth in attendance, finances and facilities. However, to assist the church in making a shift in a missional direction, McNeal argues that the church must begin to measure success by using a new scorecard. He holds we should measure vitality in terms of growth in the area of people, service, prayer and outreach. This is one of the few books that directly mentions outreach.

Maybe the best introduction is found in Alan Roxburgh and Scott Boren's Introducing the Missional Church. They begin by noting the difference between the attractional church and the missional church, and hold that the attractional pattern is not the goal or primary call of the church. They believe what is required is an alternative imagination to the attractional, in order to understand the missional church. The missional imagination is not about the church: 'God is up to something in the world that is bigger than the church, even though the church is called to be a sign, witness and foretaste of God's purposes in the world.'[188] A question which flows from this, but which is not addressed, is: what then is the role of the church?

They hold that there is not a formula or a blueprint. Rather, they want to challenge the elevation of any model as the way to do church; to challenge the arguments that the Bible reveals a missional secret or formula; and third, to challenge the idea that there is some point in the history of the church that provides us with just the right pattern and formula for creating missional churches.[189]

Any reading in the area of missional church or any Google-search of "missional" would lead you to believe that "missional" is the new buzz word. The question then is whether it some latest Christian fad that will soon pass? Seeking some definition seems difficult and/or impossible! Some within the movement claim that to definite "missional church" means one can then develop tactics and strategies to make it real. Roxburgh and Boren suggest that Scripture does not so much define reality as invite us onto a journey in which we discover the world God is creating.[190] They use the metaphor of a river, and ask how we will navigate the river with its twists and turns, as it takes us into spaces we have never been before. They speak of three powerful currents – mystery, memory and mission.

[188] Roxburgh and Boren, Introducing the Missional Church, p20
[189] Ibid, p24
[190] Ibid,p39

While the metaphor of a river has been used in various places across the ages to describe the church on its journey with God, a question consistently arises – are the banks or bounds of the river set, or are they, too, moving?

Roxburgh's follow-up book, Missional: joining God in the neighbourhood, seeks to move beyond a church-centric model and suggests we need to give equal attention to church, culture and Scripture. While claiming to draw heavily on the work of Newbigin, Roxburgh certainly moves away from his (Newbigin's) focus on the church in his suggestions in this book. I think his retheologizing for our time is questionable; and his practicing eschatology by entering our neighbourhoods to genuinely receive hospitality and engage, without the motive of getting people to become part of the church family, invites the questions – what is the motive, why are we doing this, and where is the Good News in this? Having spent time in other books decrying programmes and rules, he sets out ten rules that, when followed, can help bring about change! The model is heavily dependent on face-to-face interaction and offers no understanding of virtual presence.

While not writing on either the mission-shaped church or the missional church, Tom Wright insists that, as the church experiments with new forms of mission, a clear and Biblically-appropriate eschatology is required. He sees that the church has sidelined this matter – either proposing an optimism in the progress of the world, or abandoning the world for the reality of going to heaven when we die. He writes, 'If we want a mission-shaped church, what we need is a hope-shaped mission.'[191]

The breadth of the missional conversation is wide. At times it seems the word "missional" can mean whatever we want it to mean! The question needs to be asked: is a definition helpful? In other words, are there core characteristics that should inform the way we understand the missional concept?

I believe there are at least three major theological distinctions that help to undergird the missional conversation. Without such a foundation, we run the risk of simply attaching the word "missional" onto everything the church is already doing, and therefore ignoring the necessary paradigmatic shift.

1. Missional Church is about the missionary nature of God and His Church.

   Those in the missional movement recognize both God and the church are intrinsically and principally 'missionary' in nature. God is a missionary God who sends a missionary church. In fact, a survey of the term "sending" in its various forms in Scripture reveals the missionary nature of the Triune God, as well as the very essence of the church. The redemptive activity of God, his relationship to the world, and his dealing with mankind is described in Scripture by the word "sending". The word "sending" is the 'sum and substance of God's creativity and activity.'[192]

   The Bible is full with sending language that speaks to the missionary nature of a Triune God. God the Father sends the Son, and God the Father and the Son send the Spirit, and God the Father and the Son and the Spirit send the church. In the Gospel of John alone, nearly forty times we read

[191] Wright, Surprised by Hope, p206
[192] Vicedom, Mission of God, p9

about Jesus being sent – either from the evangelist or from Jesus' own lips. Jesus sees himself, not only as one sent, but also as one who is sending: 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' (John 20:21).

