

Reimagining our common mission: ‘Tell Scotland’ now

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Abstract

In mainstream churches, with particular reference to the Church of Scotland, this paper argues that the concept of ‘mission’ is in need of rehabilitation. It has been reduced to vague objectives and is being tainted by being linked with a programme of restructuring and church closures. The rehabilitation of the concept of ‘mission’ will be necessary as the Kirk proceeds with its task of re-negotiating the future of its ministries, its buildings, and communities. To this end, the paper revisits the life and work of the Church of Scotland minister and evangelist Tom Allan (1916–1965), drawing out principles from both his work at parish level and with the ‘Tell Scotland’ national mission campaign. Rather than being about numerical gain or preserving institutional structures, ‘mission’ might be understood and lived out through theologically reflective, lay-empowering, and relational community engagement, creating space for new possibilities shaped by God’s grace.



1. The crisis of ‘mission’

For the title of a recent sermon, I purloined the classic 1970s Nick Lowe and Elvis Costello song, “What’s So Funny about Peace, Love and Understanding?” I thought those words needed some rehabilitation in a Christian mindset, tarnished as they might be with a whiff of incense from a joss stick, and a ‘hippyish’ romanticism. I want to introduce you to another word that is perhaps in urgent need of some rehabilitation too, or



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at least of a collective quest for its meaning. I want to us to explore whether it still carries any potency and utility for twenty-first century Scottish Christians facing deep-set challenges in their institutional churches, or whether it's more like the embarrassing drunk uncle at a wedding: the one who no-one wants to acknowledge even if he is part of our family history; the one we are hoping will be poured into an early taxi home, so we can all relax with him well out of sight and mind.

I give you the 'M-word', 'mission', now beaming in neon lights across much of our church discussions, vision and planning, and yet not only elusively slipping through our fingers when we seek to define it, but also becoming highly divisive and even counter-productive for some. Why might the concept of 'mission' be in something of a crisis in Scottish Christianity today? I would like to offer four possible reasons:

- a) Firstly, when the word 'mission' is voiced in congregations, it suddenly creates its own echo chamber. It sounds frightening, often produces a recoil in embarrassment and a strong reluctance to engage. This may well be the legacy of the age-old divisions in Scottish Christianity where 'mission' was an activity separated from the normal operation of parish church life under Christendom, to be carried out territorially by trained specialists, often beyond these shores. It could also be the more recent legacy of the 'crusade evangelism' of Billy Graham and his likes – a memory of street preaching and the door-knocking of 'parish visitation', which many people now find unimaginable in a secular society.
- b) Secondly, in reaction to the word 'mission' being emblazoned on the front page of initiatives emanating from the Church of Scotland and Church of England, some commentators are becoming increasingly aggressive towards utilising the word 'mission' as the foundation of future planning. It is accused of being formless and contentless. The charge sheet reads that the vagueness of the concept of the *missio Dei* – mission as an attribute of the Triune God and not an activity of the church – means that everything can be said to be 'mission' and therefore nothing is mission. The argument goes that consequently the word 'mission' has been hi-jacked as their preserve by those whose focus is either on a rapid form of church growth, or instead in order to bypass the institutions through 'new worshipping communities' or 'fresh



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expressions of church’, which certain prominent commentators see as a destructive fad – demeaning the old in favour of an uncertain new. Instead, they argue, the focus should be a celebration, reimagining and renewal of the parish in its traditional form, and of the church community and building that sits at its heart.

For very recent examples, see Alison Millbank’s October 2023 article in the *Church Times*, “Management and Mission: The Church of England is Not a Machine”;¹ also her book, *The Once and Future Parish*;² and in relation to the Church of Scotland, Marjory MacLean’s 2023 book *Visions and Authorities*.³ This backlash against the M-word would firmly place worship and sacramental celebration as an essential first step before we even begin to consider, for example, the Five Marks of Mission.⁴ On the other side of the coin, in what still remains the best theological account of ‘fresh expressions of church’, Michael Moynagh’s *Church for Every Context*,⁵ he argues strongly that mission is a first step scripturally and theologically before worship, and therefore our engagement in mission can pre-empt any worship practices that might result.

