

Candour



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NEWS AND VIEWS FOR MINISTERS

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What is the Church called to be in our world?



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Contributions

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The editor on (04) 801-6000 or candour@presbyterian.org.nz

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What is the Church called to be in our world?

Mary-Jane Konings, Timaru Presbyterian Church, Timaru.

There is nothing like shifting your context to challenge your intuitive sense of how Church ought to be.

There is nothing like challenging your church to recognise their context to highlight the reality that many in our parishes have few tools in their toolbox to express and critically reflect on their sense of ecclesiology.

There is nothing like an earthquake to shake up our collective sense of what the Church is. We say that it is more than the building, but now, more congregations are living that reality.

Our year at the then School of Ministry had a long running debate about the primary focus of the Church – are we a worshipping community with a missional task or a missional community that worships?

Is it worship that constitutes and defines the Church or is it mission? Does God constitute his Church as we gather in worship, or as we share in God's mission to the world? Or is it all about relationship and the creative tension between our participation in divine relationship through worship, and our participation in human relationships through mission?

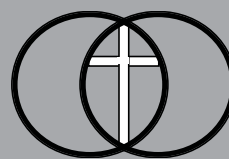
I've been reading "The Lost History of Christianity" by Phillip Jenkins, and the surviving churches were the ones that developed a local expression, in the local language, using local people. Churches that relied on central authority sending appropriately trained and resourced priests ceased to exist under difficult circumstances like persecution and rampaging pagan hords.

My particular bias is that the Church is called to be a worshipping community, an authentic, particular, local expression of God's people. Initiatives like the One Voice project and the New Zealand Hymnbook Trust equip and enable our people to sing our songs our way using our resources, rather than directing our expression of worship to be a substandard clone or anachronistic variation. Our mission is shaped according to careful, critical, Biblical exegesis of the needs and opportunities of the people in our current context, not wishful thinking, nostalgia, or the latest ideology from overseas.

Our world keeps changing. What if the answer to the question of what the Church is called to be also changes, as the changeless-God calls God's Church from death to life?

PAEROA CO-OPERATING PARISH

Opportunity for a minister to join this community facing church in an activity rich town.



We seek a nationally ordained minister (acceptable to the Church) to work with our talented, accepting and all age congregation.

Our church is closely associated with the Paeroa Community Support Trust which allows real opportunity to reach all parts of our community.

This will initially be a 75 percent position with members of the congregation continuing in roles which support full parish activities.

To express interest in this position and to request a copy of the parish profile, please contact:

Rev Murray Lambert, Convener of the Ministry Settlement Board.
PH 07 888 7242 **EM** standrews@orcon.net.nz

How do we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? On being the Church after Christendom

Kevin Ward, Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, Dunedin.

It is now commonplace to accept the view that Christianity in the West is confronted with a very different context from that which existed half a century ago, whatever label might be preferred to affix to that context: post-modern, post-Christian, post-denominational, post-Church. One frame of reference that is used to help describe the impact of this for Christianity is that of a paradigm change. This was first applied to changes in theological understanding by Hans Küng, who claimed that six different paradigms had shaped and characterised periods of Christian theological history. It was then applied to Christian mission by David Bosch, who likewise suggested six different epochs.

Historians are generally cautious of naming time periods in history for two reasons. First, change does not generally happen suddenly. It takes place over a long period of time during which there is considerable uncertainty and fluidity where there is both discontinuity and continuity. Thus placing a date on the point when one epoch or period ends and another begins can be profoundly unhelpful, as this may go on for several decades or even centuries. This is a common flaw in many of those who write about the move from modernity to post-modernity, as if in 1989 (or whatever date they decide) one reality disappeared and another suddenly appeared. There is still plenty of modernity around.

The second caution we need to apply is that of seeing periods as determined by one particular explanatory force or cause. One example of this is those who see the modern period as being understood solely in terms of the forces of enlightenment rationalism. Reality is always more complex, with a great variety of motifs criss-crossing, inter-penetrating and weaving the intricate patterns of motivation and practice.

Nevertheless the idea of paradigm changes – significant shifts in the way we view and understand reality – can be helpful for us to understand the way in which our context has changed and the very different reality in which we now have to seek what it means to be the Church and engage in mission. As Bosch expresses it:

The point is that the Christian Church in general and the Christian mission in particular are today confronted with issues they have never even dreamt of which are crying out for responses that are both relevant to the times and in harmony with the essence of the Christian faith.

There are some important insights that can be gained from the modern/postmodern shift, or perhaps as some have better called it, the waning of modernity. However, increasingly I feel that the most important shift for us in the Church to understand and come to grips with is our now post-Christendom reality. Loren Mead was perhaps the first to popularise this, when in his 1991 book *The Once and Future Church*, he portrayed the Church as having existed under two previous paradigms: the Apostolic paradigm and the Christendom paradigm.

In our time that second paradigm is breaking apart. Its successor, a third paradigm, has yet to emerge. A number of writers speak of three paradigms for the Church, and Peter Wagner, for example, popularised the concept commonly found amongst church growth enthusiasts of the "Apostolic", "Christendom" and "New Apostolic" paradigms. Mead is much more accurate in suggesting that at the moment we are in a time when the old paradigm is breaking down and the new has not yet emerged. He describes it as "the time between paradigms," rather than endeavouring to give a label to what is as yet most unclear. A number of writers, such as Alan Roxburgh who recently visited us here, speak of the Church being in a *liminal* space at the moment.

In many ways it could be argued that Mead's identification of only two paradigms is somewhat oversimplifying history. There are significant differences, for example, between the medieval

Roman Catholic Church and the modern Protestant Church. However, Mead argues that through all of this period the dominant paradigm shaping the Church was that of Christendom. Again the change to this took several centuries, beginning with the conversion of Constantine in 313 AD.

