

## Foreword

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What do responsible church leaders need to hear about mission and leadership?

When I left seminary years ago, I knew it was my particular vocation, my own mission, to serve from the parish rather than from the academy. I was eager to make theology practical in the world. I was eager to engage my people with a sense of mission, a sense of individual purpose in how they served God and the world. However, I learned quickly that, in the typical parish, “mission” was a word reserved usually for outreach and rather innocuous charitable causes. Parishes had mission committees set off in the same sort of vestry category as the maintenance committees. “Mission” was relegated to one task among many.

People in my parishes, on the other hand, were far ahead of the seminary-trained clergy I knew when it came to “leadership.” This was how they were engaging the world, and changing the world, in their businesses. The heads of successful businesses and corporations had a knack for leadership, a word that was rarely analyzed at my seminary. Often, it was these leaders in the world around me, in the parish, who taught me about good leadership and who most successfully related leadership to their own mission. Now it is hard to go anywhere in the western institutional world these days and not hear the words “leadership” and “mission.” Every corporate retreat or staff meeting wants to forge another mission statement, and more and more seminaries are focusing on leadership in ministry. Every member of the team is encouraged to be a leader of some sort.

As dean of an Episcopal cathedral which is also a very large parish, I realize the critical importance of leadership and mission, but I must also understand those terms from a distinctly Christian perspective. How can the Christian church add specifically Christian content to “mission” and “leadership”? Surely the church is not simply to

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accommodate whatever style of leadership or mission the world around us offers. Thus, I welcome an issue of the *Anglican Theological Review* which seeks to examine leadership and mission theologically. We need theological foundations, Christian theological foundations, for how solid parishes understand mission and leadership.

Of course, “thinking theologically” has been variously defined. At root, I have always considered that it means “making sense.” Thus, the question I ask of new and old theologians alike is this: How do leaders today make sense of the church and of the church’s mission in the world?

We have all suffered through the sermons of church leaders who struggle with this fundamental task of “making sense,” who often fail in their efforts to describe coherently that structure of divine reality they are trying to inspire others to see. On the other hand, we have all heard the sermon that startled us with beauty and elegance. Somehow or another, it made sense. It made enough sense to transform us. If we investigate sermons of this latter type, we will inevitably discover that “making sense” comes in various packages. Some sermons are rationally close to perfection, but others follow no ordinary pattern at all. Some are firsthand stories; some are outright fabrications. Some are humorous; some are somber. The same goes for mission events and projects and classes. Those projects and classes which attract people and gain energy are those which make sense.

The common characteristic of various styles of inspiring and transforming leadership is that each of those styles makes sense. In theological terms, “making sense” means “doing the theology.” The Christian church needs theology to make sense of the church and make sense of the world.

Moreover, effective theological thinking about mission and leadership should be comprehensive and provocative. In these days of polarized religious divisions, good theological thinking can also be either conservative or liberal. Christian theologies can be different and yet be orthodox; they can be different and still have the ability to inspire and transform. I might point out, for instance, the varying interpretations of atonement in Christian history; because no actual manner of atonement was ever included in our classical creeds, several different theories of atonement can be considered orthodox. Those various interpretations are one reason we still go to church on Good Friday, even though we’ve been to the service before. The same goes

for Christmas, really, or any other day of the calendar. Christian theologies can be different while still retaining their ability to inspire and transform.

For some of us, the personal story inspires; others of us need an academic essay. All of us, however, need the leader to have accomplished the theological project. Etymologically, of course, theology puts “God” and “Word” together; since *logos* means “order” as well as “word,” it also puts God and order together. I hope that current Christian writers about mission and leadership can provide some order for us!

That Christian order, we are fond of saying, emerges from Scripture and tradition, and from reason and experience. But Christian theology must always rely on something else, on that provocative inspiration that can come only from the Holy Spirit. This touch is what moves leaders to see new visions. It is what dares parishes to take on provocative mission.

I hope that the essays included in this volume will provoke and dare. I hope they will begin new conversations in churches and seminaries about how to think theologically about mission and leadership. Finally, I hope that God will pour the Holy Spirit into our hearts and minds, leading us into new theological truth in the days to come.

