Church in Life

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Commendations

I love the framework for innovation that Mike uses here. It's a really exciting way to come at mission and pioneering, and a welcome voice in a church that can so often be risk averse. There's a lot of energy in an approach that is fuelled by imagination, possibility and hope rather than anxiety. As a result of seeing the material I invited Mike to teach pioneers at CMS and they found it energising for their pioneering practice.

Jonny Baker, Director of Mission Education, Church Mission Society, Oxford, UK

The church, like the Triune God, must give itself away. This is perhaps the central thesis in Michael Moynagh's exciting and provocative book, and this is the reason why new ecclesial communities need to be cultivated with creativity, imagination and entrepreneurship. It's not about the church. It's about God's dream for the world. That's why a real church, like the generous God it serves, needs to be rooted in real life. When you read this book, you will think differently about the church, and perhaps even do church differently as well.

Stephen B. Bevans, SVD, Louis J. Luzbetak, SVD Professor of Mission and Culture, Catholic Theological Union, USA

Michael Moynagh has become a voice of inspiration and encouragement for many priests and pastors who are part of the Missional Movement ☐ in the UK but also far beyond its boundaries. He is appreciated for his perceptive analyses of the church's dilemmas, his broad knowledge of the social sciences, his fresh, imaginative way of reading Scripture, and his positive, practical advice to congregations. Add to this his passion for mission and his deep commitment to the Gospel and you can see why many people are blessed by his writings. In Church in Life we see all of this and more. This book is a must read for everyone interested in missional churches.

Coenie Burger, Director of Communitas: Centre for Continuing Ministry Development and Research, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

The fresh expressions movement has been criticized for a lack of theological depth. Michael Moynagh's Church in Life represents by far the most significant move to date to address that deficiency. Particularly welcome is his enthusiasm for the church itself as a gift of God to the world. I look forward to the prospect that the book will provoke a genuinely theological discussion about the church and the nature of its mission.

Revd Dr Andrew Davison, Faculty of Divinity, Cambridge, UK, and co-author of For the Parish (2010)

Michael Moynagh's new book is a key contribution to the debate about the ecclesiology and practice of fresh expressions of church – and it also has much to teach those of us immersed in inherited church life and thinking. I found myself pausing on almost every page, scribbling down quotable quotes and brilliantly concise ways of explaining complex ideas . . . In reflecting on the gift that emergent ecclesial communities are, he gives us a model of worship emerging from the church's missional and relational nature that can benefit the whole church.

Revd Mark Earey, The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham, member of the Church of England Liturgical Commission and chair of the Group for Renewal of Worship, UK

Church in Life is a rich and ambitious project of theological reflection on new ecclesial communities and the theological currents flowing around them. Comprehensive enough to anchor a whole curriculum for pioneer ministry, it is, by turns, both irenic and provocative; translating and interpreting innovative practice for mainline churches, while also challenging them to the kind of adaptive learning that will support innovation. A timely, significant and constructive contribution to contemporary missiological and ecclesiological thinking, which deserves to be widely read and engaged.

Revd Dr Doug Gay, Principal of Trinity College, University of Glasgow, UK

Michael Moynagh has made a major contribution to missiological research. Drawing on recent contributions from outside theology, notably theoretical developments in the social and managerial sciences, he presents the ecclesial entrepreneur – an individual or team who embrace change and experimentation, who focus on the church's end-users and solving their problems, and who innovate and introduce profound change from the bottom-up rather than top-down. Moynagh shows how the church needs to become more like a Spirit-filled tech start-up to fulfil its redemptive role in the world!

Andrew Godley, Head of Leadership, Organisation and Behaviour, Henley Centre for Entrepreneurship, University of Reading, UK

Michael Moynagh's new magnum opus, Church in Life, reworks ecclesiology, using the remarkable insights derived from the 'fresh expressions' movement. Drawing on remarkably diverse sources, its comprehensive research enables Moynagh to define and explicate the language of both doctrine and practice of the church. His analysis is rooted in actual practice, and documents the theological significance of emergent expressions of the missional church. What otherwise might remain a cliche (i.e. 'innovation') becomes here a fruitful, even 'fresh' field of inquiry. The outcome of the project is a range of trajectories which invite further work.

Darrell Guder, Professor of Missional and Ecumenical Theology Emeritus, Princeton Theological Seminary, USA

Church in Life is an evocative title that expresses succinctly the ecclesial and therefore missional nature of Christian life. Michael Moynagh brings us up to date on a fresh missional move of God through innovative churches which are fresh expressions of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. In so doing he informs and inspires us to live into and out of the missional identity of all of our churches.

Ross Hastings, Sangwoo Youtong Chee Associate Professor of Theology, Regent College, Vancouver, Canada

In recent years the experience around fresh expressions of church in the Church of England has given much inspiration for the transformational processes in our German churches . . . Michael Moynagh's new book, Church in Life, is a valid masterpiece of theology. It's a deep-rooted and audacious ecclesiology as an exercise in local theologizing . . . As a Roman Catholic theologian I could accompany Michael Moynagh on his audacious path and be challenged by the implications for the theology of my church. Facing these provocations challenges us to enter a further dialogue that opens new ways of re-thinking the tradition and re-formulating an ecclesiology that corresponds to the signs of the times. I am really thankful for the great inspiration of this masterpiece of ecumenical ecclesiology. It is a milestone even for a new experiential approach to theology.

Dr Christian Hennecke, author and theologian, Head of the Pastoral Department, Diocese of Hildesheim, Germany

When you see a new movie called 'Die hard 8', you might think: 'I know that story. I should not expect anything new.' This is not the case with Michael Moynagh's latest book. While he takes up some main themes from Church for Every Context, he goes deeper, with even more courage to question traditional approaches to church life. Inspired by the coming of God's kingdom and innovation theory, Michael Moynagh pleads for many (small) new ecclesial communities that bring God's future to the present, and give away (really give away) church as communal life with Jesus to as many people in as many contexts as possible. This self-giving of the church echoes the Eucharist: breaking the bread and sharing it with those gathered. This general approach does not remain abstract: the consequences for discipleship, leadership, practices, etc. become more and more practical. Watching this 'movie', I learned a lot about a hopeful vision for the future church.

Michael Herbst, Director of the Research Institute for Evangelism and Church Development, University of Greifswald, Germany

In this ground-breaking sequel to Church for Every Context, Michael Moynagh weaves together a wealth of insight from fresh expressions practice and thinking to argue for a new approach. He moves past the church-planting model toward an approach to local church mission that discerns, recognizes and empowers the new, living, innovative and self-giving communities which the Holy Spirit is already bringing forth. Highly recommended for practitioners, missiologists and theologians alike.

Kirsteen Kim, Professor of Theology and World Christianity, Fuller Theological Seminary, USA

Church in Life takes Michael Moynagh's work on fresh expressions to new levels. His thinking about innovation is key for churches that know they need to do something differently but don't know how to approach it. His theology of self-donation may just help you make sense of what the Holy Spirit is doing in the church today. This book will challenge and stretch you as you seek to discern where God is leading us. It is ideal for those at the 'coal face' but also should be required reading for those making policy for the future of the church.

