

# **Ministerial Formation as Theological Education in the Context of Theological Study**

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In this article I explore the challenges involved in the formation of men and women for Christian ministry in a rapidly changing world. In dialogue with George Monbiot, David Graeber, and Alan Roxburgh I suggest models of formation that are deeply rooted in the Baptist tradition, while earthed in the realities of twenty-first century life. As well as taking account of the social context in which ministry occurs, I am also aware of particular challenges facing churches in the UK – namely declining numbers and stretched finances. This results in engagement with how we understand ministry and vocation within the world of work and how formation is a partnership between college and placement churches.

## **Keywords**

Formation; Roxburgh; Monbiot; vocation; classroom; context

## **Introduction**

Spurgeon's College in London describes itself as a leader in the training of men and women for mission and ministry. The question is whether we are a leader in quality as well as quantity. The latter is indisputable – we train more people for Baptist ministry than all the other UK Baptist colleges put together – but the former? What follows are some thoughts that have been coalescing since I took on my current role at the College at the end of the summer of 2017.

## **Context**

The context in which ministry happens is obviously crucial in setting the agenda for its formation (in dialogue with our history, tradition, and Scripture). And the present context is not promising. Declining church attendances and stretched finances are the reality facing us, however we tweak and crunch the numbers. If we take Peter Brierley as our guide,

something in the order of 6% of the population of the UK were in church last Sunday.<sup>1</sup>

When I wrote the final version of my book, *Building a Better Body*, in 2007, I suggested that while the rate of decline had slowed, the direction was still downwards.<sup>2</sup> I also observed that many of those leaving are not losing their faith, just their patience with church. Possibly one of the biggest challenges facing ministers and others is how to engage those for whom the relentless Sunday-by-Sunday sing-a-thon has lost its ability to sustain their walk with God and they have chosen to walk away.<sup>3</sup> What will ministry formation look like to equip people to serve this growing community?

Our context is also that we live in a time of rapid discontinuous change that leaves people feeling unsettled; the fast pace of technological innovation, the rise of social networks, and the fragmentation of neighbourhoods are all features of this. And we live in an increasingly urban world, where cities dominate culture and politics and form the essential backdrop of all ministry and mission, even in the most idyllic of rural locations.

So, our context might demand a re-imagining of what we mean by 'ministry'. Are we simply training people to preach, teach, and offer pastoral care in settled communities of Christians? This is what Spurgeon had in mind in the mid-nineteenth century and possibly why he has so little to say about the wider role of ministers beyond being preachers. Or are we seeking to form men and women capable of leading others along what Stuart Blythe, formerly of IBTS Centre, Amsterdam, identified in a blog in 2017 as (though not using this word) the trialectic of mission, discipleship, and church?<sup>4</sup> Which of these three commands our attention as the one that sets the agenda for the others, or do we need to focus on each of them at the same time with the same levels of energy? Blythe argues that the three 'belong in an integrated relationship where none can really claim the priority', adding that 'each of these, Church, mission, discipleship is an expression of journeying under the Lordship of Christ'.<sup>5</sup> This is helpful but leaves those of us training people for ministry and mission with the question: are we trying to train people to run inherited church and resource the emerging church simultaneously?

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Brierley, *Pulling out of the Nosedive: A Contemporary Picture of Churchgoing* (London: Christian Research, 2006), p. 13. See also Linda Whitehead, 'The Rise of "no Religion" in Britain: The emergence of a new Cultural majority', *Journal of the British Academy*, 4 (2016), 245-261.

<sup>2</sup> Simon Jones, *Building a Better Body: The Good Church Guide* (Milton Keynes: Authentic, 2007), pp. ix-xiv.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-27.

