

PARADIGM SHIFTS IN MISSIOLOGY

1. FROM CHRISTENDOM TO THE MISSIONAL CHURCH

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1. INTRODUCTION: THEOLOGY AND STORY

More than we often realise, our theology arises from our personal story. Let me introduce myself briefly to you, so that you know where my theology comes from.

I grew up in Hong Kong. My mother and father were missionaries from Australia, officers in the Salvation Army. When we returned to Australia my parents served in the poorest parts of Melbourne, in the south east corner of the country. They taught me the urgency of the gospel and the special concern of God for the poorest.

I became a high school teacher, then did postgraduate studies. First I looked at the philosophy of religion, asking whether religious language could make sense any more in the light of western philosophy. Then I studied world religions, asking whether my Christian faith was different from their faith. Then I studied theology and worked in the inner city of Melbourne with unemployed young people, new migrants to Australia, and more recently, refugees.

I became a Baptist when I was nineteen. The Anabaptists of sixteenth-century Europe also influenced me, so that now I'm always asking what it means to follow Jesus and share his message. I like small churches which meet in houses, and I don't get very excited about denominations and other church structures..

My job is to teach mission studies at Whitley College. Whitley is a Baptist college but we have students from many denominations. There are about two hundred students there, and we are part of the MCD University of Divinity. In Australia we are very casual and informal. Students call me Ross, not 'Professor' or 'Doctor' and students and teachers are often friends. Australians feel different from the English but also different from the Americans—our culture is halfway between their cultures.

I love music and write songs. I'm very keen on caring for the environment, and try to ride a bike to work when I can. I'm married to Alison, and we've shared ministry in our home all of our married life. We explore Christian community and usually have others living with us. My two children, Benjamin and Kia, a son and a daughter, are now grown up. I have one granddaughter, who is nearly three.

In my time with you I'm going to consider some paradigm shifts in missiology..

A paradigm is a whole way of thinking. It is a framework that shapes what we see and hear and think. It is like a pair of glasses that colours what we see.

One example is how we see the universe—the earth, the sun the moon and the stars.

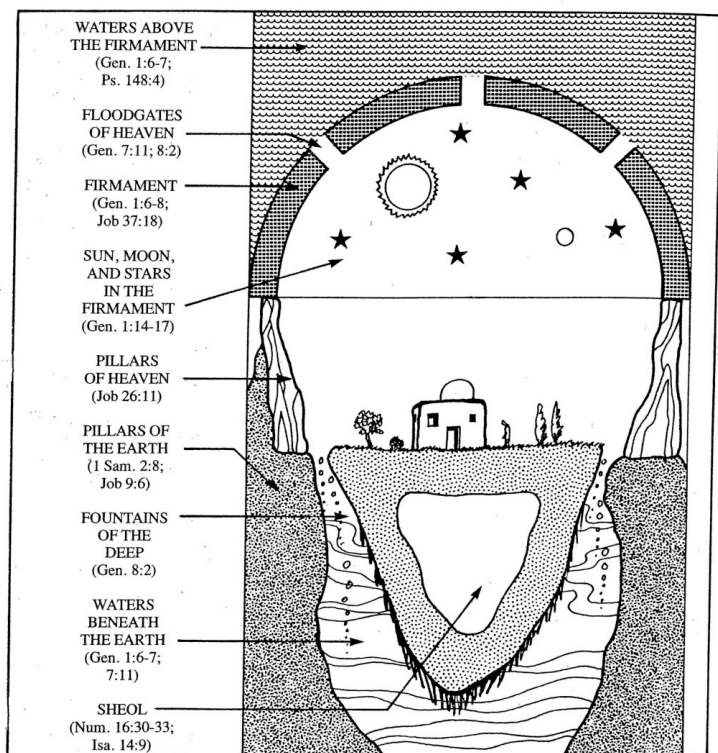
In Old Testament times the Israelites saw the universe in three storeys. In the middle was the flat earth. Above was the heavens (also called the 'firmament'), shaped like a bowl with holes in it for the rain to come through. The sun and moon travelled across the heavens each day. Below was the watery deep. God lived above the heavens and when people died they went to Sheol, somewhere under the earth. This was the biblical paradigm for the universe.

