Journal of European Baptist Studies

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Publication – Twice a year

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ISSN 1213 – 1520 (print)
ISSN 1804 – 6444 (online)

Subscriptions

International Baptist Theological Study Centre
The Baptist House, Postjesweg 150, 1061 AX Amsterdam, The Netherlands
http://www.ibts.eu | journal@ibts.eu | +31-20-2103025
Subscriptions to this journal are also available through EBSCO and Harrassowitz.

Cover design by Thought Collective, Belfast, Northern Ireland
http://www.thoughtcollective.com | hello@thoughtcollective.com

Electronic Access

This journal is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database®* and included in the full-text *ATLASerials®* and *ATLASerials PLUS®* collections. Both are products of the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606, USA http://www.atla.com | atla@atla.com

Abstracts are available through Religious & Theological Abstracts, PO Box 215, Myerstown, PA 17067, USA
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Journal of European Baptist Studies

Call for Papers

Theme: Church-State Relations

Throughout history there has been a variety of relationships between Christian churches and governments, sometimes harmonious and sometimes conflicting. This remains true in today's world, in terms of politics and political tensions within Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East (the EBF region).

We plan to explore this topic in the **Spring 2020 issue of the *Journal of European Baptist Studies***. Articles that report on research or debate issues relating to historical, biblical, missiological, or theological aspects of the theme of Church-State Relations are welcome, in particular those that explore Baptist tensions in these situations.

This call for papers shares the theme of a forthcoming consultation to be convened by the Theology and Education Commission of the EBF in November 2019.

We invite all those who wish to submit papers for consideration to send an Abstract (200-300 words which provide a broad summary of the intended article) by email to the Managing Editor as soon as possible.

Key dates:

- Call for Papers: June 2019
- Submission of Abstracts: 31 October 2019
- First draft articles for peer review: 31 January 2020
- Final versions submitted: 30 April 2020
- Publication date: May 2020

Please do not hesitate to contact the Managing Editor (Dr Dorothy McMillan) dorothy@ibts.eu for further information and please circulate this call for papers as widely as possible to others in the field.

Journal of European Baptist Studies

Volume 19 No. 1 Spring 2019

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Editorial

Many of the articles in this issue of *JEBS* relate to the gathering of theological educators at the Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools (CEBTS) in June 2018. The geographical spread of authorship alongside a rich thematic scope and reflective depth combine to make a valuable contribution to discussions about the place and shape of theological education in general, and Baptist theological education in particular. The themes are both theological and practical, including discussion about the relationship of theological education to the secular academy, the specific nature of a Baptist approach to theological education and ministerial formation, and discussion about the challenges of delivering high quality theological education in various European contexts.

A paper by Jan Martijn Abrahamse introduces the discussion. In 'The Clown of the Sciences: Theology at the Secular University' he addresses the question of 'the role of theology and theologians in a secular environment'. In this beautifully presented piece, Abrahamse draws on conversation partners William James McClendon and Stanley Hauerwas to argue that 'theology is in the right place when it becomes the laughing stock at the university'. In response to the dominance of scientific secularism in the academy, theology should not seek to defend its position as the Queen of the Sciences (was this ever an appropriate position?) but, by developing 'a healthy form of self-mockery', it can act to invert totalising narratives (both secular and theological) and challenge vested interests by performing as the clown of the sciences.

Einike Pilli's paper develops an essential dimension in the conversation about theological education by asking: 'What makes Baptist theological education Baptist?'. She convenes a fascinating interaction by setting empirical observations gathered from conversations with fellow theological educators at CEBTS, BWA Theological Education Committee, and alumni of Tartu Theological Seminary alongside texts from Baptist theologians such as Hames, Fiddes, Wright, and Holmes. Focusing on the primary issues of 'content' and 'method' in education, Pilli underlines the importance of covenantal ecclesiology as the centre of Baptist theological education. That is to say that Baptist theology is to be 'made visible' or lived out in the life of the individual and the community of believers, and that educational method rooted in covenantal relationship – to God, the community of believers, and the world – is where theology is worked out.

The next two pieces focus on the relationship of ministerial formation to theological education. In the article 'Ministerial Formation as Theological

Education in the Context of Theological Study', Simon Jones addresses the challenge of rapid change in church and society to theological education. How does the quality of our theological education match up to the challenge of forming those who can be 'midwives of new *ekklesia*'? Jones offers a number of pointers to this kind of mission-shaped education: in fast changing social, cultural contexts ministers might be formed as explorers (Alan Roxburgh) or entrepreneurs (Michael Volland); a renewed understanding of ministry in relation to ideas of vocation and work; a renewed understanding about how 'story' is the place where ministry formation and theology are intertwined for a world 'with increasing levels of anxiety and bafflement'. Drawing on George Monbiot, he argues that attention to gathering and telling of stories is a way forward for ministry formation that engages with deep questions of identity and hope. Not least is the gift of being a reflective practitioner – essential to which is the openness to reflect on situations that 'challenge (our) own settled theology' and to listen hospitably to the stories of those who live 'outside the centre of our culture'.

By drawing our attention to Baptist history and identity, Anthony Cross makes a passionate case that theological education has been and should remain a central part of ministerial formation within the Baptist church. He acknowledges the historical presence of 'anti educationalism' in Baptist circles identified, for example, by Spurgeon, who in 1882 reported the sentiment expressed by some that 'the less a minister knew the better, for there was more room for him to be taught by God'. However, Cross shows through cases such as the founding of The Bristol Academy in 1720 that rigorous theological education, which included the learning of languages, lay at the heart of the global Baptist movement. He lays down a challenge to the current process of ministerial formation amongst Baptists in the UK, where he discerns a lowering of the bar in relation to theological education and, by drawing on figures such as John Ryland, Cross argues that rigorous theological education is 'not just of benefit to ministers' but needs to be 'passed on to the church'.

Henrik Holmgaard brings a distinctively Danish insight to the conversation about the nature of theological education and the formation of ministers in the Baptist church. In 'Equipping the Saints Without a Theological Seminary' he tells how, against an historical background of uncertainty in relation to theological education, the millennial generation is experiencing a hopeful rise in numbers of Danish students studying theology at a Danish university. Holmgaard identifies, however, that university based – instead of seminary based – theological education has resulted in a critical gap between formal theology and ministerial formation. There is strong resonance here with other authors in this series of articles, such as Einike Pilli, in emphasising the role of the congregation as central to the Baptist

theological method. The Danish context conveys the practical challenges of achieving a sound process of Baptist theological formation apart from a seminary and Holmgaard offers an illuminating and hopeful account of the educational practices and organisational elements that have been put in place as a workable response to this challenge.

A recurring theme in the papers presented in this issue of *JEBS* is the centrality of Scripture for Baptist theological education and ministerial formation. In 'Resilient Readers: Spiritual Growth and the Bible' Marion Carson draws thoughtfully on faith development theory to explore how the practice of reading the Bible might develop in a way that is commensurate with a maturing faith. Helpfully grounded in her own personal experience, she focuses on the need for ministers to be educated in Biblical Studies so that they are able to lead congregations away from foundationalist and immature approaches to Scripture. She encourages the use of a more sophisticated method of interpretation which includes self-awareness, the role of experience, the importance of context, and an open ethos which encourages discussion and exploration. Ultimately, the maturity of a resilient reader lies in the ability to live with uncertainty and the self-knowledge that their own understanding is incomplete.

In his paper Stuart Blythe discusses what constitutes 'effective research supervision' for doctoral research students by presenting a summary and findings from his own research based at IBTS Centre. The paper deals thoroughly and honestly with the practical issues of achieving a high quality of Baptist theological education at a doctoral level, whilst also reflecting in its findings many of the key elements mentioned in other papers in this series about what makes Baptist theological education Baptist. A notable example is the importance placed on the relational element of supervision, which goes beyond the knowledge and skills of the supervisor. Blythe draws on the notion of a 'fiduciary relationship', one that is based on trust and the recognition of mutual obligations in the research journey. As well as the practical challenges of doing doctoral research on a part-time basis in a dispersed community, Blythe also identifies the specific question about how doctoral research is theological and how this relates to the journey of spiritual formation for the researcher. These are indeed valuable insights for the current director and staff team of IBTS Centre as we seek to improve the effectiveness of research supervision.

Whilst not a participant in CEBTS, Roger Jasper addresses a theme which is of direct concern for those involved in undertaking or supervising research degrees. In 'Hans-Georg Gadamer and the Mind of Christ' Jasper explores the problem encountered by many within the field of practical theology about the appropriate place of social scientific knowledge. Jasper reflects critically on the use of Gadamer's hermeneutical theory in the work

of Don Browning and of John Swinton and Harriet Mowat and presents some fresh perspective to the discussion about 'integrating knowledge gained from the social sciences with theological beliefs'. He proposes that integration might be predicated on the Baptist tradition of discernment, which includes a prayerful, communal practice of seeking the mind of Christ. This approach introduces traditional Baptist practices into the process of research that explicitly embody a faithfulness to Christ himself.

