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## The Shaping of Things Now: Questions of Emerging Churches

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**The Shaping of Things Now:  
Questions of Emerging Churches**

**Darren Cronshaw**

*My Interest in the Emerging Missional Church*

My personal interest in the emerging or missional church as a movement stems from my background as a missionary. I served in Asia for eight months, and had planned to be there longer. When that opportunity closed and we returned to Australia, I started thinking afresh about mission in my country and city. I resonate with Lesslie Newbigin, missionary to India, who when he returned to England after nearly forty years saw the West as a post-Christian pagan mission field: 'the most challenging missionary frontier of our time.'<sup>1</sup> His writings led to the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) in North America which urges churches in the West to prioritize mission and cultural engagement.<sup>2</sup> These priorities have helped shape the emerging missional church. And part of why it captures my imagination is its passion for mission and interest in culture.

The term 'emerging church' has been hotly debated. Some mainstream churches say 'what are you doing that we are not?' and some emerging churches resent the implication that they are still 'emerging' into being a real church.<sup>3</sup> But 'emerging' describes something that is changing and evolving rather than fixed in one place. The label recognizes that such churches are emerging from a modern into a postmodern framework, in a post-Christendom era, in a digital age, for a post-colonial era. Interestingly, it is a term that has been used to describe the early church in the first century, since that was the time the church's leadership, worship and mission practices evolved. Arguably, therefore, emerging church is an appropriate term to use for

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churches today that are evolving for a new era.<sup>4</sup>

Australian leaders in Forge Mission Training Network add 'missional' to emphasize the primacy of mission: 'emerging missional church' is a term that reminds churches that emerging is happening for the sake of mission and that mission is at the centre.<sup>5</sup> The Forge ethos is that contextualizing worship is good, and more churches in the Western world need to do that; but the mission of God is primary, and all churches need to be focused by that. When I say emerging church I mean emerging missional church. Either term describes the movement of churches that are emerging (or re-emerging) as new ways of doing church for a new era, fuelled by mission and innovation.

Emerging church is not a new 'quick fix' or model on offer alongside seeker services or purpose-driven church. It is not surprising that some publishers, speakers and churches are jumping on the bandwagon to use the label (and put up candles and darken the room) in an attempt at programming emerging church. But the underlying philosophy goes deeper and relates to incarnationally engaging culture and grappling with how to transform church for the twenty-first century.

My interest in emerging churches has been furthered by my experience as a Baptist pastor. After leaving my last church to undertake this study, I was disappointed I had neither transformed its structures, nor helped it grow in numbers, nor led it to become more multicultural and representative of its community. Part of the reason may have been its history of systemic conflict and conservative expectations. Part of it was admittedly my own lack of leadership and communication skills. But my experience left me with the questions, 'Is it possible to reshape established churches in an emerging missional framework and how can that be done?' and 'Is it more fruitful to plant new churches that are mission-shaped from their beginning?'

I took notice in 2001 of the priority that my denomination, the Baptist Union of Victoria (BUV), started to give to 'new missional communities' (NMCs). They set out to establish at least twenty missional experiments, and offered help though seed finance and support.<sup>6</sup> Anne Wilkinson-Hayes, my regional minister, has as part of her role the resourcing of NMCs.<sup>7</sup> Over the last few years new expressions of church have started include 'The Living Room' in homes around North Fitzroy, 'New Community Ringwood' which meets in an art gallery complex, the 'Inspiral' justice-oriented group for University residential students and an incarnational outreach to seekers of alternative spiritualities.<sup>8</sup>

The work of Forge Mission Training Network has also been

influential for me and the whole Australian emerging church movement.<sup>9</sup> They have played a key networking and training role in helping many (but not all) of the new emerging churches get started. Forge has developed an action-reflection training program and approach to emerging church that is built around missional identity, sustainable spirituality and pioneering leadership. The founders of Forge, Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, wrote *The Shaping of Things to Come*.<sup>10</sup> This has become a kind of textbook for Australian missional church life. The authors' sense of hope is not in revitalizing established churches (though they acknowledge a place for that). Their vision is to see new culturally diverse missional communities planted with four organic characteristics:

- 'missional structures' rather than Christendom's attractive and hierarchical model
- 'incarnational ecclesiology' that infiltrates community networks
- 'messianic spirituality' that engages culture and everyday rhythms of life
- 'apostolic leadership' that pioneers new and innovative mission, prophetically questions the status quo and evangelistically goes beyond the church's walls.

It argues and develops a framework for why churches need to experiment wildly, be free to fail, cultivate a climate of radical change and develop church on the margins.

