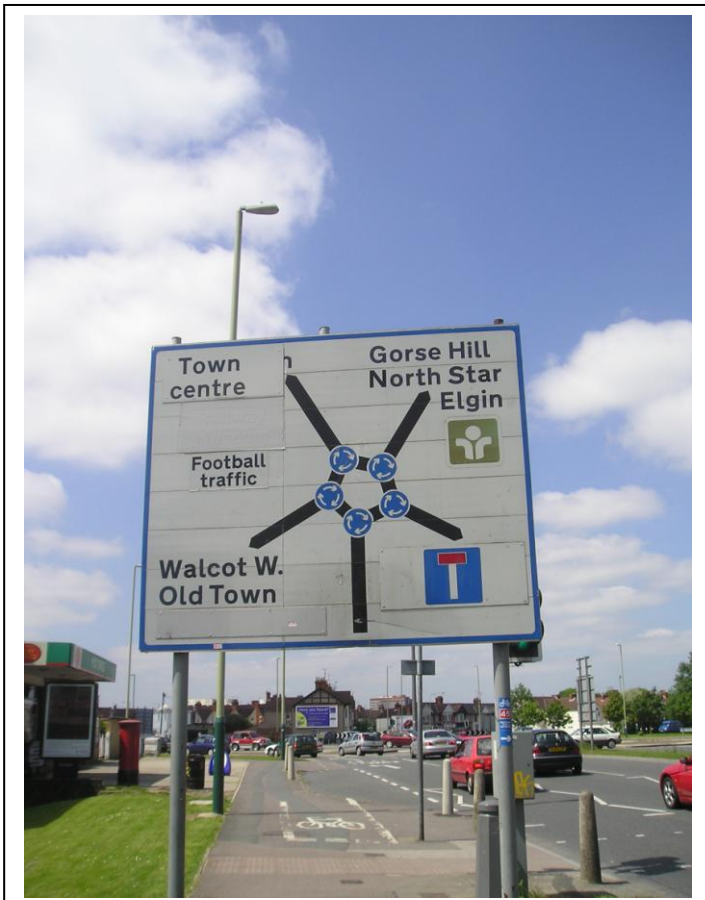


Crying out for a Polycentric Church

Christ centred and culturally focused congregations.

Joe Hasler



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congregations.

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Church in Society and Rochbury

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I am grateful to Paul Ballard for helping me engage with the literature on Contextual and Practical Theology and the contents of chapters 4 and 5 is largely material I didn't use in a thesis.

This book is written from the perspective of one who has worked for 15 years as a community development worker, and who then spent 15 years as a parish priest, on council built housing estates. I grew up in post war London in a working class area by the River Thames. So I apologise if what I have written contains insensitivities to other cultures and I hope you will take the trouble to correct me. The reader is asked not to dismiss this perspective as irrelevant because they themselves do not live or work on council built estates or their own situation is different. I would encourage readers to ask what the questions raised would mean in their own situation.

Joe Hasler August 2006

Preface

The influential Anglican report *Mission-Shaped Church* (2004), remarks that the Church of England has not responded very much to the debate in the world-wide church about the relevance of culture for mission. The inculturalisation literature recognises the truth in the claim of the theologies from Africa, Asia and Latin America that the traditional theology of Europe is just that, and cannot claim universal status.

Joe Hasler offers a significant contribution to this discussion, not only by guiding us through the recent literature on culture, mission and the construction of local theologies, but in his application of these insights to the situation of the Christian faith in England, and in particular, the attitudes and policies of the Church of England. Hasler points out that the issue in England has been obscured by the tendency to refer only to various ethnicities when we speak of multi-culturalism. For most of us, the expression 'multi-cultural' suggests racial diversity, big cities, Asian restaurants, mosques growing faster than churches, and book covers illustrating African, Asian and Anglo-Saxon children all happily playing together around a sand tray. If we think of multi-culturalism in the white population at all, it tends to be in terms of the Scots, the Irish and the Welsh, with the English occupying a rather doubtful position as a large but ill defined majority.

Hasler's argument is that white culture itself is many sided. He distinguishes rural culture, ethnic culture, the management, professional culture, and finally the culture of the largely white council estates, where he himself has worked for many years. He regards *Mission-Shaped Church* as not only ignoring this complex group of cultures, but as giving priority to the sub-urban, professional class, who by and large form the clergy and certainly the management of the Church of England. The networks so strongly advocated by the Report are the knowledge, employment

and technical networks along which the people of post-modernity move, and the new expressions of church the report looks for, even when special churches for the poor are advocated, tend to be described from this point of view. This in itself would not matter if it were self-conscious, if the partisan character of the perspective were acknowledged, but it is not. The Report thus leaves little or no imaginative space for otherness, and thus represents one more example of the central control exercised by the national church for centuries. It is this taken-for-granted truth of what is really a particular point of view that dominates and stifles.

Hasler argues this case with a number of telling examples of the distinctive nature of the culture of the council estates, describing the different roles of the home, the family, the meaning of the street, and the significance of projects. He does not believe that the professional managerial culture should be ignored; on the contrary, he recognises its vital contribution in the areas of finance and administration, but he insists upon the need for what he calls a poly-centric church. The theology for such a church will emerge from those who live and identify with each cultural sector, and these may not necessarily be geographical divisions of cities, since the cultures usually jostle against each other, and inter-mingle.

The outcomes of Hasler's analysis are striking, and perhaps a little unnerving for any readers of the managerial and administrative class who may get that far. Clergy need not be trained for a ministry to all the cultures, and in fact in many poor areas paid clergy should give way to missionaries who from within the culture of the estates can gradually begin the task of re-shaping church. The paraphernalia of parish council, impressive building, church wardens and budgets may have to be relaxed in favour of a less formal kind of existence, although Hasler is well aware of the sensitivity within working class white culture towards the holy, and the demand for a proper ritualisation of

holiness. This could, perhaps, find expression through shrines and holy places of various kinds without the oppressive presence of great Victorian churches, almost entirely empty.

What are we to make of the experience of ‘going to church’, and how did it happen that Christian faith has come to centre around this kind of habit? In *The Conversion of Europe* (Harper-Collins, 1997) Richard Fletcher, the medieval historian, has shown how Europe was very largely converted to Christian faith by the impressive power of richly adorned bishops, who had the wealth to summon heavily armed escorts, and in adversity could be protected by thick monastery walls. They created a network of churches and were able to impose taxes upon the people. A long time ago, however, the people of England became restless with this sort of thing, and if it were not for the sacrificial work of the many dedicated priests and members of religious orders who live and work amongst them today, the people on the council estates would have rejected the church even more thoroughly than they have.

Hasler’s book does not examine the origin of these attitudes, nor does he go deeply into the character of the resistance which his views might encounter. This is partly because he limits his writing to the question of culture, and partly because this is a small book. It is, never the less, a small book with a big message, a cry that must be heard by a church that still shows many signs of wanting to listen and understand, and act.

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July 2006

Introduction. The Need for Polycentric Church

In 1972 I found myself living in an ex-Methodist manse on a council housing estate in Birmingham. In a household of young Christians, I found myself back amongst the surrounding working class culture of my childhood, although it took me many years to be able to put words to that cultural awareness. I was employed as a community development worker on this housing estate at a time when most of such work was being done in the inner-city housing action areas. From then on I worked among, and mostly lived in, the council built homes of Birmingham, Essex, Liverpool and Bristol. With the on-set of my mid-life crises, one response to the many personal questions that arose was to be ordained as a deacon, and then a priest, in the Church of England. Since then I have lived in council house areas and worked as a parish priest.

In most of these places I have witnessed the establishment of, or the existence of, a working class congregation that has endeavoured to maintain the demands of an essentially suburban church. I also found, that as an Anglican vicar, I have felt the expectation to be something akin to a branch manager of *C-of-E plc*, keeping things on track. Fortunately, or otherwise, I have not always been good at meeting these expectations. Partly, this has been because I have never quite shaken off being a community development worker and I find myself intensely interested in local culture and local responses to issues and concerns. Probably because I have this particular history and perspective I have begun to ask how the congregations I have worked with can be church in their own culture. I have encouraged them to be proud of aspects of their own lived sociology and the narrative of their 'class culture'.

This book is an attempt to harness the insights of the work of theologians from all over the world and from many denominations and theological schools. However, Aylward Shorter's insights stand out. He talks about the African Church's struggles to be culturally African, but within a church that is essentially 'Euro-centric' in its expectations and behaviours. This has opened my eyes to the situation in which I have found myself for more than 30 years. Congregations in working class communities find themselves having to learn the ways of a suburbo-centric church. What difference would Shorter's plea for a polycentric church make?

Of course, we can ask why the lower income communities should make the running. Of course, we could wait for the people who call the shots when it comes to change. But experience tells us that when we are weak, structurally and economically, we need to take cultural action for freedom.

Part 1 of this book starts from **the practice** of being church in the world.

Part 2 of this book starts from **contextual theology**.

Both sit next to each other demanding a synthesis of Practice and Theology that points to the need for a Polycentric Church.

Part 1. From the Practice

In Chapter 1, The Culture Gap, I want to point to the cultural differences in Britain. I want to point to the complications we create by failing to give attention to cultural differences. This chapter outlines the culture gap experienced by those who inhabit working class housing estates. My approach here is to examine the interactions between and within groups of people. The actual exchanges that take place on the ground. These are the things that I have noticed in reality. These are some of the social realities that have made me aware of not just cultural difference but cultural dissonance.

The first part of this chapter has appeared in *Good News – an occasional bulletin of the Mission and Public Affairs Division, Archbishops Council and Crucible 2006*. This section of the Chapter is not just a critique of the report *Mission-shaped Church* but highlights the sociological differences apparent between the sub-cultures in Britain.

In the middle section of this first chapter I have used the section about Leadership that appeared in *Crucible* in Spring 2003, but I have changed the ending and my conclusions. This section also emphasises the way that British culture is not monochrome but has a number of varieties.

In the final section of this chapter, I use the example of ‘projects’ to highlight the way power relations between cultures obstructs an honest exchange between them. What cannot be ignored in these practical situations is the important part that culture plays in the reality of people’s everyday lives.

Running concurrently with these fascinations and interests with context, culture and mission in my working life has been an arena called Urban Theology. This arena has been concerned with the effects of urbanization and has perhaps been too much seduced by the notion of ‘the city’. The result has been a pre-occupation with geography, zones and neighbourhoods.

In Chapter 2, Context and Urban Theology, I approach how Urban Theology can take notice of Culture and also acknowledge the reality of the suburbs. The assumption is often that if you are white you are all the same. This chapter looks to ways that we may understand difference in an urbanised nation and address it positively. I want to note that the ‘professional and managerial culture’ that we associate with the suburbs appears to me to be singularly un-analytical about its own culture. It often assumes what is true for itself is to be true for everyone. Yet Urban Theology needs to be more cognisant of the suburbs if it is to

address the power relations within an urbanised society and not just the geographical sections of the city. At present we tend to talk about the city in geographical terms and our analysis misses many opportunities to re-evaluate our opportunities in mission and ministry.

In Chapter 3, Future Mission, I return to the locality of Estate Churches, and to the idea of a Polycentric Church. Here the intention is to think about what to do to support mission that recognises different cultures, both in the local or parish arena, and what this means to being a whole, or catholic, church. In talking about local estates, I have made some suggestions of how we might think about trying to shape churches in working class culture on a different model. The section about polycentric church points out that when we want to make changes in the way we approach less affluent cultures they need to be accompanied by changes in the way we construct power relations within the church as a whole. If we want those changed approaches, or fresh expressions, to be meaningful to the whole, the hope is that we can free less affluent congregations from a dependency on the more affluent. Freed from dependency, interdependent cultures can grow into the mutuality suggested by polycentric models. If we fail to make these steps, then we are in danger of replicating the predominant suburban models of being church and the evangelisation of other cultures will be impossible.

Part 2. From the Theology

I suppose it is because I am naturally suspicious of the kind of cultural romanticism that seeks to set artificial boundaries around culture, or to freeze it at a particular time, that I found myself looking for experiences in other parts of the world. When I was studying at Queen's Theological College in Birmingham, John Hull introduced me to the work of Paulo Freire in the 1970s, and then I became aware of the world of liberation theology in the 70s and 80s and later the conversations about inculturation. In Part 2, Chapter 4 is a survey of various Models of Contextual Theology

and Chapter 5 is my evaluation of them. It could be described as ‘the best sense that I can make of the material’ to inform my practice as a parish priest in a working class, council housing community. This evaluation leads me to want to adopt an ‘inculturation’ approach and it ends with the argument that such an approach inevitably demands a polycentric church.

There have been two important Reports recently. The first, about mission and evangelism, called *Mission-Shaped Church*. The second, about Urban Life and Faith, called *Faithful Cities*. This book tries to tread the area where these two significant and important reports overlap. John Hull’s critique of the first report strongly points to the lack of clarity about seeing the Church as the Kingdom or as a servant of the Kingdom.¹ In his critique is a question about whether social and justice concerns are taken seriously enough. Urban theology is open to questions about whether it takes missiological concerns seriously enough. This book is intended to be a positive contribution to the ‘fresh expressions’ agenda from an urban theology perspective, and from working with working class communities in particular.

¹ *Mission Shaped Church: A Theological Response*. J.Hull. 2006. p5

Part 1. From the practice

Chapter 1 – The Culture Gap

We have networks too

- but they are different to yours.

(A Response to *Mission Shaped Church*)

I spent 15 years as a community development worker before I spent 15 years as a parish priest, working on council house estates for both. One of my most used analytical tools was to identify communications networks and social networks. So the idea of a council built estate for me immediately conjures up the image of social networks. You can imagine the shock I experienced when the recent report, *Mission-Shaped Church*, seemed to say that the more mobile professional social classes operate primarily in networks whilst the non-mobile poor ‘...may still have a network based where they live’,² as if networks in our area are less prevalent than those elsewhere.

Having recovered, I was pleased to see that this report assumes the need to ‘inculturate’ the faith and therefore treats seriously the social realities of networks and neighbourhoods. It does point out that these ‘overlay’ each other.

The report also believes that ‘Mobility has become a major maker of inclusion or exclusion’.³ Those of us who work in working class communities know that less mobile communities are just as adept at excluding or shutting out social workers and other professionals, if they so choose.

² *Mission-Shaped Church* 2004 p5

³ *ibid* p6

The overwhelming impression given by the report is that fresh expressions of church are to be found in networks and not in neighbourhoods. However, the report does stress the importance of initiatives for the poor. 'Planting needs to be among networks for the affluent and in places where the poor are.'⁴

Yet *Mission-Shaped Church* seems to indicate, that in urban priority area neighbourhoods, fresh expressions of church are obstructed by the legal business associated with parish, and the middle class influences of training leaders. Two fresh expressions of church are mentioned in relation to poorer areas: Base Ecclesial Communities and Cell Churches.

The report says is that it thinks that Base Ecclesial Communities do not exist in England, partly because the existing neighbourhood response of a 'parish' entails, 'an outside leader, a large imposing building and a hierarchical belonging to a wider church.' These factors are felt to alienate Urban Priority Area people.⁵ When the report talks about Cell Church, and then discusses reproducing leaders, those in 'socially deprived areas' are singled out as having difficulty in growing second-generation leaders.⁶

The report appears to suggest that what the Church of England tries to do is maintain a middle-class organisational style that blocks inculturation and indigenisation in poorer areas.

Classical views about Social Networks and Housing Estates

In looking at council built housing, estates networks are very interesting. Frankenberg⁷ was the first person I read to talk about networks. (He develops the work of Barnes and Bott.) Frankenberg talks about a continuum with Rural at one end and

⁴ ibid p6/7

⁵ ibid p48

⁶ ibid p56

⁷ *Communities in Britain*. R Frankenberg 1969

Urban at the other. His rural networks have complex, multiple role relationships that provide a dense mesh. For example, we see the same people in a variety of situations, home, leisure, work and worship etc. etc. having different roles to reconcile *within* these situations. In dense networks, status is *ascribed*. These are latterly described as multiplex networks.

In contrast, urban networks have complicated overlapping role relationships where we frequently deal with different people in different settings, and have to reconcile conflicts *between* situations. Here networks are of low density. In looser networks, status is *achieved*. These are latterly described as simplex or uniplex networks.

Rural networks are where the first question is, ‘who is he? Whose family does he belong to?’

Urban networks ask, ‘what does he do? What can he achieve?’

Some council built housing estates have many people housed because of social need who don’t have common kinship structures in the area in which they live. However, mostly this is not true. When I was a community development worker I surveyed the first four estates on which I worked. One of the questions was ‘How many households on this estate contain a relative of yours?’ If the woman answered, then there was a consistent increase in the number of relatives as the estate had aged. By using the transfer system people moved relatives to be near them. By the time an estate is 40 years old the kinship structure can be very dense and one becomes circumspect about whom you talk to about whom. It remains to be seen whether the sale of council housing will, in the longer term, help the maintenance of kinship networks locally or hinder it. Abrams⁸

⁸ *Social change, Social Networks and Neighbourhood Care*. P.Abrams. Feb 1980 p12

points out that social networks in less affluent areas are often strongly dependant on kinship networks.⁹

Bernstein¹⁰ said that distinctive working class language styles were transmitted because of the dense networks in working class areas. This has been affirmed by research, which has been undertaken more recently in Belfast.¹¹

So, in Frankenberg's categories, council built housing estates are more rural than they are urban and the networks in them are more dense and multiple.

So *Mission-Shaped Church* is right to distinguish between networks: -

- that are less neighbourhood based with the more affluent
- and more neighbourhood based with the less wealthy.

