

Editorial Matters

I remember some time ago – it turns out that it was almost exactly ten years ago – I read a wonderful piece in *New Directions* by ‘William Paley’ on the Turnbull Report. ‘Archdeacon Paley’, for those who did not know, was described as a recently deceased Trinidadian Macaw and a well known commentator on Church affairs whose carer, the late David Nicholls, encouraged him to publish the article originally as Jubilee Discussion Paper 108. The heart of the article¹ was a critique of the ideological underpinnings of the Turnbull Report (‘The Report reflects a kind of liberal Protestant high churchism, and is light years away from a truly catholic understanding of the church. It is what is produced when liberal evangelical bishops eat prayer breakfasts with conservative evangelical businessmen’) though what particularly struck me at the time and has stuck with me every since were its concluding comments on ‘vision’:

The term ‘vision’ has in recent years had an interesting history. It used to be a religious concept, such as the vision of God’s glory in Isaiah 6 or the vision of the great cosmic battle seen by St. John the Divine on the isle of Patmos. The term was then taken over by organisation theory, its meaning was changed in a crucial way, and in recent years it has been re-imported by the church in its new form. So suffragan bishops today talk of ‘creating a vision’ for the parish and the present Report refers similarly to ‘developing a vision’ (pp. 40, 70, 75, 120, 122). The very essence of a vision, in the earlier sense, is that it is not created or developed by us but received. Despite ‘the theology of the gracious gift’ (p. 7), proclaimed in the early sections of the Report, the vision developed by the House of Bishops ‘at regular intervals’ (p. 122) – is to be part of a sharply focused and purposeful role: not much room for gracious gift here! It is fascinating to imagine Ezekiel saying to himself ‘O dear, it’s Thursday I MUST get on and develop my vision’. The vision, developed and articulated by the Bishops, would then be debated by the Synod and handed over to the proposed Council which would work out ‘strategies and resources for translating the vision into action’ (p. 122).

Sadly, a similar analysis could perhaps be offered for the recent history of the term ‘mission’. All institutions and charities and many churches – now in some places even individuals – have some clearly articulated ‘mission statement’ which will offer everyone who sees it a brief and lucid summary of the group’s (or individual’s) purpose for existence. Of course, these statements often become a stream of clichés and jargon and typing ‘mission statement generator’ into Google can lead you to various sites which will provide hours of fun as they churn out mission statements for you.

Anvil itself has long defined itself (if you ever look on its back and inside covers!) as ‘An Anglican Evangelical journal for theology and mission’. As we approach our twenty-fifth anniversary, the Editorial Board and Management Team have been

¹ The piece can be read in full online at <http://trushare.com/18NOV96/NO96PALE.htm>

thinking recently about the journal's future role and 'mission' and I hope to be able to say more about this in a future editorial. Given our focus as a journal and also given the widespread currency (we now have a whole series of 'Mission-Shaped' reports and books covering not just mission-shaped church but mission-shaped spirituality, children, youth, parish) but also perhaps significant confusion about 'mission' language in the Church of England we really could not ignore the publication last year of a 581-page volume entitled *The Mission of God* by leading evangelical Anglican biblical scholar, Chris Wright. Its title starkly reminds us that 'mission' is not our project but is something we receive from God whose mission is determinative for our mission.

Chris has served (since 2001) as International Director of the Langham Partnership International. This is a group of ministries originally founded by John Stott who all work to strengthen the church in the Majority World through fostering leadership development, biblical preaching, literature and doctoral scholarships (more information at www.langhampartnership.org). He is also currently Chair of the Lausanne Theology Working Group and previously served for five years from 1983 in India, teaching Old Testament at the Union Biblical Seminary (UBS), Pune as a mission partner with Crosslinks (formerly BCMS). While at UBS he taught a variety of Old Testament courses at BD and MTh levels. He then returned to the UK as Academic Dean at All Nations Christian College (an international training centre for cross-cultural mission) where he became Principal in September 1993. In addition to the many Christians who have benefitted personally from his teaching ministry, he has shaped much evangelical thinking, preaching and ministry through his writings, including not only significant biblical commentaries (on Deuteronomy and Ezekiel) but major works in the area of ethics (most recently brought together in another weighty volume from IVP, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*).

This issue of *Anvil* is devoted to engaging with *The Mission of God*. A short introduction to the volume (drawn from the book itself) for those readers still to buy and read a copy also offers an outline of the book's structure. We then have four review articles responding to the work from the authors' different backgrounds and perspectives. Dr Cathy Ross, originally from New Zealand, has taught mission in various contexts and is now Manager for the CMS Crowther Centre for Mission Education and J V Taylor Fellow in Missiology at Regent's Park College and Wycliffe Hall in Oxford. The Revd Mike McCoy currently serves as a parish priest in the diocese of Port Elizabeth in South Africa and has been actively involved in theological education in Africa and served for a number of years on the Anglican Communion's standing commission on mission. The Revd Tim Dakin grew up in Kenya and returned there after study in England to lead a Church Army college before taking up his current post as General Secretary of the Church Mission Society. The Revd Michael Jensen is currently completing doctoral studies at Oxford University and previously taught at Moore College in the Diocese of Sydney, Australia. Each of them offers an appreciative but not uncritical engagement with aspects of the book and Chris Wright kindly agreed to respond to their work in the final article of this special issue.

I hope that the issue as a whole will stimulate you theologically and shape you practically. Also, if you haven't bought a copy of Chris' book I hope you will buy it. If you have bought it but haven't yet read it then I hope you will be encouraged by our four reviewers that it well repays careful study so that whenever we talk or think of 'mission' we do so shaped not by the common understanding of the business and management world but by the Scriptures which make known to us the mission of God.