

Shapes of the Church to Come: Strategic Issues for the House of Bishops and the Archbishops' Council

Last Straw or New Opportunity?

1. It has long been felt that the Archbishops' Council, the House of Bishops and the Church Commissioners should come together around a common agenda on the basis of which they could begin to work in a more co-ordinated way. This paper attempts to provide some theological underpinning for such a common agenda and also some 'middle axioms' which may well provide a framework for future work and for establishing priorities which reflect the four themes and two fundamentals identified by the Archbishops' Council. It could serve as a base for investigation into trends in church and society over the coming years – and also for the provision of some guidelines about the holding together of unity with diversity.
2. The rising costs of pensions for clergy, lower returns on investments and proposals for allocating centrally-generated funds in new ways have all contributed to a financial situation which is compelling the Church to ask fundamental questions about itself and its mission and ministry in 21 century England and beyond. In other words, what is the Church to be, what is it to do and how is it to do it?
3. If the Church's task is seen as bringing the good news of wholeness, justice and compassion to every community, if it is seen as bringing a sense of God in

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Christ through a living experience of the Holy Spirit to the nation, and if there is humble awareness that Christians, from different churches, need to be working together so that their witness is effective, this is because the Church of England regards itself as part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The marks of the Church are also its missionary mandate: the Church is called to be one so that it can credibly bring divine presence and healing to each person and to every community.

Shaping and re-shaping the Church

4. A faithful Church is continually shaped by its inner dynamic: the flow of Apostolic Tradition, with Scripture as its norm, in its ministry, teaching, sacraments and outreach. The Church is, however, also shaped by the kind of world in which it finds itself. This must mean a constant receiving of the Gospel into our particular situation. Not only will this involve knowledge of the original contexts in which God spoke and acted but also of the contemporary cultures and contexts in which the Gospel is to be interpreted and lived. We need reliable analysis of the social, spiritual and intellectual elements of the cultures in which we find ourselves and also future studies which can provide some indications of trends in the years to come. In particular, we need information on the extent to which 'Christendom' is seen as part of a dying culture and on perceptions of religion and spirituality which are replacing conventional beliefs. When Christendom is referred to as part of a 'dying' culture, it will be necessary to make clear that this has nothing to do with the vigorous life which is to be found in many

churches. It is, rather, to do with Christian faith, as an informing and visible principle in public discourse, being replaced by a kind of secularisation which does not allow religion any rôle in this sphere. It will be important, nevertheless, to emphasise the consonance of Christian faith with leading contemporary values such as human dignity, spontaneity, informality and the rejection of authority which is only extrinsic. At the same time, it will be necessary to take a prophetic position on matters such as the erosion of community life, the family and the tendency towards excessive individualism. Both in identifying common values and in its prophetic rôle, the Church is witnessing to the coming of God's reign.

Responsive and Flexible

5. What is not in doubt is that we live in highly diverse, complex and mobile societies. Locally, regionally and nationally we must be structured and equipped so that we can respond quickly, appropriately and in ways that meet a variety of needs and are effective with a number of different world-views, life-styles and cultures. The shapes of the church in the future will be both territorial and networked; congregations will co-exist with cells and diverse parishes may well have homogeneous groups within them. Naturally, this demands flexibility in our patterns of mission and ministry. We should expect local Christian communities, however that is understood, to 'grow' a range of ministries, both ordained and lay, which have emerged from local missionary and pastoral needs. The wider Church, both diocesan and national, and the local Christian community will collaborate in the discerning,

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equipping, commissioning and enabling of those ministries, constantly keeping in mind the culture and context in which particular communities are set and respecting the integrity of each. It will be a challenge for those involved in the selection and training of ordained and lay ministers to rethink the ways in which the undoubted need for diversity in ministries is held together with a concern for coherence and agreed standards.

