

# Flying onwards – per ardua ad astra

## Values to take home

When the Royal Flying Corps began during WW1 they needed a motto. A young lieutenant named Yule, with a classical background came up with *per ardua ad astra* and it became accepted. Oddly the translation is disputed; Yule said he meant ‘through adversity to the stars’, others prefer ‘through struggles to the stars’. Either way, having a good goal is going to take some work, for nothing that is elevated – like a trip to the stars - comes without effort.

Fighter pilots are both born and made. Their eye sight is keen, their stomachs settled, their bodies robust enough to resist G forces. They are decisive but not reckless, clear individuals who can work in a team, brave but not foolhardy. Yet their talents and temperament need training in technique, if they are to fly the raptors of the RAF and do their job. What may assist those sky pilots within St David’s diocese who seek to go back to their parishes with some sense of expanded horizons from this conference?

If the diocese has a future it will partly be because those not yet part of it become committed disciples of Jesus Christ. Some will join the church as she is, through loving pastoral service, crafted familiar worship, and welcome from those already there. But those qualities have been values in Anglicanism for decades and the reality is that in south west Wales only 2.5% of the population seem to find that credible. How will others find the life we treasure? What part might we have to play? I begin by reminding you that this is not a new scenario.

In 1964 a layman, Leslie Paul, was asked to make a report on the Church of England. He wrote:

‘We are now in the curious situation in which the parable of the lost sheep is almost precisely reversed: there is now statistically one sheep safe in the fold and ninety nine have gone into the mountains. So what do we do? Are not our instructions clearly to set off for the mountains and to leave the one sheep for a while to fend for itself?’

Leslie Paul: *The deployment and payment of the Clergy*: (London: CBF, 1964) p. ?

Roll the story on 40 years and hear Bishop Gordon Bates, of Whitby, writing in 1998:

The Church has got to realise its missionary responsibilities. We live in a society, whether that be urban or rural, which is now basically second or even third generation pagan once again; and we cannot simply work on the premise that all we have to do, to bring people to Christ, is to ask them to remember their long-held, but dormant faith. Very many people have no residue of Christian faith at all; it’s not just dormant, it’s non-existent; in so many instances we have to go back to basics; we are in a critical missionary situation.

*Church Army News* April 1998

Yet we should not despair, as Archbishop George Carey noted in 1997:

Two hundred years ago Samuel Butler, Bishop of Bristol, declined the Prime Minister’s offer to be Archbishop of Canterbury on the grounds that there is “no hope for this failing church”. How wrong he was.

Ashe Lecture 1997, *The Way Ahead: Preparing the C of E for the New Millenium* p.1

How can we hold to the best of the past as well as reach out to a less certain future, because it is so rapidly changing.. In 1975, with what now looks like foresight, Alvin Toffler wrote a book called *Future Shock* in which he used the telling phrase the ‘Death of Permanence’.<sup>1</sup>

What values may help us as we journey out? What will hep through current adversity as we too aim for the stars?

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<sup>1</sup> A Toffler, *Future Shock*, p.?

## 1 Fresh expressions of Church are about discernment and calling

I hope I made it clear in the first session that exploring fresh expressions of Church is not about a desperate attempt to do something. Neither is it helpfully prompted by a sense of guilt at our declining effectiveness. Still less is it assisted by competitiveness, that pernicious but seldom admitted, feature of clergy life. Neither envy, that someone else has started something, nor the desire to tick the box on an archdeacon's enquiry form, will be fruitful.

I hope no one will feel pressured to start something. If we know anything about following Christ and the influence of the Spirit in mission, then what we are looking for is calling. Don't try to start a fresh expression of Church because you have been to this conference, only do it because the discernment on your patch, and the sense of call, creep up or even burst upon you.

We are now in an odd situation. Church planting and creating fresh expressions of Church in England began as an imperceptible ripple in the late 1960's and had become a measurable wave by the late 1990's. It started because God called some pioneers to branch out, to do something with their connections with people outside the churches and who were not going to come inside them. They discovered the call was to journey with them and start what did not then exist.

