

Mass Planting

Scenario: Passionate Catholic sacramentalist meets radical Mission-minded evangelist - what do they say to one another? What if this mix was two halves of one person who planted an unusual church? George Lings is equally committed to missiology and ecclesiology

so it seemed good to go and find out.

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Encounters on the Edge

A Series of Quarterly Investigations from The Sheffield Centre

No.16



"I was wondering if we might introduce our own loyalty card?"

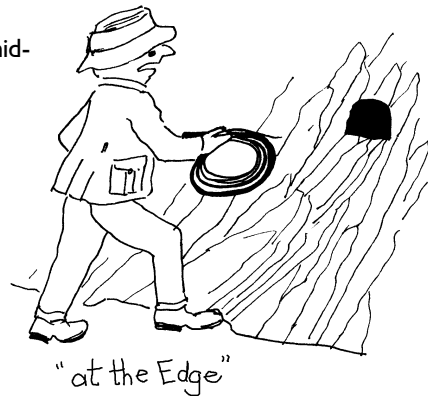
Mass Planting

*Learning from
Catholic Evangelism*

Mass Planting

Learning from Catholic Evangelism

Forgive me if you have been misled by the title and are eagerly searching for a story of rampant and reproducible planting of new churches. I don't know of such a tale in the UK at present. Instead, this issue looks at one of only a few cases of church plants inspired by Anglo-Catholic instincts. This stream of Anglican thought enjoyed an earlier heyday from the late mid-nineteenth century and an effortless ascendancy lasting into the primacy of Michael Ramsay. At present it often appears defensive and inwardly divided between its traditionalists and liberals, some feeling marginalised by the unwelcome ordination of women, others thinking they are elbowed aside by a more numerous and simplistic evangelicalism. Most lack the outward focus in mission that would better balance their priorities in worship. In such a twilight zone, "on edge" and "at the edge", when its mission voice can be found and its contribution valued, it seems good to add this to the present emerging mosaic of **western mission which seems more open today to the visual, the mysterious, the symbolic and the dramatic** all of which should be their home field.



Confessions

I grew up mildly Anglo-Catholic. My father was treasurer of All Saints Church in Putney, London. The music setting was Merbecke, Chasuble was worn, the reserved sacrament light burned, crucifer and servers processed for the gospel, all in a red brick neo-Gothic building. We stopped short of incense and Benediction. Eucharist was normal, so was a sense of otherness. Only when

approaching my teens and visiting my grandmother on the south coast did I meet a strange animal called Matins. It was a foreign and unconvincing experience. I didn't know when to stand up or when to sit down. Chanting Psalms and Canticles was the strangest singing I had ever met. Even at that age I sensed the worship lacked a palpable shape and any sense of the transcendent. The sheer volume of text to digest in rapid uninterpreted succession was alienating. As a preface to a dull sermon it seemed hard labour. It lacked movement and participation beyond the verbal, by contrast to the high privilege of bringing up the elements in the offertory hymn, or the gospel or intercessions being conducted among the people. It was nowhere near equivalent to the deeply personal and symbolic involvement of coming forward to receive something elemental in Communion.

Following a teenage conversion and contact with evangelicalism, I spent four years at St John's Nottingham at the start of the seventies. They were pioneering years with a star-studded staff and a sense of seeking to forge something not seen before. We were preparing not for a known pastoral and teaching ministry but for an unknown future that would emerge. With Colin Buchanan teaching Liturgy, and fully engaged in the revisions that would lead to Series 3 and ASB, it was entirely clear that the week revolved around the Thursday evening communion, followed by supper. Here the whole community assembled in the cockpit of a three-sided assembly, heard the devotional and exegetical input of visiting notables, gathered round the table and came away renewed in our life together in God. Emotionally, not just theologically, I can understand why we have been told to "do this". In the realm of pastoral care and ethics we say "actions speak louder than words". I sense it is also true of worship. Revisiting the centrality of communion in mission, for this issue, was not an alien journey.

By contrast to my acknowledged debt to positive experiences of Communion, I have also endured the "chips with everything" view of Communion at Deanery events.



An unflinching diet of formal Eucharist as the low, but highest common factor between irreconcilable traditions was wheeled out without creativity, without acknowledgement of differing traditions at work and without any passion. In this epitome of the “bland leading the bland”, it seemed we were neither in heaven, nor even much on earth.

Potted Preston

St Wilfrid [633-709] had a reputation for seeking power, prestige and recognition so that the Church would be taken seriously as a force for good. At various times this strong turbulent man was deposed as Bishop, exiled and imprisoned, via troubles mostly of his own making. He was the founder of Preston - deriving its name from “Priest Town” - a fortified place on the low cliffs lining the north bank of the river Ribble. It became a market town with a famous Guild carnival every 20 years, stretching back into the 16th century. The next carnival will take place in 2012. It then re-invented itself as a port and cotton town of which only one mill remains, though a majority of today’s elderly population worked in one of them. With the demise of King Cotton, in came Prince Nylon and Courtaulds established a centre on its northern border, only closing in the late 1970’s. It became part of the lore that folk were buried “Head to town, feet to Courtaulds”.

