

theological and religious reflection, challenge those areas of society which need an ethical discussion, and relate to the worldwide theological debate.

CURRICULUM REFORM AT NEWTON THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

A Discussion Paper Prepared by the Faculty

Newton Theological College opened at its present site at Jonita, eight km from Popondetta, in 1981. A rural site had been chosen in preference to one proposed at Port Moresby, so that the students could make their own gardens. It was expected that most students would be ordained to serve in rural parishes, and so would need to keep in touch with village life. The site, and the need to make gardens, are major constraints upon the curriculum: they both encourage fellow-feeling with village life, and impede contact with town life, and with facilities such as 24-hour electricity.

The College recruits from all the Anglican dioceses, but, in recent years, most students have come from the diocese of Popondetta (Oro Province), with one or two, at most, from each of Aipo Rongo (the Highlands), New Britain, Port Moresby, and Dogura. The majority of students therefore speak Orokaivan or Ewe Ge. At present, we have nine students in the "final year", and 11 in the second year; there are 13 married students and seven single, and the families of married students live with them on site. There are five lecturers: three, including the Principal, Fr Walter Siba, from Melanesia, and two from England. At present, the subjects taught include Doctrine, Liturgy, Philosophy, Psychology, Spirituality, OT books, OT History, OT Theology, NT Theology, Life and Work of St Paul, Pastoral Studies, Ministry Today, Homiletics, Contextualisation, Church History, Missiology, and Christian Ethics. Among subjects usually covered in the first year are World Religions, with special reference to Islam in Indonesia, Sects, and Melanesian Religion. The staff are already beginning to co-operate more over teaching their separate subjects, in order to prepare for a more-integrated approach.

During 1986, the staff felt the need to examine and develop the curriculum. After various special meetings, at which ideas were discussed and agreed upon, recommendations were put forward to the College Council, which met on November, 8, 1986, as follows:

- a) The selection procedure for College entrants, with special reference to levels of academic ability and motivation.
- b) The need for a well-thought-out curriculum, with a clearly-stated theological and educational rationale.
- c) A fresh look at the students' "pastoral year", due to the fact that, in 1987, the church would be unable to provide suitable placements for students.
- d) The need for post-ordination training.

Underlying such recommendations, was the desire for greater professionalism in theological education. There was a felt need for a more-structured programme, with a firm theoretical base.

The College Council were pleased with the requests for curriculum reform, and promised that co-operation and encouragement would be given. They decided that there should be no first-year intake of students for 1987 so that the staff could have more time to do such work. They also realised that change in theological education cannot happen without having consequences for the way in which the church, as a whole, operates. In recognition of the link between education and church structures, the Council spent some time discussing the suitability of "base Christian communities", as a useful ecclesiological model for the Anglican church in Papua New Guinea. The idea of a deacons' year was given a favourable response by the bishops, but no decisions were made: Two bishops recommended that a foundation year of spiritual formation could be of great benefit. They also suggested that the College course might be improved by being extended by up to two or three more years. To sum up: whilst not strictly addressing themselves to each of the suggestions made by the staff, the episcopate did give their approval, and pledge their support, for the project of curriculum reform.

It became clear from the College Council meeting that an effective methodology of curriculum reform was of the utmost importance, if anything of positive value was to be achieved. The staff of Newton College were pleased to receive a committed response from the Council, and even more pleased by various statements made by the Archbishop on other matter, which suggested that such co-operation would be generous. An example of a generous attitude was the pastoral letter preparing for an

open forum at the beginning of the last Provincial Synod, in which Archbishop George Ambo urged his people to see the necessary dialogue, which needs to be conducted between tradition, present experience, and personal appropriation of the faith. He urged people to come together to express their views on such issues as priestly formation, and the liturgy, so that they could come to a common mind. This type of healthy openness was seen by the staff at Newton College as essential for curriculum reform: it could only be helpful.

In his last pastoral letter of February, 24, 1987, Archbishop George Ambo talked about the “present state of the Anglican church” and “the necessity of . . . critically . . . examining . . . its weaknesses and failures . . . in order to improve what is done”. He said that the Anglican church is in a “critical stage”, and that “we must see with new eyes” the structures and ways of governing the church. He made it clear that the Anglican church has great financial problems, and that its staff are paid very low allowances, which “made him feel ashamed”. He saw this as a problem, which “must not go on for ever”, and must be “solved”. In these ways, the Archbishop challenged every member of the Anglican church to share responsibility for their own future, by their thinking, and by their giving, at a level that would provide for the material needs of the sort of church they thought it was God’s will they should be. So, the discussion of curriculum reform at Newton College is related to the thinking of the whole Anglican church about what changes are appropriate and practicable in a critical stage of its life.

