

Mission in Poynton Baptist Church from 1967 to the present date: an historical and critical analysis with reference to David Bosch's understanding of mission.

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the story of mission, from 1967 to the present date, at Poynton Baptist Church (PBC), the church to which I belong and work as a Minister. To help me in my analysis, I have chosen to refer to the work of the leading South African missiologist, David Bosch, contained in his book, *Transforming Mission*.

The primary research methodology involved interviews with church members, questionnaires with all those who have served the church in a Ministerial capacity, along with a range of documents from the period of interest.

The outcome of this study shows that, having established an evangelism-centric paradigm in the first epoch (after 1967), Poynton Baptist Church modified and developed, but did not deviate from that paradigm in the successive epochs.

Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the two David's who are at the heart of this study; David Pringle and David Bosch. I knew neither, and as far as I know, they had no knowledge of each other, yet their contagious passion for mission, precipitated by our missionary God, in the too few years that they lived, has left a deep and lasting legacy. I only hope that the work in these pages meets with their approval. If I can get a word in, it will certainly make for an interesting three-way debate over a 'heavenly' caffè latte.

I am grateful to my friends at Poynton Baptist Church, especially their kindness in releasing me to complete this work. To my wife and greatest encourager and critic, Zoe, special thanks.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

My interest in writing about the mission history of PBC has emerged from a twofold source: Firstly, due to my own ministry at PBC over the last eight years and the connections and experiences I have gained in that time, there has developed within me a deep sense of personal interest in wanting to tell the story. I trust that whilst I write objectively and honestly, I also recognize, that in the latter years I have played a small part in the unfolding journey and therefore look at this mission history through the lens of a practitioner who loves the church and is excited by its story, rather than a theorist who is neutral about it. And secondly, because I submit that the story is a truly remarkable one that demands both accurate telling and clear analysis. I believe profoundly that reflecting on past events can inform the practices of the present and shape the trajectory of the future. That is my hope here.

1.1 Why Bosch?

In my own studies in missiology, as part of the Master of Arts course in Contextual theology, Bosch has been cited as the principal missiologist of our times.¹ Certainly, I have found *Transforming Mission* to be an innovative and stretching study of the theology of mission that has influenced and expanded my thinking, not just for this essay, but in my own ministry in a local Baptist church.

Both these reasons have contributed primarily to my attraction to Bosch, but there are secondary reasons that are also worth mentioning: Firstly, he is sympathetic to those with an evangelical theology such as mine, but is under no illusions about the way Western Protestants see themselves and their mission.² I did consider other theologians, for instance, John Stott, the British evangelical, but I was drawn to Bosch precisely because his assumptions and ideas would offer a contrast to a church such as PBC.

¹ *Transforming Mission* has been used as the seminal work on mission on the MA course.

² According to Stan Nussbaum, Bosch's deepest concern in *Transforming Mission* is the way Western Protestants view their own role in mission (*Readers Guide*), 6.

The final reason I chose Bosch is because of his own concern for Christian mission – a passion which I share. Certainly, the impression I had when I reflected on *Transforming Mission* was not of a work penned by an ‘ivory tower’ theorist, but of a practitioner at the ‘coal face’; not just a great teacher on missiology, but someone who recognizes the challenges and frustrations of doing mission on the run.

Despite what I say above, I do not intend to adopt his ideas uncritically. To help me in that aim, I will refer to three key texts.³ I believe these texts are sympathetic to Bosch whilst offering criticisms that, I trust, help me see the bigger picture in my analysis.

1.2 Bosch’s use of paradigm theory

As the concept of ‘paradigm’ is frequently banded about in both theological and missiological circles, it is worth clarifying that I intend to use it in this study as Bosch does in *Transforming Mission*, as a framework to examine transitions in mission. Originating as a scientific idea, popularized by the physicist, Thomas Kuhn,⁴ Bosch argues that the most helpful framework to relate the ‘Christ event’ and, flowing out of this, the church’s responsibility to interpret it to the world, is by the use of ‘paradigms’, that is “revolutions” or “quick bursts” that occur because a group of people believe there is something fundamentally wrong with the ‘paradigm’ previously accepted.⁵ In *Transforming mission* Bosch thus sub-divides Christian history into six paradigms, each with its own emerging theological framework and notion of mission.⁶ Nuances within this concept - because it is transposed onto a Christian landscape rather than a scientific one that deals in absolutes - are to recognize that any new theological paradigm need not necessarily cancel the previous one, or that it need be completely right or complete, recognizing the diversity of ideas within the global intercultural community that defines mission.⁷

1.3 Overview

³ These are: ‘*Constants in context*’, by Bevans and Schroeder (Orbis, 2004); ‘*Mission in Bold Humility*’, Ed. Saayman and Kritzing (Orbis 1996) and ‘*A Readers Guide to Transforming Mission*’, Stan Nussbaum (Orbis 2005). I will refer to Nussbaum’s work most frequently, using it as the basis for my evaluation in section 4 of this essay.

⁴ Bosch details the paradigm theory of Thomas Kuhn in *Transforming Mission*, pp.183-185.

⁵ The chart comparing paradigm shifts as against gradual growth explains this. (Nussbaum, *Readers Guide*), 46.

⁶ The six paradigms are based on Hans Kung’s outline of the six major periods of church history.

⁷ *Transforming Mission*, 187.

After the introduction, I will begin in Section 2 by mapping and assessing the story of mission at PBC, limiting my analysis to those factors that contributed to both the church's understanding and practice of mission. This historical analysis will cover 4 epochs, from 1967 to the present date. I decided to commence my historical analysis in this year because, as I'll submit, this was the time of new beginnings in the church's history, when a paradigm of mission emerged that set the missiological mood for what followed.

It is important to note that my intention is to write about the story of mission at PBC rather than a more general account, as for instance, in Eric Younghusband's work, '*Abundant Harvest*',⁸ which maps the church's story from its beginnings in 1860 until 1970. I will limit my account to those events that had either a direct or indirect bearing on PBC's mission, given that this is my particular sphere of interest.

In Section 3, I will attend to the conversation with Bosch by evaluating the strengths and deficiencies of the church's approach to mission with reference to his notion of an emerging missionary paradigm. At the beginning of this third section I will tackle the dilemma of defining mission, recognizing that, rather than a rigid or fixed definition, the best we can hope to formulate are "some approximations of what mission is all about."⁹

The final section (4) is concerned with the future of mission at PBC and includes an attempt to identify whether the church is on the cusp of a new paradigm, and, if so, what the ingredients of that new paradigm might contain.

1.4 Primary research

In wanting to accurately examine the story of mission at PBC, I utilised three sources of primary research: Firstly, having initially piloted a questionnaire with Andy Aldridge,¹⁰ and then made some slight adjustments, I designed a questionnaire that I sent out to all those

⁸ '*Abundant Harvest*' is an historical account of the church's history from 1860-1970, and was published by Poynton Baptist Church as an internal publication. It is not clear why Younghusband chose to write about the church when he did or from what sources he drew from, though it is thought that the fresh impetus caused by David Pringle's arrival was the spur.

⁹ *Transforming Mission*, 9.

¹⁰ Andy Aldridge was the Full-time staff member responsible for outreach and evangelism from 1994-2004

Ministers who have served PBC in a professional, ministerial capacity.¹¹ The completed questionnaires are included in the appendix. The aim of this was to glean from the respondents a range of responses on both the individual's understanding and approach to mission, and their view of the church's ideas on mission during their time in office.¹²

Secondly, I piloted an interview with a long standing member of the church, Sylvia Mattocks,¹³ which then led to a further four, selected interviews, which are transcribed in Section 2 of the appendix. Amongst these respondents, I asked a range of semi-structured questions, dependant on their particular role at PBC at the time of interest.¹⁴ Again, their responses helped me to colour in the picture of mission at PBC, and were particularly instrumental in defining the framework for my historical analysis.

The final area of primary research was to look at a range of documents and reports from 1967. These include personal diaries, annual reports, minutes of meetings and ecumenical documents.

1.5 Poynton Baptist Church today

In order to locate the journey of mission at PBC, it is helpful to describe the church in its present form in August 2005. Comprising of 286 members, plus an extra 70 children,¹⁵ and 40 young people,¹⁶ PBC is a vibrant community of faith. There are significant numbers of people from aged 40 upwards - many of whom are employed in demanding, professional jobs - though we are less populated by the 18-30's, partly because all our students leave home to attend university, and partly because young married people struggle to afford the house prices in Poynton.

In a previous essay for this course I looked at the sense of denominational loyalty within our membership.¹⁷ I concluded that PBC has a low sense of allegiance to the Baptist denomination,

¹¹ I sent out 6 questionnaires, including the pilot, and received 5 responses.

¹² Whilst those who served in the earlier epochs admitted to responding fairly sketchily due to the lapse in time, their answers were still helpful in mapping the missiological landscape of the church.

¹³ Sylvia has been a member of the church through all four epochs (see pilot interview, appendix 1a)

¹⁴ Semi-structured questions provide a framework, but leave room for digression and supplementary questions as suggested by T. Mays, *Issues, Methods and Process*, (Philadelphia: Open University, 2001) 123.

¹⁵ Children, from crèche up to age 11 who attend PBC regularly

¹⁶ Young people between 11 and 18 who attend regularly, though it should be mentioned a further 20-30 young people drawn from mainly non-church families attend a weekly youth club.

¹⁷ Previous essay on the MA course, entitled, *'An analysis of the values that have formed Baptist identity and their relevance today'*.

but a strong ownership of the cluster of values that I consider to combine in marking a Christian as Baptist.¹⁸ Theologically speaking, the congregation is firmly rooted in the evangelical tradition if evangelical is understood as sharing a “mutually recognized theological tradition and a common ethos and polity”.¹⁹ Allied to this, I would submit that the church has been influenced by the renewal movement and therefore elevates an understanding of mission – and a style of worship – that has both ‘word’ and ‘spirit’ components.

¹⁸ According to the Baptist theologian, Nigel Wright, these values are the Lordship of Christ; the church as a fellowship of believers; believers baptism; the competence of the local congregation; freedom of conscience; and the separation of church and state (N.G Wright, *New Baptists, New agenda*, Paternoster, Carlisle, 2002),15.

¹⁹ Ernest A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A short History* (London: Carey-Kingsgate Press, 1958) 254.

Chapter 2. A remarkable journey: the story of mission in Poynton Baptist Church from 1967

During a period when most congregations in the UK have diminished in both size and in terms of their impact in their local communities²⁰, the Poynton story is a complete reversal of it. This remarkable journey spans nearly 4 decades, 3 chapel buildings on the same site, 9 ministerial appointments and a growth in membership from 12 in late 1967 to 286 in August 2005.²¹

2.1 Considerations and emphases for mapping the story of mission

In terms of telling the story of mission at PBC in the time span from 1967 to the present, I considered various ways of mapping the journey. I could, for instance, have summarized the most significant factors shaping the church's understanding and practice of mission during this time and reflected on them. However, for the sake of clarity, and because I wanted to maintain some sense of chronological flow, I chose a method that divides the various epochs into sections that are listed under the heading of the Senior Minister of the time, as follows:

- The Pringle years (1967-77)
- The Fennel/Green years (1976-80)
- The Martin years (1980-90)
- The White years (1992-2004)

Whilst I recognize that there are both periods of overlap and interregnum, this system allows me the opportunity to comment on the various nuances and emphases that affected the story of mission in the various epochs and their influence on the overall picture. I also recognize that whilst some of the epochs were defined by the personality and ideas of the specific Minister of the time – as is the case with David Pringle – others were less so, with a more complex mix of

²⁰ David Bebbington, in his history of the evangelical movement, cites the 60's as a time of catastrophic collapse in UK church membership with the result that religion became marginal in people's lives (*Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*), 250. Callum Brown's book reiterates the same point (*The Death of Christian Britain: understanding Secularisation 1800-2000*, London: Routledge, 2001), 2.

²¹ Interviews with both Anne Jones (Appendix 1b, p.2), and Joe and Eileen Birch (appendix 1c, p.1), record the early numbers. Present membership is recorded at June 2005.

influences, particularly as the church developed a team approach in both leadership personnel and leadership culture.

