

Mission-shaped Church: The Inside and Outside View

With General Synod's approval of *Mission-shaped Church* in February 2004, will this Church of England

report about Anglican church planting and fresh expressions of church make any difference? What does the report actually say? Where did the report not go far enough?

George Lings and Bob Hopkins introduce and comment on the issues at the heart of this report.

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Welcome to a booklet on a report!



We are George Lings and Bob Hopkins, two Anglican clergymen with longstanding commitment to church planting and fresh expressions of church. George was on the working group that wrote *Mission-shaped Church*; Bob gave external

advice towards the report. Both of us believe it could be significant for the Church in this country - not just Anglicans - and want to make it better known. We are glad that in February 2004, the Church of England's General Synod discussed this report, from its *Mission and Public Affairs Council*, and approved it.

We hope many readers will be inspired to go out and buy the full report; there are no royalties involved for us! We know some readers won't do that, but they probably will join the debate that it creates in various churches, and they will want to be informed. We can't easily condense 170 pages of ideas, some of which are quite radical, down to 30. So at some points this booklet will direct readers to the *Encounters on the Edge* website where fuller summaries are posted under a *Mission-shaped Church* heading.

Three letter acronym time!

Rather than use up space in the text with the phrase *Mission-shaped Church*, this booklet will use the acronym MSC from here on. Footnotes will give its page numbers, so that readers buying the book can consult it more easily.

Questions proliferate and help shape this text:

- What actually is this document?
- What is the heart of the changes it signals?
- What does it *not* say?
- What is the case it makes?
- Where did it not go far enough?
- What difference might it make?

What is Mission-shaped Church?

Various answers could be given.

- Obviously it is a *book*, but what is intriguing is that it tells the rest of the Church of England **what it is already doing** about creating fresh expressions of church, across the range of churchmanship.
- It's also a *map* of today's home mission field, **marking diversity** of expressions of church that have emerged by response. This view enables future navigators to find better ways to be church, more likely to connect and thrive.
- It's a *collection* of short **stories illustrating** the new variety, explaining their specific character, and showing what is already possible.¹
- It's the *successor* to *Breaking New Ground*, published in 1994, showing major changes in context and significant improvements in the understanding of the discipline of church planting.
- It could become a *round table*, enabling permission-givers and pioneers to sit down together as creative partners, to start and sustain what is needed.



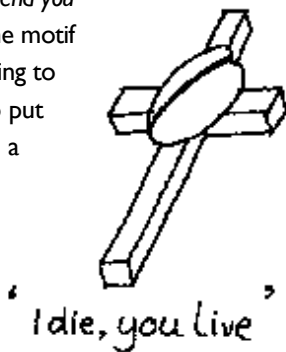
¹ We were urged to tell lots of stories in this issue, but the rest of the *Encounters on the Edge* series does that. However a two page summary of the wide range given in MSC Chapter 4 is posted on www.encountersontheedge.org.uk

- It's a key resource for trainers and will help this subject area to become a normal part of professional theological education. Only "mission-shaped" ministers can hope to lead "mission-shaped" churches. They will need "mission-shaped" training.



What is the heart of Mission-shaped Church?

- The England which churches exist to reach and serve has significantly changed. The changes are so widespread and so far reaching that it is more helpful to think that **the Church's task is cross-cultural mission.**² Mission has come home. This is something people have been urging the Church to face up to since the 1944 report *Towards the Conversion of England*.³
- The traditional ways are not finished, but **parish can no longer alone do what it was intended for.** A wide range of other ways now exists and the task is to work with each context to fashion the appropriate response.
- We think **we have arrived at generic principles** lying behind the creation of all authentic expressions of church. Ignorance about how to start is now culpable, re-inventing the wheel is now unnecessary and all churches may review their existence in this light.
- Its **theology of church planting** is based on the mission God himself undertook in Christ; "As the Father sent me, so I send you" takes on central significance, particularly using one motif Jesus chose of Himself, of seeds that undergo dying to live.⁴ It is the first denominational document to put the connected case that church reproduction is a part of church doctrine. This capability is a theological principle, not just a pragmatic reaction.
- In our words, not those of the report, we, the Church, have entered a profound change



- a Copernican revolution. We are shifting our understanding from thinking our world of the Church is the centre, to realising the Son's mission of God is the centre. This mission is discerned and disclosed in the world and it shapes what the resultant church will be. So **Mission-shaped Church is not a catchy title; it is actually a divine process.**⁵

Common misunderstandings of MSC so far

It's only valuing the new

This is simply untrue. Old and new expressions are needed to reach the diversity of our mission context. MSC gladly praises the creation of new cases of traditional forms where that fits the context.⁶ Its case is that the analysis of mission context shows that the balance between traditional and fresh expressions needs to be changed from being "disproportionately invested in inherited and traditional styles" to foster the latter, because they have a better chance to connect culturally with how most people in society live.⁷

It's just about new worship

The media think church is only about attending worship and like to present a desperate church trying to get trendy. MSC goes far deeper. It sets out the whole process of double listening to the context and to the Spirit. This is joining the mission of God, by which church is created.⁸ This includes the bringing and building of a high quality of community that genuinely attracts others, which is then followed by the sensitive practice of sharing faith with people who become our friends. This, in turn, will lead to forms of worship that nurture that faith. So worship may be the end of the story, not the beginning.⁹ However, the missionary process cannot stop there and the task includes developing discipleship that will equip Christians to face the deep challenges of a consumerist society and critique it from within. In addition, the fresh expression of church is called to engage in ongoing mission, dying to its own preferences, to engage with yet further groups who are as yet outsiders or needy.

⁵ Chapter 5 pp. 84-85 is one description of this shift.

⁶ pp.73-74

⁷ Quotation from Recommendations 16-18 p.148

⁸ pp.104-116

⁹ Note a story illustrating exactly that order on p. 116

It's a licence for the pushy and unaccountable

It's hard to see how that is true of the report, although critics may know local individual examples that give rise to that fear. Study of the theological chapter would show the high value placed on the four historic marks of the Church: *one, holy, catholic* and *apostolic*.¹⁰ Both the sections on *one* and *catholic* argue the importance of belonging to something more than a local expression.

Relationship to the bishop is also held to be crucial.¹¹ It is clearly intended that any fresh expression of church should mature¹² and find legal connection and identity of belonging within the diocesan family.¹³ Four principles to support fresh and older expressions of church living together are teased out and are covered in examination of Chapter 7. MSC's view is that parochial protectionism is a greater problem.¹⁴

Delving Deeper into MSC

Chapter 1 - changing contexts

What missionary situation are we facing as a church? Chapter 1 outlines the case that **the English mission context is significantly changing**; the list of factors about society is long and wide. The report not only describes these, but theologically argues¹⁵ that they deserve to be worked with before they can be challenged from within.

