



Exploring Formation for Ministry in a Learning Church

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Thesis

As an academic theologian, part of my teaching role has involved contributing to the education and formation of individuals for lay and ordained ministry within the Christian Church. My students at the University of Exeter have been involved in a complex arrangement between their sponsoring churches (mostly Church of England, but also Methodist and United Reformed Church), the South West Ministry Training Course (SWMTC) and the University of Exeter's Department of Theology. In basic terms, their churches oversee their practical work experience, SWMTC facilitates their general spiritual and vocational formation, and their time with me in the classroom contributes to what the Church of England refers to as developing their 'quality of mind'. Although the churches and the SWMTC describe the entire process of formation for ministry in holistic and integrated terms?so as to prevent candidates from viewing any one part of their formal-formation as more or less significant than the other?I have concerns that the Church of England's framework for ministry formation presently devalues the role of academic theology, which problematizes its relationship with HE institutions.

The way in which the Church and its training courses perceive theological education in an HE context appears to contrast with the benchmarked aims and objectives of the discipline (critical engagement and reflection, personal transformation, sophisticated understanding, etc.).¹ Rather than viewing HE theology as a vehicle for personal transformation; within its wider ministry formation remit the church views HE theology purely as an instrument for the acquisition of knowledge. To demonstrate this problem, this paper will outline the complexities of ministry formation by examining recent changes in the ideology and methodology of ministerial formation in the South West of England (Cornwall, Devon and parts of Somerset), with specific reference to the partnership between the SWMTC and the University of Exeter's Department of Theology. I will begin by examining key developments in the Church of England's approach to theological education and ministerial formation, as prompted by the rise of the Churches' Validation Framework for Theological Education in the late-1980s.² Following this, I will examine the publicly available documents produced as part of the SWMTC's own validation process with the Church of England in 2002 and 2007, paying special attention to the changes in how the SWMTC has conceived of the Church's mission and ministry in these two iterations of the document. In particular, I hope to note how?if at all?these changes in ideology and stated methodology have shaped the HE remit for ministerial formation.

After having established the context for ministry formation at the University of Exeter, and touching upon the curious relationship which the university shares with the SWMTC, I will turn my attention to a critically-reflective discussion of what I perceive to be the principal obstacle to an intellectually robust and personal transforming theological education (which reflects the discipline's QAA benchmarks). I will take the partnership between the University and the Course as my case.

Method

This piece of research, though 'critically reflective', is not the work of an educationalist. It is a theologian's critique of a theologian's work. As noted by the Subject Centre for PRS Academic Co-ordinator for theology, Rebecca O'Loughlin, in the UK there has historically been very little subject-specific development in the area of pedagogical method within theology and religious studies. In theology we tend to be sceptical of the empirical research paradigms used in the harder social sciences, favouring instead our more theoretical and discursive research methods.³ When engaging with education theory, I often feel overwhelmed and somewhat intimidated by the fundamental difference in research languages used by these other disciplines. As O'Loughlin notes, 'TRS [Theology and Religious Studies] academics and educationalists have traditionally been at cross purposes in dialogue.'⁴

This last year I have been working towards a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice, as part of my University's professional development scheme for new lecturers. As a result of this course, I have begun to consider what a discipline-specific pedagogical research method for theology would look like. Such a method would leverage the unique methods and strictures of my own discipline in order to critically analyse academic practices associated with teaching and learning in theology.⁵ The project that I am pursuing here will reflect this discipline-specific pedagogical research method by employing textual and discursive skills to analyze changes in educational ideology and methodology within the SWMTC and, more broadly, the Church of England's Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church remit. In addition, I have also used action research and ideographic or narrative research methods to convey my own experiences as a teacher and to consider the experiences of recent students of the course, who I interviewed for the purposes of this paper.

Ministry Formation in the Church of England

Ministry formation in the Church of England has developed in the last century and a half through an ongoing process of growth, decline and renewal. In the late nineteenth century, formation for ministry in the Church moved away from the exclusive purview of Oxbridge colleges to include newly formed Red Brick training institutions located throughout the country. At this time, concerns were raised about the quality of theological education provided by these nascent institutions and many within the church's hierarchy feared that Red Brick trained priests would be of a significantly

lesser quality than their Oxbridge contemporaries.⁶ As colleges of various kinds of churchmanship became increasingly more established, much of the Red Brick versus Oxbridge antinomy gradually became replaced by an anxiety of a new sort. Since the 1960s and 1970s in addition to the residential colleges, diocesan courses of study arose to offer a more contextual form of theological education for new forms of local or non-stipendiary ministry. These part-time courses were designed to offer basic ministerial training for lay or ordained ministers whose work would be based exclusively in their local communities. Courses were designed in such a way as to offer education and training for ministry without radically upsetting the lives of potential ministers.⁷ Presently there are 26 ministerial training institutions recognised by the Church of England⁸ of which twelve are part-time courses that have developed in response to regional needs for diocesan-based ministry training. Of these twelve, nearly all are involved in some form of partnership with an HE institution.

A product of the times, the SWMTC finds its origins in the late 1970s when the Dioceses of Exeter and Truro separately developed schemes to train individuals for non-stipendiary ministry.⁹ Gradually the two schemes merged into a single course and by the early 1980s candidates were being received from traditions out with the Church of England. To address this widening partnership, and the growing numbers of those involved in the Course, in 1995 SWMTC was re-constituted as an ecumenical training scheme, governed by representatives of all the sponsoring churches. It is authorised by them to prepare women and men for ordained ministries?stipendiary, itinerant and non-stipendiary. In the past, candidates for ministry from the United Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Plymouth and the Russian Orthodox Church have studied on the Course.

