

Worship and the ‘Mission-shaped’ Church

Our earlier words are bound to lose their force and cease, and our being Christian today will be limited to two things: prayer and righteous action among people.

Dietrich Bonhöffer¹

And whereas in this our time, the minds of men are so diverse, that some think it a great matter of conscience to depart from a piece of the least of their Ceremonies, they be so addicted to their old customs; and again on the other side, some be so newfangled, that they would innovate all things, and so despise the old, that nothing can like them, but that is new: it was thought expedient, not so much to have respect how to please and satisfy either of these parties, as how to please God, and profit them both. (‘Of Ceremonies, why some be abolished and some retained’, *The Book of Common Prayer*).

‘Worship’ and the Mission-shaped Church

The diversity of liturgy within Anglicanism, let alone outside it, has long attested to a variety of understandings about the proper form and meaning of Christian ‘worship’. In the recent past that diversity has expanded somewhat wildly, to include not just radically different theories and practices, but approaches that prefer to downplay or remove the connection between regular communal gatherings and ‘worship’ altogether. The problem now seems less a matter of mere disagreement, than of finding enough common ground for genuine conversation.

The recent report from a Church of England group chaired by Bishop Graham Cray, *Mission-shaped Church: Church planting and fresh expressions of Church in a changing context*,² engages with and embraces ecclesial diversity in many respects, including diversity in worship. It is an important and challenging document which addresses imaginatively the possibilities of creating new forms of Christian community in multicultural Britain, and deserves to be widely read in the Australian Church. Yet while *Mission-shaped Church* asks

¹ E. Bethge (ed), *Letters and Papers from Prison: The Enlarged Edition*, SCM Press, London, 1971, p. 300.

² Willow, Brookvale, NSW, 2005.

significant questions about worship, it lacks a stated theology or clear criteria by which the adequacy of the present and future diversity of liturgy could be assessed, other than the desire of participants to perform or view it.³ The report need not be criticized unduly for omitting what it did not set out to discuss, and its authors and audiences probably have widely different views about worship in any case. Still that omission highlights a problem, and an area where careful reflection is needed—not least so that the positive challenges of *Mission-shaped Church* can be met.

In this paper I seek to identify some starting-points for assessing the adequacy of Christian liturgy and the theology undergirding it, in the light of inevitable and indeed desirable diversity involved in ‘fresh expressions’ of Church. First I will briefly explore some issues of language and the shifting meaning of ‘worship’. I will then focus on what can be gleaned about appropriate ‘worship’ from the New Testament writings. These do not provide the whole of what most Anglicans would regard as appropriate for liturgical practice; but the New Testament provides a shared set of norms across our liturgical diversity, with which we should expect coherence, even granted a diversity of expression, and from which we should expect to construct a common language. With these New Testament criteria (and others) in mind, I will then examine some aspects of *Mission-shaped Church*, and make some further suggestions about the theological challenges raised by this significant report.

The problem of ‘worship’

The question is more than semantic, but words are not a bad place to start. The loss in English of the broader connotations of ‘worship’ as a means of referring to attitudes and actions of reverence and service (cf. ‘with my body I thee worship’) makes it hard to retain the connection between liturgical practices and that broader, and arguably more fundamental, meaning of the word. In present Western Christianity, the meaning of ‘worship’ is usually derived more or less descriptively or empirically—from observing whatever people do in Churches on Sundays—without much fundamental reflection on the origins, meanings or

³ I use ‘liturgy’ throughout this paper to refer in general terms to the forms of public Christian ‘worship’, as normally understood, whether the participants and leaders would use the term ‘liturgy’ or not. I thus intend to include rites that would prefer to understand themselves as ‘more like a family reunion than a traditional Church service’ (see further below), as well as formal styles of Anglican liturgy, sacramental and non-sacramental.

purposes either of that idea or of those practices. The English word ‘service’ has perhaps done slightly better, since it can refer both to a liturgical event and to other actions and relationships. Yet the notion of liturgy as ‘divine service’, which expresses this link, is an archaism whose meaning is largely forgotten—the two kinds of ‘service’ are mere homonyms.

