

The Mission-Shaped Church and the Formation of Christian Disciples

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Launcelot Gobbo, the clown in *The Merchant of Venice*, voices strong economic objections to the too enthusiastic conversion of the Jews:

This making of Christians will raise the price of hogs. If we grow all to be pork-eaters, we shall not shortly have a rasher on the coals for money.¹

Though expressed rather differently, the same fear is found among many Anglicans, as well as members of other mainstream denominations, who will often admit privately that they do not really want to see new members in their congregation, even in the face of declining numbers and diminishing parish activities. The disruption growth causes in the life of the Christian community may be just too great. Do we really want a larger church? Will there be enough grace to go round?

Jesus said to his first disciples: ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people’ (Matt 4: 19). The image has its obvious limitation, however appropriate to its first hearers, for we all know what happens to fish once they have been fished, and that is surely not what we intend. Here too, as for the anxious hoarders of grace, the subject of mission seems to be surrounded by an air of violence.

Would cattle-duffing be a better image? – for the aim of apostolic activity is to enlarge the herd and naturalise new members as part of it, remove them permanently from their former place and ownership, brand them and breed from them. John Finney comments: ‘The gradual process is the way in which

¹ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* III.v.21.

the majority of people discover God and the average time taken is about four years'.² In such a process of naturalisation, a moment of conversion is a beginning not an end. But that metaphor has its limits too, for the air of violence remains, but mission, unlike either fishing or cattle-thieving, needs to engage the active participation of the convert. Formation is not something done to one, but a willing entry into a new way of being. More than anything else, it is the conversion of the heart and the will that takes time.

Missiological writings seem often to be impatient of this necessity of process and self-involvement. The 1988 Lambeth Conference included among its 'Five Marks of Mission:

To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.

To teach, baptise and nurture new believers.

To respond to human need by loving service;³

but at the same time it declared:

This conference calls for a shift to a dynamic missionary emphasis, going *beyond care and nurture to proclamation and service.*⁴

² John Finney, *Finding Faith Today*, Bible Society, London, 1992, cited by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st century*, Hendrickson, Peabody MA, 2003, p. 99.

³ Church of England Mission and Public Affairs Council, *The Mission-Shaped Church: Church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context*, Church House Publishing, London, 2004, p. 156, n. 62 (hereafter MSC) (italics added).

⁴ Lambeth 1988, Resolution 4, cited in MSC, p. 36 (italics added).

So is the ‘nurture’ of new believers a part of ‘mission’, or part of an alternative pastoral model of ‘care and nurture’? My concern in this paper is to look at the tension and possible antagonism between ‘mission’ and ‘nurture’ as it appears now in the perspective of the Cray Report on the Mission-Shaped Church (MSC), to see what space it leaves for discipling as a process of transformation in depth and over time.

Arguably it is the failure of the church to nurture Christians in fully Christian habits of living and thinking that is the prime cause of the crisis of decline in which we now find ourselves in the ‘West’. However, the decline will not be reversed simply by doing that job better, and this paper will not seek to reverse this shift from ‘pastoral priority’ to missionary emphasis, but it will ask whether mission does not necessarily contain an essential element of educative ‘nurture’. It will examine (1) the role of formational processes in the Report’s theology of mission; (2) the scope for a formational emphasis within some ‘Fresh Expressions of Church’ as described in the Report; and (3) the possibilities for transformation suggested by some existing programmes of Christian nurture. It will do this in the context of the stated aim of TEAC:

to create a culture of teaching and learning in the faith community because all Anglican Christians need some kind of theological education.⁵

Formation in the Christian Life

As one of the ‘Five Values for missionary churches’ MSC includes this: ‘A missionary church makes disciples’. The claim is spelt out in these words:

⁵ TEAC, ‘Theological Education for the Anglican Communion: A task group for the Anglican Communion’, www.anglicancommunion.org/teac/, 2005.

A missionary church is active in calling people to faith in Jesus Christ, *and it is equally committed to the development of a consistent Christian lifestyle* appropriate to, but not withdrawn from, the culture or cultures in which it operates. It engages with culture, but also presents a counter-cultural challenge by its corporate life based on the worldview and values of the gospel. It encourages the gifting and vocation of all the people of God, and invests in the development of leaders. *It is concerned for the transformation of individuals, as well as the transformation of communities.*⁶

This short paragraph presents an extremely rich account of what it means to ‘make disciples’. Here evangelism, in the sense of bringing the gospel to people, or drawing people into the gospel’s sphere, is only the beginning of a potentially long and complex process of transformation. The cognitive aspect of discipleship receives surprisingly little notice here, much more emphasis falling on the experiential element of ‘a consistent Christian lifestyle’, and the affective aim ‘to love and know God as Father, Son and Spirit’ (p. 81) through worship and prayer. But in general MSC is seeking to see the process as a whole, psychologically, sociologically and spiritually.

