

# Resonance and Dissonance Between Church and Society<sup>1</sup>

Stephen Ames

---

## 1. Introduction

In the light of the gospel of Christ, how should we understand and act on the *dissonances* and the *resonances* between the church and our society? This is my theme.

The orientation of the paper is summed up in the view that the mission of the church is to bear witness to the kind of world this is. This witness is not just in the terms with which the world bears testimony to itself, but also and especially in terms of the kind of God revealed in Christ. The task is to draw out the *dissonances* and *resonances* between these two testimonies and how we should act on them.

All reflections are from some 'position' and since I am a priest in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, I will be drawing on my experience of this church, which is the one I know best. I trust my brothers and sisters in Christ will make their own connections to and critiques of the churches they know best. Here is something of my image of the Anglican church in Melbourne.

- a. The indicators of the overall life the church in the diocese show that we are not in a healthy state. Overall, we are in decline.
- b. On the other hand there are many very good and interesting things going on in the diocese at all levels.
- c. Nevertheless, the overall state predominates over the many good things.
- d. The many good things indicate a different overall state may be possible. I believe some such an alternative would be closer to what God wants for this church.

---

<sup>1</sup> This was first published in, Sullivan, F., and, Leppert, S., *Church and Civil Society*, (ATF Press, Adelaide, 2004), pp. 142-185;

- e. Change is indicated.
- f. Those outside appear to have a variety of images of the Anglican church. On the positive side, my impression is that people welcome the churches getting into social justice issues, social welfare issues, and performing a chaplaincy role at times of national grief. But there is wariness about churches having too much influence in the political system as indicated by the reactions to the former governor general.<sup>2</sup> The sexual scandals and especially the churches' response to these scandals have damaged the standing of the churches in our society. As one of the churches, the Anglican Church attracts these positive and negative perceptions.

Those outside see the Anglican Church made up of a rapidly aging group of people who find in the church support or encouragement to live some version of the good life, though, apart from 'church going' this 'good life' probably looks pretty much the way other people live.

This state of the Anglican church in Melbourne, pictured in this image is a consequence of it having lost touch with a large part of the last three generations. Not just in the sense of numbers and age profile of those not involved in the church, but with their life styles and cultures, with their different ways of being and relating as persons, with different spiritualities, sexualities and world views. These are the people whose lives are powerfully formed by the 'revolutions' that have marked our lives in the last forty years (see below), as distinct from earlier generations whose lives were formed in a different social context. In relation to these diverse currents of change, the overall life of the church is out of touch, notwithstanding the many changes that have also gone on in our church. For many of these people the Anglican church is irrelevant.

Given this image, I seek something better for the Anglican church, in Melbourne. This image suggests three tools that could help us to discern the something better. Firstly, in this image the Anglican

---

<sup>2</sup> Another account of the churches having too much influence, is provided by Marr, D., *The High Price of Heaven*, (Allen & Unwin, 1999).

church is not healthy. To go further we need some useful theological account of what is a healthy church. Secondly, part of the sickness of the church is due to its relationship with our society. We need some account of our society and the relationship of a healthy church to our society. Thirdly, the image claims that the overall life of this church dominates over the many good things happening across the diocese. This directs attention to how the overall life of the church may be differently ordered. We need to think again about the ministry of oversight, of those bearing responsibility for the overall life of the church. For Anglicans this is the ministry of bishops. In this paper the first two matters will be considered while the third, which I have addressed elsewhere, will receive only fleeting reference.<sup>3</sup>

What makes for a healthy church? I take 'health' to mean well-being, indeed abundant well-being and I believe that scripture, theology, reason and commonsense would agree. In the light of scripture and theology what is the abundant well-being that ought to characterise a healthy church?

I believe that the well-being of the church is enhanced or diminished depending on whether and to what extent our way of being church aligns with, or goes against the grain of our being in Christ. Therefore I believe that the church's well being is in being faithful and fruitful: being faithful to the being and doing of God in Christ; being fruitful is what grows in, is produced by and results from being faithful. What shall we say of our being in Christ?

To guide an answer I draw on the Creed where we say we believe in 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.'<sup>4</sup> I will use these four 'marks', though not in that order, to speak about the well-being that ought to characterise a healthy church and the *dissonances* and *resonances* we might expect to find between church and society.

Before doing so, however, I will present a view of our social context, which informs and is informed by the theological perspective intimated by speaking of a 'healthy' church. Not too much hangs on

- 
- 3 Ames, S., 'Real Oversight or the Chimere of Episcopate', in A. Cadwallader (ed.) with D. Richardson *Episcopacy, Views from the Antipodes*, (Anglican Board of Christian Education, 1994), pp.23-43; XXXXX. Another document prepared in response to a Synod motion and subject to approval by the Archbishop. Approval not given.
- 4 I was happy to discover the precedent for this approach set by Hans Küng's, *The Church* (New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 1967), part D and sorry that I had not found it earlier.

the order of presentation. The important point for me is that for theological reasons I want to imagine the well-being of the church only in the closest connection with imagining the well being of the world in which we live. Also, given the above picture of the Anglican church as I find it, there is good sense in first considering our social context. I conclude with some considerations about how we may live faithfully and fruitfully in the tensions entailed in the *dissonances* and *resonances* between church and society, when the church is becoming a healthy church.

## **2. Attending to the social context**

These reflections on the social context are intended to be indicative and suggestive, rather than comprehensive. I will use three different levels of reflection. One is the *overt* 'in your face' level of turbulent change in the period following Second World War. This level of reflections refers to the multiplicity of phenomena and fashions of social change that criss-cross and churn up everyday life. In this paper I highlight a variety of 'revolutions' that have marked this period. The second level of reflection refers to more covert changes in and under the phenomena and the fashions of turbulent daily experience. These changes, initially covert and *insinuated*, start to become clearer in the wake of the turbulence. Thirdly there is a level of reflection referring to the *grounding assumptions* or grounding 'logic' of this turbulent social change.

### *2.1 Overt 'In your face' change*

One way of conjuring up the 'in your face' experience of change is by talking about the 'revolutions' that have occurred in the period since the Second World War. Here are some examples, doubtless there are more:

- The continuing threat of weapons of mass destruction developed and stock piled by many nations. The threat was vividly awakened by the bombs dropped by the US on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> August 1945. The threat is an issue in regard to the stability of Pakistan, the relation between Pakistan and India, the weapons possessed by Israel. The threat

is most frequently raised in the relationship between the U.S. and North Korea, though not with regard to Iraq despite claims to justify the war on Iraq.

- Sexual revolution, starting with the pill in early 1960s; gay and lesbian movements.
- Green revolution—strengthened after 1969 with the photo of the earth from the moon, but facing continuing ecological degradation; ozone hole on the road to recovery; green house gas effects.
- Feminist revolution: 19th century Women’s Movements; feminism from the 1970s, followed by successive waves.
- Technological revolution—a product of twentieth century new science; post the Second World War; computers; NASA.
- Communication revolution, especially TV; satellites; optical fibre; mobile phone; internet.
- ‘Free’ market revolution; extension of market relations to more and more of life; signalled in the development of global financial markets and rapid, deregulated movement of vast amounts of capital; the replacement of skilled and unskilled manual labour with higher productivity of new technology; accelerates the commodification of more and more of life; relatedly, the collapse of state communism in Russia.
- Genetic engineering revolution; human genome project; biotechnology; cloning; stem cell research.
- Nano revolution, machines on a micro, micro scale taking over and remaking our lives.

In addition we should think of the arms trade and drug trade, as well as use and abuse of children, the impact of un-payable debt, the scourges of poverty, hunger and aids, and the increasing gap between wealthy and poor nations. Some of these changes have provided the focus for a number of social movements, most recently the anti-globalisation movements.

In this period since the Second World War we should especially refer to the growing voices of Aboriginal and other Australians seeking to acknowledge our history and work for reconciliation even though that movement has stalled under the present federal government; the change from White Australia to a multi-cultural Australia to the recent response of the government (with no real alternative from the Labour opposition) to refugees and asylum

seekers and the 'wedge' politics that goes with it; the change from a widely valued egalitarian society, with strong public sector in a mixed economy, to a society encompassed by the 'free market' with a growing division between the very affluent and powerful strata, and those who are being left behind - those who are unemployed, those with poor educational opportunities, those with limited access to under resourced public health care and those facing the shortage of public housing; the related but different division between urban and rural Australia; the many changes in the place of women in Australian society and so in the relations between women and men.

The most 'in your face' experience of change, for people in the West, was the September 11 attack on the US, the political response and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The '9/11' attack was focused on destroying the symbolic order of the U.S. (Trade Towers, Pentagon, White House(?)), a symbolic order representing the global economic, military, political and cultural dominance of the U.S., a dominance profoundly hated and mocked by the attackers. The resulting war on terrorism lead to at least three related 'in your face' experiences of change in Australia and other nations.

One, related, 'in your face' experience of change in liberal democracies is the state's increased power of surveillance of people, the increased threat of terrorist attack with the still greater, politically induced fear of this threat and the sense of insecurity about the way life is going.

Another is the heightened politics of division following Mr. Bush's challenge to all nations, "you are either with us or with the terrorists". This found a rich field of opportunities in the United Nations. Australia was divided about our support of the U.S. in the war on Afghanistan and then on Iraq. We were at war without a war being declared and again young Australians were sent off to fight in the name of a divided Australia. In a massive turnout Australians joined people around the world in protesting against this war. There are parallels and differences between the response to this military involvement and the turbulent division in Australia about our government's support for the U.S. in Vietnam. Both stand in contrast to the strong public support for our military role in the U.N. mission to secure an independent East Timor.