I will give the most attention to the first and last epochs. In the case of the Pringle years, this is because, as we shall see, the church reached its nadir in 1967 prior to David Pringle's appointment and could well have closed but for his arrival. This period is deeply significant for two reasons: firstly, because numerically speaking, the church grew at the most rapid rate in its history:²² and secondly, because I believe the church's understanding of mission, shaped by Pringle's ideas and personality, set the tone for what followed.²³

The reason the last epoch warrants more thorough attention is because it was the time when PBC's understanding of mission developed most markedly. My analysis of this period will comment on the significance of this shift on three fronts²⁴: Firstly, the push towards a more holistic theological understanding of mission that is broader than evangelism. Secondly, the embracing of an understanding of mission that is a 'whole of life' matter rather than an activity the church engaged in periodically. And thirdly, the greater push in this period to engage ecumenically in mission across the span of all the churches in Poynton.

I will attend more briefly to the middle two epochs, viewing these years as times of consolidation and continuity in the missiological sphere, rather than departing from the understanding set in the Pringle years. This in no way lessens or minimizes the impact of PBC's mission in these times, it is just a realization that these middle epochs didn't venture beyond the previously set pattern.

2.2 Mission in PBC prior to 1967

In order to set this study in context, I will include in this section a brief historical summary of the church from its inception. As other research sources weren't available to me for the periods

²² For instance, David's own statistics presented to the 1973 AGM outline the increases in both baptisms and church membership in the 1968-73 period (appendix 4a). This period saw the sharpest percentage increase in church attenders in PBC's history.

²³ My interview with David Warner, church secretary from 1972-79, refers to this epoch as the time when the 'foundation stones' were laid (appendix 1d, p9).

²⁴ Andy Aldridge's comments on these 3 shifts (Appendix 2a, pp 2-3)

before 1967, I am especially grateful to Eric Younghusband's account in *'Abundant Harvest'* as my primary text.²⁵

It is probably accurate to say that by the Autumn of 1967, Poynton Baptist Church was facing imminent closure. Property Developers were beginning to queue up, drawn by the prominent 'High Street' location of the chapel building.²⁶ According to Joe and Eileen Birch, longstanding members of PBC, the local Baptist Association were keen to sell the building with the resultant closure of the church. This followed a meeting between the three Deacons at PBC and the regional body when suggestions were mooted that it would be best to sell the building and thus bring 105 years of Baptist witness to a close.

At that time, as it was pointed out by the Regional Association, following regular counts of Sunday attendees, the numbers had reached an all-time low, with evening services averaging about 12-13 people meeting in a chapel building that had fallen into a state of disrepair. On Sunday mornings just a few gathered for prayer. The Association's suggestion, which was gathering momentum amongst some in the church, was that it would be wise to sell whilst the developers were interested. This bleak news was met by some with resignation but by others with indignation, indeed two of the three Deacons of the time, Margaret Birch and Mary Stones, were adamant to keep the church's witness going and saw the gloomy outlook as a spur to redouble the prayer efforts of the church.²⁷ "A small but dedicated band met in the vestry at 10.30 (Sunday by Sunday) to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit and deliverance from our dilemma."²⁸

2.21 Mission origins

Poynton Baptist Church was formed in 1862, following a number of preaching missions sent out from the Baptist Church at Cheadle Hulme.²⁹ Starting with a Sunday School that broadened into work with adults, meetings were initially held in the Saddle Room of the Master

²⁵ Eric was the church secretary in the late 1960's and his account has been of inestimable value in sketching the landscape and background upon which the story I want to tell unfolds.

²⁶ *Abundant Harvest*, 21. Developers were in discussion with the Baptist Union and one of the three Deacons (Mr. Oliver) felt the building should be sold. Joe and Eileen Birch recount these discussions (Appendix 1c, p1).

²⁷ Joe and Eileen's interview (Appendix 1c, p1) describes Margaret's and Mary's desire to keep the church going as well as Mr. Oliver's (the third Deacon) reticence. It also describes Mr. Oliver's response to David Pringle's initial letters (p2) and his obvious reluctance to welcome David as future pastor.

²⁸ *Abundant Harvest*, 21. Note also Anne Jones' comments (Appendix 1b, p1) about the way David's letters failed to elicit a response by the Church Secretary, though actually it was Mr. Oliver, the third Deacon who didn't respond to David's letters.

²⁹ *Abundant Harvest*, 6.

Saddler and Tarpaulin Manufacturer, John Potts.³⁰ As this burgeoning Baptist community grew in number, it became obvious that new premises were needed, and so a plot of land (where the present church still stands) was bought for £15. By the spring of 1867, the chapel building which stood until 1971 was built and opened for the princely sum of just under £300.³¹

Certainly mission, in the forms of open air preaching and invitation to meetings with strong gospel preaching, became a key part of the church's early missional strategy, particularly in reaching out to the 'Midway' area of Poynton (now the central area about a quarter mile radius from the crossroads) which was seen as the springboard for this new Baptist movement.³² In terms of this lifelong predisposition to mission, and an understanding that equates mission and evangelism as the same thing, the dye was cast in these early years.

In the early and middle years of the 20th century the Baptist church at Poynton was a microcosm of many more evangelically-minded communities that dwindled in number in the wake of the two world wars.³³ But it would be unfair to label PBC as a church that lost its outward gaze and became indulgently introverted. Significantly, for instance, the church was actively involved in campaigning in support of the 1944 Education bill which included a letter from the church secretary to the then Minister for Education, R.A Butler.³⁴ Such forays however were rare, being limited to more localized issues.

As the church numbers decreased after the Second World War, the church was unable to support a full-time Minister.³⁵ During this time the church felt that filling the vacancy might redress the downward spiral and were relieved and delighted when Rev R.T Millichip offered part-time services to the church in 1961.³⁶ He presided over the centenary celebrations in 1962 which included a 'week of mission'. Though the church at no time in its long history lost its missionary heart, the 60's were years of decline in both numbers and in terms of the state of the building.³⁷ In 1967 the landscape at PBC was naturally coloured by such negative matters, though the indignant few prayed for deliverance.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, 5.

³³ Currie, Gilbert and Horsley, analysing church membership between 1910-70, recognize that, though there was an increase in church membership in the immediate aftermath of the two world wars, it was followed by periods of real decline (*Churches and Churchgoers*), 30.

³⁴ *Abundant Harvest*, 18. What is of interest here is that the church's understanding of mission ventured beyond their historical model to incorporate an engagement with, in this instance, education.

³⁵ Again, *Abundant Harvest* doesn't cite specific figures, though Joe Birch describes PBC as a 'traditional' Baptist Church that was in trouble due to decline that culminated in the late 60's (Appendix 1c, p1).

³⁶ Rev Millichip divided his work between PBC and chaplaincy work with local industry for which the church contributed £100 pa. He was only in post until 1963 (*Abundant Harvest*,)21.

³⁷ Ibid

2.3 The Pringle years (1967-77)

2.31 His call, and the push to mission

Such was the contextual ferment within which David Pringle, a lecturer at Didsbury teacher training college, walked into when he entered PBC for the first time in November 1967: a crumbling chapel building, a depleted and dispirited congregation, a divided diaconate, and property developers chomping at the bit. Anne Pringle (David's wife), recounting these implausible events, explained how David entered the kitchen one day in their home in Marple Bridge and announced that God had told him to go to Poynton. Anne later took this 'call' to be in the form of an audible voice.³⁸ Following this revelation, David then not only had to overcome Anne's initial reticence, but the association superintendent, who had designs on the sale monies going towards new accommodation for overseas students seconded to the Baptist college, as well as the church secretary who didn't reply to two letters of introduction David sent to the church.³⁹ David's response was to turn up in person one Sunday and find out first-hand what Poynton Baptist church was like. After meeting Joe Birch on the chapel steps, he was invited in to the vestry where a small group met for their usual prayer gathering. One woman, speaking for the whole, asked him why he'd turned up, to which David responded, "I believe God's called me to be your minister". When the woman heard that David could also play the piano, probably echoing the mood of the whole group, her response was that the church needed both a pastor and a pianist and that he was the answer to both their prayers.⁴⁰

Very quickly the church called a members meeting and, once they'd realized David wasn't looking for financial recompense for his services, unanimously invited him as their new honorary pastor. Though confirmation wasn't sought, it was given when a visiting preacher, Mr Campbell, unaware of David's visit, preached about PBC rising up as a shining beacon.⁴¹ Indeed, the other churches in Poynton were so thrilled by these events that they joined together to help decorate the dilapidated building.⁴²

³⁸ Anne feels the success of David's ministry in Poynton was at least, in part, because he was absolutely certain he'd heard God speak in an audible voice when he was called (Appendix 1b, p4).

³⁹ David met with initial resistance from both the superintendent Minister, Norman Jones, who said the building was going to be sold to raise money for student accommodation at the college, and the PBC secretary (Mr Oliver) who didn't respond to his letters of introduction (Appendix 1b, p1).

⁴⁰ Ibid p.2

⁴¹ The week before David officially started in December 1967 Mr Campbell preached from Ezekiel 37, likening PBC to the dry bones that come alive, and like a shining beacon, that affects all around it (Appendix 1b, p.2).

⁴² Appendix 1b, p.2

David commenced his ministry at Poynton on the Sunday before Christmas in 1967. During 1968 David's own diaries tell the story of numerical growth from an average of 23 attenders per Sunday in January to an average of 137 by December, many of these new converts to the Christian faith.⁴³ In his annual report for 1968, Eric Younghusband, who became church secretary soon after David's arrival, summarises this remarkable epiphany: "I think that without doubt, we would all agree, that the most dynamic event that has happened in our church since the last AGM has been the advent of Mr. Pringle and his appointment as honorary pastor of our family church." Eric does however, introduce two notes of caution and concern that are significant: firstly, that the church should beware of the pitfalls of complacency, and secondly, that Mr. Pringle's work for the church should not be taken for granted, adding in his own words that, "signs of fatigue are often apparent (with Mr. Pringle) after the Sunday services."⁴⁴

Before I give attention to the methods of mission that contributed to such a shift in the church's fortunes, I want to assess further David Pringle's personality in order to identify the effect both his strength of character and his missiological understanding had in galvanizing the church into a potent force for mission.

2.32 Driven and dynamic personality

By his wife's admission, David was a driven personality.⁴⁵ Attending to a demanding career in education (which he never gave up), as well as a young family, didn't keep him from offering unreservedly of his time and his gifts for the benefit of the church. Anne cites his charismatic personality, his belief in prayer, his gift of communication and his ability to galvanise the church's membership, as well as his energy, as just some of David's considerable array of talents.⁴⁶ Referring to the church in that era, Joe Birch comments, "You wanted to grow, you wanted to be doing something – all that you could for the church. We needed someone like that to motivate us."⁴⁷ That the church flourished under this new, dynamic visionary is evident from

⁴³ David counted the number of people attending services every Sunday morning and evening. These figures are in the back cover of his 1968 diary (Appendix 4b).

⁴⁴ Secretaries annual report for 1968 AGM (Appendix 4c).

⁴⁵ Anne comments on David's "very strong personality" and "driven in his work" (Appendix 1b, p.4). Either you joined in with him or you were left behind.

⁴⁶ Appendix 1b, p3 ff.

⁴⁷ Appendix 1c, p5. Clearly, Joe thinks David's personality had a key bearing on the church's growth, commenting, not just on the range of tasks he undertook but the willing and caring way he went about them (Appendix 1c, pp3-4)

the secretary's report at the 1969 AGM, turning a depressed and discouraged flock into a happy, unified and missional community.⁴⁸

2.33 Mission as evangelism

Allied to his charismatic personality and his energetic activism, the influence on mission at PBC of David's missiological perspectives should not be underestimated. According to Anne, David believed that "the mission of the church was to win souls for Jesus".⁴⁹ Whilst David himself had a very caring nature - indeed the church was noted for its effective pastoral system and mutual care during his time⁵⁰ - he clearly equated mission and evangelism, certainly in his earlier years in Poynton, as one and the same thing.⁵¹ The church members invited unbelievers to 'gospel meetings', where they would here a strong proclaimed message that viewed the gospel of the kingdom as something to attain in the life to come rather than a reality in this life.⁵² Locating evangelism at the kernel of both David's and the church's grasp of missiology was a foundational emphasis in this era, and whilst, as we'll see, there were modifications and nuances within this paradigm in future epochs, the central thrust remained the same.

