

**New Cranmer Society-Melbourne Anglicans Together
Combined Forum at St Faith's Burwood, 20 June 2005**

*“Leadership in the Church:
Where are we going and how do we get there?”*

I travel the length and breadth of this country from Hobart to Thursday Island, from Sydney to Rottnest Island, talking about mission and ministry to uniformed men and women, and trying to exercise pastoral leadership in an organization with certain entrenched views about leading people and achieving corporate goals. This has given me a certain perspective on the Church, the Defence Force and the collective health of both.

My contribution to this forum draws on that experience and has three parts. In the first I want to examine the mechanics of exerting leadership in the Church. In the second, I want to talk about truthfulness as a description of where the Church ought to be going. In the third part, I want to contend that hopefulness is critical to how we get there.

Part 1: Leadership

Christian leadership is plainly different from other kinds of leadership. The crucial distinction is that it reflects the life and death of Jesus even as it embodies his words and works. It is clear that the kind of leadership Jesus exerted is not to be confused with management, oversight or supervision of which there is no shortage in the Anglican Church of Australia. The critical cue is the description of Christians as followers of Jesus. There appear to be three strands in Jesus' approach.

The *first* was taking people to places they needed to go in order to fulfil God's purpose for them and this world. Jesus helped his followers to be true to themselves and to God – to be the person they were made to be and the work they had been given to do. The *second* was taking people to places where they wanted to go but would not venture alone or unaccompanied. Jesus showed his followers how to live a life of faith and trust that did not rely upon either wealth or coercion. The *third* was taking people to places they had no thought of going because they did not know they even existed. He demonstrated that there were depths of human experience they could hardly fathom, that there was more than this life and this world – and he would embody how to get there. Jesus led his

followers on a journey into themselves; on a mission to a world in need of redemption; and, on a pilgrimage into the heart of God. The destination was a world restored to its divinely fashioned glory and endless life to be lived in perfect union with God.

These were the outcomes of Jesus' leadership. But what of its component parts? Let me focus on just one incident - the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as recorded in St Matthew's Gospel, chapter 26, verses 47 to 56 - in making a few key points. At this critical juncture where leadership is vital to demonstrating that God remains the source and destination of his mission: Jesus accepts responsibility for himself; Jesus' character shapes his actions; Jesus is clear about his task and how it is accomplished; Jesus declines compromises and avoids opportunism; Jesus offers an inspirational vision; and, Jesus cares for those he leads even as they progress towards the common goal which is heralding the arrival of God's Kingdom in power. The essence of the leadership depicted in this brief exchange is humility and loyalty, exemplary living and moral courage which produced confidence in those being led. Adhering to the will of God is all; living God's truth is foremost. Jesus gave them confidence that he knew about both. It is clear that Jesus is never unafraid of unpopularity or personal attack. This is because in his exercise of leadership, his followers are always assured of something very deep: his unquestioned love for them. It does not wax or wane despite disappointments or disputes. It abides undiminished.

I am reminded here of a telling scene in the movie *U-571*. It is set in the northern Atlantic during World War II and features a continuing dialogue between a young American submarine officer, played by Matthew McConaughey, suddenly thrust into command when the captain is drowned, and the wise old master chief (Harvey Keitel) who is concerned for the crew. The men look to their new leader and expect to be given direction by someone in whom they can have confidence. It is also a function of his care for them. The officer confesses to his men that he is overwhelmed by the situation and doesn't know what to do. The Chief takes him aside and privately remonstrates with him. He doesn't expect the young officer to have all the answers but he expects him to be thinking about what is to come and, therefore, caring for those in his charge by inspiring confidence by simply displaying leadership.

In my experience, leaders are born and made. Vocational assessment identifies those who have leadership capacities; theological colleges prepare those who have leadership gifts for their discharge. Genuine leadership is, of course, easy to distinguish from authoritarianism or manipulation. It has to do with character and compassion. Authoritarians are more concerned with institutions than people; manipulators are more concerned with themselves than those they are given to lead. Both lack real compassion and treat those they lead as merely means to an end; they rely on coercion rather than provoke confidence.

In my view, synods, theological colleges and vestries must concentrate as never before on leadership: liturgical worship, parish leadership, moral leadership, intellectual leadership and civic leadership. There is a terrific little booklet opening up this whole matter entitled *Making Connections: Theological Leadership in the Australian Church* written for the General Synod Standing Committee by Peter Adam, Alison Taylor and Richard Treloar. It would be usefully revived across the Church and made a focus for deliberations and decision-making at parish and diocesan level. I commend it to you. I would also draw your attention to the Canon Ivor Church Memorial Lecture delivered in June 2000 by my colleague Bishop Philip. His subject was 'Episcopal Leadership: Some Reflections'. I found his words especially valuable because he linked sincere theological expectations with genuine practical constraints.