- c) The third reason why the concept of ‘mission’ is in a crisis in this country is, in my view, of the Church of Scotland’s own making. The word ‘mission’ has been inserted into a Presbytery Planning Act which has actually been all about the restructuring of churches through multiple unions and closures, and not very much about mission. This is not in any way to decry the considerable amount of work that has been invested by very dedicated individuals in the drafting and implementation of Presbytery Mission Plans, and the skill and diplomacy that has been exercised in doing so. Rather the point to be

¹ <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/27-october/features/features/management-and-mission-the-church-of-england-is-not-a-machine>.

² London: SCM Press, 2023.

³ Independently published, 2023.

⁴ The ‘Five Marks of Mission’ were developed by the global Anglican communion in 1984–1990, and have been adopted recently by the Church of Scotland to be at the forefront of future ‘mission planning’. For the details of the ‘Five Marks’, see https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/69749/Church-of-Scotland-Theological-Forum-Five-Marks-of-Mission.pdf.

⁵ London: SCM Press, 2012.



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made relates to how the whole church has envisaged, for the most part, the starting points and framework for planning: by reverting to the default model of adjustment employed in recent decades which starts and ends in the church, and its numbers and buildings, and not in any missional way to seek to relate planning instead to the makeup of local communities or discern where God may be acting there.

The problem is that the Five Marks of Mission have, in some cases, been put up on the wall as a poster of ‘thou shalt’, without any significant effort to identify what they are meant to be; or to indulge in any deeper thinking about what ‘mission’ might mean in the context of the national church’s ecclesiology or in the terms of a local plan. Any attempt to introduce deeper theological thinking about mission into the process has been seen as a delaying tactic.

This means some churches are being judged and closed against criteria that has not been fully thought through. That being so, ‘mission’ becomes at best meaningless, and at worst dangerous to their future. In other words, just as the word ‘mission’ might be tarnished in the popular church mindset from the legacy of mass evangelism, so it’s becoming tarnished now by its use as a blunt instrument to close people down. In the absence of cohesive and inspiring thought and support for all people to see how radical cuts might now open the ground and become a platform for mission, for a cogent and inspiring ‘Stage 2’ if you like beyond the pain of ‘Stage 1’, mission becomes associated irrevocably with the present process. Mission means the arrival of anguish and extinction, not joy and resurrection. It has become Good Friday and not, as it should be, Easter Sunday.

- d) Fourthly, ‘mission’ has in some places become misused instrumentally – as a tool tied in with ‘church growth narratives’ for rebuilding the numbers in the church, or indeed to save the church as an institution, rather than what mission should be about – the expression of the Gospel in the community and of people coming to faith. Apart from once more tarnishing the ‘mission’ word, growth narratives serve only to add pressure on members and congregations already overwhelmed with change to do more, and to reinforce decline and deflation when they almost invariably run into the sand.

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In my view to solve this crisis amongst many, we need urgently to rehabilitate the word ‘mission’ in our common church psyche, to explore more fully its breadth and potential, and to properly implement ‘missional’ outcomes much more purposively and dynamically as we re-negotiate structures, buildings and people – as we plan, as we do, as we act in the name of Christ.