Over the centuries, people began to believe that the earth was round and not flat. As early as 330 BCE¹ the Greek philosopher Aristotle argued for this. This led to a new paradigm, a new way of seeing the earth. Instead of being afraid that we would fall off the edge if we went too far, people started thinking that if we kept going we would arrive back in the same place. When sailors went around the world they proved that it was true.

Soon after western science began, a German called Copernicus (1473–1543) looked at the sun, moon and stars and made careful notes. He realised that the earth goes around the sun, not the other way around. This led to another new paradigm, a new way of thinking.

We have had other paradigm shifts in science, such as when Albert Einstein (1879–1955) came up with the theory of relativity, showing that mass and energy are closely related.

We also use the term 'paradigm' to refer to different periods of history when people thought differently.



The waters above the firmament and beneath the earth: the ancient conception of the world reflected in the Old Testament

For example, the missiologist David Bosch divides the history of Christianity into six periods.² Each time there is a shift to a new paradigm. These are his paradigms:

- a. The early church, as recorded in the New Testament (30–100 CE³)
- b. The Eastern church, that is Greek Christianity in the period of the church fathers, known as the Patristic period (100–600 CE).
- c. The Medieval church (roughly 600–1500 CE).
- d. The Reformation church (1500–1700).

¹ BCE = Before the Common Era, meaning the same as BC (Before Christ).

² David J Bosch, *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 181–189.

³ CE = Common Era, meaning the same as AD (*Anno Domini*, In the Year of our Lord).

- e. The Enlightenment paradigm (1700–1950).
- f. The emerging ecumenical paradigm, developing at present.

Unfortunately Bosch does not discuss Asian church history much; his paradigms are all European or Mediterranean—mostly the western church.

Another problem is that when we divide history into eras like this, they are usually too neat. For example, the Greek church, or the Eastern Orthodox church, was strong between 100 and 600 CE, but it is still going today. And in the Reformation era, when the Protestant churches grew, the Roman Catholic church was still going strong. And Bosch's last paradigm is hardly a paradigm at all, if we mean a 'way of thinking'. He has thirteen different parts of it, full of tensions and uncertainty and fragmentation. We don't know yet how to summarise the present era. It is hard to see a paradigm clearly until it is in the past.

It is still helpful to use the idea of a paradigm to summarise a way of thinking. Sometimes a paradigm is an era in history, such as the Reformation. Sometimes it is a worldview, such as animism, which sees spirits in rocks and trees. And sometimes it is simply the way most people think about something.

Question:

What 'eras' or 'periods' or 'paradigms' do you see looking back into the history of your ethnic group?

This subject is about paradigm shifts in missiology. In my three weeks with you, I will consider three shifts that have been important:

- From Christendom to the missional church
- From saving souls to holistic mission
- From superiority to mission as prophetic dialogue

2. CHRISTENDOM

a. What is Christendom?

I don't expect Christians in Asia to know a lot about Christendom, because it is mostly something experienced in the West.⁴

Christendom can be used in several ways. Today it is often used to describe *the Christian world*. So someone might say, 'Islam is taking a stand against the whole of Christendom'. In this sense, Christendom refers to countries where Christianity is the majority religion.

I am going to use it the way historians do. Christendom is *the marriage of church and state*. It was the arrangement where the church and the state in Europe supported each other in many ways. Christianity was the state religion, with special privileges from the emperor or king. Church and state were 'in bed together'. The emperor, with his armies, defended the pope and the

⁴ The Philippines are the only Asian country I know of where Christianity is the dominant religion.

church enjoyed being at the centre of society, with power, influence and wealth. In Christendom-Europe nearly everyone was born as a Christian. Kings and queens had to promise to support the state religion, and in return priests and bishops had to swear loyalty to their king or queen. Only Christians could teach at universities or have their marriages registered. If you were not a Christian—say, a Jew or Muslim—you were on the margins and had no power or voice at all. In Christendom, the countries saw themselves as Christian countries.