Fading glory shrouds both town and football team. Tom Finney was their last legend in the 1950’s and rivalled Blackpool’s Stanley Matthews in status. In 1964 they fought but lost an epic Cup Final 2-3, as second division outsiders to a West Ham team led by England Captain Bobby Moore. Preston put up the then youngest player, Howard Kendall, who later found fame with Everton as player

and manager. National headlines since then have been rare, but the 1960’s bypass became the first piece of motorway and now forms part of the M6. Preston, with a population of 140,000 is now exploring a new future; it has acquired recent City status, offers higher education opportunities via the University of Central Lancashire and has St John’s city centre church as its Minster.

Welcome to Ribbleton

Ribbleton, the focus of this edition, is the north east corner of Preston. The 1991 census suggested the parish was 26,000, the latest figures are nearer 19,000. The map shows it contains five discrete local authority estates ranging from terraced Moor Nook built in the 1940’s, to deck access and high rise Grange from the 1960-70’s. They all represent successive migrations out of the town centre. Ribbleton Avenue is the spine of the area presenting a façade of 3



bed semi housing which disguises the real decay behind its pleasant face, on the estates and within the houses. Here the professionals of the social services leave at 5 p.m. and only the church is left caring from within the community, working from the

parish church and from two local worship centres. St Anne Moor Nook became so weak in numbers and the building so vandalised that it closed a few years ago. Petty crime, drugs, social breakdown and a poverty that leads to doorstep feeding are normal. Cars parked at the vicarage have been ‘done over’ 6 times in the last 9 months.

The population of Ribbleton is largely static. The few who are upwardly mobile tend to move away. Some aspire to moving to Longsands, the only private estate in the parish.



Begun in the late 1980's it mixes starter homes with some more substantial dwellings. In character and presence it is utterly different from the rest of the parish. Its commuters jostle daily at M6 junction 31A. Mobility can be high and fresh building of 1500 more homes nearby is set to continue.

The Damian Feeney story

Father Damian became a minor celebrity in the first three years of his ordination; at a church planting event, he was greeted with, "Ah, you are the other Catholic Church Planter!" by Revd Richard Giles, then working in Huddersfield. Interrogating my dated church planting data base, I found that while 20 plants claim that Catholic thinking is one of the traditions they own, only 6 make it the major source, so this is a rare animal and its leaders unusual people. The value of the story may be to inspire others.

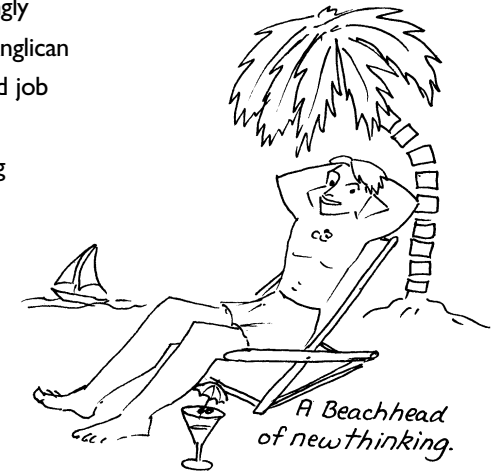


Damian grew up 20 miles away from Preston near the mid Lancashire seaside town of Blackpool. As the name suggests, he was born to a Catholic father of Irish stock, but also to a convert Catholic Anglo-Saxon mother; working class socialism was the political climate and Roman Catholic boys grammar school, led by Salesian Brothers, his education. The teenage devout Catholic toyed with priesthood at 14, but music and education were in his blood. Durham University saw his

church going cease and, by his own admission, turmoil in relationships and a loss of stability. Seven years in two music teaching jobs brought unexpected developments. Fiona became his wife and through the gentle evangelism of colleagues he



went back to church, but surprisingly within weeks sensed a calling to Anglican ordination. At the end of a second job as Director of Music he went to Chichester for three years training at the age of 29 as a competitive ambitious ordinand. Though chapel music was a strength and joy, looking back, a placement in Papua New Guinea with Paul Richardson, then Bishop of Aipo Rongo, was more significant.



In the last, very different, *Encounters no. 15*, a placement in St Helens Lancashire was key in the life of Tom Gillum. Here Tom's love for community based church work was kindled. The style of the leaders and the parish spoke volumes to him about the values of vulnerability, daring to be candid about strength that comes in admitted weakness. Damian saw in New Guinea a modelling of ministry that sowed the seeds of his calling to be a Mission priest; he developed an instinct to work for indigenous church where he as pioneer would give way to indigenous leadership. It was precisely these unusual qualities in an Englishman, and an Anglo-Catholic to boot, that first drew my attention to Father Damian and made me want to tell his story, to find out where these instincts came from and hear how they worked out in a parish setting.