<sup>4</sup> Stuart Blythe, Politurgy blog, May 2017, at <<https://politurgy.wordpress.com/2017/05/14/first-things-first/>> [accessed 12 December 2018]

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

For at least two more generations, there will be a need for men and women who see their calling in terms of leading inherited churches, some of which continue to thrive, whose role will be to function in the classic pastor-teacher mould, perhaps with a sprinkling of gently prophetic change management thrown in. But increasingly there will be a need for theologically trained men and women, able to negotiate the fault lines between church, mission, and discipleship in a way that draws people into a life of following and finding Jesus on the way, who will be midwives of new *ekklesia*. And snapshots from a week of college exit interviews conducted last summer reveal this is the world we are already working in:

- A woman seeking to explore God's call on a housing estate near where she lives. Is the small community church there a place where her gifts could be used? Will Urban Expression (now a qualifying office for Baptist ministry) be a partner for her?
- A young man looking to settle in a medium sized, outer urban church, seeking a pastor-teacher;
- A woman called to a troubled congregation where leadership divisions express themselves in a minority opposed to her being called at all because of her race and gender;
- A young man exploring what church might be as it seeks to explore contemporary mysticism tied to technological advance and the virtual world;
- A young man joining a self-funding mission team on an inner London estate;
- An established minister, leader in his denomination, seeking greater depth of understanding and insight into how church can be part of the solution to the deep and complex problems on his estate, especially the rising levels of knife crime disproportionately affecting his community;
- A woman moving from a settled view of ministry to one as a pioneer, seeking to engage with those beyond the reach of inherited church, possibly in a leisure centre or a new form of chaplaincy.

And so it goes; all these, Baptist and others, doing this in the context of their own family, financial, and community struggles. How have we invested in their formation as practitioners of ministry and mission? How does their experience help us to shape what we offer to those who come after them? Are we a learning institution, adapting how we operate and what we offer in light of the experience we and our students have?

## **Charting a Way Forward**

Here I offer some pointers and raise some questions on how equipping men and women for missional engagement with today's world needs to be woven into a programme of theological education.

The first is to continue to explore what we mean by ministry in this context. There are countless definitions. I like Alan Roxburgh's suggestion that ministers are missional map-makers, seeking to chart a way through the increasingly unfamiliar terrain in which we find ourselves, terrain where our old maps are out of date.<sup>6</sup> Ministers act as explorers, using Scripture as a compass to guide them as they build a picture of the landscape in which they find themselves, so that they can create a map by which their congregation may find their way. Hence the formation of theological imagination is an essential ingredient in ministry formation. Anyone seeking to lead congregations of Jesus followers through this unfamiliar terrain needs to dig deep into Scripture, history, and historical and systematic theology, the very kernel of theological education, in order to emerge with the skills to create the maps to navigate a way forward.

I also particularly like Michael Volland's idea of the *Minister as Entrepreneur*.<sup>7</sup> I like it because I used the word *entrepreneur* at a postgraduate seminar a couple of years ago, in trying to tease out how the Apostle Paul might have understood leadership and ministry in his context, thinking particularly of the likes of Stephanas (I Corinthians 16) and Phoebe (Romans 16).

Volland offers the following definition of entrepreneur in this context: 'a visionary who, in partnership with God, challenges the status quo by energetically creating and innovating in order to shape something of Kingdom value'.<sup>8</sup> I like that. But I would want to add, from my experience of three years working with refugees in Calais in the jungle and beyond, something about spotting what is emerging as a result of listening and waiting, reflecting and enabling others to do whatever is required to help along that which is emerging. Again, as John Drane has pointed out, this is a very Pauline practice – as we see in Acts – of going and waiting before acting or speaking; the classic example being Athens in Acts 17.<sup>9</sup> Volland does not suggest that all ministers can be entrepreneurs or that ministry is limited to those called and paid to be in pastoral charge. He agrees with Michael Moynagh's observation, 'You do not have to be an innovator yourself. You can be a pastor to those who are.'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Alan Roxburgh, *Missional Map-making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), especially pp. 3-18.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Volland, *The Minister as Entrepreneur* (London: SPCK, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> John Drane, 'Patterns of Evangelization in Paul and Jesus: A Way Forward in the Paul and Jesus Debate', in Joel B. Green and Max Turner (eds), *Jesus of Nazareth Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), pp. 281-296, especially pp. 291-296. See my reflections on our work in Calais in 'Tea and Story Telling Around the Family Album: Baptist Peacemaking in Liminal Times', *Baptistic Theologies*, 9:2 (2017), 101-115.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Moynagh, *Being Church, Doing Life: Creating Gospel Communities Where Life Happens* (Oxford: Monarch, 2014), p. 24, cited in Volland, *The Minister as Entrepreneur*, p. 5.

