

JOINING TOGETHER IN THE TRANSFORMING MISSION OF GOD

CLERGY STUDY DAY – TALK TWO

INTRODUCTION

Joining Together in the Mission of God is a clear mission statement. Yet I kept thinking ‘for what?’ The Mission of God is not an end in itself but has a purpose, direction and destiny. So I played around with the possibility of ‘Joining together in the mission of God for ...’ and had several tries at a phrase. None proved convincing, as the staff team will tell you. However by inserting an adjective it is possible to indicate something of the nature and direction of God’s mission. Again a variety of alternatives were tried but in the end ‘transforming’ came to be agreed. God is about transforming people, communities and creation. The vision of the end in Isaiah filled out in Revelation 21 is of ‘a new heaven and a new earth’; the whole of creation transformed to be where God dwells and no light is needed (Isaiah 65, 66 & 60); where the wealth of all nations finds its home – and where people of every nation, tongue and race come to dwell.

There is too a deliberate echo of David Bosch’s book ‘Transforming Mission’. Here the title is deliberately double edged – not only is God’s mission transformative but also the very practice of mission in our age is transforming as we seek to proclaim the gospel afresh.

There was too the concern that several raised that whilst the 4 core values, Discerning God, Valuing People, Serving Community & Enabling Change had proved to be a very valuable framework they, as values, had come to dominate over the primary statement about Joining Together in the Mission of God. The more I looked and listened I shared this concern; not that these core values should be lost but that the priority of God’s mission should return to be the headline of what we are about.

The idea of returning this transformed mission statement to be the primary statement of our purpose was agreed by Bishop’s Council at our January residential.

So too was the proposal that we express this mission in 3 streams – Living Worship, Growing Disciples & Seeking Justice. But before moving on to explain these more fully let’s take some time to reflect on the mission of God.

THE MISSION OF GOD (*Missio Dei*)

The Edinburgh World Missionary Conference 1910 is widely regarded as ‘the all-time high-water mark in Western missionary enthusiasm, the zenith of the optimistic and pragmatist

approach to missions' (Bosch p 338). It built on the 1900 New York Ecumenical Missionary Conference; both gathered people from missionary organisations together; but Edinburgh also saw the first time an Archbishop of Canterbury addressed a non denominational gathering of this kind. The conviction of the age was 'The evangelization of the world in this generation'. Those who gathered were confident this would be fulfilled, and in an ecumenical Protestant way (there were no Roman Catholic or Orthodox Christians at these events).

The huge confidence and optimism was shattered in Europe by the First World War. Unknown to most of those gathered in 1906 a new spiritual movement was breaking out in Azusa Street, Los Angeles as Pentecostalism was born. Equally not understood were the evangelistic and missionary stirrings taking place in the new churches these missions had brought to birth in the previous centuries; the whole 'power-base' of church was in the early days of shifting.

In 1922 Roland Allen produced a small book, 'Missionary Methods – St Paul's or Ours?' which questioned the entire framework of Missionary Methods and was to shape thinking ever since.

Particularly after the first world war theology underwent a number of radical re-shapings throughout the 20th century. We can cite significant names who effected this re-shaping – people like Bultmann, Barth, Bonhoeffer, Tillich, Moltmann, Rahner, Kuhn & Wright. Or we can name particular developments like feminist, liberation, black, queer and charismatic / Pentecostal theologies.

One of the most significant has been the the shifts in missionary thinking and the development of missiology. As Bosch puts it we have moved 'From a Theology of Mission to a missionary theology' (p492).

Let us go on a very brief history of this development.

Missio Dei

Karl Barth 1932 "The church can be in mission authentically only in obedience to God as *missio*."

