

## **The Foxtton Centre: Mission in Context**

**“Given the organisational culture of the Foxtton Centre and the cultural contexts within which it operates, the ‘extrinsic fuzzy set’ is its only legitimate model of Christian mission.” Discuss.**

**2006**

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### **Introduction.**

This essay examines the cultural and sociological forces that shape how the Foxtton Centre understands and carries out its mission. How does the type of organisation it is determine the kind of mission it understands and undertakes? The essay pays especial attention to Hiebert’s sets model of mission stating that the Centre is best understood as, what he names, an *extrinsic fuzzy set*.<sup>1</sup> The essay examines what this means and how it applies to the Foxtton Centre’s theology and practice. Next the essay examines whether this theology and practice can be seen to be true to a biblical worldview. Finally, the essay discusses how its organisational culture and mission is shaped by and responds to its surrounding cultures and their underlying worldviews.

### **Scene setting: what is the Foxtton Centre.**

The Foxtton Centre is a Registered Charity providing a range of services to people living in the City Centre and Avenham areas of Preston, England. In Government indices areas are classified as ‘Super Output Areas’. Such indices are used to measure levels of economic and social deprivation. Avenham and the City Centre score within the 10% most deprived Wards in the country<sup>2</sup>.

A Board of Trustees is the Foxtton Centre’s governing body. Constitutionally, these are drawn from local Church of England and Catholic communities, plus a representative of the Church of England Diocese of Blackburn (which helped set up the Centre with local parishes in 1969). Finally, the Board includes people living locally with an interest in its work. Currently, some of these do not hold to any religious faith.

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<sup>1</sup> Hiebert, Paul G. *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*. Grand Rapids: Baker 1994

<sup>2</sup> See [www.preston.gov.uk/Documents/General/Regeneration/nrfsummary.pdf](http://www.preston.gov.uk/Documents/General/Regeneration/nrfsummary.pdf)

The Board employs paid staff and appoints volunteers to run a number of services. The Director (Chief Executive Officer) is the only employee who it is stipulated has to be a practicing Christian. Other staff and volunteers have to be fully supportive of the Centre's Mission Statement and be happy to work for an organisation that sees itself as faith-based.

The Centre's services include children's and youth clubs, information, advice and support for homeless or vulnerably housed people, family support including child protection and court support, advocacy and befriending, counselling for young people and specialised support for street based sex workers exiting prostitution.

In its Mission Statement the Foxtan Centre states that its main aim is to provide opportunities for spiritual, physical, emotional and social fulfilment to people accessing its services. The Foxtan Centre's work is understood to be an expression of the Church's mission.

According to the Blackburn Diocese website this mission is taken to be:

To grow in every community in Lancashire  
a vibrant, inclusive Christian presence  
providing a spirituality accessible for all,  
and participating in God's mission in the world.

Bishop of Blackburn<sup>3</sup>

This, then can be taken as the way in which the Foxtan Centre is an inclusive Christian presence participating in God's mission in the world, what Bosch calls the *missio Dei*.

"Where people are experiencing and working for justice, freedom, community, reconciliation, unity and truth, in a spirit of love and selflessness, we may dare to see God at work. Wherever, people are being enslaved, enmity between humans is fanned, and mutual accountability is denied in a spirit of individual or communal self-centrism, we may identify the counter-forces of God's reign at work.<sup>4</sup> "

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<sup>3</sup> [www.blackburn.anglican.org.uk](http://www.blackburn.anglican.org.uk)

<sup>4</sup> Bosch, David J Transforming Mission: *Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission*. 1991 p 430

This holistic understanding of what makes for human flourishing underpins the Centre's work. Within the broad Mission Statement there is room for a variety of views as to what constitutes such flourishing. Christians may bring particular understandings of this, and these will probably contrast with those of another or of a no faith position. For Christians, human flourishing depends in some measure upon an appreciation of God and his purposes as revealed in the Scriptures and especially in the life of Christ.

However, the lack of a more obviously conversion oriented mission statement implies that the Foxtan Centre takes what Hesselgrave calls a neo-liberal or neo-orthodox approach to its contextualisation of the gospel. If it

### **The organisational culture of the Foxtan Centre**

A culture of an organisation is understood to be

“its sets of values and norms and beliefs reflected in different structures and systems...affected by the events of the past and by the climate of the present...by their aims and the kind of people that work in them...”<sup>5</sup>

The Foxtan Centre describes itself as 'Christian-based' and as such will be included among those organisations that are called 'faith-based'. However, this all-embracing term hides how one 'faith-based' organisation may differ from another in culture, policy and practice.