With all the care invested in theological training, all the quality control demanded by Bishop's inspectors and university moderation, **it could be the time spent with quality people in demanding locations that most deeply inspires those training for leadership.** This fits with what I find in Church Planting courses I teach. The visits to existing work make as deep an impression as anything I might hope was excellent lecturing, which is both humbling and pleasing. I am thereby encouraged to hope that by being a storyteller through the *Encounters on the Edge* series, **tiny seeds are being blown into fertile soil in the minds of readers.**

Jennyfield

St Wilfrid re-enters the story once more as the patron saint of the Harrogate parish to which Damian Feeney went as curate in 1994. *“The Jennyfield Housing Estate is your bit”*, said the vicar, Brian Pearson. Out of Mirfield, Brian offered training in the normal traditional ministries, but how to work with a curate with more experience of life and how to develop something new on the new housing of the Jennyfield estate, that represented a relatively untouched area of the parish, was another matter. Bishop David sowed the idea on a Parish Visitation three months after Damian was ordained deacon, suggesting something should be started there and that the Bishop would give support. Damian wasn't that much wiser but began to hear church planting language from John Holmes, the Ripon Diocesan Missioner who offered “to walk with him” through the experiments that might lie ahead, as did Stephen Cottrell, then Wakefield Missioner who had been his parish priest at Chichester. They went back to Bishop David Young who gave encouragement for a venture in Saltergate School on the estate. The first year was spent finding and preparing a team, that happened to be twelve people, and the plant launched in September 1995. Within six months numbers had doubled and just as well, for Damian only stayed until Advent 1996. The exit was more rapid than is usually thought healthy. Damian's response, knowing his own charismatic influence, was to believe that God moved him on before the plant became too “Damian-like” and he began to recognise that his gift is that of the pioneer. He calls himself “a man first over the top”. He is energised by the creation of a venture, but could be in danger of killing it through exhausting it, or moulding it too much after his likeness, or simply getting bored. It was the first time that he noticed that **by leaving, the new church flourished, which was in wonderful contrast to the dependency culture so typical of many Anglican congregations** not least in the Catholic tradition where there could be additional down drag in thinking “Father knows best”. Yet I am glad that John Holmes took on the critical task of oversight, as an extra piece of ministry until he too left the Diocese in 1998.

Bend and stretch

A second post took him as assistant parish priest to St Johns' and St George's, the town centre church of Preston, working with Revd Robert Ladds (now Bishop of Whitby) during a rebuilding project. In the eighteen months they had together, further patterns for the future were laid down. This gifted, energetic, even mercurial man, never had enough hours in the day. *“He would drive us both into the ground, then arrive with a charming note, champagne, flowers and stay on, for he wouldn't miss a glass of decent champagne for the world!”* His entrepreneurial spirit and the belief in not being boxed, but living as a full human being enriched by grace, pushed Damian into a range of contacts, chaplaincies and projects that stretched him. He described it as being blown along by the hot dry desert wind - the ruach - that leaves you thirsty and in need of God. At the same time it was not all about leadership from the front and another valuable lesson was watching Robert drawing in other people's gifts.

Bishop Alan of Blackburn invited him to go to Longsands in 1999 on the basis of the Jennyfield experience, with incumbent status within the Ribbleson team. The phrase used was **“let's send Damian and see who sticks to him”**. The diocese commendably funded the house, the post and the expenses and gave it five years to become a going concern. The team rector John Goddard, (now Bishop of Burnley) let Damian establish, direct and develop that ministry, though giving support from the parish and adding his weight at times of important decision.

The Longsands story

Listening to Damian pour out the story, over excellent coffee and wickedly tempting chocolate biscuits, we reflected together on what happened. As my biro raced over the pages, I noted a delicious mix of working with previous established convictions and an evolving process of what he dared to call fruitful mistakes. **Theological conviction and genuine missionary process is not the same as planning what we do in order to repeat inherited Christendom assumptions. Our doctrine tells us what we should do and why, but it is only sensitive, wise, contextualised missiology which will unlock for us the delivery questions of how, where and when.**

The givens were “I’m going to do what I do, somewhere else”, that is, he sought to repeat the inner dynamics of what informed the *Jennyfield* plant. **“And what do you do?” I asked. “Only what the Catholic church does - I go and say Mass, because here Jesus is present, we ask not how” he answered.** This could sound like an uncompromising stance by which the world must simply fit around the given worship patterns of the church. Yet at *Jennyfield*, Mass was not on Sunday morning but at 6.30 pm on Saturday evening for Damian set himself a question, “When would a non-churched divorced male under 35 years old have a slack period in their week?” Answer, as any football supporter would know: after Grandstand was over and before the Pubs were open. It is another version of the theme explored more fully in *Never on a Sunday: Encounters on the Edge no. 11*. It worked. He still thinks given the resources necessary it could be made to work more widely in Ribbleton.

Communion where?

Longsands was a different context and so a different answer. To find an answer he consulted Fiona and a map. The new housing area didn’t offer an immediately obvious location but Fiona put the right question. “Which building do most



people naturally go to?” It was the answer that was a shock - ASDA welcomed 1000 people an hour to its superstore. Worse, it was just outside the parish boundary - in the next door parish of leafy Broughton - but right on its edge and built at the very edge of town - so hardly a serious parish invasion. I admit the “on the edge” location fitted perfectly with the “on the edge” concept. *“We had a working agreement with the Vicar of Broughton who was hugely supportive. I took on a bit of his land, albeit light industrial land.”*

The manager Stuart Adlington and deputy manager were approached about the possibility of a weekly Sunday morning Mass at 10.00 am right in the middle of the “way-in” concourse, followed by breakfast in the store. The concourse and café opens at 10.00 so people are gathering, but the store only opens for business at 10.30. The St John’s contacts, chaplaincy and project experience were being cashed in. Both managers gave a “thumbs up” and permissions were granted. It would also be broadcast over the store tannoy, so staff setting up would be able to hear as well. **Relaxed eucharistic hospitality was essential**, any passing adult who wanted to receive would be able to do so. **The Christ who took the cross without flinching could cope with casual shoppers.** It was then logical to be licensed at ASDA in June 1999 which made a media splash and sad that some clergy therefore refused to come, commenting that it was all inappropriate. We may say that Christian priesthood is to be exercised in the community not in an enclave, but put that into sharp relief and parts of the church show they don’t believe it in practice.