Around the world, among the experiments of new ways of 'doing church' are alternative worship, basic ecclesial communities, café church, house church, cell church, new monasticism, festival celebrations, art cooperatives, missional orders, Celtic churches, youth congregations, Children's Church, and mid-week, school-linked and seeker gatherings.<sup>11</sup> Most of them are motivated by a desire to engage their culture and/or express mission in innovative and relevant ways. For example, the Church of the Savior has developed a multi-congregational approach to church by having any new congregation ask first 'what is our mission in this area', second 'what structures will best facilitate that mission?' and third 'what spiritual disciplines will sustain the community in that mission?'.<sup>12</sup> They decide on other structures after they have decided on their mission, and shape church around that. Church of the Savior predated the emerging church as a contemporary label, but their missional focus has inspired other emerging expressions.

In Melbourne and Australia we have other pre-emerging church models for what emerging churches are striving towards.

Over the last few decades John Smith has started God's Squad, Truth and Liberation Concern, and Care and Communication Concern as attempts to contextualize church and the gospel for Australians. Athol Gill founded the House of the Gentle Bunyip in Collingwood as an intentional Christian community. Different groups of people have been seeking to follow Jesus in radical ways and have been striving to shape church around mission. They have avoided a one-size-fits-all, get-the-latest-program-from-overseas approach to church. They could be seen as forerunners of the missional church movement. Emerging church practitioner Mark Sayers suggests there is something unique about Melbourne's openness to the emerging church because of the pioneering groundwork done by leaders like John Smith, Athol Gill and the radical discipleship movement.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Case studies*

My commitment to mission and cultural studies, my denomination's encouragement of new missional communities, my current work with Forge, and Melbourne's growing number of emerging churches have all helped shape my research interest in emerging churches in Melbourne. Frost and Hirsch's *The Shaping of Things to Come* offers a theological paradigm for the future of emerging churches, but I want to examine what innovation and mission is actually happening in a selection of emerging churches in Melbourne. The emerging church literature argues for re-consideration of the theology of church, but what difference does it make? Advocates contend that new models are the way to reach people in a 'postmodern' society, but do the results match the rhetoric? What innovation is happening and where is it taking churches in their mission? How is 'the shaping of things' now?

I have visited four main congregations over six months in 2006. They are a Church of Christ, Pentecostal, Baptist and Anglican church spread across the eastern and inner north-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. I participated in their gatherings, collected documents, interviewed key leaders and conducted focus groups. Here is a brief overview of their stories, followed by questions their experience prompts me to ask, and questions other churches might ask of the emerging church movement.

#### *1. Connection Community – Connecting with God and people*

Connection is an innovative Church of Christ congregation in Croydon. In 2001 Croydon Church of Christ literally closed. Then new pastors Wayne and Paula Nebauer, who had wanted to plant a church, came and worked with them on reinventing

themselves. Their Sunday gatherings are seen as 'shop windows' to let people see what church is about and invite them into a deeper community experience. For example, they have met on Sunday mornings in pubs, bistros and family restaurants for 'Life Connection' gatherings. The leaders host discussion around tables over coffee, interspersed with sharing stories and multimedia but rarely singing or long sermons. Connection has been marked by a passion for community, a flare for creativity and a desire to see how Christ relates to everyday life. They also connect with the community through 'the Dining Room', High School ministry, playgroups, and community faith nursing.<sup>14</sup> Their founding pastors have just left, so they are looking to the future and considering their needs for new leadership.

### *2. Urban Life – Living for the wellbeing of our community*

Urban Life is a reinvented and relocated Christian Revival Crusade (CRC) in Ringwood. In February 2005 they left their old 4.5 acre facilities on the outskirts of Ringwood, and leased an old night club in the centre of Ringwood. They describe their journey as 'from the country club to the nightclub'. They explain to visitors that 'The Urban' is a café, community centre and children's play area that also has church here on Sundays. They have revisioned what they do as a church around the twin priorities of community and mission. They describe community as 'doing life deeply together', and a key part of that is their new small group structure 'Get-Togethers' (GTs) which have only two rules – there must be some shared meal, and there is no Bible study. They describe mission as 'being found about our Father's business'. As well as their global mission that they have traditionally prized, they are freshly looking at ways to serve and reach their own community. Community ministries include a soup kitchen, high school ministry, a craft group, book club, Prime Timers social group (50+), role-playing games and an exercise group. Another radical part of Urban Life's story is that when they moved, they had a smooth leadership transition. Fifty year old Doug Faircloth handed over leadership to his associate, thirty-five year old Anthea Smits. Doug continues in a two day per week coaching role. They also changed their name – from Christian Life Centre to Urban Life, suggestive of their new location and an acronym for: 'U R Beginning A New Life'. They are looking forward to the hoped-for growth that they expect their obedience and openness will bring.