In November 2018 we were privileged to host Dr Reggie Williams at IBTS Centre, Amsterdam to deliver the biennial Nordenhaug lecture and Professor Nancey Murphy to present a response. We include full texts of these presentations as our final two articles in this edition of *JEBS*.[1] In 'Christ-Centred Concreteness' he explores how the activism of Harriet Tubman, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Martin Luther King, which was directed against a totalising 'Christian imagination that defined humanity according to hegemonic norms, for whites only', might guide Christian leadership today. In an insightful and well-presented argument, Williams challenges claims of 'intrinsic Christian virtue' (normally defined from a white male perspective) by exploring the different hermeneutics of each of these Christian leaders and how those hermeneutics were employed in opposing 'ideological hegemonies that typically support harmful politics'. The essay presents fascinating insights, not least of which is the effect on Bonhoeffer of the time he spent in the United States as part of Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church and the influence on his own theology caused by the Harlem Renaissance in a period of global turbulence.

Nancey Murphy's response to Williams is framed by the work of James Wm McClendon Jr, her late husband. Murphy, who was herself one of Williams' professors at Fuller Theological Seminary, presents a fascinating and insightful analysis of the parallels in Williams' presentation with the theology of McClendon. Murphy notices 'less obvious parallels' between the two theologians that take on a fresh dynamic in Williams' paper; these are the use of story in theology (including the biographies of women), a 'special concern for the injustices done to black people in America', and a particular focus on presence or 'being there' as a Christian virtue. In the second part of her commentary, Murphy discusses the practice of non-violent resistance as a response to institutional and societal injustices which have deep ideological roots. By contrasting the contexts of Bonhoeffer and King and by drawing on studies of non-violent resistance, Murphy presents a hopeful, Christ-centred vision for Christian engagement in worldly realms dominated by ideological and physical violence.

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[1] A video of the 2018 Nordenhaug lecture can be viewed on the IBTSC website: <https://www.ibts.eu/research/nordenhaug-lecture/>

As editor, I am fascinated by the resonances and connections between the articles presented here and I leave you with a concluding thought. There is, I suggest, an intriguing synergy between the first and final two articles, namely Abrahamse's exploration of the place of theology in the secular university and Murphy's final observation from Williams about 'the poisoning of theology by a white aesthetic'. Whether the context is dominant secularism or 'white aesthetic', the challenge for theology (and theological communities) is to position itself in relation to a social-cultural settlement that claims 'epistemological ownership'. Abrahamse, Williams, and Murphy offer thoughtful insights about how such a position might be achieved. The challenge for those in theological education is about how such ideas might be implemented in our organisations and practices.

Revd Dr Mike Pears (Editor)

The Clown of the Sciences: Theology at the Secular University

Jan Martijn Abrahamse

Some ten years ago I was stopped by another student in the hallway of Amsterdam's VU University and asked to complete a questionnaire, the exact nature of which I have completely forgotten. What I do remember is the look upon his face when I answered the question, "What are you studying at this university?" with "Theology". His look was not just one of surprise, but wonder of a more desperate kind: he didn't know what 'theology' was. Here was an intelligent student of about twenty years of age, at a university founded by Abraham Kuyper, of which theology was the founding faculty, who did not know what it was. Of course I explained it. Yet his bewilderment did not end there: "Is there an academic field that studies 'God'?" he asked. Was I not joking? This article addresses the question of the role of theology and theologians in a secular environment, such as a university. Due to social changes theology is no longer the self-evident 'Queen of the Sciences', but is challenged to review its position among sciences, which often look with suspicion at its purposes. Instead of calling to reclaim the throne, and drawing on the historical figure of the Fool, it is argued that theology (or, rather theologians) should redress themselves as 'Clowns of the Sciences'. By way of a conversation with the propositions of James McClendon and Stanley Hauerwas, a comic framework is set out that makes fun of the Queen, and thereby allows theology to participate by its oddity. Towards the end, and with the assistance of the prophet Jonah, a preliminary outline is made of the Clown's Speech.

Keywords

Theology; university; secularisation; Stanley Hauerwas; James McClendon; humour; clown

Introduction

In September 2016 a symposium was organised at the Vrije Universiteit (VU) in Amsterdam with the hardly subtle theme: 'Does Theology belong at the University?' A question that – already by the sheer fact of being raised – underlines the changing context in which theology as an academic field finds itself. During this decade, the universities of Utrecht and Leiden have already closed their respective theology departments. Just as my encounter with the student in the hallway displays, the place of theology at secular universities is becoming increasingly uncommon. Theology has evidently lost its self-

evident place.[1] Last year the VU renamed its Faculty of Divinity (in Dutch *Godgeleerdheid*) – literally translated 'learned of God' – 'Religion and Theology' to manifest its broader scope of research, which is less focused upon producing academic church ministers. It is but a consequence of the changing relationship between the university and the church, due to the changed role of the church in Western society at large. In the words of Harvey Cox, 'The daughter has grown up and moved out—for good.' [2]

Theology as the so-called 'Queen of the Sciences', it seems, has left the academic building. Of course, there are many respectable theologians who have made valuable arguments to demonstrate the added value of academic theology for general scholarship and society. Most of these concentrate on the internal scientific sustainability (methodology and argumentation) of theology, or the social function of research on religion and the human search for the 'good' life.[3] However, the question of *manner* or *posture* is left open. If no longer the Queen, which *character* should theology play? To stay within the metaphor, can it still participate as one of the princesses? Or, does it at least have a room in the palace called university? Put differently, if authority is understood here as 'to be able and reputable to speak truth to power',[4] in what way can theology speak authoritatively at a secular university? Baptist theologian James McClendon, as discussed below, assessed that theology can no longer claim a dominant position as source of ultimate knowledge. It rather should develop a humbler attitude. Yet McClendon also emphasises theology's unique scope of research, arguing it to be 'a science of convictions' underlying all other sciences. However, the effort to stay 'relevant' seems the most important incentive to

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[1] See Gerrit Neven, 'Theologie in een seculiere tijd', in *Van God gesproken: Over religieuze taal en relationele theologie: Opstellen aangeboden aan Prof. dr. Luco J. van den Brom*, ed. by Theo Boer, Heleen Maat, Alco Meesters, and Jan Muis (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2011), pp. 202-216. An example is the critical report published by the Dutch Royal Academia of Sciences, that observes a lack of priority for theology and religious studies in society and government, see *Klaar om te wenden…: De academische bestudering van religie in Nederland: Een verkenning* (Den Haag: Koninklijke Academie van Wetenschappen, 2015), pp. 14-17.

[2] Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 1965), p. 217.

[3] See for example Nancy Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning* (Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion; Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1990); Mark William Worthing, 'Theology, Queen of the Sciences', *Concordia Journal*, 20, no. 4 (1994), 402-414; Alister E. McGrath, *The Science of God: An Introduction to Scientific Theology* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2004), esp. pp. 17-33; Gijsbert van den Brink, *Een publieke zaak: Theologie tussen geloof en wetenschap* (Boekencentrum Essay; Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2004), pp. 13-25, 196-206, 337-360; Erna Oliver, 'Theology: Still a queen of science in the post-modern era', *die Skriflig*, 50, no. 1 (2015), 1-7; Joshua Searle, *Theology after Christendom: Forming Prophets for a Post-Christian World* (Eugene: Cascade, 2018), esp. pp. 61-86; and recently, Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2019).

[4] See Martin W. Bauer, Petra Pansegrau and Rajesh Shukla, 'Image, Perception, and Cultural Authority of Science—By Way of Introduction', in *The Cultural Authority of Science: Comparing Across Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas*, ed. by Martin W. Bauer, Petra Pansegrau and Rajesh Shukla (Routledge Studies in Science, Technology, and Society; London/New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 3-21.

stay at the university and retain the throne. His colleague Stanley Hauerwas offers a somewhat different perspective, when advocating to take theology's oddity more seriously.

Expounding on the course set by Hauerwas, my preliminary proposal here will be to portray theology as 'Clown of the Sciences'. While I am aware that clowns come in different sizes, colours, and faces – for example the frivolous *August* or the more sincere *Pierrot* with its characteristic tear – I take my starting point for what a clown is, or should be, from the semi-biographical movie *Patch Adams* (1998). It displays a medical doctor who from experience has come to know that medical treatment is more than physical care and requires more than 'scientific' knowledge of medicine and diseases. So, my argument is not to write off any attempt to show or prove theology as a real science, but rather to take a different direction – Nineveh. By following the prophet Jonah we will find theology's inner clown.