It is important to make clear that the church is a vital part of the missional conversation. However, the church must not be seen simply as an entity that sends missionaries, as admirable as sending and supporting missionary activity might be. Instead, we must recognize that the purpose of the church is derived from the very nature of a sending, missionary God, which in turn compels it to be sent as a missionary people, both individually and collectively.

2. Missional Church is about incarnational ministry (versus attractional/extractional) in a post-Christendom context.

   Those with a missional perspective no longer see the church service as the primary connecting point for those outside the church. While there is nothing wrong with attracting people to participate in various meetings of the church, the missional church is more concerned about sending the people in the church out among the people of the world, rather than getting the people of the world in among the people of the church. Some have described this missional-attractional distinction as a challenge to 'go and be' as opposed to come and see.

   The attractional model, which has dominated the church in the West for the past several decades, seeks to reach out to the culture and draw people into the church. However, this approach only works when there are no significant cultural barriers to overcome when making the required move from outside to inside the church. 'And as Western culture has become increasingly post-Christian, the attractional model has lost its effectiveness. The West looks more like a cross-cultural missionary context in which attractional church models are self-defeating. Furthermore, the process of extracting people from the culture and assimilating them into the church diminishes their ability to speak to those outside.'[193]

   On the other hand, missional churches see their primary function as one of actively moving into a community to embody and enflesh the word, deed, and life of Jesus into every nook and cranny. Alan Hirsch speaks of the missional-incarnational impulse, where the word "missional" expresses the sending nature of the church, while 'incarnational" represents the embedding of the gospel into a local context. In other words, missional speaks to our direction – we are sent; while being incarnational is more about how we go, and what we do as we go. Eugene Peterson sums it up well in The Message paraphrase of John 1:14 when it states, 'The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood.'

3. Missional Church is about actively participating in the *missio Dei*, or mission of God.

[193] Hirsch, Defining Missional, Christianity Today, 2008, Fall

Many times we wrongly assume that the primary activity of God is in the church, rather than recognizing that God's primary activity is in the world, and the church is God's instrument sent into the world to participate in His redemptive mission. This key distinction clarifies the difference between a church with a missions program and a missional church. A church with a missions program usually sees missions as one activity alongside many other equally important programs of the church. A missional church, on the other hand, focuses all of its activities around its participation in God's agenda for the world. God's mission must form and inform everything we do. All activities of the church must be catalyzed by and organized around the *missio Dei.* As the sent, missionary people of God, the missional church understands its fundamental purpose as being rooted in God's mission to restore and heal creation and to call people into a reconciled relationship with Himself. It is God's mission that calls the church into existence. In other words, we can no longer see the church as the starting point when thinking about mission. Instead, the church must be seen as the result of God's mission. In the words of South African missiologist, David Bosch: 'It is not the church which undertakes mission; it is the *missio Dei* which constitutes the church.' Or stated in a slightly different manner: 'it is not so much that God has a mission for his church in the world, but that God has a church for his mission in the world.'[194]

[194] Wright, The Mission of God, p62

Missional Church Executive Leadership Institute

I attended this week-long event in Chicago in July 2012. Folk who attended came from across the USA and Canada, plus one Australian and one other Kiwi – an Anglican from Hamilton.

We spent time each day, as a group, dwelling in the Word. We used the same Scripture, Luke 10:1-12, reading it aloud and everyone then was invited to share where the Spirit had stopped them in the text.

Craig van Gelder led excellent sessions, tracing the historical development of denominations and regional systems, using his book, The Missional Church in Perspective. For anyone wanting to read something of an historical overview of the missional church movement in the USA, this is the book to read. The first part of the book (chapters 1-3) was written by Van Gelder. He traces the history and development of the missional conversation. The second part (chapters 4-6) was written by Zscheile and covers perspectives that extend the missional conversation – although I thought that there was nothing new here: rather, it encouraged readers to think more about the concepts and to engage with others with the intent of acting upon those discoveries. Van Gelder focused upon four themes – God is a missionary God who sends the church into the world; God's mission in the world is related to the reign of God; the missional church is incarnational (versus attractional) and is sent to engage a postmodern, post-Christendom, globalized world and the internal life of the missional church focuses on the believer living as a disciple engaged in mission.

