An Analysis and Critique of Evangelical Approaches to Evangelism in the 21st Century

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Introduction

In this thesis, I will explore how mission and evangelism are best conducted today. The investigation is important for two reasons: as well as training to become an Anglican minister, I lead a charity and a training programme which aims to 'Demonstrate the Christian message in a relevant way and equip others to do likewise' (The Light Project, 2011). As a consequence, it is of the utmost vocational significance.

The second reason is more general: Christians all over the globe contend that the message and life of Jesus Christ is essentially *good news*. Consequently, it would seem strange, or even scandalous, that *any* good news should be communicated in a way which renders it ordinary, irrelevant or even bad. 'Good news need to be understood as good news, otherwise it is no news, which is bad news.' (Duffet 2009,121).

Mission and evangelism are the church's primary means of portraying this message to the world around it. There are several different lenses through which one can examine the question of what constitutes mission and evangelism. Bosch (1991) discusses the variety of understandings and Barret has listed over 79 definitions (Barret 1987 in Bosch 1991,409). For the purposes of this essay, I will adopt an Evangelical understanding of mission and evangelism, one in which mission constitutes the wider activity of the church towards its environs 'The church sent into the world to love, to serve, to teach, to preach, to heal and to liberate' (Bosch,1991,412). Evangelism is then a constituent part of mission: many authors

debate its reliance on words or actions (Bosch 1991, cf. Finney 2004, Singlehurst 2005, Green 1990). My personal definition is after reviewing such debates is 'People seeing, hearing and experiencing the reality of Jesus'.This piece will not be based on empirical evidence but will be a survey of the literature.

The Issue

In the words of Emil Brunner (in Sanneh 2001,86), 'The church lives by mission as fire lives by burning.' Should this be the case, and if the good news *is* to be experienced as good news, it would seem evident that mission, and its constituent part, evangelism, should be engrained into the regular functioning life of the church and furthermore, relevant to the people around it: the thesis here is that neither of these two things are the case: The church is not living and breathing mission and its message does not make sense to the people outside it.

Not only is this the case, but to change, the church will have to radically alter its understanding of mission and evangelism and also how it relates to the world around. I will argue this through five chapters which concern themselves predominantly with the activity of the Evangelical church, mainly due to the fact that the Evangelical church claims mission and evangelism as one of its very defining features.

Thesis

Throughout this thesis, I will argue that there are a set of limitations that the church has to overcome to make evangelism effective:

Chapter 1

In chapter one, I will argue that the evangelical church has developed parameters which have limited its capacity to evangelise. I will look at the church internally and argue that the activities of mission and evangelism have essentially been hampered by the way the Evangelical church has evolved over the past 300 years. This has led to the church no longer conducting effective, relevant and regular mission or evangelism.

In chapter two I will examine the situation outside of the church and those external parameters which have hampered the church's capacity to be relevant and effective in mission and evangelism. I will argue that the church has not managed to keep in-step with the world around it. Consequently, the mission and evangelism that *do* occur are not relating the *good news* in way that makes sense to people. For the church to overcome this, it must develop competencies in mapping, responding and also subverting change, as it happens.

In Chapter three, I will take the issues gleaned from the first two chapters and make an argument for an appropriate response, both to the internal and external aspects. This response includes a move towards a *Missio Dei* understanding of mission and evangelism and a measured reaction to different shifts in society: some embracing societal change and others, subverting.

In Chapter four, I will detail and assess an attempt at such a response in the shape of the Emerging Church. I will conclude that although it addresses well the external parameters, it has inadvertently created another set of parameters, ones which do *not* live and breathe

mission and evangelism any more than the first, and ones in which leadership remains an unresolved issue.

The final chapter concludes that what is required for the whole church to practise mission and evangelism in a relevant, regular way is not another set of parameters, but rather what Kent refers to as *Embodied Church* (2010 in Greggs 2010). This demands a change in thinking throughout *all* the church on what it means to be Christians who both individually and corporately conduct mission and evangelism in the twenty-first century *as a way of life*. For this to happen, there are exciting lessons to be learnt from recent church movements but also crucial issues to be addressed. The most pressing of these is how to recruit, train and encourage an outward-looking and pioneering leadership for the whole church without laying down its traditional pastoral and caring qualities.

Chapter 1 – Evangelism & Evangelicalism

My thesis is that mission and evangelism should be constant, relevant, contextual and at the heart of the church's life but within the wider evangelical church they are all too often,

occasional and peripheral. This chapter will contend that Evangelicalism cites evangelism at the very heart of its existence, but it will argue that this claim is no longer true. Some of the reasons for its departure lie in the very same reasons for its vitality, success and growth: its personal and individual understanding of faith; its celebration and subsequent reliance on charismatic figures; its desire for set methods and approaches; and finally, its deeply held conception of conversion as a specific crisis event. I will argue that these features arose in the emergence of the movement when evangelism was a vibrant ingredient and have paradoxically led to the drift of evangelism to the peripheries of the modern evangelical church.

Evangelism in Evangelicalism?

Defining Evangelicalism is no straightforward matter. Briggs begins by stating that 'Evangelical is the best of terms and the worst of terms.' He goes on to argue that at its best evangelical can be:

> … joyfully centred around the living and active word of God bringing grace and truth in the evangel. And at its worst, naïve, literalistic, harsh…, and that there is no reasoning in them or with them. (in Bebington (1989,15).

According to Smith (2008,1) there is a diversity of organizational expressions of what evangelicalism is: 'Few Protestant denominations are untouched by its influence and the organizations locating themselves within the evangelical fold are legion.' It is then no surprise that there is a multiplicity of definitions. These are often found in bases of faith such as that of the Evangelical Alliance. Smith (2008,4) remarks how evangelicalism is a movement which

has displayed a 'restless drive for definition and re-definition.' Notwithstanding, it would appear that 1989 was somewhat of a landmark when David Bebbington published his definition subsequently coined the 'Bebbington Quadrilateral.'

This definition states that there are four perennial manifestations of evangelicalism: Biblicism, Crucicentrism, Conversionism and Activism (Bebbington 1989,3). Biblicism centres on the belief that all spiritual truth is to be found in the pages of the bible. Wesley stated that the bible alone was the source of his doctrine of salvation. Bebbington recounts how, despite charges by their opponents that they were subjecting the bible to arbitrary interpretation under the alleged interpretation of the Holy Spirit, evangelicals were not only convinced that they understood the bible clearly, but they also began to revere it.

> He (Henry Moorhouse) would not suffer anything, not even a sheet of paper to be laid upon his bible. There alone, apart it must lie, unique, matchless, wonderful, the very mind and presence of the infinite, eternal God. (in Bebbington 1984, 13).

Despite this, Bebbington argues that the overall aim of the early Evangelicals was to bring home the message of the bible and encourage its devotional use rather than to develop a doctrine of scripture.

The second pillar of the quadrilateral was Crucicentrism: the belief in the doctrine of the cross or the atonement. The third is Conversionism: the belief that people should undergo a conversion experience to know Christ. The third pillar is of immense significance to this thesis as by looking at the evangelical understanding of conversion, one begins to understand the way in which evangelism is undertaken. Conversion narratives such as those of Wesley and Edwards were common place. They often included elements of agony, guilt and then the immense relief felt after the revelation of Christ. Bebbington notes how the line between those

who had undergone the experience and those who had not was the sharpest in the world (Bebbington 1984,5).

The final aspect of Bebbington's quadrilateral is Activism which naturally flows from Conversionism. Jonathan Edwards commented that 'Persons, after their own conversion, have commonly expressed an exceeding great desire for the conversion of others' (Bebbington 1984,10). Bebbington alludes to a sense of this desire in the individual but then goes on to account for the zeal and passion of the clergy which was expressed in extreme commitments and the birth of the protestant missionary societies.

Although Bebington's efforts are recognized as landmark and do provide weighty evidence for this thesis, my primary objection is the centrality of activism as an ongoing pillar. I would argue that there is an apparent contradiction in evangelicalism. If we accept Bebbington's account that activism is one of the four central pillars of evangelicalism then we would expect evangelism to be central and regular in its expression. This argument is that activism may well no longer be a central pillar at all. This is not to deny Bebbington and all those who uphold his definition but rather speculate as to whether it applied at one time to a certain percentage of evangelicals and has since faded. If the fourth pillar has fallen off then this would explain why it is not apparent in the church today and would suggest the ' table' is unsteady.

Reimer (2003) in researching the beliefs and behaviours of Canadian evangelicals provides results which support this thesis. Reimer finds that although most evangelicals are very enthusiastic about the four pillars, in reality they see *orthodoxy* as the real key to their faith. Biblicism, Conversionism and Crucicentrism are apparent in their answers to Reimer's

questions but the living out of their faith is not apparent in their responses even though they see it as crucial to their faith. Reimer comments that this may be linked to the privatization of faith, a subject to which we will return.

Soper (1994) provides more support for this thesis arguing that distinctive and characteristic evangelical doctrines which can be observed from the statements of faith have shifted to a more intellectual basis. Kent (in Greggs 2010, 108) echoes this shift observing that ‘Evangelical theology has, at its worst prized cognitive understanding of doctrine over the exercise of Christian practices and individual private commitment to God over corporate participation.’

Larsen (2007) provides us with a broader definition. He does not openly criticise Bebbington’s work but does proffer another definition, amicably referred to by his associates as the *Larsen Pentagon.* Larsen’s pentagon makes the fair point that the quadrilateral assumes certain things such as geography and history. He posits whether we can think of St Francis as evangelical due to the fact that he exhibits all four of Bebbington’s points. Larsen (2007,2) concludes that a definition that ‘ … would include Roman Catholic mediaeval saints would not be serviceable …’ What is lacking in this case is a definition that refers to a specific Christian community. To rectify this problem, Larsen adds that an evangelical will be ‘An

orthodox Protestant … one who stands in the tradition of the global Christian networks arising from eighteenth century revival movements associated with John Wesley and George Whitefield.’ (Larsen 2007,2). Despite other good definitions, Noll (in Larsen 2007,2) and

Smith (2008) concur that Bebbington's quadrilateral is the most serviceable general definition.

For the purposes of this piece, I will accept Larsen's Pentagon in that it recognises Bebbington's seminal work with the added specificity of time. In summary, evangelicalism claims *evangelism* at its very core under *activism* - but there is clear evidence that while this may be the understanding, the reality is that this fourth pillar has migrated to the edge or even fallen off.

Why Evangelism has migrated to the edges

In this section, I will explore why this fourth pillar may have dropped off. I will argue that the evangelical understanding of *conversion* is a clue to this phenomenon. Such a notion of *conversion* is highly individualistic and dateable, brought about by a methodical approach involving a specialist preacher or teacher. I argue that this understanding is inherent in the growth of the movement over the past 300 years. Rooted in German Pietism and deeply engrained in the psyche of evangelical orthodoxy, it dictates how evangelism must be undertaken: by qualified individuals using replicable approaches to bring about crises of conversion resulting in personalised, individual faith. Such evangelism can only be carried out occasionally and by certain specialists hence the loss of Activism for the individual. Evidence for this crucial understanding of *conversion* lies in the growth and history of the evangelical movement.

