

Launch of Institute of new Anglicanism

February 13th 2010.

### ***Deep Church in Nelson: A paradigm shift or gentle tweak?***

In 563 an Irish priest named Columba landed with 12 companions on the island of Iona on the West Coast of what is now, Scotland. Although he was very well educated and came from a noble family there is something of a cloud surrounding his departure from Ireland that is the stuff of legends. Columba established a monastery on Iona and this became the base for him and his followers to take the Christian faith into the land of the Celts and the Picts. This was a culture dominated by the pantheistic spirituality of the Druids – severe opponents of Christianity. His most influential convert was Brude, king of the Picts. Although he took the Druids head-on with his confidence in the Gospel, the thing that intrigues me most about Columba is the way he didn't reject the spiritual culture of the day with its pantheistic love of nature, but he redeemed it. Celtic Christianity today is far more comfortable meeting in the middle of God's creation – as one author described it 'in places fashioned by the finger of God rather than places constructed by the hands of men.'

So what's this got to do with the launch of this 'Institute of New Anglicanism?'

One of the clergy in this Diocese seems to have a passion for acronyms – judging by a recent email he sent me. He referred to the 'Institute of New Anglicanism' as 'IoNA' and there seems to be something vaguely prophetic about this when I reflect on the challenges facing Columba and the challenges facing us as we consider how we might have an impact for the Kingdom into today's culture. And if the movie 'Avatar' is any reflection of this spiritual culture of today – then the similarities between our challenge and Columba's situation are even more striking.

*(video clips...)*

In fact this is one of the most exciting features of postmodernism – the rejection of modernism's love affair with reason and individualism – which has been the prevailing western worldview for almost 400 years – and its apparent embrace of revealed or transcendent truth.

However – I'm ahead of myself.

And anyway, I see that there has been a subtle change and it's now the 'Institute **for** New Anglicanism. So I guess I'll just have to get over it and realise that instead of IoNA, I'm now dealing with 'IFNA!'

### **Deep Church in Nelson: A paradigm shift or a gentle tweak?**

The world is a very different place from when I was first ordained.

The last 25 years have seen a dramatic shift in the structures and values of our society.

Our world has changed and I hope I don't need to spend any time here outlining some of the more distinctive changes, or describing the catalyst behind the changes.

We do however need to acknowledge the reality of this change - it is fundamental to what we are doing here today, because successive census figures point so clearly to our failure as a church, to engage with these changes in any significant way.

This inability is reflected nationally in the decreasing percentage of those identifying themselves as Christian (or as Anglican) in the 5 yearly census, but also locally in our Diocesan attendance figures.

The church is in decline. Between 2001 and 2006 there was a 5.1% decline in the Anglican Church nationally.

Here in this Diocese – which boasted huge increases in the early 90's – the latest attendance figures show that we are now back to the level we were before that growth took place.

Now I know that you can't compare lemons with apples and the attendance patterns have changed during those years – but I think that we would be blind if we didn't take the trends at face value.

Statistically, Christianity is in decline and we are part of that decline.

Reduced to the most simple formula, the world has changed and we haven't.

We seem to have adopted three main strategies.

One is the 'bury-the-head' approach: pretty classic Anglican response!

One example is the 'LSM' (local shared ministry) model of ministry as it is practiced in many places. A parish that can no longer sustain full-time ministry raises up two or three people who will be ordained to maintain the ministry in that place – as it has practiced in preceding months/years. It is, at its very heart, a maintenance model – a way of ensuring that we keep doing things the way we've always done them, despite the inability of the church, as it has been practiced, to engage with and have influence within the community in which it has been planted.

The second is the 'shout-at-the-darkness' approach

In this approach the postmodern, post-Christian, post-colonial culture around us is seen as the enemy. And we set ourselves up as the moral alternative – a ghetto of self-righteousness that won't let the nasty world encroach.

The third might be described as the 'join-the-other-side' approach: Let's change our theology and discard any of the concepts that don't fit nicely within our pluralistic, inclusive culture. Let's do away with sin and salvation; let's not talk about God's judgement and certainly let's dismiss 'hell' as a medieval concept that has no place in our enlightened world. And let's tear out those pages in the Bible that challenge our modern expressions of human sexuality.

But there is a fourth approach that is emerging as we finally get serious about doing the work to understand what the philosophical and sociological features of this new age are, and how we might be the Body of Christ, doing the work of Christ, without compromising the Gospel of Christ, within this culture.

This (fourth) approach has led to the development of the 'Fresh Expressions' or 'Missional Church' movement in the UK and in the 'Emerging Church' movement in the US and there has been a growing mountain of books coming out of this movement describing the many and varied initiatives and church plants – some of which are quite inspiring and have challenged me in my own thinking.

