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TIM DAKIN

## CMS and New Mission

**In this and the next issue of *Anvil*, Tim Dakin, General Secretary of the Church Mission Society, reflects on the changing challenges and shape of world mission. This first part of the article examines four levels of change in mission and outlines four responses. The first two of these responses, relating to evangelistic mission and mission community, are then explored in more depth. The final two will be explored in the second part of the article.**

It is a truism that world mission has changed in the last few decades. But it is a truth worth reiterating because the implications of the change are yet to have their full impact upon the perception and practice of the Christian faith in both the North and South.<sup>1</sup> In what follows I look at various developments from the stance of a mission society whose traditional base is in Northern Europe but whose mission relationships are with those in the South.<sup>2</sup> I then outline how CMS has begun to change its perception and practice of mission. The first two of three strategic emphases CMS is now pursuing are discussed here and in the concluding part (to appear in *Anvil* 25.4) I explore the third of these and a fourth strategy of an emerging four-system model of mission that has begun to reshape the organisation of CMS's work, emphasising not just a mixed-economy of church, but the mission-economy of global Christianity. Although drawing on the experience of CMS, this two-part article is not about CMS's organisational objectives but about how such objectives might be given orientation and meaning in a changing world<sup>3</sup> and the implications of these four emphases for mission leadership and practice.

### From Jigsaw to Wasgij

Mission today is a puzzle. So many things have changed and are changing that it's difficult to get a clear perspective. We can no longer take the observer's position;

1 Examples of theological reflection on the change in world mission and on processes of globalisation include, respectively, Thomson 2004 and Reader 2008.

2 In Western theology the action of God, as most confidently affirmed in the language about the mission of God, has become something that is difficult to portray in objective terms. In Addition, although reflection on human action has, in the practical theology of mission, been enriched by the development of the human sciences, it has also been enmeshed in the all-powerful claims of Enlightenment

rationality from which it cannot release itself. What follows cannot address in depth either of these two aspects of the practical theology of mission, but these are the inherent fundamental concerns in Western practical theology. The two references in the previous footnotes can be explored, with respect to these two concerns and also see Fowler 1985:56f (online at <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/apr1985/v42-1-article4.htm>).

3 See Dalferth 1988, ch 18 on revelation and orientation.

we are participants in a network of mission relationships that spread out into all contexts across the globe. As participants, we have to look at each other, in the light of our faith, to see what mission means today. It's a bit like trying to do a Jigsaw backwards – a Wasgij. In a Wasgij you're given all the pieces but not the final picture. Instead there's a picture on the box of people looking at what the puzzle is about. You piece together the final picture with clues from that!

In some ways Scripture has always worked like this:<sup>4</sup> it's as though we're looking at what others have seen as they look ahead and beyond us. Looking into their faces, and with the pieces given to us now, we put together a picture of what God's mission means in practice for us today. This is to do Christian eschatology but not the predictive kind which outlines dispensations. This sort of eschatology starts from the vision of what others have seen, as revealed by God, and then works out what we now need to do in order to participate in that ultimate reality towards which all God's mission is moving: the coming of God's new world, his Kingdom. Richard Bauckham helpfully reminds us of the balance in John's Revelation and therefore what is needed in our perspective and motivation for mission:

His prophecy does not predetermine the outcome of the church's calling to witness to the nations. All that is unconditional is that God's kingdom must come and his eschatological renewal of his creation take place. But alongside the hope of the conversion of the nations to the worship of the true God stands the threat of judgement on the world in its final refusal to acknowledge God's rule.<sup>5</sup>

Bauckham later suggests what this means in terms of how we should therefore interpret Jesus and his mission: 'An important contribution of Revelation to New Testament theology is that it puts the New Testament central theme of salvation in Christ clearly into its total biblical-theological context of the Creator's purpose for his whole creation'.<sup>6</sup>

CMS has renewed its commitment to mission from this fundamentally eschatological perspective. As we look back down the centuries of Christian mission we see many faces, now turned towards ours. We look into the eyes of those who have dreamed dreams and seen visions and put into practice what they believed God had called them to do in his mission of loving the world. That calling still applies to us today, even in its complexity: we are called to follow Jesus into the future of his mission.

## Changes in mission: Four levels, four responses

From CMS's position, as a Northern European mission society, at least four levels of social, religious or organisational change can be identified that affect world mission.

