Emerging Church – part one

Issue 22 Editor: Rob Hay

Emerging Church seems to have something of the soap bar about it that post-modernity had. We kind of know what people are alluding to when they use the term but certainly would not want to try to guess precisely what they mean. In fact there is a very high probability that they don't know exactly what they mean by it! However, like post-modernity it seems that it is a significant issue we should be wrestling with and one that will potentially change the landscape that we are familiar with and take for granted.

In the first of two issues we open up some possibilities. Richard Tiplady explores some models of emerging church and looks at their roots and implications for missionary practice. Jonathan Ingleby suggests that emerging church is simply the church contextualising to post-modernity. Paul Tester looks at applying some emerging church thinking to a real life situation where traditional church models are making limited inroads. Finally we have Darrell Jackson painting the wider picture of the current state of evangelical and ecumenical missiology in Europe.

However, it is truly a picture that Darrell paints as he has used a mindmap and given some explanatory notes to help you begin to engage. We want you to engage with it. Email us your reflections on it before March 15th and if they are judged to be the most innovative and engaging they will win a copy of Chris Wright's "The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative" (reviewed in issue 17). We will publish all reflections received in a letters page next month.

The next issue will continue the theme of Emerging Church with a number of papers from the Global Connections Thinking Mission Forum.

As always we hope you enjoy Encounters and are provoked and stimulated to think and engage.

Rob

- **Article 1**: **Emerging Church? New thinking about the church in Europe in the 21st century.**
  (Richard Tiplady, 1423 words)

- **Article 2**: **The Church in a Postmodern Society.**
  (Dr Jonathan Ingleby, 1627 words)

- **Article 3**: **The Rugby Club Church.**
  (Paul Tester, 1430 words)

- **Article 4**: **Evangelical and Ecumenical Missiology in Post-Communist Europe Mindmap.**
  (Revd Darrell Jackson)

Go to the Encounters website at www.redcliffe.org/encounters to read what others are thinking on the Discussion Board. Use the Voice your comments form to add to the debate.

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Emerging Church?
New thinking about the church in Europe in the 21st century

Author: Richard Tiplady, British Director, European Christian Mission.

A movement of new thinking and practices regarding the shape of the church in the West has well and truly 'emerged'. It is a diverse and fluid movement, still taking and changing shape, one which has been given a variety of names – "missional church" and "mission-shaped church" are but two, although the phrase used in the title of this short paper, "emerging church", is the one most widely in use.

Why "emerging"? Because the ideas and practices are nowhere near fully-formed, it is imprecise (allowing room for experimentation and avoiding the restrictions of tight definitions), and because "emerging church" ideas and experiments have sprung up or 'emerged' in a variety of different contexts, more-or-less spontaneously and simultaneously.

As a movement, it has its roots in the northern/western European cultural sphere, but not just the Anglo-Saxon one. While "emerging church" ideas and practices are present in the UK and USA, they also in the Netherlands and Scandinavia, and significant early practitioners and thinkers 'emerged' in Australia and spread elsewhere. In fact, it's probably wrong to describe it as a movement; it's not that coherent. "Emerging church" has 'emerged' through the confluence of different social, missiological, theological and ecclesiological currents, which are outlined below in turn.

Currents that combine in 'emerging church'

1. Changing cultural, religious and social realities in Europe

"Emerging churches are communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures" (Gibbs and Bolger, p44). This is a key assumption behind "emerging church". Just as the 'gathered congregation' form of the church emerged most definitively in the C18-C19, when the parish system proved inadequate to service the spiritual needs of urban industrial Europe, so new forms of the church will be needed to reach post-industrial, post-modern European people.

"Emerging church" tries to avoid the secular/spiritual divide imposed on the Christian faith by the Enlightenment, emphasising church as the people of God, not a place to meet. If there is no secular/spiritual divide, then there can be no 'holy' or 'profane' places. Churches are being intentionally planted in cafés, pubs and in houses, not just in special buildings.

"In Christendom, the Sunday meeting was the centre of corporate spiritual expression for the community. In a post-Christendom context, a church-meeting focus is no longer indigenous to the culture or necessary to be faithful to the gospel. Instead, the practice of community foundation itself is more central than the church meeting" (Gibbs and Bolger, p44).

2. New approaches to missionary outreach in Europe

Michael Moynagh describes "emerging church" as a mindset rather than a model, a way of thinking about church, rather than simply a way of doing church. This mindset is "we'll come to you", not "you come to us". This has also been contrasted as "incarnational" v "attractional", the latter being the more familiar mode of church (i.e. bringing people along to the church building or meeting place). In the "incarnational" approach, we model ourselves

on the example of Jesus by going among people and embodying the life of the Spirit in their midst. This is central to "emerging church" ideas about evangelism – existing forms of Christian worship and community do not attract outsiders (and may even repel them). There should be no offence except the cross of Christ.

