

New Anglicanism and Mission-Shaped Ministry

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It might be thought that this initiative in 'New Anglicanism' is another instance of those 'pesky evangelicals' running off and doing their own thing, ignoring the rest of the Anglican Church. It hardly sounds like 'proper' Anglicanism. In this session, I want to underscore that far from being an independent-minded exercise divorced from the thinking of the wider Anglican Church, this is more a case of our drawing on and contextualizing significant thinking and experience in similar exercises that have well under way in various corners of the Anglican Church for over a decade. In many ways, the Anglican Church in both New Zealand and Australia is playing catch-up on initiatives that have the highest levels of support and commendation elsewhere, and especially in the Church of England.

The Mission-Shaped Church and New Anglicanism

Evaluations of the value of the Decade of Evangelism (1990-1999, and initiative of the 1988 Lambeth Conference) are many and varied. Yet significant initiatives did indeed merge from the Decade of Evangelism, and it goes under the name 'mission-shaped church'. Mission in the context of the post-Christendom church is being explored on many fronts, but a particularly Anglican expression of the mission-shaped church was addressed by the 'Springboard' project initiated in the UK in 1992 by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. *Springboard* was given the brief to "to encourage, renew and mobilise the Church for evangelism and mission'. Originally planned for four years, it ran for twelve, all under the leadership of Martin Cavender. In 2004 it was succeeded by *Fresh Expressions* project, led by Steven Croft.

Particularly notable was the release in 2004 of *Mission-shaped Church: church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context* (released in Australia under Willow Publishing, 2005). This was the result of a working group chaired by Bishop Graham Cray, and was unanimously welcomed and commended by the Church of England General Synod in February, 2004. It gave new legitimacy to stepping out of the square and recognising that church, when addressing a missional priority, may end up looking very different from the traditional parish paradigm. A variety of fresh expressions were noted, and diversity gained official sanction:

If 'church' is what happens when people encounter the Risen Jesus and commit themselves to sustaining and deepening that encounter in their encounter with each other, there is plenty of theological room for diversity of rhythm and style, so long as we have ways of identifying the same living Christ at the heart of every expression of Christian life in common.

Archbishop Rowan Williams

The *Mission-shaped Church* was produced specifically as a development from an earlier (1994) report, *Breaking new Ground: Church Planting in the Church of England*. A significant new dimension was noted: the thinking was now not just in terms of church planting within a traditional parish context (as in 1994), but that ‘fresh expressions’ endorsed initiatives outside the parish context and recognised that in the changing context in which the church lives, notions of what constituted a fresh expression of church may take much more varied form compared to existing church paradigms.

The movement from the 1994 report to the 2004 *Mission-shaped Church* is profound. It has progressed from ‘how’ types of questions to more essential ‘why’ – a questioning that addresses more directly the whole purpose and responsibility of church in the greater scheme of God’s missional purposes. The Decade of Evangelism, in parts of the Church of England at least, has refocussed attention from inward concerns to a renewed awareness of the church as participating in the mission of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I mention this for two reasons. One is simply by way of encouragement—good can emerge from such initiatives, and not all of them are committees by another name! But my second reason is more compelling. There is much learned wisdom being harvested from the explorations, trials and errors associated with *Springboard* and *Fresh Expressions*. I’m wary of the labels. There is a real danger of the label ‘Fresh Expressions’ is being attached to anything and everything, much of which much like what has been happening for decades. But for all that, there is some well-considered and creative mission-focused work underway under the auspices of the Church of England – more so in some dioceses than others.

If you want to explore something of these learned experiences, various perspectives are available in the 'Explorations' series published by Church House Publishing – the titles alone give you a taste of areas being explored:

Bob Jackson, *Hope for the Church: contemporary strategies for growth* (2002)

Bob Jackson, *The Road to Growth: towards a thriving Church* (2005)

Steven Croft (ed), *The Future of the Parish System: Shaping the Church of England in the 21st Century* (2006)

Mike Booker and Mark Ireland, *Evangelism - which way now? An evaluation of Contemporary Strategies for Evangelism* 2nd edition

Sara Savage, Sylvia Collins-Mayo, Bob Mayo with Graham Cray, *Making Sense of Generation Y: The world view of 15-25 year olds*

Good News People - Recognizing diocesan evangelists -Working Party of the House of Bishops

Paul Bayes, et al, *Mission-shaped Parish: traditional church in a changing world*

My sense is that the Church of England, in its more innovative mode, is way ahead of the New Zealand and Australian church in its mission shaped orientation:

It is undoubtedly the case that no other denomination in any country has affirmed the need for new ways of being church with the enthusiasm of the Church of England.