Where do we start? We seek to answer the question, ‘What is mission?’ The basis of that is the *missio Dei*. In Tim Dearborn’s words, ‘It is not the Church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission who has a Church in the world’.⁶ Therefore, ‘There is church because there is mission, not vice versa’.⁷ Mission then is of God, and not a human creation of the church. And so the first step in our thinking is this – what might God’s mission in the world be? For example, Christopher Wright argues that the mission of God can be seen from the vast sweep of Scripture as a comprehensive ‘grand-narrative’ of Creation – Fall – Redemption – New Creation, centred on and united in Christ.⁸

Our second step, in the Trinitarian sending of God, is to ask what we are to do in the privilege of engaging in God’s mission in the world. That’s where the Five Marks of Mission come in – and I should say other more holistic definitions of ‘mission’ that I would prefer⁹ – as inevitably flawed human attempts to discern and articulate how God would wish us to act in the world. The church exists because of and for God’s mission, which it can never truly identify, replicate or achieve. The church does not dream up and implement mission on its own and for its own ends.

⁶ Tim Dearborn, *Beyond Duty: A Passion for Christ, a Heart for Mission* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1997), quoted in Church of England, *Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004), 103.

⁷ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 390.

⁸ *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: IVP, 2006).

⁹ See, for example, the definition of ‘mission’ by the World Council of Churches within ‘Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today’ (2000), para.7, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/preparatory-paper-ndeg-1-mission-and-evangelism-in-unity-today>.



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And then comes the third step: who's going to do this? That's where the responsibility of us all as professing Christians kicks in – the whole of the Gospel for the whole of life, via the apostolate of the laity.

It's all about the interaction of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, His incarnation, and the presence of the Spirit with all humanity and in the life of the world, in fulfilment of the kingdom of God, and in which the church and Christian individuals are called and sent to participate. Honestly, what's not to like there? Is that not exciting? Why is there so much 'mission-bashing'? Maybe it's because of our Christendom mindset, and our current 'Dastardly and Muttley' phase in the Church of Scotland ('Don't just stand there, Muttley, do something! ANYTHING!'), mission is presented as a series of things for tired people to do, this time with the Five Marks as the magic wand.

For me, mission is much less about well-meaning lists and definitions, but about a mindset, an ethos, a spirituality. Why don't we forget about, just for a while, what mission *is*? Why don't we look at mission *as* and mission *in* – just for a change? If we did, I would revel in my two favourite identifiers of mission: firstly, Bevans and Schroeder's mission *as* 'prophetic dialogue';¹⁰ and secondly, David Bosch's description of engaging in mission *in* 'bold humility'.¹¹ For me, those four words say so much more about mission than Five Marks.

I have been asked today to rehabilitate some other thinking and see if it might help us reimagine our mission, as part of God's mission. A decade ago, I completed a doctoral thesis which resulted in a book called *Mission by the People*,¹² which is all about the dynamic modes of mission in Scotland in the two decades after World War II, and any meaning they might have for now: it is about the Iona Community, the Gorbals Group, Ian Fraser and the ecumenical movement, and, in particular, Tom Allan and the 'Tell Scotland' campaign.

The ideas and practice of Tom Allan on mission, which seeped into the initial understanding of the national campaign that was 'Tell Scotland', from my perspective lived out the kind of deeply engaged and nuanced

¹⁰ See Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (New York: Orbis, 2011).

¹¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 489.

¹² Alexander Forsyth, *Mission by the People: Re-Discovering the Dynamic Missiology of Tom Allan and His Scottish Contemporaries* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017).

understanding of mission that is still vitally important now, and is worth exploring as we seek to rehabilitate the word and apply the concept. What follows, then, is a very abbreviated outline of Tom Allan and ‘Tell Scotland’; and then the derivation of a number of principles from that work, with some thoughts offered of where that might take us now in ‘reimagining our common mission’.



2. ‘Mission by the people’ – Tom Allan and ‘Tell Scotland’

In his short life, Tom Allan was a very prominent public figure in Scotland from 1946 to 1964 as a Church of Scotland minister, evangelist, radio personality and writer. Seventy years ago, at the apparent height of Christianity in Scotland when the Church of Scotland had 1.3 million members, Allan was even then arguing that the learned language of Christian religion was gone, and that the Christian churches had lost contact and connection with the real, everyday lives of its people. What was true then is even more true now.