One would be forgiven for concluding from a cursory glance at the New Testament writings that Christianity, mission and evangelism are synonymous right from the start. Jesus'

followers in the early church were 'sent into the world, loved, served, taught, preached, healed and liberated', to adopt our earlier definition from Bosch. Furthermore they invited a response from those with whom they came into contact. Sanneh (2001,86) expresses this, stating 'the church was born in mission and so lives by it.' He tracks the identity and nature of the early church and concludes that:

> Religion as fixed in no revealed language or single culture and as bound by no exclusive geographical frontier but rather as truth abiding with believers, whoever and wherever they happened to be was constitutive of the identity of Christianity as mission from the very beginning (Sanneh, 2001, 86) .

One could contend that the missionary nature of the early church was only relevant to its time and context and that Brunner's view that 'The church lives by mission as fire lives by burning' is no longer appropriate. Indeed, according to McGrath (2007) and Bosch (1991, this was the opinion of the Reformers who believed that the *Great Commission* had been completely accomplished by their time. Sanneh (2001) appears to give the late middle-agers more benefit of the doubt and frames mission in another light, one in which faith was nominally linked to geography: mission was understood in terms of recruiting political rulers and members of the aristocracy subsuming the rest of society under the church. Even if we were we to accept that mission was being undertaken in Sanneh's guise, we would have difficulty in aligning this approach with our earlier definition of mission from Bosch, 'The church sent into the world to love, to serve, to teach, to preach, to heal and to liberate' – even with a lot of imagination! McGrath and Bosch state a convincing case in that, bar some notable exceptions, mission as we understand it was most certainly not occurring and so we conclude that Brunner's fire was waning in the sixteenth century. As Brunner's fire waned, protestant discontent was crystallizing in England. Some protestants in England desired that the national church should move further away from the trappings of Catholicism, a 'purer church along the lines of Calvin's Geneva' (McGrath, 2007,120). They were clearly

passionate and according to McGrath 'slightly obsessive.' Certainly, they were desirous of still further reformation in the *via media* between Catholicism and The Lutheran and Calvinistic church adopted by Queen Elizabeth I - this dissatisfaction eventually led to the emergence of the Puritan party, setting itself up against the Anglicans. If the Puritans added an aspect of non-conformity to the plot, the Pietists added the rest.

Faith as an Individual Affair

Noll (2001,10) recounts that towards the end of the 17th century there was a 'surging longing for true religion' in both the Lutheran church, usually dated from Philip Jacob Spener's *Pia Desideria* in 1675, and also in works such as John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress (1678). Spener's work laments the spiritually arid condition of the Lutheran church: 'How difficult it will be to find even a small number of real and true disciples of Christ among the great mass of nominal Christians' (Spener 1675,57). An obsession with rigid theological orthodoxy had to give way to a concern for the devotional life and a deeper personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

McGrath (2007 cf. Bosch 1991) cite Spener's work as one of the key starting points for the modern evangelical movement. *Pia Desideria* or 'Pious Wishes' reads with a surprising contemporary ease as he outlines his proposals for a more intimate faith listing personal bible study, house groups, living out faith as opposed to verbal assent and the avoidance of useless doctrinal debates. Spener describes how those of real faith should group together to study the bible. McGrath (2007,37) describes this as *Ecclesiolae in ecclesiae,* churches within the church although I would argue that this notion was a divisive one which Spener sought to avoid. He clearly highlights the danger of churches forming within established churches

without supervision and according to Tappert's foreword seeks more of a *collegia pietatis*: a drawing together of the likeminded within the supervision of the church leadership. Whatever Spener's original intention was, his proposals were treated with derision from official theologians although Bosch (1991) describes how they were instrumental in renewing the church.

Pietism developed especially in England and Germany. One adherent, Nikolaus Ludwig Graf von Zinzendorf founded a pietist community in Herrnhut. Zinzendorf's community had a profound effect on one of the recognized founders of British Evangelicalism, John Wesley. Zinzendorf stressed a religion of the heart based on an intimate and personal relationship between Christ and the believer. During the first half of the eighteenth century, Pietist protests against religious formalism gathered increasing strength as the search for a 'true religion of the heart' broadened and deepened. For the English speaking world, the result was Evangelicalism (Noll 2001,10). Here we see the root of the deeply individual understanding of conversion engrained in evangelical thinking, one which will lead in turn to a deeply individual understanding of evangelism.

Whereas Noll (2001) frames the birth of Evangelicalism as a gathering protest, Soper (1994) refers to it more as a reforming movement within the protestant denominations. In fairness, it would appear to encapsulate both these sentiments throughout its emergence, at some times more slowly reforming and at other more ardently protesting. Bebington (1989) states that the evangelical religion we know now has existed in Britain since the 1730s. Noll (2001,1) concurs, stating that from the 1720s onwards:

> In London and English market towns, the Scottish Highlands and Lowlands, Wales, Ireland and the North American colonies – English speaking Protestantism was

significantly renewed through a series of often intense religious awakenings'(Noll, 2001,10).

Most authors conclude that characters most associated with these awakenings were the preacher George Whitefield, the evangelist and founder of the Methodist movement John Wesley, and the gifted theologian Jonathan Edwards. Noll(2001,10) is quick to point out that other lesser known leaders also defined the revivals as well as countless other 'ordinary men and women.' News of these evangelical experiences was circulated quickly and freely through publications and itinerant preaching.

Previously within puritanical and calvinistic contexts, the believer was unable to prevail against God's sovereign choice and certainty of Salvation was unknown. (Soper 1994,39) 'Humans are innately depraved and incapable of good works, God elects or saves individuals without any act on the part of the chosen.' In John Wesley's published journals people could read of a new assurance penned in his conversion experience: 'I felt my heart strangely warmed, I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, …' (Curnock, 1938 cited in Noll 2001, 11). It is clear from such accounts how Evangelicalism captured a new kind of *personal faith and assurance* which was hitherto rare. Not only was the conversion a personal one but it weakened the intellectual aspect and shifted emphasis to the emotional and relational. The predominantly puritan way of determining a *bona fide* believer had been by testing their beliefs against rigid formulations held by the ecclesiastical body (McGrath 2007). The awakenings led now to a sense of the individual participating in a spiritual reality rather than intellectual assent. These aspects of evangelicalism are crucial to its understanding and practice of mission and evangelism, one in which the individual and their subjective choice is central. Such

understandings could have easily led to people seeing the initiation of the conversion experience by human hands. Edwards himself made the distinction between the primary divine inspiration, a move of God in the life of a person and the secondary human response which could be understood in naturalist terms (McClymond, 1998).

Noll (2001) argues that such experiences did not constitute a new religion: those awakened in the revivals remained within their churches. This could paint a fully harmonious situation, one which was clearly not the case. Soper (1994, 37) reports that although these early evangelicals brought a religious dynamism and more vital religion in the churches of England and America to what was seen as a more sedentary faith, there was also a schismatic effect which eventually brought the Methodist church out of the Anglican .

The Specialist Evangelist and the Search for Methods

After the initial furore of the Great Awakenings Scotland (2009) reports that there was a period of decline, certainly in American Evangelicalism which lasted until the 1790s. At this point, the Second Great Awakening took place (1795-1810). It was in this awakening that another important development in Christianity arose which would have an important affect on the way mission and evangelism are understood and carried out. Scotland (2009) describes how the Great Awakenings associated with Whitefield, Edwards and others were regarded as revivals in that they were sovereign works of God: as Scotland puts it, 'surprising works of God that could not be anticipated' (Scotland, 2009, 14). During the Second Great Awakening in the southern states, there arose a school of thought which gave more credence to the human

agent in revival. Although all agreed that the work was that of God, it was also agreed that preachers such as Whitefield had the gift or ability to render Scripture 'Divine Drama.' It was also accepted that a person had the ability to choose to make a decision to follow Christ as their saviour. This school of thought led to an approach commonly referred to as 'Revivalism' - a derogatory term coined by the Unitarians but then adopted by the Evangelicals, in keeping with protestant tradition (Scotland 2009,6).

Revivalists such as Charles Finney believed that that if the event was orchestrated in the right way, then God would be faithful and the desired result, conversion, would follow. This was a systematic approach to evangelism and involved the use of a structured address and follow up including the opportunity for sinners to 'choose'. It was in this time that the anxious seat appeared and the 'altar call' first saw light. According to Finney (2004), this model has brought many millions of people to God over the past two centuries, although it is not without its critics. Revivalism saw the emergence of many celebrated and gifted evangelistic preachers such as Moody, Sunday and eventually Billy Graham. The role of charismatic preaching and preachers cannot be underestimated in the evangelical psyche and its effect on current evangelistic approaches.

More recently, however, criticisms have mounted against such approaches. In a scathing critique, Chan (2006, 69) argues that Evangelicals:

> … preach the gospel with the view to getting the individual transformed or born again ….They fail to see that conversion is not about transforming the individual, per se, but is about incorporation into a spiritual reality-the body of Christ.

Norman (1995,138) enumerates other negative elements: It can diminish the importance of the Church as an element within the gospel; there can be an excessive concern with numbers; in some of its forms it can become manipulative, although this could arguably applied to almost any approach; it treats everyone the same; it can lead to a lowest common denominator gospel by which the basic message which is applicable to the largest number becomes the norm; and finally, the personality of the preacher can get in front of the person of Jesus (Finney 2004,27). Finney summarises stating 'this conveying of a formula is hopelessly individualistic and forgets the social context from which the potential convert comes' (Finney 2004,10).

The point here is not whether this is right or wrong, rather this is what dictates the way that evangelism is done today. Finney (2004) recounts that in the 1990s there was a call for the churches to step up to do evangelism. He remarks that in many evangelical circles it was often misunderstood as being a call for only a revivalist style of evangelism, supporting the thesis that it still holds sway today. The systematic approach of conveying a formula for an individual to make a choice is found widely in today's approaches ranging from the Billy Graham style stadium address to the byte-sized formulas of four steps to conversions which are widely adopted in evangelical circles - follow the steps to get the right response.

Crisis Conversion

Another important aspect of conversion which sheds light on the approaches to mission and evangelism lies in the timing of the work of God. All agreed as Edwards stated that

conversion was a great and glorious work of God as opposed to a human endeavour (McClymond 1998), but how quickly it occurred was a matter of some contention. Anglican evangelicals, according to Bebbington (1984) never had problems about accepting the validity of gradual conversions. Charles Simeon stated 'we require nothing sudden'(in Bebington 1984,72). This is an interesting comment by Bebbington as Hunt (2003) points out that one of the conclusions from the 1990s decade of evangelism was the realization that people came to faith gradually, a point which appears to have been recognized 200 years earlier! Methodists, on the other hand usually looked for a dateable crisis.

