

The Development of Anglican Schools as places of Mission

by Revd Dr Howard Worsley

Howard Worsley is Director of Education for Southwell & Nottingham Diocese, having previously taught theology at St John's College in Nottingham

In order to begin to engage with the notion of developing Church schools as places of mission, it is necessary to have an understanding of three questions;

- I) **What is a church school?**
- II) **What are the models of mission for a church school?**
- III) **How is development from one stage of being to another to take place?**

In undertaking to consider such an exploration, I will draw on a small but relevant bibliography. I do so from my own context of Director of Education of an Education Department in the midlands, and as a former theological educator and priest. In this I am aware that my exploration is fuelled by the belief that Church schools are able to forward the mission of God and of the Church at a time when the Church of England is assessing her resources and engagement in the nation.

I) What is a Church School?

1) History of Church Schools

An outline of the history of the Church's commitment to the provision of education goes back over centuries. A summary of recent history since the establishment of the National Society in 1811, is recorded in Chapter 2 of The Way Ahead Report (2001) which traces the involvement of the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches in their responses to the succeeding education acts. This seminal report then goes on to describe the purpose of Church schools in terms of provision of education standing at the "centre of the Church's mission to the nation." It notes a development of emphasis since the Durham Commission of Enquiry in 1970 when the Church's role in mission was seen to focus more on service than on nurture. In the twenty-first century, the church school is effectively a partnership with the local education authority, but one that is distinctive and inclusive, one that has different governance and that may operate an admissions policy that has criteria relating to faith. A *history* of this in a given context is essential information.

2) Categories of Church Schools

The Dearing Report continues to denote that in the vast array of different church schools, secondary and primary, voluntary aided, voluntary controlled and foundation, urban and rural, there is distinctiveness of *category* in being a faith school. This is reflected in the delivery of RE (and its inspection), in the Christian nature of collective worship and in the general ethos. These three things are to be inspected by the section 48 inspection (formerly section 23) that is peculiar to the Church school.

Within an increasingly pluralist society, the words of the late Lord Runcie relating to Church Schools stand true when he said that they,

"nourish those of the faith
encourage those of other faiths and
challenge those of no faith."

3) Theological Models of Christian Education

Behind these general definitions of the church school are a variety of *theological models of Christian education*. The three principle theological models are;

- a) education into Christianity,
- b) education about Christianity,
- c) education in a Christian manner.

Discussions about these models is offered in Astley 2002 (issue 10) in which he notes that the latter model whereby schools are places where pupils are taught "Christianly" is most predominant in educational thinking in Britain where there is a notion of teaching and learning Christianity.

A summary of the variety of types of Anglican school is noted in appendix A where J.Astley elsewhere (2001 issue 8) offers an initial template of 12 models of Church schools before he discusses issues of mission and evangelism in the school context.

The school context, like any other context, must be suitably understood before being offered a model of mission. To open this up in a contained manner I have used the work of Hasler (2005) who discusses context as culture, geography and economic value.

4) The context of the church school seen in the local culture

Writing about context *as culture*, Hasler wishes there to be an understanding of ethnic, class, professional/managerial and rural culture. He notes that ethnic communities bring distinctive values even as they adapt to British culture. His understanding of class culture is informed by the notion of taste (Bourdieu 1984) in which a professional class is distinguished by a mentalist attitude, a working class is distinguished by its physicality and a rural class by its connection to place.

5) The context of the church school seen in local geography

Looking at context as *geography*, schools might be identified to be situated in a city centre, inner city, a housing estate, the suburbs or the village. In each instance, Hasler notes that neighbourhood will mean something very different.

6) The context of the church school seen in prevailing economic terms

Finally, in looking at context as *economic value*, Hasler notes the seismic cultural shift from the 'means of production' to the 'means of consumption.' There is a move to make people customers rather than patients, passengers or members which, applied to the context of school is for pupils to be users or clients rather than students.