Revd Canon Dave Male, National Advisor for Pioneer Development, UK

If you are dissatisfied with the status quo in the church's ability to connect with those far from Christ and maintain cultural relevance, this is the book for you. Theologically reasoned and practically illustrated, Church in Life is your roadmap to innovation and re-imagining of the local church. A fascinating book.

Craig Ott, Professor of Mission and Intercultural Studies, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, USA

Given the challenges facing Christian mission in the West, there is an urgent need for the church to innovate. New Christian communities are crucial in this search for renewal. In this excellent study, based on a great number of case studies and packed with relevant theological and entrepreneurial theory, Michael Moynagh provides a wealth of up-to-date resources for missionary pioneers. For reflective practitioners and students of mission who seek to understand and improve their practice, this book is a welcome tool. I warmly recommend it.

Stefan Paas, J.H. Bavinck Professor of Missiology and Intercultural Theology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and Professor of Missiology at Theologische Universiteit Kampen, Holland

In this lucid, searching and wise book, Michael Moynagh opens up some substantially new and nuanced ways of understanding the nature, purpose and identity of the church in today's world . . . What Moynagh's book perceptively articulates is that the new needs the old; that 'blending' the contemporary with the traditional needs skill; and that the younger expressions of church life will need to mature if they are to be vessels of wisdom for our future. This is a careful and critical book that requires consideration and composure from all who seek to shape the future church.

The Very Rev'd Professor Martyn Percy, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, UK

Church for Life offers a practical theology of innovation. It weaves stories, Scripture and simple practices into a rich theological tapestry. It offers hope for the post-Christendom church, integrating the theological conviction that God is making all things new with an impressive array of practical stories and contemporary research. I'll be recommending it to funders, denominational leaders and pioneers in our New Mission Seedlings.

Steve Taylor, Principal, Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, Dunedin, NZ

The future of the church depends on it generating new forms and fresh expressions: the topic could not be more important. Michael Moynagh has spent years reflecting on new ecclesial communities, and his writing is both theoretically rich and fully accessible. Will these initiatives succeed? Read the book and decide!

David Voas, Professor of Social Science, University College London, UK

Michael Moynagh has done it again! Building on his foundational work, A Church for Every Context, he goes on to create a framework for innovation in the church . . . This is a work that will bring hope and inspiration to the innovative church leaders who understand that God is up to something brand new in the world today. Moynagh does not depreciate the traditional church but instead builds bridges between inherited and new expressions of church. Once again, Moynagh shows his deep roots in theology along with an understanding of the hard, practical, on-the-ground work of starting new ecclesial communities . . . This book is both a work of theology and a very practical guidebook for leaders with a new vision for being church in a particular context.

Vera Karn White, Coordinator for 1001 New Worshiping Communities, Presbyterian Church, USA

Nothing had made sense of the way we had planted churches on inner-city housing estates or grown our community engagement ministries until I read this book. Its mix of theory, practice and theology has gifted us with the confidence we need to accelerate what we are already doing and take even more risks for the growth of the Kingdom of God in our part of North London.

Revd Preb. John M. Wood MBE, Vicar of St Ann's, Tottenham, London, UK, Director 'Hope in Tottenham'

Church in Life

Innovation, Mission and Ecclesiology

Michael Moynagh

Contents

To Liz

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Our sociologists of religion tell us that the influence of a parish has a radius of six hundred meters. In Buenos Aires there are about two thousand meters between one parish and the next. So I then told the priests: 'If you can, rent a garage and, if you find some willing layman, let him go there! Let him be with those people a bit, do a little catechesis and even give communion if they ask him.' A parish priest said to me: 'But Father, if we do this the people then won't come to church.' 'But why?' I asked him: 'Do they come to mass now?' 'No', he answered. And so! Coming out of oneself is also coming out from the fenced garden of one's own convictions.[1]

The then Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, is one of many who have noticed how the church is physically absent from much of contemporary society. How can the church, as a

visible community, be a friend to people if it is not tangibly alongside them? The question takes us to the heart of Church in Life. Drawing on recent British experience, the book is about the church's call to be a loving community in every segment of society and the processes by which the Spirit is bringing this about.

The next few pages describe what I am calling new ecclesial communities and introduce my three principal claims: for theological reasons the Spirit is summoning Christ's body to put church multiplication near the centre of its theory and practice; new types of congregation are rounding out the church-growth influenced church planting widespread in parts of the world today; these new ecclesial communities can be helpfully understood through the lens of innovation.

New ecclesial communities

Something remarkable is happening in the Christianity of our times. The church is learning to express God's love in new ways. Across denominations and networks of churches, and sometimes outside them, in parts of Africa, Australia, Europe, North America and elsewhere, new ecclesial communities are popping up in the context of people's everyday lives – in cafés, gyms, tattoo parlours, laundromats and even online games. This grassroots movement, if it really is a movement, is patchy, many communities are short-lived, and we still have a great deal to learn. But there is evidence of fruitfulness and gathering confidence in these communities' witness to the kingdom.

Historical roots

Though these new ecclesial communities have plenty of antecedents in church history, their recent intellectual pedigree begins around 1968. In that year, and arising largely from the work of Dutch theologian Johannes Hoekendijk (Flett, 2016, pp. 187□240), a World Council of Churches report proposed that alongside the 'parish' new churches, taking diverse shapes, should undertake mission in the many contexts of work and leisure in which people find themselves (WCC, 1968). Four years later John Taylor, General Secretary of the Church Mission Society and later Bishop of Winchester, wrote enthusiastically about 'little congregations' of perhaps just two or three Christians scattered across the settings of ordinary life (Taylor, 1972, pp. 147–52). Lesslie Newbigin, a leading mission thinker, expressed similar thoughts soon after (Newbigin, 1977, pp. 115–8).

Yet these ideas were scarcely noticed, let alone acted upon. They seemed too radical, few concrete examples pointed the way, and there appeared little pragmatic need to think about novel expressions of the church. This indifference changed with the publication of a Church of England report, Mission-shaped Church, in 2004. The report called for new ecclesial communities, what it called 'fresh expressions of church', that would go out to people in innovative ways. They would meet in unusual places at unusual times and help people towards transformed lives via fresh commitment to Christ.

Not many church reports become bestsellers, but this one did. Since its publication, it has sold over 30,000 copies (a huge number for a British report), reached an international audience and been credited with reshaping the Church of England's ecclesiology (Davison and Milbank, 2010, p. 1). It has fanned the development of several thousand 'fresh expressions of church' in the UK and catalysed similar initiatives in Australia, Canada, mainland Europe, South Africa, the United States and elsewhere. 'Fresh expressions', whether or not that language is used, have captured the imagination of people in a growing number of denominations, from Baptists to Roman Catholics, with increasing interest from denominational leaders.

Mission-shaped Church was influential partly because, unlike the earlier World Council of

Churches' report, it did not cast a theoretical vision. It was a commentary on what was actually happening. The report provided missional examples of new and different ways of being church. It used these to chart a way forward for a church that not only felt bewildered by sweeping changes in the cultural landscape, but had also experienced some 40 years of numerical decline. The report captured a mood.

