

DAVID EVANS

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## Turnbull and Mission: an Open Letter

**With the Turnbull proposals being debated in November in General Synod, we publish this open letter by a former missionary and General Secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of the Anglican Communion, who is now the General Secretary of the South American Mission Society. David Evans sounds an alarm. He fears that the adoption of the proposals as presently conceived will only serve to marginalize and diminish the commitment of the Church of England at its heart to mission and evangelism. While he speaks entirely on his own behalf, there is no doubt that he expresses views quite widely held by those in our church who are most involved and concerned for the effective participation of our church in mission 'from everywhere to everywhere'.**

The Turnbull process is putting the squeeze on Mission. And time is running out as the Turnbull proposals will be debated in the November Synod with a view to lasting decisions being made. Could we be repeating the process that eventually took the International Missionary Council into the World Council of Churches structures and, as some would say, into institutional oblivion? It can hardly be an encouraging sign that also at this time the Anglican Consultative Council has decided to abolish its Department of Evangelism, so ably headed by Cyril Okorochoa since its inception to coincide with the Decade of Evangelism. Apparently its concerns are to be absorbed into the over-weighty portfolio of Canon John Peterson, the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion. It has been stated before that when all is classified as mission, nothing actually is.

It has been argued in the context of our theological colleges that where mission is concerned we really need missionary theology permeating everything rather than a separated and compartmentalised missiology. But we are also a long way removed from that ideal with the present Turnbull proposals. Let me remind readers of the more recent changes since the original Turnbull Report was published.

The first proposals envisioned a Mission Resources Division, which under one Chairman would bring together the former Board of Mission, the Board of Social Responsibility, the Board of Education and the Council for Christian Unity. This has now become 'Church and World'. The very title lacks any dynamic relationship between the church and the world. The word 'and' hardly evokes the missionary thrust of the church's tasks in the world. It is flat and uninspiring. Again, we are clearly taught that the unity of the church is to be sought in order that the world

may more easily believe its missionary message. Also, the widespread sociopolitical concerns of the present Board of Social Responsibility must not be divided from the effective communication of the whole gospel. We have come to understand more clearly that the mission task of the whole church involves the total transformation of the world. And how could the crucial task of education be separated from the understanding of our call to teach the Christian faith? Not only this, but the worldwide Anglican Communion has been represented through the Partnership for World Mission, a committee of the present Board of Mission. World mission relationships have historically been undertaken by the mission agencies of the Church of England. The recently acclaimed 'Growing Partnership' document was well received in Synod and all levels of mission interest in the Church of England, from enthusiastic individuals to the system of linked dioceses were expressly encouraged to use the expertise of those C of E mission agencies. And yet with the present proposals, the Partnership for World Mission will be further removed from the Archbishops' Council than it is from the present Policy and Standing Committee of General Synod.

An 'impartial' appraisal might well feel there is a deliberate marginalization of mission in all of this. The role of the Church of England in world mission today is of course very different from that of our Victorian forbears. We are into the business of promoting mission from everywhere to everywhere, and we are more likely to be receiving from the South ourselves or supporting South to South mission or acknowledging three or four new creative mission centres, such as Singapore in Asia, Kenya in Africa, and Brazil in South America. But to appear to downgrade concern for mission at least through its institutional expression can only lead to further downsizing of our church in these homelands. We need the younger churches' vibrancy to reactivate us into more effective cross-cultural mission here. And we need to fulfil international responsibilities with resources of experience in the mission enterprise. There are many opportunities of service ministries throughout the world now that most national churches have their own leadership. Mission is by no means over.

As the previous occupant of the See of Durham would undoubtedly and uncomfortably ask – 'What's it all for?' I believe we must all agree that better management, higher efficiency, sounder accountability are only desirable as they are intermediate objectives. We aim ultimately to restructure so that a greater number of people may come to acknowledge and worship the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. That is achieved by deliberately lining up more with God's mission to the world. I sense that streamlining procedures and simplifying structures would have the approval of the one who sent out the Seventy relatively unencumbered. But I also remember that he expressly said 'seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these other things will be added to you'. This is what mission must supply to restructuring – a permeating and persuading sense of purpose and priority. I remember how struck we all were in the days when the province of Nigeria showed its commitment to the Decade of Evangelism by establishing eight missionary dioceses and consecrating eight missionary bishops to bring them into being. Now mission really did dominate the agenda there.

I don't believe for a moment that mission has been sidelined deliberately in the Turnbull proposals. But that it has happened seems clear. One of the reasons for the marginalizing is indubitably that the main input for the exercise came from those with managerial expertise. Many have already commented on the domination of managerial rather than missiological issues. The result effectively is that an extra layer of bureaucracy separates those who fulfil the function of 'mission specialists' from those who take vital decisions in church life.

Another reason seems to be that the word mission itself has become politically correct in the world at large, to the extent that it is evacuated of its biblical meaning and content. Mission for some at least is little more than an official statement of a business policy. So all the new boards and councils have mission statements without necessarily giving evidence of being a vital part of the One Holy Catholic and *Apostolic* Church.

Another reason for concern expressed often by the Mission Agencies of the Church of England is the dangerous separation between 'Ministry' and 'Mission'. What is the point of training and equipping and paying for an ordained ministry if those men and women are not totally convinced that they are an integral part of God's mission to a needy world and are launched into demanding missionary tasks in these islands and beyond. Young men and women are not going to feel God's call to ordained ministry in the Church of England unless they sense a thrustful purposefulness about our overall image, in our national and local institutions and in our daily practice of living out and speaking out the unique worth of Jesus Christ to the present generation.

**The Rt Revd David Evans** is General Secretary of the South American Mission Society and a member of the Board of Mission of the Church of England. The letter includes issues which have been fully discussed in various fora. But the content of the letter remains a personal contribution without any pretence to official status or voice on behalf of the Mission Agencies, PWM or the Board of Mission.