Smith is a Christian practitioner, researcher and writer with many years experience in working among poor and diverse communities. In his paper *Faith in the Voluntary Sector*<sup>6</sup> Smith discusses the relationship between faith organisations in England the rest of the so-called voluntary sector and the government. Much depends on understanding that there are different kinds of faith organisation. Smith refers to the *USA Working Group of Human Needs and Faith-Based Community Initiatives*, which classifies faith organisations in into five types.

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<sup>5</sup> Handy, Charles. *Understanding Organisations*. Forth Edition 1993 p 180

<sup>6</sup> Smith, Greg. *Faith in the Voluntary Sector A common or distinctive experience of religious organisations?* 2002

Some organisations are *faith saturated*. In these, all staff share the faith of the organisation and its aims. The organisation's programme will have explicit and probably mandatory religious content.

In *faith centred* organisations nearly all the governing board and staff will share the organisation's faith commitments and there will be overt religious input available as part of a programmes of services. However, users can choose not to engage in the religious aspects of the programme without receiving a poorer service as a result.

*Faith related* organisations are those which have been founded by religious people and which may display some religious symbols but do not stipulate that staff have to be of any particular faith, apart from the most senior employee. In *faith related* organisations there will be some, occasional, faith event, though this will underlie the programme rather than be a central part of it.

Additionally, there are *faith background* organisations with an historical link to a faith tradition but which act and look secular. Finally, in *faith-secular* partnerships there is no reference to faith in a programme of services delivered by faith and secular organisations in partnership but there is an expectation that faith organisations involved will add value to the enterprise.

This writer holds that the Foxton Centre is best understood as a faith related organisation. Religious symbolism is limited to a 'faith space' area and occasional memorials are held for users who have died. These tend to use Christian texts and symbols. In 2006 staff began a new project called *spirit levels* in which faith and spirituality, and its place within the Centre was explored at a training weekend.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Spirit Levels. Report into Staff Training Residential around faith and spirituality. December 2006 (unpublished).

### **Set theory: Culture and Models of Christian Mission**

According to Kraft, culture can be defined as 'a society's complex, integrated, coping mechanism, consisting of learned, patterned concepts of behaviour, plus their underlying perspectives (worldview) and resulting artefacts (material culture).'<sup>8</sup>

He defines worldview as 'the culturally constructed assumptions, values and commitments/allegiances underlying a people's perception of reality and their responses to those perceptions.'<sup>9</sup>

Hiebert, proposes that a culture and a culture's worldview can be understood by examining how people, ideas or behaviours are categorised or grouped and how that culture understands that migration takes place between these categories. He calls these categories, 'sets'.

Hiebert divides cultures into whether their sets, or categories are bounded or centred. Cultures with bounded, or intrinsic, sets are those in which objects, people, events or thoughts are described or categorised by how or what they are, into what type they are. What is an object's essential characteristic that means it belongs to a set and what essential characteristics distinguish it from objects outside the set.

What Hiebert calls the second variable in understanding sets is that of the boundary between one group and another. A well-formed boundary is one where there is a clear demarcation between two distinctives. For example, in some cultures there is typically a clear distinction between a road and a path demarcated by a kerb raised slightly above the level of the road.

Alternatively, the boundary can be much less well formed; for example, where there is no clear demarcation between where a road begins and the path ends; the two merge into each other. There may be positions that are clearly

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<sup>8</sup> Kraft, Charles H. *Anthropology for Christian Witness*. 1996 p38

<sup>9</sup> Kraft p52

in the road, or on the path, but there may well be debate about just when a person moves from being on the path to being in the road, there is a 'grey area' where s/he is neither wholly in one area or the other. These 'softer' boundaries Hiebert calls 'fuzzy'.

By contrast, there are also relational, or centred set cultures. Here, objects and people are understood by considering how they relate to each other, or to some other reference point. The reference point is the defining centre, hence centred sets. Hiebert says Kinship terms such as sister, uncle, and daughter are examples because they describe a relationship.