Then people like me noticed what was happening, began to analyse it and report our findings back to the wider church. The scale, vitality and health of the phenomena became impossible to ignore and led to two Church of England reports, ten years apart. The latter has become a best seller and the issues raised have gained such broad acceptance, that it feels like a change of climate – or at least a forecast of different weather in the future.

The further stage – that we have not seen before – has involved the creation of an Archbishop's team – Fresh Expressions - to help facilitate the changes on the ground that will work with this, helping local churches re-imagine themselves for mission. All this is good, but there is a danger in that the nature of the story so far is being changed. The initiative from the centre or the top is different from the calling to those at the edge. It would be unfair to think the former cannot be a spiritual process and illusion to think that local initiative is always right. But it is a change that has dangers.

Let me put it into a contrast between two aphorisms; One you may know – the second I offer today

Mission is finding out what God is doing and joining in.

Mistake is finding out what God is doing and organizing it.

Please don't hear that second aphorism as a plea for anarchy. I do know that the longer term effect of Wesley's ministry was greater than that of Whitfield, because converts were organised into bands and classes, though Whitfield was deemed the more powerful preacher. I know too that all organisms must have some measure of organisation. Skeletons are great when they are inside bodies. I am less keen on them, if I meet them on their own. Organisation of itself does not bring life – ask anyone in the National Health Service.

We are called to co-operate with God in mission, but we must not imagine that our endeavours can be any kind of substitute for his life and grace. Recall Paul in 1 Cor. 3: 'I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.' Advocating more planting, or even watering what is begun cannot be sufficient. We are now for the first time in a situation where there is some pressure to create fresh expressions. Unless this is part of a calling from God, all we shall do is rearrange some plant pots we already have – or put out some plastic flowers and hope no one looks too closely. So I say in all seriousness, don't do this unless God calls you to.

## 2 Fresh expressions of Church are about their values not shapes

There are dangers surrounding fresh expressions of Church of trying to copy what others have done and then to impose that. I saw this most clearly in researching the most widely spread type of fresh expression of Church, called Messy Church of which there are at least 300 registered examples in the UK. However, this was not the first time I had seen the pattern. It occurred probably 8-10 years earlier with another type, called Cell Church.

The profound danger is that punters and critics alike can be deceived and think that the *shape* of the event is the diagnostic feature. Offer ‘welcome, worship, word, and witness’ and some think they are doing Cell church. Or provide ‘welcome, craft, celebration and meal’ and it must be Messy Church. In both cases this is the error of confusing activity with purpose, and shape with values. This problem is one that even earnest practitioners can fall into. I asked a Messy Church leader in Yorkshire what they were trying to do. The reply was ‘I take a theme, find some crafts, fit it to some songs and a talk, and we lay on a meal.’

The consequence of such pragmatism is to put a ceiling on what can be achieved, for the more sublime aims are lost in the task and its ongoing pressure of maintaining the activities. In the case of Messy Church, just doing the shape opens the door to dumbing down its potential for transformed families and Christ-centred community. It begins the degeneration that settles for the fun of crafts and loses the wisdom about being all age. Just doing the shape also colludes with an entertainment-based society and it fails to build deep relationships because doing the activity becomes the task.

Far more important than the shape of either of these two very different fresh expressions of Church are their underlying values. In the case of MC, the values are: hospitality, creativity, celebration and being all age. Do you notice that craft is not a listed value. Its author Lucy Moore is perfectly clear about this. In the DVD and the first book, she suggests that there could be many alternatives, such as ecology, cookery, arts or sport based church and is disappointed these have barely emerged.<sup>2</sup> Thus I believe she is right that the value is *creativity*, because that reflects the *imago Dei*, rather than just one manifestation of it, such as craft.

With Cell Church the 5 values are: All involved, Becoming Disciples, Creating community, Doing evangelism, Encountering God. These are principles and the suggested shape of a cell church evening is just one possible way to help embody them. But I know a cell church, on a local authority housing estate, where they find the four fold shape of welcome, worship, word, witness is too complex. So to create community, have all involved and promote discipleship they play entirely fast and loose with the shape – sometimes only doing one aspect in any one week. For the same reason other groups devote a whole week to putting on the party for their friends outside the church. That’s practising the value called doing evangelism.