Despite its ecumenical stance, the majority of the course's graduates are candidates for ministry in the Church of England and the Church of England's educational philosophy guides the course's curriculum design. Although a significant part of the course has been delivered by University of Exeter staff and the Certificate, Diploma or Bachelors Degree which one earned through the Course was awarded by the University, SWMTC was careful to state that the ideology which underpinned its ministry formation was ecclesial rather than academic. In the SWMTC handbook it was noted that, 'The primary purpose and goal of training is preparation for ministry. The primary validation body is, therefore, the Church.'¹⁰ Nonetheless, the course still situated itself within the context of a partnership with the University of Exeter wherein theology was allowed to take on a more 'public' dimension. Again the handbook noted that theology's 'claims to be a 'public truth' cannot be the exclusive business of the Church. Theology has a proper place in Higher Education and its claims to truth have to be debated and tested in that arena.'¹¹

That the University of Exeter and SWMTC were engaged in a partnership was not at all uncommon. As noted above, the majority of the Church's provision for ministerial education is sustained through partnerships with UK universities, either through validation arrangements between HE institutions and ministerial training schemes, or through the use of HE institutions for the attainment of degrees awarded by and part-taught by HE institutions. Positively, the HE partnership has encouraged more rigorous learning among candidates and it potentially lays the foundations for life-long learning. Encouraging HE qualification for ordinands has raised standards in the delivery of training and contributed to a sense of professionalism amongst clergy.¹²

Whilst clergy undoubtedly benefit from the culture and excellence of theological education in the HE context, concerns are consistently raised by Church authorities regarding the conflation of academic theological qualifications and ministerial fitness. The church's guidelines explicitly focus 'not on curriculum content, but on the character and personal qualities of those who will serve the church in ordained ministry.'¹³ It is clear that the church views the attainment of character and quality, over the award of a degree, to be the marker of successful ministerial formation.

The Process of Validation

The period in which part-time courses emerged within the Church of England's ministry formation remit was marked by organic and somewhat untamed development. Coinciding with the advent of parttime ministry training courses, the Church's training provision began to offer candidates training in practical ministry skills, pastoral counselling,

management skills, and a variety of other more directly applicable skills-based modules. In the taxonomy of theological education, this represented a shift away from what Francis Schüssler Fiorenza calls a 'theological vision of ministry' training towards a 'professional model of ministry' training.¹⁴ With the curriculum swelling, it became necessary for the Church to directly address the content and quality of its theological education.

Under the guidance of Archbishop Robert Runcie (1922-2000) and Daniel Hardy (chair of Church of England Working Party on Assessment, 1987), the Church began to critically evaluate the nature and character of its ministry training. As Archbishop Runcie noted in his preface to his report, 'The rationale of theological education in the Church of England has never been made fully explicit.'¹⁵

In 1987 Runcie and Hardy produced *Education for the Church's Ministry* (ACCM-22)¹⁶ which recommended an overhaul of the Church's ministry formation provision. Instead of suggesting a centrally mandated theological curriculum, ACCM-22 called for the devolution of centralised control and proposed the development of a validation process facilitated by inspections of institutions at regular intervals. The Church wished to determine the 'rationale' of ministerial education, rather than mandating particular forms of content or modes of delivery.¹⁷ One of the benefits of ACCM-22's decentralization of curriculum is that it empowered regional providers of ministry training to offer curricula and formation opportunities which played to the strengths of individual colleges, courses, and departments. Moreover, this move to a decentralised curriculum allowed colleges and courses to offer curricula which more directly reflected the unique demands of each region. The move away from centralised curriculum towards more regionally determined curricula has meant that the Church's central authority is now more concerned with mandating ministerial culture and character than it is concerned with mandating the acquisition of core knowledge. The document notes that the goal of ministry formation is 'wisdom and [a] godly habit of life... exercised in and through the corporate ministry of the Church of England for the world.'¹⁸

The current directive for ministerial formation in the Church of England is outlined in three recent documents which build upon the framework outline in ACCM-22: *Mission and Ministry* (2003),¹⁹ *Criteria for Selection for Ministry in the Church of England* (2005)²⁰ and *Shaping the Future* (2006).²¹ In all three of these documents, a general description of ministry formation is given which situates academic theology within a constellation of other key formational elements. *Shaping the Future* outlines five elements of a 'balanced' curriculum, including 'Affective learning: development of self-understanding; Generic Skills: Critical thinking, collaborative working, leadership; Disciplinary learning; Performance practice; Contextual learning.'²² Within this curriculum, the component which is most readily identified as 'academic' theology (and thus uniquely in the purview of the HE sector) is 'disciplinary learning' which consists of elements dealing with Church (mission/practice), Doctrine (History/ Tradition) and Scripture (Hermeneutics/Homiletics). These curriculum guidelines are intended to be observed by courses and colleges alike.

SWMTC:Validation in 2002 & 2007

Following the basic guidelines issued by the Church, the SWMTC is divided roughly into four components: Evening classes, Ministry Development Modules (MDMs), Tutorial Groups, and Ministry Placement. Though all four of these components count towards the award of a University of Exeter degree, only the evening classes are, in large part, directly overseen by University of Exeter theology staff. MDMs, tutorial groups and ministry placements are co-ordinated by SWMTC and overseen by their own tutoring staff. Students on the course will attend evening classes which are offered by the University of Exeter and taught at either the Streatham Campus or in Cornwall. Students take core modules in theology and biblical studies as well as a choice of electives in related theological and biblical studies sub-disciplines. MDMs are delivered over six residential weekends, with two weekends assigned to each MDM focus. Here, students develop skills for reflective practice, ecclesiastical polity, and mission. These residential weekends are supplemented by an annual eight-day Easter School which focuses on an intensive study of either pastoral theology or bereavement. Monthly, students meet together with their tutors in a regional tutor group (based either in Exeter, Launceston, or Truro) where they cover a rotating diet of themes including arts and imagination, Christian ethics, and spirituality. In their penultimate year, students have a ministry placement and each year throughout the course,

students are assessed on a led service and sermon.