6. These ministries must, of course, be understood in the context of God's calling for each of the baptised to be a witness and also of the calling of the whole people of God, the laos, to worship, witness and work together. This central notion of the laos does, however, need to be balanced by that of the klēros, or specific ministries of teaching, serving and oversight to which particular people are called (e.g. 1Pet 5:1-4). The Church's ministry has often been thought of in incarnational terms. St. Paul certainly seems to regard his apostolic ministry in this way (2 Cor 4: 6-12). The identification of particular churches as the church in Corinth, Ephesus, Rome or Jerusalem also suggests an incarnational model from which our own commitment to specific localities has been derived. It cannot be denied, however, that such an understanding has sometimes led to a static view of ministry and church. Ministers, in particular, perhaps with reconciliation as well as presence in mind, have emphasised kenōsis, or self-emptying, as a model for their ministry (cf Phil 2:7) rather than plērōsis, or the filling by the Holy Spirit, which drives us out in mission (Acts 4: 8, 31, 13:9). A mission which is as much about creating, inaugurating and innovating as it is about caring, sustaining and

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nurturing. Such a pneumatological understanding will lead to more dynamic models of the Church, like that of a pilgrim people. Even here, however, specific ministries of discernment, guidance, presidency and of maintaining the unity of the Church will be necessary.

7. The Church of England is an episcopal church because it believes that such ministries are focussed in the office of the bishop. They need not, however, be limited to this office. Stipendiary clergy, in particular, are already sharing in the bishop's episkopē, especially in the emergence, development and sustaining of locally appropriate ministries. In the New Testament period, and in the Early Church immediately afterwards, there seems to have been a basic distinction between a local ministry of presbyter-bishops, deacons and others and a wider, usually itinerant, ministry of apostles, apostolic delegates, prophets and teachers (Acts 13: 1-3, 14: 23, Phil 1:1, 1Tim 3: 1-13, 5:17-22, Tit 1: 5-9, 1Pet 5: 1-4, Didache 11-15 etc). It seems likely that the historic episcopate, as it emerges, combines the local rôle of a presiding elder with the wider rôle of the apostolic delegate, prophet and missionary. We are, once again, in a situation where we need to recover the integrity of local ministries as well as effective ways of overseeing and resourcing them. The importance of selecting, training and equipping for this ministry of oversight is hard to overstate.
8. The 1998 Lambeth Conference sets out the task of a missionary bishop in a missionary church. It sees this as rooted in spending time with God in prayer, meditation and a study of the Scriptures. Bishops must have space for renewal and a fresh vision if they are to

assist the rest of the Church in renewing its life and if they are to bring the Gospel's challenge and hope of transformation to the wider community. The Conference urges every bishop to strike the right balance between the management of structures and the pastoral care of the clergy, on the one hand, and, on the other, the bishop's apostolic and prophetic responsibility for bringing the good news to bear on local, national and international situations (Report: Section II sub-section 6, pp175ff).

Free but Committed

9. A pilgrim Church should have light and adaptable structures for consultation and decision-making. In particular, those whose principal task is to take the Gospel out into the world or to build up communities in faith and love should not be confined to committees and meetings for any longer than is strictly necessary. We need simpler procedures (and much less paper) for synodical government and a lightening of the bureaucracy involved in preparing legislation which must be laid before Parliament. If these are to be achieved, we will need to be better prepared to trust others to get on with agreed tasks.

10. If a pilgrim way of being church is to be effective locally, communities need to be freed of the burden of maintaining buildings which are often seen as national or local treasures but which are not adequately supported by the State or by local authorities. There is a dilemma here for the Church: on the one hand, many of these buildings have 'iconic' value and can be centres of Christian education for the wider community.

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on the other, they absorb such significant resources in terms of money and time that little is left for the rest of the Church's ministry and mission. Recent changes, like the grant in lieu of some VAT for listed buildings and arrangements for tax recovery on donations to charities, will certainly help but more direct aid is required if these buildings are to remain living centres of community life rather than becoming 'moth-balled' museums.

11. An even playing-field is needed for the established Church. At present we have obligations to local communities and the nation but few commensurate obligations in return. To take one or two examples, we are obliged to pay the stipends of clergy with a freehold but the parish share from which such a stipend is paid is entirely voluntary. Because of freehold, there is little mobility in deployment and our human resources can be inefficiently and uneconomically deployed. While the 'incarnational principle' demands that clergy stay in a community for a significant length of time and are not seen as 'hit and run' missionaries, pneumatological considerations lead us to look for greater mobility in every kind of ministry and at every level. Just to take another example of asymmetry in our obligations, dioceses are legally responsible for maintaining parsonage houses in good condition but, once again, we rely on people's good will to raise the money.

