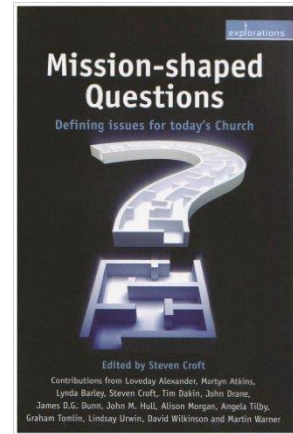


Mission-shaped Questions

Defining issues for today's Church

ed Steven Croft, CHP 2008
Notes by Alison Morgan



1. Steven Croft – Fresh expressions in a mixed economy Church: a perspective

- Fresh expressions.. 'what is distinctive about a fresh expression of church is not novelty for its own sake (the word 'new' was dropped after careful discussion) but contextualization of the gospel for the sake of mission. A fresh expression of church is not a stepping stone to some kind of Sunday service; it is an aspiring mature church in its own right.
- Mixed economy..
- Church: 'is something that happens before it's something that is institutionally organized. It happens when the Good News summons, assembles, people around Jesus Christ' -Rowan. 'The point of fresh expressions is the point of the Church itself, that is to provide a place where Christ is set free in our midst.. to gather those who want to be in his company'

A spectrum of fresh expressions

- High-profile initiatives with a post attached – eg Tubestation
- An initiative operating within a single benefice, as an additional congregation or community with a new style
- A 'grown-up' mission initiative – eg a youth congregation from a youth group
- Existing churches seeking to renew/redirect what they already have, thus creating a new community

Up to now there has been much more reflection on mission than there has on church. Key people Roland Allen, Vincent Donovan, John V Taylor, Lesslie Newbigin – all with perspective of overseas experience.

2. Martyn Atkins – what is the essence of Church?

What is church is a key question for both inherited and emerging expressions of church. Church is the chosen partner of the Trinity in God's mission. It is created and shaped to serve in the missio Dei, the goal of which is the coming of the kingdom. It is derived from the nature and purposes of a missionary God. Consequences:

- There can be no mission without church
- Church is filled with the HS as a natural consequence of its derived nature. 'Without the HS, God is far away, Christ remains a figure of the past, the Gospel a dead letter, the Church a mere organization, authority a means to exercise power, mission a propaganda machine, worship becomes outdated and morality the action of slaves' – Patriarch Athenagoras, p21.
- Church is a called-out people, a community which articulates and embodies the reign of God
- Being mission minded is the highest calling of the church – not just about bringing people in, but partnering God in working for the kingdom
- Church is an early warning system – if it's not filled with the Spirit in the pursuit of God's kingdom, something is wrong
- Creator God inspires varied church

One, holy, catholic and apostolic.

3. Lindsay Urwin – what is the role of sacramental ministry in fresh expressions of church?

Sacraments and fresh expressions remain strangers to one another. Sacraments and symbols are seen as a technique to attract as 'more than words' in a multimedia world – but sacraments are only worth celebrating if they draw people into an experience of truth (which is Jesus). The Church exists to adore God and proclaim in word & deed what we know of him. Perhaps people don't use sacraments in evangelism or in fresh expressions because they regard them as institutional events? We need to rediscover the Christ-presentness in the sacraments, not jettison them. We have hedged them about with too many rules and regulations. Perhaps family services fail to draw people into long term

commitment to Christ because they lack the power of sacramental encounter, and thus forget that Christian worship can never be divorced from sacrifice. 'The Christian Church should know nothing of novelty, what it must know about is renewal and updating and uncluttering, and the presentation of gospel gifts sensitive to the context'. Fresh expressions of the Church are only interesting and will only bring transformation if they are evidently fresh expressions of Christ. They must draw people into a personal encounter with the living Christ.

Coffee and cake turns into you; bread and wine turns you into Christ, because he is stronger than you.

'I remember a Catholic theologian when asked about the ablutions and the attention that must be given to their reverent consumption after Communion, suggesting that in the midst of our proper care we can rest on the probability that what God gets into, he can get out of' ...

4. Tim Dakin – what is at the heart of a global perspective on the Church?

God's global mission of love – seen in the context of the 4 parts of the grace and Ephesians 3: grace of God (height), love of God (depth), fellowship of HS (breadth), be with us all for evermore (length).