In both cases the discerning people know the inner values, they take them and work with them so both Messy Church and Cell church takes different shapes according to the context.

This lesson, that it is not a matter of shapes but values, is something that everyone involved in fresh expressions of Church needs to be aware of. I suggest it manifests when the Church becomes desperate to do something to attract the young, meets something that becomes popular and so copies the externals without understanding the internals. It is part of the mistakes that occur when we are desperate for solutions. It comes from our organisational mindset that has a touching belief in programmes. It comes too from our naivety about messianic miracle cures.

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<sup>2</sup> L. Moore, *Messy Church*, pp. 49-53 and *Messy Church 2*, p.12

Then good ways to work become both trivialised and blunted. Careful engagement with context reduces, and once more church, done in attractional, provider-client mode, rears its head. You come to us and we'll do you good. It means that the counter-cultural impact, always associated with discipleship, and equally important the attendant transformation of surrounding society, gets lost. It ends up with bad missionary practice and we impose a shape or form of church upon an unsuspecting public. You might even say that the grace of living by values has been lost and the law of doing the shape has taken over. So actually we ought not to be puzzled that the shape we imported has not brought life to us or others.

At the risk of introducing a magic bullet at this point, what could be an antidote?

### 3 Dying to live

The writers of what became *Mission-shaped Church* had to think of a title. For some time we thought a good provocative summary of its thrust was "dying to live". It got turned down by the publishers, but the idea is alive and well in the text.

Fresh Expressions and Church Planting are about the process of creating contextual church. At its heart is a dying to live process. In contextual planting it is not the case that absolute gospel, or 100% neat church, is imported so that we can know exactly what will emerge. That would be a transplant or a clone, not growing something from the context. As the definition of planting from *Mission-shaped Church* p.32 tells us, both gospel and church, embodied in a group of particular people is sown in a specific culture and something different to both emerges. But, is such thinking fair to biblical sources?

There is a New Testament analogy from 1 Corinthians which reflects on what is known about all sowing and planting of seeds. 'When you sow you do not plant the body that will be, but a seed.. but God gives it a body which he has determined.' 1 Cor. 15:37-38. This is what every farmer knows – a seed looks very different from what comes up later.

#### **Planting involves dying**

As I have reflected on best practice in church planting over 20 years, I want to add the spirit of the previous verse in this Pauline text – "what you sow does not come to life unless it dies". This awareness connects with something even more theologically significant than St Paul's understanding of death and heaven in 1 Corinthians 15. It echoes Jesus' own teaching on the significance his own death in John 12:24 onwards.

Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Jesus presents a picture of seeds, which die to enable the reproduction of a plant that grows, which in turn continues the process of creating further seeds.

The discipline of Church Planting teaches that movement and change are inherent in mission. This is true for seeds. Seeds left in an unopened packet cannot be described as planted. They must be moved out of the packet. Their interment in the soil means an intentional end of their existence as seeds. Now translate that dynamic into the discipline of creating Fresh Expressions of church in any mission context. It means that the seed, in this case the incoming planting team, does die. This seed does lose part of its previous identity; it was part of the sending church which had its own particular manifestation and culture. This seed will become a body that it was not before. What we are realising is that Dying to Live is inherent in the discipline and process of creating of Fresh expressions of Church.

There is a truly radical change involved in true mission. The planting team [or seed], by mixing with its context, becomes rooted there. It draws nourishment and resources from that environment as it sends out roots and a shoot. By this process, it dies as a seed, changing from what it was. In church planting, the seed community becomes a new body of believers, as well as a body of new believers. As such the seed planting analogy has real strengths. It conveys by analogy, what should occur theologically, in all cross cultural mission.

