

# USPG and Theological Education

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In this short paper I seek to do three things:  
to illustrate the role that USPG has played in theological education since its foundation in 1701;  
to describe what we are supporting around the Anglican Communion today;  
to look at some future directions and suggest where USPG might play a part.

The paper is necessarily about broad trends rather than attempting a comprehensive survey. It concentrates on training for the ordained ministry, while recognizing that theological education is a much broader concept for the whole Church. In looking to the future it sets out the tension between differing emphases.

## 1) History

Since its foundation in 1701 S.P.G has been concerned with theological education. Our founder, Thomas Bray, saw to it that the clergy who were the first missionaries were supplied with books to enable what would now be described as 'continuing professional development'. Education in its widest sense was the driver for much that Bray did through SPCK and SPG. Two examples may illustrate what happened as SPG's presence around the world grew.

Firstly, in Barbados in 1712 the Governor General bequeathed his estates to the SPG for the purpose of establishing a college. This began one of the most inglorious episodes in the Society's history as the legacy included not only the sugar plantations but also the slaves who worked upon them. Construction began in 1714 on a College "*for the use of the mission in those parts of the British dominions*", and as a "*nursery for the propagation of the Gospel, for providing a never-failing supply of labourers to be sent forth into the harvest of God*". During its history it has served as both a Grammar School and a Seminary, the latter staffed for about twelve years from 1955 by the College of the Resurrection. In 1983 the property was transferred to the Codrington Trust, for training ordinands for work throughout the Province of the West Indies.

Secondly, in India, Bishops College Calcutta was established in 1820 by the first Bishop of Calcutta, Thomas Fanshawe Middleton, with funding from SPG and other agencies, to train Europeans and Anglo-Indians to work first as catechists and then as ordained clergy. Indians and other Asian students were soon admitted, but the College's contribution to the number of

clergy working in the Indian church grew slowly - in part because it also educated students studying other subjects. In 1918 Bishop's College became a purely theological college and began its association with Serampore, which continues to this day. The SPG continued to support the college until the 1950s, when it exchanged giving an annual grant for a lump sum for the college to invest.

The Church of England continued to send out missionaries. Clergy rarely received any training, it being assumed that their University degree, together with the grace of Holy Orders, would equip them for ministry whether at home or overseas! But in the second half of the 19th century the numbers of SPG lay missionaries increased rapidly especially with the development of medical work, the recruitment of British teachers (particularly women to teach girls in Asia) and the appointment of women in their own right. Lay missionaries were present in UMCA from the beginning.

The Missionary College of St. Augustine was established in Canterbury in 1848 to "*relieve the deficiency of an adequate supply of Ministers, duly prepared by special training, to labour with effect in the dependencies of the British Empire.*" Its purpose was to train men so they were ready to be ordained on their arrival in the diocese where they were to work, and to train men from overseas who were sent by their bishops and then ordained on their return home. In 1952 the College re-opened as the Central College of the Anglican Communion to train clergy from all over the world. It closed in 1966.

In 1923 S.P.G. set up a Training College in Selly Oak, Birmingham to train women missionaries. From the 1950's some men took courses but they were not allowed to 'live in' until the College went co-educational in 1965. In 1996 the Methodist Church closed their own Kingsmead College to create with USPG the United College of the Ascension. The U.C.A. both prepared UK clergy and laity for missionary work overseas, and provided further training and research opportunities for leaders and potential leaders from churches around the world.

However, questions were increasingly raised about bringing students to the UK, because of the cost, the concern for cultural context, and a greater commitment to building up the local capacity around the world. U.S.P.G. began to prefer funding more local institutions rather than providing much more expensive scholarships in Birmingham and other places in the UK. There is a continuing tension between those who favour this policy and those who regret the loss of the cross-cultural context which U.C.A. sought to create, together with what they see as the added value coming from the UK academic scene and an exposure to UK culture more generally.