Given that the course is designed with the needs of adult parttime learners in mind, the programme offered by SWMTC relies heavily upon flexible and distributed learning paradigms. All taught modules are run in the evenings and the use of learning technologies such as WebCT is highly encouraged.

Assessment on the course takes two principal forms. The SWMTC managed portion of the course relies upon an exhaustive learning journal to which students contribute throughout their time on the course. The journals encourage reflective practices and are intended to help students learn more about themselves and their ministerial development. Added to this is the student's portfolio which includes reports on their placements, orders of church services, liturgies, and devotional reflections. It is important to note that this portion of the ministry formation, though assessed, is intended to assess only the spiritual, personal and ministerial development of students and not their intellectual development or capacity. According to the SWMTC handbook, 'Assessment of intellectual development, theological understanding and learning takes place primarily in relation to the modules taught in evening classes, which address key areas of the theological curriculum....These assessments contribute to the assessment of...interpretive skills...'23

Validation

The inspections and validation process which was catalyzed by ACCM-22 suggested that theological institutions determine their rationale for ministry formation by periodically submitting answers to three questions about the mission and ministry of the church. In the original document the following questions were suggested:

- What ordained Ministry does the Church of England require?
- What is the shape of the educational programme best suited for equipping people to exercise this ministry?
- What are the appropriate means of assessing suitability for ordination to exercise this ministry?

As the validation process developed, the issues raised by the first question, 'What ordained ministry does the Church of England Require?' expanded to reflect both the increasingly ecumenical context of ministry formation and broader questions regarding the church's underlying mission. In 2002 and 2007, the following questions were to be answered for the validation process:

- What is the training institution's understanding of the mission to which the Church of God is called and of the patterns of Church life and order through which the Church of England, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church respond to that calling?
- In the light of that understanding what are the main characteristics of ordained and other public ministries for which the training institution seeks to train its candidates?
- What is the process and content of ministerial education and formation which will most appropriately prepare candidates to begin the lifelong exercise of these ministries?
- What forms of assessment are most appropriate for determining the suitability of candidates to begin the exercise of these ministries?

The primary sources for my research into the ideology behind SWMTC's ministry formation provision are the two sets of answers to these four validation questions, produced in 2002 and again in 2007. In the five intervening years between the inspection periods, the ideology which underpinned the SWMTC's answers to these questions shifted dramatically as a result of a number of critical reports issued by the Church. These reports analyzed the adequacy of the inspection process itself and the quality and consistency of the Church's ministerial formation provision across the country. Below, I will note how the course's founding conception of the Church's mission and ministry shifted away

from one which was rooted in a critical engagement with the self-described 'story' of the Church, to one which was more explicitly concerned with a critical engagement in the practice of ministry itself. This shift from narrative identity to a praxis-centred identity resulted in the marginalization of academic theology and further problematizes the course's relationship to the HE sector, in light of HE Theology's stated QAA benchmarks.

Validation in 2002

The 2002 iteration of the document is a formidable piece of theological writing. It begins by locating the church within the historical work of the Trinitarian God who made himself manifest through the lives of the 'Chosen People of Israel', in the Person of Christ and through the power of the Spirit (for the life of the World) in the ministry of the Church. This history is revealed to the Church through the Scriptures, and it is this scriptural revelation of a covenant making and covenant keeping God which guides the church's mission and informs its understanding of ministry.²⁴ By placing the in-breaking of the Divine as the 'ground and goal'²⁵ of the Church's life and work, the kind of Church that is characterised by this document is one that is exceedingly counter-cultural. The Church is the agent of God's non-possessive and sacrificial love in the world and represents a tightly-knit community of individuals who have acknowledged the story of this God as one which challenges the structures of power that exist in the world. The mission of the Church to the world is one which embodies this specific story through a ministry of non-possessive and sacrificial love (despite the apparent failure of the Church to live out this ministry in the past²⁶). To facilitate this mission, the church must form ministers who will 'discern, embody and confess the creative and redemptive activity of God, made known in the story of Israel, Jesus and the Church.'²⁷

In broad brushstrokes, SWMTC's answers to the validation questions in 2002 reflect a more properly 'theological' understanding of the church and its ministry. The language it uses is intentionally reminiscent of ACCM-22, particularly when it describes the extent to which the church and its ministry are counter-cultural.²⁸ Training for this sort of ministry emphasises collaborative interdependence,²⁹ ecumenism,³⁰ and is rooted in the centrality of rigorous and holistic theological education. ³¹ As such, theological education is that which forms students to 'grow in those personal qualities by which...the creative and redemptive activity of God may be proclaimed and realised in the world.'³² Academic theological education fosters within individuals the capacity for a critical engagement with the story of their faith and the critical application of this story to the church's work at present. The qualities of a minister formed under the ideology of this document are those which can be developed through a programmatic and instrumental approach to teaching and assessment. That is to say, all effective ministers could be selected based upon their participation in these four main attributes which the ministerial formation curriculum is intended to develop.

Validation in 2007

The context for SWMTC's validation in 2007 was markedly different than 2002. By 2003, the church faced a significant financial crisis that was in part brought on by the costs of supporting a large number of training institutions around the country. Moreover, theological education was markedly bogged down by the increasingly elaborate system of inspections and validations. **Mission and Ministry**³³ and Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church³⁴ sought to critically evaluate the church's remit for theological education, by addressing, once again, the rationale for ministry training.