Karl Hartenstein 1934 coins term 'mission dei' and distinguishes it from 'mission ecclesiae'

The International Missionary Conference held in Willingen in 1952 moved this forward; David Bosch summarised this as " The classical doctrine of the *missio dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another 'movement': Father, Son & Holy Spirit sending the church into the world

... Willingen's image of mission was mission as participating in the sending of God. Our mission has no life of its own: only in the hands of the sending God can it truly be called mission, not least since missionary initiative comes from God alone." (D Bosch 'Transforming Mission' p390 cited in Bevans & Schroeder 'Constants in Context' p290)

As this became more widely accepted and debated one of the main questions was 'Is 'Dei' in this phrase the God or gods of all religions or the Triune God of Christian faith? Indeed because it appeared that the former interpretation was becoming accepted evangelicals and Roman Catholics struggled to accept the term 'missio dei' as of value. However the term has persisted and has been fully integrated into missionary theology through the work of Newbigin, Bosch, Shenk, Bevans, Schroeder and others.

The question of why this shift to mission has happened has to be asked. The answer lies in both the 'missionary movement' of the past 3 centuries and the radical change in the culture of western Europe and North America.

Stephen Neill summarised where we were for centuries in these words - "the vision of a typical English village of not more than 400 inhabitants, where all are baptised Christians, compelled to live more or less Christian lives under the brooding eye of parson and squire." In such a context, "evangelisation' has hardly any meaning, since all are in some sense already Christian, and need no more than to be safeguarded against error in religion and viciousness in life." (The Church & Christian Union 1968 cited in David Bosch 'Believing in the Future' 1995) – In other words the George Herbert, Country Parson vision of church and nation.

This as we all know has been changing for a very long time but the 20th century saw the rapid move away from it, propelled especially by the two World Wars.

David Bosch's 'Transforming Mission', published in 1991 is the seminal work showing clearly how mission had been transformed through the ages notably in respect to specific 'paradigm shifts'. Influenced heavily by Michael Polyani and Thomas Kuhn's idea of paradigm shifts, he explores Hans Kung's 6 major paradigms of Christian history

1. Apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity
2. Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period
3. The medieval Roman catholic paradigm
4. The Protestant (Reformation) paradigm
5. The modern Enlightenment paradigm
6. The emerging ecumenical paradigm

He was arguing we are in the midst of this 6th shift. His thesis is that in each epoch there were paradigm shifts in theology and in mission.

We have been transformed since he wrote – just consider that since he wrote we have seen the collapse of Soviet Union, the end of apartheid in South Africa and the Mandela phenomenon, 9/11 and its impact, rise of China (& India & Brazil), financial crises, ecological and environmental awareness, return of religion and rise of Islam, continued moves to secularisation, the world-wide web, mobile technology, dominance of sport, Rome's new confidence, Anglican communion, and we are currently seeing major shifts in North Africa and Arab nations. He had already noted the shift of Christianity to the South from the North and the rise of Pentecostalism, although took less note of both than his critics suggest he should have done.

Stephen Bevans & Roger Schroeder have built heavily on Bosch's work in Constants in Context; Andrew Walls has continued to produce splendid stuff and Chris Wright has produced a magisterial work on the missional basis of the Bible (The Mission of God). Then there are all sorts of works coming from Africa & Asia pushing fresh questions of theology and mission.

So it is perhaps invidious to even attempt to say where we are. But I will offer two key reflections.

The first is the centenary celebrations of Edinburgh 1910 held last year. There were 3 major gatherings all designed in one way or another to reflect on where the missionary task has reached 100 years later, and how it has changed.

TOKYO 2010

Making Disciples of People in Every Generation

Our Responsibility

Because of the reality of mankind's dire need and God's gracious remedy, Jesus left with His followers the missional priority of making disciples of every people (Mt. 28:18-20). By this mandate we acknowledge both the breadth of the unfinished task – *all peoples* – and the depth of the task – *making disciples*, as its focus

Penetration ("go"): making a priority of going to those who have had little or no exposure to the gospel. Messengers go and encounter non-believers by way of personal encounters, broadcasts, podcasts, printed material, recordings, electronic communications, or any other innovative means used as a channel of penetrating witness. Thus, the importance of the ministry of evangelizing.

Consolidation ("baptizing"): gathering new believers into a relationship with Jesus and other believers, which is evidenced by the identifying rite of baptism. To conserve the fruit of evangelism and then be able to systematically disciple believers

takes a local body of believers living in corporate harmony. Thus, the importance of the ministry of establishing churches.

