Emerging Church – part two

Issue 23 Editor: Jonathan Ingleby

This second attempt to have a look at the topic of Emerging Church is based largely on the Thinking Mission forum held under the auspices of Global Connections in February of this year. The title of the forum was *Baby or Bathwater: Must We Ditch Traditional Church Structures to Do Mission Well?* and you can see more details, including some of the articles published here and the discussion that followed the talks, on the Global Connections website.

The title suggests that there is some fear in Christian circles that by throwing over 'institutional church', church itself will somehow get lost. I was interested to note that Jonny Baker, who writes here about the situation in Britain, does not think that this is likely to be the case – but you can read for yourself. The other two main articles have to do with the fact that something akin to emerging church has appeared in non-Western contexts. Paul Davies looks at the Base Ecclesial Communities in Latin America and their sometimes tense relationship with Mother Church, and Ida Glaser at the emergence of Muslim Background Believer communities in Bangladesh. Again the whole question of the relationship between the emerging churches and the already established 'institutional' church is one of the contentious issues. In the case of Bangladesh there is a fascinating cultural context which further complicates matters.

I add a sort of postscript of my own – it is written in a British context but might apply anywhere – pondering whether the problem is not so much theological as sociological. Perhaps the institutional church is often structurally too heavy, and therefore simply too demanding, for people with busy life-styles.

For the purpose of this edition of Encounters (as against the Thinking Mission forum) my piece takes the place of a contribution by Nick Mercer. Nick was making out a case for the 'traditional' High Church community as a place where people might find a home in our present ecclesiastical climate. He does commend a book by Bishop Stephen Cottrell's, 'From the Abundance of the Heart: Catholic Evangelism for all Christians' (DLT, 2006) as a good introduction to the same point.

Finally, we also have a couple of interesting book reviews. I do commend this issue to you.

Jonathan

- **Article 3: The emergence of Muslim Background Believer communities in Bangladesh.**
  (Dr Ida Glaser, 1040 words)

- **Article 4: Maintenance Exhaustion: A postscript to the debate on emerging church.**
  (Dr Jonathan Ingleby, 1126 words)

- **Book Review 1: The Soul of Mission: Perspectives on Christian Leadership, Spirituality and Mission in East Asia.**
  (edited by Tan Kang-San; Pustaka Sufes. Sdn. Bhd.)

- **Book Review 2: Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations.**
  (edited by John Corrie; Inter-Varsity Press)

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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Baby or Bathwater?

Must we ditch traditional church structures to do mission well? A perspective from the Emerging Church in the UK

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Part of the genius of the gospel is that it has been able to take root and grow in the soil of cultures and communities across the world and down the ages. Good mission (we now know) would hope for, and expect, the fruit of the gospel to be Christian communities that reflect local cultures, languages, ways of relating, music, rituals and so on, with leadership that is truly indigenous and is able to improvise imaginatively the gospel in and out of the cultural context. We also know this is a lot trickier in practice than this sounds. We are painfully aware of the complex mix of contextual and imperialistic mission practice whose legacy is visible around the world.

The Western world has changed hugely in recent decades and undergone a paradigm shift from modern to post-modern times. Virtually every sector of life and culture has struggled with this change. And the church is no different, finding the challenge of change difficult. A number of pioneers and younger leaders, native to this emerging postmodern culture, have instinctively done what many missionaries have done before, followed the beckoning of the Spirit, shared the gospel and developed Christian communities within this culture(s). Emerging churches are simply communities who practice the way of Jesus in postmodern cultures [1].

The quest or journey they have been on has led to much deeper changes than initially imagined as they have deconstructed many inherited forms and structures of church from the modern era and re-imagined emerging theology, leadership, discipleship, spirituality, worship, evangelism, and patterns of church life.

In the UK we have an unusual situation. Broadly speaking the institutional church has recognised and baptised this movement. A number of factors have created a culture of permission for newness and experimentation within the structures of the institutional church.

> a) We have been given the gift of loyal radicals, people who have a radical vision of mission but have, sometimes through gritted teeth, remained part of and within the institution, rather than upping sticks and leaving. Those people have worked with patience and faithfulness to bring change.
>
> b) The track record of the house churches birthed in the seventies that went for independence but ended up with controlling leadership and dogma and a culture time-warped in the seventies, proved to be sobering. It created a hesitancy about following suit and leaving in a quest for independence. People asked 'What would stop the same thing from happening to us?'
>
> c) In a postmodern culture older things have a currency. At a time when culture seems to be changing so fast, to be able to be located in a tradition that has been passed down for 2000 years gives a real sense of 'weight', a much needed anchor point in the world. And it is a tradition with a vast amount of resources and an incredible global network.
>
> d) Mission Shaped Church, penned by some of the loyal radicals above, became a best seller [2] and combined with the appointment of Rowan Williams and his genius vision of a mixed economy church, created a new

environment. Opening up a new pathway for ordaining pioneer ministers, and the creation of bishop's mission orders to plant new kinds of non-parochial churches have even changed legislation at the heart of the establishment.

e) The well documented decline in church attendance and accompanying financial pressures have certainly created some pressure towards change or newness.