The critical difference, once this paradigm settled in, was that by law the church was identified with the Empire. The world... was legally identified with the church. There was no separation between world and church within the Empire. The law removed the hostility from the environment but also made the environment and the church identical.

This paradigm saw Church and society as one (the unity of sacred and secular); mission as an enterprise in far off places done by professionals rather than the ordinary person; congregations as geographical parishes rather than committed communities; and membership as the result of birth rather than choice. A significant consequence of this was that mission was removed from the ordinary life of the church and the role of the minister or cleric became that of a “chaplain” to care for those in the parish.

Mead’s application of the term Christendom to all of this period can be criticised. Indeed strictly speaking it should only properly be applied to that medieval period when secular and spiritual powers were fused in what we now call Europe. This lasted for only about 300 years and was in serious decay by the Reformation. Mead, however, argues that “when the unity of life in Empire and church began to come apart the Christendom paradigm did not die. Instead it continued to shape each of the fragments into which the world and the church broke.” This state continued well into the 20th century in most western societies.

Callum Brown has demonstrated how at the level of popular culture in Britain this fragmentation continued to shape behaviour and attitudes through the 1940s and 1950s. James Belich identifies similar trends in New Zealand in the first half of the 20th century. “The general impression... is the very opposite of irreligious. There was a strong tradition of piety and family use of the Bible... New Zealand in this period and beyond is known for exceptional Sabbatarianism.” My own upbringing in New Zealand in the 1950s and 1960s had continual reminders, both at school and in the wider culture, that we were part of Christendom, reinforced almost daily by the prayers, Bible readings and hymns of assemblies in state schools. Jim Veitch wrote in 1990:

The influence of Christianity on New Zealand life until the mid-sixties was extensive. It was a rare family who did not have some connection with the church. Women and children in particular used the church and its extensive social activities. It was in the Sunday School that children received moral education, and most parents... went to church in support of this...

Christian influence still dominated Sunday and holidays, shaped attitudes to books and entertainment, and even controlled the language people used... The moral principles of Christianity... were sufficiently well known in the community to provide business, industrial and community leaders with a broad ethical framework.

All of that, as we know, has largely disappeared in the last five decades. Although the response of our society to the tragedies of Pike River and now Christchurch, and the role that society has looked to the Church for, indicates again that we still live in the shadow of at least some aspects of that. However, it is only a fragmented shadow that remains and Mead argues that:

The paradigm’s importance for us lies in the fact that most of the generation that now leads our churches grew up with it as a way of thinking about church and society. And all the structures and institutions that make up the churches and the infrastructures of religious life... are built on the presuppositions of the Christendom Paradigm – not the ancient classical version of the paradigm...but the version that flourished with new life in the 19th and early 20th centuries... We are surrounded by the relics of the Christendom Paradigm, a paradigm that has largely ceased to work.

What were some of the effects of working with that understanding? Anthony Robinson, who also visited us last year, in his book about the Church in our current context, *Changing the Conversation*, suggests the following six things:

1. Conversion and formation declined because a person was a Christian by virtue of birth, citizenship and residence. Christian faith was a given rather than a choice or conscious commitment.
2. Christianity no longer found its primary embodiment in congregations but in nations.

3. Mission was not an inherent characteristic of every congregation that belonged to all members; rather mission was something done by specially designated missionaries in territories or nations that were not Christian.
4. The purpose of the Church was to provide religious services to a particular local population.
5. The ministry of the Church was increasingly performed by and belonged to religious professionals.
6. Society (or culture) and faith (Christianity) overlapped to such an extent that being a good Christian and being a good citizen were equivalent.

Most of my church life has been spent in the free or gathered church (mainly Baptist), all of which were not immune from these tendencies. However, my doctoral research which focussed on a study of four congregations (two parish and two gathered churches) over the period 1960 to 2000 made me realise how much more these factors were embedded in the life of, and implicit in the understanding of, these parish churches. I think this is one of the reasons that gathered churches have by and large done better over the past 50 years than parish churches, as all the statistics show.

The church was maintained by the birth of children in the parish who were baptised and eventually joined the local church, married, had children and continued the cycle. All this basically broke down in the 1960s and very few are now born into our churches. It took until well into the 1990s for this to be realised. Gathered churches have always seen themselves much more as communities of choice (hence believers baptism) and so have by and large been more mission focussed, rather than relying on the surrounding community to sustain them.

In addition gathered churches generally have not seen themselves as being part of the establishment, reinforced by the word 'sectarian' often being applied to them. Certainly this was part of my experience being brought up Brethren and then Baptist in the 1950s and 60s. So rather than supporting and serving the surrounding culture and society, they had a stronger focus on calling people to live to a different drum than that of the wider culture. Sometimes (I would want to say too often) this led to a rejection of almost everything about the wider society and culture. Nevertheless as our society has drifted further from its Christian heritage and roots, and embraced values that are often antithetical to that of the gospel, so the Church can no longer simply function as a pillar of society. It must call people to live by an alternative set of beliefs and values.

Both of these factors lie at the heart of the shift in what is called for in the way we are Church in our post-Christendom context. It calls for a re-invigoration of our theological convictions about the gospel of Jesus Christ and a re-imagining of what it means to be the Church of Jesus Christ, called into mission by God, demonstrating in the way it lives the new reality (Kingdom) that God in Christ is calling us into and inviting people to become part of that new humanity made possible through the death and resurrection of Christ and the presence of the Spirit.

Alan Roxburgh met with a group of Church leaders to reflect on what is happening to their churches. After reading Psalm 137 and spending time in their own lament they wrote their own Psalm.

The Introduction Workgroup of the Leadership Sub Committee is starting to seek positions for graduating students from the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership who are available for a call to a congregation or congregation sponsored mission opportunity.