All this is well put, and contrasts sharply with what counts as ‘making disciples’ in many parts of the Christian world today, where some sections focus on ‘outreach’ to nonbelievers (often really meaning ‘indrag’ as Walter Hollenweger points out) while others focus on the ‘care and nurture’ of their members – but perhaps seldom both. This duality is sometimes justified as a convenient division of labour: let each part of the church do what it does best. But the cost of splitting Christian formation from the gospel is too large. It encourages evangelists to think of the church as a sharply defined ‘bounded set’ entered in a single moment, with a clear demarcation between insiders and outsiders. Recent writers tend to criticise this view, together with its

⁶ MSC, p. 82, (italics added).

tendency to breed reliance on ‘formulae’ and ‘experts’, and complacency among the ‘saved’.⁷ On the other hand, it allows ‘nurture’, in separation from the gospel, to fall subject to secular ideologies of education, or of counselling.

The result, as Daniel Hardy points out, is that churches are crippled by being ‘content with kindergarten-level information in a world which is increasingly ignorant about the substance of the Christian faith’.⁸ Or else they substitute critical study for ‘the active engagement with the abundance of the truth and holiness of God’.⁹ Either way, people may be left with little of value to say to their neighbours, missing the fully Christian understanding of vocation and formation. This primary divorce of mission/evangelism from Christian formation results in a failure to meet the second and third criteria named in the Report’s definition cited above: the generation of a ‘Christian lifestyle’ and a gospel-shaped ‘counter-cultural challenge’ to the community.

In seeking the reason why the church has failed to provide an account of the gospel adequate for the minds and hearts of the contemporary world, John Hull speaks of ‘an unlearning Christ’, which may function as ‘the model or pattern for the unlearning believer’.¹⁰ By this phrase he points to the way certain images of Christ and God have buttressed a culture of retreat from challenge and uncertainty into a space of stability and safety, or unchanging values and undemanding order, yielding a ‘comfort’ which merely consoles. Consolation has its moment, of course, and the grace to be found in God’s eternal and unchanging order of love is real, life-giving and potentially life-

⁷ Frost & Hirsch, pp. 49-51.

⁸ Daniel Hardy, *Finding the Church*, SCM, London: SCM, 2001, p. 200.

⁹ Hardy, *Finding the Church*, p.178.

¹⁰ John Hull, *What prevents Christian Adults from Learning?*, SCM Press, London, 1985, p. 201.

transforming, but the question is: do we want the transformation, or only the experience of peace? Does grace enable us to live graced lives in and out of church, and if not why not?

Colin Gunton argues that the source of this ‘unlearning’ (located variously in the Tradition, the Bible or the Magisterium) is an over-emphasis on the divine and unchanging Christ even within the humanity of the incarnate Son of God. The result is a lopsided ecclesiology, based on a static image of Christ and deficient in the dynamic of the Spirit. By contrast, he argues that we must ‘ground the being of the Church in the source of the being of all things, the eternal energies of the three persons of the Trinity *as they are in perichoretic relations*’. For

The activity of proclamation and the celebration of the Gospel sacraments are temporal ways of orienting the community to the being of God ... as the Spirit ever and again incorporates people into Christ and in the same action brings them into and maintains them in community with each other.¹¹

A willingness to learn is therefore crucial in discipleship at any stage. After people have heard the gospel and responded, is its reality opened to new believers in terms which nurture them from early stages into full and operative Christian identity? Neither ‘conversion’ nor baptism is an end, just as falling in love and the marriage ceremony are not, in the natural way of things, ends. All are beginnings of relations whose richness and depth (and sometimes their difficulty) cannot be seen at the start but are to be discovered over time and

¹¹ Colin Gunton, ‘The Church on Earth: The Roots of Community’, in C. Gunton and D. Hardy (eds.), *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community*, T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1989, p. 78.

through unfolding participation and commitment. The Report agrees in principle, for Christian transformation involves

the journey towards God in worship, which must equally be about seeking God and about becoming like God in holiness. Without the transformation that should gradually result, we are only playing liturgical games or having charismatic caresses (MSC, p. 99).