Mission and Ministry attempted to overhaul the validation process by reframing the ACCM-22 questions. In the decades since ACCM-22, institutions had provided inconsistent answers to the validation questions and **Mission and Ministry** sought to give much needed guidance on how training centres could more effectively respond to the validation process. Additionally, the document brought into light concerns regarding the failure of courses to 'demonstrate, on educational and formational grounds the appropriateness of using traditional university theology degrees as part of educational programmes for the church's ministry.'³⁵ Because concerns had been raised nationally about the quality and consistency of ministry education, and because there was little in the way of demonstrably proven learning outcomes, **Mission and Ministry** hoped to produce from courses more clearly articulated aims and

objectives for ministry formation.

Formation for Ministry in a Learning Church was aimed at addressing the rise of 'mixed-training' and mixed-provision contexts. Since the mid-90s, as is indicated by SWMTC's own history, courses and colleges around the country began to accept students from a variety of denominational backgrounds. Moreover, students with various ministerial aspirations (lay, ordained, part- and full-time) would study together in a single educational environment. As the demand for courses increased, partnerships with the HE sector placed new pressures on ministry formation training and brought into question the necessity of HE qualifications for all forms of ministry. As addressed by the report, changes in the shape of initial ministry education (IME) brought to light the need for the church to offer more in the way of continuing ministry education (CME) or post-ordination training (POT) for candidates. In the world following **Formation for Ministry in a Learning Church**, it was widely recognised that adequate ministry formation exceeded what could be feasibly attained in a traditional 3-year university course.

The 2007 Framework Agreement reflects the critiques of ministry formation levied by *Formation for Ministry in a Learning Church* and *Mission and Ministry* and the agreement builds upon the vision for ministry formation described in *Shaping the Future* and the most recent version of the Church's Selection Criteria. Rather than taking the historical activity of the Divine as its starting point, the 2007 documents emphasised the more constructive role played by culture in shaping the mission of the Church. Though it is still clear in this document that the church consists of a group of people who have responded to the story of God's activity in the world, unlike the 2002 document, the emphasis on the Church's 'counter-cultural' identity is diminished. This reflects the burgeoning interest within the Church in notions of mission and outreach, as evidenced in such publications as the mission-shaped church from which the document quotes, 'it is not the church of god that has a mission in the world but the God of mission who has a church in the world.'³⁶

The qualities to be engendered by ministers under the rubrics of the 2007 agreement were intended to enhance an individual's sense of the Church's missional context. Candidates were encouraged to recognise the specific and particular ways the gospel is enculturated in their own ministries. Part of this included an awareness of 'fresh expressions of church' and exposure to new and creative forms of worship and witness. Other areas to be developed in students under the 2007 scheme included openness to ecumenism, spiritual leadership and collaborative ministry skills. In light of the church's need to 'top-up' education following IME, emphasis was also placed on the importance of life-long learning for clergy.

Mission, Story, and the Role of Theological Education

Because mission rather than story had become the determining factor in ministry formation after SWMTC's 2007 submission, the benefits of a rigorously academic theological education were marginalised. The 2002 framework emphasised the importance of the historical narrative which is told by and lived within the Church. It was in the light of this narrative that the church interpreted its present mission and ministry. In its current iteration, SWMTC stands in agreement with the Church's own selection criteria for ministers, where it notes that 'without faith, spiritual depth and a sense of vocation, intellectual ability in a minister counts for very little.'³⁷ But does the church really undervalue HE theology, or is it rather undervaluing a caricature of HE which conflates theological education with 'intellectual ability', at the cost of diminishing personal transformation? I will argue below that what is most likely behind the church's seemingly anti-intellectual bias is a fundamental misunderstanding of academic theology, which can be rectified by an examination of the QAA subject benchmarks.

As noted above, the church divides its learning outcomes into broad categories of vocation, ministry, spirituality, personality and character, relationships, leadership and collaboration, mission and evangelism, faith, and lastly, quality of mind.³⁸ This final outcome, 'Quality of mind', is the only category specifically designated as pertaining to academic theology. It is explained further in the Criteria for Selection that quality of mind is explicitly linked with the HE or academic element of formation, but only insofar as it relates directly to an increase of knowledge and understanding, the enhancement of critical and reflective skills, the development of understanding, the ability to use

evidence to support opinions and to discern valid from invalid arguments for the purposes of good communication.³⁹

Though the traits which the church associates with higher education are clearly in keeping with what one would expect from education in the humanities, they ignore the broader cultural and political benefit of learning theology in a higher education setting, as conceived of by the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education benchmarks, which speaks of such an education as that which 'engenders knowledge, understanding and informed critique of human culture and existence.'⁴⁰ Academic theology surely involves the 'acquisition of knowledge and understanding', but such acquisition is not an end to itself. It involves a fundamental change in one's perspectives and attitudes. To quote again from the benchmarks:

[Studying theology] may have a profound impact on the student's life and outlook. The experience of studying this subject may contribute to a student's personal development, transforming horizons by engaging with cultures and societies other than their own, whether ancient or modern. It may foster a lifelong quest for wisdom, respect for one's own integrity and that of others, selfexamination in terms of the beliefs and values adopted for one's own life, a better understanding of its role in geo-political conflict and, not least, the challenging of prejudices. The multidisciplinary nature of much TRS also means that students have breadth of vision and intellectual flexibility.⁴¹

