

**A TALE OF TWO CITIES:  
IMPLICIT ASSUMPTIONS AND MISSION STRATEGIES IN  
BLACK AND WHITE MAJORITY CHURCHES**

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**ABSTRACT**

Drawing on my experience in two urban parishes, one predominantly White and the other Black, I seek to show how it is legitimate that we interrogate our present age through the lens of faith. I argue that by its experience of being forced into difference, the Black church has much to offer the White church, especially as the former in cities is growing, unlike the latter. Black-driven mission must be a challenging concept for the White-led dominations. By a genuine commonality, there is much to hope for in a new expression of church that is driven by mission and sustained by prayer.

**Keywords:** Black theology; Black majority church; White majority church; mission; stewardship.

**Introduction**

In this article I seek to explore the impact of ethnicity upon mission in terms of expectations, using a direct record of the experience in two Church of England parishes; one is White majority and the other one is Black majority.<sup>2</sup> I bring together some of my theological and sociological musings and apply them to the data collected by a series of one-to-one interviews with active church members in these two churches.

Because Black theology as a discipline seeks to rationalize Christianity as

1. The author is vicar of the Parish Church of St James Handsworth and a research scholar at the Queens Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education

2. The Church of England is a White historical denomination with significant Black majority congregations in inner city and urban locations.

liberative, it is also a theology of liberation in its truest sense. If the Church is to engage seriously with the two great dominical commandments, to love God and love your neighbour as yourself, then Black theology can assist the whole Church in this process of bringing the kingdom nearer, as it empowers Black people. The question remains as to whether the White church is ready to accept the assistance of Black people in this manner of actively seeking to make social change.

In order to undertake this research I engage with some of the aforementioned questions by interpreting the responses from research participants in the light of the substantive Black theological questions pertaining to mission and the Church. One of those crucial areas of enquiry is to make sense of how Black people “do church” in historic White denominations.<sup>3</sup>

### Parish Profiles

Both churches come from a broad Catholic tradition, using vestments and having the Reservation of the Sacrament,<sup>4</sup> although it should be noted that the Black church uses more incense. Both churches are located in urban areas with a high number of transient residents, which results in social tension from time to time. Both churches have two services on Sunday mornings along with midweek services. The White church has 35–40 people at the main service;<sup>5</sup> the Black church has 70–80. This leads to a very different worshipping experience for all who attend. Both churches use Common Worship liturgy in contemporary language with inclusive language.<sup>6</sup> The White church hosts a Greek

3. See Anthony Reddic, *Working against the Grain: Re-imagining Black Theology in the 21st Century* (London: Equinox, 2008), 118.

4. Anglican eucharistic theology understands the bread and wine of the last supper to be the real or spiritual presence of Jesus' body and blood. In some Anglican churches the Blessed Sacrament is kept in a wall safe known as an Ambry and can be taken to the sick and housebound. For an understanding of what is meant by a High Church tradition within Anglicanism, see David Isiorho, “Multi-ethnic Anglicanism and the Role of Modern Ecclesiastical Parties in the Mode of Inclusion in Parson and Parish,” *The English Clergy Association* 171 (Summer 2011): 8–10. For an older source see also, Jonathan Baker, “Churchmanship,” in Ian Bunting, ed., *Celebrating the Anglican Way* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996), 110–24.

5. A number of people have left the area and others have “gone home to God.” New people have joined in recent years but this has not kept pace with the decline in church attendance. This clearly has implications for finance and stewardship and the Parochial Church Council will need to address these issues head on.

6. *Common Worship* is a framework for a collection of Anglican liturgies to be used in places of worship within the Church of England. It is not an official replacement for the 400-year-old *Book of Common Prayer* (since it includes these historic texts) but rather is to be understood as a resource for use within this common structure in a way that is relevant to a particular context. Thus, contemporary Anglican liturgies represent a family of volumes which have been blended with traditional material and have been subject to a scholarly and

Orthodox community that uses the premises occasionally, also a Seventh Day Adventist community, largely Asian, which uses the church hall every Saturday. Two thirds of the population are White, with one-third UK citizens of Asian and Caribbean origin.