Thus even Christians who belong to Churches of clearly sacramental character, such as Anglicans, may well see their specific liturgical actions simply as options among those offered across the generic activity ‘worship’, chosen according to aesthetic preference. The events they participate in, ‘worship services’, are by implication constructed to suit their tastes, rather than as forms of specific practice—sacramental or homiletic or prayerful—mandated for and characteristic of the Christian community across its history. This lack of a theological core is reflected most starkly in those settings where ‘worship’ is virtually equated with ‘music’, and ‘worship leaders’ are conductors or impresarios rather than preachers or priests. Yet the problem is also in evidence where pomp and paraphernalia wrap themselves around an event whose theological and sacramental core is obscured, or simply absent.

‘Worship’ in the New Testament: ethos and practice

The words usually translated as ‘worship’ in the New Testament indicate dispositions of piety and reverence on the part of a person or community (Rom 12:1). This is not merely an inner or spiritual thing, but includes specific utterances, actions or events, including ritual (John 4:20, 12:20, Acts 8:27, 24:11), as well as acts of charity and justice (James 1:27), all of which might be said to embody such dispositions of worship.⁴ Prescribed liturgical action in the Temple and other very concrete performances with a ritual dimension, such as physical prostration, can be considered ‘worship’ (Matt 28:9), but these are best seen as elements of whole lived reality of obedience or service, rather than as pertaining to a specific realm of life.

⁴ So for instance Larry Hurtado’s recent work, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2000, has very little to say about liturgical practice, but considers the object of Christian devotion, with attention to text and utterance.

‘Worship’ language is not tied strongly to distinct Christian gatherings or communal activities in the NT, even though liturgical observance of ordinances traced to Jesus Christ (1 Cor 11: 24b, 25b; Matt 28:19) or to apostolic authority might of course be regarded as ‘worship’ in the sense outlined above. There are various reasons for this absence of ‘worship’ language for Christian activities, including the continued existence of other gatherings and practices (such as the rituals of the Temple, initially) that were more customarily regarded as the communal expression of ‘worship’ or service of God.

Forms of action characteristic of the Christian community include communal meal gatherings (1 Cor 10:16-17, 11:17-34, Jude 12), baptism (Rom 6:4, 1 Cor 1:13-17, 15:29, Acts 2:41 etc), common prayer (Acts 1:14, 6:4, 14:23, Col 4:2) and other forms of utterance (1 Cor 12, Col 3:16), and fasting (Matt 6:16-18, Acts 13:2-3, 14:23). This list could be expanded to include actions less clearly liturgical, such as practical concern for the poor (Gal 2:10, 1 Cor 16:1-2, James 1:27 again); if for present purposes we focus on the foundations of liturgical practice, or ‘worship’ in the narrower modern sense, this is not to say that such a limitation best expresses the understandings of the earliest Christian communities about their distinctive actions.⁵

So there are two fairly distinct (though not exclusive) ways by which to approach the question of Christian ‘worship’ from the New Testament. On the one hand, there is the language or concept of ‘worship’, which suggests a particular ethos, the reverent orientation of the whole person and of communities towards God. This does involve certain activities which include speech and physical performance, and which may be in the domestic and personal realm as well as in the communal and public; but these are not the core of ‘worship’, let alone the whole of it. This notion of ‘worship’ suggests something about ethos or the disposition of Christian life, but relatively little about the specifics of distinctive liturgical practice or performance.

On the other hand, there is a collection of distinctive practices attested and urged in scripture, specific liturgical actions characteristic of the Christian community which involve the attitude of proper reverence and service towards God, but which are not always or necessarily called

⁵ See further Andrew McGowan, ‘New Testament Worship’, *New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, SCM Press, London, 2002.