In terms of reflecting on the influences on this strong and focused emphasis, it is particularly significant that Anne believes that David's call was a call to mission rather than a more general call to pastoral ministry.⁵³ From his earlier involvement in Baptist communities in Moss Side and then Oldham, David elevated evangelism as the primary task of the church,⁵⁴ and his skills as an evangelist and preacher, allied to his strength of personality, meant that this view quickly filtered through to the church at Poynton.

2.34 Poughkeepsie and Lausanne: toward a broader understanding

It is unclear as to whether David held to the totality of this perspective through the span of his 10 years as PBC's honorary pastor. On reflection, I believe that David's understanding may

⁴⁸ The secretary's report at the 1969 AGM (Appendix 4c).

⁴⁹ This he did through hard hitting, 'heaven and hell' sermons (Appendix 1b, p.5).

⁵⁰ David and Anthea Warner comment on the strength of pastoral care, and the love people had for one another that was the hallmark of the church (Appendix 1d, p9).

⁵¹ David probably viewed evangelism as a direct presentation of the gospel with an invitation for response, and mission as pre-evangelism (according to Anne, appendix 1b, pp.4-6)

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ They both responded to a public call to serve the Lord in the area of mission at a Billy Graham crusade in Manchester in 1961 (Ibid, p.4)

⁵⁴ His desire to propagate the gospel was also seen when he was commissioned to write a school text book called '*Christianity in action today*'. (Ibid, p1 and 4).

have changed to a more holistic approach and my grounds for this are twofold: One clear influence that, according to Anne, impacted David's ministry was a church exchange with an American pastor to a theologically liberal Baptist community in Poughkeepsie, New York state.⁵⁵ Clearly stimulated by this different social and theological context, the whole family was deeply moved by the kindness of these more liberally-minded Christians, repeating the experience on a number of future occasions. Though it is debatable as to whether they affected David's theology of mission - or indeed, that PBC's was shaped by hosting the American pastor and his family - it did open the door to a mutually nourishing series of exchanges that extended to various members of the church.⁵⁶

A second reason is because of his links with both the Billy Graham organization and the Evangelical alliance, leading to a request from the Lausanne committee of the 1974 'International Congress on World Evangelization', for David to lead a seminar on the subject of visiting and nurturing people interested in the Christian faith.⁵⁷ That this congress became synonymous with the shift in theological understanding amongst leading world evangelicals to embrace social action as part of mission, is a view generally held today.⁵⁸

Whilst it is unclear as to whether these matters brought about a broadening of David's view, what is glaringly obvious is that he never allowed the elevated position of mission as evangelism to be relegated, nor the mobilization of the church in that task. Though both his and the church's reputation became known way beyond the boundaries of Poynton, David had no desire for personal power or big power structures, "he just had a passion for the gospel."⁵⁹

2.35 Various methods of mission

Various methodologies were used in the Pringle era. My focus now is on those enterprises that I consider to have had the most significant impact on the growth of the church.

⁵⁵ Anne comments on the Poughkeepsie experience (Appendix 1b, pp 7-8) One clear outcome of the Poughkeepsie experience was a renewed interest in the healing ministry, due to a healing miracle that was reported in a woman ill with cancer.

⁵⁶ The 1971 AGM report comments on this (Appendix 4d, pi)

⁵⁷ Ibid, p10.

⁵⁸ The 1974 congress at Lausanne is generally viewed as the critical event that shifted evangelicals to view social action (as well as evangelism) as part of mission. My interview with John Stott details this (Appendix 3b), and my essay, *The recovery of the evangelical social conscience* analyses this development.

⁵⁹ Appendix 1b, p6.

Comment has been made already about the regular evangelistic services held at PBC.⁶⁰ Another significant factor was the galvanizing of the Baptist community in the building programme that resulted in a new chapel building being opened on July 8th, 1972.⁶¹ This clearly increased the visibility of the church in the community and resourced the mix of events and activities that the church now held.⁶²

In terms of the methods of mission, the following new initiatives, in my view, contributed the most to the church's growth in this epoch:

a) Starting a Saturday morning café⁶³

Early in Pringle's time, what became known as the 'cross-roads' coffee bar, became a regular feature of the church's programme, running every Saturday morning⁶⁴. Cross-roads was apt partly because of the church's location by the Poynton crossroads, and partly because conversations ensued about unbelievers being at a spiritual crossroads. Following initial contacts made through the coffee bar – David Pringle would often stand outside encouraging bystanders to come in – enquirers were followed up through a visitation programme. Though it is unclear how many enquirers were converted directly through this method, it did afford the church both a greater profile in Poynton and a reputation as a caring community. In terms of making initial contact with unbelievers it clearly proved very productive: "It was an outreach, people came in, they talked, they saw what was going on and they came back to see a service."⁶⁵

b) Linking up with Crusaders⁶⁶

I recognize that this link isn't a mission methodology as such, but it warrants attention simply because, as I point out, it had a fundamental impact on the growth of the church.

⁶⁰ Anne's interview (Ibid, p.3) Also, David Warner comments on special evening services when there was so little room, people had to sit on the window ledges (Appendix 1d, p2).

⁶¹ During this year church services regularly drew over 200 people in the new building. It was also the year John Metcalfe was called as a non-stipendiary, associate pastor. (AGM report for 1972, Appendix 4e, p1).

⁶² Anthea Warner includes a wonderful story of sacrificing her 'pram fund' to the project (Appendix 1d, p5).

⁶³ Anne comments on David standing outside and inviting bystanders to come in for coffee and toast. David Warner comments with humour on the slightly embarrassing sight of David talking to people in their cars at the crossroads outside the church waiting for the traffic lights to change (Appendix 1b and 1d).

⁶⁴ Stuart George's report as Outreach co-ordinator outlines this (section of 1972 AGM report). It also comments on the gratitude of the local community towards the fellowship because of this activity (Appendix 4e, p.2)

⁶⁵ Cited by Anthea Warner (Appendix 1d, p.6)

⁶⁶ David and Maureen Wilkinson, who were early members of Poynton Crusaders explain how the relationship was forged between their burgeoning organization and PBC (Appendix 1e, pp1ff.).

Crusaders is an inter-denominational youth agency that describes itself today as existing “to reach young people for Jesus Christ, engaging them in effective Christian living.”⁶⁷ In the late 1960’s it had a strong local group in Poynton, providing a range of Christian-based activities for young people. Maureen Wilkinson, a teenager in this burgeoning group, stresses the point that the Poynton group laid great emphasis in reaching out to unbelieving children and felt that it could most effectively do that without ties to any one church or tradition.⁶⁸ Indeed, Maureen comments on initial resentment amongst the young people when overtures were made by the Baptist church, because they were keen to exist without a label, and felt that the church might be poaching them for their own benefit as they had no youth group of their own.⁶⁹ But there was clearly a degree of mutuality in the connection given Crusaders lack of meeting facilities and the church’s lack of youth. This state of reticent co-existence quickly changed into a more mutually enriching relationship, because the young people enjoyed the lively services, and because the Baptist members made them feel at home and were happy for them to keep their identity.⁷⁰ The natural progression that developed was that, through a range of evangelistic activities and camps, new children and young people “grew in to PBC youth...Crusader connections were lessened...people became members and then got baptized...then went off to university.”⁷¹ David and Anthea Warner believe that this movement of young people played a critical role, not just in bringing other young people in but also in introducing families both to the Christian faith and to the church.⁷²

c) Training and equipping members in the ‘Evangelism explosion’ method of evangelizing the local community⁷³

Established in Coral Ridge, USA, ‘Evangelism Explosion’ is an evangelistic tool to train Christians to present the Christian faith to people in their homes, who already have a church connection.⁷⁴ Stuart George, who came to faith himself through this tool, became a

⁶⁷ see Crusaders website (www.crusaders.org.uk/)

⁶⁸ Appendix 1e, p2. Maureen points out that children and youth attended from the spectrum of denominations, including one family who were Jehovah’s Witnesses.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p4.

⁷⁰ This mutuality quickly developed (Ibid, pp 4-5), indeed, Maureen says that it was unclear as to whether the Christians on Trial (COT) group that met on Sunday evenings were a PBC group or a Crusaders group.

⁷¹ Ibid, p5. One such convert was Dave Wilkinson, who was typical of many that followed this path, who went on to contribute in a considerable way to the ongoing mission and ministry of the church.

⁷² Anthea comments on the infectious nature of PBC at this time, resulting for instance in Liz Burnell (nee Wood) and her sister Joanne, inviting their parents, who in turn came through to faith, baptism and membership of the church (Appendix 1d)

⁷³ A number of new converts found faith through this method, and one of them, Stuart George, was a key proponent of this evangelistic tool (Ibid, p8).

⁷⁴ See website (www.ee-gb.org.uk/)

real advocate of this method both inside and outside Poynton.⁷⁵ Reporting the statistics to the 1972 AGM that reflected the success of ‘Evangelism Explosion’ as a tool, Stuart recorded that 35 visits had been made to homes, 49 people were visited (some were in couples), and whilst 12 made no decision 15 accepted Christ as their Saviour.⁷⁶

The idea of using new converts who had found Christ through this tool to be trained to be part of one of the teams, was a tactic often used at PBC during these days.⁷⁷ ‘Evangelism Explosion’ unashamedly targeted fringe people in the church, asking very direct questions such as “if you were to die tonight could you be sure you would go to heaven?”⁷⁸ I will analyse in a later section my view on this method; what cannot be denied was its effectiveness in this era. Dave Wilkinson, summing up ‘Evangelism Explosion’s’ impact, called it “the commando arm of the church”.⁷⁹

d) The re-invigoration of local dwindling congregations,⁸⁰ and the planting of new ones.⁸¹

When a member of the church shared a vision likening PBC to a candle lighting other smaller lights around it, David intensified the church’s missionary exploits beyond Poynton to help smaller, struggling Baptist communities, who, in turn, mirrored the philosophy of mission pursued in Poynton.⁸² I recognize here that this initiative was beyond the Poynton setting, but it is notable because PBC, certainly in this era, had such a deep-rooted passion to share the message of the gospel beyond the boundaries of Poynton (though, not outside Baptist boundaries). This of itself reveals a more holistic, less narrow, and outward facing approach, even if these communities became replicas of Poynton in terms of their mission philosophy. This model closely reflected the ideas put forward by the burgeoning church growth movement led by missiologists such as Donald McGavren in the USA and Eddie Gibbs in Britain.⁸³

⁷⁵ Stuart comments in the 1972 AGM report that he visited and wrote to fellowships “from Scotland to London, Oswestry or Sale”, to encourage them to use the Coral Ridge scheme. (Appendix 4e, outreach report)

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ David Warner comments on this (Appendix 1d, p.3)

⁷⁸ Maureen Wilkinson comments (Appendix 1e, p.8)

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ David Warner comments on PBC ‘helping’ Bramhall, Disley (Appendix 1d, p.8) and Anne adds Lostock to the list (Appendix 1b, p5).

⁸¹ PBC attempted to plant a small Sunday school, after running a children’s mission, in the Manchester overspill estate at Colshaw farm in Wilmslow. (Appendix 1d, pp7-8).

⁸² Appendix 1b, p5.

⁸³ C. Peter Wagner, professor of church growth at Fuller theological seminary, records the elements of the church growth movement espoused by the likes of Mc Gavran in *Riding the Third Wave* (Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1987), 48ff. The church growth movement was particularly strong in the 60s and 70s.