The Black parish also includes a separate Asian community with its own premises that meets every Sunday afternoon. The vicar is the pastoral leader there. The population consists of White, African Caribbean, Asian, Vietnamese and Chinese people. The parish is a major centre of Black, Sikh, Hindu, and Punjabi Christian life and faith, and, increasingly, of Bengali-speaking Muslims. Over 75 per cent of the residents come from the so-called minority ethnic population and the area is often the first place migrants coming to England end up living, resulting in fluidity of population movement. In the past this area has often been associated with media stories relating to crime and disorder.<sup>7</sup> Apart from the fact that these have usually been some distance from the parish and are often distorted in the telling, the majority of residents are experiencing falling rates of crime. Some of the social disturbances of August 2011 did take place within the parish however, unlike the events of 1985 and the early 1990s, which were largely restricted to a neighbouring area of the city.

### **Methodology for Understanding Our Vision**

The research strategy was to devise a system of data collection that would provide evidence of the existence of a mission agenda within the parish church and how this might be further developed into a collective vision, which would include Anglican ministry. I interviewed 12 research participants from each sample group using 12 broadly worded questions. The questions were asked in

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prayerful process of revision and amendment. *Common Worship* offers liturgies in both traditional and contemporary language.

7. In order to understand how the urban disturbances were seen as acts of criminality we have only to look at the way in which the press reported these events. *The Daily Express* referred to Zulu-style war cries and depicted Black people as golliwogs in cartoons (*Daily Express*, 14 October 1985) while *The Sun* gave focus to the idea of inter-racial conflict between communities carrying the headline "Why West Indians hate Asians" (*The Sun*, 12 September 1985). According to J. Gaffney ("Interpretations of Violence: The Handsworth Riots of 1985," policy paper in ethnic relations, ESRC, 1987), the organizing principle of the press is storytelling, and these stories are informed by myths based upon Britain's colonial past. Thus stereotypes are an instant resource in a process of immediate storytelling. However, the stereotypes are limited to Black=Zulu; older Black=Uncle Tom; Asian=politically passive/economically shrewd, small businessman. This means that certain stories cannot be told. This is crucial because the structure of the story is the agency of explanation. For Gaffney, the stories that are untold remain so not simply because they might push the interpretation towards class analysis or give credibility to political actors, but because they undermine the explanatory characteristics of certain of the essential resources in storytelling.

a logical order of progression. The first question was, What is it about the Church that makes you feel good about being involved with this church? This was followed by, What would you change? These were warm-up questions followed by more specific ones related to mission and drawing upon discussions that the churches were already having: Do you think a parish mission is a good idea?<sup>8</sup> What impact would it have on church attendance? What impact would it have on stewardship? What would you do to support it? What does the Church have to offer the people of our community and how do we communicate this?

The third set of questions focused on hopes and aspirations for the future. These included: What do you think the church will be like in five years' time? What do you think the church will be like in ten years' time? What do you think the church will be like in 25 years' time? What are the priorities for the next four years?

### **Mission-related Findings and the Feel Good Factor**

White majority church members felt good about being involved with this church and talked about a sense of belonging and friendliness.<sup>9</sup> People said that they felt at home even if they had not been brought up here. Companionship was the biggest factor, but also church services and the building were mentioned as contributory factors to that feeling of belonging and ownership. One participant was more explicit in saying that everybody at this church was Christian and went to church because they were genuine about their faith.<sup>10</sup>

8. The term "mission" was not defined by the researcher. A crucial part of the methodology was as to avoid the introduction of definitions that may prevent the elucidation of assumptions about this term on the part of research participants.

9. It is a supportive community accepting of all whatever the creed, class, or racial origin. One of its great strengths is its ability to make new people feel welcome. The vision includes charitable giving and maintaining its status as a training parish for first-time curates.

10. An important distinction can be made between people whose church membership is motivated by a faith commitment and those who attend church as a result of custom or habit. This is seen clearly in the sociological literature concerning the relationship between racial prejudice and religion. By far the majority of these studies relate specifically to the American situation and show that the relation between racial prejudice and religion, behaviour, and values is one in which churchgoers are more racially prejudiced than non-churchgoers. However, when the researchers use terms such as intrinsic (G. Allport and J. Rose, "Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 5 [1967]: 432–43) and committed (B. Spilka, "Religion and Prejudice: A Factor Analytic Study," *Review of Religious Research* 6, no. 3 [1965]: 6163–68) to describe religious orientation, then distinctions can be made between committed Christians who go to church out of conviction and conventional churchgoers whose attendance is infrequent and is motivated by social custom. Thus, conventional church goers may be more prejudiced than non-church goers; but

The view was also expressed that at this church you were accepted and made welcome and, because of that, people had become more involved in recent years. This sense of community was understood as a place where others were interested in you for who you were and everybody cared for each other. It was also said that clergy had set the right tone and had contributed to this atmosphere.