Social capital and social networks

‘Social capital refers to the resources that can be mobilised as a result of the structure of relationships between actors and in which actors are embedded.’¹²

Social Capital is an idea that is important to Christian Mission. Ann Morisy,¹³ says in her book, *Journeying Out*

‘Social Capital also happens to be extremely significant to the Church – and the Gospel, because social capital is essentially about trust and the ability to cross boundaries between strangers.’

⁹ *Mind, Body and Estates*. J.Hasler 2000

¹⁰ *Class, codes and control Vol 1*. B.Bernstein 1971

¹¹ *Social Networks and Social Class*. L.Milroy and J.Milroy 1992

¹² *The Neighbourhood and Social Networks*. G.Bridge. 2002

¹³ *Journeying Out*. Ann Morisy 2004

Because of the government's interest in the social regeneration of housing estates and inner city areas, much recent attention has been drawn to the research into social networks as they relate to this idea of social capital. Bridge¹⁴ reviews more recent literature about social networks and neighbourhood. The debate includes a lot of attention as to whether dense multiplex networks are: -
A source of resource to people or a constraining influence that impedes access to a wider arena. Or whether, Neighbourhood is something to be encouraged or something from which to liberate people.

The conclusion seems to be that a mixture of multiplex and uniplex networks is the most desirable.

However I do not believe that *Mission-Shaped Church* is concerned at this stage about what is a desirable network. It is more concerned with what networks are there. For the report is concerned about inculturation. I take this to imply that the influence of the gospel is brought to bear from within the existing culture, which may, or may not be, what we consider desirable. From this point of view, whether the target networks are multiplex or uniplex is of uttermost importance.

Recent research does not deny that some networks are more multiplex than others,¹⁵ but the tie to one being rural and the other being urban is dropped.

Some indicators of the implications of ministry in multiplex social networks

It is really no wonder that the report's recommendations include those that address the permeability of parish boundaries. The classic suburban problem is the role conflict *between* overlapping networks. Little attention is given to the dense multiple networks

¹⁴ G.Bridge. 2002

¹⁵ Ibid.

of less affluent networks. What is disappointing about *Mission-Shaped Church* is that the working group does not distinguish between the general nature of the network behaviour in affluent and less affluent communities.

Three brief examples of the implications of dense network behaviour that might have been explored in the report more fully than is possible here are: -

Firstly, if status is ascribed rather than achieved, what is the point of identifying leaders who can be trained within the training systems we have already designed for suburban Britain? Surely we need to identify those who already have leadership ascribed to them and find ways of training them according to whom they are (becoming) rather than what we want them to become. The important point here is about the identification of leaders rather than about methods of training in a culture where meritocracy has less currency.

The second example is about the handling of role conflict. Preparing people to handle the discrepancies that arise from being a priest, a mother, a playgroup leader, and a customer at the local Spar shop, has different consequences, and greater intensity, when operating within a community of multiple role relationships. The important point here is about the different nature of the leadership task and the different kind of formation that is required.

Thirdly, if an imposing building obstructs, and the kinship structure forms the core of local networks, then perhaps we should explore the use of households rather than church buildings. This would demand exploring how 'public' church would be, and the contradiction of this with the privacy of 'the home' in working class communities. The important point here is about how we choose the strategic approach we employ when thinking about inculturation in working class areas.

If the report had begun to explore the difference in the nature of the roles and activities of networks perhaps we could begin to tease out a way forward for less affluent communities. It may be that some work in this area might have indicated what we should try. If they really believe some of what goes with being ‘parish’ gets in the way, then what should be done?

Conclusion

For those in working class housing estate ministry the report is disappointing. It fails to grapple with the fact that the ways we presently run parish may in fact obstruct fresh ways of expressing church in working class communities. The *Mission-Shaped Church* working group does not appear well versed in the sociology of poorer communities.

I welcome the report’s attention to neighbourhoods and networks and pray that this report will not turn out to be one where the suburban church, whose problems are acting *between* overlapping networks, is suggesting solutions to those of us who have different problems to face. ‘We have networks too - but they are different to yours’.

Estate churches and leadership

Britain’s outer housing estates have come under closer focus with the onset of government regeneration initiatives of various kinds. Involvement with these schemes go hand in hand with a whole range of parish ministry, since the involvement of a congregation presupposes a community active in the estate’s social life. There has been a growing interest in the issues that face estate ministry, ways in which it can be supported and what kind of training would be useful to clergy and laity, particularly as recruitment to such posts becomes more difficult.

Local Leadership

When next Sunday's sermon is a long time coming, and I gaze out of my study window and watch the people of our cul-de-sac, I notice some common patterns. And these patterns are consistent with the way people go about their business in the different parishes and communities where I have worked. What I see offers some analysis, because it begins with the context out of which leadership of housing estate communities and congregations emerges. I am not qualified to comment on the issues of those estates that reflect multi-cultural Britain. I offer this analysis in the hope of promoting the conversation about what is appropriate by way of support, mentoring and training, not to suggest quick solutions, but to help discover solutions that meet the reality of estate ministry.

I want to consider first the social interactions that take place in the predominantly white working class housing estate communities where I have worked in areas of Bristol, Swindon, Liverpool, Essex and different places in Birmingham. To consider leadership demands an understanding of the kind of social arena out of which that leadership arises as well as the organisational models that people have at their disposal.

The social arena of neighbourhood

In terms of neighbourhood, it is helpful to note what goes on in our street and what kinds of social interactions take place.¹⁶ The first kind of encounter is one where *gossip* is exchanged. At first sight this is just a matter of passing the time, but it usually involves far more than that. If the son of the woman at No. 23 has left his decaying wreck of a car on the lawn of her home, and it is talked about enough, then information about local values, mores and folkways are being exchanged and reinforced.

¹⁶ *Neighbourhoods and Congregations*. J.Hasler 1990.and P.Abrams 1980.

The second kind of encounter is that which involves *borrowing*. I lend you my ladder and you will borrow my lawnmower. There is often a quite complex chain of borrowing before equilibrium of exchange is reached. People work hard to make the equilibrium balance or else some 'face' can be lost and you may get talked about.

The third kind of contact often is seen as *friendship*. One person may call upon another and they may go out together either shopping, or drinking, or bingo, or whatever.

All these functions are important to neighbourhood networks because

- They help identify the building blocks of solidarity through *friendship*.
- They locate resources through *borrowing*.
- They promote the values and conduct of community business through *gossip*.

This is the way that community networks can be seen at work, and leaders emerge from these interactions. This is the basis of the leaders' credibility in the local situation.

Local Organisation

British working class communities have at their disposal a number of models of organisation. The first comes from the working environment and can be called the *foreman model*. The experience of many workers is that there is one person to whom they and their peers are accountable. This implies that there are clear tasks associated with organisational roles. This works well in uniformed organisations like the Boys Brigade, martial arts clubs, majorettes, etc., popular in working class communities.

Another model is that of the *trade's union branch* or community association model. Here we all have our say. An issue is voted on. And we all support the majority decision. The fragmentation

of the large workplace and the move to subcontracting self-employed workers has weakened this experience among working class folk in recent years.

Another model of organisation comes from the domestic arena and the world of self-provisioning. This is highly influenced by the matrilineal structure of ‘mother and daughters’ and sisters. Organisation here is through ‘*the woman what does...*’ The woman what runs the Brownies. The woman what runs the catalogue. The woman what runs the playgroup. These people are not only organisers but also gatekeepers to valuable opportunities and resources.

Local churches

Local congregations often have difficulty in engaging the cultural experience and expertise of local people in church leadership. Sometimes what ministers are looking for are people who are Treasurers and can write minutes. Of course it is easy to recognise that these tasks are really part of administration and not leadership. But often administration is important if you see the job as running the branch of a predominantly suburban church on a working class housing estate.

It is a real art to use *foreman*, *union*, and *woman what does* expertise in the running of the Parish Church Council, or the equivalent church committee, whose rules come from an alien culture. Maybe it is an art so sophisticated that it becomes manipulative and unreasonable to expect. Another temptation is to import a suburban elite from suburban churches who can come and take the pressure off local people, without questioning whether that pressure should have been imposed in the first place. What also happens when this approach is followed is that the issue is evaded and it provides new boundaries to be crossed within the parish rather than outside of it at the next organisational level, such as the Deanery or the Circuit.

If we look at the organisational models available to working class people then there is much to engage. Family structure is close to communal rather than organisational structure. The issue is whether we are prepared to enable local leadership that is open to being changed by the church tradition but without trying to change the culture of it. Often the danger is we let 'us' be changed by 'them' instead of being ourselves and open to change.

The gospel according to projects

What it means to be a Project

When I worked as a community development worker I seemed to spend a lot of time setting up projects, being employed by them, or negotiating with other people. The 'Project' appears to be the way of funding work in poorer areas without being committed to giving any long-term resources. And although it is not necessarily the case, they often represent an 'us' deciding what needs to be done for 'them', or worse, what needs to be done to 'them'. Sometimes, having made this decision, there is at least the insistence that it is done 'with them'.

We have received the *Faithful Cities* report which applauds the Church's involvement in social regeneration projects, but also urges churches and Christians to seek 'a values-driven approach'.¹⁷ Having spent much of my life in projects the benefits are clear to see. But I also want to comment on some of the hidden uncertainties. This report marks 21 years since the publication of *Faith in the City*. One of the recommendations made by the *Faith in the City*¹⁸ report led to the setting up of the Church Urban Fund (CUF). This in turn led to a number of Church Projects. In retrospect, one may ask why the Church, given the welfare society, should undertake this important work. But the report called on the Nation to end the relative neglect of

¹⁷ *Faithful Cities* 2006 p54

¹⁸ *Faith in the City* 1985

Urban Priority Areas at the time. In making this call it felt the need to give a lead, put its money where its mouth was, set an example.

Like its secular counterparts, the predominant model in allocating these funds was to 'projects'. These projects joined a long line of social interventions by government into areas of low income. Some of us remember the Educational Priority Areas, the Housing Action Areas, the Community Development Projects of the late 60's early 70's. We remember too the employment driven initiatives of the 80's, Youth Training Schemes, Youth Opportunity Schemes, and some smaller scale adult initiatives, where local activists were seduced into employment and their silence bought. In more recent days we have seen Sure Start, Children's Fund, Single Regeneration Budgets, New Deal, and Neighbourhood Renewal. The impact of the CUF was such that the Church was at one time thought to be the largest employer of community workers in the voluntary sector.

These days, the funding for any project is unlikely to be from one source. Putting together a package, and being able to interpret outcomes in a form that meets the funding objectives, means a new range of skills has to be learned.

Over time these projects have become highly professional. Applications have clear objectives and targets. They often need to employ professional staff and administrative support as well. These are housed somewhere, so a health and safety policy will be required with its annual risk assessment. Employment brings the need for equal opportunity policies. A management committee is needed which has people who ensure the management committee manages the project and not the employees managing the committee under the guise of capacity building.

When I worked in Hartcliffe in Bristol, on Thursday mornings I would go to the Church Hall. I would go to the office of the Teenage Parents Project. This was a very successful project. It employed two project workers and a number of crèche workers. Being the local vicar, and the project meeting on church premises, I chaired the management committee. We met to administer the substantial grants from trusts and local authority sources. The project became more and more grounded in the community, but this only seemed to add to the time I had to spend with others putting all the project policy and protocols in place to satisfy the funding bodies. What I noticed was, that for the most part, the congregation moved from mild reluctance to mild sympathy about the project. The outcome was that employed staff, which did not come from the congregation, ran a useful and successful project. From the church's point of view there was no increased encounter between people in the congregation and those who were not, except at management committee level. Years later they moved to other premises for all sorts of good reasons. But one was that the lack of real connection with the congregation despite the efforts of the church staff.

After 2 or more hours in the Management Committee I would emerge into another part of the Church Hall. By now I was surrounded by a host of elderly and disabled people. Margaret who ran the lunch club was from the local congregation, as were her 5 or 6 helpers. "Too busy to talk now," she says. "By the way, we got a cheque from the City Council for a few hundred pounds, but I sent it back. We don't need it." Here was a constant exchange, week by week, between people from church with their neighbours.

Both projects are doing important work. One absorbs a lot of time and achieves little by way of mission opportunity. The other seems to be the opposite. But more importantly one is forced to do it like them, the other will send the cheque back rather than loose their independence.

It is not that working class people cannot manage the tasks set by professional and managerial culture. The reader will not have difficulty in seeing, in the light of the previous two sections, that this is not only an alien style to working class folk, but to engage in it is to create a gap to be bridged, that is for many, a bridge too far. So the under-representation of local residents often leads to a different way of framing results and measuring outcomes than may otherwise have been the case. Certainly, the evaluation of work done by our local Neighbourhood Renewal Project seems more sophisticated than many local people would believe. They really just want more buses and the burnt out cars removed more quickly.

The professional and managerial culture requires ‘us’ to do it like ‘them’.

Honest exchange?

What happens is that most projects need to engage with the community either as participants or as customers. The project needs the local people to be involved and usually offers inducements or services to attract the people to engage with them. Having researched the local ‘needs’ the project spends time trying to embed itself in the locality. What they often fail to appreciate is that local people have seen this happen several, if not many, times before. People usually engage to make use of the benefits on offer. Most projects are funded for 3-5years, so by now the project may be half way through its life. At this point the project’s less obvious objectives begin to surface, and if local people are astute enough, the negotiations can be protracted to the end of the project’s life without loss of benefits. Let me give two examples.

I worked for a project where the implicit aims were to engage local people in the provision of children’s services. The Project was set up and an out of school club was formed with a small and temporary staff. Some parents arrived early to collect their

children. They would help clear up and later help in running the programme. Soon they ran the programme. The project wanted them to have formal meetings, partly to have records of the decisions made about using that particular budget, and partly so the body could have more formal control and later be able to engage with other child providing groups in the area. The parents would have a kind of rolling meeting in front of the shops the day before and considered this quite adequate for the needs of the activity. The project felt local control was a good thing for the locality so it insisted that a meeting took place. The parents voted with their feet. Then would re-engage a month or so later and the activity would resume. Although there was no articulated conversation, there was a conversation of actions rather than one with words. This conversation was re-enacted several times before the project staff concluded that local people were quite clear as to the extent of the control they wanted. They wanted to run the programme and not be bothered too much with budgets and official status. As far as they were concerned 'all that stuff' could happen under the project's umbrella. They did not want 'them' trying to make 'us' like them. They would decide their level of involvement and the way they organise it.

In another project I worked in, a special night of the youth club was set up for girls. The project objective was that girls were subdued by the presence of boys and they should have time to be free of their oppressive presence. It was a mildly middle class feminist attempt to provide an alternative to what appeared to be the normal mixed gender cultural setting. In trying to enlist people to run this event it was the elder sisters of many of these girls who offered to run the session each week. So these young women would arrive, often with their youngest children or babies, to run what was in effect a local junior girls night out, an event, like bingo on Wednesday nights, that reinforced all the local customs and culture. Local people will resist 'them' trying to make 'us' more like 'them' and will resist it energetically.

Hollands¹⁹ shows how local people use these projects to affirm their cultural expectations rather than change them.

I have watched this happen so often that it has been quite difficult to listen to people listing the achievements of their project when you know that there is probably an alternative script. You know, too, that local people collude with the project report to enjoy the benefits of the resources that the project brings.

Perpetuating projects does not help to bring about an honest exchange between cultures, yet they bring much needed resources to low-income communities.

Imitating a Suburbo-centric Church

I hope the reader does not think I am accusing Projects of being either imposing or naïve. The reality is that they are only aping the model set by local government, the church, and a host of other powerful bodies. For example, the local church on a housing estate is set up as that branch of *C-of-E plc* with its branch manager to see that all the things that happen, like having churchwardens, a Sunday school, a Parish magazine, an annual parochial church council, is like the model set by our suburban colleagues. But now, at last, it's breaking down.

It doesn't feel as if there has been a conspiracy, it feels as if it has just been taken for granted that British culture is homogenous, and it is not. Projects have just followed on, but in doing so, they reveal for us a wider and even more serious situation. What has gone on with projects reveals a larger social reality that has become institutionalised.

¹⁹*The Long Transition*. R. Hollands. 1990.

Conclusion

Culture is a crucial factor in what goes on between people. It is a major part of what shapes how things go on between people. It effects how people connect and the networks they form. It affects the way people behave and to some extent, how they behave in relation to each other. It even creates a discourse with other cultures that is not easily avoided. It cannot be ignored and any urban theology needs to take the reality of ‘culture’ into account if less powerful cultures are to break free of a suburban model.

Chapter 2 – The Context and Urban Theology.

Urban theology observed

As an urban practitioner I have always been looking for theology that connects with what I do. Partly to inform my practice but also to give me affirmation that I am exercising a ministry that sits comfortably with my Christian vocation. I have always sought to give attention to urban theology and I am interested to find that in Britain there are a number of re-occurring themes, some of which skew the overall picture away from the emphasis that I would want to stress.

Geography

The first is the influence of geographers and planners. Without a doubt it is important to take note of other disciplines, but why these in preference to social anthropologists? Geography has given two skewing concepts, each an important contribution to urban theology, but each being a little more dominant than I would want.

The first is the notion of ‘City’. Many Church reports focus on Cities.²⁰ Yet Andrew Davey points out that even, ‘Those who do not dwell in urban areas are similarly affected through the dominance of the urban...’.²¹ Urbanisation is wider than just Cities and urban theology does not give the impression that it takes this into account.

Secondly, this planning emphasis means we begin to geographically zone the City into regions and this becomes the

²⁰ *Faithful Cities. The Cities. Faith in the City God in the City Staying in the City* etc. etc

²¹ *Urban Christianity and Global Order*. A. Davey 2001 p7

focus of our analysis. I want to suggest we examine cultures as well as districts. So I shall suggest we see culture first and geographical areas second.