If you are a convener of a Settlement Board please consider approaching us about one of our newly trained ministers. In most cases they will be available for a call late in 2011 or early next year.

Brief profiles were in the March 2011 Spanz but further information can be obtained from the convener through whom all approaches and correspondence should be channeled.

CONTACT Rev Alastair Smales, Convener Introduction Workgroup, 5 Glen Place, Mosgiel 9024.
EMAIL jcwa@extra.co.nz **PHONE** 03 4892933

137 for 2010

In the midst of this crazy world I look around and wonder what has happened.

How do I talk to the kid with a ring in his nose?

Does "The Old Rugged Cross" mean anything to him?

He asks me to sing a song about "my Jesus."

From what I can tell he is from another planet, or am I the stranger here?

I think it's time to sell the Wurlitzer.

So how do I tell Martians about Jesus when the only language I speak is 1955?

How do I write a headline for them that does not screw up the Good News?

I kind of wish it were the way it was, but it's not.

So I need to figure out

how to sing the old lyrics

with a whole new tune.

MINISTERS' STUDY GRANTS

Are you a Presbyterian minister planning on further study? Do you know that you can apply for a study grant from the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership?

Applications are invited in March and September each year for post-ordination study grants for ministers in good standing of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. These grants are made possible through the generosity of the Mary Ann Morrison and M S Robertson estates and are administered by the Senatus of the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership.

WHAT ARE THE RULES?

1. The proposed course of study will aid the applicant's professional development.
2. There is a potential benefit to the Church and the probability of significant service to the Church.
3. Parish and presbytery approval has been obtained for the study, where appropriate.

In normal circumstances grants do not exceed one-third of the study costs involved and may be held in conjunction with other scholarships and grants other than the Postgraduate Scholarship. Grants are not made retrospectively and relate only to costs to be incurred by the scholarship holder themselves.

Please note: successful applicants who move to ministries or other positions outside of the Church within two years of receiving a grant may be required to repay up to 50 percent of the grant received.

HOW DO I APPLY?

Applicants are asked to address the criteria and set out their expected costs including conference fees, tuition fees, basic accommodation and travel, and to supply any other information that may be relevant.

ENQUIRIES TO: The Registrar, Knox Centre for Ministry & Leadership,
Knox College, Arden Street Opoho, Dunedin. registrar@knoxcentre.ac.nz

CLOSING DATE FOR THE NEXT ROUND OF APPLICATIONS: 31ST MARCH 2011

What, or who, are we called to be?

Keith Nisbet, Howick Presbyterian Church, Auckland.

I find myself finishing this article in the wake of the Christchurch earthquake. Search and rescue are still looking for people in flattened buildings, casualty wards are full, the death toll is rising and ordinary suburban Kiwis are lining up at water trucks. I must admit I am a bit shattered – after all this sort of thing happens in other countries, not New Zealand. But it has happened – to our people, to one of our cities and to our churches. And I’m struggling to come to grips with that.

In the midst of this tragedy, where is the Church? In many ways, front and centre. The Salvation Army was one of the first groups to mobilise and offer practical help and care for the distressed and displaced. Various churches are being used as gathering points for welfare and water distribution. We are being asked by one and all to pray. On a sadder note many of the most badly damaged buildings are also churches - Christchurch Cathedral, Knox Presbyterian, the Catholic Basilica to name just three. In a time of desperate need the Church is very much in evidence.

Perhaps this reflects the general feeling in NZ society towards the Church. There is, for many, very little real connection with it, but that said, it is good to have the Church there when needed. Perhaps the Church is a bit like the family lawyer: we don’t see much of them but they are great to have around when you need legal help in a hurry. This is a very different situation in comparison to years gone past. For generations the Church has had a very secure place in society, even in a secular society like New Zealand.¹

However, things have undoubtedly changed. No longer is a city built around a cathedral, nor even is a church considered an essential part of a new subdivision. No longer do clergy have automatic inroads into the community by virtue of their collar or robe. No longer does society recognise the place or role of the local church in their community. In fact many people I speak to struggle to even identify where we are physically located! Our world and our society have changed immeasurable in just my lifetime. I feel that we as a Church are struggling to find our place in this new context that has emerged and, even as I write, is still emerging.

Howick Presbyterian

Howick Presbyterian Church is a strong, well established church with a long and illustrious past. There have, however, been troubling signs in recent years. In the past three years two vital youth ministries, a 7pm service and an 11am café service have ceased. The eldership is predominantly of an older generation. Many of the families who attend our 10am family service² remain on the fringes of the church. Most of the young adults, while very active in a home-group, simply skip church services all together. Most of the work on the property is carried out by a very dedicated group of retirees. The social events and pastoral care ministries are also run by this age group. As such Howick called me in March last year as their Next Generations Leader with the specific mandate of helping to find a way ahead.