Since the College Council meeting, at least two important things have happened, which let the staff to realise that there must be even closer co-operation with the episcopate, if the curriculum reform is to be achieved. It was also realised that our expectations for reform must be modified, and that we must not try to do too much too soon. Firstly, we received a letter from one bishop outlining his wishes for priestly formation at Newton College, but these did not correspond at all well with the expectations of the staff. Secondly, a lengthy written request by the staff for controlled and specified reforms in College liturgical life was, after a year, completely rejected by the episcopate. There had been no consultation with the bishops before such requests had been made known to them, and so they had no way of knowing the thinking behind the requests. If there had been

prior consultation, the bishops might not have rejected them in the same way.

In 1987, the staff met again to discuss the curriculum, this time in the light of the Mercado report on “Forming Ministries in Melanesia”.¹ Important issues raised in this meeting included:

- a) The need to take into account the cultural backgrounds, and the ability, of the students.
- b) Do we help students to become culturally flexible and adaptable so that they can work in different areas of Papua New Guinea?
- c) The need for experts to assist in the process of curriculum reform.
- d) The need for staff training in various effective methods of teaching.
- e) Should we provide theological education for change: both rural and urban?
- f) How can we use “experience” in theological education?
- g) What type of higher theological education is required?
- h) It was thought that such education should respect Melanesian traditions of “knowing”, and not slavishly follow Western patterns of “academic” education.
- i) There is need for ecumenical co-operation in theological education.

After this, a meeting was held between the staff of Newton College and priests of the Parish of the Resurrection, in which the College is situated. This was held to discover a better definition of the appropriate relationship between the College and its immediate neighbours. It still remains a problem to be solved. The meeting brought out into the open the serious lack of an organised course in pastoral work. Five of the present

¹ A study of three major MATS seminaries, analysing their degree of “enculturation” in staffing, life-style, and curriculum, their “maturity”, and their “programme”, privately printed by the author, Fr Leonardo Mercado SVD.

final-year students have had no pastoral experience, and, at the moment, no firm plans have been made to provide them with any before ordination. There has, at best, been talk of their working for a year as lay assistants in the parishes to which they will eventually be ordained. The problem appears to be two-fold: the lack of enough competent parish priests, with whom to place the students, and the lack of suitable accommodation for married students, some of whom have large families.

On March, 16, 1987, a students' open forum discussed the curriculum development project, and made many helpful suggestions. Their main concern was with the "hidden curriculum", a topic which came up again when they had another open forum to discuss College rules on alcohol. They made it clear that the College ought to give more attention to this aspect of curriculum reform. They were also concerned about the lack of any well-defined guidelines regarding evaluation of student progress, about the multiplicity of subjects, with consequent heavy workload, and about the great difficulty experienced trying to cope with the difficult language of most theological textbooks, since English is a second language for all the students. They also suggested that some subjects, such as spirituality, pastoral studies, and homiletics might be shared by staff, so that the students gained from the varied practical experience of the teachers.

At a follow-up staff meeting, issues such as the meaning of "success" and "failure", and the relevance of "standards" and "evaluation", were discussed. On the one hand, there is a need to find out how effective is the teaching being offered to the students, and how their needs can be recognised and met; on the other, the students themselves talk a lot about diplomas, as if such badges of "success" were an end in themselves, and not a means to assessing appropriate deployment of differing, but equally valuable, pastoral and ministerial skills. The staff agreed on the need to relate the formation given in the College with the future ministry of the students within the church, so that the College was not seen as just another institutional means of self-advancement. The staff went on to try to formulate realistic practical aims for both this year and next year. These involved proposals for tightening up, and improving, selection procedures; the provision of a preliminary foundation year, during which student, who would have much to offer the church but who could not meet basic academic requirements, could be offered alternative forms of training and

service; the importance of sorting out what is taught, by whom, when and how; and the absolutely essential requirements of setting up a well-structured pastoral experience programme.

A new selection procedure is in the process of being set up; letters have been sent out to all bishops and prospective candidates, explaining the new requirements. It is only a beginning – but a start has to be made somewhere. All bishops have also been sent a letter asking for their views about curriculum development, and the progress made so far. Their replies are awaited, and it is hoped that the new College Council meeting will spend time discussing the practical proposals. In a few weeks' time, the staff will meet again to exchange with each other their proposed syllabuses for the areas in which they teach. This will enable them to see how much overlap there is, how far multiplication of subjects can be avoided, what new areas need to be covered, how much time needs to be given to each unit of work, how all the units can be arranged into a coherent and dynamic whole, and how different methods of teaching can be used to suit different subjects.