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A critical dialogue between the missiology of Lesslie Newbigin and the emerging understanding of mission with the Prebyterian Church in Ireland

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**A critical dialogue between
the missiology of Lesslie Newbigin
and the emerging understanding of mission
within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland**

by

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A Dissertation

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List of Abbreviations

APP	Additional Pastoral Personnel – a term used within PCI for non-ordained employees working in a variety of roles in congregations
BMI	Board of Mission in Ireland (of PCI)
BMO	Board of Mission Overseas (of PCI)
BSW	Board of Social Witness (of PCI)
CSI	Church of South India
IMC	International Missionary Council
NRC	Netherlands Reformed Church
PCI	The Presbyterian Church in Ireland
PC(USA)	The Presbyterian Church USA
PWA/PW	Presbyterian Women’s Association, renamed Presbyterian Women in 2008
PYP	Preparing Youth for Peace – a project of PCI’s Youth Board. The name was changed in 2005 to Preparing Youth to be Peacemakers
WCC	World Council of Churches
YAC	Youth and Children’s Board (of PCI)

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the Research

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) is the largest Protestant denomination in Northern Ireland, and the second largest in the whole island of Ireland.¹ In recent years the churches in Ireland have encountered many of the same challenges faced by churches in Western Europe. These challenges include societal changes, variously referred to as post-modernity or post-Christendom, and falling numbers. These challenges have elicited various responses within PCI. This research project seeks to examine these responses between 1990 and 2009, and then to provide a critical response drawing upon the missiology of Lesslie Newbigin.

1990 was the 150th anniversary of the formation of PCI, and was marked by a Special Assembly in Coleraine. This marked the beginning of a process in which mission began to feature increasingly prominently in the discourse within PCI. This is evident in the subsequent reports of the Strategy for Mission committee up to 1994, the adoption of the first ever mission statement by the denomination in 1992 (PCI 1992a) and the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on Priorities, which initiated the restructuring of the central organisation of the Boards of the church into mission boards and support boards. Several of the restructured Boards have since engaged in a process of strategic review in which mission has been a key element (see Sections 2.5 to 2.8)

More recently, in 2007, the General Assembly approved proposals from the Board of Mission in Ireland (BMI) which have promoted mission planning at presbytery and congregational level, and in 2009 the General Assembly approved a document entitled 'An Understanding of Mission for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland' (2009a, pp.63–5). Thus the period 1990 to 2009 was one in which PCI engaged in significant

¹ According to the 2011 census in the Republic of Ireland there were 24,600 Presbyterians compared to 129,039 Church of Ireland and 3,861,335 Roman Catholic (Central Statistics Office 2012). In the same year the Presbyterian Church's own statistics recorded only 13,613 persons of all age in the Republic of Ireland (PCI 2009a, p.314). It is clear that many more people record themselves as Presbyterian in the official census than are actually recognised as having a connection to Presbyterian congregations.

missiological reflection.

Within this increasingly prominent mission discourse within PCI two interrelated themes are immediately apparent. The first is the changing context in which the church is situated. Over the past thirty years the social realities have changed radically and PCI has felt the impact of this in many ways. PCI exists as a denomination throughout the whole island of Ireland. However, in 2009, only 5.2% of people of all ages in PCI were members of congregations in the Republic of Ireland (PCI 2009a, p.284). This project will, therefore, concentrate on the context in Northern Ireland.

The second theme is that in this changed context a new understanding of mission and its place in the life of the church must be developed. The first aim of this research is to delineate and describe PCI's mission discourse and to assess if a consensus, which could be described as an emerging view of mission, has been reached. The second aim is to offer an evaluation of PCI's mission discourse by engaging in a critical dialogue between it and the missiology of Lesslie Newbigin.

The missiology of Lesslie Newbigin is an appropriate partner to co-opt into a critical dialogue with the emerging view of mission within PCI for several reasons.² First, Newbigin was ordained by the Church of Scotland, was a missionary of that church and in his retirement he served as a minister of the United Reformed Church in England. Thus, alongside his life-long commitment to the ecumenical movement and church unity, he remained part of the Reformed tradition of which PCI is also a part. Second, Newbigin's missiology represents a body of work that is widely recognised as being comprehensive and influential. This remains true more than a decade after his death, for, as Wainwright notes, Newbigin's work does not have merely retrospective but prospective significance. He states that Newbigin addressed several movements and developments that began during his life but which

2 In a PhD thesis *Towards a Theology of Evangelism for Late-modern Cultures: A Critical Dialogue With Lesslie Newbigin's Doctrine of Revelation* Kandiah (Kandiah 2005) also enlists Newbigin as a dialogue partner. He cites Newbigin's experience as an evangelist, a strategic thinker, and an ecumenical evangelical, along with his engagement with late modernity as reasons why Newbigin is a suitable dialogue partner (2005, pp.15–20).

will continue to influence Church and world in the twenty-first century. Newbigin addressed several of them in their early stages, and insights and guidance may be found in his work for the ways in which Christians may regard these influences as they go forward (2000, p.27).

Weston also notes Newbigin's ability to 'identify ahead of time the most significant missionary questions and issues including contextualisation, pluralism, church unity, and mission in the context of the end of Christendom' (Weston 2006, p.vi; see also Shenk 1998, p.3).

Third, this wide-ranging and influential body of work was developed during Newbigin's career during which he was primarily a practitioner rather than a missiological academic. Newbigin saw himself primarily as 'a pastor and preacher' and highlighted how his writing fell short of the standards of academia (1989, p.x). While this might cause difficulty for scholars who prefer a systematic approach (Goheen 2000, p.7), the fact that he 'theologized in the midst of practice and for its better pursuit' (Wainwright 2000, p.6) makes him an ideal dialogue partner for PCI as it engages in the same task. It is of particular benefit that Newbigin's writings contain a considerable amount of material in which he reflects on his own missionary practice, thus allowing consideration of how his theological insights were worked out 'on the ground'. Obvious examples include the talks he gave to clergy in the Madras diocese collected in *The Good Shepherd* (1977a) and several articles in *A Word in Season* (1994a).

Fourth, Newbigin's missiological career spanned more than sixty years, during which time it is possible to note both development and continuity, with Hunsberger (1998) and Goheen (2000) both noting significant stages of development in Newbigin's thinking, although they differ in their delineation of them (see Section 3.3). Newbigin thus provides an example of how missiological thinking can expand and develop as it reflects on experience and interacts with a changing environment, while remaining true to foundational assumptions.

1.2. Research Procedure and Thesis Structure

Having established that the missiology of Lesslie Newbigin is an appropriate partner for a critical dialogue with the emerging view of mission in PCI, it is necessary to set out how this dialogue is to be enacted. In the dialogue, Newbigin's missiology will play a role comparable to that of a mentor; that is, one who has considerable knowledge and experience and is available to advise and guide one who is following a similar and related, but different, path.

Mentoring is a relational process between a mentor, who knows or has experienced something and transfers that something (resources of wisdom, information, experience, confidence, insight, relationships, status, etc.) to a mentee, at an appropriate time and manner, so that it facilitates development or empowerment (quoted in Cunningham 1998, p.35).

A mentoring relationship involves a more experienced professional serving as a supportive and guiding role model for another professional less experienced in the field (Cunningham 1998, p.35).

The role of the mentor, therefore, is not to dictate or demand conformity, but to use their experience to point out possible pitfalls and open up new areas of thought and development.

The dialogue begins in Chapter 2 by introducing the mentee. An introduction to PCI as a denomination is given, along with an overview of the main initiatives within PCI relating to mission between 1990 and 2009.

Having heard the mentee describe the issues they are facing, Chapters 3 and 4 introduce Newbigin as the mentor. His experience and insights are elaborated in areas relevant to the issues that PCI has been facing. Chapter 3 examines Newbigin's approach to the emerging post-Christendom context. This includes analysis of his general theological method, his theology of cultural plurality and a theological understanding of the end of Christendom. Chapter 4 focuses on issues concerning the church in mission, including questions of ecclesiology, attitudes and expectations in

mission, the institutional church, and ministry and leadership.

The main engagement between PCI and Newbigin takes place in Chapter 5, dealing with the emerging post-Christendom context, and Chapter 6, dealing with the church in mission. Each of these chapters contains sections giving more detail of PCI's thinking and experience in the relevant areas, followed by sections in which the dialogue with Newbigin's missiology is enacted.

In Chapter 7, the Conclusion, an assessment is made as to whether it can be said that there is an emerging view of mission within PCI, theological resources relevant to PCI are discussed, and specific recommendations are made.

The order of presentation described above represents the result of the research process, not the actual order by which the research process was conducted. In the research process both bodies of work, PCI sources and Newbigin's writings, were examined and themes for analysis were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

occurrence: any potential theme had to be clearly distinguishable either in Newbigin's missiology or in PCI's discourse so that there is material for analysis. Ideally the theme appeared both in Newbigin and in PCI, so that application of this criterion ensured that selected themes were pertinent to the critical dialogue between Newbigin and PCI.

wider missiological relevance: in order to narrow down the possible number of themes, priority was given to themes which have been part of the discourse of the wider missiological community. Application of this criterion ensured that themes were not too narrowly focussed or parochial, although in the case of PCI themes were inevitably related to its particular context.

practical application: preference was given to themes which lent themselves to practical application rather than simply theological abstraction. Application of this criterion ensured that the dialogue remained faithful to the practical

concerns of both participants.

When the major themes had been identified both bodies of data were analysed using a coding process. Inevitably there was considerable variation in the thinking and experience of Newbigin and PCI on these themes. The analysis of each focussed on areas of interest, or sub-themes, arising from each. Some of these sub-themes were common to both bodies of data, which led to an opportunity for direct dialogue between them. Other sub-themes appeared in the analysis of either Newbigin or PCI, but not both. In this case it was necessary to determine the implications and significance of the presence or absence of this sub-theme for each partner.

1.3. Methodology for Researching the Emerging View of Mission in PCI

Several factors required more detailed attention to be paid to the methodology for researching PCI's mission discourse than to Newbigin's missiology. Newbigin's missiology is largely available in the form of a considerable corpus of written material, which, although written over many years and showing stages of development, does culminate in a clear framework for understanding mission. It is the contention of this thesis that, beginning in the early 1990's, PCI has been going through a process in which its missiology is moving from one settled understanding towards another. In contrast to Newbigin's writings, which are in a sense a closed set and in which a clear, settled understanding of mission is arrived at, the current situation within PCI is dynamic and fluid. It is clear that development has been taking place and it is possible to trace this development. It is, however, not clear if the period of transition has been completed and a new settled understanding has been arrived at, or whether it is still developing. As McGuigan (quoted in Sørensen 2007, p.27) notes

To study the present is an inherently risky business in which one is bound to make mistakes which become only too evident when they are eventually seen with the benefit of hindsight... the intellectual risks are worth taking, however, since some critical understanding of one's own time is a vital resource for surviving it, let alone changing it.

A further complicating factor in researching the emerging view of mission in PCI was in the nature of the evidence. When dealing with Newbigin's missiology we are dealing with an individual and can gain access to his thought through his writings, which include considerable autobiographical material, most notably in his autobiography *Unfinished Agenda* (Newbigin, 1993) and *The Good Shepherd* (Newbigin, 1977). With PCI we are dealing with an institution, or organisation, which has very different ways in which it gathers information, generates knowledge and reaches understandings. Accessing and gaining an understanding of PCI's missiology therefore necessitated a combination of qualitative research methods, particularly documentary analysis and interviews of key informants.

Another issue that had to be addressed was how to define PCI itself, and if it is possible to talk of 'PCI's view' of anything. As a denomination PCI has two modes of existence (see Section 2.1). It exists as separate and individual congregations throughout the island of Ireland, and in a sense these congregations are its primary mode of existence. However, PCI also has an institutional existence as the General Assembly with its boards and committees. These two modes of existence are distinguishable yet inextricably linked, and this makes it difficult to talk of 'PCI's view' of any particular issue. On one level, it would be legitimate to state that a statement by the General Assembly, or perhaps a Board of the Assembly, represents the view of PCI, but this might hide considerable disagreement on the issue at congregational level. It is beyond the scope of this research to investigate the understanding of mission at congregational level, and it was therefore necessary to restrict the research of the development of missiological thinking to the institutional side of PCI's existence.

1.3.1. The Research Questions

Flick (2009, p.98) highlights the importance of paying attention to the formulation of research questions and their influence on the success of a qualitative research project. He also notes that the issue of formulating research questions does not just occur at the beginning of a project, but also at several key points, including conceptualising the

research design, entering the field, selecting cases etc. It is not inappropriate to have *a priori* hypotheses as the basis for research questions, as is the case in this project, but the researcher must ‘remain open to new and perhaps surprising results’ (2009, p.98).

The research questions that were applied to this area of the research were:

Is there an emerging understanding of mission within PCI?

If there is, what are its key themes?

Is it still developing or has it reached a settled state?

If it is still developing, in what ways might it, or should, it develop?

1.3.2. The process of change

It is the contention of this research that PCI’s understanding of mission has been in a state of flux, and it aims to assess whether there is an emerging consensus. Hans Küng has applied the insights of Thomas Kuhn on paradigm changes in scientific thinking to theology (Küng 1991, pp.123–169). Küng’s analysis was appropriated by Bosch in *Transforming Mission* (Bosch 1991). Newbigin’s analysis of paradigm change in science and its application to epistemology makes similar points (1989, pp.43–7). Although it may be an overstatement to refer to the developments in missiological thinking within PCI as a paradigm shift, several of Küng’s observations about how paradigm change occurs are instructive.

Küng’s first observation is that initially there is a ‘normal science’ with its classic authors, text books and teachers. This stage is characterised by a cumulative growth in knowledge, a solving of remaining problems and resistance to everything that might lead to the alteration or replacement of the existing model of understanding.

Second, a new stage is precipitated by the awareness of a growing crisis, which results in a change in certain previously valid assumptions and leads to a breakthrough of a

new interpretive model or paradigm. This second stage is a period of 'transitional uncertainty'.

The third observation is that replacement of the old paradigm only occurs when a new one is ready.

Fourth, both scientific and non-scientific factors play a role in whether a new paradigm will be adopted or rejected, so that ultimately transition to a new model may be described as a conversion.

The final observation is that it is hard to predict whether a new paradigm will be absorbed by the old one, or if the old one will be replaced while the process of discussion and argument is still taking place. In the case of paradigm changes in theology a third possibility exists, that the old paradigm continues to co-exist with the new one.

These observations provided a framework for analysing the data gathered about recent missiological thinking in PCI and determining if there is an emerging view of mission.

1.3.3. Assessing the Documentary Evidence

There is considerable documentary evidence available for researching the emerging view of mission within PCI. The process has largely been driven by Boards and Committees of the General Assembly and thus there are reports, minutes and papers that have been generated as they have engaged in the process.

Prior gives important guidance for the use of documents in social research. Documents are social products (2003, p.12) and research should keep in mind the dynamic involved in the relationships between production, consumption and content (2003, p.26). Having noted the complex relationship between congregational and institutional aspects of PCI, it is important to bear in mind that documents do not merely convey information, but give expression to a set of power relations. Prior uses

the example of office memos which become ‘engaged in a system of action-at-a-distance’ and notes that texts routinely have such ‘structuring’ effects’ (2003, p.67). Therefore, when analysing documents, it is important to pay attention to the following (2003, pp.142–3):

- i. the author(s) who authorised the document and where they are made ‘visible’ or ‘invisible’ in the document;
- ii. the resources used by the author(s) to underpin their rhetoric;
- iii. how the documents structure their readers, that is to say, the specific audience that is addressed and how the document engages them, and seeks to influence them, through, for example, the title of the document and by its place and manner of publication;
- iv. how, through the use of textual devices, the document structures the world, that is, the underlying methods of organising and interpreting raw data.

In the context of this research documents were analysed according to their purpose and the part that they played within the missiological discourse within PCI. Küng’s observations provided a framework within which to locate specific documents in the process of PCI’s missiological discourse. It was possible to identify documents which indicated that the assumptions of an old model were being questioned, indications of a resulting period of uncertainty, and elements of an emerging new model.

1.3.4. Interviews of Key Informants

The data obtained from documentary evidence was supplemented by interviewing key informants. Interviews were conducted with the Secretaries of three of PCI’s mission Boards: David Bruce (Board of Mission in Ireland), Lindsay Conway (Board of Social Witness) and Uel Marrs (Board of Mission Overseas).

The interviews therefore fell into the category of ‘expert interviews’. Flick defines

experts in this context as people ‘who are particularly competent as authorities on a certain matter of facts’ and have ‘technical process orientated and interpretive knowledge referring to their specific professional sphere of activity’ (2009, p.166). Bogner and Metz suggest three main purposes for expert interviews, each of which was relevant for this research. First, for exploration and orientation in a field of study in order to generate a thematic structure and generate hypotheses. Second, to collect context information which can be set alongside insights coming from other sources. Third, to develop a typology or theory by reconstructing the knowledge of various experts (quoted in Flick 2009, p.166).

The third purpose highlights the more recent approach to interviews in qualitative research, in which it is recognised that the interviewer and interviewee are both actively involved in the production of knowledge within the interview. The older approach can be described using the ‘miner metaphor’, in which knowledge is seen as buried metal and the interviewer is a miner who unearths it. In this case the knowledge is seen to be contained within the interviewee and is waiting to be uncovered by the miner (interviewer). The more recent approach can be described using the ‘traveller metaphor’, in which the interview is seen as a journey in which knowledge is not given, but is created and negotiated in the interaction between interviewer and interviewee (Ritchie & Lewis 2003, p.139).

Gubriem and Holstein elaborate on this distinction. For them, traditional interviews worked by constructing *a priori* categories and then asking established questions with the aim of capturing precise data that could be categorised, codified and generalised (2003, p.53). In this approach the interviewee is seen as a ‘vessel of answers’ and is epistemologically passive, that is, not involved in the production of knowledge (2003, p.70). The concept of the ‘active interview’ (2003, pp.69–75) offers a more satisfactory model. In this model the respondent is considered to be actively involved as a ‘maker of meaning’, for in the process of offering up facts the interviewee ‘constructively adds to, takes away from, and transforms the facts and details’ (2003, p.70). The interviewee thus mediates and alters the knowledge that is conveyed to the interviewer. A dramatic metaphor is also appropriate for such an active interview,

since the narrative for the interview is scripted, with a topic, distinguishable roles and a format for conversation. But it also has a ‘developing plot, in which topics, roles, and format are fashioned in the give and take of the interview’ (2003, p.75). In such an interview ‘meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning, nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter’ (2003, p.68). This is confirmed by Ritchie and Lewis, in their description of what they term ‘in-depth interviews’, who state that such interviews are ‘generative in that new knowledge or thoughts are likely, at some stage, to be created’ and that ‘participants will be directed down new avenues of thought and may propose solutions for problems’ (Ritchie & Lewis 2003, p.141).

The interviews in this research were therefore structured to provide background and contextual information to be used in conjunction with the data gathered from documentary evidence. They were also structured recognising the potential of the interviewees to be actively involved in the generation of knowledge regarding the process of the emergence of a new understanding of mission within PCI.

All informants interviewed completed informed consent forms. Interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. Digital storage of the original sound files and transcripts included password protection and hard copies were kept in locked storage. Interviewees were given sight of passages in the thesis in which they were quoted.

1.3.5. Codifying and Analysing Data

The codification and analysis of data is an essential component of qualitative analysis and there are various methods and approaches (Flick 2009, pp.305–333; Ritchie & Lewis 2003, pp.110–5; Gibbs & Taylor 2009). Although this is not primarily a sociological research project, it is worth reflecting on the approach that was taken in the analysis of the data. The analysis of Newbigin and PCI was carried out by the analysis of various themes, which equate to the codes generated in qualitative research. The themes were selected from Newbigin and PCI according to the criteria set out above. In qualitative terms the themes bear similarities to both *a priori* and

grounded codes. They are similar to grounded codes in that they emerged from the analysis of Newbigin and PCI. They are similar to *a priori* codes in that, in the development of the themes, account was taken of the wider missiological debate and, once they had been defined, both Newbigin and PCI were re-examined on the basis of those themes.

1.4. Originality, Scope and Limits of the Research

This research project brings the mission discourse within PCI into a critical dialogue with Newbigin's missiology.

During the period covered by this research PCI has been seeking appropriate responses to its changing context. At every level of the church, and in both its institutional and body strands (see Section 2.1. for a description of these strands), there has been discussion and debate, with proposals and initiatives being produced. This research project is the first to seek to gather this material and to evaluate both the content of this missiological discourse and assess if there is an emerging view of mission within PCI. Out of necessity the research has focussed on material from the institutional strand of PCI (see Section 2.1 for the rationale for this decision).

This is a research project under the rubric of Practical Theology, which is relevant to how PCI's mission discourse was researched. The raw data for the research was in the form of reports and documents produced primarily within the institutional strand of PCI, supplemented by interviews with key informants. Although many theological concepts arise within these materials, they are written with pragmatic intent and are not primarily theological works. PCI, in fact, produces very little that could be described as Systematic Theology. In turn, this research, although gathering the material and providing a theological analysis, does not meet the criteria of Systematic Theology, but retains the procedure and emphases of Practical Theology.

Similarly, although sociological methods, particularly methods of qualitative research, have been utilised, this remains a theological research project. The qualitative research

methods were used primarily to gather data regarding PCI's emerging view of mission. This data was then used in the theological dialogue with Newbigin's missiology. The appropriateness of this approach was confirmed in a discussion with Prof. John Brewer (School of Social Science, University of Aberdeen) (Brewer 2009).

This research project has utilised Newbigin's missiology to act in a mentoring role with regard to PCI's mission discourse. Thus, the originality of the research regarding Newbigin lies primarily in its connection and application to this discourse. Although at certain points I provide critique of Newbigin's missiology and apply it in new ways, the focus of this project is not to provide a new insight into Newbigin, but to engage in the dialogue with PCI's mission discourse.

1.5. The Relationship Between the Researcher and the Research

The complex relationship between researcher and the research being carried out has become an important issue in qualitative research. Given that within this research qualitative methods were used merely as a tool to gather information that was then be used in a theological analysis, it is not necessary to evaluate the epistemological issues at the heart of this debate. This was confirmed by Prof. John Brewer (School of Social Science, University of Aberdeen) (Brewer 2009).³ Nevertheless, the researcher must always consider his/her relationship to the research, and the possible bearing this could have on it.

My personal history links me to both sides of this research project and has prompted my interest in pursuing it. I met Lesslie Newbigin in the autumn of 1990 while I was a student at Selly Oak colleges. I was introduced to his missiological encounter with modern British society in a seminar he gave to a small class of students. I have worked as a missionary in Nepal for a total of six years, thus sharing (although for a much shorter time) Newbigin's experience of living within an Asian, Hindu society and returning home with a different view of my home culture.

³ For discussion on the epistemology behind qualitative research and the issue of reflexivity see (Brewer 2000, p.277ff; Flick 2009, pp.56–8).

I also have considerable involvement in PCI. During my years in Nepal I was serving as a missionary of the Board of Mission Overseas (BMO). I was ordained as a minister of PCI in 2001 and since then I have spent two years in Nepal, five years as a minister of a Home Mission Congregation in Limerick⁴ and five years as minister of Garnerville Presbyterian Church in East Belfast. I am currently employed by the Irish Churches Peace Project, of which PCI is the lead partner. I am thus part of the organisation which is the subject of research.

I have also had close connection with several of PCI's Boards and have played a small part in the missiological discourse in the past few years. I have been involved in many of the General Assembly debates since 2001 which feature in this research. As a minister I have also been involved in the implementation at Presbytery and congregational level. My perspective in this research, then, is not that of a neutral observer but as a stakeholder in the process.

The fact that I am a minister of PCI is an advantage in that I have a considerable amount of background knowledge of the denomination and its workings. Being a PCI minister is also an advantage in terms of access. I know personally each of the key informants within PCI, which proved to be an advantage in terms of gaining permission to access for interviews and written materials. However, the influence of my prior relationship with the key informants may have had a particular influence on the interviews. This is most relevant in the case of BMO, under which I served overseas, and the Board of Mission in Ireland (BMI), under which I served as a Home Mission Minister in Limerick. The prior relationship with key informants and my involvement with PCI and its recent missiological discourse confirm that the 'miner' metaphor of interview, discussed in Section 1.2.4, is not appropriate. The 'traveller' or 'journey' metaphor is much more appropriate, given the existing relationship with informants and our shared experiences of PCI and the recent missiological discourse.

⁴ Home Mission Congregations are congregations which meet certain criteria and receive extra support from the BMI.

2. The Emerging Understanding of Mission in PCI

2.1. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland traces its history to the arrival of Presbyterian Scottish settlers in Counties Down and Armagh in the early seventeenth century, with the formation of the first Presbytery in 1642 (Holmes 1992, p.27; Holmes 2000, p.27). As the numbers of immigrants from Scotland continued to rise, the Synod of Ulster was formed in 1690. In the early nineteenth century the Synod of Ulster was split by a controversy over Arianism, with the orthodox party ultimately gaining the upper hand. This made possible the uniting of the Ulster Synod with Seceders from Scotland in 1840, leading to the formation of the General Assembly and the birth of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as it currently exists. Several of the principles arising out of the conflicts prior to the formation of the General Assembly are still key to PCI. These include the authority of Scripture, the Presbyterian form of government and discipline, and full subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith by all office bearers (Holmes 2006, pp.310–1). In 1859 a revival broke out through much of Ulster and has become ‘a cherished part of the Evangelical tradition in the province’ (Holmes & Knox 1990, p.39). The revival strengthened the evangelical movement and the revival tradition within Presbyterianism.

Numerically PCI’s membership peaked in 1967, with 402,104 persons of all ages being recorded (PCI 1967, p.186). Since then, the statistics for membership, baptisms and new communicants all show consistent decline (Figure 1 (PCI 2009b, p.285)).

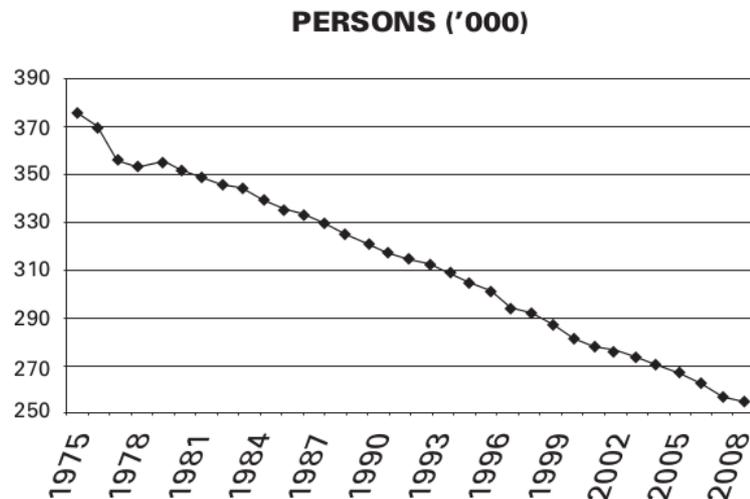


Figure 1: Persons claiming connection with PCI

Structurally, PCI can be considered to have two distinct, yet inter-related modes of existence, which in this thesis will be termed the ‘body mode’ and the ‘institutional mode’. In the body mode PCI exists primarily as a church with congregations as the fundamental unit. In terms of the legal structure of the denomination the body strand is defined in PCI’s constitution, the Code, as the courts of the church, which include the Kirk Session, Presbytery and General Assembly. The Kirk Session is responsible for a local congregation ‘in all matters of doctrine, discipline, worship and order’ (PCI 2011, para.19(2)). Congregations are grouped into geographical areas called Presbyteries, which are ‘the body primarily responsible for corporate oversight of the congregations’ (PCI 2011, para.19(2)). The Presbytery is responsible to the General Assembly, which is the highest court of the church and consists of serving and retired ministers and representative elders from each of PCI’s congregations. Even though this Presbytery structure is one of the main distinctives of Presbyterianism, the congregation has increasingly been recognised as the ‘primary mission unit of the church’ (PCI 2002, p.307).

The institutional mode of PCI’s existence relates to the centralised functions of the

denomination. The General Assembly delegates this centralised work to boards and commissions, each of which has committees and panels with specific responsibilities. Following the Ad-Hoc Committee on Priorities recommendations in 2003, the Boards have been classified into three groups:

1. Mission and Ministry Boards, whose role is to encourage and support mission and ministry at a local level and to oversee specific mission and ministry in their own area of responsibility. The Mission and Ministry Boards are the Board of Mission in Ireland, the Board of Mission Overseas, the Board of Social Witness, the Board of Youth and Children and the Board of Christian Training.
2. Support Boards, whose role is to provide support to the mission and ministry Boards. The Support Boards at this time were the Boards of Finance, Communications and United Appeal.
3. A Management Board, known as the General Board, whose role is to facilitate and coordinate the work of all the Boards, as well as to oversee other areas of work given by the General Assembly (PCI 2003, p.310).

The Boards are made up of representatives from Presbyteries, according to rules within the Code which ensure a balanced representation of ministers and elders and male and female (PCI 2011, para.269(4)). Much of the work of each board is conducted through committees dedicated to specific areas. Larger boards have an executive staff. In 2001 the General Board reported that, while the Board structure was comparable to similar Reformed churches, the number of people sitting on Boards and Committees was significantly higher (PCI 2001, p.10). Holmes points out that in the latter half of the twentieth century, PCI has seen a process of ‘institutional centralisation’ (Holmes 1992, p.156). This was necessary to deal with the increasing need for the denomination to address national and international issues, as well as the increasing complexity and volume of the centralised work.

Within the overall denomination these two modes exist in a symbiotic relationship, in that they are distinct from each other and mutually dependent on each other. The interdependence of the two modes derives partly from the fact that both are under the authority of the General Assembly, and that the Boards and Commissions of the Assembly consist primarily of representatives from Presbyteries and congregations. (Figure 2).

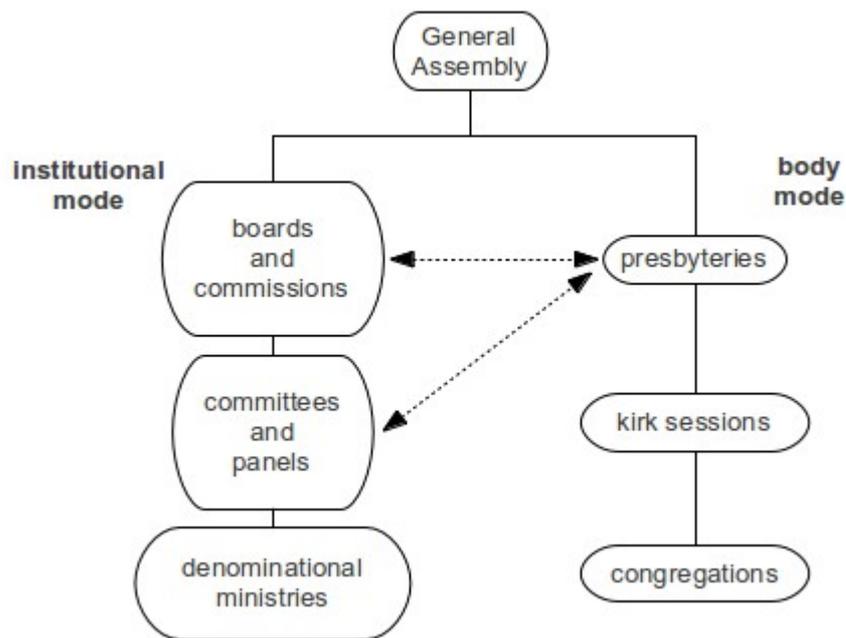


Figure 2: PCI Structure

In this diagram the solid lines represent official and legal accountability structures. The dotted lines show the influence of informal relationships and connections within the denomination as described in Section 5.1.1. below. Although the denomination exists in these two modes it is the body mode which is consistently viewed as the primary mode of existence. This is clear in the Code, where Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries and the General Assembly (along with its Commissions) are described as courts of the church whereas boards are given ‘supervisory responsibilities over a broad field of work’ (PCI 2011, para.268(2)), and committees exist ‘to promote particular aspects of work under the supervision of the board’ (PCI 2011, para.268(2a)).

2.2. The Coleraine Assembly

2.2.1. Background to the Assembly

In 1990 the 150th anniversary of the formation of the General Assembly was marked by a special Assembly held in Coleraine with the express purpose that ‘the vision and commitment of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland may be renewed in ways which are true to the Reformed Faith which we have received; and appropriate to the changed world in which we live 150 years on’ (PCI 1988, p.81).

From its inception, the special assembly was intended to be part of a process leading to change in the denomination, the purpose of the conference being stated as:

Under the Lordship of Christ and in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, our aim is to lead and facilitate a process between now and 1992 which will impart a renewed vision to the P.C.I., freeing us FOR more effective service, and FROM outdated and unBiblical traditions, and renewing our life, witness, and worship to meet the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly changing situation (1989, p.71).

The organising committee had also given consideration to the style of the assembly, opting for a ‘renewal’ model which aimed to be ‘essentially relational and inspirational’ (1989, p.71). The main themes of the conference were to be Life, Witness and Worship, although the assembly would aim ‘not to set down definitive policy, but to indicate broad guidelines for the future’ (1989, p.73).

2.2.2. The Coleraine Declaration

The Special Assembly received the text of the Coleraine Declaration (Appendix 1) ‘as a document that witnessed to some of the insights and visions gained at Coleraine’ (1990a). In line with the overall theme of the assembly, ‘Transformed, Not Conformed’, the declaration begins with bullet points listing areas in which the church has been conformed to the world and areas in which it sought to be transformed. It then expands on the three main themes of the Assembly; mission, life and worship.

Under the mission of the church, the declaration recognises the overseas involvement of PCI from its conception and the commitment to working in partnership with overseas churches. Mission at home, however, is the ‘first and immediate task’ (1990a, para.3.1) which has been hindered by the divisions of Irish society. The tensions within PCI over the question of relationships with Roman Catholics are recognised, with a recognition that ‘only through a Biblical ecumenism which is concerned with both truth and love shall the wounds of the people be healed’ (1990a, para.3.1). In the context of Northern Ireland the church must be engaged in developing a constructive way forward, which will require courage and flexibility. Evangelism and social action are affirmed as being inextricably linked in the task of mission. Social action is seen as taking place both through local congregations listening to and serving their communities and through the central church. The need for appropriate strategies to meet the challenges of mission in both urban and rural contexts is recognised, which, in the face of widespread indifference and rapid social change, will require new and imaginative methods.

The section on the life of the church affirms the importance of the unity of the church, confesses that PCI has been ‘less than enthusiastic about visible unity’ (1990a, para.5.1) and commits to seeking to give visible expression to unity whenever possible. The leadership of congregations is then addressed. The pressures faced by the ordained ministry are recognised and the need for changes in their training for ministry in the new context are highlighted. The leaders of congregations, both elders and other local leaders, are encouraged to develop a team approach and to amend their practices accordingly. Various aspects of lifestyle are dealt with next, including a call for a simple lifestyle, an emphasis on family life and ministry to children.

The section on the worship of the church begins with an acknowledgement that the renewal of the church depends on the grace of God and that, in this renewal, worship is central. Preaching is central to worship but it must be relevant to the current context. Sacraments, prayer and singing are also recognised as important aspects of worship.

This document gives an important indication of the thinking and the mindset of the denomination at the time. It shows a denomination recognising the changes in the society around it and beginning to address its response. Several aspects of that response are worthy of note. First, the sense of humility espoused by the organising committee is apparent. There is recognition that PCI has fallen short in the areas of ecumenism and in conforming to sectarianism and materialism. There is recognition of the changes in society around the church and the impact of secularisation. The general tenor of the document is that these changes are negative and that they are external to the church. Second, the document shows a church-centred understanding, in which mission is seen as the task that God has entrusted to the church. Also, despite the acknowledgement that social action is an essential part of mission in para 4.1, there are several paragraphs where the implication is that mission is equivalent to proclamation evangelism (e.g. paras 2.1, 2.3, 3.4). Third, although the importance of visible unity, Biblical ecumenism and learning from partner churches is mentioned, there is little evidence of this being applied to the mission, life or worship of PCI. Fourth, the document shows the church beginning to grapple with a changing context, but not yet aware of the true extent of the change. In some ways it is coming to terms with the end of Christendom, yet in others it continues to assume models based on it. For example, para 6.3 notes that the majority of people come to faith before the age of twenty and thus emphasises the importance of ministry to children and young people through church and family. However this would need to be radically rethought in a context where children were not being brought into contact with the church by parents.

2.2.3. The Follow Up

The Coleraine Assembly was always planned to be part of a process, so the Coleraine Declaration was forwarded to Boards and Committees of the General Assembly, as well as to Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions for comment.

The responses were gathered and at the 1991 General Assembly recommendations for Boards and Committees, Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions were agreed. The

recommendations for Boards and Committees included a reassessment of ministerial training, the development of programmes to help teach church members to engage in local mission through both evangelism and social witness, and a re-examination of the structure of Boards and Committees. Significantly, the Assembly also agreed to the preparation of a Mission Statement to be brought to the 1992 Assembly.

The recommendations to Kirk Sessions included the development of a ‘warm, loving fellowship’ (1991a, p.54), the development of worship, local mission to be seen as both evangelism and social action, engagement in cross-community activities and the development of a simple lifestyle. Presbyteries were recommended to support congregations and to provide regional services that congregations could not support on their own. The report concludes with several general recommendations including repentance for ‘an atmosphere of divisiveness and judgementalism’ (1991a, p.54) and an affirmation of the right of members to hold differing political opinions and aspirations.

In 1992 the Coleraine Committee reported to the Assembly for the final time. It noted that while the Coleraine process had been encouraging for many, not everyone had been enamoured by it. The number of responses from congregations and Presbyteries had been disappointing (1992b, p.86), but it noted several signs that the process was having an effect and affirmed that it would continue to do so over the following years.

2.3. The PCI Mission Statement

As noted above, one of the recommendations of the Coleraine Assembly Committee was the production of a Mission Statement for PCI, which was brought to the 1992 Assembly (Appendix 2). The introduction to the statement, states that it is to be seen as ‘a general document aimed... at telling the Church itself what we should be doing and encouraging’ (1992b, p.87). It is seen as presupposing the confessional standards of the church and being a ‘working document with a shelf life’ (1992b, p.87) in that it contains both things which are enduring and issues related to its particular time and place.

The first paragraph of the Statement defines PCI as a 'Reformed Church within the wider body of Christ'. Significantly, it affirms that it exists to 'enable her members to play their part in fulfilling God's mission to our world' (1992b, p.89), which implies a shifting perception of mission from being church-centred to God-centred. This is confirmed in the introduction given by the committee in the Annual reports (PCI 1992b, p.87).

The second paragraph deals with the shared life which the committee states needs 'to be a reality if we are to show the world a reconciled and reconciling people' (PCI 1992b, p.87), indicating an understanding of the church which is more than merely functional. The third paragraph concentrates on the worship of the church, which must be a way of life for the church as well as authentically Reformed and relevant. The fourth paragraph affirms mission as consisting of both evangelism and social witness, and that mission must cross boundaries of culture and faith. The final paragraph is a call for Biblical discipleship in various areas of life.

2.4. The Priorities and Central Structures of PCI (1995-2003)

As a result of the Coleraine process a panel on Boards and Committees was set up under the General Board. Over the next few years it highlighted the need to move from a representational model of board structure to a task oriented model. It also saw the need to reduce the number of 'seats' on Boards and Committees, particularly in the face of falling numbers within the denomination. In 1996 it introduced a resolution that the General Board begin to look at the priorities for the denomination (1997, pp.5, 8).

The first report of the Panel on Priorities notes the continuing trends of declining membership, which implies that the fundamental need is 'stabilising the base' (1997, p.5). It also states the need for congregations to be able to retain money locally for mission and the need to move from a priority of property over personnel. In 1998 the panel stated the need for a more radical review of the structure of Boards and Committees.

In 2001 a study paper was presented to the General Assembly, entitled 'Towards Prioritising the Central Work of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland' (2001, pp.9, 10), which proposed the formation of an Ad Hoc Committee to draw up a report on the central priorities for PCI by 2002. In the same year the Panel on Boards and Committees made the distinction between boards which had a technical function, those which were 'mission boards', and boards that had a support function (2001, p.11). It also pointed out that the mission of PCI should, as far as possible, be carried out through its individual members, congregations and presbyteries, and that the central structure should 'encourage, co-ordinate and help to resource the efforts' (2001, p.11). The role of the centre was to ensure that no important area of mission is neglected and to take responsibility for elements of mission that could most effectively be carried out at the centre.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Priorities presented its first report in 2002 and laid out some of the principles that were evolving. The first was that 'the local congregation is the primary mission unit of the Church' (2002, p.307). It went on to affirm that congregations do not exist in isolation but as part of PCI, which is itself part of the wider church. The mission and ministry boards of the church should therefore exist to 'encourage, facilitate and resource mission and ministry at local congregational level' (2002, p.307), or help congregations be involved in wider mission not possible at a local level. The servant boards should exist to provide relevant support to the mission and ministry boards and congregations. The report also acknowledges the key role of the newly formed Board of Mission in Ireland which had agreed to form a working group to examine its priorities.

The final report of the Ad Hoc Committee On Priorities in 2003 highlights the need for coordination and cooperation between the boards and proposed structures to achieve this. It also recognises that the representative nature of the boards and committees has the disadvantage of tying up large numbers of people, leading to institutional inertia. It therefore recommends that conveners and secretaries should be encouraged to exercise individual leadership and that they should be 'ideas people' (2003, p.313).

From 2004 a Priorities Committee has existed under the General Board. In 2005 it set out five characteristics to which PCI should aspire if it is to be a strong witness in the present context: a prophetic voice, a caring fellowship, a platform for service and outreach, a place of transformation and a community of global concern (2005a, pp.13–14). These were described in more detail in 2006 and formed the basis of the committee’s work for the following years.

The work of the Ad Hoc Committee On Priorities arose from a widespread feeling, dating back to the Coleraine Assembly, that the centralised structures of the denomination needed to be reformed. The process of reform took a period of 12 years and resulted in some changes to the organisational structure. However, it did represent significant changes in the thinking of the denomination. For the first time the congregation is seen as the primary mission unit. It also stated clearly that the centralised structures of the church existed to serve and enable congregations in their mission, only taking on projects which local congregations would not be equipped to undertake. The new system of designating Boards as Mission and Ministry, Service and Management was also part of a more general process in giving priority to the areas of Mission and Ministry.

2.5. Strategy for Mission (1986-2000)

The concern for a strategy for mission within PCI can be dated to the mid-1980’s when a ‘Strategy For Evangelism’ was published (1985, pp.187–8). In 1986 the Ad Hoc Committee on Denominational Strategy of Witness presented a report which included the recognition that discussion of such a strategy for the denomination rested on ecclesiological considerations. It also included reference to the social changes that had occurred in the 100 years since Church House had been built and the shift from congregations being the centre from which work was undertaken and paid for to a more centralised, Board centred structure. Recent history had shown that it was hard to persuade the wider church to support such centralised activity (1986, pp.273–6).

Between 1989 and 1991 the Strategy for Mission Committee existed under the Home

Board and concentrated on mission in urban and inner city areas. It affirmed mission as ‘all that God sends the church to do in the world’ and ministry as ‘the whole Christ, for the whole person, by the whole church to the whole world’ (1989, p.154). It proposed that some congregations be changed into Mission Centres and that team ministry, in which a ministry team would work across several smaller congregations, should be developed. In 1991 responsibility for development of these proposals was passed to other parts of PCI, but they were not developed.

In 1992 the Strategy for Mission Committee became an Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly and was tasked to produce the ‘overall strategy for mission by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland ... and from this strategy document set out what needs to be done specifically to forward urban mission’ (1992b, p.184). This was the beginning of a process which stimulated mission thinking within the denomination for several years.

The Strategy for Mission Committee produced its first substantial report in 1994. The introduction to the report accepted Stott’s definition of mission as “everything God sends the Church into the world to do” (1994, p.302) and stated that the aim of the Committee was to help PCI rediscover a ‘mindset for Mission’ (1994, p.180). Research into PCI’s work in five types of area highlighted significant issues, including the amount of resources spent on maintaining buildings, the decrease in active membership, spiritual apathy and the lack of young people. It was also acknowledged that PCI congregations were best adapted to ministering to a passively Christian community and that dramatic changes had taken place in society. Whilst these changes presented challenges there were also opportunities, which would demand flexibility if advantage was to be taken of them.

The Committee presented proposals in three areas of strategy: existing congregations, leadership (ministers and elders) and creative new areas of mission. The proposals were deliberately radical and were presented to test if the Assembly had ‘a collective mind to go for mission as a way of life in the P.C.I. today’ (1994, p.317). With regard to existing structures there were proposals that Presbyteries and congregations prepare

strategies for mission, that there be in-service training for ministers and elders, and that opportunities for sabbatical leave for ministers be encouraged. The report goes on to argue that Presbyterianism would not be faithful to its founders if it allowed itself to be fossilised and become irrelevant to the context of the age and culture in which it lived. New methods of church planting and expressing the priesthood of all believers must therefore be found. This would involve the development of new forms of ministry and the establishment of 'Mission Priority Areas' where normal structural rules would be transcended (1994, p.319).

The report presented resolutions on all of these points, some of which it recognised as being radical. The Committee was seeking through them to 'test the mind of the Church' (1994, p.310 cf 317) about setting mission at the heart of the life of the denomination. All of the resolutions were passed.

In 1996 the Committee presented a lengthy report which sought to turn the proposals of 1994 into reality. The report contains sections dealing with 'People', 'Existing PCI Structures and Mission', 'Presbyteries' and 'New Channels for Mission' and concludes with eight appendices giving further detail on certain areas.

The section on 'People' includes proposals for a ministerial development programme and proposals for the training of elders and members of congregations. The key proposal under 'Existing PCI Structures and Mission' is the formation of a single Board responsible for mission throughout Ireland and another for Christian training. These boards would be formed by reorganising existing Assembly committees and the formation of several new committees. The section on 'Presbyteries' reaffirms that Presbyteries and congregations should draw up strategies for mission and that the visitation of congregations by Presbytery should focus more on issues of mission. It also proposes that Presbytery business be freed from 'clogged agendas' and that Presbytery become a 'dynamic, Spirit-led, worshipping community fired for mission in its area' (1996, p.314). This section also includes discussion related to congregations, arguing for a 'Church-wide initiative or mission to our members to set higher standards of discipleship' (1996, p.318). The section on 'New Channels for

Mission' includes further detail on the proposal for the new mission board and how it would relate to other boards. It also includes discussion on church planting and mission priority areas, which are seen to be appropriate for geographical areas where 'PCI presence and witness is inadequate' or in 'social space with similar need' (1996, pp.335–6).

The 1994 report of the Committee had set out deliberately challenging proposals to 'test the mind of the Church' (1994, p.310) and all of the resolutions appended to that report were passed. The 1996 report brought resolutions to make the 1994 proposals a reality. The fact that the proposals were not immediately accepted, as initially proposed, but sent down to Presbyteries and relevant Boards for comment, shows that, despite approving the principles in 1994, PCI was not ready to make the changes necessary to implement them. The change in mind-set the Committee was seeking to inspire had not yet happened (1996, p.52).

The Committee's 1997 report considered the responses received from Presbyteries and Boards to the previous report. As a result of the consultation process, some of the resolutions of the previous year were amended, although the general thrust of the proposals remained the same. The report begins by asserting that the revival of the church depends on work of the Holy Spirit and not on changes in structure and mindset. The responses of the Boards and Presbyteries are summarised and show broad agreement with the principles of the 1994 report. While the responses highlighted some practical difficulties they also exposed two important issues: that PCI is an 'independent spirited Church' (1997, p.292) which does not want change imposed, and that many members of Presbyteries stressed the congregation, not the Presbytery, as the fundamental unit of the church.

The major proposals of the 1996 report are revised and dealt with in three sections: congregational mission strategies with Presbytery support; resourcing and developing leadership in mission; and renewing the Board, Committee and Agency structures of PCI. The first section proposes that congregations draw up mission strategies that would be approved and supported by Presbytery. The second section includes

amended resolutions for in-service training and sabbaticals for ministers as well as rationalisation and development of training for elders and members. In the third section three existing Boards are directed to begin working toward the proposed new structure. Church planting and Mission Priority Areas are areas in which further thinking is necessary and for which the Committee would bring proposals in 1998. The report reiterates the need for renewal of the membership of the church in terms of discipleship and giving. All the major resolutions were passed, except for proposals for ministerial development, which were amended so that financial costings could be prepared.

The Committee's final report in 1998 reiterates its intention to be a 'think tank' (1998a, p.252) to inculcate a mission mindset within the church. It notes that the Committee has been a catalyst in changing the 'climate of opinion' within the church, which seems to be 'approaching something like consensus in terms of the directions in which we need to move' (1998a, p.253). Revised proposals for Mission Priority Areas and church planting are included. All of the resolutions were passed, except for one relating to the supply fee (1998b, pp.52-4).

The Strategy for Mission Committee had been concerned that there be an on-going mechanism for keeping the church focussed on mission, so the 1998 report included a resolution that a Strategy for Mission Panel be formed under the Board of Evangelism and Christian Training. No reports from this Panel were submitted to the Assembly and in 2000 the Board proposed that it be discharged.

The work of the Strategy for Mission Committee is an example of the process by which PCI changes its mindset. The institutional strand of PCI was clearly the initiator and driver of the process, as the Committee was a legitimately constituted Ad Hoc Committee of the Assembly. However, at a key stage, it was referred to the body strand (Presbyteries) for consideration. Much discussion and debate took place, the results of which were fed back into the institutional process and used to amend the original proposals. It was a long process, with mixed results. The Committee felt that by 1998 many of the things that had initially seemed 'threatening and radical' had

been ‘confirmed and accepted’ (1998a, p.253). In this it had, to some degree, achieved its purpose of changing the mindset of the denomination. On the other hand many of the practical out-workings of this mindset change proposed by the Committee took many years to be put into effect. The bureaucratic process of reorganising the Board structure was not completed until 2001 and other aspects of the Strategy for Mission Agenda disappeared from the Assembly agenda for several years. For example, it was not until 2005 that the Board of Mission in Ireland’s report included an appendix entitled ‘Towards a Strategy of Mission for Ireland’ (2005a, pp.164–8) and 2006 when the idea of congregational and Presbytery mission plans returned to the agenda. Church planting and Mission Priority Areas had been briefly mentioned in 2003 (2003, p.169).

2.6. The Board of Mission in Ireland (2001-2009)

The Board of Mission in Ireland was formed in June 2000, by amalgamating the Home Board and the Board of Evangelism and Christian Training, as a result of the recommendations made by the Strategy for Mission Committee. The first report of the new board appeared in 2001 and begins with a call to mission in the rapidly changing social context in both the Republic and North of Ireland. This mission will involve ‘confronting growing secularism, increasing social problems and widespread indifference with the good news of Jesus Christ’ (2001, p.165). The Board’s Irish Mission Committee proposed a tent-making scheme, which envisioned people in secular employment working as church planters or in situations where the witness of the church was ‘ineffective or non-existent’ (2001, p.169). Contacts would be directed to ‘the nearest Presbyterian congregation or congregation of a church in fraternal relations with PCI’ (2001, p.169). The evangelism committee’s report refers to a report *Reconnecting With a Missing Generation (Hamilton & Welch 2000)* commissioned by the Presbytery of North Belfast and BMI to establish the extent of decline in church involvement among the 20-45 age group, to identify the key reasons for this decline, and to identify patterns and principles of ministry to help churches engage with this age group. It highlights several principles as a basis for ministry: the importance of

belonging; conveying acceptance; involvement and collaboration; cultural relevance and having the right approach to working with parents, children and families.

In 2002 BMI reported its task as to confront indifference and to stem the tide of secularism, to combat the corruption and violence in Irish society, and to yearn and strive for the church's renewal (2002, p.159). It stated that this would not be accomplished simply through new programmes or changed worship patterns but through individuals in living, personal relationship with Christ.

The 2005 report was significant for the inclusion of a report from the Urban Mission Panel and for the presentation of a proposed strategy for mission in Ireland. The previous report of Urban Mission Panel, then under the Union Commission, had recognised the statistics of decline in Belfast, but argued that the response should be neither propping up existing congregations, nor rationalising closure. It had proposed that the Panel be moved to sit under BMI with the remit of monitoring opportunities for mission, advising congregations and designating congregations as urban mission areas. It had also proposed several means of training and equipping ministers for service in these areas (2004, pp.67–8). In 2005 these proposals were developed further, defining congregations eligible for extra support as those having a majority of members living within the parish bounds, being located in areas marked by social deprivation and requiring additional resources to continue or develop their mission in the community. Priority would be given to congregations showing vision and flexibility. It also states that ministers in such charges should normally reside within the parish bounds (2005a, pp.162–3). A supplementary report brought specific proposals to allow the appointment of 'development moderators' to prepare and guide urban congregations into change (2005a, pp.46–7).

The proposed strategy for mission (2005a, pp.164–8) begins by stating that mission flows from the being and character of God who will 'use his Church as the chief human agency of his mission' (2005a, p.164). Thus mission is not so much about what the church does for God as what God does through us. Human strategies are, therefore, only adequate to the extent that they merge with what God is doing. The

strategy is focussed on the ‘vision of God, by his Spirit, creating “vibrant communities of Christ serving and transforming Ireland”’ (2005a, p.166). The term ‘vibrant communities’ is explained as highlighting the recognition, central to the strategy, that the congregation is the basic unit for mission, but that different models alongside the traditional congregation are envisaged. These vibrant communities are to place priority on those who are outside over those inside and to prioritise people over plant. The term ‘serving and transforming’ is elaborated to clarify ‘the HOW and WHAT of mission in Ireland’ (2005a, p.166). Vibrant communities are to be characterised by involvement in local communities, with the desire to see ‘individuals, families and the local community become what God intended’ (2005a, p.167), with confidence that God can work and in awareness of what other Christians are doing. The outworking of this strategy would require flexibility in the structures of the church, insistence that resources must follow priorities and application of the principle of the strong supporting the weak.

This report was developed and a strategy for implementation was presented in 2006 (2006a, pp.157–161). At the heart of the strategy are proposals that Presbyteries and congregations draw up five year mission plans. In contrast to similar proposals by the Strategy for Mission Committee in 1994, these proposals include enforceable deadlines and legislation affecting vacant congregations’ leave to call. The report also includes appendices giving the rationale for such mission planning and guidance in preparing such plans. These appendices argue that, while for many the proposals represent a departure from their pattern of ‘being’ and ‘doing’ church, they are ‘founded on and agreeable to the Word of God’ (2006a, p.163). The proposals were not accepted by the Assembly, but were sent down to Presbyteries for consideration and comment, although a pilot scheme to be run in two Presbyteries and ten congregations was approved (PCI 2006a, p.35).

The 2007 BMI report contains responses to the comments and concerns of Presbyteries which are grouped into areas of concern (2007a, pp.131–142). Theological concerns centre around the role of the Holy Spirit, preaching and prayer, the definition of mission, the Biblical basis of strategic planning and the imposition of

management models on the church. The report argues that the proposals are not tantamount to reliance on human techniques but rather ‘had their genesis in a Biblical understanding of the church and its task in the world’ (2007a, p.132). A definition of mission is deemed to be beyond the scope of the paper, but mission is expressed in terms of the *missio Dei* and the Lausanne Covenant. Numerous Biblical references are cited to give a basis for strategic planning and a defence of planning in general, based on its *de facto* use within churches, was given. The next group of concerns has to do with problems of perceptions, and the report seeks to answer concerns about centralisation, diversity, an agenda to close churches and the terminology of ‘outsiders’ and ‘insiders’. The greatest area of concern has to do with the element of coercion implicit in the 2006 report and there is recognition of the need to balance coercion and the ‘real and urgent need to give congregations “an encouraging push”’ (2007a, p.126). The section entitled ‘From Theory to Practice’ recognises the need for flexibility to be built into the process and for Presbyteries to take ‘wise and courageous leadership’ (2007a, p.137) for strategic decision in their area. The report concludes by reiterating the principles and main outline of its plan. The proposals were passed by the General Assembly.

This is another example of the institutional and body strands interacting to influence each other. The debates over the proposals in Presbyteries are quoted as being ‘good examples of the true purpose of presbytery’ (2007a, p.138).

In 2009 BMI presented a paper giving ‘a contextualised understanding of mission for our Irish Presbyterian setting’ (2009b, p.63). This is a short document, setting out BMI’s understanding of mission (see Appendix 4). God is affirmed as the prime mover in mission and the bible as giving the ‘big story of mission’ (2009b, p.63). The document moves beyond the Lausanne Covenant’s description of the relationship between evangelism and social concern to affirm a holistic, integral mission in which ‘words and actions are part of the same holistic demonstration of the kingdom’ (2009b, p.64). Mission may not begin with evangelism, rather there may be many starting points. However, Chris Wright (2006, p.319) is quoted to the effect that mission that does not ultimately include declaring the word and name of Christ has not

completed its task (2009b, p.65). The church is urged to shake off a chaplaincy mindset and to see itself as a partner participating with God in his mission. This will require re-interpreting the mission mindset in each generation or else the church will decline and ultimately die.

Also in 2009, the board presented a summary of the Presbytery mission plans that had been prepared following agreement of the strategy in 2007 (2009b, pp.65–9). It finds that the plans show a church ‘whose mission is still largely determined by patterns from the past’, is based on an attractional model and focussed on maintaining ‘what we view as sacrosanct features of Congregational life’. Presbyteries find it hard to prioritise between existing congregations’ requests for resources and balancing these with new opportunities for mission. It is recognised that Presbyteries must themselves become missional bodies and must balance formal procedures with discerning the movement of the Spirit.

BMI has had significant and direct influence on the practice of mission within PCI. In particular, the ‘vibrant communities’ process has had a direct effect in requiring Presbyteries and congregations to engage in a process of developing mission strategies for their own context.

2.7. The Board of Mission Overseas (1990-2009)

The Board of Mission Overseas (until 2006 the Overseas Board), exists to oversee the overseas work of PCI, including relationships with partner churches,⁵ recruitment and training of missionaries, relief and development projects and promoting world mission within PCI.