A major part of the week was spent, looking at organizational systems and technical and adaptive change. This provided the basis for the case development – which we all were asked to prepare, prior to arriving. From those original pieces of work, we were asked to engage with framing the statement; name presenting issues; identifying adaptive challenges; developing experiment and action plans. Not having someone else who was Presbyterian and from New Zealand to work with was a distinct disadvantage to me. I would strongly suggest that anyone else considering attending this should do so with another person from the same setting. The major part of the week was involved in the challenge of unpacking the case, and engaging with adaptive change.

I had read briefly about technical and adaptive change, and I would suggest that others read, discuss and reflect on this, prior to attending. Maybe the most important book is The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for changing your organization and the world from Harvard Business Press. The main author is Ron Heifetz. Put simply, the adaptive context is a situation that demands a response outside your current toolkit or repertoire; it consists of a gap between aspirations and operational capacity that cannot be closed by the expertise and procedures currently in place.

Adaptive leadership is the activity of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive. The concept of thriving is drawn from evolutionary biology, in which a successful adaptation has three characteristics:

(1) it preserves the DNA essential for the species' continued survival;

(2) it discards (reregulates or rearranges) the DNA that no longer serves the species' current need; and

(3) it creates DNA arrangements that give the species the ability to flourish in new ways and in more challenging environments. Successful adaptations enable a living system to take the best from its history into the future.

To summarize this model:

Adaptive leadership is specifically about change that enables the capacity to thrive.

Successful adaptive changes build on the past rather than jettison it.

Organizational adaptation occurs through experimentation.

Adaptation relies on diversity.

New adaptations significantly displace, reregulate, and rearrange some old DNA.

Adaptive leadership is the activity of mobilizing people to tackle the toughest problems and do the adaptive work necessary to achieve progress.

Sharon Daloz Parks, in Leadership Can Be Taught, describes the distinction between technical and adaptive issues in this way: technical problems (even though they may be complex) can be solved with knowledge and procedures already in hand. In contrast, adaptive challenges require new learning, innovation, and new patterns of behaviour. In this view, leadership is the activity of mobilizing people to address adaptive challenges—those challenges that cannot be resolved by expert knowledge and routine management alone. Adaptive challenges often appear as swamp issues - tangled, complex problems composed of multiple systems that resist technical analysis and thus stand in contrast to the high, hard-ground issues that are easier to address but where less is at stake for the organization or the society. They ask for more than changes in routine or mere performance. They call for changes of heart and mind—the transformation of long-standing habits and deeply-held assumptions and values.[195]

If one relates all this back to the opening reading section on contemporary ground of our culture and society, one can see how this tool or model could be useful in helping us understand the setting we are in, together with providing a way to address it rather than either reverting back to the past, or giving up because we have never been this way before.

In material I read around this topic, I discovered these 'Seven Ways to Know if You Are Facing an Adaptive Challenge':

1. If the solution requires operating in a different way than you do now - you may be facing an adaptive challenge.

[195] Parks, Leadership can be taught, p10

2. If the problem AND the solution require learning - you may be facing an adaptive challenge.

3. If the solution requires shifting the authority and responsibility to the people who are actually affected - you may be facing an adaptive challenge.

4. If the solution requires some sacrifice of your past ways of working or living - you may be facing an adaptive challenge.

5. If the solution requires experimenting before you're sure of the answer - you may be facing an adaptive challenge.

6. If the solution will take a long time - You may be facing an adaptive challenge.

7. If the challenge connects to people's deeply held values - you may be facing an adaptive challenge.

The model was helpful in seeking to name and/or address the real matter in a situation and to seek to find ways of progressing this. Again, having someone else present from our setting would have been far more useful and helpful, both in terms of writing up a case study to begin with and second, to discuss it as the week progressed. This is especially important when the week is aimed at mid-level judicatory processes and organization.

While Roxburgh, in particular, is critical of the church using business models, there seems to be an acceptance of the model – almost without question: and while one can identify that the adaptive model requires more than changes in routine and/or performance - they speak about the transformation of heart and mind – and changes to longstanding assumptions and values, why we should use this model is not adequately dealt with.

Much of what we would call adaptive work does have, at its heart, spiritual work. Yet that work is not only the responsibility of the individual or group. We need to pause and ask where, if at all, does God play a part in this. It does seem a very human approach to a changing world and changing situations. Maybe this is summed up in this quote: 'Solutions to adaptive challenges reside not in the executive suite but in the collective intelligence of employees at all levels.'[196] While we must move beyond the programme or restructuring, the adaptive model can call us to change such things as Scriptures or symbols, which form the very fabric of faith. This model will require new models and approaches and experimenting and evaluating and ongoing learning. One is tempted to ask, at the beginning of the process, if there are boundaries or river banks around this.