Word 'parish' derives from Gk paroikos, 'resident aliens'. A parishioner is a 'strange foreigner'!

The global church must face global issues – interfaith relationships, climate change, poverty/injustice, disease, political ideologies, AIDS. We need to hold to a global perspective.

5. James Dunn – is there evidence for fresh expressions of church in the New Testament?

Christianity began as a sect within C1st Judaism. It was a fresh expression of Israel's traditional religion – Jesus taught outside the recognised authority structures, and subjected sacred traditions and traditional interpretations of scripture to radical critique. He offered forgiveness independently of priest, temple and sacrificial cult, and saw his mission as for the benefit not of the righteous but of sinners. Characteristics of the new movement:

- It was eschatological in conviction and character – the end was already happening
- It was experiential – intimacy with risen Jesus, power of Spirit.
- It questioned tradition
- It was not tied to buildings. The only churches were house churches (Rom 16.5, 1 Cor 16.19, Col 4.15, Philemon 2). Most were probably ground floor apartments...
- It was non-religious – no priesthood, no ritual or sacrifice or libation

These characteristics should be true of the Church today.

6. Graham Tomlin – can we develop churches that can transform the culture?

Church and culture?

Britain is a place of many cultures. But should we be trying to transform our cultures? Niebuhr offered 5 models of relationship between Christ and culture, of which his preferred was Christ engaging with and transforming culture. But for some, eg Hauerwas, the church is there not to transform culture but to build its own; to bear witness to a kingdom which lies beyond the structures of human society. The problem with trying to build a better world here is that humankind is flawed; and the secular religions that flowed from Christianity lost this insight. Another difficulty is that Jesus didn't advocate it – he called us not to transform culture but to bear witness to himself; and this is why the Spirit was given. And many in our culture are suspicious of a Church which thinks it can bring about heaven on earth anyway. So Church should be seen as existing to point creation towards a new culture where pain will be no more; to offer an echo, a glimpse of the kingdom. Church represents kingdom.

The culture of church?

If so, church will have its own culture – what should that look like (so it doesn't just look middle class or whatever else its context is)? In the NT the characteristics of the church seem to be moral, not liturgical – a new way of living, relating and behaving. Eg Eph4.

Transforming culture?

Abolition of slavery – the point is that the church was a community capable of producing people like Wilberforce – HT Clapham. Church transforms culture only through Christians who are shaped by their Christian faith more than they are by the media, living out Christian lives in schools, shops, businesses, embodying a way of life which seems strange to the culture, but might also hold a strange attraction for it. If we are serious about doing this, we need to ask what particular virtues need cultivating in the particular context in order to exhibit the kingdom. When it knows that, it has to introduce the spiritual disciplines necessary to cultivate those qualities. Eg if business plagues the culture, we should identify contentment, and focus say on teaching about Sabbath. Or teach a generosity class – with practical exercises. Probably few fresh expressions set out thinking about disciplines – but if we don't teach an alternative way of life we offer little of distinctiveness. We need to be attentive not just to the target culture, but also to our expression of the kingdom culture.

7. Angela Tilby - What questions does Catholic ecclesiology pose for contemporary mission and fresh expressions?

How do we know when a church is a church? Depends how we deal with history. Many see it as an antique shop, for picking bits out of – ‘ancient is awesome’. But the identity of the Church comes from the fact it exists in time. It is its history. And from the beginning, Church and mission went together. The Church is the mission of God extending through time. Liturgy is important too – it is the expression of our common life (as opposed to private devotion). If we abandon liturgy, we abandon a sense of common values.

A question for fresh expressions – what is your asceticism? Your personal and corporate discipline? Perhaps fresh expressions read too well the concern for comfort, gratification and instant comprehension of our culture. We need pre-eucharistic services; but without the eucharist there is no church, only pre church.

8. John Drane - What does maturity in the emerging Church look like?

Emerging church – repackaging an existing product for a new generation? Creating something by/for those dissatisfied with existing church (those alienated from the EPC end of the theological spectrum, cp Jamieson)? Or creative groups still embedded within the tradition and heritage of historic Christianity? ‘Emerging church’ can mean any of these.