**First** there is the global scale of change in which there are massive cultural and demographic shifts. These include:

- the worldwide spread of modernity and urbanisation and the challenge of secularism

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4 What follows is not meant to be a theory of biblical interpretation for mission, for one approach see Bauckham 2003.

5 Bauckham 1993: 149.

6 Bauckham 1993: 163f.

- the resurgence of Islam renewing the challenge of interfaith dialogue;
- the growth of Southern Christianity with the migration of peoples, many of them Christians, from South to North;
- the growth of a post-colonial narrative about identity; and
- the development of the network-world of communication which provides means for new ways of relating beyond the local.

In the light of these CMS has acknowledged the need to decentralise and internationalise its mission work in the different regions of the world and also recognised the fundamental need to *emphasise the priority of evangelistic mission*.

**Second** there are also changes in the European context, including:

- the cultural turn towards postmodernism;
- the collapse of Communist Russia and the growth of the European Union;
- the decline of institutional Christianity and the rise of informal spirituality;
- a recognition that the Jesus of classic Western theology is a foreign culture to some;
- the growth of immigration; and
- the awakening in Christian consciousness (across the denominations) of the need for new evangelisation in Europe and a rediscovery of the church and power of the old traditions.

In response to these changes CMS has recognised Europe to be a ‘mission field’ since the early 1970s and has had to think again about its own mission spirituality and responsibilities to evangelise its traditional base. This has led CMS to develop *a new emphasis on being part of the Church as a mission community*, expressing the fact mission is prior to the church and is shaped by it locally and globally.

**Third**, there have been changes within the Society of CMS and its organisation. These are linked to both the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Society in 1999 and a pattern of major change every 50 years. The 50-year cycle pattern was proposed by Max Warren who, in the 1950s, suggested CMS had passed through three phases and was entering a fourth. The first three phases were:

1. the experimental period when CMS was learning how to do evangelism and church planting
2. a phase of establishing local Christian presence, of church growth and leadership development; and
3. a building up of Christian civil and cultural institutions.

Warren laid the foundations for the subsequent 50-year period, 1950-2000 –

4. the ‘partnership in mission’ phase.

In the partnership phase there was a new emphasis on co-operative relationships with the maturing churches of the South. However, the direction of mission was still from North to South. In the changes which are now taking place there are centres of mission all over the globe. The underlying pattern moves beyond partnership into a network of mission relationships.

In so far as it is possible to project ahead into the next phase, CMS has begun to reshape itself by *emphasising a network approach to mission*. This includes repositioning itself in a mission relationship with its own traditional base in Europe and adjusting its transcultural mission relationships with other centres and heartlands of faith to incorporate a reciprocal approach to both the challenges and the exploding range of world mission opportunities

**Fourth**, in the developing context of twenty-first century mission many new mission initiatives or challenges have emerged, reflecting the unrestricted and global flows of mission. These have fleshed out in new and exciting ways the five marks of mission affirmed by Anglicans.<sup>7</sup>

New initiatives which fill out the range of possibilities implied by the five marks include:

- business as mission, encouraging Christians to see business initiating social, economic, ecological and spiritual change (a quadruple bottom line);
- the emergence of inter-faith dialogue based on Pentecostal/Spirit-based approaches (eg Yong's 'poured out on all flesh' theology<sup>8</sup>);
- developments beyond territorial understandings of Christianity (eg Catholic dioceses as sections of God's people rather than areas);
- overlapping multi-layered presences of Christian mission (we are much more like second and third century Christianity);
- a recovery of confidence and motivation: a hope for mission based on biblical eschatology (the modern motivation for mission connects with newly 'acceptable' academic investigations of missionary motivation in the colonial period<sup>9</sup>);
- fresh and alternative expressions of Church (eg the mission-shaped church developments in the Church of England);
- the possibilities of rediscovering Jesus' mission of the Kingdom of God (eg Tom Wright's project and its implications for mission<sup>10</sup>);
- missional responses to third-world poverty through small loan projects and micro-finance;
- a massive increase in short-term travel mixing mission and pleasure;
- the emergence of ecological mission.

These initiatives<sup>11</sup> have put pressure on the mission capital (prayer, theology, money, people, patterns of relationship, and tradition) of the Christian world, forcing new understandings and reallocation of resources within the new network-world of mission.