One of the first acts of the General Assembly on its formation in 1840 was to commission two missionaries to work in India. In 1990 the Overseas Board produced

⁵ It should be noted that BMO is responsible for relationships with the churches in a specific mission partnership with PCI. More general church relations, including membership of bodies such as the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, comes under the Church Relations Committee of the General Board.

a history of the overseas mission of PCI to mark the 150th anniversary of these events (Thompson 1990a). The final chapter (Thompson 1990b), entitled, 'Mission Into the Twenty-First Century' summarises the Overseas Board's view of mission at the time. Mission is affirmed in terms of the *missio Dei*, with the Holy Spirit being the primary agent of mission and mission being conceived in Trinitarian terms. Thus, while the church and its plans cannot be central, it is legitimate to consider the global changes that will impact on mission strategy.

Four such changes are explored. First, the shifting balance of world Christianity to the south and the east, with theological thinking increasingly emanating from these areas. Second, the importance of unity in mission is being recognised by evangelicals as well as ecumenicals. Third, the world is changing with an increasing population, the spread of Islam and growing urbanisation. The assumptions of those involved in mission are also changing as ecological concerns and issues of poverty and justice are recognised as being integral to mission. Importantly, the assumed cultural superiority of missionaries from Britain and Ireland is being replaced by a recognition of the need for local churches to take the lead in incarnating the gospel to their context.

In responding to this, Thompson argues that PCI must begin by emphasising what it does not know; 'The future is in God's hands; there will be many surprises' (Thompson 1990b, p.205). However, he argues, it is likely that PCI's mission will increasingly be undertaken on an inter-denominational basis, should increasingly finance indigenous church workers to do jobs currently done by expatriate missionaries. PCI should also recognise that initiatives in mission should come from local churches and not be driven by PCI, and that PCI should proactively develop a listening attitude to its partner churches.

In its 1990 annual report the Overseas Board presented a report 'The Way Ahead – Toward AD 2000' (1990b, pp.164–7). This report affirms the church's mission as sharing in the mission of Christ to the whole of creation and recognises the diversity of the church throughout the world. In the coming decade mission will have to become increasingly international, inter-denominational and inter-cultural. Among

some of the challenges perceived for the next decade are the need to put mission at the centre of PCI's life, and the changing geographical balance of global Christianity away from the first world to the two-thirds world, a shift that is leading to new patterns of mission. The proposed strategy for the Overseas Board is to continue working in partnership with overseas churches and to engage in a process of dialogue with them about future sharing of personnel, finance and other resources. The report was sent to Presbyteries for discussion.

The responses from Presbyteries were the subject of a residential conference, the results of which were brought to the Assembly as an appendix to the 1991 report (1991b, pp.113–120). A section dealing with evangelism and church planting notes a perception among many that the Overseas Board is not fulfilling its evangelistic remit. Another section deals with the issue of partnership, noting the need for mutuality and that 'bearing witness to Jesus Christ must come before denominational ties' (1991b, p.116). There is obvious tension between the board's position and some of the Presbytery comments which sought to restrict partnership to churches considered to be 'reformed and evangelical' (1991b, p.119). At several points the report highlights the danger of sending personnel from PCI to partner churches when their background in PCI might be a hindrance. This is mentioned in relation to sending people who are 'rurally' minded into contexts of rapid urbanisation and also to the danger of exporting the 'attitudes of a dying western Church' (1991b, pp.114, 118).

In 1992 the Overseas Board report contained a strategy for mission in the nineties (PCI 1992b, pp.153–7). This strategy includes some policy statements in which mission is given a trinitarian basis and is seen as advancing the kingdom of God through love of God and neighbour and making disciples of all nations. The objectives include new initiatives in evangelism, developing partnership relations, and education and training of the wider church and mission personnel. Guidelines for partnership in mission include a mutual acceptance of the understanding of God's mission, of each other's doctrine and practice and of the unity the Church.

The 2002 report included a brief paper entitled 'Globalisation, Mission and the

Kingdom of God' (2002, pp.133–4). Globalisation is seen as the 'increasing interconnectedness of the world, its peoples and communities', not just in terms of trade and economics but in how communities see themselves and interact. It is recognised that this will have an impact on the global mission of the church, but this statement is not expanded. Globalisation is seen to lead to increasing power and wealth of multinational corporations and increasing poverty of poorer nations. The rise of religious fundamentalism and increasing vitality of cultural and ethnic groups throughout the world are seen as a 'twin and opposing force to globalisation'. The paper proposes the theology of the Kingdom of God as a lens through which the church can view these trends, but again does not expand on this statement.

The paper was sent down to Presbyteries for comments, with a summary of comments being presented the following year (2003, pp.164–6). Presbyteries differentiated between 'benign or neutral globalisation' and the 'economic and cultural influences which emanate primarily from the capitalist industrialised West'. Within Ireland globalisation was seen as eroding traditional moral standards and the marginalisation of faith. The consumer mentality and market influence were having an effect on people's loyalty to denominations and the 'ways of "doing church"'. Globalisation has also had an effect on the local economy and jobs, and had some positive economic impact on some of PCI's partner churches. However, it more often strengthens and perpetuates economic inequalities. Presbyteries commented that the church must adopt new methods and seek to recontextualise its theology, while resisting the dangers of the medium distorting or contradicting the message. The church must remember that in the economy of the Kingdom the 'small, slow and insignificant may be of greater value than the powerful and instantaneous'. The church must take a prophetic stand against the values of the new global consumer culture, recognising that 'we are materially rich, yet spiritually poor', and it must rediscover its role as the 'conscience of the nation'. Theologians and church leaders must dialogue with economic and political bodies. Globalisation should confirm the church in its global mission, without which the church 'will atrophy: it may even die'.

In 2003 the board initiated a process considering the vision, mission and strategy of

the church in overseas mission. In 2004 an interim report on this ‘Mission in the Melting Pot’ process (2004, pp.166–174) stated that the ‘vision statement for our church in global mission is that: we will be a missionary church increasingly used by God’ (2004, p.169). In explanatory notes on this vision statement, the church’s essential nature is seen to be that of a community sent into the world according to God’s plan, and thus ‘missionary activity flows from the very nature of the Church’ (2004, p.170). The term ‘global’ in the statement is deliberately used to encompass the local and global responsibility of the church and to avoid the paternalism associated with the term ‘overseas mission’ (2004, p.170). The vision statement also deliberately affirms that mission is God’s mission, in which he graciously allows the church to participate. The next section of the review defined the missionary purpose of the church as ‘to proclaim Christ and His universal reign’ (2004, p.170). The explanatory notes affirm the importance of evangelism and discipleship as the ‘one task within mission which the Church alone is qualified and authorised to do’ (2004, p.170), but balance this with an affirmation that Biblical mission is holistic and by recognising that God’s reign extends beyond the church. The third section deals with values, that is the ‘beliefs, behaviours and characteristics’ (2004, p.171), that will guide BMO’s engagement. The first value, ‘God-glorifying’, restates the understanding that the church participates in God’s mission and, thus, the first priorities in mission are worship and prayer. The next value, ‘people focused’, highlights the priority of personal missional encounter. The third value, ‘holistic’, encompasses evangelism and discipleship of individuals along with serving the whole person, their communities and environments. The ‘church based’ value affirms that mission is not one task among many, but the very reason for the church’s existence and that global mission is the responsibility of the whole church, with the local congregation as the primary unit. Being ‘interdependent’ affirms PCI as a small part of the universal church and the need to continue to work in, and develop, partnerships. The final value, ‘forward-thinking’, affirms the responsibility for proactive planning in mission. The last section of the report deals with strategy and states the vision that

The Overseas Board will engage in increasingly versatile service of our church in global mission. Our purpose is: to champion global mission by

enthusing our church to proclaim Christ world-wide, enabling our members to share their gifts and lives across cultures (2004, p.173).

This marks a shift from the board being the ‘sending and receiving agency’ of the church to it taking more of a support role for congregations in their involvement in global mission.

The final report of the ‘Mission in the Melting Pot’ review was given in 2005, in which the vision and purpose statements from the previous year’s report were reiterated (2005a, p.142).

Throughout the period covered by this research BMO’s *modus operandi* has been to work with partner churches, and the issue of partnership relations frequently features in its reports. The *Mission in the Melting Pot* review highlighted the need for the board to set clear criteria for partnerships which should serve mission, include the possibility of change for both partners, and have future potential (2005a, p.147). In 2008 the board reported the results of a ‘Day Away’ held by the Steering Committee looking further at the issue of partnership (2008a, pp.116–7). It stated that partnership in mission derives from the mission of the triune God, in which ‘sending’ and ‘sharing’ are both emphasised. BMO must educate PCI for direct partnership at congregational level, whilst recognising the need for the nurturing of long term relationships at an institutional level. BMO must seek to become a more humble partner with ‘genuinely reciprocal relationships of co-dependency [*sic*]’ (2008a, p.117) which will have implications for how PCI’s mission boards connect with mission in Ireland. In 2009 BMO stated that PCI’s relationships with the worldwide church have many foci, including doctrine, social issues and mission. BMO’s experience has shown that sharing together in mission can ‘quite often prove to be one of the most helpful contexts for on-going discussion on doctrine and unity’ (2009b, p.127). Where congregations or Presbyteries independently initiate partnership relationships, BMO would seek to offer consultation and encouragement as part of its ‘twin-track approach of being both agent and adviser in mission’ (2009b, p.128). The report deals with the problem of dependency in relationships and aims for

relationships in which ‘partners have the potential to share a broad range of resources, including the sending and increasingly the receiving of mission personnel’ (2009b, p.128).

In the years between 1990 and 2009 BMO has continually sought to examine PCI’s role in global mission, and its own responsibility as a board within PCI. The analysis of mission into the 21st century by Jack Thompson in 1990 is a firmly God-centred view of mission and deals with missiological questions relevant to PCI’s missiological thinking throughout the period being examined in this thesis. These include the issues of contextualisation and culture, unity and the nature of mission itself. In many ways Thompson’s analysis represents a statement of the key themes in mission that PCI would be grappling with for the following years. It also bears many similarities to Newbigin’s missiology.

Within BMO itself there are signs of wrestling with these issues in subsequent years, despite the publication of Thompson’s analysis in its name. For example, a move can be detected from a church-centred to a God-centred view of mission within the Board’s reports. There is also a shift from the global mission of PCI being centralised within the board, to the board enabling and facilitating PCI congregations’ and individuals’ engagement in global mission, although it still retains a centralised role in the recruitment of missionaries, relationships with partner churches and other aspects of work. BMO has also reflected on its relationships with its partner churches, recognising the fact that in global terms PCI is a small denomination and that it can learn from its partners.

2.8. The Board of Social Witness (1990-2009)

The Board of Social Witness is responsible for PCI’s centrally operated social witness projects. These include residential homes for the elderly and projects addressing drug and alcohol abuse and the rehabilitation of prisoners. It is also responsible for PCI’s chaplains to the armed forces, hospitals, universities and prisons. In addition, BSW provides support for congregations engaging in social witness projects.

Due to the nature of its work, BSW often has to address issues of public policy. In 1991 the board's report included an appendix 'The Church and the Welfare State' (1991b, pp.155–9), which examines the appropriate response of the church to changes in the welfare system. It argues that, although the church should not be identified with a particular political philosophy or programme, it must at certain times stress certain Biblical teaching related to current issues. Several changes in society are noted, including increasing individualism, materialism, personal freedom and privatisation. Following Chris Wright (1983), Biblical principles are identified in light of the current situation, with the economic instructions given to Israel being seen as particularly relevant. The creation principles of shared resources, responsibility of work, expectation of growth and shared produce are also elucidated. It is recognised that all governments would probably agree with these ideas, but concern is expressed that, in the present climate, those already poor will become poorer and 'in such a situation we must have great concern that redistribution of income is adequate and done in such a way as to preserve people's dignity' (1991b, p.158). Individuals are called on to express these values in their personal lives. The church is called on to affirm the worth of each human being and, thus, to speak to government on issues such as the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' and tax policy relating to the wealthy and those on low incomes. The church must also speak to government when areas of life are abandoned to market forces and about the resulting issues of social justice.

The 1999 report begins by noting two common factors evident to those doing deputation on behalf of the board; first, lack of knowledge of the board's work in the wider church and, second, a scepticism about whether the church should be involved in social witness. This scepticism, along with a perceived belief of some within PCI that social engagement is equivalent with the social gospel, is a concern apparent in many BSW reports. This is evidenced by the fact that the case for social witness is often briefly made in the board's annual reports (see e.g. PCI 1998a, p.164; PCI 2000, p.215) and in the interview conducted with the Board Secretary (Conway 2010).

The 1999 report also argues that, if a congregation is to be a 'vibrant, witnessing and worshipping community' (1999a, p.183), it is necessary to have a clear statement of

mission and purpose in order to determine its priorities. Pastoral care and social witness must feature in these priorities, along with vision and leadership to see and act on opportunities. It argues that social witness in a congregation will often require partnership with others, which entails both opportunities and threats, particularly for Kirk Sessions who must relinquish some ownership and control. However, implementing these principles will lead to a warmer and more welcoming fellowship, with increasing levels of discipleship, broader ministry and the church being more proactively evangelistic. The board commits to develop its support for congregations in this.

The 2000 report again addresses the issue of partnership, this time in relation to the board rather than congregations. The board's partners include the communities the board is serving, funders and bodies within the church. These partnerships necessitate the board 'developing confidence in expressing what we believe in terms that others understand' (2000, p.218). Within the church it will require a 'Biblically based consensus that social witness is integral to church mission' (2000, p.218). Within this report the Social Witness Southern Development Committee again highlighted issues which are relevant to the perception of social witness within the denomination. The committee expressed the desire to see the establishment of a project outside Dublin in order to address two wrong assumptions. The first was that social problems were concentrated in Dublin and the second was that 'social action is for people with specialist knowledge and training and that the resources of a large congregation are necessary for setting up a project of this type' (2000, p.219).

In 2001 the board produced a document *Engaging With the Community: The Challenge of Mission in the 21st Century* (Social Issues and Resources Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 2001). This document begins with a foreword arguing the case for social involvement, while stressing that it is based on a firm commitment to the primacy of evangelism and the understanding of the relationship between evangelism and social action defined by the Lausanne Congress (2001, pp.4, 14).

BSW has also engaged with some of the issues arising out of the changing moral nature of society. In 2002 a report on the Review of the Panel on Remarriage was given. The purpose of the review was to 'review the arrangements for interviewing divorced persons who wish to remarry in the light of experience of the Panel on Remarriage' (2002, p.198). The report recognises the problems faced by ministers in dealing with the tension between Biblical ideals and the reality in a 'fallen and sinful world' (2002, p.201) and recommends that ministers still be encouraged to refer divorced persons seeking remarriage to the Panel for its advice and opinion. The 2002 report also included an appendix looking at the issue of human cloning.

In 2007 the Social Issues and Resources Panel produced a report on the subject of homosexuality, another issue arising from the changing moral nature of society. The report dealt purely with pastoral care issues and did not seek to change the official position of PCI as stated in 1979. The panel had engaged with people with same sex attractions and their families. It condemned all forms of homophobia, recognising the need for 'repentance and greater understanding' (2007a, p.182) within the church. A proposal that copies of the report be printed and distributed as pastoral guidelines was passed, but only after an amendment that it be sent to Presbyteries and a revised report be brought the following year was defeated. When the resolution was passed fifty-four people recorded their dissent, indicating the depth of feeling surrounding the issue.

In 2003 the board reported on results of a survey of the social involvement of congregations, which showed a high level of engagement, although it showed that 'we tend to keep the mentality of expecting people to come to the Church as a building rather than being the Church as God's people with the Mission of going out to the community' (2003, p.209).

Throughout the period reviewed, BSW reports can be seen to consistently defend and promote the relevance of social action in the life and mission of the church, although it is sometimes seen as a precursor to evangelism. There are also frequent affirmations that BSW is not promoting a social gospel. This indicates that the issue of word and deed has not been fully settled within the denomination. BSW is also seen to be

actively engaging in the issues of engagement with a changing society. This engagement has been through consideration of specific moral issues, but also in its partnership with secular bodies and funders. There is also a tension throughout the reports between the centralised social witness of BSW and that of the local congregation. At several points BSW recognises its responsibility to encourage and support congregations in their work (see e.g. 2009b, p.171; 2006a, p.180). However the major focus of the reports is on the centralised work of the board.

2.9. The Board of Youth and Children (1990-2009)

The Board of Youth and Children (prior to the Youth Board), is ‘committed to the nurture, empowerment and development of children, young people and young adults through an integrated denominational programme of ministry which places them at the centre of life in the Church’ (PCI Youth and Children’s Board 2014). It supports the youth and children’s work within congregations and runs numerous events for young people at denominational level. The most relevant aspect of its work for this research has to do with its encouragement of young Presbyterians to engage with those of different communities.

In 1990 the Youth Board presented a report ‘On Relationships Between Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Young People’ (1990b, pp.255–261) to the Assembly. The report aimed to engender self-understanding among Presbyterian young people on matters of faith and practice and to encourage them in greater understanding of and contact with Roman Catholics. It affirms the unity of the church, which includes all who are born in the Spirit regardless of denominational affiliation. The extent of relations between Presbyterian and Roman Catholic young people is seen as one of the key issues of the time. PCI should be aiming to bring young people to ‘personal and saving faith in Christ Jesus and seeking to develop them in that faith’, including ‘teaching on the main doctrines of the faith, as set forth in our subordinate standards, thus giving ... an understanding and appreciation of the distinctive features of the Reformed faith’ (1990b, p.257). At the same time they must be given ‘an accurate understanding of the basic doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church’ (1990b, p.258). Given

this foundational understanding the question, then, is how to live with these differences, which are complicated by the particular cultural context of Northern Ireland. In this regard greater contact between Presbyterian and Roman Catholic young people is commended, particularly normal social contact outside of religious settings. This report deals with several important missiological issues. First, the issue of unity and denominationalism, with the unity of the church being affirmed alongside a strong emphasis on defining one church over and against another. Second is the question of relating to people who hold different beliefs, with the report calling for a real engagement, which will often occur in the course of normal social relationships. However, the report does not mention the possibility that in such an encounter the Presbyterian young people might be changed. This report and the Preparing Youth for Peace (PYP) programme that arose out of it provide an important insight into PCI's engagement with these issues.⁶

The PYP strategic plan was approved in 1998 with a Programme Officer appointed and pilot programmes being run in 2001. By 2004 700 young people had participated (2004, p.263). In 2005 a supplementary report was presented to the Assembly detailing a review of the PYP course. It is clear that the course had been perceived by some to have a hidden agenda of 'ecumenism by the back door' (2005a, p.54) and had been accused of minimising the differences between PCI and Roman Catholicism. As a result the fact sheet on Roman Catholicism was replaced by the Doctrine Committee's 1990 report, 'Agreements and disagreements of Irish Presbyterianism and Roman Catholicism' (1990b, pp.7–23). The entire section on Roman Catholicism was replaced with a section on 'Culture and Identity', marking a significant change in emphasis of the course to meet the needs of young people in a post-conflict context.

The 2009 report expressed concern that funding for the two peace-making posts within PCI, one of which was dedicated to the PYP course, was running out and questioned how the denomination could 'honestly say that we aren't sectarian/racist/prejudiced if we have never engaged meaningfully with someone from

⁶ See Section 6.1.4 and 6.2.5 for a fuller description of PCI's engagement with the Northern Ireland context and an evaluation of it.

another community/race/social class?’ (1999a, p.201).

Through its commitment to the PYP, course the Youth and Children’s Board has demonstrated a desire to encourage young people to seriously engage with society and with those who are different from them. At the same time there is a consistent desire to ensure that young people have a clear idea of the distinct identity of PCI.

This chapter has traced the major developments and initiatives in PCI’s missiological engagement between 1990 and 2009. It has shown a denomination that is aware of a changing context and which, as a result, has been seeking to adapt its structures and practices. In the following two chapters Lesslie Newbigin’s engagement with the emerging post-Christendom context and his understanding of the church in mission will be explored. It will then be possible to bring Newbigin’s missiology into a critical dialogue with PCI’s emerging view of mission.

3. Newbigin and the Emerging Post-Christendom Context

3.1. Introduction

The aim of this research project is to offer an evaluation of the emerging view of mission within PCI by creating a critical dialogue between it and the missiology of Lesslie Newbigin. It is therefore necessary to establish the themes which will be relevant to the dialogue. In Chapter 1 the criteria for selection of themes were delineated as occurrence, wider missional relevance and practical application. The themes selected from Newbigin's work, and the reasons for selection, are as follows.

The first theme is the manner in which missiological thinking is done, which includes consideration of the foundations for theological thinking, how theological thought is developed and how it is applied. Obviously, the manner in which missiological thinking is done satisfies the criterion of occurrence as all such thinking is conducted from some foundational principles and in certain ways, even if these are not explicitly acknowledged. It also satisfies the criterion of wider missiological relevance for the same reasons. The criterion of practical application is satisfied because both Newbigin and PCI engage in missiological thinking as a result of their missiological engagement. Their missiology is not done out of academic interest, nor often with academic rigour, but it is 'to validate, correct and establish on better foundations the entire practice of mission' (Kirk 1999, p.21).

The second theme is the relationship between the gospel, church and culture, with particular reference to the emerging post-Christendom context in the United Kingdom and Ireland. This was significant in Newbigin's writings following his return to Britain, and also features prominently in PCI's discourse. It is also a theme on which there is significant literature in the wider missiological community. It has practical application, in that the understanding of the relationship between gospel, church and culture, whether tacit or articulated, has significant influence on the engagement a church has with the culture in which it is located.

The third theme is ecclesiology. Thinking about the nature and the form of the church is an important theme in both Newbigin's writings and PCI's emerging view of mission. It is also a theme with wider missiological relevance and practical application, as ecclesiological questions figure in the recent missiological discourses of other denominations, such as the Church of England (Archbishop's Council on Mission and Public Affairs 2004) and the Church of Scotland (Special Commission Anent Review and Reform 2001).

The fourth theme is the church in mission, specifically the attitudes and expectations of the church in mission, and the appropriate shape for the church in mission. Once again this is a theme that is easily discernible in both Newbigin's and PCI's thinking. It also meets the criterion of wider missiological relevance and practical application as it impinges on issues of strategy and organisation.

3.2. Lesslie Newbigin

Lesslie Newbigin was born in 1909 and spent his early years in Northumbria. In 1928 he went to study in Cambridge, during which time his scepticism towards Christian faith was overcome. A key factor in this was his involvement with the Student Christian Movement, in particular, an experience which led him to see that the cross provided the clue by which to understand the world (Newbigin 1993, p.11). Following his graduation he worked for SCM in Glasgow for two years, before returning to Cambridge to study theology in preparation for ordination in the Church of Scotland with the view to mission work in India.

Newbigin, and his wife Helen, went to India in 1936, but after completing language study Newbigin was injured in an accident and had to return to Britain to recuperate. On returning to India he served as a missionary in Kanchipuram, during which time he became heavily involved in the negotiations towards the formation of the Church of South India (CSI). Upon its formation in 1947 Newbigin became bishop of Madurai.

In 1959 he was seconded from CSI to take on the role of General Secretary of the International Missionary Council (IMC), which was preparing for its incorporation into the World Council of Churches (WCC). After the amalgamation Newbigin became director of the Division of World Mission and Evangelism.

In 1965 Newbigin returned to CSI to become the bishop of Madras, a position that he held until his retirement in 1974. On returning to Britain he joined the staff of Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham, to teach theology of mission and ecumenical studies to people undergoing missionary training. In 1980 he took on the role of minister to a struggling United Reformed Church congregation in multi-racial inner city Birmingham. In 1992 he and his wife finally retired to live in London, although Newbigin continued to write and speak until his death in January 1998.

Newbigin's influence derives from his combination of practical experience and the

theological reflection that both arose out of his experience and influenced his practice. He was a prolific writer, with the online database of documents relating to Newbigin (Newbigin.net n.d.) containing 508 books and articles written by Newbigin. Several anthologies of his work (Wainwright 2000; Weston 2006), academic theses (Foust 2002; Kandiah 2005; Weston 2001), books (Hunsberger 1998; Goheen 2000; Laing 2012a; Stults 2009; Wood 2009) and collections of essays (Foust et al. 2002; Laing & Weston 2012) deriving from Newbigin's work have been published.

3.3. The Manner of Newbigin's Missiological Thinking

It is the intention of this thesis to use Newbigin's missiology as a basis for a critical dialogue with the emerging view of mission within PCI. In this dialogue Newbigin will be given the role of a mentor, that is one who has considerable knowledge and experience and is available to advise and guide one who is following a similar and related, but different path. Approaching the dialogue in this way implies that it goes beyond merely intellectual considerations, to include considerations of attitude, method and purpose. Newbigin was primarily a practitioner, not an academic and his writing was done from this perspective. Any application of his theological insights must be consonant with his life and practice, giving consideration to how he arrived at these insights, and how he applied them. It is therefore necessary to examine the foundational aspects and process of Newbigin's theology before examining specific missiological themes relevant to the dialogue with PCI.

3.3.1. The Atonement and Newbigin's Experience

Wainwright provides two statements which provide a starting point for considering the foundational elements of Newbigin's theology. The first is a quote from Hans-Ruedi Weber, who said that Newbigin 'was an initiator and animator of ideas, of an ever new common search ... He liked to be at the beginning of things, at the frontier of thinking and initiatives' (Wainwright 2000, p.26). The second is the observation that, despite

the development of his thought, ‘the lineaments of his thinking ... remained constant for sixty years and, as his ideas developed and expanded, the fundamental pattern continued to be readily recognisable’ (Wainwright 2000, p.26). Wainwright argues that ‘Christ’s atoning work constituted the centre, set within an increasingly explicit trinitarian frame, and persistently directed toward the goal of God’s reign’ (Wainwright 2000, p.26). In contrast, Hunsberger argues that election forms the core, ‘or most basic axiom’, of Newbigin’s theology (Hunsberger 1998, p.2). While this is undoubtedly a central and significant theme for Newbigin, and the basis of much of his thinking, election itself is derived from his prior commitment to the atonement, his experience of Christ and the scripture as testimony to God’s acts. The interaction between foundational beliefs and the desire to be at the frontier of thinking and initiatives can be discerned behind all of Newbigin’s writings.

As Wainwright notes, Christ’s atoning work remained central to Newbigin’s theology throughout his career. This core commitment arose out of a personal experience while helping in a programme for unemployed miners in the Rhondda valley during his time at Cambridge. Faced with the hopelessness of a situation in which he had nothing to contribute, he had a vision. His description of the experience is worth quoting as it demonstrates how the experience would have continuing relevance to his thinking:

It was a vision of the cross spanning the space between heaven and earth, between ideals and present realities, and with arms that embraced the whole world. I saw it as something which reached down to the most hopeless and sordid of human misery and yet promised life and victory. I was sure that night, in a way I had never been before, that this was the clue that I must follow if I were to make any kind of sense of the world. From that moment I would always know how to take bearings when I was lost. I would know where to begin again when I had come to the end of all my own resources of understanding or courage (Newbigin 1993, p.11).

Implicit in this vision of the cross is an understanding of the atonement, from which two things can be noted. First, Newbigin explicitly recognised the experiential aspect of his faith and theology. In later works he would refer to the experience of ‘being laid hold of’ (Newbigin 1995a, p.17; Newbigin 1956, p.99; Newbigin 1977b, p.260;

Newbigin 1979a, p.2) and the foundational role such experience had in the formation of a rational structure of thought. Second, Christ's atonement was a boundary issue for Newbigin, one on which he could not compromise. For instance, his commitment to this doctrine led him to argue against a broadening of the ecumenical vision of WCC to include other faiths (Newbigin 1963, pp.16–9).

3.3.2. The Bible

Another constant in Newbigin's theology throughout his career was his commitment to, and use of, the Bible. Wainwright notes that 'he prayed with the Bible, he preached with the Bible, he thought with the Bible, he wrote with the Bible' (Wainwright 2000, p.390). Newbigin's understanding of scripture was heavily influenced by the Biblical Theology movement. Goheen summarises this approach as one which (a) saw the Bible as a story whose main character is God acting in history, (b) saw the scripture as one unfolding story, in contrast to the historical-critical method and (c) held the conviction that revelation was mediated through history (Goheen 2000, p.122). He goes on to note several characteristics of scripture articulated by Newbigin: the scriptures are a record of the mighty acts of God in history, these events form a narrative unity, and the Bible is in the form of universal history, which reveals the character and purpose of God and is Christocentric (Goheen 2000, pp.124–7).

The Biblical Theology movement provided Newbigin with an interpretive lens for scripture which became the foundation of his engagement with Indian and modern Western culture. However, things do not remain static in the field of biblical studies and the approach of the Biblical Theology movement has been questioned, with other interpretive methods being introduced. For example, Brueggemann lists the following as significant in the wake of the Biblical Theology movement: sociological approaches, rhetorical criticism and various aspects of interpretation in the postmodern context (Brueggemann 2005, pp.49–89).

The Biblical Theology movement was, however, being criticised in Newbigin's latter years. Brueggemann lists James Barr's main criticisms of the movement. First,

concerning poor linguistic methods, which emphasised certain biblical words at the expense of their meaning in their context within a sentence. Second, that the recital of God's deeds is more 'story', or 'history-like' than 'history', the recognition of which is a step toward forgoing the 'happenedness' of biblical events. Third, that within the text God does not so much act as speak, and theological interpretation must therefore focus on the utterance of God (Brueggemann 2005, pp.45–6). Newbigin engaged with Barr's criticism, arguing for the basic insights of the movement and their importance for the church (Newbigin 1982a; Newbigin 1989, pp.68, 74–5, 94, 103). This defence notwithstanding, biblical interpretation has moved on from the Biblical Theology movement, and the question arises as to the significance of this for those seeking to apply Newbigin's theology today. Two biblical scholars, Walter Brueggemann dealing with the Old Testament, and N.T. Wright with the New Testament, have sought to develop an interpretive approach in the wake of the Biblical Theology movement.

Brueggemann traces the Biblical Theology movement to Barth, who reacted against a theological enterprise which had accommodated itself to enlightenment assumptions and had 'emptied the biblical text of any serious theological claim' (Brueggemann 2005, p.18). Against this, Barth asserted that the Bible must be heard for itself, thus creating space in which normative statements about biblical faith could be made. Brueggemann also highlights that Eichrodt and Von Rad, both significant figures in the biblical theology movement, were writing in a specific historical context and that their 'works resonated with their particular time and place' (Brueggemann 2005, p.38). Von Rad's model of interpretation, in particular, was 'a venturesome response to the crisis of the German church in his early years' (Brueggemann 2005, p.38). The Biblical Theology movement was, therefore, a movement seeking to hear the biblical voice in difficult historical circumstances in which its voice had been effectively silenced. Newbigin's ministry covered much of the same period and was thus facing many of the same issues, so it is unsurprising that Biblical Theology became his interpretive lens.

The biblical theology movement, and in particular the work of Barth, led to a tension for Biblical scholars, an interpretive decision to locate their work in the narrative of

modernity or of faith. Brueggemann suggests that in the postmodern context this may no longer be the most helpful way to frame the problem (Brueggemann 2005, p.19). Within a pluralistic context he states, in words reminiscent of Newbigin, ‘there can be no right or ultimate interpretation, but only provisional judgements for which the interpreter is prepared to take practical responsibility, and which must always yet again be submitted to the larger conflictual conversation’ (Brueggemann 2005, p.63). There are many competing interpretive voices, ranging from the ‘centrist’ enterprises of those in the major research institutions, which have continuity to what has gone before, to interpretations from the margins, including feminist, black and liberation theologies. It is at the interface between these readings in conflict that the theological claims of the text come to the fore.

Brueggemann highlights several important themes within contemporary Old Testament scholarship, which must be incorporated into any contemporary application of scripture. First is the existence of conflicting perspectives within the text. These include tensions between iconic and aniconic perspectives, that is texts which advocate maintenance of the present equilibrium and those which advocate transformational change, and between liberation and consolidation perspectives. The resulting ongoing dispute within the text is never finally resolved. Second, ‘the Old Testament in its final form is a product and a response to the Babylonian exile’ (Brueggemann 2005, p.74). The crisis of exile was one in which the old certitudes had been removed and new articulations of faith were required. Within this context, the Old Testament writings are ‘an enterprise of counter-reality’ (Brueggemann 2005, p.76). Those reading this material must put themselves in the position of exiles waiting for the homecoming, a position which resonates with the ‘homeless mind’, and the economic and environmental crisis facing modern readers (Brueggemann 2005, p.78). Third, the intertextuality of the text has given a sense of the conversation over time within the community, and that ‘the practitioners, speakers, and listeners of this intertextual conversation are clearly text-saturated people’ (Brueggemann 2005, p.79). This implies that Old Testament theology must become less about developing a system of settled propositions, and more about identifying characteristics and themes.

The purpose is ‘to observe and participate for a while in the practice of this rhetorical activity, whereby the whole of reality is received and appropriated differently’ (Brueggemann 2005, p.80).⁷ Fourth is the dialectical and dialogical quality of the text, which is centred around the question of theodicy. It is a dialogue about Israel and God, in which the parties are ‘always in the middle of an exchange, unable to come to ultimate resolution’ (Brueggemann 2005, p.83). This is, of course, in direct contrast to conventional theological practices, with their propensity to reach conclusions and certitudes to which appeal can subsequently be made. Fifth, the polyphonic character of the text must be recognised, which implies that the Bible is not a ‘totalizing metanarrative’ but a ‘master narrative’, which includes many voices and many stories which comprise *the* story (Brueggemann 2005, p.89).

Brueggemann concludes that Old Testament theology at the end of the twentieth century is not simply a religious exercise, but must be a contribution to the public discussion of ‘how matters are to be adjudicated in the midst of a revolutionary struggle’, since the text is ‘operative in the world of power and it concerns the rise and fall of empires’ (Brueggemann 2005, p.113).

From a New Testament perspective, Wright has sought to develop an interpretive method which will allow for a use of the New Testament which is in some way authoritative. The challenge in the wake of the Biblical Theology movement is to combine an emphasis on serious history with an emphasis on normative theology (Wright 1996, p.27), a task which will involve ‘trying to rethink a basic worldview in the face of the internal collapse of the one which has dominated the Western world’ (Wright 1996, p.24). He proposes a position of *critical realism* which is based on the premise that underlying the beliefs and aims of worldviews lie explanatory stories. These stories are open to amendment, or even to being abandoned, when they come into contact with alternative stories. Human observations are interpreted within the story of the person or group, but are open to critical reflection, which can lead to alternative ways of speaking truly about the world, with the use of new or modified

⁷ Compare this to Newbiggin’s view of the church as a community living by a story which forms the basis of their plausibility structure.

stories (Wright 1996, pp.38–44). Wright later notes that all reading involves the reader as an active participant (Wright 1996, p.120), and that worldviews are the lenses through which the world is seen (Wright 1996, p.124). He goes on to provide key points for a Christian theology which seeks to engage with ‘current concerns in the world, whether through confrontation or integration’ (Wright 1996, p.132). First, Christian theology tells a story and seeks to tell it coherently. Second, as an articulation of a worldview, this story seeks to answer the four key worldview questions: Who are we? Where are we? What is wrong? and; What is the solution?⁸ Third, this worldview has been given expression in a wide variety of socio-cultural symbols, which enable adherents to live appropriately and with a feeling of coherence. Fourth, the resulting worldview gives rise to a particular type of praxis, or ‘mode of being-in-the-world’ (Wright 1996, p.133). Christian theology must therefore be speech about God, about the history recounted in the New Testament as the source of the modifications and adaptations necessary in our worldview, and speech about the present and future. The Christian theologian must, however, speak ‘of truth to which one is totally committed but which can only be stated provisionally’ (Wright 1996, p.136). Returning to the task of finding a reading of the New Testament which can be in some way authoritative, Wright uses the analogy of a Shakespearian play, the fifth act of which is mostly missing. He postulates a staging of the play in which sensitive and experienced actors immerse themselves in the first four acts and are told to work out a fifth act for themselves (Wright 1996, p.140). The first four acts would be the undoubted ‘authority’ for their work. This, Wright proposes, could provide an account of authority for our present context, and proposes the acts of the biblical story as Act I: Creation, Act II: Fall, Act III: Israel, and Act IV: Jesus. The first scene of Act V would be the writing of the New Testament, which simultaneously gives hints as to how the play is supposed to end. This account of Biblical authority places a high emphasis on immersion in the story and on the normative role. However, a simple retelling of the first four Acts are not adequate to bring the drama to its intended conclusion. This model also recognises that faith and obedience remain essentially risky, because certainty on the required moves in Act V, on the basis of understanding the previous

⁸ Wright’s analysis of worldview, and his worldview questions, have found application in (Savage & Collins-Mayo 2006, pp.9–10)

Acts, is impossible. In spite of this, the ultimate result is guaranteed, and the call to the actors is to faithful improvisation.⁹ Wright concludes that the New Testament offers a set of stories and a single Story. 'It offers itself as the true story, the true myth, the true history of the whole world' (Wright 1996, p.471) and, as such, lays claim to speak of things that are true in the public domain, although its authority must be conceived in dynamic, rather than static, terms.

This survey of two significant Biblical scholars provides guidance in listening to Newbigin as a mentor in the application of scripture. For Newbigin the Biblical Theology school provided a method of interpreting scripture which allowed its normative voice to be heard, in a context where this voice had effectively been silenced within the church, the academy and wider society. Brueggemann and Wright are both seeking to develop an interpretive method which allows that same normative scriptural voice to be heard in a postmodern, pluralist context, recognising the developments that have taken place within biblical interpretation. Their individual interpretive methods have important similarities, which also resonate with Newbigin's writings. First, the text must become the foundation of a worldview. Wright is more explicit in his use of the term 'worldview', but it is implied in Brueggemann's assertions that the intertextuality of the text implies that interpreters be 'text-saturated people' (Brueggemann 2005, p.78), and that for such people 'the whole of reality is received and appropriated differently' (Brueggemann 2005, p.79).

Second, this worldview is held with universal intent, to use Newbigin's phrase. For Brueggemann, Old Testament theology is not just a religious exercise, but 'at the same time a contribution to the *public discussion* of how matters are to be adjudicated in the midst of a revolutionary struggle' (Brueggemann 2005, p.113). Wright argues that the New Testament 'claims to be the subversive story of the creator and the world, and demands to be read as such' (Wright 1996, p.471).

⁹ Wright's analogy is picked up by Walsh and Keesmaat in their engagement between the book of Colossians and postmodern culture. They adapt Wright's scheme by making the consummation a separate Act 6 and elaborate on the theme of faithful improvisation (Walsh & Keesmaat 2005, pp.133-7)

Third, although the foundation of this worldview is based on scripture and is held with universal intent, certainty in interpretation is not possible, and the truth to which one is committed can only be stated provisionally. This derives from Brueggemann's description of the polyphonic nature of the text, with its unresolved tensions, and Wright's analogy of faithful improvisation. The Biblical Theology movement glossed over these tensions, and Newbigin himself showed awareness of some of them. For example, he describes the Old Testament's ambivalence over the monarchy (Newbigin 1999, p.28), and the tensions within the Old Testament, and between the Old and New Testaments (Newbigin 1995b, pp.87–8). However, he also expressed concern that over-emphasis on the tensions would result in a biblical scholarship remote from 'the issues which Christians have to face in the worlds of ethics, politics, churchmanship and – of course – missions' (Newbigin 1986a, p.80). Newbigin stressed that the Bible was not a repository of infallible oracles, and warned against the illusion that scripture gave access to unquestionable truth (Newbigin 1960, pp.126–719911991; Newbigin 1991, p.6).

Fourth, both scholars highlight the importance of the exile, which shaped the formation of the Old Testament, and which was considered to be continuing in the experience of Israel in the New Testament (Wright 1996, pp.268–272). Brueggemann sees the theme of exile having contemporary significance in relation to the emergence of a 'homeless mind' which has arisen as a result of the reduction of human life to technique and bureaucracy, along with the worldwide environmental and economic crisis, which has produced a large number of literal exiles (Brueggemann 2005, p.78).

The above analysis has shown that Biblical Studies has moved on from the Biblical Theology Movement, while the social situation in many Western countries has developed beyond a waning of Christendom. In spite of his commitment to Biblical Theology and the fact that Newbigin's career fell largely within the Christendom era, he still remains a useful mentor for two reasons.

First, Newbigin was committed to the Biblical Theology movement because it was the best available biblical scholarship to give the Bible an authoritative voice in the

context in which he was engaged. As noted above, the movement can be traced back to Barth, Eichrodt and Von Rad's attempt to hear the biblical voice in their specific social situations. Newbigin is an appropriate mentor, not in his commitment to the Biblical Theology Movement *per se*, but in his commitment to use the best available scholarship to allow the Bible to speak authoritatively into the current context. His response to Barr's criticisms of Biblical Theology show his concern to preserve this authoritative role for scripture, but also that, in terms of the theory of paradigm shifts, Newbigin was working within an old paradigm which was facing increasing anomalies. For Newbigin, either a new paradigm of Biblical interpretation was not available, or he was so much part of the old paradigm that he was not able to make the shift to the new. As a mentor, therefore, Newbigin, provides both a positive example and a warning. The positive example is that of appropriating the best biblical scholarship in order to give the Bible an authoritative voice. Brueggemann and Wright are examples of recent biblical scholarship seeking to give the Bible an authoritative voice in the wake of the Biblical Theology Movement. The warning is in the danger of being so committed to a particular method that legitimate criticisms are not given enough credence and the voice of the text is in fact subdued.

The second way in which Newbigin remains a useful mentor is in regard to the specific challenges to the biblical voice being heard in the postmodern context. Within postmodernism there are two significant challenges to the biblical voice being heard. First, is what Carson describes a 'hard' or 'strong' postmodernism which states that all human knowledge is perspectival and, thus, human beings cannot have objective knowledge (Carson 2009, p.105). Second, is the rejection of meta-narratives as expressions of the 'will to power'. The analysis of Brueggemann and Wright has shown their concern to address these issues in a way that gives the bible a voice. Despite his use of the older Biblical Theology method, Newbigin also addressed these issues. In fact he was largely in agreement with what Carson describes as a 'soft' or 'weak' postmodernism (Carson 2009, p.106), for example, when he states, 'I have argued (in agreement with the postmodernists) that all truth claims are culturally and historically embodied' (Newbigin 1995b, p.97). However, Newbigin does not accept

the radical pluralism of ‘hard’ postmodernism, arguing instead for a plurality of the sort exercised within the scientific community in which assertions are published and tested by the wider community (see Weston 2004, pp.232–324; see also Carson 2009, pp.106–111). Newbigin argues for ‘a commitment to search for the truth, a commitment that implies the belief that the truth can be known – not fully and completely, but in part and with increasing depth and range and coherence’ (quoted in Weston 2004, p.234). Newbigin also agrees with the postmoderns that the Christian story is one story among many, and that these stories are claims to power. Yet, he asserts, ‘among all the stories that human beings tell about themselves and the world, there could be a true story. No logic requires us to deny this possibility. And this, of course, is what the Christian Church confesses’ (quoted in Weston 2004, p.235). But, in response to the dangers associated with the claim to power, Newbigin points out that the fact that the cross lies at the heart of the biblical story ought to invalidate any imperialistic tendencies. He also argues that the Christian perspective, in which truth is not something that is possessed or controlled, but something that is sought after in relationship, also negates the ideology of power (see Weston 2004, p.235). Newbigin is, therefore, a suitable mentor for those seeking to address some of the key aspects of postmodernism that would deny the bible an authoritative voice. Newbigin’s response is not a denial of postmodernism’s insights, but a critical engagement with them. It was an engagement in which he frequently sided with the newer position against the older and was based on a framework developed in his engagement with modernity (Weston 2004, pp.232, 236).

3.3.3. Newbigin’s Theological Praxis

In his critique of liberation theology in *The Open Secret*, Newbigin affirms the emphasis on praxis, stating, ‘there can be no “academic theology,” if that means theology divorced from commitment, faith and obedience’ (Newbigin 1995a, p.120). It has already been noted that Newbigin was not primarily an academic theologian, but a practitioner. His theological thinking was in line with Kirk’s description of the purpose of missiology, to ‘validate, correct and establish on better foundations the entire practice of mission’ (Kirk 1999, p.21). Newbigin’s theological praxis operates

according to the hermeneutical circle described by Bosch (Bosch 1991, p.425), which begins with experience and proceeds to reflection as a second act of theology. In fact, as Bosch points out, a better description is of a hermeneutical circulation, or that there is a dialectical relationship between theory and praxis. Newbigin's theological praxis will be described in terms of the inspiration for his theological reflection, the two major shifts in his theological thinking and his on-going engagement in praxis.

Newbigin found inspiration for theological reflection in various sources. First, he devoted considerable effort to thinking theologically about his own experience. Some examples may be considered. Reflecting on his experience of studying John's gospel and Hindu scriptures with Ramakrishna monks, and contrasting it with the experience of working with people of other faiths on practical social projects, reinforced the insight that the point of contact for the gospel lay not in the sphere of religion, but of everyday life (Newbigin 1993, pp.54–5). In later writings Newbigin refers back to this engagement in the Ramakrishna mission, reflecting on their willingness to accept Christ as just another god (which he relates to the tendency to co-opt Jesus into a culture) (see e.g. Newbigin 1989, p.3) and their difficulty in accepting the historical nature of the Christian faith (Newbigin 1995a, pp.66–7).

Another early experience in India on which he reflected theologically, which had lasting impact, was the manner in which people were gradually drawn from initially observing a worshipping village congregation into membership (Newbigin 1993, pp.53–4). (For his later reflection on this experience see (Newbigin 1961a, pp.75–7; Newbigin 1966, p.4)).

A later example is his reflection on his experience of British culture on his retirement. His later writings on gospel and modern western culture arose not just from moving back to Britain, but from being actively involved in the life and mission of the church. This involvement allowed him to experience the loss of confidence in British churches

and the antagonism to Christianity felt by British people outside the church, on which he reflected theologically (Newbigin 1993, pp.230–2, 234–6; Newbigin 1994a, pp.48–65, 67–8).

Experience, for Newbigin, did not just provide material to illustrate his theological insights, although he did use it in this way. Rather, it shaped and influenced his theological thinking. He continuously wrote articles, or delivered lectures, which were basically theological reflections on his experience as a practitioner (see e.g. Newbigin 1945; Newbigin 1953; Newbigin 1994a).

Secondly, in his theological reflection Newbigin also engaged seriously with the contemporary social trends that formed the context for mission, along with the accompanying theological responses to these trends. Much of his writing was an attempt to understand the contemporary situation, and its theological significance, because ‘we must see to act rightly’ (Newbigin 1963, p.11). Newbigin did not write systematic theology,¹⁰ rather, almost all of his books and articles were written in response to a particular situation facing the church (Hunsberger 1998, pp.36–8; Goheen 2000, p.6), which required a right theological understanding before an appropriate response could be formulated.¹¹ In seeking a right theological understanding Newbigin engaged seriously with other theological responses, and this was not simply done through his writings, but also through personal engagement and involvement. For example, the negotiations leading to the formation of the Church of South India required the patient building up of trust among those involved, which he achieved in large measure by moving the discussion from English into the vernacular (Newbigin 1960, p.13 See also Section 5.2).

A third source of theological reflection and insight were relationships and conversations with other people. At certain key stages he records significant conversations which led his thinking in new directions. He records a conversation

10 Wainwright refers to a series of eleven 800 word articles Newbigin wrote for *Reform* magazine as Newbigin’s nearest approach to a dogmatics (Wainwright 2000, p.326).

11 *The Open Secret* is an obvious exception as it was written primarily as a theology of mission during Newbigin’s time teaching at Selly Oak Colleges. See (Newbigin 1993, p.229).

with an African doctor who provided an insight into the nature of healing and the role of the Christian congregation (Newbigin 1993, p.192), and another with a Thai general who asked if the West could be converted (Newbigin 1994a, pp.66–7). Newbigin records both of these conversations as leading to significant theological reflection. He also records how his pastoral role with rural Indian congregations was intimately linked in his mind with the work of the Committee of Twenty-five, and how time visiting African churches and sharing Bible study with them helped steady his convictions and gain a perspective that ‘the passing theological fashions of Europe were not the only things that had to be taken into account’ (Newbigin 1993, pp.136, 170). The creative thinking inspired by these conversations, and his reflection on specific experiences as noted above, illustrates the imaginative aspect of theology noted by Kirk (Kirk 1999, p.19; Bosch 1991, p.431).

Reflecting on his own experience, and on the context in which mission was practised, whilst interacting with other people led to a clear development in Newbigin’s theology over the years. The two main shifts in his thinking were the shift from a church-centred view of mission, to a Christocentric view, and subsequently to a trinitarian view (see Section 4.1.3 below). These shifts can be regarded as a progressively deeper understanding, which came as a combination of reflection on his own experience and wider theological developments. However, Newbigin himself acknowledges that not all of his theological development was positive. His initial engagement with the secularism of the 1960s highlights the dangers associated in attempting to formulate a theological response to a new sociological trend. His initial assessment of secularisation was relatively positive, seeing it as the means by which God was drawing all people into a single world history, in which they would be freed from the negative constraints of religion in order to make a choice for or against Christ. He saw that secularisation was, in fact, introducing many of the changes into societies that missionaries had been working toward for years (Newbigin 1966, p.17). Later Newbigin stated that, in assuming that secularism would provide a neutral space, he had become ‘the easy victim of an illusion from which my reading of the Gospels should have saved me’ (Newbigin 1993, p.236), and he would later devote

considerable effort to exposing the ‘myth of the secular society’ (Newbigin 1989, p.211). This is indicative of the risks involved in faithful improvisation and the theological analysis of current events, and of the tension between holding convictions with universal intent yet at the same time as provisional judgements.

The theological influence of Newbigin’s work is undeniable, yet his purpose and motivation was consistently toward the practical and pastoral rather than the academic. Thus, his work has been criticised for lacking academic rigour. He has been criticised for not adequately pursuing the question of universalism (Hunsberger 1998, pp.225–234), not fully developing the implications of his Trinitarian understanding of mission (Goheen 2000, pp.161–4), and, in relation to his analysis of philosophers such as Descartes and Locke, of focussing on only one aspect of their position (Stults 2009, p.263; Ramachandra 1996). As a practitioner, Newbigin was concerned to give serious theological consideration to the context and practice of mission, but he had a tendency to develop his thinking only as far as to be useful in practice.

Newbigin’s lifelong concern for right praxis is evident throughout his career. Four examples, from different phases in his career, illustrate this point. First, while he was Bishop of Madurai (1947-52), Newbigin was part of the ‘Committee of Twenty-five’ theologians, including Barth, Brunner, Niebuhr and ’t Hooft, tasked to prepare WCC churches for the second Assembly on the theme ‘Christ the Hope of the World’. Newbigin saw this work as intimately related to the work in small village congregations in his diocese, which he believed could find resources of hope and courage through being rooted in Christ. He sought to bring the experiences of the villages to the Committee’s discussions, and to bring something back from the discussions to the villages (Newbigin 1993, p.136).

Second, Newbigin was selected as general secretary of the International Missionary Council (IMC) at the critical time of its preparing for integration into the World Council of Churches. This was a role which demanded both administrative and theological acumen. There was significant opposition to integration within the IMC, partly because it was viewed primarily in administrative terms, in contrast to within

the WCC where it was approached theologically (Laing 2012a, p.108). Newbigin's conviction that 'structures should be shaped to embody theological convictions' (Laing 2012a, p.137) shaped his approach to the task. Within the IMC Newbigin had a clear agenda to move the focus from organisational issues to 'the task of adumbrating a theology, and still more a picture of what the Christian world mission means in this mid-20th century, and a type of structure which will correspond to that picture' (quoted in Laing 2012a, p.111). Newbigin proved effective in disseminating the theological vision through the IMC. However, once integration had been achieved and Newbigin became director of the Division of World Mission and Evangelism, several deficiencies came to light. Some of the reasons for this were structural. The IMC was a small organisation being subsumed into a much larger one. Also, whereas the IMC had gone through a process to reconceive its understanding of mission and the relationship to structures, there was no corresponding recognition that the church had to change its relationship to mission. This enabled the 'WCC executive to accept the integration of the IMC without an analogous reformation of the structure of the WCC' (Laing 2012a, p.135). However, later Newbigin conceded that his own administrative failures contributed to the deficiencies of integration (Laing 2012a, p.136). He focussed too much on maintaining relationships with IMC offices in London and New York, thus sacrificing influence in the important WCC centre of Geneva. His conviction that 'mission is everything' meant that there was nothing within the large structures of WCC from which he could 'opt out of in good conscience' (quoted in Laing 2012a, p.136). His tendency to operate alone and with a sense of 'bogus omniscience' (quoted in Laing 2012a, p.136) led to his being spread very thinly and limited the influence of the newly integrated IMC within WCC.

Third, as bishop of Madras (1965-1974) Newbigin met monthly with the clergy of the diocese for worship, fellowship and discussion about the work within the diocese. Newbigin's sermons on aspects of the ministry to these gatherings were published in *The Good Shepherd* (1977a). These sermons cover topics such as social action, evangelism (as opposed to proselytism), worship and the inner life of the pastor. Many of the great theological themes that appear in his theological writings appear in these

short sermons in a form directly relevant to serving pastors and their congregations.

Fourth, in 1979 Newbigin opposed a proposal at the Birmingham District Council of the URC to close the congregation of Winson Green, located in an inner-city area of deprivation and high immigration. The congregation consisted of about twenty ageing white members who lived in the suburbs, and the proposal was to close the congregation. Newbigin argued that if the church abandoned such areas to retreat to the more comfortable suburbs it would forfeit its claim to be a missionary church. As a result he became the part-time pastor of the congregation and discovered that this ministry was harder than anything he encountered in India. He, and later his Indian colleague in the ministry, found that the attitude of the 'native Anglo-Saxons' (Newbigin 1994a, p.41) to the gospel was either 'cold contempt' (Newbigin 1993, p.235), or they were living quite satisfactorily 'without the hypothesis of God' (Newbigin 1994a, p.42). He found that this was the most difficult missionary frontier, and the assumption of many church people that evangelism of people of other faiths was inappropriate led him to give considerable thought to the question of pluralism. It is clear that much of his later writings on the encounter with the modern western worldview and the pluralist society were influenced by his experiences in Winson Green congregation.

3.3.4. Conclusion

It is not just the content of Newbigin's theology, but the manner in which it was done, that makes him an ideal dialogue partner and mentor for PCI as it develops an emerging view of mission. Newbigin was personally and theologically committed to the atonement as the interpretive key, or as he expressed it, the clue to follow in understanding the world. The bible was also foundational for him, and the Biblical Theology movement provided the framework for a reading of it which allowed its normative voice to be heard. Those seeking to follow Newbigin's example need to find interpretive methods appropriate to allowing the bible to speak normatively in their own contexts.

Newbigin's theology was a continuous reflection on his own, and the church's, experience in mission. While holding firmly to the atonement and scripture, he was willing to engage with contemporary sociological trends and contexts, and to take the risk of providing a theological interpretation. Such interpretation requires faithful improvisation, and is the creative synthesis of reflection on experience and the foundational elements of the atonement and scripture. His theology was, therefore, capable of development over the period of his career, with new insights being incorporated, whilst remaining recognisably consistent.

3.4. The Relationship Between Gospel, Church and Culture

The above analysis has shown that Newbigin's theological reflection remained rooted in certain foundational principles, yet was capable of development and of adapting to the various contexts he was faced with. His career began in India during the time of the Raj, when he wrestled with issues of dependency and paternalism. It moved through the period of the 1960s, during which time within the WCC there was great optimism about what could be achieved in the world, and the role of the church in mission was minimised. It continued through the years of his retirement in Britain, in which he initiated consideration of a missionary encounter with modern western culture. His missiological thinking and practice during each of these periods contain principles that are still relevant and pertinent.

Newbigin was, however, writing in the latter half of the twentieth century, and his analysis is of that period. His writings are, therefore, relatively recent and continue to provide insight into our context and how to relate to it. On the other hand, the world has continued to change in the years since his death. Newbigin's analysis was by one who experienced the waning of Christendom, while the current experience of the church is that of entering post-Christendom, and the difference in perspective between these two experiences is significant. This is particularly true for a generation of Christians born into the emerging post-Christendom context, who have no personal experience of the Christendom with which Newbigin was familiar. Newbigin displayed remarkable foresight regarding future trends throughout his career. Notably, in 1996, just two years before his death, he predicted that the three major factors that would compete for the allegiance of the human family would be the gospel, the free market and Islam. These comments seem almost prescient given the events following 9/11 and the more recent global financial crisis (Newbigin 2003, p.119).

Newbigin's foresight led him to see the demise of Christendom before many others. Yet, in spite of this, his perspective and experience was that of Christendom and he recognised the limitations this had in his looking to the future (Newbigin 1997, p.9).

To those whose experience of life and faith is entirely located within an emerging post-Christendom context, that is, to those of my own generation and beyond, Newbigin's writings provide important wisdom, but must be appropriated and developed with perspicacity.

Newbigin's contribution to answering four significant questions for those in the emerging post-Christendom context will be considered. First, how are we to understand our context? This question seeks to interpret and understand the fact that the homogeneity of Christendom has come to an end and that the church now finds itself a minority in a pluralist society. Second, how do we understand the church in the emerging post-Christendom context? This question addresses the fact that engaging in mission in a new cultural context forces questions of ecclesiology to the fore. Third, what should our attitude and expectations in mission be? This question addresses the changes in assumptions and expectations that are appropriate for the church in mission, in the post-Christendom context. Fourth, what is the appropriate shape for the church in mission after Christendom? This question addresses the strategies for mission, both for congregations and denominations.

The first question, addressing the ending of Christendom will be answered in the remainder of this chapter. First, Newbigin's theology of cultural plurality will be examined, and then his approach to understanding the end of Christendom. The remaining questions will be addressed in chapter 4.

3.4.1. Newbigin's Theology of Cultural Plurality

The first task for the church in the emerging post-Christendom context is to come to some sort of theological understanding of that context. Within the Christendom paradigm it was implicitly assumed that there was one Christian culture to which all Christian communities would conform. This was the initial assumption of the great missionary expansion, but gradually it was recognised that a degree of cultural diversity was inevitable. This led to theological and practical reflection on indigenisation, inculturation and contextualisation (Bosch 1991, pp.420–432, 447–

457; Costas 1982, pp.3–20; Kirk 1999, pp.89–94; Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation 1992, pp.263–7; WCC Central Committee 1992, pp.44–5). These were, however, concepts which were deemed relevant in non-Western contexts and not applicable in the ‘Christian’ West. It is now undeniable that Western culture has shifted and continues to change. The church’s relationship to that culture has, therefore, also shifted, and the question of the relationship between the gospel, church and culture must be addressed. In particular, this understanding of gospel, church and culture must give an adequate understanding of the fact of a plurality of cultures and, therefore, the variety of cultural expressions of Christianity.