It would be a disservice to Evangelicals to state that these factors are the only that have shaped the ways that mission and evangelism are carried out today in the church. Indeed, the nineteenth century saw the birth of missionary movements that traversed the world through names such as William Carey and Hudson Taylor both promoting the social development of the people with whom they worked. Indeed, evangelicals have always been involved in social and political mission ranging from the abolition of slavery, the civil rights movement to the likes of The Salvation Army working in some of the most difficult urban areas (Sanneh 2001 cf. Noll, 2001, Green 1990). This thesis is not designed to overlook these movements but rather identify those specific historical factors within Evangelicalism which have led to mission and evangelism becoming a peripheral church activity.

A Summary of the Symptoms

In summary, this chapter argues that evangelism and especially *activism* no longer thrive in the everyday life of the typical modern evangelical, primarily as a direct consequence of how conversion and faith are understood: personal faith delivered by specialists with set approaches and brought about in crises. The personal nature of evangelical conversion and faith stresses that the experience is ultimately an individual one and makes the business of evangelism also an individual one. This could be regarded as a positive aspect which ideally places the locus of evangelism in the hands of *all* Christians. In reality, evangelism has become unpopular and has not been promoted by the church as a corporate body, but rather sidelined by the church as collection of individuals. This individualisation of conversion and faith has, arguably been counter-productive and has ostracised Christians from conducting evangelism together.

The individualisation of faith and consequently, evangelism, has been further exacerbated by the surrendering of the activity into the hands of specialised professionals. We see from Wesley and his successors that preaching was a major channel for the growth of evangelicalism, indeed it was the chief method of winning converts. This understanding is arguably rooted firmly in the psyche of the evangelical who sees this method of mission and evangelism as the *modus primus of* evangelism. A corollary of this would be that only those gifted in *preaching* can be evangelists and this is arguably one of the reasons that evangelism has become consigned to the periphery of the church's activity in that most churches are not led by evangelists. Consequently, evangelism becomes occasional as it is best done by the visiting speaker who does not live and dwell in the local church. Even worse, the individual Christian can wash their hands of the whole embarrassing affair - the crescendo of Pietism.

> It is now possible to live the Christian life without doing the things that Jesus commanded us to do. We have hired people to go into all the world, to visit those in prison, to feed the hungry … The average Christian does not have to do it. (Thomas 2006,26).

The later development of Revivalist thinking has further led to mission and evangelism being associated with an approach or a formula. Furthermore, this formula then becomes the right approach - when the approach is effective or delivers the goods, it becomes replicable and is exported. A problem here arises when the context into which the approach is shipped becomes no longer appropriate - the result is that evangelism becomes alien to the context – decontextualised. Such decontextualised approaches to evangelism arguably add to the disillusionment behind the sentiment that 'it just doesn't work.' One could argue that it was never meant to work in another context – this despondency pushes evangelism further to the periphery of the church.

If the church sees the goal as a crisis moment then it will cater accordingly its approach to evangelism and push for decisions accordingly. If it understands this conversion experience as a process then it will allow an ongoing movement in evangelism. Accordingly, if evangelism is crisis based then it becomes very difficult for it to be an ongoing part of the church life unless the church introduces significant numbers of non-Christians into its building on a weekly basis. The reality is that this form of evangelism cannot be undertaken on a regular basis by smaller churches and so evangelism becomes more rarified, delivered by the professional visiting preacher.

The final evidence for the removal of mission and evangelism from the heart of the church can be seen through recent moves to stem decline in church numbers. Francis & Roberts (in

Green 1992) report how UK initiatives in the majority of Christian denominations during the 1990s made a concerted effort to bring evangelism back to the table, an indication in itself of its peripheral status. Seen by the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams as a 'necessary idiocy', he is quoted as saying that 'much of Western Christianity has gone to sleep on the job' and that evangelism 'is so much the essence of the church that a decade of evangelism is rather like declaring a decade of breathing' (in Green (1992,12). In this criticism, Rowan Williams was pointedly referring to a situation where, for many in the church, 'evangelism' had become a dirty word. Green (1992) goes on to conclude that evangelism is often the subject of misunderstanding and misconception, something with which many church people feel uncomfortable. Murray (2004,225) notes that evangelism as an activity today is widely unpopular within and beyond churches, listing reasons from the antics of famous televangelists to general disillusionment from past failures. Such testimonies bear out my own personal experience as an evangelist working with local churches where the dreaded 'e' word is reserved for gifted speakers, enthusiastic but naïve youth or certain zealots with questionable intent.

This chapter concludes that not only have mission and evangelism become the elephant in the room, but also less and less central and usual *within* the evangelical church as a direct result of its own growth and development. The next chapter will look *outside* of the church and assess how changes in society have led to the church becoming further and further out-of-touch with the people around it.

Chapter 2 - Outside of Church

The first chapter of this thesis looked at what has happened predominantly *within* the church which has led to the marginalisation and ad-hoc nature of mission and evangelism. This

chapter will now look at what has been happening *outside* the church with the hope of ascertaining how the church should react. I will argue that in navigating the phenomenon of secularization in the West, the church has reacted to what it has perceived as an increasingly secular society. Recent work uncovers the reality of secularisation in a somewhat different light – ours is not a secular society but one where belief is prevalent and relevant, albeit in changing ways. The thesis is that a church aware of the situation outside itself is not only able to embrace and use shifts in culture to relate its message in pertinent ways but also to subvert other aspects of culture where it deems appropriate.

Secularisation – Definitions

The evidence for this re-shuffling of the place of religion in society lies largely in the sociological discussion around the phenomenon of secularization. Bryan Wilson (the British sociologist who in Larsen's view has done most to advance the secularization thesis in the last three or four decades) has defined secularization as 'the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance' (Wilson 1966 in Larsen, 2006,321). Steve Bruce accepts this definition, summarizing it as 'the diminution of the social significance of religion' (2002,2). Swatos (1999,1) reports, that the term 'secularization ' was coined by Max Weber in the 1930s but it did not find widespread use in sociology until the 1950s. The etymology of the word is in the latin *sæculum* which has been taken to mean a plethora of things ranging from clergy working outside monastic communities to a life-style at odds with God and later coming to distinguish between civil and ecclesiastical law, lands and possession (Swatos1999,2). Mulders (2008) defines secularization as the process whereby various cultural spheres are autonomised away from a single religious basis. Berger (1999,2) reports

that the key idea of the theory can be traced to the Enlightenment and posits: 'Modernisation necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals.'

To summarise, secularization ultimately claims the disappearance of any belief in God and the freedom of social institutions from church influence. Berger (1999) reports that enlightenment thinkers often regard such secularization as a positive thing in that it purges us of backwards, superstitious behaviours. Religious people on the other hand often define it as the enemy or an invincible tide which the churches should resist. For better or for worse, as Larsen (2006) notes, over the last thirty years secularization has been ubiquitous in reflections on Christianity.

What has *not* been happening?

Martin (2005) reports that some sociologists have only taken a recent interest in the topic while others have given a comprehensive account of the rise of secularization over the past centuries. One of the most thorough is Rodney Stark (1999) who sets out by quoting the unfulfilled prophesies of characters as varied as Jefferson, Freud and Voltaire. He reports that for nearly three centuries, social scientists and western intellectuals have all been promising the end of private and institutional religion, noting that each generation nonchalantly claims that within another few decades humans will outgrow belief in the supernatural: '…by the twenty-first century, religious believers are likely to be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture.' (Berger 1968 in Stark 1999,3). The zenith was the confident mood of the late sixties and seventies, where within social scientific circles, the

idea of secularization became almost sacralised and constituted a belief system: Stark does not try to hide his disapproval referring to it as a ‘doctrine’ (1999,250).

Classic Secularization

The essence of this ‘doctrine’ is referred to as ‘Classic Secularization’ theory (Martin 2005, cf. Swatos 1999, Stark 1999) and holds five important features: Firstly, ‘there is universal agreement that modernisation is the causal engine dragging the gods into retirement’ (Stark 1999,251). The theory correlates an increase in industrialization, urbanization, and rationalization with direct decrease in religiousness. Stark also refers to the fact that modernisation itself is a long uniform process and hence secularization is supposed to be the same. A second feature ties into this pattern in that it is considered a one–way all absorbing condition —once achieved it would be irreversible, instilling as Stark puts it ‘mystical immunity’ (Stark 1999,253).

Stark’s third argument is that Classic Secularization does not only predict the separation of church and state and a decline in the direct, secular authority of church leaders, but also a decline in individual belief in the supernatural. According to Stark (1999), Freud’s irritation with religion lay not in the institution’s power but rather the individual’s illusion which would perish on the psychoanalyst’s couch.

Next, Stark argues that in all theories it is science that has the most deadly implications for religion. 'For Comte and Wallace, as for Voyé and Dobbelaere, it is science that will free us from the superstitious fetters of faith.' (Stark 1999,255). Finally, while most discussions of secularization focus on Christendom, all leading proponents of the thesis apply it globally. Therefore, it is not only Christianity that is doomed to die out, but, as Wallace explained in the passage quoted above, 'belief in supernatural powers' (Stark 1999,255). Reading through Berger's original work, one does wonder whether Stark's tendency to neatly group all the theories together into one homogenous theory of Classic Secularization is quite so tidy a he makes out. Despite this, there does appear to be a somewhat hope and faith in the writing of the sixties and seventies that the *end was nigh* for religion.

Reactions to Classic Secularization

As heralds of secularisation called last orders for religion, the faith sector has been seen to react in a variety of ways. Such reactions appear to fall into two categories: The first of these Berger describes as *Rejection*: seeing modernisation as the enemy required leaders to resist all trappings of modernity or the forming religious sub-cultures designed to keep out the influence of outside society as with the Amish communities (Berger 1999).

A second reaction of the religious communities has been *Adaptation* whereby the church tries to integrate aspects of modernisation into its fabric. One could expect that religious institutions which adapt to the modern world might fare better than those opposing it – but the opposite has proven to be the case. Secularised religion, as in the case of Liberal

Protestantism has generally failed according to Berger and oddly 'beliefs and practices dripping with reactionary supernaturalism' have widely succeeded (Berger 1999,3). Davidson (2008) agrees with this reporting how conservative churches were growing faster than liberal ones because new members are attracted to the high levels of commitment and the sacrifices conservative groups require of their members. He argues that people are not attracted to liberal churches because they are not as exigent and prescriptive, an attraction in an age of uncertainty.

Berger (1999) also comments on the rise of very vocal groups which he attributes to a reaction against a supposed secularization. On the international religious scene it is conservative, orthodox or traditionalist movements that are on the rise almost everywhere. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, there occurred a remarkable revival of the Orthodox Church in Russia. The most rapidly growing Jewish groups all over the planet are the orthodox groups and there are similar vigorous upsurges of conservatism in all the religions, including Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Berger rightly notes that these all differ hugely but what they have in common is their unambiguously religious inspiration. Martin (2005) confirms the trend reporting that church practice has risen steadily throughout the whole period of modernisation from 1800-1950.