Black majority church members also spoke in positive terms about the atmosphere at their church and comparisons were made with churches where people did not get on well together and where there was “back biting” and bickering. Here, again, it was felt that the clergy had an important role to play in maintaining that good atmosphere and spirit of harmony, which was so important to welcoming new people to church.<sup>11</sup> People recalled bad experiences of attending White churches when they first came to the UK.<sup>12</sup> The Black church was seen as a place where people could find support, and a sense of calm and peace. All research participants wanted to see more young people in church and realized that the Sunday Schools needed more helpers and the active support of parents. People liked the worship and traditional hymns and believed this was part of the good atmosphere they experienced.

Both Black and White majority church members describe their faith community as a safe and positive environment, but the former were able to make important distinctions between their context and other places that did not foster a sense of belonging and any significant degree of friendliness. The White church members did not compare their place of worship with any other location. They felt privileged to be where they were and seemed to imply that it was normative and that all church situations were equally pleasant enclaves. From a Black theology perspective this tells us that Black church membership is based upon a discernment process that seems to be different from that of the

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committed Christians who attend church are no more prejudiced than non-church goers. The relation of religion and racial prejudice has been investigated within the European context by C. Bagley (“Relation of Religion and Racial Prejudice in Europe,” *Scientific Study of Religion* 9, no. 5 [1970]: 219–25) who discovered similar patterns in the data from English and Dutch samples.

11. Although it is the role of the clergy to keep people together, collaborating with one another, that work is so much easier when a congregation wants to work in partnership with their vicar in realizing the kingdom.

12. When Black Anglicans from the Caribbean came to worship in the Church of England they encountered the same racism in the House of God that they had experienced in wider British society. The social forces which had denied them access to adequate housing and employment also denied them freedom of religious worship. See “Seeds of Hope: Report of a Survey on Combatting Racism in the Dioceses of the Church of England,” Central Board of Finance of the Church of England, 1991, 1. See also David Isiorho, “Black Theology in Urban Shadow: Combating Racism in the Church of England,” *Black Theology: An International Journal* 1, no. 1 (2002): 29–48.

comparative White affiliation. It was clear that Black church members had made decisions about where they would worship. This choice was often a group decision involving family and friends, often supported by a wider knowledge of available resources. In other words, they were more likely to choose with whom they were going to worship rather than just simply attending the local church. This is supported by the fact that Black majority church members are just as likely to live outside as within parish boundaries, and that people will often travel on two or three buses to attend worship. There is also a tendency among the wealthier members of the congregation to move out to the suburbs while continuing to worship in the city.

Black majority church members were aware of the strength of other forms of Black churches and the potential for growth, but did not see this as exclusive to Pentecostalism.<sup>13</sup> Thus, a renewed concern for mission could influence church attendance. It was also understood that these churches probably had things for youngsters that they did not. Other Black churches were perceived as noisy and nobody wanted to abandon Anglican worship even if they thought it would appeal to young people. There was a realization that they offered family services in the context of the Eucharist and that, if they could revive the Sunday School, there was no reason why they would not see more young families coming to church.<sup>14</sup> It was important that new people were received properly and made welcome and that their involvement was seen as a way of sustaining their interest in church.

Some White majority church members also wanted to see younger people attending adult services as well as family and youth services. Others were happy for this to find its own level and were just pleased that there was provision for young people. Everyone would like to see more people of any age, and in an ideal world, many desired to see a full-time organist and a larger choir at their church.<sup>15</sup> Those who attended mid-week Communion services would like to see numbers grow as they felt these services had much to offer.

### **Mission-related Findings and Black Theology**

The majority White church members were in favour in principle of having a parish mission especially if it involved a younger element. However, it was far

13. For a detailed overview of the significance of Black churches in the UK see Reddie, *Working against the Grain*, 111–36.

14. There was a revival of the Sunday School with the establishment of a strong team of leaders; rotas were drawn up and a programme put in place following the liturgical year of the Anglican Church.

