

RECONNECTED
RELEASING THE IMAGINATION
AROUND MISSION AND CHURCH IN A
POST MODERN WORLD

Advanced Ministerial Project

Postgraduate Certificate in Practical Theology

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By

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1. Abstract

The hypothesis of this study is that many UK based practitioners hold a dualist distinction between mission and church that can be limiting, however by challenging this distinction and understanding the Church on The Edge (COTE) process, mission orientated practitioners are released into a creative space, and way of thinking that enables them to engage more effectively with the communities they serve.

The study undertook wide ranging research of practitioners with various levels of responsibility and experience, most of whom are adopting a more relational based approach to mission. It was discovered that the sample groups did indeed hold a distinction between mission and church, which was further reinforced by interviews conducted with national trainers. This report challenges the validity of this dualism and offers a new approach; Ecclesio-Dei.¹ The research demonstrated that this new approach is able to build on people's experience of mission and offer them a new frame of reference leading to significant changes in practice, and which should lead to increased effectiveness.

The research also highlighted that newer practitioners find the challenges to the established orthodox paradigm of church that Ecclesio-Dei presents hard to assimilate and this inhibits people's willingness to change and ultimately their effectiveness in relationship based mission engagement. However this paper was able to conclude with several recommendations that would not only help overcome the inertia of these less experienced practitioners, but also support and enhance the development of the more experienced worker and ultimately increase the effectiveness of their missional engagement with the communities they serve.

¹ Initially the term missional ecclesiology was used in COTE training and papers, and throughout the research process, but in the light of the findings of this research it has been changed to Ecclesio-Dei as will be explained later.

2. Introduction

Hans Urs von Balthasar's view on faith could be simplified that "Christianity both answers our questions and questions our answers."² It seems apt to quote from the Archbishop's biography at the start of a work that is essentially researching the impact of the learning from a project that questions the current constructs about what is church and asks if this is still relevant in a post-Christian West. This research is focused on the impact that these questions and answers have on mission orientated practitioners as they seek to be faithful to the *Missio Dei* at a time when church no longer holds the central position in society it once did.³ Michael Moynagh suggests the church has lost her way and "Many clergy and lay people know that today's church is not working, it is not connecting with people any more, but they cannot imagine anything different."⁴

The Church on the Edge project is a UK based partnership between Frontier Youth Trust, Church Missionary Society, the Anglican Diocese of Exeter, and local churches. It was initiated to research what mission shaped relational youth work and emerging church can learn from one another, and explore this through practice. The project has at its heart the intention of growing church with young people on the edge of society as a missionary endeavour, and developing a framework that can facilitate locally grounded and "resource light", expressions of church. It is an experiment in incultural mission, which has as a core value a humility to learn from those we are engaging with. It was and is an exercise of the imagination about what church could be at a time when many people's imagination around the subject is held captive by established ecclesiological paradigms, shaped though a medieval heritage and Christendom mindset.⁵ As Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat note in their study of Colossians "Radical Christian proclamation and cultural practice will seek to

² Rupert Shortt, *Rowan's Rule: The Biography of the Archbishop* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008), (p. 124).

³ Stuart Murray, *Church After Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005), (p. 39-66).

⁴ Michael Moynagh, *Changing World, Changing Church* (London: Monarch Books, 2001), (p. 13).

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation and Obedience: From Faithful Reading to Faithful Living* (Augsburg Fortress, 1991).

demythologise the empire and devalue its currency. Such proclamation, such poetry will always be a subversion of the dominant version of reality".⁶ Alongside Walsh and Keesmaat other writers such as Walter Brueggemaan, Stuart Murray, Andrew Kirk, David Lyon all cite how the church has become tied up with the empire, and the need for a reimagining that demythologises the dominant ecclesiological paradigm.⁷

The project builds on earlier detached youth work carried out by Richard Passmore which has been adapted to give a broader framework researching how we grow church with young people through the process of being:⁸

- A Contacting Community
- A Growing Community
- A Connecting Community
- An Exploring Community
- A Practicing Community

The project used an action research approach to discover how unchurched young people would define, develop and shape church as we moved through these stages together, aiming to develop culturally relevant expressions with a missionary core.⁹

Drawing from Grenz and Franke who explore a method for 'doing' theology in a post modern age that uses the interaction of culture, Biblical text and tradition to provide a context for theological reflection, Church on The Edge identified a number of findings.¹⁰ Firstly that the established idea of mission as a bridge into church holds little weight Biblically and is not

⁶ Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat, *Colossians remixed : subverting the empire* (Downers Grove Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), (p. 84).

⁷ See Bibliography

⁸ Richard Passmore, *Meet them where they're at : helping churches engage young people through detached youth work* (Bletchley: Scripture Union, 2003).

⁹ For a full description of the project see appendix 1 of submitted to IASYM in Jan 2009

¹⁰ Stanley J. Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Westminster/John Knox Press,U.S., 2001).

consistent with the images of church offered in scripture.¹¹ Secondly the missionary traditions of people such as Vincent Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, Stanley Jones, *Christ of the Indian Road*, and *Water Buffalo Theology*, written by Kosuke Koyama, all the way back to Acts 17, where Luke records Paul contextualising the gospel and using the language of the Unknown God reinforce the need to move beyond a contextualisation of the message towards a journey of discovery on both sides. Robert Schreiter sees this journey as inculturation which he describes as “the dynamic relation between the Christian message and culture or cultures; an insertion of the Christian life into a culture; an ongoing process of reciprocal and critical insertion and assimilation between them”.¹² The emphasis being the *reciprocal* nature that allows the process to question our current assumptions (answers) about what church and mission is.¹³

Finally having looked at the Biblical text and traditions in mission, we turn to the third part of Grenz and Franks’ method: culture. The COTE learning here is a story of possibilities - as the workers encountered young people the impact on the workers themselves was one of enlightenment and a broadening view and understanding of God, a growing recognition that the god we know may not be God. As Meister Eckhart prayed “God rid me of god”.¹⁴ This further supports the reciprocal nature of the missional undertaking. When one goes out to intentionally be and grow church, it is a journey which fuels the individual in their understanding of God, enabling them to see the missionary endeavour as an act of worship to God, and encounter the presence of God in the whole process, which in turn brings us full circle to an understanding not of mission as a bridge into church, but church as a dynamic, subversive, interaction between the individual, community and *Missio-Dei* on a redemptive path together.

¹¹ The dualistic notions of sacred secular divisions do not reflect the cultural or epistemological worldview of the times.

¹² Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* New edition edn (SCM-Canterbury Press Ltd, 1985), (p. 17).

¹³ The Biblical narrative contains many examples that challenged the assumptions of the day such as Samson and Timm or Peter’s vision on the roof, and to assume that our approach to church and mission are now fixed or true would be rebuffed by post modern theorists such as Paul Ricoeur whose research into narrative, reminds us that identity is fluid as we possess history through time.

¹⁴ Peter Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God* (London: SPCK Publishing, 2006), (p. 19).