Hunsberger’s analysis of Newbigin’s ‘implicit “theology of cultural plurality”’ (Hunsberger 1998, pp.7, 235) provides a useful summary, and will form the foundation of this section (Hunsberger 1998, pp.235–279). Hunsberger argues that what is needed is a theology that addresses the following questions: the meaning of the plurality of cultures; how that fact is to be valued; and the ‘meaning of the fortunes of history by which these cultures are placed in relation to each other’ (Hunsberger 1998, p.237). Whereas many approaches address the issue of the relationship between the gospel and culture, for example Niebuhr’s classic *Christ and Culture* (Niebuhr 1956) or the church and the culture, for example *Christianity in Culture* (Kraft 1979), Newbigin describes the missionary encounter as a triangular relationship between the local culture, the Christianity of the missionary church and the witness of the Bible (Figure 3 (Hunsberger 1998, p.238)). In this model there are three encounters: the gospel-culture encounter, the Bible-church relationship and the church-culture dialogue. Before elucidating each of these encounters it should be noted that exposition below follows Hunsberger’s terminology, so that ‘culture’ will normally refer to the local culture being encountered by the gospel and ‘church’ will normally refer to the missionary church understood as an ecumenical fellowship.

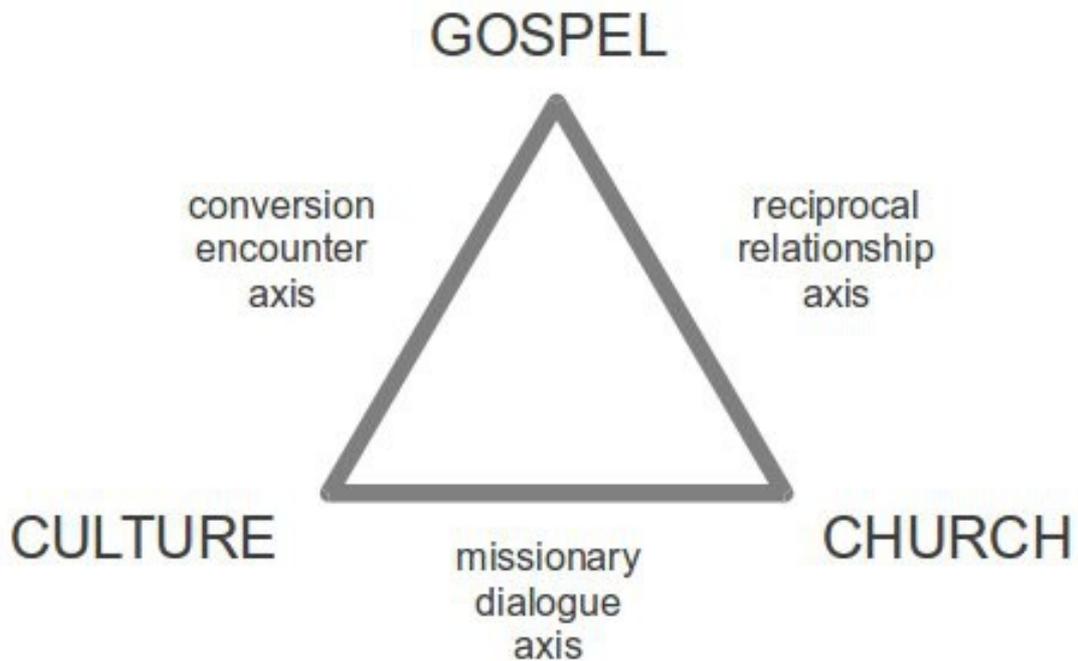


Figure 3: A Triangular Model of Gospel-Culture Relationships

The Gospel-Culture Encounter

For Newbigin this is the most essential level in the missionary encounter. Newbigin's fundamental premise is summed up as follows:

there can never be a culture-free gospel. Yet the gospel, which is from the beginning to the end embodied in culturally conditioned forms, calls into question all cultures, including the one in which it was originally embodied (Newbigin 1986b, p.4).

Newbigin sees Paul's conversion as an illustration of this, in which the gospel is communicated in the language of the receptor culture, therefore provisionally accepting the understandings involved in that culture. Yet the gospel also introduces contradictions and a call for conversion (Newbigin 1986b, pp.5–6). The same dynamic of provisional acceptance of the receptor culture, with subsequent contradictions and call to conversion arises in cross-cultural mission.

Many of Newbigin's discussions on the missionary encounter begin with the most obvious encounter, that between the missionary's culture and the receptor culture. However the most basic encounter can only happen authentically when the Bible is introduced as a 'force that critiques both cultures' (Hunsberger 1998, p.240). Newbigin values Hogg's approach of 'challenging relevance' for the communication of the gospel in a culture as it recognises that the gospel refuses to be too 'fitted' or too 'foreign' to the culture. He also prefers the term 'contextualisation' over alternatives such as 'indigenisation' and 'adaption'. Contextualisation implies 'the placing of the gospel in the total context of a culture at a particular moment, a moment that is shaped by the past and looks to the future' (Newbigin 1986b, p.2), thus avoiding pitfalls such as relating the Christian message to traditional cultural forms which young people are rejecting, and that the missionary is bringing a pure gospel which requires adaptation to the receptor culture. From this it is clear that Newbigin is positive towards the concept of contextualisation, in spite of critics who claim the opposite (see below).

Hunsberger sees that one of Newbigin's major contributions to the discussion of cultural plurality concerns the question of continuity between the gospel and culture. Newbigin divides the question in two. For the convert, the relationship with their own culture has gone through a paradigm shift, with a new ultimate commitment at its centre. Yet from this new vantage point the discontinuity is not total. The convert is also united with the particular historical strand of the missionary's church, yet a radical discontinuity with the cultural embodiments of that church is retained. This double continuity and discontinuity allows converts to give their conversion its authentic form within their own culture. This has important implications for mission, in that the Spirit always converts by an embodied form of the gospel, never by a 'distilled, pure, unadulterated' (Newbigin 1986b, p.4) gospel. The idea that one can arrive at a pure gospel without any cultural accretions is an illusion. Therefore, while the embodied form of the gospel brought by the missionary is part of the communication, it is the embodiment in the receptor culture which is most important. Thus 'mission becomes servanthood to a gospel which belongs to the "other", not the

‘extension of one’s own church’ (Hunsberger 1998, p.241). Newbigin’s perspective is, therefore, not that this cultural translation of the gospel is a mere necessity, to be begrudgingly accepted, but that the Spirit gives a positive valuation to the full range of cultures. Thus, Hunsberger correctly sees Newbigin as having a genuinely high view of cultures. Newbigin takes them more seriously than those who argue that cultures are neutral, by recognising that they include a centre of ultimate commitments and by acknowledging their dynamic nature.

Hunsberger demonstrates the positive valuation of the range of cultures by an analysis of interpretations of Genesis 10-11, which is ‘the spawning ground for any biblically orientated theology of cultural plurality’ (Hunsberger 1998, p.244). Newbigin’s interpretation sees that ‘diversity is part of God’s gracious purpose for the human family, but separation and mutual rejection is not’ (Newbigin 1977c, p.122). He also fully recognises that the confusion of languages at Babel was God’s judgement on human efforts to construct their own ‘heavenly city’ (Newbigin 1977c, p.121). Diversity is, therefore, not a departure from the creation ideal, with a restoration of unity as the ultimate goal. It is not a case of ‘diversity in the way of unity but a diversity on the way to unified diversity’ (Hunsberger 1998, p.253).¹²

The Bible-Church Relationship

In considering the Gospel-Church encounter of Figure 1, Hunsberger changes the terminology slightly, giving the section the title ‘The Bible-Church Relationship’ (Hunsberger 1998, p.255). He does not explicitly justify this change in terminology, but his exposition concentrates on Newbigin’s description of the relationship between the church and the Bible.

The gospel-culture encounter does not take place in a vacuum, rather the gospel will

¹² It is interesting to note Newbigin’s willingness to speak in these terms about diversity in the area of cultures in comparison with his rejection of reconciled diversity between churches in favour of organic union (see Section 4.1.2).

always be represented by a community, that is, the missionary's church. This is a community that lies on the other side of the boundary marked by conversion and in which former ultimate commitments have been exchanged for the Bible as the 'determinative clue' (Hunsberger 1998, p.255). According to Newbigin, neither the Bible nor the community determined by it can be properly understood except in their reciprocal relationship with each other. The Bible comes as the book of a community, but the community and its tradition have taken shape as each generation has sought to live in faithful obedience to the Bible. Thus, within the community, a hermeneutical circle operates, with a 'constantly developing reciprocal relationship' (Newbigin 1986b, p.58). This hermeneutical circle cannot be said to operate when there is no commitment to the authority of the Scriptures, since something else will hold the place of authority in that culture. Thus, 'the missionary dialogue with other cultures is not simply a dialogue between cultures; the Bible functions decisively ... as a third and independent party in the developing relationship' (Newbigin 1978a, p.15).

Hunsberger sees Newbigin's theology as recasting the agenda for a theology of cultural plurality in two ways. First, Newbigin shapes an 'inter-cultural ecclesiology' (Hunsberger 1998, p.257). He sees the church as essentially 'pluriform' (Newbigin 1969a, pp.126-7), such that each local church must 'embody a catholicity which calls in question the life-style of that place'. This is a catholicity that 'will confirm a proper particularity in the life-style of each local church' (Newbigin 1977c, p.21). In the triangle of relationships in a missionary encounter the corner representing the 'Christianity of the missionary' is thus acknowledged to be profound and complex. This perspective shifts the ecumenical discussion from being a 'cross-confessional' to being a 'cross-cultural' discussion, in which each local church 'perceiving Christ through the spectacle of one culture, can help the other to see how much the vision has been blurred or distorted' (Newbigin 1986b, p.9). This takes place within a complex pattern of church-culture relationships, in which it must be recognised that cultures are constantly changing. Newbigin's recognition of the dynamic nature of cultures, is an advance on Niebuhr's typology of 'Christ and culture' relationships (Hunsberger 1998, p.259) and implies that 'the battles to be fought in different cultural groups will

be different: what is radical in one group will be reactionary in another' (Newbigin 1973, p.10). All of which leads to the conclusion that the church does not retain a static relationship with the culture in which it exists.

Newbigin's 'inter-cultural ecclesiology' has implications for the way in which theology, particularly Christology, is done. The church's theological work must be done '*in via*' and

it must be done in the openness of dialogue with the varied cultures of mankind; it must be done in the openness of learning within the ecumenical fellowship of all Christians; it must be done in faithful adherence to the given tradition (Newbigin 1978a, p.10).

Newbigin emphasises the importance of Third World theologies, which implies the possibility that equivalent theologies will develop in the encounter between the gospel and the emerging post-modern, post-Christendom context in Britain.

There is a danger that if theology is not conducted in this manner the local church will judge the gospel in the light of the local myth, which Newbigin sees as a particular danger in the West. Newbigin's emphasis also suggests the need for 'culture encounter' (Hunsberger 1998, p.263) exposition, of the sort he demonstrated in his commentary on John's gospel. This 'culture encounter' exposition is one which goes beyond interpreting biblical texts for particular cultures to include the exposition of the cultures themselves, laying bare the issues which the gospel brings (Hunsberger 1998, p.264). (See further Section 5.4).

The second area in which Newbigin's theology recasts the agenda for a theology of cultural plurality is in the area of revelation and relativity. Underlying Newbigin's theology of revelation are two assumptions: (i) the personal character of God, which means that God can act in historical terms and choose the time and place for those actions, and (ii) that human life is social and corporate, which means that salvation must embrace both elements. The intersection between historical divine action and self-disclosure with the pattern of human social intercourse is an important area of

reflection in the development of a theology of cultural plurality. Newbigin's assertion that God is personal implies that his principles and will cannot be abstracted from his person; what God wishes to disclose is always God's *self*, and such a disclosure is made by the free actions through which God interacts with human persons in real history' (Hunsberger 1998, p.269). Also, because God is personal, his communication is not in abstract forms, but in relatedness. Thus God's self-disclosure cannot be encased in any of the forms in which it is made, nor is it aloof from history, but comes primarily in the form of narrative. Revelation is also communal, in that it is addressed, not to cultures, but to people living dynamically in terms of their culture. It engages their response as bearers of the image of God with whom God seeks to be reconciled. In this perspective cultures are neither neutralised nor absolutised.

The Church-Culture Dialogue

It is the Spirit who brings about conversion, and when conversion occurs in a new culture there is an addition to the pluriformity of the church. The church's witness can never be a monologue, but is always dialogic, 'including both the church's inner dialogue with its own culture and its outward dialogue with all others and their respective cultures' (Hunsberger 1998, p.270). Hunsberger explicates the implications of this for the agenda of the theology of cultural plurality in two areas. First, in the area of culture and religious pluralism, Newbigin broadens the concept of dialogue, by which he means the basic missionary character of the church, beyond other religions to include other cultures. In doing this he recasts the discussion of religious plurality in four key ways. First, in relation to the question of continuity with other religions, Newbigin asks the question from the point of view of the convert, and divides it into questions of continuity with their culture and with the new community they have become members of through conversion. In both there are elements of continuity and discontinuity. Second, Newbigin's approach is more genuinely pluralist than many others who espouse religious dialogue, in that he does not seek to provide an overarching view of the religions, but asserts that each position begins from some

unprovable foundational axioms which must be acknowledged. Hunsberger accurately maintains that Newbigin presses this point ‘too hard and too long’ and does not give enough attention to the provisional nature of these axioms and the debate about the relative merits of one axiom or another (Hunsberger 1998, p.272). Third, Newbigin challenges the assumption that religion is the facet of human life in which the sacrificial element is to be found. In contrast the Bible shows that the religious dimension is often the area of greatest darkness. Newbigin also refuses to relegate religion into a separate part of life and sees the gospel as a ‘secular announcement’ which speaks to the whole of cultural life (Hunsberger 1998, p.273). Fourth, Newbigin’s ‘intentional agnosticism’ on the destiny of those who have not acknowledged Jesus as Lord is an attempt to move beyond the presumption of the inclusivist and exclusivist approaches. But Newbigin also protests that in focussing on a narrow aspect of salvation, i.e. the destiny of the individual soul, such approaches are ‘reductionist in the extreme’, in that the present and social dimensions of salvation are excluded. Again Hunsberger feels that Newbigin presses the point ‘too hard and too long’ and that question of the destiny of the individual person cannot be avoided (Hunsberger 1998, p.274).

The second implication for the development of a theology of cultural plurality is in the area of election and biblical theology, which is related to the question of particularity. Once again Newbigin turns the issue around to ask it from the point of view of the one encountered by a ‘witness’ from another culture. This focuses attention on the mission of God and election becomes the clue to the solution of the problem of particularity. It is the means by which a personal God works in a meaningful history, with each one chosen to bear the blessing to the other. Newbigin’s argument about election will only stand within the rationality of the Christian faith, and even then limitations are evident. Hunsberger mentions two such criticisms. First, that in his discussion of election Newbigin blurs the distinction between the Old and New Testaments, in effect reading the Old Testament in light of the New. It is not therefore a convincingly ‘biblical theological’ idea. Second, although Newbigin attempts to do so, the classical questions regarding election cannot be completely avoided (Hunsberger 1998, pp.276–

7; cf. Williams 2011).

In conclusion Hunsberger sees that Newbigin's theology of cultural plurality provides an important practical contribution to pastors and church leaders in regard to the encounter of the gospel with their own culture. First, it enables them to engage in a missionary way, knowing that the gospel approaches every culture with both affirmation and critique. Second, it provides resources for the 'inner dialogue' in which it is necessary to engage before engaging in an outward dialogue. Third, Newbigin's vision nourishes congregations toward their calling to be 'the hermeneutic of the gospel' (Hunsberger 1998, p.279).

Hunsberger's explication of Newbigin's implicit theology of cultural plurality has been described in order to provide a foundation for the first part of the answer to the question of how the church in the West is to understand its current context. This is a context in which the cultures of modernity and Christendom have come to an end and new cultures are emerging. From the above analysis, several points may be made.

First, diversity of cultures is part of God's purpose and does not represent a departure from his ideal. Cultures must also be recognised as dynamic rather than static. This is a simple point, yet in a time in which the church sees the surrounding culture changing, along with its relationship to it, it is an important point to acknowledge. It is tempting for the church to view the Christendom culture as somehow closer to a supposed ideal and to resist, or mourn, any departure from it. This, however, is to deny both cultural diversity as part of God's plan and the dynamic nature of culture. It is also to be unaware of, or to wilfully ignore, the syncretistic relationship of the church with a culture which had, in fact, at its core an ultimate commitment other than Christ. Recognising that cultures are constantly changing and developing implies the need for the church to be constantly reassessing its relationship to the surrounding culture, and for it to be analysing the trends in an attempt to read the signs of the times. It has already been noted how Newbigin attempted to do this at various stages, and how, although necessary, it is fraught with danger. Newbigin's early engagement with secularism and his later correction demonstrate that all attempts to discern the signs of

the times must be provisional and under constant review.

Second, although Newbigin's triangular representation of the missionary encounter is useful in ensuring that the missionary church is not identified with either the gospel or the recipient culture, it must be used with care in the western context of cultural change. Newbigin's analysis of the missionary encounter was largely influenced by his missionary experience in India, that is, in an encounter in which the three elements of gospel, culture and missionary church are clear and distinct categories. For example, the apparently simple problem of selecting Tamil words to use to describe Jesus highlighted for him the issues of continuity and discontinuity between the gospel and the receptor culture. Newbigin discusses how, in a missionary encounter across a language divide, the missionary must initially use one of the locally available words for 'god' to talk about God, and different terms to explain Jesus and his ministry. However, as the dialogue continues it becomes obvious that the missionary is investing these words with different meanings. There is, thus, both continuity and discontinuity with the receptor culture (Newbigin 1978a, pp.1–3; Newbigin 1989, p.75). Newbigin sees this process has having already taken place in the New Testament, most notably in John's Gospel (Newbigin 1982b, pp.1–3; Newbigin 1986b, p.53). N.T. Wright makes a similar point, which has significance for mission in a post-Christendom context, when discussing the statement 'Jesus is God'. It is often assumed that the purpose of this statement is to give information about Jesus. However, the statement equally aims to challenge and change people's perception of God (Wright 1996, pp.xiv–xv, 472).

The gap between the Christianity of the missionary and the Bible was also brought home to Newbigin in practical situations. He cites one occasion in which he was trying to explain the miracles in Mark's gospel to Indian village teachers. He sought to explain the miracles in the terms he had been taught in college, only to discover that for these teachers such miracles were not a problem, but a matter of experience. They were in fact closer to the worldview of the Bible than he was (Newbigin 1978a, p.5). This example also illustrates the gap between the Christianity of the missionary and the understanding of that faith in the community that is called into being through

conversion.

In the context of cross-cultural mission the three points of the triangle are easily distinguished. The situation is much more complex in a culture which was once perceived to be Christian, in which the church had a central role, but which is now moving into a new phase. The temptation for the church in Christendom was to collapse the culture-church distinction, leading to syncretism, while in the emerging context the danger is that the church is tempted to collapse the Bible-church distinction and thus identify itself with the gospel in a reactionary stance against the emerging culture.

However, the situation is even more complex. The missionary encounter involves a triangle of relationships between the gospel, the church of the missionary and the receptor culture through which the Spirit brings conversion so that there is a new addition to the pluriformity of the church. This is relatively straightforward when the missionary has physically moved to engage the receptor culture. The implications of this model in a context of cultural change are more complex. In this situation, as Hunsberger points out, the dialogue is as much internal as it is external, with the implication that the gospel will encounter culture within the individual, as well as within the church, requiring daily conversion (Hunsberger 1998, p.279; cf. Hunsberger 2003, pp.148–150). Thus, for a church existing in a context of cultural change, the bottom line of the triangle (Figure 1) becomes an internal dialogue within both the church and the individual believer. However, such internal dialogue does not fulfil all the elements of the missionary encounter within Newbigin's model, according to which a new faith community will be born, creating an addition to the pluriformity of the church. Hunsberger and the Gospel in Our Culture Network in North America focus on the inner dialogue and conversion of the existing church in the changing cultural landscape, but do not make much mention of churches which are emerging out of the new cultural milieu. In a time of widespread cultural change, which is moving beyond the surface level of social trends to fundamental changes in underlying worldview, it is according to Newbigin's analysis of the missionary encounter, right, proper and inevitable that a new expression of church comes into

being.

Hans Küng (1991, pp.123–169) has observed that paradigm shifts occurring in church history are unlike those in science, in that not only does a new paradigm of church emerge, but the old paradigm continues. Thus, the Reformation saw new paradigms of church emerge, but the previous Catholic Church continued, although it too was changed in the process. It is also worth noting that the paradigm shifts Küng mentions all coincide with times of major cultural and societal upheaval. In his examination of what have come to be known as ‘fresh expressions’ of church, Mobsby distinguishes two basic types (2008, pp.27–31). The first are those using a ‘translation’ type approach to contextualisation in a postmodern context. These are adaptations of inherited forms of church and include cell churches, youth churches and traditional church plants. The second group is seeking to be postmodern and utilise a ‘synthetic’ model of contextual theology. These include alternative worship communities, café churches and network churches.

If it is accepted that we are in a period of fundamental cultural change, Mobsby’s two categories may indicate that a paradigm shift, as described by Küng is taking place. Mobsby provides a useful distinction between fresh expressions of church, which represent adaptations by established churches to adapt to the new context, and emerging churches, which are an addition to the pluriformity of the church arising out of an engagement between the gospel and the new culture. The emerging church is recognised as an important phenomenon, even though in comparison with other religious orientations it is not numerically large (Marti & Ganiel 2014, p.9). Its influence, however, is felt through publications, websites and networks and its presence is felt ‘across the Christian landscape’ (Marti & Ganiel 2014, p.10).

Although the emerging church is a recognisable phenomenon, it resists easy definition, being described variously as ‘a movement, a conversation, a friendship, and a new Reformation’ (Shults 2009, p.425; See also Anderson 2007, p.12; Carson 2009, pp.9–14; Johnson 2008, pp.155–6). In spite of this, several characteristics of the movement can be described. First, it is a movement which is seeking an appropriate

Christian response to the emerging world. The Emerging Church Movement is ‘forging a religious orientation suited to the society in which we live’ (Marti & Ganiel 2014, p.163). It seeks to engage with the surface level changes in society, such as socio-political, technological and climatic changes, as well as the deeper level philosophical changes, such as post-modernism, post-colonialism, and post-conservative and post-liberal theologies (Johnson 2008, pp.167–8). Second, it is a disparate movement which is amorphous with ill-defined boundaries (Carson 2009). In their sociological analysis of the movement Marti and Ganiel describe it as a set of groups that resist definition. This is partly a resistance to being labelled with a term that carries stigma and to create breathing space for the creation of new frameworks in the face of powerful definitions of Christianity, both conservative and liberal (Marti & Ganiel 2014, p.5). They prefer to consider the emerging church movement in terms of an ‘orientation’ rather than an ‘identity’ as this allows for the wide variety of beliefs and practices, and even disagreement, within the movement. Third, a key element of the movement is the deconstruction of inherited models of church and theology. Marti and Ganiel’s research shows many within the movement as coming out of mainstream churches, with one interviewee describing their emergent congregation as ‘a church for recovering Christians’ (Marti & Ganiel 2014, p.64). They find that emerging churches react against ‘conservative/evangelical/fundamentalist Protestantism’ and other forms of traditional Christianity, which they experience as stifling and inauthentic. Deconstruction within the emerging church is not primarily in the philosophical sense, but rather is a response to their awareness of the ‘extreme complexities of their world and their faith’ and an attempt to provide the ‘wriggle-room’ for belief and practice (Marti & Ganiel 2014, p.26). This characteristic of the emerging church has led to the accusation that it seems dismissive of the Christianity of the modern period (Carson 2009, p.64). Fourth, emerging churches are also engaged in reconstruction, or, as Marti and Ganiel put it, in ‘collective institutional entrepreneurship’ (Marti & Ganiel 2014, p.163). Jamieson’s research of those who had left evangelical, pentecostal and charismatic churches found that some remained in groups that continued to define themselves in terms of the churches they had left. In a sense these groups remain focussed on the deconstruction of previous beliefs and

practices. Other groups move beyond this and have a ‘focus on new faith constructions and ways of nurturing and developing faith’. Jamieson describes these groups as ‘liminal’; liminality being ‘an ambiguous, sacred, social state in which a person or group of persons is separated for a time from the normal structures of a society’ and ‘the threshold of the new’ (Jamieson 2002, pp.158–160). The emerging church engages in deconstruction in order to ‘*reconstruct* new ways of thinking about and practicing communion among followers of Jesus Christ in contemporary society’ (Shults 2009, p.427). The emerging church engages in this process of deconstruction and construction both in relation to the structures and forms of the church and theology. Fifth, almost inherent in the designation of the movement as ‘emerging’, is the fact that it is an evolving and developing movement; it is a ‘work in progress’ (Drane, quoted in Marti & Ganiel 2014, p.6). This is unsurprising, both because the context into which the emerging church is seeking to incarnate the gospel is still developing and changing, and because the deconstructing tendency leads to an ‘open-ended, never-finished faith in which Christians see themselves as on a perpetual spiritual quest’ (Huggins, quoted in Marti & Ganiel 2014, p.163).

The sixth characteristic of the emerging church movement is that it is perceived negatively by many in the established churches. In 2009 the Annual Convention of the American Council of Christian Churches resolved ‘to reject and repudiate the Emerging Church movement as heretical’ (Marti & Ganiel 2014, p.168). It is criticised for lacking theological depth (Carson 2009, pp.68–70; Johnson 2008, p.170) and for an uncritical acceptance of postmodernism (Carson 2009, pp.75–86; Johnson 2008, pp.171–4) and as being a reaction against a fundamentalist tradition separated from the surrounding culture (Carson 2009, p.85). However, within the emerging church movement there are those who are seeking to develop serious theology, although they are self-consciously seeking a new theological method appropriate to the emerging context. For example, a section of the book *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (Pagitt & Jones 2008) entitled ‘A Hopeful Way Forward: Theology of Practice, Practice of Theology’ contains six chapters on theology and the theological method. The criticism of an uncritical acceptance of postmodernism is also unjustified, for at least some of

those within the movement. For example, Anderson views postmodernity as ‘a context in which we must do theology rather than as a hermeneutical tool’ (Anderson 2007, p.12). Although many within the movement are reacting against a fundamentalist background, Carson’s critique does not do justice to the breadth of the movement and the efforts being extended to reconstruct a form of church and theology arising out of the engagement between the gospel and the emerging context.

If it is accepted that the church is going through a time of paradigm change, as described by Küng, then the emerging church may represent the beginnings of the new paradigm. Within this description, the negative reaction of the established churches is representative of those who are still working within the old paradigm and perceive the new as a threat. However, Küng’s description would imply that the establishment of the new paradigm will not result in the death of the old, but that it will continue to exist alongside the new.

Newbigin’s model of missionary encounter endorses the emergence of new forms of church; yet he would also insist that these new forms of church be taught to see themselves, from the beginning, as part of the church universal and to develop tangible ways to express this. Yet the history of paradigm changes within the church, as described by Küng shows how divisive the process can be. At this point the emerging churches should be aware of the tendency to be dismissive of older expressions of church.

Newbigin’s analysis of the missionary encounter is fruitful. Its depiction in diagrammatic form as a triangle of relationships is helpful in distinguishing the three elements in the missionary encounter, which are often unconsciously conflated in harmful ways. Yet the graphical depiction is also unfortunate, since the triangle is the most structurally rigid shape which is why it frequently features in engineering structures. In the missionary encounter the three elements do not remain in a fixed relationship to each other; the sides of the triangle prove to be elastic.

The third point to be made from Hunsberger’s analysis of Newbigin’s theology of

cultural plurality concerns the correct attitude toward the culture surrounding the church. Hunsberger clearly sees that Newbigin has a positive attitude toward the plurality of cultures. Other authors do not give such a positive assessment of his attitude toward culture, particularly Western culture. Stults, for example, states:

From a missiological point of view, however, the failure to utilise the appropriate contextualisation as a methodology is to ignore the reality of intercultural ministry and the wealth of important insights gained from cultural anthropology. This, I believe, is Newbigin's biggest failure ... His view of culture tends to be negative (Stults 2009, p.239).

Newbigin would understand this [the need for contextualisation] and may have seen its value in the Indian context, but he does not indicate that he sees the value of contextualisation in the Western context (Stults 2009, p.242).

Goheen also lists authors who see Newbigin's stance as being primarily against culture or counter-culture (Goheen 2002a, pp.136–8), and some who acknowledge that Newbigin also sees the gospel as an agent of cultural reformation (Goheen 2002a, p.138). While it is recognised that Newbigin affirms that the gospel has a 'positive relation to' and a 'critical appraisal of' culture (Goheen 2002a, p.139), it must be admitted that in his treatment of culture he stresses the antithetical aspect of contextualisation. Goheen posits that the clue for this might lie in the settings in which he was working: within a minority Christian community in a Hindu culture, the syncretistic atmosphere of the WCC of the 1960's and his discovery of a compromised church in Britain upon his retirement. In relation to modern western culture, in which he saw the church in an 'advanced state of syncretism' (Newbigin 1994a, p.67) and that the antithetical side of the cultural task had been eclipsed, it was understandable, even strategic, for Newbigin to stress the critical appraisal of the culture. Goheen quotes Jack Thompson of the University of Edinburgh: 'When a fat man is sitting on one side of a seesaw it is necessary to jump very hard on the other end' (Goheen 2002a, p.142). Goheen also cites Raiser's description of the differences in context between the missionary situations of the churches in Africa and Asia, where the problem is one of *cultural estrangement*, and in North America and Europe, where the

problem is one of *cultural captivity* (Goheen 2002a, p.142). Goheen argues that, in the context of this cultural captivity, Newbigin was justified in emphasising the critical appraisal of modern western culture.

Once again, however, the rapid and profound changes in western culture mean that the situation is now more complex than this. That the church was bound, and continues in large part to be bound, in cultural captivity to the cultures of Christendom is undeniable. The culture has changed, and is changing, so that the church in the West is also experiencing a profound estrangement from the culture it inhabits. Thus, the church is at the same time captive to a culture which no longer exists and estranged from the culture it inhabits.

The fourth point arising from the discussion of cultural plurality concerns a weakness that Newbigin himself highlighted in his engagement with western culture. When asked why the Gospel and Our Culture project, which arose out of the British Council of Churches' 1984 project, did not include people from the arts, Newbigin's reply was that this was simply due to his incompetence in the field (Newbigin 1993, p.254). Newbigin's engagement with modern western culture was predominantly with its epistemological foundations. While this may have been due to his conviction that the foundational assumptions of any point of view should not be allowed to go unacknowledged or unexamined, it may also have had to do with the areas in which he had most expertise. He did engage with other aspects of culture, most notably with the economic aspect, although not with the same depth or rigour with which he pursued the epistemological issues (see e.g. Newbigin 1984a, pp.40–1, 43, 56–7; Newbigin 1986b, pp.106–116; Newbigin 1990).

3.4.2. The End of Christendom

One of the most basic tasks of the church in mission is to seek to understand its context. For the church in the western world this is, among other things, a context in which Christendom is ending. A church whose ecclesiology developed in the stable culture of Christendom, which was for a considerable period of time assumed to be a,

or perhaps 'the' Christian culture, must develop a theology of cultural plurality if it is to come to terms with an emerging new culture. It must also come to some sort of theological understanding of the demise of Christendom. Newbigin provides much material to begin the process of developing such an understanding, but since he was himself a product of Christendom, and because there have been significant developments since he was writing, other sources must be brought into the conversation.

The roots of Christendom obviously go back to Constantine and the role the church took on in the years following his conversion. Newbigin argues that prior to this the church had refused the status of a *cultus privatus*, because it could not accept relegation to the personal, private and spiritual spheres of life, thus making its clashes with the imperial power inevitable (Newbigin 1984a, pp.32–3; Newbigin 1986b, pp.99–100). So, when the empire lost its vision and began to disintegrate the church had no option but to step in, as the only group with the resources to hold society together (Newbigin 1984a, pp.33–4; Newbigin 1986b, pp.100–101, 128). For Newbigin, therefore, 'the experiment of Christian political order had to be made (Newbigin 1984a, p.34). Nigel Wright sees Newbigin's position as too mild, arguing that the Constantinian settlement resulted in the church compromising on its previously 'detached involvement' (Wright 2000, p.15) with the empire, and moving to a position in which it had power, privilege and patronage to impose Christian values, in what it believed to be the interests of the kingdom of God. Wright argues that this form of Constantinianism is deeply embedded in the church's thought and is a 'hard habit to break' (Hauerwas, quoted in Wright 2000, p.18). Newbigin is well aware of the negative aspects of the Constantinian settlement and the church's seduction by secular power (Newbigin 1989, p.223; Newbigin 1986b, pp.100–101), but argues that to suggest that the church should have instituted a modern concept of separation of church and state is simply anachronistic (Newbigin 1998, p.3). He recognises that the Constantinian settlement provided a reasonably stable order, in contrast to the chaos that threatened, and gave birth to the world we have inherited (Newbigin 1986b, p.124; Newbigin 1989, p.223; Newbigin 1984a, p.34). He also

notes the positive contribution of Augustine in placing love at the heart of social order (Newbiggin 1986b, pp.103–4). Stults moves beyond this to highlight the debate concerning the total effect Augustine had on Western culture and the church (Stults 2009, pp.237–8).

Similarly, in spite of his strong critique, Newbiggin recognises positive elements of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment was, at least partly, a reaction against an authority wrongly claimed in the name of revelation. It brought an end to the religious wars of the seventeenth century and gave birth to the freedom of conscience and enquiry that allowed modern science to flourish (Newbiggin 1984a, p.52; Newbiggin 1998, pp.3, 4; Newbiggin 1989, p.223). More significantly the Enlightenment brought an end to the territorial principle, and restored the recognition that being a Christian is more than being a citizen of a Christian country; that ‘allegiance to Jesus Christ is a matter of personal decision and devotion, not a corollary of national, ethnic or political affiliation’ (Newbiggin 1997, p.8; Newbiggin 1998, p.4). Since the Enlightenment the separation of religious and secular authority, which was anachronistic to read back to the time of Constantine, has become reality, although not without problems. The problems stem from the fact that, if civil authority is not legitimated by a ‘more-than-human authority’, it must rest on the will of the people. Human rights, if not derived from their source in God, become matters of ‘ad-hoc political negotiation’ (Newbiggin 1998, pp.3–5). According to Newbiggin, secular society is proving to be inadequate, leading to the rise of fundamentalist movements which seek to restore the union of political and religious authority (Newbiggin 1994b, pp.2–3; Newbiggin 1986b, pp.115–6; Newbiggin 1997, pp.1–2).

In spite of the problems inherent in the separation of religious and secular authority, Newbiggin insists that the church should not seek to return either to a pre-Constantinian innocence, which is impossible (Newbiggin 1986b, p.102), or to a situation where the church exercises political power (Newbiggin 1989, p.223). Such an identification of religious and political power, as in Islam, denies the doctrine of original sin and unleashes demonic powers (Newbiggin 1986b, p.116). There are many possible relationships between the church and state, and no one stance can be said to be right

for all times and places. Yet the church cannot accept relegation to the private sphere. It cannot accept that there are areas of life over which Christ does not have lordship or that the central shrine of public life is empty (Newbiggin 1986b, p.115).

In harmony with writers such as Walter Wink (Wink 1992, pp.6–10, 65–85) and Nigel Wright (Wright 2000, pp.179–192), Newbiggin develops a nuanced view of structures of authority and the relationship the church and individual Christians should have with them. In *Foolishness to the Greeks* Newbiggin concentrates on the notion of kingship, but in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* he broadens the discussion beyond the state to include the principalities and powers mentioned in the New Testament (Newbiggin 1986b, pp.126–134; Newbiggin 1989, pp.198–210). In relating principalities and powers to human agencies Newbiggin is referring to the ‘power and authority which is real, which is embodied in and exercised by individual human beings, but is not identical with them’ (Newbiggin 1989, p.202; cf. Wink 1992, pp.6–8). Thus, the concept can refer to the political realm, but also to economics, race and other elements in the structuring of human life (Newbiggin 1989, p.207; cf. Newbiggin 2003, pp.114, 119).

These structures are an inherent part of human life (Newbiggin 1989, p.205), part of the created order and authorised by God (Newbiggin 1986b, p.126; Newbiggin 1989, pp.204–5). The relationship between the individual and these powers is not one-way but is reciprocal (Newbiggin 1989, p.199). The powers have, however, been corrupted and are in rebellion against God, and thus can become demonic, tyrannical and dehumanising (Newbiggin 1986b, pp.126, 128; Newbiggin 1989, pp.204, 205–8). Similarly, Wright sees all systems of human government as being intrinsically flawed and there being an ‘intensification of fallenness when it comes to structures as opposed to persons’ (Wright 2000, p.182). This aspect of the powers is exposed when they are faced with God in the person of Christ. The powers crucified him and were thus ‘exposed, illuminated, unmasked’ (Newbiggin 1989, p.209). It is this fact that makes the separation of church and state a necessity and implies that no one political system can be fully endorsed (Newbiggin 1986b, pp.110, 115; Newbiggin 1995c, p.4; cf. Wright 2000, pp.181, 183–4). The powers have been disarmed and robbed of their

pretensions to absolute authority by Christ, but not destroyed (Newbigin 1989, pp.201, 204, 208; Newbigin 1986b, p.126).

Newbigin's description of the powers is similar to Wink's, who states that the powers are good, the powers are fallen, the powers must be redeemed (Wink 1992, pp.10, 65–85). Wright sees the social order as 'within the context of Trinitarian action in creation, preservation and redemption', and the state as therefore being ambivalent (Wright 2000, pp.181, 184). He also sees the gospel as unmasking the powers' pretensions to divinity (Wright 2000, p.181). The powers, or the structures of human life, will, therefore, continue to exist and neither an attitude of simple protest nor of extreme conservatism is appropriate for the church (Newbigin 1989, pp.208–9; Newbigin 1986b, pp.127–8; Newbigin 1998, p.6). The church is not to seek to seize the levers of power, since such revolutions often result merely in the oppressed becoming the oppressor. In contrast, the church is called to an active engagement that bears witness to the powers of the kingship of Christ (Newbigin 1986b, p.128).¹³ This must be done remembering that the fight is not against the individuals within the institution, who often feel themselves powerless (Newbigin 1989, p.209). The church and individual Christians cannot avoid the responsibility of engagement and involvement with the powers, in spite of the inherent dangers, but must seek a society which is Christian, in the sense of 'a society whose public life is shaped by the Christian beliefs about the human person and human society' (Newbigin 1998, p.6).¹⁴ Similarly, Wright argues for 'the radical distinction between church and political community' (Wright 2000, pp.181, 185) and that the separation of church and state does not imply the separation of church from society, but that the church mould society wherever possible (Wright 2000, p.187).

Newbigin, at times, appears to have believed that there were sufficient Christians in Britain to bring about a Christian society (Newbigin 1986b, p.129; Newbigin 1994b, p.5; Newbigin 1995c, p.4). It is statements like this which lead Stults to conclude that

¹³ Wright argues for 'the radical distinction between church and political community' (Wright 2000, pp.181, 185).

¹⁴ Wright argues that the separation of church and state does not imply the separation of church from society, and that the church moulds society wherever possible (Wright 2000, p.187).

Newbigin is overly optimistic (Stults 2009, p.236), but it should be noted that Newbigin regretted using the phrase ‘Christian society’ because of misunderstandings that he was advocating a restoration of Christendom (Kettle 2012, p.24). Also, on other occasions, Newbigin considered the possibility of the continuing decline of the European churches (Newbigin 1989, p.244).

Yet, even if the church is in a minority, and faces persecution as a result of its engagement with the powers, it must bear witness to the ultimate authority of Christ (Newbigin 1986b, p.129). In fact it is from minority Christian communities throughout the world that the church in the West needs to learn this sort of witness (Newbigin 1997, p.9; Newbigin 1989, p.210; Newbigin 1986b, p.129).

Newbigin’s discussion of these issues often leads to him listing criteria for the church in its role as witness to Christ’s authority in the midst of other authorities (Newbigin 1986b, pp.134–150; Newbigin 1989, pp.227–232; Newbigin 1998, pp.6–8). There are minor variations in the points he makes, but the common elements are:

- a recovery of eschatology, which answers the problem raised by the tension between individual and social destiny. The church must thus be a community of hope.
- a Christian doctrine of freedom and tolerance which holds firmly to truth as public truth, but provides security for those of other views.
- a ‘de-clericalised’ (Newbigin 1986b, p.141; Newbigin 1998, p.7) theology which prepares lay people to consider the bearing of their Christian faith in the decisions they have to make and the priorities they have to establish, recognising that it is such people, not church councils or synods which make pronouncements on social issues, who are working on the frontiers of the engagement with the powers.
- ‘if the church is to be effective in advocating and achieving a new social order

in the nation, it must itself be a new social order' (Newbigin 1989, p.231). This will necessitate a critique of denominationalism.

- the church must be a community that is involved in the concerns of its neighbourhood.
- the church must learn from churches of other cultures in ecumenical fellowship.
- the church must be a community of praise

In summary, then, Newbigin gives the foundation for the church to come to a theological understanding of the end of Christendom. He sees that the church had a responsibility to step into the breach when the Roman Empire was in danger of social collapse and argues that the notion of a separation of church and state for that time is anachronistic. The church, however, was quickly corrupted by the temptation to use power to coerce belief. The Enlightenment brought about a separation of church and state which the church must now see as the correct arrangement. This is not to be a begrudging acceptance of the current reality, but flows from a biblical understanding of the principalities and powers. Newbigin presents a nuanced view of these structures for organising human life. They are a necessary part of the created order, yet always have potential toward dehumanising tyranny. Thus the church cannot hanker back to Christendom, nor seek to re-establish it. It must negotiate a critical engagement with the principalities and powers and witness to the ultimate authority of Christ. This gives a theological foundation for the church entering post-Christendom.

The process of cultural change in the West has continued since Newbigin's death, and it is therefore necessary to recognise that Newbigin's continuing influence is most likely to be in the nature and principles of his engagement with western culture, rather than the specific details (Hunsberger 1991, p.236). Weston argues that 'Newbigin can be shown to have developed a missiological approach that effectively anticipates many of the questions raised by contemporary postmodern perspectives' (Weston

2004, p.230). The secularisation of Britain has continued to develop, with the role of Christian values in public life being continually reduced. This has been given explicit expression in court rulings in recent years, with one judge stating, ‘Whatever may have been the position in past centuries it is no longer the case that our laws must, or should automatically reflect the Judaeo-Christian position’ (Brown 2011). This, combined with the continuing decline in church membership, gives credence to Stults’ assertion that Newbigin is overly optimistic about the possibility of the church reconverting the West (Stults 2009, p.236). On the other hand, Stults’ emphasis on revival as a way to move beyond Newbigin does not appear to actually provide much more of any substance, as revival is beyond the control of the church (Stults 2009, pp.269–273).

One of Newbigin’s most significant contributions has been in the stimulation and encouragement of a genuinely missionary encounter between the Gospel and the modern western worldview. In the 1970’s and 1980’s he saw that the reigning plausibility structure was derived from the Enlightenment and based on a scientific worldview. He thus devoted considerable effort to laying bare the underlying assumptions of that worldview and exposing it to the claims of the gospel. It is arguable that this worldview is no longer dominant and has been replaced with an economic worldview, or that the economic worldview at least exists alongside other worldviews. Newbigin himself stated that the free market would be the church’s ‘most urgent missionary task during the coming century’ (Newbigin 1995a, p.95; cf. Newbigin 2003, p.95). There are significant indications that he was correct in this observation. Economics has been described as an ‘imperialist beast’ (Harper & Gregg 2008, p.87; cf. Sandel 2012, p.6) in that its general approach is being applied to an increasingly wide range of human activity. This can be seen in the spread of the economic approach into areas such as health care and provision of services that traditionally had a different ethos (Harper & Gregg 2008, p.87; Sandel 2012, p.48). Sandel states that we have ‘drifted from *having* a market economy to *being* a market society’ (Sandel 2012, p.10) and that ‘the last few decades have witnessed the remaking of social relations in the image of market relations’ (Sandel 2012, p.51). He

also cites the view among some economists that economics does not merely offer ‘a set of insights about the production and consumption of goods but also a science of human behaviour’ (Sandel 2012, p.48). Sandel thus challenges the assertion often made by economists that markets are morally neutral (Sandel 2012, pp.9, 64, 88, 113). Economics is, therefore, basically a worldview (see e.g. Sandel 2012, pp.85, 202–3). It claims to understand the world ‘as it really is’, to use Newbigin’s phrase, including assumptions about human nature and purpose and the ordering of human relationships (Anon 2012a; Sandel 2012, pp.85, 202–3).

Hunsberger has noted how economic language has infiltrated the church along with consumer attitudes (Foust et al. 2002, p.97), which perhaps indicates that the church is in a state of syncretism similar to that which pertained when Newbigin began his engagement with western culture, albeit with a different ideology. If this is so, the church must seek to uncover and engage with the underlying assumptions of this worldview in a similar way that Newbigin did with the modern scientific worldview. This will necessitate theological engagement with disciplines not normally associated with the theological academy. It will also necessitate ordinary Christians negotiating their involvement with this power, recognising that economic structure is a part of the created order, but fallen and therefore with a tendency to dehumanise people. The church must learn to bear witness to the lordship of Christ in a culture dominated by the economic worldview.

3.4.3. Conclusion

Newbigin’s analysis of the relationship between the gospel, the missionary church and the culture being reached provide the basis for a theology of cultural plurality. Such a theology of cultural plurality is crucial for a church in the midst of cultural change, as it affirms the diversity of cultures and their dynamic nature as part of God’s intention. Maintaining the distinctions between the gospel, the missionary church and the culture is important if the church is to avoid the dangers of collapsing either the church-culture distinction, leading to syncretism, or the gospel-church distinction, leading to the church identifying its cultural expression of the gospel with the gospel itself and

thus reacting defensively to the emerging culture. Newbigin's analysis of the missionary encounter concentrates on the engagement between a missionary church and a 'foreign' culture. In a context of cultural change this does not take enough account of the fact that the dialogue between the gospel and culture becomes one that is internal to the life of the missionary church, and individuals within it. From the positive assessment of the diversity of cultures Newbigin argued that the encounter between the gospel and a new culture would result in an addition to the pluriformity of the church. In the context of cultural change it is, therefore, to be expected that questions of ecclesiology will arise and there will be increasing pluriformity within the church.

Newbigin also provides resources for the church to understand and engage with the emerging post-Christendom context. He offers a nuanced view of the structures of human society, which are an inherent part of human life. They have been created by God, yet, have also been corrupted and are in rebellion against him. Christians must, therefore, engage with them and seek to influence society with Christian values, even if as a minority. Since the processes of cultural change have continued since his death, the ongoing significance of Newbigin's writing will often be as general principles rather than in specific detail. In contrast to the time of much of Newbigin's writing, when the modern scientific worldview was predominant, the economic worldview has become more prevalent. It is with this worldview that the church must now engage.

4. Newbigin and the Church in Mission

Newbigin's theology of cultural plurality recognises that when the gospel comes into contact with a new culture, through the missionary activity of the church from outside that culture, a new pluriformity of the church will come into being. In a situation of cultural change it is to be expected that new additions to the pluriformity of the church will emerge from the encounter between the gospel and the emerging culture, and that existing churches will change as the dialogue between the gospel and emerging culture is internalised.

It is thus clear that a church which exists in a time of cultural change will be forced to address issues of ecclesiology and the appropriate structures for the church. This chapter will examine Newbigin's approach to these issues.

4.1. The Need for a New Ecclesiology

The emerging postmodern and post-Christendom context in Europe and North America, and its effects on the church, have led to a widespread recognition that traditional ecclesiologies are no longer adequate. In fact, developments in thinking on the nature and the purpose of the church arising from the experience of the church in mission can be traced through the missionary conferences from Edinburgh 1910 (see e.g. Bosch 1991, pp.368–381).

The development of new ecclesiologies has had both academic and practical expressions. From an academic and theoretical viewpoint several books and articles exploring this theme have been published. Following the publication of *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Bosch 1991), Bosch saw the development of a missiology of western culture to be a priority, and that the first step would be a missionary ecclesiology (Goheen 2000, p.1). The Gospel and Our Culture Network in America has published numerous books and articles as it perceives the need, in the context of societal shifts, to 'engage in the *study of the church*, to explore its nature, to understand its creation and continuing formation, and to examine

carefully its purpose and ministry (Van Gelder 2008, p.2).¹⁵ Goheen's doctoral thesis on Newbigin, and much of his subsequent writing, are examples of an academic engagement with this issue, but he records how his interest arose from his experience of the deficiencies of available ecclesiologies in his role as a church planter (Goheen 2000, p.1).

The practical drive for reviewing ecclesiology has also been experienced by two major denominations in Britain. In 2001 a special commission of the Church of Scotland submitted its *Church Without Walls* (Special Commission Anent Review and Reform 2001) report to the General Assembly. The commission had been appointed to re-examine 'the primary purposes of the Church and the shape of the Church of Scotland' (2001, p.8) and the report is a comprehensive examination of these questions in light of the context of the new millennium. In 2004 a working group of the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs Council published *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (Archbishop's Council on Mission and Public Affairs 2004). This was the result of a review of a 1994 report, *Breaking New Ground*, and its 'most significant recommendation' was that the parish based model of Anglicanism underlying the earlier report was 'no longer adequate' (2004, p.xi). The *Mission-Shaped Church* report itself, and many subsequent publications, show the Anglican denomination addressing ecclesiological questions institutionally and at grass-roots level.

The drive to re-examine ecclesiology as a result of engaging with a new context was familiar to Newbigin. In the introduction to *Household of God* he gives three reasons for a re-examination of the nature of the church (1951, pp.11–24). The first is the breakdown of Christendom, which was the context in which ecclesiologies of the Reformation period were born. During this period the churches were confined to a 'peninsula of Asia', that is, a non-missionary context which resulted in ecclesiologies that defined churches with respect to each other, rather than to the non-Christian world. Second, drawing from his experience in India, Newbigin shows that churches in missionary situations must be involved in many more areas of members' lives than

15 A full list of books published can be found at (The Gospel and Our Culture Network 2012)

those living in a Christendom context. In the Christendom context the church need not be actively involved in large parts of members' lives as the societal values governing those areas are in line with those of the church. Third, for Newbigin the implications of mutual recognition by churches within the ecumenical movement necessitates a fundamental rethinking of ecclesiology.

The church retained a crucial place in Newbigin's theology throughout his career, to the degree that Goheen was able to use the concept of 'missionary ecclesiology' as the organising principle for his thesis on Newbigin.

We will now examine five key areas of Newbigin's ecclesiology: the church as a visible, historic community; the unity of the church; the relationship between the church and the kingdom; the relationship between church and mission; and the significance of the local congregation.

4.1.1. The Church as a Visible and Historic Community

Newbigin insists that the church is a visible historic community. In *The Household of God* he critiques the typical Protestant view that a person is incorporated into Christ by hearing and believing the Gospel as having no place for the continuing life of the church. He goes on to give Biblical support to the typical Catholic view that incorporation into Christ is by being incorporated into his body, noting its congruity with God's method in the Old Testament of calling a particular people and relating to individuals as part of a group. In the New Testament, when Paul talks of the body of Christ it is not in metaphorical terms, but about actual communities. In other writings Newbigin refers to the fact that Christ chose not to leave a written record of his teaching, but rather made the conscious decision to form a community which would be the 'bearer of the secret of the kingdom' (Newbigin 1995a, pp.51–2; Newbigin 1989, pp.94–5). In his later years the community aspect of the church became crucial in his engagement with the epistemology of modernity, as it is the community in which an alternative plausibility structure is possible. He also argued that a continuing community is necessary as the link between individuals and the historic events of the gospel.

These are important principles underlying Newbigin's affirmation of the church as a visible historic community, but there is a more fundamental principle. Seeing the church as a visible historic community, embodying a plausibility structure and providing the necessary link between individuals and historic events, forces consideration of the doctrine of election. Hunsberger is correct in saying that this doctrine is foundational in Newbigin's theology, although scripture and Newbigin's personal experience of the atonement underpin this doctrine (see section 4.2). Hunsberger notes how, at several points in his argument, Newbigin settles on the doctrine of election as the 'most fundamental grounding point on which his argument, his apologetic, his logic rested' with 'a gentle thud' (Hunsberger 1998, p.2).

Newbigin expounded his doctrine of election in several writings throughout his career. Hunsberger shows how the doctrine featured more in the early and later periods, when

Newbigin was primarily concerned to relate the gospel in a context of pluralism. In these contexts the scandal of particularity was particularly acute. In the middle period Newbigin was primarily seeking to defend faith in the context of secularism (Hunsberger 1998, p.69). However, the underlying structure of Newbigin's understanding of election remained constant (Newbigin 1951, pp.99–100; 1961a, pp.77–83; 1995a, pp.68–90; 1983; 1989, pp.80–8). He argued for the necessity of election from the nature of salvation. Both the ends and the means of salvation must, necessarily, be congruent with the nature God has given humanity, the world in which he has placed us and his ultimate purpose that all things be reconciled in Christ. The goal of salvation is, therefore, both cosmic and relational, in that its goal is the restoration of relationships between God and humanity, between humans, and between humanity and creation. This is in direct contrast to views which see God and humans as monads and salvation as an individual spiritual relationship. Newbigin's understanding of salvation leads him to a twofold argument for the logic of election. First, salvation must be centred on an actual event in an actual place and time in history, since a personal God must act at particular times and places, and his universal purpose must be worked out through a continuous series of particular choices. Second, salvation must be an action which binds people together in relationship to each other and in a shared relationship to nature. Election is 'the choosing, calling and sending of one to be the bearer of blessing for all' (1995a, p.71), not the direct approach of God to each individual. Thus, receiving God's saving revelation is dependent on receiving the messenger that he sends.

Newbigin concedes that election appears exclusive and arbitrary when approached from a Hindu or modern western perspective of the autonomous individual. However, when viewed from the above perspective the logic of election becomes clear, even a necessity. At times Newbigin used the phrase 'the logic of election'. At other times he went further and argued that election was necessary (see e.g. 1951, p.100). Williams has shown that despite his attempts to show the necessity of election, Newbigin falls short, and his arguments are only effective in showing 'the possibility that God's operations in history are *fittingly* undertaken in the form of electing activity towards a

particular people' (Williams 2011, p.3).

This does not remove the inherent mystery of God's choice in election. At this point Newbigin persistently argues that the focus must be on the purpose of election, not on God's reasons for choosing. The purpose of God's choosing is that the chosen is the bearer of blessing to others. When this missionary purpose of election is forgotten and there is concentration on the reasons for election in the secret counsel of God, then 'God's people have betrayed their trust' (1951, p.101; cf. Williams 2011). This implies that election is not to be seen in terms of election to privilege, nor that those who are chosen have an exclusive claim on God that others do not. Newbigin consistently stresses that election is not to privilege, but to responsibility; those who are chosen are 'bearers – not exclusive beneficiaries' (1995a, p.32). Newbigin is not alone in emphasising that election is to responsibility, but in contrast to others, he does not deny that those who are chosen share in the benefits of salvation (see Hunsberger 1998, pp.104–7; Williams 2011, p.7). The church 'is both the first-fruits and the instrument of God's gracious election, for His purpose is precisely the re-creation of the human race in Christ' (1951, p.103). Finally, Newbigin insists that election must retain a firm connection with the doctrine of Christ, and the incarnation in particular. When this connection is lost in favour of speculation that God could choose and regenerate people through the secret work of the Spirit, then the importance of the visible church and the missionary task are also lost.

It can be seen, therefore, that for Newbigin election is neither an embarrassment in the face of diversity, nor an impediment to mission. On the contrary it is the answer to the problem of particularity, and, especially in the Trinitarian context of his later work, demands a missional understanding of the church. Newbigin makes three points flowing, directly or indirectly, from this foundational understanding. First, the church must be understood in dynamic, not static terms. Newbigin's observation that the classic Reformation ecclesiologies were developed in a non-missionary situation has already been noted. These ecclesiologies are therefore preoccupied with defining one particular church over and against others, and by defining the visible marks of the church. In contrast, Newbigin argues for an ecclesiology that is eschatologically

focussed and thus missionary. The church should, therefore, be defined not in terms of visible marks but in relation to its being called into being by God and the goal to which it is headed (1951, pp.133–4), and as ‘a pilgrim people on its way to a promised land’ (1961a, p.93), or ‘an expedition rather than an institution’ (1961a, p.111). Second, the problem of the obvious flaws within the church is not to be solved by appealing to a distinction between the visible and invisible church. Newbigin regrets that when Luther described justification by faith as the article by which the church stands or falls, he was referring only to the justification of the individual, not of the church as well. As a result Luther replaced the biblical dialectic of holy and sinful with an unbiblical one of visible and invisible (1951, p.56). Newbigin insists that, in both the Old and New Testaments, the people of God are seen as the visible community in specific places, and the same must still apply. Allowing the distinction between visible and invisible church leads to hypocrisy and sectarianism. This leads on to a third principle, that the church cannot be understood as a voluntary organisation, made up of people sharing the same interest. Although this thought is present in earlier writings, it takes on greater significance in Newbigin’s engagement with modern western culture. In this context he argues for a critique of denominationalism as the religious aspect of secularisation (1986b, pp.144–6).

Guder provides a model of the church which incorporates Newbigin’s emphases of the church as a visible, historic community, its definition in dynamic terms and minimises the visible/invisible dichotomy (1998, pp.201–220). Drawing on the theory of bounded and centred sets, Guder argues that congregations and denominations have functioned as bounded set organisations (Figure 4 (Guder 1998, p.202)). That is, they have provided spiritual, social and cultural boundaries by establishing the rules and expectations of membership. The role of leaders in this model is to move people across boundaries.