Of course, for leaders to lead effectively there must be people willing to be led efficiently. One cynic commented that for Anglicans the 'priesthood of all believers' has been translated into the 'primacy of every parishioner'. Anglicans are not easy to lead and I understand some of the reasons why. There are clearly imbalances of trust and accountability. These are difficult times for all leaders for a variety of reasons. And yet, we need to esteem leadership, study its principles and critique its exercise. The alternative is captured in one of the most tragic verses in the Bible. It is the ending to the book of Judges: 'in those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in their own eyes'. Poor leadership is always and everywhere preferable to no leadership.

Theme 2: Truthfulness

It might surprise you that I believe 'truth' is where the Church is going. Pontius Pilate enigmatically asked Jesus: "what is truth?". Notably, he does not receive an answer possibly because one doesn't exist. The Bible asks and then answers a very different question: 'who is truth?'. In John's Gospel, most explicitly in chapters 5 and 15, Jesus is very clear: 'I am the truth'. Now to say that someone is 'the truth' is, to us, rather unusual and perhaps a little strange. But two things are clear about the sense here in which the word truth is being used. *First*, this is not a claim to be informed or correct about everything, or to be a repository of all knowledge, like a perpetual winner of "Who Wants to be a Millionaire". *Second*, this is a claim to be genuine and authentic for the purpose in hand, that is (bringing to mind John 14) Jesus manifesting God to us and making available for us a renewed and restored relationship with him. That is what the truth identified with Jesus is good for; that is what he offers to us. When Jesus says in John 5 that the testimony to him is true ... and that he is 'the truth', we are being told that in and through Jesus we are to find access to God, the framework for relating to him and each other, and the basics on which we can build all else. He offers, in other words, the status that we need in order to be free of the perennial hindrances of fear and hatred and self-concern; a status in which we can be transformed and empowered to love and to serve.

This is indeed good news. But there is a necessary caution to be expressed: this claim to truth, seen as rubbing off from Jesus to the Church as his agent ... or to Christian individuals and groups as his emissaries, has all too often been misunderstood. It has been taken to mean precisely what is here excluded: that somehow Christ, and then his followers, are repositories of accuracy and correctness on all kinds of subjects and all manner of questions. Not so. We must be clear: the Church is given a glorious gospel to proclaim not a battery of privileged information to communicate. Our primary call is to be committed to the truth that is Jesus: to the relationship with God that derives from him and to all its benefits. This is the truth that makes us free, announces that the Kingdom of God has come near, and creates a community in which the Holy Spirit transforms individuals and renews their interactions. The mission of the Church is to so embody the life of Jesus that its common life draws in those who are thirsty and hungry, and which depicts the way it will be when all things are reconciled to God. The ministry of the Church is to nurture its

members while commending the love and compassion of Christ for all, through its interactions with the watching world.

The principal impediment to mission and ministry is a lack of truthfulness or, worse still, untruthfulness. History contains too many accounts of Christians who have been hypocritical and Churches that have betrayed their principles. Most individuals and many institutions proclaiming high ideals will fall short of their embodiment at some point. After all, fallible humanity is involved. But tragically for Christians and the Church, the chasm between what is said and what is done has, at times, become very wide and extremely deep. Convenient attitudes to material wealth and a willingness to overlook political oppression deserve censure if not condemnation. The church preaches temporal frugality and spiritual generosity but routinely seeks temporal security and physical comfort. Forgiveness and compassion, hallmarks of the church's life, have frequently been restrained or denied. And, of course, there has been a good deal of insincerity and sanctimoniousness in relation to sexuality.

In my experience, the Anglican Church is rather difficult to lead because it is occasionally in-disciplined and frequently ill-disciplined. This naturally obscures where the followers of Jesus, individually and together, are going. We see the importance of discipline to truth in the movie *The Mission* which is set in mid-18th century western Paraguay. The Jesuit community has committed itself to evangelizing the Guarani. The Jesuits believe that God has called them to proclaim the truth that all people might live in the light of Christ. But the Spanish and Portuguese slave traders, with encouragement from their 'Christian' diplomats, hinder their efforts and seek ways of discrediting and then disposing of the Jesuits. In the ensuing struggle, one of the monks defies his superior, acting in a manner that betrays the truth they seek to proclaim. He is directed to apologise and is reminded that truth consists of things both said and done.