Two models

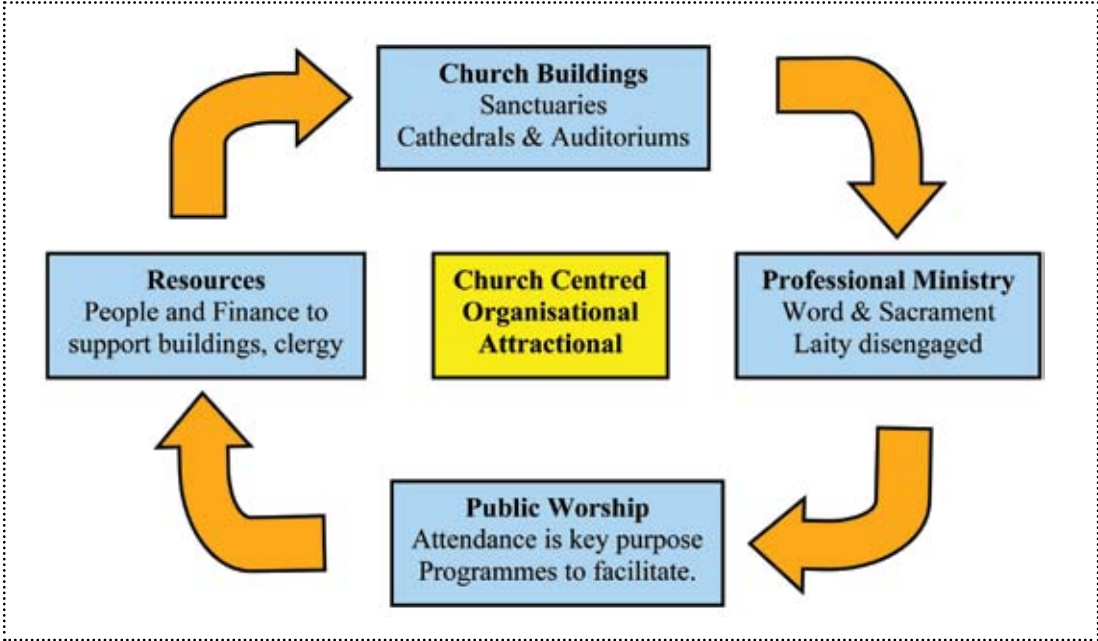
As we are wrestling with all of this we have found two models presented by the Very Rev Garry Marquand in his 2009 study leave report, *Mission, Community and Worship* particularly helpful. The first is of the Christendom church. I would say this diagram paints a very real picture of most of our Presbyterian/Co-operating venture churches. If you differ from this assessment, then ask yourself the questions we have asked. Where do the majority of your resources go?

¹ There is on-going debate about how much New Zealand ever was the “God’s own” we lovingly look back to. Even while Sunday School attendance was high there were generations of Kiwi adults who seldom, if ever, set foot in a church. Our government is secular and we have never had the state religion of many European nations. As such things like the compulsory Religious Education in schools that exists in England and South Africa do not happen here.

² We have an 8:45 traditional Presbyterian service of worship each Sunday

What is at the top of your session/parish council/leadership meeting agendas? Who takes primary place in your services of worship? The reality is that most of us still prioritise Sunday morning services, ordained ministry, buildings, programs and the pastoral care of our own.

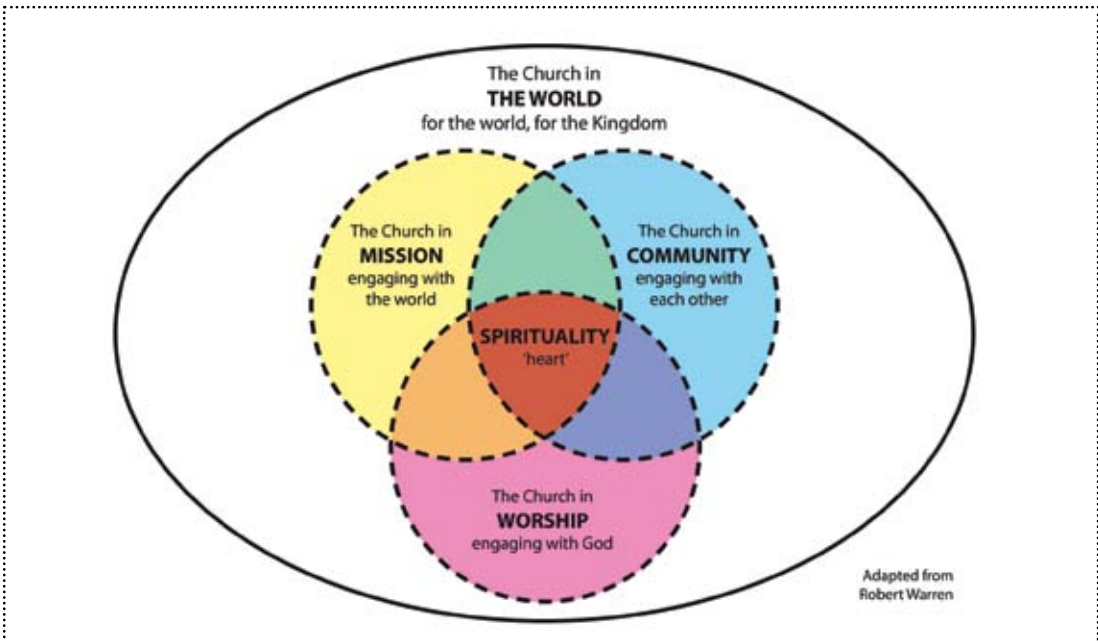
The Christendom Model



Unfortunately the activities, priorities, and motivations of this way of doing church are very alien for many. And by that I mean not just to myself and most of my generation but perhaps even most of New Zealand. Keeping the buildings painted while providing money to keep the minister in the manse no longer inspires passion or commitment.

Another model Garry presents is one he (and its creator Robert Warren) call the *Early Church model*. I prefer to call it the *Missional Church model* as I believe that it represents who we are called to be as Church in a missional context.

Missional Church Model



In this model a dramatic shift occurs. No longer are we called to serve our buildings or uphold ordained ministry but instead we are called to be community, actively engaged in worship and mission. While each of the circles is distinct, at the same time they overlap and therefore enrich each other. Just as each is equal in size, this model challenges us maintain a sense of equilibrium and balance between our worship, community life and mission.

It therefore challenges our (often extreme) focus on the 10am morning service, our Western pre-disposition to an individualistic faith, and our often insular church life. It instead leads us to explore worship, community, mission and spirituality in relation to the whole rather than as disembodied activities. And at the core grows the heart of the church, its spiritual life. This model of Church inspires passion, spiritual growth, and commitment to a community with a cause. It is all about people, spirituality, faith and mission rather than location, loyalty to a denomination and upholding the past. Of course it is in many ways nothing new as it is much the same as Mo Mansill's "In, Around, and Out" model of 2004!