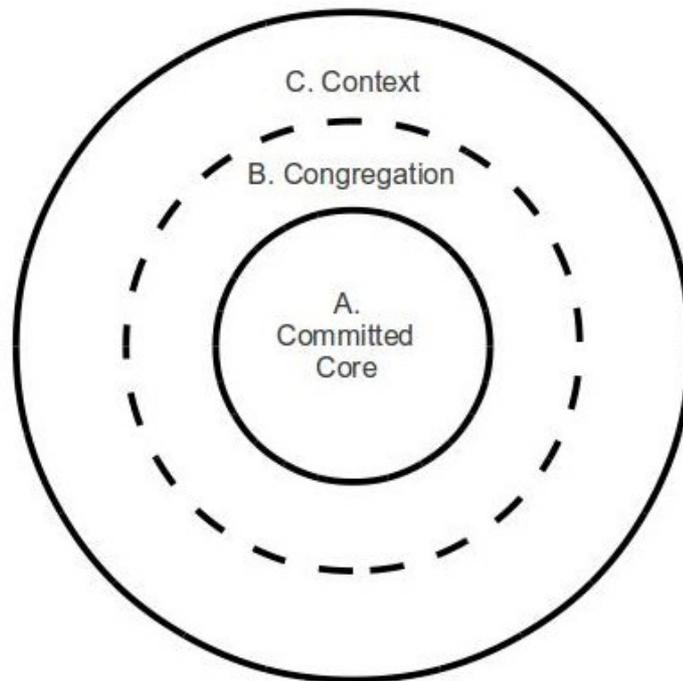


Figure 4: Bounded set model of church

Guder then adopts the frequently used notion of centred sets and develops a model which combines it with an understanding of the church as the pilgrim people of God (Figure 5 (Guder 1998, p.213)).

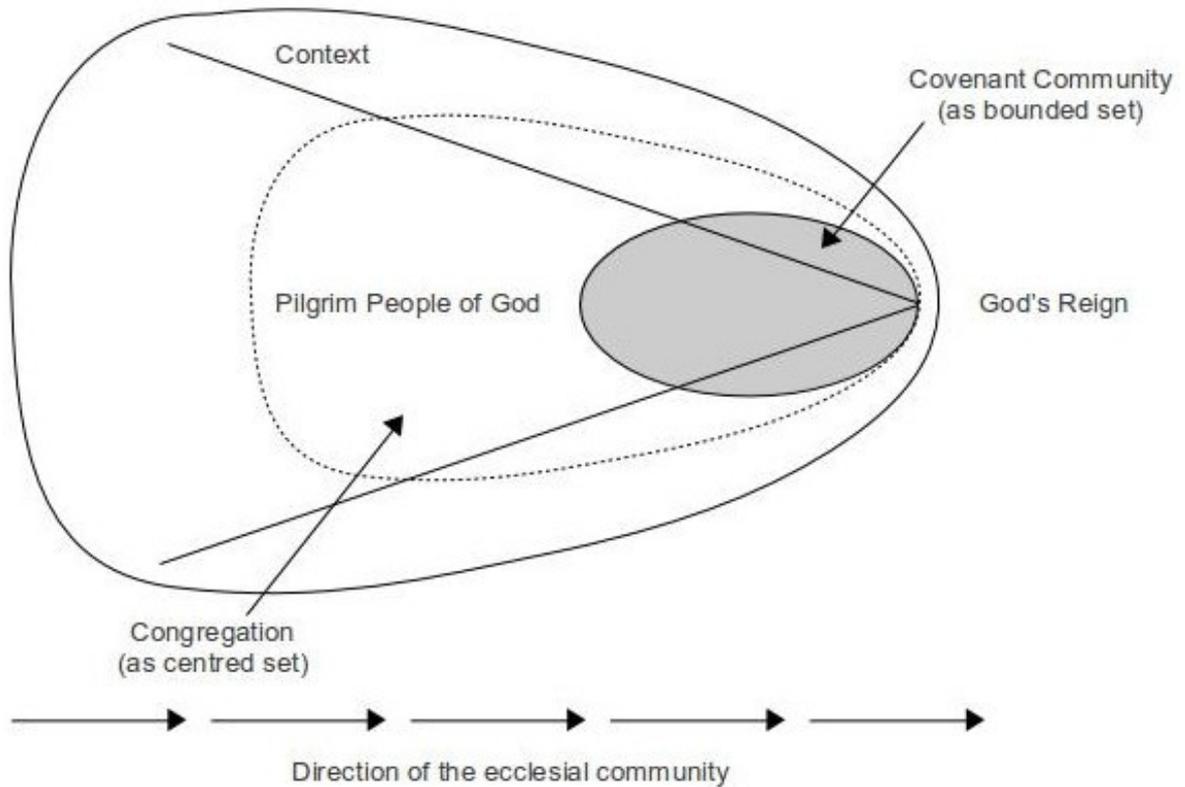


Figure 5: Dynamic model of church

In this model the missional community is seen as existing as both a centred set and a bounded set within the wider social context. As a centred set, it is defined by its centre, which is the reign of God present and future, thus introducing the concept of the pilgrim people of God. In the centred set people are invited to journey with the community, to hear its stories and to encounter the reign of God. Within this centred set, however, the missional community must form a covenanted community. This is a bounded set composed of those who have chosen to take on the commitment, practices and disciplines that make them a distinct community. The missional community is travelling in the direction of the coming Kingdom, as represented by the solid horizontal V, but situated within the current context (the outer dashed oval).

The model of church currently assumed within PCI is that of a bounded set. In PCI's terminology the core membership are the 'voting members', that is those who have contributed to congregational finances and have attended communion in the previous

year. This relates to the 'committed core' in Figure 5. In PCI those who are not voting members, but are connected to a congregation in some way, are referred to as adherents, and relate to the 'congregation' in Figure 5. The task of leaders in this model is to move people across the boundaries, first into the congregation and then into the committed core.

Guder argues that, while previously congregations and denominations had clear understandings of 'the processes for getting in and the rules of belonging' (Guder 1998, p.206), in a pluralised setting these have been eroded. Many in congregations are confused about what it means to be a Christian and are 'testing meanings received in the church through their own filtering systems' (1998, p.207). The centred set invites these people to go on a journey, with the direction of travel being emphasised more than a person's position in relation to a boundary.

However, Guder argues, 'there are points where the journey can continue with integrity only when people are intentionally bound by a common language and story, a common set of practices particular to the Christian way' (1998, p.209). Hence the need for a bounded set within the centred set. This covenanted community must be shaped by disciplines of Christian life and accountability. Guder proposes that the covenant community be considered as a 'secular order' (1998, p.208), with those in the congregation being 'invited to become novices in the new order of God's missional people' (1998, p.210).

4.1.2. The Question of Unity

Newbigin's lifelong passion for the unity of the church is understandable only in terms of his understanding of election. The logic of election rests on the nature of salvation, which must include the reconciliation of people with God and with each other. Thus the disunity of the church is a serious missiological issue, as outsiders will rightly question any claim about reconciliation through Christ made by a divided church (1961a, p.125). The ecumenical movement was born out of the missionary movement and the younger churches' experience of the contradictions of living with division in

minority situations. Newbigin argues that there should not be surprise at the desire to be united, but that churches should be content to be divided (1960, p.9).

Newbigin's passion for unity did not cause him to minimise either the differences between churches or questions of belief. His numerous theological writings and his involvement in the formation of the Church of South India and the World Council of Churches bear testimony to this. Nor would he consider any easy, but inadequate, solutions to the problems of disunity. One such response that he rejected was that of the Catholic church, which asserts that it is, in fact, the only one true church and sees other 'churches' as 'congeries of baptized persons' which in God's grace bear some of his gifts (1960, p.24). Another inadequate response is to argue that the unity of the church is a spiritual reality and that organisational unity is not of the essence of the church. Both of these responses deny the reality of disunity and refuse to acknowledge that the real problem is sin.

Newbigin had a very clear understanding of what unity meant, and it remained basically unchanged throughout his life:

First, it must be such that all who are in Christ in any place are, in that place, visibly one fellowship. Second it must be such that each local community is so ordered and so related to the whole that its fellowship with all Christ's people everywhere, and with all who have gone before and will come after, is made clear. That will mean at least this: a ministry universally recognised and visibly linked with the ministry of the Church throughout the centuries (1993, pp.141–2).

In 1984 Newbigin gave a lecture entitled *The Basis and the Forms of Unity* (1984b), which provides a useful exposition of his views on unity later in his life. It shows how his thinking about unity remained consistent, but also some long term and increasing concerns about the direction of the ecumenical movement. He begins by acknowledging that enthusiasm for ecumenism had decreased from the high point in the middle of the century, and cites four reasons for this. First is the self-preservation instinct within denominations, which made the option of 'reconciled diversity' more attractive than 'organic union', because it entailed little cost and left the

denominations intact. Newbigin had consistently been against any form of unity which fell short of full organic union. This appears to be in contrast to his guardedly positive assessment of the proposal for 'conciliar fellowship' following the Nairobi Assembly, which he accepted insofar as it would be a 'committed conciliarity' that assumed full organic union. He had, however, warned of the dangers that 'corporate identity' and 'corporate egotism' of denominations could be a hindrance (Newbigin 1976, p.157). Second is the rise of an evangelical fundamentalism which is uninterested in ecclesiastical structures. Third is a concern for action for justice and peace, which sees traditional issues that divide churches as irrelevant. Fourth is the claim that ecumenism should be extended beyond the churches to include peoples of other faiths. Newbigin had argued against this trend as early as 1963 in *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission* (1963, pp.18–9), and in the 1990's entered into a debate with Konrad Raiser in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* on the issue. Goheen argues this was a debate between two Trinitarian views of the *missio Dei*; Raiser's view being cosmocentric and Newbigin's Christocentric (Goheen 2000, pp.157–162).

Newbigin goes on to discuss the basis for unity, beginning with God's purpose to reconcile all people to himself in Christ, which means that those who are bearers of his mission must themselves be reconciled. There will thus be no movement toward unity without deep commitment to Christ. Newbigin describes his own personal experience of this. It was his personal relationship with people who were in Christ that meant he could no longer accept separation from them in the life of the church. This personal dimension is often neglected, yet is the one spiritual resource by which unity is made possible. Newbigin had previously recorded the importance of such personal relationships in the building up of trust in the processes around the formation of the Church of South India. The trust engendered through personal relationships enabled the participating churches to proceed with the union without all the theological problems being resolved. A Pledge, guaranteeing the conscience of minorities, and a thirty year period for the settlement of questions of ordination were instituted in an expression of trust that the Spirit would guide his church into truth (1960, pp.116, 118). This, of course, should not imply that Newbigin trivialised doctrinal difference.

On the contrary, he worked tirelessly to overcome such differences and was willing to be convinced through his engagement with other's opinions, most notably on the issue of the historic episcopacy (1993, p.70).

Newbigin next addresses the forms of unity, criticising the concept of reconciled diversity as taking denominations as the 'basic unit of the universal church' (1984b, p.6). The basic understanding underlying denominationalism is that:

The Church is essentially invisible: what is visible is a variety of human institutions which represent diverse essays in the direction of churchliness, living, one hopes, in friendly rivalry but making no exclusive claims to the name of the one holy catholic Church (1984b, p.6).

According to Newbigin denominations are, therefore, more akin to religious fraternities (in Greek: *heranos* and *thiasos*), than the *ecclesia tou Theou* of the New Testament, a visible body of men and women, but also the assembly of God to which all people were called. The difference is vital, since accepting the role of a religious fraternity is to retreat from the public to the private sphere of life, and 'even if all of these associations could agree to co-exist in friendly cooperation, the result would not be the Church as the New Testament portrays it' (1984b, p.8). The New Testament cannot be used to derive an authoritative pattern for the form of the church. Rather, since the church is the provisional incorporation of humankind in Christ, its structures of organisation, ministry and community life must be shaped in relation to the secular structures of the particular time and place. 'The church... can only be a sign of God's intention for all humankind if it is in each segment of society a relevant sign of God's intention for that segment' (1984b, p.10; cf 1977c, p.119). Thus unity cannot be something invisible or purely spiritual, but it must involve mutual solidarity, servant leadership and a focus on the marginalised. As Newbigin had pointed out earlier 'The only purely spiritual thing in our experience is an intention: the moment we begin to put our intentions into effect, they become mixed up inextricably with the world of things, acts, organizations and the like' (1960, p.50).

This lecture gives a useful summary of Newbigin's views on unity and shows that, although his underlying principles remained consistent, his attitude toward the ecumenical movement changed toward the end of his life. He was notably disappointed with the waning of enthusiasm for organic union (1993, p.242) and the trend away from a Christocentric view of the *missio Dei*. However, his disappointment led to a stronger emphasis on the personal and local elements in building unity. As early as 1958 he had argued that unity should begin with the local and regional, rather than with a central structure which sought to influence the 'grass roots' (1958, p.50; cf 1993, p.162). When he updated his autobiography in 1993 he noted how Local Ecumenical Partnerships were fulfilling this role, but re-stated that the goal of organic union should not be lost (1993, pp.242–3; cf. Cross 1996).

A recent book in the *Missional Church* series, published by the Gospel and Our Culture Network in the USA, is devoted to the question of missional denominations (Van Gelder 2008). It is significant to note that the existence of denominations is taken for granted throughout the book. In a section describing different perspectives on denominations and denominationalism (Van Gelder 2008, pp.13–7) neither Newbigin's critique nor the question of organic union are mentioned. Rather, American denominations are seen to have consciously taken on the form of corporations, thus reflecting the forms of broader culture (Van Gelder 2008, p.90). There are also clear indications of what Newbigin described as the 'inbuilt commitment of large organizations to their own self-preservation', which would always be an 'immensely powerful counter-force against any movement for reunion' (Newbigin 1984b, p.2). For example, attention is given to the issue of 'denominational identity and purpose', which leads to attention to their 'particular theological, confessional, and political identities' (Van Gelder 2008, pp.111–5, 153–4).

This is a continuation of the problem that Newbigin pointed out regarding Reformation ecclesiologies, that they defined themselves over and against other churches, rather than the world. However, in the light of the stubborn resistance of denominationalism and the loss of enthusiasm for organic union, it must be asked if Newbigin's ideal of full organic union is simply unrealistic, no matter how sound his

underlying theology may be. Haar, in an essay tracing the development of the models for unity in the ecumenical movement, shows how the concept of conciliar fellowship evolved from the earlier work toward organic union (Haar 2011). It rests on the concept of interdependence, and on an eschatological understanding of unity, that is, that the church *is* catholic, but at the same time, constantly on the way to *becoming* catholic. This is strikingly similar to Newbigin's dynamic description of the church and provides a bridge across the gap between theology and actual experience. It is, however, only tenable as long as interdependence is worked out in practice and the natural tendency of organisations to be primarily concerned about their own interests and survival is resisted.

Van Driel (2011) provides a practical example of how a potential division between liberals and conservatives in the Netherlands Reformed Church (NRC) was dealt with. The example is pertinent because the ecclesiology assumed is very similar to Newbigin's, because there are affinities between the NRC, Newbigin and PCI due to their shared Reformed heritage and because van Driel uses the example of the NRC to critique American denominationalism.

The background is a potential split in the NRC in the nineteenth century in which conservatives were concerned that the NRC was losing its theological identity, in particular with respect to adherence to its confessional standards. One conservative group argued for a 'juridical way', and ultimately split from the denomination. The other conservative group argued for a 'medical way', believing that it was not right to leave the church as long as there is freedom to preach the gospel, and that the gospel itself can heal a sick church. At the heart of this approach was the concept of covenant, which van Driel develops in five theses. First, the unity of the church is founded by God's covenantal actions, not by human confessions, covenants, agreements or practices. Second, the confessing nature of the church is not best protected by simple majority votes in favour of adherence to confessional documents. Rather, it is in being a church that commits itself to confessing the gospel 'in the face of all the powers and principalities of our age' (2011, p.65). This necessarily involves the whole church wrestling for the truth. It must be accepted that the outcome of this

process cannot be determined in advance as new insights may be discovered in the process of discernment.

The third thesis is that church discipline is eschatological. This implies that the criterion for church discipline cannot be determined by looking backwards, as there has been no time in which the church's teaching has been infallible, or its life impeccable. The golden age lies in the future and can only be spoken of provisionally. Also, since the Kingdom is God's gift, the real actor in church discipline is God. Our disciplinary actions should only make use of the means God gives the church to express judgements, that is, in preaching. Finally, the church's disciplinary actions can be more firm and decisive the more immediately they concern issues to do with the embodied Word, Jesus Christ. 'If there has to be a disciplinary action, or, even, if there ever has to be a church-dividing conflict, let it be a disciplinary action or let it be a church-dividing conflict concerning the confession of Jesus Christ!' (2011, p.68).

Fourth, God's covenant constitutes the church in visible and invisible, as well as organic and institutional forms. The implications of God's covenant in the Old Testament with the whole people of Israel, are that a person is a member of a church, not because they have decided to join, but because they have been born in the church or found by it; church membership is a divine gift, just as faith is; the church is not a human association based on the agreement of its members; thus, if there is disagreement, simply leaving is not an option. Here van Driel critiques the American denomination as a sociological, rather than a theological, construct, and thus of having no theological resources, or reason, to stay together in the face of dissent and disagreement.

The fifth thesis follows on from this; a consumerist attitude to church is inappropriate and to be actively resisted. For denominations this rules out thinking in terms of 'market share' in relation to other denominations, and for individuals implies that 'shopping' for a congregation is ruled out. In the 1950's the NRC applied the geographical principal that membership of a congregation was determined by the geographical area in which one lived.

Van Driel reports that, contrary to what may be expected, the minority of conservatives who stayed within the NRC did not become a powerless minority. Instead, in the 1930s and 1940s liberals and conservatives came to discover that, without giving up their particular approaches to the gospel, the church must boldly confess its obedience to the gospel of Christ. In agreeing on this, the majority of the national synod accepted a new Christ-centred church order and restored ties to the confessional documents.

4.1.3. The Church in Relation to the Kingdom and to Mission

Newbigin's missionary experience and theological reflection led to two major shifts in his theology (Goheen 2000, p.8), both of which came as a result of his evolving understanding of the relationship between the church and mission. The first shift occurred during his writing of *Sin and Salvation (1956)* and came as a result of reflecting on the role the church played in conversion. The view he had inherited gave the church a role only after an individual had been converted, but his experience in India had shown him the role of the church as the society through which a person came into contact with the gospel (1993, p.137). Thus, he moved toward a church-centred missiology. This, of course, coincided with similar developments within the wider missionary community, which undoubtedly informed Newbigin's thinking. For example, the relationship between the church, mission and the kingdom were issues at the conferences in Jerusalem (1928), Tambaram (1938), Whitby (1947) and Willingen (1952) and it was at Willingen that the Trinitarian foundation for mission and the concept of *missio Dei* were introduced (Bosch 1980, pp.161–181). In the following years, the collapse of colonialism and increasing globalisation, combined with his involvement in the process of integration of the IMC into the WCC, led to his recognition that a church-centred missiology was inadequate. This resulted in the development of a Trinitarian understanding, again influenced by developments in the ecumenical community. He notes that the practical implication of this was that, when appointed bishop of Madras,

‘I resolved that I would challenge the strong churches of Madras City to think less of their own growth and welfare and more of God’s purpose for the whole of the vast and growing city’ (1993, p.203).

One phrase frequently used by Newbigin encapsulates his understanding of the church in relation to the kingdom; the church is the instrument¹⁶, sign and foretaste of the kingdom. Newbigin used this phraseology as early as 1951 (1951, p.153), and continued to use it throughout the rest of his career (see e.g. 1994a, pp.60–3). Newbigin elaborates each of the elements of the phrase in a 1984 article, *Does Society Still Need the Parish Church?* (1994a, pp.60–3). Foretaste refers to the New Testament word *arrabon*¹⁷, the word used for a cash deposit. A cash deposit is not an IOU, but is spendable cash. It is something which can be enjoyed now, but also assures of a greater reality still to come. Thus, Newbigin argues, purely functional views of the church are inadequate. He agrees with the Orthodox position that the church is first of all a communion in the Holy Spirit in the life of the triune God and must be defined in ontological, not merely functional, terms.¹⁸ This ontological identity is necessary because ‘it is precisely because she [the church] is not *merely* instrumental that she can be instrumental’ (Newbigin 1951, p.169; cf. Newbigin 1972, p.5). Yet the church *can* also be an instrument through which God’s will is done in the world. The church is not the only instrument that God can use, for example, the state can be an instrument for God to do justice, but only the church can be a foretaste of the Kingdom. The church is also a sign, which points to something which is real but not yet visible. The church does not compete with other agencies which offer solutions to people’s problems here and now, nor does it offer utopian illusions. Rather, it points to a reality beyond history and death. The church is ‘erecting in this world, here and now, signs – credible signs – that make it possible for people to believe that that is the great reality and to join us in going that way’ (1994a, p.63).

16 Hunsberger argues that ‘agent’ would be a more personal alternative (Hunsberger 1998, p.101).

17 Although in New Testament usage *arrabon* is only used in reference to the Holy Spirit. The justification for using it in reference to the church is hinted at in (1978b, p.6).

18 Within the ecumenical movement the terms ‘sacrament, sign and instrument’ have been used to relate the church to God’s plan of salvation (Bosch 1991, pp.374–6). Newbigin gives reasons why he does not accept the application of the term ‘sacrament’ in this context in (1960, pp.68–70)

The description of the church as the instrument, sign and foretaste of the kingdom is useful in that it affirms that, while the church cannot be identified with the kingdom, it cannot be separated from it. The reality of the kingdom is prior to the church (1961a, p.86) and Jesus warns the disciples that the mission on which they are sent is not one over which they have control, but that it is God who will bring it to its proper end (1978b, p.5; Newbigin 1995a, p.61). In this regard Newbigin, who throughout his career worked to ensure appropriate structures for mission, recognised the primary role of the Spirit in mission. He recounts several experiences in which he discerned the Spirit working in mission and his efforts in organising the church were attempts to allow the church to respond to what the Spirit had initiated. A good example of this is the scheme he set up appropriate leadership training for local village congregations while bishop of Madurai (1993, pp.138–140; 1981, p.254; 1994a, pp.21–32; Newbigin 1995a, pp.56–65).

This implies that mission is not a cause about which the church should be optimistic or pessimistic, and also releases the church from a ‘Pelagian anxiety’ (1994a, p.155; 1989, p.224) in mission. For example, when asked if he was optimistic or pessimistic concerning the future of the church in India, Newbigin’s standard reply was ‘I believe that Jesus rose from the dead, and therefore the question doesn’t arise’ (1994a, p.55). It also follows that the church must resist the danger of identifying the work of God with the progress of the church (1963, p.25; 1994a, p.33), thus, during the ‘secular decade’ of the sixties Newbigin consistently argued against an extension of the *missio Dei* concept in a way which saw the church as dispensable, or even a hindrance, to mission (Newbigin 1993, pp.187, 194–5, 219–220).

Although the church is not the only instrument which God uses, only the church can be a foretaste of the kingdom. It is the ‘prolepsis into history of the perfect fellowship of the Kingdom of God’ (1960, p.98) and, although it is the Spirit who is the primary agent of mission, the church is the ‘locus of the mission’ (1989, p.119).

Bosch reflects that few have succeed in maintaining a creative tension between the church as ‘the sole bearer of a message of salvation on which it has a monopoly’ and

the church as ‘an illustration – in word and deed – of God’s involvement with the world’ (Bosch 1991, p.381). Emphasis on the first, as in the Church Growth school, robs the gospel of its ethical thrust. Emphasis on the second robs it of its soteriological depth and leads to an almost complete identification of the church with the world and its agenda. The secularising theology of the 1960s was an example of the latter, resulting ultimately in too much being expected of the church and ultimate disillusionment with it. As a practitioner and a theologian Newbigin managed to maintain this creative tension. His shift to a trinitarian missiology was in many ways in line with developments within the ecumenical movement, but Newbigin maintained a Christocentric focus, resulting in him arguing for certain emphases against the majority (Newbigin 1993, pp.219–220, 248–9; Newbigin 1981, pp.248–9).

As we have seen, Newbigin, in contrast to some within the WCC, saw the church as intimately related to, but not identified with, the *missio Dei*. Newbigin remained adamant that mission is essential to the existence of the church. In *The Household of God* he argues that when ‘the Church ceases to be a mission, then she openly denies the titles by which she is adorned in the New Testament’ (1951, p.143). He highlights ways in which the church shows that it has not grasped this truth, including the separation of church and mission societies, the view that mission can only take place after ‘home’ needs have been met,¹⁹ the establishment of congregations that do not have mission incorporated into their life from the beginning and a focus on the pastoral care of members by paid clergy. Newbigin could be scathing towards churches with such an inward focus. When an elder of a church in Madras described the function of the congregation as catering for the needs of its members, Newbigin responded by saying ‘Then it should be disbanded’ (1994a, p.34).

However much mission may be an essential aspect of the church’s identity, Newbigin makes an important distinction between missionary dimension and intention, as elaborated typically in *One Body, One Gospel, One World* (1958, pp.43–4). The fact

¹⁹ ‘It is taken for granted that the missionary obligation is one that has to be met after the needs of the home have been fully met; that existing gains have to be thoroughly consolidated before we go further afield; that the world-wide Church has to be built up with the same sort of prudent calculation of resources and costs as is expected of any business enterprise’ (1951, p.144).

that the church is the mission means that everything the church does has a missionary dimension, but not necessarily everything is done with missionary intention, for example, worship (1977a, pp.30–1; 1986b, pp.149–150). However, there must be some things which are done with specific missionary intention, that is, with the goal of moving people from unbelief to faith. Newbigin argues that, within the overall mission of God, the relationship between evangelism and social action is not logical, but ontological, and both are part of the overall mission of the church (1961a, pp.91–2; 1989, pp.128–140). Yet he also allows for a narrower understanding of missionary activity as that with the specific intention of bringing people to faith. The church must engage in acts with specific missionary intention if the missionary dimension is not to be lost (1958, pp.43–4). The distinction Newbigin made between mission and missions is similar, with mission being the overarching concept and missions the specific activities the church engages in to further the mission. Hence Newbigin insisted on maintaining the ‘s’ at the end of the title ‘*International Review of Missions*’ while he was editor (1993, p.189; cf. 1989, p.121).

As has already been hinted, Newbigin’s understanding of the relationship between the church, the kingdom and mission has implications for the motivation and attitude of the church in mission (see Section 4.4.1). The ontological priority of the kingdom and mission remove responsibility for ‘success’ from the church, making optimism and pessimism inappropriate attitudes. Mission is not a burden that has been placed on the church, nor a command to be obeyed. Rather the gift of the Spirit makes mission a promise (1995a, p.58; 1978b, p.5), an ‘explosion of joy’ (1989, p.116) and a doxological response of gratitude (1981, pp.251–2). Mission is in the indicative mood, not the imperative (1961a, pp.86–87).

4.1.4. The Local Congregation

Newbigin spent the majority of his career in what might be termed senior positions within the wider church, yet it was the local congregation that was fundamental to his thinking. While in India he saw his role as bishop to be the building up of village congregations, and saw an intimate link between that work and his involvement with a

committee of twenty-five top WCC theologians (1993, p.136). While working within the WCC, the local congregation continued to be central in his thinking, and on his retirement he not only opposed the closure of Winson Green congregation, but was willing to take on the role of its pastor. The emphasis on the local congregation was an essential aspect of Newbigin's ecclesiology throughout his career. Thus, Stults is wrong when he argues that Newbigin's emphasis on the local visible fellowship came as a result of his disillusionment with the direction taken by the WCC in Strasbourg (Stults 2009, p.210), as it had been a consistent emphasis from the beginning of his career.

Newbigin acknowledges the influence of Roland Allen, who sought to 'prise the missionary calling loose from its colonial moorings' (Newbigin in preface to Allen 1968, p.xiv) in his missiological thinking. Although Newbigin initially struggled against Allen's ideas, he later actively sought to put them into practice (Wainwright 2000, pp.75–6). Allen's influence can clearly be seen in Newbigin's insistence on the primary role of the Spirit in mission, as noted above, and in his understanding of the local congregation. In several places, Newbigin clearly echoes Allen in describing Paul's mission as planting small groups of believers, who from the outset were seen as the church of God in that place, and were expected to be missionary from their inception (1963, p.77; 1995a, pp.128–130; 1989, pp.121–3). Newbigin, therefore, argued against any understanding of the local church, or any church structural arrangements, that saw the local congregation as being anything less than the church of God in that place. His first impression of the church in India was of village congregations which saw themselves as 'dependencies of the Mission rather than as congregations of the holy catholic Church', largely because they were based on a model which required finances from outside (1993, p.62). As bishop of Madurai he intentionally sought to develop an alternative system for establishing new congregations, more in line with Paul's methods (1994a, pp.28–30; 1993, pp.138–140). The system began by looking for the people already shown to be pastors and leaders in the new congregation, and to teach, train and encourage them. He noted:

When a new congregation understands from the beginning that the

responsibility for its own life is a responsibility which it must itself discharge before God, it can stand on its own feet and propagate its own faith without the presence of a resident paid worker. On the other hand there is also abundant evidence to show that if, at the beginning, a new congregation is taught to lean upon a paid worker sent from outside, it will be almost impossible for it to outgrow that dependence (1953, p.69; cf. 1993, p.140; Newbigin 1963, pp.76–7).

Newbigin also pays attention to the primary designation of the church in the New Testament as the *ecclesia tou Theou*. The *ecclesia* was the public assembly to which all citizens were summoned by the town clerk to discuss affairs of the city; the church, therefore, is the assembly to which all people are called by God. In claiming this term the early church refused to accept a safe place as a religion in the private sphere, but staked a claim in the public realm that political authorities could not ignore (1984b, p.7). He also notes that *ecclesia* refers to ‘actual visible bodies of sinful men and women defined simply by the names of the places where they lived’ (1986b, p.145; Newbigin 1994a, pp.51–2), and that the term can be used interchangeably to refer to the local congregation or the universal church. The local congregation and the catholic church are the same reality (1994a, p.52). The local congregation is therefore defined by a twofold relation: to God and to the place in which it is situated and neither of these may be neglected. Newbigin highlighted a specific danger of the connection with the local area being lost when evangelism or social action are undertaken by larger ecclesiastical structures, leaving financial support as the only involvement from the local congregation. This was brought home forcibly when he was wrestling with the problems facing the Inter-Church Aid department of the WCC. It was inundated by an impossible number of requests from mission hospitals for aid. It was a Nigerian doctor, at that time in charge of health services for the government of Nigeria, who gave Newbigin the clue, by pointing out that ‘the basic unit of healing is not the hospital, it is the Christian congregation’ (1993, p.192; cf. 1977a, pp.71–3; 1989, p.229).

The local congregation must be the church of God *for* the place, in the same way that Christ is *for* the world. The doctrine of atonement shows that, on the cross, Christ was in one sense totally identified with the world, but in another sense totally separated

from it. Thus, the local church is both a congregation and a segregation (1966, p.109). The church has, therefore, always adopted structural forms determined by the secular realities for which it is there, and it must continue to seek appropriate forms based on these secular realities, not its own internal needs (Newbigin 1994a, p.53). As early as 1966 Newbigin was arguing that, although the local parish church might remain the predominant model, Christians were experimenting with various ‘new forms of presence’ corresponding to the ‘many varied idioms of the worlds which men inhabit’, and that these experiments must be acknowledged as true congregations (1966, pp.112–115; cf. 1977a, p.89; 1994a, p.53). This is a tantalising premonition of what are now often referred to as ‘fresh expressions’ or ‘the emerging church’, but although similar concepts are mentioned in later writings, Newbigin tended to continue predominantly to think in terms of traditional local congregations.

Newbigin was well aware of the weaknesses and flaws inherent in local congregations, yet refused to downplay the congregation’s significance. In the engagement with modern secular culture, the congregation is the only effective hermeneutic of the gospel. In *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* he spells out six characteristics for the congregation to fulfil this role (1989, pp.227–233). It must be: a community of praise; a community of truth, in which an alternative plausibility structure reigns through the remembering and rehearsing the true story of human destiny; a community that does not live for itself, but is involved in the concerns of its neighbourhood; a community where men and women are prepared for the exercise of priesthood in the world through the formation of frontier groups and the exercise of a full variety of gifts; a community of mutual responsibility, in which a different social order is modelled; and a community of hope in the midst of a culture that has lost hope. In another article he notes that it is the local congregation through which people in secularised societies are being drawn out of unbelief and that, although the original evangelisation of Europe was from the top down, it will only be re-evangelised from the bottom up (2003, pp.175–6).

4.2. The Church in Mission

4.2.1. Attitudes and Expectations in Mission

Having considered the current context of mission in the west, by examining the meaning of the plurality of cultures and of the passing of Christendom, and explored the need for a new ecclesiology, it is necessary to examine the motivation and expectations of the church in mission.

It has already been noted that Newbigin moved from a church-centred view of mission to a Trinitarian understanding in the early 1960s. Goheen summarises the key aspects of Newbigin's shift to a Trinitarian understanding of mission as follows (2000, pp.16–121). Within the church-centred view Newbigin saw that Jesus had made explicit provision for the extension of his presence and saving power by 'creating a community which he called, trained, endowed and sent forth' (2000, p.118). The church, therefore, receives its existence in the commission of Jesus; it exists to continue his mission in the world. The church is equipped for this mission by the Holy Spirit. While the Trinity is not entirely absent from this understanding, the role of the Father and the Spirit are neglected and mission is seen primarily as an activity of the church. Although himself involved in the Trinitarian formulations at the Willingen conference (1952) (Newbigin 1993, p.130), Newbigin's shift to a Trinitarian understanding was the result of trying to give an account of the work of God in the world and its history (Newbigin 1993, p.144), particularly arising out of his experience in Asian churches. The danger for these churches, in relation to a society in which they are a minority, is not syncretism, but 'ghettoism'. Their need is for an understanding of what God has done uniquely in Jesus and what he is doing in the world, so that they can communicate the gospel and live in accordance with what God is calling them to do in their secular life. This, Newbigin argues, requires a Trinitarian theology (1962, pp.11–2).

The Trinitarian perspective was not an abandonment of Newbigin's previous understanding, but it 'advanced his understanding, enabling him to gather together and

relate systematically many of his ecclesiological insights' (Goheen 2000, p.119). His previous Christocentric view was 'being expanded and deepened by a Trinitarian formulation' (2000, p.120). This accounts for the fact that, while there are noticeable shifts in Newbigin's thinking, there is also great consistency in his understanding, expression and practice of mission throughout his career.

The Trinitarian basis for mission is foundational to Newbigin's understanding and from it can be derived many of the attitudes and expectations that the church in mission should adopt. Thus, it is appropriate to briefly outline Newbigin's expression of it, this summary being drawn from *The Open Secret (1995a)*. The simple act of missionary preaching about Jesus raises questions of his identity that can only be answered in relation to the Father and the Spirit. The work of the Father concerns the Kingdom of God, which in the Old Testament is shown to develop by the process of selection and narrowing, until in the New Testament it is focussed on the person of Jesus. He brings the kingdom not by overpowering the powers of darkness, but by bearing their weight upon himself. The kingdom, thus, remains a mystery; it is both hidden and revealed, and the process of election continues as some are called to be bearers of the secret to all. Jesus did not just proclaim the kingdom, he embodied it, and this embodiment continues in the church. The church has obviously not lived up to this calling, but the fact remains that the only way for people to be connected with the historical event of the cross is through connection with the community which sprang from the event and is continuous with it. The Spirit is the *arrabon* of the kingdom and is also the active agent in mission. 'Mission is not just something the church does; it is something that is done by the Spirit, who is himself the witness, who changes both the world and the church, who always goes before the church on its missionary journey' (1995a, p.56). Just as Trinitarian theology provided the foundation for the early church's mission in a pagan world (1963, p.36), and for Augustine in providing the resources to engage with the demise of a successful culture (1984a, pp.23–5), so a Trinitarian understanding of mission is crucial in the context of the shift to a post-Christendom context.

Frances Young sees Newbigin's trinitarianism as not being theologically developed

and, in line with Athanasius, as being an economic trinitarianism, focussed on God's relationship in the world as presented in the Biblical story of creation, redemption and sanctification. Young sees that a radical recovery of Trinitarian theology is needed in our context of pluralism, but develops this in terms of the doctrine of the essential Trinity, which recognises the transcendence of God and our creatureliness, yet allows for his immanence and involvement in the world (Young 2002).

From Newbigin's Trinitarian foundation flow insights regarding the attitude and expectations in mission useful for the church in an emerging post-Christendom context.

4.2.1.1. Mission is not a command or a burden

The first insight is that mission is not a command given to the church, nor a burden placed upon it. As early as 1961 Newbigin was asserting that the witness of the church arises from a new reality entering the world, namely the kingdom of God, present not just in Jesus but also in the church (1961a, p.86). The new reality is prior to the church and it is, in fact, the Holy Spirit who is the witness to it (1989, p.120). Thus, the relationship between the church and the mission cannot be considered in purely functional or ontological terms, but is related to it in three ways: as a foretaste of what Christ has achieved, as where the power of the Spirit is available and as the place where witness is borne to the mercy of God in Christ (1958, pp.19, 20; see also section 4.3.3). Therefore, Newbigin states that the church plays a secondary role to the Holy Spirit in mission (1994a, p.22; 1995a, p.61), that mission is not a command given to the church, but a promise (1995a, p.58; 1978b, p.7), and that the primary mood of mission is in the indicative, not the imperative. 'Even the great imperative of Matthew 28, 'Go ye into all the world', is undergirded by the essential indicative, 'I am with you always to the end of the age' (1961a, pp.86-7).

So, even though he made constant efforts to ensure that church structures were appropriate for the task of mission, Newbigin always argued that the church must not conduct mission as if it were a military operation or sales campaign (1995a, p.64; 1958, p.19; 1963, pp.54, 79). Rather, it must expect the Spirit to be active in witness

and to respond accordingly. Newbigin's experience taught him that once this attitude is taken what appears to be a pastoral problem can, in fact, be a missionary opportunity, and 'if the experience of one missionary is to be trusted, I would add that one has to run to keep up with him [the Spirit]' (1966, p.122).

4.2.1.2. Resources for mission and criteria of success

The second insight for mission in a post-Christendom context is a correction to assumptions regarding the resources required for mission and how success is to be judged. From the beginning of his missionary experience Newbigin was wrestling with Christendom attitudes and institutions which were inappropriate for India and, later, Britain. The expansion of Christendom had coincided with the political and cultural expansion of the Western world, that is, with financial, political and cultural power, and mission was seen as a programme for which the church was responsible (1995a, p.22). The models of mission were based on structures that required significant financial and personnel resources, as well as significant cultural influence (1963, p.46), which at times placed restrictions on the growth of the church (Newbigin 1953). The fact that the Spirit is the primary witness, and the church's witness is secondary and derivative, caused Newbigin to deliberately imitate the Pauline mission, which was notable for its lack of resources and influence (1994a, pp.23–7; 1993, pp.138–9; 1995a, pp.128–131). In fact, his experience showed that it was when the church has been in a position of weakness and rejection that the Spirit has 'himself risen up and, often through the words of very "insignificant" people, spoken the word that confronted and shamed the wisdom and power of the world' (1995a, p.62). Newbigin cites the 'little apocalypse' of Mark 13 as a theological basis for this phenomenon (1963, pp.45–8; 1995a, pp.38–9, 61).

However, it is not only assumptions about the resources and cultural influence necessary for mission that need corrected, but also assumptions regarding success in mission. Within Christendom and a church-centred view of mission it is perhaps natural to identify the work of God with the progress of the church (1963, pp.25–6), or to assume that growing numbers, budgets and buildings are pleasing to God (1994a, p.33). Newbigin's main criticism of the Church Growth Movement is that the New

Testament places much more emphasis on the faithfulness of the church than on numerical growth (1995a, p.125; 1987, p.14), and he asks if a church concerned with its own self-aggrandisement is recognisable as a community of the crucified Christ (1995a, pp.124–8; 1963, p.54).

Understanding mission to be primarily God's, and the church's calling to be faithful in its role as an instrument, sign and foretaste of the kingdom releases it from a 'Pelagian' anxiety in mission, which manifests itself in 'a strident summons to more energetic efforts in evangelism and social action' (1989, p.243). In response to anxiety and hesitancy caused by the loss of Christendom Newbigin argues that, since mission was not our effort, but God's, optimism or pessimism were not appropriate attitudes. Optimism or pessimism are appropriate attitudes in regard to specific projects (Newbigin 1993, pp.55–6; 1962, p.7; 1963, pp.21–2; 1978b, p.7), but Newbigin was consistent in warning against identifying any project with the Kingdom of God. Instead, he argued that we should expect that all of our efforts and labours will in time be consigned to 'the rubble of history', yet ultimately will be seen to have contributed to God's kingdom (2003, pp.47, 50; 1989, pp.114–5). Working in situations where the church was in a minority context, and in many ways weak, Newbigin always refused to concentrate on signs of success, but would express confidence in the kingdom of God (1994a, pp.41, 47, 55–6). In the face of secularisation Newbigin argued for the church to remain confident in the gospel and to work toward a Christian society, but he also seemed, at times, to be aware that this might not be achieved. Even then he refused to give in to pessimism, refusing to equate the importance of the gospel with the number of people who believe it. Even if the church continues to shrink in the west, it should not be a cause for anxiety, because God is faithful and will complete what he has begun (1989, p.244).

4.2.1.3. The church cannot be understood in purely functional terms

The third insight for mission in a post-Christendom context is that, while mission is integral to the life of the church, it cannot become the total definition of the church. The mission is primarily God's mission, of which the Spirit is the primary witness. The church exists as an instrument, sign and foretaste of the kingdom, and it is

precisely because it is more than merely an instrument that it can be instrumental (1951, p.148; 1994a, pp.59–65). Writing in the early period of his career Newbigin argued against the commonly held view that fellowship, evangelism and service were the three dimensions of the church's mission. Rather, he argued, the prior reality of God's mission through the Spirit creates the common life (*koinonia*) of the church, and it is out of this that service and evangelism flow and have value (1958, p.20). Later, Newbigin would point out that in the book of Acts it is the presence of a new reality, which calls for explanation, that causes those outside the church to ask questions, which in turn provide the opportunities for proclamation (1989, p.116). Similarly the mere presence of the church in the Soviet Union and China, where no explicit witness was possible, led to growth through the power of the Spirit. This is because, 'where the Church is faithful to its Lord, there the powers of the kingdom are present and people begin to ask the questions of which the gospel is the answer' (1989, p.119). He also argues that the formation of a community was key to Jesus' mission and that the local congregation would be key in the engagement with modern western culture as a hermeneutic of the gospel. The congregation, when true to its nature, is given its character by Christ. The first characteristic of such a congregation, therefore, is not in the area of missionary engagement, but that it is a community of praise (1989, p.227).

Understanding that the mission of God is prior to the church, that the church is brought into being to be the instrument, sign and foretaste of that mission, and that the church cannot be understood in purely functional terms (1994a, pp.59–60) leads to other helpful observations. First, the relationship between evangelism and social action is ontological, rather than logical. That is, while they must be understood as distinct activities, neither should be subordinated to the other, but both should be seen to flow from the new reality that is the community of the Holy Spirit (1958, p.23; 1977a, pp.93–4). Newbigin's reflections on the relationship between evangelism and social action were based on his personal experience and reflection (see e.g. 1993, pp.53–4; 1994a, p.62).

Second, the fact that the church is a foretaste of the kingdom makes sense of the

relationship between believing and belonging. In his early years in India Newbigin saw this in operation in village churches, as people moved from observing from the periphery, to sitting with the congregation to eventually receiving baptism (1966, p.108). In his later years he would see the congregation as a community which remembers and rehearses the alternative plausibility structure that is the Christian story (1989, pp.228–9).

Murray shows that the move to a post-modern, post-Christendom culture has resulted in many churches moving to a ‘belonging before believing’ model of evangelism and that the relationship between belonging and believing must include categories such as ‘belonging but no longer believing’ and ‘believing without belonging’ (S. Murray 2004, pp.1–38). This latter category includes the significant number of people who in surveys will declare that they hold Christian beliefs but do not attend church, and also those who have left churches but still retain their faith. Jamieson’s research shows that for a significant number of people leaving Evangelical, Charismatic and Pentecostal churches, their leaving was not necessarily indicative of faith being lost, but sometimes of a deepening of faith which could no longer find expression within these churches (Jamieson 2002, pp.11–2). Ward’s study of people who left New Zealand churches in the 1960s and 70s leads him to conclude that they left ‘because they no longer wanted to belong in the ways required or provided, rather than because they no longer believed’ and the challenge of the church is, therefore, to find new ways of belonging (Ward 2005, pp.38, 42). The fact that many such people come together in ‘post-church’ groups, which in fact share many of the functions of church (Jamieson 2003, pp.221–2), is yet another indicator that the post-Christendom context demands the development of a new ecclesiology.

Third, it is helpful to distinguish between mission and missions, and between missionary dimension and intention. Newbigin defines ‘mission’ as ‘the entire task for which the Church is sent into the world’, and ‘missions’ as ‘the specific activities which are undertaken by human decision to bring the gospel to places or situations where it is not heard, to create a Christian presence in a place or situation where there is no such presence or no effective presence’ (1989, p.121). Because of its missionary

nature, everything the church does has a missionary dimension, but not everything has a missionary intention and ‘unless there is in the life of the Church a point of concentration for the missionary intention, the missionary dimension which is proper to the whole life of the Church will be lost’ (Newbigin 1958, p.43). It is thus clear that the affirmation that the church cannot be viewed in solely functional terms does not rule out specific missionary activity.

Fourth, although in every role he played within the church Newbigin sought to think and act strategically, he was sceptical of any technique which purported to guarantee to produce a successful congregation (1987, p.13; 1989, p.224), which is why in his writing he does not present such strategies. He does, however, present clear characteristics that a congregation must model if it is to be a hermeneutic of the gospel (1989, pp.227–233). First, it will be a community of praise, acknowledging that we find our true humanity in reverence of One worthy of praise and giving thanks in a spirit of gratitude. Second, it will be a community of truth, which, through the remembering and rehearsing of the Christian story, challenges the reigning plausibility structure. Third, it will be a community that does not live for itself, but is deeply involved in the concerns of its neighbourhood.

Fifth, it will be a community where men and women are prepared for and sustained in the exercise of priesthood in the world. It is a recurring theme for Newbigin that the basic missionary engagement with the world is in the lives of the ordinary members of the church. He argues that the congregation must seek to train, support and nourish its members for the task of priestly ministry in the world, and proposes ‘frontier groups’ in which people working in similar sectors can discuss issues they face in light of their faith. The congregation must also recognise that different members will be called to different types of service as they are gifted. The congregation must not seek a uniform style of discipleship, but expect a diversity of ministries. Goheen sees this aspect of Newbigin’s missiology as having received little attention, particularly in the ‘alternative community’ model developed by the Gospel and Our Culture Movement in North America (Goheen 2002b). He also distinguishes three different forms of mission by the church in Newbigin’s writings. First, the community of the church

bears witness to Christ by modelling the life of the kingdom; second, corporate witness in which the local congregation reaches out in evangelism and service both locally and globally; third, the witness of the various members in their daily lives. Newbigin expresses the conviction that it is in the third form that the primary witness is given (Goheen 2002b, p.44).

The sixth characteristic of the church as a hermeneutic of the gospel is that it will be a community of mutual responsibility which models the new social order in contrast to the individualism of western culture. The seventh is that it will be a community of hope.

4.2.1.4. The church must expect to be changed in mission

The discussion above regarding Newbigin's ecclesiology and his theology of cultural plurality has already highlighted the fact that the church will take different forms according to its cultural setting. It follows from this that the church in mission must expect new forms of church to arise out of the missionary encounter with a new culture, and that the missionary church must itself expect to be changed. The conversion of Cornelius and its ramifications within the early church are significant in Newbigin's missiology (1951, pp.32–48; 1960, pp.31–9; 1969b, pp.102–5; 1995a, p.182; 1989, p.124). The early church recognised that the Holy Spirit had been given to Cornelius and other Gentile converts, and on this basis they were recognised as having been incorporated into the community. With regard to the question of circumcision in the early church, Newbigin notes the place it had in first century Hebrew minds: the Old Testament commands, that for generations it had been the mark of the covenant people, that martyrs had given their lives to defend it, and that Christ had himself been circumcised and not said anything to abrogate it (1951, pp.32–3). He argues that most theologians are afraid of experience, yet it was solely based on their experience of the work of the Holy Spirit in new contexts of mission that the early church made the radical and controversial decision that circumcision was no longer a necessary prerequisite of membership of the covenant people (1951, pp.91–2). Thus, the Gentile churches were not mere extensions of the church in Jerusalem, but were free to develop in very different ways. This is paradigmatic for

Newbigin and illustrates several key concepts for the church in mission.

First, the church must recognise the nature of God's revelation; that it is given not in a form which gives infallible certainty, but in a form which demands individual responsibility in recognising and accepting the truth. The church has misunderstood the nature of authority when it claims to possess infallible truth and merely requires the submission of its members to it (1960, p.127). The claim of the church that Jesus is Lord is analogous to a scientific theorem, which, if true, implies much more than the person who first made it could possibly be aware. In the same way the community which lives in commitment to Christ as Lord has not been given a detailed map of how this will be worked out in history (1969b, pp.79–80). In mission the Spirit leads the church towards the fullness of the truth that it has not yet grasped (1995a, p.59). Thus, no verbal statement can relieve each generation of the duty of rethinking and restating its message (1960, p.138).

Second, mission cannot be seen simply as church extension, that is, the reproduction of the same form of church in a new context. The early church accepted that the Gentile churches should not be mere reproductions of the church in Jerusalem, but that they 'be allowed be a fresh showing forth of the infinite riches of Christ' (1966, p.111). Newbigin concurs with Allen that the form of church in Corinth would have appeared shockingly pagan to a Jewish Christian (1969b, p.103). There is, thus, a tension between the fact that through conversion new believers are incorporated into the fellowship of the church and the fact that a newly planted church must be allowed to develop its own identity. The church is fundamentally a congregation, not a segregation, in that it is not a private club for the religious, but a visible sign and first-fruit of the promise of reconciliation of all things in Christ (1966, pp.107–8). Yet the church is also a segregation, in that it must take appropriate forms according to different contexts. Thus Newbigin acknowledges de Nobili's work with Brahmins, which resulted in the first truly Indian church, and the positive benefits of the black churches in America in the civil rights movement (1966, p.110). Newbigin also argues that the church must take on a structure appropriate to the structures of the society in which it is situated, rather than be structured according to its own internal needs

(1994a, p.53). In a secularised, fragmented world, therefore, the local parish church can no longer be assumed to be the sole definitive form of church (1966, p.112). The church is sent to draw all people into one family, but in doing so it is

‘necessary to go, to leave the establishment behind, to make daring experiments in seeking to learn what it means to live the life of Christ in every one of the idioms and patterns of the myriad human communities’ (1966, p.111).

‘Properly speaking, the Church is just the people of God, just humanity remade in Christ. It should therefore have as much variety as the human race itself’ (Newbigin 1961a, p.82).

Third, and following on from the concept that mission is not church extension, the new church must be allowed to contextualise its faith, in particular in its response to ethical issues. For Newbigin, conversion cannot be separated from obedience, as McGavran argued, but it is not the missionary who should decide the ethical content of conversion. Instead, the missionary must acknowledge the freedom of the Spirit to speak to converts through the scriptures, and that this might lead them to understand the ethical content of conversion in ways different to that perceived by the missionary (1995a, pp.135–8). The life of Christ will not be demonstrated by the universal application of a universal pattern of personal and social behaviour, as in Islam, but in the life of a community which ‘remembers, rehearses, and lives by the story which the Bible tells’ (1989, p.147). Even within the New Testament the working out of this resulted in sharp differences over questions of how to relate to the surrounding culture, and we should not expect unanimity today (1989, p.148).

Fourth, the church in mission must expect to be changed. The Gentile mission of the New Testament not only resulted in Gentile churches which were different from the Jerusalem church, but also in a wider and deeper understanding of the gospel for the Jerusalem church. In fact, Newbigin goes as far as to say that the conversion of Cornelius also resulted in a conversion for Peter, and those engaged in mission must expect a similar experience (1995a, p.182). Conversion is a work of the Holy Spirit that creates a new community of faith, which is not just an extension of the missionary

church, yet is in relationship with it (1969b, p.107). The missionary church will find that the insights gained by converts as they explore the ethical implications of the gospel will cause it to have to revise and correct its own patterns of obedience (1995a, p.139; 1989, p.151). While the church in mission must have an appropriate confidence, as noted above, it must also engage with a learning attitude (1989, p.118) and realise that mission involves a *kenosis*, or self-emptying (1995a, p.181; 1966, p.109).

Fifth, the church cannot avoid the risks involved in mission. The risks derive from the points above. There are risks involved with new converts seeking to contextualise their faith. True engagement and dialogue with people will also place the ‘Christianity’ of the missionary at risk (1995a, p.186), in that it is open to new perspectives and to correction, even facing ‘the possibility of radical reconsideration of long-accepted formulations’ (1995a, p.186). In saying this, however, Newbigin is obviously not advocating that the church give up its ultimate commitment to Christ as ‘the clue to history, its source and its goal’ (1989, p.123; cf. Newbigin 1989, pp.103–115, 158; Newbigin 1995a, p.16). Phrasing the ultimate commitment in terms of a clue which is to be followed implies that the church can recognise that there are areas of mystery, and that rethinking faith in the light of new experiences will not negate the initial faith, but lead to confirmation, strengthening and enlarging (1989, p.243). The church is steward of a treasure which is not its own property, but the Lord’s (1995a, p.188). As a steward it can fall into the temptation of thinking that it is the proprietor, supposing itself to be saved and the nations lost, or become lazy and allow it be stolen. It may also forget the purpose for which it was entrusted, and bury it in the ground rather than risk investing it. This is what happens when the church sees the received expression of its faith as being inviolate and unchangeable. The gospel is entrusted to the church ‘to be risked in the change and interchange of the spiritual commerce of humanity’ (1995a, p.189). Thus the church must not be obsessed with its own welfare and its own members, but consider itself the church *for* the society in which it is located (1994a, p.53; 1993, p.203).

4.2.1.5. *Points of contact*

A Trinitarian understanding of mission sees mission in terms of the *missio Dei*. Although the church is an instrument, sign and foretaste of the kingdom, God's work in the world is not confined to the church. In fact it was wrestling with the question of God's work outside the church, and how it related to the church's mission, that led Newbigin to his Trinitarian missiology (1995a, pp.8–11; 1963, p.33; 1962, p.12). This has important implications for the church seeking to engage in mission in an emerging post-Christendom context.

Newbigin's personal experience and theological reflection led him to argue that the point of contact for the gospel often lay not in the religious sphere, but in the ordinary secular experiences of life (1969b, p.46; 1961a, p.65). Newbigin observed that in his dialogue with the Ramakrishna monks in Kanchipuram both sides tended to defend their preconceived positions (1993, p.215). This dialogue led him to realise that religion can be a way of protecting oneself from reality (1993, p.55). In this Newbigin found himself agreeing with Kraemer's view of religions. In contrast he found that inter-faith meetings on public issues in the city of Madras forced the participants to reach beyond their standard formulas to seek answers to the problems they were facing (Newbigin 1993, p.215). On his return to India as bishop of Madras, Newbigin's Trinitarian missiology, which had evolved during his years in Geneva, resulted in him seeking to avoid his previous tendency to be too ecclesiastical in his concerns, and to emphasise the church as the church *for* the nation, sent by Christ to whom all things belong (1993, p.203; 1989, p.229). He thus set up structures within the diocese to ensure that local congregations were engaged with the needs of their community, a practice he continued in his involvement in Winson Green congregation in Birmingham. The local congregation, he argued, must be concerned more about the rule of God than about itself, and so must care for the well-being of the local community, leading to involvement in a variety of local issues (1994a, p.43). However, the church must not lose the distinctive note of the gospel and simply become a philanthropic agency. It must remember its connection with the kingdom and thus seek to create 'signs, parables, foretastes, appetizers of the Kingdom in the

midst of the hopelessness of the world' (1994a, p.44). Just as Jesus' deeds of love were not contrived with an ulterior motive, but were a genuine overflow of his love, so the church's deeds should be natural and spontaneous signs of the new reality it shares in Christ. Yet just as Jesus' deeds required interpretation through his teaching, so the church's deeds require interpretation (1977a, pp.93–4). Newbigin does take care to point out that, as was true for Jesus, this does not mean that every deed must be accompanied by a sermon or a tract. He also notes the tension between the church's desire for people to be changed, that is, converted, through its social engagement, and the danger of engaging merely as 'bait to make people swallow our preaching' (1977a, p.92; cf. 1994a, pp.154–5). The ontological relationship between word and deed mentioned above is thus reaffirmed

Being the church for the local area and getting involved in its issues will result in encounters with people of other faith commitments, which take place in the 'open country' where each is called to test their faith in the light of the current issues of the city or nation (1995a, p.184). In this encounter the church must recognise that every part of the created world and every human being is already related to Jesus. Thus, it need not attempt to deny the reality of God's work in the lives of people outside the church, in fact it should eagerly expect to see evidence of it. It will join with non-Christian neighbours in activities which 'serve life against death and light against darkness' (1995a, p.175).

The fact that the point of contact for the gospel is often in the ordinary, secular sphere of life has implications for recognising who is to be responsible for mission. Throughout his career Newbigin saw that mission should be inherent in the life of the church. Thus, from their inception, congregations should be taught to see themselves as the church of Christ for their locality. They should be taught that, in the Holy Spirit, they have been given all the resources necessary to fulfil their mission, rather than be encouraged to see themselves as dependencies of an external body. They should, from their inception, be made aware of their missionary obligation and when this is done they will fulfil their responsibility naturally (1958, p.26; 1994a, pp.25–32; 1953; 1993, p.140).

