

It is 'of the essence... of the church to be a missionary community'
(p85 *Mission-shaped Church* – a Church of England Working Part Report by Church House Publishing, 2004)

Illustrate this statement from the New Testament, church history,
and the contemporary church.

From your examples discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in a missionary church.
What implications does this understanding of church have for the patterns of ministry?

(Maximum 2000 words)

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Introduction

It is often said that the heart of the church should be mission focused. This principle will be examined more closely in this paper, worked out in the New Testament with particular reference to Acts 10; 11; 15, the church history around the time of Zwingli, and the contemporary church with the focus on a Dutch family. In each section a brief overview of the context will be given. Within this context the role of the Holy Spirit will be discussed as well as the implications for the patterns of ministry.

The new testament

The first effective missionary work took place at pentecost (Acts 2). After receiving the Holy Spirit the disciples started their work. But as far as Acts 7, the church was still confined in Jerusalem and had not stepped out of the city gate. It was like the disciples had forgotten the essence of Jesus very last words:

'And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.' (Acts 1: 8).

Later God's Spirit started to touch the hearts of non-Jewish people as well. Johnson and Newton Malony stated that an important group conversion took place around the Roman officer Cornelius, in Acts 10. Cornelius, together with his family and servants, converted to Christianity (Johnson and Malony 1982: 94). According to Gaventa (cited in Stralen 2009: 36) this is the reason for Luke to describe Cornelius in Acts 10 as a representative of a bigger group.

A very important role was that of God's Spirit, Who started the missionary work among Gentiles. Cornelius had a vision and he was told to send his men and ask Peter to come over and minister to them. It took a vision to make Peter realise that the good news was for all of humanity. As Peter was ministering Cornelius and his household, the Holy Spirit came over them, and they started to speak in tongues. Seeing and hearing this convinced Peter, and he ordered his helpers to baptise Cornelius and his household. The growth among the gentiles continued and even reached the people in Antioch (Acts 11: 19- 21).

No longer were there new Christians who knew how to live in conformity with God's rules. These new Christians knew little about these rules. Some of the Jewish Christians thought that the new Christians should obey the law of Moses and be circumcised. In Acts 15 the disciples decided not to burden the new Christians with heavy rules. The disciples composed a letter with a few rules for the gentiles who converted to Christianity 'directing them how to govern themselves with respect to Jews' (Henry 2009: 270).

All of this did not change the patterns of ministry immediately. Most of the followers of Jesus stayed in their own town and did not directly obey the words of Jesus in Act 1: 8. Mission was still mostly centred around Jerusalem but, in 70 A.D. a Jewish revolt failed. The Romans sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. These events were a major turning point for Christianity. Christians became dispersed, moving out more and more beyond Israel. Jerusalem was no longer the main capital of Christianity. Antioch in Syria, Alexandria in Egypt, and Rome in Italy became the important centres of Christian communities. Now the Christians started to spread the gospel

directly in the midst of the gentiles. It took a dramatic change, foretold by Jesus in Luke 19: 41- 44, to change the patterns of ministry. The patterns of staying 'close to home' changed in stepping out, and live and work among the gentiles.

Church history

In later history the church became more dominant. The Church of Rome was the dominant ruler of Western Europe with its own way of maintaining loyal members. The sacrificial character of the mass, the redeeming character of good works, the value of Mary and the existence of purgatory (Boettner 1966: 182; 221; 281) were a way of the ruling church to keep the people loyal. The Roman-Catholic Church stated that this church is the only true church and all other movements are to be charged with heresy (Boettner 1966: 500).

A shift took place around the year 1500 and later. Throughout Western Europe godly men stood up against this practice, the Reformation period had started. The roots of the Swiss Reformation are to be found in the person of Huldrych Zwingli. Zwingli became priest and started to minister in different places in Switzerland. In 1516 Zwingli accepted the office of preacher at Einsiedeln. Einsiedeln was an important place of pilgrimage where the people sought forgiveness of sin. Zwingli did not like the way priests extorted money from the common people. He strongly disapproved of this practice, and 'turned away many a pilgrim by his sermons, to seek for consolation in some other way' (Herzog, Plitt and Hauck 1891: 2577).

In 1518 Zwingli was awarded the office of People's Priest at the Grossmünster in Zürich where he was able to preach to large amounts of people. It was in Zürich that Zwingli started to preach in a new way. According to Gilbert, Zwingli was conscious of his mission as a reformer (Gilbert 1997). It is safe to say that Zwingli was working not only as a reformer, but also as a missionary of God's Church. Catherwood says in his book that Zwingli was

'putting the word of God at the heart of the service, and doing so in a way which explained the Bible to ordinary people' (Catherwood 2000: 74).

