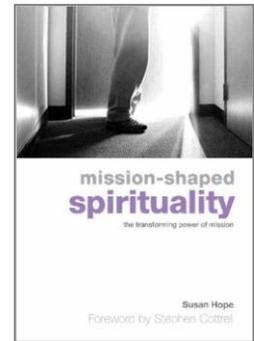


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Mission-Shaped Spirituality: The Transforming Power Of Mission

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About the book

Sometime towards the end of the last millennium, the tide of the churches' mission in England seemed to turn. People are talking about mission again, but in a different way; excited – and right across the church, if patchy; like rock pools filling up while the main tide is still some way out. It seems likely that it is the Spirit who is the initiator of this present tide; and our task is to go with him, surfing on the waves.

Mission: 'God's missionary purposes are cosmic in scope, concerned with the restoration of all things, the establishment of shalom, the renewal of creation and the coming of the kingdom as well as the redemption of fallen humanity and the building of the Church' (MShCh)

Evangelism: 'that set of intentional activities which is governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God' (Abrahams), or just 'to announce good news' (*euangelizomai*)

Spirituality: life lived towards God.

1. From come to go

The defining word for the Church and its mission has changed from 'come' to 'go'; and not just geographically, but going to be with people how they are, connecting with their lifestyles, values, networks, culture.

- Is there such a thing of a spirituality for mission, an apostolic spirituality?
- Where is confidence for the task to be found? We live in a culture which confuses confidence and extremism.

The English church has never systematically and intentionally engaged in a missionary work to its own people – early mission came from Romans and Celts. The spirituality of the English church is that of a settled community.

How to think about missionary spirituality – through history, scripture – or through story. The book is punctuated by stories.

2. Called and sent

Her own experience of writing 'go' across pp of her diary, and going to the city centre to talk to people. the fire of mission can re-ignite through the act of going.

An apostolic spirituality is one formed in/through encounter with God. Many in our churches have yet to encounter him. Where there is a lack of concern for mission, perhaps it's because we haven't truly received the gospel for ourselves. We are finding that it's OK to let mission take a human shape rather than an ecclesiastical one. It can be done through the things we enjoy.

Newbigin – we are chosen in order to be sent. We forget this; so perhaps remembering is the first thing, the way of rediscovering our energy. Apostolic spirituality is at the core of what it means to be a Christian.

3. Living trustingly

Knowing yourself to be 'beloved'. Jesus began his public ministry after God had said to him 'you are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased'. His ministry is kick-started with a word about love. Discovering that we are deeply loved is a lifetime's work. It's not enough – without the salty, steely corrective of discipleship it'd risk sounding like modern psychobabble. The demands of discipleship rescue is from passive dependency on God.

The word 'confidence' comes from *confidere* – which is to do with trust. Confidence comes from relationship. Christian confidence therefore comes not from dogmatic certainty but from learning to trust.

Julian of Norwich: *He did not say, 'You shall not be tempest-tossed, you shall not be work-weary, you shall not be discomforted.' But he said, 'You shall not be overcome.' God wants us to heed these words so that we shall always be strong in trust, both in sorrow and in joy.*

4. Seeing

We need a kind of baptism of imagination – to open our eyes to look at the cultures and people-groups beyond the walls of the church. There is mission potential all around us.

The Celtic model of mission is responsive – step into the coracle, let the wind blow, do mission where you land. The Roman model is strategic – Augustine and his 40 monks landed with a plan. Both models are useful. We must feel free to fail. We will fail. We have to learn.

5. Take nothing for the journey

MShCh is clear that we can have no clear idea, when we set out into a new group, culture, neighbourhood, what shape the new church might take. And we should have an empty-handedness about the presentation and proclamation of the gospel message itself.

Justin remarked that pagans were turning away from violence and tyranny because they were drawn to Christians as people whose lives were distinctive and free. What does that mean for us? consumerism? We need to live by a story which is different from the prevailing story.

'Take nothing' means you depend on those to whom you go. What do you need to be church? One church in Sheffield was closing due to structural instability. They decided they needed 2 plastic boxes; one with communion stuff, one with baptism stuff.