Jesus' words in John 12, suggest that dying to live is inherent in the Christian way. This is not some weird game only those in church planting play. Baptism should have reminded us of that; it is symbolic enactment of, and identification with, the Death and Resurrection of Christ. He also makes it abundantly clear that his patterns are to be ours. This very text follows his view of what must happen to him.

He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If any one serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any one serves me, the Father will honour him. John 12:26

It is curious and worrying that while we have taken the notion of death and resurrection into our central liturgical rites, we link it to the church's year and patterns of spirituality, but we have broadly omitted taking it into mission. Yet the very person who taught mission to us said it was the pattern of his mission.

Jesus made it quite clear that his followers are committed to his pattern. Turn on to John chapter 20, and the same but resurrected Jesus is bringing peace among the startled disciplines. He shows them his hands and his side – the cost of dying is not glossed over. Then these missionary headline words follow, or if you prefer ecclesiological language – at this point apostolic identity, is conferred on the church. “As the Father sent me so I send you.” What a word this little word “as” is.

As – in the same manner as I was sent as God's apostle – so I send you

As - on the same journey from incarnational identification with culture, to the disclosure of Lordship, endorsing counter cultural engagement with that culture– so I send you.

As – in the same way as I the seed died in the ground and have now emerged both similar and different – so I send you.

As I – the eternal Son was willing to die to the glories of heaven, to be transformed into the form of a dying slave – so I send you.

As - in the same way of becoming very different to become like those to whom I was sent - so I send you.

Have no doubt that the patterns of Jesus are for us all. They are for the whole church, most especially when it gets clear that Church is extension of the mission of Jesus. The patterns apply to the creation of fresh expressions of Church. They apply in all cross cultural work. Dying to live is normal, because it was the norm set by Christ.

But the publishers of *Mission-shaped Church* thought the phrase was much too risky. It got dropped. None the less it is central to the thought of the report. It is again a case of Christ and his patterns showing the church what she is always called to be

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If you were to discern that starting a fresh expression of Church was what God was calling you to do in your context, how will this affect your ministry and your understanding of it? The most obvious factor is that this creates yet another ecclesial community that requires some looking after. As such this development accelerates an existing trend whereby the old equation of one parson to one parish has long broken down through what is euphemistically called pastoral re-organisation. The ruder term is managed decline. Although in this different fxC scenario we are looked at planned growth, in both cases it changes the kind of the ministry clergy offer.

## [4 Exercise episcopate not control]

A number of thinkers since the 1960s have written and spoken about a shift towards what is helpfully thought of as a local episcopate. Ironically in terms of local geography this may be much nearer to 2<sup>nd</sup> century Ignatian practice than our present arrangements, by which Bishops tend to work at least county wide. There is not time today to trace that development since Leslie Paul in 1964 1<sup>st</sup> used the phrase the bishop-in-little.

But we can explore the roles of these Bishops in Little. Firstly please eradicate delusions of power, resist those flashes of purple, and forget illusions of grandeur. However, if the term is legitimate and the model is valid then it must make sense of essential episcopate roles.

### 1 Vision

I believe the first role is to do with Vision. I arrive at this thanks to initial ideas from Paul Bayes – now English national Mission and evangelism adviser. He set me thinking about familiar objects:

Telescope                      Periscope                      Microscope

What then is an epi-scope? – how interesting there are links to other words like *oversight*, or *overseer* or *supervision*. Vision is perception of what is and what might be, it is inklings of what God is up to; it is some clarity about values shared for the journey and therefore how the future is to be welcomed. All this makes ‘Double Listening’ to tradition and context a key task for all with episcopate. It means tenacity to hold onto vision and humility in living out values. It means courage in asking others to be accountable. It means trusting the rest of the local church in their presbyteral and diaconal roles and supporting them in their ministries. This is deeply collaborative.

### 2 Focus of Unity

It means the vision holder can and must be the Focus of Unity – no longer just lording over one flock, but serving – the diaconal word - across a local diversity of both Existing and Fresh Expressions of Church, valuing all of them and controlling none of them. This is a person who, like a good head of a family enables and facilitates relationships across the family, if necessary acting as intermediary and translator. Once more the role is inherently collaborative for it renounces both the possibility, and the desirability, of doing everything.