Doctors, Clowns, and Fools

In *Patch Adams* we are introduced to the origins of the now familiar practice of hospital clowning by the vision and efforts of medical doctor and clown Hunter 'Patch' Adams, which he later further developed in his *Gesundheit! Institute*, founded in 1971. During his medical studies, Adams' playful approach to the study of medicine is a thorn in the eye of his ambitious roommate. When 'Patch' asks him why he doesn't like him, his roommate answers: "Because you make my effort a joke. I want to be a doctor! This isn't a game to me. This isn't playtime! This is serious business." His different approach gets Patch almost thrown out of medical school by one of his professors. When asked for the reason, the professor replies: "Because what you want is for us to get down there on the same level as our patients to destroy objectivity." He ends his rant with the words: "Is this all a big joke to you? Get out of here!" The clownish performance of Patch Adams at a medical faculty offers a great illustration of the collision between theology and the sciences.

Clowns are generally known for their playful foolishness. They do not possess institutional authority, nor do they claim power for themselves.[5] Clowns 'are supposed to stand in the margin of cultural normalcy and decency. They are excluded from civil society due to their appearance,

[5] See for example Eli Simon, *The Art of Clowning: More Paths to Your Inner Clown* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, [2009], 2012), pp. 4-5; and Paul Bouissac, *The Semiotics of Clowns and Clowning: Rituals of Transgression and the Theory of Laughter* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 171-173. I am fully aware of so-called 'horror clowns' who can terrorise neighbourhoods, as for example in Stephen King's book *It* (1986) – exploiting 'coulrophobia', a morbid fear of clowns.

personae, and performed behavior.'[6] They fail and by failing they are uniquely suited to hold up a mirror to society and its powers.[7] The origins of clowns go back to the early civilisations of Egypt and Rome, where the Fool played before the emperors, and as jesters at the royal courts of medieval kings.[8] Their task was not only to bring entertainment and laughter, but also to provide critical reflection: 'mock rule'.[9] These figures were 'licensed' to speak the truth to power and provide ironic critique to the state, the church, and society, not on the basis of official law, jurisdiction, reverence or esteem, but through 'folly'.[10] The Fool, thus, represented and produced a counterworld, a 'foolish' perspective on reality, displaying the incongruities and fallacies of life and society, including the monarch. Jesters and fools played the comical mirror-image of kings. The relative 'freedom of speech' granted to them was balanced by their social position at the margins of society, living by their wits:

> In this marginal world, the fool enjoyed a strange freedom (the German *Narrenfreiheit*). In word, song, and action he was allowed to debunk both religious and secular authorities (though, obviously, there were occasions when some of the authorities lost their tolerance and suppressed the folly). A key theme in folly was inversion.[11]

The authority of the Fool, in short, is not based on the vantage point of strength, power, or superiority, but on vulnerability and marginality. Accordingly, some authors such as Kevin Vanhoozer have described the role of the theologian in terms of 'the Fool'.[12] Doing Christian theology is a participation in the story of 'the folly of the cross' as the apostle Paul so aptly states (I Corinthians 1.18-2.5).[13]

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[6] Bouissac, *The Semiotics of Clowns and Clowning*, p. 176.
[7] Simon, *The Art of Clowning*, pp. 6 and 11: 'In a flash, a floundering clown can transform frustration into triumph, impotence intro brilliance, and panic into joy.'
[8] See Peter Berger, *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience* (New York/Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), pp. 65-86.
[9] Conrad Hyers, *The Comic Vision and the Christian Faith: A Celebration of Life and Laughter* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1981), pp. 40-41.
[10] See Jessica Milner Davis, 'The Fool and the Path to Spiritual Insight', in *Humour and Religion: Challenges and Ambiguities*, ed. by Hans Geybels and Walter Van Herck (London/New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 218-247; and Berger, *Redeeming Laughter*, p. 73.
[11] Berger, *Redeeming Laughter*, p. 74.
[12] See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), pp. 438-441; and *Faith Speaking Understanding* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), pp. 185-188; Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 139-157; Rein Nauta, *Paradoxaal leiderschap: Schetsen voor een psychologie van de pastor* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2006), pp. 188-189; and Olof de Vries, *Alles is geschiedenis: Bouwstenen voor een baptistische geloofsvisie uit de dogmatiek van Olof H. de Vries*, ed. by Henk Bakker et al. (Utrecht: Kok, 2015), pp. 50-52.
[13] See Jan Martijn Abrahamse, 'Satire and the Cross: Upsetting Theological Discourse', forthcoming.

Following the example of *Patch Adams*, theologians should not only be good doctors of the church.[14] They must be great clowns and discover the healing powers of laughter, for ‘a cheerful heart is a good medicine’ (Proverbs 17.22).

Game of Thrones

The changing place of theology at the university is connected to secularisation or life in a ‘secular age’, as Charles Taylor typified our times.[15] Secularisation is not an easy concept and there are many interpretations. Recently the Dutch philosopher of history Herman Paul defined secularisation as a grand narrative to explain certain social phenomena within the Western context, such as decline in church attendance, diminishing faith in the existence of God, the marginality of religion in the public space, and the collapse of (religious) institutions.[16] All these developments may be joined in ‘a turn to the *saeculum*’: they generate a world in which human desire finds its fulfillment entirely within the spectrum of the here and now. Secularisation, as Paul shows, is not so much a matter of the mind, but of the direction of our hearts – where our desires are born. There is no longer a self-evident notion of ‘the *beyond*’. That is also why the student was so surprised. He would never consider studying something outside the scope of the natural. This exclusive orientation on the *saeculum* reshaped human interest and therefore the concept of real ‘academic’ knowledge. Owen Chadwick, in his book on secularisation, writes: ‘Science and Religion were blown up into balloon duelists, Science meaning all knowledge, Religion containing no knowledge, and the two set side by side, with know-nothing using sabre to keep know-all from his place.’[17] Academic knowledge, therefore, is *secular*; it confines itself to the limits of the natural world, accessible by empirical exploration. For the empirical world liberates from the necessity of accounting for existence on the basis of metaphysical beliefs. It finds its certainty in the knowledge of science, in the understanding of the laws of physics, ‘[n]ot as the humble and submissive slave of a supernatural master, nor as the helpless toy in the hands

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[14] See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ‘What Are Theologians For? Why Doctors of the Church Should Prescribe Christian Doctrine’, in *Pictures at a Theological Exhibition: Scenes of the Church’s Worship, Witness and Wisdom* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), pp. 49-71.

[15] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007); cf. Gobert Buijs, ‘Hoe seculier zijn we eigenlijk? Kennismaken met *A Secular Age* van Charles Taylor’, *Soteria*, 33, no. 4 (2016), 1-15.

[16] See Herman Paul, *Secularisatie: Een kleine geschiedenis van een groot verhaal* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), esp. pp. 7-14; and *De slag om het hart: Over secularisatie van verlangen* (Utrecht: Boekencentrum, 2017), pp. 7-20.

[17] Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Gifford Lectures; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 167-168.

of heavenly powers, but as a proud and free son of Nature'.[18] Theology – in the sense of accountable speech about God – has become, henceforth, an (irrational) alternative to scientific research. For science offered an alternative framework of mind that made the biblical narrative unintelligible. Additionally, religion became socially unacceptable due to its subjecting morality that comforted people to accept the status quo:

> throw off God (not because anyone has disproved him but) because we are against authority and God is part of authority, supreme in authority. God was moral code. God meant resignation, and resignation meant acceptance of tyranny.[19]

Academic knowledge liberates from moral pre-suppositions and metaphysical authorities and refuses 'to be content with an uncritical reception of traditional ideas. 'A certain awe still surrounds reason as a critical power, capable of liberating us from the illusion and blind forces of instinct, as well as the phantasies bred of our fear and narrowness and pusillanimity.'[20] Taylor speaks about the coming of 'exclusive humanism' changing the atmosphere, putting an end to a naïve acknowledgement of things transcendent. The age of reason displaced religion as a legitimate source for ethical understanding, and therefore as a true form of education, due to its subjecting morality and unscientific basis. In short, '[t]he onslaught was more ethical than scientific; and that was the source from which its passion flowed'.[21] Academic education, a source of progressive knowledge – '[f]aith is stationary, science progressive'[22] – became a vehicle for emancipation and liberation from intellectual and religious oppression. As such, education has become a source of individual redemption.

The university has become 'a game of thrones' in which theology lost its ruling, due to an exclusive humanism. To be 'learned of God' has become a joke to science. After all, to succeed in modernity is to 'free oneself' of existing patterns of tradition. Education henceforth is celebrated as a 'liberation' of pre-existent moral schemes. As a result, theology or the 'artist formerly known as Queen' lost its throne.[23] To proceed we need, as Patch Adams says, "to treat the patient as well as the disease".