There is a shift from a more unified to a more **fragmented society**¹⁶; contributing factors are trends in employment, increased mobility, changes to family life patterns and so more single households. The predominance of entertainment and leisure also accentuates personalised culture. The effects are that Sunday is under increased competition and, in the ensuing diversity of life patterns, no one church strategy will be adequate.¹⁷

At the same time, and not least because of various media of electronic communication, the dominance of territory to confer identity is being replaced by **network**.¹⁸ Clearly, place still exists, but who we know, not where they

¹⁰ pp. 96-99

¹¹ p. 101 paragraph 5 and pp. 135-136

¹² pp. 120-122

¹³ pp. 123-124 and details of the options are covered in pp. 125-131

¹⁴ See pp. 141-143 for the case made and proposal to change this

¹⁵ See the Chairman's report for the headlines and Chapter 5 for the case

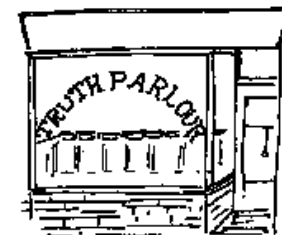
¹⁶ see pp. 1-4

¹⁷ p. x1 paragraph 3

live, is more significant. In a fragmenting society, people are choosing how to connect. Friends and colleagues matter more than neighbours. We face a change, from ministry centred on *where* people sleep, to mission to *how* they live.¹⁹ Incarnation will have more interest in the latter than the former.²⁰ To enter such a fluid world, expressions of church will be **non-boundary** rather than cross-boundary. To achieve that, we need a shift to seeing existing parochial, territorial boundaries as permeable.²¹

A third strand of change in society is from an emphasis on production to consumption. This has brought increased emphasis on the individual, and that personal choice and attainment of pleasure is a matter of right. We even "buy into" ideas. This emphasis, and the relentless advertising to ensure the demand is insatiable, creates an underclass and excluded class of the poor. A number of people²² see **consumerism** as the leading ideological challenge faced by the Church, and MSC concurs.²³ In this society, creating diversity of expressions of church is both obvious and necessary. No one way or style can suit all, let alone attract all. We are shifted yet further along the road of working out how to express unity across widening diversity.²⁴

Some have questioned whether MSC is too consumerist driven.²⁵ The consistent view-point is summarised early on: "*The gospel has to meet people where they are, before it can enter and affect their lives.*"²⁶ Bob and I would add that this is half the picture. The Church as community has the same function and goes through a similar process. It is formed in and for a culture; then by its reading of the gospel and the convicting ministry of the Spirit, that community becomes progressively shaped around the values of its Lord and



* How much is that truth in the window? The one with the waggily meta-narrative *

¹⁸ pp. 4-8

¹⁹ See *The Net* story on p. 8 or read *Encounters on the Edge* No. 19 "Net Gains" for a fuller version.

²⁰ p. 12 paragraph 4

²¹ See pp. 8 & 19 and a whole framework to do this responsibly on pp. 138-143

²² David Lyon *Jesus in Disneyland* Polity 2000 especially p. 145, Craig Bartholomew *Christ and Consumerism* Paternoster 2000, Leslie Newbigin in various books.

²³ p. 10 paragraph 4 onwards, pp. 91-2

²⁴ See Archbishop Rowan's foreword paragraph 2. Chapter 4 is a list of the diversity of groupings we already see. That list is not closed. A summary of the chapter can be found on

www.encountersontheedge.org.uk

²⁵ See the appendix to Malcolm Brown *A Measure For Measures* GS 1528

²⁶ p. 6 last paragraph

Founder. It will find itself becoming more counter-cultural and its inner communal life should both demonstrate and bolster the counter-cultural values it claims. The Desert Fathers would be an early classic case.

If the first three are dynamics of changes in society, the fourth marks the shift of the status of church in society. The report takes no view of a chronological order or causal connection but notices they co-incide.²⁷ The **demise of Christendom** and arrival of post-Christendom mean Christian identity is no longer conferred on the population by the culture and its values are no longer normative. So most young people do not know the Christian story. To register as “Christian” in a national census may not claim more than being white and nice. Now, church monopoly on truth, let alone attendance, is perceived as being ludicrous. Multi-faith options and combinations are expressions of choice. To this should be added data suggesting that, by 2015, those with confessed allegiance to either New Age Spirituality or Paganism will be as numerous as practising Christians.²⁸ All these factors mean that our long-lived and much-loved “come to us, we are available and accessible” strategy is virtually totally out of date among the under-35s; “...mainstream culture no longer brings people to the church door”.²⁹ Nor will a longer view work based on those returning to faith. Here Chapter 1 needs reading along with the latter parts of Chapter 3, pages 36-41. The latter offers us a way of reading the **contours to the mission field at home**. It distinguishes between people who have left church and those who have never been. The research cited argues that nationally each group is about 40% of the adult population. MSC then argues that the resources for, and basic approaches to, these two groups are different and that the second group - the non-churched - will become more and more dominant. If the groups are age weighted, the de-churched are 25% and shrinking and the non-churched are 65% and growing. Inherited ways of being church and even doing most of our evangelism henceforth will only tend to help a reducing minority of people.

Some readers will note that there has been no discussion of another broad feature: the shift from modernity to **post-modernity**. Opinions differ as to whether post-modernity truly exists, though a particular philosophical view called post-modernism undoubtedly has its proponents. Some would rather talk of late, or even liquid modernity. People are transitional about these shifts. On the one hand, they value utterly modernist technology in areas such as

transport, phones and computers that are consistent, reliable and predictable. Yet on the other hand, they desire freedom to differ, unlimited options to choose, looseness of social conventions and tolerance over personal convictions above all. **What is clear is that modernism is over**. By modernism we mean convictions that everything important is knowable, achievable and rational, that science and faith operate in different compartments of facts and values and that human beings, with their science and minds, can scale whatever heights are ahead of them. Such a defined world, such word-based, head-centred processing and such optimism over humanity is no longer the mental address most people live at. **Doubt, feeling and mess have shouldered their way to the table**. With such shifts, the Church must also engage. This affects the style in which any approaches are made, rightly forcing us away from reliance on mission as detached propositional faith, argued by an individual, or from authoritarian and moralistic church groups.

With all these changes, the rates and proportions vary. The changes tend to be more obvious north rather than south, among the poor than the rich, in urban as opposed to rural contexts and among the younger generations. Nevertheless, this shift will be broadly true of most first world countries, except the USA which is entering this set of changes more slowly because of its far higher residual church attendance.

In short, the parish system will continue, not least because of its defended position, but it looks as though the vast majority of its old expressions are just that, expressions that no longer fit. They have lost contact with the majority of the population and its culture.³⁰ The need to reconnect is urgent and MSC gives us tools to pursue that road with integrity.



Chapters 2 and 3 - improved understanding

Chapters 2 and 3 explain **how thinking and practice in planting churches has developed** since the 1994 church planting report, *Breaking New Ground*. Time has revealed practical factors no one expected.³¹ Cross-boundary church planting without consent, which in 1992 roused fear and anger, has largely disappeared. It has been overtaken by the acknowledged need for *non-boundary* churches working with networks. The creation of a wide diversity of

²⁷ pp. 11-13

²⁸ George Lings' colleague, in *The Sheffield Centre*, Steve Hollinghurst will be making this public through his website www.tomorrowsevangaliam.org.uk later this year.