15. A competent and committed organist was found who was able to breathe new life into the choir, thereby enriching the worship.

from clear what this actually would involve and church members found it difficult to commit themselves to something that was yet to be defined.<sup>16</sup> Most did think it was worth a try to get a few more people into church but they were not in a position to know if a parish mission was likely to have any effect on church attendance or stewardship. Further questions on mission and outreach resulted in people expressing the view that they should do something if the parish were to grow both numerically and in terms of the quality of what they were doing. Only one person went so far as to say mission is part of what defines church whilst others felt that a definite goal would have to be found to make this effective.<sup>17</sup> The view was expressed that the impact of a mission strategy on church attendance would depend on who was running the mission and how they communicated their goals. The more optimistic thought this could be good for church attendance particularly among young people. Others were not so sure. One research participant expressed doubts about bringing friends to mission events if most friends were already church members. Another wondered how this was going to work given that most working people are under a lot of pressure and are unlikely to be able to give time to church. It was felt by some that if attendance went up then so could planned giving, but no time scale was attached to that view. Others felt that this would not make an impact straight away and that new people would need to learn about stewardship and planned giving.

White majority church members did not make it explicit what they understood by mission and initially looked to the interviewer to define this term for them. An important part of the research strategy was not to provide such direction as it would contaminate the findings by introducing concepts from the academy. The researcher's task was to let the research participants tell their own story using their own language and, in the process of doing thus, provide some clarification of the many implicit assumptions they held about the term "mission." These could be unpacked as a series of questions about the theology of mission and the *missio Dei*, which is in essence, the Church.<sup>18</sup> To my mind, these are not appropriate questions to ask of research participants. This is something that readers will have to decide for themselves. My focus as a practical theologian is to engage with the assumptions of research participants

16. Definitions of missions are a ninetieth-century preoccupation. See David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 511.

17. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 512–18, defines mission as six multidimensional salvific events which are to be considered as a whole and in continuity with each other. These are to be found in the New Testament and include Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and finally the Parousia.

18. Thus, the Church does not do mission, the Church is mission in a fallen world. See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 519.

and the multi-dimensional nature of mission as understood by active church members. This particular mode of mission has things to say about Christian witness and reaching out to those beyond the fold, with the clear intention of inviting them in. The strongest model, here, in both the academic literature and in the hearts and minds of active church members is biblical.<sup>19</sup> We have only to think of St Matthews's mission imperative to go out into the entire world and make disciples.<sup>20</sup>

Black majority church members were positive about trying new things if ideas came forward to improve what they were already doing, but on the whole they were happy with things as they were, although some thought a few more social events would be good. Some also felt that the vicar was overworked and were of the opinion that staffing allocations had favoured the neighbouring parishes led by White clergy. How long would they have to wait for a curate who would work specifically at their church?<sup>21</sup> It was also felt strongly that some of these White clergy think that Black people are stupid and talk down to them.<sup>22</sup>

The Black majority church operates within a group of churches while maintaining its mission as an independent and autonomous parish.<sup>23</sup> Their mission statement calls them to looking at what they are doing and where they might be called to be. There was a strong feeling among church members that they should not rely on one or two group ventures to fulfil their outreach work. Having said that, they have been active members in the wider group

19. See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 15–170.

20. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matt. 28:19–20.

21. A White group curate who worked across four parishes (and incidentally lived in the house provide by the Black majority church) had just been withdrawn from this parish with no explanation. However, this Curate has remained on the governing body of the Church school, presumably, because it was good for their CV and such training opportunities were scarce, or at least that was the view of the training incumbent in the neighbouring parish.

22. See Mukti Barton, *Freedom Is for Freeing: 12 Years (1998–2010) Work as Bishop's Adviser for Black and Asian Ministries* (Birmingham Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd, 2011), 39–41

23. Two of the four parishes in this group are failing White churches with an average attendance of 15–20 worshippers at their main Sunday service. If there were Ofsted inspections for churches as there are for state schools, both these parishes would be in special measures, or at least given notice to improve, and the leadership team judged incompetent and thus replaced. The other White church in this group is comparable in numbers with our Black majority church and although it only has only one worship centre it seems to be over-staffed with curates and retired clergy. A significant feature of this church is its ability to attract a disproportionate number of White adherents given its location in a very Black area.

ministry, as witnessed in a Quiet Day that they recently organized, which was deemed a moving and successful occasion.

Within a few weeks of the appointment of a Black incumbent, there was “trouble at the mill.” Relationships between the group clergy became strained.<sup>24</sup> A youth group led by White staff with as many as half a dozen members had met at the premises of the Black majority church. They invariably failed to clean up behind themselves following meetings and, eventually, they were asked by the vicar and church wardens not to return. “World War Three” broke out among the group clergy and consultants had to be called in in order to return the situation to some sort of equilibrium. The youth workers sent offensive emails to the vicar saying that he personally should see to it, not only to prepare the room before the youth club arrives, but also, he should be prepared to clean up after they had gone, with his janitorial team. Clearly, this was never going to happen! It is obvious to me that they would not have talked to a White vicar like that. One of the church wardens pointed out that she had been cleaning up behind White people all her life and that she was not prepared to do it any longer. A further incident involved the Black church’s refusal to cancel its Sunday morning service in favour of a group confirmation service for which it had no candidates. They did have candidates, but Southeast Asian parents wanted their children to undertake their confirmation class after the school year had come to an end. The White churches in the group did not want to wait. Their candidates were ready and no other considerations seemed to matter. In short, the White clergy then refused to attend any further meetings with the Black vicar and appealed to the church authorities for advice as to what to do next.