Like all models, the Adaptive-Technical approach has its strengths in helping people tackle tough challenges and thrive. Over time, these will build an organization's adaptive capacity, so developing processes that will generate new norms to help the organization meet new, ongoing adaptive

[196] Heifetz and Laurie, The Work of Leadership, p126

challenges. Yet, a haunting question remains – do we end up relying on a business model, rather than the triune God? I, for one, remain concerned and sceptical.

Even while on study leave, I became aware of additional books which were recently published that I could/should/would read, if time permitted. Two in particular were Salt, Light and a City by Graham Hill and Missional God, Missional Church by Ross Hastings. I look forward to reading them and reflecting on them in the light of what I have already read.

Reflections and questions

Any study leave like this is bound to raise questions and invite reflection. I suspect this will be an ongoing journey. In many cases in ministry, the strong drive for pragmatic answers and looking for and trying new ways trumps any serious theological and Biblical engagement with the matters at hand. It is somewhat surprising, given the rich scholarly heritage of the Presbyterian Church. So have we become a church where answers or results are more important that the theological understanding that has helped us to this point? If we lack good theology underscoring our thinking, talking and discussions, one wonders about the basis of our starting points.

The importance of understanding the context and Gospel was again reinforced in my study. Linked to this is the engagement of the Gospel with the culture. I was left wondering about my own lack of ministry training and preparedness for this and reflected again on the depth of Newbigin's work on the Gospel in a pluralistic society. How do we seriously engage with these matters in the church, where running the programme is often the key driver? How do we have the conversations about the sacred cows that move beyond our personal preferences?

The lack of understanding of m*issio Dei* and the implications of this seem to be huge. The concept of *missio Dei* is essential to the nature of the church. Participation in the *missio Dei* begins with an understanding of the role of the church. While this will always happen from a context, and discernment how we are to respond will be vital – if we continue to operate within structures that are missional, we will sell short God's Mission every time. God's mission is calling us and sending us – to be a missionary church – primarily in our own community. Yet our ecclesiocentric approach sees mission become one of many programmes the church offers. Para-church mission groups become involved and see themselves as the sending agency and the destination is often some far-off pagan place. We fail to see that mission is not a programme: rather, it defines the church as God's sent people. Either we are defined by mission, or we reduce the gospel and the mandate of the church. I think we would do well to reflect deeply on Newbigin's understanding of mission and his lament that mission had become separated from the church. Michael Goheen, quoting Newbigin, writes, 'The idea that the mission of the church can be an enterprise apart from the church, acting over its head, directed from elsewhere, and the church a receptacle into which the products of mission can be deposited, is surely one that corrupts both. The truth is that the church is not the church in any New Testament sense unless it is mission.'[197] I was left reflecting how easy it is to resort to a solely programmatic approach, where we ask either staff or volunteers to be responsible for programme management and delivery versus joining God in God's mission.

At the practical level, we try and re-organise the church and, in doing so, focus on what the church does – but do not address the first order questions about the nature of the church. So we become a user-friendly church; or a small group church– rather than the church. On an organizational level, we tend to focus on the weakness and try and 'fix' that.

[197] Goheen, As the Father has sent me, I am sending you, p142

This seems based on the view that the church is 'a place where certain things happen,' and so it becomes inwardly-focused and we spend our resources on maintenance rather than mission. The church becomes a place where the needs of its members take precedence over the needs of those outside. Thom S. Rainer wrote about this in 'Seven Sins of Dying Churches', *Outreach Magazine* , 'In a recent survey of churches across America, we found that nearly 95% of the churches' ministries were for members alone. Indeed, many churches had no ministries for those outside the congregation. Many churches seem to exist only for themselves. While there certainly should be ministry available for church members, often the balance between external and internal ministries is heavily skewed toward internal. When churches seek to care and minister only to their own, it's a likely sign that decline is in motion and that death may be imminent.'[198] Likewise, Bill Easum writes in Unfreezing Moves, 'Most Protestant congregations are stuck in the muck and mire of their institutions with little or no movement toward joining Jesus on the mission field. To them faithfulness means supporting their church and keeping it open.'[199]