²⁹ p. 11

³⁰ Admitted on p. 13 last paragraph

³¹ See pp. 19-21

expressions of church has emerged, rather than more of the same. This has helped fuel the axiom, “create, don’t clone”. Time has also helped us identify past distortions and partial truths.³² To assume that “church” centres around providing public worship, must be congregation-sized and must meet on a Sunday, is now seen as confusing the form with the essence. Church being Trinity-centred, communal and missional, better expresses the latter. We like the thought of a MSC working party member, Sally Gaze, that **there are only expressions of church, not one absolute form**. All manifestations of church are either old or new expressions.

The stranger comes home?

When *Breaking New Ground* was penned ten years ago, church plants were regarded as dubious and adversarial at worst, and, at best, as bridges back to proper church. The last ten years have shown the latter sentiment to be illusion. Yet now one of the most potent throw-away lines in MSC reads, “part of the paradigm shift... is the discovery that fresh expressions of church are not only legitimate expressions of church, but **they may be more legitimate** because they attend more closely to the mission task, and they are more deeply engaged in the local context and follow more attentively the pattern of incarnation.”³³ How extraordinary that what was despised at the edges of the Church has, in a decade, found itself laying theological claim to be more legitimate church, arguing in an official report that reproduction by planting is core to part of the very nature of Church.³⁴ So the stranger dares to invite the rest of the Church to reconsider how it has been shaped and challenges whether those expressions are any longer adequate.

Church planting and fresh expressions of church, back where they belong!

It could be confusing that Chapter 3 looks at *church planting*, while Chapter 4 reviews currently observed *fresh expressions of church*. Some could think, “Are these in different chapters because they are separate things?”, “What’s the relationship between church planting and fresh expressions of church?” or “Are they quite different and unrelated?”. Unfortunately, over the last ten years that mental division has grown up. Some see themselves as church planters and others think it is passé and old hat³⁵. The latter want to explore new ways of being church, which sounds trendier.

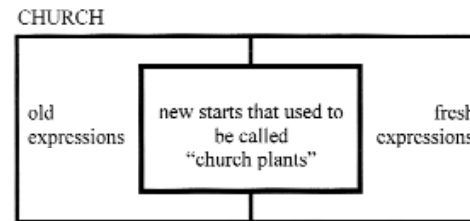
However, we welcome that the report squarely addresses this issue and firmly fixes them in relationship to one another. In explaining, the report defines the

³² pp. 22-24
³³ p. 23
³⁴ p. 93ff
³⁵ p. 26

relationship by clearly establishing **church planting as a discipline**. It is a mission-based **process** (principally to be thought of as a verb), and fresh expressions of church are the **consequence** or fruit (a noun) of that process.³⁶

Bob: This is very helpful and puts back together that which God never intended to be divided. They are inseparably part of the same missionary activity. However, this is in fact a little over-simplified, and as such the report, in the interests of brevity, develops slight imprecision at this point. Together we offer a diagram to give a more correct picture. It affirms the intimate connection, but also recognises that at either end, there are areas where they can be distinct.

To the left of the middle, sometimes the *process* of church planting has led to a replication of old expressions of church. No fresh expression results; the report calls this *process* “cloning”³⁷ and MSC calls the *consequence* “traditional church planting.” However, for a growing percentage of the population, the elderly, this may sometimes be very appropriate.



NB the diagram does *not* indicate proportions of each kind but the theoretical connections

George: Bob is right to spot the anomaly, that on this basis traditional church plants should not have been included in the list of fresh expressions in Chapter 4. I agree but point out that in a longer, historical perspective they were fresh expressions 15 years ago.

Bob: Part of the critique of past church planting also becomes clear from the diagram. From a mission point of view, the problem with too many plants was not that they were new (that is, they have just begun) but that that they were not new enough³⁸ (that is not *different* enough to old expressions of church to connect with culturally more distant people). Mercifully, the creativity we have seen over the last decade and greater awareness of the diversity of contexts we face is helping address this.

³⁶ pp. 31-32
³⁷ p. 20 - the coinage of planter and writer Stuart Murray-Williams who gave evidence to MSC
³⁸ Compare what will be helpful, offered by George Lings and Stuart Murray-Williams in *Church Planting Past Present and Future* Grove Evangelism No. 61 pp. 21- 27

At the far right, fresh expressions can also be the *consequence* of transforming an existing church into a new mode. An example would be a congregation changing to becoming truly a cell church. Here the *process* should not be called church planting, because no further church is added, though a fresh expression of church grows up. This is by no means a quibble. It is seeking real clarity. Yet this observation is wonderfully inclusive of every existing church. It establishes that any existing congregation can, if appropriate, enter into a process of *transition* to a fresh expression more suited to its new context. However, it may be equally valid not to press an existing congregation to change its expression, but to pursue the option of planting a further fresh expression of church appropriate to other surrounding cultures. This is the essence of Archbishop Rowan's (*below, left*) foreword and his "mixed economy" language³⁹ which makes room for all and affirms all. We concur with his instinct that fresh expressions and more traditional expressions should live in interdependence, as part of being *one*.

Defining church planting

Bob: Having explained this crucial linkage between church planting and fresh expressions of church, it should be no surprise that the new definition that the group have coined is divided into two sections. The first defines the *process*, and the second, the desired *consequence*.⁴⁰

Chapter 3 quotes and affirms the enduring value of my single-sentence definition of planting from many years back. In my view, MSC's development of the longer, two-section definition unmistakably succeeds in more clearly specifying the *process*. This covers both its nature and the fact that it involves three elements: the essence of the gospel, the community which embodies it and the mission context. Sowing this seed of gospel and church, the *consequence* is the birth of a further indigenous church. In its careful choice of wording, MSC has thus succeeded in incorporating into the definition four of the five values of a missional church on pp. 81-82.

Chapter 4 - fresh expressions of church

This chapter works through an alphabetical list of the variety known to our sources. Some kinds exist in well-integrated networks, others the MSC writers have grouped solely by their similarity of characteristics. For each, there are

³⁹ The foreword is p. vii and "mixed economy" introduced on p. xi

⁴⁰ p. 32 "Church planting is the process by which a seed of the life and message of Jesus, embodied by a community of Christians is immersed for mission reasons in a particular cultural or geographic context. The intended consequence is that it roots there, coming to life as a new indigenous body of Christian disciples, well suited to continue in mission."

stories by way of illustration and explanation of their specific character.

The list ranges from alternative worship to youth congregation. It is not a list of what is allowed, nor does it preclude what may yet emerge. The intriguing commonalities are that they tend to value small groups as part of their life and are flexible about day of meeting. Many are suitable for mission to networks and contain post-denominational membership.

How do I find out more?

For a short introduction to each type please consult our website and download the two-page summary. Alternatively, phone *The Sheffield Centre*⁴¹ and ask for a printed copy. The website also gives access to the rest of this story-based series which gives extended coverage of 75% of the types mentioned.

Chapter 5 - theology for a missionary church

Four major themes are covered.