It depends on where these communities are located on how much they have re-imagined the traditional church structures, but many have found plenty of freedom in terms of leadership structures, liturgies, where to meet, discipleship, mission, worship and so on. The key issue has often been negotiating space within the broad structures with enough room for manoeuvre and improvisation. This sounds too rosy – church can be frustrating, stuck, dying, wedded to a bygone era, controlling, dogmatic, and overloaded with priestcraft. There can be no permission and no resources. It does depend on where you are.

So, unsurprisingly, parallel to these positive developments, many groups have emerged or developed outside of institutional structures. There has been an exodus from church. And many things have emerged amongst those who have left - new monastic communities, gatherings round the meal table, mission cells, co-operatives, mission houses, missional communities, post church groups and so on. And doubtless some have just drifted solo. These last are hard to quantify or measure as they are under the radar of ways of measuring church attendance. An optimistic view is that the exodus of some from church is part of a mission movement in postmodern cultures, another way the church is emerging.

Alan Jamieson's research amongst church leavers [3] led him and Jenny Macintosh to develop ‘Spirited Exchanges’ in New Zealand, a network of post church groups for people who, contrary to what the church assumed, had left church but not given up on faith. He says "It is my belief that these post church groups give us some indication of what will be the shape of a major sector of the church in the future... ...Are the post church groups forerunners of new forms of faith in our own rapidly changing society?... God is allowing a new thing to grow". He suggests 5 lessons that churches could learn from post church groups.

1. A focus on community, integrity of participation, dialogue in finding truth, minimalist structures and transparent leadership

2. A high priority given to emotions, laughter and intuition

3. An openness to a broad eclectic use of worship styles

4. An openness to people who think and believe differently

5. The journey for the churches to an honest engagement with postmodern culture, involving a major shift.

There is now a loose network of Spirited Exchanges in the UK.

The shift in communication technologies in a networked society has also meant that it is possible to 'leave' and remain connected to the body of Christ in all sorts of creative ways. The old adage, or piece of scare-mongering, of taking a coal out the fire and placing it on the hearth being a picture of what happens if you are not at church, is not what people experience if they leave the traditional structures now. They can leave and remain related locally and globally and be on fire.

I am relaxed and hopeful about all of these things. Both ways, staying and leaving, can be good. Renewal comes from the edge and the centre, within and without, and if the church is emerging both ways that seems good. Let some leave and pioneer and let some people stay and pioneer. The wider mission community should certainly be able to celebrate the newness of God's work, both in and outside of traditional structures, by crossing cultures and setting up new paradigms. It has been a privilege to work with CMS who have invested in encouraging both, though I have been surprised at how threatened by and resistant some parts of the mission community worldwide are to this challenge, judging by articles and reviews in mission journals.

This conversation – about what is relevant to the culture – has happened in relation to the cultural imperialism of Western Christians elsewhere in the world. We should not be threatened by the same discussion in relation to our own cultural contexts. For example I came across the Lambeth 1988 statement on liturgical inculturation 'Down To Earth'. The encouragement for innovation and creativity, the need for connection with people's feelings, the scope of change required, and the awareness of the way the church has alienated people by its lack of inculturation are astonishing to read in such an official document. These insights were written to help the Anglican churches around the world to develop their own authentic expressions of faith. If the forms of institutional church life in the UK are wedded to modernity, the same insights need to be applied on our own doorstep to inculturate the faith in postmodern times.

