

Fishnets Church on the edge Missionary apologetics (Slide 1)

Intro to self and FYT

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So lets kick off with a story

After many years of hard work an inventor discovered the art of making fire, so he took his tools to the snow clad northern mountains, and initiated the local tribe into the art and advantages of making fire. The locals became absorbed in this new thing, so much so that it did not occur to them to thank the inventor. The inventor was one of those rare human beings who didn't need to be revered, such was his greatness, all the inventor sought was the satisfaction of knowing that someone had benefited from his discovery.

The next tribe he went to was just as eager to learn, but the local priests were jealous of the strangers hold on the people so had the inventor assassinated. To cover up their crime they had a portrait painted of the inventor, and set it on the main alter of the temple, they even wrote a liturgy so his name would be revered and remembered, they enshrined the fire making tools in casket and it was said that they healing to all who laid hands on them with faith.

The priests came together and compiled a book on the life of the inventor, this holy book told of the inventors loving kindness and it was offered as an example for others to emulate, and his deeds were so eulogized and his superhuman nature made an article of faith. The priests ensured it was handed down the generations, and the liturgy was kept, they ruthlessly punished people who questioned or deviated from the doctrines. Caught up as they were in these religious tasks the people completely forgot the art of making fire.

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For a reflective practitioner such as myself this is an incredibly hopeful statement. It validates the praxis approach to mission and ecclesiology (the theology of church). It also gives space for developing doctrine and possibly theology in and out of the current context or experience.

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The question is has our Christian experience been of a people who make fire or of a people who have forgotten the art of fire making, because it is the fire makers, who can help us develop a missiology that arises from experience and is relevant in March 2009 rather than an intellectual system or approach to church that is heavenly minded but no earthly good.

So what I hope to outline today is an approach to church and mission that comes from the experience of making fire on the ground with young people. For some of you this will be a **missionary apologetic** that challenges the norm, it certainly questions many of our current approaches to church but I hope to show how the learning from these experiences of mission offer a new way of thinking about church, that when tried help you firestarters out there reignite the communities you serve.

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Two key issues are that we have developed a theology and ecclesiology that controls and constrains rather than liberates the church to become what she could be. Secondly our approach to ecclesiology is such that church has become a holy cow that runs the risk of standing in the road of change and no one seems willing to move or challenge it.

BUT we need to challenge these conceptions yet when we do we run the risk of being labelled heretical, and it closes down adult conversation and practice. It is too easy to forget that todays orthodoxy was yesterdays heresy.

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doing, growing dynamic word, TO the wording of Fresh expression a noun that suggests we have arrived and know what this looks like. So many fresh expressions are basically attractational models of church, that don't make ask any real questions.

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Turn to the person next to you discuss if you have ever been engaged work that you FEEL is like church but others wouldn't call church

With the establishment of Christianity as the state religion we have lost some of the vitality of Christianity that Christ taught and lived. We have reduced the revelation of Jesus to an ethical code or to a notion of what is true, where discipleship is seen as no more than assent to a set of propositions. This is no more truer when we think of church. This living hope for humanity, has been reduced to a set of propositions, with articles of faith about who is in and who is out.

Jesus didn't live or teach this way, he was beyond ethics of this nature. Take for example the ethic of not stealing, which is fine but what happens when the person is starving, Christianity is a faith that both answers our questions and questions our answers. **slide 8**

So if we be faithful to Christ and think we have answers to what church is, we need ask some serious questions about those answers. So lets rethink about church in this more open way.

Ephesians 5

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But today I wanted I read it with the broader context, to note that Christ gave Himself up for the church to make her holy and blameless and I am sure there are some things we as individuals may need to give up in order to liberate the

church become all that she might. My instinct here is one thing we may need to put aside is power, Christ became powerless on the cross which opened the way to truth and reconciliation, how much do we as leaders need to put aside our power so we might liberate others to lead us into truth and reconciliation. How can we as leaders give our youth workers/ missionaries to young people the space to try new things, we need to don our flack jackets and take the stick from parents and congregations to give the new things chance to grow even though may look nothing like what we intended.