Liberation Theology

Another influence is that of Liberation Theology. The *Faithful Cities* report notes how many saw in the report *Faith in the City* a connection with Liberation Theology even though the writers may not have intended this. *Faithful Cities* suggests this maybe because of the *Faith in the City* report's emphasis on 'the preferential option for the poor.'²² It may also have been the associations with Latin America and Base Communities that helped this²³ and the Marxist connections with 'Class'. *Faith in the City* happily referred to 'working class areas' along with 'the working classes' in its theological priorities. At the time class was seen primarily as a structural category, or a reflection of employment status. The inability to see class as a cultural description means little attention has been given to inculturation themes in that report or subsequently in urban theology in general.

In fact it may be that in British urban theology we have overstressed a combination of planning and liberation theology as the major base line from which we have worked. It is not that the insights from these have been misleading, far from it, but they have tended to crowd out other options.

This combination has given rise to a strong and important emphasis on the needs of the poor and excluded. In doing so, however, we have spoken of the urban as if it were all inner city and problem housing estates. We have failed to challenge the suburban components of the urban to work out how its culture and theology might relate to the areas we have so thoroughly

²² *Faithful Cities*. p8

²³ *Faith in the City* pp63/64

examined, surveyed and researched. It is as if the suburbs were normal and thus not requiring any examination. Their assumed predominant culture appears to allow them to avoid scrutiny. We are aware that the City is not just one context. Ann Morisy, in *Journeying Out*²⁴ has shown that the suburbs have not to be ignored by Christian ministry.

Class

Another trend I have noticed is a growing avoidance of the term 'class'. Even an excellent report like *Faithful Cities*, which seeks to promote 'everyday theologies', can only use the word once.²⁵ Perhaps it is that we have not registered that class is how ordinary people classify themselves. Perhaps we are frightened that people will think that we are investing 'class' with structural or Marxist meanings when most everyday people are defining it culturally. A recent BBC News item said that 36% of builders regarded themselves as middle-class and 29% of bank managers considered themselves working class which may indicate a cultural description of the notion of 'class.'²⁶ Class still carries a hermeneutic of our lived sociology and a narrative of our social history into the present.²⁷

Christ and Culture

What I want to offer below is another approach to contribute to urban theology, alongside the themes of liberation and geography, that takes into account the missiological themes of Christ and culture, or faith and context. If I fail to find a way of putting these together I live in two theological worlds. One is the world of social concern and another of mission and evangelism. In practice I cannot separate my social concerns from my evangelistic concerns, and neither do I think it is healthy to do so.

²⁴ *Journeying Out* A.Morisy. 2004.

²⁵ *ibid.* p4

²⁶ item 5th May 2006

²⁷ *Class.* P.Joyce. 1995.

Cultures in towns and cities

When I talk about my experience of working class culture, other people often tell me that it's not like that where they are. I was describing how hard it was to get that moment of silent reflection before we begin worship. I was describing how everyone was gossiping about the police helicopter the previous night and speculating about what the target of its observation might have been. And it is true, that if they didn't gossip about that, it would be something else. A colleague in a different parish said rather wistfully that all the congregation where he worshipped gossiped about was what went on in church. It was as if the congregation was not interwoven with the life of the wider community and that they had become a special interest group. Places are different. They have different predominant cultures and behaviours.

How can urban theology be such that it addresses the variety of contexts that make up the city, but in a way that self-consciously shows these different contexts to be related to one another? My own journey in this respect was that in 1999 I worked on a thesis that identified the symbolic network present in working class culture.²⁸ Having done this it posed the question about the contrasts with other cultures, or strictly speaking, the other subcultures, of British society.

The second question I want to attend to is 'what is urban theology?' and its relation to culture and neighbourhood. Urban theology is more than a Christian commentary on urban policy. It is more than a programme of theology thought to be good for urban areas. I consider it to be the theologies that we see emerging from the people living in the urban areas in all its variety. When we examine the symbolic networks of the various cultures that make up the urban, we find that they profoundly influence the theology that people have. It is as if the culture is a

²⁸ *Mission and Working Class Culture*. J.Hasler. 1998.

filter through which their theology is received. Sometimes that filter even enhances our understanding, even when it comes from other cultures. The difficulty is how to distinguish these theologies. I have chosen to speak of Ethnic Cultures, Working Class Culture, Professional and Managerial Culture, and Rural Culture. Each has a distinctive take on its theology by virtue of the culture through which it is received. It may be that the reader will be provoked by my short list to name other cultures that I have neglected.

It is fashionable to describe any interest group as a ‘culture’. I want to resist this. I believe that a culture, or sub-culture, has a distinctive ‘symbolic network’. Many describe communities of interest, their business or social club, as having a distinctive culture. Before I would describe something as a culture I want to show

- that there is a symbolic network that develops over generations
- there is a distinctive language-use that is deeper than the mere appropriation of a jargon.

This is an important point if I am to ask the church to invest some strategic thought and action by considering cultures. It is easy to spend a lot of time examining interest groups that are here today and gone tomorrow. I find that it is commentators from professional and managerial culture that tend to lose the idea of culture and replace it with communities of interest. Communities of interest, rather than communities of place, are typical of the suburban situation, and the attempt to define cultures in the same way often feels to me as another attempt by the dominant culture to avoid any self reflection on their own culture. It does seem hard to persuade professional and managerial culture to identify what its own culture takes for granted.

However, I do believe that there are some difficulties. When I visit towns like Hebden Bridge, Glastonbury, and Stroud, I

become aware of what appears as a kind of culture that is maybe ‘Bohemian’, with a touch of ‘New age-ism’ and certainly more than just ‘ageing hippy’. What I do not know is whether there is a second generation to this culture’s behaviour. Some communities of interest are so powerful in places that I confess that there may be a blurring of definition sometimes. Yet I am convinced that this is a rare phenomenon and does not justify the term ‘culture’ being extended to communities of interest.

Another question I want to engage with is how does all the work done in relation to faith and culture, sometimes referred to as ‘Models of Contextual Theology’, become useful in the urban situation. What is clear is that in any urban setting we have a number of cultures and sub-cultures operating side by side. What is often more difficult to identify is the aspects that make up one’s own culture. ‘It is like asking a fish to have a concept of water.’²⁹

It seems to me that in the Church of England, and in other English Churches, there is a danger that all white people are seen to be of one culture. What I want to show is some of the variety of culture that determine how we understand, and through which we are even able to receive, the Christian message. Also how the neighbourhood can play a part in the way ministry can be negotiated. And finally, at how recent market values have impinged on all our cultures.

Context as culture

I want to identify the following number of cultures. My descriptions are brief but I hope are helpful indicators.

²⁹ *The Troubled Fish: barriers to dialogue*. Southgate & Randall 1981

Ethnic cultures

In the inner cities, but also in other parts of towns and cities, can be found ethnic communities that have a distinctive culture. Some of these communities are many generations old. They will have made various adaptations to the wider British culture and various contributions to it. Yet, like all cultures, their culture will have its own tradition and a narrative that spans centuries. There will also be some recently arrived cultures.

Working class culture

In older parts of the cities and towns there may still be working class communities. On the council built housing estates there are often large white working class communities. Many are in owner occupied homes of the new build around the outskirts of the town or city.

I still call it ‘the working class’ because this is where the tradition of this class is rooted. I do not assume any Marxist structural definition of the word ‘class’, nor do I see it as linked to the economic status of its men. I define this class as a cultural phenomenon and am open to the notion of ‘Taste’ as a way of describing it.³⁰ But it seems to me easier to use the same label that its members use. In working class culture there is a symbolic network. The language use is without many adjectival clauses and dependent on simile and metaphor. The physicality is stronger and the body gives a greater sense of personal identity. Gender differentiation is strong and networks follow a matrilineal structure. The street has some meaning and ownership. Work is respected. But what is important is these factors combine and support one another in a particular way. They work to continue the culture and fight off inappropriate influences.

This culture is distinguished by its respect for physicality, and this pervades all its ways, values, mores and folklore.

³⁰ *Distinction: A social critique of the Judgement of Taste*. P. Bourdieu. 1991.

Professional and Managerial Culture

This class culture has been much informed by modernity. For example, these management minds have been used to organising or advising working bodies. Language is full of adjectival clauses that not only have the propensity to more closely define, but also the tendency to obfuscate. The mind is very important to this culture. Mind over matter. The right attitude will help you fight illness. The kingdom of heaven, it seems to me, is pictured as a place of disembodied minds, despite the fact that the part of our mind inextricably bound up with our brain will have decayed with the rest of our body.³¹ This class is distinguished by its mentalist attitude, and this pervades all its ways, values, mores and folklore.

Rural Culture

I include this culture because it deals with the town even if it does not reside in it. In some ways this culture is like working class culture. However, it has a stronger sense of place and belonging to place. If you live in a village your absence from a significant event will be noticed. It should be said that people from rural culture often no longer occupy rural settings alone.

Commentary

I have identified four very obvious kinds of culture into which children are socialised, or inculturated. The building blocks are absorbed by the time we are 2½ yrs old. Evangelisation involves us using our culture as the framework from which we understand the gospel and come to have a love of God's faith in us. We may use our culture, contest it, or do many other things with it, but we are unable to ignore it. I may not be fixed in my culture but that is from where I start. It is a reference point; probably the reference point that I take for granted and scarcely give a thought to. It is the water that the fish takes for granted most of the time.

³¹ See *The Absent Body*. D. Leder. 1984. p145/6, 154ff for interesting discussion on the third person corpse.

In looking for how faith meets our context, culture seems to be the first place to look. If mission and ministry want to get relevant, then culture seems to be the place to start.

Context as geography (neighbourhood)

This geographical definition is another way to talk about urban theologies. In recent times this has been to distinguish the construction of theologies by neighbourhood. i.e. Inner City Context, Housing Estate Context, Suburban Context. What this masks is that some housing estates have populations that are almost completely white working class while others are very different. Some inner city areas are dominated by the presence of a single ethnic group while others are less so. Yet I believe the 'neighbourhood' is an important component of urban theology but not helpful as a means of defining the variety of cultures and theologies that arise in the urban situation.

Laurie Green, in *Urban Ministry and the Kingdom of God*, does a number of useful things. One of them is to show how in planning terms there has been a shift from a geographical definition of 'Zone theory' in the 1920's and 30's³² towards a cultural definition in the work of Massey and Sandercock in 2000.³³ I want to show one way that culture and neighbourhood can connect in the formation of an urban theology.

City centre context

The city centre, or the centre of any large town, has many kinds of people populating it, some reside there, some work there, and some go for entertainment and many other reasons besides. It also attracts those who are homeless and those who beg. Waterfront developments and gentrification have led to gated estates and business apartments.

³² *Urban Ministry and the Kingdom of God*. L.Green. 2003. p24/25.

³³ *ibid.* p49/50.

Inner-city context

The inner city, in most cities and some large towns, consists of a number of ethnic cultures and some of the old white working class. There is also a degree of gentrification as younger professional families get on the lower rungs of the property ladder. There is a certain amount of negotiation between cultures that has to take place. Here the neighbourhood is a cultural market place.

Housing Estate context

Council built housing estates were, until very recently, white working class. In some ways the right to buy schemes have kept them like that, except for the housing stock that people have refused to buy. These houses are the few that remain in the council stock available to allocate to those with most need. People from other cultures are among those who have occupied this significant minority of housing stock. There are of course places where council built housing serves a very different cultural mix such as London, Bradford and others. In traditional white working class housing estates the street is an arena for conversation. It is a place of public exchange. The neighbourhood can often still be called a community.

Suburban context

Suburbs in the city are often places where the professional and managerial culture finds its home, although more recently many have migrated to the villages of the urban hinterland. Here the street is a corridor along which you drive to go to work, school, the supermarket, or to the activities that make up your communities of interest. The public domain is not necessarily neighbourhood based.

Some new developments have provided homes for the more skilled working classes. This means some suburban areas have a greater mix of cultures than before.

Village context of the urban hinterland

We have seen the retreat of rural culture in many villages as they become more the homes of new suburbia. The ‘out comers’, or whatever they are called in any particular region, gradually upset the ‘local’ order. It is interesting to watch this battle in the village church since the official leader is often an outsider himself or herself. (That is, if yours is the village that houses the vicar.) Often rural culture continues despite the changes, but underground. This is why the cost of housing in rural areas is such an important issue. The future of the culture is at stake.

Neighbourhood as context

As we have observed, neighbourhood means very different thing to different parts of the town or city. If culture is the most important reference point for the context in urban theology, then neighbourhood is the second most important reference point. Neighbourhood indicates for us where negotiations between cultures take place or are avoided. It opens the way to move beyond just the construction of cultural theologies and begins to address the possibility of an urban theology. This includes the inter-penetration of cultural and theological themes between the component cultures.

The neighbourhood is not just an indicator of the kind of negotiations that do or don’t take place, but this in itself provides the basis for analysing the power relations within the urban area and the various cultures represented, i.e. Who can refuse to negotiate? Who is too weak to negotiate? Etc..

Context as economic values

It would be possible to make many points about the recent shift in emphasis from the ‘means of production’ to the ‘means of consumption’. Malcolm Brown makes a useful summary in the

Appendix 1 of the *Measure for Measures* report to the General Synod of the Church of England.³⁴ I want to add one point about the shift from communal values to those of market organisational ones.

Previously I was described as ‘a subscriber’ to the telephone service, ‘a member’ of the building society, ‘a passenger’ on the railway, ‘a patient’ with the National Health Service, and now I am universally described as a ‘customer’ in all these places.

In his useful article, *Shopping–shaped Church*,³⁵ Neil Burgess points out that a consumer society only includes those who can afford to consume. He draws attention to Frisk’s *Understanding Popular Culture*³⁶ who points out that consumption, and the buying and selling of commodities, cannot adequately describe popular culture. Yet it is undeniable that this shift to consumption has a large effect on all cultures in Britain, either by virtue of their ability to participate, or by virtue of their relative exclusion.

The move from production to consumption has included the turning of religion and social processes into commodities. One of the consequences has been the move from communal values to organisational ones. I believe this effects even church congregations.

As an Area Dean of a deanery trying to deploy reducing resources across a number of congregations I notice that there has been a change in what used to be described by poor congregations as ‘the giving congregations’. They are now being perceived as the ‘paying congregations’ because they speak loudly in the competition for resources even when they try not to. The conversation of market economics is engaged. This is true

³⁴*Measure for Measures: Report to the General Synod of the Church of England*. M. Brown 2004. Appendix 1. p11/12.

³⁵*Shopping–shaped Church*, Neil Burgess. 2005. p4.

³⁶*Understanding Popular Culture*. Frisk quoted in Burgess above.

for the church and the voluntary and community sector too. Gradually Oscar Wilde's comment about economists seems even truer; that they know the cost of everything and the value of nothing. It can now be summarised on the balance sheet. This marks a shift from the communal to the organisational.

Another trend is to turn a gift into a job. In the endeavour to maximise people's skills and qualities, even those working in a voluntary capacity, everyone is encouraged to have a job description. There may be good reasons for this but it seems to me that there is nothing more fatal to a gift than to feel it's a job when you wake up on Monday morning. Besides, I challenge anyone to write a job description for the prophet Amos with clear lines of accountability that can be harnessed in his annual job appraisal. This trend marks out another shift from the communal towards the organisational.

I was told that the Latin word, 'to possess' could be translated as 'to have' or 'to hold'. So thirdly, the idea that accountability can be *held* between people is a communal idea. The idea that accountability is *had* is a market concept. Increasingly we are being bid to have what are described as clear lines of accountability. What this means is that responsibility is individualised and does not include the idea of communal responsibility. We are continually being asked to move from 'belonging with' towards 'belonging to': from joining in the community, to being possessed by the company.

These preoccupations with economic values also provide part of the current context.

Conclusion

I have argued that the urban situation is best described as a variety of cultures that inter-relate. The first task is to identify these cultures and to discover the theologies alive within them.

I have said that the neighbourhood is a good place to begin the second task, which is to approach the interaction and interpenetration between the various cultures.

I also pointed out that market issues and attitudes have a considerable effect on these exchanges, but these should not obscure the primary task.

I think that the implication of this demand is that significant attention should be given to the variety of cultures in the development of urban theology.

Chapter 3 – Future Mission and Polycentric Church

Future mission and working class culture

Congregations in Working Class Communities - The place

In working class culture the home is a private space. ‘An Englishman’s home is his castle’. It is a place of refuge and almost sanctuary. What goes on in these four walls is nobody else’s business. Home is private: Street is public, although in some exceptional places even streets can allow some people rights of passage and not others. Home is sanctuary to family. Family is not just 2.4 people but the network of sisters, aunts, daughters, and those attached to these. A family structure is often matrilineal in organisation. The family will often includes very good friends and maybe close neighbours. In traditional 9-5 manufacturing areas, one might find a neighbour sat at the kitchen table and when ‘he’ comes home the visitor makes her apologies and escapes. With different patterns of working, and many women working to make the income viable, we see variations on this theme.

To many working class folk the church building is another, often semi-neglected, public place. For many of those who have made the journey to publicly expressed belief, the church building makes a transition from public space to becoming God’s house. God’s home is in heaven but the church is His house in this place. They worry that God’s grass has not been cut whereas their non-church going neighbours take it as par for the course.

The events

A new church opens near us. The publicity says that this church doesn’t mind if you eat your cakes during the service. People stop me and ask me what I think about it. Then they tell me that they are horrified this is even considered OK. They seldom go to

church, they tell me (as if I don't know), 'Church should be done proper'. Funerals where the family are pleased in how it has been done thank me and add the words, 'proper job'. One of the reasons for the decline in weddings in working class culture could well be that people can't afford the 'proper job' as pictured on the television and in advertising media. If the church wants to make 'agreement noises' to working class culture then every effort has to be made to do a traditional proper job. There is an historical class division issue that says that working class communities should not settle for second best because they are not so rich.