‘worship’. Christians eat at the table of the Lord, baptise, fast, pray, teach, and so forth; many of these actions have ritual elements such as prescribed forms of words, bodily performances and use of particular objects and substances. They are not originally referred to as ‘worship’; their uneasy relationship with that language or concept does not make them any less essential to the being of the Church. The two dominical sacraments have a particular place among these practices. Each has its own rationale(s), sets of meanings that flesh out the ways they are constitutive of the Church: baptism effects the incorporation of its members into the body (1 Cor 12:13), which is itself effected by sharing in the one broken bread of the Eucharist (1 Cor 10:17).

Both of these categories, ethos and practice, are important to bear in mind while considering any approach to ‘worship’. Understandings of them will differ among Anglicans and others, of course; but I suggest that these two elements could summarize what is common or necessary to Christian worship, not only for testing the increasingly diverse expressions of community life, but as a positive affirmation of what will be necessary in the continuing process of giving ‘fresh expression’ to the distinctive life of the body of Christ.

Mission, Diversity and Liturgy

In the foreword of *Mission-shaped Church*, the Archbishop of Canterbury speaks of “‘Church’” as ‘what happens when people encounter the Risen Jesus and commit themselves to sustaining and deepening that encounter in their encounter with each other’, acknowledging that there is ‘plenty of theological room for diversity of rhythm and style’.⁶

Mission-shaped Church deals with the outer limits of that diversity, such as syncretism,⁷ but not so much with the inner core or starting point. The actual language used of (the) Church in the title, ‘mission-shaped’ and ‘fresh expression’, may actually imply an answer. The first phrase suggests a ‘plastic’ view of Church, where substance is stable but shape is highly changeable.⁸ The second suggests that ‘Church’ is itself more or less a stable idea or experience, to be wrapped in new and attractive but perhaps ultimately inconsequential material or cultural packages. The common element of these two images is that what is stable

⁶ *Mission-shaped Church*, vii.

⁷ *Mission-shaped Church*, pp. 91-3.

⁸ *Mission-shaped Church*, p. 33.

or essential belongs to personal belief or experience rather than to the realm of culture or practice, which are which is secondary or ephemeral. Each of these images—and others—thus not only marginalize the particular practices of Christian tradition, but suggests that the alternative practices essential to the renewal of the Church and the success of its mission are on the one hand urgent and vital, but on the other ultimately insignificant. There is a particular theological difficulty here to which I will return.

In *Mission-shaped Church*, mission itself is mostly equated with the success of Church planting and fresh expressions of Church. There is passing reference to the five ‘Marks of Mission’ adopted by Lambeth 1988, which express a broad understanding of mission including proclamation, service and efforts for justice. *Mission-shaped Church* effectively bypasses them, however, in favour its own ‘five values’,⁹ which are unobjectionable but do not suggest that ‘mission’ be understood nearly so broadly. In their proper concern for critical consideration of the structures of ecclesial life and their adequacy to the mission of the Church in the present, the authors seem at times to have assumed that the specifics of liturgy are not fundamental to the being of the Church but are part of the present ‘shape’, which is somehow both theologically incidental but missiologically vital. This begs the question, however: on what basis are such judgements to be made? Without consideration of issues such as those proposed above, the results will be problematic.

It is worth comparing the way that the Mission Commission of the Anglican Communion has made a much clearer and stronger connection with worship and sacraments in its own second thoughts about the Five Marks:

...worship is not just something we do alongside our witness to the good news: worship is itself a witness to the world. It is a sign that all of life is holy, that hope and meaning can be found in offering ourselves to God (cf. Romans 12:1). And each time we celebrate the Eucharist, we proclaim Christ's death until he comes (1 Cor. 11:26). Our liturgical life is a vital dimension of our mission calling; and although it is not included in the Five Marks, it undergirds the forms of public witness listed there.¹⁰

⁹ *Mission-shaped Church*, pp. 81-2.