‘Mission’ for Allan, and others of his post-war generation, was not then narrowly defined as a set of steps or marks or actions, but instead was located in all places and in all times where belief meets behaviour. It was, and is, about faith being expressed relationally in word and deed in the everyday, where it affects what we do for others in our society, what we say when asked about faith, and what our purpose is in life.

Allan sought this re-connection of institutional Christianity with the world through a radical revision of the essence and direction of the church, summarising the goal of his missiology in this way in 1954 (forgive his gendered language):

The mission of the Church is concerned not only with the man, but with the world in which the man lives, and is committed to bringing the light of God to bear upon the whole of life. This can only be accomplished in a continuing engagement with the world at every level [...].¹³

¹³ *The Agent of Mission: The Lay Group in Evangelism, Its Significance and Task* (Glasgow: Tell Scotland Pamphlet, 1954), 3.



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Allan thus wrote of his surroundings in Glasgow: ‘Jesus orders us out into the highways and byways, into the streets and lanes of the city, to meet with people wherever they are, and whether they recognise their need for God or not.’¹⁴

Allan wanted to make Christianity ‘real’ to the triumphs and struggles of everyday existence, relevant in its language, location, outward face, and personal expression, so that the Gospel would live and breathe in the lives of ordinary people. Is that purpose in the exercise of God’s ‘mission’ not surely our purpose too?

All possible means would be called into action. He wrote: ‘[There is a] false dilemma between the so-called ‘individual salvation’ and the so-called ‘social gospelism’. It is not either/or. It is both/and [...].’¹⁵

Lay people were its cornerstone:

It is becoming clear that there is one way before all others to which God is calling His Church to-day: and that is to reaffirm the Apostolate of the Laity. So that ordinary folk who know in their own lives something of the transforming power of Christ go out as His ambassadors into the workshop, the factory, the market-place, the community. If the secular world will not come to us, then we must reach out to it, bearing in our lives the image of Christ, and translating our faith into terms of active and decisive witness.¹⁶

Allan’s life, work and missiology

Tom Allan was ordained and inducted into his first charge as Minister to the working-class parish of North Kelvinside, Glasgow in September 1946.

He found there a focus to address what Allan saw as the ‘three primary problems [of] contact, communication and consolidation’¹⁷ with those outwith the church, given that the ‘vast majority of people regard the church as irrelevant.’¹⁸ The model of mission that Allan devised and

¹⁴ Tom Allan Archive, New College, Edinburgh, AA6.5.2 & AA6.11.7, *Evening Citizen*, “My Friend the Criminal”, 10 August 1963.

¹⁵ Allan Archive, AA6.5.6, *The Tell Scotland Movement and Billy Graham* (1954), 2.

¹⁶ Allan Archive, AA6.5.7, *Evening Citizen*, “Rescue the Fallen”, Article 5.

¹⁷ “Rescue the Fallen”, Article 5.

¹⁸ Tom Allan, *The Face of My Parish* (London: SCM Press, 1954), 12.



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implemented that was to dominate the rest of his ministry was summarised by him in this way in Allan's seminal book, *The Face of My Parish*:

Gradually three principles became articulate for me, and I began to hold them with increasing conviction. The first is that the solution to the vast problem communicating the gospel to the masses who live outside the sphere of Christian fellowship is inextricably bound up with the local church—that the key to evangelism lies in the parish. Secondly, that the Church can only fulfil its function, and penetrate the secular world when it is exhibiting the life of a genuine and dynamic Christian community [...]. And thirdly, that in all this the place of the layman is decisive.¹⁹

The keystones to a contextual expression of the Gospel were, therefore, the local area out of which the people and the form of the church arose; the revitalising of that church to approach the marks of a genuine Christian community; and the recognition that lay people were the start and end of any missionary concept.

