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This latest volume in a series of publications under the banner of ‘ancient faith, future mission’ contains an eclectic assortment of essays by fifteen contributors (most of them Anglican), loosely gathered round the subject of fresh expressions of Church in relation to the Kingdom of God. Believing that ‘both the Church and the Kingdom of God are important and related in God’s purposes,’ the editors regret a perceived tendency in church circles to emphasise the importance of either ecclesiology or missiology at the expense of the other (p. xiv). Accordingly, ‘This book seeks to take a non-dual and integrated approach to holding both Church and the Kingdom of God in tension. It tells the story of how fresh expressions of Church have sought to address some of the really complex and difficult issues of life in the real world, while also coming together in worship and knowing the Church community as a deep spiritual home’ (p. xv).

The book is a response to the criticism that fresh expressions emphasise their potential benefits to individuals as religious consumers, with little, if any, corresponding sense of a consequential commitment to transformational action in the world. In fact, the kind of spiritual introversion that arises from an individualistic perspective is neither necessarily nor particularly a feature of fresh expressions. All Christian communities are required to nurture the sort of discipleship that fulfils the twin vocations of Church and Kingdom.

But is ‘tension’ the most appropriate image for the relationship between Church and Kingdom? The editors think so: ‘Whether we like it or not there is a tension between the words “church” and the “Kingdom of God”’ (p. xiii). Whereas the word ‘church’ concerns the call of Christians to be gathered into a spiritual community to worship and serve God, ‘the Kingdom of God concerns the world where God is at work bringing justice, reconciliation and restoration between God and all life, with Christians responding to the call to join in with that work’ (p. xiii). If dualism is to be avoided, a great deal hinges on the precise way in which Church and Kingdom are integrated ecclesiologically and their twin vocations held ‘in tension’.

In the opening essay on ‘Fresh Expressions, the Cross and the Kingdom’, Rowan Williams expertly sketches the theological contours that should shape our understanding of the Christian life. Whereas the cross signifies the emptying and reshaping of self by radical grace, the Kingdom signifies hope for a transformed world and society. He then poses three questions as the basis for honest and faithful discipleship. Paraphrasing, how does ‘a mature and biblical
community': (1) enable its members individually to enter more fully into the central mystery of Christ's relationship with his Father; (2) collectively make a difference to wider society through its presence and activity; and (3) facilitate the mutual building up of its members in their discipleship (pp. 4–5)?

For the former Archbishop of Canterbury, ecclesiology attempts to ground what we say about the Church in what we say about the active God of Scripture, so that our understanding of church life is not primarily about promoting a human institution but about a new humanity that is created by the events of Easter. The challenge for fresh expressions, in their pursuit of culturally relevant forms of church life, is ‘to keep the focus on the action of God, rather than on the choices and preferences of human agents’ (p. 9). The significance of the sacraments is that they are ‘effective enactments of the acts of God’, so that ‘when we have our sacramental teaching and practice clear, we are likely to have our transformational social vision clear as well’ (p. 9).

Surely, this is just another way of expressing the classical definition of the Church as a *coetus fidelium* gathered round the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments in order first to be transformed and then sent out to engage in transformational action in the world. Such an emphasis on the action of God suggests that the Church is sign, instrument and foretaste of the Kingdom in the particular sense of being sacramental in character. As such, the Church is more than a convenient junior partner in the divine plan or a human community in which God's saving activity happens to be concentrated in essentially transient forms of Christian life. Rather, the Church is the providentially structured or (to use the classical language) ‘ordered’ and grace-bearing body of Christ through which God has chosen to act in the world by means of specific mandated actions, as testified in the New Testament and transmitted in the Apostolic Tradition. In this approach, the Church's ‘being’ and ‘doing’ are related such that the Church first ‘is’, then ‘does’.

Of course, fresh expressions are not noted for being anti-sacramental. As Graham Cray explains: ‘A minority of fresh expressions begin with eucharistic worship, but all need to progress towards it, at an appropriate stage of their development as a Christian community’ (‘Communities of the Kingdom’, p. 26). Still, what constitutes ‘an appropriate stage’ for the celebration of the sacraments is a loaded ecclesiological and missiological question that requires further study.

The remaining essays in this volume, written mostly by practitioners, describe some of the ways in which fresh expressions are already, or might become, engaged in the process of transforming society and the world through their presence and action. Two examples illustrate the range of activities, but raise unanswered questions about the nature of the Kingdom and its relation