The word 'tradition' is an interesting one. Sometimes what people mean by it is 'the way we've always done things' which inevitably leads to stuckness. It is the sort of thing that leads to the view expressed in an editorial of the International Bulletin of Missionary Research on churchless Christianity: "Christianity in its most visible and impressively organised forms has steadily resisted those persons and practices most integral to its spiritual renewal and hence survival..." The basic and seemingly obvious point about the Christian tradition is that it is living and not closed or completed. In this respect, our use of 'tradition' to defend the status quo is not faithful to the tradition at all. Jaroslav Pelikan says that in this kind of scenario religious leaders are defending not tradition but traditionalism [4] One is living, the other is dead. Part of the process of carrying a tradition forward is struggling with it, and engaging in its own debates. A tradition needs diversity at its heart. In this respect whilst tradition does in some respects provide limits, it also gives the tools to liberate us from the way traditions have been used against us. Wherever the message of Jesus for today is distorted, the tradition needs correction and to keep reforming religious tradition in a prophetic spirit is to be faithful. This reformatory impulse is at the heart of the tradition. To deny it is 'to disallow that subversive and dangerous memory of Jesus in the church' [5]. But paradoxically it is the resources from within the tradition itself which will subvert the inadequacies and injustices of a religious tradition. To preserve a tradition then is to drive to the heart of it, to understand its significance, and then do our best to re-present the same field of reference in our own context. Tom Wright's notion of 'faithful improvisation' opens up a creative way of living out of the resources and imagination of the tradition in life-giving ways. A case can be made out that the emerging churches are traditional and proud of it. Taking the eucharist into the context of a meal is traditional! This is a very different sensibility to the modernising moves made by new churches in the 70s.

Of course there are challenges – theological education, ordination, the Eucharist, Anglican identity to name a few small ones! But a glance elsewhere at other Western contexts where the emerging church is growing is a reminder of the uniqueness of the UK situation. There is much more polarity in the US between 'Emergent' and the mainline denominations for example, and frustration within some who are trying to broker the conversation in mainline contexts at the tone of Emergent. In Australia Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost's anti-institutional tone has not made it easy for those working on the inside of denominations to

join in the conversation in the same way, and, in part, the denominational contexts are harder – there is not the same openness and there has been a lack of loyal radicals on the inside.

Church is the whole body of Christ world wide and down the ages, visible and invisible. We only really know who Jesus is as we see the many faces of Christ, the theological takes and expressions of his body around the world and down the ages [6]. It takes a whole world to understand a whole Jesus Christ [7]. Church is not just a nice idea – it is about knowing Jesus. Whichever way the emerging church plays out its mission, that connectivity into Christ's one holy catholic and apostolic church is crucial. That does not necessarily mean institutionally, but relationally and in the spirit and heart of its leaders.

So my take is that the emerging church in the UK is growing out of contextual mission in postmodern cultures seeking to grow indigenous expressions of church that are both related to the wider body of Christ and faithfully improvised out of the riches of the tradition within and without the traditional structures. Must we reject traditional structures to do mission well? Not necessarily, though plenty will be ditched and new things brought into play out of the tradition, and that will be fine. Are we in danger of throwing baby out with bath water? No - not in the UK. We have an amazing gift at this moment in time that I thank God for, especially when I travel to other parts of the world.

Notes

[1] This is Ryan Bolger and Eddie Gibbs' conclusion in their book Emerging Churches.
[2] Mission Shaped Church was an official C of E and Methodist report.
[3] His research was published as Churchless Faith, and these quotes are from an article in the International Review of Mission, April 2003
[4] Pelikan, J. The Vindication of Tradition, Yale University Press, 1984
[5] Tracy, D. The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism, Crossroads, 1991
[6] In mission-speak this is what Andrew Walls refers to as 'the Ephesians moment' or what others have called 'the ontic expansion of God in Jesus Christ'.
[7] The words belong to Max Warren

<back to top>

"Ecclesiogenesis"
Base ecclesial communities in contemporary perspective

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Introduction

Are traditional church structures the baby—so important as never to be thrown out—or the bathwater—they can be summarily ejected in order to make the church more 'relevant'? The emergence of the Base Ecclesial Community (BEC) movement in Latin America challenged the structures of the traditional church, especially the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). Some thought of it as marking the death of the traditional church and birth of a new church. The cry would be 'The Church is dead, long live the church!' We will briefly examine how the BECs did challenge the church and what we can learn from this challenge.

The BECs were small groups of socially and politically active laity, who met together regularly to read the Bible, pray and reflect theologically and practically upon their social and political activity. They were normally led by either a member of the laity or by a religious—a monk or nun and their rhythm of action and reflection formed the basis of the theological reflection of the early theologies of liberation.

History

In the mid-nineteen fifties, and early nineteen sixties militant members of Catholic Action and other socially involved Christian groups such as Church and Society in Latin America (ISAL) started to reflect upon their social activity and the reasons behind the poverty they were discovering. This led them to become critical of the response of the Roman Catholic hierarchy (cf. Coleman 1958:33) and other traditional Christian responses. Subsequent to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and especially after the Medellin meetings of the 'Latin American Ecumenical Council' (CELAM 1968), they began to reflect in a more theologically consistent way on their action in the light of their faith (cf. Boff, L 1985:131-137; Cook 1985 and Dawson 1998). A movement was born.