### 3 Exhibiting Catholicity

The one with Episcopate clearly expresses in their person the value we call Catholicity. This person represents the Church beyond the local. This is true in at least two senses. They are connection to the world family of church and also to other expressions locally. Part of the episcopate instinct is to connect specific groups to others. This is the person who will say to the doubtful hand – you can’t say because you are not a foot you don’t belong to the body. The one with episcopate will remind the proud eye that it needs the ear. Equally I believe any episcopate itself needs also to be under authority, and again this is living out the value of Catholicity and the expression of relational unity, typical of the Trinity.

### 4 Care of the Carers

The Episcopal figure is Shepherd to the Presbyterate and perhaps also any formalised Diaconate. Don’t imagine that pastoral care is obliterated or diminished. I suspect it is just as large a dimension of life - it’s just more focussed and more difficult. Our current diocesan Bishops and Archdeacons know this very well, what ends up on their desks are the cases no one else has solved yet. Presbyters' problems will be tricky ones. The easy ones they solved themselves.

## 5 Recognizing Ministry

The one with Episcopate enables and authorises Ministry: I see this occurring already and increasing in significance. I think of my own experience as a Vicar. Years ago it was accepted by a Diocese that a vicar in local parish was the Locus of Authority over the appointment of Sunday school teachers, worship group and home group leaders etc. But when it came to newer ministries like Healing or precedents about unauthorised preachers I found, the 1980s and 1990s, the shutters came down with a bang. In the very same parish 10 years after my departure, freedom for these decisions is being gladly given. In effect episcopate is becoming more local.

## 6 Working with a diaconate

This episcopate will need the recovery of the Diaconate – In 1992 Christopher Donaldson<sup>3</sup> made the case that it be focussed in a person acting as administrator. Churches I have been part of would not have functioned without a gifted administrator. Steven Croft in 1999 makes the case that it is seen across the whole expression of Church through service to community. John D Collins argues they have an ambassadorial, even evangelistic role. Exeter Diocese have been looking at what are sustainable Christian communities. Pragmatically they define what they call a mission community in four ways. An aggregate uSa of 150, a financial capability of giving £50,000 annually, provision of 50 hours of Licensed ministry per week and, note this in the context of Diaconate, 20 hours of paid administration.

## Dying to doing

You may have noticed that up till now, there has been no talk of what has to be given up. Where is the dying to live that is characteristic of *Mission-shaped Church* thinking. Well here it comes. To embrace Episcopate there is dying to the Presbyteral. That is tough stuff because it means stipendiary clergy dying to the doing of ministry and being the prime doer. How often do we who are clergy survive in ministry because we sense we are needed – and we are needed because we of what do. Only if there is less doing can there be time to listen and to watch – to gain clarity about seeing. It will mean a dying to live, about being the elder among the locals – the probable meaning of presbyter. Precisely because the one with episcopate is not the elder of one expression can that person best offer catholicity across the expressions. It is also dying to the illusion of a rooted local belonging. The point about good episcopate is both connection to and coming from the Church catholic. Stipendiary Clergy classically come from the outside and will move on. They are long stay itinerants and yet they live as it were as one of the locals for now.

To enter episcopate, and relinquish the presbyteral is also dying to the control instinct. I have heard far too often over the last 25 years of clergy who have quietly throttled some church plants and fresh expressions of Church, either through too tight control of what happened in practice, fear of something newer being better than what they provided for the traditionalists, mistrust of anything occurring when they were not present and jealousy of local lay leaders doing a good job. Trusting others is essential in episcopate. Oversight is not overdoing – it is seeing what is being done and having grace to rejoice.

Yet, as with all good Christian deaths it leads to fruit. Take two classic texts: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,” and ‘except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die’. If that is good theology about mission, and about church, we can have courage to trust it will be good theology about ministry. The fruit will be the ministries of others, in others, by others. Just like seeds and plants, they the plants will grow into what we, the seeds, cannot be.

