

**Address by Bishop Roger:  
Colchester Deanery Chapter Summer Evening, Thursday 19th July 2018**

There's a lovely cartoon which features a dog on a unicycle riding across a high wire while balancing a vase on top of his head. He has a cat in his mouth, a hula hoop around his waist and he's juggling four balls. The caption reads: 'High above the hushed crowd, Rex tried to remain focused. Still, he couldn't shake one nagging thought: He was an old dog and this was a new trick.'

Now - looking around here today I wouldn't dare to suggest that I am in the company of some ageing canines but I have a question for us... How does an organization that has been around for so long that has a deeply embedded culture and long established ways of operating how does an organization like that innovate?

There has been church for 2000 years and the Church of England has been around for nearly 500 years (1534); we have been around for a long time. WE ARE OLD DOGS. So what have we learnt about innovation?

Well, for the church we've always had to balance innovation with keeping the show on the road. In one sense - for us - even today it is business as usual: priests still live in vicarages and lead services in churches; they take baptisms and weddings (quite often in that order) and they also take funerals, chair church councils and sit on governing bodies of schools.

But - at the same time - the ground has begun to shift and things are beginning to change. The parish system is beginning to creak. People no longer define themselves just by where they live; for many people their networks are more important than their neighbourhoods. Who they work with; who they spend their leisure time with; These things may define them more.

Meanwhile society is becoming increasingly fragmented; the proportion of children living in lone-parent families has rocketed; more people are living alone; the population is ageing and many people are 'cash rich but time poor'.

What have we said as a church was that, while people's need for God remained... the way that we do church had to change. A former Bishop of Oxford said that today's priests may be ministers of the last rites of the church as we know it. That same bishop said that those priests of today and tomorrow need to be able to think outside the conventional church shaped box. But, he said, the situation is more complex because we need to be living in two worlds at the same time.

He said 'It's as if the ship has to undergo a refit while still at sea; it can't retreat to dry dock and take time out.' We have to do the future thinking while the former model is still surviving because if we leave it too long the 'catch up difference' becomes too great

Friends, for old-dog organisations like ours this is a real challenge. How do we undergo a refit while still at sea? How do we do the future thinking while the former model is still - not only surviving but also needs to be resourced and maintained?

In the short time that I have I want to look at how we manage that tension between keeping the ship afloat (which takes a lot of resources) and - at the same time - innovating, refitting, rebooting; reimagining how we could do things in the future.

Ed Catmull is a computer scientist and is the current president of Pixar Animation Studios and Walt Disney Animation Studios. He was the man behind the film 'Toy Story' that forever changed the way that animated movies would be made. Ed wrote a book - released a couple of years ago -

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in which he talked about how we might overcome the unseen forces that stand in the way of true inspiration. And in this book, called *Creativity Inc*, there is a chapter called 'The Hungry Beast and the Ugly Baby' During the 1980s and 1990s Ed was at Disney's Burbank headquarters. Disney were on a roll. They were producing films like *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin* - *The Lion King*. Things were going well. But Ed kept hearing the executives say 'You've got to feed the beast.' The studio had to find new projects to justify and usefully occupy its growing staff. It's recent success had created a monster; a beast that needed to be fed an uninterrupted diet of new material and resources in order to function. The place became a production line and quality suffered - across the board. From 1994 to 2010 not a single Disney animated film opened at number 1 at the box office. Why? because people had got to thinking that their job was just to feed the beast.

Now the church is pretty beastly and what Ed Catmull found at Disney would be true for us that in such an environment , originality is fragile, innovation is difficult and continuity - keeping the ship afloat, feeding the beast – becomes, whether we like it or not, an all-consuming activity.

Original ideas and new ways of working are fragile. And Ed Catmull says that such ideas are also truly ugly; awkward and unformed, vulnerable and incomplete. They need nurturing in the form of time and patience in order to grow.

What that means is that they have a hard time coexisting with the beast. If we are to be innovative then we need to be careful that we don't judge new things, new ideas - new ways of doing stuff - by the standards that only the mature can meet.

In the church, I think we've actually been successful in incubating some significant new developments. About 2 or 3 years ago some research was done in 10 of the 41 dioceses in the Church of England including the Diocese of Chelmsford (the area of the Church of England covering Essex and part of East London). What we found was amazing. Across those 10 areas There were 477 churches that weren't what you might think of when I say the word church. They are what we call fresh expressions of Church. Many of them met in a community facility or a pub or a café.

