

Theological Education: The Heart of Our Vision

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I appreciate the generosity of the editors of the *Anglican Theological Review* in inviting me, as Secretary to TEAC (Theological Education for the Anglican Communion), to contribute briefly to this issue of the *ATR*. I will not seek to describe the work and program of TEAC, as that has been ably done by Dr. Eileen Scully in the following article. Instead I will touch upon one or two principles which I believe are at the heart of our vision.

“What are we prepared to learn?” That was a question posed by Archbishop Rowan Williams in *Writing in the Dust*, the short but powerful book he wrote after the events of September 11, 2001, a day when he was participating in a conference in New York being held only yards away from the World Trade Center. The question was, of course, initially asked in relation to potential responses to the awful events of that day. But it is also a question that Archbishop Rowan seems to be asking members of the Anglican Communion to address seriously in various aspects of our life. It certainly seems to me to be a very apposite question to hold in mind when we consider theological education in the Anglican tradition.

When he asked the question in relation to September 11, the Archbishop’s own answer was clear: the need to take a moment to “write in the dust,” pausing to reflect and question ourselves, and making space and time to avoid any prepackaged solution or knee-jerk reaction. But in relation to theological education: what indeed *are* we prepared to learn? Theological education at its best must invite those who are engaged in it to make space and time, to delve deep, reflect, and question, and to avoid prepackaged solutions. Theological education involves the whole person, mind, body, and spirit. It is an ongoing process—or perhaps a “way.” TEAC deliberately chose the title “The Anglican Way” to describe that particular facet of its work. When

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Archbishop Rowan spoke as part of the presentation of TEAC to the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) 13 in 2005, he reflected that “the gospel overflows in theology. . . . Theology is perhaps first and foremost a celebration—a celebration that helps us find a way, or a truth that leads us into a life.” Through theological education we are invited to join this celebration, which links way, truth, and life—and then to become part of it for others. So I am particularly glad that in Dr. Scully’s full and very fair article she has picked up the attention TEAC has given to encouraging both clergy and lay Christians to discover that learning needs to be lifelong. It must not draw to a close with the rites of confirmation or ordination.

Dr. Scully also alludes in her article to the important tension in theological education between the contextual dimension and the received tradition of the church. This is actually mirrored in the work of TEAC itself. Although our task is to draw attention to essential principles, it is vital that each province really make them their own, and then be enabled to share their discoveries with the wider Communion. This interplay between the heritage we share in common and the contextual needs and gifts of different geographical regions is not unique to the Anglican tradition, but is certainly one of the main Anglican distinctives. And just as the Communion is wrestling in its whole life with the dialectic between received heritage and context, so Anglican theological education seems inevitably and rightly to act as a sort of prism which intensely refracts their engagement and tension. I would suggest that this is one point where the question “What are we prepared to learn?” is supremely relevant, and where the answer does call for a certain humility and willingness to take the time to “write in the dust.”