The Hebrew culture of biblical times can be understood as being relational rather than centred. 'While the Greeks saw God in intrinsic terms, as supernatural, omnipotent and omnipresent; the Israelites knew him in relational terms as Creator, Judge and Lord. The strong biblical theme of covenant seems to support this.

According to Hiebert, Western Culture is most at home with bounded sets seen in our love of order, in the pursuit of ultimate reality or absolute truth and in our division of things as good or bad, right or wrong, rich or poor.

Therefore, in Hiebert's model, there are intrinsic or well-formed sets with either clearly defined or fuzzy boundaries. There are also extrinsic or centred sets, again with either well-formed or fuzzy boundaries.

Set theory can be utilised to explain how a church, a Christian organisation or indeed an individual missionary understands what is their theology and practice of mission. Similarly, understanding a receiving culture's worldview in such terms can shape a Church, organisation or individual's theology of mission.

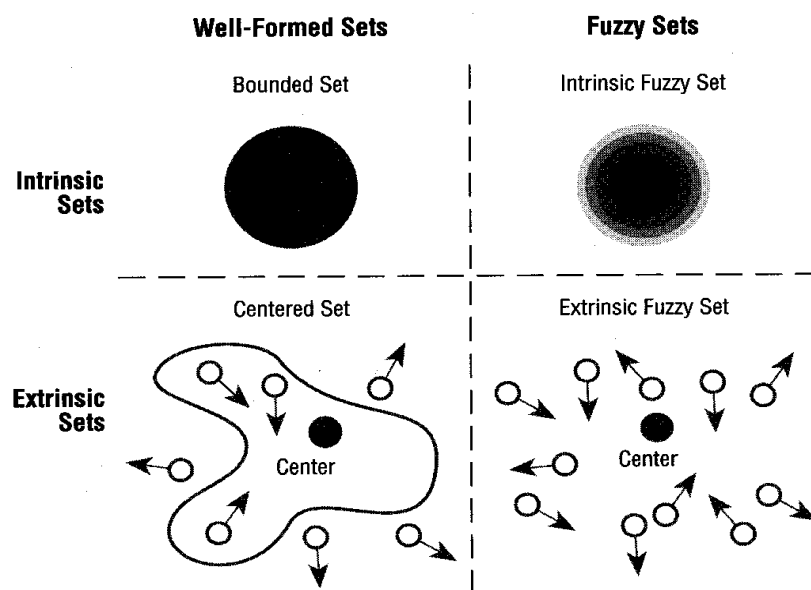
In centred set terms, mission is about bringing people into the set labelled Christian. Christians are those who consciously and actively commit to being followers of Christ. This commitment is confirmed by acknowledgement of

certain creeds or statements of faith, and of active membership of a Christian community. There is room, where the boundaries are more fuzzy to accommodate people who have made a commitment but have not yet changed all their behaviour to conform to the accepted norm.

In more relational understandings, the term Christian is defined by whether a person has some kind of relationships with Christ. This could be in its very early stages, very unformed but growing. That person is deemed to be travelling towards the Centre, which is Christ, even if they are currently a long way away.

In these terms, people of other faiths who have heard about Christ and who have begun to be drawn towards him can be included.

Figure 6.2  
A Typology of Sets



Taken from Hiebert's *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* p 112

Hiebert says that the Christian church has expressed its mission in all these forms in one way or another. However, the use of a certain model can be born of particular approaches to Scripture and theological understandings, be based on quite different worldview assumptions, take very different patterns of



expression and lead to quite different outcomes. More than that, says Hiebert, some models are more biblical than others and therefore to be preferred.

**The Foxtton Centre as an extrinsic fuzzy set mission organisation.**

It is the contention of this paper that the Foxtton Centre understands and lives out its mission in such a way that it should be understood as utilising the extrinsic fuzzy set model and that this is its only legitimate mode of operating given its organisational and operational contexts.

Centred sets are defined by the relationship of something to the centre. At the centre of the organisation that is the Foxtton Centre is Christ expressed in the living out of Christian values in working along side vulnerable, stigmatised and socially excluded individuals and communities. This is seen as the dynamic equivalent of Christ's working among the outcasts of his time as depicted in the gospels.

Charles Kraft first coined the term 'dynamic, or meaning, equivalence'.<sup>10</sup> He recognised that the Bible could not be translated literally from one language into another because words and ideas change their meaning over time and across cultures. Therefore, the task of the Bible translator is to try to capture the *meaning* of the original biblical text in equivalent terms within the receiving culture.

