MISSION AND CHURCH SCHOOLS

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William Temple is reputed to have said that the Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members. And if Temple didn't say it, someone should have done! Another quote about the church which is easier to tie down comes from Emil Bruner:

> *The Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning.*

The purpose of the church is to serve God's mission; bearing witness to Christ and making disciples locally and to the ends of the earth. Nuturing believers and helping them to grow in their faith is part of the role of the church, but the purpose of this is to equip believers to witness more effectively to Christ. That is what the church is for...

I've gone over this ground numerous times in this blog, so why pick it up again? The issue which has brought this question back to mind is the question of faith schools which has come back onto the agenda in the UK (Mouse has covered the question well). To be honest, the whole concept of faith schools is not something that I can get very excited about. However, I've read a number of comments like this one from Cranmer's blog which have given me pause for thought:

> *Bishop Pritchard... wants to evacuate Anglican schools of Christians.*

Surely, if the church is living up to its missional purpose, the whole idea would be to have as many people as possible from outside of the Church attending. The whole notion of a cosy little Anglican school which only educates children from Christian families is a denial of what the Church is all about in the first place! Schools need appropriate governance and staffing to ensure that they can maintain their missional ethos, but if they are truly Church schools they need to serve the community as a whole. (It was the Bishop of Oxford saying something of this ilk that started off the whole row in the first place.)

This question is symptomatic of the way Churches can easily lose the plot. When we pull up the drawbridge and hunker down inside our cosy church buildings (or schools), serving our own needs and making sure that we are comfortable, we have ceased to be the outward-facing, witnessing body that Jesus calls us to be.