At the very least these reactions show that counter-secularization , or 'de-secularization ', as Berger is willing to concede, is at least as important a phenomena as secularization (Berger 1999,6). Indeed Berger lists the features of counter-secularization as great religious passion, a defiance of the zeitgeist and a return to traditional sources of religious authority. He concludes

'Modernity undermines all the old certainties, uncertainty is a condition people find hard to bear, any movement that promises to renew certainty has a ready market' (Berger 1999,6).

As we see, significant portions of the church have reacted to the 'onslaught' of secularization. Something that makes the church's reaction rather interesting is the wealth of evidence from sociologists who appear to agree unanimously that secularisation is *not* happening as predicted. Berger (1993) makes a fascinating point that as the theory itself appears to be ill-grounded, so are some of the Church's reactions to it.

David Martin claims that he himself was one of the first contemporary sociologists to reject the secularization thesis outright, even going as far as proposing that the concept of secularization be eliminated from social scientific discourse on the grounds that 'it had served only ideological and polemical, rather than theoretical, functions and because there was no evidence in favour of *any* general or consistent shift from a religious period in human affairs to a secular period' (Martin 1990, 465). Others soon followed suit:

> the assumption that we live in a secularised world is false. The world today, with some exceptions …, is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever (Berger 1999,2).

This was the graceful recant of the same Peter Berger who, back in 1968, had predicted religious enclaves scrabbling for an existence by the end of the millennium. Later on in the decade, Berger went on to say that there are clearly secularising effects, more in some places than in others, but essentially he concludes that the theory is mistaken (Berger 1999). The

reasons for the about-turn of Peter Berger and the change of mind of most contemporary sociologists lie in the apparently unfulfilled hopes of the secularization theories.

To refer to Stark's first feature, if modernization is the causal engine dragging the gods into retirement, then there are some major anomalies – many industrialised and modern nations appear to display a stubborn fascination with the divine, in Stark's words 'The American case continues to offer a devastating challenge to the secularization doctrine' (1999,6). Sanneh(2001) also suggests that the same is the case in Europe arguing that it also fails in Europe on the grounds that there has been *no* demonstrable long-term decline in European religious participation. Stark reports a similar argument and his confidence rests on what he refers to as the 'myth of past piety', the idea that people in Western Europe were never really as religious as we imagined.

> Granted, participation probably has varied from time to time in response to profound social dislocations such as wars and revolutions, but the far more important point is that religious participation was very low in northern and western Europe many centuries before the onset of modernization. (Stark 1999, 256).

Berger (1999) reports the rise in certain parts of the religious scene in modern societies and states that this provides a massive falsification of the idea that modernisation and secularization are cognate phenomena.

The second feature, the irreversibility of the process also has its problems – Mulde (2008) comments on how events and trends in Eastern Europe and the nations of the former Soviet

Union do not support these expectations. 'St. Vladimir has routed Karl Marx.' (Greeley 1994 in Stark 1999, 272). The third feature also appears to errant: Stark's argument is that current data does not herald of an age of *scientific atheism*. Levels of subjective religiousness remain high. He concludes that to classify a nation as highly secularized when the large majority of its inhabitants believe in God is absurd. Indeed, the important question about religion in Europe is not why people no longer believe, but why they 'persist in believing but see no need to participate with even minimal regularity in their religious institutions?' (Davie 1994, 395). Sanneh (2001) concords arguing that although there has been a clear institutional drop-off, personal faith shows no signs of abating.

Fourthly, Stark argues that if science is the lethal weapon of Classic Secularization then scientists ought to be expected to be a wholly irreligious lot. The argument given is that scientists are about as religious as anyone else, and so the presumed incompatibility between religion and science seems mythical. Finally, the theory that secularization is a global phenomenon appears to have stalled and died out very quickly – 'no one has bothered to explain it to Muslims or Hindus or Buddhists for that matter' (Stark 1999, 278).

Although the secularization theory has not applied to the most part of the planet there are, according to Berger (1999) exceptions to this trend. The first is Europe where Berger contended in 1999 that the old secularization theory would seem to hold. With increasing modernisation there has been a key increase in the key indicators of secularization both on the level of expressed beliefs and dramatically in the level of church behaviour. Berger prefers to frame it as a shift in the institutional location of religion rather than secularization.

The second group which Berger(1999) refers to are the *globalised elite*. By this he refers to an international subculture composed of people of western-type education especially in the social sciences and humanities. While its members are relatively thin on the ground, they are very influential in that they control the institutions that dictate the 'official definitions of reality' – the educational system, mass media and the higher reaches of the legal system. The group is remarkably similar the world over, as it has been for some time (Berger 1999). Martin (2005) supports this thesis attributing the applicability of secular theory in Europe to these strongly placed secularist elites and also the long-term after effects of monopolistic systems. Berger (1999) argues that the plausibility of the secularization theory is largely down to this group and concludes 'there is one prediction that can be made with some certainty: there is no reason to think that the world of the 21st century will be any less religious than the world of today' (Berger 1999,12).

So the classic theory was, for most sociologists, put well and truly to rest – or not, as the case may be. Literature is replete with the accusations from protagonists and antagonists of the theories accusing the other of irrational faith in their predisposition: Larsen (2006) accuses Steve Bruce of stubbornly hoping that that his main opponents object to secularization theory simply because their personal religious convictions compel them to do so. Berger (2006 in Mathewes 2006,155) in a recent interview argued that Bruce is stubbornly holding on to the theory. Interestingly, Hugh McLeod has recently argued persuasively that secularization happened at least in part because there were large numbers of people who were trying their hardest to bring it about (Larsen 2006,329). Similarly, Charles Taylor in Martin, (2005) likens its onset and enthusiasts to some of the nonchalant Christian missions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Even if secularization is not proceeding as planned, the theory has been ubiquitous in reflections about Christianity in the West during the last thirty years, if not longer. Larsen concludes;

> Thus, like a shadow, the secularization thesis looms over much, but is nevertheless frustratingly hard to grasp or pin down …. Sociology's secularization thesis has been defined, explained, attacked, defended, and examined in a bewilderingly wide variety of ways. Therefore, it is almost impossible to engage any discussion of the subject without a proponent of the secularization thesis responding to a critic with the words, 'that is not what I meant by secularization,' or without a critic replying to an advocate's presentation, 'that may be true, but it is not evidence for the secularization thesis.' (Larsen 2006 , 320).

Nevertheless ,Larsen (2006,320) still argues that versions of secularization theory peddled by the likes of 'Berger and his followers, Bruce and Wilson' persist to provide an intellectual challenge to Christian reflection today by asserting or implying that faith is a legacy of a more primitive intellectual culture that is destined to wither away as the light of learning spreads.

Establishing a degree of perspective on the secularization theories is crucial - there is clear evidence that something *is* happening and faith within society is shifting, but not in the ways predicted. It is also apparent that strong and relatively differing views on the subject are held by opposing academics, not to mention faith sectors: there is clearly a strong accusation in both camps of secular or religious bias which must be weighed. The thesis here is that society is not secular and that faith is relevant and prevalent, one which certain evidence seems to support.

The thesis here is that for the church to be able to relate its *good news* to the world around it then it must be able to make a relatively accurate assessment of that world. If the religious climate *has* changed considerably over the last 50 years (Larsen 2006) and the church's reaction has been ill-fitting (Berger 1993) then it is crucial to establish what actually *has* been happening , a question to which we turn our attention now.

Revised Secularisation

Trying to pick apart what actually is going on through the literature is no simple affair. More recent studies and reflections on what has been happening have been grouped under the heading 'Revised Secularisation' whose features will now be examined.

Pluralism

One feature that does consistently occur with modernisation is pluralism. Berger in an interview with Mathewes (2006,153) argues that ' modernity very likely, but not inevitably, leads to pluralism.' He states that this is a pluralisation of world views, religion being just one of them. Berger defines Pluralism as 'the coexistence in society of different worldviews and value systems under conditions of civic peace and under conditions where people interact with each other' (in Mathews 2006,153). He goes on to state that this will lead to people making choices, but not simply accepting or rejecting religion. He describes how these choices often combine modernist with religious thinking and the results are myriad. This phenomenon has been described by Robert Wuthnow (in Mathewes, 2006, 153) as *Patchwork Religion* or *Bricolage:* you *do-it-yourself* assembling your own version. The result of this is

that religion in many ways grows out its traditional boundaries –*grows* rather than recedes. This interesting observation starts to clear the way for recent thinking on multiple modernities, the idea that development is path-dependent, and so different societies will develop different kinds of modernity.

Stark (2006) has also offered a 'supply-side' interpretation as a similar understanding for religious behaviour and change in a plural society. In this view, religious monopolies (such as state churches) often depress religious vitality while a free religious market of competing faith groups can create a vital religious climate. This is a view supported by Sanneh (2001,2) who argues that 'mission was born in this context' .

Steve Bruce(2002) stubbornly holds on to Berger's original theories, maintaining that in this plural society, secularization is occurring - people are free to start churches if they want but they are not – so, they must be losing their religion. Larsen (2006) disagrees and cites Robert D. Putman's work which discusses the breakdown of communal patterns of behaviour. He posits that just because certain traditional institutions do not work, does not mean the people are not committed to the cause.

> People are arguably just as 'political' or 'politically conscious' as they ever were, yet they are less likely to join a political party. I lived in the Midlands market town of Loughborough during the late 1990s and it was hard to find a more rundown, fading institution than the Labour Club. It finally closed, even though the country was being run by a Labour government and its constituency was being served by a Labour MP at the time. People are free to create new political parties as well, but when they do so they do not seem able to gather a significant active membership. Nevertheless, this does not add up to a de-politicized population. (Larsen 2006,325).

Differentiation

A second factor that most agree on is *Differentiation (*Stark 1999 cf, Martin 2005): this refers to a decline in the social power of once-dominant religious institutions whereby other social institutions, especially political and educational institutions, have escaped from prior religious domination. If this were all that secularization meant, there would be nothing to argue about. Stark (2006) points out that throughout Europe bishops have less political power than they once possessed. Nor are primary aspects of public life any longer suffused with religious symbols, rhetoric, or ritual. These changes have, of course, aroused scholarly interest, resulting in some distinguished studies. Stark (1999) accuses the proponents of a revised secularization of trying to wriggle out of their original claims: he suggests that those now arguing for a differentiation have conveniently smudged over the fact that they believed that individual faith would disappear.

Martin (2005) agrees stating that although classic linear secularization is clearly not the situation, there is a strong case for social differentiation whereby the separation of religion and state leads to religion losing its hold in several spheres. One effect of this is the privatisation of faith. Martin(2005) argues that whereas privatisation ought to mean the disappearance of churches from the debate the opposite has happened in some cases. As churches gave up their old links with structures of power they took up various other causes and re-emerged as a major player in the public sphere, able to articulate many of the concerns of civil society: pollution, abortion, social migration, racial prejudice, state repression and economic exploitation. A classic example of this would be the role of the Catholicism in relation to the *Solidarity* movement in Poland.

