

# The Spirit says 'yes'<sup>1</sup>: exploring the essence of being church in the 21st century

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'The Church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning'.

Emil Brunner, theologian (1899-1966)

'It is not the church which 'undertakes' mission; it is the *missio Dei* which constitutes the church.'

David J. Bosch, missiologist (1929-1992)

'Everyday people are straying away from the church and going back to God.'

Lenny Bruce, comedian (1925-66)

From the earliest beginnings of the Christian movement, the Holy Spirit has created a variety of expressions of being church in changing cultures and environments. Each generation as well as people groups has had to rediscover what the appropriate clothing of the gospel is for evangelism and church planting. Often a fresh reading of and reflecting on the book of Acts has become the centrifugal inspiration to aid this discovery.

The focus, however, has often centred on the outward forms more than the essence, as debates were fostered about what is appropriate and necessary, often driven from the culture of the interpreter. Even in the earliest church, the key decisive issue centred on how 'Jewish' the new Gentiles believers must become (Acts chapters 10, 15 and the ongoing struggles within the Pauline churches over the 'Judaisers').

Just as the Holy Spirit led ordinary men and women to become the church on the day of Pentecost, so also during the beginnings of the Charismatic movement, these same issues were once again explored as the Holy Spirit led younger men and women to explore the nature and purpose of being the church.<sup>2</sup> For many, this was both an exciting and painful time as new forms of church life and mission were explored. The new wine demanded new wineskins, and there were many attempts at expressing what this might be like (including house churches, communal living, renewal and extensions of existing churches, developments of new church networks, and the like).

This of course was nothing new, for the church has often

had to re-invent itself as it faces new mission opportunities from either changing cultures (one thinks of the rise of the Celtic church [essentially a rural development and response] during the collapse of Rome [primarily urban centred] or varying responses to the gospel [like the Gentiles coming to faith in Acts 10].) These paradigm shifts of culture and how they affected the shape of the church are what Christian history and the move of the Holy Spirit are all about.

Once again, with a change in culture from a modernist to a post-modern<sup>3</sup> expression, we find ourselves asking the question: how do we understand what it means to be church in the 21st century? What are the appropriate wineskins to express the gospel?

This question is being regularly and actively explored all over the world by theologians, mission strategists, pastors and local church leaders, church planters and other emerging church practitioners. The sheer volume of literature is quite staggering.<sup>4</sup>

Within a changing cultural environment where our understanding of 'Sunday' (and how it should be used e.g., worship, shopping, visiting family, leisure), what we mean by 'church' (building, services, priests and pastors, community, historic relic) and what we mean by 'ministry' (leadership led, sharing of gifts among the church community, work in the community) are all open to discussion and debate. Involvement and participation in these areas (or the lack of it) by both believers and seekers alike mean that this is no mere academic question. For those who regularly worship and share life in local churches, it has even greater relevance for themselves and their mission. How we express being God's people in this changing environment is foundational.

What then are the key components to being a church, a Christian community in our world today? Are some things only cultural, while others are essential? How do we decide? What do we keep and what might we leave out and still be an authentic expression of church today?

I would like to suggest seven elements that I believe are essential to being church in whatever expression the church might express itself. I am already assuming that the church has a living relationship with God and that it is clear on its purpose and reason for being.

The first one is **worship**.<sup>5</sup> We are called and invited by God to express our love, admiration, thanks and passion in worship. This may seem obvious and therefore most churches would already be expressing worship through various activities and disciplines (e.g., singing, prayer, sharing of the sacraments, preaching, fellowship, and many other ways). Some would use particular forms of structure or

liturgy to enable the gathered worshippers to express their faith in ways that resonate or challenge them.

In worship we need to be reminded that we are part of a worldwide movement of Christians who join their voices together when the church expresses worship, therefore we can and should draw on the rich tradition of Christian worship at our disposal to aid us in this endeavour.

This is one basic way we can experience the unity or ecumenism of the Spirit. To explore another tradition or way of doing things can be very liberating for a community of faith. It can help when times of malaise set in and show us new ways of expressing our love and passion for God. It is not inconsequential that for many older adults, there is an attraction to a more thoughtful rather than pure spontaneous approach. Many in the 'emerging church' experiences additionally see this, where the rich and varied forms of Christian spirituality are finding new resonance.