By preaching the word of God in an understandable way, Zwingli understood the very heart of Jesus' teaching about the sower in Mark 4. By the hearing of God's word in an applied way the people started to see in what way they could receive forgiveness from sin. In this the role of the Holy Spirit is clearly seen:

'And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.' (John 16: 8).

Zwingli himself was very aware of the fact that it is the Holy Spirit Who gives real spiritual life because:

'in Scripture the Spirit is called a breath, etc. For as we live physically by the inbreathing of air, so the Spirit of God is that true life in which all things live and from which they derive their life' (Zwingli 1901: 64).

The implications for the ruling Roman Church were very serious. The income of the Roman Church depended greatly on the loyalty of the lay people. Now there was a rapidly growing group of people who called themselves true followers of Christ. Many people departed from the Roman-Catholic Church and started their own churches. The clerical and the saintly intercessors were no longer necessary. The Reformed Churches appointed preachers, elders and deacons like the apostles did in Acts 14: 23. These overseers worked closely together with the church members. The

schism from the Roman-Catholic Church brought back valuable biblical principles, but at a high price.

Although many people came to a true understanding of salvation, this did not directly change the patterns of missionary work in the church. Despite the fact that there were missionaries throughout the history of the church, who ministered among non-believers, the church members did not step out into the world to minister among non-believers. According to Newbigin this was because the gospel was penetrated

'into the very stuff of their social and personal life, so that the whole population could be conceived of as *corpus Christianum*' (Newbigin 2006: 115).

Contemporary church

The church in the western society has changed over the decades. After the Reformation, small denominations started to emerge. 'Protestant Church' became the new collective name for these churches. Newbigin says that the present church is once again in direct touch with the non-Christian world 'through the experience of foreign missions, and through the rise of anti-Christian movements' (Newbigin 2006: 115). This forced the western church to go outside, and revise their view on mission. Suddenly the words of Peter were relevant again:

'and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you...' (1 Peter 3: 15b).

Many Christians started to develop new strategies to reach the non-believers. Two of these people were Johan and Willy Maasbach in Holland. In 1952, this couple started to organise evangelism campaigns. At that moment they were pioneers on this terrain. A big breakthrough came in 1958 during the healing campaign with T.L. Osborn at the Malieveld, The Hague, and on the Bodenterrein, Groningen. Every evening there were more than ten thousand people present to listen to the gospel, translated by Johan Maasbach. After this event people asked Johan Maasbach to speak throughout Holland (Stichting Johan Maasbach Wereldzending, 2011).

The campaigns were strongly focused on Jesus' words in Mark 16: 17- 18, where He says:

'And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover'.

There is not much to be found in writing about the healing of sick or exorcism practice in these campaigns. Despite this, the work of the Holy Spirit was evident in two ways. Firstly, many people accepted Christ as their Lord, and secondly, there were people from more traditional churches who came to a renewed spiritual life. Repentance and conversion are the indisputable work of God's Spirit (John 16: 8). Knippenberg says that this revival of faith was the main reason that the Pentecostal Churches in Holland grew rapidly (Knippenberg 1992: 159- 161).

The Maasbach family always searched for new and better ways to preach the good news. The patterns for their missionary work are different from that of the more traditional churches in those days. The Maasbach's planted several churches in Holland, but they did not organise everything around the church building. They stepped into the world of the non-believers through open air campaigns, youth meetings, television, and radio programs. By doing so the gospel reached far more people, and that can be seen as an obedience to Jesus' command to go out into the world (Acts 1: 8).

Conclusion

That the essence of the church should be a missionary community can be illustrated clearly throughout church history. Although differently worked out over history, the church saw the importance of mission and tried to make it the core activity in its existence.

During the whole of the illustrations in this paper it is unmistakable that God's Spirit is the Author of mission, or like McGavran says:

'It is not a human activity but *missio Dei*, the mission of God, who himself remains in charge of it' (McGavran, 1996: 20).

McGavran continues by saying that 'revival is God's gift and human beings can neither command it nor make God grant it', but he says that God is willing to listen, and answer, to those who are studying His word and pray intensely (McGavran 1996: 134-136).

The implications for the patterns of ministry depend strongly on the world views of the people. Even if God's Spirit is working through revival, people tend to stick to their own patterns. Often there must be a dramatic change in the direct environment to move people out of their trusted patterns. Frost and Hirsch gave an excellent summary about this way of being a missional church:

'The missional church is incarnational, not attractional, in its ecclesiology. By incarnational we mean it does not create sanctified spaces into which unbelievers most come to encounter the gospel. Rather, the missional church disassembles itself and seeps into the cracks and crevices of a society in order to be Christ to those who don't yet know him' (Frost and Hirsch, 2003: 12).

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