- 1 How we think of church, must be rooted in the being and mission of God. The inner life of the Trinity and revelation in salvation history show God himself to be community-in-mission. "Mission comes from the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit".⁴² Church is to express the same dynamics with Trinitarian focus, relational life, incarnational instincts, Christ-like disciple-making and seeking transformation of creation.⁴³
- 2 The incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ underlie the patterns of "dying to live" which crop up throughout the report. So seminal was this thought, so self-giving and so expressing the hope of getting beyond present limitations, that, at one stage, the working group considered *Dying to Live* as a title for the report.⁴⁴ Publishers did not concur. This section also roots the necessary incarnational entry to any culture, before the later counter-cultural engagement with it, in these Christ-shaped patterns.⁴⁵ In the case of consumerism, the gospel-shaped *community* has to address questions at the core of the human self which makes choices. Living the gospel is partly about what and why I choose, as well as who chose me. This informs whom I serve and whom I will be prepared to die for.
- 3 The report explores "inculturation". This term is close to another, more familiar to some, known as "contextualisation". Both are about how gospel

⁴¹ See the closing page for all necessary administrative details

⁴² p. 85 – foot of the page

⁴³ pp. 81-82 the order of the five marks is here adapted to focus on the ontology being prior to the activity

⁴⁴ The website spells out more of the "dying to live" motif in 2 downloadable pages

⁴⁵ pp. 87-90



and church truly enter a culture from below, in order to transform it from within, rather than acting from above and imposing values upon it. Simplistically, the shades of difference are that inculturation is more focused on church and contextualisation upon gospel. Gospel and church, brought in through the planting process, cannot assume a fixed form and must not fuse their meaning and their form.⁴⁶

- 4 Various marks and connections of the Church are explored. These air the case for the more recent assertion that the Church is designed to reproduce,⁴⁷ which fits well with the seeds and dying to live notions. There is reworking of the historic four marks: *one, holy, catholic and apostolic*. MSC includes how fresh expressions fit in with specifically Anglican issues like the Lambeth Quadrilateral, episcopacy and sacraments.

Great strength but also major weakness - the outside view

Bob: All the work on mission context is the background to the excellent missiology and ecclesiology that requires authentic cross-cultural engagement (the seed dying to itself) and necessitates the creation of new inculturated communities of disciples (seeds bearing much fruit⁴⁸). Chapter 5 rightly relates each section to the cross-cultural challenge. It is also the culmination of the brilliant section on *salvation history*. However, this motif is often the almost exclusive specific reference point in developing some of the theological aspects. So all-pervading is this emphasis on the *cross-cultural* context and the associated need for cross-cultural mission principles to be the shaping influence that the report ends up with **serious omissions which result in distortion and imbalance**.

The first omission is the fact that there is always the challenge for the Church to be shaped by its mission context, whether surrounded by a changing culture or in times of stability. During the long periods of modernity or preceding settled world-views, and throughout centuries of Christendom, there were still at least the following three mission challenges that should have shaped the Church:

- **Re-shaping the culture it is set in;** always there is a gospel challenge leading to transformation. (The report makes good reference to this.)
- **The need to make disciples of the next generation.** This core function was performed in Christendom by the extended Christian family. It was complemented by Christians creating schools and Sunday schools.

The principal original purpose was to form, or disciple, the next generation of children in the Christian meta-narrative (world-view, story and values). The demise of these factors in the 20th century has allowed the surrounding shift towards post-modernity, with its pluralism and consumerism, to denude the Church so rapidly. Here we are not talking about the need for fresh expressions of church, but that we allowed a crucial expression, happening outside church buildings, to disappear without replacing it. This is a cause for repentance.

- **Periods of population movement and growth** while culture was relatively stable. In some previous generations, mission did shape the Church's efforts to connect with these new growing populations through the multiplication of parishes in medieval times and later through daughter churches and mission halls. Though these had their inadequacies, they were definitely being shaped by mission. The massive new-build housing developments in Ashford, Thames Gateway and Northamptonshire, highlight this challenge today.

These examples highlight the key issue, that whilst the report rightly focuses on the need for mission-shaped churches, we must do justice to the prior question of **what is the shape of mission?** Is it necessarily cross-cultural? Certainly the mission of God the Trinity involves moving **out** and moving **on**. However, there may not be a major cross-cultural dimension in either the moving *out* to reach enlarged or re-located existing populations, or in the moving *on* to disciple the next generation of Christian children, except in times like the present when culture changes so fast that each generation has distinct cultures.

George: The question of whether mission for God is necessarily cross-cultural connects to many issues. The discontinuity between God and His creation, the nature of the gap caused by "the fall", the need for Revelation, the change for God the Son in the Incarnation and the discontinuity between life on earth and the future life in heaven, all link to it. But I take Bob's point that not all mission on earth, need be cross-cultural yet even then, the Church must be shaped by mission.

Bob: By contrast, I note that in MSC, the mission of Jesus is explored only in its cross-cultural dimension and incarnational focus (Phil 2). The report seems to make no reference to the missionary method of **Jesus during his ministry**, who adopted a mission method with a strong mono-cultural focus. Having taken on the specific culture of a Jew, he focused on "the lost sheep of the

⁴⁶ p.91

⁴⁷ pp. 93-96 First explored in a 1992 sabbatical dissertation by George Lings (available from The Sheffield Centre).

⁴⁸ John Ch. 15 explores this dynamic

house of Israel”. His life ministry was **to his own culture and multiplying disciple-making communities** to produce a movement within it. This omission connects to the root of the bias. The theological and practical analysis seems weighted towards the cross-cultural dimension, but it is over-drawn giving the impression that this is the only authentic shape of mission.

We have the insiders already

Bob: The second serious omission is the fact that the report seems to ignore the possibility of the Church actually **having indigenous missionaries at its disposal!** This omission is crucial and probably points to some blind spots that could seriously impede the implementation of the report and its recommendations.

The vital consequence of having indigenous missionaries is that the mission endeavour, of planting many new churches into that culture, is **no longer cross-cultural**. That dimension of the incarnational journey has already been traversed. Such missionaries don’t need to die to their culture, other than in the transformational dimension of mission. For the seed of the gospel and the embryo community carrying it, the challenge is no longer to leave behind its culture. Rather it is the local sending church, or the wider institution, that has to die to its assumed prerogative of enforcing uniformity on what is then a not-so-fresh expression of church!⁴⁹

There are several situations in which indigenous missionary bands exist locally. The first is that across the nation the Church is already blessed with **young people** from generations that now represent different cultures,⁵⁰ though they are only a tiny minority. They contain examples from many, if not all, of the other sub-cultures within those generations. Here the issue is whether the Church will recognise their significance and then find appropriate ways to release and support these youth leaders and pioneers.

The second is the existence of mission-minded leaders from an older cultural group. Once again the need is to spot them, share vision, train and set them free to engage with their own context to make disciples in multiplying relational communities. In some places there are significant numbers of **leaders among 18-35 year olds** “dying” to create church for their peers. They are bursting with vision and creativity and the leadership capacity and they welcome support and accountability. The result may be what looks like a fresh expression of

church to others, but it is doing what comes naturally to them. Furthermore, it is not just the parent church here letting go of previous demands for uniformity, it is also waking up to the fact that the blindness or resistance to this, in other expressions of church, are other causes for repentance.