A theology of *theosis* is necessary to underpin any attempt to induct people into a true Christian faithfulness which is conformity to Christ himself, and not to a constructed image of Christ.

Hence Christian formation is not only about 'faith' but also about 'faithfulness' in practice over time. Beyond the act and event of conviction it moves to a life oriented on Christ, and in doing so necessarily takes on something of the character of the circumstances in which people live. If 'reproduction is not cloning' (MSC, p. 96), every Christian is different, and the future will be different from the past.

As Frances Young argues, we are called to 'perform' the gospel.¹² 'Perform' is not used here with any sense of self-centred display but as an oboist performs a symphony: a skilled, dedicated participation in the effort of the whole group, by which marks on pages in front of fifty people are realised as co-ordinated sound. For many outside the churches Christianity remains as impenetrable as the score of a Beethoven symphony: obscure, heavy, laden with a dead past and a high culture that repels and embarrasses. But it is also true that many Christians, though they have learned to whistle a tune or two, have not learned to read the score or take their part in the ensemble. This is

¹² Frances Young, *The Art of Performance: Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture* Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1990.

partly about knowledge and skill, but there is also, in Christian life as in music, a crucial act of improvisation, of non-identical repetition. The oboist must be able to reproduce exactly the notes as written in order to play them with feeling and character and *therefore* in a way which is his or her own, and different, however minutely, from every other performance before and after.

Formation in the Fresh Expressions of Church

If this is a fair theological outline of what it means to develop a ‘consistent Christian lifestyle’, how well disposed and equipped are the ‘Fresh Expressions of Church’ (FECs) described in Chapter 4 of the Report to deliver such a practice?

The chapter lists no fewer than twelve new developments differing vastly in style and ethos. To assess how they stand in relation to our question about forming people for deep discipleship, we can review a sample of them briefly, in the light of four questions:

1. Where do they lie on the map of contemporary religious culture?

Two well known ways of plotting this will be used: ‘Stages of Faith’ as developed by James Fowler,¹³ and the division of cultural phenomena into the ‘post-modern’ and its alternatives, the ‘modern’ and the ‘counter-modern’, as sketched for example by Paul Lakeland.¹⁴ It should be noted

¹³ James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*, Harper & Row, New York, 1981. For summary and comment, see also Hull, pp.185-95; Andrew Pritchard, ‘Fowler, Faith and Fallout’, *Reality Magazine*, www.reality.org.nz/articles/33/33-pritchard.html, 1999. .From Fowler, we shall be especially concerned with stages 3 (synthetic-conventional), 4 (individuative-reflective) and 5 (conjunctive).

¹⁴ Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian identity in a Fragmented Age*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1997, p. 12.

that neither of these frameworks is concerned with the content of faith so much as the way in which faith is held.

2. *In what relation does this FEC stand to church structures, such as creeds and sacraments?*

This is an institutional question, but it is also a question about resourcing and about theological grounding. Is an FEC so ‘fresh’ that it is no longer recognisable as ‘church’ at all? Is it able to deliver the fullness of what the church exists to deliver?

3. *What processes exist here for personal transformation and for the working out of vocation in the context of Christian mission?*

This relates directly to the issues discussed above, but also to whether an FEC restricts believers to its own specific style of Christian living, or enables them to follow their own path with God.

4. *What structures of ministry or leadership exist to support growth into deep discipleship?*

Is the ongoing transformation an intentional element in the FEC, and does it have structures in place to enable it?

‘Alternative worship communities’ (pp. 44-47) provide an example of a phenomenon that falls into Fowler’s Stage 4 (individuating-reflective), and is post-modern, post-institutional and post-denominational, with a high emphasis on being accessible to the secular culture, albeit ‘as a safety net for those falling out of existing churches’ rather than (note the image!) ‘a fishing net for those still outside church’ (p. 45). They tend to display a mission consciousness but without evangelism in an active sense (‘too modernist, directive and narrow’). Like the ‘Sea of Faith’ movement they are more likely to stress ‘my exploration into God’ than ‘God’s mission to the world’, at least as embodied in an institution. Leadership structures and links with the church are commonly so weak that moving people out of this creative but loose fringe

into a deeper engagement with the Christian tradition will be dependent on the choices of individuals.