As stated this paper researches the impact the learning COTE has had on people who have encountered it, through the story of the project, through dialogue with workers, or through attending specific training events connected with COTE. As such the research was broken down into four sections:

1 A questionnaire was carried out with new youth workers (specifically those in the first year of training on a degree in youth and community work and applied theology) to ascertain the views around missional ecclesiology of people who have not encountered the project.

2. A focus group was undertaken specifically with a group of more experienced workers who had undergone COTE training to assess the benefit and impact the training has had on their thinking and work.

3. Structured interviews were undertaken with key workers who have encountered the project. These workers were selected as they are usually leading a local missional/church organisation and have a reasonable amount of autonomy to shape their local project.

4 Finally structured interviews with national trainers, who often deliver training to church staff and volunteers around mission and fresh expressions. These were selected to gain a broad picture about how people approach church and mission and if they find the COTE methodology to be a helpful model for learners.

The research methodology is discussed in Chapter 4 and the findings presented and analysed in Chapter 5 and 6. However before we move onto those areas the next section discusses some of the key texts and informing constructs that shaped COTE.

3. Informing constructs

As the COTE project has been established for a number of years and builds on several different constructs around mission and ecclesiology, rather than a literature review focusing on specific texts, this section amalgamates several of the key texts and the theories they offer within Grenz and Franks, Culture, Scripture and Tradition paradigm. However, the findings of COTE have already questioned some of the theological (largely ecclesiological) positions and the role tradition has played in potentially subverting the missionary endeavour. Scripture and Tradition will be examined under section 3.1 together drawing on the allegorical images the Bible offers of church, alongside what Bosch and Donovan offer to the missionary tradition. The final section will examine the broader cultural context COTE and interviewees find themselves in.

3.1 Missional Ecclesiology

Whether it is a lack of courage or a lack of imagination, as has already been suggested the contemporary paradigms of church are limited. The authority and orthodoxy that seems implicit within our current understandings of church, makes questioning our current ecclesiological positions difficult. In 1902 Alfred Loisy said “*Jesus foretold the Kingdom and it was the church which came*”.¹⁵ In recent years the emerging church has helped overcome some of this initial inertia, but it is important to recognise the domination that the church has had over mission and emerging ecclesiologies. When discussing the influence the church had Donovan states “it was not scripture or theology which prevented them from doing what

¹⁵Alfred Loisy, *The gospel and the church* (1902) cited in Gerard Mannion, Richard Gaillardetz, Jan Kerkhofs, and Kenneth Wilson, *Readings in church authority* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), (p. 452)

they thought they had a right to do but simply the history of church embedded in a single culture with its own ideas coming from that culture”.¹⁶ It would seem the church felt it needed a level of protectionism as the gospel was explored in new cultures and the reciprocal nature of the process that Schreiter encourages was not offered to the early pioneers. Perhaps more than this, orthodoxy was heralded as a reason to resist mission of this reciprocal nature, but as Bosch points out “theology rightly understood has no reason to exist other than critically accompanying the *Missio-Dei*”.¹⁷

‘The classical doctrine of the *Missio- Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another “movement”: Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.’¹⁸ Bosch’s insights from *Transforming Mission* have indeed done just that and his influence should not be underestimated.¹⁹ If community is “the primary bearer of mission”, and as the gospels demonstrate that community was the context for Jesus ministry, then as Bosch highlights the relationship between mission and church must be more closely considered.²⁰ Yet the term Church (*ekklesia*) only occurs twice in the gospels both in Matthew and in contexts which have been seen to deal with organisation and authority (Matt 16:18 Peter the rock, and Matt 18:20). However the weight is on community so to return to the notion of community, or Jesus communities, as a model for mission and church we see Christ’s new covenant is a new covenant of people with both the remnants of Israel and others from outside or beyond those boundaries.²¹ Essentially it is a paradoxical community one which is open with

¹⁶ Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* New edition (SCM Press, 2001), (p. 122).

¹⁷ Stan Nussbaum, *A Reader's Guide to Transforming Mission* (Orbis Books, 2005), (p. 134).

¹⁸ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* New edition edn (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books (USA), 1992), (p. 390).

¹⁹ There is rarely a book on mission that does not reference *Missio dei*. Alongside this events like the syncroblog on missional and *missio dei* in June 2008 had hundreds of contributors from mission and academic fields.

²⁰ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* New edition (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books (USA), 1992), (p. 472).

²¹ It could be argued the notion of a community around Jesus is a retrospective label in the light of the more organised Johanian and Pauline approaches of the later early church and that the epistemology of the term *ecclesia* comes from this rather than Jesus’ ramshackle bunch of followers

indistinct boundaries, and one distinctive against the world but to love the world. Whilst the notion of missional church may have its roots in Newbiggins work.²²

In the past COTE has used the term 'missional ecclesiology' to give a sense of an emerging community of church, an indistinct approach to community which is itself a missionary community made of those on a journey with Christ that may include non-believers, those on the margins and those at the core. Jesus had a focus on openness, not only to those on the margins of society but open to those at the centre.²³ Missional is used rather than mission to reflect the Missio-Dei and to differentiate from traditional approaches to mission which are often a subset or action of church.²⁴

"New paradigms do not establish themselves overnight. The new paradigm is therefore still emerging..."²⁵ This missional ecclesiology and Bosch's idea of an emerging process is further reinforced when we look to the rest of the New Testament notions of church particularly in Dulles' work on ecclesiology, *Models of Church*.²⁶ Perhaps Dulles is a product of his time, and the pressure to categorise was too much. Essentially Dulles offers a taxonomy of church. Defining and separating these is a difficult task, but it can be argued that it is an impossible and contradictory task based on what Dulles himself offers in the introduction. Here he describes the notion of church as a mystery. Dulles talks about it being a union with the divine, not fully intelligible to human minds "*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.*" *This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the Church.*' (Eph 5:31-32). Dulles suggests that this concept of mystery that is closely linked to the mystery of Christ is why the Bible uses imagery when describing church; therefore it may be easier to define what the

²² James Edward Lesslie Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989), (pp. 122-130).

²³ For example see the story Jarius in Mark 5

²⁴ Michael Frost, *Exiles : living missionally in a post-Christian culture* (Peabody Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006); Darrell Guder, *Missional church : a vision for the sending of the church in North America* (Grand Rapids Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998); Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The missional leader : equipping your church to reach a changing world* 1st ed. (San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

²⁵ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* New edition (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis Books (USA), 1992), (p. 349).

²⁶ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* 2Rev Ed (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 2000).

church is not. He goes on to say that images can suggest “*attitude and a course of action*”.²⁷ Mineaver goes further suggesting that there are over ninety allegorical images of church in the Bible.²⁸

Dulles’ models are derived from Max Weber’s analytical constructs known as ‘Ideal Type’. This sociological approach, as Graham et al suggest, has a strong heritage in theological study.²⁹ Many classic texts using similar typological approaches such as Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*, or Frei’s *Types of Christian theology*.³⁰ Whilst this typology gives room for and recognises the breadth of any theological discourse, its application in ecclesiology is open to question. This is not because the notion of type is not usable, but because of the nature of ecclesiology. The strength of typological approaches are that it enables the reader to engage through a particular lens, to pursue this type, and question through the lens of this type the relevant area of study.