The third is what has happened to Australia and its politics. The war on Iraq was pursued under the doctrine of the preemptive strike,

and not withstanding international law, was allegedly justified by Iraq's possession of and capacity to rapidly deploy weapons of mass destruction as well as pass them on to Al-Qaeda. This was questioned in the lead up to the war. Subsequent investigations have not turned up an WMD. The government has now invoked the deposing of Saddam Hussein as the humanitarian justification for the war. This is amazing given the history of the U.S. support for Hussein including allowing him to stay if he had disarmed Iraq; the U.N. sanctions that contained Iraq while killing Iraqis and provided scope for Saddam to terrorise and kill them; the fact that dictatorships from Burma to Saudi Arabia are allowed to continue because no foreign policy 'analogy' obtains; and our indefinitely detaining Iraqis and Afghans fleeing the these regimes because they have jumped the 'queue' (though no analogy obtains) and are maybe terrorists. We continue to be misled about the reasons for the war by our government that speaks as if it occupied the 'high ground' both morally and intellectually. That kind of speaking is largely justified by pointing to the horrors of terrorism and Saddam Hussein's rule in Iraq. The trouble is if you pick a standard low enough anything can look good.

These comments help mark out the contemporary conditions under which we live life on planet earth. But there are at least two other levels of change going on.

## 2.2 *Covert, insinuated change*

If we stay at this overt level of change we will have plenty to think about and do, but we need to move onto consider other things that may help us live more faithfully and fruitfully under contemporary conditions. To borrow from St Paul, we may see in the daily phenomena of turbulent change 'another law at work', maybe several. This is what I want to highlight now and at other points in this paper.

At the overt level one can often find in the media and in many conversations, the view that the only thing we can be certain about is that change is always with us, and everyone will have to adapt and adjust. This seems so true that **turbulent change has come to be treated as 'natural'** as if such change was a force of nature. This attitude to change is so obvious that it is not even noticed. It is simply insinuated. It leads to forgetting the past, to focusing on the latest emerging new wave of the future. This is fed by technological, commodity and consumption imperatives that reverse Kant's dictum:

*can implies must so, just do it!* This change process is a virulent naturalism.

This understanding may be elaborated using the work of Australian scientist and philosopher, Cliff Hooker.<sup>5</sup> Hooker argues that in a stable environment, organisms whose biological resources go to producing more off spring, which leads to greater adaptation, do best overall. In a changing environment, organisms whose biological resources go to make for greater adaptability, which means greater complexity, do best overall. Hooker thinks that these insights into biological evolution hold true for social and cultural change. He also thinks that since the scientific revolution, a 'huge societal change engine' has come into being characterised by a dominant form of inquiry, which proceeds by probing and disturbing the physical environment and seeing what happens. The probing includes the technological extension of human capacities. This mode of learning eventually leads to an increasingly changing social and ecological environment. In response to this accelerating change, those people who happen to be equipped with greater adaptability to such change will fare better overall, than those who have pursued greater adaptation to their environment and enjoy different modes of knowing, which may include this 'probing' form of inquiry in limited ways, certainly not as dominant. These especially include people with their roots in pre-modern societies, including tribal societies.

Though I cannot here review the relevant historical development, I do want to add to Hooker's view the qualification that the 'huge societal change engine' has come into existence as commodity production and market exchange develop and interact with this form of inquiry. Production and market exchange are powerfully informed by the continuing development of technologies, which this form of

---

5. C Hooker, at the University of New Castle. See his 'Between Formalism and Anarchy: A Reasonable Middle Way', in *Beyond Reason*, edited by G Munevar (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991). The argument is that a particular mode of inquiry strongly contributes to the development of a particular social form. This is another perspective on and a contribution to one aspect of the social analysis developed by people at *Arena Publications*, viz. that there is a largely unrecognized connection between the abstract character of the dominant contemporary social form and intellectual practice. I am much indebted to the work of Geoff Sharp, Nonie Sharp, John Hinkson, Paul James, Guy Rundel, Alison Caddick, Simon Cooper and Chris Scanlon, all part of *Arena*.

empirical inquiry makes possible. Eventually this interaction leads towards convergence: inquiry is increasingly directed by the interests of the dominance of commodity exchange and the production that serves it and is served by it.

On Hooker's model it is people with greater capacity for adaptability and who continue to invest their resources in developing this capacity, who survive and thrive best in such a changing social context. But this context is then further biased in their favour by their initiating or contributing to new changes that pursue this mode of 'probing' inquiry, and so further destabilise the social and ecological environment. Clearly there will also be those not favoured by this process.

The 'societal change engine' is now drawing individuals, organisations and nations into a vast global change process that both maintains these distinctions and rewrites them. On this model we can envisage how these different kinds of participants show a similar range of responses to this turbulent change, forming a spectrum from highly advantaged to highly disadvantaged. Here I group different kinds of responses by individuals in Australia.

Firstly, people who have the adaptability to embrace this turbulent social environment and thrive within it. One thinks of highly mobile, young, cosmopolitan 'knowledge workers'. They are adepts in using the state of the art of this mode of inquiry in various fields, the knowledge and technology it produces and who have access to increasing wealth and other resources needed to employ and develop this 'state of the art'. Adaptability is not just for one generation. Older people with established wealth and education, are also able to thrive within this turbulent social environment.

Secondly, people who reject this form of life, from executives in the 'knowledge economy' down-shifting out of the rat race, to young people also exploring alternative life styles, including those whose body piercing, clothing, and 'tribal' forms of association, symbolise the alternative. They variously survive and thrive, with the latter thriving more precariously. An important instance in Australia of this kind of response is a number of indigenous communities who have made a significant re-appropriation of their heritage as part of an increased individual and communal adaptability in the present environment of change.

Thirdly, older people who remember a different form of life, marked by a greater degree of face to face contact, and a greater

reliance on tradition and institutions. These people go some way to retain that form of life within their circle of friends and family, in work and leisure and community associations. They make some use of the benefits of new technologies. For some people this adaptation is lived with a strong sense of nostalgia and may merge with the following grouping.

Fourthly, the people who survive, but do not thrive. These are the many people underemployed or unemployed and the people who are over-employed in the sense of overworked. Despite material prosperity at least for those employed, even many of them are unhappy or at least ambivalent about the way they have to live under contemporary conditions.

Fifthly, the people whose survival is at risk or lost, who have limited resources, who cannot see any opportunity for themselves amidst the turbulent social change. For example, people in various kinds of addiction, whether alcohol, other drugs, or problem gambling, as well as the many youth suicides and the larger number of attempted suicides. Here we must include indigenous people whose communities suffered horribly from their first encounters with those whose acquired identity, world view and skills, gave them a competitive advantage, in the destabilised environment of *their* making and who have not been able to re-appropriate their traditions.

Those who are most advantaged, will instantiate an uneven leading edge of social change processes. Those occupying this position will increasingly control, concentrate and consume more resources to ensure the elaboration of a still greater adaptability (and therewith a greater self-preoccupation) and to maintain and escalate the rate and directions of change. In this lays their advantage. This ensures that those with less adaptability, less able to 'move on' will be further disadvantaged. This dominance requires the forceful protection of access to human and material resources needed to retain the advantage. This dominant leading edge position will also ensure the dominance of their life styles and understanding of life through the media that serves the convergence of inquiry, commodity production and market exchange noted above. For those in that position the prospects engendered by this process have 'no limits'. People and organisations with global reach and power, who enjoy this advantage, are elaborating a 'world order' within and across nations, in order to

maintain the advantage. This is a systemic consequence not a conspiracy.

Analogous consequences are also discernable within and between nations, where there is an increasing gap between those advantaged and those disadvantaged by this change process. From the position of those advantaged many of the disadvantaged will become dispensable, eventually becoming invisible, unrecognized, as they are left behind and lost in the waste products of the turbulent change process. Australian history offers the fictional term 'terra nullius' as a metaphor, for this repeated effect of the change process.

Among those who reject this form of life are those who hate its dominance, especially its dominant culture and symbolic order, including making dispensable the disadvantaged. Among those who hate its dominance some pursue violent opposition in acts of terror. Among those most disadvantaged by the change process some resist the way their life is going by attempting to cross national borders as refugees in order to access even the crumbs of the 'good life' of the advantaged.

### 2.3 Grounding assumptions

Here I can only indicate rather than argue for these views. The immediate starting point for this reflection on our social context is that this turbulent social change is now treated as 'natural', as if it were a force of nature. In Hooker's view this is a correct description, since it is the continuation of the *same* processes as are seen in evolutionary biology.

I think the grounding assumptions of this change process is one expression of naturalism. In much contemporary philosophy, naturalism is the view that what the natural sciences says there is, is all there is, and that methods used in scientific inquiry are the best or even the only ways finding out about the world and ourselves as part of the world. This objectifying approach to the world aims to give a completely naturalistic account of human life. In this view the world has no intrinsic point and therefore no intrinsic value. Rather, both epistemic and moral values, which guide our inquiries and our relating to each other, are understood instrumentally.<sup>6</sup>

---

6. As the physicist and Nobel Laureate S Weinberg famously remarked, 'the more the universe seems comprehensible the more it also seems pointless'. S

My view is that our culture inscribes in us the naturalistic view of the world as the taken for granted habit of thought about the kind of world this is in which we live. Consequently the absence of intrinsic purpose and value becomes the 'truth' about human life. Yet human beings seek a sense of the meaning and value of their lives as if intrinsic. This contradiction opens the way for something else to be the exquisite surrogate of intrinsic purpose and value of life. This ensures that any surrogate fulfils and frustrates the seeking. For example, when the surrogate is commodity consumption people become 'consumers' who can never have enough. This state of being a consumer is now achieved by the time children reach pre-school. On the other hand the felt absence of intrinsic value and purpose can lead to various kinds of spiritual awakenings that in turn may lead to the critical dropping out noted above, or may help people simply 'keep going', or may turn into a spiritual market place, coopted into the paths of commodity consumption. A third example is the dominance of instrumental value shown in what I call the 'two great commandments' of the change process: you only have value if you add value; you only get value if you pay for it.

#### 2.4 Summary

The daily phenomena of turbulent change are generated by a 'societal change engine' that arose 400 years ago in Europe and is formed by the convergence of a particular mode of inquiry, the technologies thereby made available, commodity production and market exchange. This 'change engine' continuously destabilizes the environment, favoring those

---

Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 155.