3. A renewed emphasis on the kingdom of God (the in-breaking reign of God)

A "kingdom of God" emphasis is central for many emerging church writers. Mark Scandrette of ReIMAGINE in San Francisco said about his attempts to set up a Gen-X church, "We got the questions wrong. We started out thinking about what form the church should take, as opposed to what the life of Jesus means in this time and place. Now, instead of being preoccupied with new forms of church, we focus on seeking the kingdom as the people of God". The in-breaking kingdom of God scandalizes the wealthy, the comfortable and the religious, and lifts up in the outcast, the immoral and the rejected. At least, it did in Jesus' day, so why should we expect it to be any different now?

4. Not "what is the church?", but "what is the church for?"

The quote from Scandrette above shows that "emerging church" is therefore as much about the purpose of the church as it is about the shape of the church. Form should follow function. Emerging church challenges us to rethink our fundamental assumptions about what it means to "be the church" as well as how we "do church". Only thereafter should we create new wineskins, doing things in an entirely new way, for the sake of the spread of the good news of Jesus Christ in Europe. For example, Latin American missiologist Orlando Costas described church-planting as "penultimate", i.e. it is not the goal and purpose of mission. The purpose of church-planting is to create living communities of Christians that will work for personal and social transformation in their locality. If this is true, then how does this affect the way we plant churches?

Examples to illustrate

The above elements may describe the ethos and driving forces behind "emerging church", but missionaries, church leaders and others rightly ask, "OK, so what does it look like?". Two examples, with their websites for further information, are given below:

Urban Expression www.urbanexpression.org.uk

A church-planting enterprise that began in the East End of London (which is urban, deprived, socially and ethnically very mixed, multicultural and multireligious) and now also active in Glasgow. They don't always look like church, and their involvement with their local communities' needs is very deep. Most or all members of Urban Expression are evangelical, but they don't have a statement of faith – they are united by what they call their "Core Convictions" which incorporates:

- their Mission Statement ("Urban Expression is an urban mission agency that recruits, equips, deploys and networks self-financing teams pioneering creative and relevant expressions of the Christian church in under-churched areas of the inner city")

- their Values (relationship, creativity and humility)

- their Commitments (e.g. "We are committed to following God on the margins and in the gaps, expecting to discover God at work among powerless people and in places

of weakness" and "We are committed to being Jesus-centred in our view of the Bible, our understanding of mission and all aspects of discipleship")

The Crowded House www.thecrowdedhouse.org

The Crowded House is a network of missional communities in Sheffield and Loughborough with a commitment to church planting. Their website states that "most of our churches meet in homes. We want to offer a place of belonging. We are committed to *mission through community* (we believe that the life of the Christian family is a powerful apologetic for the gospel) and *communities in mission* (we want to be congregations focused on the gospel and church planting)". The following excerpt from their website illustrates their approach:

> *At university someone had tried to get Patrick along to church. What a joke! But was he at church now? He wasn't sure. It had started when a colleague asked him round for a meal. He was impressed by how Simon and the other people in his house all got on with one another. They'd got talking about life and stuff and they'd invited him to come round again on Sunday. Simon had suggested he come round in time to watch the football. When others arrived later in the afternoon they had all eaten together. They were a real hotch-potch of people, but Patrick enjoyed the banter. After the meal they had read from the Bible and discussed what it meant. No-one seemed to mind his questions. Now some were playing a board game. A family with young children had just left. A couple seemed to be praying in the kitchen. Maybe this was church. Maybe it wasn't. Whatever it was, Patrick felt strangely at home.*

A few questions

"Emerging church" is not a panacea for the challenges facing the church in Europe today. But as an ethos, an idea and a movement, it offers us much to consider.

How then should we learn from "emerging church"? How can we participate in the discussions, understand the experiments, learn from the mistakes and success of others, and incorporate them into our own mission strategies and practices? In addition, can we encourage and resource our missionaries with these ideas and practices, and can we contribute to and support the work of others without trying to make it our own?

<back to top>

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The Church in a Postmodern Society

Author: Dr Jonathan Ingleby, co-editor of Encounters and Postgraduate lecturer in mission, Redcliffe College.

Why bother with context?