Emerging from what? Those emerging from an evangelical subculture are different from those emerging from a missiologically intentional conversation between gospel, tradition and culture – one is backward looking, the other forward looking. Creativity seems a key characteristic – and it’s been lost from the church. Robert Kennedy: ‘**some people see things as they are, and ask why? I see things as they might be, and ask why not?**’

Marks of maturity of emerging church –

- Concern for an organic way of being – it’s fine to say what we know about ancient (eg Celtic) times is too insubstantial to bear the weighty reconstructions of Christian spirituality that are now being placed upon it. But from a missiological point of view this is to miss the point – when a metanarrative is no longer adequate, it’s natural to look back for new paradigms that might inspire the future. The Hebrew prophets often did this, reinterpreting old stories for new times. Concern for social justice and environmental care often comes with it.
- Recognising the spiritual in all things. Barth first suggested (1932) mission should be understood as an activity of God, though the term *missio Dei* wasn’t coined till the mid C20th. The challenge to look beyond ourselves and see the bigger picture of what God is doing.
- Working towards an inclusive community – intentional hospitality
- Living in the story – Daniel Pink suggests we need creators, empathisers, pattern recognisers, meaning makes, artists, storytellers, caregivers, consolers, big picture thinkers. Following Jesus as a person, not as object of belief. Stories not propositions.

‘So much of what we have inherited is like a comfortable sweater that is now unravelling round the edges. We can do one of 2 things with that sort of sweater: either we patch it up, to try and make it last a bit longer, or we pull at the loose ends to see what happens, with a view to taking the wool, washing it, and knitting it into a garment that will be fit for a new generation’.

9. David Wilkinson - what are the lessons from evangelism and apologetics for new communities?

Key challenges for new communities:

- Affirming passion – it’s a strength for many fresh expressions
- Deepening theological foundations – we need a new theological understanding of God at work in the world, the nature of media culture and the role of the imagination.
- Living with risk
- Developing diversity in ministry
- Being local in a global context- we must see ourselves in perspective.

10. John Hull - mission-shaped and kingdom focussed?

We need to distinguish between a Church-shaped mission and a mission-shaped Church. That is, we need to concentrate not just on the vertical but also on the horizontal. ‘Horizontal transcendence means that we are confronted by absolute otherness, by the presence of the other person, the fellow human being, whose need places upon me an unqualified demand such that in that demand I find myself in the presence of God’ [er...]. The Bible tells the story of God exchanging vertical transcendence into horizontal transcendence, and extending that horizontal transcendence into the future, the kingdom. The revelation of God now comes through the human other [?].

Good section on social justice here, from Deuteronomy, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah. Jesus offers the same teaching – forgiveness and reconciliation, loving your neighbour, welcoming others and welcoming Jesus. Jesus is found through

human otherness. If we are to mould the life of our churches upon the mission of God, it is to the prophetic tradition that we must look (rather than to the mystical, charismatic or sacramental) – it's more important than 'individual religious experience'.

[this is the one chapter I am not comfortable with – he seems to ignore an enormous swathe of the NT; relationship with God and with the Holy Spirit is ignored in favour of an OT theology of social justice]

11. Loveday Alexander – what patterns of church and mission are found in the Acts of the Apostles?

Biblical foundations for mission-shaped church. She likes to read Acts as a series of explosions, working outwards from the upper room (2) into the streets of Jerusalem, from Jerusalem (8), from Antioch (13) and finally reaching Rome (28). Growth and expansion are constantly highlighted; Luke is interested primarily in mission.

Acts can easily be read as a fresh expressions story – lots of different ways of being church (even on a boat, 27!).

Everywhere the word is proclaimed and church starts to happen – except in the conventional religious spaces of temple and synagogue, where it is cast out. There the word/Spirit creates its own religious spaces, not buildings but communities, small groups. Paul founds them and leaves them, trusting them to the Spirit (cf Allen's critique that the mod missionary movement failed to trust). The principle of indigenous churches is now widely accepted. It's been said in Latin America that 'liberation theology voted for the poor; but the poor voted for the Holy Spirit'.