### *3. Eastern Hills – Creating lives which reflect the Kingdom of God*

Eastern Hills is a new Baptist church plant in Croydon. It

was started in 2003 by a group of young adults including Bible College of Victoria graduates Toli and Emma Morgan and Matthew Jones. They are characterized by creativity in worship, community and hospitality, and engaging the world. They seek to engage world at a variety of levels – cultural awareness, high school groups, a creative group for people with mental illness, a soup kitchen team which now runs a sports team, rent relief and assistance for Sudanese asylum seekers, and basically supporting anything people want to get involved in. One of their first socials was the harbor deepening protest rally, which they went to out of a keen sense of social justice and because one of their members felt passionate about it. They meet at Wyreena Community Centre, but early 2007 were planning on moving to the larger Yarunga Community Centre in Croydon Hills. They look forward to the flexibility and room for growth that more space will offer them.

*4. Solace – to enable a people to thrive as followers of Jesus, celebrating and re-making their everyday world*

Solace is a congregation planted in 2000 within St Hilary's Anglican Church which has since branched off on its own and meets at Balwyn Baptist (in the east) and St Paul's Anglican, Fairfield (in the inner north-east). They were started by Olivia MacLean with a focus on interactive worship – for all ages and all stages of faith and learning styles. Their Thursday evening and Sunday morning gatherings tend to be interactive and contemplative. They started with a vision for the unchurched but found they attracted a lot of de-churched and over-churched people who appreciated the space to be free to question and explore their faith dilemmas. Their distinctive is celebrating a spirituality of everyday life and vocation. They have developed this with a *Remaking* course and book about seven Ways of Jesus-centered spirituality, based on Richard Foster's writing on historical spiritual traditions and Dallas Willard's concept of 'transforming grace'.<sup>15</sup> Another unique feature is their 'Dreaming' nights to help people think about questions and plans (including business plans) to remake their world. They are looking forward to 'bridging the gap' between their ideals and where what feel they are now.

After visiting them, I have considered what participants consider are the strengths and weaknesses of these four churches. Drawing on their strengths, I have considered what these emerging churches have to say to other churches? And considering their weaknesses, what might other churches question and critique in them and the broader emerging church movement?

*Questions emerging churches asks**1. Is your mission primary?*

A foundational question the emerging church asks is whether mission is primary, rather than our inherited traditions of church. Or Forge takes it a step back further to ask 'is Jesus primary'? Frost and Hirsch, inspired by David Bosch, urge Christology to inform missiology, and then missiology to inform ecclesiology.<sup>16</sup> So instead of starting with church forms, they would say start with understanding Jesus, then develop an approach to mission and then form church around that.

For example, Urban Life asked about all their programs, 'how does this help us with community and mission?' Their senior leader Anthea says they are operating almost none of the programs they were doing five years ago. Their missional refocus has prompted a reallocation of resources – planned and unplanned. As people respond the new challenge for local mission, they report plenty of people volunteering for the soup kitchen, community ministries and helping in the café, but are starting to feel an almost gratifying shortfall in worship team numbers!<sup>17</sup>

As well as prioritizing mission activity in church programs, some emerging churches are beginning (at least in their aspirations) to refocus on mission of the whole people of God – in their families, community groups and workplaces.<sup>18</sup> Some emerging churches are better at celebrating this than others. Solace is a great example, which is forming their whole network and ethos around encouraging one another in their everyday mission roles.

The theological basis that emerging churches are inspired by is incarnational mission. Rather than bringing people in with an 'attractional' model of church, emerging churches espouse sending their people out in an 'incarnational' mission. Thus Frost and Hirsch encourage joining community groups and building friendships through those networks, more than attracting people to join church groups.<sup>19</sup> Solace, for example, was recruiting board members and talking to someone about that until the potential recruit told the pastors that he was considering either the Solace board or the local school board. They encouraged him to join the school board. 'Is your mission primary?' is the key question.

*2. Is your leadership permission-giving?*

As I talked to leaders and participants of emerging churches, a recurring story of what they say is important in the growth of their church and in feeling valued is a permission-giving ap-



proach to leadership. All four of my case studies show this pattern and have their own stories. It is particularly part of Connection's culture.

Wayne and Paula at Connection said a lot of their time, from the green-light brainstorming at their first retreat through to an intern program that has developed, has focused on encouraged people to dream and think innovatively about church. When people have a passion to do something, as long as it is within ethical and broad vision boundaries, they are generally given permission to implement their ideas. There are no committee and church meeting structures that new initiatives have to be cleared through. One of Connection's interns, Yasmine, is among those who appreciate this aspect of Wayne's leadership:

Wayne never said to me "Oh, you have got to do this and you have got to do that". He just asked me where my heart is and then said, "Okay, cool, let me find something for you to do in terms of your passions and what you want".<sup>20</sup>

Is your leadership permission-giving (and empowering)?