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[18] Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind*, p. 171. Cf. Roger Scruton, 'What Ever Happened to Reason?', *City Journal*, 44 (1999): 'The postmodern university has not defeated reason, but replaced it with a new kind of faith—a faith without authority and without transcendence, a faith all the more tenacious in that it does not recognise itself as such.'

[19] Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind*, p. 86.

[20] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 9.

[21] Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind,* pp. 155-156.

[22] Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind*, p. 167.

[23] See Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*, pp. 43-45.

God Save the Queen

James McClendon, in the third part of his three-volume systematic theology, titled *Witness* (2000), reflected extensively on the role of theology in society, especially in relation to the 'secular university'. This wording he considers 'oxymoronic',[24] since, as he rightly points out, universities are historically grown out of the church as a gift to society 'to constitute a *powerful practice*' besides state and church in support of the wider Christian social order.[25] The Enlightenment, however, changed the self-evident character of this relationship, suddenly postulating the question of why Christianity should have a place at the university.

To make his case, McClendon reformulates the question, relying heavily on the work of Cardinal John Henry Newman.[26] The question should not be *whether* Christianity should play a central role at a university, but when universities claim to study life in all its facets, then they cannot in a credible way exclude certain 'convictions' from their curricula. Hence, McClendon's argument is that the rightful place of theology at the university is the university's own calling to research and investigate all of life. Theology has its place, not only as an aspect of life, but also since theology itself requires interaction with other fields of study. Theology is present as 'a science of convictions' which examines 'the deep assents constituting a people of conviction, connected (in theology's intent) *to whatever* else *there is*'.[27] Accordingly, McClendon argues, when theology is taken up among the sciences, it will be subject to the scientific checks and balances like any other science.

But what does theology have to offer? First, it brings ethical reflection, questioning the reductionist views of knowledge prevalent in modern societies, which are focused on value and pragmatics instead of beauty. A beauty which cannot be found in the exterior aesthetics of the university but in its core business: teaching, to challenge, to explore, and to stretch minds. Based on John Howard Yoder's *Body Politics* (1992), McClendon describes the ethical task of theology in terms of conflict resolution, interethnic inclusiveness, economic levelling, etc. Second, theology brings doctrinal reflection, reminding the university that it is not god and explaining how the God of Israel cultivated modern sciences. Third, theology can serve as 'meeting place' for conversations about life and convictions. In short, McClendon describes theology as a reflective science, examining and

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[24] James Wm. McClendon, *Witness* (Systematic Theology, vol. 3; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), p. 389.
[25] McClendon, *Witness*, p. 391. Italics original.
[26] See John H. Newman, *The Idea of a University* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1999).
[27] McClendon, *Witness*, p. 402.

questioning the moral and ideological frames from which they are exercised, thereby undermining science's objectivity.

Toward the end of his 'plea', McClendon goes so far as to suggest that theology represents a unique science which provides exchange of ideas among the sciences, as a sort of unifying bridge bringing all sciences together as 'university'.[28] Since there is 'theology' in all sciences, theology as a distinct 'science of convictions' forms the basis of all.[29] The idealism behind McClendon's idea – which does appear somewhat awkward, considering his general emphasis on concrete practices[30] – was apparently also clear to himself. With some good sense of irony, he dubbed his concept 'University of Utopia'.[31] To McClendon, theological education is not different from any other art and science, since they all are concerned with and based upon convictions. In his view, the university itself, as a community of learning, continues to be *theological*, not only from a historical perspective, but also essentially, since it is occupied with the whole of creation. Theology, as a distinct field within this broad spectrum of theological studies, is there to remember the whole of God: 'Theology in doing so recalls that the university is the church's ancient gift, really God's gift' (James 1.17).[32]

It seems that McClendon still aims to 'safeguard' theology as a 'fundamental' field of study. You can almost hear him crying, *God save the Queen!* He rightly dismantles modernity's self-proclaimed objectivity but fails to face the insignificance of theology as a whole today. To picture theology as a *supra*-science of convictions, as 'one science to rule them all and in convictions bind them', sounds too much like an attempt to resurrect the Queen. In addition, by describing the relationship between theology and the other sciences as representing *divinity* versus *creation*, he oddly enough echoes his own despised 'Clergy-Laity Divide'[33] and, moreover, acknowledges the differentiation created by modernity.

Making Fun of the Queen

Another example of reassessing the role and place of theology among the sciences can be found throughout the publications of Stanley Hauerwas. A

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[28] McClendon, *Witness*, p. 412; cf. Worthing, 'Theology, Queen of the Sciences', 412-414 (p. 414), who makes a similar argument: 'It is precisely because this appraisal of theology as a universal science brings together all the other sciences that theology can, with justification, understand itself not just as a science but even as "queen of sciences."'

[29] McClendon, *Witness*, p. 414.

[30] See McClendon, *Ethics* (Systematic Theology, vol. 1; Nashville: Abingdon Press, [1994], 2001).

[31] McClendon, *Witness*, p. 414.

[32] McClendon, *Witness*, p. 418.

[33] See Jan Martijn Abrahamse, 'The Stripping of the Ministry: A Reconsideration and Retrieval of Robert Browne's Theology of Ordained Ministry' (Ph.D. Dissertation, VU University, Amsterdam, 2018), 44-47.

renowned theological ethicist, he has written in various articles and essays about the role of theology at the university, particularly in his collection of essays *The State of the University* (2007), in which he notably criticises attempts 'to justify the inclusion of theology in the university as one more specialized form of knowledge'.[34] Different from McClendon, Hauerwas, though he too declares his appreciation of Newman, does not think that theology as 'the project of "pulling it all together"' is a fruitful strategy, since he fears it 'could be a nostalgic attempt to reclaim the habits of Christendom'.[35] Rather, he happily embraces theology's placement at the bottom of the food chain: 'Accordingly theology is only a "Queen" of the sciences if humility determines her work.'[36]

Earlier Hauerwas engaged this question in a witty essay called 'Christians in the Hands of Flaccid Secularists' (1998). Instead of coming with an apology, he takes the 'secular' understanding of knowledge as an argument to underline the oddity of theology among the sciences. For in theology not all positions are 'interesting', since it is not about useful 'information'.[37] He tells two stories. One time an editor of a nation-wide popular magazine asked Hauerwas to contribute. After some consideration, he proposed the aforementioned title – 'Christians in the Hands of Flaccid Secularists' – for the average Christian a funny play on Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon. However, the editor didn't 'get it' and Hauerwas therefore concluded that it wasn't going to work: 'I told the editor, "I do not know how to write even half-serious theology for people who no longer have sufficient knowledge to tell which God it is that they no longer believe in."'[38] The second story narrates an encounter Hauerwas once had at Duke University, talking with scholars about professional ethics among the university's tenured staff. He saw himself faced with the question of how to introduce yourself as a theologian – spending your life thinking about God – to scientists who spend their life studying empirical objects:

> So I began by remarking that it was not clear that I should be among this group of academics, because I am not an intellectual. I am a theologian. Theology names an office of a community called the church and is in service to that community.

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[34] Stanley Hauerwas, *The State of the University: Academic Knowledge and the Knowledge of God* (Illuminations: Theory and Religion; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 6.
[35] Hauerwas, *The State of the University*, pp. 30-31.
[36] Hauerwas, *The State of the University*, p. 31.
[37] Cf. 'The problem is how do you teach theology in universities to students who have been thought to think, like this bright young editor, that, in the name of being educated, all positions are "interesting". Theology for such people cannot help but be more "information."' Stanley Hauerwas, 'Christians in the Hands of Flaccid Secularists: Theology and 'Moral Inquiry' in the Modern University', in *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Scottish Journal of Theology: Current Issues in Theology; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), p. 203.
[38] Hauerwas, 'Christians in the Hands of Flaccid Secularists', p. 203.

> So as one who occupies that office I am not free to think about anything I want to think about.[39]

These funny examples of self-mockery not only identify the so-called 'elephant in the room' – theology's lack of (moral) objectivity – but also point to the problematic character of academic freedom by placing it in the context of servitude: What justifies research? Who are served by it?[40] So doing, Hauerwas calls into question the university's self-evident self-relevance as 'knowledge for knowledge's sake', independent from traditions of knowledge.[41] However, Hauerwas observes, the presupposed objectivity of such a position is no longer tenable.[42] Since theology is anything but objective science, its oddity 'freed' it to once again take up its original task and 'show the difference that God makes about matters that matter'.[43] In a way, he concludes, theology is today more 'free' since it no longer has to bother with sustaining or supporting so-called Christian powers: 'so we can now take the risk of teaching theology, if we are able, as edification'.[44]

The particularity of Christian theology as a 'free discipline' is a main theme in his *magnum opus* – the outworking of his Gifford lectures in 2000 at the University of St Andrews, *With the Grain of the Universe* (2001). Arguing from Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, he argues that the knowledge of theology is connected to a particular form of living.[45] Christian speech about God not only requires to be 'learned of God' – having the conceptual skills – but also to be transformed by God, learning the moral skills appropriate to a life of worship. Theology, hence, is first and foremost a 'discipline' before it can be considered a science.[46] Theologians are themselves the empiric testimony, or rather 'witnesses', of the truthfulness of learning.[47] That theology is about witness also makes schooling in the knowledge of God participatory instead of individual. In other words,

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[39] Hauerwas, 'Christians in the Hands of Flaccid Secularists', p. 204; cf. Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 19: 'I am not in service to a state, or a university, but rather I am called to be faithful to a church that is present across time and space.'