'Take nothing' means you make connections

'Take nothing' means not taking our own ecclesiastical baggage – cp Vincent Donovan. It means not taking the gospel as a package, but going in a spirit of listening. This is what it means to travel empty-handed.

Strengths of this approach:

1. it forces us to depend on the Spirit
2. it means there is likely to be an exchange, a transaction which meets the need
3. it turns the task of mission into an adventure

6. Two by two

We have a crisis in confidence in our ability to communicate with a postmodern culture. But postmodern people are like us; 'They are made of flesh and blood. They laugh. They cry. They sweat. They get puffed when they run for the bus. Their hearts beat faster when they are afraid. They like to be liked. When they feel peckish, they'll open the door of the fridge and have a little snack. They are glad when Friday comes.'

The invitation to belong before believing is the invitation to come and discover the truth of the gospel by living in the company of those who believe it – seeing ourselves as a core community in which what matters is whether a person is facing the centre, not how far they have got.

7. Prayer, promise and struggle

Story – youth worker (Mark Tanner) at Coventry challenging young people to come to breakfast on the way to school (they had to change bus just outside the church) and pray.

Everything starts with dependence on God. Apostolic people often experience life as some kind of wilderness – testing, dereliction, emptiness, loneliness, bereavement, pain. Suffering is a mystery; but it teaches us to depend on God. Jesus went there too; it doesn't demoralise, it equips. We learn to open ourselves to the Spirit.

We are taught to ask, seek, knock; but there is no formula for finding the Spirit. Just patterns – brokenness, knocking; thirsting, drinking.

All Christians have received the Spirit. But not always fully. We don't all need to become charismatics in the sense of embracing the tradition that has become known as the charismatic movement. But we do in the sense of having a healthy, robust and living experience of the power and presence of the Spirit of God in our ordinary everyday lives and in those of our churches.

8. The message and the messengers

The first messengers dealt with an enormous news story, and found it to be written increasingly in their own blood. Did they become more and more driven, anxious about the need to pass on the message? Apparently not.

At the heart of apostolic spirituality lies one great, central, bewildering, joyful, life-giving discovery – that Jesus is alive.

Jesus is Lord – or, in postmodern speak, maybe Jesus is the centre. This conviction is branded into the heart of the messenger. Going in mission can cause the dormant reserves of faith which lie unused within us to surge to the surface.

Story – Sue and Edwin giving weekly dinner parties in their home in Sheffield for street people. One day the bishop came, suddenly took bread and blackcurrant juice, said the simple words of communion. Several young men burst into tears.

If there is a Christian confidence that can work for our age, how can the whole church be infused with it, so that we can become an apostolic people, not just have apostolic leaders? Maybe through testimony. Testimony is everywhere in our culture. As institutions and authority fade, people are turning to one another to discover how to do life. 'It works for me' asks questions of the hearer, questions prevailing philosophies and powers.

9. Helping to heal the world's woe

Story – testimony of the healing of Kerry, 14, after a road accident. Evangelism and healing go hand in hand; the announcement is enacted. Harvey Cox writes about the difference between the African witchdoctor, who placates the spirits, and the Christian, who banishes them. Evil and disease are an intrusion into the way things are meant to be. Healing is an assertive thing in the face of destructive powers – if a provisional one.

The Eden Project. Jesus did much of his healing in the face of criticism. So will we; but we have the freedom to be able to do that in our trust of God.

10. Learning, laughing and the long haul

Sustainability is always a factor – will it last? Will we hang on in there – because giving up carries the opposite message from the one we intended! (which isn't to say that some initiatives come to a natural end, eg Mass in Asda). Finding a rhythm of life helps – the Benedictines did manual labour. We need rhythms of prayer, but also of celebration – parties and picnics. Franciscan Rule: 'without the constant renewal of divine grace the spirit flags, the will is weakened, the conscience grows dull, the mind loses its freshness and even the bodily vigour is impaired'.

11. An apostolic adventure

'What the Church of England could do with possibly more than anything else at present is an adventure'. The clergy may need it more than anyone else. We need to cross boundaries, take risks, travel into unknown places, risk offence and danger.

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