

‘Presence and Prophecy, a heart for mission in theological education’

An Introduction from the Board of Mission

1. *Presence and Prophecy, a heart for mission in theological education* is a major ecumenical report from the Mission Theological Advisory Group (MTAG), established jointly by the Board of Mission and the Churches’ Commission on Mission (CCOM) in 1991. Five members were appointed by the Board and five by CCOM. From 1991-2001 it was chaired by the Rt Revd Dr Michael Nazir-Ali, the Bishop of Rochester, a member of the Board during that period. As an ecumenical working group its remit was to reflect theologically on mission issues affecting all the churches. Alongside substantial pieces of work it has also produced occasional papers on a number of subjects and offered comment to enquiries.

Background and origins

2. The first major piece of work completed by MTAG was *The Search for Faith and the Witness of the Church*, published in 1996. This report, widely used and commended, looked at ‘barriers to belief’ in five areas of modern life and the gospel’s response to them. It attracted particular attention for its examination of implicit religion in people’s lives and for its study of contemporary spirituality. The report came to Synod in July 1997 where it was not only debated, but discussed in study groups whose feedback was very helpful in shaping and adapting educational aspects of the material.

3. Once that report began to be used more widely it became clear that there was a need for some of its material to be more widely examined and developed. This became very evident during a conference on *Making Christ Known* jointly organised by the Advisory Board for Ministry and the Board of Mission with the staffs of theological colleges and courses looking at how a mission perspective could be brought to bear in the preparation of ordained ministry.

4. In the follow up process to that Conference MTAG was given the task of reflecting in an ecumenical context on the question of how people are equipped for mission through theological education.

How the work was done

5. The resulting work, *Presence and Prophecy* has been produced not just by the group but with the help of many people involved in theological education and in particular disciplines. Not all have been friends of the mission perspective, but each has helpfully contributed to an ongoing conversation about mission which has allowed MTAG to respond to their thoughts and ideas. To this extent *Presence and Prophecy* is not just about how theological education could be challenged and changed by mission thinking but also how mission thinking is confronted by other disciplines and must itself respond. The resulting conversation is therefore one in which MTAG invites all others to join. A ***Study guide*** prepared by Simon Barrow of CCOM is included as a GS Misc in order to help people enter the conversation at the appropriate point for them. MTAG's work has further been shaped and guided by times of prayer and reflection and a selection of these is being published as a companion to *Presence and Prophecy*

under the title *Transparencies*, also being circulated to Synod members.

What's in Presence and Prophecy?

6. ***Presence and Prophecy*** begins with an analysis of aspects of the world we live in and seeks to balance those observations with a missiological picture of the way God sees our world. In these ***Settings***, the group has included stories and illustrations of mission and a discussion of styles of teaching and learning. In the second part, ***Illuminations***, the group considers what different subjects in the theological curriculum look like when viewed through a mission perspective. In the third part ***Heartenings*** it looks at the challenges to mission and at the sources of wisdom and hope for all people.

Why a debate at Synod?

7. ***Presence and Prophecy*** is brought to Synod for comment and debate because of the significance of this work that MTAG has undertaken for influencing the way in which people are equipped for ministry from a mission perspective. As a Church we are living in a new missionary setting which requires new models and emphases in the way we equip our ordained and lay leadership. This report provides important material to assist in that process.

8. In its preparation MTAG has held conversations with many different people from across the Churches and the Board believes that it is important for Synod members to make their contribution so that the follow up process can take account of those views. It is important because ***Presence and Prophecy***, like the earlier report ***The Search for Faith***, is more than a report. It is a contribution to a process, which must be taken

forward to respond to the questions and ideas of many other people whose theological reflection will go far beyond the work so far undertaken.

9. Thirdly it is important that Synod consider the report because it is an ecumenical publication that will be discussed and debated in other Churches in Britain and Ireland. The reaction and views of the Synod of the Church of England will be a significant contribution to a much wider process that seeks to bring a more focused mission perspective to the preparation and equipping of lay and ordained leadership to the Churches of these islands.

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