In part the mood connected with the emerging church conversation, which began in the United States during the 1990s and spread to other countries. The conversation involved mainly evangelicals who were asking how the church could be relevant in a postmodern age. They started to reimagine the church. At the same time, people spontaneously began to be church in new ways. One couple I met in 2002 described how they had got to know some of the young people in their neighbourhood, invited them for food and social time in their home, and had begun to introduce them to the gospel. 'I suppose we must be doing emerging church', they remarked.

A definition

So what are these new forms of church? As in Church for Every Context (Moynagh, 2012, p. xiv), I understand them to be communities that are: Missional – through the Spirit, they are birthed by Christians mainly among people who do not normally attend church.   Contextual – they seek to serve their context and fit the circumstances of the people in it.   Formational – their leaders aim to make disciples.   Ecclesial – their leaders intend them not to be stepping stones to an existing church, but to become church for the people they reach. The community may be a new congregation of a local church or, if it is not part of a local church, a church in its own right.2

An example is Saturday Gathering, which grew out of an ecumenical food bank in Halifax, north England. After a while, a group of Christian volunteers realized that going to conventional church was too big a step for the food bank's clients who had little church background. So they started a Saturday evening gathering in the same venue. Clients of the food bank eat together, discuss stories from the Bible and issues from their own lives, pray, and sing a few Christian songs. The Gathering began in 2012 with a dozen people and 15 months later was attracting about 60, nearly all of whom were not previously attending church. In January 2014, 19 members were baptized and confirmed by a Church of England bishop.3

To forge these new communities, typically the founding team listens to the people it seeks to serve, finds ways to love and serve them, builds community with those involved, offers opportunities for people to explore the Christian life and encourages a community with tastes of church to emerge round those coming to faith. In the case of Saturday Gathering, the food bank was the outcome of the first two processes. The next three occurred on Saturday evenings.

Using this approach, Christians don't invite people to come to an existing congregation, which would be an 'attractional' form of mission. They don't go out in 'engaged' mission, based on some form of community project, and then invite people to church. They are an 'incarnational' presence in the midst of daily life, creating a church-like community with people who want to follow Christ.4 Within the Church of England, over three-quarters of them remain within the parish that started them (Lings, 2016, p. 10). They are, in effect, new congregations, complementing the existing church by serving people it does not reach. In Rowan Williams's words, they form a 'mixed economy' in which new ecclesial communities do not supplant the existing church, but sit alongside it in relationships of mutual respect and support (Church in Wales, 2000, p. 3).

These new communities go by a variety of names, such as simple church, organic church, missional communities, new monastic communities, praxis communities, fresh expressions of church and church plants. Having toyed with 'new contextual churches' (Moynagh, 2012), I have settled on 'new ecclesial communities' as an umbrella term for initiatives that meet the missional, contextual,

formational and ecclesial criteria. The term 'community' leaves open at this stage the question of whether these initiatives can properly be described as 'church', a controversial issue addressed in [Chapter 12](#).

'New ecclesial community' refers in the first instance to the team that initiates the venture. It can refer also to the community that emerges round the team. In addition, if it meets separately from the rest of the initiative, it can refer to the community of those coming to faith. Finally, it can refer to all three at the same time! This fluidity of language is not without precedent. The New Testament uses 'church' to refer to the gathering in people's homes, the assembly of the whole town or city, or the entire body of Christ.[5] As with 'church', how 'new ecclesial community' is being used will be clear from the context.

Are they missionally fruitful?

The most thorough research into these new communities has been undertaken by Britain's Church Army Research Unit, which has counted 'fresh expressions of church' in half the Church of England's dioceses and conducted telephone interviews with the leaders of all those satisfying its ten criteria (Lings, 2016, p. 18). These criteria diverge from my four above, not only because there are more numerous, but because they do not insist that a fresh expression is birthed mainly among people not attending church. They include church-growth influenced church plants, discussed below, which seem to attract a substantially smaller proportion of people from outside the church and which in the UK are normally distinguished from 'fresh expressions'. This failure to make an important distinction limits the research as a resource for new ecclesial communities.

Even so, the findings published in 2016 provide considerable evidence that these new communities can be missionally fruitful.   1,104 'fresh expressions and church plants' were identified.[6]   As estimated by their leaders, 50,600 people were attending the initiatives' regular (at least monthly) main events.   Three-quarters of the initiatives had been started in the last ten years, with evidence that the pace continues to accelerate (pp. 41–2).   In the first wave of ten dioceses, an estimated 13.5% of local churches had at least one fresh expression or church plant.[7]   The average size of these initiatives is about 50 people of all ages.   In a sub-sample of 66 'fresh expressions of Church', as many adult and children attendees had not been going to church in the previous two years before they joined the community as had been going to church – 45% in both cases. These figures exclude the team leading the initiative (Dalpra and Vivian, 2016, p. 30). If this is representative of the sample as a whole, it suggests that these new communities are remarkably effective in drawing in people from outside the church.[8]   Four-fifths (80.4%) are taking steps to grow disciples beyond what is available in their main gathering. 37% have had baptisms, while 43% have held a Holy Communion.[9]

The report concludes, 'Nothing else, as a whole, in the Church of England has this level of missional impact . . .' (p. 10). This is a somewhat ambitious conclusion. What the report does not tell us is how many people from outside the church were coming to faith. If few were journeying to Christ, one would need to compare these 'fresh expressions' with other outreach activities that have little evangelistic impact, and the report does not do this. For all the report's helpful wealth of data, we do not have some crucial figures: how many people are journeying towards Jesus and how many would say they have been found by him? Only then will we know if these new forms of ecclesial community go beyond loving and serving people outside the church to drawing them into the Christian life.

So it is too early to put a definite tick against the evangelistic fruitfulness of new ecclesial communities, which is hardly surprising: the majority are still in their infancy. However, the initial signs are encouraging. Their numbers have grown rapidly, they are successfully serving people outside the conventional church and they seem to be looking for ways to make disciples. This

hopeful picture is confirmed by anecdotal evidence. For example, in 2014 I asked the leader of an all-age fresh expression how many atheists and agnostics were attending. He replied, 'Not many at the moment. That is because most have come to faith.'10

From missional church to multiplying church

Church in Life has three audiences. The first is those who reflect on the church's life and mission. The book contends that new ecclesial communities have a compelling theological rationale. This means that there is no need to start them for purely pragmatic reasons – to stoke the dying embers of church. Even if the church was growing, it would still be theologically necessary to encourage these communities.

This suggestion should be read in the context of Stephen Bevans's comment that ecclesiology and missiology have typically focused on different things: ecclesiology on what the church is, missiology on what the church does. The disciplines have tended to bypass each other. Recent movements in the two disciplines have begun to close the gap. In both disciplines today, the immediate starting point is neither the church's nature nor – as used to be the case with missiology – its activity, but the reality of the triune God. Ecclesiology has become more missiological as it realizes that it is God's mission – the sending of the Son and the Spirit – that calls the church into being. Missiology has become more ecclesiological by recognizing that the church is how God's mission explicitly takes shape (Bevans, 2005, pp. 45–9).