When there is a dispute between Black and White staff, we should assume that both racism and racialization are likely elements at work. This is not to prejudice anybody involved but simply to acknowledge the current human condition. In such situations, the use of outside consultants may not be sufficient to resolve the crisis. A restructuring of working agreements, on a no-blame basis, is often the best course of action unless a genuine intention of culpability is proved and, if proven, then such racism should be a disciplinary matter.

This has very clear implications for Black theology in Britain. It tells a liberative discipline that it has a long way to go to achieve a measure of equality for Black and Asian Christians in the historic White churches. We are

24. White clergy across the diocese had been invited to a consultation organized by the Bishop’s Adviser for Black and Asian Ministries to discuss the needs of Black people in multicultural churches. All the White clergy in the group ministry made excuses as to why they could not attend this important and well-supported event. See Barton, *Freedom Is for Freeing*, 40.

concerned here with the social and spiritual transformation of the marginalized and the theology of their context. The interpretative framework is the re-imagining of the Bible and how it is understood in the Black church. Black and Asian experience is of crucial importance, and is the starting point for effective change, rooted in christological understandings of God's intervention in the world.<sup>25</sup> Thus Black equality is all about the liberation that Jesus would want for the down-trodden and, as such, is a Christ-centred aspiration.

It was acknowledged that to sustain their efforts for growth, greater participation from this Black majority congregation was required. Here, it was felt that the church had a history of people being reticent and not coming forward to take responsibility. It was agreed that people now needed encouragement to change that mode of thinking. The process of interviewing people and asking them for their opinions was welcomed by all, as an act of inclusion, and part of the wider process of change. This challenges Black theology to articulate the gospel more closely from within the context of identity politics. The Black God-talk of the marginalized reveals a history of people who have been knocked back, to the point where they have internalized their low self-esteem, which results from their holding back from much-needed forms of activism. Identity politics is there to restore confidence and to re-skill our people for effective leadership. This is achieved by drawing attention to ethnic inequalities and the theological implications for societal change and personal development. The Black church needs Black theology because it uses a socio-political, theological approach that seeks to critique racism, Whiteness, and Black marginality.<sup>26</sup>

### **Stewardship, Community and the Decline in White Church Membership**

Black majority church members were not sure how mission would affect stewardship in terms of the planned giving since the congregation was well aware they would have to give more anyway. Thus, the view was expressed that people are generous at this church and will give more if the situation is clearly explained.<sup>27</sup> Certainly mission will have an influence on time and talents because it relates to the concomitant levels of involvement. Church activists felt that their church had a lot to offer the community, including the love of God, but people would first need to come and get involved. Others wondered if they should have projects for the elderly in addition to the church school and pre-

25. See Reddic, *Working against the Grain*, 25.

26. See Reddic, *Working against the Grain*, 28.

27. A successful stewardship campaign in 2010 led to a 14 per cent increase in planned giving.

and after-school projects.<sup>28</sup> The question here was whether it did enough to attract the interest of the community in the first place so that they would know what the church had to offer? Clearly there is a felt need here to reach out to the community to try to serve it. One of the resources they had to offer the community was a large upper room above the old part of the church building and church members came up with several suggestions as to how it might be used, including a quiet room with conference facilities, social functions such as birthday parties, baptisms, weddings, and funeral receptions, and social evenings for church members, dance classes, or aerobics.<sup>29</sup>

The White majority church, in response to the question, What does the church have to offer the community?, talked about baptisms, weddings and funerals. Clearly, they were aware that the church has the same things to offer the community as it has to offer the congregation as the “Body of Christ” in that place. They wondered if the community was ready for such an involvement, which would add another and very different dimension to their lives. Pastoral care and friendship was also mentioned as part of the package along with worship and play; the latter including a Fresh Expressions project for the younger children.<sup>30</sup>

On the issue of communicating what the church has to offer and getting across to the general public what they are doing and how they could join in, some thought advertising was the answer, while others believed that face-to-face contact was the best way forward. The children’s baptism party as well as ongoing work with the schools were seen as positive signs of growth. The Christmas fayre and annual fete were understood as important mission opportunities. The proposed new build would increase amenities for the area and this might be a vehicle of communication.<sup>31</sup>

28. A nursing home adjacent to the church was recently opened with the full support of the vicar and church members. A Eucharist takes place every third Wednesday in the month with church members in attendance. At Christmas, an augmented choir sang carols for the residents. In this context, mission is very much heart speaking to heart across the suffering of the human condition.