George: I welcome this critique and accept the principle that the converts within a culture are its best missionaries, for they inhabit the culture. My caveats are that, both among teens and twenties, many existing Christians have already been domesticated by the Church and will need to think cross-culturally to escape that captivity. In addition, even switched on mission-minded graduates, belonging to a *New Wine*-type church will need to think cross-culturally if after graduating they buy cheaper housing on a local authority estate and want to get involved in mission, say to local teenagers.

Bob: The next circumstance to consider is what happens after the first cross-cultural church has been planted well, having done its incarnational job properly, resulting this time in a fresh expression. Members of the new culture will have been incorporated into it and become the majority of that planted church. These are the natural ones to be called to move on to plant the next church and that seems to be the way that St. Paul operated. However, precisely because this expression is inculturated, it can spawn many similarly shaped churches **as yeast does moving through the lump of dough**. This next church, if it is for the same culture, will not be that different, but will need to be just as mission-shaped. This does not make it a clone, though it could be described as a sibling. In fact this is how, across the world, movements of mission spread through a sub-culture.⁵¹ MSC has omitted to name and espouse this dynamic, only making limited reference to it.⁵²

Up till now movements of mission have been a bridge too far for the Church of England⁵³ but I believe they are the major hope for the future of a mission-shaped Church in our nation. Only to focus on making the first cross-cultural bridgehead as the report tends to, perpetuates operating only in the dynamic of **addition** and misses the practical implication of the crucial recognition that one mark of the Church is to **multiply**.

Encouragement for inherited-mode churches

Bob: Correction to these omissions and distortions provide a much more hopeful picture for traditional churches. They do not have to become a fresh

⁴⁹ see p. 98 this point is well made in the section on church as *catholic*

⁵⁰ See pp. 75-80 on youth congregation and especially the case for its validity and necessity on p. 79

⁵¹ Bob argues this case at greater length in Chapter 12 of *Setting the Church of England Free* pp. 139-152.

A case in point would be church growth in South American shanty towns.

⁵² pp. 131-2 come closest, but mainly list the difficulties in achieving it, rather than arguing for its necessity

⁵³ The 18th century example of Wesley being a classic case

expression of church or engage a different culture from the majority of their members. Rather, they just have to be shaped by mission. Again the key question is **what shape is mission?** The answer is not necessarily cross-cultural, as the drift of the report tends to imply.

An inherited expression of church can further take on the shape of mission by

- making disciples who in turn make disciples, who may all be in the same culture
- discovering real community and living it in a way that connects with others
- becoming more incarnate in their existing context, by engaging beyond themselves and seeking God's opportunities to be transformational from within it

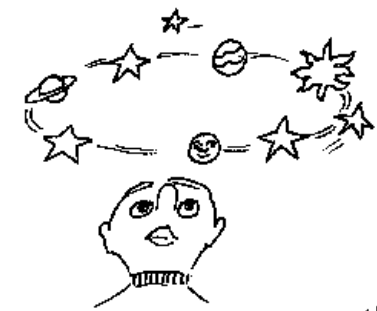
Inherited-mode church cannot be called mis-shapen just because it's not engaging cross-culturally, but only if it is not making disciples who themselves make disciples in multiplying communities that have a transforming influence on their context. A single plant into club culture, among surfers or New Age travellers has little power to transform that culture. However, if that single example multiplied widely, it certainly could. By stark contrast, often existing churches present church as only Sunday attendance and moral niceness. Those instincts might be described as the defective genes that disable church for mission. These indeed are mis-shapen churches with very limited power to transform.

George: I accept mission which multiplies churches within an entered culture is utterly valid, but still hold onto the suspicion that the characteristic directive of the Spirit (Acts 1.8) is to move the Church from its preferred Jerusalem contexts, to the ends of the earth. Effective same context mission cannot become the excuse not to do cross-cultural mission. If MSC is distorted at this point, it may be that the group's perception of the captivity of current Anglicanism, within its own Jerusalem of attenders and fringe, might be the motive.

Copernicus revisited

We commented earlier that all this involves a Copernican revolution, shifting our understanding from thinking our world, of the Church, is the centre to realising the Son's mission of God is the centre. Realising the centre is different to what we previously thought, changes the inherent direction of the missionary and spiritual journey. "Come to church" made some sense when

church was the centre. We don't know whether it is just sociology, or maybe it is parable, that the Church now finds itself at the margin of society and is searching for an identity in a networked world that is inherently de-centred and there are only connections.⁵⁴ But those perceptions are just tactics. Theologically, the Copernican revolution means joining the outward mission of God and He is the centre. This changes all mission to a "go" shape, in which the seeds of gospel and church are kept in the knapsack of the traveller. They only get taken out and planted as the journey unfolds. These seeds then must die to take root in the cross-cultural context. In the past, churches have played with "go" language, but because they have left themselves in the centre of the frame, all such talk has become subverted once more into "come" practice.



"This makes my head go round!"

Mission-shaped church - the process

"Mission", "shaped" and "church" are three words describing a story; a discovery as history unfolds. The book title could have been written as a sentence. Mission shaped church. We argue that this is also the story of the first church and this story is normative for the whole church. The mission of Jesus Christ, His values, cross, resurrection and Spirit shaped it. Without those realities, Church would not have come into being. If being church is about joining God's mission, it is far more profoundly true than we ever thought, that mission shapes church.⁵⁵ That order of words is not an accident of history, it is a theological principle; *"the Church is the fruit of God's mission"*.⁵⁶ Only in active mission to a particular context can we discover what church needs to be and see it responsively created for that context. This sets up enormous questions for those churches that we have inherited, both the buildings and their communities. If their mission context has changed and they have not altered to respond to this, does that mean they are losing identity as truly churches because they are not mission-shaped? We think it does. This is not the tactical disadvantage of irrelevance. It is at least cultural blindness and missiological ignorance; even

⁵⁴ See Alan Roxburgh *Missionary, Congregation, Leadership and Liminality* 1997 Trinity Press International

⁵⁵ For those who want to explore that thought, call up a lecture on www.encountersontheedge.org.uk A Church for the 21st Century - Changes in Belief about Church

⁵⁶ See p. xii

worse, it is theological amnesia and even dementia. In a post-Christendom world, there is no longer a guaranteed future for them.

Mission-shaped-Church - the identity

Let us play further with the words. Consider them as a compound noun: mission-shaped-church. My understanding is that is what church is. This is the creative fusion of best missiology and ecclesiology. This is saying that the very nature of church must include that it has been shaped by mission. MSC is clear that such thinking is rooted in Trinitarian theology.⁵⁷ God is in himself relational, communal and missional, in that order, for creation and redemption are the overflow of the triune life. Because of that logic of God being community-in-mission, we cannot ever finally separate church and gospel, the community and the gospel they bear. This cuts both ways. On the one hand there can be no disincarnate gospel. Even a tract lying on the pavement once had a writer. Gospel does not exist as a free-standing category in mission. Even truth itself is relational. God's supreme missionary exclaimed, "*I am the truth*".⁵⁸ Equally, deep in the DNA of church is identity as a missionary community. The DNA may include more than that, but it is not less.