Embassy and Hospitality

12. Properly mission-minded churches will seek to retain both embassy and hospitality as the two poles of mission: a welcome for those who come to our

premises, whether for worship, an occasional office, some community activity or as tourists. Such a welcome should not, however, be confused with just 'being nice'. It is a welcome in Christ's name. However we do it, there should be added-value to it because it is Christian and we are Christian. Such added-value may be seen in the accessibility of our worship and teaching or in the provision of appropriate resources so that casual visitors can pursue their interest in the faith at their own pace.

13. Appropriate ways of reaching out need to be considered in the light of a rapidly-changing society. Have we identified the 'nodal points' where people are gathering? What Christian presence would be appropriate in such places? If churches are working with the elderly or young people, is there any distinctively Christian content in what they do? This may only be an epilogue, a story or a song but, once again, we have to be alert to adding value rather than simply replicating the work of the social services (Ann Morisy).

14. One of the ways in which the Church shows its historic commitment to universal education is through Church schools. We should welcome the government's recent encouragement for more such schools and we should take note of Lord Dearing's report *The Way Ahead* when it emphasises both inclusiveness and distinctiveness: Church schools are not just 'single-faith schools' in that they should have a commitment to serving the whole community, whilst retaining a committed Christian core of staff and pupils. They are at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation and

exemplify admirably both outreach and welcome as aspects of this mission.

15. In growing or planting churches, is sufficient care being taken in resourcing such fledgling communities both financially and, more importantly, in terms of human resources? Are ways of being church, in such contexts, imported from elsewhere or does the local community have a say in how their life together is structured? In a hitherto 'unchurched' situation, what efforts are made to reduce duplication of work by different denominations? Even if an LEP is not possible, can there still be a covenant among the churches, the sharing of buildings where appropriate and joint witness? What is the relationship between groups for outreach and nurture (such as a cell) and the wider church? Some ways of gathering like-minded people, from a similar professional, cultural or even ethnic background, are undoubtedly effective in terms of outreach, but does a church always have to be heterogeneous, with a mix of ages, sexes and backgrounds?

16. Mission, in both its aspects of embassy and hospitality, must take account of the need to communicate in a language which people can understand. Once again, this has to do with understanding diversity. Different kinds of language, liturgy and music will be appropriate for different groups of people. We need to be sure that those engaged in ministry, both ordained and lay, are able to call on resources which help them to communicate to very diverse constituencies.

Opportunity and Growth

17. A proportion of central and diocesan resources needs to be put to those aspects of church-life where there is growth and opportunity. This is not to deny the importance of resourcing ministry in difficult circumstances. Effective ministry, which combines the prophetic and the serving with the worshipping and the witnessing, is desperately needed among the urban and rural poor. We must recognise, however, that some of the resourcing for such ministry will come from investing in growth and opportunity wherever they occur. The recent decision by the Archbishops' Council, supported by the Church Commissioners, to set aside £10 million over three years for mission in parishes is a move in this direction. In due course, its effectiveness will have to be reviewed and evaluated. In the meantime we need to think of other initiatives.

Partnership in Mission

18. The Church will not be effective in mission until there is real partnership between the institutional aspects of the Church and those movements which have a special calling to be missionary. These may be religious communities, mission agencies or youth and children's organisations. We have to take seriously the business of partnership in mission, whether with the other churches of the Anglican Communion, with the Porvoo churches, with our own movements and agencies or with voluntary and statutory bodies in the wider community. Some of our partners will identify with our cultural situation and will bring their own insights to bear in tackling it. Others will come from very

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different contexts and may bring fresh perspectives which move us in radically new directions. Both kinds of partnership are important.

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Visibility

19. Some people feel that Christianity is rapidly becoming invisible in this country. Simple but effective ways are urgently needed to 'open up' our worship to those who do not normally go to church. An increasing number have no idea what goes on inside! There are enormous liturgical, homiletical and even architectural challenges here for the Church. Just as clergy need to be visible 'on the beat', all Christians need to be visible at the work-place, in recreation and in civic society. The sharing of faith must involve giving an account of why Christians have values of a certain kind and behave in particular ways. Only then will we be able to influence social norms significantly. Church reports, clerical and even episcopal pronouncements, while important, cannot substitute for this widely-diffused witness. This means that church people need to be prepared for such a witness. How can this be delivered? Too much preparation for ministry is church and not world focussed. Our integrated training schemes need to focus, more and more, on preparing people for witness and service at the work place. Industrial Missioners and others should be seen as enablers of local Christian communities in their engagement with work-places in their locality rather than as those who work on behalf of parishes and dioceses in representing them at the work-place.