Mass demonstration meets mass consumerism

How did communion in the concourse go? Yes people who came for breakfast experienced surprise, a few were shocked and some just stared. But Sunday by Sunday it became more normal. Harvest 1999 came and went. The Carols



went out over ASDA FM - to a 1/4 million in stores nationwide. Preston ASDA was getting on the map. On Palm Sunday, 500 crosses were given out with an explanation to each recipient by the small team. Often the team were offered money but always refused it saying, with a smile to stop it being a “put-down”, that salvation came at a higher price.

The stories reveal you never know what seeds may germinate. Denise lived opposite the parish church but never came. Father Damian went to visit a frail dying woman in 2002. “*What a coincidence it’s you,*” she said “*I listened to you in ASDA and said my prayers as I had my breakfast.*” It became part of the funeral address. Going round the store shopping after the sound relay had failed one week, the sassy boys in the ASDA Bakery claimed they had missed not listening while they worked.

This makes it sound easy, appreciated and a glorious rediscovery of the openness of today’s people to spirituality. Hear the other side. Damian opened up to us the cost. “*The hardest bit was doing it in the context of almost total rejection... you were a nuisance, an irrelevance...it stripped you bare ... there was a profound sense of our dislocation*”. **Yet that very sense of playing away, being on foreign turf, is deeply resonant of the incarnation.** We can so stress the incarnation as identification with humanity that we sanitise the gap being crossed. For Christ to become Man tells us its nature is to become like what you are unlike. **The sense of being off limits is in the nature of mission. Mission is being sent to where you are not yet.** Being thrust out guarantees no comfort in the destination. In addition there was a sense of being alienated by parts of the church. There was outrage at the presence of the body and blood of Christ on display and Christians wanted that to be within the sanctuary of the church building. We sat in his car, in the car park, as we talked about the ASDA chapter. “*Do you miss it?*” I enquired. He thought for a moment and then answered, “*I don’t miss it because I am not a saint.*”

Is a stage OK?

Mass at ASDA was not a long term sustainable strategy. It came to a natural end in Autumn 2000 when the local management changed and sadly one supportive ASDA official had been found to be embezzling. By then it had done its sowing

work. It had established a presence and a reputation of the church in Ribbleson. It had been the way of finding and recruiting the team who together were finding the next stage of church for Longsands.

It had also made its counter cultural protest in the local cathedral of materialism. A clarion note was sounded at Harvest 2000 when Damian

preached on fair trade. The point made was that ASDA carries 54,000 different lines but at the kind of prices and terms of trade that many in the two thirds world cannot have even one line by which to live. Who needs such choice so that the poor have no choice?

The weekly message was more visual. In Damian’s language, the Incarnate Christ was placed on a supermarket table; precious things and words were made available to all, including the careless. **The paradoxical desire for Purity, which tends to separate and for Incarnation which crosses boundaries to join, met in the demonstration of the holy.** The tension was most painful in the run up to

Easter and Christmas. Both festivals are the triggers for a frenzy of the most blatant intentional idolatry offered to the gods of economics, advertising, inflated demand and their false promises of satisfaction and the cultivation of successful image.

To be in the way, on the way in - filling the concourse with a communion service before the rat race for Sunday morning bargains was declared open, had the status and pain of rejected prophetic ministry. It reminded me of Studdert Kennedy’s poem *When Jesus Came to Birmingham*, sketching contemporary indifference and ending with the image of a crouching Jesus



weeping for Calvary. No wonder we prefer to operate in the cocoons of our churches, but I for one felt deeply privileged to hear first hand of this wonderfully foolish and yet fruitful missionary encounter. It reminded me of our tough post-Christian mission, the folly of the Cross as expounded by St Paul and that **there is a time to move on.**

The last point is well made in a Pastoral Letter from the Catholic Bishop of Lancaster who had just decided to sell the Bishop's house, to abandon the grandeur inappropriate for a shepherd and servant and to go out on the road around his diocese.

"We are called Christians because we are followers of Christ and we must follow him in this as in all else. Remember his instructions to his disciples when he sent them out to preach. If people listen and respond that's wonderful; stay with them and share what they have. But if they refuse to listen, leave that village and go on to find others who do want to hear – and not only can you not take from the mockers any food or accommodation, you cannot even take from them the dust of their streets."

Are we serious about Pilgrim church?

We talk more today about being a pilgrim church but tend to limit the applications. We rightly relate it to the intended incompleteness of the eschatological framework of now and not yet. By its history and interior tensions Anglicanism is intuitively good at admitting its provisional understanding and practice. We are relearning that **the nature of being a disciple is to follow and that must mean to move.** We wisely connect being pilgrims to our spirituality, both through physical expressions like retreats, but more widely to our spiritual life being one of seeking God. I notice with gratitude that the Prayer book of the Northumbria Community has a strong focus on seeking God and to become more what He calls us to be. The seeking is not one of a desperate person lost without bearings in a religious fog. I use seeking in the sense of longing for connection and deeper discovery; it is expression of intention to live life with, in and for God. It is the journey of finding that the more you know of Him, the more there is to know.