Oh dear, I'm sorry

Conversely applying the same principle, where that historical process of church being shaped by mission has been absent, or where the church does not recognise its community-in-mission identity, then why are we surprised that church no longer works? It has become not just disconnected, but dysfunctional and illegitimate. There are only mission-shaped churches and misshapen churches. Which do we want? More important, which does the world need and what is God Himself calling for? As such, MSC is right to call for **repentance**.⁵⁹ It cites us allowing church and culture to drift apart without noticing. Stuart Murray commented to the working party:

"I would suggest repentance is needed less for 'allowing our culture to slip away from the Church' than for attempting to coerce Christianity within our culture in the first place!"

George: I am finding that the critique of Anabaptist friends - to see our church identity as more counter-cultural and our engagement with society proceeding from powerlessness - is one I welcomes, despite its sharpness.

⁵⁷ Compare pp. 84-86
⁵⁸ John chapter 14 v6
⁵⁹ pp. 13-14, 39, 96

Bob: Should we renounce the historic influence of **Acts of Uniformity**? They could be seen as the 17th century power play of worldly authorities to control the populace and at worst were to stifle and persecute authentic movements of renewal and mission-shaped church such as the Quakers, Anabaptists, and later the Methodist mission order.

MSC does note⁶⁰ the shocking range of weakness, ineptitude, offence, failure, disappointment and oppression, that led to the 40% of the population who have given up on church and the de facto rejection of it by the 40% non-churched. On reflection, MSC could have included our blindness or stubbornness to see our identity as mission-shaped church. We wish some would write different content to prayers of confession. At present they are essentially moral, but not missional, individual and not communal, and we would welcome the deliberate creation of some sense of lament in prayer and song.

Spiritually, we doubt that a long history of blindness about, and resistance to, our intrinsic mission identity is very quickly healed. Equally we do not look for extended self-flagellation. "*Repentance involves turning around and living in a new way*".⁶¹ One sign of a new way of living is that throughout, MSC has tried to model some greater ecumenical and missionary modesty. Usually the report refers to the role of being a Church for England, not the Church of England. While stuck with that pretentious historical title for now, Anglicans are becoming more realistic about their contribution and ecumenical partners help us in that readjustment.

Chapter 6 - methodologies for a missionary church

Space prevents any detailed consideration of this practical chapter, which commends a double listening, in the Spirit, to culture and tradition. A mission-centred process to find and form church is spelt out; questions of worship and what works in a rural context are aired as well as what is needed for planted expressions to mature.⁶² We highly recommend this chapter to practitioners as it is the only chapter that talks about how mission-shaped church is created. The material is based on fifteen years of work analysing planting models by us both. The methodologies in this chapter are both assessed and ordered for their effectiveness in the practice of planting mission-shaped church, consistent with the whole report.

⁶⁰ pp. 38-39

⁶¹ Bob Jackson *Hope for the Church* CHP 2003 p. 32 cited by MSC p. 14

⁶² Much of this methodology is already taught by The Sheffield Centre staff, at the Church Army's Wilson Carlile College of Evangelism. Courses are in block weeks and open to all. See the closing

Chapter 7 - an enabling framework

Chapter 7 also contains a level of detail that will be needed by practitioners and pioneers, so both are advised to get the full report in order to be able to work through the implications together.

Here only the framework is outlined. MSC argued that network-based churches need their own new legislative instrument, having given an assessment of all existing options.⁶³ The group did not have the authority to propose what the new category⁶⁴ should be, but developments⁶⁵ are explored below under a section called “new permissions”.

MSC recognises that the speed of change needed and the slower speed the current system permits creates real tensions.⁶⁵ However, in a climate needing rapid and flexible change, it is natural that the role of a leader - in this case the bishop - is accentuated as initiator and permission-giver. MSC reworded a draft document from within Sheffield Diocese and recommended this way of proceeding. It works with four interlocking principles to facilitate diverse church planting across a diocese.

- a) the bishop acts as authorised broker in discussions with ability to authorise or deny permission to proceed
- b) where it is agreed that a church plant should be begun but its meeting place is in another parish, the old and fresh expressions of church in that parish should be complementary in aim and style
- c) in all cases legal boundaries should be seen as permeable, reflecting that such boundaries need to be both respected and crossed
- d) a mutually agreed process be entered, including review and support to both expressions, in order to hold these values together⁶⁶

Bob: While glad of the gains here, I have a number of frustrations. We still have to work out how to assist and order a multiplying movement of missionary planting. The nearest likeness is the report noting patterns from HTB and St Thomas Crookes⁶⁷ as sending multiples of fresh expressions of church, all flowing from a strong source of fruitful mission and in some cases spreading beyond a single diocese. It is my belief that we shall need much more flexibility of structure than identified here if we are to embrace movements.

⁶³ pp. 125-129

⁶⁴ The proposal on p. 131 is that it should be called “A Bishop’s Order”.

⁶⁵ pp. 131-132 Talk of this shift and a tension between being Anglican and Apostolic

⁶⁶ pp. 138-142 A version can be downloaded from www.encountersontheedge.org.uk

⁶⁷ p. 130

I wonder what the shaping influences on the report were. Does the report betray a conviction that the most difficult obstacle is not the lack of missionaries prepared for “dying to live”, but the difficulty of an institution that resists change? Is there a hint that a shaping influence on the final document was the need to judge what was achievable, in persuading a reluctant church institution? Did they lack the vision or faith to imagine an indigenous mission-shaped movement from the Church of England? It is sobering to note that planting single cross-cultural churches into any one sub-culture, however mission-shaped, will never have a significant transformational effect for Christianity on the sum of today’s cultures. Only a mission-shaped multiplying movement can do that leavening dimension of the kingdom (Matt 13 v 33).

I also question part of the criteria used for validating network, non-boundary church plants. The criterion of difference and complementing other expressions and parishes in the region in their mission aims and church style is accepted. However, a weddedness to the old paradigm of parish I find unacceptable by the linkage of those tests to the place of meeting. The text at this point says, “clearly different from the parish in which they may be technically located”. For me, this misses the point entirely since network churches are not about place. It even becomes impossible as they often not only move venues, have a variety of them and in the more radical expressions like “liquid church”⁶⁸ or Oxford Diocese’s “i-church”,⁶⁹ there may never be a principal gathering point but many dispersed constantly changing ones. Furthermore, this criterion of difference is probably more likely to be needed to be applied with reference to other non-boundary plants in the diocese than to a parish-based ministry. I see the diocese as a whole as the only appropriate context for the test.

George: The MSC group did have to make difficult judgements about what was achievable and to offer recommendations that could be accepted by Synod. To construct a report that suffered rejection would jeopardise the gains for which it stood. Its favourable reception is now the base from which to continue to build. My view of the disputed network test accepts that network is not interested in boundary. However, other factors are important. There is a relationship to maintain with other parish churches who may well still think in the territorial way; where there is a clear principal gathering point for a network church, ignoring that is neither wise nor collaborative. Where there is no permanent meeting place, clear ways of expressing their relationship with other Christian groups is a right concern, within one body of Christ. Celebrating

⁶⁸ Pete Ward *Liquid Church* 2002 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.