### 3. *Are you engaging culture?*

Part of incarnational living and non-dualistic spirituality is to explore how God connects with contemporary culture. Emerging churches want to engage their culture in worship and evangelism. Eastern Hills was started by a group of young adult friends who were wrestling with questions of how the gospel engages culture. Toli said they were asking:

How do we do Church in such a way that it is connected with the world in which we live, with the community in which we live? How do we do this stuff? How do we actually make this connection between our Worship on a Sunday and what happens in our world?<sup>21</sup>

Drawing on the inspiration of Saint Paul the Apostle and his understanding of how the gospel touches culture, one Sunday morning Toli urged the congregation to grapple with questions of our culture. He suggested going to public lectures, spending time in pubs, visiting galleries and watching films as a way of engaging culture and not just plundering it for gospel illustrations. Bible study takes time and so does cultural analysis, and Toli argued both are as important as the other to allow the Word to become flesh and blood in our culture. His potentially controversial challenge was: 'Don't think that seeing a movie is less important than reading the Bible.'<sup>22</sup> Are you engaging culture?

4. *Are you interactive in worship?*

One of the most formative aspects for me of the six months of visiting emerging churches was participating in their interactive worship. For example, my daughter and I visited Solace and participated in the 'Solace liturgy' which invites six or seven people to lead different parts of the service. People mingled or sat around St Paul's on various lounges, chairs and steps. Stuart Davey, one of the pastors, greeted us and explained we were free to go to different parts of the room to prayerfully read the papers on the wall (which included articles about the deaths of Steve Erwin and Peter Brock), make an offering in one of many offering boxes (with symbols of our money, time, environmental care or encouragement of others), respond by writing, painting or molding play-dough, help yourself to a coffee (fair trade), or engage in quiet conversations. After this choose-your-own adventure 'liquid church' experience, Stu called everyone together and asked, 'Where have you seen God at work this week?' Con had visited a church in Queensland and appreciated the welcome and love he experienced. Someone else had just got to talk to their Dad before he died. Stu had weeded his garden and reflected on what God was taking out of his life.

This was the first of a few questions through the morning, interspersed with songs, teaching about transforming grace,<sup>23</sup> and a Leunig poem.<sup>24</sup> Maybe only a third of people present contributed to discussion, but most listened with interest. Well constructed questions led to thought-provoking discussion, and I noticed people did not criticize responses or seek to immediately resolve dilemmas. I also noticed people were reasserting their commitment to traditional evangelical practices like prayer, Bible reading and compassion to the needy, but wanted to do these things with right motives and not out of obligation. Stuart summarized the morning, closed in prayer, and invited everyone to contribute to the six or seven things that needed doing to tidy and clean up.<sup>25</sup>

Solace gatherings have always tried to be 'informal, participatory and authentic'. The symbols that represent the culture of Solace include mugs, candles, tables not pews, play dough, and (relative) absence of music.<sup>26</sup> Olivia says worship becomes like a game of Hacky Sack – anyone can start or contribute to the conversation.<sup>27</sup> As well as teaching input with occasional lectures, they have an open microphone and lots of encouragement to ask and explore questions. As well as practicing communion traditionally, at times they instead share whole meals together. Instead of meeting inside for worship every Sunday, once or twice

per year they plant trees or participate in Clean Up Australia.<sup>28</sup> There was question about what people might say in the open mic, whether lunch can replace Eucharist, or whether Greening Up Australia can replace a service. But participants say these practices helped them connect with God and one another in new ways, and they continue to explore interactive and diverse expressions of worship. Are you interactive in worship?

5. *Are you doing life together deeply?*

Emerging churches, at least those I have visited as well as the rhetoric I read in the books, give priority to building authentic community. Some have explored intentional community and living together. Others have reevaluated or built their programs with a focus on community.

Urban Life, in their small groups, wanted to get away from singing and preaching at one another without knowing one another. They wanted to move away from what they called the craziness of telling each other how to live without being prepared to (or having the format to) open their lives to share life together. Inspired by Acts 2:42-47 and the vision of a group of friends who would bleed for one another, they started asking 'What would a group look like that we could not wait to get to?' and 'Into what sort of a space would we be comfortable inviting our friends?' They dreamed that they would want good food, a big table and lots of laughing. They were not convinced they needed Bible study and singing, and got that input at other times. And so they refocused their small groups as 'Get-togethers' or 'GTs' with only two rules – there has to be a shared meal and no Bible study.<sup>29</sup>

GTs have become a primary context for community care. Anthea visited a man in hospital after a heart attack. She started with, 'Oh, I'm sorry I haven't been to see you, how are you doing? I heard you had a heart attack.' He said, 'Oh, you didn't need to come and visit me, it was fantastic, the GT group they just came in and they brought communion in for me and I had so-and-so come in and they have been coming in regularly to have prayer with me and oh it's just fantastic'.<sup>30</sup>