We can perhaps see examples of this in the pages of the New Testament, where, for example, authors regularly quote important Old Testament texts and include early Christian hymns (e.g. Philp. 2:1-11). However, we are given limited guidance as to what actually needs to be part of the service of worship. Much of this is due to the fact that the worship for these earliest Christians would have been a continuation of the Jewish synagogue practices that they had inherited.<sup>6</sup> Adding to this is the new experience of Jesus as Messiah and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, which meant some expressions were quite fluid and open to each person bringing their own contributions as led by the Spirit (as in the practices of the Corinthians – 1 Cor. 14:26). This fostered a dynamic of finding appropriate contextual expressions of worship that reflected the reality of their journey with God.

Today many churches continue in the received traditions of liturgy without taking the time to reflect and ask how this particular approach to worship is affecting the congregation, its mission and the surrounding community. In other instances where more formal liturgy is often absent, churches are returning to or re-envisioning a more liturgical framework. A common example is in the resurgence of the use of the Psalms as a key component of their shared worship, recognizing that every human experience is involved in worship in this, the prayer book of the church.

In my second year lectures on hermeneutics, we examine case studies of how Christians in differing times and cultures have interpreted texts and how it has affected their life as church and their mission. From the rise of apartheid from Dutch Reformed churches, to the struggle of the confessing church during the Nazi regime, to the struggles of power and poverty in the Southern Americas, inherited expressions and understandings have brought blessing but more often difficulties to the church and its mission. In addition to the case studies, I also show a portion of the 1986 film *The Mission* about Spanish Jesuit missionaries working in the rain forests of Brazil and how the inherited church (which encouraged slave training) contrasts with the new emerging church in the tribal village which seeks to embrace appropriate cultural expressions of what it means for them to be worshippers of Jesus. The aim is to begin to illustrate how each of us can be blinded in our interpretations and to begin to become more aware of what we bring, what we receive, and how we make use of it.

What I think is often lacking in church renewal and explorations of worship is the realisation of the need for each church to express itself with a local accent, in other words, contextually. This makes worship authentic to that local expression of being church. It is here that continuing work and searching needs to take place to enable and encourage a local church to consider how they might express their journey with God and his mission in words, music, and their own story within their own culture. This could involve writing their own songs, their own prayers, and their own framework for worship. The aim here is not to be clever but honest, authentic and human. To seek to engage with God in both our joys and pains and find meaningful ways to express this in community worship is both a delight and a challenge.

The second element is the need for a **shared life in fellowship**. To engage with God in his mission in the world requires the need for shared life on the journey of joy and discovery of being his people in the world. Without this sense of togetherness, there can be no real sense of mission since God's aim was always to create a people, a nation, a community of Jesus and the Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

This means more than just the mere time spent in the meetings when the church gathers. To be church means to be *together*. It is ultimately about the need for community and sharing the whole of life with one another (this seems to be central to the biblical meaning of *κοινωνία*).<sup>8</sup>

This also implies the need and opportunity to share our resources with each other to enable us to fulfil the callings God has given us. In this way, we can seek to accomplish the mission agenda by appropriately using our time, material and spiritual resources, as well as our very lives laid down for the common good.

As the Spirit is helping us to explore being church in fresh ways, this aspect of authentic fellowship in the gospel comes into its own again. To share not just in meetings or events, but actually to open our lives up and journey together, to be in a place of transparency and feel safe, to know you are a part of the life of God with other people, this empowers us to live the Jesus life in the world. Since nearly all the New Testament was written directly to or for faith communities, and since we find most uses of the English word 'you' are plural, it is hard to imagine how we could not live in fellowship together. The lone Christian is therefore an anti-type to the normative purpose of God in creating a people for his praise.

The long list of one-anothers,<sup>9</sup> found mostly in Pauline literature, illustrates that this is not just an ideological or spiritual reality, but also involves our human undertakings and relationships. It is about being the body of Christ, of being Jesus to our communities and nations, which enables us to demonstrate the power of changed lives and values as we learn to live together under God's reign as King.