Sustaining this assumes that there are resources to do what is essentially a 'service provision' task. The church colludes with this shift from the communal to the organisational by charging a fee. So the 'consumers' feel they have paid for a service, and judge whether it is value for money.

Sunday, by contrast to public worship, has become a more 'private' event. Many small churches in housing estates have downsized and become cosier, or 'homely' to the extent that it is easy to spot who are the 'church family' who eagerly welcome you, and to spot who are the visitors. For the congregation the cost of maintaining a public service from their own resources becomes increasingly difficult even though they too want Sunday to be a proper job and would be reluctant to consider alternatives.

The pressure to maintain the vicar and the building has served to take pressure off the community as a whole and increase the dependency of the congregation on resources from outside. This may even constrain their imaginative thinking as they feel the need to satisfy the expectation of those from other cultures. At the same time it is important that the congregation does not serve only its own needs but constantly recalls God's call to serve the wider world.

Churches and Mission-fields

During my ministry at Lockleaze, in Bristol, over 4 years, the financial pressures on the Diocese brought to the forefront the difference between living alongside giving congregations and paying congregations. The same was true in Hartcliffe, a larger housing estate parish where I was for 7½ years. Because Lockleaze, where I am now, is also a housing estate parish, we are on the receiving end of charity, and because we don't pay our way we have in the past been acutely aware of other people's generosity. Not just in terms of paying quota/parish share but in many other little ways. What we are becoming aware of is that some of the people who have seen themselves as 'giving' congregations now see themselves as 'paying' congregations. We hear it in the form of, 'We pay for our priest, why should we go without while others get one they don't even pay for?' We have become more aware of the dependency we suffer which has been masquerading as inter-dependency.

Roland Allen³⁷ distinguishes between the Local Church and the Mission Field. To be church, he says, each church has from its own resources sufficient (not all) gifts to carry out its mission in the world. It has the Bible, the Creed, the Ministry and the Sacraments. It recognises the spiritual gifts and needs of its people and calls forth various ministries. It will share its ministry and life with neighbouring communities. The Holy Spirit works with the human endowments of the community leaders. They are not over trained and they are not imported from outside. The Christian community controls and manages its financial affairs independent of subsidy. **Any Christian community that does not do these things is not a church but a mission field.**

I have worked, in Liverpool, Essex, Birmingham and Bristol. They were all places where the congregations would be considered as 'mission field congregations'. Yet at the same time

³⁷ *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours?* 1912. R.Allen

they have been encumbered with all the trappings of self sustaining churches: PCC's, finding Churchwardens, trying to write Annual Reports. They have all been encumbered with the pressure to come up to scratch and have a parish magazine and a Sunday school etc.. Freeing the mission field from Parish Church seems to me to be a priority.

In doing church differently from each other, how do we each make appropriate cultural adaptations, so that we can inculcate faith in the various sub-cultures of our society? In situations like Lockleaze, to do this we feel we are expected to experiment alongside maintaining the current parish expectations. This is clearly unreasonable when the reason for wanting to do church differently is because it hardly works. (40 people on Sunday out of a parish of 6,951.) To experiment requires us to live out two contradictory messages at once. One is to do the 'proper job'. The other is to go private and integrate with social networks. Will we choose to be bold? If we can't afford one, the first, will we choose the second?

I also recognise that I am in danger here of being selfish and beginning to go down the road of looking for solutions for working class culture and ignoring the needs of my suburban and inner-city colleagues, who may not yet believe it, but are fast approaching a situation like ours. I do want to plead for them as well, but solutions have to emerge from the place where they are felt as problems. One knows what it is like having other people solve your problems and I wouldn't want to do the same for them.

My view is that in working class cultures we need to have resources put into missionaries and take them away from being vicars. The task of the missionary is to be church shaped. To create churches that can be self-supporting. For us in working class culture it would need vast congregations to be able to pay for the kind of priests we have now. I think we need to be shaping

churches that have tent-making or volunteer priests. We need to do this now while there are enough resources to pay for these missionaries before many suburban congregations collapse. They too need to think about what their future is as well, although their demise is further off than ours, so that what resources there are can be equitably shared and not to the exclusion of any one particular culture.

The dilemma

At present the two major costs to congregations are

- the payment to the diocese towards the stipend, housing, training and professional support of the priest.
- The maintenance of the building.

The first would be severely reduced if the priest was a volunteer but training and support costs would still have to be found. It may be that the costs of the building could be afforded if there was little further loss of people in attendance. The ‘shared premises’ option tends to engage us with projects and integrate ‘us’ with ‘them’ rather than ‘them’ with ‘us’.

So it may be possible to retain the building if the volunteer priest option was taken. Whether volunteers would be available to respond to the requests for funerals and weddings is more questionable. If there was a loss of this public function in the longer term the need for some of the larger buildings may be questioned.

Another option would be to become less public and more private in seeking to penetrate the social networks and follow the example of the network churches described in *Mission-Shaped Church*. In working class culture networks are strongly family and kinship based, but engage others too. The strong connection between home and family may mean this would lead to the dispensing of buildings especially designed for worship and the

use of homes. This would be a radical departure for working class culture and would demand the using of '*church shaping*' missionaries. Some would argue that the congregations have already become special interest network groupings, for 'blocked spiralists' for example, and are no longer public events anyway.

I am not recommending a wholesale change at this stage. I am recommending that we are bold in testing out the variety of options before time runs out. We need to find out in what ways, that which seems sociologically coherent, is workable on the ground. And working class culture needs to be included in this testing.

Church-shaping in working class culture.

What I hope to do in the rest of this section is to reflect on what has been said thus far and to highlight briefly what has been noted about the qualities and skill and support systems for such missionaries. I am following a summary of the pattern given by Roland Allen³⁸ that the task of church shaping means:

- Every church has within its own membership sufficient gifts to carry out its mission in the world. (Sufficient does not necessarily mean all.)
- It should have handed over to it the Bible, the Creed, the Ministry, and the Sacraments.
- The community is responsible for recognising the spiritual gifts and needs of its members and for calling forth those ministries.
- The Christian community will share its message and its life with neighbouring communities not yet evangelised.

³⁸ *ibid.*

- The Holy Spirit, working on the human endowments of the community leaders, is sufficient for its life. Do not train them too much. Do not import them from outside.
- The Christian community should control and manage its own financial affairs independent of subsidy.
- The Bishop and his staff are crucial in this process.
- Any Christian community that can't do these things is not a church; it's a mission field.

Missionaries in working class culture

Firstly missionaries need to have a self-conscious grasp of the culture with which they are working. I am not saying they have to be working class themselves, but either by contrast, by total immersion, or by other ways, they must be conscious of the culture in which they are working.

Secondly, if the neighbourhood is predominantly working class they must have some awareness of the other cultures present in the area. No Christian community can be authentic if it does not display hospitality. It may also be that the Christian presence can be a means to honest negotiation between cultures.

Thirdly, we have noted that strong working class networks are heavily dependent on family and extended family structures. The missionary should look to engage with family groupings and possibly even joining together a number of family groupings into an emerging church. I would avoid the 'church building' as this seems to attract people who find themselves in social housing by virtue of need rather than any place in the local culture. A community that can be hospitable is needed first. A building does it the other way round and will distract the missionary into doing the work of the whole community before it is established. I would

seek home-based worship.³⁹ Having said that there may be a need for sanctuary, a space for refuge. Maybe something like a shrine or a holy well is needed.

Fourthly, there is a need to identify leaders who are integrated into the patterns of exchange within the community. I think that these people should be identified and ordained. Rather than take them away to be trained they should be trained in response to the issues and opportunities that they discover. The missionary should act as if they were the mentor and co-ordinator of training resources.

Fifthly, they should encourage the emerging church to develop models of organisation that are familiar to the community rather than imitate what is going on in other cultures. Who trains the missionaries is a major issue. Who has the variety of cultural experience?

Sixthly, they should help the locally emerging church to negotiate with the wider church, through the Bishop, how to participate in the wider church in a way that promotes honest exchanges.

Seventhly, the missionary will need a support and supervision structure within the Diocese. Preferably a number should be employed who can support and learn together.

Conclusion

What are needed are church shaping missionaries in working class communities that are looking to find faith in the social structures of working class communities. What we need to escape from is the mentality of 'going to church' and take our 'being the church' into the arena of peoples lives. If we don't we are in danger of Sunday churches becoming an activity like Wednesday bingo. I appreciate that Wednesday bingo is an important part of

³⁹ See *Transforming Communities*. Croft. 2002. p3ff.

people's lives just as church as entertainment can be, but it is not enough. God has so much more in store for us.

Crying out for a polycentric Church – dependency and interdependence

Having worked with estate churches for 30 years now, I am struck by the need to try different things, and I would like to try to use our paid resources to employ missionaries. But whatever is tried, all missiological concerns are accompanied by justice concerns. Mission is a pressing concern for estate churches and working class Christians, just as it is for others in Britain. We are not let off the hook because we are poor. The system until now has been one of subsidy. Yet, the major costs to congregations, the costs of housing and the stipends of the clergy, are controlled by those from professional and managerial culture in the church. They also control who can become ordained by insisting on particular kinds of education and formation so alternatives are not easy to put in place.

Maybe this will begin to change as we feel the financial constraints of recent times. But these are justice issues whereby one culture dominates another. It seems to me that there is a kind of enforced dependency; one which is enforced by the lack of alternatives, and a system where ordinary working folk are filtered out of the decision making arenas by virtue of the class culture that dominates synods and meetings. We in poorer and less managerial cultures could sit and wait for those in power to put things right. We could ignore the collusion of our own culture and blame 'them', or we can take action. But I do believe that to do so we need a voice at the table more than the resources of other cultures.

What this suggests is the need to break out of dependency models and to create structures that free us to inculturate the gospel in many different places.

...,the missional church disassembles itself and seeps into the cracks and crevices of a society in order to be Christ to those who don't yet know him.⁴⁰

There have been many helpful ideas about creating diversity in this way. Ann Morisy, in *Journeying Out*, talks about the 'principle of obliquity.'⁴¹ I understand this to be communicating faith through the pre-occupations that people carry in their lives. Chis Baker talks of 'hybrid church' to describe the natural growth of church in multi varied forms to respond to differing contexts.⁴² It may be that Rowan Williams's 'mixed economy' is making space in the same direction. (E.g. See his Keynote Address at Mission-shaped Church conference June 2004.) I believe there is much to learn from all these careful commentaries on our situation. Closer still is David Clark's plea for a diaconal church⁴³ that serves the Kingdom. The reason I have given an emphasis to Shorter's 'polycentric church' is because of the culture gap I have experienced. I believe it best addresses the issue of dependency and interdependence.

I am indebted to Alistair Palmer, a great advocate of the 'Total Ministry', or 'Mutual Ministry' style of working, who reminded me that the journey towards interdependence is through independence and not dependency. Working class congregations are coming from a position of dependency. They need to rediscover independence, but only as a means to arrive with congregations in other cultures to a position of interdependence.

⁴⁰ *The Shaping of Things to Come*. Frost & Hirsch. 2003 p12.

⁴¹ Ann Morisy, 2004 11ff.

⁴² *Going with the flow* Chis Baker 2005.

⁴³ *Breaking the Mould of Christendom*. D. Clark. 2005

The rest of this Chapter is an attempt to approach some of these issues.

Similar difficulties but different responses

In the Deanery in which I am set there are 26 congregations contributing to the Diocesan budget. I would like to display some numbers for the 4 largest contributors and the 4 smallest.

Congregation	Parish share 2005	Average Sunday Attendance 1995 Directory	Normal Sunday Attendance 2005 Directory	Loss over 10 years	% Loss on 1995 figure
1	107,410	254	149	105	41
2	106,894	290	210	80	28
3	80,452	278	110	168	60
4	72,528	109	97	12	11

Without wanting to be very sophisticated with the numbers I will compare attendance statistics over 10 years. (Bristol Diocesan Directory 1994/5 and 2005.) The 1995 attendance figures are calculated on a slightly differently basis to those of 2005, so a loss of a relatively low percentage may be standing still, or growing even. However, this is not likely for a loss in the range of 25-60%.

The congregations above do not see themselves as ‘under the cosh’. It is also true that the sums of money they contribute are one factor that actually leads some of their members to describe themselves as a ‘successful’ congregation. The reality is that, except for Congregation 4 who may be standing still, these congregations are losing attendees at an alarming rate. In most of these congregations there is a predominantly professional/managerial culture but some are more influenced than others by market values.

The 4 lowest contributors are inner city and housing estate congregations.

Congregation	Parish Share 2005	Average Sunday Attendance 1995 Directory	Normal Sunday Attendance 2005 Directory	Loss over 10 years	% Loss on 1995 figure
23	8,554	78	36	42	54
24	7,546	69	33	36	52
25	5,257	36	20	16	44
26	5,089	31	24	7	23

Congregations 25 and 26 do not have a full time priest serving only their needs. They both share with larger congregations.

The percentage loss of attendees over ten years for the lowest contributor (Congregation 26) is little different to that of the congregation with the highest attendance (Congregation 2).

The point I want to make is, that in terms of church attendance, congregations face similar challenges. If this is due to a failure of the church to connect with British culture as a whole, then there will have to be a particular set of responses beyond the scope of this work. If it is a failure of the whole variety of subcultures to connect, then the challenges are various, and different responses need to be considered. We could say that similar symptoms arise because of the same national factors, or we could say there has been a failure on the part of all the various sub-cultures I have identified. They require a number of ‘culture particular’ responses. I suggest both are likely to be true, national and sub-cultural weaknesses. Congregations in every sub-culture, ethnic, working class, professional and managerial, rural, etc., need to begin to connect and engage better with the cultures where they are set. So the time has come for those who are not from professional and managerial cultures in the church to stop kidding

themselves. They need to stop projecting on to others an illusion of success. What is needed is a different atmosphere of mutuality.

Having said this, there are obstructions that could be removed.

Evangelisation and Culture

Aylward Shorter wrote in *Evangelisation and Culture*:⁴⁴

By definition, inculturation cannot be imposed from the centre, but it can be obstructed by it.

He believes that creative pluriformity is essential. Obstructing this is counter productive. Not only does inculturation pose a problem for authority, without it, authority can be marginalized and the centre ignored as irrelevant or un-feeling. He quotes Oscar Bimwenyi from Zaire:

They pray to a God with a liturgy that is not theirs. They live according to a pre-existing morality, which is not the conversion of their own previous morality under the action of God's grace and the breath of the Holy Spirit. They are ruled by a canon law which is not a law born from the conversion to Christ of social and juridical realities inherent in the universe to which they belong....

My first response was that this account from Africa is like it is for most of the un-churched believers on the estates where I have worked. Then I thought this might be exaggerated. Then, as I carefully consider each point, I believe that what Shorter says about the international Roman Catholic Church is also true about the little Church of England.

We are supposed to have liturgy in the vernacular. The Prayer Book was, in its time, supposed to be a triumph in this respect.

⁴⁴ *Evangelisation and Culture*; Aylward Shorter. 1994 86ff

Yet many of our current liturgies do not have the syntax, narrative or metaphor of working class culture (Hasler 2000), nor I dare say of many ethnic cultures as they speak English.

Shorter talks of the need for a polycentric church that is a shift from a euro-centric church. I am crying out for polycentric church in Britain that is not a suburbo-centric church.

I was interested to see the notes of the recent Urban Research Symposium published on the World Bank web site called, '*Polycentric Organisation: A Fundamental Requisite for Solving Urban Problems*'. Ostrom and Sawyer describe polycentric organisation as follows.

Polycentric order assumes elements are capable of making mutual adjustments for ordering relationships with one another within a general system of rules. Each element acts with independence of other elements.

This does not imply, for example, that the Church of England should adopt congregationalism. It does imply a shift in role for Bishops as they call on congregations to make the mutual adjustments necessary in this new order called polycentric order. There is more to be said about polycentric church in the second part of this book. Even from the practice it is worth remembering that as Schreiter⁴⁵ points out, the encounter of local theology with the tradition...

... can raise many problems for churches as they develop their local theologies. They are not trying to dilute or avoid aspects of the tradition; there is a deep desire to remain truly faithful to the apostolic tradition and to be themselves faithful witnesses to the gospel in their own circumstances.

⁴⁵*Constructing Local Theologies*. Schreiter. 1985. p95.

In Britain we have fought shy of these difficulties. Is this why we have failed to truly connect with the cultures that make up the nation?

Part 2 From the theology

Chapter 4 Models of Contextual Theology

So far I have been looking at the need for a polycentric church. I have done this from the perspective of practice. This practice is of being church within a lived sociology, for no mission takes place in a sociological vacuum. In this part of the book I want to survey various Models of Contextual Theology. In my experience theory and practice do not live in different worlds just because they require a different style of presentation. The theology will effect how I see and receive my experience of practice. My experience of practice will colour how I read the theological work of others.

The next two chapters attempt to make sense of contextual theology in the light of the experiences that we have already considered in earlier chapters and to reveal the synthesis that has been made. Chapters 4 and 5 have a more academic style. I want to begin by using the work of Orlando Costas to make plain some basic presuppositions about mission.

Mission and culture

Costas, in his *Liberating News; A Theology of Contextual Evangelisation* makes three points. These are the points he says lead Bosch to say, ‘Authentic evangelism is always contextual.’⁴⁶

First of all, **‘evangelisation is a witness that takes place in a given social and historical context.** It is part of a living space with its own cultural, geographic, economic,

⁴⁶ *Transforming Mission*. D. Bosch. 1990 p417

social and political characteristics, and is carried out in a temporal moment, be it a generation or an epoch.⁴⁷

Acts of evangelisation happen in a particular place with its own circumstance, culture and concerns. People hear from where they are, not from where we would have them be.