One such example of this model was at neighbouring Bramhall Baptist Church.⁸⁴ Brian Strangward, who succeeded Eric Younghusband and preceded David Warner as PBC's church secretary, was seconded to Bramhall to act as moderator and to reactivate the dwindling community. After ratifying an agreement between the trustees of Bramhall and David Pringle and PBC's diaconate that secured the lease of the building to reopen for public use, it is significant that between the annual anniversary services of 1971 and 1972, local attendees (rather than Poynton implants) rose from 2 to 50.⁸⁵ Whilst it is unclear if these new people were new converts, it is entirely plausible that most of them were, given the new fellowships adoption of the Poynton evangelism-centric model. Whilst the personnel and contexts were slightly different, a similar model was used later to revive the Baptist witness at Disley,⁸⁶ and Davenport,⁸⁷ and establish new faith communities on the Lostock estate in Poynton and a new Sunday School on the Colshaw farm estate in Wilmslow, though the latter was eventually integrated with a new work led by the Bramhall Methodist circuit.⁸⁸

2.36 Final reflections

Before I move on from the Pringle years, it is significant to reflect on the steep growth at Poynton, at a time when the trend was the opposite amongst UK churches.⁸⁹ The apex of the percentage increase in numerical growth, in terms of church attenders, was in 1972.⁹⁰ Over the decade when David was honorary pastor the membership grew from 12 at the end of 1967 to 217 at the end of 1977.⁹¹ Whilst statistics don't even begin to reflect the stories of transformation, nor the breadth of factors that made this epoch so remarkable, they do point to a church that set its sail to spread the gospel, and in that, succeeded.

I have attempted in my reflections on this period to recognize the huge contribution made to it by David Pringle, and his wife Anne, who is a considerable Christian leader in her own right. But it would be false to suggest that, in this epoch, PBC was a one-man show. It was an era when considerable contributions were made across the spectrum of the church's membership.

⁸⁴ Brian Strangward reports on the change in Bramhall's fortunes in the 1972 AGM report (Appendix 4e).

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Anne's interview (Appendix 1b, p5). Later, Anne, and her second husband Alex Campbell, made a considerable contribution at Disley (p.11)

⁸⁷ this later was amalgamated with Larkhill Baptist church, which became Chelwood Baptist church.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.5 and David Warner's comments (Appendix 1d, p8). The 1976 AGM also details this (Appendix 4f, p2).

⁸⁹ Comment has already been made of this 'reversal'. See footnote 21.

⁹⁰ David Pringle's own statistics from 1968-73 show the increases, with a total of an average of 364 people each Sunday (both services) in 1972, an increase of 57% over 1971. (Appendix 4a).

⁹¹ AGM report for 1978 (Appendix 4g, p1)

This Baptist emphasis on the power of a gathered and galvanized community, was one that stood the church in good stead for what followed.

In the summer of 1976, after nine years continual service, David Pringle started a sabbatical which he was never to return from.⁹² The fellowship that owed so much to him was shattered to hear that, toward the end of his sabbatical, he had died one morning whilst setting out to go to college. Coming to terms with the loss of their great pioneering visionary, it was only natural that a shadow of grief was cast across the church for some considerable period of time.⁹³

2.4 The Fennell/Green years (1976-80)

In September 1976, after working as a travelling secretary with the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF), Andrew Green became the church's first full-time, paid pastor since Rev. R.T Millichip in 1961.⁹⁴ He joined Clement (Clem) Fennell as joint leader - Clem was a lay associate to David Pringle, and worked as a consultant veterinary surgeon.

2.41 An increased emphasis on discipleship

As I ventured earlier in this essay, this was the first of two epochs that were mainly marked by consolidation and continuity rather than by any radical departures from the church's missiological understanding and practice established in the Pringle era. Whilst mission seen as evangelism continued to be a vital factor, the secretary's report at the 1978 AGM records that, "over the last couple of years our outreach work has stagnated, the rise in membership being largely accounted for by Christians moving into the area."⁹⁵ This era saw a marked increase in transfer growth as against conversion growth, probably due, in my view, to the church's reputation as a vibrant church and to the increase in housing in Poynton in the 70's.⁹⁶

⁹² The 1976 AGM report details this, recording David's intention to take a rest and prepare for a new post at Manchester Polytechnic (Appendix4f, p1).

⁹³ David Warner presented a moving report for the 1978 AGM, in which he spoke of David's death dominating the memory of the year; "David would want no tablet or memorial in his honour. We, as a fellowship, are in every sense a living testimony to David and Anne's ministry; many of those worshipping today at PBC have been led to the Lord because David and Anne gave the Holy Spirit freedom to work through their lives." (Appendix 4h, p1).

⁹⁴ Appendix 4f, p1.

⁹⁵ Appendix4h, p2.

⁹⁶ For instance, both the Bird Estates and Vernon Rd estates were built in the late 70's (*Poynton, a thriving community*)19.

Andrew Green, in his questionnaire, records that “quantitative growth was there – but not huge”, but that “qualitative growth was significant.”⁹⁷ It could be argued that a strengthening of the discipleship programme, which Andrew and Clem undoubtedly brought to the leadership mix, was vital to nurture the faith of the membership.⁹⁸ He also recognizes that the loss of David Pringle’s personal gift of evangelism was lost to the church. It is telling that, in this era, Andrew “saw the need for Christian growth and maturity, so church was not just an ‘evangelistic machine’.”⁹⁹

2.42 ‘Playaway’: mission as social responsibility?

It is quite possible that the seeds of a move towards a more holistic theological view of mission occurred at PBC in this time. My grounds for this are not just because of the balance between evangelism and discipleship being more evenly distributed,¹⁰⁰ nor just that, in the wake of the charismatic movement, Poynton, like many evangelical churches, looked at the issue of spiritual healing,¹⁰¹ but because of the sense that the church felt socially responsible for local families beyond the traditional parameters of spiritual welfare.¹⁰² Recognising that mission had social as well as spiritual connotations was a fresh notion - though it would be unfair to suggest that the church ever ceased from the vigorous support of missions work overseas, or indeed, home based missionary groups such as the Bible Society or Manchester City Mission¹⁰³ - and this expressed itself in the launch of a new carers and toddlers group called ‘Playaway’.¹⁰⁴ This resonates with Andrew Green’s attempts to facilitate an understanding of mission at PBC in this era that saw the ‘Kingdom of God’ in a more holistic way,¹⁰⁵ though ‘Playaway’ was still probably viewed as ‘pre-evangelism’ rather than ‘unconditional gift’.

⁹⁷ Andrew Green’s questionnaire Appendix 2b, p.3). This was so even though the church continued what Andrew Green describes as a fruitful evangelistic programme.

⁹⁸ The secretary’s report speaks of furthering the spiritual life at PBC both through good quality worship services and group bible studies (Appendix 4h, pp 6-7).

⁹⁹ Appendix 2b, p4

¹⁰⁰ It is noteworthy that Andrew stressed that the church, under his leadership examined what discipleship meant in a fuller way. (Ibid, p.3)

¹⁰¹ The late 70’s was the time when the charismatic movement really took off in the UK, led by, among others, the Anglican, David Watson, who interestingly, led a large ‘mission’ in Manchester in 1977 that PBC were involved in. (1978 AGM report, appendix 4g, p2). I would argue that this epoch laid the foundation of the move from PBC being a ‘conservative’ evangelical church to a ‘charismatic’ evangelical church, though this only took hold in the White years.

¹⁰² Ibid

¹⁰³ John Churchman co-ordinated a ‘missionary committee’ that met through all 4 epochs of time, being the forerunner of the MIST team today (Mission support team), though its thrust was to support and profile the work of missionary agencies beyond the walls of PBC. In the 1979 AGM report he implores the church to a wider vision (beyond local church), though it is notable that he cites Christ’s command to preach the gospel as the mission imperative, again elevating evangelism as the primary aim of mission (Appendix 4j, pp 7-8). The leaflet for PBC’s Missionary convention details the range of agencies that PBC supported at that time (Appendix 4k).

¹⁰⁴ Playaway made a striking impact putting the church in contact with the needs of the families of people who didn’t attend church (Appendix 4j).

¹⁰⁵ Andrew’s questionnaire, appendix 2b, p2.

2.5 The Martin years (1980-90)

When Andrew Green left to study at Spurgeon's college, the church decided to call Rev. Roger Martin to the pastorate, formerly the Minister at Teddington Baptist church. Roger served PBC for the next decade, being joined firstly by Rev. Billy Montgomery (in 1984), and then Rev. David Graham (in 1987), both as assistant Ministers.

2.51 Continuity of approach

In my view, this third epoch was not unlike the previous one in terms of it being a time of further consolidation and continuity. Significantly, in Billy's questionnaire he records that the church understood mission for the span of his years purely as personal evangelism.¹⁰⁶ Whilst Roger senses that the church evolved in its missiological understanding during the decade from seeing mission as personal evangelism to a more relational or world focus, it is revealing that he comments that the church still maintained a fairly narrow view:¹⁰⁷ the church had "very little social implication of the gospel," regretting the fact that the church didn't stand with the community as it should have.¹⁰⁸

Despite this limited understanding and practice, or indeed because the church still elevated evangelism, Roger records that he baptized 30 people each year for 10 years, reckoning that the 'real' membership of the church rose from 190 to 390 in the decade.¹⁰⁹ Whilst it is again unclear as to whether these new people were new converts to the Christian faith, it is revealing that Roger cites the church's motivation "to 'go again' (evangelistically) and to see real conversions on a monthly basis," as one of the greatest achievements in this era.¹¹⁰

In terms of mission methodologies used in this era, a range of tools were used, though they fall either into the category of specific evangelistic enterprises such as the Billy Graham event at Liverpool, or the support of missionary agencies who focused on evangelism overseas.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Appendix 2c, p2.

¹⁰⁷ Appendix 2d, p2.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p3. These figures also include members who became part of the Hazel Grove church plant in 1988. Whilst I have no reason to question the validity of these figures I am aware that the church did a fresh inventory of the membership in Rob White's time when I was assistant, and found them to be inflated.

¹¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹¹ Such as Tony Kirk's ongoing work with Operation Mobilisation (Ibid, p2).

2.52 Planting Hazel Grove

In my view, the lasting achievement of this decade was the church plant at Hazel Grove, a vibrant faith community which now has 214 members.¹¹² At the beginning of 1988, the possibility of planting a second congregation, that had been previously contemplated, was pursued by 25 adults, most of whom lived either in Hazel Grove or on the north side of Poynton.¹¹³ The church meeting in April that year made the historic decision with a view to launching the new fellowship in the September.¹¹⁴ After overcoming initial problems locating a venue, by September, over 50 people from PBC took the leap, spending the two weeks prior to the launch inviting local people through doorstep conversations and leafleting the area.¹¹⁵ To their surprise (and joy), over 140 adults and children attended those initial meetings, settling down to average weekly attendances of 80 adults and 20 children.¹¹⁶ As Chris Newton's report reveals, amongst the local mix of non PBC attenders there were local enquirers inquisitive about this new community, others were new converts, and still others who joined the church from other fellowships and appreciated the opportunity of Christian service in a pioneering venture.¹¹⁷

As was the case with the 'church re-invigorations' in the Pringle days, my view is that the evangelism-centric philosophy transferred from the 'mother' to the 'daughter' congregation. It is significant that Billy Montgomery, who returned as Hazel Grove's new Minister in 1997, continues to understand mission mainly in terms of personal evangelism.¹¹⁸

Initially, this new faith community kept strong links with the sending church in Poynton, but became a completely independent Baptist church by the time Rev. Rob White came to Poynton as Senior Minister in 1992.

2.53 Further reflections

Before I look at the fourth and last epoch, I want to reflect on the main points that have emerged from this story of mission so far. I have attempted to establish that the church's missiological trajectory was set in the Pringle years with a theology of mission that was centred

¹¹² As at June 2005.

¹¹³ About 25 adults initially committed themselves to the venture according to Roger Martin's comments in the 1988 annual report (Appendix 4m, p3).

¹¹⁴ Chris Newton, the leader of the new plant details this in his report in the '88 AGM (Ibid)

¹¹⁵ Ibid

¹¹⁶ Ibid

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Chris' report doesn't detail the proportions.

¹¹⁸ Appendix 2c, p4.

on evangelism, and that the missional practices that ensued flowed out of that view. Two further modifications of this perspective was to see mission as supporting world missions (of an evangelistic type), and to see mission as church growth, as seen in the re-invigorations of dwindling churches.