The local congregation must seek to be the church *for* the world around it and, in this regard, specific programmes or projects are essential. Yet the history of the church, which has been clericalised and professionalised, has led to the work of the church being identified with paid ministers and specific projects run by the church (1952, p.185). The modern missionary movement has also left a legacy which sees mission as something to be carried out by paid professionals in organisations, and with a corresponding despondency when these are inhibited for whatever reason (1958, p.27). These attitudes eclipse the church's most basic point of contact with the world, the life of its individual members. The primary engagement of the church with the world is not in actions undertaken by a congregation or church body, but in the actions of its members in their daily lives. Thus, a congregation without any formal social action programme may, in fact, be more effectively engaged than a congregation which has one (1994a, p.154). Ministers, bishops and other church leaders may have a role in speaking to the nation or world, but they cannot do the work of the church in the world (1952, p.187; 1984a, pp.113–4). In fact, the effectiveness of their official pronouncements will carry weight only when validated by Christians using their influence in public life (1989, p.230; 1984a, p.41).

Thus, while it is appropriate to continue teaching church members about the Christian life, it is also necessary for the church to equip people to engage in their secular occupations, so that, as far as they can ensure it, the will of Christ is done in the world (1952, p.186). Consistently, over many years, Newbiggin argued that the church should support people in this task by setting up groups of people in similar professions to discuss the issues they faced (see e.g. 1952, pp.187–8; 1994a, p.156; 1989, pp.230–1). The danger of not doing this would be that Christians would either simply withdraw from challenging professions or live with double standards (1952, pp.187–8). It is in the lives of ordinary congregation members that the real interface between 'the Church and the world, between the new creation and the old, takes place' (1994a, p.156). The church must, therefore, also equip members to enter into dialogue when questions arise out of differences in behaviour. This is a dialogue in which the Christian story, and its bearing on life, is explained, and includes the call to

conversion (1994a, pp.156–7).

4.2.2. The Institutional Church

Through much of his career Newbigin was more directly involved at the regional, as opposed to local, level of the church. He worked as bishop of two dioceses in the Church of South India and in administrative positions in the IMC and WCC, but the insights gained from his experience are relevant to all denominations or regional church structures.

Newbigin was very aware of the practical problems of matching limited funds to apparently limitless needs (1993, p.192) and of the pastoral burden borne by those with responsibility. He recognised the very human tendency for people in such positions to look for clear-cut rules and criteria for judgement in making decisions. Such an approach is, however, to avoid the need to use ‘the delicate faculty of spiritual discernment’ (1951, p.97). Although he recognises this tendency, Newbigin insists that when the church seeks security against making mistakes, theological error and disunity without the ‘risky adventure’ of spiritual discernment, it is ‘not building according to the Spirit but according to the flesh’ (1951, p.98).

His experience of the unification of the Church of South India, and its development in subsequent years, yields several insights regarding the institutional aspect of the church. First, the negotiations towards union highlighted the tendency of denominations to ‘run in the grooves’ provided by their history, so that many issues were decided by precedent. The practice of mission in India and the coming together of different traditions forced consideration of whether the inherited models were suitable for their particular context. Those taking part in the negotiations were forced back to the New Testament, and to reconsider basic issues, such as the nature of the congregation, the diaconate, the ministry of the laity and of women, and the need for an ordained non-professional ministry (1960, p.xxix).

Second, the experience of CSI led it to a theology of the ‘Church-in-motion’ (1960,

p.xxx). As noted in Section 4.3.2 the formation of CSI went ahead without final agreement on the issue of ordination. A period of thirty years was agreed before this issue would be finally decided. Reflection on this, and other such issues, strengthened the view that the process of ‘growing together’ must continue, and is linked with the missionary task of reconciling all people to God. The CSI, therefore, came to see the church as a ‘pilgrim people’, and as the church *in via* (1960, pp.xxx–xxx).

Third, this understanding of the church is relevant when considering its relationships to the creeds and standards of faith. When discussing the section of the CSI constitution dealing with standards of faith, Newbigin characteristically notes the importance of the presuppositions that are brought to the discussion. Those approaching them looking for loopholes through which error may enter the church will find them, and will assume that they are there for that purpose. This conclusion is reached partly because it has been approached without personal meeting.²⁰ Such an approach is based on a misconception of the nature of the church’s protection against error. Creeds are developed to guard against error, but since error is ‘hydra-headed’, and the truth is not a proposition but a person to be known in personal faith, no single creed can protect the church from error (1960, p.126). The assumption that, if God has revealed himself, he must have done it in a way that we can be infallibly certain of what that revelation is, contradicts the facts of his revelation in Christ, who refused to give a sign when asked. This, Newbigin argues, rests on human anxiety and insecurity arising from our fallibility and impotence (1960, pp.126–8). Later Newbigin would argue against a similar desire for a revelation which provides a knowledge not reliant on personal commitment (1989, pp.24, 96–7; 1986b, pp.45–6). He sees creeds and statements of faith as necessary in the face of particular errors, but to assume that they negate the need for personal responsibility in response to Christ is to ignore the danger of other errors, and to seek to avoid responsibility to Christ, who is the Truth.

Newbigin’s missiology and his practice of mission both imply that denominational

²⁰ ‘What is important in examining one another’s position is that we should attend to what the other has tried to affirm rather than reconstruct his thought for him on the basis of what he has omitted to deny’ (1960, p.126). On the importance of the building of personal relationships and trust in the process of unification see Section 4.2.3. and (1960, pp.125–6).

structures should seek to avoid the natural tendencies of human organisations to become increasingly bureaucratic and to rely on precedent. He sought to develop structures which recognised that they could never remain unchanged, but would always be required to adapt to the work of the Holy Spirit and the changing context of the missionary engagement.

He also sought to give institutional expression to another key theological principle; that the local congregation is the fundamental unit of the church. In his early years in India he became aware how the mission and church structures created village congregations which saw themselves as dependencies of the mission, rather than congregations (1993, p.62; 1961b, pp.5–6). As has already been noted, this dependency was a result of a model of mission and ministry imported from European churches, which was not appropriate to the Indian village context. It was also not in line with the New Testament. Similarly, his experience led him to realise that the common practice of denominations, or ‘supra-congregational’ structures, to organise the social action of the church centrally was a denial of this key missiological principle (1995a, p.10; 1989, p.229). If such programmes are divorced from the life of a congregation they lose their character as signs of the kingdom. A congregation without appropriate engagement in compassionate service runs the risk of serving only its members (1995a, pp.10–11).

4.2.3. Leadership

Newbigin critiqued the supra-congregational structures in India and sought to develop structures that were more responsive to the work of the Holy Spirit, appropriate to the context in which they were situated, and in line with his missiology and ecclesiology. He applied the same critique to the leadership of congregations.

In 1960 Newbigin, reflecting on his experience in India, noted the assumptions that the ministry was a full-time profession, with high academic standards and to be supported by the giving of the people (1994a, p.24). This, he believed, led to a situation in which mission was effectively being stifled, and the question being asked

was, not how many people can one person effectively pastor, but how many people are required to support a full-time pastor. The result was that one pastor ended up being responsible for multiple congregations (1961b, p.4). It was a model in which the growth of the church depended on increasing financial resources. It also resulted in the daily life of congregations being left to people with no training, while the pastor distributed sacraments and carried a large administrative burden. More seriously it destroyed the proper character of the congregations, making them feel like outstations of the mission, rather than the church of Christ, and inhibited the spontaneous growth of the church (1961b, pp.4–7).

As bishop of Madurai, Newbigin was in a position to develop an alternative model. He sought to gather those considered natural leaders within the village congregations together in order to engender a sense of responsibility for the church of God in their area (1994a, pp.21–32). He records how they initially brought village leaders to the seminary for short courses, but discovered it was necessary for the seminary to go to the villages (1993, p.118). The results quickly showed that congregations under this sort of voluntary ministry were more spiritually alive than those under paid ministry.

A mass movement among village people seeking baptism allowed further development. Newbigin's observed that whenever there was a turning to the gospel there was always at least one person who had been touched by the Spirit, and that was the person God had chosen to be the elder or pastor to the group. Thus, instead of putting that person aside in favour of a person trained and paid for by the diocese, i.e. under its control, the new method was to accept the starting point as what God had done and to build on it. The leaders were trained in the village, in 'a sort of apprenticeship.' From the beginning it was clear that the responsibility for further growth lay with the local group and that God would provide the ministries and spiritual gifts they would require. The diocese recognised the new congregation, and their leader's need to learn, and offered training and support. Although the notion of ordaining village leaders who did not have academic ministerial training faced opposition and required a long period of debate (1994a, p.30; 1993, p.118), the result was that in a period of ten years the number of congregations in one area grew from

thirteen to nearly sixty, and village leaders developed into genuine pastors. Unfortunately, Newbigin's successor as bishop did not approve of this scheme and the programme was discontinued (1993, p.139).

Newbigin was seeking to apply his conviction that the witness of the church is secondary to the primary witness of the Spirit. He acknowledged the problems associated with the inherited model of leadership and developed alternative structures more in line with the practice of the New Testament and the local context.

In 1979, writing from the British context, Newbigin argued that the church in Britain was now, in some ways, in a similar position to the church in India, with 'the spectacle of aged clerics running round three or four parishes on a Sunday morning to administer sacraments to congregations of which they are not a living part' (1979b, p.110). He argued that the common strategy of concentrating ministerial resources by merging congregations so that there were enough people to support ministers would simply accelerate decline. It was the opposite of a missionary strategy, which would deploy ministers to areas where Christian presence is weakest (1989, p.236).

Newbigin welcomed the development of non-stipendiary ministry as a response to this, but went further, arguing that the non-stipendiary ministry of a local and respected elder, with a more highly trained paid ministry to supplement and to provide ongoing leadership-development, should be considered as the norm (1979b, p.110). The critique of structures imported from Christendom Europe to India is thus turned back to the emerging post-Christendom context in Europe.

It is clear that Newbigin was aware of the issues surrounding inherited forms of ministry. Apart from the changes instituted while he was bishop of Madurai he did not instigate further experiments in ministry. He did, however, continue to engage with the issue both practically and in his writings. The following are pertinent insights with implications for ministry and leadership, particularly in historic denominations.

First, in his monthly meetings with clergy in Madras Newbigin mentions several times

the tension faced by the clergy as to the proportion of time and effort they should be expending within the congregation and outside it (1977a, pp.13–4, 60–1, 76). Pastors face pressures from their congregations if they are perceived to be spending too much time with non-Christians, the underlying assumption being that the clergy are paid to look after the Christians. Again, writing later, and in the British context, Newbigin argued that, within Christendom, ministerial training was conceived of in terms of the pastoral care of existing congregations, with pressures on the ministers to spend their time ‘looking after’ members (1989, pp.235–6). This represents a fundamental misunderstanding of ministry and the church. It sees the church as an organisation run by professionals, with the laity existing to be taught, led and comforted (1977a, p.75). The truth is that ministers are not set apart in order that the rest of the church be excused from service, but in order to help the whole church be a serving church (1977a, pp.43–4, 76). The role of ministry is the training and equipping of members to fulfil their roles in mission through faithfulness in their daily lives (Newbigin 1989, p.238). ‘The test of our ministry will be the extent to which our people become ministers’ (1977a, p.76). Pastors must also have direct involvement in evangelism, because the gospel is only fully understood when it is being communicated to those for whom it is good news, which is fundamentally different from preaching it to those who have heard it innumerable times (1977a, p.61).

Second, a form of ministry which relies more on non-stipendiary ministry at local level, supported by a paid ministry, both of which are focussed on the equipping of every member to serve, will require changes in the training of ministers. In particular it will require a shift from training focussed on the pastoral care of existing congregations to the task of leading ‘the whole congregation as God’s embassy to the whole community’ (1989, pp.235–7). The system he developed in Madurai showed that congregations under this sort of leadership were more spiritually alive (1994a, p.27). Later, writing in the British context, he argued that the same principles be applied. He argued that training for ministry should be similar to that for professions such as medicine, which includes a significant proportion of practical experience (1979b, p.107). The historic denominations could also learn from the

Pentecostals about leadership development ‘on the job’ (1979b, p.111). Theological education by extension offers a model that has the possibility of authentic contextualisation happening as theological reading and discussion is taking place while students are fully involved in the secular situations of ordinary Christians, hopefully resulting in a truly missionary theology (1979b, p.113). Theological education must be done in a triangular field, with the following three points: obedient discipleship within the community shaped by the scriptures; openness to the witness of Christians from other cultural situations; and openness to the theologian’s own culture. Thus, Newbigin argues, theological education is a task of the church and cannot be delegated to the universities, although he does see potential in partnership arrangements between denominations and universities (1979b, p.115).

Third, the relationship between the minister and the congregation needs to be understood correctly. As noted above, the congregation often assumes that the minister’s role is to ‘look after’ those who attend the church (1989, p.236), resulting in tension when the minister spends time with those who are not members. There is also a danger among the clergy and laity of seeing the church as an organisation run by the professional clergy in which the laity are ‘simply there to be organised, taught and comforted’ (1977a, p.75). Ministers then begin to think more about how to manage people, rather than considering how to lead them into the fullness of God’s grace (1977a, p.145). Newbigin characterises the Protestant picture of the minister as facing the congregation as a teacher faces the class, both having their backs to the outside world (1989, p.240). In contrast, he proposes a picture of leadership based on the Good Shepherd (1977a, pp.13–17), and on Jesus leading his disciples and calling them to follow him (1989, pp.240–1). ‘A true pastor must have such a relation with Jesus and with his people that he [sic] follows Jesus and they follow him’ (1977a, p.14). This requires a personal relationship and rapport with people, and an attitude which places more value on people growing in ‘holiness, wisdom and love’ (1977a, p.16) than on successful programmes. The minister must also be engaged in the ‘warfare of the kingdom against the powers which usurp the kingship’ (1989, p.240), thus encouraging the whole congregation in their individual engagements in their secular

lives.

Fourth, the underlying implication of this is that, ‘ministerial leadership is, first and finally, discipleship’ (1989, p.241). The hidden life of the pastor, in prayer and daily consecration is where the essential battles are won or lost. Jesus’ teaching that ‘apart from me you can do nothing’ warns that apparently successful ministries may not bear ‘real fruit of the vine, but also that abiding in him results in real fruit being borne, even in situations where ministers feel they can do nothing (1977a, pp.141, 146). Goheen comments that Newbigin’s life and ecclesiology cannot be properly understood apart from the high priority that he puts on prayer (Goheen 2002b, p.51). It certainly was important in his own life, and he often encouraged the ministers in the Madras diocese to maintain their own spiritual lives.

4.2.4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined Newbigin’s insights on the search for a new ecclesiology and the practicalities of the church in mission, drawing significantly from Newbigin’s experience and practice. The church must engage in mission with an adequate self-understanding and with appropriate attitudes and expectations, particularly in a context of cultural change. Not only is the culture of Christendom shifting to a post-Christendom culture, but the main denominations in the United Kingdom and Ireland are facing numerical decline. In this context, Newbigin’s assertion that mission is not a command or a burden, but primarily the work of the Holy Spirit, with the implication that the church has all the resources required for mission, is a significant encouragement. Newbigin’s insistence that success cannot be measured numerically, that the church must expect to be changed in mission, and that the point of contact for the gospel lies most often in the ordinary lives of members in the secular reality of the world, are all instructive for denominations and congregations in this context.

Throughout his career Newbigin’s theological thinking and his missiological practice had a symbiotic relationship. He always sought to ensure that his missiological principles were given concrete expression in the life and structures of the churches in

which he was serving, and was thus continually involved in strategic planning and organisation. In spite of this, in all of his copious writing he never wrote a methodology for mission, which I have asserted to be true to his insistence that it is the Spirit who is the author of mission.

In chapters three and four Newbigin's manner of theological thinking, his theology of cultural plurality, his ecclesiology and issues pertinent to the church in mission have been examined. These form the basis from which Newbigin will relate to PCI as a mentor. It is, therefore, necessary to examine PCI's emerging missiology and to construct the critical dialogue with Newbigin. This will be the task of chapters five and six.

5. Newbigin as Mentor to PCI in Emerging Post-Christendom Context

Chapter 2 gave an overview of the developments and initiatives relating to mission within PCI. Chapters 3 and 4 have introduced Newbigin as a mentor for PCI, in particular establishing his missiological thinking regarding the main research questions identified in the Introduction. These were the manner in which theological thinking is done, the relationship between gospel, church and culture, ecclesiology and the church in mission. It is now possible to construct the critical dialogue between Newbigin and PCI. This will be achieved by examining PCI's engagement with each of the research questions in more depth, and then using the insights from Newbigin as a means of evaluation.

5.1. The Manner of PCI's Theological Thinking

5.1.1. The Process of Theological Thinking in PCI

In order to determine if there is an emerging view of mission within PCI it is necessary to consider the process by which theological thinking is done and how shifts in theological perspective happen within the denomination.

The two modes of PCI's existence, the body mode and the institutional mode, have been described in Section 2.1. The symbiotic nature of the relationship between the institutional and body modes is very apparent in this process. Within the body mode knowledge and understanding is developed from experience, as well as through formal and informal meetings and networks. Within a small denomination like PCI there are numerous opportunities for ideas to be shared and discussed. These may be in formal settings, such as discussions at Kirk Session or Presbytery, but there are also groups and networks outside the denominational structure, such as the Westminster Fellowship and other clerical and lay groups. David Bruce (2010) refers to the role of 'lead thinkers', or 'influencers' in changing the mindset of the denomination. These are people whom others observe, and even imitate. They are 'the prophets', and their

influence permeates through the denomination in an osmotic manner. He also notes how young ministers within the denomination have their assumptions about church and ministry challenged by the actual experience of ministry. Some remain unchanged by this, while others are willing to look for new models and ideas.

The knowledge and understanding developed within the body mode may be accepted by different groups and networks, and there are often differing understandings of various subjects by different networks within the denomination at any one time. These understandings are introduced to the institutional mode through the representative membership of the boards, committees and General Assembly.

Within the institutional mode, knowledge and understanding are developed in a more formal manner. Issues tend to be discussed in regular, formal meetings for which minutes are kept. Often papers will be prepared to introduce an issue or to consider different viewpoints. Boards and committees are also more likely to engage in strategic planning related to the area of work assigned to them by the General Assembly. The general procedure by which such strategic decisions are taken was set out in 2001 (PCI 2001, pp.11–2):

- i. Full-time Board Secretaries and honorary Conveners have the knowledge, vision and enthusiasm to identify needs in a changing situation and to provide the necessary ideas and leadership.
- ii. These leaders confer with the relevant Committees, sub-Committees or panels, which should include people with relevant expertise.
- iii. These subordinate bodies then report to their supervising Board, which should have a substantial “democratic” representation from the wider Church. Boards were designed to function as mini-Assemblies rather than maxi-Committees. Some criticisms made of Boards in the past may have failed to recognise that point.
- iv. The annual General Assembly remains the final and supreme decision-making body, especially on broad policy issues.

This quotation highlights the influence that the institutional strand has on the setting of strategic direction for the denomination, and in particular the influence of the Board Secretary and Convenor. It is also apparent that the executive staff and Board Convenors have considerable influence in this process, although the democratic representation on boards ensures the influence of the body strand. As will be argued below, strategic thinking and planning cannot be separated from underlying theological and missiological issues, and thus the institutional strand of PCI has a large influence on the missiology of the denomination.

The influence of the institutional mode also occurs indirectly through the representative membership of the boards and committees, so that knowledge and understanding developed within the institutional mode seeps out into the body mode. It also occurs directly when the General Assembly, at the request of a board, passes legislation that demands congregations or presbyteries consider and respond to a proposal or to take specific action. Another way in which the institutional mode directly influences the body mode is through publications (*Reachout*, produced by BMI, *Wider World* produced by Presbyterian Women and the denominational magazine, *The Herald*), events and training courses produced by the various Boards.

Union Theological College, which is the General Assembly's official college, responsible for the training of most candidates for ministry has obvious influence in the development of ministerial students. It also runs training courses for deaconesses and accredited courses for youth and children's workers. However, in spite of being a theological resource it has little formal direct influence in the wider denomination.

It is thus clear that the theological thinking within PCI occurs through a complex interaction between the body and the institutional strands, and through both formal and informal processes. Dunlop describes the representative system within PCI as 'democracy run riot', and states that 'significant change comes about only after maximum information has been provided and extensive debate has taken place at all levels of the Church's life' (1995, p.4). It is beyond the scope of a single research project to analyse the emerging view of mission within PCI in both body and

institutional strands. However, recognising the interaction and mutual influence between the two strands, it is legitimate to approach the task by focussing on the institutional strand.

5.1.2. Theological Foundations

The Code states that ‘The Word of God as set forth in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and the supreme standard of the Church’ (PCI 2011, para.10). As a Reformed church, PCI accepts the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms as subordinate standards, which ‘set forth what she understands the Word of God to teach on certain important points of doctrine and worship’ (PCI 2011, para.12).

The subordinate standards are, therefore, foundational for PCI’s theological thinking. When examining an issue at the request of the General Assembly the Doctrine Committee often refers to the subordinate standards as part of its report. This can be seen in reports dealing with the Toronto Blessing (1996, p.24), ministry (2000, p.22; 2002, p.25; 2004, p.34) and paedocommunion

(PCI 2009b, pp.33–5). However, reports from other Boards and Committees, seldom make reference to the standards. It would thus appear that the subordinate standards are foundational in a legal sense, but are not part of the practical process of missiological thinking within the denomination.

The fact that the subordinate standards do not play an active role in the missiological thinking of PCI could simply be due to their foundational nature, that is, that their influence is often assumed, rather than explicitly stated. This could also be said for scripture, which is relatively infrequently quoted in documents such as annual reports. Occasional reports will seek to provide a biblical argument for their position, such as the 2008 report on Lifestyle (2008a, pp.52–70), and occasionally there is criticism for proposals which are perceived to lack a biblical basis, as in the case of proposals by BMI to introduce strategic planning at congregational and Presbytery level (2007a,

pp.132–3).

Another reason for the absence of references to the subordinate standards in the missiological thinking of PCI may have to do with their historical nature. The Presbyterian Church USA (PC(USA)) argues that confessions arise from situations of internal danger, external threat or great opportunity for the church. Put negatively,

when all the church has to say is the restatement of what everyone already knows and believes, or when it has no word to speak other than safe generalities that ignore or cover over the concrete, specific issues of a crisis situation — then it is not the time for confession even though what is confessed might be true in itself (PC(USA) 2004, p.xiii).

According to PC(USA), confessions, even when written in an attempt to formulate Christian truth relevant for all time, are in fact related to the particular historical context facing the church, and are written from within the thought forms of their time (2004, p.xv). The authority of confessions is, therefore, limited in three ways: they have provisional authority, in that they are the work of ‘limited, fallible, sinful human beings and churches’ (2004, p.xviii), they have temporal authority, since faith in the living God means being open to hearing a fresh word from him, and they have relative authority, in that they are subordinate to the authority of Scripture (2004, p.xviii). PCI officially recognises that the authority of the subordinate standards is limited, and has specifically modified them in regards to their statements on the civil ruler and the Papal Antichrist (see PCI 2009b, p.40).

Recognising that confessions arise out of specific historical circumstances which the church must address, PC(USA) has adopted nine confessions of faith, including the Barmen Declaration (1934), The Confession of 1967 and A Brief Statement of Faith (1983). Neither PCI, nor its mother church, the Church of Scotland, has adopted subordinate standards other than the Westminster Confession and the Catechisms. However, the factors of internal threat, external threat and opportunity have led to PCI’s acceptance of the Coleraine Declaration, the Mission Statement and the Peace Vocation. These statements are in many ways similar in form to confessions, but while

they have been officially adopted by PCI, they have not been given the same status as the Westminster Confession. Given that these documents have been accepted by PCI relatively recently it is surprising that they do not often explicitly feature in discussions and in written documents.

5.1.3. The Nature of PCI's Theological Engagement

In Section 3.3.3. Newbigin's theological engagement was seen to have been influenced by his reflection on his own experience, by reflection on contemporary sociological trends and by relationships and conversations with others. The same three influences can be seen in the development of PCI's theological thinking.

Throughout the period 1990-2009 PCI's reflection on its own experience has been driven by its experience of the sociological trends in wider society and their impact on its own life. This is evident from the motivation for the Coleraine Assembly, which was to examine the life of PCI in order to 'to meet the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly changing situation' (1989, p.71). The resulting Coleraine Declaration confesses areas in which PCI 'has been conformed to this world' (1990a Preamble), as well as acknowledging positive aspects of its life and the challenge of the changing context. The process of self-examination continued in subsequent years, most notably through the work of the Strategy for Mission Committee, which examined the experience of various types of congregations, made proposals for reform of the central structures and engaged the denomination in thinking about its theology of mission. It stimulated mission thinking within the denomination by making a series of challenging proposals regarding, among other things, PCI structures, Presbytery functions, discipleship and mission priority areas (see Section 2.5).

This reflection on experience and sociological trends continues in the annual reports of the various boards. A survey of these reports and other documents produced within the denomination shows that the predominant experience of PCI is of numeric decline and of living with inherited models of mission and ministry. The concern about numerical decline can be seen, for example, in the 1997 report by the General Board

on priorities, which states that the fundamental priority must be ‘stabilising the base, that is, congregational life and witness, as in the absence of a strong base personnel and finance are not available for mission at home and abroad’ (1997, p.5; cf. 2004, pp.67–8). In 1999 the Board of Personnel and Finance brought a resolution that encouraged Presbyteries to consider the statistics of decline among families and younger people (1999a, p.256). In November 2000 the North Belfast Presbytery and BMI published a report which showed significant decline in church attendance of those aged between 25 and 44. This decline was, significantly, at variance with the statistics for the general population

(Hamilton & Welch 2000, pp.7–8). In 2004 the Urban Mission Panel’s report included reference to the most recent census, showing the decline in numbers in Belfast, along with an increase of those claiming no religion, or religion not stated (2004, p.67).

In addition to numerical decline, several reports make reference to inherited models of church and mission and the resistance to change. The 1991 report of the Strategy for Mission Committee reported on a survey of congregations in the Belfast Synod, which showed low ‘dynamism for mission’ and ‘an air of containment, contentment and even complacency’ and that congregations required help in setting priorities (1991b, pp.133–4). In 1994 they stated that traditional congregations were ‘best adapted to ministering to a passively Christian community’ rather than the changing society in which they were located (1994, pp.306–7). In 1996 they argued that a ‘mindset change’ was needed within PCI (PCI 1996, p.307) and in 1998 it was able to state that the church was coming to a consensus on the direction in which it needed to move (1998a, p.253).

It is, thus, clear that reflection on its experience and the sociological trends of the society in which it exists have been the stimulus for some of PCI’s thinking.

That PCI should be open to influence from those outside the denomination is set out in the Code. This states that, in seeking to come to an understanding of God’s will on any subject the Word of God is paramount, but the individual ought not ‘refuse light from

any quarter' (2011, para.10). The influence of people outside PCI is not often apparent in official documents, although BMO reports have included regular references to partnerships, and that appropriate partner relationships will involve mutual learning, and even co-dependency [*sic*] (2008a, pp.116–7; 2009b, p.127). However, the effect of outside influences becomes much more apparent in the interviews with Board Secretaries. Each interview shows how theological thinking has been influenced through contact with other individuals and organisations. In particular, Bruce (BMI) (2010) and Marrs (BMO) (2010) highlight the influence of the Lausanne movement, especially their attendance at the Lausanne III conference in 2010, and the writings of Chris Wright. Conway (BSW) (2010) also indicates the significance of engagement with churches and individuals in the United States and the Church of Scotland in developing his, and therefore, the board's thinking.

5.2. Dialogue With Newbigin on the Manner of Theological Thinking

Sections 3.3 and 5.1 set out the manner of Newbigin and PCI's theological thinking. In setting up a dialogue between Newbigin and PCI on these issues the following topics will be considered. First is the informal and personal element in the theological formation of a denomination, and implications for the relationship between the institutional and body strands of PCI. Second is the need for reflection on the theological implications of strategic planning. Third is the importance of maintaining theological foundations, whilst allowing for the possibility of theological shifts.

First, in considering the informal and personal element in the theological formation of a denomination Newbigin's experience of the formation of the Church of South India is instructive. Newbigin became involved with the plans for union twenty-four years after the process had begun, and at a time when the process was languishing (1993, p.69; cf. Laing 2012b, p.59). He saw that the problems were not just theological, although theological issues around the historic episcopate were significant, and Newbigin fully engaged with them. In fact, throughout his career, Newbigin passionately affirmed that unity could not be forged without serious theological

engagement, and the publication of *The Reunion of the Church* was to provide the theological basis for the formation of CSI.

However, CSI was not formed solely through theological argument and Newbigin saw two additional factors as crucially significant. First, he saw the importance of the grass roots and encouraged their involvement. Proposals for reunion had been launched with enthusiasm, but the discourse had largely been conducted in English, and was thus dominated by missionaries. At a conference in Madras, Newbigin noted that the speeches against the scheme were largely given in Tamil and had greater impact than the English speeches in favour of it (1993, p.70). Newbigin gave his report to the conference in Tamil, resulting in a majority voting for union and several Indians saying it was the first time they had understood the issues. Newbigin then proceeded to ensure that reports and documents regarding the proposed union were translated into the vernacular (see Laing 2012b, p.60). Second, Newbigin's reflections on the formation of CSI highlight the importance of personal relationships, and building trust between participants, in allowing progress to continue toward the agreed goal, even when particular issues have not been fully resolved. Personally, he notes that it was his relationship with people 'who were ... truly in Christ' that enabled him to 'move out of the secure shell of the Reformed tradition' to become 'deeply committed to total solidarity with men and women of very different Christian traditions.' He argues that this relational experience is the 'one spiritual resource by which unity is made possible' and that a focus on external issues, such as forms of unity, is to 'move into areas of controversy where little can be taken for granted' (1984b, p.5).

Although Newbigin is referring to the specific question of unity, his experience and argument are instructive to a denomination seeking to adapt to a changing context. Even though this research project is concentrating on the institutional mode of PCI, it must be recognised that transformation must either arise from the grass roots, or penetrate to the roots.

However transformation comes, Newbigin and the CSI scheme point out the need for personal trust when dealing with the tensions arising from differing convictions. In the

CSI context, shared evangelistic work and the relationships built through the long discussions towards union led to a realisation that, although there were differences over church order, there was trust in each other as members of Christ (Newbigin 1960, p.114). The importance of this trust was set out in the Pledge, which affirmed that this trust could be the only ‘basis of freedom of opinion on debatable matters, and respect for even large differences of opinion and practice’ and ‘that this freedom and mutual respect can be safeguarded not by the framing of detailed regulations but by assurances given and received in a spirit of confidence and love’ (1960, p.115). The formal adoption of the Pledge, which affirmed the need for trust and committed the church to avoid the ‘over-riding of conscience either by Church authorities or by majorities’ (1960, p.116) was a means by which the institutional strand of the church recognised and protected these relationships of trust. In a similar way, the institutional structure of PCI must recognise the importance of the informal relationship networks within the denomination, and that relationships must be encouraged and developed between those who hold different convictions. It must also continually seek to ensure that the grass roots are aware of important issues and are actively involved in all discussion. The institutional mode of PCI also has a role in providing for, and protecting, the freedom of conscience which relationships of trust require. It has done this, for example, in providing a conscience clause for ministers when it accepted the ordination of women.

The preceding paragraphs have highlighted the inter-relationship between the institutional and body strands of a denomination, along with the need for grass roots involvement and relationships of trust. Ultimately denominations are made up of individuals, and change within a denomination must involve individuals changing. In *Evangelical Journeys* Mitchell and Ganiel (2011) present the results of their sociological research into the faith journeys of evangelicals in Northern Ireland. Ninety-five interviews were conducted, from which six trajectories were identified: converting to evangelicalism, deepening in a conservative direction; maintaining a steady faith; moderating from a conservative background; transforming evangelicalism; and leaving evangelicalism. Among other factors, social relationships

are shown to be a significant factor in individual's religious journeys

(2011, pp.176–188). Those moving in a conservative direction tended to have family networks that were tightly religious and to restrict their social circle to like-minded people. Those on moderating and transforming journeys tended to have more diverse families and to have, or to seek, wider social contacts, although they surrounded themselves with like-minded people for support and to explore their religious journeys together. The influence of advocates is also noted, both in the process of conversion to evangelicalism and the process of moderation. In fact internal evangelical dialogue is noted as one of the major stimuli for religious moderation.

As an evangelical denomination in Northern Ireland the six journeys described by Mitchell and Ganiel are represented within PCI's membership. They note that the people interviewed 'had put a great deal of thought, and intentional work, into constructing their religious identity' (2011, p.186). This is true even for those on a journey towards deepening conservatism, or a steady faith, whose strategies for maintaining their faith are as creative as those who transform or abandon their religious identities. They make 'extremely rational cost-benefit analyses' (2011, p.186) in limiting friendship networks and avoiding material which would challenge their beliefs. Thus, along with all evangelicals in Northern Ireland, PCI's members are 'choosing their religion' in response to experiences 'within their subculture, popular culture, political structures within Northern Ireland and wider social influences' (2011, p.187).

That Mitchell and Ganiel highlight the importance of social relationships in this process confirms the role of relationship within the denomination as it seeks to respond to a changing context. The response of those on a deepening conservative journey, or with a steady faith, to protect their faith by limiting their social relationships shows an instinctive understanding of Newbigin's assertion that the church must be a community which inhabits a different plausibility structure. However, it fails to recognise his assertion that this plausibility structure must be held with universal intent. It must be 'publicly affirmed, and opened to public interrogation

and debate' (1989, p.50). Although Mitchell and Ganiel are dealing with the individual's faith journey, their observation of the creativity and commitment required to negotiate a faith journey, in whichever direction, applies equally to PCI at congregational and denominational levels. In a changing social context it is forced to expend energy to negotiate its spiritual direction, whether it decides that direction is to maintain its structures, practices and theology, or that the new context demands new expressions.

The second topic for dialogue between PCI and Newbigin in the area of theological thinking concerns the relationship between theology and strategic planning. My discussion of the manner of PCI's theological thinking highlighted the significant role the institutional strand has in strategic planning within the denomination. It was stated that such strategic planning always has an underlying missiology. This is exemplified in Newbigin's strategic engagement. From his earliest days as a missionary Newbigin was thinking of the theological implications of the missionary strategy being used. In 1945 he wrote 'The Ordained Foreign Missionary in the Indian Church' (1945), in which he engaged with the theological issues raised by the relationship between 'older' and 'younger' churches and the role of the foreign missionary. Later he published 'The Christian Layman in the World and in the Church' (1952) and 'The Ministry of the Church, Ordained and Unordained, Paid and Unpaid' (1953), in which issues of missiology and ecclesiology were dealt with in terms of the missionary strategy being employed. As the CSI bishop of Madurai and Madras, Newbigin's strategic organisation was always clearly linked to his theological thinking

(see e.g. Newbigin 1994a, pp.21–32, 33–47). Throughout his career he consistently relativised the role of human planning in mission in favour of God's prior role. Mission is not to be conducted as a military or commercial campaign. Rather, Newbigin sought to develop his strategy in response to what God was doing through his Spirit (see e.g. Newbigin 1958, p.19; Newbigin 1963, p.79; Newbigin 1995a, p.64). In his role as bishop he, in a sense, represented the institutional strand of CSI. The strategies he developed were innovative, arising out of a creative encounter between the specific context and his missiological and ecclesiological convictions. His

writings show a concern, not just for employing the right strategy, but communicating the theological reasons from which they developed.

Newbiggin's concern that mission strategy and planning be based on proper theological foundations is consonant with the method of his critique of western culture, in which he constantly sought to uncover the unstated assumptions at the heart of the modern worldview. In fact, uncovering unstated assumptions was a method Newbiggin applied when engaging with other mission strategies. As bishop of Madras he not only sought to develop mission strategies from within the diocese, but also engaged with organisations and ideas from outside, remarking on the volume of such strategies which promised success (Newbiggin 1987, p.13). His critique of Donald McGavran's church growth strategy is also concerned at engaging with the theology underlying the strategy

(1995a, pp.121–159). McGavran argued that the Great Commission presented an order of priorities in mission which put discipling and baptising before teaching. Further, he also argued that missions had put too much emphasis on and effort into trying to bring converts into conformity with the standards they assumed were required by the gospel, rather than focussing on discipling and baptising. He also argued that mission resources should be applied to places where rapid church growth is possible. McGavran made use of social science methodologies, including statistical research and anthropology, to develop strategies for church growth (see e.g. McGavran 1990, pp.66–87, 91–106). Newbiggin's critique focuses on the theological issues underlying the strategy. First, he argues that a focus on numeric growth is not apparent in the New Testament. Second, he argues that McGavran's distinction between 'discipling' and 'perfecting' implies a two stage process of conversion, and denies any ethical implication in conversion. Third, Newbiggin argues that McGavran's understanding of culture is inadequate in that it assumes a 'culturally uncontaminated gospel being planted in a series of culturally isolated, stable and homogeneous communities' (1995a, p.149). McGavran's missiological strategy was to concentrate on numerical growth by reducing the cultural barriers for people in coming to faith. Newbiggin exposes the inadequate theological foundations of this strategy.

The close connection between strategy and missiology is confirmed by Kirk, who defines the theology of mission as:

a critical reflection on attitudes and actions adopted by Christians in pursuit of the missionary mandate. Its task is to validate, correct and establish on better foundations the entire practice of mission (1999, p.21).

The institutional mode of PCI has considerable influence in strategic thinking within PCI. The specific strategies will be examined in the appropriate sections of this thesis, but the point to be made here is that this examination must consider the theological foundation underlying the strategies, whether stated or unstated.

The third area for dialogue between Newbigin and PCI with regard to theological thinking is in the area of theological foundations and the openness to development. Sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 examined Newbigin's commitment to the atonement and to scripture. Although these remained constant in Newbigin's theological thinking, his thinking was also constantly capable of development, with two clear shifts in his thinking occurring when he moved, first, towards a church-centred view of mission and, then, to a trinitarian view. Each of these shifts could be described as a paradigm shift, not that they involved a denial of what he previously believed, but that they entered into a larger understanding, which encompassed what he had previously understood, from a more adequate perspective.

As stated in the Introduction, Küng has shown how various paradigm shifts have occurred throughout church history, notably at times of cultural and societal upheaval when both the theological and institutional models the church assumed came under strain. Küng notes the inevitable discomfort and uncertainty during times of paradigm change, and that it is also the younger generation who are 'converted' to the new paradigm. He also notes that, unlike paradigm shifts in science, when a paradigm shift has occurred in church history the old paradigm has continued in existence (1991, pp.215–9).

Newbigin's personal experience was of two personal paradigm shifts, which both

occurred as a result of him honestly facing the fact that his theological understanding was no longer adequate to account for his growing experience in mission and the world in which the church was located. As a mentor to PCI he would, thus, advise PCI that it is possible to remain committed to its theological foundations while accepting the possibility of a new, previously unimagined, understanding. Further, he would argue for a proper understanding of confessions and statements of faith. In defending the CSI Statement of Faith, he agrees that such statements are written to protect the church against error, but since error is 'hydra-headed' and truth is a Person, no creed or statement can guard the church from error in perpetuity. He goes on to argue against a view of revelation that assumes the possibility of infallible certainty, and that when a church claims to have 'a deposit of infallible truths' which requires only its members' submission, it has in fact lost its true authority. He argues that the desire for certainty is a result of humanity's insecurity and anxiety and

is the essence of all idolatry that it seeks to provide men with the assurance that the forces controlling their destiny have been brought down on to the plane of human society and human action where they can be, to some extent, controlled (1960, pp.127–8).

The phenomenon of insecurity leading to a desire for an infallible knowledge is, of course, one of the characteristics of fundamentalism. Newbiggin argues that, in identifying God's revelation as a series of objectively true propositions, fundamentalism is, in fact, as much a child of the Enlightenment as liberalism, which relegated faith to the subjective experience (1986b, pp.45–7; 1989, pp.24, 38, 49; 1988, p.192). Fundamentalism is a strategy used by religious groups to protect their identity, which they perceive to be under threat in the contemporary era. The strategy involves the 'selective retrieval of doctrines and practices from a sacred past', which are 'refined, modified, and sanctioned in a spirit of shrewd pragmatism' in order to protect the group's religious identity (Hinnells 2005, p.339).

Mitchell and Ganiel's research clearly shows this strategy being used by those whose faith journey was moving in a conservative direction, and it is clearly a strategy that individuals within PCI might be tempted to employ. There is, however, no evidence

within the official documentation that this approach is represented within the institutional strand of the denomination.

According to Newbigin, the desire for certainty is a denial of the responsibility of faith. In contrast to a strategy which looks to an idealised past and resists the notion of change, Newbigin represents an attitude that has firm foundations, yet sees the foundation as a basis on which to build. This is emphasised in several illustrations that he uses. He describes Christ as the 'clue' to which we are committed to find understanding, but the clue is only the starting place for investigation and knowing the clue does not provide full knowledge (1989, pp.123, 158; 1995a, p.16). He also uses the illustration of the climber who maintains three points of contact with the rock face, but uses one hand or foot to explore for new footholds in order to make progress (1966, pp.37–8).

It was noted that PCI is committed to the Scriptures as the word of God and to the Westminster Confession and Larger and Shorter Catechisms as subordinate standards. Unlike PC(USA) no further confessions have been adopted, although the Coleraine Declaration, the Mission Statement and the Peace Vocation were adopted as statements representing PCI's response to a particular context at a particular time. Newbigin's advice, as a mentor to PCI, would be that adherence to its standards should not be such that it assumes they contain answers which preclude the need for critical engagement with contemporary society and the issues raised in that engagement. Nor should adherence to the standards preclude the possibility of a paradigm shift in church practice and structure, and even theological understanding. In fact, as the next section will show, in a context of cultural change PCI should, perhaps, expect such a paradigm shift to occur.

5.3. PCI and the Relationship between Gospel, Church and Culture

In Section 3.4 Newbigin's missiological thinking on the relationship between gospel, church and culture was examined. Newbigin gave a positive view of the plurality of

cultures and thus developed a nuanced relationship between the gospel, the Christianity of the missionary church and the culture which it encountered. In this relationship the missionary church was required to recognise the possibility that its own faith was syncretistic in relation to its home culture, and to allow converts to determine the shape of Christianity in their culture, thus adding to the pluriformity of the church. In a context of cultural change it was noted that this process must become internalised, in the form of an internal dialogue, within the missionary and the missionary church.

Section 3.4 also argued that Newbigin provides many of the resources required to develop a theological understanding of, and response to, the end of Christendom. In particular, his analysis of the ‘powers and authorities’ provides a nuanced view of the relationship between the church and the regnant power structures in society. A church moving from the context of Christendom must critique the Christendom arrangement, and move toward a new self-understanding.

It is necessary to outline PCI’s thinking on these issues, before allowing Newbigin to engage with them as a mentor.

5.3.1. PCI, Cultural Plurality and the End of Christendom

Chapter 2 outlined the development of missiological thinking within PCI from 1990 to 2009. The Coleraine Assembly was a key event at the beginning of this process, and was predicated on the recognition of ‘the changed world in which we live’ (1988, p.82). The Coleraine Declaration itself shows a church that is beginning to be aware of the changing context, but which is continuing to operate with Christendom models.

In subsequent years the facts of societal change frequently feature in reports and documents. These changes are most often viewed as a regrettable deterioration in moral standards and as having a negative impact on the church. For example, the 1994 report of the Strategy for Mission Committee highlights materialism, the breakdown in traditional plausibility structures, religious pluralism, rejection of authority,

fragmentation of society and the replacement of geographical communities by relational networks (1994, pp.307–9). The 2001 report of BMI sees the church's mission as 'confronting growing secularism, increasing social problems and widespread indifference' (2001, p.165). In 1991 BSW noted several changes in society, including increasing individualism, materialism, personal freedom and privatisation' (1991b, pp.155–9), but went on to offer biblical principles for engagement. The report, *Engaging With the Community*, lists many changes in society, all of which are perceived as negative and which culminate in the statement 'the extent of the disaster in our society can hardly be exaggerated' (Social Issues and Resources Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 2001, pp.8–9).

Thus, the official documents of PCI consistently portray the changes in society as negative and that the role of the church is to resist them. These changes are also perceived as being a threat to the church and having a negative impact on it. A rare exception is the recognition of the positive impact of asylum seekers and migrants in 'spiritually static or moribund' congregations in the Republic of Ireland (PCI 2001, p.177). The official documents also consistently show that PCI recognises that it must change in response to the changing context. For example, the Coleraine Declaration recognises the need for 'new and imaginative ways of teaching biblical truth, evangelism and Church planting' (1990a, para.3.4). In 1994 the Strategy for Mission Committee argued that PCI would not be faithful to its founders if it allowed itself to be fossilised and to become irrelevant to the context and culture of the age in which it lived (1994, p.314).

The documents show that PCI is aware of, and concerned about, the decline in its membership, which is related to the changes in society. For example, in 1995 the Priorities Committee noted the trends and stated the need for 'stabilising the base' (1997, p.5). In perhaps the most extreme statement, BMO spoke of the dangers of it exporting 'the attitudes of a dying western Church' to its partners (1991b, pp.114, 118). In 2009 the Strategy for Mission committee of BMI presented a summary of Presbytery mission plans which recognised that each Presbytery was working with an inherited distribution of congregations, many of which were 'founded at the peak of

the Irish Christendom experience in which expansion in local population almost automatically translated into the need for an associated local Congregation' (2009a, p.66). Population shifts have resulted in some congregations being separated from their 'traditional Presbyterian hinterlands' (2009a, p.66), while others have benefited from population shifts. The Presbyteries recognised their decreasing numbers, the below average participation of the 15-45 age group and an increasing age profile. This led the Down Presbytery to state, 'we have a window of 10-15 years when significant finance and active leadership will be available to us to develop the ministries of our Congregations. Failure to do so will, humanly speaking, leave many of our Congregations in slow, terminal decline' (2009a, p.67).

There is indication in the documents that PCI has given consideration to its relationship to the culture it has inhabited, as well as the culture that is emerging. The Coleraine Declaration confesses that PCI has been 'conformed to the world' in terms of materialism and sectarianism. The Strategy for Mission Committee's first report affirmed the cultural 'translatability' of the gospel, which it saw as implying the need to question the traditions of the church (1989, pp.155-6). As noted above, this committee also saw the danger of the church being fossilised and becoming irrelevant to the emerging culture, and, in a statement which highlights PCI as a Christendom denomination, it acknowledged that PCI was best adapted to ministering to a passively Christian community (1994, p.307). BMI also hinted at PCI's Christendom mentality when it urged the church to shake off a 'chaplaincy mindset' (2009a, p.65) and BMO likewise showed a Christendom mindset stating that the church must rediscover its role as the 'conscience of the nation' (2003, p.165). In 2009 the Strategy for Mission Committee's summary of Presbytery mission plans recognised that most congregations continued to use attractional models of mission, which were increasingly less effective as the gap between church and society increased. In spite of the need for 'a more carefully contextually nuanced and incarnational approach' (2009a, p.67) most congregations found it difficult to think beyond minor variations of traditional models of mission.

The changing values in society result in pastoral issues for the denomination. In 2002

BSW published a Review of the Panel on Remarriage (2002, pp.198–208) which recognised the problems faced by ministers in dealing with the tensions between Biblical ideals and the reality in a ‘fallen and sinful world.’ It also stated that attitudes towards divorce and remarriage had changed within the denomination in the previous thirty years, with a greater willingness to remarry divorcees. In 2007 the Social Issues and Resources Panel of BSW produced pastoral guidelines on the subject of homosexuality (2007a, pp.174–183). The guidelines reaffirmed the doctrinal understanding of homosexuality adopted by PCI in 1979, but sought to deal sensitively and appropriately with an increasingly common pastoral issue in congregations. Even though the report focussed entirely on the pastoral care issues and did not seek to amend PCI’s stance on homosexuality, it proved controversial, with fifty-four people registering their dissent at its approval by the Assembly (2007b, p.37).

Despite many brief references to the changes in society in annual reports, there are few attempts to analyse the emerging culture in depth. In 2002 the BMO report included a brief paper on globalisation, which was to be sent to Presbyteries for discussion (2002, pp.132–3). The responses in the 2003 report show that Presbyteries engaged with this issue. They recognised globalisation as having various forms, from benign to more harmful, and how the associated consumer mentality is affecting denominational loyalty and ways of ‘doing church’ (2003, p.164). In 2008 the Global Concerns Committee of the General Board produced a significant report on lifestyle (2008a, pp.52–70). The report was concerned with lifestyle in response to the threat of climate change, but engaged with other issues such as economics. The report brought various biblical themes, such as the creator God, celebration and stewardship of creation, and worship and rest, to bear on the subject. It includes practical suggestions for the denomination, congregations and individuals to live in a sustainable manner.

It could be argued that it is not surprising that there is no in-depth analysis of societal change within the annual reports of Boards and Committees. As annual reports, theirs is a reporting function, rather than a theological one. However, there is little evidence of theological analysis of societal change in other documents produced by PCI. The

Engaging With the Community report (Social Issues and Resources Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 2001) contains arguments to justify community and political involvement, and reports on some of the trends in society in general terms. It also reproduces an extract from *The Paradox of Prosperity*, (Salvation Army & Henley Centre for Forecasting 1999) published by the Salvation Army, which examines statistics of family breakdown, the ageing population and the emergence of new 'spirituality'. It recognises a transition in society from organised 'religion' to popular 'spirituality' and from religious institutions which seek to command allegiance to a grass roots activity and 'build-your-own' religion (Social Issues and Resources Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 2001, pp.36–7). There is, however, no theological engagement with the emerging culture, or any attempt to provide a theological understanding for cultural change.

Reconnecting With a Lost Generation (Hamilton & Welch 2000) compares census statistics with statistics of ten congregations in North Belfast to highlight the under-representation of those aged 20-45. It goes on to suggest reasons for the decline on the basis of a generational profile and to posit the basis for effective ministry. Such ministry would emphasise the importance of belonging, conveying acceptance, involvement and collaboration, cultural relevance (which includes a critique of the sermon), and a whole family approach. This report goes further than other PCI reports in actively seeking points of contact with the emerging social context.

A paper by David Temple, then Superintendent of the Irish Mission, entitled *Culture, Change and Challenge: Postmodernism and the Church's Mission in 21st Century Ireland* (2004) represents the most significant engagement with the emerging culture. It begins by noting the tendency for PCI to resist change and to see culture change as a challenge to be resisted. A brief description of the development of postmodernism and its major characteristics is followed by an analysis of how evangelicals have 'adjusted well to the modern era' (2004, p.5) in their understanding and presentation of gospel truth as objective, rational and eternal. The changes of postmodernism are seen to 'affect people's belief structures and therefore present an enormous challenge to the church' (2004, p.4). In the emerging postmodern context PCI is experiencing decline,

even though ‘the clergy were proclaiming the Gospel faithfully and teaching the scriptures systematically’ (2004, p.6).

Four changes in thinking brought about by postmodernism, and which are seen to present a challenge to the church, are discussed. The first two are seen as negative changes, the second two as positive. First, postmodernism represents a different concept of truth, in which the concept of absolute and objective truth is abandoned. This presents the Christian church a challenge as it undermines claims that doctrinal formulations state objective truth. Second is pluralism, which is seen to follow on from the view that there is no objective or absolute truth. This challenges the church’s view on the uniqueness of Christ and its evangelism. In the face of this pluralism the church must maintain its belief in the Bible as God’s unique revelation, Jesus Christ as the unique incarnation of God, that salvation is only through him, and that God’s saving grace is not mediated through other religions. Third, the quest for community in postmodernity presents a challenge to the church, which should model community but often does not. Fourth, the desire for spirituality in postmodernism shows that postmodern people are not ‘resistant to spiritual things’ (2004, p.12), but the church will find they will only engage within the context of personal relationships.

The paper moves on to discuss models of mission, drawn from Jesus and Paul, in ‘an increasingly Post-Christian... era’ (2004, p.13). The ministry of Jesus highlights a model of mission that engages with postmodernity’s emphasis on community and relating to people with integrity. It is also noted that Jesus often communicated through story. The discussion of Paul’s missionary example highlights the need to identify with people of a different culture, which may lead to those seeking to reach postmoderns being misunderstood by others within the church. Temple states that, ‘sadly some Christians have too quickly censored contemporary social customs and alienated themselves from the very people they should be trying to win!’ (2004, p.15). Paul’s encounter at the Areopagus is cited as showing that people must be seen as possessing an array of alternative worldviews which must be addressed by the gospel, rather than as being ‘empty hard drives waiting for us to download our Christian files’ (Carson, quoted in Temple 2004, p.16). The Areopagus address shows that evangelism

of postmoderns will involve calling them to abandon certain fundamental positions, and that evangelism must start 'further back' in order for postmoderns to understand the problem for which Jesus provides the solution. Evangelism will also present a massive change of worldview to those being evangelised, and requires the sensitive building of bridges into their worldview and values.

The paper concludes with strategy suggestions focussing on the local congregation and relational evangelism. With regard to the local congregation, there is a need to 'change the way we do church' (2004, p.18), from nineteenth century forms to being purpose driven. Relational evangelism is introduced as a strategy in light of the fact that much evangelistic effort is being expended for little return. In an 'increasingly biblically illiterate age' (2004, p.19) evangelism must be viewed as a process rather than a single event. Evangelism must also be done recognising God's role as the 'master evangelist' and that 'our most effective evangelistic opportunities ... are simply obedient responses to the Father's invitation to enter into a ministry He has already begun' (Carson, quoted in 2004, p.21).

As already noted, this represents one of the most thorough engagements in a PCI document with the emerging culture. It recognises the fact of culture change and that this represents a challenge to the church. Yet the precise nature of this challenge is not defined. It is not clear if the challenge is simply that of the church overcoming its natural resistance to change or if it is that the emerging postmodern worldview is more resistant to the gospel than the modern worldview. While the paper highlights two areas that the church must resist, that is the concept of truth and pluralism, and two areas with which the church positively engage, that is community and openness to spirituality, it does not engage with the question of the plurality of cultures and the relation of the gospel to them. Thus, while it does, to some degree, critique the church's accommodation to modernity, it does not go far enough. The paper is written from the perspective of a missionary looking at a foreign culture (postmodernity) and examining it from the outside. It seeks to analyse the culture from that point and then to engage with it. At points it assumes that the postmodern person must be taught certain things before engaging with Christ. This is most notable when it insists that

postmodern people must be made aware of the problem to which Christ is the answer, before moving on to look at the answer. This appears to insist that a postmodern person accept a definition of the problem that has been formulated within a modern worldview. This is tantamount to insisting that the postmodern person must become modern before engaging with the gospel, rather than allowing the interaction between the postmodern worldview and the gospel provide the understanding of both the problem and the solution. If an incarnational model had been introduced when considering the mission models derived from the ministry of Jesus, the tenor of the paper would have been different. This would have allowed the triangle of relationships described by Newbigin to operate, rather than it being simply an encounter between the gospel, as enculturated in a church shaped by modernity, and the postmodern culture. The paper places PCI firmly outside postmodernity. It does not recognise the internal dialogue that is exercised by members who live both within the postmodern world and in PCI. Nor does it fully recognise the need for postmodern people to engage with the gospel from within postmodernity and to allow a new addition to the pluriformity of the church.

Thompson's analysis of mission into the 21st century (Thompson 1990b) hints at another mode of engagement with the emerging culture. Thompson argues that those involved in mission must rethink previous assumptions about inculturation and contextualisation. This will involve a rejection of any feelings of cultural superiority and that local churches should take 'the initiative in deciding how the gospel needs to be incarnated in their own particular contexts' (Thompson 1990b, p.203). Although Thompson is writing in regard to PCI's overseas missionary engagement, the principles could equally apply to the context in which PCI finds itself surrounded by an emerging culture which is in many ways 'foreign' to it. Thompson's principles would preclude PCI viewing the emerging culture in a purely negative manner and imply that the incarnation of the gospel into this culture will take many forms, including liturgical, theological, pastoral and ethical.

Awareness of the issues of the emerging post-Christendom context was shown in the interviews with key informants. Bruce reflects on PCI's particular history within

Northern Ireland, in which it was ‘socially conservative, politically unionist’ and ‘too close ... to one particular side of the conflict’ (Bruce 2010). In the post-ceasefire environment PCI finds itself ‘a little out of control’ (Bruce 2010) and distanced from the corridors of power. According to Bruce, PCI has been influenced by developments within world evangelicalism, such as the Lausanne movement, and the shift in influence in the world church towards the ‘global south’ (Bruce 2010). Ordinary congregation members may not be directly aware of this influence, but ‘see its effects in the tenor of statements that we make and the policies that emerge from the denomination centrally’ (Bruce 2010). Bruce also predicts that within a generation PCI would look very different, being much smaller and ‘more viral and organic than institutional’ (Bruce 2010). He emphasised the role of key thinkers within PCI in changing the denominations mindset, describing them as having a ‘permeating’ or ‘osmotic’ effect (Bruce 2010). Also significant, as already noted, were a significant number of younger ministers who find that the experience of pastoral ministry in the current context forces them to reassess the models of church life and mission that they had when they entered ministry.

Marrs comments at length on the restructuring of the Boards and Committees by the Ad-Hoc Committee on Priorities. He perceives these were a response to the problems encountered by the denomination, but sees them as lacking a coherent strategy and as a panic reaction which worked at the level of ‘actions and structures because there they will see an immediate change and result’ (Marrs 2010). Marrs sees that in the future the pressure of ‘legislation and political correctness and policy of government’ will lead the church to become less institutional, becoming ‘like an underground church almost’. This will force the church to ‘go back to being a church’ and that ‘the church at home is increasingly going to be squeezed, and it will eventually squeak the gospel’ (Marrs 2010).

5.4. Dialogue With Newbigin on Cultural Plurality and the End of Christendom

In Section 3.4.1 Hunsberger was cited as asserting that Newbigin’s theology of

cultural plurality is an important resource for pastors and church leaders in engaging with their own culture. It enables them to engage their culture with affirmation and critique, gives resources for the inner dialogue which is the prerequisite of the outer dialogue, and nourishes congregations in their call to be the hermeneutic of the gospel (1998, p.279). It is now necessary to bring Newbigin's theology of cultural plurality and his reflections on the end of Christendom into dialogue with PCI's engagement with the same processes. Three areas will be addressed. First is PCI's relationship to Christendom. Second is PCI's response to the changing cultural context and the ending of Christendom and third, how PCI should engage with the emerging context.