Establishment and 'Exile'

20. We should certainly be taking and using even the reducing opportunities provided by 'establishment'. It is likely that the established nature of the Church will continue to be modified in the light of what is seen as the emergence of a multi faith society. Even if there is disestablishment (which we do not seek), however, the national mission of the Church will remain. Both Karl Rahner and, more recently, Walter Brueggemann, have foreseen a time of 'exile' for the Church, which may make our approach more counter-cultural but it should not in any way narrow the scope of the Church's task, which will remain the bringing of good news to every locality for which it has to care. It may be that local Christian communities will see themselves more and more as moral and spiritual communities, exercising an increasingly prophetic ministry in a society which has become distanced from the vision and the values of the Gospel. The emergence of such an understanding should not mean that we abandon any hope of making 'connections' with the cultures in which we find ourselves. These can still be made on the basis of a properly Trinitarian understanding of creation and redemption: all have been made in God's image, God's Word illumines and enhances that image and the Holy Spirit inspires people to recover that image and to begin again (John 1: 3-9 and 16: 7-15). In the total task of the Church's mission, both inculturation and the counter-cultural have to be held in creative tension. We should not capitulate entirely to the one or the other.

'Both-and' rather than 'Either-or'

21. Too often discussion about the future of the Church has been adversarial with 'tradition' set against 'innovation', 'authority' against 'democracy', 'a church for the community' against 'the gathered congregation'. In many cases such polarisations are unhelpful and needlessly force people into exclusive and excluding models of the Church. Can we promote a much more 'both-and' rather than 'either-or' understanding of the Church so that tradition and renewal, order and spontaneity, leadership and consent, a missionary congregation and the focus for its mission are all held together? This is important if we are not always to be seen as divided. We should seek to be an 'and' rather than an 'or' organisation, wherever possible.

An Anglican Method

22. Anglican thought has often been inductive and synthetic. That is to say, it has first investigated thoroughly the deposit of Tradition and, particularly, the Bible. It has then attempted to relate such work to insights gained from other disciplines and to the particular situation facing the Church. From time to time, such a method has been criticised as 'elitist' and 'liberal'. Some have favoured 'direct action' rather than intellectual consensus and others have employed a more deductive and dogmatic approach. If further polarisation is to be avoided, it may be necessary to agree a basis for the exercise of authority. The Chicago Lambeth Quadrilateral speaks of Scripture, Creeds, Sacraments and Ministry as forming 'a sacred deposit' which is at the root of Anglican self-understanding, as

well as being a basis for ecumenical dialogue. The 1948 Lambeth Conference's view of 'dispersed' authority in Bible, Tradition, Creeds, Ministry and the consensus fidelium, is also well-known. It is necessary to point out that both the Quadrilateral and the Lambeth Conference speak of Scripture as 'unique', authoritative', and 'the rule and ultimate standard of faith'. Both also speak, however, of the need to interpret the sacred deposit in the context of changing circumstances and new knowledge (our own Preface to the Declaration of Assent, while emphasising the value of the Anglican formularies, echoes these concerns). This means that diversity can be owned and celebrated but also that there are limits to diversity which have to do with the very title deeds of the Church. These involve not only matters of doctrine, though that is primary, but the nature of the Church, its worship and ministry. A major challenge, in the coming years, will be to keep these two aspects of the Church's life in a proper balance.

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Towards an Anglican Ecclesiology

23. It has sometimes been said that Anglican ecclesiology is both biblical and Cyprianic. From St. Cyprian's letters we know that, while he valued the inter-relationships in the world-wide Church, he had a special regard for the place of the local church. At both diocesan and provincial level, moreover, he and his fellow North African bishops seem to have encouraged the full participation of clergy and laity in synodical decision-making. In the context of such an ecclesiology, the Church is often described as 'episcopally led and synodically governed'. This is