One of the seminal understandings of recent times has been that everything comes to us through language and culture. The truth is that we meet God, just as we meet our neighbour, at this point. We encounter reality in our culturally and linguistically determined context. This insight also includes a vital missiological principle. It is what Leslie Newbigin calls 'the logic of election'. God does not come down to me as it were 'through the skylight' but via my neighbour. But my neighbour, if he or she is going to communicate with me, must do so by means of a shared language and culture. So the bearer of God's word must enter the culture and learn the language of those among whom he or she is living and then communicate the message within that context. This is the process we call contextualisation.

Today's context - life in fragments

Almost every commentator you read today suggests that we stand at a moment of decisive cultural change. The key indicator, as we all now know, is that trendy little prefix 'post'. So this essay mentions a postmodern society. The information age is labelled post-industrialism, George Linbeck is a 'post liberal' and more than a dozen years ago now Dave Tomlinson wrote his controversial book called the 'The Post Evangelical'. So what is going on?

To me, the basic idea in postmodernism is that of fragmentation - what Francis Lyotard famously called 'a suspicion of meta-narratives'. There are no big, all embracing, stories, or if there are they are false. Also, history does not matter very much. At best it can be plundered for its antiquarian interest – 'theme parks'! – but we do not need to study it seriously, nor do we expect it to shape the present. Neither is the future important. We have no certain knowledge of it and those who say that they have a clear *goal* in life are deluding themselves. Living in the present is the name of the game, indeed living on the surface. After all, if there is no significant past or future, do we have anything else but 'surfaces'. Also, if there is no one banner under which we can all stand, no cause we can all join, no story which is the story of us all, then we can and, indeed, must invent our own. (Does this mean, for example, that our churches today are 'invented communities' marketing our wares like a supermarket?) This is a dangerous move towards relativism and non-realism. If nobody has got the truth, why should we trust anybody – why is one story better than another? And the people who say that there are no big stories, why should we trust them?

All this sounds such bad news that we might wonder what all the fuss is about or why, at any rate, Christians need to pay much attention. However, for many people in today's world the point is just the opposite. The postmodern society sounds like good news, like the great escape. Why is this? It is because modernity has failed. Here are some of the ways:

> 1. We are much less sure about the promise apparently held out by man's unaided rationality.

> 2. Evolutionary 'progress' seems to have been derailed. Two world wars, Auschwitz, the atomic bomb, Vietnam, leaves us feeling very differently from our ancestors a century ago.

3. In particular, technology and science has not delivered. What we now observe is not a technological utopia, but a man-made ruin.

4. The big political stories, Marxism and free market Capitalism have few adherents. Marxist ideologies seem little more than a 'long march to prison'. Capitalist societies seem inherently and increasingly unjust.

5. Institutional religion appears to be failing, at least in the postmodern West.

These are all meta-narratives that have, to some extent, been discredited. Modern philosophers like Derrida and Foucault go further. Inherently the attempt to create meta-narratives was little more, they say, than a complicated plot by those who had the stories to marginalise and then overpower those who did not. If the stories are essentially Western, white, male, rationalistic, technological stories, then those who are non-Western, or black, or women, or 'religious', or 'primitive' (i.e. technologically illiterate), are being told a story in which they can play no essential part. But these groups are waking up to the fact that they have their stories too and if this means the breakdown of meta-narrative then, as far as they are concerned, so much the better.

How then do we live out the gospel?

1. We must not cling to, or go back to, modernity

You may say to me: we have never wanted to be 'modern' in this sense. We have always realised that the goals of modernity were false. Let me list just some of the ways that modernity has got into the church:

❖ We have a rational confidence in 'the word'; texts, sermons, definitions, statements of faith, explanations, discussion, rational control, are what we are about. Notice our distrust of areas of spirituality - dreams, prophecies, ecstasy, visions, dance etc which are not rationally determined. Do we get this from the Bible? We do not. We get it from modernity.

❖ At another level we have great confidence in the 'great god technology'. A little technology may help, but much of it isolates, alienates and exploits.

❖ We have subscribed to the political meta-narratives as long as they have suited us. When Western imperialism suited us, we supported it. The same is true today of exploitive capitalism. We have supported systems which have exploited the poor, taken the bread from the mouths of children, exported death.

❖ We too have been sucked into a confidence in inevitable, thoughtless progress, a vague utopian developmentalism. You can tell this because we have lost effective belief in the Biblical meta-narrative. How many of you have preached on heaven and hell, or the Second Coming, recently?

❖ Our religion is still very institutional: we define people's spirituality by their piety. 'Going to church' is still the required signal for effective discipleship.

❖ Above all, we have used the meta-narrative of the gospel, which was meant to liberate people, to tell a 'story' of our own which has excluded others who are not like us.