The third essence is the central and vital importance of **regular engagement with the Scriptures**. We are essentially a people of the book. From our early Jewish roots to the ongoing development of the early church and throughout Christian history, the place of the word of God has been an integral ingredient of what being church is all about.

In practice this is most often expressed in teaching, preaching, training, bible study, bible translation, scholarship, as well as engaging other spiritual disciplines (such as meditation or *Lectio Divina*). These are some of the forma-

tive ways in which God's people have sought to engage with the word.

Far too often, particularly in western expressions of Christianity, Bible study or listening to a sermon has taken place without the necessary work towards appropriate application and ongoing engagement. The aim should be transformation (personal, corporate, and community). Letting the word shape us is crucial to the process of enabling us to fulfil the mandate to maturity and the commission to go to all nations in God's mission.

This task reminds us of the many ever-present hermeneutical challenges that face the reader/listener as we engage with the word.<sup>10</sup> Learning to be aware of our own cultural baggage and the ways this affects how we understand and act upon the word is both a challenge and an opportunity.

One way a church can explore this more creatively is what I have experienced as 'community exegesis'. This is where a group of people sit down together and share their own insights and experiences from the word they have read/listened to. My own home group has explored this when we looked at the parables of Jesus and invited people to bring to the group the ones they liked, the ones they did not understand, and the ones that they wished had never been written down. Through this process, we learned to listen to what the Spirit was saying through one another and then to bring in the appropriate historical, sociological and theological insights, which aided our journey and understanding. Much was learned through this group sharing that would have been lost through a more traditional western approach of the bible expert being there to provide all the answers.

Holistic discipleship is the fourth essential in being church.

We are beginning to realise the failings of the church in the West to follow Jesus' primary commission to make disciples.<sup>11</sup> Instead, we have primarily invested our time and efforts in encouraging and producing converts, church-goers, or even a culture of being 'churched' without an ongoing living, obedient relationship with God.<sup>12</sup>

Recently the works of Dallas Willard have enabled us to reconsider the importance of doing and the consequences of not doing discipleship properly. In a very poignant passage he writes,

For at least several decades the churches of the Western world have not made discipleship a condition of being a Christian. One is not required to be, or to intend to be, a disciple in order to become a Christian, or one may remain a Christian without any signs of progress toward or in discipleship . . . So far as the visible Christian institutions of our day are concerned, *discipleship clearly is optional* (italics his).<sup>13</sup>

In a previous generation, Dietrich Bonhoeffer made similar observations about his fellow Christians and his own national church amidst their participation in Hitler's Reich programme. In his classic work *The Cost of Discipleship* he comments,

Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ. It remains an abstract idea, a myth that has a place for the Fatherhood of God, but omits Christ as the living Son . . . There is trust in God, but no following of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Again he says, 'When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die'.<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately for Bonhoeffer, this approach of Christianity without discipleship led to the reality of a *cheap* grace, one that refused to participate in the daily challenge of following Jesus and therefore becoming like him, which inevitably leads to the place of the cross and subsequently suffering, rejection, and misunderstanding.<sup>16</sup>

If the primary role of the church is indeed to make disciples, then the challenges and opportunities to assist individual believers and church communities to learn to deny self, take up the cross and follow after Jesus<sup>17</sup> must be integral to the very work we are engaged in.<sup>18</sup> To become mature almost always means to face up to the things that hinder, the obstacles that must be overcome, the pain to change, the sacrifices that will lead to a new beginning. This requires us not only to be 'doing good' and being active but also reflecting on what we do, why we do it, and how it expresses the authentic nature of Jesus to others.

However it is more than just being busy serving. One could argue that the western church is often the busiest church on the planet, but the quality of life and community can leave much to be desired. The systemic reality is not just doing things or even doing the right things, but being able to do serious reflection on our journey, our mission and therefore our *raison d'être* together as we seek to follow Jesus in our own communities.

And this means that ultimately discipleship is participating in the reality of the cross and suffering in our growth. Bonhoeffer's statement makes this abundantly clear,

Only a man thus totally committed in discipleship can experience the meaning of the cross. The cross is there, right from the beginning, he has only got to pick it up there is no need for him to go out and look for a cross for himself . . . Every Christian has his own cross waiting for him, a cross destined and appointed by God. Each must endure his allotted share of suffering and rejection.