PCI's relationship to the passing Christendom context

The above analysis of PCI documents has shown that PCI recognises itself as a Christendom denomination. This is evident in statements recognising a 'chaplaincy mindset' (2009b, p.65) along with congregations which are comfortable ministering to a passively Christian community and struggling to think beyond minor variations of existing models of mission. The documents include statements that imply that PCI ought to find ways to maintain its position in society, such as the statement that 'the church must rediscover its role as the "conscience of the nation"' (2003, p.165). Yet, on other occasions, statements argue that PCI must abandon its chaplaincy mindset, implying recognition of the fact that, since the context is changing, the church must also change. It is unsurprising that this major change in context provokes varying, and even conflicting, reactions within PCI as explored below.

Before this, it is worth developing the two aspects of PCI's relationship to Christendom mentioned above, namely the chaplaincy mindset and being the conscience of the nation.

Newbigin used the image of chaplaincy to describe the church's role in Christendom (1998, pp.6, 7). In a similar vein he stated, 'the Church [in Christendom] had become the religious department of European society' (1966, p.103). It is an image which captures the church's self-understanding as 'the chaplains, the caretakers, the cement

of the social order' (Hunsberger 1991, p.224). Within this model the church came to assume that 'the concerns of the church and the quests of the culture go hand-in-glove' (Hunsberger 1991, p.225). Even though Christendom is ending, the church's 'images and instincts are still formed by its memory' (Hunsberger 1991, p.225).

Brueggemann and Miller, using the Biblical model of exile as a metaphor for the church moving out of Christendom, argue for parallels with the Temple period of ancient Israel, in which the Temple functioned as the 'royal chapel' (1994, p.265). During this period the religious and political establishment were, at least notionally, pledged to the same theological understanding. It was during this period of shared presuppositions that the prophets were able to speak. Brueggemann and Miller argue that, 'this voice of passion is viable only in a social circumstance where established powers are in principle committed to the same conversation' (1994, p.266). In exile this sort of prophetic confrontation is not possible as those in power are simply not interested in such a confrontation; 'the community of faith had become politically innocuous and irrelevant' (1994, p.270).

Further, Brueggemann and Miller argue that Niebuhr's 'Christ transforming culture' model has come to be considered the normative model for the church in relation to culture. This is the result of a distortion of Niebuhr's typology which does not recognise that it was a historical study of the different ways the church has had to relate to the surrounding culture in different times and circumstances (Brueggemann & Miller 1994, p.263).

Thus, the statement encouraging PCI to rediscover its role as the conscience of the nation, and other similar statements, can be seen as expressions of a desire to return to the Christendom arrangement and to assume the 'Christ transforming culture' model as normative. The reality is that it will no longer be possible to exercise the church's prophetic role to society in the same way and a new model for engagement will be necessary.

PCI's response to the changing cultural context and the end of Christendom

Section 3.4.1 elucidated Newbigin's positive theological understanding of cultural diversity. The analysis of PCI documents above shows evidence that PCI shares Newbigin's appreciation that the gospel cannot be limited to one particular culture and that a changing context will require the church to change. Placing Newbigin in the role of mentor suggests several areas in which he could inform PCI's theology and practice.

First, Newbigin's model of cross-cultural mission is in the form of a triangle with the gospel, the church of the missionary and the host culture as the corners. Newbigin develops the three resulting relationships: gospel-church, gospel-culture and church-culture. It is the identification and separation of these three components, and the corresponding relationships, that distinguishes Newbigin's approach from other models of cross-cultural mission and makes it particularly useful in a time of cultural change. It is, therefore, important that PCI give consideration to both the gospel-church, and the church-culture relationship.

Consideration of the gospel-church relationship is to guard against the danger of collapsing it in a manner which effectively assumes that there is an identification between the church and the gospel. It is to avoid the danger of assuming that the cultural expression of Christianity expressed within PCI (or Christendom denominations) is, in fact, not a cultural expression but normative. Newbigin's diagnosis of the syncretistic relationship between the church and modern western culture in the west highlights the collapse of the gospel-church distinction. He states that the gospel and modernity became 'a package in which the Gospel was so "inculturated" into modernity that the two appeared to be one' (1995d, p.7). There is, therefore, a very real danger for a church that has collapsed the distinction to react negatively to any change in the surrounding culture, since a change in culture is perceived to be an implicit threat to the gospel. This is the problem with the paper *Culture, Change and Challenge: Postmodernism and the Church's Mission in 21st Century Ireland*, discussed above, particularly in its implication that postmodern

people must become in some ways modern before they can receive the gospel. PCI is so comfortable with modernity that postmodernity appears as a threat.

Another strand of Newbigin's writings is instructional for PCI in this regard. He notes that the process of contextualising the gospel, which often places emphasis on traditional language and culture, has a tendency to involve the church with the 'conservative and backward-looking elements in the society' (1995a, p.104; 1979b, p.108). This is a barrier for those who are reformers within the culture. Speaking to the clergy in his diocese in Madras he argued that religion is 'almost by definition' a conservative force in society, with the result that often 'the Church has seemed to stand simply for that which is about fifty years out of date' (1977a, p.19). This 'conservative instinct' (1977a, p.20) does have a foundation in truth, in that no church should merely try to follow social trends, but should be faithful to what has been handed down to it. Yet the church must also accept death and resurrection as the law of life, which

means that we are always ready to face the loss of old securities, the obliteration of old landmarks, the shaking of old certainties – knowing that, if we hold fast to Jesus, we shall be led on to better securities, deeper certainties, richer experiences of God's grace (1977a, p.21).

A particular danger of collapsing the gospel-church distinction for PCI within the context of Northern Ireland has been the danger of identification with the Unionist point of view. The documents show that PCI has become aware of this danger, as in the Coleraine Declaration which states the need for PCI to distance itself 'from the kind of Protestantism which closely identifies the reformed faith with particular political and cultural aspirations' (1990a, para.3.2). Mitchell and Ganiel's sociological research into the faith journeys of evangelicals shows the close association between politics and faith for those converting to and deepening in evangelicalism (2011, pp.71–3, 86–92). For those on moderating evangelical journeys relationships with people from different backgrounds and living outside Northern Ireland were factors in their journey (2011, pp.111–6, 124–6). Mitchell and Ganiel's findings highlight the importance of the political landscape within Northern Ireland on people's faith

journeys.²¹

The other aspect of the missionary encounter which must be considered in view of the emerging post-Christendom context is the relationship between the church and the emerging culture. Here the danger for PCI is not of collapsing the distinction but of a feeling of estrangement and distance from the emerging culture. As noted in Section 3.4.1, at a time of cultural change there is a danger that the church finds itself captive to a culture which no longer exists (Christendom) and estranged from the culture which it inhabits (post-Christendom). PCI's relationship to Christendom was examined above and the relationship to post-Christendom will be examined below.

However, before leaving the question of PCI's response to the changing cultural context and the end of Christendom the emotional aspect of the change must be considered, and again it is an area in which Newbigin has advice to offer. It has already been noted that the predominant attitude of PCI toward the cultural shifts in society is negative, with an emphasis on what is being lost. All of the quantitative indicators for the denomination, such as families and individuals claiming connection and communicants, have been in decline for many years, as reported each year by the Board of Finance and Personnel.

It must be acknowledged that, for denominations like PCI, the move towards post-Christendom will inevitably involve a process of loss. The loss with which Irish denominations like PCI must come to terms in the emerging post-Christendom is described by Higgins (2013, pp.36–41). Within Christendom it was assumed that everyone was a Christian, that society was homogeneous and that the church and state relationship were closely entwined. Leadership and power within the churches were concentrated with the clergy. In the post-Christendom context each of these is shattered in a 'kind of ecclesial future-shock' (2013, p.38). The church finds itself on the periphery and 'the felt-experience is often that of exclusion, no longer calling the

21 A brief introduction to the relationship between the political history of Ireland and the Protestant and Catholic traditions can be found in (Higgins 2013, pp.12–28)
(Higgins 2013, pp.12–28)

. See also Section 6.1.4 and 6.2.5.

moral tune and with no automatic guaranteed right to be heard' (2013, p.39). She notes that the response is often a defensiveness which betrays a sense of the loss of power. The continuing presumption by churches on their past power and glory is the greatest deterrent to confessing faith in the post-Christendom context and she sees little evidence of churches in Ireland being willing to 'do theology, shape our ecclesial structures of power, authority and leadership for a post-Christendom era' (2013, p.41).

Rae concurs that we do not yet have much idea of the shape of the church beyond Christendom, and that we are reluctant to leave behind the things that made the church visible within Christendom: 'land and buildings, investment funds, the paraphernalia of long established rituals and traditions, particular forms of ecclesial organisation...' (Rae 2012, p.200). Guder points out that it is hard for Christendom churches to give up power when so much apparent good is seen to be done by it (2000, p.200), and the tendency of churches to continue doing the same things even though change has happened around them (2000, p.95). He also points out that it is much easier to close a congregation than a denomination (2000, p.199).

It is, therefore, clear that impact of the end of Christendom is not merely theological or organisational, but emotional. There is an emotional element of loss, which must be acknowledged and processed. The movement from a position of power and influence to weakness and marginalisation could easily lead to a crisis of confidence. If measures of success derived from the Christendom era continue to be applied there will be an abiding sense of failure. As Brueggemann puts it, the greatest threat is 'the power of despair', since everything that has been worked for is lost (1997, p.6). Thus the question of the appropriate attitude and expectations in mission will be addressed in the next chapter. In the meantime it suffices to say that PCI would be wise to listen to Newbigin's advice that the church is not a good cause, whose success depends on its own efforts. Both optimism and pessimism are irrelevant. What is crucial is that the church should 'remain to the end faithful stewards of what has been entrusted to them' (1978b, p.7).

PCI's engagement with the emerging context

It has already been noted that PCI's general attitude toward the emerging post-Christendom context is that it is a trend which should be resisted, and that there is an emotional aspect to the change which must be acknowledged and dealt with. There are, however, also clear indications that PCI sees the need to adapt to the emerging context and to develop appropriate responses. As early as 1991 the Coleraine Declaration stated the need for 'new and imaginative ways of teaching biblical truth, evangelism and Church planting' (1990a, para.3.4), and similar statements occur throughout the reports.

Newbigin's engagement with the emerging context raises several areas for consideration by PCI.

First, application of Newbigin's analysis of the missionary encounter in the context of cultural change has highlighted the importance of recognising that the missionary encounter is not just external to the church, but internal. That is to say that culture change is not something that only happens outside the church. The church is made up of people who inhabit the emerging culture and are as influenced by it as other citizens. Refusal to recognise this leaves the church open to the constant dangers of being unaware of the influence of culture, leading to syncretism, or to refuse to engage in appropriate contextualisation and thus to be disconnected from the culture. Newbigin argued strongly against the syncretism of the church with modernity, but also against an identification of the gospel with the conservative elements of a society.

PCI's documents consistently view the cultural changes as something external to the denomination. There is almost no recognition that an emerging postmodern worldview might be held by many ordinary church members.

The worldview and spirituality of Generation Y, that is those born since 1982, in the UK has been examined in *Making Sense of Generation Y* (Savage & Collins-Mayo 2006) and *The Faith of Generation Y* (Collins-Mayo et al. 2010). This is a secularised

worldview consisting of a ‘happy midi-narrative’ (Savage & Collins-Mayo 2006, pp.36–41). It is a ‘midi-narrative’ because it is neither a meta-narrative nor individualistic, but communal at the level of friends and family. It is a worldview that assumes there are enough resources in the individual and their community to enable happiness to prevail. It is a worldview that is mediated by the popular arts (Savage & Collins-Mayo 2006, p.41).

It is probable that the worldview of people under the age of thirty five within PCI follows the same contours of other younger people in society. It is natural that older generations within the denomination will find this worldview alien. It is also inevitable, as Newbiggin points out, that a religious institution will be instinctively conservative. The interaction with the emerging culture has predominantly been from those within PCI for whom the emerging culture feels alien. However, this engagement will itself feel alien to those who are part of PCI but are also part of the emerging culture. There are three specific dangers inherent for PCI in this situation: (i) those who are part of the emerging culture will feel that PCI, and therefore the gospel, is alien to them and reject it outright, (ii) they will not find the resources within PCI to adequately critique their culture and thus develop a syncretistic faith, (iii) they will leave PCI to join other, more culturally attuned communities of faith.

The need for PCI to recognise that the emerging cultural context is not merely external to itself is hinted at in one report of the Youth and Children’s Board, significantly in a section written by youth delegates to the General Assembly. They state their concern that the church is not helping young people deal with the pressures they face, and that

Young people do not necessarily want to be told what to think, but rather how to think; this means giving them both guidance and space to make biblically informed choices, and accepting them even when they make mistakes (2009b, p.205).

These comments resonate with the worldview of Generation Y and with the research by Jamieson on people who had left Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Australia and New Zealand (2003; 2002). (See Section 4.2.1.3)

Second, a purely negative assessment of the emerging culture is neither necessary or appropriate. Newbigin has been accused of an overly negative assessment of modernity, and it is true that despite occasional references to the benefits brought by the Enlightenment, secularism and the modern scientific method, his assessment is generally negative. Goheen argues that the advanced state of syncretism which Newbigin found within the British church, in which the church was held in ‘cultural captivity’, demanded an emphasis on the critical aspect of the church’s engagement with culture (2002a, p.4). The situation in which culture is changing, and a new culture emerging, is obviously different. A purely antithetical stance is no longer required and a more balanced approach, which is more able to recognise that the gospel both affirms and critiques the culture, is possible. Thus, as Weston describes (2004, pp.231–4), Newbigin was able to be positive towards aspects of postmodernism, most notably in its assertion that all knowledge is culturally and socially embodied. As may be expected with Newbigin, he does not affirm all of postmodernity’s assertions. For example, he argued that the central place of the cross in the gospel meta-narrative is an antidote to the postmodern suspicion that meta-narratives are simply assertions of power, and against this he developed a principle of ‘committed pluralism’ which ‘implies the belief that the truth can be known – not fully and completely, but in part and with increasing depth and range and coherence’ (Weston 2004, p.234).

Third, such an engagement with the emerging culture will require a ‘culture encounter’ exposition of scripture (Hunsberger 1998, p.263), as demonstrated by Newbigin in his commentary on John’s Gospel (1982b). This is an exposition of scripture which seeks to listen to ‘the questions which the “modern world” puts to the text and to the questions which the text puts to the world’ (1982b, p.ix). Walsh and Keesmat provide an excellent example of such a culture encounter exposition of postmodern culture in *Colossians Remixed* (2005) in which they seek to interpret the book of Colossians within a postmodern worldview. They introduce three interlocutors who epitomise aspects of the postmodern worldview: William, who reacts against the absolute claims to authority he meets in the text, Elanna, who is

incapable of making final decisions on ethical issues, and Eric, for whom meta-narratives are inherently totalising and oppressive. Walsh and Keesmat's exposition allows postmodern questions to interact with the text, but also allows the text to address the postmodern assumptions of their interlocutors. At points their assumptions are affirmed, at others they are challenged. This form of biblical interpretation and exposition must be developed by the church and has implications for the role and training of ministers, which will be dealt with in a later section of this thesis.

Fourth, a true engagement with the emerging culture must be multi-disciplinary. In *The Other Side of 1984* Newbigin was seeking to stimulate a wider critical engagement with the modern scientific worldview by the British churches. Although his contribution to this engagement through his writings and teaching is immense, he recognised that a complete engagement with culture must be multi-faceted and draw in people with different areas of expertise. Thus, the first consultation of the Gospel and Our Culture movement included seminars on education, economics, health and healing, the media and the arts and drew in people with appropriate expertise (Newbigin 1993, pp.253–5). This is, in fact, consonant with his observation from working in a minority situation in India, that in engaging with an increasingly secular world the coming together of Christians in professional associations will be increasingly necessary in order to discern 'the guidance of the Spirit for their daily work' (1962, p.24; cf. 1952, pp.187–8).

Fifth, the church must adapt to a context in which it exists as a minority within society. Tom Sine notes that religious denominations and organisations tend to do their long-range planning 'as though the future will simply be an extension of the present' (quoted in Frost & Hirsch 2001, p.22). Recognition that Christendom is ending must be accepted by the churches and appropriate modes of mission and life must be found.

Murray (2004, pp.242–3) lists some of the implications for the post-Christendom church in mission, which include, *inter alia*, that the church must accept that its

resources are limited so that it must use its resources strategically, and that it can no longer expect or demand to be consulted. More positively, the church can recognise that being marginal allows it to take risks and pioneer initiatives that mainstream institutions cannot. He also argues that the church must rediscover a 'prophetic minority' stance and 'a tone of voice that befits marginal communities' (2004, p.243). This is reminiscent of Brueggemann and Miller's observation that biblical prophecy was best able to operate in the first Temple period, when the established powers were committed to the same conversation. In the context of exile, and life in an empire which did not share the same Yahwist worldview, prophecy was not able to function in the same way.

Newbigin's practical experience once again provides guidance for a church seeking to develop the right 'tone of voice' for a 'prophetic minority' stance. Although the move to a post-Christendom, pluralist society denies the church the automatic and privileged access to power that it once had, this does not imply that the church must cease to engage in the public square. Engaging as a minority is, however, different from engaging from a position of privilege. One implication of this is that the church may have to work in partnership with other groups, whereas previously it could act alone. For example, in his involvement with the development of the Religious Education curriculum in Birmingham, Newbigin found allies in the Muslim community (1993, p.246). Prior to this, in Madras, whilst encouraging congregations in the diocese to take seriously their responsibility as churches for their local area, Newbigin had discovered that partnership with other community groups provided a natural point of contact for the gospel (1993, pp.54–5).

Another implication is that, while previously the influence of the church in the public square was through statements made by official church representatives, in the minority post-Christendom context the church's influence will come through Christian individuals bringing their faith to bear on the issues they face as they engage with the world (1986b, p.141). For PCI this would imply that, alongside the work of the Church and Society Committee, which makes official responses to government on various issues on behalf of PCI, much consideration should be given to preparing

individual members for their engagement in the public square.

Another important aspect of minority witness in the emerging context, to which Newbigin points, is how the church presents truth claims in a pluralist society. In assessing Newbigin's contribution for a missional response to post-Christian culture Kärkäinen argues that the church should adopt a 'fallibistic epistemology' (2012, p.138), while resisting the nihilism of postmodernism. This is, necessarily, a more humble approach than any which seeks to affirm indubitable certainty, but rather recognises the socially embodied nature of all knowledge. He points out that Newbigin's understanding of human knowledge as 'personal knowledge' recognises the subjective aspect of knowledge, but allows for it to be held with 'universal intention' (2012, p.141). Kärkäinen also argues that the church affirm 'committed pluralism' while condemning 'agnostic pluralism' (2012, p.147). Agnostic pluralism assumes that truth is unknowable and there are, therefore, no criteria by which to judge different patterns of belief and behaviour. Committed pluralism recognises that there are different communities within societies with different traditions and modes of rationality. The attitude of committed pluralism drives the church to dialogue with these traditions, but this will be a dialogue which assumes that truth claims are at stake and aims for more than a peaceful coexistence between the rival views. Finally, Kärkäinen argues that the church must 'trust in the power of persuasion while abandoning any notion of the will to power' (2012, p.150). Kärkäinen's analysis of Newbigin points towards a missional engagement with post-Christian culture in which the church abandons some of its modernist assumptions and tone when engaging in the public square. Instead it is able to embrace aspects of the emerging post-Christian culture, such as fallibistic epistemology, committed pluralism and relying on the power of persuasion. It will thus speak with more humility and with more engagement to its interlocutors in the public square. The church should not see this as something that is forced upon it, for Newbigin has shown that in each of these areas the church is, in fact, being freed from its cultural captivity to modernity. However, in order that it not become captive to the emerging culture it must also continue to emphasise that which makes it distinctive from the emerging culture.

Further, Frost and Hirsch argue that the Christendom church is characterised as being attractional, in that it has a 'Come-To-Us' stance, is dualistic, in that it fails to make significant connections between interior faith and exterior practice in everyday life, and is hierarchical (2001, pp.18–21). They propose that, in contrast, the church in post-Christendom should be incarnational, messianic and apostolic. In this they echo several of Newbigin's affirmations about the church as a hermeneutic of the gospel. Newbigin argues that the church can not only say 'come', but must also go into the various forms of human community it encounters 'so that there, in the midst of its daily secular decisions, God's will may be done' (1966, p.115). He continually argued against the dualistic thinking that relegated faith to the private realm and argued that the role of clergy must be re-examined in the emerging context.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the manner of PCI's theological thinking and how it is engaging with the emerging cultural context of post-Christendom and post-modernism. It has been argued that PCI is aware of the challenges that it faces, but that it lies on the 'pre-Copernican' side of an impending paradigm shift. Newbigin, following Polanyi, points out that in science the period before a paradigm shift is one in which increasing amounts of data emerge which do not fit the current model of understanding, until a new theory eventually emerges which makes more sense of all the data (1989, pp.55–6). Kūng's application of this to the history of the church strongly implies that the church entering post-Christendom should expect a similar paradigm shift.

While the difficulties and uncertainties of this process should not be underestimated, Newbigin's personal experience and his theological reflections encourage PCI to engage in this process with a positive attitude and confidence. The engagement between the gospel and the new, emerging culture will lead to new discoveries and understandings, which, although not discernible in advance will in retrospect be seen to be consistent with what has gone before.

The next chapter will explore two key themes as PCI moves towards a new paradigm and how Newbigin can act as a mentor in the process. The two themes are ecclesiology and the engagement in mission.

6. Newbigin as Mentor to PCI as a Church in Mission

The first part of this chapter will explore various aspects of PCI as a church in mission. The second part of the chapter will bring the results of this into critical dialogue with Newbigin as a mentor.

It will be noted that the themes in the analysis of the PCI documents do not exactly mirror the themes of chapter 4 on Newbigin. This is because they represent two very different bodies of material, dealing with different contexts and issues, and to impose a thematic scheme on one from the other would be artificial. The themes in each section are those that arise naturally from each body of work. The result is that as well as common themes, there are themes that are present in one but not the other. Common themes allow for direct comparison in the resulting dialogue. There is one theme arising out of the analysis of PCI, that of the particular Northern Ireland context, which obviously does not appear in the analysis of Newbigin in chapter 4.

6.1. PCI as a church in mission

6.1.1. Promoting a change in mindset

In the years following the 1990 conference in Coleraine the theme of mission is seen to increase in importance within PCI. A significant factor in this is the emerging post-Christendom context in which PCI existed, as described in Section 5.3.1.

The missionary stance of PCI can be deduced from annual reports, which show that, alongside the awareness of cultural changes in society, PCI has been very aware of the statistics of decline. For example, the realisation that the continued existence of significant numbers of congregations is under threat unless something changes is apparent in several reports (2009b, p.67; 2006a, p.158).

While both the Strategy for Mission and the Vibrant Communities initiatives consistently assert that mission is inherent in the life of the church (See Section 6.1.2),

there is clear evidence in the reports that the renewed emphasis on mission within PCI is at least partly due to its statistical decline and concern for survival. In fact, the concern for survival is at several times used as an encouragement for engagement in mission. For example, a report tabled in 2000 in response to an Assembly resolution the previous year proposes, ‘that Boards and Presbyteries consider all available statistics on the continuing decline in families and persons in membership, especially among younger people’

(2000, pp.8–12). The Down Presbytery stated,

We have a window of 10-15 years when significant finance and active leadership will be available to us to develop the ministries of our Congregations. Failure to do so will, humanly speaking, leave many of our Congregations in slow, terminal decline (2009a, p.67).

The Strategy for Mission Committee recorded its task as being to ‘help the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to develop a new mind-set – or rather rediscover an old one. A mindset for Mission’ (PCI 1994, p.302). This call for a new mindset was repeated in 1995, and the Strategy for Mission Committee set up a sub-committee to promote it within PCI (1995, p.288). The importance of changing the mindset of PCI continues to feature in reports in subsequent years (1998a, p.256; 2009b, p.148; 2009a, pp.65, 67). Yet there is recognition of inertia within the denomination, which impedes change. In 1994 the Strategy for Mission Committee reported that congregations in Belfast were suffering from an exodus of the Protestant population, that in provincial towns many in congregations were ‘passengers or even spectators’, and in rural congregations there was ‘the consistent complaint of spiritual apathy’ and how ‘the traditional congregation is best adapted to ministering to a passively Christian community’ (1994, pp.303–7).

An analysis of Presbytery mission plans produced as part of the Vibrant Communities initiative highlights many of the impediments to the formation of a new mindset (2009a, pp.65–9). It is recognised that the current spread of congregations is inherited from the era of Christendom, and that population shifts have cut many congregations

off from their ‘Presbyterian hinterland’. In general PCI finds it hard to ‘think beyond minor variations of the themes of mission followed in the past’ (2009a, pp.66–7), with congregations effectively maintaining existing activities and relying on transfer, rather than conversion, growth. Thus, the reports show a denomination which recognises the critical situation it faces, but which struggles to break out of the inherited mindset.

The change in mindset proposed in the initiatives is often described, with minor variations in phraseology, as a movement from ‘maintenance to mission’ (1990a, para.4.3; 1994, pp.302, 304; 1996, p.164; 2000, p.10; 2005a, p.151; 2006a, pp.66, 146). In 1994 the Strategy for Mission Committee argued that mission is central to the history of the church, to theology and that it encompasses ‘everything that God sends the Church into the world to do’ (1994, p.302).

The impediments to mission within the denomination are matched in the reports by a positive assessment of the opportunities, if possibilities for mission are grasped. Frequently in the reports there are statements affirming that the revival or renewal of the church is dependent on the Holy Spirit. Within the context of reports promoting a change in mindset, and proposing new strategies in order to engender this change, there is an assumption that this sort of revival is to be expected. This assumption is implicit in several reports of the work of the Strategy for Mission Committee (1994, pp.310–1, 317; 1997, pp.287, 292; 1998a, p.224), although occasionally it becomes explicit. For example, in 1997, after affirming that it must be the work of the Holy Spirit to revive the church, the report calls for repentance and prayer, stating ‘these will bring the revival’. It also uses the analogy of the strategy proposed as ‘the digging of ditches for God to fill’ (1997, p.287). This optimism is repeated in reports relating to the Vibrant Communities of Christ initiative. In 2005 BMI first submitted a document ‘Towards a Strategy for Mission in Ireland’. It acknowledges that human strategies are ‘inevitably myopic and liable to be mistaken’ and that mission is ‘what he [God] sovereignly and graciously does through us’ (2005a, pp.164–5). The subsequent sections speak of ‘having confidence renewed’ and ‘a sense of Call that comes close to certainty and that causes the heart to stir and the mind to race’ (2005a, p.165). The vision that the report presents, and for which a strategy was developed in

the subsequent years, is of ‘vibrant communities of Christ serving and transforming Ireland’ (2005a, p.166).

It is apparent from this brief survey that the institutional strand of PCI has been seeking to develop a mindset for mission, recognising that if there is not fundamental change the survival of many congregations is at risk. PCI recognises significant internal barriers to achieving this change of mindset, but there is a confidence that if it is achieved, God will work through PCI to transform Ireland.

It should, however, be noted that the optimism expressed in the official reports is occasionally not reflected from the grass roots. In 2000 the General Board reported on responses from Boards and Presbyteries regarding the continuing decline in membership (2000, pp.8–12). The Presbytery of Donegal noted that figures in rural areas were better than in urban areas, but argued that this was due to the fact that Ireland was lagging behind the trends seen in Britain, France and Germany. Among reasons for the decline the Presbytery of Down stated ‘The major factor is spiritual. God’s Spirit is not moving’ (2000, p.9).

Two major strategies to bring a mindset for mission to the heart of PCI have been employed, the first being to restructure the central administration of the denomination in line with the goal (see Section 2.4). In 1996 the Strategy for Mission Committee argued that ‘for a major change of direction to be accomplished within the PCI not only is a new agency for mission required, but a new Board structure also’ (1996, p.313). They proposed a reorganisation that would result in two Boards dealing with mission in Ireland and the training of members for ministry and mission. This led to the formation of the Board of Mission in Ireland and the Board of Studies and Christian Training which first reported in 2001. In 2002 the distinction was drawn between mission boards and boards with a support function (2002, p.11). The mission boards were BMI, BMO and BSW, although it was recognised that other boards could legitimately claim to be involved in mission. In a separate report in the same year the Ad Hoc Committee on Priorities stated that the purpose of mission boards was to ‘encourage, facilitate and resource mission and ministry at local congregational level’

(2002, p.307).

The second strategy to change the mindset of the denomination has been through the preparation of strategic plans for mission by Presbyteries and congregations. The Strategy for Mission Committee first proposed that Presbyteries prepare a collective strategy for mission within their bounds in 1996

(1996, pp.315–7, 328). In 1997, following input from the Presbyteries, the final resolution passed by the Assembly was that the Assembly ‘request’ each congregation draw up a mission strategy and that Presbyteries support the process (1997, p.309).

In 2006 BMI’s report presented a plan to implement its vision of Vibrant Communities introduced the previous year. It came to the same conclusion as the Strategy for Mission’s report of 1994, that each Presbytery and congregation should produce a strategy for mission. The report included guidance on the structure of these plans and proposed that congregations and Presbyteries be required to produce them, and that Union Commission would consider the plans when considering granting a congregation leave to call (2006a, pp.159–166, 172). Following Presbytery consultation these proposals were approved in 2007 (2007b, pp.30–1).

The 2007 report included an appendix which summarised Presbytery responses to the 2006 proposals. The appendix highlights the concerns within the body strand of PCI to the proposals put forward by the institutional strand. It also includes BMI’s arguments for acceptance of its proposals. Several critical aspects of BMI’s plan to bring a mindset of mission to PCI are contained in the appendix and will be considered in appropriate sections of this chapter. It is appropriate at this point to consider the concerns over the place of strategic planning. Presbyteries raised several theological concerns, including the role of the Holy Spirit, prayer and preaching, and the biblical basis for strategic planning. BMI responded by affirming the dangers of reliance on ‘man-made techniques and methodologies’ (2007a, p.132) and by stating that the role of the Spirit and prayer ‘should be taken as understood’ (2007a, p.131). Strategic planning was defended by reference to various Biblical passages which show planning

being exercised. BMI also argued that the use of strategic planning was not imposing secular models ‘any more than the use of instrumental technique or rhetorical skill’ (2007a, p.134).

A full assessment of the mission planning process has not been conducted by PCI. However, in 2009 a summary of Presbytery mission plans was submitted by BMI (2009a, pp.65–9). The plans showed Presbyteries working with a distribution of congregations inherited from the past and working with an attractional model of mission. The implication is that ‘we [PCI] find it difficult to think beyond minor variations of the themes of mission followed in the past’ (2009a, p.67). The need for a change of mindset from maintenance to mission is reaffirmed, as well as the opportunities represented by the end of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Another finding is that Presbyteries find it hard to prioritise between existing congregations and competing requests for resources for mission. This summary would imply that the body strand of the church is only slowly moving towards a new mindset and has some way to go before it has reached it.

The interviews with the key informants, however, showed some positive effects arising out of the mission planning process. Conway saw that mission planning had caused congregations to talk about possibilities for social witness in a way that had not been anticipated (2010, p.3). Bruce commented that the decision by the Assembly to require mission planning by congregations and Presbyteries was controversial, and was probably passed because people had seen the decline in the denomination and that previous strategies had not been effective to halt it. The general feedback from Presbyteries has been that the process has been a good one for the denomination (2010, pp.5–6).

In the twenty years following the Coleraine Assembly PCI as a denomination has been seeking to develop a mindset for mission. The above analysis has shown that this has been driven by awareness of the changing context of post-Christendom and the corresponding threat to congregations and the denomination of reducing numbers. The documents show both genuine concern about the trends, and optimism that a

combination of the work of the Spirit and appropriate planning will see a turn in fortunes for the church. The initiatives to change the denomination's mindset have been top-down initiatives in which the institutional strand has sought to stimulate the body strand to recognise that mission must be an integral part of the life of every congregation and to move beyond models of congregational life that have been inherited from the past. There is no evidence in the reports of the institutional strand having to adapt to innovations arising from the grass roots.

6.1.2. PCI's understanding of mission

In Section 3.3.3 Newbigin's shift from a church-centred to a Trinitarian view of mission was described. In the church-centred view, mission was seen as a task given to the church, with the associated tendency of identifying missionary success with the progress of the church. In this view the saving work of Christ is central, but the role of the Father and Spirit is neglected. The Trinitarian view sees mission as deriving from the work of the Father in bringing his Kingdom, and emphasises the role of the Spirit as the active agent in mission. God, not the church, is the subject of mission and God's activity outside the church is recognised. The focus is on the Kingdom more than the church, which is related to the Kingdom as an instrument, sign and foretaste.

The following analysis of PCI documents borrows the terms 'church-centred' and 'Kingdom-centred' to examine PCI's understanding of mission. Statements which refer to, or imply, mission as a task of the church and which focus on the building of the church as the goal of mission are categorised as 'church-centred'. Statements which refer to, or imply, mission as God's task and which allow for an understanding of God's Kingdom activity in the world beyond the church are categorised as 'Kingdom-centred'. It should be noted that some references that have been classified as church-centred contain reference to the Kingdom. This is because even though the Kingdom is mentioned, the underlying focus remains on the church as the agent, or on the building of the church as the goal. As Hunsberger points out, the New Testament

does not use this terminology to describe the relationship between the church and the Kingdom. In contrast it uses terms such as ‘receive’ and ‘enter’ (Hunsberger 2003, p.149).

6.1.2.1. Church-centred understandings of mission

It has already been noted that the Coleraine Declaration of 1991 exhibits a church-centred view. This is evidenced by the title of the section on mission, ‘The Mission *of the Church*’ (emphasis added), and in the text in which mission is described as activities of the church, with no reference to God’s mission (See Section 2.2.2).

Statements by other boards and committees emphasise mission as the church’s task. For example, the Overseas Board stated that ‘the task he [God] has given to his Church is still unfinished’ (1993, p.172), and in 1996 the Evangelism Committee stated that ‘Christ left his followers with an immense task – the Great Commission’ (1996, p.235). In 2001, the Irish Mission stated:

By mission we understand the need to bring the full spectrum of Christian truth - “Speaking the Truth in Love” - to an increasingly secular community, by all possible means, with sensitivity and flexibility to build the Kingdom of Christ, including the planting of churches and encouraging growth in small churches (2001, p.168).

Other statements imply an emphasis on mission as evangelism and building up the church. Thus, the Overseas Board stated, ‘we are primarily concerned with the proclamation of the Gospel, with the growth of the Church and with the establishing of people in their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and their membership of His body, the Church’ (1996, p.146).

In 2004 the Director of Evangelism stated, ‘The best approach to evangelism today is well captured in the slogan “A Healthy Church is a Growing Church”’ (2004, p.187). In 2003 the report into the review of BMI stated the vision of the board as, ‘to glorify Christ and by his Spirit to work for the building of his Church throughout Ireland’ and defined the role of the board as, ‘To stimulate congregations and presbyteries to mission within their bounds ... to advance Christ’s Kingdom in Ireland’ (2003, p.182).

In 2004 BMI produced the report of a review it had carried out into its work. The vision of the Board was stated as ‘To glorify Christ and by his Spirit to work for the building of his Church throughout Ireland’ and the role of the Board was stated in terms of encouraging and stimulating congregations in mission (2004, p.195).

Another aspect of being church-centred in mission which arises occasionally in the reports is a focus on activities within the church and run by the church. For example, the 2001 BSW report (PCI 2001, p.193) states, ‘evangelistic efforts often still assume that reaching the unchurched will take place on church premises, if not in the church building itself: that evangelism is an event, rather than a process of engagement and relationship building.’

From this it can be seen that there is a strand in PCI’s mission discourse that focuses on the growth and extension of the church and talks in terms of building or advancing the Kingdom.

6.1.2.2. Kingdom-centred understanding of mission

There is, however, another strand within the documents in which a Kingdom understanding of mission becomes apparent.

Already in 1990 in his chapter in the Overseas Board’s 150th anniversary publication, Thompson argued that mission be understood in terms of the *missio Dei* and that the Holy Spirit be recognised as the prime mover in mission (Thompson 1990b, p.196).

In 1991 the Irish Church Relations Committee, in discussing the basis for criteria for relating to other churches, quoted Verkuyl’s definition of the *missio Dei* as the bringing of God’s Kingdom to expression in restored relationships between God, people and nature. It states, ‘The whole of the Church’s deep and wide mission agenda must receive its focus and orientation in this Kingdom perspective’ (1991b, p.89).

The Mission Statement adopted by PCI states that PCI ‘exists to love and honour God ... and to enable her members to play their part in fulfilling God's mission to our

world' (2002, p.89).

In reflecting on the issue of ministry, the Doctrine Committee warned of the impression often given that 'the work of the Lord' is limited to ordained ministry or missionary work and argued for the importance of the secular vocation of all members and their ministry outside the church (2004, pp.27, 33). The need for the church to support and empower people for action outside the church and to help them think theologically about their vocation is also highlighted (2004, p.31).

BMO embarked on a review of its vision, mission and strategy in 2003. The final report to the General Assembly states that the church originates in the mission of the Father, Son and Spirit and thus mission cannot be conceived as one of its activities, but at the heart of all its activities. It is God's mission, in which the church is invited to participate (2005a, pp.142–3). Values which would guide BMO's work are derived from this understanding; the work would be God-centred, people-focused, church-based and forward-thinking (2005a, pp.144–6). The report also affirms that God's reign extends beyond the church and thus must be declared and demonstrated to all principalities and powers. BMO must, therefore, 'not simply look for the building of a particular denomination or the establishment of a presence geographically' (2005a, p.143).

In the same year that BMO reported on its review, BMI presented its proposal, 'Towards a Strategy of Mission for Ireland' (2005a, pp.164–8). Although the Great Commission is quoted at the outset, it is immediately argued that the grounds for mission lie much deeper in the very 'being and character of God' (2005a, p.164). From this, several convictions are listed, among which are that the church is the chief human agency of God's mission and that mission is not about what the church does, but what God does through the church (2005a, p.165). The proposal envisages 'vibrant communities of Christ' which, *inter alia*, would show 'a heart-felt desire to see individuals, families and the local community become what God intended' and would go to where people are 'physically or geographically, spiritually, culturally and socially' (2005a, p.167). This report was the beginning of a significant process in

which BMI sought to stimulate a missionary outlook within the denomination.

In 2009 BMI's Research and Resources Committee presented 'An Understanding of Mission for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland' (2009a, pp.63–65). At the outset it states that God is the prime mover in mission, and that 'mission, therefore, is not primarily something we do but God does' (2009a, p.63). This is reaffirmed towards the end of the document, where each level of PCI must 'see ourselves as part of God's unfolding plan for mission', in which 'we are not passive ... but partners, fully participating with God in his mission' (2009a, p.65). The document also highlights the role of the church in mission, stating that in Scripture God's rule on earth is extended through his people.

It is thus evident that there is a clear strand of mission discourse within PCI which sees mission deriving from God and that he is the prime mover in mission. It also recognises the church's place within God's mission while allowing for God's activity outside the church. This understanding of mission is much closer to Newbigin's Trinitarian view, even though it does not explicitly base it on Trinitarian theology as Newbigin did.

6.1.2.3. Relationship between 'word' and 'deed'

'Word' and 'deed' have been seen as essential parts of mission in PCI documents for many years. The Coleraine Declaration states, 'Evangelism and social concern are linked together inextricably in the purpose of God' (1990a, para.4.1). The 2009 BMI document setting out an understanding for mission affirms a holistic view of mission in which words and actions are seen as 'part of the same holistic demonstration of the Kingdom' (2009a, p.64). In this, the document explicitly goes further than the Lausanne Covenant of 1974. However, quoting from Wright (2006, p.319), it argues that mission which does not ultimately 'declare the word and name of Christ' is 'defective' (2009a, p.65).

There are obvious examples in PCI reports of a focus on evangelism; however, some of these must be understood in context. For example, it is natural for a Board of

Evangelism and Christian Training to focus on that aspect of mission which appears in its title. It is also inevitable that the Irish Mission, which came under that board, would take a view of mission which emphasised evangelistic activity.

It is equally inevitable that BSW will emphasise the aspect of mission that it is tasked to engage with. It is notable that, in its reports, BSW frequently justifies social action as a legitimate missional activity (1990b, pp.195–6; 1992b, p.204; 1993, p.214; 2001, p.193; 2002, p.188; 2007a, p.156). This would indicate what is explicitly stated in 2001, that while social witness has been accepted as a legitimate missional activity, this ‘is often not translated into active engagement in the community, with the community’ (2001, p.193).

The fact that some reports highlight the evangelistic aspect of mission, and that BSW frequently asserts that social action is a legitimate aspect of mission, is indicative of a theological view within PCI that evangelism has priority over social action. The differences between the institutional and body aspects of PCI have already been noted in this thesis, and this may be a case where the institutional understanding of mission is not shared by all in the body strand.

The key informants interviewed all espoused a holistic view of mission, with both Bruce and Marrs referring to the influence of the Lausanne movement (2010, p.2; 2010, pp.1–2; 2010, pp.1–2). Conway referred to the ‘battles’ within the denomination about the acceptance of social witness, but was of the opinion that these battles had been won (2010, pp.8–9). However, at several points Conway expressed uncertainty as to whether BSW should be considered as a mission board or a service board (2010, pp.1, 11–12).

6.1.2.4. PCI's emerging view of mission

The documents and the interviews together show that PCI's understanding of mission is in flux. This is unsurprising given the complex nature of PCI, with the interplay between institutional and body strands. It is inevitable that a variety of views on any subject will be found, and that a general change in consensus will only emerge over a

period of time.

Already in 1990 Thompson presented a view of mission which, in the terms of this discussion, was a Kingdom-centred view and addressed many of the missiological issues explored in this thesis in a manner consonant with Newbigin's missiology (Thompson 1990b). It is significant that this contribution came from the Overseas Board; that is, from that part of PCI directly involved in cross-cultural mission and in direct relationship with churches in other cultural contexts. It is an illustration of Newbigin's argument for the validity of cross-cultural mission, in that 'the gospel comes back to us in the idiom of other cultures with power to question our understanding of it' (Newbigin 1994a, p.115). Thompson argued that PCI should be proactive in listening to partner churches, proposing that visiting lecturers teach at Union College and that the BMO staff should include one staff member from a partner church. However, there is little evidence in the documents of a formal mechanism by which the learning and missiological reflection of BMO is fed into that of the other Boards. Insights gained by BMO personnel individually, and by BMO as a board, do not, therefore, have direct influence throughout the denomination, but have an osmotic effect through PCI's representational structures and informal relationship networks.

In subsequent years aspects of a church-centred view of mission and a Kingdom-centred view can both be found in PCI documents. However, in general, within more recent documents, the Kingdom-centred view is more prevalent, and is the view expressed by the key informants. For example, Marrs reaffirmed the Kingdom-centred focus arising out of BMO's review (see Section 6.1.2.2). However, he also noted a nervousness within PCI about addressing missiological issues, due to the various understandings of mission that exist within the denomination, ranging 'from a fairly strong social gospel right through to a very conservative evangelical gospel, and shades in between' (Marrs 2010, p.2). He also questioned whether a denomination of 550 congregations could be 'viewed as a body that has a sense of direction' (2010, p.5), and that, since the boards have not developed their theologies of mission, it is impossible to say if there is agreement. He did, however, see that common themes were emerging. Bruce was more positive, stating that the boards are 'on the same page

in relation to holistic mission' and increasing cooperation (2010, p.9).

Thus, within the institutional strand of PCI, this would appear to be the emerging view of mission. On the other hand, without an overall denominational vision and strategy for mission, the structural separation of mission into separate boards and committees has an inherent danger of hindering the development of truly holistic mission in the denomination. The initiatives of each board or committee will inevitably focus on that aspect of mission that is their remit. This will have a knock-on effect to congregations who may choose to engage with aspects of mission which suit their own preferences, rather than developing a holistic mission practice and theology. The insidious problem for PCI, as expressed by Marrs, is that while there may be a need to develop and implement a denominational strategy, 'maybe it is not Presbyterian to do things that way' (2010, p.6).

6.1.3. PCI's ecclesiology

This section will examine PCI's ecclesiology in the narrow sense of its understanding of the nature of the church. Other ecclesiological questions, such as ministry, structure and unity will be dealt with in later sections of this chapter.

The Code of the Presbyterian Church begins by defining the church as consisting of the invisible and visible church. The invisible church 'consists of all those who have been, are being or shall be gathered into one under Christ, the Head' (2011, p.10). The visible church 'consists of all those throughout the world who profess to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation and to live obedient to God's Word, together with their children ' (PCI 2011, p.10). The visible church consists of many particular churches, of which PCI is one.

The Code states that all who profess faith in Christ are called to be members of the visible church, i.e. a congregation, and that such membership has associated rights and

responsibilities.

The examination of Newbigin's missiology in Section 4.1 showed that engagement in mission led to consideration of ecclesiology. The Gospel and Our Culture Network in America has followed Newbigin in relating questions of missiology and ecclesiology, producing several publications on the theme, including *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Guder 1998) and *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin's Theology of Cultural Plurality* (Hunsberger 1998).²² Similarly initiatives in the 'Church Without Walls' (Special Commission Anent Review and Reform 2001) initiative of the Church of Scotland, and the 'Mission Shaped Church' report and the subsequent Fresh Expressions movement of the Church of England (Archbishop's Council on Mission and Public Affairs 2004) also included significant reflection on the nature of the church and the appropriate forms of church in the emerging context. These reflections included considerations about the shape of the local congregation and the denominational structures of which they were part.

Within PCI, it was engagement in missiological issues that led to the view that the congregation, not the Presbytery, is the 'primary mission unit' of the church (2002, p.307). This was a new insight, as it had previously been assumed that the Presbytery was the primary unit (1994, p.311; 1997, p.292). In 2002 the Doctrine Committee report included characteristics of congregations that were defying contemporary trends of decline and which were characteristics of the New Testament church: confidence in God and the Gospel; every member ministry; worship that is real and relevant; sense of community; effective evangelism; and community involvement and openness to change (2002, pp.28–9). In 2005 the Priorities Committee had the vision of PCI as a prophetic voice, a caring fellowship, a platform for service and outreach, a place of transformation and a community of global concern (2005a, p.13). These, although brief and undeveloped statements, are all reflections on the nature and form of the church.

²² A full list of books published can be found at (The Gospel and Our Culture Network 2012).

Newbiggin's experience, alongside that of the Church of England, shows that ecclesiological issues are raised when new churches are formed. The Church of England's *Mission Shaped Church* report recognises that after a decade of planned church planting several lessons had been learned. Significant among these was the principle that new churches should be created, not cloned to copy the form of the sending church. It states, 'the planting process is the engagement of church and gospel with a new mission context, and this should determine the fresh expression of church' (2004, p.21). As Mobsby's research into Fresh Expressions and Emerging Churches has subsequently shown, the movement has been from the 'bottom up' and many of these churches began spontaneously and with no initial intention to become churches (Mobsby 2008, p.24). The emergence of these groups has forced the Church of England to look beyond the inherited parish model and to reconsider its ecclesiology.

Thus for Newbiggin and the Church of England the unplanned formation of new groups of Christians forced a reconsideration of the inherited and assumed models of congregational life and relationship to the wider church. It is, therefore, worthwhile paying attention to the processes regarding the formation of new congregations within PCI.

The Code describes the formation of new congregations in terms of 'church extension' to be overseen by the Church Extension Committee (2011, p.79). This is in spite of the fact that this committee ceased to exist in 2004, following a review of BMI's structure. It is also significant that the phrase 'church extension' has been replaced in BMI reports with phrases such as 'church planting'.

The Code, thus, reflects a prior model that has been replaced in PCI's thinking and practice. However, the stipulations within the Code still remain in force and must be adhered to. According to the Code, discussions regarding new congregations should arise in an area 'which may lack adequate ministrations of the Church' (2011, p.79) and must proceed after consultation with Kirk Sessions of churches which may be affected. When it has been decided to proceed with a church extension, an interim Kirk Session is to be formed and the bounds of the new congregation are to be

decided. The Code then makes provision for a site and buildings to be procured by BMI and a minister to be called. If, after a period of time, such a church extension does not appear to be capable of development to become fully constituted, it is to be terminated. If it does develop and is fully constituted as a congregation it becomes vacant, a new minister is called, a regular Kirk Session is appointed and assumes full responsibility for its property and finances.

The church extension model was the practice for establishing new congregations within PCI for many years. Congregations were most often established in areas into which Presbyterian families were moving from other areas, reflecting the migration of the Protestant populations during the Troubles and the general movement of people from the cities to commuter zones. It often took a considerable number of years for a congregation to achieve congregational status; for example, work in Ballysally began in 1977 and it achieved congregational status in 2006 (2006b, p.40).

Three new initiatives have departed from the church extension model. Maynooth and Donabate are located in the Republic of Ireland and Cliftonville Road is located in North Belfast. In contrast to the church extension model these church plants have been deliberately planned to connect with communities which do not have a historic connection with PCI. The first of these, Maynooth, was proposed as a daughter church of the congregation in Lucan, which had grown from an average attendance of 160 to 250 at Sunday services, with approximately 54 family units in the Maynooth area (Lucan Presbyterian Church 2002a). The proposal was for some of these family units to form the core of a new church in Maynooth. The church would initially not own any property, but use hired facilities. Options regarding ministry were explored, with the possibility of a part-time ministry being the option preferred by the Lucan congregation (Lucan Presbyterian Church 2002b). Ultimately a full time minister was appointed in 2003, technically as an Associate Minister of the Lucan congregation, and the Maynooth church plant received full congregational status in 2007 (PCI 2007b, pp.33–5).

The Cliftonville Road plant is situated in an area of North Belfast from which the

Protestant population migrated, leading to the closure of Oldpark Presbyterian church. The proposal document states ‘the need to reach unchurched people in Nationalist areas and to find a way of doing church which will discipline them and send them out as servants to their own and other communities’ (Presbytery of North Belfast 2008, p.1). The proposal recognises that ‘a normal Presbyterian congregation with its usual complement of organisations and meetings would be unsuited to reaching such a population with the Gospel’ (2008, p.4) and that PCI must become ‘more than a tribal church’ (2008, p.4). It recognises the strains that may arise when the informal structures suitable to such a church plant are forced to integrate with the ‘potentially life-sapping administration and government of the denomination’ (2008, p.5). Initially the church would not be provided with premises, but would use community based premises. The proposal was for two staff, one of whom was to be a minister, but within the church plant people would be encouraged to take responsibility as soon as possible for leadership and finance. The goal was to achieve full congregational status by the end of the tenth year and the budget for the first five years was £513,026 (2008, p.6).

The proposal for the Donabate church plant also recognises that a different form of church is necessary. It proposes that the church begin without premises and, from the start, encourage people to take responsibility for leadership and finance. The project would be staffed by a minister. This church plant aimed to achieve full congregational status in five years, but was starting with the advantage of a home group of the mother church already meeting in the area. The budget for the first five years was €450,341 (Howth and Malahide Presbyterian Church 2008, p.6).

These church plants show a movement away from the church extension model in that they represent a deliberate attempt to cross cultural boundaries and to plant in what might be described as non-Presbyterian constituencies. They recognise that in doing this a new model of church is required and that, in developing this new model, the outcome could not be predicted. They show a move from the church extension model of beginning with a church building, yet all three models remain expensive, particularly in terms of the salary for a minister and the associated cost of purchasing

a house for them, and require several years before the congregation is seen as a full congregation.

The issue of cost is a very significant one for a church facing decline. While bishop of Madurai, Newbigin found that the inherited models of church and mission meant that mission expansion became dependent on a surplus in the budget. Influenced by Allen's analysis of mission in the New Testament Newbigin sought to develop models which were less dependent on finance. This involved questioning some of the assumptions about the local congregation, ministry and ordination. On his retirement in Britain he argued that the church was facing a similar situation and that similar responses would be needed.

In 2009 the Union Commission noted with encouragement that new church planting initiatives were being proposed within PCI. It also noted that, 'though there are more Irish Presbyterian Congregations today than in 1840 when the General Assembly was formed, Church membership has fallen by about 50% in the same period' (2009a, p.27). The report asserted the 'need to go back to very basic theology' regarding the pattern of ministry and encouraged congregations and Presbyteries to give consideration to alternative ways of dealing with the decline than amalgamations or unions of existing charges.

Ecclesiological questions regarding the nature and models of church are beginning to appear in PCI, but the evidence of the reports shows that this is in the very early stages and that no settled consensus has been reached. Ecclesiological questions are, therefore, likely to assume more importance in coming years.

6.1.4. PCI and the Northern Ireland Context

Any consideration of PCI as a church in mission must consider the particular context of PCI in Ireland. Obviously this particular context in Ireland is a subset of the more

general context of European and Western Christianity. It is equally obvious that there are specific considerations related to PCI as part of a divided society in the North and as a minority population in the Republic of Ireland. The Church and Government Committee of the General Board has responsibility for responding to the political developments in both jurisdictions. This section examines the missiological aspects of PCI's relationship to its particular context and does not deal with reports by the Church and Government Committee.

PCI exists as a denomination throughout the whole island of Ireland. However, in 2009, 13,346, or 5.2%, of a total of 255,607 people of all ages in PCI were members of congregations in the Republic of Ireland (PCI 2009a, p.284). This research will, therefore, concentrate on the context in Northern Ireland, in which the most obvious contextual issue is the recent history of the conflict and the fact that PCI exists in a divided society. In spite of an ongoing debate as to the exact role religion has played in the conflict in Northern Ireland it is clear that it is at least one of many significant factors (Liechty & Clegg 2001, pp.28–62). The main division in Northern Irish society is between the Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist community and the Catholic, Nationalist and Republican community. The division between Protestant and Catholic is also felt in the Republic, but to a lesser degree.

Ecumenical Relationships

Within this context, the question of ecumenical relationships is imbued with extra significance. Patterson (1997) traces the hardening of attitudes against ecumenical relationships within PCI from the 1960's to 1990. This hardening affected relationships with other Protestant denominations, ending discussions towards shared ministry with the Church of Ireland and Methodist Church in 1988 (1997, pp.41–5), and towards greater cooperation with the Roman Catholic church (1997, pp.45–51). Patterson shows the linkage between the hardening of attitudes against ecumenism with the political situation, quoting Pollak's comparison of Irish Presbyterians to the Dutch Reformed Afrikaners of apartheid South Africa (1997, p.63).

In the early 1990's the Irish Church Relations Committee brought reports to the Assembly dealing with relationships to other churches. In 1990 the Committee summarised four papers it had considered in seeking to develop criteria for relationships with other churches. In the first, Flavelle argued that unity must be sought, even though it will not be fully experienced until Christ comes, and that we must not require standards of another church that we do not attain ourselves. In the second Porter argued that the separation from the Roman church is of a different character than the separation from other reformed denominations, thus ruling out joint worship. Morrow argued for a 'pragmatic ecumenism' (PCI 1990b, p.149) in which relationships and co-operation with other churches and agencies would not be uniform. Porter responded to Morrow's paper stating again the difference in relationship with the Catholic church, but affirming that in areas where doctrinal clarity is not compromised, such as 'matters of social justice, humanitarian issues and questions of public morality', there could be real co-operation (1990b, p.150).

In 1991 the Committee's report gave three criteria for relating to other churches. First, our understanding of God's mission in the world, which the report states, following Verkuyl, is rooted in the *missio Dei* and in which the church and the Word of God are central. Second is our doctrine of the church which includes the four historically agreed attributes; that it is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. Third is how we perceive the unity of the church. Here the committee argued that 'the visible unity of Christ's Church to which we are committed is neither static nor necessarily an institutional Church ... nor is it a fusion of traditions on the basis of some lowest common denominator' (1991b, p.90). The committee proposed an approach of 'pragmatic ecumenism' (1991b, p.90), following the previous year's paper by Morrow, in which the levels of co-operation with various churches and agencies would not be uniform.

The report goes on to discuss relationships with the Catholic church, quoting the view of the Assembly in 1861 that the Catholic church retained 'vestiges of authentic Christian faith' (1991b, p.93).²³ Porter's paper, summarised in the previous year's

23 The 1990 Committee on Doctrine report entitled 'Agreements and Disagreements of Irish

report, is quoted to argue that in areas where ‘no compromise of doctrinal clarity arises’, such as ‘justice, humanitarian issues and questions of public morality’ there can be co-operation with Catholics (1991b, p.93). The importance of local level relationships, alongside formal denominational relationships with other churches is also highlighted (1991b, pp.92, 94). In its conclusions, the Committee states the need for ‘mutual respect and trust among ourselves’ and to learn ‘not to doubt each other’s motives or spirituality without good cause’ (1991b, p.94), hinting at the strongly held divergent views within the denomination.

The Committee’s report in 1992 summarised Presbytery responses to the 1991 report. There was widespread agreement on the ‘project model’ of co-operation with other Reformed churches, the emphasis on local relationships, the need for better relationships of trust within PCI, for co-operation with the Catholic church on matters where no compromise of doctrinal clarity arises and dialogue with the Catholic church around the scriptures. There was, however, continuing disagreement on the issue of joint worship with the Catholic church.

In 1994 the Inter-Church Relations Board stated clearly that it remained committed to visible unity as a goal. The Convener described four aspects of such unity. First, it is unique, in that it is patterned on the unity between the Father and the Son. Second, it is spiritual, in that it is only established by the work of the Spirit. Third, it is apostolic, in that it is faithful to the revelation given to the apostles. Fourth, it is loving, in that it is a unity of deep affection. He also argued that the unity must be visible and observable (1994, p.116).

These reports in the early 1990’s show that a variety of attitudes towards the issue of ecumenical relationships existed within PCI. The Board remained committed to the goal of visible unity, while others had doctrinal concerns about relationships with other churches, and in particular with the Roman Catholic church. The attempt to find an agreed position in the early 1990’s was not successful. Continuing division on this

Presbyterianism and Roman Catholicism’ quotes Calvin and Hodge as recognising the Catholic church as a church and the possibility of salvation within it (1990b, pp.7–23).

issue was evident in 1999 when a resolution by the Inter-Church Relations Board to reorganise the Irish Church Meeting was proposed. The Irish Church Meeting is made up of the four biggest denominations in Ireland (Catholic, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist), along with smaller churches who are members of the Irish Council of Churches. The proposal was for the formation of a Conference of Churches in Ireland, with the purpose of providing opportunities for member churches to meet, cooperate and act together, support local church initiatives and to encourage communication and links between Christian groups and secular society. The proposal was defeated, with 92 people recording their dissent at this decision (1999a, p.140; 1999b, p.48).