2. We must affirm the meta-narrative of the gospel

In brief this means that we have a history (against postmodern amnesia); we have a future (against postmodern despair); we are a covenant people (against individualism and greed). (I hope all this reminds us of the Lord's Table!)

3. We must present the gospel cross-culturally (practice critical contextualisation)

❖ Remember that the Bible is also a document which is rooted in a specific culture and language(s). Therefore, there is no substitute for Bible study, just as there is no substitute for language learning and culture learning in missionary work. In Bible lands, so to speak, we must be cross-cultural travellers or settlers and not tourists. Bible translation work remains an essential ingredient of contextualisation.

❖ Being marooned in a Christian sub-culture is fatal to our communication with those outside the faith. Further, we must beware the confusion which comes from equating 'the world' in the pejorative sense, with culture. All cultures have a 'worldly' element (including the Christian sub culture!) but, of course, that is not the whole story.

❖ There is a practical methodology here which enables us to practice critical contextualisation and I can illustrate this by means of a concrete example. Imagine you are a youth group leader who has a fairly well committed group, but one that is suspicious of formal church involvement.

a) Study the local culture phenomenologically and uncritically. E.g. What sort of music do your young people listen to? How do they spend their evenings? What would be their preferred means of gathering together?

b) Study Scripture together to provide a framework for decision making. E.g. How does Scripture view the creative arts? What does the Scripture mean by such terms as 'worldliness' and 'separation'? What value does the Scripture put on corporate acts of worship?

c) Get the group to evaluate their own practices and make decisions about them. Do not make the decisions for them. Remember they know their own culture better than you do.

4. We must remember that contextualising the gospel in a postmodern world demands a different style

❖ People have significant 'little stories' that we need to listen to. They will often provide us with significant clues. Our practice must be more of the therapist and less of the preacher. Similarly, the Bible is full of little stories, like Judges or the parables of Jesus.

❖ We need to interpret, rather than legislate.

❖ Don't institutionalise - that's too big a story. Not the Church, or the denomination, perhaps not even the local church meeting together in one building. The appropriate group might be a house-group or a coffee evening. The appropriate place might be a pub or a community centre or a rugby club.

❖ Conversations are better than services.

❖ Not doctrine, but stories - a mystery to be contemplated, not a problem to be solved. Also accept the fragmentary. Agree that there may be loose ends.

❖ Right brain is as important as left brain.

Conclusion

This is a day of great opportunity. Modernity was, and is, essentially a control mechanism. However, people are beginning to break away. Let us give up our ambition to be in control and offer them our own fragmented lives so that we can join them. Together we can journey toward the truth, with Jesus as our guide.

<u>\<back to top\></u>

The Rugby Club Church

Author: Paul Tester was involved for a year in ministry on a typical UK housing estate. Here he shares some ideas as to how an 'emerging church' approach might work in a church planting context. The local rugby club was the key to his thinking.

Church attendance is rapidly declining across the UK and the national Church is faced with the possibility that it may be close to extinction (Moynagh, 2001, 7-10). It must consider the possibility that God has abandoned it (Murray, 2004, 231), and if it believes that this is not so, it must look to see how, and where, God's Spirit is leading and renewing His Church (Fresh Expressions, 2006, Prospectus: Phase 2, 4). The "emerging church" appears to offer the potential of such Spirit led renewal. This essay will consider how such a church might be planted on the Gloucester estate of Matson.

Matson is typical of many estates across the UK. It is one of the more deprived areas of the country (National Statistics, 2006). There are three existing churches on the estate which are working well together. The churches have congregations that are predominantly middle class and towards the older end of the age spectrum, some of whom travel in to the churches from surrounding areas. Local centres of activity include a youth club, a pub, a family and neighbourhood centre, a shopping arcade, a library and notably Matson Rugby Football Club (RFC). I have been playing rugby at the club for the last three months and have observed how the club is truly a centre for the people of the community. It involves not only the senior players but also young players and women from the local netball club. It also has a skittle alley, bar and multi-purpose room which are used by various community groups. On a Saturday afternoon particularly, the club is full of people from the local area who have played sport, their relatives, those who have spectated and those who have helped in the kitchen / worked behind the bar. Although Christian influence at the club is currently minimal, as such a community focus, it provides an opportunity for the establishment of a community and mission based church to minister to the unchurched people of the estate.