The 'Tell Scotland' Movement 1953–1955

In early 1953, following successful radio missions, in an almost unimaginable development in the present day, the BBC gathered most Protestant denominations into a fully co-ordinated, national, ecumenical effort to evangelise the whole nation, known as the 'Tell Scotland' Movement. It sought to engage every congregation in the country, and in turn reach every person in their community whether at work, at home or at leisure, and did so with the full support of the mass media.

As knowledge of his work in North Kelvinside spread, Allan was invited to become its full-time Field Organiser. The model of mission expressed in North Kelvinside and his book *The Face of My Parish* was transposed to the national movement. Allan explained in a radio broadcast:

What is the 'Tell Scotland' Movement anyhow? [...] It is based on the solid conviction that the best method of winning Scotland for Christ [...] is through the quiet, patient, consecrated witness of the local congregation to the Truth by which it lives and for which it

¹⁹ Allan, *The Face of My Parish*, 66.



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stands. That witness will mean different things in different places—at least in detail. But one thing is certain. The key to the whole Movement is with the laity—with you.²⁰

Recent research has confirmed that the number of ‘professions of faith’ in the Church of Scotland rose sharply through such mission in the initial stages of ‘Tell Scotland’.²¹ Its development took an unexpected turn, however, which changed the whole complexion of the Movement, with the invitation to Billy Graham to conduct the All-Scotland Crusade in 1955. Despite its enormous popular appeal, the Crusade had no lasting impact. As Graham’s biographer wrote, the Crusade ‘had created immense expectancy throughout Scotland. The heather seemed dry, Graham had lit a fire and departed, his part done. And the heather did not blaze.’²² Research soon afterwards demonstrated a temporary surge in church attendance in the wake of the All-Scotland Crusade, followed by a significant dip and since then a long decline, tending to indicate that any numerical effect upon religious observance was transitory.²³

So did Allan’s model of the purging and reinvention of the church through the apostolate of the laity ever actually work in a parish setting?

St George’s Tron 1955–1963

After two years as the Field Organiser of ‘Tell Scotland’, Allan became the minister at St George’s Tron in the centre of Glasgow in September 1955. By that time, he was a national celebrity.

It was here that Allan, more than any contemporary, was able to implement the ‘Tell Scotland’ model of parish and mission – dedication to the people through self-giving and service, a living presence on the streets and a contextualised Gospel, with the laity of the church at the heart of it all and the goal of a revitalised institution. The outward expression of this ethos was for Allan and a team of church members to roam the gathering

²⁰ Allan Archive, AA6.3.2, Tom Allan radio talk, “The Missionary Church”, 6–8.

²¹ Collation of the published figures by John Hayward – contact the present author for further information.

²² John Pollock, *Billy Graham: The Authorised Biography* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1966), 198.

²³ See John Highet, *The Scottish Churches: A Review of Their State 400 Years After the Reformation* (London: Skeffington, 1960).



points in the streets and the homeless lodging houses to speak to and care for the lost and downtrodden, because ‘This is what the Church exists in the world to do. Its Gospel is not for some privileged handful of people. It is for the whole world. Its compassion is not limited to the lovely and the loveable. It extends to the unlovely and the lost. Only then can we be true to Christ.’²⁴

Allan could have written *Church Without Walls*²⁵ and the *Mission-shaped Church*²⁶ reports forty years beforehand. The latter’s definition of a missional church is really his:

- focused on God
- incarnational
- transformational
- disciple-making



3. Principles and conclusions

So what can we translate to the present day from Allan’s life and work, and from his dynamic ideas on mission, that might be helpful to rehabilitate the word? Here are some thoughts:

1. To recognise that ‘mission’ is central to all Christian expression, and that a church without it is nothing. At present, in our country it remains peripheral at best, and denigrated or ignored at worst.
2. To recognise that local context and everyday life are centrally important – to genuinely love and care for those around you, and not just for an ulterior evangelistic motive. Mission is about listening, discerning and acting in the local. It is about dialogue and relationship – a transaction where we receive as well as give, we are the learner as much as the teacher. Michael Moynagh talks of the first step in mission being ‘360 degrees listening’ before discerning and acting – to God,

²⁴ Allan Archive, AA6.5.7, *Evening Citizen*, “Rescue the Fallen”, Article 1.