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**7** For an exploration of the five marks of mission see Walls and Ross 2008.

**8** Yong 2005.

**9** See, for example, Porter 2004.

**10** For example, Wright 2007.

**11** We see here, at a global level of change, that there are political, economic and technological dimensions. We may also

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note, beyond what we have already identified, some global theological flows that feed into these social changes, eg liberation, feminism, ecology and human rights. All these changes have an impact on how the Christian tradition is interpreted: there is now an inter-cultural level of hermeneutics.

CMS has reworked its understanding and pattern of mission capital to be able to respond to these initiatives. The process has included a re-appreciation of the mission capital which societies like CMS carry in their DNA. Responding to these new initiatives has led to a re-shaping of how CMS organises mission: *we are developing a four-system model of mission that breaks out of the limitations of 'church' and looks at the mission-economy as the primary economy.*

In summary, CMS's response to these different levels of changes has already included three strategic emphases:<sup>12</sup>

1. The renewed commitment to *evangelistic mission* in which *the ultimate significance of Jesus* is emphasised;
2. The clarification of CMS's ecclesial identity as a *mission community* acting as a *hermeneutic of the gospel*;
3. The development of a *worldwide network* of societies and agencies which enables interchange within the global body of Christ for mission

In addition, with the changing nature of world church initiatives, CMS has also begun to emphasise a four-system model for the economy, the administration, of God's mission:

4. The *four-system model* (of contextual mission and community, transcultural and reciprocal mission, mission capital and mission network) provides a shape for facilitating the economy of mission from a particular region within a globalised world.

Each of these four strategies in response to the four changes above will now be explored in turn, the first two below and the last two in the concluding part of this article in the next issue, *Anvil* 25.4.

## **I – Evangelistic Mission: The ultimate significance of Jesus<sup>13</sup>**

### **Confidence, crisis and Communion: A new Ephesian Moment**

One of the challenges of change is what it does to confidence. There has been a loss of confidence in Northern mission societies struggling to make sense of the new situation of world mission and to find a new place in changed circumstances. This process has been made more complex because the modern missionary movement released, through the cross-cultural process, Christians and the gospel from cultural confinement in the North at the same time as the institutional strength of Northern Christianity was declining. It is as though Northern Christianity emptied

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**12** The origin of these emphases are to be found in the writings of former General Secretaries: Max Warren wrote that the metier of the Society is evangelism (in an unpublished manuscript, Warren 1957: 54), John Taylor advocated for CMS to be seen as a mission order of the church and for the formation of 'a worldwide network of such fraternities' (Taylor 1966, ch 6), and Simon Barrington-Ward foresaw how an interchange between 'communities of covenant' could spread across the whole Anglican Communion (see Barrington-Ward 1988).

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**13** This phrase is from Walls who suggests that there is a small body of convictions which is essential to the transmission of Christian faith: '1. The worship of the God of Israel ... 2. The ultimate significance of Jesus of Nazareth ... 3. That God is active where believers are ... 4. That believers constitute a people of God that transcend time and space ... These convictions appear to underlie the whole Christian tradition across the centuries, in all its diversities'. (Walls 1996: 23-24).

itself in the process of sharing the gospel, replicating the serial growth and decline of the various centres which have come and gone in the two thousand year history of Christianity.

A number of factors have exacerbated this loss of confidence, including the disorientation of globalisation processes and the break-up of the from-here-to-there (the West to the rest) pattern of mission. For CMS, these processes, which some see as the 'deterritorialisation' of Christianity,<sup>14</sup> have also connected with the specific question of Anglican identity as the present crisis in the Communion has added to these confusing changes.