Description and reflection

There are various features that are worth highlighting with regard to the BECs. Firstly, the BECs were born out of obedience. The people meeting together defined the church as those gathered around Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, however, is the one who is to be found among the poor. Being a member of the church started, therefore, with the act of obedience to be with the poor. This is what Leonardo Boff has called an 'ecclesiogenesis' (the birth of the church.) He said 'the true ecclesiogenesis, that is, the genesis of the Church, is born of the faith of the people' (Boff, L. 1985:131). This is, of course, a radical departure from traditional and even post-Conciliar Roman Catholic ecclesiology (cf. Kärkkäinen 2002: 26ff and Dulles 1988). It is not even Bonhoeffer's 'the church-for-others' (Bonhoeffer 1971:382f.), or Puebla's (1979) 'the preferential option for the poor' but rather the fact of the poor as constituting the locus of the true church.

Secondly, they were orientated towards people rather than institutions. The BEC was defined by the members of the group rather than by the church hierarchy or by theologians. This is not to say that they denied hierarchy or theology but, in the ways the BECs were being church, hierarchy was not primary and theology was secondary. This meant that the place of

the BEC within the established church was ambiguous. It claimed to be church without priests, bishops or pope.

I would guess that one of the biggest criticisms of the hierarchical and traditional churches is the emphasis upon institutions and structures rather than on people. The BECs did not deny the structures but they were not primary. Does this mean we throw out structures and institutions? I think not. Max Weber has clearly shown the importance of structures for the continuity of any movement (Weber 1947). I do think, however, that a constant theological and open reflection needs to be made as to whether the institutional structure is taking priority over people. The identification of how this is expressed will be, of course, different in different cultures and even churches but I feel this is one of the major lessons we must learn from them. The structures are bathwater, which can be periodically ejected in order that the baby itself remains clean; i.e. it remains people centred.

Additionally, for the BECs, theologians and clergy were welcome, but as members not particularly as leaders. It is interesting to note that the BECs that were most successful were ones led or facilitated by laity or religious not by clergy. It was in the real sense of the phrase 'lay initiated and lay led.' This is not to say that the BEC leaders were not theologically educated, in fact education was very important within the BEC movement, but this education, sociological and theological was done far more informally. It is also interesting to note how leaders of BECs were often the targets of persecution, arrest and even death squads.

The issue of leadership is another area of importance where we can learn from the BECs. Dynamic leadership with true commitment is important. Effective leadership comes not from status or position within the organisation but from demonstrated commitment and gifting. The priest was often viewed with suspicion because he presented a status rather than a commitment.

Furthermore, the self understanding and leadership style of the BECs led them to be primarily prophetic rather than priestly. The Eucharist may have been celebrated but the 'priestly' elements of the life of the church were not prominent. Prophetic action and announcement and reflection upon that action were much more important. The BECs were a prophetic community in transit towards the world. This leads to the fact that the BECs were praxis or mission driven. Identity was not defined in doctrinal categories but through praxis and what that praxis highlights. The starting point was not 'what is nature of the true church' but 'what is the mission of the true church'? This made the BECs reflective; i.e. action is primary and reflection follows. A church is not a church without action—praxis is primary.

The missionary nature of the church has been declared in almost all Christian traditions but the outworking of that missionary nature is rarely seen. Mission should be the air of the church, the atmosphere in which it lives and thrives. The BECs were an example of a small group within the wider church for whom mission was the primary purpose for their existence.

It is difficult for the established and hierarchical church to express this. It tends to have too much to do to maintain itself. The structure, however necessary it may be, absorbs time, money and effort. The small group does have an advantage here and can be more directly mission orientated.

The Bible became, for many BECs the inspirational tool of missiological reflection. The importance of the Scriptures was not universal across the BEC movement but it certainly came to a much greater prominence after Medellin (1968). One sociologist, comparing the BECs and the Pentecostals in North Eastern Brazil, notes that although the main object of the BECs was reflection on social and political action, many members of the BECs came to a closer relationship with God through the reading of the Bible (Mariz 1993: 78-79).

The centrality of the reading of Scripture has to be one of the most important factors in the maintenance of missionary enthusiasm in the small group. The BECs saw within the pages of the Bible reflections of their own struggles. They saw the disciples as a small, struggling

group, attempting to live out their faith in a hostile environment. These reflections cannot be done on a grand scale; can only be done in small groups, reading and reflecting together.