The reader then moves to a new type and repeats the process. However, as ecclesiology is an emerging process, this delineated approach may limit the process that the Biblical allegorical narratives/images demand. Constructing a typology of what is observable, as what we currently understand church to be, is a reasonably straightforward task but as mentioned the Biblical reference made and outlined by Dulles and offered for what church is makes a typological approach inconceivable. As Dulles rightly points out church itself defies a propositional approach, and is MYSTERY. So to say it is this or that is counter to this text and could be seen to invalidate Dulles typological approach.

Typological approaches are nothing new but the perception that new understanding can be derived from the single type draws the learner towards attitude or course of action rather than the dynamic synthesis of the two. Any discipline engendered towards change and

²⁷ Dulles, 13.

²⁸ Paul Minear, *Images of the church in the New Testament* (Louisville Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

²⁹ Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frankie Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods: v. 1* New title edn (London: SCM Press, 2005), (p. 12).

³⁰ Helmut Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (London: Faber, 1962). H. W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* New edition (Yale University Press, 1994).

growth may involve the need to synthesise the concepts into new learning, this would be particularly true in the arena of theology where there are such rich historical fields to plough. Synthesis is a difficult task at the best of times and whilst Dulles clearly seeks to set the models within this sort of mystery; the need to hold in tension the position of church and the protectionism suggested in the introduction means that models that seem to back up the perceived orthodoxy, come to the fore. This perceived orthodoxy is akin to the literary and cultural criticism concept of purposed dominance. Dark draws on Tolkien's distinction between "applicability" which gives dignity to the reader, and facilitates freedom of and for the reader, whilst "allegory" aids the "purposed dominance of the author".³¹ He goes on to align this "purposed dominance" and tightly controlled message as similar to propaganda. Whilst it is not suggested that Dulles uses models in this way it would seem clear that the reader may.

Before we leave this section it is important to see the Ephesians passage within its broader context. In verse 25 it is noted that Christ gave Himself up for the church to make her holy and blameless and which begs the question of what things do we as individuals or organisations need to give up in order to liberate the church to become all that she might? Theological reflection would suggest Christ became powerless on the cross which opened the way to truth and reconciliation, how much does the church as we know it, and its leaders, need to put aside power so others might be liberated to lead us into truth and reconciliation, and can this be done with such a strong *orthodox* view or purposed dominance interpretation of what church is?

In the introduction to *Christianity Rediscovered* an un-named student neatly sums up Donovan's work with the now well quoted statement:

³¹ David Dark, *Everyday Apocalypse: The Sacred Revealed in Radiohead, the Simpsons, and Other Pop Culture Icons* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Brazos Press, 2002), (p. 16).

“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 that 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”.³²

Other stories such as Christ on the Indian Road, like Donovan that come back from the mission field, confirm 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).³³ As Donovan demonstrates so ably, following the *Missio Dei* 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.³⁴ Friere, an educationalist and Christian socialist, approaches this as the ontological imperative.³⁵ The imperative being, human life has to be preserved and liberated, or to paraphrase Jesus ‘life and life in all its fullness’.³⁶

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. Following the *Missio Dei* in a post-Christian world is as much about doing mission as it is about being church. Returning to the Biblical images of attitude and action one could argue what most people know as church is about the attitude/being, and mission is the course of action. This is slightly over simplified, as we must, to hold the tension of being mission orientated in the attitude, thus holding both in a creative tension and NOT separate, adopting a BOTH/AND approach. One could even go as far as to say that most of 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. Hence the need for a term like missional ecclesiology (or *Ecclesio-Dei* offered later) which holds a synergetic tension and balance.

³² Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* New edition (SCM Press, 2001), (p. xix).

³³ John 5 v19

³⁴ Here missionaries were using the reciprocal nature of mission discussed by Schreiter in the introduction long before he coined the term. The missionaries’ version of Schreiter’s inculturation derived from theological reflection in the light of missionary situations they found themselves in. Also see footnote 13

³⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 2Rev Ed (New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 1996), (p. 25-53).

³⁶ John 10 v10

Within Grenz and Franke's construct we have discussed some of the theological considerations and explored the missionary traditions so we now turn to the cultural setting we find ourselves in.

3.2 Missiology in the post modern context

Whether we are in the cultural epoch of post modernity or hyper modernity is debatable and far too broad to deal with in this work.³⁷ Diogenes Allen explains 'post modern thought is discourse in the aftermath of modernity.'³⁸ So exactly what it is, is open to question. As a cultural and epistemological concept however there is some value in having a term to describe the day to day experiences and mindset, art, style etc. or worldview of the missionary context in the west. So in this context we will continue to use the term 'post modern' taking the broad view in line with Allen.

In terms of beginning to think about the impact of post modernity on missiology, which we must as 'The emergence of this post modern ethos has affected all dimensions of western culture including theology'³⁹, we cannot avoid the early animosity towards post modernity by theological thinkers.⁴⁰ Early post modern thinkers particularly the European philosophical relativists such as Derrida and Foucault, centred on deconstructive relativism but as Nancy Murphy highlights there is a difference between this European movement and some of the more constructive arguments put forward by the Anglo-American philosophers. A good example of this more constructive take on post modernity is that of Stiver, who identifies three strands; a critique of modernism, a paradigm shift and, importantly in this case, a 'sketch of the future'.⁴¹ If we are to take the cultural context seriously within the reciprocal nature of inculturation this "sketch of the future" could fuel the re-imagining of church within Grenz and Franke's framework.

Grounding this to the reality of the missionary context we are in, there are a few key areas pertinent to this study that need to be considered. Jones summarises the post modern

³⁷ Barker Chris *Cultural Studies, Theory and Practice* (London: Sage Publications 2000)

³⁸ Grenz and Franke p. 21.

³⁹ Grenz and Franke p. 18.

⁴⁰ It could be argued that theology (like all ologies) is a science and is thus a creation of the enlightenment type of thought.

⁴¹ Grenz and Franke p. 19 -21.

credos as; "Objectivity is out, subjectivity is in, Question everything, There is no Truth with a capital "T," Tell stories, and Never make lists!"⁴² However COTE has taken a synthesised view of these and other generally accepted post modern conditions (PMC) and offered a missional response based on the learning of COTE.⁴³

PMC - Truth is relative

- reinforces the need for missional humility countering the Christendom arrogance.
- mission is about following the Missio Dei, which is a dynamic and possibly enlightening process

PMC - This is my truth

- mission is a dialogue and Christianity is a faith that questions our answers so we can journey together
- we do not have a monopoly on truth but see through a glass dimly that may help liberate us
- if we listen to their truth they will listen to our story

PMC - it is all one

- mission is worship which fuels our faith and gives time to engage with people⁴⁴
- is a response that goes beyond the categories of modernity so can itself be critiqued.
- you will find God in that moment.