[40] Cf. Hauerwas, *The State of the University*, p. 134: 'The questions that are seldom asked at universities because we do not know how to answer them are: "What is the university for?" and "Who does it serve?"'.

[41] See Hauerwas, *The State of the University*, pp. 108-121.

[42] Hauerwas, *The State of the University*, pp. 122-135.

[43] Hauerwas, 'Christians in the Hands of Flaccid Secularists', p. 214.

[44] Hauerwas, 'Christians in the Hands of Flaccid Secularists', p. 215.

[45] See Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), pp. 173-204.

[46] Of course, in Hauerwas's argument the church is the necessary 'community of discipline' schooling Christians in the tradition of witness; see Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: As Study in Theological Ethics* (Trinity Monograph Series in Religion, vol. 3; San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1975), pp. 229-233; cf. Abrahamse, 'The Stripping of the Ministry', 215-222.

[47] See Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*, p. 212: 'Witnesses must exist if Christians are to be intelligible to themselves and hopefully to those who are not Christians, just as the intelligibility of science depend in the end on the success of experiments.'

intelligible speech about *this* God needs to be mirrored in a community of learners 'free' from the need to justify its practice by non-theological standards (*viz.* self-referential and self-justifying). Hence, the way theologians themselves are present at the secular university is part and parcel of the theological endeavour.

Only recently Hauerwas more explicitly connected the oddity of theology as 'free discipline' more prominently with humour as a way of doing theology. In an essay 'How to Be Theologically Funny?', included in his book *The Work of Theology* (2015), he argues for the retrieval of the funny side of theology: 'Humor is not the only mode of entertainment the discourse of theology can take, but it is surely the case that we – and the 'we' means most people – are often attracted to speech and writing that is funny.'[48] Certainly in a post-Christian age, theology should seek to be – 'as good stories should be'[49] – entertaining. First, since jokes have the ability to bridge differences and bring both 'teller and hearer' into the same realm as they require common experience. Second, jokes allow us to 'comprehend the unexpected and absurd aspects of life'.[50] They thereby testify to our finite existence and limited understanding. And third, humour can have subversive character. Jokes are the power of the weak against the strong, which 'cannot be acknowledged exactly because subversion is betrayed by being acknowledged'.[51] Humour stimulates the imagination of those confronted with exclusion and marginalisation. Hence, humour provides the subversive yet control-less authority Hauerwas seeks to navigate theology in a secular environment:

> The subversive character of humor often expressed in joke is an undeniable reality. Those who use humor to subvert the pretentions of the powerful often have little to lose. One might think the eschatological character of the Christian faith would make Christians a people who have learned to live 'loose'. To be able to so live is made possible by the recognition that the use of humor in a defensive or attack mode is indicative of people enslaved by fears. Christians can risk being subversive because they believe there is a deeper reality than the world determined by fear.[52]

And so, Hauerwas concludes that with the downfall of Christendom in our day and age, we might also rediscover a Christian sense of humour.[53] He finds his kindred spirit in Karl Barth, who recognised the eschatological force of humour and laughter as a refusal to take the present world with

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[48] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2015), p. 233.
[49] Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*, p. 206.
[50] Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology*, p. 238.
[51] Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology*, p. 239.
[52] Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology*, p. 244.
[53] 'If, as I suspect, we are coming to the end of Christendom we may as Christians discover we have a sense of humor.' Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology*, p. 244.

ultimate seriousness – humour as a protest and announcement of the new future, and as a way of perseverance and acceptance of our limitations. As Hauerwas comments: 'Rather, the way he taught himself to do theology is itself a testimony to the humor necessary if theology is to be a free discipline.'[54]

I think Hauerwas has put on us on a helpful track, by, quite literally, *making fun* of the Queen. Humour fits those who don't fit in, and allows theology to participate by its oddity, or foolishness: a foolishness that liberates theology from the temptation to fit in, while thereby losing its ministry of witness. Hauerwas reshapes our question: we should not ask how 'theology' is present, but how theologians themselves are present at the university.

Finding Our Inner Clown

I would like to continue this road and rewrite the tragedy of theology into a comedy by redressing theology into the Clown of the Sciences. Maybe not by putting on a red nose, but rather by searching for the theologian's 'inner clown'.[55] For this, we need help from the prophet Jonah. He will be my unwilling assistant for the next act and paragon of the 'clownish theologian'. The ironic jokes in the Book of Jonah are so obvious that its comic intent is widely attested.[56] It has been dubbed a theological comedy, a satire, or gentle parody, on Israel's prophethood, the calling of Israel to be a blessing for the nations (cf. Genesis 12.1-3), or prophetic proclamation of end-time salvation for the nations. Jonah is therefore a perfect example for us to find our 'inner clown'. The story's irony enables us to dismantle our theological pretentions, and helps us retrieve the 'playfulness of the text', as Joel Kaminsky has put it.[57] The playfulness of the Holy Scriptures' own narratives overcomes a deadly seriousness – certainly among those who call themselves Bible-believing Christians – leaving its redeeming jokes often completely lost in

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[54] Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology*, p. 248.

[55] I borrowed this idea of 'inner clown' from Simon, *The Art of Clowning*, xx: 'If your clown is knocking on the door to your soul, you should listen to her. "Break out", as you call it, figure out who your core clown is, and then play, play, play.'

[56] Cf. Thomas Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), pp. 15-16, 24. See further Hans Walter Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 3: Obadja und Jona* (BKAT, Bd. XIV/3; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977), pp. 58-64; Phillip Cary, *Jonah* (SCMTCB; London: SCM Press, 2008), pp. 17-22, 30-34; Philip Peter Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), esp. pp. 33-34; James D. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah* (SHBC; Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2011), pp. 401-410; Kevin J. Youngblood, *Jonah: God's Scandalous Mercy* (HMSCS; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), pp. 25-45; and Gregory R. Goswell, 'Jonah Among the Twelve Prophets', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 135, no. 2 (2016), 295-299.

[57] Joel S. Kaminsky, 'Humor and the Theology of Hope: Isaac as a Humorous Figure', *Interpretation*, 54, no. 4 (2000), p. 363.

translation. I have listed five playful ironic moments in the narrative of Jonah – there are more to be found – that will help us to recover our inner clown.[58]

The opening of Jonah echoes the opening of many other prophetic books (1.1-2). Yet, is slightly redacted for didactic purposes.[59] Like good slapstick, Jonah makes himself ready but runs the other way. Called to go 'up to Nineveh', he goes 'down to Joppa', even all the way 'down into a ship'. And, when the waves come crashing in and the fierce and experienced boat crew call upon their gods (1.5) – a time when one might need a prophet of Israel! – our man is in a deep sleep. But now comes the real pun. After they've awakened Jonah and inquired about his theology, he responds with no lack of self-confidence and seriousness: 'I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land' (1.9). The funny thing about Jonah is that he is so deadly serious and still fails to see what the boatmen grasp immediately: If this God is indeed the creator of all sea and land, why bother running away? Jonah, the Hebrew prophet, turns out to be the schlemiel of the story.[60] He does not see the irony between his statement and his actions. Yet this clown of a prophet turns out to be the vehicle by which these 'pagans' come to know the God of Israel (1.15). It's the irony of grace, which finds the boat crew but misses Jonah who is tossed in the water. Can somebody sink even deeper?

Although clearly not the prophet we would expect, the Book of Jonah never becomes cynical. Not silent about the evil of Nineveh (1.1-2), the focus is to our surprise on the folly and the hypocrisy of Jonah. Although Jonah is quite a character, maybe the worst prophet ever, we never resent him. Deep down in the sea he finds himself swallowed by a sea monster – almost sleeping with the fishes – and there he finds God. And, as you do when you find yourself in a fish, he composes a beautiful psalm, pure poetry, in which he sings about his conversion. He might be a Hebrew prophet, he now knows that 'Salvation comes from the Lord' (2.9). He may be baptised, yet he is not done (1.8). Even God seems to be sick and tired of Jonah: 'And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land' (2.10).[61] Inconsumable, spat out in order to recommence his mission to Nineveh, here called a city *of* God (3.3).[62] Jonah is pretty minimalistic in his message and

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[58] Cf. Conrad Hyers, *And God Created Laughter: The Bible as Divine Comedy* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), pp. 91-109.