²⁵ Church of Scotland, *Church Without Walls* (Edinburgh: Parish Education Publications, 2001).

²⁶ Church of England, *Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).



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the local people and community, the local church and the wider church.²⁷ This should, in my view, have been at the heart of the current planning process in the Church of Scotland, if it were to be ‘missional’. Such planning might have entailed starting with a national exercise in every parish in ‘listening in mission’ over 360 degrees to truly understand each context: who is there? what is there? where is God in this?, before then matching resources in buildings and ministries to that.

3. To rely on the individual at the local level in mission and the organic growth of Christian communities: the ‘laity’ are the key, not the clergy. Local decision and actions, for local people by local people.

There are two key points from this. Firstly, what we must avoid is any perceived distancing and disabling of the local through processes whereby decisions seem to be made centrally, outwith the control of those on the ground, and where a ‘learned helplessness’ and pessimistic fatalism then develops – ‘there’s nothing we can do because Presbytery/121 have decided it for us’. In a recent survey of Presbytery Clerks carried out by Victoria Linford for her upcoming DMin Thesis, 6 out of 8 interviewees said the Presbytery Mission Plan Act was, in fact, a barrier to mission, because of the loss of the very local agency it was claiming to enable. One respondent answered, ‘It is not the Act that is wrong but the interpretation of the Act. [...] It has removed agency from local congregations and placed it, not in Presbyteries, but in the central church. Essentially a few people in the central committee and the General Trustees can override what local congregations are saying. And that’s not missional.’

The second key point is this. The laity are the key and not the clergy, albeit not by elevating them to another status or title within the church; instead, it is about empowering and enabling people where they are.

4. To recognise that a revitalised institutional church may still hold a role as a hub for such development, in the inherited form or ‘fresh expressions’; but that for ‘church’ in whatever form, the key is ‘presence’, being relational and not geographical.

²⁷ *Church for Every Context*, 252–55.



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In his 2023 book, Will Foulger observes that the parish ‘has always been about engagement and encounter with what is there, about being close not simply in terms of proximity, but relationally’.²⁸ The problem is that a desire to sustain the structure might be the very thing preventing that engagement. Thus the original intentions of practices in the parish can become lost or ‘so “implicit” that the meaning has become forgotten’.²⁹ In other words, we may have forgotten why we have parish churches, or perhaps why we even have a Church of Scotland at all. If Article III and a national, territorial ministry is to continue to mean anything, it surely must be, as Will Storrar wrote in 1990, that there is no more to be a Church of Scotland, but a Church for Scotland.³⁰ That would entail a distinction between being present simply by virtue of having a church located in a particular area (with its purpose unknown to the local community) and becoming truly present by growing and nurturing relationships.

5. To ensure that the foundation of the Gospel is articulated in undertaking mission; and to engage in deep theological enquiry, even if it means ‘coming down from the mountaintop’. Missional leadership requires theological heft.

Allan’s model of mission and ministry was not plucked from the ether, but based on a close theological understanding of works ‘hot off the press’ from Bonhoeffer, Ellul, and the French worker priests. We must avoid the mistake of confusing a need for recruitment of ministers with the importance that ministers are trained theologically and practically to a high standard for the challenging tasks ahead. We must not make the mistake of saying that those we train for ministry have no need to look into the two thousand years of Christian thought contained in the library across the courtyard, and no need to listen to the world-class theologians who work in this building. That would be like telling a trainee civil engineer that she doesn’t need to learn the laws of physics

²⁸ Will Foulger, *Present in Every Place? The Church of England’s New Churches, and the Future of the Parish* (London: SCM Press, 2023), 109. See book review by John Inge, *Church Times*, 30 June 2023, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/30-june/books-arts/book-reviews/present-in-every-place-the-church-of-england-s-new-churches-and-the-future-of-the-parish-by-will-foulger>.