It can be seen that, in the second and third epoch's, the story is essentially one of consolidation and continuity. Attention was given in these sections to those factors that may have broadened the scope of the church's view of mission such as the influence of the charismatic renewal,¹¹⁹ and the impact of the carers and toddlers group. In the final period of this mission history, which we turn to now, we will see how the missiological landscape was shaped by changing contextual factors, both ecumenically and in terms of the local community, at the cusp of the new millennium.

2.6 The White years (1992-2004)

In this section I argue that, in relation to the previous three epochs, the understanding and practice of mission at PBC changed most markedly, whilst continuing to remain within the evangelism-centric paradigm. My grounds for such an assessment are based on two factors: Firstly, I will assess the range of *general* factors in church life; secondly, and most significantly, I will comment on those *specific* developments that impacted on the church's mission.

2.61 New era: general developments that influenced mission

One significant outcome of the interregnum between the Martin and White epoch's was a subtle shift in leadership culture. At the end of Roger Martin's time, the church had decided to broaden its leadership structure to incorporate Elders and Deacons, when previously there had only been a deaconate working in tandem with the full-time ministerial staff.¹²⁰ The reasons for pursuing this route are not clear, though the general feeling was that the church was growing considerably and was exerting too much pressure on the old system. Though David Graham was in post as assistant for much of the interregnum, the range of leadership responsibilities were shared across the new eldership so that when Rob joined the church he entered a structure that had begun to shift toward a flatter, team oriented culture.

¹¹⁹ Though this didn't really take hold until the White epoch

¹²⁰ Roger Martin's letter, as part of the 1989 AGM report (appendix 4n, p3), details his pleasure at the way the church engaged in the business of appointing new lay Elders. The full-time staff became part of this team.

Whilst the church had generally operated before then with members working together in teams, this subtle shift had, in my opinion, a twofold outcome: firstly, it was the beginning of a realization that the source for vision in church life was ‘bottom-up’ as well as ‘top-down’. Secondly, and as a result of the first outcome, there was the beginning of a shift in the church’s centre of gravity, so that, whilst continuing to appreciate strong leadership, the impetus for the church’s life came from within rather than from the front. One outcome of this new culture was the commissioning and releasing, in the early years of this era, of lay people as ‘Pastoral workers’, who worked alongside the ministerial team, and in the later years, the release of a Musical Director.¹²¹ Whilst it took a while for this new culture to impinge upon mission, it did, as we’ll see, have a bearing later, with the push toward all members in the church having a responsibility for mission.

These ideas, expressed in co-ownership of vision, every-member ministry, and the primacy of evangelism and outreach, formed part of the new ‘P.O.W.E.R’ vision that, under Rob’s leadership, the church accepted and owned sixteen months into his ministry.¹²²

This, more team-oriented approach, didn’t however stop the church from recognizing the need for specialist input, especially in the area of mission. One outcome of this, which coincided with the launch of the POWER vision, was the appointment of Andy Aldridge to the full-time staff, who joined PBC in 1994 as Outreach co-ordinator, having previously worked as an evangelist with Youth for Christ in Cheltenham.¹²³

Some assessment has already been given to the impact of the charismatic movement on the story of mission at PBC. There was an emphasis throughout the White years on the importance of renewal in the sense that the church should be a movement of “people functioning in the daily empowering of the Holy Spirit and His leading, not in methods or traditions.”¹²⁴ Whilst this emphasis expressed itself particularly in types of corporate worship that were less ‘traditional’ and more ‘open’, as well as the greater use in public worship of the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as tongues and prophecy (though not to excess), it is more difficult to gauge the impact of this emphasis on mission.

¹²¹ Rob views the releasing of ‘pastoral workers’ and the Director of Music as one of the significant achievements of his time (appendix 2e, p3).

¹²² Rob identifies these issues as part of the background material for the launch of POWER in 1994 (Appendix 4p, p3).

¹²³ Andy was formerly the centre director of Cheltenham Youth for Christ.

¹²⁴ Appendix 4p, p2.

It is also significant to recognize the effect of transfer growth throughout this epoch. Rob reckons that the biggest proportion of the growth in membership in his time was due to people moving in, though it would be inaccurate to suggest that this period was without conversion growth.¹²⁵ One positive aspect of this transfer growth was that a number of people working in itinerant ministries found a welcoming church base at PBC.¹²⁶

2.62 Specific developments that influenced mission

I now want to highlight in this section three specific developments that, in my view, had a considerable bearing on both the understanding and the practice of mission during the White epoch. These were:

a) A theological grasp of mission that is broader than evangelism

In the early 90's, it was true to say that the inherited understanding that equated mission as evangelism and church growth drove the missiological agenda of the church.¹²⁷ Rob White expresses the emphasis at this time as 'ingrab' rather than outreach, commenting tellingly that, whilst the church was keen and open in terms of mission, it was quite moribund insofar as its engagement with the local community was concerned.¹²⁸

I want to assess here a cluster of factors that were significant in developing the church's theology of mission to a more holistic and incarnational position: The first factor was the shift from seeing evangelism as crisis to process, allied to an emphasis placed on micro-relational mission rooted in the community rather than an over-reliance on macro-event mission.¹²⁹ A classic example of this has been the impact at PBC of the evangelistic tool, Alpha, which draws on groups of enquirers, who are friends of believers, and through listening, over food and through open discussion, engage meaningfully with the Christian faith.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Rob believes that the membership grew by 50% during his time, recognising that the greater proportion of new members were Christians joining PBC from outside (Appendix 2e, p.3)

¹²⁶ Examples of this are members of Wellspring, Innervation Trust and the Message, all who have had a very positive influence in the mission and ministry of the church.

¹²⁷ Both Rob White (Appendix 2e, p2) and Andy Aldridge (Appendix 2a, p2) refer to the emphasis on proclamation evangelism, though Andy does point to an understanding of mission that incorporated social care that was beginning to emerge.

¹²⁸ Appendix 2e, p2.

¹²⁹ Rob and Andy both comment on the emphasis on relationship and process.

¹³⁰ PBC have run Alpha courses twice a year over the last decade.

Second, came the re-evaluating of the place of special events. Whilst larger-scale events at PBC weren't neglected, they were targeted to the seeker, with an emphasis on cultural relevance and quality of presentation.¹³¹

Alongside these new ideas, there was some theological reflection at various intervals,¹³² both through home group study and Sunday preaching. Through these mediums, the theological basis was explored for this new emphasis which stressed that the seeker needed to 'belong' to the church, before 'believing' and 'behaving', a marked shift from the 'believe first' emphasis of earlier years.¹³³

So, a new emphasis on the micro, the relational, cultural relevance, targeted events, borne out of a widening theological notion. But, what of the broadening of this notion beyond the sphere of evangelism to a more socio-centric understanding of mission?

Significantly, I believe the church's theological instinct that elevated the place of evangelism was never challenged or changed, and yet it was accompanied in the late 90's – I certainly sensed this intuitively in my early years¹³⁴ – by a recognition that social involvement was a fundamental aspect of mission. This resonates with Rob White's expanded missiological view at the end of the epoch which saw mission, "much more as an incarnational presence in the community and beyond".¹³⁵ The move to this new, centrifugal position, shared by some but not all, connecting our understanding of the nature of God with the social (as well as the spiritual) needs of the community, was new theological territory.

b) Mission that embraces all of life

Increasingly, during the final decade of the millennium, there was in Poynton increasing pressure on people's time, finances, family and work.¹³⁶ This increased sense of overload, felt both within and beyond the church community, was instrumental in the leaders bringing a recommendation for the church to adopt, over a two year period, a new campaign called,

¹³¹ Such an event was 'Livelink', a replica of the Willow Creek model of seeker service. Events were divided into S1, meaning a Christian event with no gospel message; S2 was an event with a gospel message; and R, which would be an S2 but with an opportunity for unbelievers to respond.

¹³² Though, it could be argued that this reflection wasn't done with any intention.

¹³³ These ideas emanate from Laurence Singlehurst's book, '*Sowing, reaping, keeping*'. Stuart Murray Williams discusses the different permutations of belonging and believing in chapter 1 of *Church after Christendom* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2005).

¹³⁴ I was appointed in September, 1997

¹³⁵ Appendix 2e, p4.

¹³⁶ This resonates with trends throughout the UK particularly in middle-class settings.

‘Campaign for a balanced Lifestyle’ (CFABLS).¹³⁷ Intended to lead to a complete takeover of the church’s programme, the vision of CFABLS was “To enable the church through partnership with the wider community...to help people in Poynton develop a biblically balanced lifestyle, through the demonstration and communication of biblical attitudes, values and practices in the context of contemporary Poynton culture”.¹³⁸ In terms of implementation, the campaign was rolled-out through a variety of activities,¹³⁹ all with the above aim in sight.

My view is that, within the church, CFABLS met with a mixed response. Legitimate criticism of it as a concept included comments that it led to some fragmentation,¹⁴⁰ that it was targeted at a limited constituency and some people (particularly seniors) felt left out,¹⁴¹ and, most significantly, that it never fully accomplished its aim despite a two year focus. Certainly, as an evangelistic enterprise it had, at best, limited results.

Yet, whilst I believe these criticisms are justified, it should be remembered that CFABLS was of benefit to those who were searching for a simpler, less stressful lifestyle, as it made connections between the God of the bible and their contemporary lives. It also had the desired effect of re-locating mission from the preserve of the few to the all.

Flowing out of CFABLS, came the follow up campaign, ‘Everyone a missionary’ (EAM), which had less of an impact across the sweep of the church than its predecessor, though for the few who engaged with it, came the wonderful discovery that, amongst their friends, family and work colleagues, there was a mission field. This was a great discovery for those who had previously viewed a missionary as somebody working overseas. I believe that this gain of placing mission on the agenda of every Christian, allied to the push for the broader social understanding of mission, will, in time, be seen as the great pluses of these initiatives.

c) *Mission borne out of new ecumenical partnerships*

The third factor that shaped mission in PBC in the fourth epoch was the forging of new ecumenical partnerships across all 7 churches in Poynton, known as ‘Churches Together in

¹³⁷ CFABLS targeted people who were “stretched for resources, struggling in relationships, and searching for something” (appendix 4q, p11).

¹³⁸ CFABLS mission statement, Ibid, p.8

¹³⁹ Activities included special lifestyle courses (parenting, coping with debt), small group discussions, services and LIVELINKS, and partnership with local community.

¹⁴⁰ This was partly because we used Sunday evening services to run different lifestyle groups that split the congregation.

¹⁴¹ It was aimed at the 25-55’s

Poynton' (CTIP). Whilst there had previously been a Ministers group, the shift in this era was a much deeper sense of unity allied to a push towards grassroots, ecumenical mission.

I would suggest that a combination of factors contributed to this move to a much more unified, dynamic and mission-centred focus in inter-church relations. First, in the 90's there were a cluster of Ministers who started to meet together for fellowship and prayer that recognized the importance of mission.¹⁴² Second, the Ministers tended to have a broadly evangelical theology with a missiological grasp that mirrored the more holistic stance that was beginning to emerge at PBC.¹⁴³ Allied to this was the realization of the need for the 7 churches to work together to present a common witness of the gospel in Poynton. The final factor was the emergence of gifted lay people who shared the vision for ecumenical mission.¹⁴⁴

This combination of factors led to a variety of initiatives, most but not all of which had a mission-based focus. Uppermost in people's memories was the millennium festival, if only because of the size and impact it carried.¹⁴⁵ Reflecting on the progress report for the festival,¹⁴⁶ it is significant that some of the main points mirror, at an ecumenical level, the changes in the understanding and practice of mission within PBC during the White epoch.

2.63 Ecumenical report reflects shifts in mission at PBC

This report identified that:

- Mission should be christocentric rather than churchcentric (point 1)
- Mission should be linked to contemporary culture, and churches need to listen and be sensitive to their contexts (point 2).
- Mission should be practised in partnership, both with Christian and secular bodies (point 3).
- Mission is about celebration and education, not just proclamation (point 4).
- Mission is broader theologically than evangelism (points 5, 8 and 11)

¹⁴² Rob White's leadership was vital in establishing the Ministers group on this fresh footing with a much greater degree of mutuality and friendship.