This movement has become very popular within the mainstream church here in New Zealand, particularly within our own denomination and many churches seem to be jumping on the bandwagon as if it is some sort of lifeline to grab hold of. The words 'missional' and 'fresh expressions' etc are bandied around ad infinitum and it seems as if almost anything can be passed off as a 'fresh expression' without doing the hard work and asking the hard questions.

At a conference I was at a few months ago, someone described themselves as a ‘fresh expressions’ church because they had a brand new colourful notice-board outside the church. Another church described themselves the same way because they had developed a ‘tots and tunes’ program.

One book, from this avalanche of material that has had quite an impact upon me recently is called ‘Deep Church’ by Jim Belcher, the founding church planter and lead pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Newport Beach, California.<sup>1</sup>

‘Deep Church’ was a term coined by CS Lewis in a letter he wrote to the Times in 1952. The ‘God is Dead’ movement that epitomised 20th century modernism had become very powerful and vocal. In the early 1950’s a groundswell of orthodox voices was growing in opposition to the modernist thinking that was dominating Theological Colleges and Seminaries. The problem was that these orthodox voices spanned the ecclesiastical spectrum from high to low or, as we might say today, from evangelical to anglo-catholic. There was little unity in their voice. So in an attempt to unite those who believed in supernatural revelation Lewis wrote to the Times; *‘Perhaps the trouble is that as supernaturalists, whether ‘High’ or ‘Low’ Church, thus taken together, they lack a name. May I suggest ‘Deep Church’; or, if that fails in humility, Baxter’s ‘mere Christians’?’*

Belcher has looked at the division that exists in the US between those who are seeking to uphold an orthodox faith in a pluralistic, relativistic culture and suggest a possible middle way – or third way that he calls ‘Deep Church.’

This book really appealed to me on two levels.

Firstly because of his very clear analysis of the divisions within the evangelical church in the States and his research on the essential characteristics of postmodernism as he experiences it in the US and the impact of postmodernism upon the mission and ministry of the church (positively and negatively).

And secondly because of his description of what he is seeking to develop as ‘Deep Church’ at Redeemer Presbyterian. It resonated with me because of the spirit that I sense growing within the Diocese as I travel around the parishes. I think this is a very relevant book for us as a Diocese.

Let me take a few minutes to quote from each of the seven chapters that describe his picture of ‘Deep Church’ as they are seeking to incarnate it:

#### 1. Deep Truth.

*‘As part of a centred-set church, the pastors at Redeemer attempt to preach and lead worship in a way that is sensitive to the seekers in our midst. Humbled by our own sin and need for the gospel, we remember what it feels like to not believe. We don’t want to be bombastic or arrogant know-it-alls. We don’t set up unnecessary boundaries for those who are searching for meaning. But this does not mean that we are not confident about the Well in our midst. We are not hard postmoderns. Our confidence is in Christ, not ourselves. When it comes to the gospel we are confident – even dogmatic, because the message comes from God’s revelation. He has spoken to us in His Word and made the message of salvation clear. Thus we confidently proclaim the existence of the Well in our midst. Through our preaching, liturgy, weekly Lord’s Supper and a community of believers united in Christ, we want to provide a cup of living water to a dying world. We want to see others drawn to the source of life.’*

#### 2. Deep Evangelism

---

<sup>1</sup> Published 2009 by IVP

*'What we see with Jesus is that thousands of people were invited into the community of Jesus. But once they joined the community, Jesus challenged them to not just be part of the community but to commit themselves to him. (John 6:26-29, 43, 53, 66). For those who followed him because of his teaching and signs about his Kingdom, Jesus challenged them to embrace his mission and its application by taking up their cross and following him. And many did. They became his disciples.'*

### 3. Deep Gospel

*'The Gospel is at the centre of all that we do. The 'gospel' is the good news that through Jesus, the Messiah, the power of God's Kingdom has entered history to renew the whole world. Through the Saviour God has established his reign. When we believe and rely on Jesus' work and record (rather than ours) for our relationship to God, that Kingdom power comes upon us and begins to work through us. We witness this radical new way of living by our renewed lives, beautiful community, social justice, and cultural transformation. This good news brings new life. The gospel motivates, guides and empowers every aspect of our living and worship.'*

### 4. Deep Worship

*'In order to be faithful we must draw on not only Scripture, but tradition as well. But we also draw on our cultural sensitivities and our desire to 'worship before the nations' making sure that our worship is accessible to an outsider. Keeping all three – Bible, tradition and culture – in mind, we are able to craft a worship gathering that is neither irrelevant nor syncretistic. If any one of the triad is missing, we risk falling into one of these two extremes.'*

He then goes on to describe 'Deep Worship' in seven areas or values:

- Ancient and new
- Biblical drama
- Joy and reverence
- Priesthood of all believers
- Profound but accessible sermons
- Weekly communion
- Guest friendly – doxological evangelism