[59] See Annette Schellenberg, 'An Anti-Prophet Among the Prophets? On the Relationship of Jonah to Prophecy', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 39, no.3 (2015), 353-371 (pp. 366-367).

[60] Derived from the Yiddish word 'shlemiel'; a stupid, awkward, or unlucky person, and a common archetype in Jewish humour. See for example Sanford Pinkster, *The Schlemiel as Metaphor: Studies in Yiddish and American Jewish Fiction*, revised edn (Carbondale/Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press), p.199.

[61] Youngblood, *Jonah*, p. 114.

[62] Youngblood, *Jonah*, p. 131.

his effort (3.4), as if purposefully sabotaging the mission in order to give Nineveh the slightest chance of grace. He is more concerned with himself than the fate or fortune of Nineveh.[63] His ridiculous behaviour is absurd, but this funny little man ends up taking down a city. In fact, he is one of the few prophets who crossed boundaries – as clowns do[64] – and prophesied outside his national borders. Of course, the irony is clear: where Jonah needed to hear his message twice, Nineveh listens the first time (3.6-9). The whole story of Jonah testifies that the so-called 'other' can be part of divine self-closure; encountering others is a way through which the 'insider' learns and receives a fuller understanding of God.[65]

The prophet eventually withdraws to a hill overlooking the city of Nineveh. Where you would think the story should have ended with the conversion of the people of Nineveh, it continues with a marvellous episode about a confrontation between God and his prophet. Jonah cannot live with a God who forgives his enemies, those nasty Ninevites (4.3). Then God pulls a joke on him. He grows a tree in whose shade Jonah's anger melts like snow in the sun. When God takes his revenge upon the plant, Jonah is in tears. His grief over the bush is in stark contrast to his willingness to see the city burn. And then the Book of Jonah suddenly ends with God's question, almost as if addressing its readers: "Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

Jonah is a great help in finding our inner clown. The story dismantles the superiority of grand theological claims that are not supported by life testimony. He might be a Hebrew prophet, yet his life shows he has yet much to learn about the God he confesses to worship. The awkwardness of his robust claim to the boatmen stands in contrast to his minimalist prophecy to Nineveh. Nonetheless, when he is 'turned around himself', being spat out and smelling like rotten fish, the great city takes heed when faced with this 'countered world'. Furthermore, Jonah enables us to develop a healthy form of self-mockery. The book provides a godly mirror of modesty.[66] And, 'it ain't pretty'. Jonah is humbled, not by sheer humiliation, but by comically showing that the joke is on him. His tragedy becomes a comedy of salvation. That is the hope resounding in the words: "Should not I pity that great city?" Despite all his silliness, the book of Jonah opens our eyes to see what God is doing in other places and through other peoples. Where Jonah assumed that nothing good could come out of Nineveh – the empire where evil 'never

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[63] See Schellenberg, 'An Anti-Prophet Among the Prophets?', p. 357.

[64] Cf. Simon, *The Art of Clowning*, p. 6: 'Clowns bridge worlds.'

[65] See Ryan Patrick McLaughlin, 'Jonah and the Religious Other: An Exploration of Biblical Inclusivism', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 48, no. 1 (2013), p. 84; and Patrick J. Reimnitz, 'Fish Out of Water: The Book of Jonah Among the Minor Prophets', *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa*, 38, no. 1 (2014), 25-26.

[66] See Cary, *Jonah*, p. 17: 'Jonah is a ridiculous excuse for a prophet—the holy man as screwup—and we are just like him.'

sleeps' – he learns God's compassion for a godless city; the same compassion that gave Jonah a second chance.

The Clown's Speech

So, what does Jonah do for the theologian? What does a clownish theologian look like when playing at the university? Let me offer some traits to help theologians 'come into character'. First of all, theologians need to be modest as they have 'God' as their object of study. 'Laughter is thus appropriate to Christian humility; by it we remind ourselves of our finitude. It saves from pretentiousness and pomposity.'[67] Conrad Hyers writes in his book *The Comic Vision and the Christian Faith*: 'Whether acknowledged or not, the theologian is in the clumsiest of possible positions. The importance of the office notwithstanding, the very ultimacy of the object of inquiry makes of theology the highest form of foolishness.' Due to its absurd study, a theologian's speech should be more like stuttering, conscious that 'we only know in part' (I Corinthians 13.12).

Second, theologians should not take the lead, but become vulnerable by making fun of themselves: 'When people make fun of their own values, when religious people tell religious jokes, they are in a playful manner conscious of the frailty of their values.'[68] Vulnerability is the ultimate witness to a counterworld. The contesting character of theology, embraced especially by free church theologians,[69] comes by weakness, not by strength or superiority. Clowns, after all, do not mind being laughed at, or made fun of; that is what makes them clowns! Theologians thus combine truthfulness with vulnerability. Likewise, theologians seek wisdom in foolishness, strength in weakness, hope in a cross, unity in diversity. Harvey Cox puts it like this:

> When the Christian in the university criticizes the university he must do it from the reference point of a community which is not an expression of the culture's own accomplishment. But the churches can provide that community only if they are not subject to the vested interests of the culture, if they speak from the strength that comes from weakness and with the power that only powerlessness allows. The churches in short live under the cross if they are the church. The university is the embodiment of wisdom. But the cross is foolishness to the wise.[70]

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[67] Fred D. Layman, 'Theology and Humor', *The Asbury Seminarian*, 38, no. 1 (1982), p. 14.
[68] Walter Van Herck, 'Humour, Religion and Vulnerability', in *Humour and Religion: Challenges and Ambiguities*, ed. by Hans Geybels and Walter Van Herck (London/New York: Continuum, 2011), p. 201.
[69] See Jan Martijn Abrahamse, '"Dumb Dogs that Cannot Bark": The Puritan Origins of Preaching Revival', in *Baptists and Revivals: Paper from the Seventh International Conference on Baptist Studies*, ed. by William L. Pitts (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2018), pp. 288-303.
[70] Cox, *The Secular City*, pp. 234-235.

Theology is in the right place when it has become the 'laughing stock' at the university.

Third, theologians need to be open toward all areas of life and creation.[71] To be a clown is not to hide behind a red nose, nor should we hide behind 'red letters' of Scripture. Not only since every clown needs an audience, but also because a clown's own performance is made together with the audience.[72] As soon as theologians shut off the outside world, they lose perspective on what God is doing and teaching them through, notably, the research and developments in the sciences.[73] This engagement is not a strategy for acceptance or relevance, but to pursue its own vocation: to be learned of God. The same goes for what happens in the arts, popular culture, literature, and current affairs.[74] Theologians, hence, should not seek narrative isolation, but investigate the stories people are confronted with in everyday life: what does it mean to live with the story of Scripture in a pluralist society?

Fourth, theologians should draw attention to the oddities of human life: its limitations, pleasures, and its wonder. Theology addresses the themes of life that go *beyond* empirical measurability.[75] It relativises hard science, as well as science's relativity of life.[76] Theologians destroy objectivity when they, like clowns, hold up the mirror of joyfulness. For example, Miroslav Volf's penetrating question to Kant's progressive idea of knowledge: how should we live to avoid dying of improvement?[77] In *Patch Adams* the resentful roommate eventually turns to Patch when having trouble with a patient who refuses to eat:

> Now, I know everything there is to know about medicine. I've studied relentlessly. I guarantee you I can outdo, outdiagnose any attending [physician] and surgeon in this hospital. But I can't make her eat. You have a gift. You have a way with people. You know, they like you. And if you leave, I can't learn this way.

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[71] See Stefan Paas, *Vrede stichten: Politieke meditaties* (Boekencentrum Essay; Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2007), pp. 50-54. A stimulating example is the recent reflection upon the effects of evolutionary theory/theories for aspects of Christian faith about creation by Gijsbert van den Brink, *Reformed Theology and Evolutionary Theory* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2019), forthcoming.
[72] Cf. Simon, *The Art of Clowning*, pp. 3-4.
[73] Cf. Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*, p. 81: 'theology will have to enter into a truth-seeking conversation with the sciences'.
[74] See for example Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Guides to Theological Inquiry; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), esp. pp. 61-92; and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'What Is Everyday Theology? How and Why Christians Should Read Culture', in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, ed. by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), pp. 15-60.
[75] Van den Brink, *Een publieke zaak*, p. 352.
[76] See Karl Barth, 'Theologie en de hedendaagse mens', in *God is God: Voordrachten 1930-1960*, trans. Nico T. Bakker (Kampen: Kok, 2004), p. 30.
[77] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), pp. 278-279.