Alan Hirsch, a mission strategist and emerging church leader from Australia, makes a similar statement in his recent book *The Forgotten Ways*. He states,

For the follower of Jesus, discipleship is not the first step toward a promising career. It is in itself the fulfilment of his or her destiny. We never move from being a disciple *on-the-way*. And yet it seems as if we find little place for radical discipleship in our life together as believers (italics his).<sup>19</sup>

This highlights the need for appropriate leadership that sees as its primary ministry, to enable and empower each member to become what God intends. This is what Jesus demonstrated in his work with the twelve and the remaining followers, and this is the outcome that is highlighted in Ephesians 4:11-16 in terms of leadership that brings the church to maturity.<sup>20</sup>

Fifthly, *communitas*.

The word and concept as used here first appears in a book<sup>21</sup> by the anthropologist Victor Turner, who along with his wife worked primarily in Zambia among the Ndembu tribe.<sup>22</sup> In his observations, particularly of the initiation rites of passage leading to adulthood of young males, he discov-

ered that these young men went through three distinct stages: separation, liminality,<sup>23</sup> and reintegration.<sup>24</sup> In their culture, children would live with their mothers until their entrance to manhood (about 13 yrs) when the men and leaders of the tribe would take them away (separation), and place them outside the tribe in the jungle where they had to learn to adapt or die (liminality), then once they passed this test, they were brought back into the tribe where they now lived with the men (reintegration). It was the stage of liminality in particular which enabled these young men to share and explore something much more edgy, uncertain and often life threatening as they journeyed together through this process.

It was in this stage of liminality that the authentic sense of *communitas* was realized. Here, both individuals and the group experienced something that was neither what they had previously known (the comfortable and known past) nor what they would become (the uncomfortable and unknown future). Instead, they found themselves in a state of flux, of uncertainty, of transition. It is here, argues Turner, that the discovery of a new way of life was experienced. Living in such an extended period created a spatial, social and spiritual threshold that deeply affected their own lives, and upon their return reinvigorated the tribe by this shared experience, which kept the tribe in tune to their values and purpose.<sup>25</sup>

In the recent film adaptation of J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, we can see something of this illustrated at that moment at the end of the first film/book as the formation of 'the fellowship' of Hobbits and men, Trolls and Elves, and one uncompromising wizard are sent off together into an unknown place to purpose the destruction of the one ring of power. It is an adventure full of excitement and fear, of battles and blessings, of deep friendships and loss of life. This, I believe, is an example of what Turner is arguing for. And it is this that I see in the earliest expressions of the emerging church in Acts, in times of church renewal in history, and in the fresh expressions of church that are being explored today.

So this Latin word '*communitas*' rather than the more common English word '*community*'<sup>26</sup> enables us to understand that being church involves more than just being together, even together for a purpose. Instead it involves the shared experiences of marginalisation, danger, disorientation and ultimately finding God afresh as we follow him in his mission.

This clearly was the experience of the formative church of Jesus with the twelve and the seventy-two. Following Jesus meant leaving what was known and comfortable, sharing with him in his life and ministry, and then being sent out to carry it on. It was equally echoed in the life of the emerging church in Acts as they discovered that following Jesus into new cultures, people groups and amidst opposition, confusion, and fear was equally exciting and difficult. Again, as the church has faced new mission opportunities and challenge throughout its two millennia, this has often been repeated. Today the ongoing experience of those who are seeking to become new expressions of church also face these issues, particularly in a post-modern and increasingly post-Christian western society.

#### Sixth, a sacramental way of life

For most Protestants, the two classic expressions of the

sacrament of grace are baptism and communion.<sup>27</sup> These are seen to be the two corporate experiences initiated by Jesus to his people for their participation as means of enduring grace on the journey of discipleship and mission. Baptism is most often connected to initiation whereas communion is the nourishing element of the journey of faith. While these two are significant, they have also caused enormous controversy over the centuries. It is not my aim to explore these, but note that they are vitally important aspects of the church and the individual Christian's life and growth.