Authentic community is seen as worthwhile for its own sake but also an appropriate expression of mission, especially in a postmodern world where relationships are so valued. Aaron was a young person who basically walked in off the street one morning and came to Christian belief through belonging to the Urban Life community. In some church cultures it is very important to believe (and/or behave) before you can belong, but Urban Life seeks to prioritize welcoming people to feel they belong irrespec-

tive of their beliefs and behavior. In the case of Aaron, this led to him finding faith for himself and his behavior is changing as he learns about following Jesus.<sup>31</sup> It is difficult to do effective mission without community. Are you doing life deeply?

These are some of the questions that my visits to emerging churches suggest to me. But there are also questions to address to emerging churches suggested by the potential weaknesses and shortfalls that participants identify.

*Questions to ask emerging churches*

*1. Have you forgotten the importance of nurture?*

Emerging missional churches place an emphasis on mission, sometimes to the neglect of nurture. Missional emphasis is actually one of the things that attracts many Christians who like to be part of the action and long for more relevant expressions of church. However, a disappointment of some emerging church participants is lack of nurture.<sup>32</sup> Part of that may be the 'me-centered' generation of Christians who are used to being 'fed' in other churches. Part of it is preoccupation with Bible-teaching sermons as the form that helps people feel nurtured and a reluctance to appreciate more interactive forms of nurture. Sometimes people do not realize the value of missionary spirituality and that they will grow best by actively living out their faith. But sometimes people's concerns do reflect an actual lack of focus on teaching and spiritual formation. Some leaders aren't nurturing their leaders and people as much as they could.

I am committed to the church and its purpose to glorify God through worship, mission, pastoral care and spiritual formation. Church is not *just* about mission. And in fact to do mission effectively, we need to give attention to the other aspects of church. Emerging church practitioners sometimes say they are focusing on mission because it is the first thing that needs focusing on, or because the church has been so imbalanced on looking after itself that it needs a recalibration in the other direction. But an imbalance in one direction does not justify an unhealthy imbalance in the other direction. Rowland Croucher's main reservation with *The Shaping of Things to Come* is that church includes four essential activities—worship (to God), formation (in ourselves), koinonia (with Christian others), and mission (relating to those outside faith). Renewal requires the integration of all four.<sup>33</sup> Have you forgotten the importance of nurture?

*2. What are your processes for innovation and change?*

Emerging churches value being on the edge of change and

developing programs (and shutting them down) depending on the needs of the context. Sometimes they hold on to their denominational tradition, but often they question it or at least want to transform it. They often move, are regularly changing, and aspire to innovate further. Some emerging churches have thoughtful processes for this, and take the time to carefully plan consultation. Others are more ad-hoc and have left people with their trust undermined and their efforts unappreciated. This is not unique to emerging churches but because of the importance they place on innovation it is particularly important to pay attention to. Emerging churches may attract a greater proportion of innovators and early adopters.<sup>34</sup> Yet this does not excuse emerging church leaders from ignoring appropriate process. People still expect to be consulted when change affects them, even if they are in a congregation without decades of tradition. One of the best resources for emerging leadership is chaos theory and living systems thinking.<sup>35</sup> What are your processes for innovation and change?

### *3. Are you fostering evangelism?*

Emerging churches say they place a high priority on mission and are often starting new community programs. They tend to express a commitment to holistic mission. When asked about mission, Solace refers to the \$10,000 raised in 2006 for Opportunity International, Eastern Hills refers to their advocacy for asylum seekers and Connection prizes 'The Dining Room'. At Urban Life Anthea is clear to explain their holistic approach to mission as involving both proclamation and social justice or acts of mercy. They often talk about their desire to see people come to faith through verbal witness. But they also have a clear commitment to service and demonstrating the gospel in action. Anthea says, 'Christianity is often about populating heaven, where it needs to be about transforming earth.'<sup>36</sup>

The commitment to holistic mission is noteworthy and perhaps particularly appropriate in Australia where we value serving those in need and standing up for the battler.<sup>37</sup> But I am interested how much evangelism emerging churches are actually doing. Some groups shy away from evangelism because of past experiences of insensitive programs. Sometimes they question it as part of re-evaluating beliefs about the gospel and the uniqueness of Christ.<sup>38</sup> Some groups avoid evangelistic programs because of a commitment to relational evangelism and inviting people to belong to the community before they are expected to believe. Most emerging churches say they design their gatherings to be more accessible to people outside the church, but this

sometimes is more effective for attracting back over-churched people back than drawing in unchurched people. Troy Arnott at New Community Ringwood has a refreshing focus on evangelism. He has done a lot of theological reflection on how to share faith in a postmodern setting, and runs seminars for his people to encourage and empower them.<sup>39</sup> I am looking forward to comparing National Church Life Survey (NCLS) data on evangelism and new Christians to see whether Troy's efforts have made a noticeable difference when compared to other emerging churches. It will also be interesting to compare the evangelistic effectiveness of more mainstream church plants or national averages with my four case studies. Are you fostering evangelism?

