

What I'm going to do is to offer is some very general thoughts about theology and formation -- if only so that you know the sort of things I think about theology in general and formation in particular.

My starting point is this: I think of theology as a kind of 'position report'. If you imagine yourself in some sort of army patrol somewhere in the deserts of Afghanistan, and somebody rings in and says, 'report your position, where are you?' theology I think is a description of where we are. And that question, 'where are you?' operates at a number of different interlocking levels which may help to explain the different layers at which theology operates and the different criteria which theology uses.

For any Christian, the first answer to the question, 'where are you?' ought to be 'in Christ'. That's where we start. Because the question 'where are you' from the Christian believer requires the answer 'well, I am -- strange as it may sound -- standing *where Christ is.*' In virtue of my baptism and the gift of the Spirit, I am in the place where it's possible to say *Abba* to God - as *Galatians* and *Romans* put it. And I can't underline too strongly that that is where theology has to begin.

Because to be in a place where you can say *Abba* to God is already to take a number of things for granted: that this name for God is trustworthy and truthful, that it is appropriate to speak to God as to a wholly loving and affirming parent. But it is also to trust what Jesus says and does and is, because it is the life and death and resurrection of Jesus that establish what it means in practice to call God *Abba*. This is a life of unqualified transparency to the gift of God: a life lived in total self-emptying for that love, which replicates that love, a life which overflows in creating forgiveness and liberty in those around. That's where Jesus is and that's where we are, being in him. And we're able to be where he is because in the very intriguing and elusive metaphor that the New Testament uses, it is the very breath of God that blows us there otherwise known as the Holy Spirit.

So you'll see that I have already smuggled into this first answer 'where are you?' a complete doctrine of the Trinity! That is indeed where we are, we are somewhere in the middle of that mind-defying divine exchange and movement which we call the Holy Trinity, the mystery at which we 'throw' words, hoping that one or two of them might stick. And historically some of them have: they're called the Creeds. I always liked to say to my own theological students that the history of Christian doctrine is a history of discarded solutions. But what abides is that basic biblical categorisation of where we are: I am in Christ, I call the mystery at the heart of all things *Abba*, and I am brought there and held there by the wind of the Holy Spirit, the breath of God.

So theology reports on that. Theology draws out the implications of being in that particular place and tries to make some of those connections. It begins from the phenomenon of Christian identity - which is perhaps a very obvious thing to say, but I believe still needs saying. Theology starts from the fact that there are Christian women and men and this is where they live and this is what it's like to be a Christian man or women. But of course we're never *just* in Christ. When Karl Barth spoke about doing theology 'with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other' (one of the great sayings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) he was reminding us that where we *are* is also dictated by the politics, sociology and economics of a world of huge complexity. And to speak as if that had no role at all in describing where we are is actually to describe a kind of position which is nowhere in particular. Our faith teaches us that Jesus was nothing if not a man who lived in a particular place at a particular time, and whose living out of the *abba*-directed life in the Spirit was at every point shaped by, responsive to, the history and the sociology of occupied territory in a centralised empire with enormous political and economic challenges and injustices. Take Jesus out of that and you actually take Jesus away. He spoke the way he did *because* he was where he was historically. So where are *we* historically? 'Phone in your position' here means 'give an account as a believer of where you are'. What is it that enriches, what is that denies your humanity, your liberty your God-imagining character in this setting? Which is why, as I think we've discovered more and more vividly in the last 100 years, theology has to be contextual.

The trouble is that that word *contextual* is something that absolutely everybody will now sign up to. Is theology contextual? Well of course it's contextual! So it can mean pretty well everything we want it to mean. And sometimes it's used in some very odd ways, and sometimes it's used as a way of undermining the solidity of the identity we have in Jesus. Sometimes it's just a matter

of looking for some agreeable cultural extras you can use to drape over your practice and make it look a bit more plausible. So theology I would say, needs real attentiveness to what it is that shapes being human here and now. There's a line from the poet W H Auden which he puts into the mouth of the wise men coming to Jesus: 'to discover how to be human now is the reason we follow this star'. I love that as an account of spiritual exploration.

But that's where the care and exactness with which we can measure and understand the setting we're in is part of our theological responsibility. There are contextual theologies, there are emancipatory and liberationist theologies of all kinds, which are theologically brilliant, cohesive, emotionally powerful - and descriptively rather weak. Somehow if we're going to do theology in that kind of setting we need to have the right level and sensitivity of attention to the realities around us. Not that the theologian has got to be a professional economist or sociologist; but it won't do to surround our theology with second hand or second rate accounts of what kind of society we're in.

