

Go to the World! Go Struggle, Bless, and Pray: Bishops, Theological Schools, and Mission

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These words are from a hymn entitled “Go to the world” written by Sylvia G. Dunstan. It appears in the mission section of *Common Praise*, a 1998 hymnal of the Anglican Church of Canada. The words capture the very essence of theological education for the future church, a future into which we are being drawn even now.

At its Anglican Way Consultation in Singapore in May 2007, the Commission for Theological Education for the Anglican Communion (TEAC) identified signposts for the Anglican Way, emphasizing that we are “formed by scripture, shaped through worship, ordered for communion, and directed by God’s mission.”¹ Paragraph 12 reads:

As Anglicans we are called to participate in God’s mission in the world, by embracing respectful evangelism, loving service and prophetic witness. As we do so in all our varied contexts, we bear witness to and follow Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Saviour. We celebrate God’s reconciling and life-giving mission through the creative, costly and faithful witness and ministry of men, women and children, past and present, across our Communion.

The March 2006 Report of Theological Education for the Anglican Communion (TEAC) is encouraging in its effort “to take seriously the relationship between mission and theological education.”² The

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¹ Theological Education for the Anglican Communion, “The Anglican Way: Signposts on a Common Journey” (Singapore, May 2007), §§1–16. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/theological/signposts/english.cfm>.

² Theological Education for the Anglican Communion (TEAC), “Report to the Joint Standing Committee of the Primates and ACC” (March 2006), §4. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/theological/teac/reports/rep2006.cfm>.

post of Director of Theological Studies at the Anglican Communion Office is, as the report says, “a kind of first fruits”³ of the work of TEAC. Suggestions for further work include fostering and supporting the ongoing development of regional Anglican theological education networks; nominating theological education officers in all provinces; and setting up a permanent Anglican Communion Theological Education Commission to succeed TEAC. I am convinced that this emerging priority of theological education in equipping the church for God’s mission in the world is of the Holy Spirit. I believe that bishops have a critical role in highlighting this priority and enabling it to mature fully.

First and foremost, bishops must engage in conversation with heads of theological schools on a regular basis. I became aware of the importance of this as the diocesan bishop of the Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. The Atlantic School of Theology, founded in 1971, is an ecumenical school, training and forming men and women for ordained and lay ministries in the Anglican Church and in the United Church of Canada, and for lay ministries in the Roman Catholic Church. On an annual basis, the heads of churches met with the president. He reported on enrollment statistics in the various degree programs, curriculum revision, changes in faculty, funding issues, and other matters of an administrative nature. More importantly, he engaged us in conversation centered around the needs of the church. He called us to consider and name the context in which ministry was being carried out, and the kind of leadership required of those whom the school would be graduating and the churches ordaining. He was calling us to visit afresh our understanding of mission. That president was certain that, in the task of training and forming men and women for ministries, ordained and lay, the school was serving a servant church dedicated to God’s mission in the world.

The Ontario Provincial Commission on Theological Education (OPCOTE) in the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario is an umbrella organization representing the Provincial House of Bishops, the Provincial Synod, the four colleges, and each of the seven dioceses as well as the Toronto School of Theology and the Church’s Ecumenical Commission on Theological Education. The work of this body has done much to enhance relationships between dioceses and schools. Bishops and principals are determined to work in partnership

³ TEAC, “Report,” §6.

in preparing men and women for service in God's mission in the world. Bishop Michael Bedford-Jones, the outgoing chair, wrote in a November 29, 2007, e-mail:

OPCOTE has been a major factor over the years in enhancing the progress of Anglican Theological Education in Ontario, and is a model for other parts of Canada. My hope is that OPCOTE will continue to be a useful resource as the National House of Bishops pursues the various requests of General Synod for better funding and recognition as a core endeavour by the church. We recognize that as the church changes to meet its challenges, theological education must be in the forefront.

Recently the Council of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada endorsed a 2006 request of the House of Bishops to convene a national gathering on theological education in Canada. This gathering will address a wide range of topics, including a review of current patterns for selecting and preparing people for ordained ministry, common standards for selection and training, and common standards for spiritual and emotional readiness. This event is to be held in consultation with ecumenical partners in Canada and in concert with the work of TEAC.

To all such conversations, bishops must be fully committed. Within those conversations, I would suggest four areas that the bishops should address specifically.

Identify Mission as a Major Thrust in Shaping Curriculum

Many bishops applaud TEAC's initiative in drawing links between theological education and the Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God
- To teach, baptize, and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform the unjust structures of society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.⁴

⁴ Anglican Consultative Council, "The Five Marks of Mission," <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/fivemarks.cfm>.

The Report of TEAC to the Joint Standing Committee of the Primates and ACC speaks of “a considerable amount of interest and discussion generated by these links.”⁵ Many bishops have already begun to engage theological schools in the conversation. It will be important to watch the interplay between these conversations and those which the schools have with their accrediting bodies.