Costas's second proposition is that **evangelisation is God's initiative.**⁴⁸

To proselytise is to try to get people to change from one religious belief system, ideology, or political party to another, usually through the offer of psychological, social, cultural, political or economic incentives and through the application of pressure. In contrast, to evangelise is to share with others lovingly and respectfully the joyful news and liberating grace of the gospel, to extend its invitation to faith in Christ and participation in His fellowship, and commit the person or community's response to the Holy Spirit. Authentic evangelisation refuses to be coercive and is always respectful of human dignity and freedom because it is an act of love. It is therefore against proselytism.⁴⁹

Evangelisation is an activity where the missionary and the evangelist are engaged in a fresh experience of God's work in their lives. His third point is: -

Evangelisation involves persons and communities working for the transformation of their respective life situations.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Liberating News*. O.Costas 1989. p21/22

⁴⁸ *ibid.* p23

⁴⁹ *ibid.* p18

⁵⁰ *ibid.* p30

Evangelisation is not about offering a predetermined package; it is about ushering in change, whether it is changed people, changed situations, and/or changed perspectives. If transformation is from A to B then evangelisation cannot ignore A.

The gospel cannot be shared in a sociological vacuum.⁵¹

I also find Costas's reflections helpful because they do not restrict evangelisation to proclamation. Shorter makes this point, but with greater clarity. 'Verbal proclamation is not the only form of proclamation.'⁵² He goes on to make clear 'The Word must not only be proclaimed: it must also be celebrated and lived.' Celebration in worship is an integral part of evangelisation. Sometimes one picks up the impression that evangelisation is viewed as an outcome of worship. Worship, however, is one of the ways God makes his presence known among us, and God's presence is central to any evangelisation.

Shorter says about his book *Evangelization and Culture*: -

A basic slogan of this book, therefore, is that evangelisation comprises proclamation, praxis and prayer.⁵³

Of course one might say that the current situation for the church in Britain is one where proclamation has been neglected. It is not suggested that proclamation should be weakened, but that it takes its place in a wider and dynamic perspective that takes account of the 'situation' of people's lives. I believe that Shorter's views add to those of Costas in that he has a greater awareness of the place of 'Church' in evangelisation. He says: -

⁵¹ *ibid.* \p31

⁵² *Evangelization and Culture*. A. Shorter 1994 p7

⁵³ Costas 1989 p8

The relationship between Church and Kingdom is a dynamic one. That is to say that the Church is on pilgrimage and grows and develops in accordance with the demands of the Kingdom.⁵⁴

Whilst I do not equate the Church with the Kingdom, I believe the Church is a group of people on the move, striving to respond to, and be a sign of, the Kingdom.⁵⁵ It is this dynamic movement that allows us to speak of 'the tradition, because a tradition is the story of the changes showing a development of a growing understanding of God and God's purpose as related by the church.

As Church, we are pilgrims on the way to a growing maturity in Christ, as we strive towards greater conformity with the Kingdom of which we are called to be the sign and the seed.⁵⁶

Evangelisation is about being 'the sign and the seed'. I find this positive statement about the place of church in evangelisation helpful. For, as we consider the context of the potentially evangelised, and realise they cannot be removed from their culture, so we also realise that neither can we remove the potential evangelist from either their church, or their culture. For an inculturated gospel does not mean an indistinguishable church even though it may mean different ways to be distinguishable.

Costas' call for attention to context has been joined in many places. I believe that he best expresses the need for a general description of mission that is essentially contextual, that joins God's initiative and involves the transformation of all engaged in the venture we call evangelisation.

⁵⁴ *ibid.* p9

⁵⁵ *ibid* p116

⁵⁶ *ibid* p12

Contextual Theologies - A general description

In his monumental work *Transforming Mission* Bosch traces the history of how mission has been seen from biblical times to the present day. He presents to us six great epochs of missionary thinking. So it is not surprising that he should be found to say: -

A basic argument of this book has been that, from the very beginning, the missionary message of the Christian church incarnated itself in the life and world of those who had embraced it. It is, however, only fairly recently that this essentially contextual nature of the faith has been recognised.⁵⁷

Bosch also identifies a number of dangers present in the contextual approach to theology. He points to the danger of relativism and a neglect of the universal aspects of theology. He also warns of the danger of creating an 'absolute' out of contextualism itself, i.e. a situation where particular theologies avoid the lessons of other contexts. And finally he points to the danger that the context could become the only authority for theological reflection. But he makes these warnings in the light of the need for evangelism to be contextual if it is to be authentic.⁵⁸

Bosch identifies: -

...two major types of contextual theology, namely, the indigenisation model and the socio-economic model. Each of these can again be divided into two sub-types: the indigenisation motif presents itself either as a **translation** or as an **inculturation** model; the socio-economic pattern of contextualization can be evolutionary (political theology and the theology of **development**) or revolutionary (**liberation** theology, black theology,

⁵⁷ D. Bosch 1993 p421

⁵⁸ *ibid* p126-432

feminist theology, etc..)⁵⁹ (Bold type indicates my emphasis.)

Picking up the words emphasised gives us four major types of contextual theology.

- A. The Translation model
- B. The Inculturation model
- C. The Development model
- D. The Liberation model

I would like to add a fifth type; that of those Evangelicals who would avoid being classified under any of these headings. The contextual models of theology of Bosch imply the existence of theologies (plural) and in contrast many Evangelicals (e.g. Hesslegrave, Nicholls; see below) prefer to refer to the contextualisation of theology (singular). I have therefore called this: -

- E. The Contextualization model.

In the rest of this section I will consider each of these five models in turn, but I intend to make only general observations at this stage. The purpose of this section is to set the scene for a more careful and detailed examination later. But the reader may want to note how much they agree with Bosch at this preliminary stage and to see to how much they identify the models in their own experience and practice.

A. The Translation model

The first model is sometimes described as 'adaptation' or 'accommodation'. Translation means the adaptation of the more peripheral things into local cultural forms, such as vestments, music, non-sacramental rites, art, literature, etc., without the

⁵⁹ *ibid.* p421

accompanying changes in the things more central to theology and church practice. Furthermore, it is a matter of form and method rather than content.⁶⁰

Bosch points out that in his view ⁶¹the Translation model does not really constitute a truly 'contextual model'. He suggests that this model still carries with it past experiences and attitudes of 'cultural domination'. He maintains that it is not a truly contextual model because it does not come from within the culture itself.⁶²

B. The Inculturation model

The contention of the second model, the Inculturation school, is that the West has enforced its own culture upon other cultures, and in doing so has preached a message that is culture-bound and not necessarily appropriate in a different setting. In his book *Towards a Theology of Inculturation*, Aylward Shorter usefully examines what 'culture' is, and some of the possible impacts when more than one culture meet.

Inculturation, as Shorter uses the word, denotes the specific case of the encounter between a culture and the Christian message. Shorter's definition of inculturation is from Fr. Pedro Arrup SJ:

The incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation) but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation.⁶³

⁶⁰ *ibid.* p449

⁶¹ *ibid.* p421

⁶² *ibid.* p448-449

⁶³ *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*. A Shorter. 1988. p11

Shorter highlights the fact that inculturation is not only the insertion of the Christian message into a particular culture. Since the Christian faith can only exist in a cultural form, inculturation is characterized by the way culture has an impact on the way that faith is expressed, and also by the way faith has an impact on the culture. Inculturation carries with it the notion of dialogue between cultures and that new insights and understanding of the gospel message can be learned for our own time.

The above two models, described by Bosch as indigenisation models, have a cultural rather than economic basis.

C. The Development model

In many ways the third model, namely the Development model is the socio-economic equivalent to the translation model. The rise of development thinking in what became known as the 'developing countries' was a way of thinking that held out hope that the third world would share in the advances of technology. In reality, even though many third world nations moved towards political independence, economically they remained dependent on the West.⁶⁴ The result was that the evolutionary thinking presupposed in the development project was found wanting. One exception has been thought to be the 'tiger economies' of Southeast Asia, but recent events in Korea may yet prove that they have not been immune from these influences either.

In the past this has led to the economic analysis of Marx, perhaps with different degrees of dilution, being taken more seriously in many places. This shift is described by Bosch as the move from development to liberation.⁶⁵ Before long the development outlook, which was thought to perpetuate the dominance of the

⁶⁴ *A Reader in Political Theology*. A.Kee. 1974. p66-70

⁶⁵ D.Bosch. 1993 p432. and *A Theology of Liberation* G. Gutierrez 1974 p21-42

richer nations of the West, gave way to liberation theology; first in Latin America and later in other parts of the Third World.⁶⁶

D. The Liberation Model

The Liberation school is the fourth model of contextual theology to be described. Their contention is that in contrast to the traditional methods of Western theology, which have emerged from an educated elite or 'from above', the third world is responding with a theology 'from below'.⁶⁷

The reasons that lay behind this development are that it is suspected that Western theology ultimately serves Western interests,⁶⁸ and furthermore, it is something that is thought rather than done.⁶⁹ This contention continues by claiming that Western theology tends to support the status quo when what is needed is to change the situation in favour of the poor and less powerful interests.⁷⁰

In November 1969 a conference at Cartigny, Switzerland on the 'Theology of Development' included a paper called 'The Meaning of Development: Notes on a Theology of Liberation'. Gustavo Gutierrez gave the paper. Although there may have been earlier indications, this signalled the beginnings of the shift from development, which was in the main the thinking of Western theologians, to liberation thinking, which by and large would be undertaken by Latin American theologians. It could be said that this emerging theology was not so much Marxist as provoked by Marxism and a number of Marxist influences.⁷¹ Both Marx and

⁶⁶ A.Kee 1974 p66/69 and D Bosch. 1993 p433/435

⁶⁷ D.Bosch. 1993 p423

⁶⁸ G. Gutierrez 1974 p27

⁶⁹ *ibid.* p9-10

⁷⁰ *ibid.* p299-302

⁷¹ *Marx and the failure of Liberation Theology.* A.Kee. 1990 p163/181

the Bible are seen as a critique of the philosophy of oppression. Miranda⁷² examines this idea with both care and precision.

An important achievement is that the Latin American theologies have drawn attention to the 'social structure' as an important reality to face, not only in the sense that it is there, but that it makes a difference to the freedoms and the constraints upon the way that people can act. It throws up questions about the nature of 'human agency' that has important questions to be faced, which will be discussed in detail below.

The other influence of liberation theology is its insistence of the 'preferential option for the poor'. The impact of this is that any Christian praxis can be evaluated by its effect upon the poor and the powerless. This has very effectively been brought to our attention by this theological approach.⁷³

Bosch sees three main strands to revolutionary theology.⁷⁴ These have been born out of the oppression of the poor, of being black, or of women.

One of the difficulties in evaluating this type of theology is knowing how much a Marxist interpretation of such ideas as 'liberation', 'praxis' and 'ideology' is being used at any particular time.⁷⁵ One of Kee's major criticisms is that these theologians have not been Marxist enough, and that it would have been better if they had responded to the challenges that Marx makes in a more thoroughgoing and systematic way. If Kee's analysis is followed then it is questionable as to whether black theology and feminist theology can rightly claim to be called liberation theologies at all. The influence of Marx, and therefore their claim to be revolutionary, is disputed. The roots of these theologies are

⁷² *Marx and the Bible*. J.Miranda 1977.

⁷³ *Latin American Liberation Theology*. R Chopp. 1989 p188

⁷⁴ D Bosch 1993 p421

⁷⁵ A.Kee 1990

very different.⁷⁶ Although I have been following Bosch's categories of contextual theology it should be noted that Kee's analysis would not include black or feminist theology as liberation theologies. They do not address Marx's criticisms of religion⁷⁷ and it is certainly doubtful that Bosch is correct in including them under a heading of socio-economic oppression in preference to indigenisation or cultural oppression.

The Contextualization model

The examples of Bosch's four categories, Translation, Inculturation, Development and Liberation are sub-categories of the two approaches described as **indigenisation** and those that respond to **socio-economic injustice**. The way Bosch defines them gives the weight of attention to the context. They appear to emphasise and start with the culture, or the social situation, into which the challenges of faith will help to bring about a Christianised situation.

I sense that writers who prefer the term 'contextualisation' do so, not because they start with the context, but because they are more concerned with what makes up the content which is to be 'contextualised'. Such writers have a concern for what they would like to see alive in any particular context. Nicholls would want to stress what he believes to be 'supra-cultural', i.e. those things about the gospel that hold true in whatever culture.⁷⁸ He is worried that debates about contextualization can seem to be separated from the real issues of the proclamation of the gospel and the indigenisation of the church.⁷⁹ Kraft's treatment of anthropological and cultural factors centres upon what he

⁷⁶ See *A Black Theology of Liberation*. J. Cone 1986; *BlackTheology*. P. Kalilombe 1989 p193-199; *Sexism and God-talk*. R. Radford Ruether. 1983a p210; *Theology and Feminism*. D. Hampson 1989 p148, 15.

⁷⁷ A.Kee 1990 p189

⁷⁸ *Contextualisation*. B. Nicholls 1979.

⁷⁹ *Contextualisation*. D. Hesselgrave and E. Rommen 1989 p52

describes as 'Biblical Christians'.⁸⁰ This is a body of Christian writers who would prefer to stand aside of the four categories described above by Bosch, and who would prefer to make their analysis upon the basis of what they think it is that should be 'contextualised'.⁸¹ It is true that this outlook is likely to lead to a translation model, but it is important to note that there is a different perspective that puts the weight upon the message rather than the situation. Thus they would discuss the models we have already described within an evangelical framework under the heading of 'contextualisation.'

These five models all follow Bosch who uses the word 'context'. Yet again, there are others who would contest the use of the word 'context' at all, let alone 'contextualization'. Shorter⁸² says that there are other reasons why some would prefer context rather than culture. He thinks that some prefer 'context' partly because:

...they would restrict the term 'culture' to such things as folklore or the arts and because they wish to place the emphasis on modernity, technology and socio-political realities.

He goes on to say that:

...'inculturation' was a sociological term before it became current in theology. He notes that it is more difficult to define a term like 'context'. Contexts are complex, diverse and indeterminate.⁸³

⁸⁰ *Christianity and Culture*. C. Kraft 1979 p33ff

⁸¹ Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989 p37ff.

⁸² A. Shorter 1994 p30

⁸³ *ibid.* 1994 p30

So Shorter's view is that 'context' is a too ill defined term to be useful. He would prefer the use of 'culture' in preference to 'context'.

Conclusion

I have noted five models of contextual theology. In reality, when we discuss models we are in fact discussing types, and in any particular situation can be a mixture of types. We have noted Bosch's categories: -

- | | |
|----------------|------------------------------|
| Indigenisation | i) Translation or Adaptation |
| | ii) Inculturation |
| Socio-economic | i) Development |
| | ii) Liberation theologies |

There is also the question of whether the emphasis is to be on the context in which theology can become real, or the theology that is to be contextualised. The latter concern attracts to it the title of Contextualisation.

Having used Bosch's outline, which has given the opportunity to survey some basic issues about contextual theology, there is a need to take note of more recent developments. Contexts are more varied than those discussed. So far no mention has been made of the Asian theologies. The impression can be given that liberation is to Latin America as inculturation is to Africa, which is extremely misleading. These debates are beyond the scope of this work. However there is one issue that needs to be taken up and debated, i.e. the difference between those models which appear to give priority to the situation, culture or context; and those which give priority to the message that is to be contextualised. To help settle this issue I intend to look at available ways of mapping Christianity and culture in the next section.

Niebuhr describes the possible positions of relating Christ and culture in this way.⁸⁴

Christ against culture

This position sees Christ as standing in opposition to the prevailing culture. He calls the 'Christ against culture' possibility an 'opposition type' because in this type Christ and culture are seen to be in contradiction.

One of Niebuhr's examples is Tertullian who insisted on Christians not engaging in any activity that could be construed as contaminated by 'pagan' influences. He would do nothing that might be seen to collude with idolatrous practice and said that Christians should refuse to serve in the army. Anything that might suggest that Christians were not putting their whole trust in God was to be avoided. Furthermore, remaining pure after baptism was equally important. Tertullian was appalled when a bishop issued a declaration that even the gravest sins of apostasy and adultery after baptism could be forgiven.⁸⁵ Niebuhr spends some time looking at Tertullian as an example of this opposition type of theology.

Niebuhr also makes passing reference to the early monastic movement, the Waldensians' sense of austerity from the twelfth century, and later the radicals of the reformation such as Hutterites and Mennonites.⁸⁶ The Quakers following the path of George Fox also followed a 'mystical' inspiration combined with austere lifestyle.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ *Christ and Culture* H.R. Niebuhr., 1951 p40ff

⁸⁵ *The Early Church*. O. Chadwick 1967 p90ff

⁸⁶ *The Reformation*. O. Chadwick 1964 192-196

⁸⁷ *ibid.* p241-244

However the other main example used by Niebuhr of the opposition type is that of Tolstoy. He points to Tolstoy's five injunctions⁸⁸ to:

1. *Live at peace with all men and never consider your anger against any man justified*
2. *Not make the desire for sexual relations an amusement....*
3. *Never take an oath to anyone, anywhere, about anything. Every oath is extorted for evil ends.*
4. *Never resist the evildoer by force. Do not meet violence with violence.*
5. *Not make war or to take part in warfare.*

These very brief summaries serve to show how Tolstoy saw the demands of the Gospel as in opposition to the prevailing culture of nation states.

As we survey this thread of thinking throughout history with Niebuhr, maybe this combination of high thinking and low living is well described as the 'Puritan spirit in Christianity.'

All of these movements did not see it as part of their responsibility to build an ordered and stable society. They would see their job as to withdraw from the world and minimise earthly desires.⁸⁹

Christ of culture

This position would see Christ as in agreement with culture, or at the very least as expressed through culture. Niebuhr calls 'the Christ of culture' possibility an 'agreement type' because in this type Christ and culture are not seen to be in contradiction.