And then of course there's the third dimension of *where are you?* Which is where all of this begins to connect a little bit, the question is about formation. This is the question where are *you?* It is addressed to *each* believer trying to do theology. Where are you: in your understanding of God – yes; in your place in society – yes, but also in your understanding of yourself. Are you growing? Are you changing in your perspective of who you are before God? Because again, theology is not done by people living in mid-air, or nowhere in particular. And that particularity means the particularity of *my* life, *my* journey. That doesn't dictate the answers; I'm not saying that that means theology is what *feels* right at this or that moment, but that into my full theological task comes this element of learning who I am as a person here and now.

It's irresistible to let your reflections fall into groups of three! I apologise for doing the blindingly obvious thing, but at least those three levels seem to be involved in doing theology. Reporting the position in response to the question *Where are you?* begins by saying well, I am in Christ: 'Before the throne of God I stand'. '*Bold I approach the eternal throne. And claim the crown through Christ my own*' (which has always seemed to me possibly the very best slogan with which to begin theologising). But I have to go on from there to understand where I am in relation to society and culture, and to understand it in relation to myself, my exploration, my struggle. It's slightly connected with the way in which many years ago I suggested you could

divide theology up into *celebration*, *communication* and *critique*. *Celebration*: where I am in Christ; the *communication* that makes me attend to the realities of the language around me; the *critique* that brings me up short against my own limits and struggles and takes me back to the beginning. But I don't want to over-elaborate that.

I want to move on from there to think aloud with you a bit about how this impacts on the work of institutions like yours. I'll begin with 'standing in Christ'. As you will have gathered I think that for any theological education worth the name you've got to have a 'big picture'. And one of my biggest worries about some kinds of theological education, some kinds of ministerial formation – in the UK as much as anywhere – is that for a lot of very good educational reasons we have slightly broken up the big picture, and become a little bit too focused at times on modules and specialisms etc. We haven't quite known where to put the big picture, the one we affirm in our liturgies, often in our hymns; the big picture I began with from *Romans* and *Galatians*. And one question I'd like to hear you discuss is 'what is the point at which the big picture comes in?'

It was crystallised for me many years ago by my wife – who as you know is a theological teacher – when she, after a rather difficult term of teaching in a theological college, said: 'There's only so far you can go in ordained ministry with an anthology of your favourite extracts from T S Eliot and Julian of Norwich'. There's only so far you can go without the big picture, without some way of understanding that there is a fundamental Christian identity and that it looks and sounds and feels like *this*.

So that's one challenge -- curriculum challenge, but also I think what I'd call an 'ethos and atmosphere' challenge. How do our institutions *as a whole* communicate the big picture? How does the worship of this community speak of the big picture? And what do we expect from our Biblical studies in seminary? Expertise in the history of texts? Well, please God, no, or not just that – but what more?

I used to teach many years ago at Westcott House, Cambridge, and the then principal would take a class of people who had just graduated in theology in Cambridge and spend a term with them doing what he called remedial Bible study! That is, getting them to read the Bible all over again so that they didn't simply go out into their parishes with a bundle of textual historical ideas in their minds -- so that they had begun to get used to again to the big picture.

Then, the second area of *locating ourselves*. Where are we in our society and our culture? More and more in this country and in other contexts, it has become important in the business of formation to explore at least some sorts of ‘mixed mode’ training, some elements of exposing people to what’s perhaps a challenging, not completely familiar, social setting, and asking them and encouraging them to reflect hard theologically upon it. And again I’d like to hear the different ways in which that coming and going in the training process might apply within your institutions. It can be just a matter of sending someone off on a placement, almost to fill in time. It can on the other hand be a moment of real breakthrough for people, learning how to think of this ‘where am I’ question as a real theological one. How do people in general learn to be Christlike, learn to grow into the *Abba* dimension in *this* society, with *these* words, *these* economic conditions? Or: what gets in the way of their growing into that in this place and these economic conditions? So again a question about how our institutions and their style or feel allow for that ebb and flow into and out of the social setting, and how we best equip people to attend as carefully and as professionally as possible in those settings to the realities that there are around them.

The third dimension is in some ways the most important of all - and strangely also the one that often seems to be the first to go. This is nourishing people in self-awareness. I don’t think there is any theological education worth the name that is not at some point crucially an education in self-awareness. This doesn’t mean an education in introspection – looking inside and worrying. You can do that without going to seminary! But learning a bit of emotional intelligence, a bit of imagination, a bit of honesty and transparency.