Transformation (“teaching to obey”): teaching Christ-followers to observe His commands with the outcome of transformed lives. The new believer’s worldview must be adjusted to a biblical worldview; his lifestyle changed to increasingly conform to the image of Christ; and his ethical conduct progressively marked by biblical morals. Ideally, this results in individuals applying the gospel of the kingdom to every sphere and pursuit of life—from government to economics, from education to health, and from science to creation care. As a consequence whole communities, cultures and countries benefit from the transforming power of the gospel. Thus, the importance of the ministry of teaching.

EDINBURGH 2010

Edinburgh 2010 **COMMON CALL**

As we gather for the centenary of the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh 1910, we believe the church, as a sign and symbol of the reign of God, is called to witness to Christ today by sharing in God’s mission of love through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

The Edinburgh 2010 Common Call emerged from the Edinburgh 2010 study process and conference to mark the centenary of the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910. The Common Call was affirmed in the Church of Scotland Assembly Hall in Edinburgh on 6 June 2010 by representatives of world Christianity, including Catholic, Evangelical, Orthodox, Pentecostal, and Protestant churches

LAUSANNE – CAPE TOWN 2010

- *The Church’s mission goes on.* The mission of God continues to the ends of the earth and to the end of the world. The day will come when the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ and God will dwell with his redeemed humanity in the new creation. Until that day, the Church’s participation in God’s mission continues, in joyful urgency, and with fresh and exciting opportunities in every generation including our own.

This Statement is framed in the language of love. Love is the language of covenant. The biblical covenants, old and new, are the expression of God’s redeeming love and grace reaching out to lost humanity and spoiled creation. They call for our love in return. Our love shows itself in trust, obedience and passionate commitment to our covenant Lord. *The*

Lausanne Covenant defined evangelization as '*the whole Church taking the whole gospel to the whole world*'. That is still our passion. So we renew that covenant by affirming again:

- *Our love for the whole gospel*, as God's glorious good news in Christ, for every dimension of his creation, for it has all been ravaged by sin and evil;
- *Our love for the whole Church*, as God's people, redeemed by Christ from every nation on earth and every age of history, to share God's mission in this age and glorify him for ever in the age to come;
- *Our love for the whole world*, so far from God but so close to his heart, the world that God so loved that he gave his only Son for its salvation.

In the grip of that three-fold love, we commit ourselves afresh to *be* the whole Church, to *believe, obey, and share* the whole gospel, and to *go* to the whole world to make disciples of all nations.

Another way of assessing where we are is to return to the missiologists writing. I find Bevans & Schroeder's 6 Constants – Christ, Church, Eschatology, Anthropology, Salvation & Culture found in every era and in all 3 major strands of theology (conservative, liberal and radical) very helpful.

I also think that their summary of mission now as being Prophetic Dialogue very valuable. Within Prophetic Dialogue they highlight Witness and Proclamation; Liturgy, Prayer & Contemplation; Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation; Interreligious Dialogue; Inculturation; & Reconciliation.

From within Africa and South America Lamin Sanneh's work on the translatability of the gospel is deeply rewarding to explore; in the South American context this is being explored by Samuel Escobar amongst others. Wonsuk Ma from Korea is writing very stimulating works from an Asian Pentecostal perspective. We need more women writing in this field; Cathy Ross, Ida Glasser, Melba Maggay & Beverley Hadday amongst others I hope will produce more. One of the most fascinating aspects of all this work is the intense ecumenical crossovers happening between Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Protestant & Pentecostal theologians from all parts of the globe.

SO WHAT IS THE MISSION OF GOD?

“The God revealed in the Scriptures is personal, purposeful and goal-orientated.” (Chris Wright, ‘The Mission of God’ p63)

We can look at Isaiah 56-66 and see a variety of pictures and purposes in the mission of God.

Isaiah 56.1 sets the tone for the whole of these chapters, which all commentators, regardless of their view on authorship and dating, regard as a coherent section within the book as a whole. God’s mission is about justice and righteousness. It is about God being the saviour and deliverer.