As a wider part of this, when a church adopts the view that it is a vendor of religious goods and services, it in turn relies on marketing techniques to attract customers, or new members, to the church. This may have worked in the past, but times have changed – especially among the younger generation. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons conclude that no strategy, tactics, or clever marketing campaign could ever clear away the smokescreen that surrounds Christianity in today's culture. The perception of outsiders will change only when Christians strive to represent the heart of God in every relationship and situation.[200] Eddie Gibbs speaks to a possible reason behind the move that so many churches make toward marketing strategies to reach those outside the church: churches throughout the Western world find themselves increasingly marginalized from society as they endeavour to relate the good news to people whose assumptions and attitudes have been shaped by modernity and postmodernity. Our post-Christian, neo-pagan, pluralistic North American context presents cross-cultural missionary challenges every bit as daunting as those we would face on any other continent. Unfortunately most pastors and church leaders have had no missiological training. Consequently they resort to marketing strategies in place of missionary insights in their attempts to reach out to a population that is becoming increasingly distanced from the church.[201]

This leads me to ask if one of things we need to be grappling with is teaching/instruction in the area of mission. Again, Gibbs writes: "The majority of church leaders throughout the Western world find themselves ministering in a rapidly changing cultural context that is both post-Christian and pluralistic. Consequently their outreach ministries are as cross-cultural as those of their more traditional missionary

[198] Rainer, 'Seven Sins of Dying Churches,' *Outreach Magazine*
[199] Easum, Unfreezing Moves: Following Jesus into the Mission Field , p10.
[200] David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons. Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity And Why it Matters, p226.
[201] Gibbs Church Next: Quantum Changes In How We Do Ministry, p36

counterparts seeking to make Christ known in other parts of the world. Consequently they are in as much need of missionary training to venture across the street as to venture overseas."[202]

There are also questions as to how, in our post-modern, post-Christian, multi-faith world, we can actually have a conversation or develop a theology of mission using *missio Dei*. To be sure, *missio Dei* puts the theology of mission in the context of the Trinity – yet that is the very heart of the Christian faith! While some seem to want to start the conversation about a theology of mission from a human perspective, Barth, with his focus on divine revelation, would want to take issue with that approach.

Linked to this is a lack of a strong missional ecclesiology. It is not that this is under-developed - it seems not to be developed at all! I did find a paper from Paul Hooker, What is Missional Ecclesiology?, yet was left wondering about the need for more writing from a reformed viewpoint. I wonder if our theology is guiding our practice, or is our practice guiding our theology? Maybe part of this conversation is the issue of training people for this new situation. The Church of England has developed the Pioneer stream and Dave Male is a strong advocate of this approach. In our setting, is that really an option? Should we offer a different starting point, where all those who present for ministry training are required to have a pioneer ability? And, rather than a two- or multi-tiered approach, say we are all in this new place and we all need to listen to what the Spirit is saying.

While the call of the gospel is for counter-cultural mission and ministry, I was left reflecting that some of the strongest drivers in the church are nothing more than reflections of the consumerist culture for choice. I reflected on the high value we place around choice, and the idea that more choice means better options and greater satisfaction. This is a concern I have around Fresh Expressions, and the assumption that the more options, the greater chance we have to engaging people; yet is that true? This model is one that missional church thinkers and practitioners would want to question.

Linked to that is the strong hold of segregation versus the pull of authentic community. In many places, the church has developed ministry, programmes and even whole ways of doing life that are built around the principle of the homogenous unit – even if they have never heard of it! If we offer 'church' to people who like the same things, are the same age and are at the same stage of life, are we really being the church? While there are strengths to that approach, it often denies us the ability to be the multi-generational body we are called to be.

Are the changes required far deeper and broader than what is currently offered – which seem superficial and stylistic? Do we need to address a paradigm shift to our changed context? This question goes back to our understanding of church. Might it be that this will require experimentation as we go, before anything is established? Will this best be achieved by incremental adjustments, or is something far more radical required? Our current model of church is often built around the understanding that the church is here to worship God – so mission is secondary and difficult. If our ultimate purpose is to share in *missio Dei,* everything changes! The question of defining *missio Dei* is an ongoing matter, been focused around the questions: does the *missio Dei* remain bound to the *donum Dei* (gift of God) in Jesus Christ and the

[202] Ibid, p27

need for grace, forgiveness and reconciliation with God? Or, is the *missio Dei* more to be understood in terms of God's general concern for the whole creation, *mission Dei mundo* (mission of God in the world)?