Therefore, says Kraft, 'the ideal we advocate for Christian belief and practice in the broader sense is an equivalence of meaning to that recorded in Scripture...We suggest that, since God adapts to people within their cultures, *this equivalence should be in meaning, function or dynamic, not merely in form* [his italics].<sup>11</sup>

According to Hiebert, the term Christian, in the extrinsic fuzzy set model is broadly understood to be 'those related to Christ in one way or another,

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<sup>10</sup> Kraftpp454f

<sup>11</sup> Kraft p455

whether as Lord, ...guru, ...philosopher or ...good man.’<sup>12</sup> There is no sharp dividing line between Christians and non-Christians, there are degrees of being Christian ranging from those expressing devotion and commitment to Christ to those who are indifferent or even opposed to Christ at the other extreme. Within this model, there is no conversion as such, rather people make partial changes, some of which may take them closer to Christ.

Western culture’s love of bounded sets, suggests Hiebert is fundamental to its understanding of order; an order that keeps chaos, or perceptions of chaos at bay and helps us make sense of the world.

The reality can be very different; less definable, more chaotic and less prone to categorising. This may explain western culture’s discomfort at the complexity of the issues affecting people’s lives.

This can be illustrated by reference to people described as ‘homeless’. A person can be categorised as homeless if they are sleeping rough, that is, outside, without a roof over their head. However, ‘homeless’ can also describe people without a place that can be called ‘home’. ‘Home’ has a number of connotations such as ‘safety, stability, warmth and community. There are people with a roof over their heads who, due to a range of physical, mental, social and spiritual needs do not have a ‘home’. Understood thus, ‘homeless’ is a centred set, rather than a bounded set, because there are degrees of ‘home’ towards which, it is hoped, people can travel.

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<sup>12</sup> Hiebert p 132

Similarly, people can be categorised as 'prostitute', 'young offenders', 'anti-social', 'substance abusers' and so on. Such categorisation does not adequately describe the reality of life for such people, never mind that people are thus implicitly *defined* as being prostitutes, young offenders etc with all the temptation to stereotyping that entails. Such labelling fails to recognise or understand the complexity and individuality that make up a whole person. This demeans and devalues an individual and a community.

By concentrating on one label amongst many, the perspective of the whole is lost and the fundamentals of human flourishing can be missed. A holistic approach to people encourages an organisation to see the complexity and severity of situations and with others put packages of care together to address this.

A bounded set culture can create barriers which marginalized people find exclude them and lessen their chances of moving from 'outside' to 'inside' society, from being unacceptable to being acceptable.

These conceptual and actual barriers to services suggest that people on the margins of society operate within a bounded set culture. Such people are outside services until they can pull themselves together to cross the boundary, often requiring attendance at a building at a set time and place to have access to health care or benefits. They are outside society until such time as they have crossed the boundaries of getting off drugs and into training and employment.

In the most extreme cases people live such chaotic lives driven by substance misuse that it is impossible to suggest they are moving coherently towards Christ. Yet, the Foxton Centre, as an extrinsic fuzzy set organisation tries to put no such barriers to belonging, to acceptability and to accessing services in people's way.

In earlier writings the Centre described itself as operating in a centred set culture, but with well-formed boundaries<sup>13</sup>. At the heart of the Centre is Christ and through the Centre people travel towards Christ, even if starting from a long way off.

However, it is probably more accurate to describe the Foxtton Centre as having fuzzy boundaries and indeed trying to create such a culture because a person is not understood or defined as belonging in any way by reference to where they stand in relation to Christ. Indeed, such a defining could be seen as one more way in which people are categorised and one more barrier preventing people getting the help they need. If clients feel that there is a benchmark against which they are being measured, will this be yet another expectation put upon them that they may be unable to live up to.

Such an approach tries not to make a judgement about where people are in relation to God, sees no need to do so in living out in fulfilling its particular mission.

For the Foxtton Centre the extrinsic fuzzy set approach is the *meaning equivalence*, dynamically expressed, of Christ's work among the outcasts and sinners of the gospels. Christ's ministry among such people was not merely stating that the message of salvation could apply even to these outcasts, but that the categorisation of people in such a way was wrong.