*4. Do you recognize the broader body of Christ?*

A strength of emerging church thinking is encouraging diversity of models, but a weakness is that this can be perceived as questioning the validity of mainstream churches. One of Alan Hirsch's criticisms of the contemporary church growth movement (CCGM) is that however good their typically 'attractional' approach is, they will only reach a certain segment of the population.<sup>40</sup> Contemporary seeker-style churches need to be complemented with incarnational models. But emerging churches with their incarnational rhetoric need to evaluate how incarnational they actually are and would benefit from considering their attractional influence.<sup>41</sup> Emerging churches have prophetic challenges that mainstream churches need to hear, but emerging churches need to be listening to and appreciating the place of mainstream churches too.<sup>42</sup> And, from my perspective in Forge, we are always seeking to balance the tension of being prophetic about the need for incarnational mission and new church plants, and respecting the broader body of Christ and celebrating mission wherever it is. One of Solace's founding principles is that they want to stay connected to helpful traditions and 'hold the hand of the historical church'.<sup>43</sup> There is also a challenge at an individual level; some leaders can value innovation in theology so much that they start to ignore the body and the importance of traditional boundaries. Do you recognize the broader body of Christ?

*5. How much does your reality match your rhetoric?*

Solace has an expression 'mind the gap', echoing the London Underground, or more philosophically the theory of cognitive dissonance; because they acknowledge that there is a big gap between their ideals and who they are.<sup>44</sup> This is something that motivates them to change, but identifying the gap (and for some

emerging churches being more honest and acknowledging that it exists) is an important stage in their 'becoming' who they want to be.

I am fascinated to explore what mission and innovation is happening in emerging churches. My hypothesis is that emerging missional frameworks are releasing new expressions of mission in innovative ways, but I want to explore that further with congregational studies and seek to understand the gap between reality and rhetoric. In the form of more questions I am exploring: How are mission and innovation being cultivated? How else can it be encouraged? What similarities and differences occur in understanding innovation and mission between pastors and congregation and between different congregations? How have existing churches been remissionalized with emerging church frameworks, and how does this compare with planting churches that are intentionally mission-shaped from the beginning? What can other churches learn from emerging churches and what have emerging churches still got to learn from other churches?

In terms of mission in particular, how does the theology of mission that emerging churches espouse help foster the mission of emerging church participants, and how do they express their mission? What are some of the motivational factors that encourage church participants to engage in mission? What factors detract from missional activity? What forms does mission take, in the lives of individuals and through the life of the congregation? To what extent can emerging church mission be described as 'incarnational', and how much 'attractational' mission occurs?

In terms of innovation, how do emerging churches deal with management of change and the diffusion of innovation? What is participants' experience of innovation-decisions? What frameworks do leaders use? Are people satisfied with the frameworks? What can emerging churches learn from the sociology of innovation in religion, and the new science of chaos theory? Do emerging churches attract people who are innovators? Do they intentionally build a culture of change that increases organizational innovativeness? What can other churches learn from emerging churches about how to lead churches through change and into innovative new approaches to church life? It may also be fruitful to ask whether emerging churches are a fad, a missionary movement or a revitalization movement, why people decide to attend emerging churches, and how their renewal and innovative practice may be sustained.

How much does your reality match your rhetoric?

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 Writer

Cronshaw, Darren. Address: 7 Coolaroo Court, Mooroolbark VIC 3138 Australia. Title: Director of Theological Studies. Rev Dr Cronshaw earned a B.A. and M.Litt from Australian National University (1992 and 1994), a Graduate Diploma of Education from University of New England (1994), a Bachelor of Theology (honors) from Bible College of Victoria (1997), a Master of Theology from Whitley College (1999), and a Doctor of Ministry from Bible College of Victoria (Australian College of Theology) (2006). His book *Credible Witness* (UNOH 2006), based on his DMin thesis, explores models of mission drawing on Australian history and culture. This paper introduces the four emerging churches Darren is researching as case studies of mission and innovation and some of the questions he is starting to explore towards a Doctor of Theology at Whitley College (Melbourne College of Divinity). Darren has had rich and varied experience in pastoral ministry, Christian camping and cross-cultural contexts. He has also taught as adjunct faculty at Bible College of Victoria, Whitley College, and Tabor College (Melbourne), and serves with Forge Mission Training Network ([www.forge.org.au](http://www.forge.org.au)). Husband to Jenni, Dad to three children, lover of good books and movies, and newcomer to the emerging conversation, Darren welcomes feedback to [shapingnow@optusnet.com.au](mailto:shapingnow@optusnet.com.au)