Historically, Christendom *began in the 4th century*, when the Roman Emperor Constantine became a Christian in 312 CE. He began the process of bringing Christianity into the centre of the Roman Empire, which then became known as the Holy Roman Empire.

Historians say it *ended in the 16th century* when Martin Luther broke away from the Roman Catholic church during the Protestant Reformation. But it has broken down very slowly, and still hangs on today in some countries, either as a Catholic Christendom or as a Protestant Christendom.

Many missiologists refer to Christendom as a mindset, or a way of thinking (a paradigm that lingers on today). It's hard to get rid of the feeling of power and comfort that Christendom used to bring. So there is a strong move in missiology to think differently, to think 'missionally', leaving Christendom behind. This is the paradigm shift I'm looking at today.

b. Emperor Constantine

For the first three hundred years Christians experienced persecution. They were a small group, and the Roman Empire had a brutal military dictatorship. From New Testament times onwards they won new converts because they were filled with the Spirit, they lived differently, they cared for each other, they shared their possessions, they witnessed to their friends and they were brave, often being killed for their faith.

They grew fast. Rodney Stark estimates that Christians grew from being just a few people to being about 10% of the population by the time of Constantine, around 300.⁵

Year	No. of Christians	% of population in Roman Empire
40	1,000	0.0017%
50	1,400	0.0023%
100	7,500	0.0126%
150	40,000	0.07%
200	218,000	0.36%
250	1,171,000	1.9%

⁵ Rodney Stark, *The rise of Christianity: A sociologist reconsiders history* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 7.

300	6,300,000	10.5%
350	33,880,000	56.5%

Emperor Constantine (272–337) was converted after having a dream the night before a big battle. He dreamed he was told to paint the sign of the cross on all his soldiers' shields. He did this and he won the battle. From then on he fought under the sign of the cross.⁶ He made Christianity legal. Within two hundred years it was the only legal religion in the Empire and people were being forced to become Christians. Constantine built big churches and cathedrals. Christians got the good jobs. Many people converted to Christianity because it was the thing to do. Bishops became respectable and powerful. They began to wear expensive robes like those at the imperial court. The church moved from the edges of the empire to the centre.

c. The Church in the Western Middle Ages

From the 4th to the 16th century, Europe experienced Christendom. Westerners call this period *the Middle Ages*, in between the Classical era of Greek and Roman culture and the Modern era of science, humanism and art. The Middle Ages was all about Western Europe, not the Middle East. It was about the Latin-speaking church (later the Roman Catholic church), not the Eastern Orthodox church.

In my opinion, in this period the church largely forgot what it means to follow the humble Jesus who sat down with the poor and challenged those in power. It was a period when people were forced to become Christians, and when Christians were tortured or killed if they were found to be heretics—not believing what the church believed. It was a period when the popes and bishops were rich and very powerful, and many of them were not spiritual but were corrupt and evil. The empire gradually fell into decay and the light of the gospel became dim.

The 'Christian empire' in Europe collapsed in 1453 when Muslims—who had been advancing for centuries—conquered the capital city of the Holy Roman Empire, Constantinople.⁷

In this period, there was a theological shift, influenced by people like Augustine (354–430) and Anselm (1033–1109). Instead of looking forward to the whole universe being saved by God, the church focussed on original sin and *saving the soul* of each individual person. It was negative, individualistic and inward-looking. It separated the soul from the body, spirit from matter, 'being saved' from 'living the gospel'.

Also *salvation* became separated from what Jesus Christ did and became something the church decided. If you obeyed the church you could be saved; if not, you were going to hell.