PMC - Individualist consumerism

- even here God is present; there is the 'echo of a memory'⁴⁵ that this may not fulfil.

⁴² Tony Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry: Exploring Cultural Shift, Creating Holistic Connections, Cultivating Authentic Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), (p.26-27).

⁴³ See Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Communities in Postmodern Cultures* New title (London: SPCK Publishing, 2006); Laurence Paul Hemming, *Postmodernity's Transcending: Devaluing God* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); Barry Smart, *Postmodernity* 1 edn (Routledge, 1992); Paul D. L. Avis, *A Church Drawing Near: Spirituality and Mission in a Post-Christian Culture* (London: T & T Clark, 2003).

⁴⁴ This is close to Dulles' model of church as the mystical communion and whilst this may offer some helpful insight the weaknesses of typological approaches have already been discussed.

⁴⁵ Bob Mayo, Sylvie Collins, and Sara Savage, *Ambiguous Evangelism* (London: SPCK Publishing, 2004), (p.28).

- the fleeting nature of the purchase and the God who plays hide and seek.

PMC - metanarratives reflect the interests of the powerful

- missional ecclesiology as a process itself may challenge the powerful position of the church.
- the reciprocal nature of COTE missional approach counters any bias to the powerful.

PMC - it is all relative

- opens dialogue and listening which in turn offers and reinforces the desire for relationships.
- a good place to start a journey of discovery.

PMC - hyper criticism

- if a seeker seeks they will find, encourage the questions rather than close down the dialogue by giving an answer.
- the offer and possible discovery of the heretical imperative to liberate ourselves and church.
- Christ is beyond the propositional approaches and faith is not about assent to the particular.⁴⁶

Whilst there is more that could be expounded here, and many of the interviews conducted reinforce the concepts offered above, we now move on to explore the research methodology used.

⁴⁶ Peter Rollins, *The Fidelity of Betrayal: Towards a Church Beyond Belief* (London: SPCK Publishing, 2008).

4. Research Methods and Critique

As Swinton and Mowat remind us Practical Theology has many facets and a wide range of approaches.⁴⁷ Hauerwas who sees practical theology as “dedicated to enabling the faithful performance of the gospel and to exploring and taking seriously the complex dynamics of the human encounter with God”⁴⁸ is helpful in terms of this research. COTE involves both the faithful performance and helping others take seriously the complexity of following the *Missio Dei*. Swinton and Mowat recognise the telos laden nature of practice, and this has already been reflected in synthesised approaches needed in the literature review.⁴⁹ They conclude that as practical theology is a quest for truth, it must examine the theories and assumptions underlying practice. As it is interpretative, practical theology may offer challenging insights into the tradition, yet it stays close to experience and is fundamentally missiological. From its conception COTE set out to do much of this and so one may argue that this research could simply tell the wider story.⁵⁰ However, although COTE has been interpretative and had an impact that does challenge insights from the tradition, the rigour of reporting on this would not have been enough.

So therefore developing a methodology was difficult due to the nature of the COTE project. This was compounded as the story of COTE is known worldwide and is a project designed to disseminate the learning.⁵¹ To narrow down exactly the focus of the study was difficult, as there were many avenues that could have been taken. The root issue identified within the practice and wider disseminated training was the role ecclesiology has in impacting mission. Whilst it was hypothesised that the perceived *orthodoxy* around ecclesiology (the distinction between mission and church) was detrimental to missionary endeavours this research had to

⁴⁷ John Swinton, *Practical Theology and Qualitative research* New title edn (London: SCM Press, 2006), (pp. 3-6).

⁴⁸ Swinton. p 4.

⁴⁹ Swinton. p. 19

⁵⁰ See Appendix Two Project outline

⁵¹ Papers were presented at IASYM conference in Germany 2007 and the COTE story is discussed in Paul McQuillan, Richard Passmore, Gerry Moloney, Peter Hancock, and Mary Eastman, *Encountering the Mystery, Discovering God with young people in a secular world* (Cambridge: YTC Press, 2008) and in Jo Pimlott and Nigel Pimlott, *Youth Work After Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008).

review several stages to build the argument and ensure the rigour of the suspected link rather than, as mentioned, simply telling the story. Therefore as highlighted in the introduction, the research falls into four areas, a questionnaire, two sets of interviews and a focus group.⁵² We will examine each of these sections in turn.

4.1 A questionnaire was carried out with new youth workers (specifically those in the first year of training on a degree in youth and community work and applied theology) to ascertain the views around mission and church of people who have not formally encountered the project through training or reading.⁵³ Due to the limited nature of the study a cluster sample was needed that both offered insight into the views mentioned but that also may offer insight into the telos that COTE contains.⁵⁴ Telos does not exist in a vacuum it forms out of the story and context we find ourselves in. Therefore questions 3 to 6 were designed to reflect the underlying telos and journey of the practitioners that led to the COTE project in case this provided helpful insight.

Whilst care was taken to ensure a mix of measurable questions and those requiring description, the perceived orthodoxy (or purposed dominance) of church could have been problematic. To counter this question 3a: *does the thought of introducing young people you engage with to church cause you any conflict?* Was coupled with 4a: *would attending church as you know it be helpful to the young people you work with?* And 4b: *would attending church as you know it be relevant to the young people you work with?* In some ways it was asking the same question and the deliberate wording of “as you know it” sought to ground it to the local expressions of church, whilst 3a offered an opportunity to the interviewees to be less inhibited if any perceived “orthodoxy” was present. Question 5 and 6 also included the variable of the cultural shift in the language around church that has arisen from recent publications and the profile of fresh expressions etc.⁵⁵

⁵² The research was conducted in line with the ethical guidance processes from Exeter university and a copy of the ethic submission can be found in Appendix Three

⁵³ See Appendix Four

⁵⁴ Nancy J. Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), (pp. 132-133).

⁵⁵ Richard Passmore, *Off The Beaten Track* (Selly Oak, Birmingham: Christian Education, 2004), (pp. 22-23).

To an extent these approaches worked well however analysis is compounded in a work of this nature as “Contextual, Explanatory, Evaluative and Generative”⁵⁶ questions were used. The coupling previously explained meant that at times Explanatory, Evaluative and Generative questions were together making extrapolation more complex.

4.2 A variable that needed to be considered within the research was how much influence the trainer may have had, rather than COTE itself. Therefore a focus group was undertaken with a specific group of more experienced workers who had undergone COTE training to assess the benefit and impact the training has had on their thinking and work. It was felt a period of six weeks was needed between the training and the focus group, to minimise any bias based on the training process and to see if the issues addressed had taken root in any practical way. Questions were directed towards the generative in order to provide information on both the training processes and impact on practice, taking a similar view to that of 4.3 (below) that if the participants really value the concepts it will affect their practice.

