

The Changing Nature of Theological Education

Theological Education in the Anglican Church of Australia, Denis Kirkaldy, 1992. General Synod Paper No.2, Christian Education Publications: Sydney. 138 pages.

Many ministers trained more than twenty years ago would have little in common with a minister trained today. The changes in theological education have been dramatic and the changes continue. The General Synod of the Anglican Church has published a report in which Anglican minister and educationalist, Denis Kirkaldy, highlights the changes and raises some significant questions which need to be addressed.

Though this is a report about Anglican theological education, many of the issues are common to other denominations. The report arose from a concern within the Anglican General Synod Commission for Ministry and Training to highlight the changes which have taken place within the Anglican Church and "to consider the extent to which our present arrangements are effective in equipping our clergy for effective ministry in Australian society in the late twentieth century."

The introduction to the report indicates there had been remarkable uniformity for the period 1900-1970, but now there is "fragmentation and disarray". Kirkaldy examines the many styles of training existing in Anglican colleges by highlighting a number of educational models that are used. The models range from the traditional/University model with an emphasis on lectures and exams to a type of apprenticeship (usually with some formal base as well).

The report provides a brief historical reflection and then examines some reasons for the dramatic changes to theological education. These reasons are grouped:

1) Changes in Australian Lifestyle

Included here are: the decline of country centres; financial problems associated with increased staff costs, buildings and facilities; the widespread availability of

tertiary education; better travel arrangements; the changing role and status of clergy.

2) Changes in students

Including, increasing maturity (age) of candidates; increasing number of married candidates; increasing tertiary background, coupled with the diversity of tertiary training available. (Most candidates do not have a classical education).

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Other key issues include

- * **changing educational philosophies;** the tension between academic and practical training;
- * **rising costs** associated with training;
- * debate about local versus wider **control;**
- * improvements in ecumenical relationships;
- * the impact of a growing **lay education movement;**
- * dissatisfaction with models of training;
- * the relation of the College to the Diocese (or in the case of other denominations, to the relevant governing body);
- * the availability and use of government aid or reliance on private fees and the move toward increasing specialisation in theological education, reflecting the growing specialisation of ministries.

This report also raises questions about the practice of ordination. What is the link between ordination and training and what knowledge, skills and practical training are necessary for ordination? How do you impart such practical skills? Kirkaldy suggests that a basic list most would agree on would comprise: liturgical leadership (including preaching), teaching and marriage and bereavement counselling.

Other important points to note are:

* the impact of lay training on ordination training. Kirkaldy pleads for a greater emphasis in teaching candidates about Christian Education:

* the use of distance education (T.E.E.) and its relationship to the training of the laity and to candidates. Kirkaldy identifies five strands that would be helpful for candidates:

- (1) studies in Biblical Theology
- (2) Learning and study skills
- (3) Assessment of "personality" traits
- (4) Introduction to theological education and college lifestyle
- (5) Biblical Languages;

* a discussion of the special needs of rural dioceses (also see the thesis on Rural Ministry mentioned in the December 1992 issue of *Pointers*;

* the role of biblical languages in training. The author highlights the changes within educational circles, particularly noting the decline in the number of students who have studied ancient languages, the decline of interest in and the teaching of English grammar and the lack of identification that language staff have with the problems of contemporary students.

The appendices provide some excellent resources for people who want to look at these issues in more detail. There are college and student statistics, an interim report on the adequacy of training as perceived by Anglican clergy, basic information on the questionnaires used and a list of stimulating questions for discussion (which could easily be changed to reflect other denominational traditions). This report will stimulate and challenge all people engaged in, continuing in or receiving theological education.

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