To summarise this section concerns identifying what it is to be a particular church school. Identification must be made of six things, namely the school's history, its category, its theology of education and also its context expressed culturally, geographically and economically.

II) What are the models of mission for a church school?

I am indebted to Jeff Astley for his work in writing about mission in the context of school. He writes (2001 issue 8) that:

The Mission of the Church is always to proclaim the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ, in word and deed. It is to witness to the forgiveness and new life which God offers to all..... through the Cross of Jesus Christ. It is also to witness in intelligent and faithful action to His compassion, His reconciling love and His righteousness among all people. It is to bear witness to the grace and power of the new creation in every aspect of daily life. It is frequently said that Christianity is essentially a missionary religion 'A Christianity with no mission at all would not be Christianity' (Barth 1961). The church's mission may be seen as an expression of its 'catholic' universality. The root meaning of mission is sending (from Latin 'mittere'). In theology, the basic understanding of mission is of an activity of God, who sends prophets, apostles (Greek 'apostellein', to send forth) and evangelists, and supremely his son, in order to fulfil the *tasks of mission*.

7) The tasks of mission

These are:

- a) To proclaim God's words (kerygma', proclamation);
- b) To inaugurate God's salvation, by enacting God's works through a ministry ('diakonia', service) that is continuous with God's compassion (pastoral ministry) and justice (pastoral and prophetic ministry); and
- c) To create God's community ('koinonia' fellowship), by means of (a) and (b).

These three tasks of mission go necessarily together constituting an indivisible unity. But c) (koinonia) should not be narrowly understood, for the purpose of mission is not the expansion of the church. The church is merely God's agent in God's mission of salvation to the world. The church's calling is to *participate* in God's mission, the end of which is the kingdom. When the kingdom comes, the vocation of the church will have been fulfilled and the church will come to its (literal) end. The vocation of the church is therefore to help bring about, and then make way for, what is to come. In this sense it is an eschatological purpose (J Macquarrie 1977).

This broad understanding of mission (the whole) may be related in different ways to evangelism, as a part of that whole. Thus, where evangelisation wins new members of the church, the aim of that work is not to increase the church's size, but to enable it to penetrate the world more successfully with the message and actuality of God's own ministry to the world. Evangelism is the spreading of the good news by proclamation, whereas mission is the outflow of the love of God and through our life, word and deed (Osthathios cited in Abraham 1989).

Nevertheless, church pronouncements and popular theology have often distinguished a narrower conception of mission focusing on the proclamation of good news, as in a) (kerygma) above, and the consequent expansion ('planting', 'growth') of the Christian church, as in a narrow construal of c) (koinonia) above. On this narrower view, mission is distinguished from the diaconal or service dimension of the church's expressed in b) (diakonia).

In his more recent work, where he maps such wider understanding of mission into the church school context, (2002) Astley adds a fourth task of mission in the post Dearing era, namely the notion of working for human dignity. He notes that these latter three concepts of diakonia, koinonia and working for human dignity are all implicit notions of mission unlike the explicit concept of kerygma.

Within a church school it is important to distinguish the sense in which mission is expressed implicitly and explicitly and with the different tasks outlined. Astley (2002) details how *three different aspects of theology* emerge from these tasks of mission, namely the theology of service, the theology of nurture and the theology of prophecy.

Clearly, given the different models of mission and the variety of theology underpinning them, there will be a wide range of ways in which to discover appropriate development. Into all this it is important to also offer further understanding as to context in that the model of mission needs to respond appropriately to context.

8) Mission in a pluralistic context

It is of course important that mission is carefully defined in a pluralist society, even if such society is rather termed "post Christian society" or even "post 9/11" or "post 7/7" society.