29. The upper room has become the base for the Boys’ Brigade and Girls’ Association recently formed at this church, which does not preclude other uses.

30. The parish curate was given an overarching remit for work with young people in the parish. He took on responsibility for the established youth group. Worship and play and was very successful in drawing new people into the church family. See The Archbishops’ Council, *Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004), 73–74.

31. No new building work has taken place during the last four years from when this project was first mooted. However, plans were discovered by the incumbent of the time for similar work dating back 20 years. Clearly architects’ fees would have been paid in both cases involving several thousands of pounds. This mismanagement of resources on the part of the Parochial Church Council is an indication of a declining church. A statement of need to

Black majority church members were positive about the future, believing the building and congregation would still be there in 25 years' time, even though some of them thought that they would be worshipping God on "a different shore." The windows would be fixed, the building repairs completed and the quiet room decorated as a retreat centre. They hoped the congregation would have increased to include a lot more young families. It was also recognized that new people coming in may not necessarily be young people and, unlike themselves, their active church experiences will be post-retirement. The general feeling was that there would be a new congregation to replace those who had "gone home to God." There was also a feeling that the church would have to do more on the welfare front because governments will do less to help people. Church members were worried about their grandchildren and hoped their situation would not be as hard as the ones they had experienced.

White majority church members also believed that their church had a future beyond their lifetime. There was a strong feeling that the building work would attract more people and would help them to reach out more effectively to the community. One person mentioned population increase and how this was very likely to increase church attendance. There was a hope that they could move on from financial concerns and become involved in some "serious" mission work and that Fresh Expressions would play an important part in this.<sup>32</sup> There was also a feeling that their work with young people should be mission-shaped and open to the wider community if there was going to be growth.<sup>33</sup>

However, the same White majority church members were not so sure that growth would happen and they wondered if the church might go into decline with numbers falling. Some took a neutral position saying it was not possible to look too far ahead and that it could go either way—boom or bust. For some,

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develop the church buildings and improve facilities is as follows: new front door at the west end of the church that is visible and accessible to the main road; refurbishment of hall toilets, kitchen, and floor; sound-proofing the hall and lounge so that they can be used at the same time; partition of the hall so that it could be used by more than one group at a time; the partition would need to be capable of being folded away so the hall could be used as one room but also locked securely into place to provide a sound-proof barrier on other occasions; amalgamation of church and hall; provision of toilets for the disabled in church; provision of kitchen facilities in church; provision for storage for flower arranging and cleaning equipment; internal screen/doors under organ gallery and utilization of space in the cycle area; provision of parish office and large meeting room; additional meeting rooms for youth and Sunday School; utility area/sink in church; selling or leasing land to fund the above.

32. Fresh Expressions was understood to be an initiative to establish new or different forms of church for a changing culture. At this church, it is also very much about drawing new people in to mainstream church.

33. The Church Kids Project is a closed youth club run by a 70-year-old former church warden who has a vested interest in keeping this an exclusive provision for her grandchildren. The negative implications here for mission are so sadly obvious.

this position was related to the unsettled and uncertain state of the world. One person suggested that the church might end up as part of a ministry team and they hoped it would still remain a training parish.<sup>34</sup> Another suggested this would only happen if the finances were not sorted out.<sup>35</sup>

### **Transforming Church**

Black church activists had no difficulty in taking on the diocesan mission strategy—Transforming Church<sup>36</sup>—because it was presented as something they could respond to on their own terms with the emphasis being on improving their existing practice. This diocesan strategy was something that could be easily implemented in the parish provided it did not undermine or contradict what they were already doing. This seems to be its strong selling point, which was quickly acted upon by local clergy.