⁶ Alan Kreider, 'Changing patterns of conversion in the West', in *The origins of Christendom in the West*, ed. Alan Kreider (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 17.

⁷ It then became Istanbul and was the centre of the Muslim Ottoman Empire, or Turkish empire, until 1922.

As a result, *mission was seen as the self-realisation of the church*. In other words, mission was not seeking God's kingdom but wanting the church to grow and develop. This is the most important missiological weakness of Christendom. Everything centred around the pope who was in absolute charge of the church. It was the pope who engaged in mission, using his bishops and priests under him. The lay people didn't take part.⁸

The word 'mission' had not been used in the church before, even though similar words about being 'sent' had been around. But now, in the 16th century, 'mission' came into popular use, not for the whole church's participation in the mission of God, but for the priests of the Catholic Church sent by the pope.

People assumed that everyone in Europe was already Christian, so there was no mission to be done there. Missions were in the new colonies in Africa, America and Asia. Nobody could go without the blessing of the Vatican in Rome.⁹ Mission was usually carried out at the same time as European countries sent soldiers to conquer new countries and merchants to exploit their wealth. It became known as *the three Ms*: missionaries, merchants and the military.¹⁰

Bosch, in his book *Transforming Mission*, likes to give each paradigm in the history of the church a Bible verse that sums up the era. Sadly but accurately, he sums up the Middle Ages, or Christendom, with Luke 14:23—"Then the master said to the slave, "Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled".¹¹

d. Mission in Christendom

How can we summarise the missiological paradigm of Christendom? Here are some aspects of it:

- i. There was no need for local mission because everybody was a Christian.
- ii. Conversion was not necessary because you were born Christian.
- iii. The parish (a geographical unit) became more important than the congregation or faith-community.¹²
- iv. You just had to belong; you didn't have to live differently.
- v. Mission was 'out there', overseas, on the edges of the empire.¹³
- vi. Mission was about getting people to join the church.

⁸David J Bosch, *Witness to the world* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980), 118.

⁹Bosch, *Transforming mission*, 228.

¹⁰Samuel Ngun Ling, 'Challenges, problems, and prospects of theological education in Myanmar', *CTC Bulletin (Christian Conference of Asia)* 22.1 (April 2006), available at <<http://www.cca.org.hk/resource/ctc/ctc06-01/ctc06-01e.htm>>.

¹¹Bosch, *Transforming mission*, 236.

¹²Loren B Mead, *The once and future church: Reinventing the congregation for a new mission frontier* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1991), 15.

¹³Mead, *The once and future church*, 15.

- vii. The empire and the church were one: conquering and converting went hand-in-hand.¹⁴
- viii. Mission involved using power, even force.
- ix. Only priests engaged in mission; lay people were not involved.¹⁵

e. **The Slow Breakdown of Christendom**

After the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, Christendom broke in half, but it continued as before. In countries such as Germany each province (or division) chose whether to be Protestant or Catholic, and the state continued to pay the ministers and support the church. Even today in Norway the state collects taxes for the church and pays the Lutheran ministers.

Gradually Christendom has broken down and faded. But still we see signs of it. In England the Queen must swear to defend and uphold the Church of England, and the Bishops must swear to defend the Queen. The queen appoints the bishops and the Archbishop of Canterbury crowns the queen—‘We’ll support you if you support us’. The House of Lords in Parliament reserves twenty-six seats for bishops. It opens each day with the Lord’s Prayer. State schools must provide daily Christian worship.¹⁶

In countries such as the United Kingdom, the US and Australia, what is left is the Christendom mindset. In other words Christians often think of themselves as at the centre of society, with power and influence. They sometimes like to think of their country as Christian, and are nervous when Buddhists or Muslims come as migrants. Or they long for the days when the church was at the centre.

Question:

It is hard for the church to follow Jesus when it has a lot of power and influence, as in Christendom. What is good and what is hard about being a church on the very edges of society, as it is here in Myanmar?