The reaffirmation of evangelistic mission in response to these challenges is based on the rediscovery of what Andrew Walls calls the 'Ephesian Moment'. The changes and challenges of the twenty-first century are seen as, above all, an opportunity to repeat the pattern of that short-lived coming together of Jew and Gentile in Christ. As Walls says 'the Ephesian moment – the social coming together of people of two cultures to experience Christ – was quite brief' but,

in our day the Ephesian moment has come again, and come in a richer mode than has every happened since the first century. Developments over several centuries, reaching a climax in the twentieth, mean that we no longer have two, but innumerable, major cultures in the church.<sup>15</sup>

The interpretation of our twenty-first century context as a new Ephesian Moment has become foundational for CMS's renewed confidence and commitment to evangelistic mission. From this basis it is possible to see again, with new eyes, the great vision of Ephesians: that in Christ God is uniting all things and that through Christ the fullness of him who fills all will be revealed even in the Church as it is built up to Christ's full stature! The cosmic, human and ecclesiological significance of Jesus is re-emphasised as the content of the gospel. In Christ, God has dealt with sin and death and made possible forgiveness and transformation. The death of Jesus shows us how serious sin is, the resurrection reveals the new creation. Mission therefore is about the ultimate significance of Jesus as Lord and Christ.<sup>16</sup>

### **Eschatology and mission**

As already implied, eschatology informs the strategies proposed here. Eschatology emphasises the action of God in history and invites a faith that similarly sees participation in God's mission through active involvement. It therefore provides a motivating, an inspiring, theological basis for mission action as it did in the early mid postmillennial perspective of those who founded CMS:

The whole foreign missionary movement that captured the imagination of Anglo-American evangelicals in the early years of the nineteenth century was inspired by fervent expectation that gospel work across the world would usher in the universal reign of Christ. John Venn, Rector of Clapham and the first chairman of the Church Missionary Society, declared in 1802 that it is 'clear in Scripture that there is yet to be a long period of peace and glory in the Church, such as has never yet been known'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Sanneh 1993, ch 5 (here at p 207).

<sup>15</sup> Walls 2002: 78.

<sup>16</sup> For an accessible restatement of the significance of Jesus for ultimate questions see Nazir-Ali 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Bebbington 2008: 78.

Eschatology, as the way God is acting in the world to fulfil his plan of salvation, is crucial to human agency and purpose because, ‘The “actual” universe is the universe as it one day will be. And this eschatological universe is nothing short of a new creation’.<sup>18</sup> Renewed confidence in mission is therefore linked with eschatological perspectives in which all aspects of mission, as diverse as the five marks of mission, can be given a narrative framework whilst being focused on Jesus.<sup>19</sup>

### Sharing Jesus, Changing Lives: Cross-cultural and local intentionality

For CMS this motivation translates into a commitment to share the love of Jesus that lives might be transformed. Our strap-line, with all its double meanings, summarises our hope: *Sharing Jesus Changing Lives*. In practice, CMS has committed itself with renewed intent that all should become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ as his disciples. We seek to share the love of Jesus through four approaches, depending on the local situation: *proclamation, presence, praxis* and *the power of God*. We prioritise our engagement where we find the following five mission challenges coalesce: the margins of society, large urban centres, young people’s concerns, many faith contexts, secularised cultures. Combining these approaches and challenges to mission gives a framework for developing specific strategies for different countries and opportunities.

This renewed commitment to evangelistic mission is historically based for CMS in the Anglican involvement in mission. This history is not uncontested and is indeed becoming a crucial testing ground for interpreting the nature of mission and the church and the motivation for mission. Bruce Kaye has recently suggested that the Anglican Communion is the result of neither colonialism nor nineteenth century English mission activity. Drawing, he says, from authors like Sanneh<sup>20</sup> he proposes a post-colonial direction: ‘a new historiography which seeks to move the non-metropolitan perspective to the centre of the concern’.<sup>21</sup> Kaye’s proposal – with examples from America, Australia, Kenya and Japan – is that Anglicanism finds its true history in the local and on-the-ground church planting that took place in many parts of the world.<sup>22</sup>

Whilst I would agree with Kaye’s emphasis on the priority of the local evangelist and church planter<sup>23</sup> – one can hardly deny the importance of the vernacular in a tradition rooted in the English Bible and Prayer Book – surely the key element here is the agent’s *intentionality* not their *ethnic origin*? Another stream of historiography

**18** Grenz and Franke 2001: 272.

**19** There are at least three foundational theological perspectives: ‘The three strategies that we dare to speak with a measure of confidence about the sacred mysteries are thus: (1) by analogy with the truths known naturally; (2) from the interconnection of the mysteries with one another; and (3) in reference to our final end and ultimate destiny’ (Hunt 2005: 2). Each strategy would have a place in the other but one approach tends to provide an overarching framework for a theological perspective, to give orientation and meaning

to the Christian life. The eschatological strategy is obviously the one affirmed here.