## NOTES

1. Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 20.
2. See [www.gocn.org](http://www.gocn.org). Seminal GOCN volumes include: Darrell L. Guder et al., *The Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); George R Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).
3. For a sample of the ongoing debate see Andrew Jones, 'Defining the Emerging Church' [Weblog] (January 29 2004 [Accessed 5 January 2005]), [http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2004/01/defining\\_the\\_em.html#comments](http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2004/01/defining_the_em.html#comments); Darren Rowse, 'What Is the Emerging Church?' [Weblog] (20 January 2004 [Accessed 5 January 2005]), [http://livingroom.org.au/blog/archives/what\\_is\\_the\\_emerging\\_church.php](http://livingroom.org.au/blog/archives/what_is_the_emerging_church.php).
4. 'Emerging' also has relations with emergence phenomena and new science thinking that recognizes that organization and new life arises or emerges out of chaos. E.g., Steven Johnson, *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities and Software* (New York: Scribner, 2001).
5. Alan Hirsch, 'Emerging Missional Church' (Urban Mission class,



Ridley College, Melbourne, 26 October 2006); Stephen Said, 'Emerging Church Versus Emerging Missional Church' ([neortribe.net](http://neortribe.net)) May 27, 2004 [Accessed 27 October 2006], <http://www.neortribe.net/blog/2004/05/emerging-church-versus-emerging.html>.

6. Anne Wilkinson-Hayes, 'Emerging Church and the "in-between"', *Zadok Perspectives*, vol. 89, Summer (2005), 18.

7. Wilkinson-Hayes co-authored a helpful introduction to new ways of church life. It gives examples of community-based groups emerging in England and elsewhere, such as Living Proof (which emerged out of a student to student mentoring program), the Furnival (in a renovated pub), and the Children's Church (shaped around learning from and with children). Stuart Murray and Anne Wilkinson-Hayes, *Hope from the Margins: New Ways of Being Church* (Cambridge, UK: Grove Books, 2000).

8. See [www.livingroom.org.au](http://www.livingroom.org.au), [www.ncr.org.au](http://www.ncr.org.au), [www.inspiral.org.au](http://www.inspiral.org.au). For an overview of new BUW communities and missional thinking see: BUW, 'Seeding 2006', *Witness: The Voice of Victorian Baptists*, vol. 121, no. 08, September (2006).

9. See [www.forge.org.au](http://www.forge.org.au).

10. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003); cf. Darren Cronshaw, 'The Shaping of Things to Come', by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch (Book Review), *Zadok Perspectives*, vol. 84, Spring (2004) 26.

11. Books with snapshots of emerging churches from around the world include Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*, (London: Church House, 2004); Michael Moynagh, *Emergingchurch.Intro* (Oxford: Monarch, 2004); Steve Taylor, *The Out of Bounds Church: Learning to Create a Community of Faith in a Culture of Change* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

12. Murray and Wilkinson-Hayes, *Hope from the Margins*, 11-12; Elizabeth O'Connor, *Servant Leaders, Servant Structures* (Washington, DC: Servant Leadership School, 1991).

13. Mark Sayers, Interview by the author (Ringwood, 27 July 2006); cf. Athol Gill, *The Fringes of Freedom: Following Jesus, Living Together, Working for Justice* (Homebush West: Lancer, 1990); John Smith and Malcolm Doney, *On the Side of Angels* (Tring: Lion, 1987).

14. Wayne and Paula Nebauer, 'Connection Pack: Heaps of Information About Us' (2005).

15. Solace, *Remaking: A Workbook for Spiritual Formation*, A collaborative project of Solace edited by Stuart Davey (Melbourne: Solace EMC,

2006); Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (London: HarperCollins, 1999); Jana Rea and Richard J. Foster, *A Spiritual Formation Journal: A Renovaré Resource for Spiritual Renewal* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996); Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

16. David J Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991); Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*.

17. Anthea Smits, 'Paradigm Shifts of Urban Life' (Forge Missional Paradigms for the Emerging Church conference, St Martins Community Church, Melbourne, 18 February 2006).

18. cf. A Wayne Schwab, *When the Members Are the Missionaries: An Extraordinary Calling for Ordinary People* (Essex, NY: Member Mission Press, 2002); James Thwaites, *The Church Beyond the Congregation: The Strategic Role of the Church in the Postmodern Era* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999).

19. Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 44.

20. Connection, Focus group by the author (Croydon, 3 June 2006).

21. Toli Morgan, 'Church and Culture Workshop: A Conversation with Eastern Hills Community Church' (Becoming Multicultural Conference, Whitley College, Melbourne, 2006).