The Church of England's position on faith schools in 2005 remains unambiguous in that they are to be distinctively Christian whilst being as inclusive as possible of their local community. Canon John Hall has been keen to publicise that the church is working to increasing the number of faith schools in accordance with parental demand and that such schools are intended to develop community cohesion (see discussion with Frank Dobson on BBC1 on 20th July).

Much has been written as to the relative stance of Christian mission in the presence of other world faiths and of particular value are the works of Leslie Newbigin.

My views in brief are that the church's responsibility is initially to make Christ visible, and then to make disciples of those who follow Christ. As to the first responsibility, there is a key verse in John's gospel where the historic Christ is recorded to say "And I, if I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself." (John 12 v 32, referring to John 3 v 14).

This, put simply, shows the church's task to be proclaiming in a wide arena.

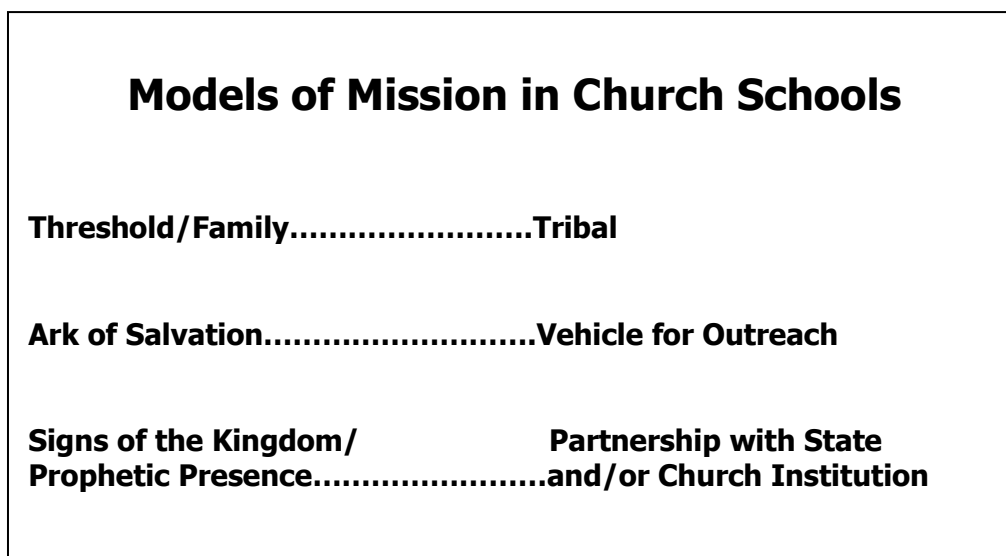
The Great Commission (Matthew 28 v 19) then instructs the disciples to nurture those who follow. It is crucial that they are seen to 'make disciples' rather than 'to convert'.

The church school therefore is a place of proclamation, in that it is clear and unashamed in its task to reveal Christ. In that those of other faiths will be present as Christ is revealed, is not a cause for division, unless the intent is simply to convert. If the school has an inclusive understanding of Christ – as one who is understood within other constraints and other faiths, it is easier to see that the revealing of Christ is welcome to other faiths. Where this has been effective includes many areas where Christianity is not the dominant religion, where parents of children from other faiths are keen to send their child to a Christian school rather than a school that is agnostic in its ethos.

The church school is also a place of nurture, where children of the faith can be encouraged to explore, challenge and own the Christian faith in the curriculum and extra curricular activities.

9) The models of mission

To process this work further are the insights from a task group of diocesan directors on education, who undertook to identify the *models of mission* implicit in The Way Ahead Report (TWA) (2001) and in the Mission Shaped Church (MSC) Report (2004). In summary the group, working in 2005, identified a number of models or metaphors which could be detected in the two reports. The list may not be complete and the models may not be exclusive. It is recognised that some of these models may be in tension/dialogue with one another.



'Nurture' was identified as a motive or a means for several models, but not as a model in itself. The group was also aware of the description of the church school as 'kind of church.' Rather than discuss this at the outset, it was decided that the six chosen models/metaphors of church should be the way into an analysis of this suggestion.