**20** See, for example, Sanneh 1989.

**21** Kaye 2008: 43.

**22** The impact of either cross-cultural missionary or local missioner is to some extent relativised by the impact that migration has had on the spread of Christianity. For a recent restatement of this thesis see Walls 2008.

**23** For a ground breaking study of the importance of local missionaries see Pirouet 1978.



within the postcolonial framework takes seriously the intentionality or motivation of the agent (whether a cross-cultural or a local missionary).<sup>24</sup> There are greater and lesser intentions within mission.<sup>25</sup>

Whether as a cross-cultural or a local missionary, the key issue is intentionality.<sup>26</sup> Sanneh's thesis that the unintended consequences of the commitment to Bible translation resulted in a destigmatising of the receiving culture and the relativising of the sending culture<sup>27</sup> means the dynamics of mission are crucial. These factors point to the greater intentions of the missionary: God's intention. The gospel has a power of its own to release, enrich and empower those who receive it. Those who intend to share the gospel, be it ever so badly and with the overlay of colonial power, are still participating in *God's* mission activity, the eschatological intentionality of God himself, to bring in the Kingdom.

### **Mission spirituality**

It is the narrative of God's mission, with its eschatological vision, which shapes missionary zeal or mission spirituality. Zeal is based on the life of the Spirit in the believer, not on following a rule or a law or supporting a mission society. It is as the Spirit is received in relation to a growth in the knowledge of the revelation of hope in Christ (for the individual, the church and the world through the church) that true missionary zeal is born: 'Missionary life begins with an act of reception; missionary zeal grows upon the knowledge of the Spirit so received; missionary work is the expression of the Spirit in activity'.<sup>28</sup>

The basis for this zeal is Christ. Allen's appeal could have been written for today, as he reminds us that the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus Christ is at the heart of God's mission:

Only in the last few years have we begun to grasp what a world-wide communion might mean. Already we are expecting new ideas of virtue, new aspects of the Truth of Christ. We begin to understand what the foundation of native Churches in China or in Japan, in India and in Africa may mean for us all, bringing to us new conceptions of the manifold working of the Spirit of Christ. We begin to understand that a world-wide communion does not involve the destruction of local characteristics, that a world-wide communion is a communion, a unity, catholic, apostolic, not a loose federation of mutually suspicious societies. This sense of the corporate unity has come to us late, and we have scarcely begun to see what it is; but we see that it is the manifestation of Christ.<sup>29</sup>

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**24** See Porter 2004 who has previously argued for a metropolitan view (see pp 13, 58) and explores the importance of missionary inspiration, locating it within a rejuvenated eschatology (with millennial overtones) in which the wider purposes of God for the world can include, but not collude, with colonial expansion. It is the missionaries' critique of colonialism, from their motivational vision, that needs reviewing.

**25** See Berg 1956, one of the classic books on mission motivation in the modern British missionary movement.

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**26** The intentionality of either cross-cultural missionary or local missioner is to some extent relativised by the impact migration has had on the spread of Christianity. See Walls 2008.

**27** Sanneh 1989: 1.

**28** Allen 2006: 59 (first published in 1913). On these and other works by Allen see Bowen 2008.

**29** Allen 2006: 51.

## Conclusion

In simple terms there has been a change in perspective that finds echoes in other areas of Christian thought and practice: the shift from observer to participant. The colonial period provided a platform for mission societies to be observers of the world scene and even if they were not complicit in colonialism (as ‘the despised semi-detached appendix to the Great European Migration’<sup>30</sup>) they were caught up in its implications. The loss of Northern power and the post-colonial challenge to world politics has surfaced the cultural presuppositions that provided the context for the modern missionary movement. As we face the crisis in the Anglican Communion, we must ask whether we are being given the opportunity to discover the Communion for what it truly is or could become: a fresh expression of church as a Communion in Mission.<sup>31</sup> We are also being challenged to regain confidence not from a position of power, either spiritual or political. This has pushed Northern Christians to rediscover the biblical story of God’s worldwide mission<sup>32</sup> but in order for these changes to happen we shall need all the missionary zeal and the risk-taking experiments that Allen encourages us to explore. There is no blue-print for the church in an era of globalization. We can be bold with our fresh expressions because there is so much more of the transforming life of Christ for us to discover as we are led by his Spirit in discovering the ultimate significance of Jesus.