¹⁰ <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/fivemarks.cfm>

This contrasting statement encourages me to suggest that there is may be a difficulty here not just related to the necessary character of Christian liturgy, but about the character of the Church itself and its mission, as well as how these are related to liturgy. ‘Fresh expressions’ worth having will have to consider the scope of mission more broadly than in terms of numerical success—even just to achieve numerical success.

Ethos: ‘worship needs’ and the Mission-shaped Church

Mission-shaped Church does not spend a great deal of time discussing liturgy explicitly, but the ‘fresh expressions of Church’ central to the report concern the ways Christians act communally, especially in gatherings equivalent to ‘worship’ as it is generally understood.

First and most obviously, ‘worship’ in the *Mission-shaped Church* is understood to be diverse.¹¹ This is worth noting and affirming, as a principle necessary for the life of the Church in a diverse society with culturally-varied communities. The present or familiar diversity of Anglican worship, whether in Australia or England, is strikingly limited to the embodiments of issues and debates largely forgotten, even among the culturally-narrow strand that maintains it, and thus oddly inward-looking.

Yet the diversity envisaged in the report is also oddly one-dimensional; ‘traditional forms’ of ‘worship’ are considered together as one pole, over and against which new or alternative forms are placed. The example of Grace, Ealing, is presented as fairly typical: a small group who ‘decided to put on some services that would be different from the usual at their Church’; the liturgical specifics were understood and constructed according to that same contrast.¹² Thus instead of an open and diverse system or network of possibility around a common core of commitments, we see a set of responses or reactions defined in relation to tradition and institutions.

The other basic element of the liturgical diversity of ‘fresh expressions’ is its consumer-oriented character; diversity reflects a variety of ‘worship needs’.¹³ The frankness of this approach to consumer culture by *Mission-shaped Church* is somewhat refreshing, and its

¹¹ *Mission-shaped Church*, p.12.

¹² *Mission-shaped Church*, p. 45.

¹³ *Mission-shaped Church*, p. 62.

analysis convincing as far as it goes. There is no reason to object to a sort of engagement with the forms of life and exchange of this current society, any more than to former Christian immersions in ancient, feudal, or bourgeois societies, just to name the obvious western predecessors. Each has its characteristic dangers, as the report acknowledges.¹⁴ Yet the emphasis on ‘worship needs’ as the determinant of liturgical practice stands in some tension with any ethos of Christian worship; for ‘needs’ are understood as the pre-existing wants of the participant, rather than any imperative to exist or act in a certain relationship to God.

Mission-shaped Church thus tends to work from the familiar assumption that ‘worship’ is that generic thing people do on Sundays (or is that some other time?),¹⁵ rather than either the communal expression of reverence or the performance of the characteristic liturgical actions of the Church. Choices from across the apparent range of possibilities are made according to no more profound criterion than meeting ‘worship needs’. Despite the professed desire of the report to avoid it, this amounts to a consumerist (*sic*) approach to liturgy and/or worship, with such ‘worship needs’ arguably occupying the vacant theological core. Of course there are many points at which the report seeks to state, clearly and impressively, other factors driving the mission of the Church. What is less clear is how ‘worship’ itself reflects these deeper commitments.

Dominical sacraments: criteria or core?

If there is a problem here with ethos, *Mission-shaped Church* is clearer about the need for the characteristic liturgical practices of the Christian Church. The report is careful to affirm the place of the two dominical sacraments, and does so in strong terms: ‘A mission initiative that does not have an authorized practice of baptism and the celebration of the Eucharist is not yet a “church” as Anglicans understand it’. The presence of these practices is therefore sought by the authors, although the purposes of these sacraments are not explored, beyond approving mention of Stephen Cottrell’s definitions of sacraments as ‘establishing commitment and relationship’ and ‘pledges of the New Covenant’.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Mission-shaped Church*, pp. 9-11.

¹⁵ See further below.

¹⁶ *Mission-shaped Church*, p. 101.