I like the way Tom Wright puts it: the power of the gospel lies, not in the offer of a new spirituality or religious experience, not in the threat of hellfire (certainly not the threat of being 'left behind') which can be removed if only the hearer ticks this box, says this prayer, raises a hand or whatever…but in the powerful announcement that God is God, that Jesus is Lord, that the powers of evil have been defeated, that God's new world has begun. This announcement, stated as a fact about the way the world is rather than an appeal about the way you might like your life, your emotions or your bank balance to be, is the foundation of everything else. Of course, once the announcement is made, in whatever way, it means instantly that all people everywhere are gladly invited to come in, to join the party, to discover forgiveness for the past, an astonishing destiny in God's future, and a vocation in the present.[203]

Such an approach will challenge us in our faith-sharing and evangelism. It will see us primarily in the world, rather than the church-based come-to-us events. It will also mean all community-based/community-facing ministry will need very clear faith components.

In reflecting on new ways of doing church, I wonder if we are we primarily catering for bored, middle-class church goers and so creating communities of like-minded dissidents, united by discontent; or is this a last-ditch attempt to breath fresh life into a dying model and so a forerunner of a missional movement? On this, I think the jury is still out.

While Fresh Expressions is promoted strongly within the Church of England, it is maybe still too early to note developing trends, but the ability to reach a multi-cultural society seems limited. Some research suggests it can, yet where in all this does cross-cultural mission sit?

While I read a lot, my reflection is that there is a surprising lack of material concerning evangelism. It seems that for many, sharing the gospel has been ignored, placed in the too-hard basket, or no longer seen as important.

Children and households under-feature or are ignored in many Fresh Expression and Missional Church conversations. Messy Church seems to be the flag-bearer for Fresh Expressions in this regard, yet this seems to fly in the face of what Fresh Expressions is about. Messy Church is now clearly seen as a programme and is in danger of quickly losing any edge it may have had. It is also noted that something like Messy Church remains as a destination rather than a door and while numbers attending are encouraging, numbers leaving show that, rather than being something pioneering, it looks more and more like an adaption of the attractional model. One book – Postmodern Children's Ministry by Ivy Beckwith and two articles provide a deep challenge to the much-used model of segregation of children (and youth) that should be read and discussed. The first is Is the Era of Age Segmentation Over by Kara Powell, Fuller Youth Institute at Fuller Theological Seminary, and the second is Where are the Children?:

[203] Wright, Surprised by Hope, p239

keeping sight of young disciples in the emerging church movement by Karen Yust, Brian McLaren, Dan Jennings and David Csinos.

The poor and the marginalised are also often missing in the discussions. Where such conversation does occur, it seems to be based on 'us' coming to 'you' model. I believe there is much more thinking and conversation to take place in this area.

As far as the missional church approach is concerned, it seems to me to be hampered by the multi-faceted approach to "missional", which leads to "missional" becoming whatever one wants it to be. At its base, it leans strongly into Newbigin's engagement of gospel and culture, yet at times lacks the theological depth required to move forward. Is it the case that in North America as missional church movement grew out of Gospel and Culture Movement, that it lacks theological practitioners? Newbigin was able to hold these things together and to speak to and across those worlds. In that part of the world, is that something lacking? Related to that, what does the work of Martin Robinson in the UK have to say – especially to our setting?

Robinson and a team have developed a model based around partnership, involving several congregations working together in a 'cluster', supported by experienced trainers and consultants. This partnership is strategic and spiritual, including times of prayer, worship and fellowship which strengthen the common journey into mission. It is "missional" in that the focus is on equipping each church to participate in God's mission of reconciling, restoring and redeeming the world to himself. Being missional is more than just doing more social service activities or increasing the membership of a church. A missional church looks for how God is at work in the world today, in light of how it knows God has worked in the past, especially through Jesus Christ. A missional church chooses to join God in that mission in the world, to let God call and send it in that mission. The focus is on Church because they believe that the local church is God's primary instrument for reaching his world. It is based upon the view that, to change from seeing mission as something that the Church does, to seeing mission as the underlying raison d'être of the church, is no easy task, which is why Partnership for Missional Church proposes a three-to five-year process to enable the change to take root in the ongoing culture of a congregation. The process has three phases: Discovery, Experimenting, Embodiment.
One of the distinctive features is that it recognises the need for a deepening spirituality to accompany enhanced strategic planning within local churches. Underlying this three-phase process is a strong emphasis on Spiritual Disciplines including: Dwelling in the Word; Prayer; Journaling; Silence; Emptying of self; Longing for home and the reign of God. Does this offer us something that is worth more exploration?