To be honest, all of my ministry involvement up until the day I entered our Church's School of Ministry in 2001 has been lived out in this model. Local youth ministry, Scripture Union camps and regional youth ministry all naturally sought to outwork the above three areas in equal measure. This was not due to any prescribed or intentional program by those in leadership but came about as a natural outworking of who we were and the environment we found ourselves ministering in. As such lay ministry thrived, leadership grew in leaps and bounds, mission had tangible results and community often grew so strong that it was a real wrench to say goodbye to those we had served with. It is this simple model that automatically emerges when teams go overseas on short-term mission trips or groups participate in a local outreach or service activities in their community.

The Here and Now

How this model actually works out in a congregation like Howick is something we are wrestling with now. If we take this model to heart then it forces us to examine core issues such as our current priorities and practices, our use of resources, and our motives. In a traditional Presbyterian church that can be a very unsettling process!

We have therefore started gently. We have put the missional model before the congregation as something that we will be exploring throughout the rest of the year. As such it forms the backdrop to our Lenten series and will do the same at Pentecost. We have begun to intentionally integrate personal stories of mission into the 10am service and are seeking out ways of intentionally building community.

For instance, rather than removing our young people to a youth group or evening service we are trialling having them actively involved in the life of the 10am service twice a month. Thus far this has required understanding, compromise and change for everyone involved. We are, in all of this, actively looking for those overlapping connection points where worship, community and mission further inform and enliven each other.

Begg-Dickie Post Graduate Scholarship

The Knox Centre for Ministry & Leadership invites applications from suitable candidates for the 2011 Begg-Dickie Post Graduate Scholarship. The scholarship aims to promote and develop the theological and teaching resources of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

In order to qualify for 2011, the applicant must have graduated from the Knox Centre for Ministry & Leadership (previously the School of Ministry) between 2006 and 2010. The scholarship will contribute to the cost of fees, travel and living expenses for one year, incurred as part of post-graduate study

in New Zealand or abroad, as approved by the Senatus of the Knox Centre for Ministry & Leadership. If working towards a two-year (full-time) masters degree or a three-year (full-time) doctorate, the recipient may apply for a further one or two years funding, subject to approval by Senatus. On completion, it is expected that the recipient proceed to service within the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. For further details, see <http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/national-ministries/knox-centre-for-ministry-and-leadership/resources-for-leaders/begg-dickie-schola>

The submission deadline is 31 March 2011

Behind the scenes we are in the process of discussing this model and its implications with several elders and other key people in the church. I've also worked it through with one home group that was struggling for direction. Through it they have discovered a whole new inspiring focus.

The response this far has been overwhelmingly positive with two helpful themes emerging. The first is that change needs to come from the 'grassroots' of the church rather than be programme driven, otherwise we are merely repeating the Christendom model. The second is that we can't follow a prescribed path as we are not sure exactly how this will pan out. Flexibility is going to be key!

The possibilities

The possibilities of ushering in a new era are enormous. We are not attempting to create change in reaction to what has gone before (or what we have *lost*) but in response to the rapidly changing social setting around us. The challenge of the gospel is not in how we preserve the status quo but in how we adapt as the body of Christ to the society and culture around us. This gives us enormous scope!

As we have talked this through it has become apparent that some of the possibilities will emerge as we the faith community simply re-examine what worship, community and mission actually are. Other possibilities arise from the cross-pollination of stories of what God is doing, of the greater interaction of people as they respond to one another and of the vitality of a renewed focus on these central aspects of life, church and faith. There is the distinct possibility we may move away from that age-old question of "what we are to do?" and instead ask the question "who are we to be?"

The challenges

The challenges are enormous. The first and most obvious one we have struck is around the very definition of the words worship, community and mission. For many worship is what happens on a Sunday morning, community is our wider neighbourhood and mission is what missionaries do overseas. Others see worship in terms of music, community very vaguely as the people gathered in our vicinity, and mission as everything we should be but aren't doing. Clarifying these vital concepts has come to be our starting point.

A second challenge is realising just how deeply rooted we are in the Christendom mindset. Our services are still very much led and controlled by we, the ordained ministers. Our financial resources are very much focussed on clergy stipends and the ongoing maintenance of buildings. A vast amount of time and energy go into the Sunday morning services. Our leadership, pastoral care, and children's ministry structures still reflect the 1950s rather than 2011. With change there will need to be as much letting go as taking up.

Another challenge surfaces in the question "what exactly is the role of ordained clergy?" With greater lay involvement what becomes of the minister of Word and Sacrament? Can we let go? How do we continue to be a theological resource and key leader without distinct roles such as preacher or liturgist/worship leader? Do we still have a job? I'm sure we do, but I think it will be decidedly different to what we have done in the past.

Conclusion

Change is inevitable. All the vital signs and statistics of the Presbyterian Church over the last 30 years tell us that it is not an option but a necessity. I finish with a quote from Garry's paper:

The Christian movement can have a very significant future – a responsible future that will be both faithful to the original vision of the movement and of immense service to our beleaguered world. But to have that future we Christians must stop trying to have the kind of future that nearly sixteen centuries of official Christianity in the Western world has conditioned us to covert.³

Christchurch is but one picture of our beleaguered world. Our hope at Howick is that we might move towards being of greater service to the many, many other places of struggle and pain in our society. We don't know yet exactly what this future is for us but we do know that we are at least underway.

3 Hall, Douglas John: *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*. p ix

What exactly is the Church called to be in our world? On living post-Christendom

Bruce Hamill, Coastal Unity Parish, Dunedin.