²⁹ Foulger, 55.

³⁰ See *Scottish Identity: A Christian Vision* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1990), 221.



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– she can have a go at building a bridge after a short time of watching and repeating. Allan’s work would not have occurred without meaningful theological training, nor will it ever occur again if that is removed.

6. To express a strong concurrent social witness – it is both/and not either/or. Mission is truly ‘holistic’, so if you use the Five Marks of Mission, use them all.
7. To avoid allegiance in mission to theological extremes, cliques and closed fraternities; to ‘walk the tightrope’; to embrace ecumenical respect and co-operation, not just as a convenience, but as a necessity.

In all this, Allan would say that we should not grieve for the old, but seek the new. We should embody the joy of the Gospel, and trust in God to expect transformation. As he said to naysayers who criticised his relationships with those on the street, ‘as if Christ who raised Lazarus from the dead, can’t raise an alcoholic from Buchanan Street!’³¹ So too with the church. As Tommy McNeil said in his recent book *Sleeping Giant*, ‘your church is not dead but asleep, awake and arise!’³²



4. So what now?

1. Let’s treasure the church as we know it, but recognise and accept that it may or may not survive in its present form, and either way trust in God that there is a future. We might reimagine Article III so that it does not reinforce old mindsets that hold us back, but opens up ‘fresh expressions of church’ and ecumenical dimensions. At the same time, we might, in Will Foulger’s words, develop ‘structures that will allow presence in place to happen in our context.’³³ That does not mean endlessly uniting parts of the old; instead, it means creating new spaces for enquiry and the exploration of faith, the ‘rewilding of the Church’ that Steve Aisthorpe imagines.³⁴ It means investing in and celebrating

³¹ Allan Archive, AA6.5.7, *Evening Citizen*, 1959, Article 1.

³² *Sleeping Giant: A Call to the Church to Awake and Arise!* (Maidstone: River Publishing & Media Ltd, 2021).

³³ Foulger, *Present in Every Place?*, 63.

³⁴ Steve Aisthorpe, *Rewilding the Church* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2020).



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pioneering and new worshipping communities, alongside seeking renewal of the inherited church.

2. We have to pause, pray and discern before we act, and not rush headlong into desperate actions that will be a ‘race to the bottom’ – they will destroy us before we know it, whether in planning or in re-imagining ministry training.
3. We need to forget growth analogies, and grow old gracefully; even pass away if needs be; live the faith and trust in God. Martyn Percy wrote that ‘The Church is not a body that is supposed to be ever more productive, like a factory or industry that simply improves its output year on year. It is an organic body of wisdom, in which pruning, seasons, life and death, course through its very veins.’³⁵
4. Empower not burden the laity. As the church historian G. D. Henderson wrote, Presbyterianism may have ‘asked too much and given too little’.³⁶ People need to be enabled, as Sally Brown describes, for the task of preaching, to be ‘agents of redemptive interruption’ in and amongst the world.³⁷
5. If the mainline denominations want to survive as institutions, we need to embrace the local and relational, and seek presence that is non-geographical. We need to think about mission in a joined-up manner, and train people through reflective practice to the right level to face the missional challenges. And we need to worship and pray. Then we might find out again who we are, and what God’s mission is – if you like, we might be able to rehabilitate the ‘M-word’ to drive a more faithful and sustainable future.

³⁵ Martyn Percy, *The Ecclesial Canopy: Faith, Hope and Charity* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2012), 20.

³⁶ Quoted in Doug Gay, *Reforming the Kirk: A Future for the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2017), 38.

³⁷ Sally A. Brown, *Sunday’s Sermon for Monday’s World: Preaching to Shape Daring Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020).

