

Theological Education

An APJN Committee Report

Extract from the report of an Anglican Peace and Justice Network meeting in Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand, November 2001

The APJN is aware that one of the most important tools for embedding a peace and justice consciousness in the life of the church is theological education. By this we mean not simply the training of clergy, but theological education of the whole people of God for the ministry of God in the world.

This education, whether carried out in traditional theological college settings, through theological education by extension, through adult education programs, or education for ministry programs, or through the educational programs of local churches, needs to be aimed at the formation of Christians for their vocation and ministry. At present, the church's systems of theological education are largely inadequate to this task. Theological maturity is not simply a product of increased understanding but is reflected in the transformation of the life of the church and its members to reflect the life of Christ. This is not possible unless peace and justice perspectives are embedded in all aspects of theological education.

In saying this we are not simply saying that peace and justice issues need to be on the curriculum although they certainly do. Even here it is not enough to add courses on peace and justice issues as if they were discreet areas of concern to be dealt with separately. All aspects of the curriculum need to be scrutinized in terms of the ideological commitments that shape what is taught and how it is taught. Biblical studies, historical and systematic theology, church history, and all the disciplinary areas that have characterized the theological curriculum are practised in ways that reveal assumptions about the type of community we have been, and aspire to be. Yet changes to the curriculum also need to be accompanied by changes in the practice of theological education. Peace and justice issues are at stake in pedagogical practice, in assessment of students and of the outcomes of theological education, in teacher-student relationships, in admissions and appointment policies of our institutions. We cannot hope to bring about the sort of transformation we seek unless the context for theological education, as well as its content, reflects the vocation of the church to peace and justice. In particular we need to encourage the presence of more young people, more women, and more persons of color in theological education. We also need to reject the assumption that theological education is only, or even primarily, about preparation for ordination. To encourage a learned ministry in the absence of a learned laity sets up a power differential that leads to a dependency at odds with the existence of communities of peace and justice.

Theological education of the type we would hope for needs to be contextual and responsive to the needs of the church in its particular, social, cultural, and economic settings. Often such contextual theology is encouraged by the

experience of other contexts, which allows us to see our own through new eyes. We would, therefore, recommend and encourage the establishment of intentional exchange programs for faculty and students as well as cooperative ventures between all centers for theological education throughout the Communion with a view to sensitizing all colleges to the impact of peace and justice issues both within their own context and within the wider Communion.