The difficulty with discussing “the Church” in “the world” lies primarily in the ambiguity surrounding the term “world”. In talking of the end of Christendom, we need to be clear from the beginning that we are focussing on the *social* world or worlds, in relation to which the Church stands as itself a distinct social entity. What’s more, we do so in a way that is inevitably reminiscent of the New Testament, and in particular, John’s term *kosmos* and the Paul’s *aion haustos* which often highlight the fallenness of those social worlds.

It has become commonplace in discussion of our mission situation to begin by talking of the end of Christendom. No longer is the Church integrated into the whole of society as a part of something more or less Christian. Often this fact (the end of Christendom) is not evaluated theologically but treated as a neutral datum of assumed providence the Church must come to terms with. However, this approach is not enough, perhaps even detrimental, for it obscures problematic assumptions. As John Howard Yoder succinctly puts it “...we can no longer so simply identify the course of history with providence. We have learned that history reveals as much of Antichrist as of Christ”.¹

We begin to understand the challenge of reflecting more theologically on history when we notice that our new historical situation is already reflected in the above question. To ask about “the Church” in relation to “the world” is to presuppose that they are distinguishable realities again. There are (at least) two social orders here, where once there was thought to be an integrated unity of which the Church played a part. However, an acceptance of the new situation, without a theological consideration of the ideas implicit in Christendom has meant that its unravelling has not necessarily resulted in a Church that looks different and is visible - “a city built on a hill” (Matt 5: 14) and able to address the world or (worlds) as ‘the world’. I believe this is particularly true for those churches of the reformation which ended up reinforcing the constantinian synthesis rather than critiquing it². Here the worldview of constantinianism³ commonly persists even when Christendom is gone.

What you think the Church is called to be post-Christendom depends on where you stand in relation to the constantinian perspective that informed Christendom in the first place. Two responses are indicative of the continuing constantinian perspective. One is the continuing *privatising* of the essence of faith. This needs to be understood as a hangover from a time in which the state (for our purposes a key aspect of “the world”) was given responsibility for socio-political order and space. The other response is the *publicising* of faith as service of the orders of “the world” which bring progress⁴. For both responses the Church as its own social order (or rather Christ’s social order) is invisible to the world. It fits into and effectively conforms to that world, its modes of operating, its notion of power and its practices. A consequence of this is that “the world” is not addressed by an *other* – a social order conformed to the interruption called Jesus Christ. In other words, to truly bear witness to the world we need to understand the difference Christ is and makes socially. To put it the way Yoder and Hauerwas have often done: the first thing the Church must do for the world (post-Christendom) is to be the Church, ie rediscover what it means to be the Church. We must consider the otherness of the Church⁵.

1 John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, edited by Michael G. Cartwright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 55.

2 Presbyterians especially need to learn from the more radical wing of the reformation what the magisterial reformers failed to address by baptizing (i.e., ratifying rather than drowning and raising) forms of social order like the civil magistrates.

3 I am not offering a critique of Constantine so much as a critique of a set of assumptions which were operative prior to and after his adoption of Christianity. More on this further down.

4 Note the implicit theology in the term ‘progress’

5 See “The Otherness of the Church” in Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, pp. 54-64.

The problem with constantinianism, then, is Christological. As Christians we bear witness to the presence of God in history as an interruption to history. The resurrection of Jesus puts the cross at the centre of history as the definition of the power of God (1 Cor 1: 17-18). It is, thus apocalyptic. It reveals something that history cannot contain, a singular newness, which in turn casts light on the historical processes which cannot extinguish it (John 1:5).

The witness that flows from such an apocalyptic event claims a perspective on history which is not merely a reflection of the latest changes. The cross of Christ reveals the world to be “the world”. By interrupting the social order of humanity it reveals its fallenness. Christ was crucified by the world, ie by “structured unbelief”⁶. As Paul puts it, in the cross of Christ the power of God meets the dominion of the principalities and powers and is victorious (Col 2:15). In particular it is victorious as an alternative mode of operation from that of the world (1 Cor 2: 1-8)⁷. Such a christological and cruciform perspective clearly challenges the very roots of the constantinian synthesis where it was assumed that the state’s use and threat of force had become the means of God’s rule.

Such Christology means that the Church’s witness is an expression of the difference Christ is and makes socially. As Pauline scholarship is rediscovering⁸, the mission of God is the calling and formation of a people. Thus, the Church is “not simply the bearer of the message of reconciliation in the way a newspaper or a telephone company can bear any message with which it is entrusted. Nor is the Church simply the result of the message, as an alumni association is the product of a school or a crowd in the theatre is the product of the reputation of a film”.⁹

The New Testament presents the priestly kingdom as neither instrumental to, nor epiphenomenal of the mission of God, but part of its purpose, embodying socially the difference Christ is and makes. It bears the message of reconciliation as an embodiment of reconciliation (Eph 2: 16, 2 Cor 5: 18). What’s more, it does so in relation to a world enslaved to principalities and powers (eg market, military, state, media) whose *apparent* power to direct history and be effective, is precisely that – merely apparent. However, to go beyond constantinianism is not to depart from these orders in a kind of withdrawal from the world, but to engage them by addressing them concretely in the otherness of the Church’s life in which the form and content of the gospel are bound together.

Once we have learnt to appreciate the importance of the Church’s social otherness, we can then follow our original question and explore what the Church is called to be. For not just any kind of social otherness will do, certainly not a *reactionary* counter-culture. Missional otherness, of the kind that participates in the missional interruption of history we call Jesus Christ, will thus be both christological and cruciform. It will have its own positive form and content enabled by the Spirit.