I am advocating a radically different type of church for the proposed plant in Matson. Such a plant must include the key ingredients of a church but express them in a way that is relevant to the church plant culture. Drawing on the experience of cross-cultural church planting from around the world, the form and activities must be shaped by people from the receiving culture (Hesselgrave, 1980, 349; Finney, 2004, 103). This is a risky, yet necessary process. Although networks appear to be the way in which society now relates, networks have not replaced neighbourhoods (Church of England, 2004, 5). "Local communities are still important to people" (Moynagh, 2001, 150). Becoming involved in the rugby club provides the opportunity for a church planting team to reach a sub-culture which is primarily community based. Building relationships, and being part of estate life, will be key (as illustrated by the church plant on the Prospect Estate (Guildford Diocese, 1996)). Mason (2003, 80) notes that the church should not compete with existing facilities and resources but work to improve what is available. If the church plant were to provide a qualified, high quality coach to the rugby club, it is likely that the club would agree for the use of its premises for church plant gatherings. The coach, and 2-3 players (all mature Christians), would live on the estate with their families and form the core of the church plant. The plant would be a "cell" church, meeting in the club, at a time likely to be suitable to potential new members. A convenient meeting time is likely to be a weekday evening after training. This will not clash with young people's sport on Sunday mornings and will be at a time when most club members will be at the club. As such, a number of the barriers to church attendance described by Finney (2004, 127-131), such as the unpopularity of Sunday morning services and the poor perception of organised religion in today's culture, would be removed.

One of the key ingredients of the church plant will be mission. The Spirit must lead the process and role-modelling through an incarnational approach will also be key (Mason, 2003, 159). Sport provides a relevant opportunity for strong relationships to build quickly (Mason, 2003, 46) and the impact of such a ministry can be immense. Jason Robinson, former England rugby international, is a living example of the potential. Those likely to be drawn to a rugby church plant will be from two groups that are typically missing in church, men and young people (Mason, 2003, 53). This approach of designing church for the unchurched incorporates the idea of "prior mission" (Savage et al, 2006, 121) and parallels the approach of the New Testament church which operated on a "we'll come to you" basis (Moynagh, 2001, 139).

Watson (1978, 7-8) looks to New Testament church principles to shape modern day church. When considering how worship should manifest itself in church he considers there to be two key aspects to worship, "bowing down" and service (1978, 180). From my experience, it is unlikely that sung worship will be a natural "bowing down" response for those involved with a rugby club and so worship in the cell church would be of a more "alternative" form. Flannagan (2004) provides an example of a useful resource with ideas for more relevant prayer and praise. Church members would also be encouraged, through "cell" discipleship, to live life in a way that glorifies God, as their worship through service. Mason (2003, 29) quotes Colossians 3:17, "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" to confirm this approach. He relates it particularly to the attitude to be displayed on the sports field. Teaching would be relevant and generally through oral and visual means to maximise it's effectiveness. Any resources would be chosen to maximize their relevance (e.g. Bibles designed for a rugby literate audience (Bible Society, 2003)).

Community should naturally flow from the relationships built through the common bond of the rugby club and the shared experience of church. To facilitate this further, shared leadership would be developed, initially under the authority of the planting partnership. However, the intention would be for this to pass to those from the plant culture as soon as was reasonably practicable. Hesselgrave (1980, 349) argues that local spiritual leadership must be developed before organisation of the church can be finalised. Through the use of the "cell" model, all can be mobilised for discipleship, ministry, leadership and expansion" (Church of England, 2004, 52). Ellis and Mitchell (1992, 162), referring to New Testament example, also note that academic achievement is not a pre-requisite for leadership, which is worth considering as the majority of the local people will not have a strong academic background.

Unity with the wider church must be maintained, but at the same time the planting partnership must understand from the outset that the plant must be given space to determine how to express that. Tensions will no doubt arise regarding contentious issues such as the sacraments. However in line with the "emerging church" philosophy (Steven Croft for Fresh Expressions, 2006, "What not to say"), the new plant must be given the space to develop its own understanding as to how church should be from Scripture. Unity can nevertheless be maintained through emphasis on the common ground of the key church ingredients and specifically the churches' shared spiritual unity (Watson, 1978, 342).