⁸⁸ Niebuhr 1951 p71

⁸⁹ *Culture*. D.Jenkins 1983. p139

One example would be Justin Martyr who saw Christianity as the true philosophy. He saw Jesus as an expression of the Logos, the divine reason of which Plato speaks.⁹⁰

For Niebuhr, Abelard is one of the clearest examples of this type. Peter Abelard broke away from feudal conceptions and sought to explicate the Christian faith in terms of the thought patterns of the emerging renaissance thought.

But in stating the faith, its beliefs about God and Christ and its demands on conduct, he (Abelard) reduces it to what conforms to the best in culture. It becomes a philosophic knowledge about reality, and an ethics for the improvement of life.⁹¹

Niebuhr makes passing reference to John Locke and his response to Descartes;⁹² to Schleiermacher's acceptance of separation of religion and science and morality in line with the developing Modernism of his time;⁹³ and, one might add, Rauschenbush and the way he embraced the social gospel in times of growing emancipation and democracy.⁹⁴ All these have seen the gospel in agreement with the thought patterns of their time and have sought to point up their similarities with the Christian faith.

The other main example given by Niebuhr is that of Ritschl. Ritschl was influenced by an anti-naturalistic and anti-positivist philosophy in the tradition of Kant.⁹⁵

...Ritschl's solution of the problem of Christ and culture is to show how loyalty to Jesus leads to active participations

⁹⁰ Chadwick 1967 p74-79

⁹¹ Niebuhr 1951 p99

⁹² *ibid.* 1951 p100

⁹³ *ibid.* 1951 p102-3

⁹⁴ *ibid.* 1951 p109

⁹⁵ *Liberal Protestantism*. J. Richmond 1983 p327

in every cultural work, and to care for the conservation of all great institutions.⁹⁶

These are examples of embracing the predominant philosophy in the culture of the time, and are perhaps best described as the 'Liberal spirit of Christianity'.

All who share this attitude take a positive view of human cultural achievement but believe that it cannot be true to its best ideals except through obedience to Christ.⁹⁷

Christ above culture - Or Christ and Culture in synthesis.

This position sees Christ as a synthesis of both of the previous positions.

Niebuhr's first main example is Clement whose central thinking was the doctrine of creation.⁹⁸ He believed that creation contained the seeds of truth, yet he was opposed to naturalistic hedonism.⁹⁹ His approach was a synthesis of the kind of thinking to be found in Justin and Tertullian. To use Niebuhr's own words:

There is in the synthesist's view a gap between Christ and culture that accommodation Christianity never takes seriously enough, and that radicalism does not try to overcome.¹⁰⁰

According to Niebuhr, this tradition has been most strongly exhibited in the writings of Thomas Aquinas whose influence is still felt in today's Catholic tradition.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Niebuhr 1951 p109

⁹⁷ Jenkins 1983 p139

⁹⁸ Niebuhr. 1951 p130ff

⁹⁹ Chadwick 1967 p94-100

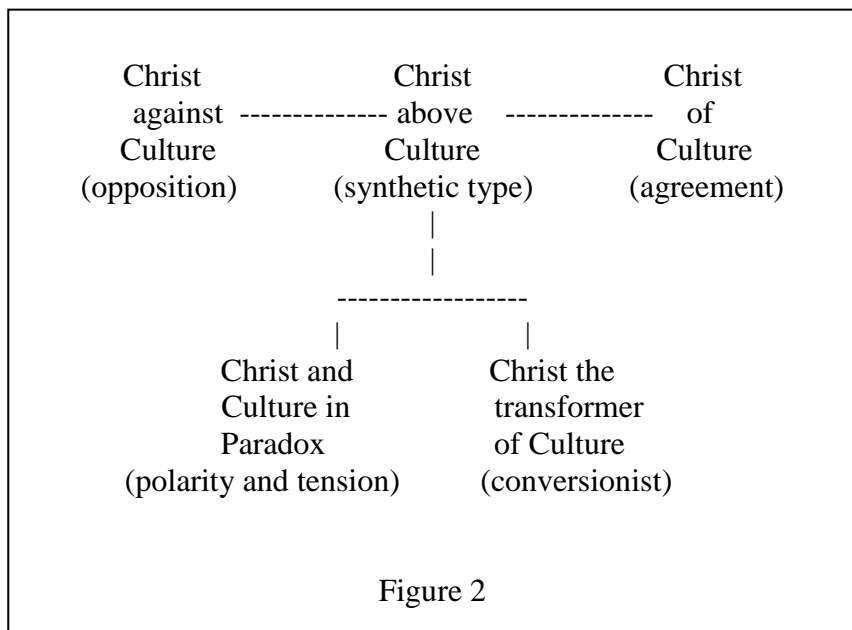
¹⁰⁰ Niebuhr 1951 p128

¹⁰¹ *ibid.* 1951 134ff

We can summarise this position with the words of Jenkins:

Those who hold this view lay great stress on the law, which they see as natural law rather than revealed Torah, although with the recognition of a close relationship between the two. This law all people can see, but it is qualified and illuminated by the light of the gospel.¹⁰²

It might be helpful at this point to repeat Niebuhr's map:
(See figure 2)



¹⁰² Jenkins 1983 139)

The other two possible responses are similar in that they are different ways of acknowledging differences between Christ and culture, but set out to hold them together in some unity.¹⁰³

Niebuhr sees the 'Christ and culture in paradox' and 'Christ the Transformer of Culture' as variations of the synthesis made by the 'Christ above culture' approach.

Christ and culture in paradox

This position also tries to hold together the positions of opposition of Christ to culture and agreement of Christ and culture. But instead of holding them together by means of synthesis it seeks to hold them together with the tension of paradox. Niebuhr chooses those aspects of St Paul, which recognise on the one hand that Christian claims are quite distinctive from the predominant culture, but on the other recognises that lives have to be lived inescapably within a particular culture. A similar dilemma can be found in the writings of Marcion, Luther and Troeltsch.¹⁰⁴ Niebuhr concludes this section with these words:

These thoughts lead to the idea that in all temporal work in culture men are dealing only with the transitory and the dying. Hence, however important cultural duties are for Christians in their life it is not in them; it is hidden with Christ in God.¹⁰⁵

Summarised differently:

The tension in which people stand between the will of God and human culture cannot be relaxed except eschatologically, but this does not encourage a defeatist

¹⁰³ Niebuhr 1951 p41

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.* 1951 p171ff, p173ff, p183-5

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.* 1951 p191

attitude in relation to cultural possibilities of life on this earth. On the contrary, it encourages vigilance and self criticism and stimulates creativity.¹⁰⁶

Christ the transformer of culture

This position also sees the need to hold together the Christ seen in opposition to culture and the Christ seen as in agreement with culture. However the way these are held together are neither by synthesis nor by holding in tension. This position sees culture as being transformed by Christ and all that is inadequate being renewed.

According to Niebuhr, the conversion motif is written throughout the pages of the New Testament, but is most clear in the writings of St. John's Gospel.¹⁰⁷ He points to the many signs and themes where the 'Word' transforms the world and flesh.

Niebuhr's two main examples are St. Augustine and F.D. Maurice.

This approach can be found in the writings of Augustine who did not simply equate the earthly city of self love with the state, or the church with God's city, but saw the church as the organ and representative of God's city in the world.¹⁰⁸ Calvin too took great care to see Christianity as the means to establishing order and peace.¹⁰⁹

F.D.Maurice is an excellent example of the transformative or conversionist strain of theology.¹¹⁰ 'Maurice was no state

¹⁰⁶ Jenkins 1983 p140

¹⁰⁷ Niebuhr 1951 p197ff

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* 1951 p207ff & Augustinianism. W.H.C. Frend 1983 p57

¹⁰⁹ Chadwick 1964 p82-96

¹¹⁰ Niebuhr 1951 p218ff

socialist.’¹¹¹ He believed that Christian socialism was the gradual development of divine purpose, which would transform the existing order rather than look for its overthrow.

The world of culture has its demons, but they can be exorcised, and something like a new Christendom becomes a possibility, not through synthesis but through radical transformation.¹¹²

Conclusion

I note that in the way in which I have presented Niebuhr's map we have an oppositional view of Christ and culture on the left and a view that Christ is shown through culture on the right. I think that Neibuhr’s models are still relevant, even today, certainly in the currency of Britain and the West, over 50 years later. Others have provided other options and these are to be considered.

Other useful maps

A.Dulles - Models of the Church

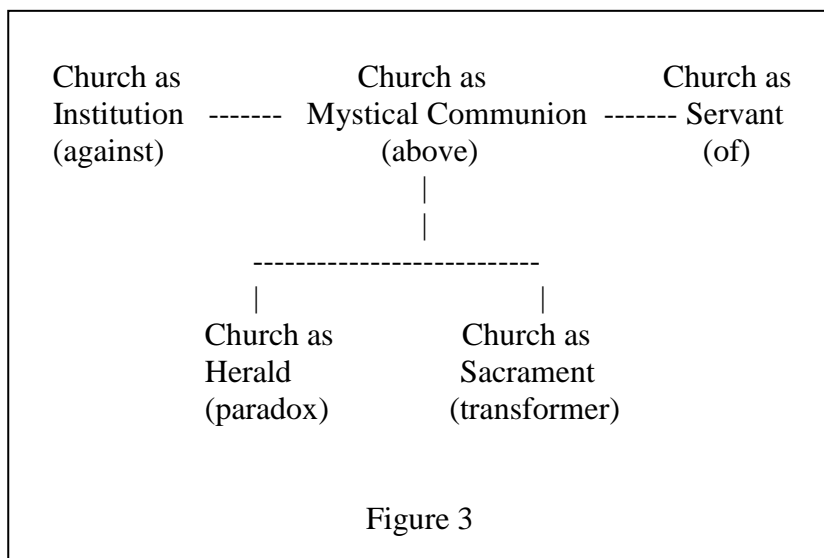
Dulles writes with a view to being clear about the ecclesiological differences that exist within and between Christian denominations. It is his hope that developing clarity about what we mean when we talk about 'church' will serve the purposes of ecumenism. He intends that by presenting five 'models' of the way we can be church, he will enable a comparison of broader analogies and pictures than would be possible if he had chosen to compare specific dimensions or aspects of church life. These models describe the church as Institution, Mystical Communion, Sacrament, Herald, and Servant. These models have made a big impact on ecumenical affairs and I am asking the reader to extend this into a consideration of their relation to culture.

¹¹¹ *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*. K. Inglis 1963

p268

¹¹² Jenkins 1983 p140

Although Dulles has a very different purpose from that of Niebuhr, he does from the very beginning indicate that he is much influenced by Niebuhr's use of models, and his discussion of Christ and culture.¹¹³ It is quite possible to suggest that Dulles's five models of the church in some ways very closely match those of Niebuhr's map. If we accept this we would see his models in this position. (I have bracketed Niebuhr's relationship between Christ and Culture under each of Dulles models.) But whilst they start from this similar position it is important to acknowledge that Dulles develops his models in a very different way. (See figure 3.)



When Dulles describes the church as institution he says:

The church is essentially a society - a 'perfect society' in the sense it is subordinate to no other and lacks nothing for its own institutional completeness.

¹¹³ *Models of the Church*. A. Dulles. 1988

He is saying that the sense in which the church is a society, it is one that exists in opposition to other notions of society.¹¹⁴ This conforms to Niebuhr's 'Christ against culture' type.

When he describes the church as a servant he says:

The theological method accompanying this type of ecclesiology differs from the more authoritarian types of theology that have become familiar to us in past centuries. This method may be called "secular dialogic," secular because the church takes the world as a properly theological locus, and seeks to discern the signs of the times; dialogic, because it seeks to operate on the frontier between the contemporary world and the Christian tradition (including the Bible), rather than simply apply the latter as a measure of the former.¹¹⁵

In this sense the church, if not the servant of a secular culture, is certainly not in opposition to it. This conforms closely to Niebuhr's 'Christ of culture' type.

When Dulles talks about the church as mystical communion he says that it:

harmonizes with several biblical images - most notably with two images...those of the **Body of Christ** and the **People of God**.¹¹⁶

This synthesis, Dulles maintains, allows both a theological and sociological perspective, and I suggest, brings a synthesis to the qualities of the institution and the servant models. In many ways this conforms to Niebuhr's 'Christ above culture' type.

¹¹⁴ ibid p31

¹¹⁵ ibid. p92

¹¹⁶ ibid. p50

Dulles sees the chief proponent of the idea of the church as herald as being Karl Barth. '...Barth, who draws abundantly on Paul, Luther, and others.'¹¹⁷ Niebuhr sees all of these writers as conforming to his 'paradox' type.

Finally it is not difficult to associate the church as sacrament with the idea of transformation.

So in the work of Dulles there is a map that extends and amplifies Niebuhr's models and helps in our considerations about 'mission' and 'evangelism'. One of the ways that people think about evangelism is the way they 'be church'.¹¹⁸

Again it is clear that on the left there are oppositional models between church and culture and on the right there are agreement models.

D.Ford - Modern Theologians

Ford, in his two volumes of edited work about modern theologians also gives a map. He asks the reader to:

Imagine a line punctuated by five types of theology. At one end, the first type is simply the attempt to repeat a traditional theology or version of Christianity that sees all reality in its own terms... At the other extreme, the fifth type gives complete priority to some modern secular philosophy or worldview...¹¹⁹

Again we have a continuum with traditional Christianity on the left and secular culture on the right.

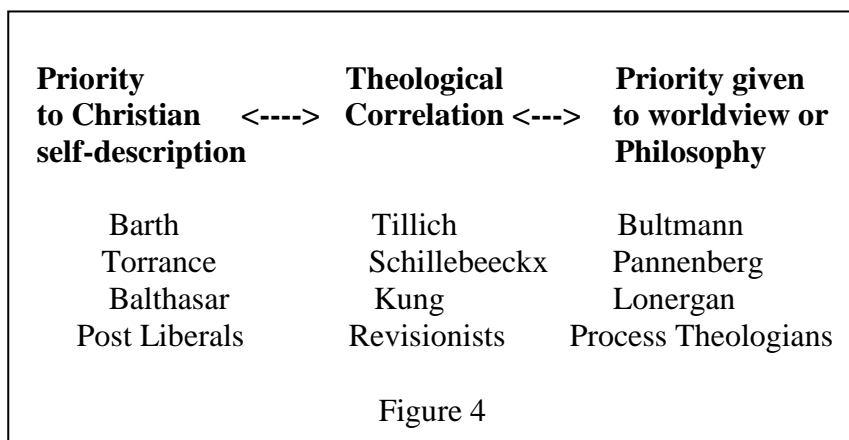
¹¹⁷ *ibid.* p77

¹¹⁸ *Being Human; Being Church.* R. Warren 1995

¹¹⁹ *Modern Theologians.* D. Ford 1989, Vol 1, 2

I would see the work of Milbank as an extreme position that constructs a version of Christianity that sees all reality in its own terms.¹²⁰

Ford suggests that the other three positions are the ones occupied by most modern theologians, their positions varying according to the weight given to the self-description of the Christian community and the weight given to modern philosophy or cultural understanding of worldview. Ford does not give examples of the two extreme positions since he is writing about modern theologians. So, with him we will consider the three central ones. (See Figure 4.) Ford essentially adapts Tillich's model.¹²¹ Here are some examples of how Ford's map would look.



Because Ford concentrates upon the theologians who are (at least in his first volume) relating their theology, from whatever position, with modernism, he is inevitably basing his examples from a Western theological analysis. Again, the most oppositional

¹²⁰ *Theory and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. J. Milbank. 1990. See also *Theology and Sociology*. Section 5. Ed. R. Gill. 1996.

¹²¹ *Systematic Theology Vol 1*. P. Tillich. 1951 p64-66

types are on the left, and the most agreement models are on the right.

Hesselgrave and Rommen - Contextualization

Hesselgrave and Rommen also provide a map for what they consider to be contextualization models. They write from an evangelical perspective and their two variables are what they describe as the 'supracultural elements in Biblical revelation' and the 'Cultural/Human elements in Biblical revelation.'¹²²

When Hesselgrave and Rommen use the word 'orthodoxy' they refer to a theology that begins with the primacy of Scripture. Similarly 'Apostolic' has all the meaning one would associate with the classical evangelical position.

What is helpful about this model is that in many ways there is a correspondence with Ford's picture. Of course the evangelical position is not the only conservative orthodoxy, and if we see this model as similar in thrust to that of Ford, this map can be very helpful.

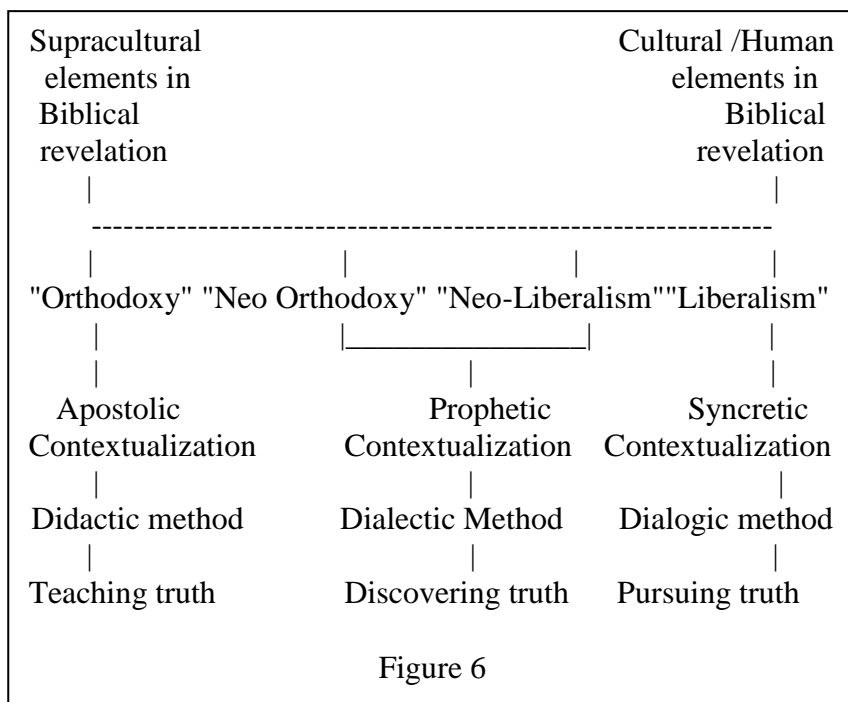
Didactic method	Dialectic method	Dialogic method
Nichols Kato	Koyama Guteriez	Thomas Mbiti

Figure 5

Hesselgrave and Rommen give examples of some of the contextual theologies under these headings. (See Figure 5.)