To be learned of God involves the search for joy and wonder about the gift of life. Theologians, therefore, should be kidding, in the sense of 'making a kid' out of us: asking life questions, asking for the 'why' and the 'wherefore', reaffirming our curiosity about life's meaning and purpose.[78]

And fifth and last, theologians should take life seriously, with all its discrepancies.[79] Conscious of the life between brokenness and *shalom*, between evil and salvation, they anticipate a new world.[80] Humour 'challenges the dominant tragic worldview that confines humanity to a stoic acceptance of current conditions of existence'.[81] The joy of surprise of things going differently than we expected, than our wildest dreams, is a joy of liberation (Psalm 126.1-2).[82] Through humour we anticipate the redemption of the world, from which our world receives its ultimate order and meaning, as Reinhold Niebuhr wrote:

> This faith is not some vestigial remnant of a credulous and pre-scientific age with which 'scientific' generations may dispense. There is no power in any science of philosophy, whether in a pre- or post-scientific age, to leap the chasm of incongruity by pure thought… Faith is therefore the final triumph of the incongruity, the final assertion of the meaningfulness of existence. There is no other triumph, and will be none, no matter how much human knowledge is enlarged.[83]

Theologians are articulators of hope, as the comedy of salvation enables them to see past the confinement of the 'not yet'. Humour can be a prelude, maybe not of faith itself,[84] but of a new world coming from God, recreating our human tragedies.

Conclusion

The student I met in the hallway truly 'got it'. To study God at the university you must be joking. Theologians are 'the clowns among the scientists'. Like clowning, theology should be entertaining. If it has a place at the university, its self-deprecating authority is a pointer to God. It takes guts to be

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[78] See Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*, pp. 11-34.

[79] See Fred D. Layman, 'Theology and Humor', *The Asbury Seminarian*, 38, no. 1 (1982), 16-17.

[80] Cf. De Vries, *Alles is geschiedenis*, pp. 50-52; also Helmut Thielicke, *Das Lachen der Heiligen und Narren: Nachdenkliches über Witz und Humor* (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, [1974], 1988), esp. pp. 162-180.

[81] Cf. Kaminsky, 'Humor and the Theology of Hope', p. 373. cf. Peter Berger, *A Rumor of Angels*, expanded edition (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p. 79: 'At least for the duration of the comic perception, the tragedy of man is bracketed. By laughing at the imprisonment of the human spirit, humor implies that this imprisonment is not final but will be overcome, and by this implication provides yet another signal of transcendence—in this instance in the form of an intimation of redemption.'

[82] See Jan Martijn Abrahamse, *Breekbaar halleluja: Onderweg met de pelgrimspsalmen* (Utrecht: KokBoekencentrum, 2018), pp. 86-93.

[83] Reinhold Niebuhr, 'Humor and Faith', in *Discerning the Signs of the Times: Sermons for Today and Tomorrow* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), pp. 129-130.

[84] Niebuhr, 'Humour and Faith', p. 111.

defenceless and vulnerable. My hope for theology, in order to be theological – a 'learned' speech of God – is that God makes fun of the Queen, and that we as theologians will be like Sarah and cheerfully proclaim: 'God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me' (Genesis 21.6).[85]

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[85] Cf. Kaminsky, 'Humor and the Theology of Hope', p. 366.

What Makes Baptist Theological Education Baptist?

Einike Pilli

What makes Baptist theological education Baptist? I start the article by asking what makes Baptist theology distinct among other theological approaches. After that I present two types of empirical data: the first was gathered in two conversations, which took place among Baptist theological educators in the summer of 2018 – one at the workshop of the Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools (CEBTS) and the other at the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Theological Education Committee. The second set of data comes from research into alumni feedback from Tartu Theological Seminary. In conclusion I suggest five possible characteristics of Baptist identity in regard to the method and content of theological education:

- Baptist theological education is rooted in Baptist ecclesiology;
- Personal faith and integrity are crucially important aims of theological studies;
- Biblical hermeneutics and knowing one's tradition in context are two important areas of study;
- Constant openness and search lead to even better understanding;
- Baptist theological education is always missional.

Keywords

Theological education; ecclesiology; Baptist; method

Introduction

This article is written from the context of Estonia, which is one of the most secular European countries in terms of church membership[1] and has a population of only 1.3 million people. At the same time, there are three different protestant denominational theological schools, all at university level.

Working as Rector of Tartu Theological Seminary, owned by the Estonian Evangelical Christian and Baptist Union, has made me think about why we need our own theological school. What makes Baptist theological education distinct from Lutheran and Methodist traditions, which are represented in two other theological schools in Estonia? Do we need our own school and, if so, then how should we be different?

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[1] According to Eurobarometer 2005 <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2005/eurobarometer-2005-questions-answers > [accessed 23 April 2019]

However, I think the question is important not only for Estonian Baptists. Denominational Baptist seminaries all over Europe and, indeed, across the world could gain new insights from the same discussion. Therefore, in the following article I will ask the question: what makes Baptist theological education Baptist?

I start the article by asking what makes Baptist theology distinct among other theological approaches. Is it method or content or both? After that I present two conversations among Baptist theological educators, which took place in the summer of 2018 – one at the workshop of the Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools (CEBTS) and the other at the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Theological Education Committee.

These discussion results represent the first type of empirical data of the article. The second type of empirical data comes from alumni feedback from Tartu Theological Seminary, also gathered in 2018 (see Table 1 and Table 2). In the discussion part of the article I will draw these together and present five possible characteristics of Baptist theological education.

What is Distinct about Baptist Theology?

One may start to address this question by asking if there is a Baptist theology at all. Paul Fiddes argues: 'If there is such a thing as this (the Baptist way of being the Church), then there must also be a Baptist way of doing theology.' And therefore, 'as long as we can identify a Christian community, or family of communities, as something called "Baptist", then there must be a Baptist mode of theologizing.'[2]

Paul Fiddes mentions, some years later,[3] that we may discriminate between content and method of theology. Are the Baptist distinctives more in the method of theologising or is the content different as well?

1. Method of Baptist Theology

Brian Haymes[4] is sure that the method is different. He mentions four Baptist ways of theologising. These are rooted in the distinctive ecclesiology, which is in interaction with the method of theology. The four characteristics of theologising in a Baptist way, summarised by Paul Fiddes, are as follows:

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[2] Paul Fiddes, 'Theology and a Baptist Way of Community', in *Doing Theology in a Baptist Way*, ed. by Paul Fiddes (Oxford: Whitley Publications, 2000), p. 19.
[3] Paul Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces. Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2003).
[4] Brian Haymes, 'Theology and Baptist Identity', in Fiddes, *Doing Theology in a Baptist Way*, pp. 3-5.

> continual re-making, and imaginative living in the biblical story, a generous pluralism, and a collegiality in which doing theology is shared between experts and those who simply live out their theology.[5]

I will look at these in a more detailed way. The first one, continual re-making, means that 'each generation must work at its theology as reflection upon practice…It is not enough simply to ask how we can get the gospel across – we have to keep asking together what the Good News of God is.'[6] This suggestion to rethink theological approaches in a fresh way becomes specially important during the moments of the development in tradition which Alisdair MacIntyre calls 'epistemological crises'.[7]

Toivo Pilli illustrates this need for re-thinking theology using two images. He writes that people who have expressed a Baptist doctrinal distinctive through the image of 'the sword of the Word' in hand could also consider the alternative of 'a walking stick' in the manner of a pilgrim.[8] This continuous searching and re-making of theology happens in at least five healthy tensions, which could become 'stepping stones' both for keeping theology in balance and in planning the theological education curriculum and teaching methods. These tensions inherited in Baptist identity are: Word and Spirit; Individual and Communal; Witness and Service; Freedom and Responsibility; and Autonomy and Co-operation.[9]

Secondly, the imaginative living of the biblical story means that the Word of God will become alive and visible in the life of the believer. Faith takes the form of discipleship and changes the believer. The biblical story is lived out in the individual and corporate life of Christians. 'Narratives construct our identity, the theology is self-involving, and active discipleship is a creative feature of it all.'[10] Nigel Wright reminds us of the central Baptist characteristics of making a voluntary and independent decision to follow Jesus and to become a member of the church. However, he adds, after the decision is made, the person is becoming a disciple of Jesus. And being a disciple means that they should let Christ form them in his image by the means of Spirit and Word.[11] Therefore, the biblical story become alive in believers again and again. However, the biblical story does not only influence the practice of living. Practice itself inspires theology and is worthy of reflecting and inspiring theological discourse.

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[5] Paul Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, p. 17.
[6] Haymes, 'Theology and Baptist Identity', pp. 3-4.
[7] Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd edn (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).
[8] Toivo Pilli, 'Baptist Identities in Eastern Europe', in *Baptist Identities: International Studies from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Centuries*, ed. by Ian Randall, Toivo Pilli and Anthony Cross (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2006), p. 92.
[9] Ibid., p. 92.
[10] Haymes, 'Theology and Baptist Identity', p. 5.
[11] Nigel G. Wright, *Free Church, Free State* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), pp. 65-66.