There are undoubtedly issues to be resolved with "emerging church". A case in point is the fragmentation of the church into many different sub-cultures. The whole church must continue to wrestle with this issue as to how "one-ness" is expressed and with other issues raised by "emerging church". The church should practice double listening (Church of England, 2004, 104) - the listening to God speaking through both the culture and tradition, and the gospel and church. Steven Croft (for Fresh Expressions, 2006, "What not to say") reminds us that "there are no blue-prints to follow". However, with a strong focus on listening to God (Church of England, 2004, 104) and participating in mission where God is already working through his Spirit (Fresh Expressions, 2006, Prospectus: Phase 2) there is the potential for renewal in the UK church. A sport based church can be successful, if God wills it to be so. These could be exciting times where we "recapture the subversive pre-Christendom dynamism that turned the world upside down from the margins" (Murray, 2004, 155).
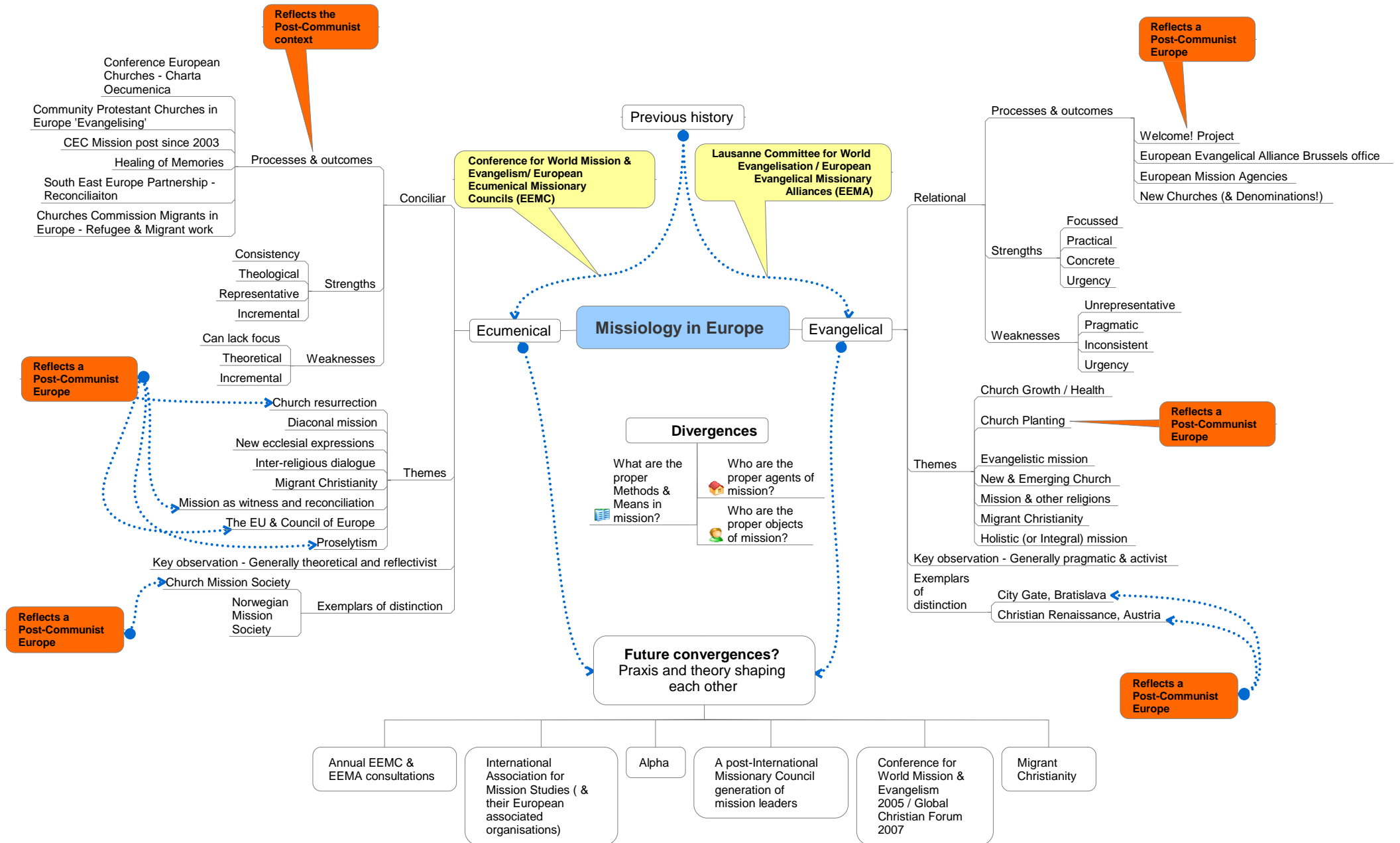
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[<back to top>](#)

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Evangelical & Ecumenical Missiology in Post-Communist Europe

Missiology in Europe

Ecumenical

Reflects the Post-Communist context

Conciliar

Processes & outcomes
- Conference European Churches - Charta Oecumenica
- Community Protestant Churches in Europe 'Evangelising'
- CEC Mission post since 2003
- Healing of Memories
- South East Europe Partnership - Reconciliaiton
- Churches Commission Migrants in Europe - Refugee & Migrant work