In addition to this I also would suggest that the church itself is an expression of sacrament. The New Testament was primarily written to churches who were the living incarnation of Jesus in their community. This *ἐκκλησία* is an expression of the grace of God to that location and people. The 'body of Christ' is not just some esoteric or symbolic expression of God, but, like its Lord in his incarnation, the human church demonstrates, albeit weakly and incompletely, the living Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. This means that God is expressing his life *through* his people. The church intentionally becomes the body of Christ where *all* body parts are active and Jesus is seen and experienced, often in the everyday events of life.

Emerging churches in particular have recognized afresh the value of the incarnation as a means of living the good news in their communities. Goodness and kindness, important characteristics of God himself, are thereby experienced by those currently outside or on the fringe of the existing Christian community, often before words are fully spoken or understood.

The Christian memory is all but gone in much of western Europe. As we learn to negotiate what the demise of the Christendom cultural paradigm means it will inevitably demand a different approach to being church and living the gospel.<sup>28</sup> The story of the prodigal son is not the experience of many Europeans; there is no previous experience of God to return to. Rather, I suggest the dialogue and conversational approach used by Paul and his team in their missionary journeys convey the flavour of a post-modern, post-Christian approach to connecting with God. Actions and words are both necessary. Bombardment by mere words often leaves people cold, rational and uninterested or dismissive. 'The church should be an event that needs an explanation, not the other way round.'<sup>29</sup> Seeing a radical community of people that love one another, serve their community without seeking self-interest must be a prophetic symbol today.

#### Seven, missional<sup>30</sup>

In the past fifteen years, there has been a plethora of writings and discussions on the issue of being missional.<sup>31</sup>

Alan Roxburgh sums up the present reality in his lucid comment that the world missional,

has now become part of the *lingua franca* of the church in North America. Almost everywhere one goes today the world missional or the phrase missional church is used to describe everything from evangelism to reorganisation plans for denominations, to how we make coffee in the church basements and denominational meeting rooms. In a very brief period of time a new form of language entered the common conversation of the church and diffused itself across all forms of church

life. At the same time, it is still not understood by the vast majority of people in either leadership or the pew. This is a stunning accomplishment: from obscurity to banality in eight short years and people still don't know what it means.<sup>32</sup>

Whatever else this word means, it implies joining God in his mission in the world (the *mission Dei*). To *be* good news not just to share it, to express grace in the day to day as we follow Jesus into the darkness of the world. God goes before us and with us (and indeed after us).

The best summary must continue to be the five marks of mission first put forward by the 1988 Lambeth Conference and subsequently adopted by the worldwide Anglican Communion:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

This represents the missional heart and imagination that is needed for churches to become what God requires of them.

As we allow the Holy Spirit once again to transform and shape the church, my prayer is that this season of exploration will be challenging, exciting, frightening, and (hopefully) fun!

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## Notes

- 1 Readers may see the connection with the use of 'yes' in 2 Cor. 1:18-19. Others might see the deliberate play on words from Little Britain ('Computer says "no"').
- 2 E.g., David Watson, *I Believe in the Church* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1978); Ray Steadman, *Body Life* (Regal Books, 1972); Howard Snyder, *The Problem of Wineskins* (IVP, 1975); Post Green Community, *Expressing His Life* (Celebration Publishing, 1975); D. & N. Copley, *Building With Bananas* (Paternoster Press, 1978).
- 3 A good starter for understanding post-modern development and culture and how this relates to matters of faith and life is Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Eerdmans, 1986). In a more accessible format, one could also consult Brian McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side* (Zondervan, 2000), pp. 159-169.
- 4 Of the numerous books, websites, blogs, and discussions taking place, the following are worthy of note:  
**Books:** James Thwaites, *The Church Beyond the Congregation* (Paternoster, 1999); Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches* (SPCK, 2006); Michael Moynagh, *Changing World, Changing Church* (Monarch, 2001); *Emergingchurch.intro* (Monarch, 2004); Kester Brewin, *The Complex Christ* (SPCK, 2004); *Mission-shaped Church* (Church House Publishing, 2004); Steve Taylor, *The Out of Bounds Church* (Zondervan, 2005); Pete Ward, *Liquid Church* (Paternoster, 2002); Stuart Murray, *Church After Christendom* (Paternoster, 2004); Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Zondervan, 2004); Robert Webber, ed., *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches* (Zondervan, 2007); Michael Frost &

Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come* (Hendrickson/Erina: Strand, 2003); Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Brazzo Press, 2006); Michael Frost, *Exiles* (Hendrickson/Erina: Strand, 2006).