Finally, apart from being an ecclesiogenesis, the BECs also became a locus theologgenesis of Latin American theologies of liberation; the place where theology is born. Because of their small group nature, the BECs generated theology. They were not beholden to priests and other clergy, but in small groups they generated new theological insights which would never have emerged from a seminary or from a theologian's pen. Clodovis Boff speaks of three levels of theology: the popular, the pastoral and the professional (Boff, C. 1993:1-21). Popular theology was generated by the BECs. This was normally expressed in informal ways, for instance, through dramas, songs or pamphlets. Pastoral theology took the popular and reflected upon it from the wider context of leadership. This was often expressed in sermons or more formal talks. Professional theology took the issues raised by pastoral theology to a more abstract level and there was given greater rigour. The professional theology then informed the pastoral theology and the pastoral theology was able to encourage and refine the popular.

Just as the BECs were the place where new theology emerged so new expressions of church can serve as a locus theologgeneses. The danger is that if theology is the preserve of the hierarchical church or, God forbid, of theologians, it will become the locus theologimoribundus—the place which marks the death of theology. Theology becomes the dead repetition of irrelevant doctrine that has no place in the church.

Conclusion

The BECs challenged the traditional structures of the hierarchical church in various ways. They prioritised people over structures, laity over clergy, prophetic action over priestly ritual, orthopraxis over orthodoxy, Bible study over Eucharistic celebration and bottom-up theological reflection over top-down autocratic religion. All of these elements have massive implications for mission and church planting both here in the UK and further a field.

In sum, I agree with Martin Luther's famous saying: Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda: 'the Reformed Church in constant reformation'. So, in the light of the BECs, how do I answer the question whether traditional ecclesial structures are the baby or the bathwater? The structures are the bathwater, they can never be sacralised. The church is the people; the structures must serve the church as the people, not the other way round. Having said this, the structures are expressions of the church as people and cannot be considered to be simple accoutrements, to be ejected because they do not suit the present epoch. Avante guarde groups, such as the BECs within the wider church need to be welcomed and given a voice so that the bathwater will serve the baby in all its needs.

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<back to top>

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The emergence of Muslim Background Believer communities in Bangladesh

Author: Dr Ida Glaser is currently part-time Missiologist in Residence at the Crowther Centre for Mission Education in Oxford.

The emergence of groups in Bangladesh from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers – MBBs) who are *isayi*, followers of Jesus, and who remain outside the structures of the already existing Christian church might be thought to be one example of 'emerging church'. In the mission context this usually means not leaving existing church structures, but whether to bring believers into them in the first place. There are thousands of these believers, mostly gathering in small *jama'at* groups in homes, usually meeting on Fridays which is a holiday. Often several groups will be overseen by one, charismatic, leader, who may be part of – even pastor in – a denominational church or mission agency/network. There are occasional larger gatherings. Funding for these groups may come from abroad. Training networks are growing, again with outside help. The whole process is a focus of intense interest for missiologists. Some also claim that there are huge numbers of believers in Jesus *within* the mosques – the so-called 'insider movement'. This is doubtful. In one sense Muslims are believers in Jesus and are happy to say so, particularly if there is money involved! In practice most *isayi* tend to stop worshipping at the mosques, however, within six months as they come to a point where they can no longer pray the blessings on Muhammad, although they may well continue to attend the mosque for social purposes.

Why are these groups meeting in the way that they are instead of joining traditional churches (though, of course, some do)? There are three main reasons.

Survival

Zafar Ismail's research suggested that many Muslims who came to faith in Pakistan later 'fell away', not because they were disillusioned with Jesus, but because they could not survive outside of their community. This was not so much a problem of persecution as the need for social support . The movement in Bangladesh, described above, has enabled people to keep their basic community identity, although of course it then raises long-term issues to do with marriage etc. Some of the first generation of converts, for example, have married traditional Christian women, which makes the choice of identity for their children a challenge.

Of course, opposition is also less if people are seen to be keeping their culture. Staying within culture enables families and communities to maintain HONOUR – one of the most important aspects of Bangla (and many other) cultures. It is also significant that Christianity has often been equated with a *degenerate* culture!

Territory

In one area a group of *isayi* wanted to build a church. They bought land and prepared to build. There was opposition – threats and so on – from the local Muslim community, even though the government sent in folk to affirm that the believers were within their rights. They decided not to build because of the bad relationships that had been caused, and when they went back to worshipping in their homes, the trouble stopped – everyone was happy. In other words, territory mattered, even in a relatively tolerant setting. This is partly a question of honour. When the believers become visible, the honour of the community is at stake. But it is even more a question of territory. While the area is seen as Muslim, there is no problem. As

soon as there is a bid for 'Christian' territory, there is likely to be trouble. This extends even to the issue of burial rights.