Strengths
- Consistency
- Theological
- Representative
- Incremental

Weaknesses
- Can lack focus
- Theoretical
- Incremental

Reflects a Post-Communist Europe

Themes
- Church resurrection
- Diaconal mission
- New ecclesial expressions
- Inter-religious dialogue
- Migrant Christianity
- Mission as witness and reconciliation
- The EU & Council of Europe
- Proselytism

Key observation - Generally theoretical and reflectivist

Reflects a Post-Communist Europe

Exemplars of distinction
- Church Mission Society
- Norwegian Mission Society

Previous history

Conference for World Mission & Evangelism/ European Ecumenical Missionary Councils (EEMC)

Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation / European Evangelical Missionary Alliances (EEMA)

Divergences

What are the proper Methods & Means in mission?

Who are the proper agents of mission?

Who are the proper objects of mission?

Evangelical

Reflects a Post-Communist Europe

Relational

Processes & outcomes
- Welcome! Project
- European Evangelical Alliance Brussels office
- European Mission Agencies
- New Churches (& Denominations!)

Strengths
- Focussed
- Practical
- Concrete
- Urgency

Weaknesses
- Unrepresentative
- Pragmatic
- Inconsistent
- Urgency

Themes
- Church Growth / Health
- Church Planting
- Evangelistic mission
- New & Emerging Church
- Mission & other religions
- Migrant Christianity
- Holistic (or Integral) mission

Reflects a Post-Communist Europe

Key observation - Generally pragmatic & activist

Exemplars of distinction
- City Gate, Bratislava
- Christian Renaissance, Austria

Reflects a Post-Communist Europe

Future convergences?
Praxis and theory shaping each other

- Annual EEMC & EEMA consultations
- International Association for Mission Studies (& their European associated organisations)
- Alpha
- A post-International Missionary Council generation of mission leaders
- Conference for World Mission & Evangelism 2005 / Global Christian Forum 2007
- Migrant Christianity

Insights into the mind(map) of a European missiologist!

Author: Revd Darrell Jackson, Tutor in European Studies and Director, Nova Research Centre, Redcliffe College.

I was asked to offer a presentation comparing Evangelical mission with Ecumenical mission in post-Communist Europe. Developing a mindmap ensured that I gave balanced and equal treatment to both of these approaches. The downside of speaking from a mindmap is the lack of a 15 page script from the speaker! The upside of speaking from a mindmap is the lack of a 15 page script from the speaker! What you get here are the introductory notes to help you navigate the mindmap.

Evangelical mission has tended to favour relational approaches to pan-European reflection and activity. This has produced some stimulating work but has its strengths and weaknesses. Its themes have sometimes overlapped with those of the ecumenical mission. It has tended to be somewhat activist and generally pragmatic.

Ecumenical mission has been conciliar (through Councils and Assemblies), has established some lasting programmes, but also has its strengths and weaknesses. It has tended to be somewhat theoretical and reflective.

In each instance I have noted the exemplary activity of several mission agencies that have taken the post-Communist context of Europe into account.

In the presentation I noted several areas where there are signs of some convergence between representatives of each approach. These include regular consultations between the European Evangelical Missionary Alliance leaders and the European Ecumenical Missionary Council leaders (some of whom are the same people!). The International Association for Mission Studies brings together missiologists from across both evangelical and ecumenical traditions, particularly within the regional bodies in the British Isles, Francophone Europe, Scandinavia, and Central & Eastern Europe. Alpha, as a practical evangelistic and introductory discipleship tool, is an interesting example that has crossed from charismatic Protestantism into Roman Catholicism and, more recently, Eastern Orthodoxy.

However, I believe that there are still three important areas of divergence that point to an agenda for dialogue between the two traditions in mission. These involve the need to address, a. The question as to who are the proper agents of mission; b. The question as to who are the proper objects of mission; and, c. The question as to what are the proper means and methods in mission. In turn these will require attention to the Church and Agency/Society in Mission, attention to our differing evaluations of the spiritual status of those who affiliate only loosely with our respective traditions and, finally, attention to those theological and biblical insights that inform our mission practice.

<back to top>

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Darwin's Angel
An angelic riposte to *The God Delusion*

by John Cornwell
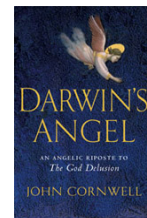
Review by David Ingleby was formerly Head of Computing at Huddersfield Technical College. He has a degree in Biblical Studies and is currently a church leader at Lindley Evangelical Church, Huddersfield.