In the fall 2006 issue of the Alban Institute’s periodical *Congregations*, an article by Lawrence Golemon entitled “What Seminaries Do Well” refers to the major Carnegie study that found that “effective seminaries begin to cultivate ‘a pastoral imagination’ among new clergy.” The same holds true of laity. “The pastoral imagination is shaped in part by subject matter and practical techniques, but it is chiefly an integrative ability to perceive, interpret, and engage the world with theological insight and practical wisdom.”⁶

In a similar way, Archbishop Rowan Williams speaks of a theologically educated person as “someone who is reading the world in the context of the narratives that have brought God alive, savingly and transformingly. That means that a theologically educated person reads the Bible as a record of the changes impressed upon the human world by the living God.”⁷

The Rt. Rev. Don Phillips, Bishop of the Canadian Diocese of Rupert’s Land, wrote in a November 30, 2007, e-mail:

[W]ith the recognition of what is being called (in North America) ‘the Missional Church’ the enterprise of preparing ordinands for ministry in the Church might be more accurately described today as preparing ordinands (and church leaders in general) for ministry in the Church in the world. The measure is no longer ‘does this person function effectively in the Church?’ The measure is becoming ‘does this person function effectively in the Church so that the Church is functioning effectively in the world?’ This new context in which to measure ministry formation and training outcomes places a new challenge (and dilemma) on theological colleges.

⁵ TEAC, “Report,” §4.

⁶ Lawrence Golemon, “What Seminaries Do Well,” *Congregations* 32, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 17. Internal quotation from Charles R. Foster, Lisa Dahill, Lawrence Golemon, Barbara Wang Tolentino, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

⁷ Rowan Williams, “CEFACS Lecture” (Birmingham, November 3, 2004), quoted in TEAC, “Report,” §3.

Urge Teaching of an Ecclesiology Grounded in the Pauline Doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ in the World

The October 2006 document of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission entitled, “The Anglican Way: The Significance of the Episcopal Office for the Communion of the Church,” states that the bishop’s “evangelical office of proclamation and witness is a fundamental means by which those who hear the call of God become one in Christ. . . . The bishop encourages all God’s people to be bearers of the good news of Jesus and practice personal evangelism through words and actions.”⁸ The same document highlights the bishop’s role:

[T]o coordinate the gifts of the people of God for the building up of the faithful for the furtherance of God’s mission. . . . In the secular context of many cultures, success in life is mostly determined against a background of ruthless competition and individualism. In the church ‘we are all members one of another’ (Roman 12:5); and gifts are not the property of any one person but reside in the whole body for the purpose of strengthening the Church to serve God’s mission.⁹

Bishops must impress upon theological schools the importance of an ecclesiology that reflects what Lutheran pastor Michael Foss describes as a need for a shift from “cultures of membership to cultures of discipleship.”¹⁰ This call is wonderfully articulated in the Report of the Theological Education Review Group of the Episcopal Church of Sudan. It reads:

We affirm that all Christians are called to ‘learn Christ’ and that theological education is one way of describing the obligation that discipleship imposes on every member of the Body. The Church should aim to provide opportunities for all its members to study the wisdom and truth of Christ in relation to their own culture,

⁸ Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission (IATDC), “The Anglican Way: The Significance of the Episcopal Office for the Communion of the Church” (October 2006), Thesis Two. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/theological/iatdc/docs/2006theses.cfm>.

⁹ IATDC, “The Anglican Way,” Thesis Five.

¹⁰ Anthony B. Robinson, “This Thing Called Church, What is it Really?” *Congregations* 32, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 25.

vocation, interest and capacity. Provision of theological education should therefore be multi-layered and address the needs of the whole people of God.¹¹

Call for Cooperation in Restoring the Diaconate

In the Canadian publication *All Who Minister*, the editor, Maylanne Maybee, writes, “Ordination simply highlights and sacramentalizes these Christic qualities of the ministry of all the baptized.” She continues, “I believe orders are signs to the church of her nature, life, and mission. They do not deprive the people of God of their ministry of priesthood or of diaconal service to others. Rather, they spotlight that ministry, hold it up, and encourage it to happen.”¹² A number of years ago, the late Bishop of Nevada, Wesley Frensdorff, suggested:

[W]e imagine the local unit of the church as an ellipse, organized around two focal points. One focal point represents the life of the Church as it gathers for worship, learning, and fellowship; the other represents the Church in mission as it disperses for service and action beyond itself. There is interplay between these two aspects, but one is not more important than the other, nor is one complete without the other.¹³

The diaconate reminds us of this fundamental truth of our life in Christ and our work in the service of his Kingdom. Maybee, a noted advocate for the restoration of the diaconate, describes this distinct order of ministry as “a vital instrument of the church’s mission of reconciliation, justice, and peace making.” Declaring the need for a restored diaconate as “more urgent than ever,” she writes,

¹¹ TEAC, “Report,” §3.

¹² Maylanne Maybee, “Bringing the Light of Christ into Places of Darkness: The Diaconate in the Anglican Church of Canada,” in Maylanne Maybee, ed., *All Who Minister: New Ways of Serving God’s Peoples* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 2001), 188, 199.