**Websites:** <http://emergingchurch.info>; [www.emergentvillage.com](http://www.emergentvillage.com); [www.emergent-uk.org](http://www.emergent-uk.org); [www.freshexpressions.org.uk](http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk); [www.theopedia.com/Emerging\\_church](http://www.theopedia.com/Emerging_church) (this is a very helpful overview article on the key issues).

Two older writers that have had significant influence on the conversation have been David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Orbis, 1991), and Lesslie Newbigin, particularly his later writings, esp. *Foolishness to the Greeks: Gospel and Western Culture* (SPCK, 1986) and *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (SPCK, 1989).

- 5 'The chief aim of man is to worship God and enjoy Him forever' (Westminster Shorter Catechism).
- 6 <http://www.liturgica.com/html/litEChLitWEC.jsp?hostname=null>; As the church became less 'Jewish' and more Greek, more formal developments began to emerge. These practices can be found in the later Christian writings (e.g., the Didache, Pliny the Younger, the first apology of Justin Martyr).
- 7 Gen. 12:1-3; 1 Peter 2:9-10.
- 8 The root idea is to take part in something with someone. In common Greek culture, it meant everything from sharing in marriage to bonds of human friendship as well as religious overtones in relationship to union with the gods. See R. P. Martin, *The Family and the Fellowship* (Paternoster, 1979), pp. 36f.; J. Y. Campbell, 'κοινωνία and its Cognates in the New Testament' in *Three New Testament Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), pp.1-28. It is most often used found in the Pauline literature. It is noteworthy that sharing of funds, of life and suffering as well as faith are all involved in the process.
- 9 John 13:14,34; Rom. 12:10,16; 14:13; 15:17; Gal. 5:13; 6:2; Eph. 4:2, 32; 5:19,21; 6:18; Philp. 2:3; Col. 3:13, 16; 1 Thess. 4:9, 18; 5:11, 13, 15; Heb. 3:13; 10:24, 25;13:1; James 4:11; 5:9,16; 1 Pet. 1:22; 4:9, 10; 5:5.
- 10 Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Zondervan, 1997); John Goldingay, *Models for the Interpretation of Scripture* (Clements, 2004).
- 11 On this see Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (Harper-Collins, 1998), pp. 2-4; and esp. chapter 8 (pp.297-339); His most recent book explores this further through various essays in *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (Monarch, 2006). Another recent work is Mark Greene, *Let My People Grow: Reflections on Making Disciples Who Make a Difference in Today's World* (Authentic, 2006). The classic work must still be Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (SCM, 1963). In addition, one must also mention the early charismatic leader David Watson, *Discipleship* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1983). A very useful bibliography by Dennis Ingolsland contains a thorough list of books, theological articles, and dissertations on the theme of discipleship primarily from North American sources: <http://home.crown.edu/ingolsland/Articles/DiscipleshipBibl.htm>
- 12 One of the apparent outcomes of this, at least in the churches in the United Kingdom, is the great and growing divide between those who have been involved in some capacity in some form of 'church' (Sunday School, youth clubs, local churches and even in church leadership) who are the growing group of the de-churched (estimated by George Lings as being near 40% of the population. [www.encountersontheedge.org.uk](http://www.encountersontheedge.org.uk)). Also found in chapter three of *Mission Shaped Church*, pp.36-