Likewise, as Dawkins says, the evolutionary process is blind, see R Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (London: Penguin, 1986). But note there is no simple connection between this world-view and the ethics that may be espoused. For example, R. Dawkins thinks human kind is alone able to rise above the gene regime. But to what end, according to what values? "We can discuss ways of deliberately cultivating and nurturing pure, disinterested altruism – something that has no place in nature, something that has never existed before in the whole history of the world." R.Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 1989, pp. 200-1

equipped with the capacity to enhance their adaptability to change, over those equipped for adaptation to a particular environment. This has led to a globalised social Darwinism, a virulent life form delivering unprecedented material affluence for those able to adapt and leaving in its wake the debris of those who cannot. This form of life is expansionary and now is pervasive. Its 'logic' is in effect oriented to what, according to political theory, is called 'sovereign power' – that power of which there is none greater. One expression of this power is the widely taken-for-granted assumption that all this is 'natural'. The grounding assumptions on which this operates are well represented philosophically by naturalism, including the view that the world has no intrinsic purpose or value.

#### First interlude

It would of course be possible to go straight to discussing *resonances* and *dissonances* between church and society. For example, the above discussion of *grounding assumptions* surely points to a *dissonance* between church and society. Possibly. But what if a church is 'positioned' such that it too is now operating from a large dose of naturalism and what if its spirituality has been co-opted as a form of consumption or what if the church is enculturated in such a way that it suffers from amnesia and is a caricature of the gospel? Some people in the church have a 'commodity' approach to the gospel. They think we have a terrific product, which we are not selling properly. A different instance would be the 'positioning' of the churches in supporting the colonial and later federal and state governments' treatment of indigenous communities.

The problem in going straight to a discussion of *resonances* and *dissonances* is that it too much takes for granted the position from which to pursue that response. It assumes we are already 'positioned' by the gospel, that we are able to reflect and act in its light. If this assumption is incorrect, then any church that holds it is at best naïve and at risk of being caught in *resonances* and *dissonances* with the society in which it lives, but not on account of the gospel.

In this paper I count it necessary to take time to elaborate a position from which to make a more thoughtful and active response to the social context envisaged above.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. A theological vignette on a healthy church

Recalling the introduction, I believe that the well-being of the church is enhanced or diminished depending on whether and to what extent our way of being church goes with or against the grain of our being in Christ. What shall we say of our being in Christ?

To guide an answer I draw on the Creed where we say we believe in 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.' I will use these four 'marks', though not in that order, to speak about the well-being that ought to characterise a healthy church and the *dissonances* and *resonances* we might expect to find between church and society.

#### 3.1 We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church<sup>8</sup>

##### The Church is One

*'Joined to Christ by the power of the Spirit, Christians enjoy fellowship both with God the Father and with one another.'* Through this grace of God, *'the church is constituted by the participation of its members in the communion of the life of the triune God.'*<sup>9</sup>

- 
7. This point also concerns the forms of theological reflection. I believe there are at least five forms of reflection. a) Interpreting experience in the light of one's faith. b) Handling the contradictions between one's experience and one's faith. c) Elaborating one's theological resources. d) Critically integrating one's theological and non-theological resources for reflection. e) Most importantly, establishing what is normative for one's theology. We need to work on all five forms of reflection. Each of each of these forms of reflection is indicated in what follows. A further important issue is what the theological reflection actually reflects. Does it reflect by rationalizing a situation or does it reflect the God who will allow no one to boast, as in Jeremiah 9.23-24?
  8. From the Nicene Creed. I will highlight what I think are a few crucial aspects of each mark. For the purpose of this paper I treat the second mark last.
  9. *Episcopal Ministry, The Report of the Archbishop's Group on the Episcopate* (London: Church House, 1990), 158.

*Unity in the Spirit*

We share in the Divine life by the power of the Spirit, for it is by the Spirit that our hearts are opened to hear the good news of Christ calling us to new life; that we are led to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Saviour, that we are baptised into Christ; that we give thanks for the death and resurrection of our Lord, and together eat and drink his body and blood; that we read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the scriptures to shape our faith and our lives; that we maintain the common faith and fellowship of the church; that we fully enter into the mission of God in and for the world.

*Unity in diversity*

The unity of the church is a unity in diversity, a dynamic unity which gives 'individuals, and local communities, and different traditions, scope to be fully themselves'<sup>10</sup> as together they pursue the mission of God.

Only so does the church build itself up to the stature of the fullness of Christ and only so can it have access to and be a foretaste of the dynamic unity and diversity of the life of God. The diversity of the gifts of the Spirit which are distributed to all the members of the church are to be fully expressed because they are essential to the constitution of the church as the body of Christ and thus to fulfilling its part in the mission of God in and for the world.

*Community of communities in Christ*

The church is a communion of communities in which the whole, who is Christ, is in each of the parts.<sup>11</sup> On this basis each community, being

---

10. *Ibid*, 8.

11. See John 15:5, 'I am the vine you are the branches'. Christ is the 'whole', we are the 'parts', though here the whole is not only more than the sum of the parts, the whole precedes the parts and is not obtained by bringing the parts together. Also the theological motif of the 'body of Christ' is so different from 'body' used metaphorically of a group of people. Again, this motif highlights Christ, not just as 'head' but as the whole whose members (parts) we are. We can see this also from the diverse applications of 'ekklesia' (church) in 1 Corinthians 1:2, 11:22,

in communion with all the other communities of the church, has access to the fullness of God, who in Christ, dwells in each community and each community in God. Again, when all the communities of the body of Christ are working together, the body is built up until it attains the full stature of Christ.

The church is a communion of communities in which the whole, who is Christ, is in each of the parts. Our being in Christ is therefore a holographic unity, marked by a distinctive eccentricity, synergy and creativity, by subsidiarity and a sense of what counts as a 'local' church when the church is also universal.

#### *Eccentricity*

For this reason the unity of the church is marvellously eccentric in that the only 'centre', who is the triune God, is accessible to the smallest as to the largest Christian communities, as each and all, maintain the unity of the church. For the same reason the unity of the church is not 'arithmetic', the sum of its parts, nor 'radial' like the spokes of a wheel to some would be 'centre',<sup>12</sup> nor 'bureaucratic', as if the church were merely an organisation to be rationally administered.

#### *Synergy and Creativity*

Rather, the church is a community of communities and the communities that make up the church are to live out a deepening interdependence that is essential to their proper self-understanding and to their well-being. This is because, though often poorly realised and sometimes betrayed in practice, we have been admitted to a new order in Christ in which we are interdependent. This new order in

---

12:28; Romans 16:16; Acts 20. 'The term has been transformed [from classical and contemporary Greek usage and even from its distinctive meaning in the Hebrew Bible] . . . to describe a body of men and women in which the unity of every part corresponds to, repeats, represents and is the unity of the whole.' (E Hoskins and N Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958).

12. Not that could not be a 'centre' just that it would have to represent the centrality of the living God who is marvelously eccentric.

Christ is grounded in and open to the reciprocity and mutuality of the triune God. This draws us into ever-new *synergies* of communion and cooperation, which evokes an abundant creativity, which has its 'measure': "thirty fold, sixty fold, a hundred fold". This is the strength and vitality we are given for mission.

*The Church as Institution is to serve the Church as Community*

"To stress that the Church is communal is to emphasise relationships; the personal is thus prior to the institutional; the institutional exists to nurture and sustain relationships of human persons joined, as far as possible for us creatures, in a resemblance to [the] Trinitarian life."<sup>13</sup>

The personal, meaning persons in community, has priority over the institutional; the institutional is to serve the personal.<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere scripture says we now see as through a 'glass darkly', but then we will see 'face to face'. Even the embodied, face to face character of the Christian community is to be a sign of the glory that is coming, already at work in us.

The more obvious implications of this have to do with way we handle our politics, the way the institution makes decisions about individuals, the way we handle conflicts between individuals and groups, the ways we can be more accountable to one another that are constructive, even life giving, the quality of our speaking to and about one another, especially when the 'other' is absent.

*Summary*

These and other themes to do with our unity in Christ need further theological reflection. But we can see that:

- The well-being of the church depends on whether our way of being church is aligned with our being in Christ.
- The vitality and creativity of our life and our living authority for mission as a church and as churches, depend on our enjoying

---

13. *Episcopal Ministry* (1990), 8.

14. In this respect what was said of the sabbath applies to other institutions; see Mark 2:27-28.

rather than blocking our shared access to the fullness of Christ, who therefore do not quench the Spirit.

- This is so both ecumenically and within the Anglican church, for there is only one church.
- Shared access to the fullness of Christ is a gift that comes to the church from the Spirit through the interdependence of all the parts all working together, both as communities and people within communities.
- Where the church is weak it is because we see in our members another law at work from the one we say we approve.

### **The Church is Catholic**

*'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'*<sup>15</sup>

The church has received this great commission and it is one key measure of the catholicity of the church. If the church lacks the breadth measured by the great commission it is too narrow, too partial, and in its members there will again be found another law at work, besides this 'law' of Christ.

The great commission sets no limit on who is to be met with the gospel and baptised. The same is true of 'the many' in the word over the eucharistic cup. If anyone thinks in terms of numbers, percentages, optimal size, the only scriptural answer is 'everyone!' If someone bids us be 'realistic' the answer is that the gospel is precisely about what counts as 'reality'. If someone says we cannot 'go it alone', the answer is that we never thought of going it alone.

Rather, this task is accomplished in the Spirit, by Christian communities around the world that are the bearers and interpreters of the gospel. They provide the means whereby people come to faith and grow in faith, as reconciled to God and members one of another in

---

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 28: 18 – 19.

Christ. The catholicity of the church is especially to be seen in ecumenical cooperation in response to the great commission.