Naturally enough, other FECs which emphasise *access* also tend to have a weakness in the area of deep transformation. The prime example is the ‘Seeker Church’ or ‘Seeker Service’ (pp. 69-71) with a style designed to appeal to casual worshippers and a teaching which relates everyday experience to the gospel. This is really an evangelistic strategy sponsored by existing churches, and therefore modernist in type. We should expect that such a project would include a hope and plan to move newcomers on, in time, into deeper structures of discipleship, but as Richard Giles points out ‘the pastor will be in danger of cultivating a new breed of Christian reared on the “milk” of the special service alone, who will never be weaned off it onto the “solid food” of regular worship (1 Cor. 3.2)’.¹⁵ The same is true of the ‘Youth Congregation’ (pp.75-80): whatever its success at attracting and nurturing this disaffected age-group, does it have the capacity to move people on into a faithfulness that is not age-dependent?

The growth of ‘Network-focussed Churches’ (pp. 62-67) is different. Although they may be similar in adopting an outwardly post-modern and non-institutional style, they are seeking to be a permanent expression of church for a specific group, founded on the rejection of the (pre-modern) idea that life and identity are lodged primarily in a place (a ‘parish’), whereas for most they reside in networks of shared interest (based on an occupation, or a disability, or a leisure pursuit). Hence such a network may be an alternative kind of parish in providing a permanent context for worship and (where the nature of the ‘focus’ is sufficiently embedded in people’s lives) for spiritual transformation. This may be questioned, as when John Milbank asks whether

¹⁵ Richard Giles, *Creating Uncommon Worship: Transforming the Liturgy of the Eucharist*, Canterbury Press, Norwich, 2004, p. 43.

networks have the capacity to provide either the range of internal ‘difference’ or the ‘self-sufficiency’ needed for true community:

All these things, however worthy, are rather evidence of lack of community....These are essentially *reactive* groupings – often sustaining a semi-mythical sense of victimage.¹⁶

While the comment is apt in general, the particular networks discussed in the Report have most often been established by a parish or local group of churches, and understand themselves to be linked to the wider church as an ongoing structure of its mission. With these, if supported by the resources of the wider church, there is the possibility of a fruitful interaction of gospel and culture, enabling development of a fully Christian lifestyle.¹⁷

Two examples of FECs oriented specifically on *process*, rather than access, are ‘Base Ecclesial Communities’ (pp. 47-49) and ‘Cell Church’ (pp. 52-57). Base Ecclesial Communities began among the marginalised Christian poor of Latin America, and aim at consciousness-raising and empowerment towards a fully Christian life, with the integration of the gospel and life-issues. In that context they are a challenge to the modernist structure of the Catholic Church, although the provision of trained ‘pastoral agents’ ensures continuity of belief and practice with the wider institution. In terms of faith-development their aims are to move people on from Stages 2 and 3 to Stages 3 and 4 or beyond – although in a more communal, less individualist fashion than Fowler’s terms (derived from religious life in North America and Europe) suggest. But

¹⁶ John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: ontology and pardon*, Routledge, London, 2003, p.164 italics original).

¹⁷ Compare John Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2004, pp. 114-117.

whether these can be transplanted into the context of British or Australian society is a moot point.

A related but more naturally ‘Western’ style is the Cell Church, where the reality of the church and its identity is understood to be located wholly or partly in cell-groups organised for ‘worship, word, community and mission’ (p. 52). ‘Cell Church offers a seven-day a week system that mobilizes and multiplies every member for discipleship, ministry, leadership and expansion.’¹⁸ A cell church ‘is not designed to stimulate [numerical] growth but to channel and develop it’ (p. 53), using the dynamics of small groups to generate accountability, engagement and living relationships. Indeed, Finney cites research evidence that no such numerical growth results from the use of cell-groups.¹⁹ The report notes that cells create a ‘high internal level of intentional discipleship’ (p. 53) which enables them to generate leaders, and so to become self-sustaining. However, it points out that celebrated examples of cell churches in South-east Asia rely on highly directive styles of leadership and theology (p. 54). In the looser context of ‘Western’ societies, no doubt there is a danger that a network of cell-groups may dissolve centrifugally into house-churches, and at this point the quality of leadership and its ability to maintain continuity between group life and the full theological and sacramental life of the church catholic is at risk.