Language

The single biggest issue appears to be language. Bengali, after all, is two languages.

The movement towards Christ can be linked not only to people retaining or adopting Islamic culture, but specifically and perhaps more importantly, with the use of Muslim Bengali. Bengali as a language has its roots in a Hindu society, and Hindus and traditional Christians use a vocabulary that largely comes from Sanskrit. In contrast, Muslims use perhaps 2,500 different words that come from an Arabic/Persian/Urdu source, including many ordinary words such as 'water', 'mother', father' as well as key religious words.

The first complete translation of the Bible into Muslim Bengali came at roughly the same time as the movement towards Christ among MBBs started to gather momentum. It was a problem for the traditional churches because of its use of Islamic vocabulary. In particular it used *Allah* rather than *Ishor* for 'God' and this was totally unacceptable, to the extent that MBBs could not take their Bibles into a traditional church.

The problem also goes the other way. The traditional Christian language implies Hinduism to many Muslims, and Hinduism implies polytheism. One MBB leader, when asked why he hesitated to use traditional Christian premises for a meeting, although he was quite happy to use the premises of a foreign Christian agency, immediately identified this as a problem. When he first came to Christ he witnessed to his family using traditional Christian terms and was thrown out because they thought that he had adopted a Hindu idea of god. In short, those using traditional Christian premises are associated in Muslim minds with Hindu practices. This then brings in other tensions because the debate between Muslims and Hindus is not only theological but has historical roots in the history of partition etc.

Some MBBs insist on the necessity to relate to the traditional churches, and even seek to join them. An example would be a woman with a 'traditional' mother and an MBB father, who is also married to an MBB. She attends a Presbyterian church, where they use the Hindu vocabulary, but at home they use Muslim vocabulary, and she has to talk to her son about both *Allah* and *Ishor*, *'Isa* and *Jesus*. The church does have a weekly prayer meeting that uses the Muslim vocabulary. One of her concerns is that the *jama'at* movement is going to produce its own denominations (It has happened: compare the SIM and SUM denominations in Nigeria.) but without the careful reflection and history that has gone into the traditional churches.

Other are working hard to shape the *isayi* movement as it gets established. This raises issues of training, theology, and worship as well as the relationship to the social and political context. All of these are complex issues which are in process of being tackled but will need yet more thought as time goes on.

<back to top>

Maintenance Exhaustion
A postscript to the debate on emerging church

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The debate about 'emerging church' is thought to be a debate about theology, more specifically missiology and ecclesiology. In some cases it is. I notice that even the term 'emerging church' can provoke a theological debate (see the conversation posted on the discussion board of the last edition of Encounters, where one assumption is that 'emerging church' necessarily suggests that behind the term lies a postmodern epistemology which is unfaithful to the gospel). Certainly those involved initially in the Base Ecclesial Communities in Latin America (see Article 2) might want to claim that their whole movement was empowered by a different ecclesiology – less 'high', less hierarchical, less priestly – than that of the mainline Roman Catholic church of their day. As for the movement among Muslim Background Believers to establish their own fellowships rather than join already existing Christian formations, this too might express theological differences – in the case cited in Article y a profound difference over theological language, for example.

Nevertheless, I wonder whether, in Britain particularly, there is not something else going on at the same time, something much more simple, which you could call 'maintenance exhaustion' and which might be revealed not by theological reflection but by a little sociological analysis. Let me explain.

If we look at the life of the average or typical couple found in our churches today we may assume that both parents are busy people. Dad has a job, and jobs, if you have one, seem to be increasingly demanding. Christian people are often, rightly, the best employees, in the sense that they are the most conscientious and, as a result, are often given onerous responsibilities. So Dad is a busy man. Mum may also be working, even full time. If there are children then both parents have additional, very demanding, responsibilities. A multitude of Christian books, again rightly, exhort parents to spend enough time with their children and to give them the love and attention that they need as they grow up. There may well be other family responsibilities. Aged parents, perhaps, need caring for. Even if they are not a direct responsibility, they need and deserve attention and time. The wider family circle deserves an occasional glance as well! Then there is the house and garden. No doubt in our society we are too worried about possessions and we are all familiar with people who seem obsessed with improving their houses or producing a beautiful garden. Yet whatever we feel about this, we cannot simply allow our houses to go to rack and ruin, or our gardens to become jungles. Some time must be spent on them. Life has other demands: we must attend to such matters as shopping, banking, insurance, laundry, ironing, not to mention recreation, time off for entertainment, family holidays, reading and hobbies.

