

# Vocation

## by the Archbishop of Wales

In the most general sense, vocation is God's summons into existence itself. God calls creation into being; every thing that is made is called and named; its identity lies in the purposive call of God. But for the Christian, this is more specific again: human beings are called to grow in community into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Their vocation is not just to exist, but to come into a life that shares in Christ's life. The Church's very name (*ekklesia*) means 'a community that is called together'; but the Church is not only a called community, it is a community that represents God's call and invitation to all humanity.

So specific 'vocations' within the Church need to be seen as ways of representing and reinforcing this basic invitation from God; vocation in the Church reminds the world that it is called into being and invited into new being. Particular styles of life and ministry in the Church are different ways of echoing God's call.

In this light, we need to be careful about separating person from function. Only when I am conscious of being called by God to be myself in Christ can I find what specific work he asks of me in passing on that discovery and that hope to others. If we bear the call of God to others, that will itself be a way of becoming more profoundly who we are and who we are meant to be.

It is possible to see the whole of the educational process as a story of vocation, to the extent that it is about *inviting* people to become what they can be. Christian education will be particularly attentive to this, always asking what it is that this or that person can show us of God's love and Christ's renewing power.

So, as with vocation in general, the process of education needs people who have some sense of being called and 'invited' themselves. It has long been recognized that the best teachers tend to be those who don't separate person and function, who find that encouraging others to respond to their fullest potential is what makes them themselves. This is an aspect of teaching very much obscured by all the trends in our society to regard teaching as simple communication of skills or information (not to mention the idea of replacing teachers by computers for certain purposes). Any Christian educational process ought to be fully conscious of this dimension, however, and should give priority in its vision to a very clear acknowledgement of the teacher's work as the way a teacher responds to God's call to become herself or himself in helping others to become themselves.

There are obvious implications for *all* teacher training, but especially Christian training. One of the areas for Church colleges to take on board is this question of personal nurture and development in 'becoming oneself in

Christ'. Chaplaincy in such an institution is not just liturgical or even pastoral; it needs to have some aspects of real spiritual stretching about it, what in ordination training would be called 'formation'. Likewise, professional development for the Christian teacher is something that must involve attention to the teacher's calling as disciple, as someone called to call others and open doors for their spiritual growth.

This task is not just for other educational professionals. Pastors and local church communities need to be involved in supporting and stretching the calling of the teachers in their schools and in their congregations. Teachers working in non-Church schools are likely to need as much or even more in the way of nurture, to sustain their awareness of their work as a calling.

In a school community, much depends in all this upon the skills of a headteacher. In the Church school, it is absolutely essential that a head should understand this vocational dimension to the staff's work (even in the case of those staff who have little or no overt religious commitment, but are willing to work for the school's ethos). The head needs to see that these issues of 'formation' and support for a vision that does not separate function and person are addressed in professional development programmes and so on. And if s/he is to do this effectively, s/he will need resourcing in turn. Christian heads require professional training that will keep before them the job of undergirding the vocational side of all the work of a school – as well as, once again, serious and sympathetic help from local congregations, and understanding from Foundation governors who can be relied on to support the vision.

In brief, a head who is conscious of this vision, and above all a head in a Church school, will be someone who is capable of resisting some of the pressures towards functionalism, crudely measurable outcomes and the depersonalizing of the teaching relationship that are around in the educational establishment.