¹³ Wesley Frensdorff, “Ministry and Orders: A Tangled Skein,” in Josephine Borgeson and Lynne Wilson, eds., *Reshaping Ministry: Essays in Memory of Wesley Frensdorff* (Arvada, Co.: Jethro Publications, 1990), quoted in Maybee, “The Bread Will Rise: The Distinctive Calling of the Laity,” in *All Who Minister*, 171.

[T]he world's deep hunger in our age is for a spirituality—a vision of holiness—that opens new spaces, that works for a global community, that recognizes modern day saints of any religion who inspire and exemplify good news to the captives and liberation to the oppressed, that offers hope for an end to violence, and that supplies grace in the face of the defilement of daily living: global warming, ecological collapse, AIDS, carcinogenic food, water that is poisonous and commodified.¹⁴

A restored diaconate will enable the church to address with much greater strength this deep hunger of which Maybee speaks so passionately. The restoration of the diaconate as a distinct rather than transitional order of ministry has come about as a result of conversation and commitments on the part of bishops and theological schools. For the sake of serving God's world well, conversations of this kind are to be encouraged everywhere in the Anglican Communion.

Encourage Study of the Essence of Episcopal Ministry

In his chapter “The Episcopate” in *All Who Minister*, noted Canadian bishop Michael Ingham surveys the development of the episcopate since the earliest of times, citing the letters of Ignatius, Hippolytus, Irenaeus, and Cyprian, each of whom has his own particular focal point for the role of the bishop. Ingham moves on to assess the exercise of episcopal ministry, concluding with some suggestions for reshaping this ministry. Such reshaping includes “recovering the primary apostolic purpose of the office as expressed in the Ordinal and shedding whatever is not found there.” He points out that much of what bishops are called to do in fact lies within the category of what needs to be shed; these tasks are what he describes as managerial rather than spiritual in nature. A real capacity to focus on the spiritual requires what he calls “a large degree of freedom from administrative and managerial function”—a freedom that would enable the bishop to read and reflect, to study and write, and to discern the movements of the Holy Spirit, not only within the church, but within the world.

“Bishops,” he writes, “should be teachers of the gospel first of all.”¹⁵ The church of the future will better equip its apostolic leaders

¹⁴ Maybee, “The Bread Will Rise,” in *All Who Minister*, 181, 187–188.

¹⁵ Michael Ingham, “The Episcopate,” in *All Who Minister*, 230.

for this ministry. It will encourage if not require adequate amounts of time for study, quiet, and sabbatical, that bishops might more fully live the vocation to which the church has called them: “to be one with the apostles”¹⁶ in proclaiming Christ’s resurrection. This is the primary role of the bishop as enunciated in most Ordinals throughout the Anglican Communion. Clarity with respect to this role will enhance the bishop’s capacity to carry out other roles—guardian of the faith, chief pastor, and wholesome example—with much more imagination.

So how does that happen? I trust that theological schools and the kind of support they can offer will be part of the response. As there is often only one bishop in a diocese, it is very important that bishops’ gatherings—in provincial or national houses, or at Lambeth—involve more significant blocks of time for study, quiet, and shared reflection on the exercise of *episcopé*. I see not only seasoned bishops but scholars of the church as a great resource for facilitating our learning in order that the prayer said for bishops at their consecration might be more fully realized.

Almighty Father, fill this your servant with the grace and power you gave to your apostles, that *he/she* may lead those committed to their charge in proclaiming the gospel of salvation. Through *him/her* increase your church, renew its ministry, and unite its members in a holy fellowship of truth and love. . . .¹⁷

In the call of God to “Go to the world . . . to struggle, bless and pray,” I am personally and profoundly moved by Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s observation:

There is a movement not easily discernable, at the heart of things to reverse the awful centrifugal forces of alienation, brokenness, diversion, hostility, and disharmony. God has set in motion a centripetal process, a moving toward the center, toward unity, harmony, goodness, peace and justice that removes barriers. Jesus says “And when I am lifted up from the earth I shall draw everyone to myself” as he hangs from his cross with outflung arms, thrown out to embrace all, everyone and everything, in cosmic embrace,

¹⁶ “The Ordination of a Bishop,” *The Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 638.

¹⁷ “The Ordination of a Bishop,” 639.

so that all, everyone, everything, belongs. None is an outsider, all are insiders, all belong. There are no aliens; all belong in one family, God's family, and the human family.¹⁸

Here is the desire and initiative of God at work to restore and renew all things in Christ. Here is a vision to which we are drawn, and a vocation to which we are called. Here is our life's work until that day when "the Church shall be gathered from the ends of the earth into God's Kingdom, where peace and justice are revealed, and we with all God's people, of every language, race and nation, share that banquet God has promised, through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ."¹⁹

¹⁸ Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999), 213.

¹⁹ Eucharistic Prayer 4, *Book of Alternative Services*, 203.