## II – Mission Community: Hermeneutic of the gospel

‘Church Missionary Society’ became the nickname for the ‘Society for missions to Africa and the East’ founded in 1799. It became the official name not just because it was shorter but because it reflected the ethos of this voluntary society: CMS was founded on the church principle. CMS is not a para-church society. Its leaders were committed to mission as part of the church and not apart from or parallel to the church. Yet the structures of the church, based as they were on a territorial understanding of church organisation, did not include organs of initiative that could work trans-locally.

Henry VIII’s dissolution of the monasteries did not remove the capacity for voluntary association engendered by the plural nature of British society. CMS’s founders, using the model of the overseas trading joint stock company, banded together as an association committed to sharing the gospel not just with their neighbours next door but with neighbours in the next continent. Inspired by the Evangelical Revival and motivated by a mild postmillennialism, these church missionaries became an interpretation of the gospel. Such associations or communities, in pursuing a specific purpose or charism, are not just a means to an end. They sometimes also focus an essential element of the nature of the church.

The church is not essentially parish or diocese. It is essentially missionary or missional. CMS is therefore a reminder of what the church is about – church as mission community. It is one way of enabling the church to act effectively as a mission community beyond diocesan and parish structures and beyond a territorial Christianity: to be a mission-shaped church.<sup>33</sup>

**30** Walls 2008: 198

**31** See Anglican Communion Office 2006, ch.2 for an exploration of this theme in an official Report.

**32** Chris Wright’s magisterial work (Wright 2006, on which see the special edition 24.4 of *Anvil*) is the latest restatement.

**33** See Dakin 2008 on the implications of mission spirituality for mission-shaped church.

### Mission transforming faith and order

The Church of England's faith and order have been shaped by two major periods of change: the Reformation and the Hanoverian reorganisation of the church.<sup>34</sup> The modern missionary movement is another reshaping of Anglicanism which significantly affects our understanding of the church. Perhaps only now are we coming to terms with what this change implies. 'Mission-shaped church' is one reflection of this at a local level within provincial/national structures. More is emerging as global Anglicanism affects the local mission of Anglican churches.

As the last gasp, but also the undoing, of a Christianity based on a territorial and national pattern, the modern missionary movement highlighted two pairs of principles that are held in tension with each other:

1. The *gospel principle* in which the dynamic activity of God world-wide is proclaimed from the perspective of the translatable biblical narrative of God's mission focused in Jesus.
2. The *church principle* in which God's mission is interpreted but not confined by the vernacular, cultural, understanding of the gospel encapsulated in the life of the people of God
3. The *voluntary principle* in which the agency of faith is recognised to go beyond any mediation of the gospel in cultural or church terms
4. The *governance principle* in which there is a recognition that there must be some form of accountability expressed in a form of Christian governance

For CMS founders the question they struggled with – alongside the need for a renewal of personal holiness and the transformation of a society in which the slave trade was practised – was 'How does a Reformed national church, undergoing significant reorganisation (in the Hanoverian period), reach out to those beyond its borders?'. The Evangelical Revival promoted such questions as those who had been touched anew by the gospel sought to reach out to their neighbours in other lands. This voluntary mission society, with episcopal patronage,<sup>35</sup> was one means for responding to this challenge. Its character unfolded as it learnt to become a mission community of the church:

- though founded as Anglican, it relied on Lutherans at the beginning;
- though led by men, the majority of missionaries were to be women;
- though clergy were leaders to start with lay people led mission projects and often led the Society's committees and local associations.

CMS therefore became a community characterised by five things: it is missional (missionary); lay (including clergy); ecumenical; spread-out (across the world and within Britain); and diaconal (called to serve others in Christ's mission).

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**34** Avis 1981: 1 reminds us that 'Reformation theology is largely dominated by two questions: "How can I obtain a gracious God?" and "Where can I find the true Church?'. See also Burns 1993 who reminds us that the organisational reform of the church was underway before the Tractarians emerged and that it included the

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establishment of rural deanery and diocese on a new footing, followed by a reemphasis on a renewed role for archdeacons and bishops. These changes were aided by Church Commissions and a Church Discipline Act.