Theology's transformational potency is shared in common by cognate disciplines within the humanities family. As noted by educationalist Philip W. Martin:

broadly the Arts and Humanities have this in common: they do not understand themselves to be an education primarily structured around the imparting of skills and competences, but one primarily structured round a series of engagements with a body of knowledge....⁴²

As with all humanities disciplines, theology takes part in the chorus of university voices in offering critical transformation to its students by exposing them to new ideas and perspectives and by offering them a fresh perspective on current and historical events.⁴³

Perhaps the church's hesitancy regarding the study of Christian theology in an HE context reflects the trend within academic theology towards a more 'religious studies' orientated curriculum. Perhaps the church fears that in a secular university context, theology will be treated from a supposedly neutral or exclusively sociological perspective. American educationalist and theologian Edward Farley proposes that despite the rise of religious studies, universities will always benefit from the unique insights and methods of confessional theology. He notes that the study of a 'specific faith...with the attempt to uncover and understand its power, attractiveness, or authenticity' is itself a respectable and vigorous form of scholarship.⁴⁴ To be sure, theological scholarship is not a value-free pursuit. Indeed, like all forms of humanities discourse it trades heavily in conceptions of culturally strong values and encountering and challenging these values in the classroom leads to the development of critical insight and personal transformation.

Historical and Cultural Excurses

If this is what academic theology is capable of accomplishing, why is the Church reluctant to acknowledge the HE component of ministry formation as more than simply the acquisition of knowledge? In interviews with high-ranking ecclesiastical figures, I encountered many instances where bishops voiced the opinion that the church does not need all of its priests to be theologically proficient. Though no one wished to go 'on the record', a principal reason for this was that the church did not want to view the attainment of an academic qualifications as a benchmark for ministerial fitness. Representatives for the Church were clear that it is their conception of ministerial fitness and calling which warrants the acceptance of candidates for Holy Orders and not the accreditation of such candidates by higher

education institutions. Moreover, representatives for the church were concerned that Higher Education, as a sector, was more interested with fees and tuition than with facilitating transformation and critical reflection amongst students. Part of this concern over creating an overly academic clergy rests on the Church's understanding of the role of ordained ministry and the nature of contemporary congregations. Those within church hierarchy, though generally very well educated, do not believe that parishes (principally rural parishes) require priests who possess rigorous academic theological training. Instead, the church should be staffed by individuals who are concerned with outreach, community work, and who possess the other spiritual qualities that are listed amongst the selection criteria for ministry, discussed above.

This sentiment is furthermore reflected amongst recently trained clergy, as well. To corroborate the discursive work of this project, I ran a series of interviews with former students of SWMTC who were currently engaged in Christian ministry. When asked to describe their 'ministry formation experience', these former students consistently told their stories in such a way which portrayed ministry formation as a process which transcended their years with SWMTC. They all mentioned their previous work with the church, their previous experiences undergoing training (e.g. Reader training or Bishop's Certificate courses) and some mentioned influential books that led them towards their current vocation. In most cases it has been my prompting in interviews which encouraged them to explicitly reflect on their experience in the higher education component of their formation.

This suggests two things to me. First, it would seem that SWMTC is effectively helping candidates to situate their formation within the students' broader life-narrative. By this I mean that for the students, their academic formation is perceived as being continuous with the activity of God throughout their lives. This is accomplished in no small amount by the work of theological reflection journaling which, though universally disliked, functions to successfully re-narrate the lives of these curates. Second, because formal training tends to recede into the background, there is a sense in which a student's academic formation is not adequately relating to a candidate's work in the parish. One candidate commented that he is putting his training 'on the shelf for now' because his parish found him to be too academic. A new curate in Devon, who described herself as generally academic, commented that there needed to be more in the course about 'how to go about using training to communicate this [theological education] to the people.'

Though the relevance of the academic aspect of formation is disputed, nearly all candidates praise the residential weekends. In particular, two NSMs who came from an Anglo-Catholic background made explicit reference to the formational benefits of the ecumenism of the course, citing that for them worshipping with Christians from different backgrounds was the most important aspect of formation. It is interesting to note that diversity for these students was expressed in terms of worship-style, piety and polity and not theology. Given that all interviewees expressed some sense of frustration with the administrative inefficiencies that they encountered along the path to ordination (lost paperwork, delayed selection conferences, problems negotiating academic credits), their tolerance for 'hoopjumping' exercises seems low. The attitudes expressed by these candidates regarding the applicability of their formal training suggests to me that more work needs to be done to situate the academic element of formation within their broader discipleship narrative. To this end, we should endeavour to find ways of connecting formal theological, biblical and historical study with the life of ministry in the church.

My research seems to indicate that the marginalisation of theological education amongst clergy and within the church's hierarchy is the norm rather than the exception. This would appear to stem from the Church's suspicion that the University is principally interested in the Church's money, and the University's suspicion that the Church lacks a sufficient commitment to academic rigour. This is, of course, a gross over-generalization of the problem, but nonetheless I believe that it indicates the underlying dichotomy that is tacit to ministry formation: the tension between formal theological training of ministers *qua* education and distinctively ecclesial formation *qua* discipleship. The reason for this curious conflict?beyond mere curmudgeonly attitudes on the part of ecclesiastical and academic figures?is remarkably complex.

The structure, government, and founding philosophy of ministry within the Church of England polity reflects the development of the national church in the 16th century when it forged its unique ecclesiastical identity apart from both

the Roman Church and various Continentally Reformed churches. A key figure in developing the polity of this new national church was the famous Devonian Divine, Richard Hooker. Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, were published in 1594 and again in 1597 and sought to establish a set of principles for the proper ruling of the church. Though not a binding document in the sense in which ecclesiastical canon law might be binding in the Church of Rome the document sets a precedent for the church's polity which is still very much influential to Anglican self-identity to day.