Chaves concludes that secularization should not be linked to a decrease in individual religious participation, but rather defined as the 'declining scope of religious authority' (Chaves 1994,750). In short, neo-secularization is an attempt to lift the baby of differentiation from the bathwater of predicted declines in personal religiousness. 'The thesis of the differentiation of the religious and secular spheres is the still defensible core of the theory of secularization.' (Philips 2004,141).

Larsen (2006,328) describes a similar phenomena and coins the phrase 'De-Christendomisation' . Essentially, it could be argued that Larsen is describing the same thing as Differentiation. He attempts to explain and simplify the discussion in such terms;

> It is possible that everything that sociologists want to discuss under the heading of 'secularization' may be subsumed under this category. From this perspective, dechristendomization is a process whereby the social significance of organized Christianity in a society as a whole is diminished, with contributing processes such as differentiation and outcomes such as declining church attendance also being germane. Historians will welcome a shift to dechristendomization as a way of shedding some of the theoretical baggage that seems inevitably to accompany the term 'secularization. (Larsen 2006,328).

Even if Differentiation is the centrepiece of Revised Secularization, objectors to wider theories are not phased, and rather seem to celebrate its arrival. Larsen is clearly one, seeing the marriage of religion and state as a pernicious alliance: 'it does not seem to me that disciples of Jesus Christ have any stake in the persistence of religion *per se*.' (2006,327). In his exposition of 'Christ above Culture' outlined in Niebuhr's seminal work *Christ and Culture* (1951) he hearkens back to something akin to Dietrich Bonheoffer's notion of

Religionless Christianity (1937). Kierkegaard argued in a similar vein that Christendom was never true Christianity. The state paying the salaries of ministers of religion kills off Christianity: the church would be better-off if the state employed anti-Christian propagandists instead. Christendom is hypocrisy and therefore 'Christ's judgment upon Christendom' (Kierkegaard in Smith 1965,83). This is similar to a free-church ecclesiology, one in which nominal adherence is no better than no adherence at all. Larsen is excited about the prospect and states it 'is not a death to lament rather an opportunity to celebrate' (Larsen 2006,334).

Waves

Another explanation lies in the notion that religious activity or conversely, secularization comes in waves. Morozov (2008,34) describes the present phenomenon as the fourth wave of secularization - the liberation of the religious from the transcendental. This liberation is taking place through the affirmation of religion as a 'way of life.' He argues that society accepts religion more readily, not its transcendental beliefs, but rather the rituals and ways of life it holds, for example, baptisms, services etc. It is indeed only in this form that it is prepared to accept religion. This theory does not find popular support if one considers that individual belief is still highly prevalent. As stated before, Berger (1999,3) notes that secularization on a societal level is not necessarily linked to secularization at an individual level.

Martin (2005,3) proposes a similar hypothesis by arguing that secularization , quite apart from being a unilateral process, is part of a a series of successive Christianizations followed or accompanied by recoils. He argues that we are now living in the wake and dying out of the

final eruption, that of evangelical sub-cultures. He also makes an interesting point concerning the role of individual characters in these waves. He argues that as with every other area of human endeavour, individual personalities play a much larger role than most social scientists like to concede. No-one can predict the appearance of charismatic figures who will launch powerful religious movements in unexpected places.

Belonging without believing

One of the key thinkers, especially in terms of the European question, is Grace Davie. Davie pointed out back in 1994 that the traditional tendency of the working classes, one of believing without practicing, was on the increase. She concluded that 'the overall pattern of religious life in Britain is changing. For it appears that more and more people in British society want to believe but do not want to involve themselves in religious practice' (1994,107). This tendency is at its most remarkable in inner city areas among the urban working classes where there is the added mistrust of institutions. (Davie 1994). Billings (2004) paints a similar canvass from his research into belief practices in the Lake District.

Interestingly, Davie impartially does not decry the pattern or celebrate it but does conclude that it forms part of a mosaic which indicates that faith, albeit outside of institutions, is on the increase – she describes the phenomenon as a 're-enchantment' of the West. If Davie is correct in her analysis, then the question stands: how do those with residual faith live out their faith outside of established church and how does the church conduct mission and evangelism to *believers* who will not belong?

To get to grips with this, it is important to delve deeper into the phenomenon. More recently Davie(2006) in her article 'Is Europe an exceptional case?' looks to explore if Western Europe is unique in its outlook and how it may fare as variables in Britain change. She stresses the historical and cultural importance of religion in the European context and reminds us that this interwoveness is not something to be untangled with ease. One of Davie's features of the European question is that the believing population divides into two groups. The minority are those who opt in to institutional religion. This is a group of increasingly consumer christians who choose their own church, change more easily and feel the need to frequent less often. The most successful of these are the softer evangelical groups and the growing cathedral congregations. Davie suggests that the common denominator here may be the experiential or feel good factor in these forms of organised religion. She rationales this by referring to Durkheim's notion that it is the *taking part* that matters for the late modern populations and the feeling so engendered (Durkheim 1912). Interestingly this group is defined not by duty or obligation to attend but rather by voluntary membership. 'The churches are no longer able to discipline the beliefs and behaviours of the great many of the population' (Davie 2006,20).

Parallel to this group is the second group of believers practising a *Vicarious Religion* (Davie 2006,27) whereby the church becomes a public utility – this group does not attend and may or may not have a tangible belief. It certainly expects the church to believe on its behalf, act morally on its behalf and be there for it at specific life times (funerals and weddings): 'The church needs to be there in order that I may attend if I so choose' (Davie 2006,27) This group constitutes what Billings might call latent Christians (2004). In this economy, opting out is the norm. Davie (2006) argues that these two groups are mutually dependant.

Davie's final comments concern the influx of immigrant population for whom religion is a very public affair (2006). This will inevitably have an impact on religion as a private affair, a

positive one for the antagonists of secularization theory. Davies concludes that these factors will increase rather than decrease the salience of religion in public life (2006).

Conclusion

The evidence seems to suggest that there may be a core to secularisation which lies in *Differentiation*. Institutional faith is on the decline but may well be protected from complete collapse by a *Vicarious Religion* of the masses. Such an institution would be less and less frequented except for public utility. At the same time, there also strong evidence to suggest that faith is alive and well outside of the institutions albeit in a *bricolage* fashion. The final piece of the mosaic within British society is the small but growing minority of opt-in Christians who are mimicking consumer trends and seeking on the experiential expressions of faith. The question now remains, how does the church react to this state of affairs?

> If contrary to the expectations of secularization theorists, the future will be one of greater religious pluralism rather than greater secularity, then the church must wrestle with the missiological implications of such changes. (Larsen 2006,327).

Chapter one has argued that down to the nature of the growth of Evangelicalism, mission and evangelism have become occasional and peripheral to church activity. This chapter has argued that the church must be aware of its context if it is to relate its message in a pertinent way. This context is one of two or three overlapping shifts. The question here is what is an appropriate Christian reaction to these fractures? Do the institutional models specialise and attempt to meet the opt-out *vicarious* group purely at the interface of public utility meetings?

How far should churches adapt to the apparent consumer choices of frequency and experience when thinking about mission – should it provide drop-in faith? Should the church challenge the dominant British mindset and refuse to accept that belief without belonging is valid belief? These are the questions to which we turn now in an attempt to bring mission and evangelism back to bear in a relevant twenty-first century context.

Chapter 3 - A Shift in Thinking

The previous chapters have outlined the issues within and outside of the church affecting its effectiveness in mission and evangelism. This chapter concerns itself with the nature of the response to such issues. In response to chapter one, it will argue that the internal symptoms inherent in Evangelicalism: individualised faith; crisis conversion; events and big-speaker style evangelism; and the search for replicable approaches cannot be fixed by cosmetic change. They will only be addressed by a fundamental shift in thinking on what the actual mission of the church is. This underlying conceptual change can then pave the way for mission and evangelism conducted by the whole church, all the time. In response to chapter two, it will argue that the church *does* need to adapt to *certain* changes inherent in twenty-first century society such as a more *experiential* Christianity and flexibility in meeting patterns; but at the same time it needs to oppose and even subvert other aspects of contemporary culture such as the tendency to promote fragmented lives with faith as one of those fragments. As such, the church needs to be selective in its responses.

Missio Dei

Chapter one established the reasons why mission and evangelism have increasingly moved to the margins of church life, conducted infrequently by a specialised few. Laing (2009) describes how the tide has been changing and argues that the time for the locus of mission and evangelism to move back to the centre is here. His hope lies in the emerging notion of *Missio Dei:* according to Laing, before the twentieth century, missions were an activity undertaken by the church and the source or inspiration for mission was in ecclesiology or soteriology. He argues that Karl Barth was the first in the modern period to 'articulate mission as an activity of God himself' (Laing 2009,90). He suggests that the influence of this Barthian theology

reached a peak in 1952 in the Willingen conference, where the classic doctrine of the *Missio Dei*; God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include another movement: Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. As such, mission or the bearing of good news outward was no longer understood to be an activity of the church but rather an activity of God of which the church was a participant and a product. This may not, however, be an accurate summary of Barth's thinking: rather than the church taking part in God's work, Barth states that the church, as an undeserving recipient of God's grace, has for purpose, to witness or testify to the love of God;

> As witnesses they have to repeat what God Himself has first said to them. This is the task laid upon them in their calling and to be discharged with their whole existence. This is the point of their particular existence. This makes them what they are in distinction from all others … They are witnesses. (Barth 1962,576).

Barth's understanding of *witness* which qualifies the term *mission* is one where the function of the community is not one of working *for* God to bring people in, as this is the role of God. Rather it is one which tells out the reality of God's salvation.

Whether Laing summarises Barth well or not, he correctly states that there is mission (as Barthian witness) because God loves people, not because the church needs to do it. 'It is the participation in the divine movement of God towards people' (Laing (2009, 91). This notion immediately challenges the peripheral nature of mission and evangelism described in chapter one: 'Mission is therefore not to be understood as an additional activity of the church, but as inherent to its very nature.' (Laing 2009,91).

In such case, *Missio Dei* undermines the notion that evangelism and mission are carried out by people sent somewhere overseas or to an event. It is integral to the life of the local church and it is therefore erroneous for any church to devolve or delegate mission to the exclusive agency of mission organisations. If mission *is* integral to the very nature of church, the church must be missional wherever it is located. It is this fundamental change in thinking which hopes to combat the issues of professionalism raised in chapter one.

Newbiggin (1958) states that although there must be a missional *dimension* to everything that the church does – worship, pastoral care, preaching etc., unless in the life of the church there is a specific point of expression for the missionary *intention*, the missionary *dimension,* which is proper to the whole life of the church, will be lost. While this sounds laudable, there is a clear recognisable danger of allowing the church to claim the missional *dimension* in all her activities by laying on the occasional outreach to fulfil the missional *intention* - this would be self-justifying and would just perpetuate the problem under a new title.

In fairness to Newbiggin (1958), his point is that the *intentional* mission must not be sub-contracted *out* of the church: to siphon it off and sub-contract it to mission organisations is to remove an essential ingredient from the nature of the church and it no longer becomes church, but something that resembles church. The point, however, is a clear address to the issue of specialised evangelists - mission cannot be subcontracted out.