This sketch of some FECs has aimed to show that in general there is a tension between *accessibility*, maximised through appealing to patterns of meeting and behaving already present in the culture, and *process-orientation* that enables deep transformation into a ‘consistent Christian lifestyle’ which is really counter-cultural and modelled on the gospel. But such a tension is to be

¹⁸ W.A. Beckham, *The Second Reformation*, Touch Publications, Houston, Texas, 1995, cited by MSC, p. 52.

¹⁹ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, p. 123.

expected in the early life of these experiments, as is the difficulty of being consciously post-modern while drawing on the resources of the ('modernist') institution for ministry, theological reflection and sacramental life.

At the opposite extreme MSC points to some 'traditional forms of church inspiring new interest' (pp. 73-75), such as the counter-modern phenomenon of the revival of worship using the Book of Common Prayer (1662). However, it warns that the criterion of 'missionary quality' is crucial. Is this a movement towards deep transformation by engaging with mystery, or a mode of 'unlearning' based on liturgical nostalgia? MSC rightly shows more confidence in revivals of 'monastic' intentionality and practice in dispersed communities of prayer and action such as the Northumbria Community and The Order of Mission.²⁰ With their emphasis on transformation and spiritual discipline this is necessarily a minority movement, at Fowler's stage 4 or 5, but perhaps here, in the best tradition of St Benedict and St Francis, the counter-modern may meet the post-modern and provide resourcing and inspiration for growth.

Instruments of formation

Although the report sees mission as involving both 'calling people to faith' and 'development of a consistent Christian lifestyle', it appears that the ability of the new manifestations to deliver the second, longer term, result, is mixed. Some markers are laid down, pointing towards the need, in the church's life, of means for deeper and ongoing transformation: for example, 'to be "in

²⁰ Northumbria Community, 'Summary of the Rule of the Northumbria Community', www.northumbriacommunity.org, 2004; 'The Order of Mission Homepage', www.missionorder.org, 2005; compare Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, p. 120.

communion” with the diocesan bishop’ and to ‘have an authorized practice of baptism and the celebration of the Eucharist’ (p. 101). Such criteria indicate that FECs need to see themselves, however different they are, as within the tradition and ecclesiology of Anglicanism, and in relation with other Christians who are different from them. The point about difference is crucial, for

We shall not become mature Christians unless we are in community with those who are unlike us, who do not share our viewpoints and who challenge our assumptions.²¹

Nonetheless the dominant model of mission is expansionary, and ‘growth’ in this Report means growth in numbers (pp. 93-4, 107): more not better. Are there other signs pointing towards the value of Christian formation?

As we have seen, it is a key element of some other recent studies to emphasise ‘growth’ in qualitative terms, and the need for learning in the whole church.²² Finney points out how the ‘nurture group’ began, in an evangelistic setting, as a vehicle for strengthening and deepening the faith of new converts, but then became recognised as an evangelistic model in its own right, an alternative to the evangelism of the big meeting and star speaker.²³ This is illustrated by the success of *Alpha*, *Emmaus* and other programmes in the last two decades. *Alpha* in fact began as a post-conversion nurture group at Holy Trinity, Brompton, in 1977, but became internationally successful after being reoriented in 1986 as a specifically evangelistic programme.²⁴ The evidence that it, like other programmes, has been equally attractive to long-term church

²¹ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, page 117; compare Milbank, p. 164.

²² See especially works cited by Finney, Hull, and Frost and Hirsch.

²³ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, pp. 73-79.

²⁴ Alpha Australia, ‘Origins of Alpha’, www.alphaaustralia.org.au . 2005

members, and even more effective for them, in confirming and deepening their commitment, is a sign of the extent to which this developmental task has generally been ‘taken for granted’ and left undone, and how much now needs to be done if mission is to produce persons ‘mature in Christ’ (Col 1: 28).

The success of *Alpha*, and other programmes that have built on it, like *Emmaus* and *Credo*, has in large part been due to attending to the needs of process as well as content, for example by inducting newcomers into Christian practice of community and fellowship through a meal and the relational dynamics of the small group for worship, prayer and discussion. A frequent criticism of these programmes is that they remain book-centred, and their high level of conceptual content betrays the essentially modernist assumptions behind the attractive post-modern packaging.²⁵ It is also frequently argued that they are artificial, setting up a group experience which may then be difficult to sustain and integrate with the wider life of a congregation.²⁶

At the other end of the market, the Adult Catechumenate movement (‘Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults’) seeks to be more than a ‘course’, and to offer people an opportunity to find ‘community, meaning and identity’ through integration into the faith-life of the people of God. Like *Emmaus* (though less book-centred) it looks to engage participants for a significant period of time, about a year, with follow-on processes beyond that. Its teaching style, based

²⁵ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, p. 87; Peter Ball and Malcolm Grundy, *Faith on the way: a Practical parish guide to the Adult Catechumenate*, Mowbray, London, 2000, pp.15-16.