Thus, under the heading Transforming Worship they declared their intention to maintain the existing styles of worship with the support of a larger serving team. Picking up on the theme of “drawing us into the presence of the Living God,” they would be encouraged in prayer, with an emphasis on getting people together for Bible study, all of which was a significant part of their witness.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the “Transforming Church Plan” (mission statement) would help this Black majority church to reflect on the vision they already possessed

34. The establishment of a ministry team where several parishes are put together under the overall direction of a team rector would inevitably mean a loss of autonomy for the parish. They would still have a clergy person of their own, but the responsibilities and line management would be very different. With such changes it would still be possible for the parish priest to train a curate but additional staff could also find themselves working across parishes and spread so thinly that they achieve very little.

35. The main area for development if this parish is to have a future is to raise awareness of financial issues. If these are not addressed then I fear it will enter a period of decline from which it will struggle to recover. Since the Diocesan Stewardship Officer came to talk to the Parochial Church Council in 2007, the church has had two Gift Days with some success but there remains a strong resistance to revisit stewardship in any serious way. At one of the PCC meetings, the view was expressed that they should not go to the congregation and ask them for more money.

36. Transforming Church is a diocesan strategy for church growth, which gives focus to the effectiveness of the communications skills of worshiping Christians. Consultants have been assigned to each parish to help the clergy and laity to sharpen up their practice as they implement their response to diocesan vision and goals.

37. Transforming Worship—drawing us into the presence of the Living God: at the heart of the Church’s work is the declaration of its prayer life by means of services whose richness and beauty carry a sense of wholeness and peace. As the church prays each day, so may we seek to let that dialogue with God include other people so that we can help others to hear and speak to God. We also need to organize social events as opportunities for fellowship. Another objective is to establish a quiet room with conference facilities.

and would encourage them to plan where their church was going in the next few years.

Under the heading Transforming Relationship, Black majority church members would continue celebrate and value each other through sharing the sacraments and in fellowship.<sup>38</sup> As for Transforming Leadership, this church is no stranger to the idea of shared ministry even if some of its previous White incumbents had frustrated that process.<sup>39</sup> In terms of Transforming Presence, here again Black church members had direct experience of the embodiment of the risen Christ in their community through their outreach work with young and older people.<sup>40</sup>

So what is this diocesan initiative really about? Where does it come from and what are the cultural assumptions inherent within such an approach? To answer this question we need to look more closely at the language being used and at whom it is directed and why. The transforming church strategy is an individually orientated approach in which committed Christians are being asked to recommit to an ethos, which does not necessarily involve the local church—a sort of meta church.<sup>41</sup> They were not being asked to look at how they could be more effective working through those structures. Rather, they were being asked to become more effective Christians by finding ways to share the gospel with other isolated individuals who could form a diocese-wide network, which would not be dependent upon the existing parochial system.

38. Transforming Relationships—finding healing, encouragement, and challenge through our life together. This parish has taken care to be inclusive. It needs to continue traditions such as the Caribbean evening, but also find new ways to embody its shared life in the local community, which contains many hurt and fractured lives.

39. Transforming Leadership—releasing and harnessing the gifts of all God's people. The ministry and mission are only as strong as the people who participate. It is very much a shared ministry. This church needs to seek those whose gifts are not yet realized and help them to understand the good works in which God has prepared for them to walk. Sunday School should be weekly with a team of helpers, so there is a need to identify whom can be approached to undertake this work.

40. Transforming Presence—living out God's love in our communities and the wider world. The church is called to witness to the embodiment of the risen Christ in this community. May the incarnate God take the work of its hands and let good come of it. May God take our lives, give us peace, and transform us in his glad service. In this context they need to encourage more young people to get involved. Crucial to its work with young people is the Church Primary School, which has recently been inspected and judged excellent. There is the Grove Project, providing high-quality childcare activities including nursery provision, wrap-around care, holiday play schemes, as well as training for parents. Close links are longstanding between the school, the Grove Project, and the church. The church is now working with the Boys' Brigade and Girls' Association.

41. For a well-argued case for putting the parish at the centre of mission initiatives, see Andrew Davison, and Alison Milbank, *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

*Transforming Discipleship and enabling us to grow as confident followers of Jesus* seems to be a code term for this strategy.<sup>42</sup> *Leading others to believe in Jesus and belong to his body* (Transforming Outreach) is somewhat misleading given the absence of a narrative about what the local church is already doing in relation to charitable and outreach work.<sup>43</sup> Similarly dialogue with other faith communities (Transforming Partnership) is to be achieved on the basis of equality and mutuality without any serious discussion of the incommensurate nature of divergent historic faith perspectives. Furthermore, there is no consideration or acknowledgement of community tensions associated with racial origin, faith group, or social class membership. There seems to be a subtext of “we can all get along and realize God’s purpose in the world.”<sup>44</sup>

So who is the real target group of this diocesan strategy? The thriving Black majority churches in the cities or the more individually orientated and upwardly mobile church gathering in the White suburbs? Clearly, the more things are focused on the latter, the less included Black worshippers are likely to be or to feel. The Black church is not driven by the lure of individual adult conversion and it is not that quality of choice and inclination that determines their mode of involvement. Family group membership, where the Anglican Church with its parish structure is seen as the norm, is the significant driver here.