There are, however, ontological objections to such a concept as *Missio Dei*. If God is at work in the secular world as well as within his church, how and to what extent can we discern his actions, and how much can the church be the centre of his missionary work? (Laing 2009,97).

The debate over where and how God is redeeming the world is ongoing between evangelicals and the ecumenical movement. There is also the more recent question of how God may be working in other religions. This is an important question, but one which will not be explored in this thesis.

Whether or not this is the case, and to what extent God is at work in secular society or through other religions does not, however, change the fact that for the real *Missio Dei* church, mission and evangelism must and do become part of her everyday life - both as a *dimension* and an *intention*. It aims to recognise that all the church is involved in mission all the time – events, speakers and replicable methods could not be the norm although they can still play a vital part in what Newbiggin(1958) describes as the missional *intention.*

If *Mission Dei* provides a conceptualisation of mission which addresses issues raised in chapter one, there still remains the issue of a church out-of-step with the world around it. The second part of this chapter tackles how the church should respond to the changing facets of society revealed in chapter two. Central to this thesis is the notion that the church must be selective in its response to societal change. After recognising the shift, the church must decipher and select which features of societal change contradict or challenge its teaching and which may help her relate her message with more relevance: how at its interface with society, it embraces and celebrates certain changes or rejects and subverts others. We now examine these shifts identified in chapter two, one-by-one, in an attempt to formulate an appropriate response.

Can we believe without belonging?

The first of these facets is the phenomenon observed by Davie (1994); *Believing without Belonging*. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002,22) comment that 'there is hardly a desire more widespread in the West today than to lead a life of your own.' Pembroke concurs;

> The desire for personal fulfilment and the drive to achieve are powerful forces in the postmodern society. People today in the West very commonly see themselves as autonomous, free agents endowed with the right to construct the trajectories of their lives. I am the author of my life: I am the creator of my own individual identity. This is the view of self-in-the-world that is ubiquitous today. (Pembroke 2010,404).

The factors which lie behind this move to individualisation are myriad and are detailed elsewhere (Pembroke 2010). Whether or not it is a good or bad move in itself is not the question – rather how does it affect the church and its capacity to be missional and evangelistic? Most commentators would appear to agree that it is one of the major impulses that lie behind the 'believe without belong' phenomenon which we are experiencing in the West (Davie 1994). For the purpose of this study we are trying to establish which tenets of contemporary society are conducive to bringing mission and evangelism back to the heartbeat of the church: is *believing without belonging* a good thing? Many would think not – While Pembroke sees there is some advantage in independence and self-reliance, he is adamant in his indictment:

> It is clear that there is a clash between this lifestyle and the Christian one…, the fact that Christians are incorporated into the Body of Christ through Baptism, and are

> called to live out their Baptism through service of others, means that the fullest expression of the life of faith involves giving and receiving in community. It is the failure in self-giving and the lack of concern for the common good associated with the individualistic perspective that creates the most distance from the gospel. (Pembroke 2010, 405).

Hovda (1991) argues in a similar vein in her book *Individualists are Incapable of Worship*. Such authors enumerate several contradictory factors of Christianity; from worship to the sacraments to the need to love your neighbour as yourself.

Pembroke (2010,408) identifies a significant factor in the emergence of the culture of individualism as the ‘high level of differentiation in contemporary society.’ By this he refers to how our social domain is fragmented into functional spheres. When we engage with others in the everyday world we do so through a variety of roles and personal representations. We function not simply as Mr Jones but rather as a taxpayer, a voter, a parent, someone's partner, a consumer, and much more. The postmodern self is a ‘pastiche personality’ or a social chameleon’, constantly borrowing bits and pieces desirable in a given situation. Because we are forced to constantly switch between various roles and sub-selves, all expressing their own style and governed by their own logic and social rules, there is the feeling that our sense of self is slipping through our fingers.

Such a fragmentation of roles makes committing to any such group troublesome and Colson & Larsen (2010,49) argue that *commitment* is a central tenet of the Christian faith;

> Certain characteristics are so central to Christianity that to neglect them is to become a walking oxymoron ….by abandoning commitment, our narcissistic culture has lost the one thing it seeks, happiness. Without commitment our lives will be barren and sterile.

If mainstream culture is leading us to *belong without believing*, and if this is counter to Christianity, then once again the church is called to subvert culture and be countercultural. Quicke (2006) argues in a similar vein calling for Baptists to ‘return to our roots of promoting a subversive spirituality in mission and evangelism’ (Quicke 2009, 171).

Should this be the case, then for mission and evangelism to operate in the heartbeat of the church, the church should become a place where believing goes hand-in-hand with belonging and vies against the fragmented nature of society. Evangelism should not be the promotion of a faith which is lived out in abstraction or in just another fragment of someone’s life. It should not lead to another role of *the Christian* to add to *the parent*, *the businessman, the neighbour*. It should be an activity that incorporates the person into the belonging body of the church (Chan 2006).

The impact on mission and evangelism is acute – evangelism leading to the *personalised crisis of faith* cannot be left unchecked in such contexts as it would arguably encourage more and more people to convert – and then continue alone. Mission and evangelism need to be pathways into belonging communities rather than hurdles to jump which lead nowhere. Kallenburg (2002,132) echoes a similar concern stating that ‘Evangelism is not just about passing on words but about incorporating people into a whole language system and worldview.’ For this to happen, the church itself must practise and express belonging and believing: a church which majors on community and relation.

Church – can we consume?

Davie (2006) commented on the consumer nature of society and how Christians will frequent less and expect to choose their place of worship. The root causes of these phenomenon: housing changes, mobility, employment changes, changing patterns of family, leisure time (Mission Shaped Church Report 2004) are such that they in themselves are arguably not contrary to the central tenets of Christianity and as such, the church that evangelises needs to take into account, map and adapt to such changes. Whereas the notion of belonging is apparent in the bible and tradition, the argument for meeting on Sunday specifically is less strong. A church with mission and evangelism at its core can no longer rely on a *come to us* mentality, one in which the church dictates its patterns and frequency of worship and expects people to fall into line. A church which regains a *go to them* mindset means that the church may expect a different attending pattern and offer different ways into it which reflect the changing features of contemporary society.

Experiential and Participative Approaches

In chapter two, Davie (2006) makes reference to the experiential or 'feel good' factor in certain forms of organised religion which are growing. One possible question here is whether the church should seek to promote this aspect of its life just because it strikes a chord with contemporary society or whether it should resist the whims of a hedonistic society. One angle is that this aspect of experience is central to Christianity - it is not that the church should be trying to emulate experience but should recognise and celebrate that religion, or certainly

some forms of religion, have this hard-wired into them. One could argue that in the present climate religion should be seeking to re-connect with its experiential forms.

This has been the subject and rationale for much study on the rise of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements over the past century (Anderson 2004, cf. Hilborn 2001, Albrecht 1999, Cox 1994, Martin 2002). The rise of this movement and its subsequent spread through the mainstream denominations has been accounted for in terms of both its anti-intellectual features but also its attraction to a more experiential post-modern society. The question here is whether churches which have mission and evangelism engrained in them and who are reacting to recent changes should reflect this aspect in their mission and evangelism.

One proponent of the Pentecostal experience is Cox, who argues that 'the experience of God in this approach to faith is so total, it shatters the cognitive packaging' (Cox 1994,58). There has been a wealth of protagonists in favour of such moves (Stibbe 2004 cf. Wimber 2002, Hillborn 2002). Such moves to the experiential are not without their critiques: Hilborn (2002) discusses some of the recurrent dangers of the *over-emotional* and the manipulation that has sometimes accompanied the more experiential approaches. Warner (2007,84) heeds a note of caution arguing that the history and roots of religion can be overlooked;

> Contemporaneity has been secured, while eccentricities of spirituality and exaggerated claims of present day success have been promoted. Here is a Mephistophelean pact with modernity: the hidden price tags are a ruptured tradition, a heightened potential for a *theologia gloriae* unfettered to a *theologia crucis*, a growing biblical illiteracy, a replacement of *parousia* hope with expectations of imminent success, and a quasi-gnostic, ecstatic and escapist spirituality.

The experiential to which Davie and others refer, is not only an experience of the charismatic nature. It also surfaces in the cathedral worship and the wider desire to participate, a phenomenon remarked by Durkheim (1912) mentioned in the previous chapter.

Oldstone-Moore (2009) argues that in areas such as religion, transmission of learning through a systematic and descriptive approach is not the most appropriate learning strategy. She argues that churches which adopt a more sustained experiential approach to learning (akin to that of aesthetic learning as in the teaching of the arts) would achieve more in this present generation;

> The personal response is indicative of a key feature of religion that is difficult to reproduce and grasp in a classroom setting: the power and transformative nature of the multisensory context of religious practice. The experience and practice of religion involves a combination of mind and body: it is intellectual, affective, and sensory. It is not easy to recreate or present in the classroom the transformative potency of religious practice which is often a concatenation of sight, smell, sound, touch and taste interacting with the prepared mind and heart, and the body in motion.(Oldstone-Moore 2009, 110).

Murrow (2006,208) coming from a different angle, also decries the passive nature of learning in church and discusses how men 'abhor the passivity of church and long to be challenged, to take risks and to play an active role.' This approach to evangelism may inadvertently be a positive catalyst in the re-addressing of the balance of genders currently displayed in the western church.

Riddell (2000 in Kirkpatrick 2000,27) also argues a similar point with reference to democracy. Democracy, in theory, allows for the individual to contribute to the shape of the wider; however, he states that for contemporary culture, 'the formal mechanisms of democratic decision making are regarded as remote and exclusive.' A vote is not nearly

enough. What is required is the sense of each person having a genuine contribution to make, and allowance made for their particular gift to be exercised. There is a call for participation – genuine involvement of people at the grass roots level, where they may begin to shape their own destiny.

If the zeitgeist is one of experience and participation and these are commensurate with the Christian message then these factors must feature in churches seeking to place mission and evangelism at their heart beat. They must promote a sense of belonging, but also be big on transferring their message through more than intellectual means – arguably what is needed is an approach to mission and evangelism which allows the outsider to participate in the finding of the faith and its community more fully. Not only 'belong before you believe' but more importantly, take part before you believe. This approach is not, however, without its problems. Riddell argues that established institutions are not good at coping with this new approach.

> It appears to be chaotic, time consuming and open to abuse. Those who are used to exercising power as if it were their natural right become frustrated when the group process allows even the most reticent participant a chance to contribute. Where the goal is efficiency, programme people will be frustrated. (Riddell in Kirkpatrick 2000,42).

A second problem could exist if we consider the pervading trend towards fragmented lives. Participation per se may not be wholesome - modern living encourages people to participate in fragmented areas in abstract ways. Maybe it is more important to think about the quality and connectedness of the participation. The faith person must be the work person who must be the dad and the neighbour –he must be *joined up*. Being a participant Christian in abstraction from the rest of your life may just be adding to the problem - another identity is created and ultimately the sense of insignificance is brought further into the church.