In values to take home is there nothing about eucharist? Yes there is ...

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<sup>3</sup> C. Donaldson, *The New Springtime of the Church* (Canterbury Press, 1992)

## 5 Learning from the 4 fold shape

I approach the end of the conference with a suggestion that within the Eucharist itself is some justification for this courageous and risky way of mission. Let me enter it through a question. What is the same essential “shape” to these two passages?

a] The feeding of the 5000 : Mt 14:19

“And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.”

b] The Eucharistic action Mt 26:26

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

The common shape is the 4 verbs He ... took / blessed (gave thanks) /broke / gave. You would not be very surprised that this is suggestive for all Christian Ministry. I note that same shape is found in the Communion as is found in an act of compassion which was also a demonstration of Mission. The Catholic view might be that Eucharist is the focus of all Christian worship and service. It is then no accident that Henry Nouwen develops exactly this shape in his book *Life Of The Beloved*.

But we can take it even further. The identical shape of Communion and the feeding of the 5000, in different contexts shows we can't and shouldn't force a wedge between task of worship and task of compassionate mission. They are revealed to us as having the same shape. The shape reflects a divine dynamic - not just that Jesus literally utilised this shape by the lake side and in the upper room - but that the pattern is a reflection of his own ministry.

### Jesus and the 4 fold shape

Took: Jesus took human form - Phil 2 - and took people, as he found them, to himself

Blessed: He was blessed - at his baptism - and he blessed others by his work

Broke: He Broke Jewish legalism and conventions and was broken by the authorities

Gave: He Gave Himself - in life and death

With what Result?

His pattern and process of dying to live led to multiplication of his life in his new people

### How does this paradigm apply to Fresh Expressions?

Took:

God takes a group of Christians – as they are, but sometimes with little idea of what they may be taken to. Calling is very different from contract.

Blessed:

Unless those taken are blessed by encounter with God - they have no life to give to others; receiving salvation and having a living spirituality, empowered by the Spirit, are essential before mission can happen. We can only give away what we receive. As Bishop Stephen Cottrell wrote about the effect of sacred space on his people:

Best of all as the spiritual temperature rose to apostolic level, the spontaneous combustion of Christ-like witness and ordinary everyday evangelism began to happen <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> S. Cottrell, title? p. 17.

Broke:

There is a break up of the one old congregation and of one way of doing things. Establishing fresh expressions of Church means being called into a process of dividing to multiply. There is no other way. It is its own kind of dying to live. As Jesus put it, the new wine goes into new wine skins. As such creating fresh expressions is not a process of simply adding the new into the old.

Gave:

The essence of Church Planting and so of fresh expressions of Church is giving away. The sending church gives away resources of people, time and money for others. Then the sent church gives away its life to those surrounding it. It is costly, outward and in that sense apostolic.

And what is the result?

Multiplication of Christ's life in a new group of people

What I ask myself about this intriguing set of connections is this: does it proceed from eucharist or is it the other way round. Is this one way of understanding why Eucharist is so nourishing?

Some time ago I came across an attitude in the form of a quote, whose source I have forgotten. It sounds like Bishop Michael Marshall. I shall be glad if anyone is able to remind me. The sense of it was something like this.

Have as high a doctrine of Eucharist as you like, as long as your doctrine of the church is higher. And as high a doctrine of Church as you like, as long as your doctrine of Christ is the highest. I am drawn to that progression and to evangelicals I would say: have as high a view of the word as you like, as long as your doctrine of Christ the living Word is higher.

It is Christ who is the centre, Christ who is the giver of grace, Christ alone who brings life. Ultimately only Christ can establish and increase congregations. But what is so noteworthy in our day, and what I have tried to give a rationale for here, is that it will be in his patterns. That will embrace incarnational instincts, but be most formed by the dynamics of dying to live. This gives a Christological framework in which to hold continuity and change. Continuity and change are then demonstrated in the tradition of the history of mission and dying to live is also echoed in the Eucharistic shape itself. These are values to take home and take on.