PCI as a chaplain to its constituency

In 1992, the Peace and Peace-making Committee included an appendix to their report which summarises the findings of a report by the University of Ulster entitled 'The Churches and Inter-community Relations' (Centre for the Study of Conflict 1991). This report notes that, in comparison to the rest of Western Europe, the churches in Northern Ireland remain central to culture and society. It also highlights the significance of community boundaries and the role of theology in giving a rationale for such boundaries. This is fertile ground for theologies which see Roman Catholics only as a mission field and an attitude which sees Roman Catholics as 'unclean' (1992b, p.32). In the Northern Irish context churches have tended to

concentrate in one place, people of similar understanding or experience ... rather than be places of meeting with differences ... Churches have a tendency to become protective fortresses for threatened people rather than places of open and profound discussion (1992b, p.33).

The report states that within the churches theological reflection has become focussed on 'defence of clear doctrine rather than on repentance and change' (1992b, p.33). This leads to an assumption that change must be made by the 'other', which, in fact,

limits the speaker's ability to act until 'the other' changes first.

The Committee's response to the report is to acknowledge that the enculturation of the church is so great that it could be referred to as the 'political captivity of the churches' (1992b, p.34), with the result that the churches have been 'unable to make any clear or consistent difference between a "Christian" response to violence and politics and a "pre-Christian" one' (1992b, p.34). The Committee also acknowledged the danger of 'ghettoisation' and that theology can be used to both justify and reinforce such division (1992b, p.34). It argued that the phrase in the Coleraine Declaration that 'mission has been seriously damaged by the unhappy divisions of Irish society' (1992b, p.34; 1990a, para.3.1) was an understatement. The Committee agreed that the issue of identity was significant in the Northern Irish context, as demonstrated by the fact that the labels 'Protestant' or 'Catholic' can be more important to people than the word 'Christian'. The Committee's report, along with suggested questions, were printed and sent to Kirk Sessions and PWA's for consideration.

Leichty and Clegg examine the role of churches in the Northern Irish context and observe the tendency of churches to be self-absorbed, finding life in their own community and so busy that they do not feel the need to look beyond their own borders, thus reinforcing the 'benign apartheid' of Northern Irish society (2001, p.306). They argue that the churches' ministry is that of 'chaplains to the tribes', which highlights the 'subtle and unintended' ways in which idolatry can shape the life of faith communities (2001, p.306).²⁴

In 2005 the Community Relations Council (2005) published a report on the role of churches in the peace process, in which Stevens states, 'Churches tend to reflect people's fears, reflect Community divisions, reflect a community expedience of violence and threat, rather than act as agents of change or transformers of conflict' (2005, p.10). The interview with David Bruce indicates how this was true of PCI,

²⁴ Detailed research of attitudes towards peace and reconciliation, relationships with Roman Catholics and other related issues held by PCI ministers, youth leaders and young people can be found in "Youth for Peace" (Higgins & Parkinson 2001). See also the results of surveys by the Irish School of Ecumenics into the attitudes of clergy and lay people from various denominations on a range of related issues (Ganiel 2010a).

And there is no doubt that it [PCI] was socially conservative, politically unionist. There's no doubt that it saw itself not as asking hard questions of the culture, of systems of secular governance, of issues around social justice. It didn't really see itself as having anything to say about those things. Partly because the context was the troubles and our backs were against the wall as a people, and we didn't want to be perceived as either rocking the boat, or causing unnecessary trauma to those who were already struggling (2010, p.3).

This quotation highlights the difficult balance between offering pastoral support to people suffering as a result of the conflict and offering a self-critical and prophetic voice to the same people. This was a balance that PCI had to face at an institutional and local congregational level. Dunlop describes the population shifts that occurred during the Troubles and how they affected Presbyterian churches (Dunlop 1995, pp.72–82). He also details the very personal nature of the conflict with the associated impact on congregations and the continuing trauma felt by many members (1995, pp.122–132).

Gladys Ganiel of The Irish School of Ecumenics conducted sociological study into the attitudes of clergy and leaders of various faith groups in Ireland into issues of diversity (Ganiel 2010a). On the subject of reconciliation it shows that of the PCI respondents 89.9% thought it very important to preach and teach on reconciliation between individuals and God, 65.4% on reconciliation between individuals and 31.9% on reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. The respective figures for all respondents in Northern Ireland were 85%, 68% and 44.6% (2010a, p.27). These results would imply that Presbyterian clergy hold to a more individualistic view of reconciliation in comparison to those of other denominations.

It is thus clear that the issues highlighted in the 1992 report, and which the Peace and Peace-making Committee acknowledged as being pertinent to PCI, still remain. However, in subsequent annual reports these issues are not addressed again in any detail. It is perhaps particularly noteworthy that the issues of the divided society in Northern Ireland have only passing references in the Strategy for Mission Committees reports and the BMI vibrant communities initiative. This is despite the Coleraine

Declaration explicitly recognising that these issues have a direct impact on mission. The brief references that there are confirm the observations noted above, but do not engage with the implications for PCI engaging in mission in this context. For example, in 2006 BMI provided a description of the congregational mission planning process, the first step of which was to research the demographics and trends of the neighbourhood. Within the list of questions to consider, two relate to the distinct sections of the parish area, 'in terms of socio-economic index, age profile, ethnic groups, size of housing, industrial/rural/town or village areas' (2006a, p.163), and other religious or ethnic groups that are represented in the parish. Two other questions ask about churches in the area and how many would be of broadly similar ethos to PCI. Although these questions could allow for consideration of the divided nature of Northern Irish society, in light of the above discussion, they do not give enough prominence to the political, cultural and religious divides that exist between PCI congregations and almost half of the population of the country.

The proposal for the Cliftonville Road church plant, described above, by PCI in a nationalist area of North Belfast, does mention the missiological issues of PCI planting churches in such areas. The proposal describes it as a 'cross-cultural church plant' which 'sees the need to reach unchurched people in Nationalist areas and to find a way of doing church which will disciple them and send them out as servants into their own and other communities' (Presbytery of North Belfast 2008, p.1). This recognises the issue, but I have not been able to locate any evidence of serious reflection on the issue in PCI documents.

Peace-making projects within PCI

PCI has initiated two projects specifically addressing the contextual issue of the divided society. Preparing Youth for Peace (PYP) was originated in 1999 so that young people could 'become more confident in their own identity as Presbyterians and able to open up opportunities to build bridges within their local communities across all

sorts of divisions’ (PCI 1999a, p.211). The programme was seen by the Youth Board as an outworking of the Great Commandment and Great Commission and recognised to be ‘a painful process because it involves self-awareness as well as seeking to understand cultures different from our own’ (2000, p.244). It is thus clear that the Youth Board recognised the missiological nature of the project. A research project carried out before the project began showed a high percentage of PCI ministers, youth leaders and young people agreeing that ‘peacemaking in society is a central part of Christian faith’ and that ‘if we do not attempt to face and challenge issues like sectarianism, then our faith and practice is lacking something’ (Higgins & Parkinson 2001, pp.61–2).

The PYP course was reviewed in 2005. As a result, the name was changed to *Preparing Youth to be Peacemakers*, but the most significant changes had to do on the section dealing with the Roman Catholic church. The chapter devoted to Roman Catholicism was replaced by a chapter on ‘Culture and Identity’, and the DVD on the Roman Catholic church was withdrawn. Also, a fact sheet about the Catholic church was replaced with a statement by the Doctrine Committee from 1990 entitled ‘Agreements and disagreements of Irish Presbyterianism and Roman Catholicism’ (1990b, pp.7–23), with the comment, ‘PYP has been accused of downplaying the differences and exaggerating the similarities between the teaching of our Church and the Roman Catholic Church’ (2005b, p.53). The review rejected the charge that PYP had a hidden agenda of ‘ecumenism by the back door’, but asserted that it sought to help young people face the ‘reality and challenge of “difference”’ (2005b, p.54).

In 2005 the Panel on Peace and Peace-making put forward a proposal for a peace-making programme that would bring a denomination-wide approach targeting adults and children, and that would mainstream peace building into the existing programmes and events of the denomination, as well as encouraging engagement in single identity and cross-community dialogue (2005a, pp.32–38). This programme was funded by the International Fund for Ireland and the Community Relations Council. A single-identity course, called ‘Gospel in Conflict’, on issues of diversity and reconciliation was developed and run in congregations, sometimes in conjunction with the PYP course.

An evaluation of the project was prepared in 2008, with the executive report being reproduced in the Annual Reports (2008a, pp.45–9). It records that the Gospel in Conflict course had been delivered in 18 locations with 707 participants, and that the revised PYP course had been delivered in 12 locations with 221 participants. Three peacemaking conferences and other training events were also delivered during the life of the project. The evaluation recognises that the acceptance of peacemaking within PCI had increased, but recommends that the biblical imperative for peacemaking should be developed in conjunction with Union Theological College, and that more support is needed for congregations to engage in single-identity and cross community initiatives. In particular, further progress would be required if the objective of encouraging boards, committees and agencies of PCI to make a contribution to community relations was to be realised. The future funding of the project is highlighted as a crucial issue, as the funding for the two staff posts was ending. In 2009 the Priorities Committee recommended that in the light of the challenges of racism and exclusivism, in addition to that of sectarianism, a period of reflection should be taken to consider the correct emphasis for peacemaking (2007b, p.37). The result was that no funding was found to continue the project.

It is thus clear that the Northern Ireland context is a contentious issue within PCI. PCI is hindered in addressing it by division within itself as to the appropriate relationship with the Roman Catholic church, complicated by the social divisions in Northern Ireland which often reflect the religious identities of communities. Like other denominations, PCI has sought to pastor and represent its own members through the Troubles, with the associated danger of acting simply as chaplain. There is considerable concern within PCI that relationships with Roman Catholics will threaten theological integrity. There have, however, been notable attempts to address the issues of the divided society and to promote the vocation of peacemaking.

6.1.5. Ministry and Leadership

Issues of ministry and leadership, both ordained and lay, feature frequently in the Annual Reports in the years relevant to this research. The role of the ordained ministry, training for the ordained ministry and the role of lay people have been topics of particular concern.

The Doctrine Committee engaged with the subject of ministry between 2000 and 2006. It stated that all ministry is shaped by context and tradition, and that a distinction between ordained and lay ministry is foreign to the Bible. Such a distinction is, in fact, indicative of an unbiblical view of the church (2000, pp.22, 23). Thus, the report argues for a reconsideration of the Biblical basis for ordination and that a re-examination of scripture might lead to a different view of ministry and ‘a painful rethinking of customary cherished traditions’ (2000, p.25). To refuse to do such rethinking would be to think of the church in primarily institutional terms.

In subsequent reports, the committee raised further questions regarding ordination. In 2002 the history of ministry was traced from the New Testament, through the early church and medieval period, the Reformation, the Church of Scotland and Irish Presbyterianism. It noted that PCI had never seriously questioned Reformed teaching, which saw that the administration of the sacraments and the preaching of the word should only be done by those who had been lawfully ordained or licensed. Thus, ‘in theory at least Irish Presbyterianism ... has rejected the clergy/laity division which emerged in the Church in the third century, but in practice may not have completely escaped all forms of clericalism’ (2002, p.26). It also notes that traditional patterns of ministry, consisting of a minister and a Kirk Session of ruling elders, has remained unchanged in spite of rapid changes in the society in which the church ministers. Even though many people serve in congregations in many different ways the perception is ‘that ministry is still regarded as the prerogative of “the minister”’ (2002, p.27; cf. 2004, p.30; 2005a, p.18). In 2006, in a paper on ordination, the committee stated PCI’s position to be derived from previous Annual Reports dating back to 1985. From the point of view of the church, ordination is a recognition of certain gifts and calling in a

person, and a formal commissioning for them to use those gifts. From the point of view of the person ordained, it is a commitment to a life of service to the church and submission to the courts of the church (2006a, p.12).

In addition to the question of ordination, the Doctrine Committee examined the model of ministry within PCI. In 2002 it argued that appropriate forms of ministry for the contemporary context must be found. It listed some features of growing congregations, which it noted were located in ‘the Presbyterian heartlands of counties Antrim and Down’ and the Republic of Ireland (PCI 2002, p.28). The features listed were confidence in God and the gospel, every member ministry, relevant worship and participation, a sense of community, effective evangelism and community involvement and openness to change (2002, p.28).

In 2004 the committee recorded serious concerns from Presbyteries about the 2002 report. These concerns centred around a perception that the preaching and teaching ministry was ‘relatively neglected and marginalised’ (2004, p.28), and the lack of concrete guidance and recommendations regarding ministry in the wider sense. In response the committee reaffirmed the preaching and teaching ministry and expanded on the concept of every-member ministry. While affirming the foundational nature of preaching and teaching, the committee stated that scripture does not sanction one particular style or tradition of preaching, nor that it be confined to those who are ordained. With regard to every-member ministry, the committee stated that it was not primarily considering participation in worship services. Rather, every-member ministry is closely connected to ‘the calling of individual members in their various (usually secular) spheres of daily life’ (2004, p.29). Every member ministry is fundamentally related to the fact that the church is ‘a body which is meant corporately to witness to the world’ (2004, p.29). The church must, therefore, be ‘the spiritual and nourishing centre out of which the individuals who make it up, operate in their everyday spheres’ (2004, p.29). This will require that individuals are nurtured and nurture each other.

The Doctrine Committee reports raised questions about the traditional forms of

ministry, but the committee recognised its limitations with regard to giving specific recommendations, given its remit as a *Doctrine* Committee (2004, p.28). It did, however, highlight the change in mindset that would be required from ministers and congregations. Ministers face two challenges; that of letting go of a sense of status and power, and the problem of clerical insecurity arising from a recognition that others possess gifts they do not, and not feeling adequately prepared to manage change. Similarly, in 2002 the Committee had expressed the 'need to be liberated from personal insecurity, clericalism and inappropriate congregational expectations' (2002, p.29).

In this regard it should be noted that the issue of stress in the ministry also features regularly in the reports. In 1996 the Divine Healing Committee reported on the results of a survey of ministers which showed 22% of respondents indicating an excessive level of stress and 9% having had time off due to stress. 17% had given prolonged consideration to moving out of full time ministry (1996, p.234). In 2007 it was reported that 24 ministers had been off on stress or sick leave in the past three years (PCI 2007a, p.34). The main stress factors cited were time pressures, conflicting expectations between minister and congregation and situations of conflict within the congregation. In 1997 the Committee produced a fuller report in which it proposed (i) strategies for reducing stress by changes to the Code in ways that would change perceptions of the ministry, (ii) changes to training for ministry to include spiritual and personal management and development, and, (iii) reorganising Presbytery to become less business orientated and more supportive. In the section on the minister and the congregation particular concern was noted about the excessive hours being worked by many ministers and how this feeds the idea of clericalism. It highlighted the lack of team work within congregations and the reality that 'there is a mixture of tradition, inherited roles and what is most comfortable' (1997, p.185).

Another recurring theme in the reports is that of training for the ministry. Training is seen as part of the solution to the problem of stress in the ministry (1997, pp.181–2; 2007a, p.34). It also occurs in various reviews of theological education and preparation for ministry. The issue of training is significant as what is considered

important in the training of ministers gives a strong indication of the role the denomination sees for ministers. The role is described as that of ‘pastor-teacher’ (1993, p.359), a definition that is expanded in 1995 to include two aspects. In relation to the Word ministers are to be ‘specialists in the Bible’ (1995, p.290) as well as evangelists, teachers and pastors. In relation to the world they are to be ‘neither culture-blind nor culture-bound’, but to be strategic theological thinkers, conversant with contemporary issues and capable of contextualising their ministry (1995, p.290).

A high academic standard is affirmed in each of the reviews of theological education, with this being acknowledged as ‘the main area where competence has been required by the Church’ (1993, p.359). The desirability of a non-theological primary degree before undertaking ministerial training was reaffirmed in 1994 and 2007 (1994, p.320; 2007a, p.222).

Whilst the academic aspect of training is given great importance, other aspects are also given attention. The 1993 report included the spiritual growth and maturing of students and the development of ‘ministerial’ skills, such as preaching, teaching, counselling and administration (1993, p.360). Training for ministry was seen as extending beyond the years of formal academic study, with a ‘pre-theological year’ based on an action-reflection model proposed in 1993, and training for licentiates²⁵ continuing after the academic studies being completed. The content of this ‘ministerial’ aspect of training, often considered under Practical Theology, is indicative of PCI’s expectations of ministers. In 1996 the list saw the minister requiring development as worship leader, pastor, trainer/teacher, administrator, leader, a person, a Presbyterian and a resource person (1996, p.346). In 2007 it was recognised that the Practical Theology department should offer a ‘core of General Practitioner-type courses’ for all students along with options for specialisation (2007a, p.223).

²⁵ The term ‘licentiate’ refers to those who have completed their academic studies and have been ‘licensed’ to preach by their Presbytery. Typically licentiates will work for two to three years in a congregation under the supervision of a more senior minister before being ordained as minister of a congregation.

It can be seen that the way in which PCI trains its ministers assumes a high level of academic and theological training. It also assumes that the minister must be competent in a very diverse set of skills, implying that the minister's role in a congregation encompasses each of them. It is significant that subjects such as church planting are not included on the curriculum, indicating that training is seen to be training for ministry in traditional congregations.

It has been noted above that the Doctrine Committee considered the role of lay people in ministry, going as far as to raise questions about PCI's understanding of ordination. It emphasised the ministry of lay people in their secular vocations as well as within the church. It also noted the increasing trend in congregations to appoint Additional Pastoral Personnel (APP). In 2008 the Panel on Ministries recommended the formation of a 'Non-Stipendiary Ministry of Word and Sacrament', as a new category of ordained ministry, and the office of 'Reader' (2008b, pp.78–86). The proposals were sent to Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries and relevant Boards for discussion. In 2009 the Panel reported that 3 Kirk Sessions and 6 Presbyteries did not favour the proposal regarding readers. Reasons given included that it demeaned the office of elder, was unnecessary and unbiblical (2009b, p.90). 16 Presbyteries and the 2 Boards consulted were in favour of the proposal, but with some issues and concerns. There was much more widespread concern about the proposal regarding Non-Stipendiary ministry, to the extent that the Panel declared that PCI was not prepared to accept it and dropped the proposal. It did however include a resolution to the Assembly that it carry on its work to look at 'tent-making ministries' and 'part-time ministries' (2009b, p.108). In 2010 the panel brought a proposals for Part-Time and Auxiliary Ministries which would be a part-time ministry either as part of a ministry team or in a pioneering situation

(2010a, pp.93–6). The proposals were approved.

As in the other areas considered, in the area of ministry and leadership PCI is working with an inherited model and is beginning the process of reconsidering it in the emerging context. With regard to the ordained ministry, the Doctrine Committee

raised the question of ordination itself, and the role of the minister. However, in considering training for the ministry, which is an important indicator of how the denomination views ministry, PCI has decided to maintain the high academic standards required and has sought to broaden the range of topics under Practical Theology to ensure that ministers are prepared to minister in the new context. The number of ministers suffering from stress may be an indicator of a fundamental underlying problem regarding the expectations placed on ministers. Only more recently has PCI begun to consider other models of ministry, such as Accredited Preachers and non-stipendiary ministry.

In comparison to the consideration of ordained ministry, lay ministry receives little attention in the reports. The Doctrine Committee recognised the problem that ministry is assumed to be the prerogative of the minister, or other paid staff, and highlighted the need for every member ministry. It was careful to point out that such ministry included the vocations of church members outside the congregation.

6.2. Dialogue with Newbigin on the Church in Mission

Having described the relevant issues PCI is facing as a church in mission it is necessary to enter into the dialogue with Newbigin as mentor. The dialogue is structured mostly under headings drawn from Chapter 4, Newbigin and the Church in Mission, with the addition of a heading dealing with the Northern Ireland context. The latter is obviously not a subject that featured in Newbigin's missiology, yet his writings still provide insight for PCI.

6.2.1. The church as a visible, historic community

In Section 2.3.1 three main points flowing from Newbigin's understanding of election were noted. First is that no church can primarily define itself by contrasting itself with others, as Reformation ecclesiologies were wont to do. Rather, the church must define

itself in terms of its being called into being by God and the goal to which it is headed. This gives a dynamic understanding to the church. Second, the problem of flaws in the church is not to be resolved by appealing to an unbiblical distinction between the visible and the invisible church. Rather, the church, like the individual, is justified by faith, and application of the visible/invisible distinction leads to hypocrisy and sectarianism. Third, the church cannot be conceived as a voluntary association of like-minded people, as this is an accommodation by the church to a consumer culture.

PCI's self-understanding, as implied by its acceptance of the Westminster Confession and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Westminster Divines, is as a Reformation church. The Code also states, within its first four paragraphs, that the church exists as the visible and the invisible church. PCI exists as 'a particular Church of the visible catholic or universal Church of Jesus Christ' (2011, p.10). It is, thus, immediately obvious that PCI must be aware of the dangers to which Newbigin points.

The particular issue of relating to the Roman Catholic church will be dealt with when considering the unity of the church, and the issue of sectarianism when dealing with the Northern Ireland context.

With regard to the church not considering itself as a voluntary association, Newbigin critiques the denomination as the religious aspect of secularisation. However, as in other areas of thought, Newbigin did not move on to work out the practical implications of this critique, although it could be said that his involvement in the unification of the Church of South India is his 'worked example'.

The example of how the Netherlands Reformed Church (NRC) used a medical rather than a juridical approach towards a potentially serious theological division (see Section 4.1.2) provides insights and resources for PCI consonant with Newbigin's ecclesiology. It as has been noted that PCI has faced internal disagreement and division on various issues, such as the discussions in the early 1990s over appropriate relations with other churches. The research has shown a tendency for issues these

issues to be raised and shied away from. Other issues, such as the ordination of women and pastoral care of homosexual persons, have also proven to be divisive. As PCI continues to engage with the emerging post-Christendom context controversial issues will continue to arise. These will require significant theological resources in order to be addressed openly and honestly. The juridical way is, perhaps, the most obvious path, and is regularly followed within the body mode of PCI through the Judicial Commission, which has seen a sharp rise in cases being brought. The medical way, as practised by the NRC, rests upon much firmer ecclesiological foundations and provides a framework in which issues can be addressed, different perspectives maintained, and the unity of the church preserved. The medical model, as described by van Driel, is a useful alternative to the juridical model that is often predominant within PCI. In 2009 the Priorities Committee introduced a strategy ‘to encourage an ethos of conciliation throughout the Church’ (PCI 2009b, p.21) indicating a desire to promote a more ‘medical’ approach.

Guder’s dynamic model of the church, which incorporates Newbigin’s emphases of the church as a visible, historic community, its definition in dynamic terms and minimises the visible/invisible dichotomy (see Section 4.1.1) is also instructive in applying Newbigin’s ecclesiology to PCI. While it could be argued that Guder’s model does not fundamentally challenge PCI’s bounded set model, with its distinction between voting members and adherents, Guder does, in fact, provide a useful change of emphasis. His model is much more dynamic than the bounded set model. It allows for the church as a visible, historic community, but has built into it the concept that the church is a pilgrim people. This emphasis on the church’s dynamic nature echoes Newbigin’s description of the church as ‘an expedition rather than an institution’ (Newbigin 1961a, p.111) and encourages it into a dynamic engagement with the emerging post-Christendom culture. Within this model the role of leaders is the formation of covenanted communities, as well as accompanying those journeying as part of the centred set. The place of leadership is at the front of the pointer, the horizontal V, that is leadership becomes primarily apostolic, with pastoral gifts being relativised by the ‘nature, purpose, and directional movement of the missional

community' (Guder 1998, p.212). For PCI this implies a shift in understanding in the role of a minister, which is often perceived in primarily pastoral terms. It also, paradoxically, both softens and hardens the current distinction between voting members and adherents. The centred set model softens the boundaries of the bounded set model, by defining connection with the missional community in terms of a person's direction of travel in relation to the Gospel, rather than defining it in terms of whether or not they have arrived at a specific point on their journey. Yet, Guder's description of the bounded set at the heart of the centred set implies much more than PCI's definition of voting membership. In particular his description of it as a 'secular order', with a novitiate process leading to membership, has resonances with monasticism. Guder's model implies that missional leadership involves the intentional formation of such communities, affirming Newbigin's observation that a purely functional, or instrumental, view of the church is inadequate. Spiritual formation cannot be replaced by missional activity. The description of the congregation in terms of a bounded set within a centred set also mirrors Newbigin's understanding of the local church as both a congregation and a segregation (see Section 4.2.1.4).

6.2.2. The Unity of the Church

Lesslie Newbigin was a life-long ecumenist and personally committed to the WCC. PCI was a founder-member of the WCC, but left in 1987 and has continued to have concerns about membership of inter-church bodies (see Patterson 1997). The discussions within PCI over ecumenical issues imply that doctrinal issues are the paramount concern. However, within the context of Northern Ireland, as sociological studies have shown (Mitchell & Ganiel 2011; Jordan 2001, pp.100–140; Ganiel 2010a; Ganiel 2010b), and PCI's documents admit, it is difficult to separate doctrinal issues from political and cultural issues. Ganiel and Marti (2014) state that within the Northern Ireland context the notions of boundaries and belonging are significant, and highlight the importance of 'religious belief (ideology)' (2014, p.33) for the Protestant community. They cite Bruce as linking this with a 'Calvinist-tinged evangelicalism' which has formed the "core" of Protestant ethnic identity' (2014, p.33).

Given this, a dialogue between Newbigin and PCI on the issue of ecumenical relationships would most beneficially begin, not with a debate about ecumenism itself, but in an area in which there is agreement. In 1990 Porter, who represented the most conservative contributor to the discussion within PCI on relationships with other churches affirmed that, in areas where doctrinal purity was not compromised, there could be real co-operation with other churches. These included ‘matters of social justice, humanitarian issues and questions of public morality’ (1990b, p.150).

While the underlying attitude towards the Roman Catholic church may differ between Newbigin and the more conservative elements of PCI, this approach is in harmony with some of Newbigin’s experience and his thinking arising out of it. For those within PCI who do not believe that the Roman Catholic church can be accepted as a church, Newbigin would draw upon his insight that the point of contact for the gospel is not in the religious sphere of life, but in the everyday involvement in the life and concerns of the community, in which various groups work together for the common good. Newbigin learned this by contrasting his experiences of inter-faith contact with the Ramakrishna monks and the experiences of churches engaged with the municipal life of Madras. He would, thus, encourage PCI to be involved in precisely the sorts of issues Porter mentioned above. Or, in terms of the current process in Northern Ireland, he would encourage active engagement in building a shared future.

He would, however, temper this with some of his insights regarding inter-faith dialogue. In *The Open Secret* (1995a, pp.174–182) he lists these as follows. (i) Affirming that the presence and work of Christ are not confined to the areas in which he is acknowledged. Thus we should expect to find evidence of the work of God in the other, and not attempt to belittle it. (ii) Recognising that the cross of Jesus stands as witness against all claims of religion to save, including that of Christianity [or Reformed Christianity]. (iii) Understanding that we meet God, not at the height of our religious achievements, but at the point of our vulnerability. Those in PCI who do not view the Roman Catholic church as a church should enter into dialogue, not as

those who possess the truth and the holiness of God but as those who bear

witness to a truth and holiness that are God's judgement on them and who are ready to hear judgement spoken through the lips and life of their partner of another faith (Newbigin 1995a, pp.181–2).

Those who do not perceive the Roman Catholic church as a Christian church represent the most exclusive view within PCI. There are various other shades of opinion, from those who consider the theological differences to be a barrier to joint worship to those for whom such worship is not an issue. PCI is officially still a member of the Irish Council of Churches, consisting of Protestant denominations in Ireland, and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, which includes the Roman Catholic Church. Newbigin spent much of his career in similar ecumenical councils and structures. Yet, he became concerned about the self-preservation tendency of denominations and realised that local projects would provide greater impetus. This is, of course, in keeping with his consistent view that it is the local congregation that is the fundamental unit of the church.

PCI has been involved with several congregations under the 'Alternating Ministry Scheme'. These are partnerships with the Methodist Church in Ireland in which a Presbyterian and a Methodist congregation, often in the Republic of Ireland, were united to form one congregation in which the position of minister would alternate regularly between a Presbyterian and a Methodist. Variations on the scheme occurred when new congregations were jointly planted. In 2006 BMI reported that,

the schemes were established at a time of entrenchment and a perceived need to maintain our particular Reformed traditions in areas of numerical weakness. Survival rather than mission dictated the policies followed (2006a, p.171).

It would appear that these united congregations are seen as an unfortunate necessity to ensure the survival of congregations. This is in direct contrast to Newbigin's experience that engagement in mission forced the issue of unity to the forefront, and that in a minority situation, which will be the context for the church post-Christendom, there should not be surprise at the desire for churches to be united, but rather surprise that churches be content with division.

In my own personal experience I was minister of the united Presbyterian and Methodist congregation in Limerick between 2003 and 2008. In my conversations with those who were members of the two congregations that united I came to the conclusion that to simply describe the union as a survival strategy was inadequate. Rather than fighting for their separate congregations, the members of both were committed to ensuring that a community of faith worship and witness continued to exist. In the process of union they were forced to critically examine their denominational traditions and to negotiate which aspects they felt were essential and which were negotiable. They had to come to agreement on matters of worship and order. It was, therefore, a process which touched on serious ecclesiological issues. As Newbigin experienced in the formation of CSI it was the personal relationships between the members of the two congregations, and within the denominations, that was the necessary foundation to see the process through.

6.2.3. The Church in Relation to the Kingdom and to Mission

Bosch comments on the difficulty of maintaining the tension between the church as the sole bearer of the message of salvation on which it has a monopoly and the church as an illustration of God's work in the world (see Section 4.1.3). Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology, summarised in the description of the church as the instrument, sign and foretaste of the Kingdom, maintains this tension, with the understanding that it is because the church is not *merely* an instrument of the Kingdom that it can, in fact, *be* an instrument of the Kingdom. Understanding that the church cannot be identified with the Kingdom implies that the progress of the Kingdom cannot be identified with the 'success' of the church, whether that be judged numerically or by influence in society, and ought to prevent the church taking on an inappropriate burden to bring the Kingdom into being. As Hunsberger points out, the phrases in the New Testament connecting the church and the Kingdom are phrases such as 'enter' and 'receive', not 'build' or 'extend' (2003, p.149).

The question to be addressed here is whether PCI has managed to maintain the tension between being the instrument of the Kingdom without losing sight of the fact that it is

also the sign and foretaste? The various initiatives within PCI to stimulate a mindset for mission and to encourage mission planning at all levels have been documented. It is clear from Newbiggin's own career that he placed a high priority on ensuring that the institutional aspect of the church was organised in a way that allowed for it to be functional, but not merely functional. The issue is, therefore, not about organisational change and strategic planning *per se*, but whether the correct relationship between the church and Kingdom is maintained.

Frequent statements in reports by the Strategy for Mission Committee and BMI affirm that all strategic planning is dependent on God for results. The responses by Presbyteries to the proposals regarding Presbytery and congregation mission plans in 2007 shows a concern that mission planning should not imply that managerial techniques were the answer to the church's problems.

On the other hand, the organisational structure of the boards and committees that make up PCI's centralised structure imply a functional view of the church. Boards and committees have responsibilities of areas of work delegated to them by the General Assembly, therefore the remit of these boards and committees is an indication of what the denomination sees as significant to its life. It has already been noted that boards and committees will naturally focus on the specific remit that they have been given (see Section 6.1.2.3). An examination of the remits for boards and committees over the period of this research shows that boards and committees exist to promote what could be described as the functional aspects of the church, or which relate to the 'instrument' aspect of Newbiggin's description. During this period no boards, and very few committees, existed to promote the 'sign' or 'foretaste' aspects. A Congregational Life Committee did exist within BMI between 2005 and 2008, and other committees dealing with issues such as public worship could be thought of as relating to the 'sign' or 'foretaste' aspects. However, in 2014 a new structure for the central administration of PCI was approved, which includes a Council for Congregational Life and Witness (Structures Review Panel 2014, p.19).

Hunsberger has pointed out that, in the face of cultural change and decline, churches

have turned to evangelism and techniques in order to stem the tide (1991, pp.226–7). Brueggemann sees that the church facing the crisis of post-Christendom is in danger of developing a utilitarian view of ministry, and even a utilitarian view of God (1986, pp.53–5). Although the PCI reports consistently state that a reversal of the fortunes for the church will only come through a work of the Spirit, there is a subtle danger that an unspoken utilitarianism is assumed, in which, given the right spiritual attitude and the right actions by the church, God can be expected to bring revival.

It is at this point that PCI must not fall into the trap of identifying itself with the Kingdom. Throughout the period covered by this research PCI has sought to develop a mindset for mission, and, on the surface, it seems that there is an assumption that mission will bring about growth for the church in numbers and influence in society. There are, however, occasional indications that perhaps the trends will not be reversed. Interestingly, these come from feedback to documents sent down to Presbyteries, that is, from the grass roots, and are backed up by the interviews with the key informants (Bruce 2010, p.6; Marrs 2010, pp.10–11). If the trends of decline do continue, PCI will face the pain of managing that decline. However, if this is combined with an identification of the church with the Kingdom it will lead to a crisis of faith, doubt and feelings of guilt.

Newbigin would advise against the Pelagian anxiety that results from believing that the Kingdom of God is dependent on the church's effort. He would urge the church not to think in terms of optimism or pessimism about its future, but to foster an attitude of belief in the Kingdom. Newbigin also frequently argued against the modernist assumption of progress, and the associated theological assumption, stating, 'there is no straight line of development from here to the Kingdom' (2003, p.47). He, therefore, sought to diminish the egotistical motivations for social engagement, so that instead of thinking in terms of 'we have succeeded' the church says 'God's will has been fulfilled. Thanks be to God' (2003, p.52). The church should expect that its faithful labour will be 'lost and forgotten in the rubble of history', yet, 'will be raised up, will be found to be there, transfigured, in the new Kingdom' (2003, p.47). This Kingdom perspective offers a theological foundation for PCI as a denomination. Not only does

it place all the mission planning and initiatives into a proper perspective, but, perhaps more importantly, it provides a Kingdom perspective on the apparent failure of decline, as experienced, for example, in closures of once thriving congregations.

6.2.4. The church must expect to be changed

The analysis of PCI documents has shown that the denomination is aware that it is in a changing context and that it will have to adapt to this situation. However, in his role as mentor, Newbigin would alert PCI to the possibility that, through missiological engagement with the emerging society, the changes may be much deeper than PCI expects. The Fresh Expressions movement, arising partly out of the Mission-shaped Church initiative of the Church of England (see e.g. Archbishop's Council on Mission and Public Affairs 2004; Bayes et al. 2006; Gaze 2006; Anon 2012b), and the emerging church movement (see e.g. Marti & Ganiel 2014; Anderson 2007) are examples of churches and faith communities exploring appropriate expressions of faith in the emerging context.

Section 4.2.1.4 described how the story of Peter and Cornelius functions as a model for Newbigin, whereby involvement in mission leads not just to the conversion of those outside the church, but the leading of the church into new understanding and an addition to the pluriformity of the church.

Newbigin also argues that it is a misunderstanding of revelation to see it as infallible truth that merely requires acceptance and submission. Nor does scripture give a detailed map of how the gospel will be worked out in history. No verbal statement, or subordinate standard can relieve each generation of the task of rethinking and restating its message (1960, p.138). His theology of cultural plurality also strongly implies that in a context of cultural change new additions to the pluriformity of the church will emerge, and that existing churches engaging with it will have to wrestle with issues with which the church has not previously engaged.

This perspective is instructional for PCI as it engages with the issues arising from a

changing society, in which theological and ethical issues must be addressed. It is appropriate for PCI to refer to its subordinate standards, and other aspects of its tradition, as a part of its engagement with such issues. A recent example of this is the memorial to the Assembly from the Tyrone Presbytery regarding the interpretation of the passage in the Westminster Confession stating that it is the duty of Christians to ‘only marry in the Lord’ (PCI 2009a, pp.91–2). However, referring to the standards cannot be done in such a manner as to assume that a restatement of their content is sufficient.

There are obvious dangers in encouraging this expectation of change. The Code states that PCI’s subordinate standards ‘are a testimony for truth and against error, and serve as a bond of union for members of the Church’ (PCI 2011, p.11), but Newbigin is correct when he says,

No verbal statement can be produced which relieves the Church of the responsibility continually to re-think and re-state its message. No appeal, whether to ecumenical creeds, to the universal belief of the Church, or to the Scriptures, can alter the fact that the Church has to state in every new generation how it interprets the historic faith, and how it relates it to the new thought and experience of its time. This act of confession has to be the work of the living Church indwelt by the living Spirit ... Nothing can remove from the Church the responsibility for stating now, what is the faith. It belongs to the essence of a living Church that it should be able and willing to do so (1960, p.138).

6.2.5. The Northern Ireland Context

The discussion above on unity argued that PCI should encourage engagement with the Roman Catholic church at a local level, and that this engagement should focus on issues of practical engagement to build a shared future and on the common good. Engagement at this level is recommended not only because it avoids the issue of theological compromise for those who have the greatest theological issues with the Roman Catholic church, but because it concurs with Newbigin’s experience that unity

is best fostered at a grass roots level and must be built on the foundation of personal relationships.

Engagement by congregations in the issues of the common good of the local area are also consonant with the mindset that PCI has been seeking to engender in congregations, specifically in the mission planning process. Within this process PCI has, by and large, arrived at a holistic view of mission, which sees addressing social issues as mission, not merely a pointer to mission, or a precursor to evangelism (see Section 6.1.2.3). It has been noted, however, that in all of the discussions about creating a mindset for mission the issue of mission in a divided society has not been adequately addressed.

In Northern Ireland affiliation to a denomination holds national and cultural, as well as religious, significance. The tendency for PCI, and other denominations, to act as chaplains to their own constituency has already been noted. Until recently, church extension was seen to be the establishment of Presbyterian congregations in new areas of housing to which Presbyterians were moving. Only very recently has PCI considered planting churches in nationalist areas of Northern Ireland.

Two statements highlight some of the issues PCI must address. First, at a cross-community clergy meeting I attended recently, the pastor of an independent church reflecting on his church's mission, asked, 'Is our mission only to half of this town?' Second, in a blog entry Alan McGuickan, a Jesuit priest, argued that the communities in Northern Ireland need to consider the following statement, 'These are my neighbours and, rightly or wrongly, they believe that my community has wronged them more than they have wronged us' (McGuickan 2012). These are some of the issues that PCI must consider if it is to engage in mission in a divided society, but which appear to be lacking in the main denominational drives to engender a mindset for mission.

Newbigin, obviously, did not directly address the Northern Ireland context. There is, however, one significant theme in his writings which has gained prominence in recent

missiological discourse, and which is relevant to the Northern Irish context; the theme of reconciliation. Newbigin sees the purpose of Christ's work in the New Testament as being to reconcile all things to God the Father. Thus, while the reconciliation of individuals with God is an aspect of this, it is part of a greater whole, which includes the reconciliation of people with each other. It is a significant part of his argument for the logic of election that, in the process of the gospel being shared by one and received by another, not only is a relationship formed between the hearer and God, but also between the hearer and the evangelist.

In several recent books and articles reconciliation is discussed as an aspect of mission, or even as an integrating metaphor (Langmead 2008, p.5), or paradigm (Schreiter 2013, p.9), for mission (D'Souza & D'Souza 1996; Kagawa 2003; Mwaura 2009). Some of this discussion is arising out of contexts where churches are addressing histories of violence and division. This literature contains points of similarity and opportunities for learning for PCI. Several key points may be highlighted.

First, the overlap between cultural and religious identity in Northern Ireland is similar to the experience in Rwanda and in other conflicts, in which ethnic identity trumped Christian commitment, leading to complicity in violence by people with genuine Christian commitment (Volf 2000, p.158; Rice 2013, p.55). Churches in Africa are addressing the issues of ethnic and Christian identity, in ways that have resonances for the churches in Northern Ireland. Newbigin emphasised the importance of the sharing of experience and mutual challenge made possible through international inter-church relationships (see e.g. Newbigin 1994a, p.130). In his own personal experience, his years of ministry and service in India and within the WCC influenced his engagement with modern western culture during his years in the UK. PCI, with its connections to the wider church through BMO and membership of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, has opportunity to share its experience with, and to learn from, those in conflict situations in other parts of the world. For example, in 2009 PCI's Peace and Peacemaking Programme, and BMO co-hosted an event 'Peacemaking as Mission' at which the main speaker was Joe Campbell, who has experience of mediation and peacemaking in Northern Ireland and as a BMO missionary in Nepal (PCI 2009b,

p.137).

Second, there is a need to recognise that the theological category of reconciliation cannot be limited to the vertical relationship between an individual and God. This is apparent in the 2010 Lausanne Cape Town Commitment, which states that ‘reconciliation to God is inseparable from reconciliation to one another’ (Rice 2013, p.54; cf. Langmead 2008, pp.7–10; Volf 2000, pp.160–8). Rice argues that the Commitment intentionally follows the Pauline pattern of indicative followed by imperative; reconciliation begins with God, which leads to the human response (2013, p.58). The Commitment calls on Christians to pursue relations of friendship with people of other faiths, and to repent of a failure in the past to seek friendships with people of other faiths. This is pertinent for Northern Ireland, in which the system of sectarianism has hardened the boundaries between the two communities for generations.²⁶

Third, a theology of reconciliation must address the question of violence, oppression and justice. Stevens has argued that

the Protestant churches in Northern Ireland often talk about law and order, reflecting a community under siege, and the Catholic church often talks about justice, reflecting a community feeling of victimisation (Community Relations Council 2005, p.10).

A theology of reconciliation does not imply that issues of law and order, liberation or justice are ignored. Yet, it does cast them in a new light. Volf proposes that while justice and liberation are integral to Christian social responsibility, they should not be considered as separate from reconciliation, but as ‘indispensable aspects of a more overarching agenda of reconciliation’ (2000, p.162). This is based on the central truth of the Christian faith that God, being in no way indifferent to the distinction between good and evil, is still the one who ‘offers grace to the vilest offender and justifies the unjust’ (2000, p.163). Volf also argues that a primary stress on issues of liberation and justice is suited only to situations of ‘manifest evil in which one side is

²⁶ See (Liechty & Clegg 2001, pp.102–147) for a definition of sectarianism, its systemic nature and how it hardens the boundaries between communities.

unambiguously the victim – in the right – and the other unambiguously the perpetrator – therefore in the wrong’ (2000, p.163; cf. Kaggwa 2003, p.253).

In the context of a divided society the church must also give careful thought to the manner in which it communicates the gospel, or, rather, to how it will be heard by the ‘other’. D’Souza asks why Christians have not been conscious of the violence and aggression inherent in some colonial interpretations of fulfilling the Great Commission (1996, p.209). Leichty and Clegg have shown how the attempts to convert Catholics in Irish history have been perceived in the same way, and that the memory lingers within the Catholic community (2001, pp.81–91). They also give a detailed analysis of how truth claims can be shared appropriately and inappropriately within a divided society (2001, pp.243–278).

If PCI is to truly develop a mindset for mission appropriate to its context in a divided society these issues must be brought to the heart of the discourse within the denomination.

6.2.6. The Local Congregation

The analysis of PCI documents has shown PCI moving to an agreed understanding that the congregation is its fundamental unit. This is, of course, consonant with Newbigin’s long held view. However, on several points Newbigin provides points for reflection.

First, during his early years in India, Newbigin observed that local village congregations often saw themselves as dependencies of the mission, rather than as the church of Jesus Christ, responsible for mission from the outset, and having been given the necessary resources for that mission. He deliberately sought to alter the structures of the institutional church to correct this. From that time on he argued against the inherited models of congregation and ministry that made the congregation financially dependent on external funding, rather than being dependent on the Holy Spirit.

The model of planting new churches in PCI was traditionally ‘church extension’, that is, the establishment of a congregation, complete with a ministry, buildings and organisations similar to all other Presbyterian churches, often in an area of new housing. These congregations were established with a Kirk Session made up of elders from neighbouring congregations. Church extension congregations often took decades to achieve full status as a congregation. This model has only recently been modified, with the planting of churches in Maynooth, Cliftonville Road and Donabate. However, the model for these church plants still assumes at least one full-time minister, with housing provided, along with the associated large budgets. PCI has also made some provision for churches in urban areas to receive special support. Newbigin highlights the need for PCI to give consideration to models of mission and church planting that promote dependency on the Spirit rather than the denomination. The same principle of avoiding dependency should be applied to the relationship between existing congregations and the centralised church. There is also a need to develop models of mission which do not depend on large injections of finance.

Second, Newbigin, whilst remaining committed to a local congregation being the church for a geographical locality, also argued that other forms of church, appropriate to the structures within society, should also emerge. Similarly arising out of the *Mission Shaped Church* report, the Church of England has encouraged the development of a wide variety of ‘fresh expressions’ of church, many of which could be described as experimental. There is no evidence that PCI has begun to consider such different models for the local congregation.

Third, Newbigin’s emphasis on the local congregation led him to warn against the dangers of centralised denominational structures becoming the deliverers of larger scale social projects. The danger is that local congregations are no longer seen as responsible for this sort of work, apart from providing financial support. The interview with Conway showed that BSW is aware of this problem and is taking steps to connect its centrally run operations, such as nursing homes, with local congregations through the formation of local support committees. These committees are made up of representatives of local congregations, Presbytery and relatives of residents (Conway

2010, p.4).

Fourth, the local congregation is to be seen as the hermeneutic of the gospel. It is here that the fact that the church is not *merely* instrumental allows it to *be* instrumental is seen most clearly, for it is the congregation as a body of people living by an alternative plausibility structure that is a sign and foretaste of the Kingdom. Thus, first among Newbigin's list of characteristics of the congregation as a hermeneutic of the gospel is that it is a community of praise, and the second that it is a community of thanksgiving.

Earlier in this thesis it has been argued that PCI has a generally negative attitude towards the emerging post-Christendom culture (see Section 5.3). The general tenor of PCI's engagement with the cultural changes is of resistance. In contrast, Tran (2011, pp.5–6) describes a small congregation in downtown San Diego. Tran argues that, although it is possible to describe the congregation's social action as 'resistance' against the ravages brought on by global capitalism, this would be to misunderstand what is truly happening. To term it merely as 'resistance' would be to imply that the powers of capitalism reign. What the congregation is actually doing in its social action is to make publicly known, that is, to witness to, what is already the case: that God, not capitalism reigns.

This is not resistance but simply what one does when Jesus is Lord, when the Kingdom has already come, when one believes, amidst the atheistic strictures of capitalism, the Good News (2011, p.6).

Framing the congregation's life, including its programme of social action, as witness, rather than as resistance to the powers of global capitalism, provides a perspective in which global capitalism is seen as 'but a flash within the drama of God's trinitarian life' (2011, p.5) and the Kingdom is the ultimate reality. Thus, resistance is not the primary task of the church, but is part of the larger vocation of witness. This perspective is an important corrective to PCI in its engagement with the emerging context, which has been primarily of resistance rather than of confident witness.

6.2.7. Leadership and Ministry

The Doctrine Committee reports 2000-2006, reports by the Union Commission and reports on ministerial training have given consideration to ministry within PCI and raised many of the issues also addressed by Newbigin. There are several points upon which Newbigin could comment.

First, the church should not allow financial limitations to dictate a policy which is detrimental to the church, or to mission. In India and in Britain he saw the tendency for the institutional church to ask how many people it takes to support one minister, rather than asking how many people can one person effectively minister to. The outworking of this is one minister being responsible for multiple congregations of which they are not a living part. In the face of falling numbers, PCI has, like many other denominations, united smaller congregations, mostly as joint-charges sharing one minister. The Union Commission report of 2009 shows that it recognises the weaknesses of this approach and its desire to stimulate discussion on alternatives (2009a, pp.26–8). The report states,

for generations the Church has harnessed support for a particular pattern of ministry in the service of the Kingdom and now it is asking Christian people to see that God is leading to new arrangements for the provision of ministry (PCI 2009a, p.27).

Recognising the natural resistance to solutions imposed from the centre, the report encourages Presbyteries and congregations to consider possible alternatives to uniting or linking congregations and for the whole church to engage in theological thinking about ministry.

This naturally leads to the second point, that applying Newbigin's principle forces a reconsideration of many of the assumptions about ministry; namely that it is a full-time, paid profession, requiring high academic qualifications, and that the minister be salaried by the local congregation. Newbigin's argument was that non-stipendiary ministry become the norm for local congregations, with a more highly trained, paid ministry providing training and support. His experience in India was that this sort of

arrangement encouraged congregations to become more responsible for their own life. As noted in Section 6.1.5. the reports show an initial reluctance by PCI to consider Accredited Preachers and non-stipendiary ministry, but in 2010 schemes for part-time and auxiliary ministry were approved (PCI 2010b, p.71). In 2012 the Board of Christian Training reported the response to the Accredited Preacher's scheme as being 'overwhelming' (PCI 2012, p.185). In the emerging post-Christendom context, PCI will have to continue to develop and implement a variety of options for stipendiary and non-stipendiary, full and part-time ministry.

Third, the most appropriate form of training for this sort of ministry is not purely academic, but focussed on practical experience. Newbigin put many of these insights about ministry into practice as bishop of Madurai. Initially he sought to gather those considered natural leaders within village congregations to engender a sense of responsibility for the church of God in their area. Initially village leaders were brought to the seminary for short courses, but it was soon found necessary for the seminary to go to the villages (Newbigin 1993, p.118). The results quickly showed that congregations under this sort of voluntary ministry were more spiritually alive than those under paid ministry.

A mass movement among village people seeking baptism allowed further development. Newbigin's experience showed that whenever there was a turning to the gospel there was always at least one person who had been touched by the Spirit, and that was the person God had chosen to be the elder or pastor to the group. Thus, instead of putting that person aside in favour of a person trained and paid for by the diocese, i.e. under its control, the new method was to accept the starting point as what God had done and to build on it. The leaders were trained in the village in a 'sort of apprenticeship' (Newbigin 1993, p.30). From the very first day it was clear that the responsibility for further growth lay with the local group and that God would provide the ministries and spiritual gifts they would require. The diocese recognised the new congregation, and their leader's need to learn, and offered training and support. The result was that in a period of ten years the number of congregations in one area grew from thirteen to nearly sixty, and village leaders developed into genuine pastors.

Fourth, Newbigin would concur with the Doctrine Committee's emphasis on every member ministry, particularly when it emphasised the role of the lay people in their callings in everyday life. This was where Newbigin saw the engagement between the gospel, church and world, and he consistently argued that the church should actively prepare its members for this ministry. It is, however, a largely neglected theme in PCI's discussion about mission.

Fifth, the role of the minister must be reconceived. It must move from being considered as primarily looking after the members of a church, to equipping and preparing them for their engagement in the world. The Doctrine Committee records the danger that ministry be seen as the prerogative of the minister, or other paid staff; a danger that Newbigin was aware of in Madras (Newbigin 1977a, pp.43–4).

6.3. Conclusion

In the years 1990-2009 PCI has sought to develop a mindset for mission, with two main initiatives originating from the institutional strand of the denomination. These initiatives have been driven by PCI's awareness of the cultural changes around it, the statistics of decline and the desire to adapt appropriately to the emerging situation. The discussion and debate within the denomination has not been limited to discussions of the Strategy for Mission Committee or the Vibrant Communities of Christ initiatives, but has taken place within a wide variety of the boards and committees of the church.

Newbigin has proved to be an appropriate mentor for PCI as his missiological and ecclesiological analysis was directly related to his experience as a practitioner. At each point his thinking and experience have provided insights, perspectives and challenges to PCI.

7. Conclusion

7.1. PCI in Transitional Uncertainty

The purpose of this thesis has been to analyse the missiological discourse within PCI between 1990 and 2009, to determine if there is an emerging view of mission within the denomination, and to critically evaluate this in dialogue with Lesslie Newbigin.

In the Introduction, Kūng's description of the process of paradigm change in science, which he applied to paradigm shifts in church history, was proposed as a framework for determining if there is an emerging view of mission in PCI. The process moves from the settled state of a 'normal science', through a stage of 'transitional uncertainty' until a new model is ready. The acceptance of the new model depends on a range of factors and will often only be fully adopted when the generation brought up in the older paradigm has moved on. In the case of paradigm shifts in church history, Kūng shows that the old paradigm may continue to exist alongside the new paradigm (Kūng 1991, pp.123–169; Bosch 1991, pp.185–6).

The research has clearly shown a sense of 'transitional uncertainty' within PCI, which recognises the decline in its own numbers and the significant cultural shifts in the society in which it exists. It recognises that there is a link between these two phenomena which must be addressed. Considerable effort has been expended during the period being studied to adapt the centralised structures of the institutional strand and to change the mindset of the body strand. Throughout this process the denomination has engaged in discussion and debate on many missiological themes. This research has shown areas in which a broad consensus has been reached within PCI, and areas in which such a consensus has not yet emerged.

Elements of an emerging view of mission can thus be described. It is a view of mission which has moved from a church-centred view, to one which sees mission as originating with God and being focussed on his kingdom. The church is seen as having a key role within the mission of God, and thus mission is at the heart of the

church's life. The emerging view of mission is holistic, recognising that social engagement and evangelism are both essential ingredients, but which considers that mission without evangelism is incomplete. The local congregation is seen as being the primary unit of the church and, therefore, the primary unit for mission.

There are other areas in which consensus has not been reached and areas which have not been adequately addressed. There is no consensus on the issue of ecumenical relations, particularly relations with the Catholic church, and the missiological implications of existing in a divided society have not received adequate attention in PCI's missiological discourse.

PCI has come to the realisation that inherited forms and models of congregational life, and the centralised support structures for them, need to be reformed. Particular focus has been given to urban congregations, yet as of 2014 only four congregations have come under the Urban Mission Scheme (PCI 2014, p.146). Similarly, there is frequent mention in reports of church plants, yet in the period researched only three church plants have been undertaken. These are areas in which PCI recognises the need for development, but does not appear to have been able to make significant progress. This is most likely due to the fact, recognised in PCI's reports, that as a denomination it is best geared to serving the needs of existing congregations.

Perhaps the most significant area which PCI has not adequately addressed is that of the changing context in which it is situated. Statements recognising societal change are frequent in PCI documents, yet there is little evidence of serious engagement with the underlying worldview of the emerging post-Christendom context. More concerning is the lack of critical reflection as to a theological understanding of the changing context, falling numbers within the denomination and its sense of alienation from the emerging context. This is the most significant lacuna in PCI's emerging view of mission, since a proper understanding of the context and the changes that are occurring are the foundations upon which a proper missiological response must be built. Such an analysis must not be content with describing societal changes at the level of morals and behaviour, but engage with the underlying worldview that is

emerging.

Referring back to K ung’s description of paradigm change, the research has shown that PCI has moved out of the initial stage in which the old paradigm was adequate. PCI has been forced out of this paradigm by the emerging post-Christendom context, but it cannot be said that a new paradigm has yet fully emerged. PCI is still in the ‘transitional uncertainty’ stage. This is an acutely uncomfortable phase, in which those who adhere to the old paradigm will seek to defend it and ‘immunize themselves against the arguments of the new’ (Bosch 1991, p.185), whilst others will be actively seeking the new paradigm.

7.2. Theological Resources for Living in Transitional Uncertainty

It must be recognised that PCI is not alone in this experience. In a quote which captures the emotional impact of this experience for the church in the USA, Brueggemann states, ‘The church’s services as chaplain to this democracy are no longer required. You’ve been given your pink slip; your severance pay is in the mail’ (Quoted in Hunsberger 2003, p.147).

This is often experienced as a crisis by the church, whose images and instincts are still formed by the memory of Christendom. The dis-ease is seen in the ‘burnout’ experienced by clergy and in the experience of people in the pew ‘feeling a hunger and readiness for something more, something beyond what we have thought before about ourselves and our programs’ (1991, p.225). Hunsberger (1991, p.238) describes how weekly church gatherings rarely fulfil his hopes, because they are not formed around the issues and struggles of the worlds people inhabit. This is confirmed in my own recent experience as a minister, in which several people who take their faith seriously, along with several who have been spiritually searching, have commented that they have found church to be at best unhelpful, or at worst a hindrance, to their spiritual journey. Hunsberger sees that the response to the cultural changes, reduced significance in society and declining numbers has been an emphasis on ‘evangelism’

as an attempt to stem the tide, and a concentration on ‘better techniques and more effective technicians’, rather than a recognition that ‘the crisis has to do with the way the church sees itself and forms its life’ (1991, pp.226–7).

It is at this point that Newbigin has proved to be an appropriate mentor for PCI, providing considerable wisdom for a church facing ‘transitional uncertainty’.

First, Newbigin would argue against a retreat from transitional uncertainty into the apparent certainty offered by fundamentalism. It is widely recognised that fundamentalism has arisen as one response by religious communities to the challenges of modernity and late-modernity (Appleby 2011, pp.228, 230–3; Farley 2005, p.380; LeVine 2007, p.16). Fundamentalism shares many of the aspects of religious faith essential for religions to survive (Farley 2005, p.380), but responds to the modern context in ways that are reactive and selective (Appleby 2011, pp.230–1). Fundamentalist movements react to the marginalisation of religion, but react as modern people formed epistemologically under the banner of ‘technoscientific modernity’ (Appleby 2011, p.231). Thus, their reaction to their context is ‘ironically, fundamentally modern, instrumental, rational – and manipulative of the religious tradition’ (Appleby 2011, p.231). They are also selective, in that they choose elements of their religious tradition most resistant to relativism and pluralism. They are absolutist, claiming inerrancy and infallibility for their religious knowledge, and select ‘scandalous doctrines’ (Appleby 2011, p.231) which are not reconcilable to scientific rationality. These scandalous doctrines set followers apart even from other adherents to their own religion, setting up a dualist view of the world. Mitchell and Ganiel’s description of Northern Irish interviewees described as becoming more deeply conservative shows some similarities to the phenomenon of fundamentalism (see Section 5.2) (2011, pp.76–94; cf. Jordan 2001, p.172).