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good as far as it goes. Anyone familiar with the ordinal, however, will see this [description](#) as inadequate, for the ordinal also gives bishops, both individually and collectively, tasks of governance. These have to do with maintaining the unity of the Church, upholding its discipline and guarding its faith. They have to do with leading in mission, presiding at worship, teaching with authority in the name of God and interpreting the Gospel to the world. Canon C18 speaks of bishops as chief pastors and as principal ministers in leading worship. For these reasons, whilst all contribute to the discernment of God's will for the church, it is appropriate that ultimate responsibility for articulating the theological vision regarding the nature of the Church and the general direction of its pastoral and missionary task should be located in the House of Bishops. It is necessary, of course, for these to be debated and tested in General Synod and for the Archbishops' Council to formulate policies and priorities, bringing together human and financial resources, for the implementation of the vision. As well as partnership with other bodies, we need a greater sense of partnership within the central structures of the Church. St. Cyprian certainly believed in the wider Church gathering synodically to address certain kinds of issues but he also believed fiercely that the local church and its bishop should be free to order their own affairs, if these did not impinge on the welfare of the wider church. The principle of subsidiarity is about locating the exact level at which a task can best, and most appropriately, be performed.

24. Where specific questions about relationships between the Archbishops' Council and the House of Bishops are

concerned, the key lies with the Archbishops: it is their council and they preside in the House of Bishops. Each body can, in one dimension of its role, be taken to be advising the Archbishops in their primatial capacity. In Anglicanism, both the Provincial (or National) and the diocesan levels are well-recognised. It is important for each to respect the proper identity and function of the other and for each to resource the other for the better functioning of the whole Body. A properly Anglican ecclesiology will also balance the particular rôle of the bishops and the leadership which should appropriately be exercised by clergy and lay people (cf Acts 15:22). Anglicans have already learnt a great deal about the Church from their ecumenical partners. This process of learning will continue. They have also something to contribute, however, and the ecumenical movement will benefit from this contribution.

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Towards an Action Plan for the Church

25. It will have been noticed that the analysis found in this paper implies action on a number of fronts. These may be listed in the following way:-
- (1) Understanding the mission context in which we are working and equipping people to respond to it.
 - (2) Ensuring that our worship and the resources we have available for it are mission focused. Working in partnership with movements and mission agencies to ensure that our outreach is fully effective.

- (3) Reshaping our resourcing policies so that these are not only about helping areas of need but also investing in areas of opportunity and growth
- (4) Ensuring that ministry locally is varied and appropriate to the context, and ecumenical wherever feasible.
- (5) Equipping all God's people and encouraging them in their missionary task. As regards the clergy, ensuring that they have appropriate conditions of service, training and development, and are capable of flexible deployment. This means, among other things, tackling the freehold.
- (6) Valuing, preparing and nurturing our leaders, especially through training and developing our bishops and senior clergy and ensuring their adequate resourcing.
- (7) Lightening our organisation and structures, whether nationally or in dioceses and parishes. ~~This also means simplifying the legal framework within which we operate.~~
- (8) Both using our buildings imaginatively as a mission tool and freeing ourselves to the fullest extent possible of the burden of ensuring the maintenance of the nation's historic ecclesiastical heritage so that we can respond

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effectively to significant demographic shifts in parts of the country.

26. Some of these points reflect the four themes of the Archbishops' Council and work is already underway in some of the areas identified. For example, the follow up process for On the Way has to do with equipping lay people, while the Working Group on the Structure and Funding of Ordination Training is tackling many of the issues raised about the nature and function of ordained ministries. As far as the future of the built heritage is concerned, the Bishop of London is initiating a series of seminars with the Council for the Care of Churches and the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England. The development of the Partnership for World Mission provides a structured way of feeding the insights and the resources of the mission agencies into the life of the Church as a whole. The action plan arises, however, from the vision and the analysis of the paper itself and this might provide a context for and give coherence to the work which has begun already and which will develop in the course of the next few years.

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27. We have seen then how the Church is being shaped and have recognised the need for responding flexibly to our fast-changing situation. Our paradigm for mission is that of embassy and hospitality and we have noted how the Church has to be freed from certain burdens if it is to fulfil its missionary task. We have been aware of the importance of mission in 'difficult' areas but also of the need to invest in growth and opportunity. We have argued for the greater visibility of the Church and of Christians in different dimensions of national and local life. We have gone on to consider the changing place

of the Church in Society and the implications of this for the Church's task. We have argued for an organisation that seeks to include and we have reflected on how Anglican habits of thought and ways of being church might help us to advance at this time.

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