Therefore, given the diversity of people's cultures, sub-cultures, life styles and generational differences, the church needs to radically multiply the number and diversify the forms of Christian community in order that it may fulfill the great commission. Something of this diversity of communities could be elaborated terms of size, location both geographic and non-geographic, leadership, ethos and replication. The diversity means there will be very large mega churches, 21<sup>st</sup> century versions of solid traditional parishes, both large and small, and a myriad of other 'travelling light' communities.

### **The Church is Apostolic**

*'As the Father has sent me so I send you.' When he had said this he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit . . . '16*

The whole church is sent out into the world where God is already at work, albeit often incognito. The whole church is to make known the good news of Christ and to embody his life in every aspect of the life of the world. The whole church is to do this in continuity with the church of the apostles, and therefore in handing on, in a living way, their teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers.

### *Going on beyond the present*

Firstly, within the continuity just noted, the apostolicity of the church is also demonstrated in our going beyond where we have reached to date, into every aspect of life, to all people, where we have been sent.<sup>17</sup> This should be a continuing, visible, mark of our life as an apostolic church. One possible concrete expression of this should be evident in what is intuited and envisaged as well as in what is planned and implemented, both in the short term and the long term, at all levels and in every part of the church, and frequently issuing in bold initiatives. And it would surely be evident in a felt sense of shared momentum as we move on together, being led by the Spirit.

---

<sup>16</sup> John 20:

<sup>17</sup>. In the spirit of 2Corinthians 10:12-18.

There are some indications of this orientation, but overall, it is still far from being a consistent and enabling part of our apostolate and consequently we live with a sense of fitful momentum at best. The overall state of the church still dominates. Thankfully, some bold initiatives do arise in the life of the church. I pray that they flourish even more! Imagine living with an encompassing sense of 'momentum' that carried us all forward!

*Discipleship and Apostleship*

Secondly, the church is called to follow Christ on the way and to learn from him. The disciples 'learned Christ' by a robust conversation with Jesus and amongst themselves, concerning the coming of the reign of God, who he is, his teaching, his mighty works, his authority, the meaning of the scriptures and the traditions which they inherited, how they are to pray, their relationships with him and each other, and about what they experienced on the way. Now this earlier 'conversation' is to be remembered and repeated anew in the Spirit of Jesus, both within and between the churches, concerning these very same things. The church is called to be a community of disciples who continue to learn and to learn from one another.

Given what has been said so far about the marks of a healthy church, there is a great need to go on learning together, both within and between all the 'parts' that make up the church. To borrow an apt phrase from the world, the church could be a stunning example of a learning organisation,<sup>18</sup> better, a learning community. Surely the community of disciples is to be a discipleship community?

*Learning and unlearning*

There is also some unlearning to do. Earlier it was said that the well-being of the church is in being faithful and fruitful. Of course being fruitful depends on being faithful. But is it possible to be faithful and not

---

18. P Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (London: Doubleday Currency, 1995). As an example of learning together, what can we learn from the use across the diocese of Alpha, Catechumenate, Credo, and other ways of introducing people to faith in Christ and membership of the church.

fruitful? If it turns out that some person or community believes it is faithful but not fruitful, the presumption, based on scripture, is that there is a story yet to be told, as to why they are not being fruitful or why the fruit is not being recognised.<sup>19</sup>

What we must not do is to rationalise being unfruitful as normal, nor spiritualise it as our faithfully carrying the 'Cross of Christ', nor yet resign ourselves to it, with all the scope for isolation, bad conscience, desperation and cynicism that such resignation carries, as if being faithful could still survive. This highlights one important kind of unlearning that may be needed. Rather, we must tell the story that waits to be told and so learn what is needed for being fruitful as well as faithful.

### Second Interlude

The first mark spoke about our being in Christ on the assumption that our way of being church can go with or against the grain of our being in Christ. This determines the degree to which the church has access to the fullness of Christ and therewith all that is needed to fulfil its mission and its engagement with the world. The next two marks spoke of this engagement with the world through the church being sent into all the world with the same mission as Christ with one result being more and more people from all the nations believing and being baptised. The next mark to be considered speaks about the relationship of the church and the world modelled on the relation between Christ and the world as one of *dissonance* and *resonance*. This takes us further into the engagement of the church and the world on account of sharing in the same mission as Christ.

---

19. Eg see Mark 4:15-20.

### The Church is Holy

*In response to Jesus, the unclean spirit cried out, 'What have you to do with us Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God!'<sup>20</sup>*

From scripture and tradition, I should say that being faithful and fruitful is what ought to characterise humankind created to enjoy the original blessing of being made in the image of God, to hear God speaking in many ways, calling us all to seek our life with God, to live justly and graciously with each other, enjoying the 'original blessing' in exercising an awesome dominion over the earth—though not over each other—as stewards who are the image and likeness of the living God who created the world.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the whole created order is good, yet still incomplete, being destined by God for a still greater goodness.

In fact it is another orientation, with other possibilities of life, to which we listen most carefully and are led by more persuasively, while maybe ensuring there is a 'place' for God or the gods, unless we have come to see ourselves in a godless world. In any of its forms, this other orientation of individual and social life eventually comes to be established as having a life of its own, an encompassing 'fiction'<sup>22</sup>

---

20 Mark 1: 23 – 24.

21. It is the distortion of this 'dominion' after the counter-image of the living God that is the source of the run away human ecology and economy with its destruction of species, pollution and global warming. The answer is to direct not deny human powers.

22. In discussion some people find this use of the term 'fiction' unsatisfactory. It fails to convey the reality to which it points. Patriarchy would surely count as 'fictions' but for some it is a distortion that is real and a lie and so a 'fiction'. I will continue to use the term which for me has all the power of a lived reality that is a distortion and to the extent that it is but not more, it is also a lie. For a similar use of the term 'fiction' see Frank Brennan's book, *Sharing the Country* (London: Penguin, 1991), 19. 'This legal fiction of *terra nullius* became firmly embedded in our history. Though a fiction, it has taken on a reality of its own that cannot be undone.' For a recent theological discussion of living a 'lie' see A. Shanks discussion of V. Havel's parable of the grocer shop in Havel's essay, 'The Power of the Powerless', (English translated by P. Wilson), in *Living in Truth*, edited by J. Vladislav (Faber & Faber, London, 1987), 41. See A. Shanks, *God*

more living us than being lived by us; a surrogate of true life, with its own economy, ecology and even theology, that possesses, shapes, flavours and directs our living, as if it had a life of its own. In any of its forms, this other orientation of individual and social life establishes a field of *dissonances* and *resonances* between the 'fiction' by which it lives and the life to which everyone is called by God.

This surrogate of true life in effect comes to assume the role of divinity: it defines the taken for granted 'reality'; it becomes that in which we practically live and move and have our being; it forms people from birth, or in the context of invaders and occupiers who are the carriers of their own 'divinity', it takes over and makes-over people reforming them, in its own image; it rewards those that fit in, but demeans those it does not recognise, those that oppose it or do not fit, those for whom there is no room.<sup>23</sup> Producing and becoming a 'creature' of this surrogate 'divinity' continues to be humankind's own most original sin.

Yet for all this life remains a great and precious gift that God, *incognito*, is everywhere at work to bring to its senses. There are many that still sense how precious is the gift of life, whether and however they conceive of the Giver. They too are a sign of God secretly working 'against the grain' to awaken people everywhere to the gift of life and to the love that has created them and calls them on.<sup>24</sup>

Something of this may be seen in the life of Israel, God's people from of old. At God's calling the prophets of Israel denounced the violent mis-ordering of the nation's life, the worship of idols, the 'chewing up'<sup>25</sup> of the poor by the powerful, the want of the knowledge of God, shown in the want of justice, and the warning of exile. Later there are warnings of the 'beastly' dominion of foreign occupation of the land and the enforced the worship of foreign gods. The same prophets looked for a time when the most humane reign of the living

---

*and Modernity, a New and Better Way to do Theology* (London: Routledge, 2000), 1.

23. For more on a 20c globalised version of such 'divinity' see Harvey Cox, 'Living in the New Dispensation', *Ministry Society and Theology*, Vol 14, No 2, 2000.
24. A question for some will be whether I intend to include indigenous communities in these terms as well. The answer is that I do, though with very different *dissonances* and *resonances* between their form of life and the life and the life to which God call us all, and those that are displayed in twenty-first century Western societies.
25. Micah 3:1-3.

God would come, and the 'beastly' rule would be overcome.<sup>26</sup> Yet because of this disorder, the whole creation is disordered with respect to the divine purpose in creation.

The apostles, evangelists and seers of the Church tell of this promise being realised in Jesus the Messiah in whom the most humane reign of the living God, comes into the world. This good news tells of the promised redemption and the fulfillment of the created order by that still greater goodness intended from the beginning, but only lately seen in its astonishing beauty and fullness in Christ.<sup>27</sup> At great cost this one and only future has been opened for all, now in anticipation, yet finally in glory. This has taken place through the mission of Jesus, the incarnate Word. Sent by the Father in the power of the Spirit, Jesus makes present the reign of God and so enters into vulnerable but victorious conflict with the powers of life misoriented and established falsely as a life of its own. It turns out that he triumphs<sup>28</sup> over these powers that bar entry to the reign of God. The relationship of Jesus the Messiah to the world is one of *dissonance* and *resonance*.

*Dissonance and resonance: Christ and the world*

There is a profound *dissonance* or mismatch between what Jesus shows to be the truth about the world and what the world takes to be the truth about itself. This is the *dissonance* between, on the one hand, the realities of the reign of God proclaimed and made present through Jesus, the definitive, though not exclusive, foretaste of the only future that comes from God. On the other, those encompassing, worldly 'fictions', the taken for granted 'realities' in which we come to live and move and have our being. This *dissonance* is most acute in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, including all the conflict, betrayal and desertion, leading to his execution, the price paid for being and

---

26. Daniel 7.

27. Matthew 25:34; Ephesians 1:10, 3:9-11.

28. Colossians 2:15. Here is divine authority. In this triumph, Jesus the Messiah is God's 'Yes' to all his promises for humanity and humanity's 'Amen' to God. (2Cor.1:18-20) This fine theological motif is taken from *The Gift of Authority*, the third statement on authority by the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC III).

opening the way into the only future intended for all things from the beginning.