This debate has been picked up in the review of ministry formation among Baptists in England that was published in the ‘Ignite’ report at the end of 2015. This report will shape how we understand and form ministry for the next generation, not least in its promotion of marks of ministry to supersede the core competencies.<sup>11</sup> We will return to this.

The second pointer is the vexed issue of money. Increasingly, those training for ministry are wrestling with the reality that churches might be less and less able to pay them full-time for doing it. I was speaking to a young minister recently who told me that he was resigned to the fact that he would not finish his ministry at retirement drawing a salary from a congregation. What was he doing about that, I asked him. “Worrying”, he replied.

‘Ignite’ briefly mentions bi-vocational ministry. It is clearly crucial that we who help in the formation of ministry are alert to this and are including consideration of it in the way we train people. But we could do more. Many of those who come to us at Spurgeon’s from non-Baptist groupings, especially black majority churches, are already bi-vocational ministers coming from traditions where it has been the norm for generations. How can we learn from them? In an exit interview, I was talking to a significant leader in a BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) church about opportunities for Baptists to learn different models and ways of doing ministry and mission, and especially ways of engaging people from backgrounds different from theirs. We have a great opportunity to use the expertise that walks through our doors in the form of our student body to equip all of our students in ministry.

And if this is to have traction, it must feed into theological curricula. What is our understanding of vocation? Are we able to recapture something of the Reformation focus on every area and walk of life being a potential vocation? Are we able to delve deeply into the social history of the New Testament world and discover how those early communities were organised around the working lives of the first Jesus followers? How do we understand creation and the place of God’s people within it? What place do the social sciences and management thinking have in the programmes of theological institutions? In all of this we need to get away from a narrow focus on ministry being a set of skills practised by a minority group within the church, a clerical elite, if you will. We need to re-imagine our theology of the body of Christ and leadership within it if we are to help in the formation of creative, reflective leaders who embody the story of redemption and new creation.

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<sup>11</sup> The report is available here: <[https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/456614/Ignite\\_Commendation.aspx](https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/456614/Ignite_Commendation.aspx)> [accessed 05 January 2019]

We also need to recognise that the very idea of ‘vocation’ is a slippery term. All too often people take jobs because they need to pay the rent and feed their families, not because of a sense of call to them. There are ‘non-vocational’ reasons for taking jobs. That being the case, we need to help ministers-in-training (MITs) explore how to integrate their lives, see them holistically as lives of discipleship lived in whatever circumstances come their way. This will often be the experience of those among whom MITs minister; so many Christians do what they have to do to make ends meet and need pastoral care and support along the way.

In a wide-ranging anthropological study on contemporary experiences of the workplace, David Graeber coined the term ‘bullshit jobs’. By this he means work that pays relatively well but seems to achieve no discernible social purpose and therefore feels soul-destroying. He suggests his study is about both ‘why people are so unhappy doing what seems to them meaningless make-work’, and ‘to think more deeply about what this unhappiness can tell us about what people are and what they are basically about’.<sup>12</sup>