In the Australian context, it was only in 2005 that the House of Bishops heard a presentation on the mission-shaped church for the first time (by Bp. Graham Cray, chair of the Church of England working group). In 2006 General Synod released *Building the Mission-shaped Church in Australia* (edited by Alan Nichols), the first such resource directed at Anglican churches and dioceses in Australia. It is a concise version of much of the UK material (see www.freshexpressions.org.uk), and warrants ongoing attention.

Now without a doubt, this line of thought and the initiatives it represents needs careful theological appraisal and critiques of this nature have already been undertaken. The theological framework as reflected in the UK report is uneven. While some criticisms are valid, my impression is that in other instances it is as much a case of the academy meeting the coal face—looseness of terminology and expression here and there does not invalidate the major direction of mission-shaped initiatives. It is not my purpose today to enter into theological dialogue, but two areas of concern stand out: one is the lack of clarity at some points in regard to the priority of the kingdom of God over church growth and/or survival. In the purposes of God, establishing or developing churches is not the end point of mission, and this needs clearer expression. A not unrelated issue concerns references to incarnational theology, especially as applied to the missionary church.¹

My plan today is to outline some of the principles that frame ‘mission-shaped’ thinking, offer some comments about mission, symbolic culture and evangelical trends more generally, then to make a few observations about the opportunities, challenges and dangers we face in considering mission-shaped initiatives in our local Anglican evangelical context. The latter will focus especially the implications for the types of relationships and culture of leadership that make for a mission-shaped diocese.

Introducing the ‘Mission-Shaped Church’

The primary and over-riding premise that gives any credibility to mission-shaped thinking is the *missio dei*. All mission is God’s mission, proceeding, enabled, directed by God out of love and in faithfulness to his pledge to bring salvation to the totality of creation (“Mission goes out from God. Mission is God's way of loving and saving the world...” - *Lambeth Conference 1998, Section II p121*). As others have put it, “it’s not the church of God that has a mission, but the God of mission who has a church”.

The *missio dei* can only be discerned in reference to the Trinity, and this is well articulated in the various ‘mission-shaped’ reports and statements.

Going on the UK figures, some 94% of the population are not adherents of other faiths. Of this 94%, only 10% are regular attenders at church, and another 10% have ‘fringe’ contact with a church. 40% are ‘de-churched’, of whom half are open to returning to

¹ On the importance of distinguishing the kingdom from church in this area, see John M. Hull, *Mission-Shaped Church: A Theological Response* (SCM 2006), esp. 1-9 ; on reference to incarnational theology, see Peter Adam, ‘Incarnational Theology for a Missionary Church?’, *St Mark’s Review* 2006/1, 14-21. As Adam rightly states, the incarnation is essentially related to the revelation of God, and very much part of Christ’s ministry: ‘the incarnate Christ was not dumb, and the Gospel is a message to be spoken and heard’ (18). The whole issue of *St Mark’s Review* 2006/1 is given over to theological assessment of *Mission-Shaped Church*.

church if invited, and another half have no intention of returning because of disillusionment or negative experiences. The remaining 40% have never been to a church, other than perhaps a wedding or funeral. The report drew the following conclusion:

The missionary situation faced by the Church has changed. Inviting people back to church as we currently know it may be an effective mission strategy for reaching up to (perhaps) one third of the population who are dechurched. But it is misconceived to assume that this represents a coherent mission approach for the majority of the population for whom church as we know it is peripheral, obscure, confusing or irrelevant. (41)

There are a number of key principles that undergird mission-shaped thinking. Of particular importance is the recognition that as the world and society in which the church exists and seeks to engage is changing rapidly, so too the culture of the church must adapt to remove as many barriers as possible that would otherwise inhibit effective engagement between the church and the community at large. Mission-shaped thinking encourages ‘**double listening**’, attending to the culture in which a church seeks to take root, and to inherited traditions integral to the gospel.

A mission-shaped church is called to **go out into the world**, not so much to bring people back into an existing church entity and culture, but to establish fresh expressions of church in cultural forms appropriate to any given context.