**35** On the role of episcopal patronage see Cnattingius 1952.

In developing a pragmatic approach to the opportunity to share the gospel, the founders of CMS and other mission societies enabled members of national churches to reach out beyond their own communities and beyond the establishment of the Church of England. The unintended consequence of this movement was the break-up of the Christendom model in which the four principles outlined above had been provided with a negotiated but unstable framework in the Reformation of European Catholic Christendom.

### **Interpreting the gospel**

Lesslie Newbigin has taught us that the church is the hermeneutic of the gospel,<sup>36</sup> making sense of the gospel to people in their daily lives in a community in which is found the praise of God, the truth of the gospel, a life lived for others, the encouragement of a worldly priesthood, a mutual responsibility and a hope for the world. This is not another search for the true church. Newbigin's concern is for a practised faith found in a community of disciples not one defined in a theological book or in a confession. His early book on the Church, *The Household of God*, was a groundbreaking approach.<sup>37</sup> He interpreted the mission of the church expressed in Protestant, Catholic and Pentecostal streams as means by which people were able to make public their faith in a given context as those who had provisionally been incorporated into Jesus Christ. This interpretation of the church is beyond denominationalism, but inclusive of it. It might be true to say that CMS's founders were seeking such a vision without knowing it when they refused both the non-denominational approach of the London Mission Society and the more 'churchy' denominational High Church Anglican perspective.

From Sanneh we have learnt the power of translating the message, from Newbigin that the gospel needs to be interpreted by a living community. We see today, at a global level of change, that there are political, economic and technological dimensions and that some global theological flows (eg liberation, feminism, ecology and human rights) feed into these social changes. All these impact on how the Christian tradition is interpreted and how we now have a need for an inter-cultural level of hermeneutics. Robert Schreiter strikingly draws out the implications for transcultural mission: 'it is in the experience of moving from one place to another, of cobbling together new identities out of the old ones, of negotiating multiple identities and logics that insight into where God is at work in a globalized culture will be found'.<sup>38</sup> CMS's vocation has drawn it into this kind and level of hermeneutics.

### **Conclusion: CMS as mission community**

CMS has taken the step of asking to be recognised as an 'acknowledged community' of the Church of England<sup>39</sup> where the way of life required by membership of the Society is recognised as a mission spirituality that represents something of the nature of the church itself. We do not take the classical vows or follow a rule in a residential community (though we have houses of mission); rather we are an intentional community whose mission is to serve others by encouraging them in Christ's mission. Our vision is to obey the call of God to proclaim the gospel in all

<sup>36</sup> See Weston 2006: 114ff.

<sup>37</sup> Newbigin 1953.

<sup>38</sup> Schreiter 1997: 59.

<sup>39</sup> See Advisory Council on the Relations of Bishops and Religious Communities 2004: 3.

places and draw all peoples into fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We are committed to evangelistic mission, working to see a world transformed by the love of Jesus. We interpret the gospel, living it out in mission practice as a 'community of mission service' (cms).

This request signals we are refounding ourselves on the vision which first created CMS. Some core values of the community were identified as a result of the bicentenary of CMS – faithful, relational, pioneering and evangelistic – which relate to previous eras of mission. *Faithful* can correspond to the desert/monastic movement; *relational* to the mendicant movement; *pioneering* to the breakouts of Christendom, and *evangelistic* to the new age of reason and communication.<sup>40</sup> In the new age of global communications there is no new value beyond evangelistic, just an ongoing series of evangelistic dialogues in which faith reframes what is not of faith by internalising it (via apologetics or inculturation) or holding in the balance of prophetic hope. This approach promotes the need for conversion but rejects the compulsion or proselytising that went with earlier periods of pioneering mission. The mission practice of the community is its interpretation of the gospel: *Sharing Jesus, Changing Lives*.<sup>41</sup>

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*This article will continue and conclude in Anvil 25.4*

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<sup>40</sup> I have here relied on Arbuckle's writings on the refounding of the Catholic religious communities. On the stages and corresponding values outlined here see Arbuckle 1993, ch 6.

<sup>41</sup> The strap-line not only interprets mission in terms of Jesus and the Ephesian Moment, but also aims to include the linear and

reciprocal, agent and participant, dimensions of mission. Patterns of mission can be correlated with theologies of revelation. On the hermeneutical implications of this see Dalferth's explorations of Schleiermacher and Barth (Dalferth 1988).

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