Church in Life makes the case that not only do missiology and ecclesiology belong together, but the Spirit is summoning theologians to attend to a certain type of mission. This is mission undertaken by ecclesial communities in the settings of everyday life. Though this is not the only form of mission that counts, it is mission that arises from the generous nature of God and from the church's vocation. The church is a divine gift to the world, and it is in the nature of this gift to be passed on. New ecclesial communities are how God's gift of communal life with Jesus gets transmitted to people who have not yet received it. Forming these communities is to walk in the steps of Jesus. New ecclesial communities gently befriend people and put Jesus on public display in every corner of society. They are 'insider communities', emerging within contexts rather than expecting new believers to attend church outside the setting. Chapters 11 to 14 address some of the questions arising from this.

Advocates of new types of church frequently appeal to the incarnation.11 Just as Jesus immersed himself in a particular culture – Judaism – to reach humanity, his body is called to be present in the particular cultures of today's world. This is a strong approach, but it risks telling only half the story. To paint the whole picture, God's future must be brought into the frame. Jesus came into the world as the paradigm and instigator of God's promised kingdom. Taking our cue from Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope (1964; ET 1967), new ecclesial communities should be viewed from this kingdom perspective. They are expressions of God's coming reign.

The Spirit enables founders of these communities, through prayerful imagination, to perceive new kingdom possibilities in the present. As founders imagine God's future transforming the here and now, they are inspired to enact this potential with others. In the process, the Spirit uses innovation to transport God's future into the present. Touches of the kingdom change the rules of the game and create something new. Through innovation, eternity takes root in the midst of history. New ecclesial communities are expressions of hope – hope in the renewal of creation through divine innovation.

Church in Life argues that ecclesial multiplication is fundamental to the church's life. It gives rise to expressions of God's promised future. Yet it is almost completely neglected in academic discussions of the church. Might the Spirit be calling the church to reverse this neglect – to draw

multiplication towards the heart of its witness and thought?

Innovation

The second audience is students, researchers, founders and enablers of new ecclesial communities. Church in Life substantially develops the theological and practical material in Church for Every Context (Moynagh, 2012), which was written for the same audience. In particular, this new book introduces an innovation framework. The framework can help practitioners understand and work with the dynamics that give rise to these new communities.

What is innovation?

Edison et al. found 41 definitions of innovation in the literature (2013, p. 1394)! Adapting their definition to the church, innovation is the modification of the 'rules of the game' so that church develops in new ways. 'Radical innovation' introduces first-time features, while 'incremental innovation' occurs through significant lesser changes.

As used here, innovation is not the same as:

Something new. Innovation goes beyond newness because it changes the 'rules of the game'. A Messy Church, an all-age gathering with craft activities, worship and a meal, may be new – it is the first in the town. But it is not an innovation unless the leaders change the 'rules of the game' for Messy Churches. Perhaps they replace worship with a DVD-based Bible story. This does not fundamentally change the all-age event, which is still a recognizable Messy Church. So it is not a radical innovation. But the change is significant. It is an incremental innovation. 'Significant' protects 'innovation' from being so all-embracing that it includes everything. Only significant changes to the 'rules of the game' count as incremental innovation.

Creativity. Messy Church leaders may be highly creative in the craft activities they arrange, but so long as they work within the accepted 'rules of the game' for craft activities they are not innovating. Only if their craft activities radically or significantly changed the 'rules of the game' for doing crafts would innovation have occurred. Innovation involves creativity, but not all creativity is innovation.

Invention. You might invent something, but if you never bring it to other people – to 'the market' – it will not be an innovation. So a group might develop a new form of all-age mission and successfully test a prototype on members of the congregation. Their 'invention' works. But it will not be an innovation till the event runs regularly for its target audience.

Is innovation the same as entrepreneurship? In common language, entrepreneurs are often seen as people who start new ventures, such as opening one shop and then another. 'He's quite entrepreneurial' friends say, even though the new shops may not be innovative. Entrepreneurship is associated with newness rather than specifically with innovation. Sometimes, however, entrepreneurship is equated with innovation. 'How entrepreneurial!' we exclaim when a friend brings an original product to market. This is the stance I have adopted. I shall argue that founders of new ecclesial communities are both entrepreneurs and innovators. Innovation is in their entrepreneurial blood. For this reason, I use the two notions interchangeably.

Some people find innovation a difficult word to use in relation to the church. The term does not have a strong pedigree within Christian thought. However, the notion does. David Ford, for example, portrays wisdom as a spiritual gift that enables the tradition to innovate. He strongly affirms both tradition and innovation (2007, p. 197). Faith is conservative and progressive. Believers pass on the faith of previous generations, while moving it forward in the light of divine

happenings in the world.

In the book of Job for example, Job's friends represent a tradition that has a well-worn set of answers to suffering, trauma and evil. The friends are closed to the possibility that new events may require innovation in their religious heritage. Job on the other hand refuses to accept traditional answers because they do not square with his experience. They do not fit the context. The book can be seen as encouraging a 'readiness to acknowledge that ready-made answers from the past might be inadequate to cope with new developments' (Ford, 2007, p. 174). Job's questioning and God's response open up possibilities beyond the tradition. On this view, innovation occurs as the Spirit contextualizes the tradition to new situations. What steers this contextualization is wisdom. Innovation is fundamental to the Christian inheritance.

Different approaches

Denning and Dunham describe some of the many attempts to portray how innovation works (2010, pp. 49□76). Each approach or set of approaches has strengths and weaknesses. One approach, for instance, highlights the gifted individual. Innovation is the work of 'heroic' entrepreneurs who have the right character traits and talents, and often a bit of luck. This perspective is able to generate inspiring and instructive stories, but it underestimates the relational processes involved. As illustrated in [Chapters 17](#) and [18](#), teams and partnerships play a central role in innovation.

A second approach views innovation as the result of compelling ideas. Pipeline models, for example, portray innovation as a linear sequence of steps. These steps transform researchers' ideas into products accepted by the market. The diffusion model, on the other hand, describes how innovative ideas spread from their source to others. It has caught some people's imagination through its five categories of innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards. The trouble with both these examples of the ideas approach is that relatively few innovations are associated with an orderly movement from idea to product. Often innovations are 'spontaneous reactions to breakdowns: people do them first and call them ideas later . . . Many innovations seem to arise spontaneously without a definite source. Various leaders pop up, advance the innovation, then disappear. Blogging is a modern example' (Denning and Dunham, 2010, pp. 64□5).

A third set of approaches sees innovation as new practices. Peter Drucker, for example, argued that managers produce innovation through searching for opportunities, analysis, listening, focused execution and leadership (such as mobilizing people and markets to support the innovation). He paid particular attention to identifying opportunities, which he believed was the biggest challenge for innovators. He encouraged managers to look for opportunities in breakdowns, problems, threats, and changes in business methods and demographics (Drucker, 1985). An advantage of this perspective is that it focuses on practices that can be learnt. A weakness is that it tends to privilege analytic techniques, such as market research, to assess opportunities arising from changing consumer demand. Attention is drawn away from human relationships, trust, intuition and building political support.

To correct this imbalance, Denning and Dunham (2010) have proposed eight practices for innovation: sensing, envisioning, offering, adopting, sustaining, executing, leading and embodying. These practices happen in conversations and contain skills that can be acquired. This highlights what innovators can learn, but in concentrating on innovators the approach – like Drucker's – tends to be individualistic. It does not say enough about the systemic processes of innovation. After all if, as Denning and Dunham recognize, the emergence and spread of innovations often take people by surprise, how does the Spirit blow through the church to harness this 'accidental' process?