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So having looked to biblical text to explore church lets look to our traditions of mission to see what we can learn.
Mission **Slide 10**

Once we get beyond the imperial approach that saw mission and conquest going hand in hand, we learn several key points.

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"in working with young people do not call them to where they were and do not call them to where you are as beautiful a place as they may seem to you. You must have the courage to go with them to a new place that neither you nor they have been before"

The stories that come back from the mission field are that God is already present and our role is to get in on Her act rather than forge our own path (Jesus only did what he saw his father in heaven doing) That is about process and outcome, actions need to match words, and there is need for liberation both from the captivity of poverty and the poverty of the mind. Friere an educationalist and Christian socialist approaches this as the ontological imperative - human life has to be preserved and liberated, or to paraphrase Jesus life and life in all its fullness

(**slide 11**) When we begin to re-look at church and mission in this way we see that they are two sides of the same coin, not separate entities. Mission in a post Christian world is as much about doing mission as it is about being church. Back to the biblical images attitude and action you could say what most of know as church is about the attitude/ being and mission is the course of action. This is slightly over simplified as you need to the tension of mission oriented in the attitude holding both in a creative tension and NOT separate a BOTH/AND approach. I would even go as far as to say that most what we understand church to be at the moment in the UK has so separated church and mission that it cannot be church when looked at from this theological perspective.

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So we have looked at the biblical text and theology of church, explored the traditions of mission and now we come

to the culture we engaging and what is happening on the ground and what we can learn form this

So let me tell you're the story of possibilities.

Today I bring you greetings from the church of flow. Flow is the name for God of a local tribe I work with. In this case it is a tribe just up the road.

Flow as a name for God and as mentioned earlier premise of the work is explore what missionary work in our post Christian country may look like, to find out what God is doing locally and by what name she is known, and to get in on that work, **rather** than going and saying I have God, I know what God looks like and by what name he is called, and I want to tell you about him.

We discovered the word as we questioned a group of skaters about how they felt when they skated. The response to "is it a spiritual experience?" was "you are just lost in the moment and you just flow!" My response was I think that maybe God but you don't have a language to describe it, which started a journey to discover Flow, through conversations, pilgrimage, provocations and re-contextualised bible study. This is when we take a bible story and rework into Flow language, (there are few around the room if you want to have a read) in the beginning was Flow and Flow was God and Flow was with God, we also did the trick of great worth, and a retelling of Abraham and Isaac. The key was we told the stories but we don't interpret them or explain, just ask questions to help unlock the meaning.

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We went with the young people on the skate and bike pilgrimage I told and on the first evening I told this story

Abs and Flow

In a town not so far from here there was man known as Abs. The town was a pretty desolate place, with not much going on, so Abs grew up to skate and ride, as soon as he put his foot on his first board he knew he was born to ride. As he rode he experienced life and energy in a way he had never

known before. The more he rode the more he Flowed with this life and energy. Slowly Abs began to understand the life and energy was beyond him, it was not created by him, or generated by him, but as he forgot himself in the ride he would experience it more and more. Abs began to call this life and energy, Flow. He started to recognise when he was about ride with Flow, and when Flow was not present. The more he understood and experienced Flow the more he wanted to be in Flow all the time. Slowly Abs felt Flow beginning to communicate with him, it was strange, unnerving, and Abs was not sure at first if he was imagining things. But he knew Flow. Unsure he murmured to himself, as much as to the Flow, that he wanted to experience Flow all the time. Whether it was a voice, an internal impression of a voice, or just something in his mind Abs was unsure, but he knew it was Flow. But what Flow was communicating to him seemed a strange contradiction, he felt the voice was telling him that if he really wanted to know Flow then he would have to break his skateboard. Abs was confused, wasn't it through riding that he first really began to experience Flow? Wasn't it through those moments of laughter and relief after pulling the best hand plant, or kick flip that Flow was most present? Yet Abs longed for more and had grown to trust Flow and so reluctantly he made his way to the Skatepark Quarter, the highest ramp around to smash his board on the concrete edge of the ramp.