### 5. Deep Preaching

*'Our goal is not to set up boundary markers to keep Christians safe or to keep those who don't agree with us out. Rather, we preach Christ in every text, laying out and analysing the human condition through Scriptures and experience, and exposing the radical, shocking grace of God that enters our situation, transforms us and empowers us to live differently.'*

### 6. Deep Ecclesiology

*'We not only take the Bible and mission seriously in our ecclesiology but the 'inherited forms' of the church as well. Why? Because without this tradition we lack the individual and corporate wisdom to correctly interpret what the Bible says about the church, and how it should be organised. In the crucible of day to day life together, it is too easy to think we are being biblical when we either let the traditions and preferences of the recent past dictate our ecclesiology, or let the surrounding culture mould our views of church structure.'*

## 7. Deep Culture

*'I came to understand that a Christian worldview which included the church as 'institution' and 'organism' would help the church become consistent in its interaction with public life. It allowed us to remain distinct but at the same time provided the language to work in the public and social realms, creating culture alongside non-believers. For the first time, I understood what it meant to be a 'resident alien.'*

This church that he is building is one that I'd like to belong to.

I find myself personally identifying with the values and dreams as he lays them out in the book.

But you know it would be far too easy to grab this model and try and transplant it here without doing the hard work – and it is hard work – of asking the questions that they asked at Redeemer Presbyterian.

We love to *imitate* – but I think that God's Spirit is calling us to *initiate*.

We'd rather have the results than grapple with the questions.

And that is the whole point of this Institute for New Anglicanism. It's an environment where – or a network of - people who want to ask what is Anglicanism and Anglican ministry is going to need look like that will build the Kingdom of God.

I guess the clichéd response when looking at models such as that described in 'Deep Church' is 'why reinvent the wheel?' If someone is doing it successfully, why not simply embrace it and save ourselves all the trouble, time and energy?

And the clichéd response deserves a similar answer, because the wheel won't let us move on water!

The ground around us has changed and while the old vehicle might be very comfortable for a decreasing number of passengers it may not be capable of taking us into new territory.

Over the past twenty years I have embraced Church growth principles, cell-church structures, seeker sensitive worship, purpose driven practices, alpha programs – all of which were exciting and rewarding. But at no time did we sit down as a parish and ask the fundamental questions of who, why, what and how.

And so while each of these brought some fruit to the life of the church, they failed to impact our mission.

Because what was need was a new way of thinking – not a new model.

We 'tweaked' when what was needed was a paradigm shift.

*'Tweaking' is a change to form and structure.*

*'Paradigm shifting' is about changing our thinking – which no doubt may lead to a change in form, structure and practice.*

Several years ago the Diocese brought Bob Orr over from the US to lead a leadership conference on a new model of church – known as the 'Cell-based Church.' I was really excited about this new model which was a bold restructuring of the church based on Acts 2:42-47; a church that met together in homes and together as a fellowship 'in the temple courts.' Bob Orr was convinced that we needed to reclaim this model which was a missional model. At the centre of each cell group was an empty chair, and members were invited to pray for 'unchurched' or 'dechurched' friends who they might invite to 'fill' that empty seat. As the group grew, an apprentice was being trained

up who would take two members with them and birth a new group. So this was a missional model that grew the church through a series of expanding 'cells' or small groups.

But it needed a new paradigm – we needed to become a church *of* small groups. But we joined many others and simply became a church *with* small groups.

We 'tweaked' when, what was needed was a paradigm shift.

We face a challenge to the way we do church that is going to require a paradigm shift.

It requires leadership who can ask those questions and that is why this is such an important part of our Diocesan Strategic plan. We are committed to developing a new generation of leaders who are able to engage at this level and to challenge existing leaders to 'extend their tent-pegs!'

Bob Jackson in his book 'The Road to Growth' list the following skills that future clergy and lay people will need (reworked by Archdeacon John Day on his study leave report '*Reflections on parish growth*')

Clergy that are:

Leaders in mission	more than	Pastors to the flock
Church planters	more than	Church curators
Missionaries	more than	Chaplains
Pioneers	more than	Settlers
Entrepreneurs	more than	Conformists
Managers of change	more than	Rocks of stability

Enablers of other's ministries	rather than	The corks in the bottle
Leaders of specialist teams	rather than	Multi-competent dog-collars
Inspirers of growth	rather than	Managers of decline
Counter-culture leaders	rather than	Establishment figures

Church Communities that are:

Pioneering fresh expressions	rather than	Maintaining existing forms
Prepared to take risks	rather than	Playing it safe
Relationship centred	rather than	Building centred
Working together	rather than	A group of independent operators
Authentic adverts of Jesus	rather than	Moral and authority figures of the State

It is challenging, but exciting stuff.

After years in parish ministry and three years as Bishop, I have ended up with more questions than answers and I am thrilled that the Institute for New Anglicanism offers the space to engage with those questions and seek the answers that are going to build God's Kingdom here in this Diocese.