No one approach can capture all the complexities of innovation. A pragmatic mixing of approaches to fit the context probably makes most sense. In this vein, the innovation framework developed in Parts 1 and 3 is offered as one perspective among others. The framework describes six processes of innovation that give rise to new ecclesial communities. They are dissatisfaction, exploration, sense-making, amplification, edge of chaos and transformation, all of which overlap and feed into each other. The processes are not really a model. Despite having a family likeness, they vary too much between contexts and the connections between them are too fluid. They are better described as a framework.

As an aid to practice, Part 3 describes some of the dynamics and behaviours from which each of the six processes emerges. Often these dynamics and practices can themselves be described using the innovation framework. This repetition of the framework makes an important point: the more contextual these new ecclesial communities, the more innovative they will be. To respond to unique features of the context, the founding team cannot simply copy what has been done elsewhere. Imitation would not take account of the particularities of the team's circumstances. Even if the team borrows an idea from a different context, usually it must innovate the innovation so that the latter fits the new setting. Repetition of the innovation framework demonstrates that new ecclesial communities can be innovative through and through.

From church planting to ecclesial emergence

A third audience is evangelical church planters influenced by Church Growth theory. Church planting of course stretches back to the New Testament. It has always been part of the church's DNA. The early church came to see the process as the extension of the one universal church into new territories, a view that persisted into the medieval period. Church planting was understood as taking the institution of the church to areas where institutional Christianity was not yet present, 'usually after a pioneer stage of evangelization and gathering' (Paas, 2016, p. 16).

From 'confessional' to church-growth planting

After the Reformation, the Catholic wing of the Western church continued to assume that the one church was being planted by God in the world. The Protestant wing, however, transposed church planting language to the local church. It came to speak of many churches being planted by missionaries (Paas, 2016, p. 22). Both wings engaged in what Stefan Paas calls 'confessional planting'. In Europe, this initially sought to reach 'heretics' or 'unbelievers' who had abandoned the true faith, whether Catholic or some version of Protestantism; later it came to have nominal adherents in mind. Overseas mission transported these Catholic and Protestant models to foreign countries. The aim was 'the reproduction of European Christendom on a worldwide scale. This meant that the goal of mission is always twofold: planting a church and Christianizing a culture' (p. 30).

In recent Catholic thinking, the planting of 'the Church' is seen as the outcome of evangelization among peoples where the church has not yet taken root. It is mission Ad Gentes (1965) – to pagans. 'This explains why the language of church planting in (formally Christianized) Europe is not accepted by Roman Catholics, even if they have adopted forms of ecclesial community (such as house churches) that are quite similar to some Protestant church plants' (Paas, 2016, p. 29). Church-planting language has been left in the hands largely of evangelicals. They have continued to speak in Reformation terms of multiplying congregations rather than extending the universal church. Evangelicals have also embraced late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century values such as rationality and experience as tests of truth, a stress on individuality, enthusiasm for method and planning, and a democratic spirit (p. 31).

These values produced the modern evangelical church-planting discourse, with what Paas calls its

'engineering' approach to mission. Every resource was to be tailored to the desired goal, with the maximum of effectiveness (2016, pp. 34□5). Intense discussion about strategies and methods occurred in nineteenth-century missionary circles. This continued into the late twentieth century not least through the Church Growth movement. Using planning and social research techniques, Church Growth de-emphasized ecclesiology and championed church multiplication as an expression of evangelism (pp. 37□8). Church planting based on prescriptive models, often supported by instructional manuals, flourished in the United States and was exported overseas. In Britain, influenced by the international Disciple a Whole Nation movement (DAWN), a 1992 conference of mainly evangelical church leaders resolved to plant 20,000 new churches by 2000. The favoured approach was formulaic: gather a church-planting team, find a suitable venue, provide attractive worship and start evangelizing.

However, the goal was missed by a ludicrously wide margin. Among the plants that were started, many suffered from seeing the church primarily in terms of Sunday worship, albeit done differently. They began to fit the context, but merely contextualized worship to Christians dissatisfied with their existing congregations. Contextualization was too skin-deep for the plants to reach many outside the church. Largely for this reason, some church starts were short-lived, while others made little impression on people nearby. 'Many new churches failed to thrive. Some closed after years of struggle. Many more are small, weak and making little impact' (Lings and Murray, 2003, p. 4).[12]

From church growth to ecclesial emergence

Increasingly, it is now realized that to bridge the widening gap between the church and society church planting must change. This revisionism has been led by practitioners on both sides of the Atlantic, and to some extent in Australia, who have stumbled on new methodologies. From the late 1990s, a deep desire to connect the church with people outside, missional reflection on postmodern society and, in some cases, 'post-evangelical' angst have encouraged more contextual and diverse forms of planting. 'Fresh expressions of church' have multiplied these new approaches.

Literature from the church-planting tradition has begun to catch up with these developments. Alongside Stuart Murray's books in Britain (e.g. 2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2008), American writers like Stetzer (2006), Payne (2009), Ott and Wilson (2011) and Keller (2012) have all recognized the importance of contextualization and the place of more varied forms of plant. Earlier, Moynagh (2001) and Frost and Hirsch (2003) had proposed a more radical break with model-based approaches, arguing for tailor-made churches that were appropriate to each context. On the heels of Mission-shaped Church, literature within the fresh expressions tradition has continued in the same vein – for example Cray, Mobsby and Kennedy (2010), Croft (2008a, 2008b, 2008c), Glasson (2006), Goodhew, Roberts and Volland (2012), Male (2008, 2011, 2016), Mobsby (2007), Moore (2006), Moynagh (2004, 2012, 2014) and Volland (2009). These new approaches are not always pragmatically better than model-based planting, but offer an alternative in soils where prescribed models fail to take root.

What is missing is a theoretical framework to help understand these new developments. Though rarely spelt out, church-growth influenced planting assumes a rational choice perspective. Aggregate social behaviour results from the behaviour of individuals, each making their own decisions. These decisions are based on individuals' preferences. Rational individuals weigh up relevant information, probabilities, and the costs and benefits of the options to make choices that come closest to their preferences. In church planting, this is reflected in the emphasis on selecting and training individual planters (e.g. Logan and Ogne, 1991). Though planters will have teams, teams are seen as collections of decision-making individuals.

This perspective has a number of weaknesses.[13] First, people do not behave merely as individuals. They act through relationships. Rather than sitting in armchairs thinking themselves into their choices as individuals, people engage in conversations, from which ideas and decisions emerge. Secondly, rational choice says too little about the contextual factors influencing decisions. People decide not only in dialogue with others, but in response to feedback from their contexts. Each decision then affects the context, which generates further feedback, which in turn influences the next decision.

Thirdly, rational choice fails to deal adequately with uncertainty. It assumes that people know enough to choose between alternatives. But in newer forms of church planting, founders are often not choosing between options whose costs and benefits are known. They are faced with alternatives whose outcomes are uncertain. For example: will café church work in this demographic? Typically, the founding team does not know. In such circumstances, decision-making takes the form of experimentation rather than rational calculation. Fourthly, rational choice tends to distinguish rationality from emotions. Decision-making is seen as a rational calculation divorced from feelings, whereas everyday experience testifies to the importance of gut reactions.