There is a profound *resonance* or match between the realities of the reign of God, proclaimed and made present through Jesus, and the realities of the world created from the excess of divine love exchanged between the persons of the triune God. In its created being, the world is very good and intended for a still greater goodness. This *resonance* is shown in the true humanity of the Word incarnate, in Jesus being faithful and fruitful to the end—in bearing the gospel and the power of the reign of God, in withstanding temptation, in applauding the lilies, in healing and in forgiving sin, in vivid table fellowship with the rich and the poor, the righteous and the sinners, in life and death, in bodily resurrection as the first born from the dead, in human flesh radiating divine glory. Yet more is involved. The place of acute *dissonance* is surely also a profound *resonance* between the suffering of God in Christ and the suffering of humankind subject to the powers of the encompassing fictions.

But against this claimed *resonance*, allegedly so profound, there may be heard what seems to be a deeper mocking *dissonance* between these human sufferings and the idea of the world being created from the excess of divine love exchanged between the persons of the triune God. The irony may even express itself theologically, ‘with God all things are possible!’ For many, this *dissonance* has eaten away, dissolved and so made impossible, any idea of this world being created by a purposeful love.

But this ‘impossibility’ is possible. The good news of God in Christ eventually leads us to understand that the world is created from the excess of divine love, and for love’s sake, must do so by making things make themselves. And while this ‘making themselves’ might take more than one form, in our world one form it has taken is the evolutionary process of natural selection, which has all the appearances of having so much waste, pain and suffering, and of being purposeless, futile.<sup>29</sup> The fact that this process, with elements of

---

29. This idea of ‘creation makes itself’ was used by Christian Darwinians in the late nineteenth century, including Charles Kingsley in his *The Water Babies* (London: Hodder & Stoughton 1930, original edition 1863), 248. “Tom to the mother of creation ‘I heard you were always making new beasts out of old.’ ‘So people fancy’ she said ‘I make things make themselves.’”. Cited by Charles Birch in, ‘Neo-Darwinism, Self-Organisation and Divine Action in Evolution’, in

---

*Evolutionary and Molecular Biology, Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, edited by RJ Russell, WR Stoeger, SJ, and F Ayala (Vatican City: Observatory, Vatican Observatory and Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, Berkeley, 1998), 225. Birch writes, 'Four years after Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species* the Church of England vicar and novelist, Charles Kingsley wrote for his children the evolutionary fairy tale *The Water Babies*. Kingsley was convinced that the Darwinian theory of evolution was the context within which it was possible to find the working of "a living, immanent, ever-working God". The concept of God immanent in creation was understood by Kingsley as a creation in which "God makes things make themselves"'. (*Ibid*, 225.) As far as I know Kingsley gave no independent theological justification for this view. It is important to consider whether some such justification is available. Aubrey Moore a contemporary of Kingsley's and another high church Anglican, dispensed with secondary causes and attribute the whole of the evolutionary process to the immanent working of the Logos whose incarnation in Jesus, Christianity proclaimed God. This may have been an attractive weapon to use against deism and pantheism and one can well understand Moore saying that Darwinism 'in the guise of a foe did the work of a friend'. [Gore, C, editor, *Lux Mundi*, (London: John Murray, 1904), 75.] But until Darwin came along, no theologians thought of God acting in the world in a way that the world would look to detailed observation, anything like what was proposed by Darwin's theory of natural selection and the enormous amount of data it could explain. Were More and Kingsley simply making an ad hoc 'theory-change'? I think not. More thought Darwinism gave evidence of the immanent working in the world of that Logos whose incarnation is proclaimed by the Christian gospel. But still, why would God choose to create life on planet earth in such a way? Not everyone thinks that theology is under an obligation to give an account of this change in the theological account of the way God works in the world. But by way of comparison, I think that the author of Luke-Acts goes to considerable lengths to explain theologically why it is that the gentile inheritors of the promises were turning out to be different from the original recipients. It is the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob is the God who now has made Jesus Messiah and Lord. were made. I think that some relevant insight into God's way of creating is provided by reference to St Thomas Aquinas [*Summa Theologiae*, 1a. 22. 3; 1a. 103.6; 1a. 105.5.] Because God is the very essence of goodness, says Aquinas, we should speak of God in terms of superlatives. Therefore we should say that God makes things with real causal powers; that God gives to things the dignity of also being causes, rather than the indignity of also not being causes; that it is better that things are not only good in themselves but also the cause of good in other things. On similar grounds we should say that God maximizes these features of creation rather than minimizes them. Therefore we should expect that things make other

cooperation as well as competition, eventually produces a multitude of beautiful and extraordinary creatures, including humankind, does not contradict these appearances. The fact that humankind, with its extraordinary powers, produces much that is good, true and beautiful does not prevent the overwhelming human history of power, violence, pain and suffering, from challenging, weakening and even undermining many people's belief about the world being created by a purposeful love. Or so it appears.

But in the light of the good news, these appearances, for all their power and verisimilitude, are neither the first nor the last word. For this love's sake the processes of 'making things make themselves' must run its course. This 'making things make themselves' includes the evolutionary process bringing forth humankind as the new reality of *persons* who can only really exist as persons in relation. And then the history of 'making things make themselves' must follow a long and ongoing bloody history of human beings learning the way of love and justice, beyond the limits cooperation and beyond the limits of kin and tribe and then of nation, as the only way in which persons in relation can flourish and be themselves with and from the difference of others.

The love by which the world and life on this planet is brought into being along so costly a path becomes incarnate, and subject to the same costly path, and so the violent history of the world is visited on its Creator. Here God incarnate absorbs this visitation and suffers the cost of this long history of violence, initiated by creating and sustaining the

---

things and that overall creation makes itself. How God as a rational creator might choose to realize such a creation is something to be known by observation. In our world an abundance of observation shows this includes evolution by natural selection. Thus it is because God is all powerful, all knowing, wholly good, that creation takes place by means of evolution according to natural selection, with all the suffering and waste this involves. Theologically this exemplifies the best that God could do. These comments bear on the issue of theodicy, by seeking some theological insight into why God creates by natural selection with all its apparent waste and suffering. I would link these strands in a doctrine of creation to the view that the incarnation is the inner meaning and purpose of creation and would have taken place without the occasion of a 'happy fault'. Implications for the doctrine of divine action in the world will have to be taken up another time, but will still be on the side of Moore's opposition to deism and pantheism, but not his rejection of secondary causes. See also Platcher WC, *The Domestication of Transcendence*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 115, n 12, where I first came across two of these three references to Aquinas.

world from the excess of divine love. Here God incarnate fully embodies the other way of 'making things make themselves', the way of love and justice and it turns out in fact that this love proves stronger than death. From within the world, the death and resurrection of God incarnate opens the world to the only future God desires for all things—risen from death and decay and sharing in the divine life. Finally justice will be done to the love, which initiated the creation of the world and proved to be its most passionate servant because justice will be done for the world.

Nevertheless it is another orientation, with other possibilities for life to which humankind attends and finds more persuasive. In any of its forms, this orientation of individual and social life has come to be established as if it had a life of its own, as encompassing 'fictions', more living us than being lived by us. These peculiarly human 'fictions' continue to filter and unfold God's evolutionary way of 'making things make themselves', while still giving a place to God or the gods, even a place for love and justice at least for one's own.

This path was given new scope and direction by the revolutionary changes in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Hooker's model spells out the dynamics of this powerful process expanding in our own days to globalised social Darwinism, an 'imperial fiction', whose 'logic' is to be what in political discourse is called 'sovereign power': that power of which there is none greater. This is an encompassing surrogate of true life, a virulent life form that includes reducing human value to instrumental values, with personae serving desired ends, where the economy of desire is shaped by commodity production and market exchange, themselves more deeply driven and fed by attachment and reaction to the perceived underlying lack of intrinsic value and meaning to life.

*Dissonance and Resonance: Christ and the church*

In the light of this good news, the church celebrates and announces to all, the eternal purpose of God the creator, to unite all things in heaven and earth, in Christ the incarnate Word, through whom all things were created. The church is the community brought into being to witness to this God who invites humankind into the divine life, only lately opened in all its depths through Christ. To be and do this well the

church has to attend to the *resonance* and the *dissonance* between Christ and the world.

In the gospel of Christ, the power of this future, intended in love from the beginning for all created things, now reaches into our present, repeating anew in our lives the same *dissonance* and *resonance* as shook people when Jesus first proclaimed the good news of the reign of God. Amidst this shaking the church is brought to birth by the Word and the Spirit, as the community that is to be a sign of the times, where all people may find a saving foretaste of the powers of the age to come, both in word and sacrament, in the vitality of the community, in its charismata, in its bearing each others burdens, in its faith, demonstrated by the 'foolish' courage of people's lives.

Being born and formed by this *dissonance* and *resonance*, the church is thereby called and sent into the same conflict and should expect to share the way of Jesus. This will include confronting the powerful 'fictions' of the times; standing with and for those set aside, disadvantaged and abused by these powerful 'fictions', those that are the least of Jesus' brothers and sisters; enjoying the glorious liberty of the children of God as we explore the 'original blessing' flourishing now in the power of the gospel, being more and more freed from the personal and structural distortions of sin, and imbued with a foretaste of the consummation planned and promised by God in Christ. We are all called to bear and explore this *dissonance* and *resonance*, to be a sign of the times, witnessing to the God who has the 'last word'.

All this assumes that the 'shaking' just mentioned, does indeed form the church and issue in an authentic *resonance* between Christ and the church. We have to acknowledge that all this may be attenuated, resisted, neglected, forgotten, blocked, so that some churches find their relationship with Christ is marked by a particular *dissonance*, that ironically the church is indeed a sign of the times, even in its attempt to cover up its contradictions. This *dissonance* may be brought to light and felt as fresh movements of the Word and the Spirit whether in the church or the world, again shake a church whose life, for example, resonates more with the remnants of an older established order, or the fashions of the latest one, rather than the *resonance* between the creation and the reign of God.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Revelation 2:1-3:22, the seven letters to the seven churches, is a powerful example of *dissonances* and *resonances* between Christ and the church.