One other key principle is worth observing- the ‘**both-and**’ approach. Is it realistic to expect some congregations to reinvent themselves by setting aside everything that is known and familiar, and to step into another culture that is foreign and another world? In some cases yes, but in the majority that would be an unfair expectation. There is a place for both. Giving genuine ministry and support for those familiar with traditional forms, while encouraging the releasing of facilities and resources in support on new initiatives. Rowan Williams’ call for a ‘mixed economy’ reflects this balance, of new initiatives growing in and around established ministries.

The ‘both-and’ principle is applicable at a number of levels – across a diocese, in specific regions, and within a parish or in the context of ministry networks and extended ministry teams.

Bob Jackson (*Hope for the Church: contemporary strategies for growth*) lists eight keys to growth (he discusses these at length- over 100 pages):

1. Facing facts (well grounded statistical analysis)
2. Nurturing faith
3. Welcoming all
4. Taking risks
5. Acting small, whatever your size
6. Planting churches
7. Growing younger
8. Supporting clergy

Now much of this has been around for some time. Yet mission-shaped thinking is calling for a more intentional commitment to introduce and follow through on new initiatives,

especially on the grounds of a commitment to mission, and not just church growth or enhancement. The moves from independence and solo operation involve a significant change of culture and an investment in building relationships and partnerships that will not happen unless there is a commitment in that direction.

Challenges & pitfalls

Mission-shaped church or Church-shaped mission?

Churches are perfecting the ability to speak the language of missional ministry, but changing nothing. A very real danger is in talking ‘mission-shaped church’ but in reality operating more along the lines of a ‘church-shaped mission’. Asking the key question ‘why’ throughout the planning process is critical. Is the aim to explore fresh expressions of church shaped and driven by the desire to adopt and adapt to the culture into which the new initiative is seeking to take root, or is the de facto aim to import and drop a particular form of existing church into that context?

The clear and overriding goal must be to establish healthy gospel-shaped churches adopting and adapting to the surrounding cultural context.

New attention to Cranmer’s guiding principles?

In terms of the cultural questions reflected in the church as gathered in common worship, there is profound and enduring wisdom to be found in Archbishop Cranmer’s ‘Prefaces’ to the *Book of Common Prayer*. How do we go about deciding how to express our Anglican essentials in any given cultural context?

Yet so, as that the main Body and Essentials of it (as well in the chiefest materials, as in the frame and order thereof) have still continued the same unto this day, and do yet stand firm and unshaken

We have an inherited ‘frame and order’ that needs to be respected and retained, and for good reason: it embodies and presents the gospel itself. Whether it be the form and order of Morning or Evening Prayer, or Holy Communion, we have the gospel in outline:

- call to worship
- ministry of the Word
- exhortation to examine ourselves
- confession and absolution
- peace with our neighbours
- holy *koinonia*
- response & dedication, mission & discipleship

These elements in substance should be considered non-negotiable to Anglican mission—but how they are expressed is another matter. And again Cranmer provides enduring wisdom. The mission-shaped goal is well stated:

“Our general aim therefore in this undertaking was, not to gratify this or that party, in any of their unreasonable demands; but to do that, which to our best understanding, we conceived might most tend to peace and unity in the Church; the procuring of reverence, and *exciting of piety and devotion in the public worship of God...*”

And again,

“the more proper expressing of some words or phrases of ancient usage in terms more suitable to the language of the present times, and the clearer explanation of some other words and phrases, that were either of doubtful signification, or otherwise liable to misconstruction”

And there is of course Cranmer’s masterpiece in *Of Ceremonies*, negotiating his way between traditionalists who would change nothing and those who would change everything:

And whereas in this our time, the minds of men are so diverse, that some think it a great matter of conscience to depart from a piece of the least of their Ceremonies, they be so addicted to their old customs; and again on the other side, some be so newfangled, that they would innovate all things, and so despise the old, that nothing can like them, but that is new: it was thought expedient, not so much to have respect how to please and satisfy either of these parties, as how to please God, and profit them both.

Evangelicals, mission and symbolic culture

It is my belief that in many ways evangelicals are well placed to try new forms of church, and are indeed pioneering in these areas. Evangelicals tend to be culturally flexible, especially when it comes to engaging with contemporary culture. Evangelicals led the way in introducing contemporary music, the seeker friendly church, and the overhead screen (for all the cries of sacrilege...).