4.3. Having explored the base line views of people coming into the field, structured interviews were undertaken with five key workers who have encountered the project. These workers were selected as they are usually leading a local missional/church organisation and have a reasonable amount of autonomy to shape their local project. As such it would be reasonable to suggest that if having encountered the COTE process or concepts in one shape or form, they were now using it in practice, there was value. Therefore structured interviews were conducted. Whilst Bell suggests “A structured interview will produce structured responses”⁵⁷ which may not be helpful when we consider the nature of practical theology already outlined, the level of relationship between the interviewer and interviewee gave a balance to ensure generative and evaluative responses. So whilst the questions provided a focus, dialogue from the interviewer was bound to be present due to the relationship. Therefore this was restricted to enlightening the pre-established questions, or if the interviewee drifted into a

⁵⁶ John Swinton, *Practical Theology and Qualitative research* New title edn (London: SCM Press, 2006), (pp. 51-52).

⁵⁷ Judith Bell, *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-Time Researchers in Education, Health and Social Science* 4 edn (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), (p. 99).

section that was going to be covered. Notes were taken throughout the interview which were then typed and returned to the interviewee by email to agree. The reality of the project meant interviewing people from the south west to the north of Scotland so all the interviews were conducted via telephone. This meant that a full transcript could not be taken due to technological restrictions, and reinforced the importance of records being agreed.

4.4 The final section of the research was semi-structured interviews with 3 national trainers, who often deliver training to church staff and volunteers around mission and fresh expressions.⁵⁸ These were selected to gain a broad picture about how people approach church and mission and if they find the COTE methodology as a helpful model for learners. As the project is interpretative and practical theology praxis orientated, these interviews deliberately built on the co-creation nature of the research process. Swinton and Mowat recognise that whilst the aim of the researcher may be to report on the interview, in reality the researcher is “inevitably a co-creator of the mode and content of the encounter.”⁵⁹ As the researcher is also a national trainer involved in similar activities to those interviewed, there was a potential for participatory research, however, within the scope of this research (due to the limited word count), it was better to avoid potential bias by acknowledging the co-creator role both within the interview process and externally.⁶⁰ Therefore semi-structured interviews were used to adopt a more open dialogical approach. As such the questions were designed to often blend Contextual, Evaluative and Generative concepts to aid this process.

Overall due to the complexity of the piece a good balance was found between addressing the myriad of variables and maintaining rigorous processes. Where bias was identified it was limited as far as possible and appropriate methods were selected and this encouraged both the balance of objectivity and the generative co-creative approaches needed.

⁵⁸ Colin Robson, *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-researchers* 2nd Edition edn (Oxford: WileyBlackwell, 2002).

⁵⁹ John Swinton, *Practical Theology and Qualitative research* New title edn (London: SCM Press, 2006), (p. 55).

⁶⁰ Swinton, p. 227-228

5. Presentation of findings

5.1 Level One Youth Work/Ministry Practitioner Questionnaire

5.1.1 Seven questionnaires were conducted with youth workers randomly selected from a youth and community work and applied theology BA course.⁶¹ In order to be accepted onto the course they are required to have three hundred hours of youth work experience. Several had been involved in Christian youth work for longer, all were under 25 years old. There were five male participants and two female.⁶²

All participants were working part time, 14-20 hours a week in a local church or Christian organisation. The majority of their work was with Christian young people or young people from Christian families, except one participant who was working in the community through detached work. The participant's awareness of COTE or Flow was questioned, three had a very limited awareness, and the others had none.⁶³

5.1.2 Question 2 was divided into three sections exploring the participant's thoughts around mission and church. Discussing the difference between church and mission, six of the seven answered yes there is a difference, with most seeing mission as an element of church, usually as the vehicle to bring people into church. Whilst the person who answered no stated "*....church should be part of our mission life.....*"

5.1.3 Questions three and four explored the participant's attitudes and thoughts around church and the young people they worked with. To the third question: *Does the thought of introducing young people you engage with to church cause you any conflict?* Six answered yes and one no.

⁶¹ see www.centreforyouthministry.ac.uk

⁶² A full transcript of the questionnaire results can be found in appendix five

⁶³ Flow relates to one of the well known stories of the COTE project so this was used as well in case they had heard the story but not connected it to COTE.

Those who answered affirmatively used words such as *pretty irrelevant, pressure, too formal, boring. Very institutional.*

5.1.4 There was a more mixed response to question four, with four people answering that attending church as they know it would be helpful to the young people they work with, even though six of the seven participants said that church would not be relevant.

5.1.5 Question five asked: would you call any of the work you engage in with young people, an expression of church? Six replied yes and one did not answer. The table below outlines the youth work they are engaged with and explains why the participants thought it was church:

Description	Explanation
Sunday morning meeting together exploring faith.	Church is believers meeting together in different forms and part of that is exploring and teaching and fellowship.
Primarily social group but with conversation that is often focused on spiritual issues and always containing a form of prayer. Very informal and loose.	This is an expression of church as it focuses on God at points and always contains an element of talking to God.
Young people aged 11-17. Brought up in a traditional Anglican church. Very limited experience of Christianity and/or other denominations/styles.	Strong emphasis of God. People coming together to learn about God (?)
In cell group we meet together we spend time in worship and discuss Bible passages. We also love the chance to pray for one another.	It consists of key values and elements that I regard as important for a 'church' setting or expression.
A monthly youth event for all the young people across churches in town to come together to worship God, Christian Unions (working to make their faith known).	The monthly event allows young people to have their own space to worship and learn more about the God they love and serve. Christian Union gives the young people the

	opportunity to make their faith known and encourage one another.
I help the young people run their own youth congregation.	It is young people coming together because of their love for God.

5.1.6. All the participants felt that the idea of the youth group they were involved in being an expression of Church was a positive concept.

5.2 Level Two Focus Group

Six participants from an afternoon COTE training session took part in the focus group.⁶⁴ These participants were more experienced than those in 5.1 with at least two years of significant practice experience. They were each given a copy of the questions and invited to record any particular thoughts or feelings, the researcher also took notes.⁶⁵ At the end of the session the researcher's notes were agreed with the group. The key findings from the focus group were that as more advanced practitioners they had already begun to question the established ecclesiological paradigm they found themselves in. As in 5.3 the participants recognised the irrelevance of the main bridge analogy. However, this group was more nuanced recognising that as we were in a transitional culture it does have some merit. It was also noted how powerful the stories around COTE were and even though some members felt their initial encounters with COTE suggested it was heretical, the power of the story overcame these fears. One person commented it was 'frustratingly constructive and not easily dismissed'. COTE had clearly impacted both their thinking and their practice. As more experienced practitioners but without the authority to direct the projects, it was noted that *where tacking meets the bridge it was turbulent waters*, i.e. when they felt they needed to explore new models but as they were in an old setting it was difficult. However the balance of story and theology had enabled them to more confidently challenge established forms of work, and managers, and encouraged them to think at a deeper level.