*The ambiguity of seductive fictions*

But we should recognise both the seduction of the world by its own encompassing 'fictions' and the worldly seduction of the church are manifestations of humankind's most 'original sin' and 'original blessing'. Just as the Law is good and holy, yet can be used by the power of sin for other ends, so the 'original blessing' is good, yet can be used for other ends. The 'original blessing' continues amidst our following one or other persuasive possibilities for life apart from God, which in any form comes to have a life of its own, an encompassing fiction, structuring our lives, more living us than lived by us. Yet, the 'original blessing' continues amidst the fact and fate of sin, never having been revoked by God.

The worldly 'fictions' present powerful and desirable surrogates of real life. This is because they are feeding off, manifesting and thereby unfolding, the 'original blessing', now filtered and distorted through these 'fictions'. Notwithstanding this vast sinful structuring of life there is still much that witnesses to the goodness, beauty and abundant creativity of God, even in the midst of and in some ways even by means of, the misuse of the awesome dominion given to humankind. This 'double entendre' however, must be carefully disambiguated.

The people of any church are not isolated from the powerful and seductive surrogates of real life offered by the worldly 'fictions'. Hence the risk of being captivated and so captured by the encompassing worldly 'fictions' which are the false surrogates of true life, whether of the churches' own making, or of the culture in which it is immersed and which they imbibes. All the more reason for any church to know within its own life a more authentic *resonance* with the liberating power of the gospel of Jesus the Messiah. In this way the churches may come to 'see through' the encompassing worldly 'fictions' of the times, with all their seductive ambiguity, to better discern the good creation of God and use aright the 'original blessing' to serve the reign of God.

We can see that the church must position itself in society in ways that imitate and participate in the match and mismatch, the *dissonance* and the *resonance* between Christ and the world. But with the possibility of a *dissonance* or mismatch marking the relationship between Christ and the church, it is possible that any church may

position itself or be positioned in a match/mismatch relationship to its society that is not on account of Christ. Were such a possibility realised in practice it would eventually weaken the church's participation in the mission of Christ and the church's authority, which is authority for mission.

Based on my experience, I think the Anglican Church in Melbourne moved in that direction. Overall, we took granted our success in the post war boom. Since then the society has changed in ways that reduced our 'match' and increased our 'mismatch' to society. In the process we lost touch with most of three generations. Not just in the sense of numbers and age profile of those not involved in the church, but with their life styles and cultures, with their different ways of being and relating as persons, with different spiritualities, sexualities and world views. These are the people whose lives are powerfully formed by the 'revolutions' and the other changes noted above, as distinct from earlier generations whose lives were formed in a different social context.

Anglicans persisted for too long in uncritically living off the social capital of our inherited ways of being part of and deeply embedded in, the daily life of Australians, which was changing rapidly. And, we have been too attached to, too enamored of our inherited ways of being church. This narcissism led us to mistake historical precedent for theological norm. We were thereby poorly positioned to weigh deeply enough the changes going on, much less those needed. Nor, for these and other reasons such as our actual devaluing of theological reflection outside an academic setting, were we well placed to appropriate the tradition afresh and so to risk ourselves in exploring faithful and novel ways of engaging our changing social context. Our attachments to our inherited ways of being church meant that we found ourselves increasingly in a mismatched relation to our own culture, our own times, but, I think, alas, not mainly on account of Christ.

In my experience of the Anglican church in Melbourne, we have all found it a difficult struggle to take stock of how deeply attached we are to our inherited ways of being church, of how effectively we were positioned within the dominant modern culture, accommodating ourselves to serve the private spiritual needs of people living with the scientific, technological and social 'realities' carried by the dominant, secular, industrial society, including the types of 'personae' it required and engendered. We came to provide the 'icing on the cake' in regard

to cultural, national and personal identities, which were daily being formed in an emerging social context pervaded by an increasingly turbulent change process that increased the *dissonances* and reduced the *resonances* between society and our inherited ways of being church.

There were people in the churches, including the Anglican Church, who appreciated the signs of the times in the period after World War II and there were and are many efforts to change, both denominational and ecumenical initiatives, both from the senior denominational leadership as well as local parishes, chaplaincies and church agencies. Among many continuing initiatives, Jubilee 2000 was the most noticeable on the world stage. Locally, communities exploring faithful and novel ways of engaging our changing social context do bear fruit. Not too far from now, these will be the only church communities in existence.

### 3.2 Conclusion

There are more empirical accounts of a healthy church, based on studying growing congregations. I regard them as valuable and make use of them in my work in Melbourne. However I also need a more theological account of what counts as a healthy church and this is what I hope to have communicated in this vignette. The last section takes a few matters from sections 2 and 3 to briefly illustrate what they imply about becoming a healthy church in our social context.

## 4. Becoming A Healthy Church in our Society

Along the lines expounded in the theological vignette, I take this to mean that Christian communities are becoming healthy parts of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, demonstrating their ecumenical desire for communion and their good will for all people in our society and inviting all the world to taste and see that God is good!

On the views presented above, the church is called and sent in the power of the Spirit to participate in Jesus' own mission, and so enter into vulnerable but victorious conflict with the powers of life, misoriented and established falsely as a life of its own. This requires the church to announce the good news of the reign of God revealed in Christ and hence to name and act on the *dissonance* and the *resonance* between Christ and the world. This calls for a more authentic

*resonance* between Christ and the church and calls the church to be a more authentic servant of the true interests of the world.

#### *4.1 A more authentic resonance between Christ and the church*

I began the paper by outlining my image of the Anglican Church in Melbourne. I do not consider it to be in a healthy state. This thought is strengthened in the light of the theological reflection on what counts as a healthy church.

That reflection may be summarised as follows. The marks of apostolicity, catholicity and holiness of the church show us the length, breadth, height and depth of our mission to engage the world on account of Christ. The unity of the church in Christ is the way we together, have access to the 'fullness' of Christ, that good life which Christ gives now and therewith all that is needed for the mission of such proportions.

Our overall lack of health is measured by the lack of these proportions in our mission and the extent to which we have adjusted to the lack. In these circumstances it is as if we do not need access to the 'fullness' of Christ. Why would we not need access to the 'fullness' of Christ? This is to ask about that 'other law' at work in us.

It could be due to our believing that access to the 'fullness' of Christ is more individualised than Scripture teaches, more a matter for this person, this community, as if our being members one of another in practice were not crucial to enjoying this access. It could be due to a want of confidence in Christ and his power to transform our lives and the lives of others. It could be due to our not wanting such transformation because our loyalties and affections are otherwise attached to something of secondary importance, mistakenly treated as of first importance, and therefore more manageable by us as we are.

Let us consider two examples to do with mission that call for a more authentic *resonance* between Christ and the church, in this case the Anglican church.

#### *The Church is Catholic*

Under the mark of catholicity I argued that the fulfilling of the great commission requires us to radically multiply the number and diversify the form of Christian communities. The diversity means that

there will be very large mega churches, solid traditional parishes, both large and small, and a myriad of other communities, where the emphasis will be on 'travelling light'.

This radical multiplying and diversifying, calls for all of the marks of our being in Christ to be realised, but let me focus on the first mark of the church. Here our unity in Christ, which means such a community of communities, such eccentricity, such creativity, such esteem of one another, such a multiplicity of gifts of the Spirit, such a play of form and freedom in Christ, such engagement with each other and therefore such conflicts, such a disclosure of the betrayer at hand within each of us and each community, but now owned and not on the loose, with such access to the 'fullness' of Christ for communities old and new, large and small, that we could be overwhelmed by the divine life coursing through us, our distortions, our sin not withstanding, but rather being purged in the energies of a still greater goodness, who calls us on. Such a prospect seems to me to essential to the church being truly catholic, fulfilling the great commission.

It is no surprise that such a view might evoke a litany of obstacles. The issue is whether there will be a robust conversation about our life as a church or whether it will be prematurely limited in order to avoid facing the obstacles. The latter path leads to compliance not commitment. The alternative is to get robust agreement on the implications of the great commission and see what we need in order to pursue it. Together we would then have need of access to the 'fullness' of Christ, whom we trust to call forth presently hidden or withheld resources. This last, because for want of a more excellent way, people go their own way, placing their resources in the service of an inspiring and authentic vision. The challenge for leadership to initiate, maintain and protect this conversation and ensure that it is acted on.

To pursue this mark of catholicity as a sign of a healthy church would also call for local Anglican churches to take hold of the task, not just of handing on their living church community for the future, but also replicating a Christian community for others who are not engaged by their local church. This in turn requires many more people of the church to have moved from 'belonging' faith to 'owned' faith<sup>31</sup> and be

---

<sup>31</sup> This recalls the well known work of John Westerhoff. I thank the Rev. Dr. Paul Dalzell for many discussions on this theme. Of particular interest his thesis for

willing and able to join in the founding of a new Christian community, which may be very different from the one that has sustained them.

Enough has been said to indicate how easy it would be to feel inadequate to the task. To pursue this mark of catholicity as a sign of being a healthy church would call for a power beyond what we have access to at the moment, and a power of which we were confident and that power is Christ. To pursue the great commission in this way would call for a renewal of our commitment to Christ and to one another, so that our way of being church is more aligned with rather than against the grain of our being in Christ.

*The Church is Holy – But we become like what we worship!*

To introduce another example, I recall a connection between worship and mission and the ordained ministry of oversight of the church, which for Anglicans means the bishops and priests, who preside at the liturgy, who teach and preach, and who are to lead a missionary church.

In worship we celebrate the great divine economy for the whole creation lately revealed in Christ. In mission we enter into the working out of that divine economy in our time and place. According to Psalm 115 we become like what we worship. The result of worshipping ‘idols’ is the despoiling, diminishing of human well-being: we have eyes and cannot see, mouths and cannot speak, etc. This is the cost of submitting to the ‘realities’ of the encompassing ‘fictions’ discussed above and acquiring the personae they require. By contrast the worship of the living God, whose first command authorises and calls forth, all our heart, mind, soul and strength, is life giving for us, both individually and collectively.