The minister, ordained or otherwise, who goes out and tries to teach or preach without some of that self-awareness and emotional intelligence, is someone who is going to be capable of doing a great deal of damage both to themselves and to those that they serve. And that doesn’t mean that you expect the ordained minister or preacher, or catechist, always to be talking about themselves. But you *do* expect them to be talking in an adult awareness of themselves, their limits, their struggles, their strengths. And I would say that a healthy and creative theological education does just that. It’s this third area that we most often speak of in terms of ‘formation’ and I don’t think I’d want to split it up from the other two, because I think formation is about learning to inhabit all these areas as a three-dimensional human being. It’s not as if one area is *more* spiritual, personal

or interior than the others. But certainly without some attention to that call to self-awareness, the others won't really take grip on us and on our ministry.

That's all by way of a very general overview of what I think theology might be about and what theological formation and education might be about. As such it applies to clergy and laity – in other words *Christians*, because theology is something *Christians* do. Some years ago, writing an introduction to someone else's very good book on theology, I quoted that little witticism from the 17<sup>th</sup> century French playwright, Molière; where one character says to another that he's been talking prose all his life. And he's amazed: he never knew he was talking *prose*. How clever of him! I believe it's a very important aspect of theological education to be able to say to others 'you're talking theology'. And having said all I've said about how theology is 'built up' in institutions, I've got to add that the fruit of it is the kind of pastoral minister who can go into the congregation and tell someone 'you're talking theology, let's hear some more of it'. In other words, being educated in theology is partly being educated about how to *recognise* theology when and where it happens, to say with delight in the parish or the study group or wherever, *that's* theology! And it may not be an abstract reflection; it may be a moment, a sign, a gesture. That skill is in the pastor or the teacher of saying 'that's theology: I want to hear more of it.'

So the ordained, ministering, teaching theologian is there in order to make a *learning church*, because they themselves are learners, growing in understanding; they will look for the kind of context in the parish or college or wherever in which a learning conversation is being taken forward at every level. All of this has been a crucial part of some of the most important theological movements of the last few decades, all those grass-roots theological enterprises which have sprung up across the world in perhaps half a century, where people in villages, townships and council estates have been helped to do theology out of their own experience at the local level. All of that has been a massive gift to the Church, and part of the removal from theology of the mystique which says that this is only for the experts. And the way you get beyond that mystique is just the recognition that if where we are is in Christ, then we are all there together - and therefore in Christ we are all equipped for some degree of theological reflection.

But I've given some of my hesitations about over-romanticising or over-simplifying grass-roots theology. It does require careful attention to the kind of culture and society we're in but it does also require the big picture. It's not enough simply to have a local group, however vibrant, warm

or Godly, just saying what it is that makes them feel better or worse. There's a stage beyond that which is connecting to the big picture, in developing keener and deeper diagnosis of the environment that they're in.

A few thoughts about the Anglican Communion and how we connect all this with where we are as an Anglican family. Certainly if we had to phone in our position from the Anglican family at the moment we might very well begin by saying 'is that the marriage guidance counsellor?' We are not as a Communion at the official level in a particularly good place, and we are still dealing with what I think of as 'megaphone' theology – that is large, simple and aggressive messages delivered in a highly public way that is not really designed to change anything much. And I will be perfectly candid about saying why this is so very bad news for us.

A climate where a lot of theological debate is conducted at that sort of level doesn't do very much for any of the three areas I've talked about. It doesn't do much for keeping our eyes on the big picture. It focuses us again and again on issues seen very constrictedly and narrowly. It doesn't do a great deal for our understanding of cultural contexts. I don't say at all that cultural context decides where our theology goes, but all of this can sometimes be a real alibi in tackling the most immediate challenges in our vicinity, an excuse for turning away the attention we need for where we really are.

And when theology becomes a displacement activity, we have problems. It doesn't have a whole lot to do with self-awareness either. Because megaphone theology is always heavily invested in reassuring me that I'm right. When I have any misgivings about that, I know how to deal with them; I increase the size of the megaphone. So as a Communion we have some challenges -- and you won't be surprised to know that while I don't have a quick solution to how we 'mend the net' of the Communion, I *do* have a concern that in our language and self-presentation and our sense of our priorities as a communion we are in danger of losing the big picture, losing the shared priority of giving account, finding words for what it is to be with Christ. And because we disagree so sharply about certain issues – particularly in the area of sexuality – we somehow get to the point where we no longer recognise one another in Christ, because of the degree of disagreement we have in this area. And I'm not sure how we have got there, because it doesn't seem to me an obvious theological conclusion. We've just got a lot more work to do in that area. Whoever's right, whoever's wrong about this, the fundamental recognition that we share a place

with Christ, is something I keep longing to come back to in many of our debates. And I'd quite like – when I'm with fellow Anglicans -- to be able to celebrate that. I'd like to be able to join hands and say well, in spite of everything; we stand in Christ with the breath of God.