¹⁴³ Whilst there was a variation in theological, ecclesiological and missiological positions, there was a strong sense of mutual respect

¹⁴⁴ One of the key people in CTIP was Carolyn McQuaker who was instrumental in both initiating ideas for projects and in galvanising lay people across the spectrum of the church scene to facilitate them.

¹⁴⁵ The Millennium festival was a large scale project based at a tented village in Poynton, over a two week period in the summer of 2000 that incorporated a vast array of mission-focused events. Whilst it had limited results evangelistically, it did draw the church communities close together and gave the common witness real visibility in Poynton.

¹⁴⁶ CTIP progress report for Festival (appendix 4r, pp1-2).

- Mission at an ecumenical level presents a common witness (points 6,7 and 9).
- Mission should be centrifugal rather than centripetal (points 3,8 and 9)

2.64 Final reflections

My thesis in this study is that PBC broadened, but did not deviate from the paradigm established in the Pringle era. I have argued that, though there were various factors that contributed to modifications and nuances of this basic paradigm, the middle two epochs were years of consolidation and continuity. I have gone on to argue that the White epoch was the most transformational in terms of the way the church understood mission.

I now want to analyse PBC's mission history since 1967 by evaluating it with reference to David Bosch's understanding of mission.

Chapter 3. The conversation with Bosch: analysing PBC's story of mission

I attended in my introduction to the reasons why I chose to refer to David Bosch's work, *Transforming Mission*, in this study. My intention in this section is to use Stan Nussbaum's companion to *Transforming Mission (A Readers Guide*, Orbis: 2005), as the primary text for facilitating a dialogue between Bosch and the history of mission at PBC since 1967, comparing and contrasting those elements of an emerging missionary paradigm as outlined by Bosch that connect with PBC's story. My hope is that this analysis will then act as a springboard to the final section (4), when I attempt to look at the future of mission at PBC, investigating whether the church could be on the cusp of a new missionary paradigm, and if so, what ingredients that paradigm might contain.

3.1 Toward an interim and incomplete definition of mission

Before I attend to the matter of the conversation between Bosch and PBC I feel it is important to comment on the difficulties of defining mission. According to Bosch, the term "mission" presupposes "a sender, a person or persons sent by the sender, those to whom one is sent, and

an assignment.”¹⁴⁷ Given that two of the key elements of mission are constantly changing, namely the context to which one is sent and the crucible within which the assumptions of both the sender and the person or persons sent by the sender are formed, I would argue that any definition of mission can only ever be interim and incomplete. I share Bosch’s reticence for a fixed and uniform view and concur with his notion that we should rather attempt to chart the contours of “a pluriverse of missiology in a universe of mission.”¹⁴⁸

3.11 The dilemma of evaluating how PBC understands mission

I too have discovered that mission is a slippery concept to define, particularly in a fairly large local church setting when both the context and crucible of the individuals in it are movable concepts. Any attempt to navigate this course is complex, with a myriad of sociological, contextual and theological considerations. Why exclusively white, middle class, Baptist, evangelical Christians, in outer-suburban Cheshire, understand mission in the way they do is indeed a complex study. My attempt therefore, in the analysis that follows is not to point to a rigid set of concepts, but rather to identify the cluster of approximations that have combined to form PBC’s view of mission. In saying that, I am alert to the notion that I could be seen as presupposing that all the members of the church understand mission in the same way. Clearly, that is not the case. What I do submit, however, is that there is a core of missiological understanding found within the church that I will concentrate on. Where that commonly held view differs from mine, I will state why that is so.

Having noted the problems in defining mission, I now want to dialogue with those elements of Bosch’s emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm - his sixth epoch - that resonate with the Poynton story

3.2 Nussbaums six categories: the dialogue between PBC’s story of mission and Bosch’s Emerging Paradigm

I am aware, in using Nussbaum’s six categories for the interweaving of church and mission, rather than Bosch’s thirteen elements that Nussbaum encapsulates,¹⁴⁹ that I am possibly using categories that might be tidier than the complex reality. The reason for sticking with Nussbaum

¹⁴⁷ This notion was associated originally with the Jesuits and catholic expansionism, but became the model for colonial expansionism to the Third World (*Transforming Mission*), 1.

¹⁴⁸ Soares-Prabhu, G.M., S.J. 1986 *Missiology or Missiologies?*, Mission Studies, no 6, pp85-87, quoted in *Transforming Mission*, pp 7-8

¹⁴⁹ These are listed in unnumbered sections in *Transforming Mission*, pp368-510.

is because, like him, to make sense of any evaluation, there is a limit to the amount of nuances and dimensions of a paradigm that can be held in our heads in creative tension.

I am also alert to the fact that Bosch's thirteen categories may still not present an exhaustive list.¹⁵⁰ My analysis is limited to those of Bosch's concepts that I have selected simply because they resonate with the Poynton story.

3.21 *The source of mission (missio Dei)*¹⁵¹

This starting point for my evaluation is to do with the question, *where does mission originate? Does mission have its roots in human activity, or does it originate within the character and nature of God?*

Bosch, wanting to reinstate God into the mission picture, in the wake of the ideas of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth, re-routes the ownership of mission back to the doctrine of the Trinity, rather than the studies of ecclesiology or soteriology.¹⁵² "In the new image mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God....To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people."¹⁵³ So Barth's idea of the '*missio Dei*' (God's mission) is the starting point for mission recognizing that God the Father sends the Son, and Father and Son send the spirit. An expansion of this is a third movement; that is the idea that Father, Son and Spirit send the church into the world. So, according to Bosch, "our mission has no life of its own: only in the hands of the sending God can it truly be called mission."¹⁵⁴

I should say that the greatest shift in my own thinking, brought about by my reading and research for this study, has been this re-routing of the ownership of mission back in the direction of the triune God. Before I started this recent journey, probably like the majority of people at PBC who believe that mission is sourced in human activism, I would have recognized the importance of the need for God to empower mission but had no real sense that its starting place was divinely rooted. The shock of integrating this new image really only takes hold when examining the implications of *missio Dei*.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ For instance, *Transforming Mission* doesn't comment on 'Mission as hospitality' or the link between mission and the modern ecology movement

¹⁵¹ *Transforming Mission*, pp 389-93, Nussbaum, pp. 95-96

¹⁵² Bosch details Barth's influence in this debate noting the significance of his contribution at the Willingen Conference of the IMC in 1952 (p390)

¹⁵³ Ibid

¹⁵⁴ Ibid

¹⁵⁵ Outlined by Nussbaum (*Readers guide*), 96.

- a) Firstly, mission is bigger than the church and God works beyond and outside the church. It is accurate to say that PBC has felt the weight of responsibility for owning and sourcing mission in Poynton. Whilst my historical analysis certainly shows that this ‘grasping of the nettle’ of mission certainly acted as a rider to complacency, it could also be argued that it led to destructive and unhealthy notions about self-importance and a reliance on human strategies and activity. What is liberating in the new image is the idea to me that a person’s eternal destiny is not ultimately the church’s concern (or mine), but God’s. Whilst I admire the zeal and activism that flowed out of Pringle’s view of mission that was to do with “the saving of souls”, I now see it as, at best incomplete and at worst, flawed: not because I no longer believe in the primacy of evangelism, nor because it takes account of an individuals or communities social well-being (though it doesn’t); but because it fails to realize that ultimately it is Gods activity that determines salvation rather than the church’s witness. Yes, the church has a responsibility to share in God’s mission, but I would now contend that it shouldn’t carry the burden of ultimately sourcing it. A further outcome of *missio Dei* that contrasts sharply with PBC’s approach is the sense that mission is not about ‘taking’ the presence of God into a situation but is more to do with joining in with the God who is already there. This is a humbling awakening, resonating with Nussbaum’s view that “the church cannot be arrogant about its mission or itself”.¹⁵⁶ The only trace of the *missio Dei* concept found in PBC’s story is in Andy Aldridge’s recent thinking on mission when he talks of a much fuller understanding that is “much taken by the idea of joining in with God’s mission”.¹⁵⁷
- b) Where there is more common ground between PBC and Bosch is in this second implication of *missio Dei* that recognizes that the church is derived from mission (not vice versa), and that mission cannot be reduced to an incidental role in church life. One of the central themes of my historical analysis of PBC is the belief that Christianity is intrinsically missionary. All four epochs hold to the notion of “some great ‘unveiling’ of ultimate truth believed to be of universal import.”¹⁵⁸ This view resonates with both Bosch and Wilbert Shenk, who says that the whole *raison d’etre* of the church in the New Testament is to be a missionary witness to the world, “thus at one stroke sharply

¹⁵⁶ Ibid

¹⁵⁷ Appendix 2a, p4.

¹⁵⁸ Stackhouse, Max. 1988, *Apologia: Contextualization, Globalization, and Mission in Theological Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 189, quoted in *Transforming Mission*, p9.

focusing its purpose while subsuming other functions under mission.”¹⁵⁹ This intrinsic sense of the calling of the church, both local and universal, to be an agent of reconciliation and hope to the world, is an emphasis that both I, and I believe PBC, would want to embrace.

- c) There is divergence, however, in this third implication of *missio Dei* that suggests that mission cannot be “reduced to conversions and church membership... God has bigger, wider things in mind.”¹⁶⁰ I would contend that, since 1967, the effectiveness of the church’s mission was measured by conversion and membership growth, with the added factor, in our Baptist context, of the number of baptisms. Whilst I would want to argue that these factors should contribute to the indicators we use to measure the effectiveness of mission in the local context, it takes no account of ministries which are motivated by ‘unconditional gift’ rather than ‘pre-evangelism’. In our setting, for instance, the success of our work with carers and toddlers (Playaway), should not be deemed as ineffective if it doesn’t result in conversion or membership growth. On the other hand, if setting out with an evangelistic enterprise such as an Alpha course, these indicators should play a part in assessing whether that enterprise was effective.

3.22 *The Goals of Mission (salvation and justice)*¹⁶¹

Whilst PBC would strongly embrace Bosch’s “salvation-sharing desire”,¹⁶² the fundamental question that needs to be answered here is *what is salvation? Is salvation about eternal, spiritual, other-worldly matters, or should its focus be on social justice, human dignity and this-worldly matters?* It is critical that careful examination is undertaken here given that the answer to this question will determine the scope of our missiological practice.

Challenged by the universal impact of the enlightenment, Bosch argues that, for much of the twentieth century, this question was answered unsatisfactorily in different ways by advocates of either an evangelical position or an ecumenical liberal position, mainly around the thorny issue of the interface between the evangelistic and societal dimensions of soteriology. The first, on the one hand drew from a Christological understanding that revolved around the person of Jesus and the spiritual appropriation of his death; and the latter on the cause of Jesus and a physical and social appropriation of his teaching ministry. As these approaches resulted in two

¹⁵⁹ *Mission in Bold Humility*, 83.

¹⁶⁰ *Readers*, 96.

¹⁶¹ Bosch, pp393-408; Nussbaum, pp97-103.

¹⁶² *Transforming Mission*, 393.

completely polarised, post-enlightenment paradigms, often with hostility across the divide, Bosch argues for an integrated, comprehensive approach that will “find a way beyond every schizophrenic position and minister to people in their total need, . . . we should involve individual as well as society, soul and body, present and future in our ministry of salvation.”¹⁶³

It is clear that, through all four epochs, PBC’s theological home has been in the approach the evangelicals espouse; one classic outworking of this would be the ‘evangelism explosion’ method of evangelism practiced during both the Pringle and the Green/Fennel years. I would argue however, that justice issues have impacted on our view in the last epoch even if we saw them as a side effect rather than a central part of our understanding. PBC certainly rejected, as I would also, any approach that defined salvation exclusively in this-worldly terms, as did the 1973 conference of the World council of Churches.¹⁶⁴ At PBC, our failing was to react against liberalism’s ‘justice only’ stance by advocating an equally lopsided ‘spiritual only’ stance. Whilst PBC (and I) would still, if prodded, want to elevate the spiritual dimension, I now believe a more holistic and comprehensive model is called for that doesn’t just bolt-on justice to our paradigm but finds a proper theological home for it.¹⁶⁵ On this journey of reorientation, as we seek the recovery of a full-orbed gospel, we must be careful of the twin pitfalls of either reducing the importance of the eternal, spiritual dimension, or failing to integrate and welcome the social dimension.¹⁶⁶

3.23 *The activities of mission (evangelism and contextualization)*¹⁶⁷

Comparing and contrasting PBC’s mission history with Bosch’s emerging paradigm, we have so far concluded that the source of mission arises in God himself, and that it should intentionally set its sights on both salvation and justice. We now come to consider the activities of mission with an examination of evangelism and contextualization.