Some examples of the continuing constantinianism within the Reformed tradition may help to clarify what is at stake. In our Presbyterian Church much of what might count as feeding the hungry and clothing the naked has been farmed out to independent bodies like Presbyterian Support, which although it bears the name Presbyterian is not a eucharistic/worshipping community and is structurally independent of such. The outcome of this is that inasmuch as local churches do this, they are in danger of sub-letting their responsibility to themselves be visible witnesses to the life of Jesus and to become, in the words of St Paul, “the justice of God” (2 Cor 5:21). Effectively it is similar to regarding tax-paying as missional since the government (and its principalities and powers) is now presumed to have responsibility for the bringing in of the kingdom¹⁰.

Two further examples of the continuing influence of constantinianism struck me when I attended the inaugural meeting of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) at Grand Rapids, Michigan (July 2010). This international gathering came six years after the meeting of the World Alliance of Reformed Church (its predecessor organisation) in Accra (2004). From Accra had come an influential confessional declaration in which the Reformed churches in the period prior to our current economic crisis, offered a powerful challenge to what they called empire.

6 Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, p. 62

7 On this see Arthur C. McGill, *Suffering: A Test of Theological Method* (etc)

8 See in particular 2009’s crop of major contributions to the new perspective on Paul: N. T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) Douglas Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009)

9 Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood* p. 74.

10 All of this is, of course, not a criticism of either taxation or of Presbyterian Support, but a critique of the church’s avoidance of embodied witness.

In other words, they sought to address the world as world in the New Testament sense. They defined empire as “the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests.”¹¹

In particular the Accra confession was so bold as to address the role of neo-liberal economics in this contemporary empire. However, by the time this encouraging reversal of reformational constantinianism had reached Grand Rapids in 2010, it was unclear whether the Reformed tradition had much more to offer beyond prophetic rhetoric. It seemed that for all the willingness to challenge the principalities and powers, constantinian imagination still knew only one way to address the world’s problems – namely by means of the structures and systems established by the same principalities and powers.

For many present, an understandable sense of urgency rendered insignificant the challenge of forming local embodiments of ecclesial otherness and alternative models of micro-economic resistance – a city built on a hill. It should be said, however, that, in contrast to the predominant confusion, the German churches, that had been at the forefront of much of this discussion were certainly also leading by example with their commitment to a 40 percent reduction in carbon footprint across all their institutions and churches.

The other example of continuing constantinianism from this gathering of the WCRC was their rejection of a proposal that the new International Communion express its unity in Christ with a minimal commitment “not to kill one another”. From the dominant Reformed tradition this seemed like a naïve pacificism in spite of its strong christological and eschatological basis. I was shocked that those who claim to be a communion and thus body of Christ seemed to fail to appreciate that a commitment to cruciform non-violence was an integral part of their witness to the world.

What often goes unnoticed in the passing of Christendom is the profound link between the establishment of Christendom and the legitimation of violence, or, to be more precise, between constantinianism and a major failure within the life of the Church to take serious the cruciformity of divine power as we encounter it in Jesus. Jürgen Moltmann makes this point well:

Does the Sermon on the Mount count as valid? And is it something that has to be practised? This is going to decide whether in Western societies Christianity turns into a civil religion which...no longer demands anything and no longer consoles anyone; or whether we arrive at a community of Christians which confesses Christ, follows him alone, and follows him entirely. In an age when the nuclear annihilation of the worlds is possible at any time, the choice is going to be made through Christianity’s witness for peace...¹²

If we are really going to go beyond Christendom (and not merely flow with the trends of history), for the sake of the world, we will have to reconsider the peace witness of Church.

In summary, then, we might say that Christendom is not merely another moment in history which we can now leave behind. Rather it is, for all its complexity and attractiveness, one expression of a kind of practical heresy whose temptation remains with us. It is a failure of applied Christology. In conclusion, we will seek to take the word “exactly” with due seriousness in answering our title question. Here, then, are two more specific positive implications for mission beyond the constantinian mindset. Essentially these are ways of avoiding the twin errors of privatisation and publicisation, and rediscovering the Church’s own visible witness to the world.

1. Firstly, we will be cross-centred¹² communities. Rather than fitting the cross, somewhat awkwardly into our egocentric and psychologised personal worship, we will fit our worship around the cross, and so be formed in the way of the cross.
2. Secondly, we will function in small¹² enough communities to share not just our ideas and emotions but also practical elements of socio-political kingdom life in 21st century NZ, becoming members of one another not just theoretically but in ways that are visible and mutually accountable.

¹¹ *The Accra Confession: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth*, (published by the North American Covenanting for Justice Workgroup and updated in 2010) p. 5

¹² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, translated by Margaret Kohl (SCM Press, 1990), p. 132

¹² It should be noted that the keywords of these two suggestions, ‘cross’ and ‘small’, should not be understood as exclusive of others like, ‘resurrection’ and ‘big’. In fact they presuppose them.

One Step Ahead Preaching

Nathan Parry, Island Bay Presbyterian Church, Wellington

In mid-2010 I noticed an advert in *Candour* for the One Step Ahead Preaching Course (OSAP). As I was midway through my fourth year of ministry, I was keen for some reflection on my preaching style and content as it had developed thus far.

I had already heard of this course due to the involvement of the Rev Geoff New, the Presbyterian “representative” on the DVDs.

Enquiries with Amanda Wells [former Church communications manager] as to whether she knew anyone in the Church who’d done the OSAP course and could evaluate it scored me the job of writing this review!

Firstly, OSAP is a New Zealand resource, designed to be done in groups. It is based around interviews on a DVD with accomplished preachers, with some data and a few questions to promote discussion in a short participant’s guide. It begins with three sessions on the basics of exegesis and sermon prep for those who have not studied homiletics (I did not go through these). It then follows with nine sessions for more experienced preachers.

If you are in a church that has a large preaching staff or high levels of lay involvement in preaching, then this course would be an excellent way to upskill (or just plain reflect on) the standard of preaching in your team. As a sole-charge minister, being prompted to meet with others in similar situations was a powerful aspect of the course in itself.