- 41). This has created a post-church environment, the effects of which has been a growing sector of people for whom 'church' and therefore 'Christian' is seen as damaging, controlling, and therefore to be avoided at all costs. Coupled with this is the growth of the post-modern world-view, which regards with suspicion any organised religion and seriously questions whether there is any sort of meta-narrative, resulting in a sense of fear, mistrust of and judgement about the church.
- 13 *The Great Omission*, p. 4. He also notes that he would love to hear from those who do in fact make this essential, and of course we could argue from both church history and contemporary examples known to us that there are indeed those organisations and disciplers who employ this approach. However, the overall statement seems self-evident.
- 14 *The Cost of Discipleship*, p. 64.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p.98.
- 16 'To endure the cross is not a tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ. When it comes, it is not an accident, but a necessity . . . the suffering which is an essential part of the specifically Christian life.' (*Ibid*, p.98).
- 17 Luke 9:23 and parallels
- 18 Bonhoeffer referred to this approach as the church being thoroughly 'worldly'. For him, this demonstrates both the *transcendence* of God as well as the *immanence* of his presence through his people. In other words, demonstrating the ongoing reality of God in our daily lives through the cost of giving, sacrificing, and blessing those in need, our neighbours, and even our enemies. See further Andreas Pangritz, 'Who is Jesus Christ, for us, today?' in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 139.
- 19 Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Braze Press, 2006), p. 103.
- 20 ' . . . the quality of the church's leadership is directly proportional to the quality of discipleship. If we fail in the area of making disciples, we should not be surprised if we fail in the area of leadership development . . . Discipleship is primary; leadership is always secondary. And leadership, to be genuinely Christian, must always reflect Christlikeness and therefore . . . discipleship.' *Ibid*, p.119.
- 21 Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Aldine, 1969). A good analysis of Turner's thought and its influence on various disciplines is found in Deflem, Mathieu. 1991. 'Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner's Processual Symbolic Analysis', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30(1):1-25. Beth Barrie comments, 'The most important contribution Turner made to the field of anthropology is his work on liminality and *communitas*. Believing the liminal stage to be of "crucial importance" in the ritual process, Turner explored the idea of liminality more seriously than other anthropologists of his day'. <http://www.indiana.edu/~wanthro/turner.htm>
- 22 A succinct summary of his work can be found in Michael Frost, *Exiles* (Hendrickson/Strand, 2006), pp.108-111.
- 23 For a helpful way of understanding the place of liminality in relation to theology, missiology and ecclesiology, see Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missional Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality* (Trinity Press International, 1997).
- 24 Following the pioneering work of Belgian anthropologist Arnold van Gennep who identified these as universal stages of life (*The Rites of Passage*. M. B. Vizedom & G. B. Caffee, trans. [University of Chicago Press, 1960] original work published 1909).
- 25 *Ibid*, p. 109.
- 26 Frost illustrates by way of a chart the difference for him between community and *communitas*. He sees community primarily as being inward focused, the aim being of encouraging one another, a safe place and something which has to be intentionally built. *Communitas*, on the other hand, is primarily social togetherness outside society, focuses on the task at hand, pushes society forward, and is experienced through liminality (*Ibid*, p.111).
- 27 For Catholics and Orthodox believers, there are seven in total, although they are slightly different for each group.
- 28 E.g., Lesslie Newbigin, 'Suppose instead of trying to understand the Gospel from the point of view of our culture, we tried to understand our culture from the point of view of the Gospel?' ('Can the West be Converted?', *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* Vol. 6, No. 1 [1985], pp. 25). For considering how the church can stay focused with the demise of Christendom, see Stuart Murray, *Church After Christendom* (Paternoster, 2004). For considering the changing face of the global church and a potential new Christendom from the two-thirds world church, see Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford, 2003).
- 29 I first heard this from Gerald Coates, UK new church leader.
- 30 A good summary article ('What is a Missional Church?') can be found at the friends of missional web site (<http://www.friendsofmissional.org/>) One of the earliest books which began to explore this in a contemporary western context and included the word in their title is Darrell Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Eerdmans, 1998).
- 31 Martin Jones 'The Meaning of Missional' Exploring the journey of the foundation, meaning and usage of the word 'missional' (MA dissertation 2007) Martin is a recent student with Together in Mission (a partner organisation with Birmingham Christian College) and has explored the development of this word. I was privileged to read his work as one of the markers. The first contemporary usage is Francis DeBose, *God Who Sends* (Baptist Sunday School Board, 1983). In addition, Ed Stetzer has begun a recent blog about the words' etymology and varied usage [http://blogs.lifeway.com/blog/edstetzer/2007/08/meanings\\_of\\_missional\\_part\\_1\\_1.html](http://blogs.lifeway.com/blog/edstetzer/2007/08/meanings_of_missional_part_1_1.html)
- 32 Alan J. Roxburgh, 'The Missional Church', *Theology Matters* Vol. 10, No. 4, p.2.