It is hardly a surprising suggestion that the people of the church, including the clergy, might carry into worship quite a range of understandings and symbols of themselves, of life and of God. That there might be some want of ‘orthodoxy’ in all of this is also hardly surprising. Indeed it ought to be the stuff of an energising, ongoing

---

Doctor of Ministry Studies, *Two Paths One Process? : Exploring the Lived Experience of Participants in Two Forms of Evangelism in Two Anglican Churches in Brisbane*, (Melbourne College of Divinity, 2003). Dalzell explores and compares the process of a group involved in ALPHA and a group undertaking the Catechumenate. Westerhoff said this was the best thesis he had read in forty years.

'conversation' within the church. Can that conversation be found in our midst? My remarks about what it means for the church to be holy is one contribution to that conversation.

Of course, there may be nothing to 'worry' about in any of this. But how shall we tell? If it is true that we become like what we worship, we can gain some hint of what we worship, by reflecting on what we have become. Where we are weak in mission it is a serious question as to whether our worship and ourselves as worshippers are carriers of tacit understandings and symbols of ourselves, of life and of God, that seriously misinform our worship of the holy God, and of our living. We need to take stock of the 'culture', in church and society, as the bearer of a more powerful 'cult' compared to our worship.

There is an inescapable connection between worship and mission. Where one is strong or weak so is the other. Either way leadership needs to be as innocent as a dove and wise a serpent in recognising where that 'other law' in the form of the more powerful 'cult' is at work in our corporate life, and lead the church to worship the living God rather than a surrogate. The risk is that our worship provides the 'icing on the cake' of our identities, daily informed by the social realities of our high-tech society that are able to reach into our lives and form us as 'subjects'.

Hopefully, this daily formation would be disrupted through our worship exposing us to the narrative and other effective symbols of the reign of God revealed in Christ and by a daily practice of following Christ. Besides producing this *dissonance* I suggest there is a *resonance* between this exposure and daily following of Christ and the aboriginal gift and impulse of life from God, by which we are continually sustained in existence. This *resonance* calls forth this gift of life within us, opening our lives to the life of the triune God, for which we are created. We are no longer bound by, even as we bear the marks of, all the formation of ourselves as persons to which we are subject. The combination of this *dissonance* and *resonance* makes it possible for individuals and worshipping communities to 'see through' the formative powers of the world in which we live. Then we enter more fully into the mission of Christ in and for the world.

Theologically, this is a reasonable hope, but is what we have become overall, due to a lack of the word being preached and the sacraments administered? I think not. St. John said plainly that we cannot claim to love the God we cannot see if we cannot love those we

do see.<sup>32</sup> I take that to apply across the board: worship and mission and the fellowship that it needs and expresses are intimately connected, where one is weak so is the other and perhaps like a certain young man, we only come to our senses about our fellowship and our worship, when missiologically, things are desperate.<sup>33</sup>

### **The church as servant of the true interests of the world**

The true interests of the world and of the church are to know the reality of the reign of God revealed in Christ, now in anticipation, finally in glory. This is a contentious claim.

Almost certainly it will seem either unintelligible or incredible to most people not Christians. For Christians it could be far from obvious – some other account of God in Christ defines the world's interest. Other Christians could easily find it either so obvious that there is no need to hear what the world thinks is its true interest, or find it far from obvious because only what the world testifies to its own interest should be heeded.

My position is that the church should bear witness to the kind of world it is, not just in the terms with which the world bears testimony to itself, but also and especially in terms of the kind of God revealed in Christ. The task is to draw out the *dissonances* and *resonances* between these two testimonies and how we should act on them. Given that the church may be in a mismatched relationship to Christ, it is possible that in some circumstances the world's testimony to itself may be one way the Spirit speaks to the churches. Either way it is important to attend to what the world says about itself.

This servant role is possible for any church only to the extent that it submits to a more authentic *resonance* with the life of Christ and invites everyone into the knowledge of Christ. Thus the previous section highlights the first and most important way the church is a servant of the true interests of the world.

In this servant role the church names and acts on the *dissonances*

---

<sup>32</sup> 1John 4:20.

<sup>33</sup> Luke 15:11 – 32. Is this the least misleading account of our 'position'?

and *resonances* between the realities of the reign of God revealed in Christ and the realities of the society in which the church is called to live. This takes place at the 'in your face' level of daily life and at the 'covert' level of social change.

*At the 'in your face' level of daily life*

Suppose the churches publicly 'named' where and in what way the values, ideas, movements, inventions, changes, energies, creativity evident in our society *resonate* with ways of God revealed in Christ. This would be to acknowledge the intimations of God's presence in people's lives and the unfolding of the 'original blessing', while allowing for, but in due course naming the distortions of that blessing.

This 'naming' would surely introduce a very positive stance into the way the church positions itself in relation to society on account of Christ. It would surely promote a many sided conversation and cooperation between churches and the wider community, whether with people from other religious traditions or from none.

This positive stance would be a significant change for many in the churches and may lead to a change in the way many people with no religious tradition automatically position themselves in relation to the church and its gospel.

It may be felt there is a risk for the church in 'naming' these *resonances*, as if there would then no need to speak of Christ. Since it is clear that the people on the right hand of the Judge in Matthew 25 had no theological idea of what they had been doing in serving others, rather were they doing this as if God were not a consideration. We should not be concerned that the people in whose lives we find these *resonances* do not understand themselves in anything like these terms. Who knows what may follow by way of conversations about the 'unknown God', everywhere at work, even the secret of their lives, a secret openly displayed in Christ. The church should certainly not think that this naming obviates the need to meet people with the good news of Christ, nor accept that view if it is expressed by people in whose lives these *resonances* are 'named'.

The 'revolutions' mentioned earlier are ambiguous, with both *dissonances* and *resonances* between these revolutions and the God revealed in Christ. They are part and parcel of daily life for us all. Yet they are not the focus of attention and reflection in many Anglican

communities. There is a need for a developing grass roots reflection in Anglican communities on how we in fact live and how we might better live under these contemporary conditions and so appreciate the *resonances*, contest the *dissonances* and resist their being taken for granted.

It could be thought that the *dissonances* were easier to 'name'. On one level such *dissonances* would include, the unfinished work of reconciliation between indigenous and other Australians; the dreadful state of the land on which we live; the treatment of refugees coming to Australia; the continuing level of unemployment well above the official estimate; the number of children in families living in poverty and the abuse of children; whether sexually or other ways, the cynicism about all forms of institutional life, political, religious, the law and law enforcement and business; the increased insecurity and fear about the way life is going.

The churches and other organisations and individuals have been and are involved in not only naming, but working to do something about these and other *dissonances* between the way life is going in our society and the God revealed in Christ. In the case of the sexual abuse of children and women the church has been part of the *dissonance*, which includes the denial of justice to victims and the cover up to protect the institution.

In the light of the discussions on attending to our social context and the theological vignette, these and many other matters are indeed where the churches should be focused. And this in fact is where the welfare agencies of the churches as well as many local Christian communities are already focused.

But there is more to consider for these matters are very much if not entirely at the 'in your face' level of the way life is going.

*At the covert level of social change*

I have argued that this change process is driven by a vast 'societal change engine' operating at the conjunction of scientific inquiry, the generation of new technologies, commodity production and market exchange. So comprehensive is this turbulent social change that it has come to be treated as 'natural'. This is so obvious that it barely draws attention to how deeply insinuated is this attitude to our lives. This 'naturalising' of the change process is one expression of the naturalistic world-view that over the last four hundred years has become a widely

absorbed grounding assumptions about the kind of world in which we live.

This naturalistic world-view is daily engrained in us by the 'in your face level' of the way life is going which has insinuated within it the sense that such change is 'natural'. I have sought to understand this encompassing turbulent change and its being 'naturalised' in terms as a virulent life form, a globalising, social Darwinism, an 'imperial fiction' because its 'logic' includes becoming what in political theory is called 'sovereign power': that power of which there is none greater.

This 'fiction' or better this 'lie' presents a powerful and desirable surrogate of real life. This is because it is feeding off, manifesting and thereby unfolding, the 'original blessing', now filtered through the 'fictions'. But this is not the only source of its power. This encompassing 'lie' functions as a surrogate 'divinity' by which meaning and value for life - human and otherwise - is reduced to what is of instrumental values for this 'divinity'. Thus another source of its power is that does something like the 'god job', which is needed when other 'gods' are either banished or merely given a 'place'.

Finally this same covert level of the encompassing 'fictions' evokes a still stronger attachment to and dependence on the overt accelerating, turbulent economy of change. This is done by showing that those who do not fit in and adapt to this way of structuring life are left behind as 'rubbish' in the wake of change. More deeply, people imbibe the insinuation that there is no underlying intrinsic value and meaning to life and the discrediting alternative sources of value and meaning.

The point is that the older fabric of life once woven through more frequent and more settled face to face engagements with others, is now unravelling to the point of losing the capacity to ground a felt sense of unconditioned value, being replaced by more abstract forms of communication. This form of life is rendered 'retro', being reframed and threaded by more technologically extended abstract forms of communication, based on 'real absence' rather than 'real presence'. Individuals are then more and more vulnerable to being interpolated by 'personae' serving desired ends, where the economy of desire is

shaped by commodity production and market exchange that accepts no limits.<sup>34</sup>

There is surely a *dissonance* between the reality of the reign of God revealed in Christ, the true sovereign power, and this vast 'societal change engine'. It is one thing to (begin) to name the *dissonance*, it is another thing to act on it. What action is called for and what is possible? Surely the action called for is to change the 'change engine'. Many may think this proposal is monumentally mad, well beyond any talk of 'David and Goliath', rather the Leviathan, the monsters of the book of Daniel.. I can imagine people arguing that it has nothing to do with becoming a healthy church.