In the course of telling the stories of hundreds of mainly twenty- and thirty-somethings caught in such work, Graeber identifies the echo of old, possibly religiously motivated, views of work as vocation. In the story of Mitch, for example, a ranch-hand working for a Mormon rancher in Wyoming, he observes, ‘Mitch’s story highlights the religious element: the idea that dutiful submission even to meaningless work under another’s authority is a form of moral self-discipline that makes you a better person. This, of course, is a modern variant of puritanism.’<sup>13</sup> Already, we are in theological territory. The more so as Graeber goes on to argue that bullshit jobs are a form of spiritual violence. Such work, he argues, gives rise to increasing rates of low self-esteem and depression. ‘They are forms of spiritual violence directed at the essence of what it means to be a human being.’<sup>14</sup>

Apart from putting his book on the essential reading lists for ministry formation, what kind of reflections does Graeber lead us into? Surely, at the very least, MITs need to think through the actual experience of work for so many in their congregations. We might want to preach about the essential human dignity of work, about how working is always better than not working. And yet to do so would be to fly in the face of so many people’s experience. It also negates a lot in the history of thinking about work. Keith Thomas has reflected on work in the early modern period and suggests that

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<sup>12</sup> David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 2018), p. 68.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

philosophers and churchmen did not have such a rosy view of it as some of our theologies suggest:

The two dominant intellectual traditions, Christian and classical, in their different ways both encouraged the notion that work was a tedious, even cruel, necessity, and that, ideally, life would have been better if people did not have to work at all.<sup>15</sup>

John Locke echoes Graeber in suggesting, ‘Labour for labour’s sake is against nature.’<sup>16</sup> Perhaps we need to recapture in our thinking about work – including the work that ministers do – what Thomas says of the early seventeenth-century thinking, ‘It was a widespread assumption in the early modern period that people worked *for* a living, but that work itself was not part of that living.’<sup>17</sup> It gave rise to the idea that what really mattered was that people earned enough from their labour to enjoy life when not engaged in it. Hence Adam Smith’s argument that wages should compensate the worker for loss of leisure time and not simply for hours worked and yet, as Thomas points out, theologians from the Middle Ages onwards have lauded work as an end in itself.<sup>18</sup>

There is much here to inform the formation of ministers, many of whom in our uncertain times could well have to combine the work of ministry with other employment to pay the bills. How do we understand vocation and, in particular, ministerial vocation, in such a context?

It seems to me that New Testament scholar Beverley Roberts Gaventa helps us here when she observes, while commenting on Romans 14, that ‘The divide between theology and practice that we take for granted does not exist for Paul.’<sup>19</sup> There is just life lived as disciples of Jesus. Mention of Paul, of course, reminds us of a key resource in thinking about ministry formation for the world as it is: Paul’s letters. All theological curricula take account of Paul in some way or other, but how closely do we read his letters looking for evidence of how the early church actually understood itself against the background of an indifferent and occasionally hostile empire?<sup>20</sup> We cannot reproduce Paul’s communities in our context, and we should not try; but we can learn vital lessons for our lives of faith in communities of Jesus followers just from how things were in Paul’s context as we discover it in his letters.

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<sup>15</sup> Keith Thomas, *The Ends of Life: Roads to Fulfilment in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 78.

<sup>16</sup> John Locke, ‘Of the conduct of the understanding’, in *Posthumous Works* (1706) quoted in Thomas, *The Ends of Life*, p. 79.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas, *The Ends of Life*, p. 82.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82, 85-88.

<sup>19</sup> Beverley Roberts Gaventa, *When in Romans: An Invitation to linger with the Gospel according to Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), p. 112.

<sup>20</sup> I have tried to do this in Simon M. Jones, *A Social History of the Early Church* (Oxford: Lion Scholar, 2018) and in Simon Jones, *Paul and Poverty: An Evaluation of the Apostle’s Economic Location and Teaching* (Cambridge: Grove books, 2014).

Not for him, it seems, debates about vocation. He told his hearers to work – because without it, no-one gets to eat or has anything to share with those in need – and stresses that the whole of our lives are worship offered to God in view of his mercies (Romans 12.1).