5.3 Level Three Key Workers structured interview

⁶⁴ A copy of the slides from the training event can be found in Appendix Six

⁶⁵ A consolidated copy of the member's notes and the researchers notes can be found in Appendix Seven and Appendix Eight

The main findings from the key workers, both in terms of thinking and practice, were that COTE has had a significant impact. This was evidenced by people building the process into their job roles or descriptions, and using the stories with their volunteers etc.⁶⁶ It was recognised by all participants that things needed to change; ‘that the party is over’ for Church and youth mission as we know it. For the majority of participants this came from the practice they found themselves in, where current approaches were no longer valid. However, they also recognised that some attractional models of Church could still work due to the current transitional culture. All participants strongly noted the importance of the ongoing relationship and dialogue with COTE practitioners, the importance of having somebody slightly ahead on the journey. For many they were clearly reflective practitioners and as such the idea was not of an external expert but more a theological partner or dialogue with other practitioners working in a similar way. It was noted that having someone come from outside to deliver training was helpful in reinforcing the messages they were already giving their volunteers and less experienced staff, but that was not being heard.

5.4 National trainer Semi-Structured interviews

It became clear from the three interviews conducted that established training programmes are struggling to equip missional pioneers and many adopt a “priest plus” role where people are trained on a standard course with some additional roles and input.⁶⁷ The impact of COTE was high and all had used stories from the project in their training sessions. All agreed that current understandings of church were, for the majority, off kilter with most encountering the concepts of mission and church being at best rooted in “medieval mindsets”, or not really understood. Whilst all participants felt the COTE process was helpful, two suggested that it was less important than the intentionality of COTE and a support role alongside this.

5.5 Other Results

Several people across the groups mentioned that culture is still in an in-between time and traditional models of church may remain effective for some.⁶⁸ It could be assumed that the

⁶⁶ An annotated transcript of the results can be found in Appendix Nine

⁶⁷ An annotated transcript of the results can be found in Appendix Ten

⁶⁸ This was already mentioned in 5.1.4 and by two key workers, one national trainer, and one member of the focus group.

amount of resources expended by churches suggested that this correlated with effectiveness. However, what was surprising was how far post-Christendom and secularisation seemed to have lessened the effect of this model in practice even though much energy and resources were expended in bridge type approaches. In one of the national trainer interviews it was clear that most youth ministry still works to the bridge model, but the results from two key workers would suggest that statistically this is no longer effective. The lessening impact in number terms can be summarised as about 50% of their community contacts attending open groups. 50% of these attend Alpha or searcher groups, then 50% of these will attend church events with >50% or one or two young people attending church.

There also seemed to be some correlation between the level of experience of those involved in the research and their openness to new ideas and concepts presented. This was picked up in all the structured interviews with key workers, and reinforced with the focus group. The more engaged people had been with the world beyond church, and the young people out in the community, the more they had experienced the current paradigm or bridge approach as either not working or limiting, the less reticent they were to engage both with the stories presented and the ecclesiological shift suggested.

6. Discussion of findings

Although taking four different levels of participants, from newer practitioners to more experienced workers and trainers, the messages were very consistent.

Starting with the newer practitioners, as suspected in 4.1 the perceived orthodoxy and traditional interpretation of church was problematic. This was reinforced by the findings from the interviews with the national trainers. Yet at the same time the change in language around mission and church as discussed in the introduction is having effect as evidenced in 5.1.6. The response outlined in 5.1.5 is most telling as although participants saw a difference in church and mission in the opening questioning, their response here illustrated that they saw the two more aligned. The congregations and agencies they worked for would maintain the difference but the participants were already seeing the work they were doing as an expression of church. The comments expressed in the table in 5.1.5 suggest that although they are using the language, that their work could be an “expression” of church; in reality they are doing nothing new. As one of the national trainers suggested *“Lots of Fresh expressions are rebranded ways of re-doing what’s been done before”*.

Whilst the trainer was discussing a frustration at the lack of truly innovative new forms of church, it would seem clear that even here the language had changed. The participants saw what they were doing as church, but the sentiment and dominant paradigm of church is still maintained rather than the missional ecclesiology discussed in section 3.1. Thus the potential for change and growth remained limited and it would be fair to say that although progress has been made as the intellectual grip of traditional ecclesiology has lessened; the reality is that the work specified in 5.1.5 was taking place predominantly with Christian young people where the focus is on discipleship rather than balanced with mission. Newbigin could be helpful here when he suggests the link between church and kingdom in that church is called to be a “credible sign, instrument and foretaste of God’s reign over all nations and

things”⁶⁹ and the reasons given by the participants would confirm this. Yet it was limited to the groups they were involved with rather than all nations and things i.e. other young people beyond those of church families.

It could certainly be argued that as the most inexperienced group the new practitioners have not had enough time to experience what was highlighted by the key workers, namely that their shift in thinking around mission and ecclesiology had come from both the conversations and input around COTE and more importantly from their experiences of engaging people on the ground. Again from the more experienced focus group members; experience and exposure to the changing culture had raised more questions. So the level of engagement in the missionary endeavour is critical, as is the reality of situations the workers find themselves in. As they seek to serve the young people, this challenges their own mindsets and ecclesiology paradigms. As one key worker said “There are so many major barriers that I don’t see the point of trying to cross them.” This is discussed later in change of language from missional ecclesiology to Ecclesio-Dei.

It also clearly emerged from several participants that the concept of a mentor or coach who came alongside the key worker was important. Where the contact with the project had been made through delivering training to the key worker’s team, participants in the research expressed that having an outside person delivering this was important as it reinforced many of the messages they had already been expressing to their team. The critical role of both having a person who is able to deliver training and challenge the stereotypical views around Church that people have, and then go onto mentor the key worker, is vital. This process is also very practical in enabling the ‘mentor/coach’ role as they will have a higher degree of awareness of the project that the mentee is working in.

The surprise of the findings in 5.5 (although this is a small sample) along with the evidence of how much energy and resource is expended on the bridge model must be discussed. It could be suggested that based on national statistics for church attendance similar numbers would attend church due to family links as those making it through the bridge method. So with

⁶⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* Revised edn (Grand Rapids Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), (p. 169).

increased secularisation, it is questionable if resources expended during the transitional phase are being well directed, bearing in mind the dwindling nature of such resources. Quite what is maintaining this effort is hard to pin down other than it could still be stemming the tide to some degree and/or that the perceived orthodoxy of church is so strong that it must be maintained even in the face of evidence that it may not be a the best use of resources. Pete Ward explores the roles of parents in youth ministry, including that of being givers to youth ministry in churches due to the perceived need of something relevant for their children and as such may hold sway in how the resources are spent.⁷⁰ Ward also suggests that “Adult congregations like parents must prefer to sacrifice their own lives so the next generation might live and grow”.⁷¹

Alan Richardson suggests “All Christian doctrine arises from Christian experience”,⁷² in many ways this statement validates the praxis approach to mission and ecclesiology (church). It also gives space for developing doctrine and possibly theology in and out of the current context or experience. Both the key workers and those participating in the focus groups were expressing this level of praxis that had already begun to challenge their thinking and ecclesiological paradigm. Their experiences of following Missio-Dei had challenged their mindsets, and when presented with an alternative that was both theologically rooted and practice (story) driven, it offered a new way of interpreting their already dawning experiences. What was pointed out in the focus group was that what COTE offered was more than an ordinary metaphor about how things could be. It is a new way of thinking about practice grounded in Biblical understanding and coupled with story and this had shown how the change in thinking had led to dynamic changes in practice.