I’ve already commented on the dilemmas of attempting to define mission. It is a less complex pursuit to try and nail down evangelism. Bosch submits that evangelism is best seen as a subset of mission, locating it as the “preacher-teaching” part of mission that requires words, though, if

¹⁶³ Ibid, p399

¹⁶⁴ Bosch cites the Bangkok conference as the optimistic high point for the liberal movement who defined salvation purely in economic, social and human ways, *ibid* 396.

¹⁶⁵ I expound my view on this in a previous essay for the MA course entitled, *‘the recovery of the evangelical social conscience’*.

¹⁶⁶ It could be that this journey will be best precipitated by engaging in ecumenical local mission, especially as I have noted that one of the beneficial side effects of such ventures is that you partner with communities of faith who are at a different place on this socio-spiritual scale of understanding.

¹⁶⁷ *Transforming Mission*, pp. 409-457.

the desired effect is to impact unbelievers, it must be accompanied by lifestyle and action.¹⁶⁸ Likening evangelism to an announcement about God's intervention into human history, Bosch summarises by offering a definition of evangelism as "that dimension and activity of the church's mission which, by word and deed, and in the light of particular conditions and a particular context, offers every person and community, everywhere, a valid opportunity to be directly challenged to a radical reorientation of their lives."¹⁶⁹ He describes the outcome of such a reorientation as involving deliverance from slavery to the world and its powers; embracing Christ as Saviour and Lord; becoming a member of the church; and being enlisted in the task of reconciliation and justice on earth. These fruits of the reoriented life have only partially been embraced at PBC, with a grasp that incorporates a new allegiance to Christ as Saviour, but an understanding of his Lordship that impinges on the personal and spiritual rather than the social and structural. The positive shift in the White epoch would be a greater openness to the notion of enlistment to the service of peace and justice on earth, though both I and the church would be nervous if this led to politically driven agendas that aimed to transform social structures but took no account of the conversion of the heart and soul of the individual.

One of Bosch's basic arguments in *Transforming Mission* is that, throughout history, the Christian message incarnated itself in the life and world of its adherents.¹⁷⁰ He judges that it is only recently that the contextual nature of the faith has been identified, in contrast to the view of Western Christians who "simply assumed that (their theology) was supracultural and universally valid."¹⁷¹ This supracultural view, in my judgement, is the position PBC has held through all four epochs, the assumption being that the gospel transcends any contextual considerations.

My sympathies here are with Bosch who recognises the twin dangers of either taking the supracultural stance or of an over-emphasis on contextualization, being critical of theologians who stood in Schleiermachers wake, such as Bultmann, who advocated the view that biblical scholarship was all about de-contextualizing or demythologizing the text to get at the 'true' meaning, without realizing that they were overlaying the text with their own conditioned contexts.¹⁷² Influenced by third world theologians, Bosch advocates the 'hermeneutical circle', that is a process of 'doing theology' that starts in experience or praxis and then moves to

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 412 and 414.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 414

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 421

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 448

¹⁷² Ibid, 423.

theological reflection: “Orthopraxis and orthodoxy need one another, and each is adversely affected when sight is lost of the other.”¹⁷³ I too would share Bosch’s passion for ‘doing theology’, recognizing that the best missionary endeavour is done in tandem with reflection.¹⁷⁴

Further developments of contextualization are liberation and inculturation, the former springing up from Latin America with a strong socio-political dimension, and the latter that aims to get to grips with the local context; “Liberationists see oppression in political and economic structures within one culture; inculturationists see it as cultural imperialism across cultural lines.”¹⁷⁵

It is beyond the scope of this essay to include any analysis of liberation theology – though any sympathy with the socio-political agenda’s of its proponents would probably be viewed with some suspicion at PBC - but there are connections here between PBC’s story and the matter of inculturation. One way of describing the prevailing culture in Poynton would be as ‘middle-class’, that is those cluster of ideas and values that are aspirational and ‘upwardly mobile’, with an accent on individualism and materialism. My greatest fear is that, as a church, we must constantly be conscious of being sucked into those aspects of ‘middle-class’ culture that are at odds with the Christian faith. Whilst not wanting to make a pitch here against the evils of ‘middle class’ culture, I have observed that it is more difficult for ‘working-class’ people to fit in at ‘middle-class’ churches than for ‘middle-class’ people to be welcomed in a predominantly ‘working-class’, Christian community.¹⁷⁶ One corrective that Bosch suggests is the need for dialogue among the churches of different cultures, introducing the new notion of ‘intercultural’. I would add that my own intercultural experiences, both in the third world as an employee of the relief organisation Tearfund, and through experiences in UK churches that were diverse sociologically and culturally, has increased my awareness of this dilemma. As Bosch suggests, this new intercultural way will require a new disposition and a teachable spirit.¹⁷⁷

3.24 *The Bearer of Mission (the whole church in the whole world)*¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Ibid, 425 citing Gustavo Gutierrez, *A theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll:orbis, 1988, p.34

¹⁷⁴ One of the reasons why I believe the Alpha course works well as an evangelistic tool is that it provides a forum for ‘doing theology’, allowing elbow room for the variety of ideas and contexts of the individuals who participate in it.

¹⁷⁵ *Readers*, 112

¹⁷⁶ I was previously in a church in the working-class Lancashire town of Oswaldtwistle and draw on my observations of the contrast with PBC.

¹⁷⁷ *Transforming Mission*, 456

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 368-89; 457-74)

The question here to evaluate is to do with the matter of who carries out the activities of mission: Who has been deputized as the bearer of the *missio Dei*? For Bosch, the answer is *the whole church in the whole world*. Nussbaum identifies five things that have disrupted this vision that must be overcome in the new paradigm:

- Compartmentalizing mission as one component of the church
- Treating church and mission as separate concepts
- Being resigned to denominational divisions
- Labeling some churches as ‘receiving’ or ‘daughter’ churches
- Treating the laity as second-class citizens

I will concentrate here on those of Nussbaum’s five points that resonate with the Poynton story. With regard to the compartmentalizing of mission, this is the idea that in a church’s life there are several sections such as worship and administration of which mission is one. An example of this marginalization would be the world missions committee that ran through PBC’s first three epochs and was replaced by the missions support team (MIST). The outcome of this notion in our setting was that mission (understood in the international sense) became the concern of a subset of interested members.

On the worldwide church scene this compartmentalization, according to Bosch, broke down during the twentieth century, marked by the series of International Missionary Conferences amongst Protestant Christians, and by Vatican II amongst Catholics.¹⁷⁹ This universal push to a more integrated position for mission was already part of the DNA of PBC in the Pringle days, in the sense that mission seen as evangelism was the central thrust of the church’s life. What changed in the White years, though it was by no means accepted by all, was the shifting of the emphasis from mission being an activity of some Christians to a core part of being a Christian.

My comments on treating the church and mission as separate concepts are limited to earlier points I made about the shift from a more centripetal method that drew people in during the first epoch, to a more centrifugal approach in the final epoch, that was concerned with that which God was doing beyond the confines of the church. Bosch alludes to an essentially missionary church being one on the move, rather than one that has arrived; one that proclaims ‘Let us follow him’ rather than ‘come to us’.¹⁸⁰ I would espouse this more humble disposition but would be mindful of the church’s need to retain its distinctiveness whilst engaging on more equal and less defensive terms with the local community. This is only achievable when the

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 369 and 371

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 376.

church realizes, as Stuart Murray advocates, what it means to live in Christ and to exist for others.¹⁸¹

At a local level, PBC was keen in the last epoch to work together for mission with other traditions whereas its missionary exploits in earlier years were attempted solely. Both PBC and I would join Bosch in arguing for common witness, taking the view that our allegiance to the missionary task is a greater concern than any denominational loyalties.¹⁸² The posture we have adopted ecumenically in terms of mission is a fairly pragmatic one, recognizing that some of our missionary exploits will be best done on our own and others together. What determines this are considerations based on impact and effectiveness in the community rather than any denominational or ecumenical leanings.

On the subject of reducing the importance of lay people, I would submit that, whilst all the Ministers in the epochs I have covered have been strong characters, partly because of an ecclesiological grasp that is faithful to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, there has been no enshrined place or special privileges afforded them. Whilst I genuinely welcome this stance, especially the push to a more team-oriented approach, I do believe a new understanding of the role of a Minister in a Baptist church, needs to be looked at in this post-modern, post-Christian era, favouring Nigel Wright's idea of 'inclusive representation'.¹⁸³ I am grateful that the laity has come of age, being persuaded that mission rather than clergy should be central to the church's identity in the emerging paradigm.

3.25 *The Limits of Mission (Its witness nature and its time frame)*¹⁸⁴

Bosch rightly recognizes that the church's mission is limited, and needs to be reminded that it is not the only means God has of reaching out to the world. As I've previously argued in this essay, the *missio Dei* is far broader and greater than the mission of the church. Flowing out of this are the limits of knowledge and time. What is obvious and incontestable are the restraints of human finitude and historical time, though the implications of these twin truths require careful reflection. The limitation of knowledge relates to the church's engagement with other faith groups; the limitation of time refers to the timeframe for the church's mission between Pentecost and Parousia.

¹⁸¹ Stuart Murray, *Church Planting: Laying foundations* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998) 39.

¹⁸² PBC works for mission in Poynton with all 7 Christian communities

¹⁸³ Advocated in *New Baptists*, 127

¹⁸⁴ *Transforming Mission*, 474-89 and 498-510

For PBC as a gathered community, relations with other religious groups through all four epochs have been non-existent.¹⁸⁵ Because our engagement with people of other faiths is therefore limited to mainly employment networks, my judgement is that PBC approaches interfaith dialogue with some reticence, probably, on the whole, adopting traditional, exclusivist evangelical views, that reject both pluralistic or syncretistic notions about the relative value of other religions.

What Bosch calls for is an approach that remains faithful to the Christian witness but assumes a posture that genuinely dialogues and listens to our neighbours of other faiths: “We affirm that witness does not preclude dialogue but invites it, and that dialogue does not preclude witness but extends and deepens it”.¹⁸⁶ His push for ‘bold humility’, recognizing the tension between mission and dialogue, is one I would personally welcome. I have shifted in my own position, not from denying the unique nature of God’s revelation in Christ, but in the sense of believing that the Holy Spirit works, often surprisingly, way beyond the confines of the church, and even through the journeys of faith experienced by people of other religious groups. I suspect, in this, I would be further down the road to the stance most of PBC’s membership would want to adopt. This juxtaposition of the witness and dialogical tensions is well expressed by the San Antonio conference: “We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time we cannot set limits to the saving power of God”.¹⁸⁷

In terms of an understanding of the timeframe for mission, Bosch calls for an approach that ‘looks back’ and ‘looks forward’, recognizing that between these two reference points in history, Christian mission can be practiced with “both confidence and hope...and will always be intertwined with the history of the whole world, not isolated in a religious or mystical compartment”.¹⁸⁸ I would submit that a further theological shift through the four epochs I cover – though it would be difficult to trace at what point – has come an understanding of the ‘now’ but ‘not yet’ nature of the Kingdom of God, pointing to an eschatological view of mission that would correspond with Bosch’s creative tension, where he calls for a state of patient impatience.

3.26 *The study of Mission (missiology and theology)*¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ According to the 2001 census only 1% of Poynton’s population was of non-British origin and 1% of non-Christian origin (appendix 4s, p2).

¹⁸⁶ *Transforming Mission*, 487, citing the WCC meeting at San Antonio in 1990

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁸⁸ *Readers*, 129.