### **The cultural contextualisation of Christian Mission**

It is commonly understood that Christian Mission has to be contextualised in order to translate a two thousand year old religion into 21<sup>st</sup> century settings and cultures.

“We understand contextualisation as the various processes by which a local church integrates the Gospel message (the “text”) with its local culture (the

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<sup>13</sup> Keightley, T D. *We are Here: Towards a Theology of the Foxtton Centre* .2003

“context”). The text and the context must be blended into that one, God intended reality called “Christian living”...”<sup>14</sup>

The Foxtan Centre’s understanding that its work is somehow incarnational is another way of saying the same thing<sup>15</sup>.

According to Hesselgrave, contextualisations grow out of a theological rootage. Such rootages range from liberal to orthodox extremes. Liberal theologies stem from viewing Scripture as largely antiquated and in need of interpretation and adaptation in the light of modern philosophies. Such philosophies are deemed by liberals to be ‘higher’ because they benefit from the developments of two thousand years of human enquiry and attainment of knowledge. But, states Hesselgrave, this leads to changing Christianity and, he implies, changing it so fundamentally as to make it something quite different and unrecognisable, not true to its roots.

At the other extreme, orthodoxy sees the Bible as the revealed Word of God with a unique status among all world literature. Its central doctrines are timelessly true even in the face of modern scepticism, resistance and alternative views of the nature of humanity and the history of the cosmos. Such doctrines include ‘the lostness of humanity, redemption by the blood of Christ, the necessity of conversion, and so forth. Not only that, such believers are committed to the task of communicating the biblical gospel to the whole world.’<sup>16</sup>

In between the extremes lies neo-liberalism and neo-orthodoxy. In neo liberalism, both the bible and culture are taken seriously though approached critically in an attempt to see God in action in the contemporary setting.

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<sup>14</sup> Luzbetak, Louis J. *The Church and Cultures: New perspectives in Missiological Anthropology*. New York: Orbis Books 1988

<sup>15</sup> Keightley 2003

<sup>16</sup> Hesselgrave, David J. *Communicating Christ Cross-culturally* 2nd 1991

Neo-orthodoxy holds onto ideas of the Bible's inspiration but sees it as an imperfect and fallible document. As Hesselgrave suggests, this position sees the Bible not as the Word of God but *containing* the Word of God and to identify its current applicability requires 'a contemporary work of the Spirit – a current and existential "inspiration" – to make the Bible become the Word of God.'<sup>17</sup>

The published documents exploring the purpose and practice of the Foxton Centre in Christian terms seem to take a position that contains both neo liberal and neo-orthodox elements. The Bible is taken seriously, though not uncritically<sup>18</sup>. An interest in Liberation Theology seems to indicate a concern with trying to identify Hesselgrave's 'contemporary work of the Spirit'<sup>19</sup>. There is a lack of overt Christian symbolism in the Centre and no talk in Mission Statement or policy papers of Christian conversion. Indeed, the Mission Statement endorses that the organisation exists to provide services for people of all faiths and of none.

According to Hesselgrave, neo-orthodoxy will interpret events as the activity of the Holy Spirit whereas neo-liberalism will see evidence of the human spirit.

Where both models are similar, according to Hesselgrave is in their response to their context.

"...their biblical prototype is the prophet who hears and delivers a word from the Lord vis-à-vis a given historical situation. In the dialectic of human situations the divine Word is discerned and delivered. This is "prophetic contextualisation." Its *context* is that of human aspirations and struggles. Its *method* is dialectical. And it *results* in a conjoining of the words and work of

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<sup>17</sup> Hesselgrave p141

<sup>18</sup> Keightley 2004 *Biblical images of Mission in the life and work of the Foxton Centre* and 2003

<sup>19</sup> Keightley 2003a *The Foxton Centre: A First World example of a Base Ecclesial Community?*

God and those of the contextualiser so as to bring about spiritual and/or social change”<sup>20</sup> [his italics].

### **Is the Foxtton Centre true to a Scriptural Worldview?**

Newbigin<sup>21</sup> illustrates that the Christian Church has always understood itself to be a missionary organisation with its task to ‘bear witness to the gospel’ (p5). He illustrates how modern understandings of the church’s mission are more holistic.