The relationship between Jerusalem and Antioch plays out the tensions between fresh expressions and continuing church – Antioch (ch11) is a fresh expression, and Jerusalem sends Barnabas to investigate. It becomes a church in its own right, sending missionaries and maintaining links with the mother church. Paul and Barnabas return to Jerusalem for a process of mutual discernment and testimony, so the whole Church can move forwards together in costly catholicity. Gonzalez: *the place where we are, at this apparent edge, is where God is doing new things. And those who daily see the new things that God is doing in the world have the obligation toward God and toward the rest of the Christian world to go back to the old centres, which often have lost much of their vision, taking to them our renewed vision of what God is doing today*. We will probably find the Spirit at work in the old centres too; and we find this double helix embedded in Luke's story.

12. Alison Morgan – what does the gift of the Spirit mean for the shape of the Church?

The Holy Spirit in creation – diversity; dependence/renewal.

The teaching of Jesus – affinity between created world and spiritual world; created reality embodies spiritual reality.

The Spirit in the NT church – Spirit breathes life into the church as into the world; Church also characterised by diversity and dependence.

The Spirit and the shape of the Church in history – the role of the Spirit to bring reformation and renewal as the context changes.

The Spirit and the shape of the Church today – a changing world; we need to conform not to secular models but to the Spirit, who now as ever brings diversity and renewal.

In practice:

- A focus on Jesus
- Unity
- Diversity
- Depending on the Spirit

13. Lynda Barley – Can fresh expressions of church make a difference?

Statistics – northern counties record higher levels of indigenous Christianity than southern ones. The older generations are churched, and likely to respond to traditional church; the younger ones not, and won't – these are the ones who need to be pointed towards God in a fresh way.

The most significant change in a deanery survey (Almondsbury) over 10 years was that attendance became less frequent – overall attendance declined by 17% but total numbers didn't. People now attend at times convenient to their lifestyles, and fight shy of regular commitment. Cathedral attendance is growing – they offer opportunities to observe professionally led worship anonymously and with minimal participation. Midweek attendance is increasing at cathedrals – an increase of 18% between 2000 and 2006.

60% of 60 year olds, 40% of 40 year olds and 20% of 20 year olds have childhood experiences of church.

1/3 of adults are closed to churchgoing but not to Christianity. People go to church on specific occasions and for specific purposes.

A fresh expression is 'a new and/or different way of being church in and for a changing culture'. A third of parishes are engaged in fresh expressions. In 2005 Christian Research counted 6.3% of the population in church on a single Sunday. It

estimated that 125,000 of those were involved in fresh expressions of church or ethnic churches in London. Fresh expressions are reversing decline.

The i-generation (18-30 years). Times comments that it's willing to believe but that its spiritual needs are not being met in church.

Danger – that if fresh expressions are seen as requiring less commitment, they could become alternatives to church rather than refreshing expressions of church.

14. Martin Warner – How does a mixed economy Church connect with contemporary spirituality?

There's an enormous gap between family life now and family life a generation ago. We live in a culture that has no understanding of God. Perhaps fresh expressions are not about new or distinct organization, but rather about new and distinct experiences in the life of those who have never before encountered Christian faith. Our world has great need of healing. Spiritual direction is on the increase, house groups are becoming more popular.

15. Steven Croft – Mapping ecclesiology for a mixed economy

There is a simplicity on the near side of complexity which is worthless. There is a simplicity on the far side of complexity which is priceless – Oliver Wendell Holmes.

We have got quite good at thinking about mission, now. But we remain poor at thinking about the Church. If we are to re-imagine what it means to be Church and create new Christian communities, we need to be able to reflect on what it means to be the Church in dialogue with our scripture and tradition. We talk at cross purposes when we talk about church – as if it's a conversation about music, one person is talking about the classical tradition, another about the latest singles chart and a third about learning the trombone.

The essence of church is being with Jesus (in community) and being sent out. Mark 3.13-14. See also Acts 2.42. Church has an UP dimension (God), an IN dimension (relationships), an OUT dimension (journey) and an OF dimension (catholicity).

++RW: if 'church' is what happens when people encounter the Risen Jesus and commit themselves to sustaining and deepening the 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 – preface to MShCh.

We need a compass as we explore the map of what it means to be Church in a changing world. We need an ecclesiology which is distilled, descriptive, discerning/defining, devolved, and developmental. Till we sort it – we are called to be with Jesus and to be sent out.

Alison Morgan

www.alisonmorgan.co.uk

www.resource-arm.net