## Gathering and Telling Stories

Such reflections bring us to one of the key places where ministry formation and theology are closely entwined: story. George Monbiot, journalist, critic, activist, has written a stimulating book on how to build a new world.<sup>21</sup> But is this not what the Christian Church has been about for two thousand years, I hear you ask? It is certainly what hooked me as a sixteen-year-old demonstrating against the Springbok rugby team's tour of England. A young curate, next to me in the throng, said that 'Jesus wanted to change the world more than me.' I immediately joined his youth group to test out his claim. We might not be doing it very well, but it is our *raison d'être*.

What Monbiot reminds us is that a good deal of the agenda for theological education and ministry formation has to be set by the world in which we are seeking to live as followers of Jesus. When the college I trained at began a BA review in 1988, the then Vice Principal, Peter Cotterell, said that the new curriculum should take its cue from the needs of the world and the shape of the missional workforce required to meet those needs in the name of Christ. His missiology was just taking shape and it begins in the world as it is described in the language of other religious systems.<sup>22</sup> The reason is that this is the context into which we speak, hopefully in words that resonate with our audience.

Monbiot's book opens with the words, 'You cannot take away someone's story without giving them a new one. It is not enough to challenge an old narrative, however outdated and discredited it may be. Change happens only when you replace it with another.'<sup>23</sup> He observes that stories are the means by which we navigate the world – something theologians and missional thinkers have been saying for a while. Indeed, Monbiot thinks that the world of politics has a thing or two to learn from religion: 'The lesson religion has to teach politics,' he says, 'is: first, know your values; then evangelise them in the form of powerful narratives.'<sup>24</sup>

Monbiot then goes on to tell the story of the situation our world finds itself in, using the categories found in much theological narrative. He speaks

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<sup>21</sup> George Monbiot, *Out of the Wreckage: A New Politics for an Age of Crisis* (London: Verso, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> Peter Cotterell, *Mission and Meaninglessness: The Good News in a World of Suffering and Disorder* (London: SPCK, 1990), especially pp. 5-14.

<sup>23</sup> Monbiot, *Out of the Wreckage*, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.



of original virtue (a creation myth), its disruption through mounting disorder (fall), the consequences of this in terms of the nature of the world we currently live in, especially its politics and social order, and finally a redemption narrative forged in what he calls ‘the politics of belonging’.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps Monbiot’s is a voice that needs to inform our theological reflection on the world as it is, the world for which we are seeking to form ministers and mission practitioners who will embody the story of God’s Kingdom. There are other voices too. But in this we would be rising to Cotterell’s challenge to create theological college curricula that are informed and motivated by the need to embody the good news in ways that resonate with the world described by Monbiot and others.

It is a world captured in a story that Roxburgh tells. On a visit to the UK in the summer of 2007, a time of national anxiety about rising crime levels, he watched *Richard and Judy*, a popular morning chat show on ITV at that time, who were hosting a discussion on the topic. One audience member said the following:

What has happened to us? How did we get here? When I was growing up as a young boy, we did lots of things that were wrong, but nothing like this. Back then [in the 50s and 60s] we all lived inside a way of knowing what was right and wrong. We all knew the story of Jesus, and there was a Christian background. It did not mean that we went to church, but we all knew the same story. These kids today have nothing like that any more. There’s no common story shaping us. How did that happen?<sup>26</sup>

Much of the post-Brexit debate, especially in England, has been a search for this underlying narrative. Who are we? What holds us together? The particular phrase that stood out for me in that quotation, however, was this: ‘we all lived inside a way of knowing...’ Stories are not simply accounts of who we are and where we have come from, they are the landscape we inhabit, the surroundings that shape and form us, make us who we are, hold us together, or force us apart.<sup>27</sup> It is for this reason that I have been telling colleagues that Monbiot’s book is the most searching theological work I have read this year, even though it is penned by an agnostic and makes little reference to conventional theological categories.