I think one of the most positive gifts the missional church offers is the gift of encouraging the framing of questions that help us grapple together with mission in our setting. They invite us to move from the traditional strategic-planning approach – where are we?; where do we want to go?; and how do we get there? - to questions like: who are we?; and who and what is God calling us to be?

"What might this look like?" is a question that comes about now! In the last chapter of his book, A Light to the Nations, Michael Goheen addresses this very question. He says these thirteen points are not easy and sure-fire steps to grow the church, nor are they silver bullets with miraculous fixes that can cut through complexity, difficulty, time and hard work. He says his points are brief, suggestive and evocative – sometimes theological and sometimes anecdotal. He wants to stimulate the imagination to reflect on how the church might live as a faithful missional community today:

A Church with Worship that Nurtures our Missional Identity
A Church Empowered by Preaching the Gospel
A Church devoted to Communal Prayer
A Church Striving to live as Contrast Community
A Church that Understands its Cultural Context
A Church Trained for a Missionary Encounter in its callings in the World
A Church Trained to Evangelism in an Organic Way
A Church deeply involved in the needs of its Neighbourhood and World
A Church Committed to Missions
A Church with well-trained leaders
A Church with Parents trained to take up the task of nurturing children in Faith
A Church with Small groups that nurture for Mission in the World
A Church that seeks and expresses the Unity of the Body of Christ [204]

In terms of the challenges and opportunities at a regional level, the technical-adaptive model could be a useful tool. In our setting, where Presbyteries generally do not employ many/any staff, where will the capacity come from, to engage with this model? This work would not be done quickly and the ability to find people willing to commit the time, energy and expertise required will be an ongoing challenge. Is training in this model the sort of thing that could/should be offered to all ministers every other year and to sessions/parish councils? Or is this model just a flash-in-the-pan business model that we should stay clear of?

Roxburgh calls us to re-enter the neighbourhood and discover what the Spirit is doing there and to shape the church around that mission, so suggesting and/or implying that what the Spirit is doing in the church is secondary. While calling us beyond any technique or one approach model, Roxburgh leaves himself open to this very challenge for his latest book, Joining God in the neighbourhood concludes with two chapters with rules for radicals and nine steps to begin the journey. Critics will point out that the very thing Roxburgh calls us out of, he himself promotes. So, in the end, is the missional church going to be reduced to technique and guidelines to follow?

Yet, as Roxburgh states, most of us know practically everything has changed. No one needs to be convinced anymore that we are in a massive transition period that none of us have experienced before

[204] Goheen, A Light to the Nations, p201-226

and none of us are trained to address. We face increasing anxiety around what to do about this massive transition among local, regional and national leaders.

Local church leaders are starting to sense the need to re-engage the local, their neighbours and specific contexts as a key to understanding where the Spirit might be pushing us. This will involve a major change in imagination and a lot of courage from these leaders. Re-orientation will include things like:

- Letting go of centre-periphery, hub-spoke thinking.
- Leaving behind the conviction that one more organizational change will work.
- Laying down programs imported from other places.
- Entering the local to be with and among the people.

The challenge of change at local church, regional and national levels and the implications of this seem, on the one hand, immense and the other, exciting. What is very clear is that it is a new day and we have not been this way before.

At the end of Transforming Mission, David Bosch states that *missio Dei* must remain multi-dimensional, constantly needing to adapt, and it is ultimately determined by God. He suggests that, in order to be credible and faithful to the origins and character of *missio Dei*, the church in mission will be described in terms of the six major 'salvific events' portrayed in the New Testament:

Incarnation: the church in mission identifying with the needy.
Cross: the church in mission offering reconciliation and serving sacrificially.
Resurrection: the church in mission proclaiming victory over death and destruction.
Ascension: the church in mission embodying the kingdom reign of Christ.
Pentecost: the church in mission living in the power and community of the Spirit.
Parousia: the church in mission pointing to the primacy of the future.[205]

These may never be viewed in isolation from one another. *Missio Dei* – the astonishing reality of God and the amazing call of the church.

Maybe our ongoing question should be: What is the Spirit saying to the Church?

[205] Bosch, Transforming Mission, p524-530

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