⁷⁰ Pete Ward, *Youth culture and the Gospel* (England: Marshall Pickering, 1992); Pete Ward, *Growing Up Evangelical* (London: SPCK Publishing, 1996).

⁷¹ Peter Ward, *God at the Mall: Youth Ministry Meeting Kids Where They're at* (Peabody Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers Inc, 1999), (p. 137).

⁷² Alan Richardson, *Creeds in the making : a short introduction to the history of Christian doctrine* 1st Fortress Press ed. edn (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), (p. 14).

Conceptually Bourdieu builds on earlier ideas of Habitus – cultures way of behaving and norms making society possible, which we are socialised into.⁷³ Bourdieu suggests that habitus was more than this and that through our participation we contribute to the unfolding “habitus” i.e. it is a two way dialogical or iterative process. Taking Bourdieu’s concept with the findings across all four of the participant groups questioned, it is possible to draw two tentative points. Firstly, due to the power of the established paradigm of church, even in the light of the unfolding experiences of practitioners, little has changed in the dominance of established church paradigm. Secondly, that even though much has been said to people that church and mission should be more closely linked, for example a member of the focus group said they had been told about the need for more joined up thinking before but changed nothing, or the key worker who said having someone from outside was valuable to say what they had already been saying in a different way, nothing had changed. What COTE managed to do by coupling the challenge to the established orthodoxy of what is church to it’s own unfolding story, was create a space for participative habitus in the sense of Bourdieu. So whilst it is argued that “the task of rebuilding Christian theology in a more authentic fashion requires a critique of the points at which tradition has misrepresented the spirit of the gospel; and then a reconstruction of theology according to emancipatory principles”.⁷⁴ It can equally be argued that when these emancipatory principles are told, or the tradition critiqued, that it must be accompanied by the liberatory story that initially gave rise to the need for change, so that it can have any hope of getting through the layers of misrepresentation that have accumulated over the years.

“It is surprising so few want to belong. But as fewer belong, fewer will believe”⁷⁵ Although stating the obvious Moynagh raises the question to what are we asking to belong to? Here is the root of one of the initial questions COTE had. From the research groups it would appear that few participants had problems in engaging young people. Yet whilst we maintain an outdated approach to church we are suggesting that the young people need to belong to

⁷³ Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frankie Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods: v. 1* New title edn (London: SCM Press, 2005), (p. 191).

⁷⁴ Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frankie Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods: v. 1* New title edn (London: SCM Press, 2005), (p. 163).

⁷⁵ Michael Moynagh, *Changing World, Changing Church* (London: Monarch Books, 2001), (p. 78).

something that has little relevance to them, little hope of changing, or even see the need itself to change. So when we realign the boundaries alongside the intentionality, and approach church with the powerlessness of Christ everyone can belong, and as the missionary apologetic unfolds and is shaped by all present, something is created to which everyone belongs.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

In 2008 at a gathering of small missional communities, CMS Director of Mission and Community The Rev Canon Chris Neal suggested that the church in the UK has found itself in a double wrapped paradigm that inhibits Christian's effectiveness in mission. The wrapping consists of modernist/Christendom orientated mindsets and the structures that have grown up around these resources. Neal posed the question; what resources will give us enough velocity to break out of the gravitational pull we find ourselves in? Whilst discussion led to how new initiatives are quickly pulled back by this gravitational impetus, a small but significant number suggested the need of a heretical imperative as the only way to break the malaise. For many COTE has been initially seen as a heretical approach to church, but as discussed in section three, the ecclesiological model offered is consistent with the Biblical narrative. The hypothesis of this research suggested that practitioners hold a dualist distinction between mission and church, which can be limiting, however, by challenging this distinction and understanding the COTE process, mission orientated practitioners are released into a creative space and way of thinking that enables them to engage more effectively with the communities they serve.

The limited research offered here would certainly suggest that to be the case. However, whilst the hypothesis suggested that, understanding the COTE process would play a central role, the research clearly identified the stories that accompany the process are at least as important. This is both the story of COTE following Missio-Dei and the stories of the participants following Missio-Dei. This is a new key part of the picture as it was clearly discovered, the importance of experience for those engaging in mission and the impact this missional engagement had already had on their understanding and on their openness to new concepts, particularly in relation to missional ecclesiology where people are being asked to consider a complete paradigm shift. Therefore to value the experiences of where those already following Missio-Dei, and the reciprocal nature of this, (as suggested in the abstract) a better term than missional ecclesiology would be Ecclesio-Dei or following the Ecclesio-Dei. In that Missio-Dei is a well known concept and borrowing from this Ecclesio-Dei suggests the attention/attitude discussed in 3.1. This denotes the missional and ecclesiological task more fully, replacing the emphasis back onto God and synthesis required by the Biblical narrative.

Reinforcing this is the concept of Соборность: translated as Sobornost, meaning a spiritual community of many jointly living people, was originally a philosophical term. It was used by Nikolai Lossky and other 20th century Russian thinkers to refer to a middle way of co-operation between several opposing ideas.⁷⁶ This was based on Hegel's "dialectic triad"—thesis, antithesis, synthesis—and Lossky defined sobornost as "*the combination of freedom and unity of many persons on the basis of their common love for the same absolute values.*"⁷⁷ Rowan Williams discusses the term a number of times in his study of Eastern Orthodox theologians.⁷⁸ In relation to this study Sobornost offers a third way and helpful theological backdrop to COTE and the work of Bourdieu around habitus discussed in the previous section. In that a central part of Ecclesio-Dei is the journey at times with non-believers (who may have opposing ideas, antithesis) and the journey towards life in all its fullness that sobornost affirms. As Williams expounds building on Bulgakov "the church is

⁷⁶ Sergei Ozhegov, *Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language* (Moskva: A Temp, 2007).

⁷⁷ Chris Sciabarra, *Ayn Rand : the Russian radical* (University Park Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), (p. 28).

⁷⁸ David Ford, *The modern theologians : an introduction to Christian theology since 1918*. 3rd ed. (Malden MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005), (pp. 572-586).

essentially the fellowship of the Spirit, held together by the ontological bond of God's love,..... the rest is a matter of conditioned historical decisions and polices.”⁷⁹ It is often the antitheistic/genuine reciprocal nature of having unbelievers influencing the dialogue about what church is that people often struggle with. Sobornost provides a Christian tradition where genuine reciprocal mission can be located.