I think it's also particularly difficult at the moment to disentangle the right and the wrong approaches to cultural sensitivity. There is a kind of theology which says 'this is where our culture has been and will continue to be, and this is where it is going and *that* will tell us the answer'. And whether that comes out as a conservative or a radical answer doesn't much matter, because whichever way around, you've somehow not attended to the relationship between the culture and the big picture. So, a very cautious response there to the various ways in which people throw 'culture' around. It needs a bit more patience and accuracy than that.

As theological educators in the Communion, what should we be looking to offer the Communion? I hope that above all we can go on offering the big picture: that in what we are doing with our students and what we are seeking to make possible for them in their pastoral and teaching ministry, that we can go on nourishing the necessary excitement about 'being in Christ' that keeps this whole enterprise alive. Because if theological institutions don't in some degree generate *excitement* about being in Christ, they really are failing. And we've all come across theological institutions which are really depressing people's sense of excitement at being 'in Christ'.

Surely what we long to offer to our churches and communities is an excitement and a discovery about 'where we are' -- the capacity to help people discover in themselves and also recognize in others signs/symptoms (a bit like coming out in spots) so that you are able to say 'I think they're coming out in theology' – theology's beginning to happen there in their reflection and their relationships.

Another thing we can offer is very simply what we're doing here: conversation. That is the serious, patient sharing of the experience of teaching and formation. One of my greatest hopes and prayers for the Communion is that we go on building not the structures at top- or abstract-level of unity, but a whole network of channels of unification and understanding that work personally and relationally; through things like the Mothers' Union, the mission agencies -- and the theological colleges.

Part of my hope for the new Global Alliance for Relief and Development is that this too will be a real instrument of unity. Archbishops and ACCs come and go; Lambeth Conferences don't happen very often and require energy for the challenge; and the Primates' Meeting is at the moment simply divided between some primates who think *this* is what primates ought to be doing and others who think *that's* what primates ought to be doing, and not really communicating very effectively, I'm afraid.

So while all that's going on, why don't we get on with building the relationships that allow conversations that excite; conversations that help people see who and where they are. I hope very much we can offer that. Another thing to offer is excellence, quality, not only of scholarship and teaching, but quality of worship and of shared life. I really think that it is crucial for a theological institution training ministers of the Church to ask how we can consistently give an experience of excellence in this sense -- real quality and intensity of discipleship and reflection and praying. There's an excellence that perhaps belongs to a college or seminary associated with a large-scale university enterprise; and there's an excellence that belongs to a small rural seminary. But excellence is what we seek in every case.

The challenge is always to discover what *kind* of excellence is appropriate here. Not 'how do we get a few great elite institutions and a lot of 'fair enough' ones', but 'how do we get the quality appropriate to different levels and contexts?' But keep that image and vision of quality and excellence in mind, and then we really are doing something the Church quite rightly expects us to do.

That's a very general and I hope not *too* abstract set of thoughts about how we might begin doing theology. I've no doubt at all that you've all thought those thoughts before; but it just might be helpful to have an archbishop mirroring them back to you for the sake of further conversation. But I would conclude by saying simply that this is a time in the life of the Communion in particular and the Christian Church in general when all those things I've just been saying earlier about quality and excitement perhaps matter more than they did half a century ago because – for the very best of reasons – Christian expectations are often higher. Right across the world, at every level, we're dealing with communities, nations, classes, no longer content to be told by others what's good for them and what they can and can't achieve and understand. It's as simple

as that. And one of my nightmares in the future is churches where congregations are better educated, more imaginative, more in touch with the big picture and themselves, more attuned to the culture around than their pastors. God forbid: because if we have a rising tide or level of critical intelligence in our congregations, we need the same in our clergy. We need a critical intelligence rooted in prayer and the excitement of where we are in Jesus Christ.

So it's quite a moment. We can't afford to drop our vigilance about these things. We can't afford simply to say well, there are ways of getting through. The catch is that we have this challenge and opportunity at a time when every institution I know of is under severe financial pressure and resources are just not around in abundance. This is the case right across the globe in every institution, elite or non-elite. And (as you know far better than I) we have a whole set of challenges to identify sustainable resources of quality and imagination in our institutions.

I hope that your presence at this meeting indicates a real eagerness to do that finding and sharing of resources, and a real eagerness to step up to the challenge that faces our institutions in the Communion and more widely today. Because I think it is one of the greatest things we can achieve to make the Communion and indeed the Body of Christ more and more genuinely what it's meant to be: a learning, eager, expectant community that is willing always to speak out about where it is in the purposes of God, where it is in Christ, where it is in culture, where it is in the complexities of our own personal experience and journeys.

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