The diocese would have been better off focusing on a smaller number of primary purposes for church such as worship and prayer, stewardship and teaching, and outreach to vulnerable and marginalized groups. Then this could all be focused on justice issues as the foundation upon which all the evangelistic work would be carried out. These areas incorporate all the traditional aspects of the work and mission of the Church from its earliest inception. The profoundly biblical nature of these three purposes would be an invitation to base all Christian work on the Christ-like model, without too many distinctions being drawn between ministry and mission. It would take the mission and the maintenance work of the Church out of the individual and subjective realm into a concrete area, which enables the old Anglican virtue of reason to function, without any accusation from the more evangelically minded of backsliding. Furthermore, these three primary purposes would allow the practitioner to

42. *Transforming Discipleship*—enabling us to grow as confident followers of Jesus. How do we allow others to inquire of us about our faith? How confident are we when we are asked to explain it?

43. *Transforming Outreach*—leading others to believe in Jesus and belong to his body. Establishing practical, charitable, and spiritual programmes of action and reflection, especially as the church develops the upper room, making the church more inviting.

44. *Transforming Partnership*—working together with people of goodwill to see God’s purposes fulfilled. This church is blessed with a rich variety of traditions and faiths. How far can it, how far can we, how far dare we seek to come to a whole community vision that embodies the principles of justice and equality before God that can speak to all?

critique and to dialogue with current praxis against a prophetic and biblical backdrop where the church was not so much doing its mission, but rather was recognized as being mission in the world.

### **Conclusion**

By comparing and contrasting the respective responses of the two Church of England parishes, I was able to demonstrate how church members vary their views and assumptions on mission according to their ethnic and social experience. In my first sample group, the White majority church saw mission as an extra component to church life, which would only have value if it was successful in getting people into church to join the planned giving scheme and shoulder the financial burden. Research participants from the Black majority church wanted to recruit new members to join them in the active struggle of the kingdom and to shoulder the burden of perceived inactivity among its considerably larger congregation. As a Black vicar running a Black majority church, I find many of our people demoralized after years of being ignored and spoken down to by White people who treat them as if they were stupid. This remains a recurrent theme.

So where do we go from here if we are to hang on to the bigger picture of church mission and growth? Plus, how do we make sense of the institutional context in which we bear witness as Black people of faith?

Christianity, like its founder, is rooted in history and always seeks to engage with the issues of the day. We believe in a communion that exists through time as well as space. This also means that we do not have to re-invent the wheel. We can draw on our tradition to inform our thinking and our praying about our present time. Christians are both conveyors and repositories of much historical and theological richness.

This means that we have a legitimate, even imperative, concern with bearing prophetic witness in our own time. A faith locked in the past cannot be a living, evolving, and emerging faith. We believe that Jesus is with us in his spirit. We also believe that we are literally his body here on earth. That makes what we do so important; those good works called for us to undertake, which will not get done if we do not attend to them.

For this reason, we cannot live complacent lives, but we must be stirred up; restless for God, restless for the best for our fellow creatures, and for our universe. As Christians, we believe God is the creator of all things, and that God had a purpose in creating the world. There is a supreme purpose in life; this life is incomplete in itself, and it will find its completion in the fullness of eternal life with God. As Black people, we are called to witness the embodiment of the Risen Christ in the community of faith known as the Church. Our witness is valid and righteous because Jesus is everything to us; giving us life,

filling it with love and setting us free from sin that we might live in his love. The incarnate God has taken the work of our hands and good has come of it, as seen in the rapid rise of Black majority churches. At the heart of the Church's work is the declaration of its prayer life by means of worship services, whose richness and beauty carry a sense of wholeness and peace. Our witness includes teaching and nurture—deepening our knowledge about the Christian faith.

We seek to do this through our witness in the world, which is about stewardship of resources and our Christian testimony to the world that concerns ministry and outreach. We seek to lead all to Christ by contact with this wider community, seeing this as an important part of a much larger process of church growth. We are the people of faith and it is in the faith of Christ Jesus that we continue this important work.

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