'And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon ...' (Rev. 12.7).

Cornwell v. Dawkins is a sort of 'war in heaven' but, of course, not quite on the scale of the encounter in the Apocalypse. The title of our book assures us an angel is involved and the dragon is elsewhere described as 'that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan' (Rev. 20:2) - the slippery one who questions and undermines the relation between God and man. This, to a point, seems to fit Dawkins' ambitions in 'The God Delusion', to which 'Darwin's Angel' is a response. My hesitation is because I do not find the subtle questioning used so typically by Satan in Eden, or the book of Job, or the temptations in the wilderness. Dawkins provides an eloquent but all-out frontal attack - this is war. But the effect is very much the same. As Cornwell points out the metaphors chosen (e.g. ch.19) and the adjectives used (pp.140-141), by their nature and quantity, subvert the reader's view. Cornwell is especially masterly in the exposure of Dawkins' choice of evidence, showing how it is frequently selective, partial and quirky. And the impression of hubris is gently countered by: "I should hate to think that you are on the way to substituting yourself for God." (p.22) – quite a Miltonian view of the old adversary.

Now what of the angel? We are told this 'conceit' introduces the vital role of 'imagination' to the conversation, where previously it was absent. Cornwell artfully shows how imagination has been essential to Darwin, science and a full understanding of life. But using an angel as the vehicle for one's message has wider implications. An angel of light will have in mind fairness, honesty and truth. The book displays this in a balanced, informed and at times inspired way. From their exalted positions angels are able to bring a width of response – necessary because of the wide ranging content of Dawkins' attack. (It must be added that a scan of the chapter headings whets the appetite, not only as an appropriate coverage of the issues, but as topics in their own right - the appetite is answered by a gourmet feast.) Angels, as traditionally conceived, will respond not because they are threatened but out of a concern for others; 'a duty of care' as we say these days. This is one of the most appealing attributes of the book. The caring, gentle and appropriate nature of the response leaves Dawkins' voice sounding thin and petulant. The combination of fairness and gentleness is illustrated in the process of reflecting Dawkins' accusations back on himself. For instance the angel writes: "Do you think that it is just as possible to be a scientific fundamentalist as a religious one?" (p.95) If readers find themselves at odds with 'the angel' on, say, fundamentalism, evolution, or other faiths (and I do not) then the spirit of fairness and gentleness still preserves the book as a pleasure to read.

Dawkins' war on heaven is subverted by presenting a new view; that of a 'guardian angel' dealing graciously with a refractory child. Here is a book of the Christian era - full of grace and truth.

Buy Darwin's Angel: An angelic riposte to The God Delusion from St Andrew's Bookshop.

Author: John Cornwell
Publisher: Profile Books
ISBN 10: 1846680484
ISBN 13: 9781846680489

<back to top>

Please Note: The views expressed in this review are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of Redcliffe College.

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Grove Books
A selection of books received

Author: Tim Davy, Reviews Editor for Encounters.

Grove Books describe their booklets as 28-page explorations of Christian life and ministry. New titles are published every few months in eight different series: Biblical, Ethics, Evangelism, Pastoral, Renewal, Spirituality, Worship, and Youth.

Their strapline is "Not the last word but often the first", which I think sums up the booklets perfectly. They are long enough to have something meaty to say while short enough to actually get read!

In what follows I list a number of titles sent to Encounters by Grove Books. They reflect the wide variety of topics addressed by Grove, from the gospel of Mark's portrayal of Jesus, to preaching at weddings; from the place of the pub in evangelism, to a response to Richard Dawkin's *The God Delusion*.

If you would like to review any of them, do get in touch.

Publicity and the Local Church by Nicola David

*Whose Delusion? Responding to **The God Delusion** by Richard Dawkins* by Mike Starkey

Pints of View: Encounters Down the Pub by Peter Howell-Jones and Nick Wills

Conversion Today by Gavin Wakefield

A Gay-Straight Dialogue by 'Michael' and 'Chris'

Preaching at Weddings by Rod Symmons

Renewal: What is it and What is for? By Alison Morgan

Christian Festivals: Reclaiming a Biblical Theology by Mark Fraser

Engaging Emotions: The Need for Emotions in the Church by James Dow

Ordination Rites in Common Worship by Colin Buchanan

Mothering Sunday by Em Coley

Vulnerable Learning: Thinking Theologically about Higher Education by Mike Higton

Soul Spark: A Short Course Exploring Prayer and Spiritual Growth by Nick Helm

Beyond Tragic Spirituality by David Kettle

Mark's Jesus by John Proctor

<back to top>