An alternative would be where the participant drew together several fragments of their modern life and wove them together: where their participation was in some way significant and coherent.

Furthermore, making peoples' participation a significant one is arguably a risky business – it implies that the activity of the church is to some extent dependant on the participant and if they default then the activity of the church defaults with it. One does arguably see a Jesus in the New Testament who was to some degree dependant on the participation of those exploring his testimony. He could not have done his evangelism were it not for the hospitality of Zaccheus and Saint Peter's family – such a church leans towards an evangelism which invites not only participation but also reliance and dependence on those with whom it wishes to engage.

Conclusion

In summary of chapter three, for mission and evangelism to pervade the church, it needs to re-adjust its understanding of these activitie: a change of mindset proposed by *Mission Dei*. Secondly, a church responding to cultural change should be on one hand flexible and adapt to cultural changes, and on the other hand, ready to subvert pernicious cultural tendencies such as the fragmentation of community.

One such movement within recent church history that claims to adhere to these principles is the Emerging Church or Fresh Expressions. The purpose of the following chapter is to establish whether or not this movement has managed to successfully embrace these changes -

whether this new expression provides an example where mission and evangelism find their place in the heart of the church and whether they connect with the world around them.

Chapter 4 - An Emerging Church

This chapter examines the Emerging church and Fresh Expressions as a model of the responses detailed in the previous chapter. It will argue that although such movements *do* recognise and address some crucial aspects of the problems, they have been far more effective at adapting to the societal changes listed in chapter two than the inclusion of mission and evangelism in the regular life of the whole church. In their attempt to distance themselves from the problems inherent in Evangelicalism they have ousted evangelism from their ranks and created a new faction - one in which pioneering missional leadership and regular evangelism seem worryingly absent.

The Emerging church movement has grown out of Christians who, in recent years, have cast doubt on traditional approaches to church and in turn, its approach to mission and evangelism (Chan 2004, cf. Croft et al 2005, Finney 2004, Nazir-Ali 1995). Such traditional approaches are described by Croft;

> We have become accustomed to a certain way of church which has evolved in a particular time and culture and which has worked reasonably well for many generations. (Croft 2002, 16).

Croft (2002) details the characteristics of inherited church as Sunday morning meetings comprising people brought up in church for whom church is a default. He describes the life of such congregations as fairly predictable and stable: ministry in such churches is characterised by full-time stipendiary ministers calling on help from volunteers, each typically having a building which provides the anchor for its life and work. Croft then identifies the issue for this kind of inherited church: ‘We find ourselves living in a period of significant social, economic,

technological and cultural change such that this inherited way of being church is no longer working well' (Croft 2002, 20).

Moynagh (2004) notes that in certain circles, hope for revival of the inherited church was fanned during the nineties in the *decade of evangelism* but despite valiant efforts, the decline doubled - church was not working. Gibbs (2005) recounts how mainstream churches have recently spent enormous amounts of time and effort trying to attract young people into their ranks in a vain effort to stem declining numbers. Burke's pessimism is apparent: 'They will realise that they were wasting their money and walk away. After this, there will be people who apply the gospel in postmodern cultures' (Burke in Gibbs 2005, 15). A similar slightly depressing picture is painted elsewhere (Croft 2002, cf. Moynagh 2004, Mission Shaped Church 2004). This diagnosis is not unanimous, Billings (2010) for one, is not completely convinced. Notwithstanding, there is a wealth of literature all reporting a somewhat challenging situation for the inherited church models. It is to this backdrop that the movement known as the Emerging Church has arisen and it is to this movement which we will now turn our focus.

The Emerging Church

LeRon Shults (2009,9) argues that Emerging Church defies definition and is more complex than it might initially seem: a 'multifaceted phenomenon sometimes referred enigmatically as *a movement*.' Gibbs (2005,23) echoes a similar ambiguity stating that it is 'a disparate movement, diverse and fragmented.' He suggests its insiders do not like to think of it as a movement at all, but rather a *conversation*. The Church of England's *Mission-Based Church Report* (2004) comments that the description *emerging* is good in that it suggests evolutionary

but conversely may invite existing churches to wait to see what happens. Within the anglican movement, the current language is *Fresh Expressions*, which Edson (in Gibbs 2005) suggests has a sense of being rooted in a tradition but that something lively and new is stirring within that. Emerging communities are present in a wide variety of traditions, mainly Protestant but also Roman Catholic as well as other contexts such as prisons, local government, coffee houses, and other non-traditional settings. Geographically the Emerging Church appears predominantly across North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand (Gibbs 2005).

With such nebulous definitions, it is worth giving some description of the plethora of expressions to gain a feeling of the movement. Gibbs (2005) lists: the bite-sized and unobtrusive; the 30,000-seater American church; cell group churches networked together; churches tied to work networks rather than neighbourhoods such as the police force; congregational where the congregations meet throughout the week at other venues; café church; midweek church; youth congregations; community development groups where expressions of worship are low-key e.g. knitting group or football team. Moynagh (2004) notes that some mix and match these approaches concluding they come in 'a dizzy array of shapes and sizes' (2004,13). In summary, Moynagh (2004,11) suggests that key words in defining the new patterns are 'contextual, customized and experimental.' Most writers on the subject are adamant that the movement is not the latest fad in inherited church but something fundamentally different in its ethos.

In response to the issues of participation and a more experiential faith raised in chapter 3, emerging churches *do* appear to incorporate more variety and access for people in contemporary society if we consider work-placed church, social action and community groups.

To address the question of whether this movement lives out *all* the necessary responses in chapter three we need to look not only at its forms but also its underpinning values albeit heeding a word of caution voiced by Moynagh (2004, 37) who says that 'to imply that it is framed by an onset of values could suggest a coherence that is not the case.'

Gibbs contends that there are three core practices of the Emerging Church: identifying with the life of Jesus; transforming secular space; and living as community. The *Mission Shaped Church* report (2004) lists five:

1. Focus on God the Trinity.
2. Incarnational – it is shaped by those it is seeking to reach.
3. Transformational – it exists for the transformation of the community it exists to serve.
4. It makes disciples – draws people to Christ and encourage a lifestyle not outside but within the culture from which they came.
5. Relational – its ethos and style are open to change when new members join.

According to Moynagh (2004) the key values , to which he refers as *seven faces of God*, are: interdependence; experimentation; transformation of the church itself so that it can transform society; sacrifice or embracing the death of some preconceived notions of how church should be expressed; reproduction; diversity; and unity. While these are laudable values, there is nothing to suggest that they are unique to the emerging idea: many inherited churches would claim them, also.

Chapter one highlighted the problem of mission and evangelism being left in the hands of a select few and the problems therein. An assumption within this movement is that it challenges such elitism by its focus on community (Moynagh 2004, Mission Shaped Church Report 2004). Kallenburg concurs with the notion suggesting that the gospel will remain a mystery to the surrounding culture unless the church lives it out as a body in the form of its life together; 'Only when the gospel is linked to such concrete illustration can outsiders say, I see what you mean' (Kallenburg 2002, 50). Murray (2008) reports that many in the ranks of Fresh Expressions have completely rejected the *suspicious* notion of evangelism which conducts forays outside the church walls to attract people in, in favour of exploring more authentic community. He argues that they no longer *do* evangelism or mission but rather it is inherent in their expression of community. Trilling (1986) argues that this was precisely the assertion of Vatican II – a serving church.

Other writers suggest that mission also occurs in the embodied communal life which is being redemptively transformed or 'reordered in salutary ways that manifest justice in the world' (LeRon Shults 2009,11). Gibbs (2005) argues that the Emerging Church is no longer centripetal, flowing in, with a come to us attitude, but rather centrifugal.

Should this truly be the case, it is a strong argument in favour of the proposition that Emerging Church is missional and evangelistic through its community. Furthermore, it addresses the heart of the *dis-ease* described in the introduction about the context in which church and mission takes place. Not only that, but it also assumes that church is a growing system and not a maintaining one.

The topical notion of *community* is seemingly offered by the Emerging Church movement as a *cure* for all the current ills if the individualised inherited church. While there is certainly truth in some of its claims, it is not always apparent *how* different churches avoid removing certain roles and professionalising them such as the evangelist. *It just happens in community* raises a question over Newbiggin's notion of the missional intention (1958) cited in the previous chapter. The reality is that the movement is so disparate that it is difficult to make any generalisations. It does, however, raise the issue of leadership in the Emerging Church.

In terms of relating to the context, Moynagh (2001) states that Emerging Church is keen to express church in the culture of the people involved as opposed to designing church in terms of those who already attend and then inviting those outside to attend and conform.

These values at first examination do appear to address the very issues in question - certainly mission and evangelism lie at its heart and it clearly attempts to respond to the context around it . If the church's core value is to transform secular space or transform society by identifying with the life of Jesus then one would expect a regular commitment to a life of mission. Furthermore, they are values which seek to adapt and be flexible to societal changes while still seeking to subvert individualism through their emphasis on relation and community. The values speak clearly of adaptation as new people arrive without forcing conformity – a promising start.

Certain Emerging writers also engage with the debate on *Mission Dei* cited in chapter three over whether God's transforming work is conducted just by the church or outside in secular society or other religions. LeRon Shults (2009) states that in addition to taking good news to

others, the church ought also to be open to learning something new and good from authentic encounters with other groups.

> For many Emergents, sharing in the apostolic mission of Christ takes the form of providing hospitable space and time for hearing other voices. This requires openness to the transformative possibilities of the future that does not too quickly silence others by enforcing the same legal regulations that guided one's tradition in the past. (LeRon Shults 2009,15).

Pete Rollins from the IKON church in Ireland gives flesh to this idea describing their ‘Evangelism Project’ and ‘Last Supper’;

> We have a group called the Evangelism Project that goes out to be evangelized. We visit other religious traditions, both within Christianity and outside Christianity—Buddhism, humanism, Jewish traditions, Scientology. We go to listen and learn and to be transformed… We also have a group called the Last Supper. Twelve of us meet in a supper room in a bar, and we invite public figures to come and talk to us about what they believe and why they believe it. If we don't like what they say, it's their last supper with us. (Rollins 2009, 21)

Within the Emerging Church movement, (Driscoll 2009) betrays his suspicion and notes that there are vastly differing views on how far along the spectrum one can entertain *listening to be transformed*. However far one does choose to go, this aspect of the Emerging Church does appear to hold promise for a missional movement.

All Plain Sailing?

Such enthusiasm displayed by the proponents of the movement is not without criticism: Moynagh (2004) is one of several who readily admit that certain forms of Emerging Church cater too readily for Christians who are disillusioned with church. The *Alt. Worhsip* style churches are an example that centre on experimenting with worship and liturgy and display a

particular dislike of overt evangelism. They are criticized for having quickly laid down mission and evangelism as an intention (Mission shaped Church 2004). They are also amongst the most vocal in their repudiation of inherited church.