⁶⁹ www.i-church.org introduces what is planned and invites anyone interested to make contact

difference and giving mutual affirmation seems the best way to handle this. The particular story will determine whether the best level to handle this is at deanery, diocese or trans-diocesan level.

Chapter 8 - the recommendations

We both think that though the ideas for diocesan strategy (1-8) and for resourcing (16-18) are good, the questions will be how many dioceses, and the Church at the centre, can deliver on the changes to priorities they imply.

We concur that **leadership, training and deployment** are crucial issues to see the vision of MSC fulfilled. It is most encouraging that recommendations call for the need to identify pioneer missional leaders (11) with new criteria for selection and patterns of training (10&13) and to provide suitable deployment (12). The necessary Ministry Division support for this is welcome. The defining issue will be whether the actual parallel stream for pioneers is thoroughgoing and embraces a radical development of existing processes which tend to select and train for inherited mode.

Key to this will be leaders for fresh expressions of church being formed through an apprenticeship process (12 hints at this). They gain leadership skills through immersion or socialisation in mission-shaped churches and there develop the right instincts for the future. It is also crucial to recognise that the younger generation are most effective at reaching their own age or just below. This means we should not remove them from effective mission to their own generation, by putting them through six years of residential college plus traditional curacy. Rather they should be supported and trained within their pioneer mission context, with appropriate accountability.⁷⁰

What difference will it make?

We suggest that *Mission-shaped Church* could be likened to a **vision of** what the Church is called to be and where it is called to go. Again, this is not in the sense of a particular future foretold, but a present scenario discerned.

Discernment may involve listening to what God is doing now, typical of Jesus in John's gospel. It includes hearing the groaning of creation and individuals and their yearnings to be free, of which Romans 8 18-27 speaks. It works also with

attending to the way God's intended future addresses, and even calls into being, the constant creation of the present, as the book of Revelation demonstrates. The group that met over two years to create *Mission-shaped Church*, tried to listen to this three pronged conversation and then to work out what this was saying to the Church. Visions can fire the imagination; they can give permission to dream. They offer what is possible and, in the best sense, desirable. This is the eyes speaking to the heart, but it is neither the legs nor the arms to translate idea into action. On its own it can do nothing, though it may inspire many.

What a co-incidence?

However, a context has arisen that even researchers like George, who try to be detached, regard as remarkable. Others will want to go further. The Archbishop of Canterbury in Synod called it "a *kairos* moment". Consider a wide convergence of forces, for which we know of no one human orchestrator across their range. If network is how society is developing, then this is a loose connection of people and forces for which *Mission-shaped Church* could become a core text.

The new Archbishop of Canterbury

In the gestation period of MSC, the Church of England has gained a Welsh Archbishop with living experiences of church planting, who confesses they so impressed him that he openly makes the fostering of fresh expressions of church one of his two highest priorities. The other is theological education and, doubtless, he wants the two to be connected. Thus his support of the report at the General Synod debate was as crucial as it was timely. He, in turn, is thereby furnished with a report that gives voice to his own declared priorities. In addition, he is a practical advocate of giving time and space to the new to find its feet and demonstrate its qualities: "they cry out for our support understanding and nurture, if they are not to get isolated and unaccountable".⁷¹

A new "mixed economy"

At the Synod of July 2003, Archbishop Rowan spoke of whether

	Parish	Network
Central	✓	✓
Entrepreneur	?	✓✓

the Church was capable of moving towards a more "mixed economy" - recognising church where it appears and having the willingness and skill to work with it. The phrase "mixed economy" was coined in Wales back in 1999 and is now used so often that it has clearly struck a chord. It speaks of valuing both

⁷⁰ Bob Hopkins has specific ideas and examples of how this is beginning to be worked through. Visit www.acpi.org.uk to view them.

⁷¹ Archbishop Rowan Williams General Synod July 2003

the inherited and the emerging. In economic usage, it is a way of working with national centralised bodies and more entrepreneurial-focused ones, held in dynamic tension and balance. However, this language marks a large shift from seeing church plants as aliens seeking entry to parochial normality, to seeing the two realities as truly complementary and different. As MSC itself says, “the existing parochial system alone is no longer able to fully deliver its underlying mission purpose ... a mixed economy of parish churches and network churches will be necessary in an active partnership across a wider area”.⁷²

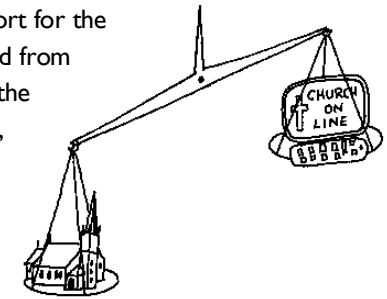
New permissions

At the same time, the legal processes governing creating churches, as well as amending how they are organised, were being reviewed. A very wide range of interested parties were consulted which could have led to even-handed tinkering with the status quo. Yet a pronounced shift to enabling mission comes out in its Report GS 1528 *A Measure for Measures: In Mission and Ministry*. Over the review period, various individuals serving on the MSC working group made presentations to them at their request and a sense of growing consensus between the two bodies became evident. The relationship is acknowledged (GS 1528 3.14-3.35). Naturally the language used is careful, but a new category of Bishop’s Order is recommended (no. 18 paragraph 3.25-3.26) for those fresh expressions of church that cannot naturally or easily find a legal identity within existing territorial legislation for parishes and teams. GS 1528 calls them “mission initiatives” which is better than “experiments”, but which we still find worrying in that this language denies them recognition as churches. However, these are real steps in the right direction, that accept the old cannot provide all that is needed, hears the call for diversity and admits the social reality of network. The report came to General Synod on the same day as MSC and was also accepted. However, it will now take time for the legislation to be enacted and its details might still be contested.

New money? Not yet!

MSC and the “mixed economy” motif both made their way into yet another strand of revision, as did the writing and advocacy of Bob Jackson.⁷³ The Church Commissioners were asked to review their spending, and all the above factors were connections for them to ponder. Their conclusions and proposals after consultation came to Synod the day after the *Mission-shaped Church*

debate. Their readable strategy is laid out in paragraph 58-75, pp. 16-21. In short, they wanted to support the parish system where it was demonstrably effective and help fund new initiatives where judged appropriate at the local level. They wished to create a six year grant scheme which was very good news for those driven to distraction by short-term seed corn financing. By 2010, they proposed putting in at least £9million per year for mission development purposes. They accepted that token financial support of the new initiatives would not meet the needs of the hour (paragraph 19), believing a move to an effective mixed economy was important. Paragraph 133 went as far as stating, “The Church of England’s ability to be the Church for England will depend upon how quickly and to what extent it is able to make that switch.” One sixth of this redirected money (around 1.5 million per year) was to be created by switching some resource away from support for the total costs of bishops (stipends, housing expenses) and from cathedrals, asking in both cases dioceses to make up the difference weighted by ability to pay. At 2003 figures, the proposed redistribution was 1 million out of nearly 19 to bishops’ costs, and half a million out of 2.5 million to cathedrals.