I believe much of the criticism of new cultural forms is superficial, and as much a question of personal tastes and aesthetics as it is fundamental to the spiritual depth of church. However, we may well be in danger of unwittingly limiting our capacity to communicate the gospel in cultural forms.

Robert Webber in his book *The Younger Evangelicals* (2002) has categorised three cycles of evangelical histories:

The ‘Traditional Evangelicals’

- Era of origin - modern post World War II era 1950-1970
- Organised - 1970-1980
- Institutionalised - 1970-1990

The ‘Pragmatic Evangelicals’

- Era of origin - Revolution of the Sixties 1970-1980
- Organised - 1980-1990
- Institutionalised - 1990-2000

The ‘Younger Evangelicals’

- Era of origin - Postmodern, Post 9/11 2000-?

I recognise that many of Webber’s claims are contentious, but I believe his observation of significant cultural change amongst evangelical ministries is important. Of particular significance in mission-shaped thinking is his identification of the pragmatic culture of the seeker church, and many of the initiatives that proved fruitful in the 1990’s. We

shouldn't assume that such forms of church will continue to be as effective in engaging a rapidly changing culture.

Seeker sensitive forms of church often sought to remove anything resembling religion or traditional church culture. Church adopts a very practical and utilitarian guise, and in visual terms looks very much alike any other community group or association.

The eminent cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas has drawn attention to the close connection between cultural symbols and underlying values, beliefs and cosmology. Every culture has symbols and rituals (not to be confused with ceremony), and they in turn reveal perceptions of deeper realities and order. My concern is that in stripping away anything and everything resembling religion or church traditions, pragmatically driven evangelicals have not filled the cultural void with much that reflects a deeper worldview, sense of meaning, values, identity and roots. The cultural world of pragmatically shaped church is bland, superficial and often owes as much to market shaped culture as it does to enduring gospel traditions – think keep fit gymnasiums, coffee shops and the self-help market. Other than the spoken word, and (perhaps) the wording of some contemporary music, our symbolic world has few compelling gospel icons and little creativity in opening windows to the imagination and the greater vision of the kingdom-reign of God that shapes our entire outlook on life, hopes and discipleship.

'Contemporary' expressions of church does indeed need to reflect on whether we are publicly reading Scripture less, making less space for creeds or public affirmations of faith, the range and depth of prayer such as found in the BCP, or the use of Psalms or general confession and so on. Indeed, the profound gospel shape of the liturgy frequently disappears, with the accompanying loss of liturgical movement and engagement. Our focus on appealing to the mind is to the detriment of the imagination and the *experience* of truth.

Webber warns that much of our (so called) contemporary church culture has been fashioned by the dominance of baby boomer culture, and that succeeding generations have a very different outlook on life and culture. The church seems to be forever playing cultural catch up, running a decade or two behind the currents of change. Yet there is some good news in that: much of the counter-cultural interests of Gen X and Gen Y is in reaction to the materialist direction taken by their parents. Who knows? if we wait long enough the church of yesteryear may become retro and back in vogue (?!), the same way as the fashions of the 50's, 60's and even the 70's come around again. Then again, I doubt whether the cultural life of the 80's will ever be redeemed!

Both within parishes and within dioceses there are clashing cultures of leadership:

- Old school modes that assume authority and respect on the basis of the office and title
- Boomers, who were trained under one culture, and now struggle to transition into another
- Younger and often the most able emerging leaders, who stare at the prospect of struggling with an institution and bureaucracy against the possibility of something independent and the freedom to create something from scratch.

Significant challenges lie ahead if dioceses are to genuinely move into mission-shaped modes. Change, and especially change that seeks to make space for new paradigms, will

experience tensions, often in already uncertain relationships. And as relationships become strained, the leadership culture of most societies shifts from cooperative consent-based power to coercive power. Lest we think the Anglican Church is immune from such realities, we can look around the world today and the Anglican Communion in particular to see just how real that danger is.

I finish where I began. The only justification for mission-shaped thinking is on the foundation of *mission dei*. Our task is to seek to follow in the steps of God in whose great mission we are called to participate. All true mission proceeds from God, is enabled, sustained and directed by God, and must be directed to the greater glory of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.