We are training men and women to lead congregations of women and men who navigate this world with increasing levels of anxiety and bafflement. Early in my last pastorate in the London suburb of Bromley, I had a conversation with an active elderly woman as we walked together into town. She told me how she hated the neighbourhood she had lived in most

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Map-making*, p. x.

<sup>27</sup> Roxburgh explores this idea further in *Missional: Joining God in the Neighbourhood* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), especially pp. 57-62.

of her life! She hated it because the neighbours had changed, lived lives very different from hers, and ate food that smelled strange; she hated it because all the good retailers had gone from the town centre to be replaced by trendy coffee houses and betting shops; and she hated me because I was introducing change into the one constant in her life, namely church, an institution largely unchanged from the 1950s, now struggling to connect with those neighbours she did not warm to. How had I been prepared for ministry in such a context?

### **Needed: Reflective Practitioners...**

So, the third area is the now obvious and vital one of helping all our ministers in formation to become reflective theological practitioners. As Roy Searle says in his commentary on the 'Ignite' report, 'Margaret Wheatley, the great writer on leadership, says that we can never dictate, direct or determine a living system, we can only disturb, discern or serve it.'<sup>28</sup>

As such, one of the key areas of ministry formation that that we are developing is helping our students to become practical community theologians, people able to think theologically on their feet in whatever context they find themselves living and working. This means that we need to help our MITs put down deep roots in the disciplines of practical theology, ethnography, and community organising. Alongside Augustine is Luke Bretherton; alongside Calvin are Pete Ward and Christian Scharen; ecclesiology is deeply rooted in the Godhead and highly liquid in the way it flows in and around society. Only a ministry formation rooted in deep theological reflection can achieve this.<sup>29</sup>

Roxburgh emphasises this when he laments that 'pastors reflect upon their settings from primarily a *practical* perspective. This is not simply because they must function with the daily exigencies of pastoral ministry in a mundane world but because they are part of the worldview of technical rationality.'<sup>30</sup> He adds that most pastors do not draw daily direction from Scripture or the theological texts with which they grappled in college, but from the latest business, psycho-social, and self-help manuals. In short, so many of the ministers being turned out by theological colleges inhabit the wrong story. They inhabit the story Charles Taylor labels modernity, characterised by personal need, technique and privatised community; or the one Monbiot calls either the neo-liberal narrative or the social democratic

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<sup>28</sup> Roy Searle commentary on 'Ignite' on BUGB website at <[https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/456614/Ignite\\_Commendation.aspx](https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/456614/Ignite_Commendation.aspx)> [accessed 05 January 2019]

<sup>29</sup> See Pete Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology: The Gospel and The Church* (Leiden: Brill, 2017) and Luke Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship and the Politics of the Common Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> Alan Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership & Liminality* (Harrisville: Trinity Press International, 1997), pp. 20-21.

story, none of which adequately describes the world as it is or as we long that it should and could be.<sup>31</sup> Missional leaders need a better story than this, one that is firmly rooted in Scripture, the theological tradition, and the community of the church.

One way of ensuring that this happens is that colleges remain partners in formation after graduation. We need to look at ways of offering ongoing formation for a lifetime of ministry. But that needs to start at college. Several of the marks of ministry identified by ‘Ignite’ – change makers, context readers, theologians-in-the-making – are things that emerge in contexts rather than classrooms; but in order to grasp contexts, hours need to be spent in classrooms honing the tools that enable our MITs to do this.

Alongside this, placements are clearly vital; and the partnership that the college has with churches offering training places for MITs is crucial to us being able to deliver high-quality formation. But placements are not only static apprenticeships in a single situation. We also need to take MITs on college-sponsored mission trips that involve not only spending time in contexts that are outside the MIT’s comfort zone, but which are reflected on when back in the classroom in assessed ways.