In Hooker's day, very much as in our own, the church was under pressure to staff rural parishes with priests who could serve the 'cure of soules'. Then, as now, the church possessed a large number of parishes and benefices all of which needed to be staffed with trained clergy. Indeed, the institutionalised English Church has always wrestled with providing sufficient quality of ministers for the quantitative need of the church. The question thus arises, how does one offer to all churches a sufficiently well trained priest given the demands of formation? Hooker notes the following:

to furnish all places of cure in this realme it is not an armie of twelve thousand learned men that would suffice, nor two universities that can alwayes furnish as manie as decaie in so greate a number, nor a fourth part of the livnges with cure that when they fall are able to yeeld sufficient maintenance for learned men, is it not plain that unless the greatest parte of the people should be left utterlie without the publike use and exercise of religion there is no remedie but to take into the ecclesiasticall order a number of mean meanelie qualified in respect of learning?⁴⁵

In simple terms, the need of the church surpasses the ability of the church to produce priests. The dirty compromise which the church must strike is appointing 'meanelie qualified' ministers whose skills and training are sufficient enough for the task.

This, for Hooker, brings up considerable theological issues, particularly regarding the Pauline admonition that there be 'learninge in presbyters....to exhort in doctrine which is sound and to disprove them that gaine saie it.' The question, raised by Hooker and indeed germane today is 'what measure of habilitie in such thinges shall serve to make men scapable of that kinde of office he doth not himselfe preciselie determine...' which is to say, when determining the skills of the individual inhabiting the priestly office, one must consider the context of the ministry and the innate quality of the minister when designing a course of study. Clearly, as Hooker notes, the Apostle, 'requireth more in presbyters then there is found in maine whome the Church of England alloweth', but in light of its need, the church must allow for the lesser evil by allowing the consecrating of 'such presbyters as are so farre fourth sufficient although they want that habilitie of preaching which some others have.' In other words, the needs of the church for ministers engaged in services, outweighs the need of the church (or the command of scripture) for learned ministers. He concludes:

the question in truth is not whether learning be required, but whether a church wherein there is not sufficient store of learned men to furnish all congregations should do better to let thousands of soules grow savage, to let them live without any publike service of God, to let their children die unbaptized, to withhold the benefit of the other sacraments from them, to let them depart this world like Pagans without any thighe as much as red unto them concerning the waie of life. ⁴⁶

Hooker's astute assessment of the position of the church regarding the formation of ministry echoes concerns raised by ecclesiastical figures and theological educators today. The church's formation provision, with its declining academic standards, reflects the tacit acknowledgment that what is most important for the church is that posts are filled, not that they are filled well.⁴⁷

Conclusion

The Church and the University appear to have conflicting views of what is accomplished by teaching and learning theology in an HE context. By way of conclusion, I wish to suggest two simple corrections that may make steps towards remedying this problem.

Clearer partnership

When I started teaching on the BTh(Ministry) course which was jointly run by the University of Exeter and the SWMTC in the winter of 2008 I had very little sense of how my module related to the broader aims and objectives of my student's course of studies. Compared to other courses of academic study, the requirements for the BTh(Ministry) are complex insofar as they are determined by factors which extend well beyond the immediate purview of an academic. Work placement, retreats, MDMs, all of these elements were provided by different institutions and because the course was designed and developed outside my immediate department, I felt like my role as a lecturer was more like that of a hired-hand than a career academic. Although it is certainly financially expedient for Church training institutions to 'buy-out' the time of its partner University's staff, it does not serve the needs of students to take courses that are delivered by alienated instructors. Until I began to research the history, aims and objectives of the course, I had very little sense of how my own teaching contributed to my student's broader goals. If Church courses and colleges are to develop further collaborative relationships with the HE sector, it would be of paramount importance for constituent members of the partnership to collaboratively develop courses and modules.

Of course, not all courses are up for perennial redevelopment, and staff turn-over can mean that individual lecturers may not be able to contribute to the course development process. Nonetheless, individual lecturers and tutors must be made explicitly aware of the aims and outcomes of their particular courses, if their teaching is to have any continuity with the students' overarching learning experience. It would be my hope that fostering a closer partnership between courses and their HE partners would go some way to alleviating the suspicion which those in the ecclesiastical hierarchy sense about the HE sector, as well as the misgivings which some in the HE sector have about their

Church-based partners.

Theology and imagination

The research above suggests that the Church views academic theology as an instrument for the acquisition of knowledge. Moreover, stifled by confusion regarding the overarching aims and outcomes of their students, academic theologians are scarcely given the encouragement or the freedom to creatively design their teaching, thus contributing to the misguided understanding of theology on the part of the church. Rather than succumbing to an instrumentalist pedagogy, I would suggest that theology must be taught not exclusively as a collection of ideas and dates, but also as a constellation of encounters and experiences. As noted above, theology shares with other humanities disciplines in its ability to transform students' lives. Academic theology must be encouraged to engage with the entirety of lived-experience and not simply the exposition of texts. It must exist within a polarity of textual hermeneutics and the phenomenology of religious experiences. Michael Gallagher of the Gregorian University in Rome has noted that theology is often guilty of zooming in 'on the religious content of literature at the expense of the aesthetic experience.' For theology to be relevant to the student's encounter with language, theologians must be aware of the entire 'process of being invited into a different wavelength of sympathetic consciousness' which theology encourages. This 'wavelength', Gallagher notes, is shared in common by 'theology and imagination [and it] lies in a whole adventure and joy of self-transcendence in its many forms.'⁴⁸ In teaching and research theological scholarship must grapple with the experience of the theological object through the captivation of the intellect as well as the enchantment of the imagination. Although the SWMTC course does encourage creativity and reflection, such aspects of the course are not expected from the academic theological component. As such, students do not come to a theology course

expecting to be challenged, transformed, or engaged by the entire 'process' of theological study, as they would, for example, from a course on liturgy, arts or cultural studies.