‘Mission...is faith in action. It is the acting out by proclamation and by endurance, through all the events in history, of the faith that the kingdom of God has drawn near. It is the acting out of the central prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to use: “Father, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as in heaven.” ‘<sup>22</sup>

Mission is also love in action. It is not only about a concept (the Kingdom of God) but a person, Jesus who embodied that kingdom. The church understands that it has been tasked with being the bearer of that presence throughout the world.

Much Christian Mission sees its task is to ‘win’ people into making a clear profession of Christian faith or to draw them closer to Christ. Hiebert holds that Centred set approaches, but where there are well-formed boundaries most accurately reflect the biblical worldview.

In his theological critique of sets and their application to missions, Hiebert contends that not all worldviews equally communicate the core message of the gospel. Some contextualisations are better than others. As we have seen, he holds that the Scriptures are about relationships, between peoples and between people and God. Therefore, the worldview of Scripture is a centred

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<sup>20</sup> Hesselgrave p141

<sup>21</sup> Lesslie Newbigin *The Open Secret An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*. 1995

<sup>22</sup> Newbigin p 39

set worldview. Where people stand in relationship to God is the clear defining factor, sometimes expressed in how they relate to each other. However, such a centre is not without boundaries. Clearly in the Old Testament there are stories of individuals and nations who have God's favour, or who are within a covenant relationship with God and clearly there are those who are not. Likewise, in the gospels and other New Testament writings there are those who belong to the Kingdom of God, who are saved and will enjoy the life of ages, and those who are outside, not saved and who won't.

This worldview is often seen to be encapsulated in pivotal sayings of Jesus such as:

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me." John 17v6 (NRSV<sup>23</sup>)

Such sayings are often interpreted exclusively by scholars, Hiebert among them. Cotterell, states that this statement is about

"...walking *to* God. And no one can get there other than through Jesus. This is in some senses the high-point of Johannine Christology. It is not an aberrant text. It is, indeed, entirely consonant with all else that John has to say to us about Jesus. The exclusiveness is of its essence and can be removed from the Gospel only at the cost of destroying the coherence of the whole work."<sup>24</sup>

However, there are other possible interpretations of such texts. These may be neo-orthodox or neo-liberal in Hesselgrave's understanding but they can also be seen to be true to a biblical worldview, albeit a different understanding of that worldview from that held by more orthodox scholars.

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<sup>23</sup> O'Day, Gail Commentary on John's Gospel New Revised Standard Version Translation in The New Interpreter's Bible Volume IX

<sup>24</sup> Cotterell, Peter. Mission and Meaninglessness. The Good News in a world of suffering and disorder. London: SPCK 1990 p60



In commenting on the same verse from Scripture O'Day agrees that the text is indeed, "the high point of Johannine theology."<sup>25</sup> Yet she says, such a text has been misunderstood and misused in an aggressive form as a 'proof text' to win arguments in a pluralistic world about the supremacy and triumph of an exclusive Christianity.

The first mistake, says O'Day, is to fail to try to discover the claim the gospel writer was trying to make in his context instead of bypassing 2000 years of history and applying the words as if spoken today. Properly understood, the text is about knowing God in a particular way, as Father. This particular way of knowing God can and has only come about because of the incarnation. The phrase 'no-one', says O'Day means 'none of you disciples listening to me'.

Within the text, then, Jesus defines God for his disciples. Within the gospel writer's context, the writer defines God for his reading and believing community.

Thus, says O'Day, the text is particular rather than exclusive. Such a claim does define a community, drawing boundaries around it that distinguish it from others. But to use this text to arbitrate over the value of other religions is beyond what Jesus, or the gospel writer intended. Rather it is a way of making clear, and celebrating what is distinctive about the Christian identity.

Such an understanding allows organisations such as the Foxtan Centre to claim in its particular cultural context its approach is in accordance with a scriptural worldview.

**Cultural contexts in which the Centre operates.**

The Foxtan Centre exists within a multi-cultural inner city in England. It is at least arguable that this context is one of globalisation, in that over 15% of its population is from minority ethnic backgrounds with recent additions of

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<sup>25</sup> O'Day p743

Chinese students and Eastern European migrant workers to add to the cultural mix of Asian and Black communities.

Smith outlines the way in which the faith organisations relate to the government and the rest of the voluntary sector in delivering social action projects. According to Smith, England is also largely secularised.