One result of these developments, together with the declining number of Missionaries / Mission Companions, was the closure of UCA in 2006, but USPG stayed in partnership with the Methodist Church to create the Selly Oak Centre for Mission Studies (SOCMS) within the Queens Foundation, Birmingham, and is committed to funding this until at least 2012. The new Centre has as its core activities:

1. The development and delivery of courses, programmes and pastoral care, both academic and formational in nature, that respond to and meet the needs of partner churches, international students and scholars, from other parts of the world church.
2. The development of a worldwide network of theological and mission study institutions with which the sponsoring bodies are in partnership in order to promote the development of mission studies as an academic and practical discipline, and to encourage mutual collaboration, in particular on site and split-site research that builds capacity in theological education and research in partner institutions.
3. The provision of exploration, training and reflection programmes for mission partners/companions/programme volunteers from the UK who have been selected by the sponsoring bodies to serve in or visit other parts of the world church, short term and long term.

## 2) Today

Like most mission agencies, USPG has sought to leave behind the colonial “North to South” role in favour of “Mission from Everywhere to Everywhere”, exploring how all our worldwide partners – the Anglican Provinces and Dioceses - can be “Heirs Together” of SPG and UMCA, and in particular helping the Anglican Churches of Britain and Ireland to play their part in the Anglican Communion. This is not easy given the continuing economic disparities of our world and the tendency of NGO’s and the Western donor culture to invent new forms of colonialism. We have however tried to make decision-making more international, and to honour the mission priorities of the local church as they nominate projects for support through grants, personnel exchange, and scholarships.

Leadership Formation including Theological Education is one of the four Priority Areas which USPG has agreed with partners worldwide for financial support. It takes three main forms.

First, grants from the Common Provisional Fund. In 2008 this represented £351,642 of the total Fund. Some examples of College funding are St Marks’ Theological College, Dar-es-Salaam (£4,500), The College of Transfiguration, Grahamstown, South Africa (£3,200), and St Paul’s Theological College Ambatoharanana, Madagascar (£16,000). Other Provinces have nominated ‘Theological Education by Extension’ Courses for funding, for example TEE in Zimbabwe and in Ethiopia.

Secondly, our Personnel programmes. In 2008, ten of the 39 Mission Companions around the world were directly involved in Theological Education, for example Andrew & Rosemary Symonds in Swaziland and Richard Fermer in Recife, Brazil. Others, like Bishop Christopher Boyle in Malawi, have seen improving theological education as one of the priorities of their Diocesan ministry.

A number of volunteers on the shorter-term Experience Exchange Programme also take part in such work. In addition we continue to offer small grants to British ordinands and clergy on

sabbatical who spend 4-6 months in a variety of placements - there were 22 such awards in 2008.

Thirdly, and central to our commitment to Theological Education, there is the Training & Experience Programme. In 2008 this cost £180,000 and supported 326 people in a wider variety of courses, from catechism through to certificate and diploma in theology, to postgraduate qualifications. The TEP also provided means for professional studies and qualifications in youth work, administration, finance and management.

### **3) FUTURE**

Many of the established institutions are doing well. For example, Lanka Theological College in Sri Lanka is developing new work in Asian and women's theology, and the U.T.C. in Bangalore continues to maintain a high academic standard. Like many of the institutions we support both of these are ecumenical. Others face more difficulties, sometimes because like Bishop's College in Calcutta they have inherited old buildings, or because in some provinces diocesan bishops prefer to set up their own courses to avoid the costs of the more centralised provision or simply because they want to have more control over the training of their own ordinands.

What then are the issues which will determine the future of theological education, especially around the Anglican Communion? Five tensions may be seen.

First, Leadership vs. Ministry. In some places there is a concern that priestly formation and ministry have been overtaken by more secular ideas of leadership. Nevertheless, competent leadership remains central to the future health of Christ's Church. This is equally true of the episcopate, where initiatives like the Canterbury New Bishops course seek to equip them for leadership in their diocese, and for clergy who (as in Northern Malawi) can be a resource for agricultural development schemes alongside their role as parish priests.