To avoid these weaknesses, the chapters that follow offer a perspective based on complexity thinking, which is a more relational, more emergent approach. Complexity thinking seeks to describe behaviour that arises from the local, uncoordinated interactions of many participants. This behaviour cannot be predicted from knowing what each component of a system does in isolation. It arises from interactions between people and has the feel of 'making it up as we go along'. Complexity thinking, along with 'effectuation theory' from the entrepreneurship literature, forms the sociological foundations of the innovation framework introduced in Part 1.

The practical evidence in Part 1 and the theology in Part 2 suggest that the Spirit may be calling church planters to embrace greater innovation, as many are beginning to do. Church in Life offers resources for reimagining church planting for the twenty-first century.

The shape of the book

The book's empirical foundations rest on seven case studies I undertook in 2014 and 2015, using semi-structured interviews. In addition, I have drawn on published accounts of fresh expressions of church, my familiarity with some 250 stories of fresh expressions on the Fresh Expressions website,[14] conversations and consultancy with numerous practitioners over an 18-year period, and my involvement with the UK Fresh Expressions team since its inception in 2005.

The book adopts a see–judge–act structure.[15] Part 1 'sees' the emergence of new ecclesial communities, using the innovation framework to describe the processes involved. If the Spirit is bringing the multiplication of these communities towards the centre of the church's life, these communities will inevitably impact different 'levels' of the church. Part 1 therefore views these communities, and the innovation processes involved, from perspectives ranging from the individual ecclesial community to the national level. Part 2 'judges' these new communities in the light of the church's theological identity. Do these communities have sufficient connection with this identity for the Spirit to make them permanent features of the ecclesial landscape? Part 3 'acts' in the sense of describing dynamics and practices that founding teams can attend to, flow with and encourage to fan the processes of innovation from which new ecclesial communities emerge. Threading through the three Parts, each of which is introduced with a brief overview, is Moltmann's theology of hope.

See–judge–act ensures that theology does not remain theory, but is grounded on experience and becomes the inspiration for godly action. It also corresponds to the dynamics of emergence, which

informs the book's sociological stance. Starting with experience echoes the bottom-up, conversational processes of emergence. The more 'objective', top-down theological evaluation of this experience is a reminder that church leaders are not powerless in the face of movements welling up from below. As they make theological judgements about what they see, they can exert influence to amplify or dampen these dynamics but without controlling them. Part 3 comprises iterations between the first two parts to produce insights to aid action. This corresponds to the iteration that occurs between what is struggling to emerge and the church's existing identity – a 'conversation' that has called forth Church in Life, which is itself a form of emergence.

1 'What I would have said at the Consistory', 30 DAYS in the church and in the world, 2007, www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_16457_13.htm (accessed 17.7.14).

2 Some would add that these communities should meet at least monthly (e.g. Lings, 2016, p. 18), which is helpful for researchers seeking to identify these communities. However, it is not necessary to add this here. The formational aim covers the need to meet with sufficient frequency.

3 www.freshexpressions.org.uk/stories/saturdaygathering (accessed 22.7.16).

4 I have introduced these communities more fully in Moynagh, 2012, pp. ix–xviii, and in Moynagh, 2014, which is a popular introduction to fresh expressions of church, with over 120 stories.

5 E.g. Colossians 4.15; 1 Corinthians 1.2; Ephesians 5.25.

6 Unless otherwise indicated, figures are drawn from the 'Executive Summary', Lings, 2016, pp. 10–1.

7 Email from George Lings to Michael Moynagh/Norman Ivison, 21 March 2014.

8 Though the two studies are not strictly comparable, the 45% who were not previously attending church is more than twice the 20% figure found in a sample of 'church plants' in London's East End (Thorlby, 2016, p. iii).

9 However, the questionnaire fails to uncover whether these sacraments involved only the team, all the Christians who helped found the community, or people who were being drawn into the community from outside the church. See question 3k, Lings, 2016, p. 218.

10 Email from Tim Mitchell to author, 15 December 2014. Twice I have quoted a fresh expression that started more than ten years ago, only to find that within the Christian audience was someone who had joined the original community from outside the church.

11 E.g. Frost and Hirsch, 2003, pp. 33–107; Mission-shaped Church, 2004, pp. 86–9, though the latter does contain a short reference to the coming kingdom (pp. 89–90).

12 For a fuller history of church planting and fresh expressions in the UK, but with reference only to the Church of England, see Lings, 2012, pp. 161–78.

13 The relatively new school of behavioural economics has highlighted some of these. See Richard H. Thaler and Sendhil Mullainathan, 'Behavioural Economics' in David R. Henderson (ed.), The Concise Encyclopaedia of Economics, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008.

14 www.freshexpressions.org.uk.

15 The see–judge–act process has its roots in Belgium, where Father (later Cardinal) Joseph

Cardijn introduced it to the Young Trade Unionists, which he founded in 1919 and which became the Young Christian Workers in 1924. The method received official recognition in the Roman Catholic Church, was incorporated into liberationist praxis theology, and has had an ecumenical influence on – for example – approaches to theological reflection.

PART 1   Emerging Communities

Part 1 supports the contention that the church is being called to put a new form of mission near the heart of its life. This involves taking church-growth influenced church planting in new directions. Fundamental to this is innovation. Part 1 introduces new ecclesial communities using an innovation frame-work of dissatisfaction, exploration, sense-making, amplification, edge of chaos and transformation.

Chapter 1 sets this framework sociologically within complexity thinking and theologically within the horizon of God's promised kingdom. Chapter 2 describes 'A serving-first journey', which new ecclesial communities typically travel, and suggests that the processes of the innovation framework propel the journey. Chapters 3 to 5 provide case studies of founders helping to bring ecclesial communities to birth, local churches being transformed through the introduction of new ecclesial communities and the spread of these communities in two British denominations. In each instance, the same six innovation processes are involved. Chapter 6 locates these processes and the emergence of new ecclesial communities in the context of changes in society.

The repetition of the processes at different levels of the ecclesial system has resonances with what some complexity thinkers describe as fractals. These depict the recurrence of patterns at different levels of a system, particularly in the physical world. Some writers have used fractals as a metaphor in relation to organizations (Harle, 2011, pp. 18⎕19), but this is controversial: in a strict scientific sense, how fractal-like are such repetitions? However the softer idea, that the innovation framework repeats itself, should not be surprising. If the framework accurately describes innovation, we should expect to see it whenever innovation occurs. Repetition of the framework can encourage founders and church leaders to look for this repeating pattern and use it as a prompt: 'Does it contain aspects that I am in danger of overlooking?'

1   The Nature of Emergence

New types of church are arising bottom-up. When Lucy Moore led the first Messy Church in a Church of England parish, she was not responding to the ideas of a bishop (Moore, 2006). When Barbara Glasson helped start the 'Bread church' in Liverpool, England she had not been recruited to a Methodist Church grand plan (Glasson, 2006). When Paul Unsworth worked with others to start Kahaila Cafe in London's East End, he was not moving forward a Baptist Union initiative.[1] These and thousands of other new ecclesial communities have emerged relationally, through step-by-step improvisation, and have come as surprising gifts to their contexts.