The interim document describes each model/metaphor in turn and briefly describes where evidence for each can be discerned in TWA and MSC.

A copy of the interim document can be seen at appendix B.

To summarise this section concerning identifying what it is for a church school to be a place of mission, identification must be made of two things, namely the school's task of mission and the model of mission.

III) Development from one Stage of being to another.

In the school context, which is greatly influenced by Ofsted, there is a presumption that everything can be measured and that once this has been done, everything can be developed within the given standard of measurement.

This piece of work does not presume this, but wishes to note that some measurements defy exterior standards of analysis if they are to be useful. Rather, I wish to borrow from Ofsted's more recent thinking for its inspections by using the notes of self evaluation and applying this to the context of individual schools and models of mission. If a school does this work, it will then be able to identify its own goals and the benchmarks that are appropriate to it.

This line of thinking emerged for me when I was addressing a group of section 48 inspectors, speaking under the given title "Inspection of Spirituality in the Church School." The assembled team of qualified educationalists were keen to explore how to inspect what it is that promotes spirituality, rather than to inspect spirituality with the 'prior' notion that a pre-existent benchmark has been identified (which was deemed to be impossible). The ensuing discussion was able to offer general benchmarks of spirituality and specific benchmarks of religious spirituality, but considered that to universalise such understanding would be of no value. In other words, any school that wishes to be seen to be spiritual and to show this to an inspection team must first identify its own benchmarks, and offer a form of self evaluation that shows how they wish to promote and develop spirituality.

10) Self evaluative process to develop mission in the church school

Similarly, I suggest that for the present enquiry the development of Anglican Schools as places of mission follows a ten part process of self evaluation.

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| 1) Identify the school category. | } | See 1) Church Schools Analysis |
| 2) Identify the school's history. | | |
| 3) Identify the school's relationship to its local Church Churches) and the emergent theology of education. | } | See 2) Models of Mission Analysis |
| 4) Identify the cultural content. | | |
| 5) Identify the geographical context. | | |
| 6) Identify the economic value context. | } | See 3) Development from one stage of being to another. |
| 7) Identify the predominant task of mission. | | |
| 8) Identify their mission in a pluralistic context. | } | |
| 9) Identify the model of mission main operative in the school and that to which it could aspire. | | |
| 10) Identify the benchmarks of progress towards achieving that identifiable form of mission and write it up as a self evaluative report. | | |

If these 10 forms of identification were offered in a self evaluation, then the school would have performed a task of theological reflection as well as one of social or educational reflection.

This task is of course not merely the work of the senior management team nor the school staff, it is also the work of the partnering local church. Indeed, it could be the work of the diocesan education team and also the local community of Christian parents and pupils.

In conclusion, I wish to offer the insights of some Christian teenagers who recently left a Church of England VA Secondary School. I asked them, what is it that makes a school distinctively Christian and how would you develop this? They told me that the given tri-fold pattern of effective RE, Christian collective worship and strong ethos are only as effective as the staff. They said that in their school, all these things were only effective if they were owned by the teachers and implemented at a personal level. Therefore they ended up reeling off issues of value and good practice rather than credal mission goals. They were;

- 1) Value your staff and encourage them to stay for a longer period at the school.
- 2) Enable staff to have time to prioritise individual students and to have personal tutor sessions to identify personal learning goals.
- 3) Listen to the school council and action their suggestions.
- 4) If possible, get a ceiling on school intake so that the whole institution does not exceed 800 pupils.

As I have reflected on these young adults' insights, I note that from a user point of view, mission must come practically.

If students are to know Christ personally, they must sense that they are in a safe place, a place to explore faith and to implement its best practice. Young people want to change the world, they want to see their schools as places of mission and this small sample saw that to do so, the structures had to be effective with pupils, staff and senior management pulling together.

Let's get on with it now.

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