¹²² Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989 p157

Again we have the oppositional view to the left and the agreement model to the right and Figure 6 is a summary of their position.¹²³

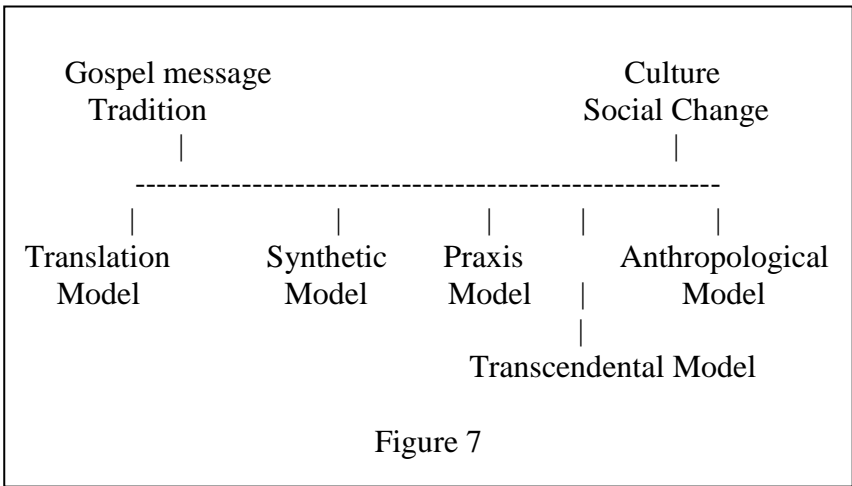


Models of contextual theology - Bevans

Bevans gives us a map of different approaches to contextual theology. His map is as follows,¹²⁴(See Figure 7) although for our convenience I shall reverse the continuum.

¹²³ ibid

¹²⁴ *Models of Contextual Theology*. S. Bevans 1994 p27



Bevans offers illustrations of his models.

1. Translation models

- e.g. David Hesselgrave, Pope John Paul II

In this model Bevans describes the Translation model that I described in an earlier section. He points out that Hesselgrave and Pope John Paul II are only two examples of this approach, and that in fact this is the most common missionary approach.¹²⁵ He also draws attention to the fact that for Hesselgrave translation is not only about a literal translation between cultures. He reminds us that even in translating languages we have to take into account idiomatic ways of speaking like ‘jumping in at the deep end.’ Bevans notes Hesselgrave's example of the inappropriate text translated into Chinese. The tract, entitled 'How Can a Man Be Born Again' was insensitive to Chinese idioms, styles of thinking, and local colour.¹²⁶

I am interested that all the examples which Hesselgrave and Rommen consider being authentic and relevant, involve formal

¹²⁵ ibid. 1994 p30

¹²⁶ Hesselgrave & Rommen 1989 223-4

language and not a combination of actions and words. Their proposals consist of a catechism, a tract, a doctrine, a debate and a sermon. Perhaps this is to be expected from an evangelical emphasis upon the Word.

Bevans has summed up Pope John Paul II's attitude to culture:

And, as the Pope never tires of repeating, 'the Church's dialogue with present day cultures is of crucial importance for the world's future.' Only through human cultures can human beings live out their humanity fully, and so the Pope sees the immense importance of cultures being profoundly and vitally influenced by the humanising message of the gospel.¹²⁷

However, Pope John Paul II's approach is that we always begin with a universal message that being essentially 'supracultural' can be translated into any particular cultural form.

2. Anthropological models

- e.g Robert E Hood, Vincent Donovan

At the opposite end of the continuum Bevans places the Anthropological model. In this model the answer to the question 'as to whether one is aiming to be a Christian Filipino or a Filipino Christian, is definitely the former option.'¹²⁸

He uses Vincent Donovan's report in his seminal book *Christianity Rediscovered* as an example of how the Masai culture can be evangelised. This is a very persuasive and moving account of how Donovan takes seriously the Masai culture in his missionary approach. Donovan says:

Goodness and kindness and holiness and grace and divine presence and creative power and salvation were here

¹²⁷ ibid p44

¹²⁸ ibid. p47

before I got here. Even the fuller understanding of God's revelation to man, of the gospel, of the salvic act that had been accomplished once and for all for the human race was here before I got here. My role as a herald of that gospel, as a messenger of the news of what had already happened in the world, as the person whose task it was to point to 'the one who had stood in their midst whom they did not recognize' was only a small part of the mission of God to the world.¹²⁹

The other three models of Bevans are ranged between the Translation model on one hand, and the Anthropological model on the other. Next to the anthropological model is the transcendental model.

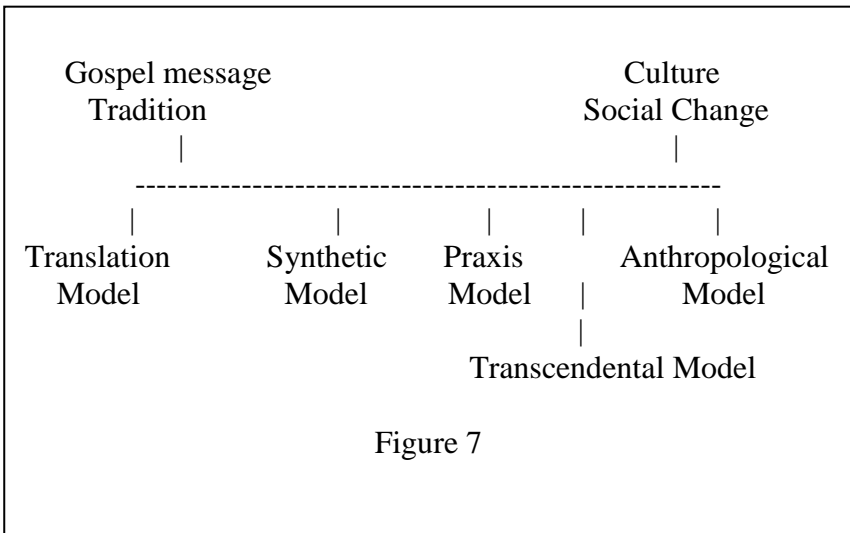


Figure 7

Perhaps it is helpful to repeat Bevans's map. (See Figure 7.)

3. Transcendental models

- e.g. Sallie McFague, Justo Gonzalez

¹²⁹ *Christianity Rediscovered*. V.Donovan 1982 p63-64

Bevans places this model close to the anthropological model but it is significantly different. The main theme of this approach, at least as Bevans presents it, is the personal witness of the examples of a 'convert' testimony that is nevertheless truly grounded in the person's culture and experience. He gives Sallie McFague as a witness among Middle Class American Women, and Justo Gonzalez as an example of Hispanic American theologians. Each writes from their own human perspective, but with a conviction about the Christian texts and tradition that demands a change of heart or mind. Bevans believes that this personal approach is not individualistic, but in following Carl Rogers, 'the most personal is the most general.'¹³⁰

4. Praxis models

- e.g. Douglas Hall, Asian Feminist Theologians

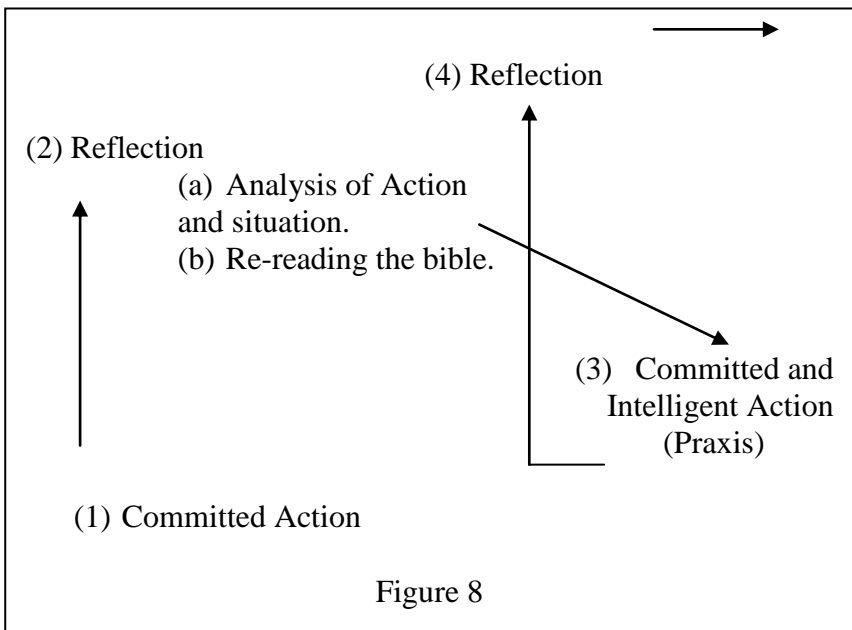
The Praxis model is nearer to the centre of Bevans continuum than the models we have so far considered. We have already made reference to a number of those theologians that make up this model when we discussed the liberation theologies above. Bevans asserts that the Praxis model is not limited to the liberation theologies influenced by Marxist thinking.¹³¹ Bevans also points out that for all the association between the Praxis model and Latin American liberation theology a lot of liberation theologians address classical themes and speculative theology, by addressing such themes as Christology and ecclesiology, rather than work directly from a Praxis model.¹³² He does not comment on Kee's statement that Liberation Theologies are not Marxist enough,¹³³ but rather sees the Praxis model as having wider use than the Latin American theologies. He believes this method is used more widely and describes it as follows. (See Figure 8.)

¹³⁰ Bevans 1994 p99

¹³¹ *ibid.* p66

¹³² *ibid.* p72

¹³³ Kee 1990 p189



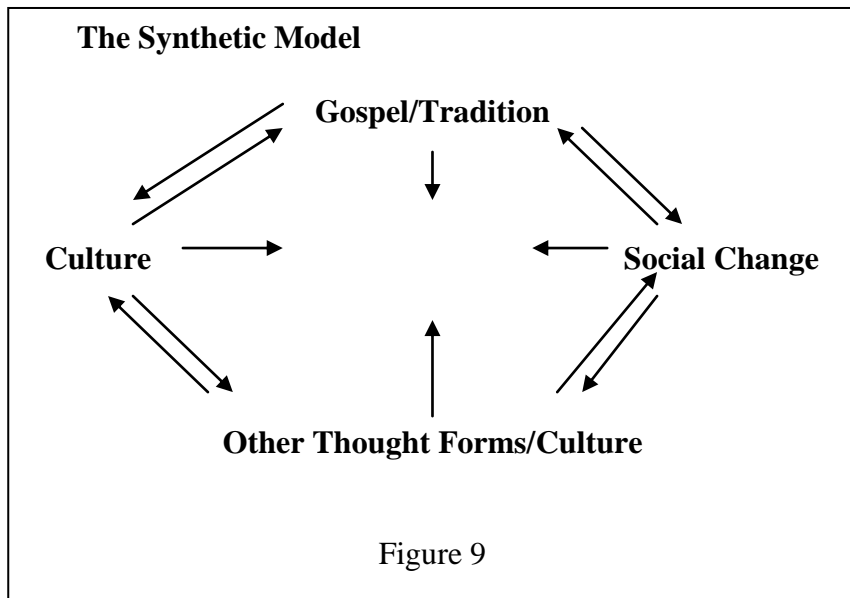
These steps begin with committed action, which moves on to a reflection stage. This consists of making an analysis of the action and the situation in which the action takes place. Alongside this is a reflection upon the Bible and the tradition in which it is understood. This reflection enables a more committed and intelligent action. It is the reflection taken into action that provides the understanding of the word 'praxis'. Bevans chooses two non-Marxist illustrations of this model that emphasises his point about a wider use.

5. Synthetic models

- e.g. Kosuke Koyama, Jose De Mesa, Aylward Shorter

When Bevans speaks of a 'synthetic model' he uses this word 'synthetic' to convey three ideas. Firstly it is a synthesis of the models that have already been described. It sets out to preserve the gospel message and tradition, while acknowledging the vital part culture plays in the formulation of theology. Secondly it

takes seriously the theologies of other cultures and develops a synthesis of one's own culture and the points of view of other cultures. And thirdly it is synthetic in the sense that it doesn't only put various points of view together, but sets out to develop a creative dialectic that allows the enrichment of any particular stance. (See Figure 9)¹³⁴



The advantage of this representation is that allows for both

- (1) the cultural and
- (2) the social change aspects.

In effect this takes into account both the inculturation method and the liberation method. This model stands most closely to the centre of Bevans' continuum.

¹³⁴ *ibid.* p82-83

In this chapter I have outlined the way that different people have given shape to the varieties of contextual models of theology. This not only shows how many have made sense of the way context inter-relates with theology but gives rise to the possibility of making some generalised comments and proves the basis on which to make a choice about what makes the best sense given our situation. I am sure that many readers will have already begun to think critically about which shapes make most sense from their own experience, or which combinations of ideas best fit their own purposes. In the next chapter I intend to examine the maps and make some assessment of which principles I think most helpful for the multi-cultural setting that I have described in Part 1 of this book.

Chapter 5 - Contextual Theologies: An Evaluation

Correspondence between the maps

What the maps of Niebuhr, Dulles, Ford, Hesselgrave and Rommen, and Bevans illustrate is that whilst they do not correspond exactly, partly because they were constructed to serve differing purposes, and partly because the boundaries provide for variations of judgement, there is a general agreement about what is involved in gaining an understanding of the way the relationship between Christianity and culture can be assessed.

The left of each continuum understands the relatedness of Christianity and culture by looking at culture in the light of the traditional self-understanding of the Christian position. Each of the maps has a slightly different picture of what makes up this traditional position, but the important point for us is that culture is evaluated in the light of traditional Christian understanding.

Equally there is a correspondence in the maps on the right hand side. This correspondence is that the cultural context is given the first consideration. The Christian influence is helped to become relevant by seeing how it can be related in the light of the 'ways of thought' that currently exist. Primacy is given to taking account of the culture, its worldview, or its philosophy.

These maps help develop the comment made at the end of the last section. They help explain the variation in the emphasis that is given to 'the context' or 'the content of the message' to be contextualised. The resulting map can be drawn to help the purposes of this work:

Priority to the message to be contextualised	<-----	Correlation of the message and the context	----->	Priority to the context for theology
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What has to be acknowledged is that none of these positions is totally exclusive of the others; in practice, all have to take account of the other. Communication between cultures is only possible if attention is given to the context. Also there is no Christianity without any proclamation of the gospel. What is at stake though is an important question of emphasis.

The word 'context' is used here not only to describe a culture and the way of going about life in a particular culture, but also a socio-economic context that may cry out for change. I have referred to culture and context interchangeably. To save unnecessary repetition perhaps the reader will allow this also to be true for both cultural and socio-economic situations that need changing.

Evaluating the perspectives

Priority to message

Bosch has the 'kernel and husk' approach as describing the first position; that which gives emphasis to the priority of the message. This indicates that there is a culturally un-contaminated core that is the message to be communicated. All sorts of cultural expressions can surround this core as long as there remains an unadulterated core. As Bosch helpfully points out, this distinction between content and form is itself an expression of a Western modern scientific culture that is not always shared by all other cultures.¹³⁵

Secondly I question whether such a distinction between kernel and husk can be helpful in practice. When it comes to

¹³⁵ Bosch. 1993 p454

Hesselgrave and Rommen's analysis of Language and Meaning¹³⁶ they seem overly optimistic about the prospects for accurate cross-cultural transmission of information, including what they see as the supracultural message. They point to the similarity of lexical/semantic relationships in various languages, and Chomsky's work on 'deep structures'.¹³⁷ In fact Hesselgrave and Rommen themselves draw attention to these factors in a separate chapter. They ask that notice be taken of worldviews, cognitive processes, ways of expressing ideas, ways of acting, the social structure, and ways of deciding.¹³⁸ By placing these in a separate chapter from the consideration of language and meaning, they do not separate the inter-relation of these factors in real life. In reality I believe their optimism about the possibility of accuracy of cross-cultural transmission of information is either overstated or a long way in the future.

Another issue about this point is the question of whether 'supracultural elements' can be communicated by accurate language, or for that matter by words in isolation to a whole range of other cultural behaviours. In the final analysis faith is communicated to us through our total context.

It is the over emphasis with words rather than a relationship with the word made flesh that prompts my final point which is well made by Bevans:

...we might criticize as well the translation model's implicit notion of revelation as propositional. Revelation is not just a message from God, a list of truths that Christians must believe. Revelation is the manifestation of God's presence in human life and human society...¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Hesselgrave and Rommen. 1989 p158ff.

¹³⁷ *ibid.* p162

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* p204ff

¹³⁹ Bevans 1994 p37

For these reasons this is not a perspective that I would choose.

Priority to the context

Bevans describes the second perspective as that which gives priority to the culture,

..the central and guiding insight of the anthropological model: human nature, and therefore human culture, is good, holy, and valuable. It is within human culture that we find God's revelation - not as a separate supracultural message, but in the very complexity of culture itself, in the warp and woof of human relationships, which are constitutive of cultural existence.¹⁴⁰

I believe that this respect for context, the context that reveals the presence of God in our world, is to be affirmed. However, if the context alone had been sufficient, or our response to it had been adequate, then there would have been no need for the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Nor would there be the need to join God's mission to the world. The gift of the incarnation, and the message it brings, is the means by which creation can be brought to fullness. The result I believe is that it is not sufficient to give priority to the context alone.