New ecclesial communities are very different from model-based forms of church planting. Typically, the latter have a clear end in mind: a church with a specific style and ethos. The planting team devises detailed plans to achieve this result. Sometimes a standardized manual is used to help with the planning. This approach can feel a little mechanical, but it has borne fruit in a number of contexts. It is a far cry, however, from the birthing of many new ecclesial communities. These tend to emerge organically, on a trial-and-error basis. The core team starts with some idea of what it hopes to achieve, but this idea crystallizes as the team goes along. The approach is more improvise-and-learn than predict-and-plan.

This chapter lays the foundations on which to describe the innovation dynamics of these communities. On the basis that theory helps you describe, it introduces complexity thinking, proposes an innovation framework from a complexity standpoint and undergirds the framework with a theological rationale. If innovation involves modifying the 'rules of the game', as suggested in the Introduction, how does it work? Take café church for example. What made it new? Many would say that it was the joining together of two concepts previously kept apart: café and church. Radical innovation in particular (as opposed to incremental innovation) occurs through the unexpected combination of different elements. Goldstein, Hazy and Silberstang quote Kary Mullis, Nobel Laureate in chemistry: 'In a sense, I put together elements that were already there, but that is what inventors always do. You can't make up new elements, usually. The new element, if any, it was the combination, the way they were used' (2010, p. 111). This chapter sets out a framework for understanding how these new combinations, these radical innovations, emerge and spread within the church.

From 'Newtonian' to 'emergent' organizations

For much of the twentieth century, the Newtonian model of science dominated management thinking (Wheatley, 2006). Organizations were seen as machines and employees like cogs in tightly defined roles. Organizations were understood by analysing their component parts – measuring them and quantifying their behaviour (Kernick, 2004c, p. 89). Questions centred on how one part impacted another. How does the behaviour of this department affect that department? How can all the departments be coordinated to produce the desired results?

Cause-and-effect thinking ruled. Causation was linear. It moved in one direction – from the environment to the organization, for example. So if you took an action here, through cause-and-effect you would achieve what you wanted there. Management was about pulling the right levers, understanding how one part of the organization 'moved' another, and acting on one part to influence the others. Management action could secure, or cause, the desired responses. Management fiat, therefore, could make an innovation spread.

Management sought stability. Information systems told managers when the organization was straying from its management-determined course. Managers then intervened to bring the organization back on track – to the original equilibrium. To avoid unexpected actions that might destabilize the whole, managers detailed procedures, prescribed processes and restricted local autonomy.

Managers assumed that the future was broadly predictable – at least that the future would be much the same as today. Senior managers were best placed to scan this knowable horizon, see the challenges ahead and determine the appropriate response. In a predictable future, goals were assumed to be achievable. Any changes needed to reach these goals must be controlled from the top and planned in advance.

In a church context, this model would lie behind a minister's belief that the way to lead change is to share his vision, work with the church council to translate the vision into achievable goals, break these goals down into concrete steps and find the right people to take each step. Control lies with the top, change is planned in advance, the direction of change is linear (towards agreed goals) and cause-and-effect rules: each step will lead to (or cause) the next step, which will bring about (or cause) the goal.

From machines to conversations

Complexity thinking, a term covering the variety of complexity theories (Davis and Sumara, 2008, p. xii), is very different. It challenges this mechanical view of organizations. Influenced by

developments in twentieth-century science, complexity thinkers see organizations less as machines and more like organisms (Waldrop, 1993). Many draw on the concepts and language of complexity thinking in the natural sciences, but there are large differences between the physical and social worlds. So when social scientists adopt complexity ideas and terms used by natural scientists, usually they do so analogously rather than as strict equivalents.

Complexity thinking differs from 'Newtonian management' in a number of ways. First, rather than seeing organizations as machines, some complexity thinkers (e.g. Shaw, 2002) regard them as networks of conversations. These conversations may be face to face, online or inside people's heads. Imagine a denomination. Strip out the conversations within it and what is left? Some buildings, legal documents and the like, but the institution's life will have died. Organizations live through their conversations. So if you imagine how conversations work, from a complexity standpoint you will get some idea of how organizations generate novelty. Organizations are best understood not by breaking them down mechanically into their component parts, but by studying their multiple interactions.

Secondly, novelty emerges not in an orderly, mechanical way but often by chance, through conversations. Machines, which are a sum of their parts, tend towards 'linearity'. You get out of them what you expect. But complex organizations are 'non-linear'. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. It gives rise to novelties that could not have been predicted, or to a whole new level of being that ends up in the causal driving seat. Thus in a conversation different ideas may come together. 'How can we thank Betty for all she has done?' a group wonders. One person suggests giving her a spectacular box of chocolates, another throwing a party. 'Why not have chocolate party!' a third person exclaims, an idea that spurs the group to arrange it. Unexpected combinations are a hallmark of new ecclesial communities. Church is combined with café, mess ('Messy Church'), felt-making, being in a forest ('Forest Church') and much more. All these communities began when concepts previously kept apart were joined together in conversation.

This means that novelty can emerge through the contribution of anyone in an organization. Think of a committee meeting. The chair takes the lead by introducing a topic. Others bat ideas around in a kind of brainstorm, during which leadership hangs in the air. Then one person makes a firm proposal. At that point, she assumes the lead. The leadership passes to a second person, who says 'I agree, but to get this moving I suggest we talk to so-and-so.' Leadership again hangs in the air as the discussion meanders round whom to consult. A third person takes the lead by urging the committee to adopt the proposal, consult the people who have been mentioned and review the situation in a month's time. The chair finally resumes the lead by summarizing the discussion and checking everyone is agreed. During the discussion, leadership has emerged in different parts of the group.

Hazy, Goldstein and Lichtenstein refer to leadership that is less one individual exercising power over another and more a dynamic involving groups of people in interaction (2007, p. 13). Thus within organizations leadership of an innovation can emerge in many different places, on the periphery rather than in head office for example. This is what happened in Britain with 'fresh expressions of church'. Rowan Williams, who as Archbishop of Canterbury did much to encourage these new ecclesial communities, first encountered them as Bishop of Monmouth in Wales. He had committed himself to spending time on the edge of the church. While doing so he came across these new communities.[2] 'Fresh expressions' were not led by a bishop; they were discovered by a bishop. Senior management may be more about fanning desirable innovation than producing it.

From causation to feedback

Thirdly, rather than one-way, linear causation in the mechanical model, the non-linearity of

complex organizations owes much to feedback, which moves back and forth. In a conversation, someone speaking does not merely influence the others. The hearers influence the speaker by their reactions, such as a look of incomprehension or a nod of agreement. Similarly in organizations, causation is back and forth rather than one way. For example, the environment does not only spark changes in a system (one-way causation), the system also produces changes in the environment. So a room's size, temperature and the comfort of its chairs will influence the conversation of a group within it, but the group's conversation may also affect the room: 'Let's open a window.' Coevolution – the context and the organization evolving together – replaces the notion that one entity has a simple effect on another.