The nature of their meetings is different; Some are targeted at particular people from surfers and skateboarders to young parents, business people and the elderly. These are new ways of doing church. And across those 10 areas surveyed something like 21,000 people were attending these kinds of churches. (That's about the same number as would attend all forms of church old and new in a medium sized diocese or area).

All *that* has happened over the last 14 or 15 years and most of that growth has happened over the last 8. It's happened because – nationally - we invested significant resources into these new forms. And we've worked hard to get an acceptance of these new ways of doing church right across the board. We've had to change our practices; our training programmes; our legislation, all the time responding to something Dr Rowan Williams said when he was Archbishop. He asked: How does the church organise itself in such a way that it doesn't simply send out the message that new expressions, new encounters are a kind of tolerable eccentricity on the edge... but neither does it send out the message that everything people are doing at the moment is wrong and they need to forget it?

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We need to protect and resource these fragile - often ugly and unformed new ventures - while still feeding the hungry beast while still keeping the ship afloat. The danger we faced as a church (if I'm honest) was probably from nay-sayers; people who would dismiss these new ventures without ever giving them a second glance.

Father Gabriel Daly says of the church that "hope for the future is all too easily frustrated by the dead hand of the past; when fresh insights are measured against old formularies and when tradition instead of being understood as a living thing is reduced to dogmas which are entombed in the ruins of past cultures."

That's what we were up against. That's why this new stuff needed protecting. Now Ed Catmull says this about protection: When someone hatches an original idea it may be ungainly and poorly defined but it is also the opposite of established and entrenched and that is precisely what is most exciting about it. If - while in this vulnerable state - it is exposed to naysayers who fail to see its potential or lack the patience to let it evolve, it could be destroyed. Part of our job is to protect the new from people who don't understand that in order for greatness to emerge there must be phases of not-so-greatness'.

Now - this is a mixed bag; not everything you protect will come good; just as we might also want to say that our established ways of doing things aren't *all* bad. What was the beer that claimed it was 'unspoilt by progress'? ...there's something in that.

Again, Ed Catmull notes: The beast is a glutton but also a valuable motivator. The baby is so pure and unsullied; so full of potential. But it's also needy and unpredictable and can keep you up and night. The key is for your beast and your babies to coexist peacefully.

And we need to note that the needs of the Beast seem to trump the needs of the baby time and time and time again. The beast is always hungry; it's expensive; and in an organization like this then it often has the first and final say as to how we make best use of our workforce.

And innovation - and ugly babies - can also be very demanding and are not always efficient at first. They can - of course - occupy our workforce but not in a way that immediately delivers the results we need.

So it's tempting not to refit the ship at all. to turn a blind eye to the things that are now looking shabby and to try and ignore the things that no longer work. Because innovating and protecting the new is a hard and courageous thing to do. But new ideas - new ways of doing things - do need protecting if they are to be given the time to evolve.

Business as usual does not need protecting. Ed Catmull says: 'Managers do not need to work hard to protect established ideas or ways of doing business. The system is tilted to favour the incumbent. The challenger needs support to find its footing. And protection of the new - of the future - not the past must be a conscious effort.

There was a Pixar film called Ratatouille in which the hero - Remy - a rat worked as a chef in a high class restaurant. But there was a jaded and much feared restaurant critic called Anton Ego who was thin because - as he put it "If I don't love it, I don't swallow." At the end of the film he says Remy's talents have "challenged his preconceptions about fine cooking and have rocked him to his core". In many ways, the work of a critic is easy, he says. We risk very little yet enjoy a

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position over those who offer up their work and their selves to our judgement. We thrive on negative criticism, which is fun to write and to read. But the bitter truth we critics must face is that, in the grand scheme of things, the average piece of junk is probably more meaningful than our criticism designating it so.

But there are times when a critic truly risks something, and that is in the discovery and defence of the new. The world is often unkind to new talent, new creations. The new needs friends.

I began this talk by recalling a cartoon of a dog but there is another cartoon I've seen that features a man and his cat looking together at a tray of cat litter. The man is saying very sternly to the cat, "Never, ever, think outside of the box." Friends, the time has come to not only think outside of the box but also to see how we can resource, champion and protect those in our organization who do.