In my view, we Anglicans are sometimes overly attentive to making churches larger when the Biblical call is to make them more truthful. Having said that, I believe that truthful Churches will grow numerically and become more fruitful by virtue of their faithfulness and their sheer attractiveness to those seeking after God. But we should be clear about this much: numerical growth is a consequence rather than a cause of truthfulness. Truth is not

ultimately determined by numbers however impressive they might be. Let me turn now to 'getting there' and the necessity of hopefulness.

Theme 3: Hopefulness

There are sadly many signs of despondency, disappointment and dismay within the Anglican Church at the moment. Why? I have already conceded that there have been individual deficiencies in leadership and collective betrayals of truth. The Gospel proclamation in contemporary Australia is often drowned out by laments about Christians and complaints about the Church. Anglicans are fixated by problems and why we can't, or won't, succeed in a given task. But Anglicans rarely give the same attention to possibilities and how they might be pursued. Criticism is cheap; vision is priceless. So we need to make another mindset shift. It involves hope.

Hope is the opposite of fear and it has nothing to do with optimism. Within the Anglican Church, there is a real and paralyzing anxiety about failure. Consequently, we have imbibed a version of spiritual rationalism. As individuals and as a community, it is not that we ask God for too much but that we settle for too little. When we first experienced God's love in Christ for the first time, our faith was expansive, our commitment was limitless and our hope without bounds. Parts of the Anglican Church have become stale, sterile and stuffy. There is much introspection and, consequently, much self-loathing. In the same way that Governor Arthur Phillip was disconcerted by Chaplain Richard Johnson's "enthusiasm" in 1788, Anglicans are wary of creativity, unsure about originality and unnerved by emotion.

Let me suggest, drawing upon the work of the South African theologian David Bosch in his book *Transforming Mission*, that the struggle of the future will be between Church people and Kingdom people, and my claim that hope distinguishes the two. He writes:

Church people often put the work of the institution above concerns of justice, mercy and truth; kingdom people seek first the Kingdom of God. Church people think about how to get people into the Church; Kingdom people think about how to get the Church into the world. Church people worry that the world might change the Church; Kingdom people work to see the Church change the world.

How do we get where God needs us to be and where we ourselves long to be? I think it is straightforward but far from simple: by an increase in faith, love and hope. It has to do principally with godliness. We must ask God for the gift of greater faith, greater love and greater hope ... each involves an element of risk, of daring and of courage. Mission requires a changed attitude to who God is ... and what God does ... to produce actions that build up the Church and bring nearer the Kingdom, which reveal the heart of Jesus and the reality of a spirit-filled life. The Church needs to be noticed for the things that matter; that mark out its distinctive character; that reflect its charter to proclaim a God who is love.

You might recall an address by one of Zion's leaders before they faced a great battle: 'Believe me when I say we have a difficult time ahead of us. But if we are prepared for it, we must shed our fear of it. I stand here before you now truthfully unafraid. Why? Because I believe something you do not? No! I stand here without fear because I remember. I remember that I am here not because of the path that lies ahead, but because of the path that lies behind me'. This leader is Morpheus, played by Laurence Fishburn in the third movie of the *Matrix* trilogy, to the remnant known as Zion. What inspiring words. Remember. We ought to do likewise. Remember because there you will find grounds for hope. God the Father has remained faithful to his people through time and space; God the Son is present with us now to heal and make whole; God the Holy Spirit will guide us into a future we never imagined.

Closing words

In my view, there is still more to unite than divide Anglicans across this country, and when we focus on our mission and become single-minded about it, we are drawn together in an attitude towards ministry that acknowledges the challenges we face and perhaps the need to either set aside or transcend our differences for the sake of fulfilling our calling. When the disciples were preoccupied with themselves and with each other, they began to argue, form factions and collude. They began to rank themselves in order of importance and squabble about status. But when they are dispatched by Jesus to proclaim the Kingdom in word and deed, we observe camaraderie, cooperation and conviction. In Luke 9, the 12 disciples are sent out and return telling Jesus with delight all they had done in

verse 10. And in Luke 10, seventy are commissioned and despatched. In verse 17 we find them returning with joy saying: 'Lord, in your name even the demons submitted to us'.

At my first annual retreat-conference with the Defence Force Chaplains four years ago, I shared with them my desire to avoid frustration and fights over what we once called matters of 'churchmanship'. After settling one or two perennial points of divergence (we are Anglicans after all), we agreed to direct our first and best energies to preaching the good news of Jesus, his atoning death and glorious resurrection, and building up believers into the fullness of Christ and to hold each other accountable in doing so. If we are totally committed to those foundational and defining goals, we agreed that our energies would be nearly fully expended, and whatever remained would find its rightful place and proper priority. My ministry as bishop, and that of the chaplains I have the privilege of serving, is to announce the coming Kingdom of God and to live as though it were already here.