I have left something out: the time our couple gives to go to church. Now whatever that time is, is it really possible that church participation will be much more than an extra. Please note that I am not saying this in the spirit of: 'they spend all their time on their job and family and have no real commitment to the church'. Given the quite genuine responsibilities that the average couple has, I do not think that we can expect anything different. Do we want Christian people to be under-committed to their jobs, to neglect their families, to allow their homes and garden to become eye-sores, to have no time to order their domestic affairs, to have no recreation and therefore be liable to a breakdown!

One of the answers to this dilemma is to have the church largely run by professionals. Under these circumstances the congregational members are simply not responsible for the church's activities. They go to church to be inspired and taught ('to be fed') and to worship. This boost to their Christian lives, along with their private devotions, then helps them to function better in

the workplace and at home. This sounds all right as a working model but there are, in practice, some serious objections.

Firstly, it is doubtful whether the church can work effectively in this way. The paid professional, even if he or she has other full-time or part-time people working alongside, cannot cope with all the church needs to do, at least as church programmes are usually configured. A long list of workers – Sunday school teachers, youth workers, a visitation team, musicians, caterers, mission promoters, door-knockers, treasurers, not to mention more formal roles such as elders and deacons or members of the PCC – are usually required.

Secondly, church members themselves are not satisfied with this state of affairs. They know that they have something to offer and that they need to exercise their spiritual gifts in order to grow. It is common knowledge that 'pew-sitters' tend to stagnate spiritually. If people are contributing nothing to the church (apart perhaps from their money) they will inevitably begin to regard church as an optional extra. But this just restates the difficulty with which we started. How can people who have so little time contribute effectively to an organisation which demands more time than they have to give?

My answer to that question is another question: can we begin to think seriously about 'low-maintenance' churches? Also, is this possibly one of the things that 'emerging church' is about? We are simply being crushed by the weight of the structures we have created in order to maintain our church life. People find they cannot take the weight and are slipping out to look for something which meets their spiritual needs and to which they can contribute something, but which does not weigh on them so heavily. Viewed from within the church, this is the familiar dilemma of 'mission versus maintenance'. We are putting so much energy into maintaining the structures that we have not got time for anything else.

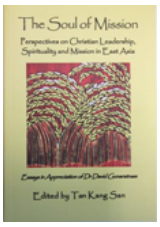
I leave my readers to figure out what might be a practical response. Burning down the church building might be a useful start! But the principle seems simple enough. No doubt structures are necessary – but they need to be light, flexible, easily re-invented, inexpensive, people-friendly, contextual (particularly contextualised to people's busy lives) appropriate and all the rest.

So here is my thesis: one important aspect of 'emerging church' is that it is a protest by busy people about the 'maintenance exhaustion' that involvement in their recently attended churches has induced. Existing, more traditional churches need to 'lighten up' in order to respond to this need and to be more effective.

PPS. This postscript is intended to add a 'practical' note to our discussions. If anybody has any suggestions about how we can escape from burdensome ecclesiastical structures (without destroying the whole show!) please write and tell us.

<back to top>

The Soul of Mission: Perspectives on Christian Leadership, Spirituality and Mission in East Asia



edited by Tan Kang-San

Review by*Tim Davy, Reviews editor for Encounters*.

Published in appreciation of Dr David Gunaratnam, a well-loved and respected leader in the church in Malaysia, *The Soul of Mission* is a collection of essays written on the themes of spirituality, leadership, history and mission in an East Asian context.

The scope of the book is impressive, dealing as it does with such a wide variety of topics. This is best demonstrated by listing the articles, which fit into four main sections:

Section 1. What is True Spirituality? Some Thoughts
1) David Gunaratnam: Quiet Leadership - Wong Fong Yang; 2) Spirituality: Some Thoughts on Culture, Context and History - Rose Dowsett

Section 2. Biblical Perspectives: Leadership, Spirituality and the Corinthian Correspondences
3) No Mission Without Holiness - Allan Webb; 4) The Servant of the Lord and Mission Leadership: Reflections from Isaiah 49:1-7 - David Pickard; 5) Mission and Spirituality: Lessons from 1 Corinthians - Jim Chew; 6) Is There A Place For Suffering In Mission? - Perspectives from Paul's Sufferings in 2 Corinthians - Lim Kar Yong 7) Trying to Preach in Context: Some Reflections from 2 Corinthians - "Matthew"