I advertised at Wellington Presbytery for interested parties, and gathered a keen group comprising the Revs Sharon Ensor, Les Solomona, and Allister Lane, and the nearly-Rev Ryhan Prasad.

This turned out to be a great team for an evaluation of OSAP. Boxing people is never helpful, but in general terms as a group we tended to the liturgical and lectionary side of life, while the presenters on the DVDs were dominantly from a charismatic “low-church” persuasion. All bar two of the presenters are Baptist or Brethren pastors, with Jo Kelly-Moore (the Anglican representative) being the liturgical exception.

The background of the presenters came out in places on the course, such as in the strong warnings not to omit the exegesis aspect of your sermon! How many Presbyterian ministers would do that we wondered? Surely we’re more likely to omit the application?!

Also, the course seemed to recommend breaking the sermon into thirds to bring balance: one-third information (exegesis); one-third illustration (stories etc); one-third motivation (a call to action). It seemed that we all felt a little uneasy about spending a third of our sermons telling people what to do, but it was a great exercise assessing how much of our sermons we devoted to each aspect, and in my case at least, cutting down on the information side! I see noticeably less yawns in the pews now.

Mick Duncan was the most controversial presenter. Aspects such as referring to the congregation as an *audience* and advocating practicing facial expressions in front of a mirror raised eyebrows. However, he also brought the powerful reminder to soak our sermon preparation in prayer, and seeing him in action at GA 2010 really brought home the power of his approach.

Other aspects of the course that struck me were:

- Reflecting on how accessible our sermons are to members of the opposite sex.
- Murray Robertson and Paul Windsor’s analysis of New Zealand culture and preaching to Kiwis.
- Geoff’s reminder that we are still preaching the message by our manner and conversation even over coffee once the service has finished.

Overall, as a group, we found plenty to agree with in OSAP, plenty to question, and plenty to provoke discussion, reflection and change in our preaching. It was well worth the time invested in our hour and a half meetings as we went through these nine sessions. As mentioned, the mere act of sitting with colleagues and reflecting on this strange thing we do that is sermon preparation and preaching was invaluable in its own right.

As a group we would recommend this course to any preachers in our Church regardless of your *box* – lay, ordained, high church, low church, evangelical, liberal. The OSAP course is of high quality; it has been developed in New Zealand by New Zealanders for New Zealand preachers and it provides much food for thought and prayer.

New creation the only hope

Martin Baker

Ten days after the earthquake on Tuesday 22nd, the event remains raw and unbelievable. I flew down a week after to meet ministers and elders from the presbytery. From the plane you could see great dust clouds, blown by the nor' west wind, spiralling around the city and eastern suburbs where the damage has been greatest.

I am not sure that there is ever a right time to draw lessons for our faith from tragedy. Outside of the physics of geological reality meeting human habitation, there is perhaps nothing to say. The fear and awfulness of God's good Creation sinking back into primordial meaninglessness permeates Scripture. New creation has always been the only hope.

The Bible refers to earthquakes around 20 times. We are told, among other things, that they herald the birth pains at the end of time; that they are events connected with the apocalypse; that an earthquake precedes the visit of the angel who rolled away Jesus' tomb stone, and even, in the Book of Acts, we are told of an earthquake just before those in prison were set free. I am drawn to the story of the call to Elijah, where we hear that the Lord was not in the earthquake, but in the low whisper, small voice, or thin silence following (our translators seem to have difficulties with the Hebrew). Low whisper, I get, but the other two descriptions, though I do not understand them, are more interestingly evocative.

Images of the Christchurch Cathedral, re-burnt into our memories every time we look at the latest news, are the poignant symbol of the city's trauma and brokenness. It was timely last week for me to hear at the Christchurch Presbytery meeting of Martin Stewart's reminder that whatever the buildings may look like, the Church is people. However disheartening the pictures of rubble that were once the worshipping places for so many, our faith draws us beyond those terrible images to see and hear the words and deeds of those who are the Church.

I've done it myself, and experienced it a thousand times, the collecting together of phrases that help provide some order. In tragic times reminding ourselves and our friends about the value of life, about how tragedy puts things in perspective, how fragile our existence is, about how we learn about what really matters. I love these phrases, I want to believe that we learn from what they tell us, but I just don't know if we do. I am not sure I see evidence of lives changed by hearing those words repeated, and I especially do not know if they provide any comfort to those who are traumatised by grief and loss.

Yet you and I are in a calling that requires us to put words into spaces. More often than not I find myself praying to have the right words, and admitting that I don't know what to say, except to find the way to acknowledge how awful the reality of loss can be.

I remember reading, and I can't recall where, perhaps in a commentary by Walter Bruggeman, a reflection on David's lament for Saul and Jonathan. (2 Sam.17ff), a sense that the whole world is called upon to pause and acknowledge that loss is loss, that we all recoil, that we are all hurt and damaged and that life is diminished.

The stories of hope I listen for are the ones that go beyond the discussions about construction teams, bricks and mortar and economic recovery. From Mayor Bob Parker encouraging everyone to go to church, even if they are not religious, to find a place to reflect and share their stories, through to the demolition team asking for prayer from the minister who was about to watch as they demolished her damaged church, through to the woman who was walking past the Wellington Presbytery team loading supplies to ship to Christchurch and stopped and wrote out a very large cheque to help. That there is something more, something perhaps as elusive as a small voice or thin silence that speaks to us in some way about life and its fullness despite, and even in the grimness of, the reality we confront,

I have to end this reflection with a special thanks and acknowledgment to those ministers, elders, youth leaders, church members and church-goers from our churches in Christchurch. Their energy, faithfulness and resiliencies are an inspiration for our whole Church.