Instead I hear its *resonance* with the 'foolishness' of 1 Corinthians 1: 25 and the impact of 'leaven' on the whole loaf.<sup>35</sup> Given the theological and social analysis, then it is indeed part of being a healthy church. But furthermore, this is hardly a new thought. Jubilee 2000 was a world-wide movement to cancel unpayable, crushing debt of many third world nations. Many people are critical of various aspects of the global 'change engine'. The economist Joseph Stiglitz<sup>36</sup> is one of them. Farm subsidies in the EU and the USA have dreadful impact on poor nations. Many nations, including Australia, call for their removal. On the theological and social analysis presented above all these are examples of the distortion of the 'original blessing' whereby all men and women have 'dominion' over the earth in order that they may be fruitful and multiply. The distortion is part of a globalised social Darwinism. Just as there is a profound *resonance* between creation and the reign of God revealed in Christ, there can be no question of ignoring the *dissonance* between the reign of God and the global 'change engine'.

---

<sup>34</sup> The point touches on a number of themes that are part of a much larger theoretical position developed at *Arena*, both in the journal and the magazine. I am much indebted to the work of Geoff Sharp, John Hinksen, Paul James, Simon Cooper and many others at *Arena*. A good introduction to the larger theoretical position is in Sharp, G., Hinkson, J. and Cooper, S., *Scholars and Entrepreneurs: Universities in Crisis*, (Arena Publications, North Carlton Vic., 2002).

<sup>35</sup> Luke 13: 20 – 21.

<sup>36</sup> Stiglitz, J. , *GLOBALISATION and its discontents*, (Penguin, 2002)

In what ways could the churches, hope to have any impact on the vast, global 'change engine'? The answer to this question could take a whole book. In concluding this paper I want to highlight three of the many things the Anglican church in Melbourne could do: contesting the naturalistic world-view; helping promote another way of organising work.

*Contesting a naturalistic world-view*

This naturalism draws on a philosophical appropriation of the natural sciences, which adds, 'and all there is what the natural sciences say there is or is complex configurations of the same. Not to contest the matter is to surrender the natural sciences to being so appropriated within this naturalism and by various cultural processes (education, work, media) become widely taken for granted.

There are rationally available grounds for contesting this naturalistic world-view and for seeking a richer world-view than naturalism.<sup>37</sup> The things for which natural sciences cannot (not, has not) provide an adequate account are the grounds for seeking a richer world-view than naturalism; for example, human inquiry conducted in the natural and formal sciences and everyday life, consciousness and intentionality. Critically building on the work of Professor Roy Frieden<sup>38</sup>, my doctoral work has been developing the explanation and derivation of the laws of fundamental physics in terms of Fisher information. On this approach the operation of the laws of physical can be explained and their mathematical forms derived. The physical universe has just those physical laws and space-time structure you would expect as a *logical consequence* of the assumption that empirical inquiry is conductible anywhere in the universe, along with some other physical knowledge, which does not entail these laws. This result cannot be explained either in terms of full on naturalism

---

37 Craig, W.L. and Moreland, J.P., eds, *Naturalism : A Critical Analysis*, (London, Routledge, 2000); Griffin, D.R., *Religion and Scientific Naturalism : Overcoming the Conflicts*, (Albany, NY : State University of New York Press, 2000); Beilby, J. ed., *Naturalism defeated? : essays on Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism*, (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 2002)

38 Frieden, R.B, *Physics from Fisher Information: A Unification*, (CUP, 1989). My work has been conducted within the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Melbourne.

(physicalism), or evolutionary theory or ‘multiple universes’. Nor can it be explained on any plausible construal of physical theory. On the other hand this result can be explained on the assumption that the universe is structured according to the laws of physics, in order that the universe is knowable through empirical inquiry by embodied rational agents. There are various possible contenders for the ‘designer’ but, any contender must have the characteristics of some kind of agency that is the natural ground of the rational agency that shows up in inquiries in the natural and formal sciences and in every day life.<sup>39</sup>

The church has many people with resources to engage in the task of rationally contesting naturalism and formulating a richer world-view. I think there is great interest among people, young people especially, on the question of what kind of world it is in which we live. It would be quite possible to develop educational programmes that are engaging and accessible for a wide range of people. The churches have many relevant resources for doing this. This is a task that has been attempted many times and is still needed after four hundred years. We may reverse Steven Weinberg’s statement: the more we understand the world the more we grasp its intrinsic purpose.

For an entirely distinct approach we can point to efforts to formulate a theology of nature rather than a natural theology. In its various forms this work aims to produce a theological world-view that holds together the scientific, technological and social dimensions of our life in a different configuration from naturalism.<sup>40</sup> This opens up the work relating cosmology and theology, to cosmology and Christology, and cosmology and eschatology. We can also point to critiques of our culture and of Christianity’s submission to modernity.<sup>41</sup>

- 
- 39 I am interested in making an argument for a natural theology. Here I am much helped, for example by Craig, W.L. and Moreland, J.P., eds, (2000), *op.cit.* and eds., *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, (Downers Grove, Ill. : InterVarsity Press, 2003).
40. See the five volume work in science and theology pursued jointly by the Vatican Observatory and the Centre for Theology and Natural Sciences, eds. R. Russell, *et. al.*, examining scientific perspectives on divine action..
40. I have found particularly helpful, J. Milbank, C. Pickstock, and G. Ward, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, (London, Routledge, 1999); J. Milbank, *The Word Made Strange : Theology, Language, Culture*, (Cambridge, Mass. : Blackwell Publishers, 1997), and *Theology and social theory :beyond secular reason*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1993). and C.Gunton, *The Triune Creator, A Historical and Systematic Study*, (Eerdans, Grand Rapids, 1998).

These ways of naming and contesting the naturalistic world-view needs to be done in intellectual and popular idioms so that the widest range of people can be engaged with the aim of it becoming the way people make sense of the world, at once strong enough to inform daily living, and robust enough to keep developing.

*Another way of working*

The question is how could the churches hope to have any impact on the vast, global 'change engine'? Another response to this question concerns the possibility of how we organize work and to what end, and how work daily engrains a naturalised world-view without ever mentioning the term. Would that the values of an alternative theological world-view might be engrained by daily work. Here I think the cooperativist traditions offer a resource.<sup>42</sup> It would need people with the relevant knowledge, commitments and skill, to form working cooperatives that would be driven by a world-view and values very different from the market place, but would be able to survive and thrive in the market place. The different values would include a different relation between those who owned and those who worked the business, for they would be the same; a better relation between work and family; and work and the environment.

The aim would be to achieve a very sustainable business and a very much better form of life, both embodying the core features of another view of the world, briefly indicated above. I think if this were achievable, more and more people would be attracted to this way of organizing and developing work. Here the 'original blessing' with its real powers would be able to live and work more and more freed from the distortions manifested in the turbulent, globalised social Darwinism. Then there could develop a real engagement of the wider society on the differences between this form of life and work and the 'change engine' driving social change at present.

One opportunity in Melbourne might be a flow on from the fair-wage campaign by churches, trade unions and other community

---

42. Race Matthews, *Jobs of their Own* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1999). From a very different tradition, but with examples of Christian taking initiatives of the kind here envisaged, see, David Oliver and James Thwaites, *Church That Works* (Word Publishing, 2001.)

groups in support of sweatshop workers. At a Melbourne fashion show last year the Brotherhood of St Laurence's new low cost design 'Hunters & Gatherers' label was the only contributor that had signed up to the fair ware agreement not to use sweatshop labour. The message was not lost on other fashion labels. The question is what would it take for the men, women and children who are caught up in 'sweat shop' labour for the rag trade, to form themselves into a cooperative and hopefully go from strength to strength? <sup>43</sup> Is it possible to find within and beyond the churches people who could work together to support the development of more cooperatives? I think even one stunning working example of a cooperative that did indeed embody a different way of life, daily reinforcing a different world-view in the participants, would be a powerful stimulus for attracting such supporters for change in the direction I envisage: change the 'change engine'.

*'Powers and Principalities' – a spirituality of everyday life*

I spoke earlier of Jesus facing and breaking all the *powers* of life misoriented and established falsely as a life of its own and that we are called into the same conflict. I also spoke of some of the encompassing 'fictions' of our day, and their power to structure our lives including our sense of 'self'.

To engage these encompassing 'fictions' we have to be able to 'see through' the realities that are taken for granted. This 'seeing through' occurs where the power and authority of the encompassing 'fictions' is broken by a still stronger power and our eyes opened to the reality on which the 'fictions' are parasitic, which they distort and hide.

A still stronger power is at work in the world for people's eyes are opened because God is at work in and for the world, both incognito as the power of the demand and desire for truth and justice, and openly in the power of the gospel of Christ. The power of the gospel recapitulates and carries further our 'seeing through the fictions' and apprehending the reality, which they distort and hide. The capacity for such 'seeing through' is no cheap grace nor is the work of resisting and engaging these powers. This spirituality of daily life of naming, resisting and challenging the powers and principalities of the

---

43. I am indebted to Fr. Robert Holland of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence for this question and the answer to which he is party.

encompassing 'imperial fiction' can be greatly enhanced by forms of spiritual companionship and guidance. The church has resources here which could be and are made available not only to Christians but to people who cannot yet receive the gospel, but, like the scribe, 'a not far from the kingdom'.

### **Conclusion**

I began this paper asking how we should understand the *dissonances* and *resonances* between the church and society. My particular focus is the Anglican church in Melbourne. My image of this church is that overall it is far from healthy. Hence the need to consider what counts as a healthy church and what relationship should there be between a healthy church and our society. This starting point opened a rich field of inquiry into the many dimensions in the theme of '*dissonances* and *resonances*'. The proposed answer to the opening question is to understand the *resonances* and *dissonances* between church and society in the light of the *resonances* and *dissonances* between Christ and the world and so to face the *resonances* and *dissonances* between Christ and the church, where our way of being church goes with or against the grain of our being in Christ.