3. **ASIAN CHRISTIANITY AVOIDS CHRISTENDOM**

I imagine that all of this is rather foreign to Christians in Asia. Your experience has been very different. In places like India, Myanmar, Singapore and Malaysia you have been on the other end of this Christendom. You have experienced missionaries, merchants and the military.

You are also a religious minority. You do not have power and influence. Under Constantine only Christians got the good jobs. It may be that in Myanmar only Buddhists get the good jobs. If there is a marriage of state and religion here, it is probably between the Myanmar government and Buddhism. I have heard it said that to be Burmese is to be Buddhist. Government leaders contribute to Buddhist statues and so on.

¹⁴ Mead, *The once and future church*, 14.

¹⁵ Mead, *The once and future church*, 17.

¹⁶ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2004), 189–191.

The 2008 Constitution of Myanmar provides for freedom of religion (within certain constraints),¹⁷ but Section 361 says,

The Union recognizes [the] special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union.¹⁸

This is very similar to the position of the Norwegian Government towards the Lutheran Church of Norway:

The Church of Norway, an Evangelical-Lutheran church, remains Norway's people's church, and is supported by the State as such.¹⁹

These are echoes of a state religion.

Another reason Christendom may be foreign to you is that the Christianity you received from missionaries tends to be evangelical. It encourages ordinary Christians to be on mission and not leave it to the pastors. It wants to convert people 'here and now', not somewhere else.

In many other places there has been a paradigm shift from Christendom to a new post-Christendom. The global church is changing its way of thinking to a missional mindset. It may be new to the West, but perhaps it is not new to you. Whether this is true or not, the missional paradigm is very important. so I'll outline it to you.

4. REDISCOVERING THE MISSION OF GOD

I don't have time here to outline the history of global mission in detail.

A few western missionaries went overseas before about 1800. Famous names include the Roman Catholic missionaries Frances Xavier (1506–1552, India, Japan), Matteo Ricci (1552–1610, China) and Roberto Nobili (1577–1656, India), and later the German Moravians (arriving in 1760 in India).²⁰

Then, following William Carey (1761–1834, India), a flood of missionaries from Britain, Europe and North America went to the non-western world. The one you know best in Myanmar is Adoniram Judson (1788–1850) who was amongst the first missionaries to Burma and arrived 1813—I'm sure there will be bicentenary celebrations next year.

¹⁷ 'Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar', <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar_Constitution-2008-en.pdf>, 2008, #34.

¹⁸ 'Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar', #361. Section 362 also says, 'The Union also recognizes Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Animism as the religions existing in the Union at the day of the coming into operation of this Constitution', though what it means is unclear.

¹⁹ 'Church of Norway', Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_Norway.

²⁰ Stephen Neill, *A history of Christian missions*, 2nd ed. (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1986).

Over time the number of missionaries from the non-western world has grown and now mission is said to be 'from everywhere to everywhere'.²¹ It is not just a western activity.

These missionaries tended to come from the evangelical wing of the church, while the more established and liberal wing was less certain about mission.

But in the last fifty or sixty years, in all parts of the Christian church, there has been a theological recovery of mission.

Christian mission has come to be seen as participation in the mission of God (in Latin, *missio Dei*).

Karl Barth was the first to see this, arguing that, as well as God the Father sending the Son, and the Father and the Son sending the Spirit, we should see the Father, Son and Spirit sending the church.²²

Lesslie Newbigin, even more clearly, said that being sent is at the heart of the church.²³ Newbigin's key text was John 20:21–22, where Jesus says, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' and then breathes on them and says, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'.²⁴

This means that we are called to be a missional church, a sent church, a church with a mission. We are not the church unless we are on mission.

We can say three things about this mission.

First, if God is the sender, God is 'outgoing love'. *God wants to reconcile the whole universe to Godself* (2 Cor 5:19) through the sending of Jesus Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit. This is a big vision. Christian mission comes from the activity of God. So the impulse for mission is not primarily the converting of souls or the expansion of the church but taking part in God's cosmic purposes for a new order of relationships at all levels in the universe governed by justice, love, peace, and grace.