It is regrettable that **we don't usually apply being pilgrim to our mission** – rather we hold onto some notion of "always being there for people", which may

say more about our need to be needed than any wise assessment of their openness. **We don't apply it to our structures.**

The plot of land defined by its parish boundaries is the field in which we are supposed to sow, nurture and harvest. Even if



someone had concreted over the entire patch, there we would be supposed to stay – chipping away with our tiny hammers to try and make a little hole back to fragments of fertile soil. It reminds me of our misplaced trust in the efficacy of the diminishing occasional offices and the strategy of inviting people to our unconvincing services and disappointing communities. When is the time to say enough? When do we move on? Jesus not only taught this to his disciples, but also modelled it himself through the three years of public ministry. When do we dare connect that to the dominical commission "as the Father sent me, so I send you" John 20.21?

I have no problem that it was only there for a season of 18 months. Longevity is not the ultimate test of authenticity.

The Old Testament mobile Tabernacle irradiated the presence of God quite as well as the static Temple, and it proved far less of a temptation to idolatry. If Hauerwas and Willimon are right that our future as a church is to find identity more as "resident aliens", then **temporary locations and vulnerable perches, could be far more plausible than defending and repairing the shells of Christendom we inhabit at present.**



What animal was this?

The ASDA chapter raises questions. Was saying Mass at ASDA being church? An episcopally ordained priest was celebrating communion with others present; does that make it church? If so, then all forms of Eucharistic chaplaincy are

church too. I have no doubt worship was offered, I am glad it was prophetic and that it created evangelistic ripples. It seems weakest, in terms of being fully church, over engendering a sense of community. Inevitably the location created a sense of working with passing trade, but perhaps it was more church than a cathedral milling with historico/cultural theme park visitors. Maybe what happened over breakfast afterwards provided the sense of community? What we include as Church is getting looser. The case for such provisionality is argued in *Encounters on the Edge no 5*, including the suggestion that we liken church to the language of being human, rather than the language of maturity. In such a framework we can applaud what is church and yet also see it as a legitimate staging post towards fuller expression.

Was it a Church Plant?

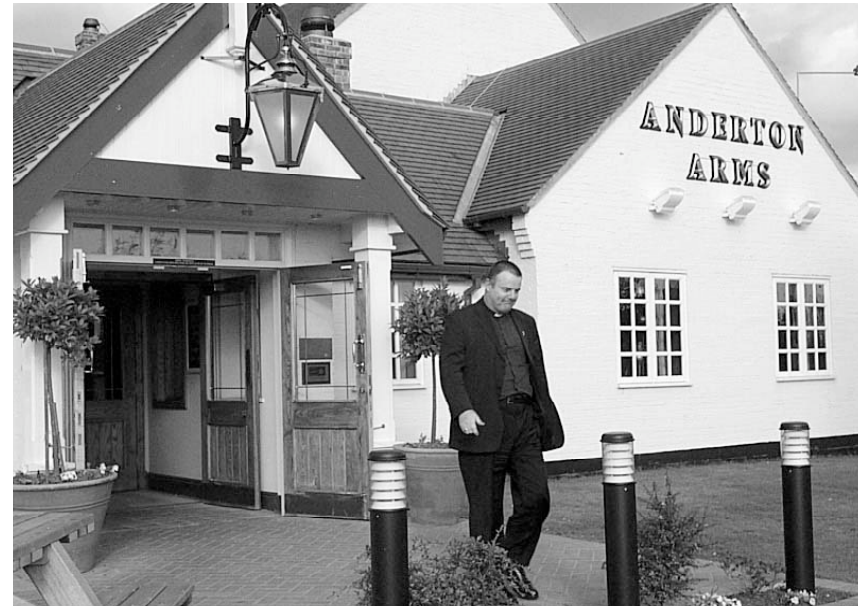
I heard from others jubilant claims of a church plant within ASDA, as though some secular citadel had been stormed and taken. **In our need to find answers there is a danger that all our geese become swans.**

I have no doubt it was good to do. I am clear that it was church, subject to the caveats above. I am less convinced that it was planted and am coming to think it was more like a window box.

These have to be watered and nourished from outside their immediate environment and never take root in the indigenous soil. **For a plant to become sustainable it must become part of that ecosystem.** Window boxes adorn and enrich an environment but remain an addition to it. For full planting in the soil of ASDA I would also look for mission to the staff, some emerging expression of Christian community among them and mission from them. I would imagine some modest place where daily staff or shoppers could be church – rather as Christian homes complement the place of a dedicated building for congregational worship. Then Mass in the Concourse would be their service, the focus of an ongoing life together. If another organic analogy were used, the story could be of organ transplant rejection by the host; but I prefer window box – perhaps it was never intended to strike roots, but to beautify and attract.