Section 3. Historical Perspectives: Past Models and Present Challenges
8) The Moravians: A Model of Spirituality and Mission for the Asian Church - Peter Rowan; 9) Revitalization, Renewal and Missions: A Case Study on Sidang Injil Borneo - Gary Roosma; 10) Mongolians: Their Journey of Faith - Kwai Lin Stephens; 11) Robert Morrison – The Trailblazer and Beyond: Following One Trail of Christian Medical Service in China - James H. Taylor III; 12) D. E. Hoste: The Spirituality of a Servant Leader - Patrick Fung; 13) The Spirituality of Wang Mingdao - Paul Woods

Section 4. Programmatic Proposals for the Future of East Asian Church and Mission
14) The Multicultural Congregation: A Critical Model for the Future of Asian Christianity - Bruce Milne; 15) Leadership or Servanthood? - Hwa Yung; 16) Rethinking the Meaning of the Cross for Christian Discipleship - Tony Lim; 17) Transforming Conversion: From Conversion to Transformation of Culture - Tan Kang-San

Reading *The Soul of Mission*, you get the feeling that it has been a labour of love for the contributors. The articles are well conceived and written, and the reader is exposed to a variety of themes and issues important not just in an Asian context, but on a global scale too.

Particular highlights for this reviewer included the chapters on the history of Christianity in Mongolia and the Moravians as a model for spirituality and mission. These illustrate nicely the breadth of interests in the book. Similarly, the papers on the cross and discipleship and transforming conversion provoked my thinking on a couple of hot topics in mission thinking; namely, generational issues and contextual Christian identity and discipleship.

I am by no means a specialist in East Asian mission and must confess I was not previously aware of Dr. Gunaratnam, the honouree of this Festschrift. Nevertheless, I found *The Soul of Mission* to be a helpful, informative and thought-provoking read that deserves to be read widely.

Buy *The Soul of Mission: Perspectives on Christian Leadership, Spirituality and Mission in East Asia* from St Andrew's Bookshop.

Editor: Tan Kang-San
Publisher: Pustaka Sufes. Sdn. Bhd.
ISBN 9832762065
ISBN 13 9789832762065

<back to top>

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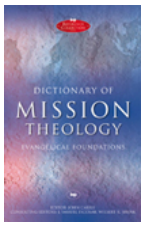
Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations



edited by John Corrie

Author: Tim Davy, Reviews Editor for Encounters.

This new Dictionary from IVP is a welcome addition to their substantial body of reference works already available. It claims to reflect the changes in the landscape of mission not only in the selection of articles but also in the choice of contributors, around 60% of whom are non-Western.

According to the introduction, the three aims of the Dictionary are:

> 1. To integrate theology and mission, disciplines that have been separated for too long.
> 2. To reflect a contextual view of mission - after all, "If mission is about universal themes of God's mission, it is also about the particularity of that mission in specific contexts" (p.xvi).
> 3. To provide an evangelical foundation for theology and mission - by reflecting traditional evangelical views yet engaging with some of the 'stretching' boundaries such as dialogue, a more developed creation theology, cultural studies, and so on.

The Dictionary offers an excellent variety of articles ranging from theological themes (for example, Christ/Christology, God, Sin/the fall), regional studies (African theology, Asian theology, Latin American theology), and an array of individual issues (AIDS, Development, Ecology/environment, Globalization, Witchcraft, Caste, Drama/theatre).

The articles themselves are engagingly written and provide clear and helpful introductions to the material. Familiar themes are examined in refreshing ways and the Dictionary genuinely does present the reader with missiological lenses through which to examine the issues under discussion. In this way the book meets its aims very well and serves as a helpful model, illustrating the rich and varied multicultural theological conversations being enjoyed today. Students of theology (indeed all of us!) would do very well to have a copy on their shelves to remind them of the need to listen humbly to the voices of those from different cultural contexts.

Perhaps this is a minor point but I was a little disappointed with the size of the Dictionary. As it is designed to sit alongside IVP's family of large reference works it is a shame such an important volume has not received the same allowance of pages as some of the other Dictionaries (for example, it has fewer than half the number of pages of IVP's recent *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* volume).

Also, while the world's regions are well represented both through articles and a number of regional advisors, it is a pity that mission in a European context did not receive at least an article length treatment. Finally, it would have been nice if in the list of contributors it had included the articles each person had written. A small thing but occasionally very useful.

But it would be churlish to finish the review with these quibbles. John Corrie and his colleagues have furnished the Christian community with a immensely significant reference volume that is important not only in what it says, but also in the way it has chosen to say it. Those involved in the Dictionary are to be commended for practising what they preach as they have described, analysed and embodied the changing nature of theological and missiological thinking and practice.

Buy *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations* from St Andrew's Bookshop.

Editor: John Corrie
Publisher: Inter-Varsity Press
ISBN 13 9781844742134

<back to top>