Mission-shaped Church suffers from the inability to go much further than this important statement of criteria. This is not unique to the report by any means; the Church itself often seems to have the same problem. Yet if the two dominical sacraments are to be upheld as essential to being ‘Church’, it will sooner or later be necessary to say *why*. The report implies that they are practices that grow out of a mission initiative; but others might suggest that they have to be at the core of any genuine mission initiative. Yet one can almost hear some of those discussed in the report—the members of new Christian communities and proponents of alternative worship, for instance—asking just why they should regard these sacramental practices as actually necessary for them to be ‘Church’, rather than as part of the rejected ‘traditional’ forms from which they distinguish their own worship life. The Eucharist is often plainly marginal to the life of the newest and most numerically-successful ‘fresh expressions’ of Church—celebrated occasionally, sometimes cursorily, with more fear of real or alleged traditional sacramental excesses than zeal for its virtues. Music is clearly regarded as closer to the heart of ‘worship’ in many cases.¹⁷ Thus the report reveals, unwittingly, how important it is not merely to seek the presence of baptism and Eucharist as signs that a community is indeed ‘Church’, but actually to place them within the heart of the life of a community and understand their meaning.

Perhaps the most telling foray into sacramental theology in *Mission-shaped Church* is accidental, and certainly innocent: the report mentions that “‘Table Church’ has created a liturgy around a meal’.¹⁸ It is not the report’s fault that the Church at large does not seem to realize that it already had a liturgy around a meal; but the statement is a powerful reflection of the Church’s loss of sacramental understanding. Retaining the dominical sacraments as ecclesial *shibboleths* is no substitute for a theology of worship that can say why these practices are at the heart of the Church’s existence.

Common core and *Common Worship*

¹⁷ Note the ‘Portable Worship’ on sale from the New Life Church in Colorado Springs. New Life describes services as ‘more like a family reunion than a traditional church service. We worship God and study the Bible in a lively but relaxed atmosphere. We catch up with each other and talk and laugh. We take care of one another. We give life to one another, and we learn what it really means to be a church.’ (<http://www.newlifechurch.org/whoweare/>).

¹⁸ *Mission-shaped Church*, p. 117.

The other specific or explicit discussion in *Mission-shaped Church* of the theory of liturgical practice involves *Common Worship*, the new liturgical resource for the Church of England. *Common Worship* reflects a desire to identify or establish a ‘common core’ around which a diversity of specific celebrations could be constructed.¹⁹

This reflects a similar tension to that noted in the discussion of the dominical sacraments; the authors know that *Common Worship* represents an important aspect of the life of the Church of England but are perhaps less clear about why, and in the process of discussion distance themselves from its ethos. For while endorsing the *Common Worship* approach in name, the report goes on to suggest that the core of liturgy itself—not just the periphery—is evolving, not static, and shaped by cultural circumstances.²⁰ This seems at odds with the picture given in the rest of *Mission-shaped Church*, where what is at the core is stable, but shaped or expressed in new ways. The implication is that when it comes to liturgy, the model of a stable core wrapped in new forms does not seem to apply. Liturgy is thus presented not as itself part of the heart of the commitment and calling of the Church, but as the changeable outward shape or manifestation of a stable reality whose essence is elsewhere, and presumably doctrinal or experiential.

A similar tension exists in a discussion of liturgical ‘pattern’, which is presented by *Common Worship* as more fundamental to liturgy than any one specific text. Again, *Mission-shaped Church* initially affirms this approach as helpful, but in doing so ominously connects ‘pattern’ with the liturgical ‘common core’, already claimed to be fluid. Sure enough, ‘pattern’ is then also claimed by the report to be protean. ‘Liturgy from below’ it says, culturally-appropriate worship, will ‘help discourage the cloning of patterns of liturgy’ in new areas of mission. Of course the compilers of *Common Worship* would actually be expected to hail the ‘cloning’ of pattern itself, but to decry the mere repetition of specific texts, tunes, and turns of phrase.