Enter the Anderton Arms



Before the ASDA window box was picked up and removed, another strand was developing. It sprang partly from the Catholic instinct “to see God in the things of earth”¹. The same instinct sees creation positively. All things are sacred; they are good though flawed, as opposed to an Augustinian/Protestant schema in which the material world is depraved, deluded and dangerous. **It looks like a division between pronouncing it sacred or us scared. As such Catholic mission has a deep instinct to baptise culture rather than reject it.**

Though it was “playing away” again, the idea grew to hold a Carols evening in the local *Longsands* pub, the *Anderton Arms*. The publican, an ex-Catholic altar boy Mike Loftus, welcomed the idea as befits a community-minded landlord. The next event was Midnight Mass in the pub; as closing time gonged, so the small team of worshippers moved in and some of the punters stayed. The theme might be cheesy but it was apt - at last there is room at the Inn! The comments were revealing. The Publican said “*Thank you for making us holy*” and the punters said, “*Thanks for not disapproving of the smell of beer on our breath.*” **The image of a judgemental moralistic church was not far away from their thoughts.**

¹ Stephen Cottrell: *Three Kisses from a Loving Father: Anglican World Pentecost 1995, Issue no.78 p24*

Precisely because the church seemed to break its own rules about where it would take its sacred mysteries, and with whom it would publicly socialise, it found mutual respect and discovered that today's Gentiles were open to the Gospel. Both events were repeated in 2000. This second sowing strand in the pilgrim story also came to a natural end because the pub was taken over, closed for major refurbishment, and reopened as a non-family friendly venture.

I wonder whether this playing away instinct is connected to another strand of Damian's life. To be an avid known Blackpool fan living in Preston may not mean much to some readers. It would be equally heretical to publicly support Arsenal and live in Liverpool.

Yet somehow **an open counter cultural stance, held in integrity and with humour, wins friends by its sheer vulnerability.** There are no power plays here and what you see is what you get.



Home in the Millennium Hall

On the feast of the Epiphany 2000, the first service was held in the recently built community hall on the *Longsands* estate. Most of the contacts were formed through the sowing of the ASDA period. The *Anderton Arms* was only just across the adjacent roundabout, so progression from that was natural too. One key couple, the Hacketts, in 1965 had built and owned the last house on the edge of Ribbleton. They had worshipped in one of its churches, the Ascension, and had seen the *Longsands* estate built to gradually utterly obscure their rural view. Yet Stephanie, trained as a Diocesan Lay Pastoral Assistant, has become in effect its lay minister and works in close collegial partnership with Damian.

Longsands is a Church of friendships – those who come become friends. It's a



flexible, happy, loving congregation to whom partying is natural. Some of these values are those dear to the founder, but I guess it is also a reflection of the area. It is classic Church Growth thinking that new churches attract the people who are newer to an area. Migrants [even within a county] can have more open attitudes and are willing to explore fresh ways. When a whole estate is new housing, many of the inhabitants want new social contacts and friendships. When they have children at home at similar stages and the same school, the desire for contact is infectious. Damian's guess is that this church may remain more effective if it were to multiply into more than one venue and time, rather than go the route of getting large enough to want to build and own its dedicated building. Having begun as pilgrims, why settle for second best? If community is what it does well, why lose that in the formality of a larger congregation?

Its worship is, once more, 6.30 Saturday evening weekly Eucharist. The service is on a sheet, not from books. As a good third of the congregation of up to 40 are children, they have their own liturgy of the word using resources around the liturgical year. The children then return for the offertory and reception. At *Jennyfield* children stayed in throughout and the community worshipped in the round. *Longsands* has tried it but prefers a more traditional layout.

Not Leaving again?

The Parish was in interregnum. Bishop Alan phoned out of the blue. *“I’d like you to consider Ribbleson.”* It was a massive shock. At the time, there were other overtures to take a more peripatetic role in evangelism and training. It was an agonising and uncertain choice. Was the Mission Priest going to be shackled by the demands of the institution, the slow pace of change in a traditional Catholic parish, set within a deanery that tended to filter out or sanitise anything radical?

However in October 2001, Father Damian said his final Mass at Longsands, let go of his “baby” and told them the future was down to them. Once again he saw the result, **“When I leave it takes off”**. Others asked what they could do and the new church now do the visiting, set up on Sunday, take all the parts of the services which they are allowed to and handle their own administration. Already Damian can see roles like catechist and evangelist emerging. Speaking to Stephanie Hackett, she is the latter. She watches for when ‘FOR SALE’ notices go up on houses, knows they must not stay an elite but cosy group, wonders how to build up contacts through the school and hatches ideas for contacts with people, the fruit of which she may never see. While he cannot yet see a person emerging as Priest he would love to see that indigenous leadership arise.

How could leaving so soon make any sense? I find my mind keeps coming back to thinking about the rebirth of the Apostolic in our day. *Encounters no. 5* p.14 carries bits of it. Other strands can be found on our website

www.encountersontheedge.org.uk under the conference reports section entitled “Life in the Abyss – Models of Missionary Ministry for Tomorrow”. Another strand emerges here from this ASDA story. I take it as read, from a common linguistic base, that **there is marked overlap between being missionary and apostolic**. So to recall both the argument and conclusion of the missionary prophet Vincent Donovan is valid.

“I would think rather the very first principle which must be invoked toward building up the young church is that we do not stay one day longer than is necessary.”