Second, as Jürgen Moltmann puts it, 'It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church'.²⁵ As is often said today, it is not so much that the church has a mission but that *God's mission has a church*.²⁶ This means that the church neither

²¹ Michael Nazir-Ali, *From everywhere to everywhere* (London: Collins, 1991).

²² Bosch, *Transforming mission*, 390.

²³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The gospel in a pluralist society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 119.

²⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *The relevance of trinitarian doctrine for today's mission*, CWME Study Pamphlet #2 (London: Edinburgh House, 1963), 32–34, cited in Timothy Tennent, *Invitation to world missions: A Trinitarian missiology for the twenty-first century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 67.

²⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The church in the power of the Spirit: A contribution to messianic ecclesiology* (London: SCM, 1977), 64.

²⁶ Stephen B Bevans and Roger P Schroeder, *Constants in context: A theology of mission for today* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 8.

shapes mission nor bears full responsibility for it. We are partners with God in God's mission.

Third, *the mission of God is at work beyond the church*. Cross-cultural workers often say that they do not bring God to unevangelised peoples; they discover God at work there and strive to bring it to the surface.

As a result of this shift in theology, we find on nearly every part of global church a new sense of mission. No longer do we think only about converting people; we also work toward a renewed society and renewed earth. No long is mission just a part of the work of the church; it is at the centre and it is the reason for the church. No longer is mission 'overseas' and done by professionals; every Christian is on mission where they are.

The whole church in all of its life is to look outwards. This is the meaning of the missional church.

This applies here in Myanmar as well as in the West. I hope it takes shape in Burmese ways and Chin ways and Karen ways and Kachin ways and so on.

5. THE MISSIONAL CHURCH IN THE WEST

I can only speak of how western churches are trying to understand the missional church. This is a paradigm shift from Christendom to being church in a multicultural society. It is a paradigm shift from being at the centre, where we once were, to being on the edge in society. It is a paradigm shift from being a 'Christian' country, where everyone knew the Bible, to being a 'post-Christian' country, where people don't know the stories of the Bible.

a. What Does 'Missional' Mean?

First, here's a simple definition of the term 'missional': A missional church is one that lives in all of its dimensions as a sent-people,²⁷ that is, it is shaped by mission.²⁸

Another simple way to say it is that is outward-looking in all of its activity.

A third way is to say that the whole reason we exist is to be a sign of the kingdom of God. Mission is God's and we are witnesses to it. We seek out where God is active and try to fan the flames.

I like to say that mission is living into the kingdom of God, or the 'commonwealth of God'. It is straining for the gracious reality of God's presence in the world.

²⁷ Darrell L Guder, ed. *Missional church: A vision for the sending of the church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 4.

²⁸ Church of England Mission and Public Affairs Council, *Mission-shaped church: Church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context* (Brookvale, NSW: Willow Publishing, 2005).

So being missional is much broader than evangelism or engaging in ‘missions’. ‘Missions’ are particular activities we might engage in; ‘mission’ is the overall task.

It includes at least these three dimensions:

- evangelism (telling the Good News),
- seeking peace and justice (living the Good News, service, social action, justice-seeking, peace-making), and
- caring for creation.

Wherever we see God at work in bringing shalom, community, love and justice, we see the signs of the kingdom. The church’s role is to be a sign of this kingdom. The church is not the kingdom, just a wobbly, fallible, faltering, distorted sign of the kingdom.

Mission is incarnational. That is, we don’t just speak our message; we give it shape or body with our lives. It ‘takes flesh’. We learn how to engage in mission from God. As God became one of us and dwelt among us, ‘taking shape’ in our reality, so also Jesus-followers are called to take the road and live and tell the Good News in the midst of the reality of those around us. We are not primarily called to bring people into somewhere, but to go out to them and take Good News to where they are.