I have been doing this over the past three years, taking students to Calais and offering them an opportunity to reflect on what they have experienced. For three in particular, it has shifted their view of what ministry is about, as they have sought to process the experience and question it in the light of their tradition and of what they are learning in other units. We are now building on this by connecting students to projects in London that are refugee-led, enabling MITs to test out what they are learning in the classroom in live environments with people who engage with them from often wholly different perspectives and worldviews. Alongside this we are exploring the possibility of establishing a network of mission labs, partnerships with local churches where MITs can be placed for short-term assignments to explore fresh ways of imagining how ministry could be shaped to best embody the good news in a particular neighbourhood. One is up and running, others are in the pipeline.

Of course, all of this merely points to the fact that the best theological education does not happen in a classroom or library; MITs do not learn most from listening to lectures. As with discipleship, so the formation of well-equipped, theologically alert and informed ministers, happens in missional and ministry situations.

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<sup>31</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), pp. 1-12, cited in Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation*, p. 21; Monbiot, *Out of the Wreckage*.

We are also seeking to develop and expand our offer within college to groups other than Baptist. So, we are exploring ways of creating parallel tracks through our practical theology programme that are geared to other groupings – such as the New Testament Church of God (who already send students to us) and Churches in Communities (with whom conversations are happening). This would involve drawing in expertise for block weeks that covered material that was denomination-specific, freeing the rest of the curriculum to become more practical and focused on missional theology.

Recently I reflected on my experiences working alongside refugees in the jungle in Calais and elsewhere in a paper published in *Baptistic Theologies*.<sup>32</sup> In that article I was able to begin the process of reflecting on how my theology (learned in college, in dialogue with colleagues, in ministry practice over thirty years) resourced my work. But, more importantly, I was able to reflect on how that work challenged my settled theology. I reconnected with the Baptist tradition of peace-making through our group Peaceful Borders; I was forced to re-examine how I understood hospitality as both giver and recipient (finding Derrida a good but limited conversation partner); I learned a little of what it meant to be ‘a hospitable story-teller’ (John Berger’s lovely phrase) and how all practical theology is an embodiment of hospitable storytelling; and finally, I pondered incarnation, being there, and the nature of chaplaincy in a disordered world. But, above all, I came to the realisation that liminality is a key way for us to understand the world in which we live and the nature of ministry within that world.

And so I returned to Alan Roxburgh and his little book that had done so much to shape my understanding of who I was in relation to the church I had been called to pastor in 2003. In his exploration of the liminal times in which we live, Roxburgh asserts that ‘the church will rediscover resources for hopeful, missionary-shaped future not only as it engages the Scripture, but also by listening to the voices of those Christian groups that have long lived outside the centre of our culture’.<sup>33</sup> I would want to add that other groups also have voices we need to hear: groups such as Citizens UK, which Luke Bretherton has shown is deeply rooted in the biblical narrative and whose work in Calais demonstrated a ‘Christian’ response to the crisis of unaccompanied child migrants from beyond the church.<sup>34</sup>

Roxburgh suggests a range of new categories for understanding ministry in this strange new world: the pastor/poet who ‘listens to the pain and questioning emerging from the fragmentation and alienation dwelling within modern people’<sup>35</sup> and connects that with the Word of God that calls

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<sup>32</sup> Simon Jones, see footnote 9.

<sup>33</sup> Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation*, p. 46.

<sup>34</sup> Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*.

<sup>35</sup> Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation*, p. 58.

them to a belonging where wholeness may be found; the pastor/prophet who sees the world and especially the marginalised and dispossessed and speaks truth both to power and to the congregation;<sup>36</sup> the pastor/apostle who imagines what the gospel might create in the neighbourhood the church is in and helps her people see it and live it.<sup>37</sup>

All these people will be formed in our theological colleges, which can again become the laboratories where new expressions of church are honed, new ways of embodying the gospel imagined, and a new dynamism come to a church at risk of being lost in liminality.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61-64.