It will already be apparent that I am unconvinced about how *Mission-shaped Church* approaches the question of identifying that core of whatever is distinctive and necessary to Christian liturgical ethos and practice, or indeed the more fundamental question of a core of Christian life and mission that needs to find a variety of ‘fresh expressions’. Its affirmation of

¹⁹ *Mission-shaped Church*, p. 117.

²⁰ *Mission-shaped Church*, p. 117.

the two dominical sacraments as tests of 'Church' is important but insufficient. What is necessary is more reflection on why such elements really are characteristic of the historic Christian community.

One further example regarding liturgical practice is worth noting. *Mission-shaped Church* notes repeatedly the place of Sunday as characteristic day of Christian worship, but only to raise (with a curious enthusiasm) the difficulties it presents in patterns of modern life and to advocate alternatives.²¹ This is a serious question; why might there not be more opportunities to form communities at other times, indeed? It is of course also not a new question, since many Churches and communities have long allowed for those whose circumstances have meant that their primary connection was through some weekday group, liturgy or activity.

Yet there is no acknowledgement at all amid these discussions that Sunday was and is not a piece of value-neutral cultural borrowing, but a theologically-driven form of the sanctification of time, the celebration of the day of resurrection. First-century Christians had no weekend, and had obstacles to overcome just as profound as those of complex family structures and children's sport today. Does this characteristically-Christian marking of time have no significance, simply because it is an aspect of practice rather than an abstract doctrine? This case illustrates not simply the inadequately-drawn character of the 'core' in this discussion but the implication that forms of practice (especially traditional practice) always belong to the inconsequential husk, rather than to the theological heart.

Mission-shaped or market-driven?

I have already suggested that *Mission-shaped Church* asks unavoidable questions about worship, as about many other things, but that the starting-point for its answers is not as sound as we need it to be as a basis for considering what liturgy (or worship!) will be like in 'fresh expressions' of Church. I want to finish with two further reflections which also have as much of 'question' as of 'answer' in them. The first concerns the burden that the liturgy must bear for evangelism, and the second has to do with 'incarnational' theology and culture.

There is an assumption shared across a great variety of liturgical and theological traditions in the late twentieth-century West, that the liturgy ought to be attractive to outsiders, and even

²¹ See the references at *Mission-shaped Church* p. 172, and especially pp. 59-62.

be the primary means by which they receive encouragement to join a faith community. I wish not to dismiss this idea—it is too ubiquitous not to be taken seriously—but to question it hard, partly because it is as recent as it is common. At no other point in Christian history has the public liturgy of the Church been expected to bear this kind of burden. Liturgy has of course been a place for preaching the Gospel of repentance and salvation, and in baptism has been the locus for the ritual actualization of conversion. And there have of course always been public forms of witness where it was possible for others to see and hear something of the life and message of the Church (1 Cor 14:22-24).

Here we must face an accident of the current era of secularization. Patterns of liturgy which once developed as the communal enactment of Christian faith, then were long employed in situations where the boundaries of Church and society were presumed to coincide, are presumed still to be ‘for all’, even though the relation between the Church and the ‘all’ has changed radically. This is a very poorly-based assumption. At the earliest stages, meals celebrated as a form of ‘Lord’s Supper’ were not open to the (full) participation of the merely curious,²² and the need to bridge the gap between the unchurched and the complexities of sacramental worship gave rise to the catechumenate, in which the ministry of the Word was uppermost.

Many assume that revision or rejection of liturgical forms, so as to make ‘worship’ immediately comprehensible and attractive, is the obvious or only response to secularization. Yet there are very different responses to this challenge. The revival of a catechumenate (whether or not by this name) has had some success; perhaps there is even room for a form of the *disciplina arcani*, just as Dietrich Bonhöffer mused from his prison cell even as he contemplated ‘religionless Christianity’.²³ Interestingly, some of the ‘megachurches’ which

²² I acknowledge some debate about this; see for instance John Koenig, *The Feast of the World’s Redemption: Eucharistic Origins and Christian Mission*, Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, PA, 2000, and my ‘The Meals Of Jesus And The Meals Of The Church: Eucharistic Origins and Admission to Communion’, in Maxwell E. Johnson and L. Edward Phillips (eds), *Studia Liturgica Diversa: Essays In Honor Of Paul F. Bradshaw* Pastoral Press, Portland, OR, 2003, pp. 101-115.