This is embodied mission, lifestyle mission, all-of-life mission, costly mission.

b. What Does a Missional Church Look Like?

Part of following Jesus is to form a new community in which we begin to live out the new order of relationships promised by God. We are a sign of the kingdom. Because restored human relationships are so central to the kingdom of God, we can’t be solo Jesus-followers. We can’t do it alone; we need each other. The church is the body of Christ. It is corporate and communal.

The theological term for having a missional approach to being church is ‘missional ecclesiology’.²⁹

Put simply, to be a follower of Jesus means,

- first, to centre our lives on following Jesus, then,
- second, to engage in living and speaking the Good News as creatively as we can, and then,
- thirdly, to consider what it might mean for the shape of the church.

In other words, our christology should shape our missiology, which then shapes our ecclesiology. It goes: ‘Jesus, mission, church’.

²⁹ Craig Van Gelder and William David Taylor, *The essence of the church: A community created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 27–44; Guder, ed. *Missional church*; Graham Hill, *Salt, light and a city: Introducing missional ecclesiology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012).

c. Mission, Worship and Community

What are the basic elements of the local church?

I see church as made up of three activities, which overlap:³⁰

<i>Church is at least ...</i>	<i>Including things like ...</i>
Mission	evangelism, service, community development, social action, care for creation
Worship	praise, hearing the Word, intercession, response
Community	pastoral care, healing, education, children and youth



We tend to emphasise one or the other, but all three are needed.³¹

These elements or dimensions of the church only say what we will do together, not how. Because mission is contextual, if we follow the order ‘Jesus>Mission>Church’ it depends entirely on the context what shape church will take.

So the structures of church are entirely open, flexible and contextual—What day of the week we meet; how we pray; whether we sing; who leads; how long we meet for; where we meet; how formal we are; whether we set up a nice space or use a lounge room, pub or café; what language we use; how we read the Bible; whether and how we include communion and baptism; and so on.

Some missional churches have very good worship, and people come to be part of it. This is mission through worship.

Some missional churches are warm and welcoming communities where people care for each other very well. People come to be part of it. This mission through community.

Some churches are very good in their service or social action out in the community. This is mission ‘out there where the people are’. It is the ‘church

³⁰ Robert Warren, *Being human, being church: Spirituality and mission in the local church* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1995), 89.

³¹ Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 255.

scattered', or the church in service mode, working towards the community development aspects of the kingdom of God. Churches near me in Melbourne work in schools, community centres, soup kitchens or drop-in centres. We even work in coalition with other groups, including non-Christians

So this is the missional church conversation we are having in Australia. Many Australian churches had lost their missional enthusiasm but are now recovering it. We are having to explore it in a society where people don't care much about God. We have a lot to learn yet.

6. WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ASIAN CHRISTIANS TODAY?

Having heard about the paradigm shift from Christendom to the missional church, what does it mean for you?

In some ways you don't need any encouragement because you are very strongly mission-minded. All the Karen and Chin people I have met in Melbourne in Australia are keen on mission.

When I preached a few years ago at a Chin church in Yangon I was told that they were supporting a missionary in every Division in Myanmar. They had a big mission budget and were praying hard for mission.

When I visit Myanmar I am humbled by the depth of your faith, by your energy and enthusiasm for serving God in mission, even under persecution. I don't come bringing advice to you on how to be a missional church.

I hope it is encouraging to hear about the paradigm shift across the world amongst Christians, from Christendom to the missional church.

Maybe, however, we can ask ourselves some questions about the way our churches engage in mission:

- Are we sometimes too busy keeping our own organisation going, or are all the activities of the church looking outward to the world around us?
- Do we sometimes just stick to our own circles, mixing only with Christians, or do we engage with Buddhists and Muslims and share our lives with them in love?
- Do we have a small vision for mission—individual change—or a large one—taking part with God in transforming the whole world?

We will develop this last question more next week.

Question:

Thinking about mission, community and worship, which one is strongest in your local church? Which one is weakest?