¹⁸⁹ *Transforming Mission*, 489-98

In this evaluation, comparing and contrasting PBC's story with Bosch's elements of an emerging paradigm, we have now established that mission arises out of God himself, that it sets its sights on salvation and justice, that it should always incorporate both evangelism and contextualization, that its bearer is the whole church in the whole world, and that a bold yet humble approach, recognizing its limitations is called for. This final section deals with the study of the missiological process I have just described, and its relationship with theology.

Bosch, locating missiology in the beginnings of the Christian story, describes mission as the 'mother' of theology, contending that, Christian missionaries like Paul, wrote their theological letters as they participated in the formation of new Christian communities and cultures. Thus, at the inception of the church, mission was the theme of all theology, indeed theology had no right to exist other than to act as a critical companion to the *missio Dei*.¹⁹⁰ Lamenting the various distortions of the interface between mission and theology, especially the post-enlightenment tendency to, at worst, ignore mission, and at best, to include it as a sub-section of theology, Bosch calls for a reordered vision that keeps the primary challenge of the church in focus: that is "to link the always-relevant Jesus event of twenty centuries ago to the future of the promised reign of God for the sake of meaningful initiatives in the present".¹⁹¹

I too would argue that theology is best understood through the lens of the intrinsic missionary nature of the Christian faith. Certainly, I greatly welcome innovative new ways of ministerial formation in theological colleges that are intentionally setting out to elevate the study of mission in our post-modern society. Through all four epochs of my historical analysis, the training of lay people in mission played a significant role in the church's growth, though I suspect that the commonly held view at PBC would still be that missiology is a branch of theological study rather than the mother of it. As Bosch points out, besides its role in challenging theological study, missiological reflection also plays a dual role in sharpening the practice of mission. I have noticed that critical examination done in the right spirit focuses and bolsters Christian mission rather than taking away from it. Certainly, for me, interfacing with students on the MA course drawn from contrasting denominational and theological traditions has enhanced my understanding of mission and renewed my commitment to its practice.

3.3 Further critical reflections on Bosch's position

¹⁹⁰ *Readers*, 134.

¹⁹¹ *Transforming Mission*, 498.

This evaluative study has been mainly supportive of the various ideas and positions held by Bosch in terms of the way he sets out the elements of an emerging paradigm in *Transforming Mission*. I mentioned in my introduction that one of my attractions to his ideas was precisely because his assumptions and understandings challenge PBC's (and my) preciously held evangelical views. I recognize too that, though it was comprehensive in its time, there have been various developments in missiology since the early 90's.¹⁹²

In their missiological history, Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder build on some of Bosch's ideas.¹⁹³ One challenging concept they write about is the notion of 'mission as prophetic dialogue'.¹⁹⁴ An aspect of this that Bosch doesn't cover is the idea of prophetic dialogue being seen as reconciliation, an idea that has relevance at a micro level, particularly as Christians become more involved in their family, employment and community networks.

I am also alert to the fact that Bosch's ideas were not accepted uncritically at the time they were written. For instance criticism was made of his omission of the role of women in mission, or the growth and impact of the Pentecostal Movement,¹⁹⁵ both of which are significant matters but venture beyond the scope of this study. Of more interest for this study is the intrigue over why Bosch seems to pay scant attention in *Transforming Mission* to John's gospel, drawing on Matthew, Luke and Pauline sources to build his New Testament, mission theology.¹⁹⁶ As one of the central Johannine themes concerns the matter of whether Jesus is the Messiah or not,¹⁹⁷ I would have been fascinated to see how this thread of understanding impinged upon the arena of multi-faith dialogue in Bosch's thinking.

¹⁹² Such as the question of the relationship between mission and ecology.

¹⁹³ *Constants in Context*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 389-94

¹⁹⁵ Both these and other omissions are cited by Christopher Sugden (*Mission in Bold Humility*). 140.

¹⁹⁶ *Readers*, 151-2

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*

Chapter 4. The future of mission at PBC: Elements of a fifth epoch

This final section is an attempt to detect the trajectory of mission at PBC by identifying those elements that might be part of any future fifth epoch. Given that the central argument of this study has been that, whilst there have been modifications and developments within an evangelism-centric paradigm established in the Pringle epoch, PBC has not deviated from this central and defining thrust. If the past 4 epochs are to inform the next phase in the church's mission, there is ample evidence to suggest that PBC is not on the cusp of a new paradigm, and for that I am grateful.

I submit, however, that, if the church in a new, fifth epoch, is to be both faithful to the story of its recent history whilst being innovative and contemporary in its mission, it will need to hold in tension the passion for the gospel of the Pringle years, but continue in the wake of the White epoch in the sense that it further develops new understandings and practices. The issue here therefore is not 'new paradigms' but rather 'new developments' that will aid the church's effectiveness in mission in the future. It is to these fresh developments (or further nuances within an existing idea) that I want to finally attend, being alert to the fact that what ought to happen and what may happen could be two different things. I will limit my reflections to what ought to happen.

4.1 Fifth epoch: Detecting the future trajectory by analyzing the past

I argued in my introduction that I believe that reflecting on past events can inform the enterprises of both the present and the future. In this study I have traced a shift in the church's missiological culture that takes account of a variety of developments that build upon the evangelism-centric base. Some of the most notable developments have included the push to a broader theological perspective, the importance of contextual considerations in relevant mission, new ecumenical partnerships, discipleship that is 'whole-life' embracing, and the significance of *missio Dei*. At PBC I would hope that all these developments 'take on flesh' in the new era, believing that the battle is well on the way to being won in all but the last development, namely the concept of *missio Dei*. I suspect that embracing this notion, whereby mission is rooted in the mystery and dynamism of the Trinity rather than the activity of the church, could well bring about a greater sense of liberty in the church's missiological exploits.

The subtle yet defining switch for me is the sense of *participation* with God rather than *initiation* for God.

4.2 Fifth epoch: Defining the shape of ecumenical engagement

One cautionary point I would like to argue for is that the shape of PBC's ecumenical engagement should be more clearly defined in the fifth epoch. At the cusp of a new era at PBC, which is mirrored by other churches in Poynton also being at points of transition,¹⁹⁸ I would strongly advocate, in the area of mission, the need to establish some clearer points of reference that take account of the following:

- An ecumenical strategy for mission that compliments each churches agendas, rather than being a 'bolt-on' that is an afterthought. My plea here is for an agreed strategy that is owned, not just by a group of keen individuals who have ecumenical leanings, but by the various leadership teams of the churches, which should in turn facilitate more effective, relational, grass-roots mission.
- Whilst I welcome the pursuit of unity amongst our various traditions, in terms of mission, PBC must be free in the future to work on our own, or with one or more of the Poynton churches, or with all 7. What must define our missional enterprise is not some misguided notion of all the groups necessarily being involved for unity's sake, but a more honest approach that is defined by the matter of effectiveness.¹⁹⁹ I suspect that one of the sticking points in recent times is that PBC has contributed disproportionately in terms of resources.²⁰⁰ I would like to see PBC continue to contribute generously and intelligently, but it must own and believe in the values espoused and the enterprises put forward.
- The two points above are fresh points but they must build on the trajectory of ecumenical dialogue set in the White epoch that elevated the vision of a relational network above an institutionalized grouping. In the new era, I want to be free to be a Baptist, with an evangelical theology, who sees mission with both evangelism and justice components, and has a responsibility to lead a Baptist community that has

¹⁹⁸ A number of Poynton's churches have recently appointed new Ministers or are about to appoint.

¹⁹⁹ For instance, we have discovered that Alpha works more effectively when its embarked upon solely than with other churches

²⁰⁰ Some members of PBC's congregation, including a key group of our leadership feel that PBC contributes more than its fair share ecumenically.

integrity about its ecumenical engagement. My ecumenical vision is not for some centralized utopia but for each church to make a distinctive contribution, both together and apart, which is done for the sake of the Kingdom of God in Poynton rather than building the empires of any one of the churches.

- I applaud the present research work being done which aims to help the churches reach out to the community in a more effective way.²⁰¹ It is vital that this research informs our missiological agendas in the future and does not sit on Ministers bookshelves collecting dust.

4.3 Fifth epoch: recovering Pringle's passion for the gospel

This study has left me with something of a dilemma, namely that in developing PBC's missiological understanding in the ways that I welcome and that I describe in this study, is it possible that we have lost the urgency for the gospel of the Pringle days? My honest answer would be that we probably have, not that mission seen as evangelism was sidelined in later epochs, but that the conversion growth decreased with each passing era. Whilst I recognize that the crucible and contexts that shaped mission in 1967 were significantly different than they are today, and that some of the evangelistic practices of that first epoch would simply not work today; what does challenge me is the simple passion for the gospel that seemed to exude every area of church life in those early days.

In the fifth epoch we must be looking to an integrated, holistic approach that brings about a synthesis between the broadening of understanding that marked the White years with a recovery of the evangelistic zeal and energy of the Pringle epoch. I look forward to innovative and exciting enterprises that don't lessen the urgency of the call to conversion but are motivated by an unconditional love for people and a desire to improve their social conditions.²⁰²

²⁰¹ CTIP have commissioned research entitled 'Understanding our Communities'. This research is to be published in the Autumn of 2005

²⁰² Such an enterprise, linked to the Festival Manchester project, was the clearing up of the local Texaco garage and its transformation into a garden and seating area.

4.4 Fifth epoch: emerging church through the Post-Christendom lens

In his book that analyses church and mission in today's Post-Christian world,²⁰³ Stuart Murray suggests that, in order for the future of the UK church to be about 'revival' rather than 'survival', a number of sacrosanct mindsets and practices will need to be transformed.²⁰⁴ Of these, two that particularly resonate with the Poynton context are the need for a church such as ours, which has always put great emphasis on our gathered nature, to recognize the potential of the dispersed or scattered nature of the church.²⁰⁵ In order to meet the challenges of the new, post-Christian world, churches like ours will need to recognize the mission capability of the whole people of God in their dispersed contexts. If our meetings together don't build up the congregation to this end, and ecclesial agendas dominate, we will miss the mark. Secondly, and allied to this, I share his view that advocates the need for leadership that is prayerful, theologically astute, but that works from within (rather than in a detached manner), in a strong but non-dominating fashion.²⁰⁶

The Baptist denomination faces many challenges in the future, not least in re-imagining the role of its Ministers and lay leaders. I want to argue for leaders that adopt an approach that elevates interdependent, interactive, missional, multidimensional yet simple, and devotional orientations over an accent on some of the ecclesial, institutional, simplistic and independent ways of the past. Because I believe that the push for 'whole-life' discipleship is a mission imperative, it is critical that leaders and leadership structures give ample elbow room for these core values over and above our programmes.²⁰⁷

4.5 Fifth epoch: Final reflections

In its missionary understandings and enterprises in the future, this historical and critical analysis of PBC has heightened the sense in me that the church needs to develop some fresh ideas of mission for the future whilst building on the paradigm established in the Pringle years. It is a church of rich heritage and enviable resource that could easily rest on its laurels and become introverted and self-indulgent. My hope is that the transition to the new epoch will give impetus to some clear and incisive thinking about the way ahead, giving rise to an

²⁰³ Stuart Murray, *Post Christendom*, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004)

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p259ff.

²⁰⁵ This continues the centrifugal versus centripetal understandings questioned at the outset of the White epoch.

²⁰⁶ In our setting, this applies to Elders and Deacons as well as full-time Ministers.

²⁰⁷ I am deeply impressed by Mark Greene's work on the push for 'whole-life' discipleship' in *Imagine: reloaded* (idea magazine:sept/oct '2005) 12 ff.

emerging church that, in a spirit of humility and service, offers a powerful and Christ-like witness to the Christian faith in Poynton.

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Glossary of Abbreviations

AGM – Annual General Meeting

CTIP – Churches Together in Poynton

CFABLS – Campaign for a Balanced Lifestyle

COT – Christians on Trial group

EAM – Everyone a Missionary

IMC – International Missionary Council

PBC – Poynton Baptist Church

POWER – Prayer, Outreach, Worship, Exposition and Release, the five parts of the POWER vision

UCCF – University's and Colleges Christian Fellowship

WCC – World council of Churches

I should also state that, throughout this study, I have used 'familiar' names rather than 'full' names.

Appendix

This information has deliberately been excluded from the website edition.