Such integrative forms of teaching and learning would benefit students from any context. Yet given that the SWMTC is principally made up by mature adult-learners, the need of imagination and integration is even more pronounced. Alison Le Cornu, the Director of Open Learning at the London Bible College argues that age, more than any other demographic category, affects the learning styles of students. In her studies, older students have a demonstrable need for a creative interplay between subject matter and personal experience and that students in her studies have responded best when modules are designed to foster imaginative insights.⁴⁹ Her research is echoed in the more anecdotal research of Andrea Kenkmann, who finds that with adult learners 'a more open and learner-centred approach to teaching,' is required. She notes that 'the key to high quality adult education is the idea of making learning fun as well as stimulating.'⁵⁰

For both Le Cornu and Kenkmann, teaching in their subjects is most effective when students can anchor learning in their life experiences. In the context of HE theology, this would involve lecturers creatively interacting with student's own stories and experiences, in much the same way that ministry students are encouraged to do in their reflection journaling or portfolio work for the formational component of their courses. What I propose is not a new envisioning of theological education, but simply the integration of the various disparate components of ministry formation to include more explicitly HE theology's capacity to facilitate transformation in student's lives. As Kenkmann notes in her work as a continental philosopher:

[the task of philosophy lies in] asking and exploring fundamental questions about the world and our lives. The aim of philosophical enquiry is not neutral and detached knowledge but the hope to make sense of our lives and flourish as human beings. Ideally, philosophy should make us happier, better, and more critical people...Philosophy thus reflects our engagement with life in general and returns to our practices. ⁵¹

I would argue that in developing the theological curriculum, regardless of its application within ecclesiastical or non-ecclesiastical courses, attention to creativity in pedagogy and creativity in content is central. Theology's rich history with the arts and culture, and the recent surge in the advanced study of theology's relationship with values and practices, attests to the potential fruitfulness of such an approach. If the relationship between church colleges and courses and HE departments of theology are to thrive, more attention needs to be paid to collaborative development of theological education and to the specific pedagogical needs of adult learners. But most importantly, theological education must be allowed to foster the creative transformation of student's lives? a goal which is embraced by other cognate humanities disciplines.

Endnotes

- 1 See Subject Benchmark Statements, Theology and Religious Studies, 2007
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/Theology.asp>
- 2 Because it represents the single largest Christian denomination served by the SWMTC, questions regarding the historical development and contemporary shape of ministry formation will centre on the Church of England, unless otherwise explicitly stated.
- 3 O'Loughlin, Rebecca, 'The Relationship Between Pedagogical and Discipline- Specific Research Methods: Critical Perspectives', *Discourse* vol. 7, no. 2 (2008), p. 69. Despite Dr O'Loughlin's concerns, there is a considerable wealth of writing which centres on the unique challenges of teaching in the cognate fields of theology and religious studies, although most of them are American. In addition to three very useful journals (*Discourse*; *Teaching Theology and Religion*; and *Christian Higher Education*), our central disciplinary

body, the American Academy of Religion, produces two regular newsletters on teaching in theology and religion (***Spotlight on Teaching*** and ***Spotlight on Theological Education***). Additionally, an excellent collection of essays was produced in the late 1990s, ***Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation***, which gathered together the writings of several prominent theologians to discuss their perspectives on the challenges associated with teaching in theological education.

- 4 O'Loughlin, *ibid.*, p. 64.
- 5 For the purpose of this discussion I will not engage more broadly with the question of discipline specific pedagogies. For further information see: Gibbs, G., 'Are the pedagogies of the discipline really different?', in Rust, C. (ed), ***Proceedings of the 1999 7th International symposium Improving Student Learning: Improving Student Learning Through the Disciplines***, (Oxford: Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford Brooks University 2000) pp. 41-51.
- 6 See Dowland, David, ***Nineteenth-Century Anglican Theological Training: The Redbrick Challenge*** (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).
- 7 Today, Ordained Local Ministry (the OLM scheme) or non-stipendiary ministry (NSM) is increasingly the norm rather than the exception in rural dioceses such as the Diocese of Truro and the Diocese of Exeter. In Truro, for example, it is estimated that by 2012 75% of all priests will be engaged in self-supporting ministry.
- 8 The Working Party on Structure and ***Funding of Ordination Training, Formation for Ministry Within a Learning Church: the Structure and Funding of Ordination Training*** (The Archbishops' Council, 2003), v.
- 9 Non-stipendiary ministry was an innovation to Canon Law and church custom which allowed ordained priests to continue working in secular employment whilst serving the church in an unpaid capacity.
- 10 Course Handbook and Guide, South West Ministry Training Course, 2008, p.15.
- 11 Course Handbook and Guide, South West Ministry Training Course, 2008, p. 15.
- 12 The Working Party on Structure and Funding of Ordination Training, ***Formation for Ministry Within a Learning Church: the Structure and Funding of Ordination Training*** (The Archbishops' Council, 2003), pp. 13-14.
- 13 The Parameters of the Curriculum Task Group, ***Formation for Ministry Within a Learning Church: Shaping the Future - New Patterns of Training for Lay and Ordained*** (London: Church House Publishing, 2006), p. 64.
- 14 Fiorenza, Francis Schüssler, 'Thinking Theologically About Theological Education,' in ***Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation: A Reader on Theology and Christian education***, ed. Astley, Jeff, Francis, Leslie J. and Crowder, Colin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 331-332.
- 15 Education for the Church's Ministry: ***The Report of the Working Party on Assessment, ACCM Occasional Paper***, vol. 22 (London: Church House, 1987), p. 7.
- 16 Education for the Church's Ministry, ***The Report of the Working Party on Assessment, ACCM Occasional Paper***, vol. 22 (London: Church House, 1987).
- 17 Education for the Church's Ministry: ***The Report of the Working Party on Assessment, ACCM Occasional Paper***, vol. 22 (London: Church House, 1987), p.23.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 19 The Theological Education and Training Committee, ***Mission and Ministry: The Churches' Validation Framework for Theological Education***, 2nd ed. (London: Church House Publishing, 2003).
- 20 The Continuing Ministerial Education and Development Panel, ***Criteria for Selection for Ministry in the Church of England (Ordained and Accredited Lay Ministry)*** (London: Church House Publishing, 2005).
- 21 The Parameters of the Curriculum Task Group, ***Formation for Ministry Within a Learning Church: Shaping the Future - New Patterns of Training for Lay and Ordained*** (London: Church House Publishing,