VINCENT DONOVAN: CHRISTIANITY REDISCOVERED P 130 – ECHOED P 163

Why could it happen at Longsands?

There are many strands. A genuinely pioneering Mission Priest was sent there. His life beforehand was the crucial preparation. Choosing the right leader still remains a human key factor.

Damian and his family went to the edge and took there what was most precious to them, the celebration of Eucharist. The story reveals the gospel is portable. The mission perception of where people went shaped where the church was formed. ASDA was Preston’s *agora*. The process was vastly implausible. A day with Damian reveals he laughs a lot and divine folly is never very far away. A friend, Jenny Hellyer, sent me this quote in her October prayer letter.

“The saint is hilarious when he is crushed with difficulties because the thing is so ludicrously impossible to anyone but God.”

OSWALD CHAMBERS (NOT A NOTED ANGLO-CATHOLIC!): MY UTMOST FOR HIS HIGHEST

Equally the soil had been broken up. Newly populated areas are more open and this one also contained people with more ability and confidence than the rest of the parish. Not surprisingly some saw this venture as a pilot both for Preston and for New Housing plots across the Diocese of Blackburn.

Is communion an evangelistic key?

Reading Gregory Dix OSB you could easily think so. Consider his lyrical prose. I include some of the more purple passages

“Was ever another command so obeyed? For century after century spreading slowly to every continent and country and among every race on earth, this action has been done, in every conceivable human circumstance, for every conceivable human need from infancy and before it, to extreme old age and after it, from the pinnacles of earthly greatness to the refuge of fugitives in caves and dens of the earth. . . .

And best of all, week by week and month by month, on a hundred thousand successive Sundays, faithfully unflinching, all across the parishes of Christendom, the

pastors have done this just to make the plebs sancta Dei - the holy common people of God... It is because it became embedded deep down in the life of the Christian peoples .. that the eucharistic action became inextricably woven into the public history of the Western world.” THE SHAPE OF THE LITURGY 1945 P 743-5

I am briefly silenced by this classic paean of praise but have no choice but to reassess its claims in the context of a changing mission context. Dix speaks with natural ease of Christendom and pastors. In 1945 both were still plausible. **In a dominant Christendom context, the Eucharistic action remains embedded in the memory.** In the Scandinavian countries today, where nominal Lutheran membership remains as high as 90%, I have seen moving video footage of street communions in the café and drugs areas of Oslo. The level of acceptance communicated by the church going onto the streets, the generosity of an open Eucharistic hospitality and the reactivated memories of church from school years are still powerful. The drama still speaks. In Finland, the Thomas Mass is held within church premises, but its intentional desire to offer worship that is generous to doubters - hence its name - draws the young who generally drift away from Church after completing confirmation courses.

However, does this work when we are confronted with today's Post-Christians who might dismiss communion as mumbo jumbo and see it as a device by which beleaguered clergy attempt to hold onto power by insisting only they are allowed to perform these rites? The family service movement and Willow Creek would ask such questions, though not all charismatics and evangelicals would agree.

I had to revise my views when Carpenter's Arms in Deal found Eucharist profoundly evangelistic, though used in a mainly Protestant way. Every month, an aspect of the Gospel was taught by Alan Dodds and related to breaking bread and outpouring of wine. As such they were at least visual aids. Furthermore, the indwelling of Christ was also highlighted in teaching about receiving. The conviction grew that Christ being lifted up *did* draw people to himself (John 12.32). In Alan's words,

“This has been one of the most significant aspects of evangelism in The Carpenter's Arms. It is not only that people hear the Gospel through Communion, but it is there and then that a response can be made.”

Other groups like Alternative Worship and some strands of Church for Generation X report similar evangelistic energy in Eucharist, but for different reasons. The book *Mass Culture* - edited by Pete Ward is a wide collection of chapters arguing a fresh place for communion, both as central to worship and appropriate evangelistically in a post-modern culture. Here they affirm **the essential draw of communion** - its natural employment of the symbolic, the visual, the dramatic, the mysterious which is not too accessible - likening it to the attraction of parable, emphasising its inherent offer of encounter with God and its sense of celebration. **At its best, people meet Jesus in word opened, bread broken and relationships mended.** But they equally deplore the way fencing the table, fussiness in ritual, alienating priestly performance, wordy liturgies, and insincere lives are a massive turn off, even when communion is the fare offered. Perhaps those two sides of that coin reflect **a tension within** **Damian Feeney. The missionary, or radical evangelist, lives alongside the traditional catholic minister.**

With both sides of that story exposed, I ask is it Eucharist that is the evangelistic force, or is it the infectious influence of the eucharistic community convinced by, and caught up with, what is happening in Eucharist? I suspect God's preference to work through his people suggests the latter. I think Cottrell concurs.

“The real questions are about welcome, atmosphere and style. Is there a simple explanation? Do these people love one another? Are they committed to what they do? Are they trying to live out the gospel they proclaim?”

STEPHEN COTTRELL THREE KISSES FROM A LOVING FATHER:
ANGLICAN WORLD PENTECOST 1995, ISSUE NO. 78, P 24

I am then disturbed when communion is wrenched out of its original social and mealtime context, made into some religious rite and by that divorced from the community communing. **I am coming to think that in today's mission context it is the Christian community, beneath worship and before mission, that is the primary influence on those who watch to see whether God is among us.** Read the book and make up your own mind.