Following the Missio-Dei into the communities served has led the workers researched, into questions, challenges and difficulties in the practice. At times it has been expressed as uncomfortable or lonely, and often they have questioned if they were on the right road. Yet what has been discovered is that it is this very act of following the Missio-Dei that enabled them to move beyond their original thesis, to encountering COTE, which for many initially seemed as the uncertain ground of antithesis through to the discovery that COTE/missional ecclesiology offers a new synthesis. Mission and church being two sides of the same coin and Sobornost in this context being the unity of persons moving forward on the basis of mutual acceptance and a desire to grow into fullness of life. Therefore we need to follow the Ecclesio-Dei to create together new Sobornistic ecclesial communities.

As Murray comments we need to encounter “the missionary of God”.⁸⁰ Yet what this research suggests is that by doing so we will recognise that, “...radical changes are needed in self-identity, priorities, structure and ethos”.⁸¹ The research further suggests that changes cannot come from simply recognising the post-Christendom condition as the purposed dominance of church is too strong. Further evidence of the strength of this purposed dominance can be seen by theologian's engagement with local contextual theology. In his work on Local theology, John Reader suggests that local theology is “a situated understanding of the Christian tradition” and “the task of local theology is to identify ways of relating the symbols and insights of the faith community to the experiences and ideas of other groups in the

⁷⁹ Williams in David Ford, *The modern theologians : an introduction to Christian theology since 1918*. 3rd ed. (Malden MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005), (pp. 576-577)

⁸⁰ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Authentic Media, 2004), (p. 137).

⁸¹ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Authentic Media, 2004), (p. 138).

community”.⁸² These definition statements along with similar presented on practical theology, whilst valuing the context, clearly operate within a realm that does not fully embrace the reciprocal nature of mission earlier described.⁸³ An example could be Hauerwas who was quoted in Section 4, and who seems more open to genuine dialogue, still uses terms like “faithful performance of the gospel”⁸⁴, or the common understanding that applied theology is taking the ideas of the scholarly world to be applied to the cultural contexts of the real world, all can now be seen as loaded statements. Perhaps the purposed dominance that theology can provide universal truths or doctrines even pervades applied or practical theology which itself is supposed to aid the missional task rather than hinder it.

This research shows that countering this purposed dominance is a difficult task. What is needed is to acknowledge and understand where people are in encountering the missionary context (following the *Missio-Dei*). To balance this with the dynamic stories of others encountering the Spirit through following the *Missio-Dei* (with all possibilities that this has to offer) and who have not been held back by the perceived orthodoxy, and then to offer or accompany the stories where appropriate with a rigorous *Ecclesio-Dei* underpinned where appropriate with Sobornost traditions.⁸⁵ This then hopefully creates the right conditions to release people’s imagination to discover the reality of what is discussed in Ephesians 2:21-22 “*In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*”

Having discussed some of the theological constructs around we now turn to consider some practical applications when we apply the learning from this research. Firstly when conducting training it may be useful to revisit Grenz and Franke’s method for ‘doing’ theology in a post modern age that uses the interaction of culture, Biblical text and tradition in forming the initial

⁸² John Reader, *Local theology : church and community in dialogue*. (London: Spck, 1995), (p. 3)

⁸³ John Patton, *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Oxford: WileyBlackwell, 1999).

⁸⁴ John Swinton, *Practical Theology and Qualitative research* New title edn (London: SCM Press, 2006), (p. 4).

⁸⁵ See Appendix Eleven

project. In the light of the research findings this framework can easily provide a good set of parameters for training and dialogue. Whilst discussing culture, it is entirely possible to get participants to reflect on the communities they find themselves in and so begin to understand how far they have travelled with the Missio-Dei, and then decide how much to focus on the story over the ecclesiology.⁸⁶ As at times volunteers or workers who may initially look like they are at Level 1 may have a far more developed sense of openness due to personal or other circumstances. Secondly Ecclesio-Dei needs to be robust, drawing from the Biblical narrative text and presented alongside the story. By carefully introducing appropriate stories this may counter inertia due to the purposed dominances of established church mindsets. Finally the traditions presented in the discussion earlier (Sobornost) can offer significant weight to the process. These traditions may offer a certain security and when balanced with the missionary traditions and stories discussed in section 3 again offers participants a secure backdrop to address the need for a paradigm shift towards Ecclesio-Dei and a re-imagining of church and mission.⁸⁷

The need for mentoring/coaching and some sort of other support/network of relational youth ministry practitioners following the Missio-Dei is also clearly identified. Whilst the advances in technology can help make this network more easily accessible and maintained, the nature of the work and demands of cutting edge practice demand something more. One model that could be developed is that of a community of practice.⁸⁸ Etienne Wenger suggests many people assume and approach learning as that which 'has a beginning and an end; that it is best separated from the rest of our activities; and that it is the result of teaching'.⁸⁹ However they recognise that learning can also take place beyond this and essentially humans are learning all the time in community. It is from this that they develop the idea of community of practice, identifying three core aspects that make a community of practice as they define it. These being *The domain*, the community has a shared interest area, *The community*, within this domain the community share learning and dialogue, and *The practice*, members of the

⁸⁶ See Appendix Eleven

⁸⁷ A transcript of an alternative training session and slides based on these suggestions can be found in Appendix Twelve

⁸⁸ "Jean Lave, Etienne Wenger and communities of practice."

⁸⁹ "Jean Lave, Etienne Wenger and communities of practice," (p. 2)

community are themselves practitioners in the domain of the community. This defined and dialogical process is akin to the iterative process mentioned in section 6. However here the community of practice can itself be culture/habitus forming and enable experimentation and growth that can then be applied back in the individual communities the members serve. The reflective practitioner approach of many involved would suggest that it could be an ideal model to adopt in this case. The coaching/mentor role is more obvious and well known, but as one of the national trainers suggested having someone who can ask the “*type of questions that come from a practitioner or experience backed worker who can ask the right missional question*” is important.⁹⁰ This role can be easily developed and within the field of youth and community work the role of a non line manager or supervisor is familiar. Working on an adapted model of this would be a straightforward way to progress. Both roles, that of the mentor and a facilitator role for the community of practice need to be planned and intentionally developed or they will be missed. Therefore a business plan has been developed to approach trusts for a key worker for COTE.⁹¹

Richardson suggests “the earliest doctrinal statements were thus missionary apologetics, not intellectual systems of theological speculation”.⁹² Whilst COTE and this research could come as a piece of theological speculation on ecclesiology it is hoped that what has been offered is a missionary apologetic for our time. A time when the structures that govern, need to release those on the frontline, with the permission to make mistakes and to move beyond the perceived orthodoxy of where we currently are. Empowering and resourcing these people to become the co-creators of new imaginative forms of church that can not only truly transform the communities they serve but also through dialogue and story transform the church as we know it.

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⁹⁰ See Appendix Seven

⁹¹ A copy of the business plan is available but too large to include in the appendix.

⁹² Alan Richardson, *Creeds in the making : a short introduction to the history of Christian doctrine* 1st Fortress Press ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), (p. 16)

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