2006).

- 22 The Parameters of the Curriculum Task Group, ***Formation for Ministry Within a Learning Church: Shaping the Future - New Patterns of Training for Lay and Ordained*** (London: Church House Publishing, 2006) p. 75.
- 23 Course Handbook and Guide, South West Ministry Training Course, (2008) p. 15.
- 24 Application for Validation By the South West Ministry Training Course Through the Churches' Validation Framework (2002), p. 3.
- 25 Ibid., p 2.
- 26 Ibid., p.4.
- 27 Ibid., p. 4.
- 28 Education for the Church's Ministry: ***The Report of the Working Party on Assessment, ACCM Occasional Paper***, vol. 22 (London: Church House, 1987), p. 27.
- 29 Ibid., p. 30.
- 30 Ibid., p. 32.
- 31 Ibid., p. 34.
- 32 Ibid., p. 37.
- 33 The Theological Education and Training Committee, ***Mission and Ministry: The Churches' Validation Framework for Theological Education***, 2nd ed. (London: Church House Publishing, 2003).
- 34 The Working Party on Structure and Funding of Ordination Training, ***Formation for Ministry Within a Learning Church: the Structure and Funding of Ordination Training*** (The Archbishops' Council, 2003).
- 35 The Theological Education and Training Committee, ***Mission and Ministry: The Churches' Validation Framework for Theological Education***, 2nd ed. (London: Church House Publishing, 2003), p. 13.
- 36 Application for Validation By the South West Ministry Training Course Through the Churches' Validation Framework (2007), 1.
- 37 The Continuing Ministerial Education and Development Panel, ***Criteria for Selection for Ministry in the Church of England*** (Ordained and Accredited Lay Ministry (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), p. 45.
- 38 The Parameters of the Curriculum Task Group, ***Formation for Ministry Within a Learning Church: Shaping the Future - New Patterns of Training for Lay and Ordained*** (London: Church House Publishing, 2006, pp. 68-72.
- 39 The Continuing Ministerial Education and Development Panel, ***Criteria for Selection for Ministry in the Church of England (Ordained and Accredited Lay Ministry)*** (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), p. 42.
- 40 Ward, Keith, 'Why Theology Should Be Taught at Secular Universities', ***Discourse*** vol. 4, no. 1 (2004), p. 37.
- 41 Theology and Religious Studies Benchmark Statement, 3.2 (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2007). See <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/statements/Theology.asp>, 1.13
- 42 Martin, Philip W., 'Key Aspects of Teaching and Learning in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences', in ***A Handbook for Teaching & Learning in Higher Education: Enhancing Academic Practice***, ed. Fry, Heather, Ketteridge, Steve and Marshall, Stephanie (London: Kogan Page, 1999), p. 302.
- 43 See also Martin, Philip W., *ibid.*, pp. 303-7.
- 44 Farley, Edward, ***On the State of Theological Education in the US (Resources for American Christianity***

, 2008) available from <http://www.resourcingchristianity.org/Interview.aspx?INTID=fa25f3ad-fde9-4ab8-8319-7dc184971b2d>.

- 45 Hooker, Richard, 'Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity Book V', in (ed.) Hill, W. Speed, *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, vol. 2 (London: Belknap Press, 1977), p. 479.
- 46 Ibid., p. 481.
- 47 This notion that rural-churches demand less academically sophisticated clergy is certainly not a new one: even prior to the reformation these attitudes existed. In 14th century England, it was not at all uncommon for urban priests to be articulate, welltrained, and well-paid and for rural priests to be virtually untrained and to live in relative poverty. Such rural priests were not even expected to have basic scriptural literacy and were encouraged, rather than forcing their congregations to endure poorly thought-out sermons, to read sermons given to them from their bishops or other more sufficiently trained clergy. For an excellent survey of problems regarding clerical abilities in the late medieval church see: Duffy, Eamon, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England C. 1400-1580*, Second ed. (London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 53-87.
- 48 Gallagher, S.J. Michael Paul, 'Theology and Imagination: From Theory to Practice', *Christian Higher Education* 5 (2006), p. 95
- 49 Le Cornu, Alison, 'Learning Styles, Gender and Age As Influential Issues Amongst Students of Theology', *Journal of Beliefs & Values: Studies in Religion & Education* 20, no. 1, pp. 110-114.
- 50 Kenkmann, Andrea, 'Creativity and Enjoyment in Philosophy Teaching: Lessons From Adult Education', *Discourse* vol. 7, no. 2 (2008), p. 205.
- 51 Ibid., p. 215

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