Readers of the series may be wondering if I am revising my thinking about whether worship is the starting place in mission today. Often

Encounters on the Edge has argued it is not, particularly when working among the non-churched for whom all Christian worship is a no go area, church buildings a foreign land and clergy seen as rather dodgy. In that context I have consistently seen that the Christians begin by seeking to build community with people in these adverse environments. It is the ASDA part of the story that introduces a fresh slant that worship could be a starting place. **Communion as a counter cultural demonstration - handled as an act of vulnerable foolishness, a sign to be spoken against, is a subversive possibility.** Much will depend on how the varied reactions are handled by the small group holding out the bread of life and lifting up the cup of salvation. It may produce yearning among the de-churched, and healthy curiosity among the non-churched. Deliberate Post-Christians may stiffen but emerging Pre-Christians could be intrigued.

The last straw?

My next question represents a bridge further to cross and a bridge too far for us to cross at present. I can see that Eucharist has inherently evangelistic colours in its rainbow. It tells the Jesus story and offers encounter with the original storyteller, who, far from being a dead leader, is alive and waiting to meet the guests at his feast, held in his honour. Equally precisely because it is encounter with the living Jesus it is an indispensable part of Christian discipleship. Of course to cap it all, Jesus told us to do it. **The more I see its centrality, the less I am certain that we should so tightly limit who it is dispensed by.** From an ecumenical perspective, I cannot seriously believe that the communion services of all *Free Churches* are a spiritual sham. I have attended enough illegal *Agapes* to suspect they were really communions. Could it be that Eucharist is very good news, but that our tight patterns of making priests are bad news? Donovan, the catholic missionary to the Masai, confronted this very question. He saw clearly that Christ's sacrifice once for all did away with the whole priestly caste, making "*an entire people to be priest*".

Yearly, our context becomes more missionary. In our day, clergy shortage is acute and worsening. Forms of church are becoming more diverse. **Legality**

and form are giving way to flexible experiment held by trusting accountable relationships. In such a world who may celebrate? **Changes in mission context tend to provoke changes in ministry practice.**

Leonardo Boff argued such a case about the Base Ecclesial Communities in his book *EcclesioGenesis*, including revision of Eucharistic presidency. Long ago in this country Wesley, continuing the life begun in the classes and bands, concluded he should himself ordain people. In World War Two in a Japanese POW camp the first woman was ordained. All cases cited, deemed the continuation of the mission and the spiritual needs of the Christian community more important than inherited patterns of ministry.

My explorations are very difficult for Catholics wishing to uphold inherited ministry patterns. They might prefer to explore new patterns of local ordained ministry as a more coherent beginning of a re-assessment not only of whom, but when we ordain. In Damian's words "*If the Mass is God's action for the world, then let us ordain our priests at greater Episcopal discretion and train them in service*"

I salute such a reply and hope we have bishops courageous enough to recognise the new demands of our day. The prime reality is Jesus Christ and His mission. His calling shaped the first community that gathered round Him and was sent to continue His mission. If Eucharist is part of proclaiming that mission and undoubtedly it is part of sustaining that mission, we need to loosen the ropes that tie up that resource and refuse to paint it into some guarded sacramental corner. It will survive a more exposed position for it is the Lord's Supper.

George Lings
November 2002

Many thanks to Noel Ford for letting us use his drawing as our front cover cartoon. This cartoon was first printed in the Church Times June 25th 1999.

² Vincent Donovan : *Christianity Rediscovered* : p140

Where could you go from here?

Strategically...

■ Further sources on *Learning from Catholic Evangelism*

- Stephen Cottrell: *Three Kisses from a Loving Father*: Anglican World Pentecost 1995, Issue no. 78
- Stephen Cottrell: *Sacrament Wholeness and Evangelism* Grove Evangelism 33
- Damian Feeney: *Catholic Evangelism*: Springboard article October 2002
- Pete Ward: *Mass Culture – Eucharist and Mission in a Post-Modern World* BRF

- If you have **connections within diocesan permission givers**, please think who else needs exposure to these kinds of questions and suggestions. How can these issues help us all get closer to good practice?

Practically...

- For whatever reason if you want **further copies**, those can be ordered from Claire Dalpra by note, phone or email - see *next page*.
- Is the **first issue you've read**? You may want to collect the previous issues listed on the back cover. All individual copies are £3.

About us...

In the early part of the 1990's **Church Army** reviewed its strategy, the outcome of which was the seminal 'People to People' strategy document first published in 1993. The decision to establish the **Sheffield Centre** was spelt out in this document, with the aim

- **To inspire and mobilise the Church in its task of evangelism.**

The Sheffield Centre has the following functions:

- **Research into church planting and evangelism**
- **Extensive study and library facilities through the Training College**
- **Specialist training in church planting and evangelism for those in full time Christian ministry**

The Sheffield Centre - developing Church Planting & Evangelism



The Sheffield Centre can offer the wider Church

- **Specialist research, consultancy and publishing on Church Planting, the fruits of which are made available through *Encounters on the Edge***
The Director: Revd George Lings.
Research Assistant and PA: Claire Dalpra
- **Resources for Evangelism and Discipleship for young people through *Word on the Web*.**
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