Despite those modest adjustments, it could be expected that the report acquired some powerful enemies. Observers say the report was savaged by the Bishop of St Albans at Synod and only survived a longer kick into touch by adjournment, enabling its re-presentation after further consultation later in the life of the Synod. It appears there is a political battle over whether the Archbishops’ Council, the House of Bishops or the Synod itself should be setting policy for the Church of England. This is especially ironic in a declining church where fights over power are part of the problem of its limited credibility. Furthermore, claiming to empower laity, the extent of the central power is shrinking. Moreover, in a “mixed economy” much of the energy comes from the entrepreneurs, and they will continue grass-roots initiatives, even if vested interest in some quarters denies them proper support from central resources. Nevertheless, it looks as though a moral argument has been won within the Commissioners who are mandated to use their money for “the additional cure of souls in parishes where such assistance is most required”, and only time will tell whether this is a fatal delay.

⁷² *Mission-shaped Church* Bishop Graham Cray’s Introduction p. xi

⁷³ Bob Jackson *Hope for the Church* CHP 2002

New appointments

In the last few years there have been a number of appointments to the ranks of the bishops of those who have positive church planting experience. They know the opportunities, the potential and the pitfalls. We suspect strategic working with them will be natural for the entrepreneurs.

Following Canon Robert Freeman, whose acute awareness helped steer MSC during its creation, has come Revd Paul Bayes (*below, left*) as National Mission and Evangelism Adviser to the Archbishops' Council. He too knows planting in general and cell church in particular at first hand, as readers of *Encounters on the Edge* no.20 *Soft Cell* will know. He wishes to be a networking conduit to serve and promote the variety of fresh expressions of church, and the job gives him that role.⁷⁴ It also now looks as though the successors to *Springboard* will also work to this agenda. The Lambeth Partners are being asked to fund a core team, whose focus is to enable the wider church to take forward what *Mission-shaped Church* has called for. All this is potentially very good news, offering to accelerate the ability to envision, provide consultants and trainers for what is needed to emerge and continue to research how they fare. *The Sheffield Centre* team and *Anglican Church Planting Initiatives* both look forward to working as informal partners with any such team and assisting one another.

New pioneers

We are also pleased to air that both *CMS* and *Church Army* are refocusing how they understand their work. We believe *CMS* see their future specifically as a mission order and that operating directly in this country is a prime focus. Their long experience of cross-cultural understanding will be very welcome and the attendant closing of the historical gap between church and mission is equally pleasing. *Church Army* are widely but internally consulting in their desire to return more clearly to their pioneering roots and to recruit those with such a temperament and gifts. This will also have implications for training and deployment. The *Church Army* college, *Wilson Carlile College of Evangelism*, could become a key mission-centred theological training provider either on a regional or national basis. *Church Army*, while not wanting to become an official order, desire to deploy people in teams, not as rugged individualists; they sense that the modelling of community is a key way forward in mission to a post-Christendom mission context and among a fragmented, network society. These teams would include pioneer evangelists, but they are open to working



with other partners, who widen the skills offered and enrich the missional community. *The Order of Mission*,⁷⁵ inaugurated at Easter 2003 at St Thomas Crookes in Sheffield by Archbishop David Hope, and already with over a hundred members, is another strand to a similar story. With its growing family of training centres and connections to the *New Wine* network, it may have a particular relevance for Generation X and younger. All three groupings have come to these views by their own longer processes. All three had some input into *Mission-shaped Church*, but the overlap with all the other factors above is striking and here is significant resource to help deliver the vision in practice.

New stories

The *Encounters on the Edge* series has had its own little part to play, although it did not invent or inaugurate any of the stories it has told over five years. The story-holders would also point away from themselves to the needs of the people to whom they were sent and to the calling of God to respond. It is not so fanciful to think that there is a stirring up of the Church going on. Yet the resultant wider knowledge of their existence has been part of what propelled the call for *Mission-shaped Church* to be written. The stories are widely cited in the report and have made their way into other reviews. As such, they have demonstrated that doing it differently is already with us. The wider church has simply had to listen. Some take these as enormous signs of hope, while others sound nervous or threatened. However, the Church has chosen among its national leaders those who are convinced.

What difference it will make is a ceaseless topic for prayer, for consultation and discernment, and for the sending out of people to fashion further fresh expressions of church. We believe this could be a prayer for our time:

O Holy Spirit, whose presence is liberty
Grant us that freedom of the Spirit
Which will not fear to tread in unknown ways
Nor be held back by fear of others or misgivings of ourselves.
Ever beckon us forward to the place of your will
Which is also the place of your power
O ever-leading ever-loving Lord. Amen

Bishop George Appleton

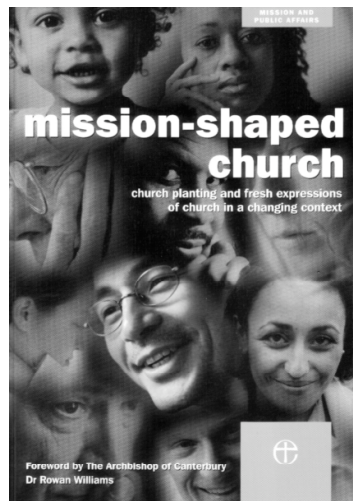
George Lings and Bob Hopkins, March 2004

⁷⁴ p. 146 recommendation no. 8

⁷⁵ See pp. 74-75 or consult <http://www.sttoms.net> under "the order of mission"

What could you do now?

- Use a combination of the Mission-shaped Church report and multiple copies of this *Encounters on the Edge* issue for study in your house groups or staff teams.
- Make use of the questions for discussion at the end of each chapter of the Mission-shaped Church report.
- Use extracts of this issue in your parish/deanery/diocese newspapers.
- If a particular fresh expression of church intrigues you, browse back issues of *Encounters on the Edge* on www.encountersontheedge.org.uk for a dedicated issue to that expression of church.
- Apply for mission-shaped church planting courses at Wilson Carlile College of Evangelism or other training opportunities listed on p.164 of Mission-shaped Church (training opportunities also listed on www.encountersontheedge.org.uk).
- **Shareit**, Church Army's magazine, gives examples of some of the work done by CA evangelists. It is available on the website at www.churcharmy.org.uk
- If you are interested in finding out what Church Army officers are doing in your area please contact **Kathy Dunnington 020 8309 3509** or email k.dunnington@churcharmy.org



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- **fresh expressions of church and church planting** (George Lings, Claire Dalpra, Peter Hallsworth)
- **evangelism to post-Christian culture** (Steve Hollinghurst)
- **connecting with young people (word-on-the-web)** (Ruth Walker, Andrew Wooding)



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Left to right: Steve Hollinghurst, Claire Dalpra, Michael Collyer, George Lings, Peter Hallsworth, Ruth Walker, Andrew Wooding



We are a team supporting the evolving mission of the Church of England.