An uncomfortable aspect of this repudiation is its often dismissive nature. Moynagh (2004, 59) states 'Many existing congregations are *dead church walking'* which seems a misplaced comment for someone who sees *unity* as a goal. Maybe he is referring to the unity of all those with like minds! This, in my opinion, is one of the strongest criticisms levelled against the emerging movement. It claims a central commitment to being missional but spends a large proportion of its time and energy defining its activity not in terms of mission but rather in terms of its alternative approach to the inherited.

In terms of evangelism, Billings (2004) suggests that there are more Christians *outside* the church than in, and the church itself has a mission to cater for them. Earlier we heard that mission in the Emerging Church often happens in their house not in ours: the question remains – who are *they*? Should this style of church really be conducting its mission with disillusioned Christians?

Other kinds of Emerging Church clearly *do* have a more clearly defined missional focus such as some café churches, congregational models and network churches. Base Ecclesial Communities are another cited example: a liberation theology approach seeking to bring hope to the oppressed and challenge unjust structures (Mission Shaped Church report 2004). It is, however, questionable, whether such communities would consider themselves as Emerging Church. This also raises a more general issue of the Emerging Church movement claiming every pioneering alternative under its wings, without its assent. There are clearly some

wonderful examples within the emerging movement of mission and evangelism conducted in community - the real question is are they wonderful exceptions?

One unclear aspect of the future of the movement is linked to its leadership and vision. Croft (2002,32) remarks that ‘a clear vision for the future is essential to the development of any endeavour’ . He is adamant of two things: the need for a fresh vision for church and that this vision will only emerge from ‘immersion and familiarity with our own context.’

Bartz (2009) criticises the process of identifying and training leaders in the inherited church stating that we rely too heavily on formation for the post: The ‘one-size-fits-all or outside-in understanding of leadership for the Episcopal Church in the United States is a failing model’ (Bartz 2009, 3). He argues that the narratives of the biblical texts recount leadership developing out of gifts and context directly tied to the uniqueness of the aspiring leader and the context or times in which they are leading (an outside-in model). Once again, the identification and growth of leaders is seen as very much earthed in the context as opposed to externally accredited. This is something that the emerging movement aspires to in its ecclesiology. Gibbs (2005) is adamant that Emerging Church models a radically different ecclesiology reflecting the whole church’s call to mission. He and other writers comment on the church functioning as a body, a typically Pauline notion found in Paul’s letter to the Romans and the first letter to the Corinthian Church

Hunter (2009,92), however, is not so optimistic. He complains that after ten or twelve years of the Emerging Church;

> You have to ask where anything has been built. Evangelism has been so muted and the normal building of structures and processes hasn't moved forward because there's no positive, godly imagination for doing either evangelism or leadership. Such things are by definition utilitarian.

This criticism by Hunter is a pertinent one. It begs the question stated clearly in the Mission Shaped Church Report: 'If the church is not missionary, it has denied itself and its calling and has departed from the very nature of God.' (2004,41).

In summary, the Emerging Church and Fresh Expressions do seem to be a model of how the church could potentially respond to some of the objectives in chapter three, especially in its willingness and ability to be flexible both in structure and in the experience and participation of Christianity: mission and evangelism become a part of the life of the church in the hands of the whole church. The key here is the word *potentially*: there are lesson to be learnt from the initial forays of the movement: evangelism cannot be disregarded due to past embarrassments; secondly, imaginative leadership is crucial and this issue has not been addressed. It would appear that in the rebuttal of inherited models of leadership, the emerging attempts at leadership have not been realistic or imaginative enough. With such considerations in mind, I will now move to the final chapter, one in which I will attempt to summarise and outline a way forward.

Chapter 5 - A Way Forward

At the outset of this piece, I stated my thesis that the purported good news of the Christian message is no longer being communicated well in the evangelical church due to a set of parameters that have developed both within it and around it. I have argued that these parameters have produced a set of limitations which impede the church's ability to be missional and evangelistic in the twenty-first century. In this final chapter, I will argue that the limitations which the evangelical church needs to address are two-fold; they necessitate;

1. A different style of evangelism
2. A different understanding of the role of church.

I will argue that the limitations imposed as a result of the growth of the Evangelical movement will be overcome largely by taking an approach to evangelism which is both *communal* and *participative*. Such an approach will engage twenty-first century society, both adopting certain features of its culture and selectively subverting others.

Secondly, I will argue that this approach cannot work unless the church understands herself in a fundamentally different light. Drawing from the evidence in all chapters, I will argue that what is needed is not a new movement such as the Emerging Church, but rather a realisation that the church is not just pastoral but also inherently missionary and evangelistic: a corporate witness to what God has done. Only then can *any* mission and evangelism find its place within the life and work of the church.

For this change to happen in *all* the church, I will argue that it is the leadership of the church which first needs to shift; from pastorally minded to missionary minded. For the church herself to have any chance of being both pastoral and missional, its leadership needs to *be* pastoral and missional.

A Different Style of Evangelism for the Twenty-First Century

Chapter one identified that a key pillar of Evangelicalism was *Activism;* its inherent desire to *let others know*. This thesis argues that it is crucial to regain that pillar but in a different way to the *individual activism* described in the first chapter, which is one of *ad hoc* evangelism events, prescriptive in its methods and left in the hands of select individuals all seeking for an essentially individual faith experience.

Rather, I advocate a neo-evangelical *Communal Activism;* I suggest that communal activism has three principle tenets, all found in the gospel writings and more attuned to the context of twenty-first century Britain. Firstly, it is evangelism that is undertaken as a church: 'The gospel is not always to be sung a solo but also as a choral piece' (Kallenburg 2002,49). Its objective is to witness to what God has done as a communal experience rather than taking it upon itself to convert people – *Missio Dei*.

Secondly, it must exhibit *Communal Incorporation;* it must recognise that people finding faith in the twenty-first century need a conversion which is fuller than an individual affair: the *crisis* conversion of traditional Evangelicalism has been eclipsed by the *gradual* conversion of the late 20th century, but neither exhibit the inevitable long-term consequence of conversion: 'incorporation into a spiritual reality - the body of Christ.' (Chan 2006,69). This approach to

twenty-first century evangelism duly calls for a subversion of the dominant individualist mindset pervading late-modern society - *believing without belonging*.

However, it is erroneous to invite people to visit or attend church in the hope that they will *belong before believing*. Recent attempts to invite people to church, I argue, should really be coined *attend before you believe* as they seek to secure the attendance or spectatorship of seekers rather than actively incorporating them. As such, *attend before you believe* is not an appropriate response to the recent changes in post-Christendom Britain reflecting the need of contemporary people to *participate*: 'it is the taking part that matters for the late modern populations.' (Durkheim 1912,82).

As such, this thesis advocates what I called *Participative Evangelism*. This is an approach to evangelism which reflects the communal activism of Evangelicalism and the dual understanding of conversion combined with an open invitation to those outside of the church to take part fully in the church's life including even its evangelism. In doing so, this approach recognises the intellectual aspect of evangelism but also invites and even requires participation.

I have recently attempted to express this concept in a variety of ways: A community fun-day which is run and hosted by the church but staffed by the local community members; Evangelistic theatre where the participants are non-church attendees; Beer and Carols night in a struggling community pub; and finally, an evangelism course inspired by recent TV documentary series 'Make Me a Christian' (Rothbart 2009). Participants are presented with the basics of Christian faith and asked to consider and discuss them as with many popular evangelism courses. In addition to this, they are also asked to take part in the working life of

the church including its mission and evangelism, work in a homeless shelter, varied Christian worship and a piece of street theatre as well as corporate prayer. The hope was that they would actually grasp faith better if they took part in its very expression themselves.

Such approaches, grounded in experiential learning (Kolb 1984) allow people not only to learn in different ways but encourage commitment and belonging rather than just learning. They model faith as a community event and also allow the person to experience faith on more than an intellectual or charitable basis. The person is not being asked to understand faith and is not the recipient of charitable giving but rather a participant; learning by doing.

Evangelism: All the Church, All the Time

Such participative and communal approaches in themselves, however, do not address the issue in its entirety. Left as things are, they would be new, fashionable or innovative approaches with a short shelf-life. For such approaches to thrive, a fundamental change in the church's *rasion d'être* is requisite.

Having examined the Emerging Church in chapter four, this thesis does not advocate a new movement but rather that the whole church recognises herself as entirely and inherently missional: a witness in the world. Any parallel movement looking to distance itself from the church and expending its energies on defining itself as *apart* is potentially counter-productive in that its reform is needed in *all* the church.

Furthermore, as Billings (2004) rightly retorts, not all the inherited church need to consigned to the scrap heap! He rightly points out that there are many local contexts where people still

look to the inherited church and are not seeking post-Christendom innovation. As such, any way forward should be confident and robust enough to recognise and celebrate the success of traditional models. They would exist separately, alongside or as 'mixed-economy churches' (Shier-Jones 2009,71). The key is not in the approach but the recognition of the missional nature of *all* the church, whatever its expression.

In recognising its missional nature, all church must at all times face up to engaging the outside world with an authentic witness, however awkward and unpalatable that might be in any given time or situation: the *Great Commission* was never the *Great Suggestion*. For this to happen I argue finally that there needs to be a change in the nature and style of church leadership.

Missional Leadership

The issue over leadership is evidently a challenge for any such pioneering movement and is arguably *the* major issue to address. This thesis would argue that leadership lies at the heart of the solution. Nurturing an imaginative and pioneering leadership as opposed to a predominantly pastoral one is key. However, this kind of leader means that the church herself needs to address *how* and *who* it recruits for leadership; how they are trained and then just as important, what structures they are released into and how they are catered for. Watson (2008) notes that the current model does not naturally attract such leaders. Unless the whole church starts to recruit a more missional style leader then the problem will worsen as the typical priest is highly pastoral rather than missional. Furthermore, if the *Mission Shaped Church Report* is recommending new forms of training, there clearly must be a lack of missional focus in training and arguably a lack of opportunities in which to be nurtured, post-training.

It is into such leaders that the notion of evangelism must be hard-wired if there is any hope at all that they will not sideline evangelism as pressure mounts from within and outside to do so. The question of recruiting the right people would seem of the utmost importance as it is dubious whether any form of training could instil evangelistic perspective into pastorally minded individuals.

However, as Pattison (2008) warns, there is then the danger of the pendulum swinging the opposite way and pastoral care becoming neglected in a mission-focused church. This warning is a crucial one to consider in any shift.

In some regards, the denominational churches have shown that they *are* willing to react to the situation. Certain dioceses within the Church of England appear to have taken the *Mission Shaped Church Report* seriously and promoted courses for people wishing to explore another way of doing church with the *Mission Shaped Ministry Course* and the *Pioneer* course for training clergy. Herein lies another pitfall: by making such pioneering ministers *official*, it could disenfranchise the laity and place mission and evangelism once again in the hands of a select few: the very thing that they wanted to avoid!

In conclusion, as (Watson 2008, 165) states, 'Any church without some form of a G*o for me* dynamic has an alarmingly limited shelf life.' If spirituality is here to stay as chapter two attests, then maybe the real question stands: will this generation of church-goers and leaders react quickly enough to retain its place in tomorrow's church?

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