²⁶ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, pp. 81, 86.

on faith-sharing, allows for different learning styles, while a sequence of rites articulates both the sacramental and the communal aspects of conversion.²⁷

A recent new programme, from a United Methodist stable but drawing on many spiritual traditions, is *Companions in Christ*.²⁸ It too aims at a long process, with a 28 week basic programme, with shorter add-ons. Really targeted at established church members, it is now developing shorter introductory units aimed at newer Christians. The course is book-based, but non-conceptual and non-dogmatic in style. Like RCIA it emphasises a shared journey of faith-exploration resourced by Scripture, the sacraments, and traditional means of Christian meditation such as *lectio divina*.

All these have in common a movement away from conceptual learning towards experience and process. This marks a considerable cultural shift towards more traditional understandings of truth and its acquisition. Finney calls for a renewal of a 'rabbinic'-style 'apprentice-craftsman' model of learning, a model which relies on skills and values learned over time and in community, in place of the dominant 'student' model with its more individualist and theoretical cast. He contrasts 'separate knowing', which operates in objective mode, through analysis and doubt, with 'connected knowing', which works by interaction and shared values; and he looks, beyond that contrast, to the integration of these styles in 'constructive knowing'.²⁹ This emphasis, at once counter-modern and post-modern, coheres with the 'performance' model offered by Frances Young.

²⁷ Ball and Grundy, *passim*; Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, p. 77; Tom Scharbach, 'RCIA: Bringing the "Good News" to the Modern World' ,http://members.aol.com/tombecket/ts_rcia.htm,, 1998

²⁸ Upper Room, 'Companions in Christ', www.upperroom.org/companions, 2006

²⁹ Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, pp.149-151.

Of course, recent decades have also seen a multiplication of more formal lay-training courses leading to certificates and diplomas at various levels. Whatever the value of the knowledge and learning processes that these offer, their inherently secular and detached ‘qualification’ model they employ may be a false direction in the church’s mission if not integrated into the church’s life communally and individually. The dominance of the theoretical, critical, modernist perspective, so appealing to Individuative-reflective types in Fowler’s Stage 4, turns out to be of little value to those in Stages 2 or 3, and often to inhibit movement into the more balanced ‘conjunctive’ perspective of Stage 5.

So the significance of the educational developments outlined above is that, whatever their stance towards the critical issues of modernism (and it is important that they do not run away from these), their emphasis falls elsewhere. Typically, it falls on *Story*, the individual’s faith-story in communion with that of the church, present and past. It falls on *Love* discovered in sharing of a group and worked out in action. It falls on *Wonder*, in the encounter with the mystery of God through symbol, prayer and worship. Ideally such a process is Jesus-centred, Spirit-led, and Trinity-shaped.³⁰ All these are elements prominent in Fowler’s Stages 1 and 2 and easily disregarded as ‘childish’; their return to the centre of adult Christian learning shows a recognition that, beyond the ‘critical turn’, maturity may lie in the direction of rediscovering a kind of primal simplicity, a ‘second naivety’ which values the wisdom of both the child and the sage.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that *The Mission Shaped Church* is deficient in the attention it gives to the importance of maturation processes in ‘the making of Christians’, a lack arising from the report’s mainly institutional and structural focus. It does of course leave space for this, and even seeks it, in principle.

³⁰ See Frost & Hirsch, pp. 99-107; Finney, *Emerging Evangelism*, pp. 135-44.

But without an explicit exploration of the nature of these processes it may by default appear to support the false simplicity of ‘fishing’: one tug and they’re in.

The existence of the programmes just described is to be welcomed as another ‘fresh expression of church’ which is complementary, in important ways, to those discussed in the report, because the change in the understanding of learning implies a new and revolutionary understanding of faith. No doubt there are more and better courses yet to come, just as there will be new and better forms of para-church. But, with or without any specific programme or educational structure, the call to spiritual maturity is a necessary complement to the exciting developments described by the report. For we are not finding new ways to shore up a dying institution, but responding to a challenge to move deeper into the mystery who is God.

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