²³ See E. Bethge (ed), *Letters and Papers from Prison: Enlarged Edition*, SCM Press, London, 1971, p. 281, p. 300.

otherwise starkly reflect the loss of a distinctively Christian sense of worship, have been quicker to note this challenge and to take it as an opportunity, holding distinct events for seekers and full members.²⁴ Anglicans might be well-advised to consider whether our own understanding of the relationship between the liturgy and evangelism, and between one sort of gathering and another, is sufficiently nuanced.

My last point has to do with the ‘incarnational principle’ which is evoked often in *Mission-shaped Church*, in and many other Anglican documents. ‘Incarnational’ is often used generically rather than in a specifically Christian way, as though it referred to the idea of taking an eternal spiritual reality and enfleshing it again and again indifferently.

I suggest that this is not ‘incarnational’ at all, but something the ancients would have called ‘docetic’. The incarnation involves specifics, in time and space, human history and culture. The incarnation is the fact that the Word became flesh under specific circumstances, and to be ‘incarnational’ is to be connected with that flesh in history and community. And the incarnation is costly, permanent, and of lasting significance. If there is an analogy to be drawn between the incarnation and aspects of the life of the Church such as liturgy, it is not the wrapping of a spiritual or doctrinal core in an incidental shell of culture and practice, but the quest for an experience where Gospel and culture find each other, are genuinely united, and are irrevocably different with respect to one another afterwards.

As we consider how change is an inevitable and necessary element of the specifics of an incarnational Christian practice through history and into the future, the notion of ‘hybridity’ might be a more honest and creative one than the sort of limited ‘docetic’ analogy.²⁵ It is not abstract, ideal Christianity that encounters new and different social and cultural settings; it is always historic Christianity, grounded in the incarnation, which both changes and is changed in the encounter. Anything else is treating the encounter with ‘culture’ as mere dressing up, rather than *kenosis*. Or, if the analogy really does not work, we should abandon such pseudo-incarnational talk, lest we end up teaching ourselves that the Word simply acquired flesh as an effective marketing strategy.

²⁴ This pattern is mentioned in *Mission-shaped Church*, pp. 69-71.

²⁵ I note the influence of Homi Bhaba’s work in ‘post-colonial’ theory here. See *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, New York, 1994.

These objections would be unfair if directed solely or especially at *Mission-shaped Church*. I see no trivialization of culture or cultures in its pages, and indeed there is encouragement of the Church to see different cultures in a more positive light. Yet if culture itself is regarded as inherently insignificant, then any un-stated theology of culture involved is oddly and ominously resonant of the logic of the global economy and its trivialization (sometimes through exoticism) of local culture and autonomy, quite apart from the implication that the Gospel itself has no historical flesh and bone.

The process *Mission-shaped Church* envisages, of engaging openly and creatively with the broader culture or cultures, is fundamentally important. There is clearly much to argue over regarding the specific terms. We must hear and receive the claim that the Church must be willing to allow its participation in God's mission to be the force that guides its future and the forms of its life. There are, nonetheless, things Christians characteristically do, say and think, that must be brought to that process of renewal. Mission has cultural content, and liturgical content. So too the fundamental meaning or ethos of 'worship' must be brought to the conversation, not as another area of consumer 'needs' but as the enacting of an appropriate human relationship with God, with a sense of its inherent demands and not simply of evangelistic possibilities. The sentiments of the essay *On Ceremonies* remain startlingly apt for negotiating the alienation between those inside the Church and those outside it, and the alienation between the liturgically-minded and the evangelistically-zealous within: our calling is 'not so much to have respect how to please and satisfy either of these parties, as how to please God, and profit them both'.²⁶

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