On the whole, the faith sector is seen as a part of the voluntary sector and within a secular context

‘where any attempt to propagate belief systems which cannot be scientifically proven, is perceived as inevitably excluding unbelievers, or other outsiders. Policy and good practice guidelines are seen as equally applicable to a faith organisation as to any other voluntary organisation. The perception is that public money should not be spent on promoting religion. When this happens, faith organisations’ distinctiveness is not recognised and there can be perceptions of ignorance about, or even a bias against faith organisations, or a sense that they are only supported by government as a way of meeting government agendas.

“...it is clear that the state believes that through faith based networks it can "reach" and involve sections of the urban and excluded part of the population that statutory agencies and secular voluntary organisations are unable to reach. A more sceptical reading of this approach is that government is desperate to identify and co-opt leaders and organisations with whom they can "do business" in order to offer legitimacy and propaganda for the "war against terrorism", manage antisocial behaviour and social unrest in the nation's dangerous places, to deliver votes, and to mute critical dissent. Sceptics also suggest that saving government expenditure is also a strong motivating factor.”<sup>26</sup>

Such scepticism can be supported by the findings of a recent research project by Lowndes and Chapman<sup>27</sup> which found that Christians involved in such social action perceive that ‘The government doesn’t want to hear about what makes us faithful people. They’ll fund us if we don’t do anything religious with the money’. The London Churches Group (2002, 20) observed that local

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<sup>26</sup> Smith p10

<sup>27</sup> Lowndes, V. and Chapman R (2006) *Faith, hope and clarity: Developing a model of faith group involvement in civil renewal* 2006 [www.togetherwecan.info/acc/faith\\_hope\\_and\\_clarity.html](http://www.togetherwecan.info/acc/faith_hope_and_clarity.html)

government officers were often cautious about engaging with faith groups due to concerns that they would use funding for evangelism or proselytising.

On the whole, this is true of other funding bodies such as grant making trusts or the Big Lottery. Many stipulate they will fund faith organisations to carry out certain work, but not to 'promote religion'.

If the government were to recognise the faith sector as a distinct Sector with special provisions or legislation this may help religious groups and organisations to raise their profile and counter secularisation. However, says Smith in an increasingly plural society it becomes impossible to demonstrate that organisations within the faith sector have more in common with each other than with organisations outside the sector.

"The variety of organisation size, management structure, type, culture, values and ethos is possibly just as wide as in secular voluntary / community sector. An assumed commonality tends to push them into inter-faith collaboration, when in fact religious groups are more likely to regard close competitors than totally secular bodies as children of the devil. In the English context where lukewarm religion is often regarded more favourably than the "hot gospel" tradition regarded as typically American, it is hard to see how any policy can be devised that can accommodate theologies of sectarianism or give space for proclaiming faith and persuading people to convert. Although promoting social cohesion is in the air, any support of, or perceived favouritism for particular faith groups risks provoking conflict. "<sup>28</sup>

Alternatively, people of faith could, says Smith seek to live out their activist calling within the structures of society playing roles as active citizens, social entrepreneurs and radical voices against the status quo. In such a model, organisations can be either explicitly or implicitly religious and be free to work in partnership with other organisations. Whilst this approach may sit well within a post modern understanding Smith identifies a number of weaknesses.

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<sup>28</sup> Smith p14

Either most believers stay within the 'comfort zones' of their own faith groupings and their witness is not, therefore in an arena where they will make much difference, or they are so isolated, away from their faith grouping that they are unable as an individual within a secular agency to 'bear much fruit'.

As an extrinsic fuzzy set the Foxtan Centre can operate as a faith-related organisation operating successfully within the voluntary and statutory sectors. Indeed, it can be seen to be bridging the faith-secular divide. By utilising the skills of Trustees, staff and volunteers of different faiths and of none under a Christian banner it can be seen to be its own bi-culture promoting discussion and understanding of different cultural perspectives.

### **Conclusion**

This essay argues that the Foxtan Centre is best understood as being a faith-related organisation. Its approach to its mission is that of an extrinsic fuzzy set organisation. This approach allows it to respond most effectively to the cultures and contexts within which it operates while holding in creative balance the desire

- to witness to Christ in a way that is true to an understanding of the Scriptures;
- to do so in a way that does not prevent any who need its services from accessing them
- to utilise the funds of grant making organisations with integrity

To do so successfully means that being an extrinsic fuzzy set, is its only legitimate model of mission.

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