Bevans also reminds us of the very real danger of 'cultural romanticism'. He warns of the danger of a cultural idealism that seeks to seal off outside influences.¹⁴¹

Correlation of the Message and the Context

I believe that according to Bevans' map, a correlation of message and context might be somewhere very close to his synthetic model (with which we associate the idea of 'culture'), but not far from his Praxis model (with which we associate liberation). I

¹⁴⁰ Bevans 1994 p49

¹⁴¹ Bevans 1994 p53

shall give weight to the synthetic model as the one that corresponds most with the correlation approach.

When Bevans speaks of his five models, he makes it clear that we are describing different types of practice. In reality there may be a combination of types in any one situation. In thinking about different British cultures there may be a need to discuss what kind of combination of synthetic and praxis models may be appropriate. Or, to use a different language, what combination of inculturation and liberation models should be used.

Summary

In this section a number of maps, those of Niebuhr, Dulles, Ford, Hesselgrave and Rommen, and Bevans have been examined. These maps all have one thing in common. Each has a continuum with Christian tradition and gospel message at one end, and culture and social change at the other. These maps show a way of relating a variety of contextual theologies. I have argued that contextual models demand attention to both the context and the message, and have opted for a correlation approach. I have chosen the 'inculturation' model, to use Bosch's terms: or the 'synthetic' model to use Bevans' terms. I have chosen these in preference to the 'liberation' or 'praxis' models; and yet there is a need to take these into consideration. I will later suggest that socio-economic and social change issues are important and that the 'inculturation' or 'synthetic' models can and need to take this into account.

Liberation and inculturation

Chopp's assessments of the liberation theologies of Latin America are that an 'understanding of human reality through praxis is joined by an interpretation, a re-formation of Christian symbols through the central theme of liberation.'¹⁴²

¹⁴² Chopp 1989 p117

She also makes three very sharp criticisms of the 'revisionist theologies' of Tracy, Browning and Ogden etc. These theologies 'desire to 'mediate' between Christianity and culture on a range of teachings and practice'¹⁴³ and would be consistent with the inculturation approach described above.

Her criticisms are:

- Firstly they understand praxis as primarily with reference to intentional human action.
- Secondly that they are concerned with reconciliation and order rather than future-oriented transformation.
- Thirdly that politics is one area of discussion rather than an issue that pervades all others.¹⁴⁴

She expands upon these arguments. I get the impression that the last two points are more about who is using the method than the method itself. Tracy's method could be used in the ways that Chopp suggests. There would be little difficulty in using the correlation method in ways that highlight transformation. In fact Tracy's validating criteria for practical theology is 'transformative praxis.'¹⁴⁵ Neither would it be difficult to engage the political components or implications in a method that lays some weight on the place of ethics and politics in its understanding of praxis.

The first point, which refers to intentional human action, is more fundamental. The discussion that I will undertake about the nature of class and the Marxist understanding of class will bring to light the sociological dilemma in evaluating the relationship of

¹⁴³ *Revisionists and Liberals*. J.Buckley. 1989 p91

¹⁴⁴ Chopp 1987 p132

¹⁴⁵ *The Foundations of Practical Theology* D. Tracy 1983 p76

intentional individual human behaviour and the nature of social structure.

Chopp refers to Giddens' work on the 'duality of structure':

The second factor concerns the recursive nature of praxis and similar to social theorists such as Anthony Giddens, seeks to view society as composed of neither intentional individuals nor functional organisms, views that give rise to either the dominance of ethics or of sociology.¹⁴⁶

Giddens stresses that while human agents act within patterns of social convention to generate activity, their actions serve to exhibit and reproduce the values of the social structure. 'Structure' suggests this pattern, or mesh, of social relations over time, is more than an external force, but an internalised shape, rather like the structure of language.

Structure is then the reproducing of social practices that persist and influence human action. These 'procedures' reinforce behaviour. However, social structure is not a constraint for it is a product of human agency and changes. Culture is a construction of human practices. Social structure is a constraint in that human actions have unintended consequences that serve to maintain, or sometimes even change, the current mode of social structure.¹⁴⁷

Giddens' theory of structuration enables us to revise simplistic pictures of the dilemma of understanding whether we create social structure, or find ourselves victims of it. Yet even though Giddens provides a clear picture about the relation between human agency and social structure it does not help us predict the consequences of any particular action or the extent to which the social structure will act as a constraining influence. The sense is

¹⁴⁶ Chopp 1987 p133

¹⁴⁷ See *Transforming Practice*. E.Graham 1996 p98

that structures cannot be predicted to constrain particular kinds of change, nor can one predict in any particular instance that human agency is able to modify, or change, the prevailing social structure.¹⁴⁸ While insights have been improved I do not believe this debate to be resolved.

But there is no doubt that social structure is to be reckoned with and that this insight of Latin American liberation theologies has not been adequately dealt with by the revisionist theologians.

Looking at this debate from the opposite direction, Ogden's commentary upon liberation theology is also relevant.

Schubert Ogden¹⁴⁹ makes four points about how he is challenged by the liberation theologies to find ways of overcoming what he sees as present inadequacies.

1. 'these theologies typically are not so much theology as witness.'
2. 'they typically focus on the existential meaning of God for us without dealing at all adequately with the metaphysical being of God in itself.'
3. 'liberation theologies typically tend to confuse - or do not adequately distinguish - two essentially different, though closely related, forms of liberation.' (i.e. Redemption and Emancipation.)
4. 'they typically have too restricted or provincial understanding of the various forms of bondage from which men and women, as well as their fellow creatures, need to be emancipated.'

¹⁴⁸ *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*. A. Giddens 1986 p60-61

¹⁴⁹ *From Faith to Freedom*. S. Ogden 1989 p30ff

I believe the last three points do not allow us to discard the correlation method and its achievements in the face of the challenge from the Latin American liberation theologies. However due note must be taken of the 'web of social interaction' that indicates the interdependency of human agency and social systems outlined in Giddens' 'duality of structure.'¹⁵⁰

I would therefore suggest that we borrow from the field of sociology a way of taking note of the positions offered by these competing theologies.

When Giddens talks about the present state of sociology he says that the main theoretical approaches to sociology are functionalism, structuralism, symbolic interactionism and Marxism. To some extent the first three approaches offer particular strengths and certain approaches that suit different subjects of enquiry.

(Marxism, itself, has several branches, and some can be equated as a Marxist approach to the other three discrete sociological approaches that Giddens outlines.)

Giddens' comment is this:

It is best not to see Marxism as a type of approach within sociology, but as a body of writing existing alongside sociology, each overlapping and quite frequently being influenced by the other.¹⁵¹

Maybe this is a model for our consideration of Latin American liberation theology. Perhaps this relates to the first of Ogden's comments that liberation theology is more a witness than theology. But it is surely a witness that overlaps and quite

¹⁵⁰ Giddens 1986 p60-61

¹⁵¹ *Sociology*. A. Giddens 1993 p717

frequently influences and is influenced by other approaches to theology. So I suggest that we say:

‘It is best not to see the Latin American liberation theologies as a type of approach within theology, but as a body of writing existing alongside Fundamental, Systematic and Practical Theology, each overlapping and quite frequently being influenced by the others.’

Liberation or Inculturation?

Schrieter's analysis leads him to make a clear distinction as to when the inculturation model and when a liberation model is most appropriate. His basic assumption is that ethnographic or inculturation approaches work primarily with issues of identity and continuity. In contrast, liberation models work primarily on issues of social change and discontinuity.¹⁵²

This is a rather superficial reading of the situation. The description of working class culture (Hasler 2000) clearly explores issues of continuity and discontinuity in the changes of employment patterns; the degrees of consensus and conflict between genders; the extent of rights of passage along certain streets; and by implication the patterns of exclusion in particular streets or 'public territory'. Ethnographic models are as much about conflict as about cohesion. Likewise, we could identify the ethnographic assumptions made in many liberation approaches. Feminist, Gay, Tribal, and Class cultures underwrite many liberation approaches implicitly if not explicitly. Perhaps Paolo Friere, the educationist, was more honest and aware of this. In his *Cultural Action for Freedom* he explicitly notes how it is cultural action, in his case the development of literacy, that opens the way for the liberationist method of raising people's consciousness of political oppression.¹⁵³

¹⁵² *Constructing Local Theologies*. R. Schrieter 1985 p13/15

¹⁵³ *Cultural Action for Freedom*. P. Friere 1972

Shorter is more conscious of the inter-relationship between liberation and inculturation methods. He is clearer that inculturation and liberation feed each other. But having said that he continues:

All of this is not to say that inculturation is only realized when total liberation is achieved. That would be to turn it into a wholly eschatological phenomenon. What it means is that inculturation implies an active commitment to this liberation, that it becomes part of the on-going dialogue that constitutes inculturation.¹⁵⁴

Even in Latin America, liberation models have to take account of ethnographic features. One of the issues for the Base Communities in Latin America has been the cultural concern of the native South American people.¹⁵⁵ Even the popular view that Latin Americans have a common legacy of Hispanic culture cannot be assumed.

Many of these discussions show that a definition based on socio-economic, or Marxist terms are under severe scrutiny. I choose a cultural approach to describing 'class'. This does not involve turning a blind eye to socio-economic factors, but in themselves they do not provide a secure enough base upon which to proceed.

My conclusion then, is to follow the inculturation or correlation programme. However, using the insights of Bevans' synthetic model (Figure 9.), it is important to follow the inculturation model in such a way that it is open to the influences of liberation theology.

¹⁵⁴ Shorter 1988 p248

¹⁵⁵ *Indigenous Mobilization*. J. Vasquez et al. 1984 p38-45.

Crying out for polycentric praxis

Inculturation implies a variety of ways in which faith is embraced and expressed. It implies that no one theology is superior and all are up for scrutiny. It implies One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church that is able to unite across cultural difference; Christ centred, but through each culture rather than by constructing some super-cultural element to Faith which in reality turns out to be a strong euro-centric or suburbo-centric tradition. In short, what is called for is a polycentric church rather than euro-centric or suburbo-centric church.

One of the current debates is about the extent that forces toward globalisation oppose the forces toward a multicultural localism or that these two forces feed each other. Andrew Davey sees ‘being church’ in an urban world as bridging a number of tensions.¹⁵⁶ These tensions he describes as being between the global and local, place and networks. Being church is about engaging and connecting with these tensions. We undoubtedly live in a polycentric world that experiences the trends of globalisation.

One of the big debates about polycentric church came from the Church of Rome when it introduced the development of a ‘world catechism’. *Concillium*¹⁵⁷ in 1989 gave a whole issue to the subject of ‘World Catechism or Inculturation’. This discussion is in the context of what we have come to describe as ‘globalisation’ on the one hand, and the diversity of culture in ‘localism’ on the other.

Tracey warns that a world catechism will

¹⁵⁶ Davey. 2001. p88ff.

¹⁵⁷ *Concillium* 204 1989

Prove another example of unwelcome and unacknowledged Eurocentrism in a polycentric world church.¹⁵⁸

Other commentators have seen the forces of globalisation as a westernising influence. Metz argues that European Christianity is itself shaped by Jewish and Hellenistic Greek influences that cannot just be shed ‘like a garment’. What can be done, he suggests, is that European Christianity can keep two principles in the light of this.¹⁵⁹

- First it must see itself, and prove itself, in terms of its biblical inheritance, to be a religion committed by its mission to seeking freedom and justice for all.
- Second it must see itself as and prove itself to be a religion which derives from its biblical inheritance a particular culture, a culture based on the acknowledgement of the other in their otherness, in other words on the creative acknowledgement of ethnic and cultural plurality, such as be familiar to us from the primitive history of Christianity.

The keynote theme of the 23rd Annual Assembly of the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany, (Evangelisches Missionswerk. EMW. 1997.) was ‘Gospel and Cultures – Inculturating the Gospel in Germany in the light of the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism.’ The introductory address was by Dr. Klaus Schaefer. He noted that no longer was Christianity orientated to the West but was polycentric. Delegates from the South pointed out that inculturation was not only an issue for them but posed a challenge for all cultures, including the West and Europe.

¹⁵⁸ ibid p36

¹⁵⁹ ibid p82

I believe that, maybe in a different way, but no less seriously, this world situation is analogous to Britain today. The churches are largely suburbo-centric and could well heed the words of John Baptist Metz above, and the evangelical challenge from churches in the South. What I have called ‘Professional and Managerial’ culture could well acknowledge its own cultural roots and notice that there are other cultures in Britain. It could commit itself to fostering the emergence of others seeking a ‘faith of their own culture’ in every place, rather than expecting other cultures to conform to their own theological preferences and their own cultural patterns of social organisation.

In Britain, the hope is that other cultures will not allow themselves to be dominated by professional and managerial culture. Inculturation will be a big step toward the process of evangelisation. The plurality implied will necessarily involve the process of growing in polycentricity. Polycentric praxis is what is called for, even if it is something we have to stumble towards in our usual faltering way. Polycentric Church is something we need to grow concurrently with initiatives to inculturate the gospel in the variety of British cultures.

Summary - Moving toward a polycentric church

Urban theology is the theology that exists on the ground. We may wish it would change, we may wish to teach something else, but the first task is to discover what has already been learned. My assertion is that examining the correlation between faith and the various cultures and subcultures in our towns and cities is the best way to do this. My own work studying faith and working class culture is one example.¹⁶⁰ I have suggested four kinds of culture and invite the reader to suggest others. Understanding aspects of the culture is the first step in any missionary situation but I see little work being done by the British church in this respect. It goes without saying that we can't preach the gospel in a true vernacular or celebrate a ceremony without some understanding about how our words and actions are going to be received. We gladly talk about being mission shaped and finding fresh expressions but with little specific or systematic study of the cultures in which we want to see these emerge. 'We are a multi-cultural society', we say; but with little real grasp of what makes up our own culture, the culture that God has put us in.

It is true that there is a certain overlap between geography and culture. The posh suburbs have much professional and managerial culture, and council built housing estates are predominantly working class. However, to describe theologies by geography is too sloppy because often the places it describes are not inhabited by one culture alone. However, the behaviour within any neighbourhood can be a powerful tool to examine how cultural theologies inter-penetrate, or fail to inter-penetrate. The neighbourhood can be a primary means that enables us to talk about urban theology, but only as a dynamic interchange between cultures and cultural theologies.

¹⁶⁰ Hasler 1999, 2000.

‘A Social Network’, or a map of the exchanges that people make, is a tool that helps us see what kind of social interaction takes place between people. How many people talk to the same people as each other? Or, do conversations form a long chain? etc. etc. I have made much here about how working class networks differ from the professional and managerial networks assumed in much of *Mission-shaped Church*. I have also pointed up how the church’s organisation is dominated by managerial and professional thinking; what I have described as the *suburbo-centric church*. I hope I have sufficiently conveyed that there is no attribution of blame or fault. The weaker seem to have eagerly colluded with the stronger, especially if it means getting more resources. The result is that we have failed to examine the difficulties of engaging faith with culture by insisting we have a one-culture approach. For example, why should the norm be that we ordain people who can operate everywhere in the Church of England? I doubt if anyone could operate everywhere in practice, and if the training were really successful, I suspect the ordained would have all become estranged from the communities from whence they came.

My major plea is for the acknowledgement that we live in a multi-cultural nation and that we start to act as if this were true, even when these cultures are not defined through skin colour, and that we begin the analysis of the cultures we work among. My hope is that this will help us set out to shape churches that reflect the glory of God through the eyes of the cultures that they are part of, and from which their local ministry emerges. My plea is that Dioceses and their Bishops, or their equivalents, see one of their main tasks as helping theology across the boundaries of the variety of cultures making up any particular diocese. Doing this will demand actions that show we are becoming a polycentric church and are not dominated by any one culture. Moving in this direction needs careful steps to take us from where we are to where we want to go.

There is no point of making a systematic study of the variety of cultures unless we are prepared to offer a different response to each. It would be easy to examine the context and still offer a form of what we have been doing for years. My own response for working class culture is to suggest we model a shift from employing vicars to engaging church-shaping missionaries who will find and encourage the ordination of local leaders who are grounded in the local familial networks of working class culture. But, what of the troubled suburban church? What should their response be? Should it be similar? Is 'network church' a suburban equivalent response to their social networks? What of the inner city and the city centre? We need to find out in what ways we can respond to what is sociologically coherent on the ground.

I have opted for an inculturation, or synthetic model of contextualisation, where faith and practice are correlated. But I have opted for these in a way that treats justice and liberation themes seriously. Inculturation here, and inculturation there, implies a polycentric church. But there are obstacles. In Britain I have seen the assumed dominance of the professional and managerial culture as one of these obstacles. Asking this culture to note what is happening is not just an option, it is a matter of justice. The place, for what I have called 'suburbo-centric' church, to start is by acknowledging the cultural history of their own roots and the symbolic networks, or the symbols of 'the taken for granted,' in their own culture. For this is the filter through which they see and describe their own faith.

In summary, the message of this book is to grasp what is the real anatomy of urban theology as it is found among the people. To be a catholic church in the light of urbanisation means to be the church of a number of cultures. One challenge is to identify these cultures and to respond to them all. Another challenge is that in any response that is genuine, the church will be seen to seek to move toward a polycentric order and not an order dominated by the professional and managerial ways of organising things.

The working class church should be a full part of the discussions, alongside other cultures, and together with their Bishops, or equivalent leaders, who as the focus for unity, would facilitate the debate, and facilitate a respect, and a joy, for the variety of ways faith has been received.

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