Increased conservatism, and even fundamentalism, is an option for PCI as it negotiates the emerging context. Newbigin would argue that, despite its attractions, fundamentalism is an inadequate response that is not true to the nature of the gospel. It is attractive because it offers seeming certainty in the midst of much uncertainty, and

because it appears to provide the community with a strong plausibility structure, which is essential for any religious community to survive. The desire for certainty is, however, a denial of the responsibility of faith and rests on Enlightenment assumptions about the nature of truth (see Section 5.2). The closed nature of fundamentalist communities also contradicts Newbigin's positive assessment of cultural plurality and therefore the diversity of cultural expressions of faith and pluriformity of the church. If PCI chooses to respond to the changing context of post-Christendom by moving in a fundamentalist, or more conservative, direction it risks the danger, noted in Section 3.4.1., of being captive to a culture that no longer exists and estranged from the culture it inhabits.

Second, Newbigin provides an answer to the fear that acceptance of 'transitional uncertainty', or that the church in the midst of the variety of cultures must be pluriform, implies an acceptance of a certain relativism. Newbigin's argument that the search for certainty arises out of Enlightenment presuppositions and contradicts the nature of truth as presented in the Bible has already been noted (see Sections 4.2.1.4. and 5.2). Truth, or ultimate reality, in the Bible is presented as personal, focussed on the person of Jesus Christ. This implies a different sort of knowledge; a form of knowledge that involves risk, trust (Newbigin 1995b, p.14) and personal commitment (Newbigin 1995b, p.66). Its confidence is not in the competence of our knowing, but in the one who is known, and its claim is not to possess the truth, but to be on the way that leads to the fullness of truth (Newbigin 1995b, p.67). It must, therefore, be constantly open to revision and correction,

but – and this is the crucial point – *only* and *always* within the irreversible commitment to Jesus Christ. If that commitment is questioned, then I am once again a clueless wanderer in the darkness, bamboozled by the products of my own imagination (emphasis in original) (Newbigin 1995b, p.70).

Similarly, Bosch (1991, pp.186–7), drawing on Hiebert, argues that accepting the notion of paradigm change in theology does not imply relativism. Rather, it must be recognised that all theological interpretations reflect different contexts, perspectives

and biases. Each theological approach is a ‘map’, and a map is never the actual ‘territory’. Whilst I may believe my map is best, I must accept that there are other types of map and that, at least in theory, one of these may be better than mine.

Thus, in facing a period of transitional uncertainty, Newbiggin points towards an alternative to fundamentalism or increasing conservatism. Yet, inherent in the dynamic engagement between gospel, culture and church that he proposes is the fact that the exact shape of what will come cannot be predicted in advance. PCI, like many other churches in the west, must not flinch from accepting this uncertainty, but find the theological resources appropriate to understanding and negotiating the period until a new paradigm emerges.

The metaphor of exile is being used by many as providing such theological resources for understanding of the experience of post-Christendom, both in the wider western world (Brueggemann 1986; Brueggemann 1993; Brueggemann 1997; Cruchley-Jones 2002; Frost 2006; Jones 2004; Smail 2003) and specifically in Ireland (Higgins 2013; McDowell 2012). Brueggemann and Miller (1994, pp.263–274) argue that the period of the monarchy and temple in Israel is analogous to the church in Christendom, in that, *inter alia*, there were legitimated religious structures which played a civic role, and a civic leadership that was, at least publicly, committed to a shared theological understanding. The experience of exile was one in which the community of faith had to adapt to a context in which it had little influence over public policy and there were significant dangers of extinction, syncretism or loss of a distinct identity. Exile was an experience of ‘transitional uncertainty’. The exile being faced by the church in the west is ‘not primarily geographical, but is social, moral and cultural’ (Brueggemann 1997, p.2). Usage of the metaphor of exile does not, therefore, imply a one-to-one correspondence between the experience of the western church and Israel. Rather, ‘metaphor proceeds by having only an odd, playful, and ill-fitting match to its reality, the purpose of which is to illuminate and evoke dimensions of reality which will otherwise go unnoticed and therefore unexperienced’ (Brueggemann 1997, p.1).

The experience of exile for Israel has been described in terms of the change curve

(McDowell 2012), derived from Kubler-Ross' work on bereavement. The change curve below (Figure 6 (University of Exeter 2011)) describes three stages in the process, which can be usefully linked to Brueggemann's description of three pastoral tasks for each stage of the exile experience (1997, p.1).

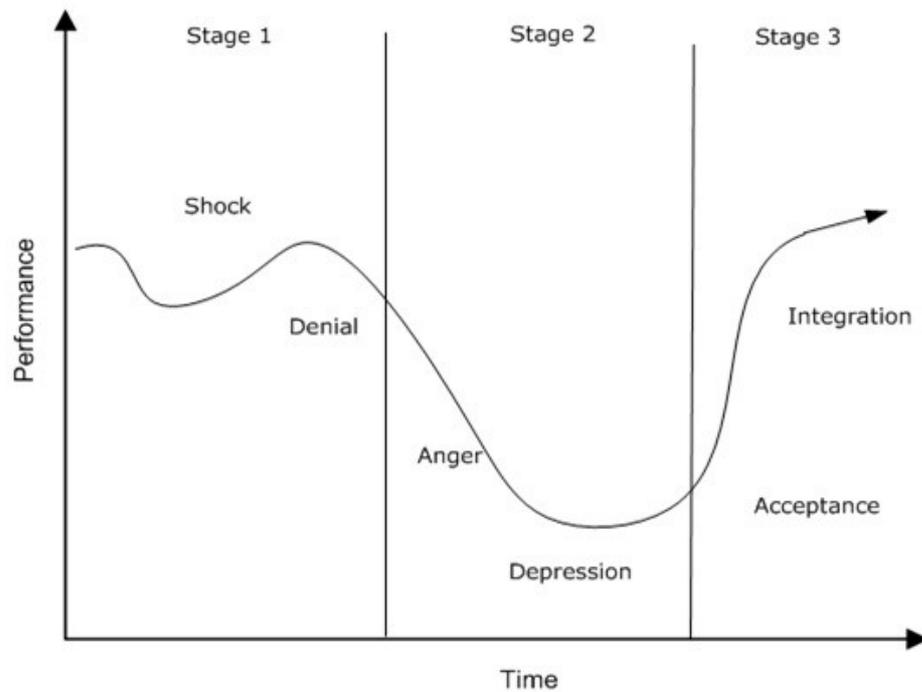


Figure 6: The change curve

The first stage is shock and denial. The response of Israel to Jeremiah and others prophesying exile was a denial, at least partly resulting from a theology that assumed God's purposes were inherently linked with the ongoing existence of Israel in the land, and the ongoing worship in the temple. There are obvious similarities to the church-centred view of mission discussed in earlier sections of this thesis. The experience of exile, therefore, precipitated a period of deep theological crisis. This crisis included questions of God's faithfulness, his power *vis-à-vis* the gods of the nations, the status of Israel in his plan and the appropriate means of worship now that there was no temple.

The experience of PCI entering post-Christendom in Ireland raises similar questions. First, does the place of the church in God's plan require that it remain influential and 'successful'? Identifying the success of the church with the Kingdom will lead to an assumption that God must step in to reverse the church's decline and loss of influence. The exile metaphor calls this into question, and if it looks at the experience of other western churches, PCI must consider the possibility that the decline it is experiencing will not be reversed in the short term. However, if decline does continue, individuals, congregations and the central denomination will face the pain of church closures and the loss of many things that are a treasured part of its heritage.

According to Brueggemann, the appropriate pastoral response at this stage is to help the church enter exile. This involves helping the church honestly face the reality of the situation it is in, and the future it is facing. It also requires an exposing of the idols which the church has unwittingly co-opted into its faith system. One area is being recognised in this regard is that of the economic worldview, briefly examined in Section 3.4.2. (cf. Brueggemann 1993; Council for World Mission 2011; Goheen 1996; Global Dialogue on the Accra Confession 2009; McDowell 2012, pp.24–6). Institutionally PCI has had direct experience of the effects this worldview can have, with the Presbyterian Mutual Society being forced into administration, resulting in adverse effects for individuals, congregations and the reputation of the denomination (PCI 2009b, pp.24–7). This experience notwithstanding, engagement with the economic worldview is crucial because of its increasing influence throughout every aspect of society and because each individual, congregation, and even PCI itself, is part of the economic system. To not critically engage with it, therefore, is to almost certainly slip into a syncretistic relationship with it, similar to that Newbigin observed between the British churches and modern western culture on his return to Britain in the 1970s.

The second stage on the change curve is anger and depression, which relates to the experience of Israel in exile. This was a period in which the poignant question, 'How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?' (Psalm 137:4 AV), became very real, since the old, accepted, and even God-ordained, structures for worship were no longer

available. The accounts of Daniel and Esther show that the community of faith adopted different approaches to living as a minority in the midst of empire, hinting at ongoing debate and probably controversy among the community as to the right response. However, it was during this period that the synagogue came into being, which is what Newbigin would describe as an addition to the pluriformity of the community of faith arising out of a new cultural context. Although the synagogue is a form of worshipping community that could not have been predicted before the exile, it shows clear continuity with the tradition and theology that had gone before. Accordingly, as PCI continues to enter the post-Christendom context, it should anticipate a prolonged period during which there will be varying responses by individuals and groupings within the denomination.

The first area in which a variety of responses is to be expected is in the development of various forms of worshipping communities. This will be driven partly by the financial implications of falling numbers and income, which raise questions over the sustainability of buildings and ministry arrangements. The more important factor is the dynamic of the gospel encountering and engaging with people brought up in a different cultural worldview than that in which the inherited structures and format of church emerged. Some Fresh Expressions of church (Goodhew et al. 2012) and emerging churches (Marti & Ganiel 2014) are examples of this.

Küng's description of paradigm change within the church, and the experience within the Church of England, would indicate that PCI should expect traditional congregations to continue, although with adaptations, but also that it should be open to new forms of church to emerge. This will require permission to be given for experiments to be conducted, with the associated understanding that not all experiments will be successful. This, in turn, requires careful ecclesiological thinking regarding how such new worshipping communities are to be assessed, as application of the old, assumed criteria would be anachronistic. Frost (2006, pp.145–156) provides a simple model for missional churches which is based on the elements of Trinitarian theology, a covenantal expression of community, being catholic in orientation to other faith communities and having missional intent. This model has the

benefits of simplicity, as shown in its diagrammatic presentation (Figure 7 (Frost 2006, p.145)), yet combines all the essential elements of a robust ecclesiology. Such a model would give new expressions of church both freedom to develop, and a framework within which to develop, as well as criteria for continual self-assessment in partnership with the wider church.

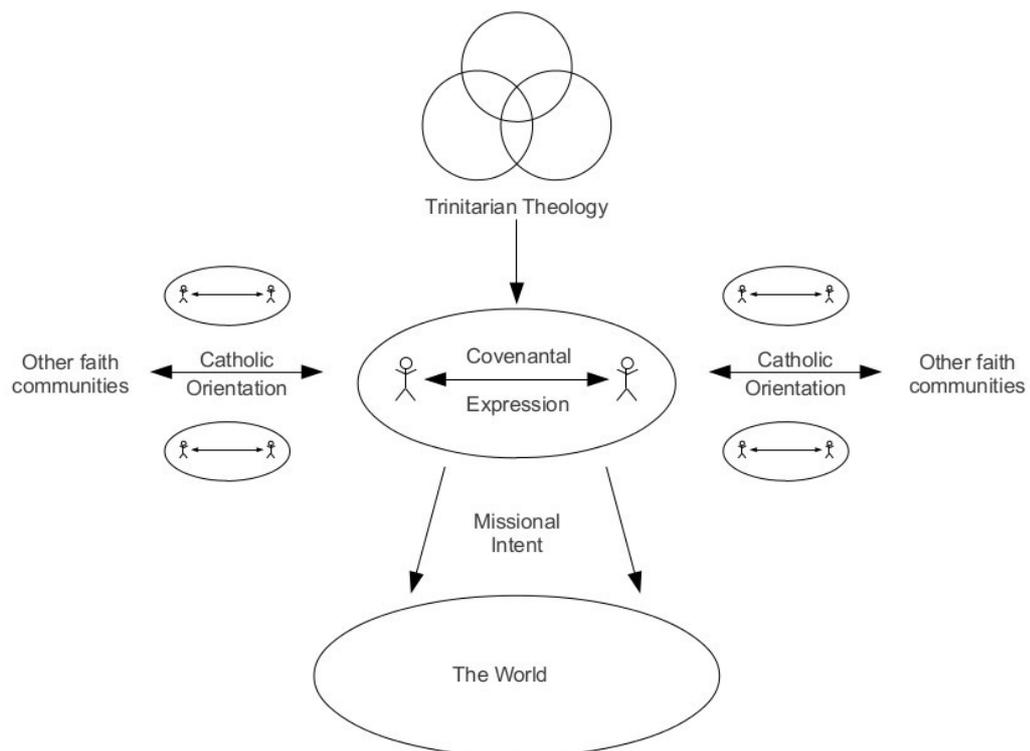


Figure 7: A model for missional communities

The varied response to the emerging context will not, however, be limited to varying expressions of church community. There are also likely to be varying responses regarding theological and ethical issues. The community of exiles described in the book of Daniel made costly decisions in order to maintain aspects of the ritual law. The community of exiles described in the book of Esther took a very different approach. Similarly, in the New Testament, differences regarding appropriate behaviour can be seen. A notable example is the issue regarding food sacrificed to idols. The question was whether or not eating meat associated with idol worship was to participate in the worship of another god. From a modern, western perspective, a matter of food appears to be one of secondary theological importance. However, in the

context of the time, and from the perspective of Christian communities in predominantly Hindu societies, the issue is of primary theological importance (McDowell 2012, pp.53–4). For example, in the context of Nepal, where Christians have faced legal and social persecution for their insistence on worshipping one God, the first generation of Christians drew very strict boundaries with the Hindu culture around them. When some, often second generation Christians, began to question if separation from some aspects of culture, for example participation in some aspects of festival days, was necessary, it was not seen as a secondary issue of culture, but a primary issue about idolatry. It is, therefore, significant that in addressing an issue in which there was controversy over such a fundamental issue, Paul refuses to give a definitive answer. Rather, he affirms the responsibility for each individual to determine their own position (Rom 14:22) and to act within the limits of their conscience (Rom 14:22, 1 Cor 8:7-8), whilst remaining sensitive to affects their actions will have on others of differing opinions (Rom 14: 13-23, 1 Cor 9-13). Thus, when Paul urges the Roman Christians not to despise or pass judgement on each other on this issue (Rom 14:2-3), it must be remembered that this is in connection with an issue considered to be of primary theological importance.

As PCI continues to engage with the emerging post-Christendom culture, it will face moral, ethical and theological challenges. Issues on which PCI has had an historic and agreed position will be raised in new ways, forcing a reconsideration of the previous assumptions. New issues will also be raised as technology and innovation introduce possibilities for life that were previously inconceivable. It is inevitable that a variety of responses to these issues will emerge within PCI and it will have to develop ways of living with the resulting tensions if it is to remain united.

Another pertinent question facing the church entering post-Christendom is the identity of the empire within which the church finds itself as a minority. One possible definition, again relating to the prevailing economic structures, is given by the Council for World Mission (2011):

We speak of Empire, because we discern a coming together of economic,

cultural, political and military power in our world today, that constitutes a reality and a spirit of lordless domination, created by humankind yet enslaving simultaneously; an all-encompassing global reality serving, protecting and defending the interests of powerful corporations, nations, elites and privileged people, while imperiously excluding, even sacrificing, humanity and exploiting creation; a pervasive spirit of destructive self-interest, even greed – the worship of money, goods and possessions; the gospel of consumerism, proclaimed through powerful propaganda and religiously justified, believed and followed; the colonization of consciousness, values and notions of human life by the imperial logic; a spirit lacking in compassionate justice and showing contemptuous disregard for the gifts of creation and the household of life.

The Jewish community in exile had to come to terms with the vulnerability of life under the authority of empire. Within this context the shape of the faithful life had to be negotiated anew, as the community no longer lived in a society shaped around the worship of Yahweh. The early chapters in Daniel show the complex negotiations involved in living a faithful life in this context, and the fact that clashes of loyalties became inevitable, exposing the vulnerability of the community of faith to the power of the empire. Recent cases, such as that of a British Airways check-in operator who was disciplined for wearing a cross at work (Bowcott 2013), show that living in accordance with personally held Christian convictions can result in legal action. This example serves to highlight the changing relationship churches and their members have with the state. PCI will need to prepare itself, and its members, for a situation in which living in accordance with personally held Christian principles will no longer automatically lead to respectability but, perhaps, to conflict with society. This is, in fact, similar to the situation Newbigin encountered in India, and in which he observed the church must be involved in every aspect of its members' lives and not just engage with the 'spiritual' (1951, pp.14–7). PCI will need to develop ways in which to support members in transitioning to a position of vulnerability, rather than of respectability. It must encourage ways in which members can develop their convictions on issues pertinent to their lives and support each other in being faithful to their convictions. This must be done, however, whilst honouring the differing convictions that will inevitably arise within the denomination, as noted above.

Brueggemann describes the pastoral task for this stage of the exile experience as helping people to be in exile. This will include honest lament over what has been lost, but also an intentional practice of hope (Brueggemann 1997, pp.4–7; cf. Jones 2004, pp.191–4). Lament is a powerful theological concept, as it gives permission to acknowledge the pain associated with an experience, and even to question God, without denying faith in him. There has been, and will continue to be, considerable pain for PCI associated with long-term decline in numbers. For example, within each congregation that closes are people who have served God to the best of their ability and knowledge, and for whom the closure is a devastating experience. Apart from a few exceptions, the mission discourse within PCI is consistently up-beat and positive regarding the future prospects of the church. This gives the impression that, perhaps, PCI considers that to honestly lament would be defeatist and unbelieving. However, it is perhaps only by having the courage to face reality, and the emotional impact that it brings, that it will be possible for PCI to truly practice the hope that is the hallmark of Biblical faith.

The third stage on the change curve is acceptance and integration. For Israel the final stage of exile was the return to the homeland begun under Cyrus. This, however, did not simply mark a return to the way things had been before. In spite of the return, Israel continued to be under the control and influence of various empires, to the extent that Wright (1996, p.269) argues Israel considered the ‘glorious message of the prophets’ had not been fulfilled, and continued to consider itself *de facto* in exile into the New Testament period. Marginalisation and temptations to syncretism continued to be the reality, in the face of which the community had to work hard to maintain its identity. It did this through developing a strong feeling of connection between the current community and its history, by intentionally practising hope and by becoming an intensely textual community (Brueggemann 1997, pp.105–6). This emphasis on history, eschatology and text was not a move towards fundamentalism, but rather a return to the very early traditions, that is before the monarchical period, in search of resources to sustain the community. Thus, ‘post-exilic Judaism is a vibrant act of new generativity, not enslaved to its oldest memories, and not immobilised by its recent

memory of establishment power' (Brueggemann 1997, p.108).

This is instructive to PCI entering into post-Christendom. It implies that a new, settled paradigm will emerge, but that this will not mean a return to the way things were before. Several Biblical scholars are pointing out that most, if not all, of the Biblical literature is shaped by the experience of the community of faith living under the influence of empire, and should, therefore, be interpreted accordingly (Elliott 2010; Horsley 2003; Horsley 2008; Howard-Brook 2010; Walsh & Keesmaat 2005). It would thus appear that the experience of marginalisation, powerlessness and vulnerability is not to be considered the exception for God's people. It also implies that exile is not just analogous to the contemporary western church descriptively, that is by describing an experience of marginalisation, but prescriptively, that is by describing a way of being church that is more appropriate to the nature of the gospel (Jones 2004, pp.178–181).

Marginalisation, powerlessness and vulnerability should not, however, imply that God's missionary purposes, or the church's place within them, have ceased. On the contrary, it is within the context of empire and exile that the community of faith is called to 'seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile' (Jer 29:7, NIV). It is also noteworthy that it was in the midst of exile, not during the monarchical period when the community of faith enjoyed power, prestige and prosperity, that it began to fulfil its commission to be a light to the nations. It was the witness in the midst of vulnerability by Daniel and Esther that resulted in those outside Israel recognising Yahweh (Dan 6:26, Esther 8:17). In the same way PCI may find, paradoxically, that marginalisation, powerlessness and vulnerability do not inhibit mission, but lead to a recovery of the correct stance for mission.

7.3. Some Practical Suggestions

The previous section sought to provide some theological resources for PCI in a period of transitional uncertainty. This section seeks to provide some suggestions as to what this might look like in practice. These suggestions are not given in the expectation that

they will be implemented by PCI, but more as an attempt to describe possible practical applications and, perhaps, a starting point for discussion. This is for two reasons. First, as the description of PCI's discourse has shown, initiatives in PCI most often arise out of a process of engagement within and between the body and institutional strands. The democratic nature of PCI's structures has the strength of ensuring participation in decision making, but does not lend itself to the direct implementation of proposals made by an individual. The second, more important reason, is that the issues facing PCI are such that suggestions by one individual will simply not be adequate. The situation that PCI is facing could be described as a 'wicked problem'. The term 'wicked problem' has been in use in social planning and is defined by Rittle and Webber (quoted in Brown et al. 2010, p.4), as follows

A wicked problem is a complex issue that defies complete definition, for which there can be no final solution, since any resolution generates further issues, and where solutions are not true or false or good or bad, but the best that can be done at the time. Such problems are not morally wicked, but diabolical in that they resist all the usual attempts to resolve them.²⁷

Further, 'since wicked problems are part of the society that generates them, any resolution brings with it a call for changes in that society' (Brown et al. 2010, p.4). Wicked problems cannot be addressed with a reductionist mode of inquiry, in which the problem is approached by selecting one worldview and one construction of knowledge. Rather, wicked problems require an 'open transdisciplinary inquiry' (Brown 2010, pp.63-4).

The practical solutions that I propose are below are, therefore, limited, in that they are arising out of a solely theological analysis and do not include the insights that would come from other perspectives. They are also limited in that, although I personally resonate and identify with many aspects of post-Christendom culture and with the search for appropriate expression of my faith within it, I have been brought up in, and worked within the old structures of PCI. As Einstein is often paraphrased as saying,

²⁷ See (Brown 2010, pp.62-3) for a list of Rittel and Webber's original ten characteristics of wicked problems.

‘The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them’ (Prindle 2012). This implies that what emerges from the period of transitional uncertainty will be developed by those who have not been moulded and formed by the existing models of PCI. The following suggestions have been formulated with this in mind.

7.3.1. New Faith Communities

Following Newbigin and Küng it has been argued that in a time of cultural change it is to be expected that there will be a new addition to the pluriformity of the church arising out of the engagement between the gospel and the emerging culture. This new expression of church will have structures and practices that are relevant to the structures of the emerging society and an appropriately contextualised theology. Although such new communities of faith should, from the outset, be aware of being part of the wider church, the responsibility for their response to the gospel lies with them.

It has been noted that there are no indications within PCI of grass-roots activity to establish such groups. A solution designed and implemented from the centre, or even by an existing local congregation, is unlikely to be a truly new addition to the pluriformity of the church because it will have been developed with the existing mindset.

However, assuming that there are people within each congregation who are naturally at home within the emerging post-Christendom culture, the Generation Y referred to in Section 5.4., who have genuine faith and feel an underlying frustration with the current paradigm, there is an opportunity for PCI to act as a catalyst for the emergence of appropriate expressions of church. PCI could actively encourage such people within a Presbytery to meet together and to explore possibilities. This could be a guided, facilitated process, using the model of collective social learning spiral (Brown 2010, pp.76–7), appreciative inquiry (Clergy Leadership Institute 2014), or another appropriate process, to guide the conversation.

Such a process could lead to the formation of one or more groups with the potential of becoming communities of faith. This model is different from the church planting model, in that PCI is not in control, but simply acting as a catalyst in the process. The groups would be given the model for missional communities (Figure 7) as a framework by which they should develop, but responsibility for that development would lie within the group itself. In particular, these groups would be encouraged to organise their life as a community, their worship practices and to develop a contextualised theology. In other words, following Newbigin, these groups should be considered as churches from the outset.

PCI should remain in close relationship with these groups, acting as a mentor as they develop and providing a natural means for them to express their belonging to the wider church. However, the groups should also be encouraged to explore resources beyond PCI in developing their worship practices and structures. For example, the concept of monasticism is being appropriated by many as providing resources for personal and communal life (see e.g. Cray et al. 2010), and the Celtic tradition is providing inspiration in the areas of worship, evangelism and community life (see e.g. Bradley 2000; Hunter 2010; Finney 1996).

Following Newbigin's convictions, practise and experience, the leadership of these groups would arise from within, as those chosen by God become obvious. Training for such leaders would not follow the traditional pattern of ministerial training. Even an apprenticeship model may not be appropriate, as apprenticeship is still moulding a person for a pre-defined role. The appropriate model for leaders of these groups is probably a mentoring model, in which a person of experience and insight gives advice and wisdom, recognising the differences in experience and context.

This model provides a mechanism for PCI to engage with those who have a post-Christendom mindset, who have faith, and are marginal to PCI's existing models. It provides opportunities for new expressions of church to emerge, for communities to be formed which, from the beginning, see themselves as congregations of the church, and which, as Newbigin assured, have the associated promises of resources given by

the Spirit. It also allows for the development of a ministry which is not assumed to be full-time, paid and highly qualified. Finally, it is a model which does not depend on the input of significant financial resources as there are no assumptions about salaries or buildings.

There are, obviously, some aspects of this proposal that would require considerable adjustments in PCI's thinking. Each of these groups would initially be fragile, and it is likely that many would not develop into sustainable communities of faith. However, as noted above, the development of new forms will always involve elements of experimentation. PCI could ensure that there are support networks and procedures in place if groups do not survive and that something is learned from each experience that can be of benefit to other groups that are forming.

Another issue PCI would have to grapple with is the place that such groups would have in its structures. It is unlikely that such groups would be Presbyterian in any traditional sense. In particular it is unlikely that they would feel a close association to PCI's subordinate standards and be willing to declare them as a summary of their faith. These groups will require, and should be encouraged to develop, their own confession of faith appropriate for the post-Christendom context. This will be problematic for PCI, which is partly defined by its adherence to its subordinate standards. This is an issue which exposes PCI's denominational nature and raises questions as to whether its mission is truly orientated towards the Kingdom or towards denominational survival. Ideally these new groups could be incorporated into PCI in a way which preserves their differences, but also binds them as part of the wider church. As a minimum some recognised and formal relationship between such groups and PCI should continue.

Within the set of practical proposals presented here, this first proposal is key, as it opens up the possibility for an addition to the pluriformity of the church, arising out of the engagement between the gospel and the emerging post-Christendom context. It is these new expressions of church, arising out of, and ideally maintaining close connection with PCI, that can help PCI in the period of transitional uncertainty and

beyond.

7.3.2. Existing PCI Congregations

Küng's description of paradigm changes in theology suggests that existing models of church will continue, even after a new paradigm has emerged. This would suggest that much of PCI's existing forms will continue, even if with reduced numbers of people and congregations. However, although they may continue to exist, the continuing forms will not remain unchanged. Traditional PCI congregations cannot avoid the fact of the emerging post-Christendom context and must seek forms appropriate to that context.

PCI documents recognise that PCI finds it hard to think beyond its inherited structures and patterns. It will, therefore, be difficult for established congregations, and even the centralised structures which exist to support congregations and to promote mission, to be truly innovative. Hence the importance of the new groups described above, which could eventually provide concrete examples of authentic Christian community engaged with and arising from the post-Christendom context. Existing congregations could apply aspects of the worship, community life and theology in their own congregational life.

Existing congregations should, in the meantime, be taking active steps to engage with members experiencing cultural dissonance, by refusing to marginalise them, but, rather, actively engage with them as people who can help the congregation engage with the emerging culture.

7.3.3. Ministry and Leadership

Ministry and leadership is another area in which PCI, in common with other mainstream denominations, has inherited assumptions which must be re-examined. In common with other denominations, the problems of stress in the ministry are symptomatic of underlying issues regarding the role and expectations of ministry. It is

also true, that ministerial training is done by those who are considered qualified within the existing paradigm.

The proposal to stimulate the formation of new groups, and the development of leadership from within those groups, provides a mechanism for a new model of ministry to emerge. This would be a model in which the shapes and forms of ministry would evolve according to the needs of the group, and in reliance that the Spirit will give each group the resources that are needed. In some groups this may evolve into one or more paid ministries, but will, almost certainly in all cases, be a team ministry. Training of these leaders will be primarily ‘on the job’ and in the form of mentoring rather than following a specified course of training. This ‘on the job’ training would probably include some courses in areas relevant to the particular person. Theological input for these leaders should be done in such a way that it stimulates, informs and supports their own theological thinking in relation to developing a contextualised theology for post-Christendom, rather than academic qualification.

Again, the existence of such new groups would provide a new perspective for the training for, and practice of, ministry in existing congregations.

7.3.4. PCI’s Theological Discourse

This research project has shown that PCI has paid considerable attention to its changing context and to the appropriate responses to it. However, the research has also shown that within PCI there is no serious theological reflection or discussion on the issues raised. The first three practical suggestions above have already highlighted the need for reflection on issues of ecclesiology, PCI as a denomination and ministry. Other theological issues to be addressed include engagement with the various aspects of post-Christendom and the economic worldview.

Once again, this is an issue that PCI cannot address from within its inherited view, and it must find ways in which to do this thinking with other people and other academic disciplines. Stimulating theological discussion can be achieved in various ways. At

denominational level workshops or conferences on various issues can be organised. At a Presbytery level the sort of professional groups advocated by Newbigin could be formed, in which people from a certain profession engage with the issues raised in their everyday life.

7.3.5. Learning to How to Disagree

I have argued that, in a time of transitional uncertainty, disagreement is to be expected, and that this disagreement will not be limited to secondary issues. The attitude of the church to homosexual people is one obvious issue arising out of the changing context that many churches are grappling with and which is threatening to cause division. Other such issues are likely to arise. Recognising that divisive issues will arise PCI should give urgent consideration to how it will engage in the conversations about these issues, before it actually begins the conversations.

Newbigin's experience from the formation of CSI was that it was the strength of personal relationship with people personally committed to Christ that allowed for trust, and therefore, unity. Also, a bounded set conception of the church encourages an attitude in which theological or ethical issues are seen as primarily boundary issues and can too easily justify separation. A centred set conception of the church places the emphasis on the relationship to Christ and the direction of movement. Neither Newbigin's experience, nor the centred set conception of church, deny the importance of theological difference, but place it in a different relationship with respect to the unity of the church.

PCI should, therefore, take steps to build relationships between people of differing theological outlooks. Efforts should be made to counteract the tendency for people to stay in like-minded groups by building relationships focussed on sharing faith journeys and experiences, rather than on discussing theological issues. Only in the context of such a relationship, in which I know the other person's commitment to Christ is as real as mine, can I disagree profoundly with them, yet remain united to them in Christ. Presbytery is one obvious forum where such relationships could be

fostered.

7.4. Further Research

This research project has been done under the rubric of Practical Theology. It has concentrated on the institutional strand of PCI and on Northern Ireland.

Further research could explore the extent to which the views expressed by the institutional strand are in accord with those of the individuals, congregations and Presbyteries that make up the body strand. Separate research could also be carried out into PCI in the Republic of Ireland. One such PhD research project, focussing on the recent experience of Presbyterian churches in the Republic of Ireland, is currently being pursued in Queen's University Belfast.

This research has also highlighted the dearth of contextualised theological thinking within PCI in relation to the emerging culture. Further theological research into the issues raised in this research would benefit the denomination as it continues to negotiate the period of transitional uncertainty and eventually moves toward becoming an instrument, sign and foretaste of the Kingdom in the post-Christendom context.

Appendices

Appendix 1

The Coleraine Declaration

In 1840 two Presbyterian Churches, the General Synod of Ulster and the Secession Synod, came together to form the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

As well as giving thanks for 150 years of service, the General Assembly decided in 1988 to mark this anniversary by arranging a special meeting of the Assembly to look to the future.

850 elders and ministers met at the University of Ulster in Coleraine from 10th-13th September 1990 to worship, study preparatory papers, listen to lectures and take part in seminars.

On the final afternoon the Coleraine Declaration was 'received' by the Assembly as a document that witnessed to some of the insights and visions gained at Coleraine.

It was sent to the Boards and Committees of the Assembly, to Presbyteries and to Kirk Sessions for prayer, study, reflection and response.

Gathered at this great Assembly, 850 of us in all, animated and uplifted by a fresh hearing of God's word, by joyful music and by songs of praise, we have been gripped by the Assembly's theme 'Transformed, not Conformed'.

We confess that too often we have been conformed to this world;

- by our failure to listen to God;
- by our lack of appetite for God;
- by our failure to recognise and use the power of prayer;
- by casually assuming God's presence with us;
- by our failure to listen to one another;
- by being bound to the traditions of the past;
- by being more committed to Presbyterianism than to Christ;
- by being content with superficial fellowship;
- by our preoccupation with money and possessions;
- by our failure to enable all our members to exercise their personal ministries;
- by ministering to ourselves rather than to others;
- by our lack of concern for the divisions within the Church, the Body of Christ;
- by not challenging sectarianism;

- by being afraid to take risks for our faith.

In spite of all this, we thankfully acknowledge God's mercy in calling us, unworthy as we are, to be His people, chosen and redeemed in Christ. It is our vision that through the power of the Holy Spirit, we will be transformed, so that we may

- be hungry for God – and His truth and righteousness;
- be open and willing to listen to His word;
- be enriched in worship as we celebrate God's awesome and joyful presence amongst us;
- be ready to make each congregation a living example of the family of God;
- be renewed in our personal and local church life so that members contribute to the total ministry;
- be willing to adopt a simple lifestyle, no longer preoccupied with money and possessions;
- be glad to share our time, talents and money for the work of God;
- be committed to mission, not only in our own country, but in all the world;
- be responsive to the needs of the world Christ came to save;
- be present as Christ's love, Christ's justice, and Christ's hope in the world's darkness and decay;
- be concerned to proclaim with new confidence and joy the saving name of Jesus, both by word and action;
- be gifted to present Christ attractively and to apply the Word relevantly;
- be able to affirm our oneness with all who sincerely love the Lord Jesus.

God make us a joyful and expectant Church, confident in Him who has made us His people, and given us a heavenly destiny.

God make us no longer a Church of yesterday, but a Church of today and tomorrow.

God make us mindful of Christ's living presence in our midst, leading us where He wants us to go, no longer conformed to this world, its mind-set and lifestyle, but transformed by the Spirit's renewing power.

To God be glory in the Church, now and ever.

Coleraine Declaration

The Full Text

Preamble

1.1 The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, met in special General Assembly at the University of Ulster in Coleraine from 10-13 September, 1990;

1.2 gives thanks to Almighty God for His many blessings given to our Church from

its first beginnings in Ireland;

1.3 and especially for the Union of Synods in 1840 and for all that we have received from the Lord during the 150 years since we first met in General Assembly.

1.4 We humbly acknowledge before God our many sins and failures, and pledge ourselves anew to seek first His Kingdom and righteousness in our common life, and in our witness to our society, and to the whole world in His Name.

The Mission of the Church

2.1 We rejoice afresh in the mission to which Christ has called us. Recognising His concern for the less privileged in society, we recognise our largely privileged membership, and we urge upon each congregation the need to share Christ's love with people of every kind, so that everyone may be reached with the gospel of Christ, and in turn may be prepared to offer their gifts in the life and mission of the congregation and of the wider Church.

2.2 Mission overseas has been a particular calling and enthusiasm of our Church since the inception of the General Assembly in 1840. We rejoice that God has enabled us to play our part in establishing the gospel in distant lands, and in building up the Churches there. We gratefully acknowledge also all that God has enabled us to receive and learn through the witness of partner Churches overseas, as well as from individual Christians from every continent

2.3 Recognising the enormous changes which are constantly taking place in our world, we affirm that the Great Commission of Christ our Lord is an unchanging mandate to preach the gospel to people everywhere, and we pledge ourselves afresh to the work of mission overseas, not least in Europe. We shall continue wherever possible to do this in co-operation with partner Churches, and we shall endeavour to learn from their vision, insights and priorities how best we may express our solidarity with them in the work of the gospel. We call upon our own Church to give itself heart and soul for the work of mission, and pledge greater resources of personnel, money, and pastoral care to serve this end. We urge congregations to set up overseas mission groups, and try to encourage active involvement, not least by men.

3.1 Mission in Ireland must always be our first and immediate task, but mission has been seriously hindered by the unhappy divisions of Irish society, both North and South.

We confess that we have not done all that we should to break down those barriers. Within our Church we are deeply divided between those who would affirm what we have in common with Roman Catholics, and those who feel that to minimise the differences is to compromise the Gospel. Both sections need to listen to each other and learn from each other. For some of us 'Speaking the truth in love' will require new, sustained and costly efforts to build friendships across the sectarian divide; for others the challenge will come in not being afraid, in the context of existing friendships, to witness to reformed truth. Only through a biblical ecumenism which is concerned with both truth and love shall the wounds of the people be healed.

3.2 We believe that amid conflicting cultures God is willing us to create a distinctively Christian counter-culture, in which we distance ourselves from the kind of Protestantism which closely identifies the reformed faith with particular political

and cultural aspirations.

We commit ourselves to learning what it means to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.

3.3 In Northern Ireland, we need great courage to work for change, and the flexibility to find new ways of enabling the two traditions to relate to one another in a positive and constructive way, developing new structures that will build trust, and help create a just and sustainable community life for the years ahead. Many people of different backgrounds have acted with great courage in face of violence, intimidation, and deep personal hurt. We urge our people to act with equal courage also in finding new ways forward, playing whatever part they can in public life for the future good of all. To practise neighbourliness, and to bridge divisions with friendship, and care for 'enemies', is the clear command of the gospel.

In Southern Ireland, where there is an atmosphere of greater harmony and openness, our people need to be courageous in bearing witness to Jesus Christ, and in sharing the biblical gospel in fellowship with all those who sincerely love the Lord.

3.4 In face of widespread indifference to the Church and to the gospel, especially in urban areas, we are freed with a gigantic evangelistic task. The whole Church must make resources available, both in terms of money, and of Church members who are prepared to engage in new and imaginative ways of teaching biblical truth, evangelism and Church planting.

3.5 Sensitive evangelism must take account of the sheer speed of change in recent decades, and what this has done to human life. We need to challenge secular assumptions, (e.g. that wealth gives happiness, or that human wisdom has all the answers), and to minister to the confusion and bewilderment they have created, both by our words and deeds. We need to discern what are people's deepest hopes and fears, and to expose the emptiness of the secular sources of comfort to which they turn, and the power of the gospel of Christ alone to meet the real needs of our human condition.

4.1 The task of mission involves both the proclamation of the gospel of salvation, and the demonstration of the love of God through the works of the Kingdom. Evangelism and social concern are linked together inextricably in the purpose of God. We affirm the wide-ranging concerns in which we have been and still are involved. We are determined to work with other Christians as salt and light in contemporary society, challenging injustice, and offering compassion and help to people in their needs. This must involve both biblical insight and adequate social analysis, as well as caring in practical ways in the name of the Lord Jesus. New initiatives will inevitably involve taking risks.

4.2 The constraints of time, manpower and resources inevitably mean setting limits to what we attempt to do, and particularly in the field of social witness. At a local level there needs to be a genuine listening to the community we seek to serve, so that they may have some part in setting the agenda. Local people need to know that our Church not only preaches the gospel, but lives the gospel in the love and compassion of Christ.

4.3 Congregations need to be regularly informed of the wider work of the Church, carried out in their name. A deeper sense of mission needs to be developed, both

centrally and locally, so that we become less concerned with the maintenance of buildings, projects and present patterns of ministry, and make mission our priority, sharing the limited resources available to us, and deciding in a prayerful and ordered way what God is leading us to do.

4.4 The Church must develop a strategy for urban mission, adequately financed, as a matter of high priority. Forward-looking policies regarding buildings, co-operation with other Churches, partnerships between suburban and inner-city congregations, the development of team ministries, significant lay leadership, the setting up of mission centres, are all areas that must be explored.

4.5 Three-quarters of our congregations are rural, and this is often where our Church appears at its strongest with much generosity for local needs. Rural congregations, however, are often unenthusiastic about the needs of the wider Church, and lacking in leadership. Their members are often too reserved to share their faith with others. It is important that our Church should develop new ways of rural evangelism, social witness and pastoral care, and of training elders and lay people to be involved in such tasks.

4.6 Recognising the value of small groups from the model of Jesus' ministry and the experience of many congregations all over the world, we would urge the greater use of such groups in our congregations, particularly for evangelism, discipleship training, and to foster community care. Such groups must be carefully integrated into the life of the whole congregation.

The Life of the Church

5.1 Our engagement in the tasks of mission involves a particular understanding of the nature of the Church 'We believe one holy, catholic and apostolic Church...' We confess that, while valuing the diversity of our several traditions, we have been less than enthusiastic about visible unity. The quest for unity is a costly and difficult one, and beset with many problems. We rejoice in the privilege of belonging to the one Church of Christ, and we will seek to give visible expression to this whenever and however we and our sister Churches can in conscience do so.

5.2 The ordained ministry is one of the Church's most important resources. Many ministers are overburdened, and hindered in their spiritual, pastoral and teaching tasks, by the pressures of correspondence, administration and representative roles in the community and the wider Church. Ways must be found, especially at congregational level, of liberating ministers to fulfil their primary tasks.

5.3 The strengths of our traditional theological education need to be released into a new integration of theory and practice. This must address the problems of 'ministry' in inner cities, rural areas, and in counselling, youth work, and social witness. None of these problems will be properly tackled without the kind of training which equips a leader to motivate others.

5.4 The scriptural pattern of ministry encourages us to motivate, train and utilise a team in the outworking of congregational life and mission. The ordination of men and women to the eldership has built this biblical perception into the structures of our local churches. The Kirk Session, together with Congregational Committee and the local leaders of many kinds ought already to have experience of working as a team.

In practice, we acknowledge we have often been weakened by the absence of vision and lack of resources, team leadership, and training. We urge Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions to review our present practice, and to seek ways to equip elders and others for this approach to ministry.

5.5 Christians are indeed God's pilgrim people in the world; as such they should travel light and live simply. They should not be enslaved to materialism or indulgent living, but ready to share their resources with others. The biblical principle of tithing should be taught and encouraged in our congregations so that, in a willing and cheerful way, funds may be released to further the work of God. Sacrificial sharing of time, energy and possessions, as well as a healthy disregard for their own comfort, should characterise the lives of Christian people.

6.1 The Church is the family of God. As such it incorporates into its membership Christian families, including singles, widowed, childless couples, one-parent families, as well as parents and children. We hold to the scriptural principles of purity before marriage, and fidelity within marriage. Increasingly, however, we are being called upon to offer pastoral care and counsel to those whose marriages are in serious difficulties, or have already come to an end, and to divorced persons seeking re-marriage. Congregations need to take these pastoral opportunities much more seriously. Training for those involved in counselling, who need not always be ministers, should be made available frequently. Presbyteries should encourage the provision of marriage preparation courses and marriage enrichment courses.

6.2 Loving family relationships are God's purpose for His children and we should do all in our power to instruct our people and to model before them authentic Christian family living, in all its love and discipline. The local congregation in a real sense should be a family and a fellowship should encourage hospitality, using the homes of its people as a base for fellowship, pastoral care and evangelism.

6.3 The majority of those who come to personal faith do so before the age of twenty! Believing in the place of children within the covenant of grace, we need constantly to reassess our ministry to children and young people, as to its effectiveness in leading them to faith in the Lord Jesus, and building them up in discipleship. Church must be for them a place where they know they belong, and where they feel valued and loved throughout their growing years. Both here at Church and in the home they must be taught about the faith so that they are enabled to relate it to life in the world as they know it. There is a desire to re-emphasise the significance of sacramental discipline, and to reappraise the consistency of our approach to it.

The Worship of the Church

7.1 The renewal of the Church, for which we long, depends in the ultimate sense not upon human organisation, but upon the grace of God, bestowed in Christ, and sealed to us by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We humbly acknowledge our deep sense of failure and need, as we call upon God to cleanse and forgive us, and to renew us by His word and Spirit, so that we may serve Him as we ought, and carry out the work of mission faithfully, as He has entrusted it to us.

7.2 In such renewal, worship is central. We rejoice in the gifts of God for the people of God. Biblical preaching must be at the very heart of true worship. It must, of course, be presented attractively, and applied sharply to the actual situations and

needs of our time. Yet the nourishment of mind and heart cannot adequately be accomplished by Sunday worship alone. We urge Kirk Sessions to be creative in providing additional opportunities to study the Bible, and we urge our people to take these seriously.

7.3 The sacraments are also gifts of God, and should be celebrated with joy. Careful ordering of the services can go hand in hand with the use of modern worship resources. The biblical practice of frequent communion is worthy of serious consideration by ministers and Kirk Sessions.

7.4 A rediscovery of prayer is also of vital importance to public worship, as well as to personal discipleship and congregational life. It is the clue to the Church's renewal, and to the effective carrying out of her mission. Many of our people miss out on the discipline and joy of personal prayer, and are fearful and ill-at-ease at the prospect of praying with others. These barriers must be overcome if we are to have the joy of seeing prayer answered in the renewal of the Church and the healing of our land. We need to help our people to more disciplined prayer in personal and family contexts, to more meaningful participation in the public prayer of the Church, and to a new commitment to group prayer.

7.5 The singing of praise is another important part of Christian worship. Recognising that music should help to renew the mind rather than the emotions it is believed that music and songs must be related to the worship and the Word. The time has now come for a new supplemental hymnary incorporating some of the best of recent material. The revision of the Psalter ought also to be contemplated, since the Psalms must always have a normative place in Christian worship. We call upon our congregations to give a high priority to improving the standard of Church music, offering possibilities for wider training and experience to organists, choirs and others involved in congregational music. We call on all our people to put new heart into their singing and to let the inspiration and joy of Christian praise be heard in all our Churches.

Conclusion

8.1 The General Assembly records its grateful thanks to all who have organised this special residential Assembly and have contributed to its programme through teaching, discussion, the leading of worship and in any way.

8.2 We offer thanks to Almighty God for all that we have learned and shared together in these days, and pledge ourselves anew to Him, and to the tasks of mission to which He sends us.

To the Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be glory in the Church now and ever.

Appendix 2

The PCI Mission Statement

Mission Statement of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland received by the GENERAL ASSEMBLY at its meeting to mark the 350th anniversary of the first Presbytery in Ireland June 1992

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND,
as a Reformed Church within the wider body of Christ
is grounded in the Scriptures,
and exists to love and honour God
through faith in His Son and by the power of His Spirit,
and to enable her members to play their part
in fulfilling God's mission to our world.

GOD CALLS US TO A SHARED LIFE
in which we love, honour and are reconciled to one another
whilst respecting our diversity
within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
We are called to encourage
the exercise of the gifts of every member of the Body
for the work of ministry and,
seeking the renewal of the whole Church,
to co-operate with other parts of Christ's Church
without betrayal of our convictions.

GOD CALLS US TO WORSHIP HIM with our whole lives,
meeting together in groups large and small
and gathering especially on the Lord's Day
for the preaching and study of His word,
the celebration of the sacraments
and the offering of prayer and praise with reverence and joy,
using language, form and music appropriate
both to Scripture and to our time and culture.

GOD CALLS US TO MISSION as witnesses to Christ
through both evangelism and social witness
challenging the values of the world in which we live
with the values of God's kingdom
and winning men and women to faith and discipleship.
This mission is to be pursued amongst all the people of Ireland

and the peoples of the European Community and the whole world:
those with whom we feel comfortable,
those from whom we feel alienated
and those who are in any way distant from us in culture and faith.

WE OURSELVES ARE CHALLENGED with a biblical discipleship

which is radical in its
self denial,
simplicity of lifestyle,
stewardship of money,
faithful relationships,
prayerfulness,
concern for the world which God has created
and love for its people whom he loves
and for whose salvation He gave his Son.

Appendix 3

The PCI Peace Vocation

The Church's Peace Vocation

WE, MEMBERS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND,
called by God,
in the grace of Jesus Christ,
and the power of the Holy Spirit,
to live in faith, hope and love,
as children of our heavenly Father,
and witnesses to God's Kingdom,
publicly acknowledge our vocation to peace,
which is both the gift and mission placed on us by God.

WE BELIEVE that the same evangelical faith in Jesus Christ,
which emboldens us to pray to God as our heavenly Father,
challenges us to develop radically new attitudes and relationships
with our neighbours in Ireland.

WE AFFIRM that to be Christian peacemakers in our own situation:
We must grasp more clearly the distinctive teaching of our Lord
which challenges the general practice of our world,
and breaks the vicious cycle of matching injury with injury,
hate with hate, ignorance with ignorance.
We must therefore be prepared to meet and talk together:
with those in our own church with whom we have disagreements;
with those from churches whose practices and beliefs differ from our own;
with those from whom we are politically divided.

WE AFFIRM that to be Christian peacemakers in our own situation:
we must recognise the responsibility given by God to government,
and to those who serve the cause of law and order,
so as to encourage well-doing, correct evil-doers, and protect the innocent.
We must therefore reject violence;
seek ways to advance justice and promote the welfare of the needy;
affirm that in democratic societies all citizens are called
to share in these responsibilities;
and encourage all efforts to establish new structures of consent
and participation.

WE AFFIRM that to be Christian peacemakers in our own situation:
We must be initiators of programmes of action
which will contribute to peace in our community.
We must therefore provide resources and encouragement to

enable congregations to move forward at the local level in the field of inter-community relations.

WE UNDERSTAND peacemaking to be an affirmation and accommodation of diversity, and that our particular history in this land of divided communities and recurring violence, of mutual suspicion, fear and injury, makes it imperative that we reassert the Church's own proper calling to seek peace, and the things that make for peace in our day.

Appendix 4

An Understanding of Mission for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

(PCI 2009a, pp.63–5)

Preamble

At the request of the Board of Mission in Ireland, the Research and Resources Committee has been working towards a contextualised understanding of mission for our Irish Presbyterian setting, as with God's help, we seek to build vibrant communities of Christ serving and transforming Ireland.

Other Boards and Agencies of the Church have expressed interest in this work, and the paper that follows is offered as a resource to help the Church reflect upon our collective call to mission. The Board envisages that ministers and congregational leaders may find the contents helpful as they prayerfully consider their local situations, and especially as they draft their missional plans.

The Board acknowledges the context determined nature of this work, and trusts that others will add to our collective understanding of mission as projects are initiated and further reflection takes place drawing out additional scriptural insights.

An understanding of Mission for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

God, the prime mover in mission

God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is the prime mover in mission. The story of the Bible is of God's mission, through his covenant of grace, to rescue a fallen world ultimately through the life, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ. Mission, therefore, is not primarily something we do but God does. God is a missionary God, and we as his people, continuously participate in his activity.

Whichever context the Church has found itself in over history, this great commission call to "Go and preach the good news" remains our primary impetus in mission.

The Bible's big story of mission

The Bible records how God's rule through his people is extended throughout the earth, overcoming sin and climaxing in the consummation of all things under Christ. This relentless extension of God's reign is mission.

Holistic, integral mission

Holistic mission is a way of calling the Church to keep together, in her theology as well as in her practice, what God Himself never separates: 'being' and 'doing', the 'spiritual' and the 'physical', the 'individual' and the 'social', 'justice' and 'mercy', 'preaching the truth' and 'practising the truth'. What is the relationship between word

and action in mission? The Lausanne Covenant of

1974 insisted that evangelism and social concern are two facets of mission, and they belong together. While correcting a significant imbalance, the Board suggests this creates an unhelpful distinction, since words and actions are part of the same holistic demonstration of the kingdom. (1Peter 2:12. 3:15).

Globally, the Church is moving south, becoming younger, and increasingly engaging with the poor, a stark contrast with our relatively static, ageing and rich context. We need to allow the world Church to tutor us towards a fuller, more holistic understanding of mission, while recognising the costs associated with this kind of radical discipleship.

So, what might be the starting points for holistic missional activity in Ireland? It is possible to begin with any live issue or at any point of need. In contemporary Ireland these entry points for mission may include, among others:

- A divided society / Dealing with past hurts
- Sectarianism
- Pluralism
- Post-modernism
- Racism
- The environmental crisis
- Social justice / Social policy
- Marginalisation
- Loneliness
- Illness
- Guilt
- Bereavement
- Addiction
- Urbanisation
- Rural life
- Media
- Ireland's part in the new Europe
- Identity
- Individualism and Significance
- Work
- Consumerism and debt
- Poverty and wealth
- Governance and statehood
- Globalisation / new world order

- Sexuality
- Relationships, including Family & Divorce
- Ageing

To be effective in mission, beginning at these places the Church must intentionally move towards a direct explanation of the gospel.

Mission may not always begin with evangelism. But mission that does not ultimately include declaring the word and the name of Christ, the call to repentance, and faith and obedience has not completed its task. It is defective mission, not holistic mission. (Wright 2006, p.319)

Presbyterian vision for mission in Ireland

There have been significant moves of God's Spirit through the denomination's history, and a desire to reach out has long been part of our heritage. However, it could be argued that we have never fully shaken off an initial chaplaincy mindset, which may have limited the parameters of our mission to our own people. In the General Assembly Reports of 1973, the late Dr Alan Flavelle wrote:

Theodore Wedel likens the Church to a coastguard station on a dangerous coast. Tales of its rescue-service are often told; memorial windows reflect its achievement; no effort is spared to give the coastguards a centre worthy of the cause they serve. But "this station-building became in time such an absorbing activity that the rescue service was increasingly neglected, though traditional drills and rituals were carefully preserved. The actual launching out into the ocean storm became a hireling vocation, or one left to a few volunteers. Is there here a realistic picture of the Church of Christ in Ireland today? (PCI 1973, pp.184–5)

This challenge, issued 36 years ago is as important for us today as it was then. It calls us as a Church to ruthlessly re-examine our attitude to mission. As individuals, Congregations, Presbyteries and a General Assembly, we need to see ourselves as part of God's unfolding plan for mission. We are not passive in this, but partners, fully participating with God in his mission. In an attitude of prayer, we need to re-engage with God's big story in the Bible, and find places of connection with our 21st century world. Chris Wright comments:

Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation (Wright 2006, pp.22–3).

To be healthy, the Church needs to be conformed in each generation to God's heart for mission to the outsider. Our reformed heritage gives us confidence to engage in this continually urgent task of mission to a lost world. History demonstrates that when the Church fails to re-interpret this essential mindset for itself, it declines and ultimately dies.

Appendix 5

Informed consent form for interviewees

Personal introduction

I am Peter McDowell, minister of Garnerville Presbyterian Church. I am currently undertaking PhD research through Union Theological College and Queen's University.

Study Title:

“A critical dialogue between the missiology of Lesslie Newbigin and the emerging understanding of mission within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland”

Invitation Paragraph

As the secretary of one of the mission boards of PCI, I would like to interview you about the developments in thinking about mission within PCI since 1990, but particularly in the past 10 years. I would also like to explore the development of missionary thinking within your own board during the same time.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to analyse the developments in thinking about mission within PCI and to determine if a consensus view has been reached within the denomination. These findings will then be used in a ‘critical dialogue’ with the missiology of Lesslie Newbigin, with the aim of providing a positive critique.

Confidentiality of information

All information you provide will be kept confidential. Only I and my research supervisor, Prof. Drew Gibson, will have access to it. All data collection, storage and processing will comply with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the EU Directive 95/46 on Data Protection. Interviews will be transcribed and what you say may be quoted in the final dissertation, excluding any parts of the interview you request not be quoted. Sections of the final dissertation that include direct quotes from the interview will be forwarded to you for approval before publication.

What will happen to the results of the research study

All information provided by you will be stored securely for ten years in order that you might access it. It will be stored anonymously on a computer and in a written transcript, with analysis of the information obtained. The results from this analysis will be available in my final dissertation, which will be available in the libraries at Queen's University Belfast and Union Theological College, Belfast.

Supervision

For further information, my supervisor can be contacted at: d.gibson@union.ac.uk;
tel: +44 (0)28 90205080 postal address: 108 Botanic Avenue, Belfast, BT7 1JT.

Participant Consent Form

Title:

I agree to participate in the above named project.

I have read the participant information sheet for the above research project and understand the following:

1. That I am free to withdraw from the interview at any time.
2. That all information I provide will be dealt with in a confidential manner.
3. I agree that the researcher may contact me subsequent to the interview for clarification of my answers or for limited additional information.

Name

.....

Address (optional)

.....

.....

Telephone Number (optional).....

Signed.....

Date.....

Appendix 6

Interview Questions

Missiology of the Board

The aim of this section to discover how this particular Board's view of mission has developed over the past 10 years.

How has your Board's understanding of mission developed/evolved over the past 10 years?

Where are we in the development process?

Describe the Board's understanding/model of mission

- a) what are its main themes/values?
- b) how does it differ from previous understanding/model?

Process

The aim of this section is to learn about the process the Board has gone through in developing its understanding of mission.

What caused the Board to begin thinking about mission in a new way?

- a) Was it a 'top down' or a 'bottom up' process?
- b) Were there factors external to PCI?
- c) Were there theological/missiological influences?

What process has the board gone through to develop its mission/vision/strategy?

- a) has process been ad hoc or managed?

What have been the influences through the process of development?

- a) What pressures and influences have come from within PCI? (internal factors)
- b) What pressures and influences have come from outside PCI – e.g. social trends, legal influences etc.? (external factors)
- c) Have missiological writings and experiences from outside PCI been part of the process? Who has introduced them? How have they been incorporated? (missiological influences)

How much ownership of the process and its outcomes has there been?

- a) by staff
- b) by board members
- c) by wider church (Presbytery/local congregation)

How much co-ordination has there been?

- a) with other boards
- b) with congregations and Presbyteries
- c) with outside agencies

Are there documents and resources which I can access to assist my research into the development of missiological thinking within this Board?

PCI

The aim of this section is to test my thesis that there is an emerging view of mission throughout PCI.

Do you think there is an emerging view of mission within PCI?

- a) Within the central body, i.e. Church House?
- b) If so, to what extent is it accepted by congregations and Presbyteries? What are the major themes of this emerging view?
- c) If not, how desirable would a consensus on mission be? How feasible would it be? How might it be developed?

To what extent do you feel the Boards share a consistent missiology?

- a) Has its development been coordinated or has it evolved organically?
- b) If there is little consistency, is this a problem? Do you have any suggestions regarding this? Is anything being done about this?

How consistent, do you feel, is the understanding of mission between congregations and Presbyteries and the centre?

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