22. Toli Morgan, Eastern Hills Sunday sermon, 4 June 2006; cf. Acts 17.

23. Annette, 'Transforming Grace', Sunday presentation (10 September 2006). Teaching about transforming grace is central to Solace and draws on Solace, *Remaking*, 27 and Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*.

24. Michael Leunig is a popular Melbourne-based artist who reflects in his poems and cartoons on the simplicity and mystery of everyday life: recreation and politics, love and friendship, faith and doubt. As such he is a favorite for Solace events. For more about Leunig and his relevance to Australian spirituality see: Darren Cronshaw, *Credible Witness: Companions, Prophets, Hosts and Other Australian Mission Models* (Melbourne: UNOH Publications, 2006), 32-37.

25. Solace 'Sunday stuff' at St Paul's Fairfield, 10 September 2006.

26. See the cultural web in 'The paradigm of the Solace Community' in Solace, 'Community Website' (2006 [Accessed 4 October 2006]), <http://www.solace.emc.org.au/dev/index.html>. Solace's multi-sensory worship approach is inspired by: Sue Wallace, *Multisensory Worship* (Scripture Union, 2002).

27. Olivia Moffat, 'What Kind of Church?' (Paper for Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion National Leadership Consultation, 2001 Conference, 2001 [Accessed 28 September 2006]), <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~efac/whatchurch.htm>.

28. For further information on these initiatives see [www.GreeingAustralia.org.au/GA/VIC/](http://www.GreeingAustralia.org.au/GA/VIC/) and [www.cleanup.com.au/au/GetInvolved/clean-](http://www.cleanup.com.au/au/GetInvolved/clean-)

*up-australia-day.html*.

29. Anthea Smits, 'Refocusing GTs', Senior Leadership Team Get Together (Melbourne, 23 July 2006); Smits, 'Paradigm Shifts of Urban Life'.

30. Smits, 'Paradigm Shifts of Urban Life'.

31. Anthea Smits, Interview by the author (Ringwood, 8 August 2006).

32. E.g., Connection, Focus group by the author (Croydon, 21 May 2006).

33. Rowland Croucher, 'The Shaping of Things to Come, by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch (Book Review)' (2004 [Accessed 14 February 2006]), <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/13085.htm>.

34. In the language sociology of religion, innovativeness is the degree to which a person or group is relatively early in adopting new ideas. Everett M Rogers, *The Diffusion of Innovations*, (New York: Free Press, 1983), 241-270.

35. Harrison Owen, *The Power of Spirit: How Organizations Transform* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2000). Owen is among the most practical contributors to the discussion, but other excellent contributions who apply new science and chaos theory to leadership include: Richard T Pascale, Mark Millemann, and Linda Gioja, *Surfing the Edge of Chaos: The Laws of Nature and the New Laws of Business* (New York: Crown, 2000); Margaret J Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2001).

36. Quoted in Steve, 'How We Treat Others—Salt and Light' (Urban Life sermon, Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:13-15), Ringwood, 2006).

37. I explore these issues in Cronshaw, *Credible Witness*, 111-123.

38. This is sometimes associated with the sort of 'post-evangelical' doubt which is one point I sympathize with Don Carson's critique of emerging churches, although it is unfair to apply the critique to all. Don Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005); cf. Tony Jones et al., 'Our Response to Critics of Emergent' (2005 [Accessed 5 October 2005]), [http://emergent-us.typepad.com/emergentus/2005/06/official\\_respon.html](http://emergent-us.typepad.com/emergentus/2005/06/official_respon.html); Dave Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

39. Troy Arnott, Interview by the author (Ringwood, 19 July 2006).

40. Hirsch makes this comment not to disparage contemporary churches, in fact he encourages those who do that expression of church well to do it better, but he wants to provoke thinking about other expressions of church. Hirsch, 'Emerging Missional Church'. See also Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007).

41. Emerging churches often worship and gather in creative ways which may attract newcomers more effectively than mainstream or even

contemporary-focused churches. NCLS figures have shown that 8% of Australian church attendees are newcomers, of which 5% are returnees after a long period of absence and only 3% come from a genuinely unchurched background. Peter Kaldor et al., *Winds of Change: The Experience of Church in a Changing Australia* (Sydney: ANZEA, 1994), 214. It will be interesting to update these figures from the 2006 NCLS survey and to compare overall figures with emerging churches.

42. Moynagh *Emergingchurch.Intro*, in UK perspective, is particularly good at appealing to existing church and denominational leaders to trial and resource emerging churches, and urging emerging church leaders to cooperate with one another and with existing churches.

43. Solace, 'Community Website', <http://www.solace.emc.org.au/dev/index.html>.

44. Moffat, 'What Kind of Church?'