Secondly, Residential vs. Non-residential. It is often the question of cost which decides whether theological training takes place in a Provincial or national seminary or more locally, so that only younger people with more discerned potential are awarded a residential place. Others are more likely to be trained on more local, for example Diocesan, courses, through evening and weekend groups, and/or through extension courses by post or the web and e-mail. In some Provinces people from these courses cannot become stipendiary ministers. Again the issues arise: how is priestly formation to take place alongside academic learning? Which form of training is more likely to draw from and engage with the student's own context?

Thirdly, Ecumenical vs. Anglican. There is a tension between working ecumenically, whether that is for principled or pragmatic reasons, and the need for a proper Anglican formation of new priests. USPG is fortunate here in having as its Theological Consultant the person who looks after the 'Theological Education in the Anglican Communion' work in the A.C.O. One of TEAC's concerns is to better articulate 'The Anglican Way' (see Appendix) and to secure more resources, in appropriate languages, to prepare those entering Anglican ministry. Such

developments, however, should be a contribution to, rather than a negation of, a theological awareness which embraces the wider “Ecumenical Vision” as expressed in last year’s World Conference of Theological Institutions (see <http://www.wocati.org/conference.html>).

Fourthly, Global vs. Domestic. This is more difficult to define, but it’s a tension between training which is more earthed/contextual and that which is more globalised world / cross-cultural. Theological education must be rooted in local situations if the student is to understand where they themselves have come from and the new situations in which they are likely to serve. But such understanding is most likely to happen when they see each local place as part of a much larger whole, and are helped to come to terms, both personally and ‘theologically’, with all the issues of commonality and difference.

Fifthly, Ecclesial vs. Prophetic. This is sometimes seen as Maintenance vs. Mission, which may be unfair because the presence of a committed and well-run congregation can be a living sign of God at work in that local community. However there is a tension between, on the one hand, ministry which is primarily concerned with individual discipleship and church growth and, on the other hand, ministry which is engaged in a more prophetic way with issues and challenges in the wider world. The latter will be marked by engagement with such matters as HIV/AIDS, and often inter-faith issues as well. The content and context of training is crucial in directing what kind of ministry a person may take up.

Other tensions could be listed – for example, Intellectual enquiry versus ‘simple faith’ – but all of them touch on two further issues. The first is about both candidates and content: who is theological education for? Up to now it has generally excluded those with less access to academic training, and in particular women. In response USPG has provided staffing for a course in the Caribbean for ordinands from the tourist industry, and support for ‘liberation theology’ workshops in shanty towns in Lima in the Diocese of Peru. A recent Anglican Communion consultation for Women Theological Educators has also been a response to this deficit.

The second is: who controls theological education? Ordination is the particular responsibility of the bishop so it is natural that he (and now in a few places, she) should exercise a particular responsibility over training for it. But some theological educators feel that bishops do not always value their contribution, especially in the more academic rigour which they seek to bring to clergy training, and particularly when their institution is claiming a certain amount of autonomy and distance from the church leadership so that it can play a more prophetic role in the life of the wider church.

In conclusion, what more might be done? There are a number of Networks which seek to increase co-operation and share resources. One of these is the Trans Continental Training Network, administered from the Selly Oak Centre for Mission Studies, where they are also exploring such developments as split-site courses including doctorates. There are links between such places as Madagascar and Canterbury, Sri Lanka and York, where training courses and even university validation may be taken forward. The web offers all kinds of

possibilities, although we often forget that for significant parts of the Anglican Communion English is at best a second language. USPG is keen to work with the St Augustine's Foundation, and other organisations like Trinity Wall Street, to find new ways forward.

I am grateful for the help of Catherine Wakeling, Habib Nader, and Clare Amos in compiling this paper.

*Bishop Michael Doe, General Secretary, USPG: Anglicans in World Mission.*

#### APPENDIX

"The Anglican Way is a particular expression of the Christian Way of being the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ. It is formed by and rooted in Scripture, shaped by its worship of the living God, ordered for communion, and directed in faithfulness to God's mission in the world. In diverse global situations Anglican life and ministry witnesses to the incarnate, crucified and risen Lord, and is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Together with all Christians, Anglicans hope, pray and work for the coming of the reign of God."

See "<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/theological/signposts/english.cfm>"