As I said I didn't give the interpretation but just asked questions and prompted dialogue

Next day we went down to the bowl in Hayle.....tell story

Discuss was that God?

Once back we reflected on the conversations and I asked if they would be willing as a group to keep exploring Flow explaining the idea of being on a journey together and asking their permission to keep asking questions and promoting dialogue. I explained I saw this an expression of church and would they be willing to come on this journey to discover what church looked like in this context. Then to seal the deal offered a rite of passage process for those interested to undertake.

(**Slide 22**) So finally what does this cultural engagement teach me about God. The process of being and growing with people out there has fuelled my faith way beyond what sitting in church on Sunday morning ever does. I have learnt new ways of encountering and relating to God. Learning what it means to let go and be yoked to Christ. Biblically new concepts from the text have been encountered, a growing ecclesiology, questions of baptism, commitment, the importance of rites of passage ...the list goes on.

And my prayer as I close this session is that as you leave today and see the young people hanging out on the streets, walk past the big issue sellers, the group of skaters, the hen party out for a good time. As you see the communities of young people in school uniform, or the uniform of the street in which they live ... if just once we would let go of our perceived wisdom and somehow, somewhere engage these communities with the missionary courage they deserve..

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Abs and Flow

In a town not so far from here there was man known as Abs. The town was a pretty desolate place, with not much going on, so Abs grew up to skate and ride, as soon as he put his foot on his first board he knew he was born to ride. As he rode he experienced life and energy in a way he had never

known before. The more he rode the more he Flowed with this life and energy. Slowly Abs began to understand the life and energy was beyond him, it was not created by him, or generated by him, but as he forgot himself in the ride he would experience it more and more. Abs began to call this life and energy, Flow. He started to recognise when he was about ride with Flow, and when Flow was not present. The more he understood and experienced Flow the more he wanted to be in Flow all the time. Slowly Abs felt Flow beginning to communicate with him, it was strange, unnerving, and Abs was not sure at first if he was imagining things. But he knew Flow. Unsure he murmured to himself, as much as to the Flow, that he wanted to experience Flow all the time. Whether it was a voice, an internal impression of a voice, or just something in his mind Abs was unsure, but he knew it was Flow. But what Flow was communicating to him seemed a strange contradiction, he felt the voice was telling him that if he really wanted to know Flow then he would have to break his skateboard. Abs was confused, wasn't it through riding that he first really began to experience Flow? Wasn't it through those moments of laughter and relief after pulling the best hand plant, or kick flip that Flow was most present? Yet Abs longed for more and had grown to trust Flow and so reluctantly he made his way to the Skatepark Quarter, the highest ramp around to smash his board on the concrete edge of the ramp.

As I said I didn't give the interpretation but just asked questions and prompted dialogue

Next day we went down to the bowl in Hayle.....tell story

Discuss was that God?

Once back we reflected on the conversations and I asked if they would be willing as a group to keep exploring Flow explaining the idea of being on a journey together and asking their permission to keep asking questions and promoting dialogue. I explained I saw this an expression of church and would they be willing to come on this journey to discover what church looked like in this context. Then to seal the deal offered a rite of passage process for those interested to undertake.

(**Slide 22**) So finally what does this cultural engagement teach me about God. The process of being and growing with people out there has fuelled my faith way beyond what sitting in church on Sunday morning ever does. I have learnt new ways of encountering and relating to God. Learning what it means to let go and be yoked to Christ. Biblically new concepts from the text have been encountered, a growing ecclesiology, questions of baptism, commitment, the importance of rites of passage ...the list goes on.

And my prayer as I close this session is that as you leave today and see the young people hanging out on the streets, walk past the big issue sellers, the group of skaters, the hen party out for a good time. As you see the communities of young people in school uniform, or the uniform of the street in which they live ... if just once we would let go of our perceived wisdom and somehow, somewhere engage these communities with the missionary courage they deserve..