Causation is multilinear particularly because interactions within an organization create continual feedback loops. 'The effects of an element's action are fed back to the element and this in turn affects the way the element behaves in the future' (Kernick, 2006, p. 387). Again, consider a conversation. Negative or 'dampening' feedback, such as the expression of disapproval, discourages repeat behaviour. He drops the subject. Positive or 'amplifying' feedback, like praise, encourages more of the same behaviour. She warms to the subject. Organizational change occurs similarly: positive feedback amplifies novelty. An idea birthed in one conversation is discussed in another, then another and then another, till it gathers unstoppable momentum. Small inputs eventually magnify into large-scale transformation. Managing change, therefore, is more complicated than pulling cause-and-effect levers. It involves fanning helpful feedback to scale up small yet desirable ideas and behaviours. Feedback is the means by which innovation spreads.

From being predictable to being unpredictable

Fourthly, it follows from all this that rather than being tidy and predictable as in the mechanical model, complex organizations are messy and unpredictable. Feedback often brings surprises. In a conversation, a throwaway comment, 'Why don't we go to Paris for the weekend?' might be 'amplified' by someone else, who uses her phone to discover a special hotel offer. A third person checks the times of Eurostar. A few minutes later, trains and hotel have been booked. 'Well,' someone remarks, 'I never expected that when I agreed to meet up!'

Likewise, because organizations are sequences of conversations, you can never be entirely sure what will happen next. Perhaps a team has been tasked by a church's leadership to start a new ecclesial community. They explore various ideas like café church or an initiative among teenagers. Someone comments, 'I must go in a few minutes. I'm on duty at the luncheon club.' 'That's it!' someone else exclaims. 'Why not start a community among the guests of the luncheon club?' Everyone agrees. A church initiative is born almost by accident.

Change cannot be designed, planned and enforced from the top, however hard some leaders try. It would be like trying to control the outcome of a conversation. You might dominate the discussion and force the other person to 'agree'. But it would be a Pyrrhic victory. The person would disagree behind your back. Your controlled conversation would spawn other conversations you cannot direct, and potentially fruitful ideas generated in those conversations might not flow into the decision-making process. Top-down plans are often altered or even sabotaged as people lower down amplify, reinterpret or ignore instructions from above. That is one reason why church leaders can find it so hard to lead organizational change. Feedback in all the different parts of the church is beyond their control. It is unpredictable.

From central planning to self-organization

Fifthly, it follows that complexity thinkers shift the emphasis from the top-down planning of the mechanical model to bottom-up emergence. Again, imagine a conversation that 'self-organizes' into a radically new direction. Friends are chatting about what they have done recently, including

films they have seen. Someone mentions a film about assisted suicide. Another person responds, 'I think assisted suicide is completely wrong.' A third person disagrees, and an animated discussion follows about the ethics involved. The topic becomes amplified as individuals respond to each other's contributions. Half an hour later someone exclaims, 'How did we get on to that!' The discussion about assisted suicide seemed to just happen. The conversation self-organized round this theme.

When in like manner a new approach becomes amplified and embedded within an organization, the system is said to have self-organized. The system has reorganized round something new, without this being directed from the top. An example is Messy Church, described more fully in the next chapter. Messy Churches have multiplied rapidly in the UK and elsewhere, and have transformed many churches' work with young families. They emerged ground up, starting in a church on England's south coast and proliferating through networks.

Some complexity thinkers use the term 'attractor' when describing this process.[3] Very roughly, an attractor is a system's direction of travel. More strictly, it is a bounded destination to which a system will tend, and within which it will remain, all things being equal. A 'strange attractor', which you get in complex systems, is both stably confined to a certain region of possibility, while having an infinite variety of paths it can travel within that region. Friends may be having an intense conversation about assisted suicide. An attractor is this flow of conversation. The waiter arrives and asks if they are ready for dessert. The conversation changes direction, as people ask whether they have time and where they are headed next. A new attractor, a new direction of travel for the conversation, emerges.

Social systems are organized round attractors, which are ideas and practices that have gained support. Emergence occurs when a new attractor, a new way of organizing, gathers enough support to challenge successfully the existing pattern of organization, an old attractor; the new attractor takes the system in a different direction. Before the new replaces the old, the two attractors compete for a while. During this period, the system is no longer stable, dominated by one attractor, a particular culture perhaps. It has been destabilized by the early appearance of an alternative approach, which is the new attractor. The landscape looks confusing and individuals are uncertain about the future. Three outcomes are possible. The old attractor wins, or the new one does, or the system slips into chaos because the rival attractors tear the organization apart.

The emergence of a new attractor may appear to happen quickly. The sudden shift in the conversation from assisted dying to what the friends do next might surprise someone listening nearby. But in reality, the attractor will have emerged over time, perhaps imperceptibly at first. The first two courses have been eaten, the plates cleared and an unusually long interval may have elapsed since the main course. Events are building up to the question of what to do next, even though the friends are scarcely aware of it. The arrival of the waiter provides a 'tipping point' for the conversation to flip to a new direction.

Likewise, after a slow build-up some innovations suddenly catch on. The leaders of St George's, Deal, south-east England, for example, had been discussing for several years how to encourage more members to be involved in missional communities (small congregations that work missionally with a specific demographic). The opportunity to reorder the church building provided a 'tipping point'. There was nowhere else to meet. Gathering in missional communities seemed to be the answer.

From simplicity to growing complexity

As we have seen, complexity thinkers believe that causation is multilinear. Parts of an organization may interact with each other in multiple ways. Resulting from this and the process of amplification,

self-organization – the spontaneous emergence of a new structure out of local interactions – tends to take a system in a complex direction. In other words, the number of 'parts' in a system multiplies, along with the number of interactions between them. So a sixth difference between mechanical and complexity perspectives is that the latter emphasizes how systems become increasingly complex. This enables them to adapt better to their environments.

Local interactions generate novelty, which represents a new level of complexity within the organization. The new is much more than the sum of its parts. The concept of emergence 'recognizes that each level [of complexity] contains the objects that are present in the other levels, but that they can be analysed differently' (Walby, 2003, p. 10). As the discussion on assisted dying gathers momentum, for instance, an observer might note that the conversation begins to follow different rules. In its earlier stage, the conversation was governed by conventions about exchanging personal news. One person says what they have been doing and whether they enjoyed it. Another person chips in to recount something similar or report a different activity. In the discussion about assisted dying, however, what count are not anecdotes of personal news but opinions on the subject and the reasons for holding them. The logic of news exchange gives way to the logic of argument. The same element of back-and-forth conversation is present, but it is qualitatively different and cannot be explained by the earlier exchanges.

Complexity thinkers would say that a new 'level' of complexity has emerged. New elements have been added to the conversation: more conceptual thinking is involved and stronger emotions are expressed. Interactions between opinions, concepts and revealed emotions multiply. At the same time, this new type of conversation changes the interactions of those involved. Increasingly, individuals forget about their personal news and concentrate on the arguments being advanced. In the language of complexity thinking, this new 'level' of complexity exerts 'downward causation' on previously existing levels of the system.   *

 Taking account of the significant developments in practice and thinking around the emerging Church, Church in Life will quickly establish itself as a key text for all interested in pioneer ministry, fresh expressions, church planting, church growth and ecclesiology.

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