This justice is about transforming people’s lives; it is about transforming communities, society, and indeed the world. In this vision of transformation the hungry are fed, the naked clothed, the homeless housed, truth takes place in the courts, the poor hear good news, the imprisoned are set free, ruined cities are re-built. It is an inclusive justice in which those outside (eunuch and foreigner) are welcomed in – though it is not an unbounded inclusiveness for these people have to bind themselves to the Lord.

The mission of God has a vision of a new heaven and a new earth within which children and old people find their full place; where work is properly valued and fruitful. There is too a new Jerusalem, into which the wealth of the nations comes; the gates are always open and the Lord is the cities light.

Yet there is a recognition that this full justice can only come about by God’s action; he has to save and deliver; he has to redeem. No one else can bring this transformation about, out of his everlasting love and compassion the Lord acts to bring about salvation.

This vision leads the people of God to confession, repentance, prayer, lament and praise.

Now Ray Fung’s Isaiah vision specifically picks up on Isaiah 65.17-end. He highlights the vision that *‘children do not die; old people live in dignity; people who build houses live in them & those who plant vineyards eat the fruit.’*

He also extremely helpfully points out that when God’s people work for this justice agenda they do so in God’s name but will find themselves joining together with others in the process. As they do so he notes that there will inevitably come an invitation to worship and an invitation to discipleship.

What is proposed is deeply indebted to, and rooted in Fung's little book. However Fung was writing in 1992, the same time as Bosch, and as we have noted the context has moved on. It is also to be noted that Fung completely omitted the environmental / ecological thrust of the closing part of Isaiah 65. Further he did not really set Isaiah 65 in its wider Isaiahic context, which is what has been part of the driving force of my own thinking through the autumn.

Further, possibly because of the narrow framework he did not make the deep connection through into the New Testament – and I think it is vital that we do so. So whilst Isaiah has been crucial in my studies and reflection as we work out our direction and priorities we must make this connection. The connection is twofold.

First Isaiah 61.1-3 we all know is the passage Jesus deliberately finds to read from the scroll in his home synagogue of Nazareth. This becomes his 'mission statement'. He knows he is the Spirit anointed one, the Messiah, who is fulfilling the hopes of the people of God, and bringing to fruition God's purposes. Our joining together in the transforming mission of God cannot but have Jesus at its centre and heart; for we join with him anointed by the same Spirit to proclaim God's good news. Jesus clear teaching and command to the disciples after the resurrection, their mission mandate, is the continuation of this work not starting something from scratch. *'Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold I am sending the promise of my Father upon you."' (Luke 24.45-49)*

Second Isaiah 60 & 65-66 together form a key backdrop to the final vision of the Scriptures – the new heaven and new earth of Revelation. The Revelation passages build on Isaiah, and indeed other prophets, to hold before us the vision of where the mission of God finds its culmination. We are called to join together in God's mission with a clear vision of where we are headed. Eschatology matters; our vision of God's vision for the culmination of all things inspires, encourages and draws us forward. We really do believe, to use different words,

He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross.' (Colossians 1.15-20)

So I have shared something of the story and process of the past 12 months. I hope this has shown clearly that we are building together on what has already been happening, and continues to take place, across the sectors and parishes of the Diocese.

We have explored the latter chapters of Isaiah together, and I trust that these past minutes have helped us all reflect afresh on the mission of God. Indeed I hope they may also have encouraged at least some of us to go away and do further reading and reflection on the nature of this mission today. I'm sure Nigel Rooms' new book, 'The Faith of the English' will also do this when it is published in May.

What I want to do now is outline specifically the proposed changes to how we express what we are about as a Diocese in this next phase of our life together.

The strap line will become

JOINING TOGETHER IN THE TRANSFORMING MISSION OF GOD

I hope the introduction of 'transforming' is clear by now.

The further proposal, agreed by Bishop's Council, is that we see this mission expressed in 3 streams, or threads:-

Living Worship, Growing Disciples and Seeking Justice.