Thirdly, generous plurality is based on the understanding that all of our theologies must be provisional, because 'all authority in heaven and earth is given to Jesus Christ'.[12] Therefore we need to recognise and accept theological plurality. Haymes writes: 'Tentativeness is not a mild form of sin but might be the expression of serious searching faith. Hence, in the Baptist theology, there will be a recognition of plurality.'[13] This means a hermeneutical approach to the Word of God and willingness to listen to each other.

Lastly, the Baptist way of theologising is unashamedly confessional and collegiate. Steve Holmes argues that the theologian is accountable to the whole people of God as a gathered church. We create our understanding of God in discussion and in shared searching. Holmes emphasises the need to return theology to the churches, where it belongs. Even more, the theological 'authority within the church belongs to all'.[14] Yes, 'scholarship is necessary, but the scholar is not possessed of any authority within the church'.[15]

Paul Fiddes[16] shares the list of characteristics outlined by Haymes. He values specially the role of 'everyday theology', together with flexible and context-sensitive answers, with the element of playfulness. These attitudes help to find the way in changing circumstances. He adds that theologians should be looking for ways in which theology connects with other academic disciplines and with human culture in the past and present. Fiddes calls theology 'high culture', which involves the discipline of the mind and skills of linguistics and visual analysis and which is learned through long apprenticeship.[17] Thus, we need both theology and theological education to help people to become professional theologians. But this needs to cooperate with and connect to the everyday life of the church.

So, there are methodological distinctives in doing Baptist theology. These lie in the continuous process of re-making theology, the embodied story and personal life of the disciple, generous plurality, and dialogical interaction between theologians and the practising church.

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[12] Haymes, 'Theology and Baptist Identity', p. 5.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Steve Holmes, 'Introduction: Theology in Context', *Theology in Context*, No 1, Winter (Oxford: Whitley Publications, 2000), p. 7.
[15] Ibid., p. 8.
[16] Paul Fiddes, 'Dual Citizenship in Athens and Jerusalem: The Place of the Christian Scholar in the Life of the Church', in *Questions of Identity*, ed. by Anthony Cross and Ruth Gouldbourne (Oxford: Regent's Park College, Oxford, 2011), p. 120.
[17] Ibid., p. 140.

2. Content of Baptist Theology

But what about the content of theology? Fiddes claims that 'Baptists have been reluctant to admit that there are any particular Baptist forms of basic Christian doctrines.'[18] However, he argues, Baptists do have a theological theme – 'covenant'. This theme not only involves the idea of participation in God, but also the aspect of covenanting together as a community of God.[19] Fiddes suggests that 'covenant and communion in God are in fact mysteriously intertwined in both time and eternity'. He explains this covenant through the theological challenge 'to try and describe this relationship between God and the whole world, a covenantal relationship between human beings and their natural environment, in a way that truly expresses mutual dependence rather than domination'.[20]

This leads us again to ecclesiology and it is hard to say how much ecclesiology is method and how much it is the content of theology. Maybe it is both. Baptist ecclesiology is, among others, discussed in Nigel Wright's book *Free Church, Free State*. He writes: 'the church is a community, a communion, a fellowship of persons in relationship'.[21] It is inspired by the communion of relatedness of Father, Son, and Spirit. At the same time, when the community of persons is in relationship with each other, they are in relationship with God, 'participating on an equal basis in the life of God'.[22]

Wright expresses the Baptist (or what he also calls Radical) expression of church through three images: the people of God, the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit.[23] All of these pictures are gathered into the defining essence of the church – mission. Wright states:

> As the body of Christ, the church is that community in which activated by the Spirit Christ takes shape and form through flesh and blood and may be encountered in the worship and witness of real-life communities.[24]

So, what makes Baptist theology Baptist? It is emphasised both in method and content and derives its inspiration from the ecclesiology. Even more, it is formed and discussed in the midst of church community, in dialogue between scholarly search and embodied worship of the covenanting community. But what about Baptist theological education?

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[18] Fiddes, *Tracks and* Traces, p. 17.
[19] Ibid., p. 18.
[20] Ibid., p. 56.
[21] Nigel Wright, *Free Church, Free State*, p. 5.
[22] Ibid., p. 5.
[23] Ibid., pp. 11-15.
[24] Ibid., p. 17.

Looking Forward: Conversations with Baptist Theological Educators

As the method of doing theology is important and requires conversation partners if we want to do it in a Baptist way, we asked Baptist theological educators to contribute to the discussion about the nature of Baptist theological education. In the summer of 2018, there were two gatherings where this issue was discussed. One, held in June in Vienna, was at the Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools (CEBTS) meeting. Another followed shortly afterwards – the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Theological Education committee meetings, which were held in Zurich in July as part of the BWA annual meeting.

1. CEBTS Meeting Insights

CEBTS participants were asked the question: "What are the two or three most important things you want to see in your students at the end of their studies?" They discussed the ideas in small groups and then offered these for discussion in the larger group of around twenty participants. The answers are summarised in the following list:

- Love of God and the Church;
- Hermeneutical competence;
- Knowing him/herself and his/her tradition;
- Knowledge of different opinions; ability to change perspective;
- Capacity for leadership;
- Discipleship;
- Knowing how to study, love of learning;
- Character – humble, curious.

Interestingly, the personal characteristics are quite strongly set side by side with theological knowledge. One can even say that the personal and loving relationship with God and the Church is emphasising that theological studies are not predominantly about knowledge and theory, but first and foremost incarnated and visible in a person's life and attitudes. Several things on the list – such as capacity for leadership, knowing how to study, and knowledge of different opinions – are often categorised in general educational theory as generic competencies or learning outcomes, which are not subject area-specific.[25] Generic competencies were mentioned as important learning outcomes also in the research I conducted in Belfast Bible

[25] John Biggs and Catherine Tang, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does*, 4rd edn (Society for Research into Higher Education; Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2011).

College in 2006.[26] Integrity, honesty, and humility were mentioned more than any others.

However, it is not only about generic competencies. Two theological disciplines, which 'blink out' from the CEBTS list are 'hermeneutics' and 'church history in context'. These might easily be a reaction to the tendencies experienced. Hermeneutical competence avoids the (mis)use of the Bible at a mechanical and superficial level. Knowledge about the tradition becomes even more important in the area of global communication, where local churches are more and more in the pulling wind of the internet and all the groups and individuals which compete with the local church pulpit and practices.

Even more, these two areas of study are connected: if the hermeneutical skills take seriously a person's church tradition, these are rooted into fertile soil and follow the communal nature of theologising. This deep-rootedness makes it possible to be open to other viewpoints and gives appropriate ability to change one's perspective, if needed.

The challenge is how to support the development of all these personally connected competences and characteristics. How can we develop not only the curriculum, but also the teaching methodology and learning environment, so that growth will happen? How can we model it well as faculty?

2. BWA Theological Education Committee Discussion

Another conversational setting took place just a week later with approximately forty participants. These people were theological educators from the world-wide spectrum of Baptist Churches. The format was similar – participants were asked to discuss two questions first in small groups and then the ideas were brought to the larger group discussion.

The first question asked was: "What are the required future competencies of the graduates of theological education? What do we need 'then' more than 'now'?" The list offered was, after slight editing, as follows:

- Team work attitude and leadership skills;
- Foreign language;
- Digital and cultural literacy;
- Stress tolerance and time management;
- Media skills and digital literacy;
- Contextual hermeneutical skills.

[26] Einike Pilli, 'Educating for Wisdom', in *Church-Based Theology for Ministerial Practice*, ed. by T. Pilli and A. Riistan (Kõrgem Usuteaduslik Seminar, 2008), pp. 76-93.

As the emphasis was more on future skills than on distinctively Baptist theology, this list presents generic competencies even more clearly than the previous one, which was gathered by CEBTS. However, some similarities catch the eye quickly – notably, contextual hermeneutical skills and leadership skills. Additionally, stress tolerance and time management place a strong emphasis on the self-management aspect of the person. How can this be taught? Or maybe life teaches it anyway and only the strong one makes it to 'another side'? Of course, we do not need to add stress in theological education to develop this ability. However, do we offer support and skills to cope with stress and manage time well? Which parts of our theological education do that?

Another question, presented to the BWA Theological Education Committee, moved more deeply into the issue of the current article, asking: "Is there anything 'Baptist' about Baptist Theological Education?" Respondents offered the following characteristics:

- Integrity of life and teaching;
- 'Theologian-hood' of all believers;
- Primary theology is done in the local church, theological education reflects on that practice and is secondary in nature;
- Dialogue and search for God's will in common discernment;
- Humility – knowing that God has always 'more light and truth';
- Servant attitude, enabling others;
- Creativity.

This list comes very close to the characteristics of Baptist theology, which were discussed in the first part of this article. What is immediately worth noticing is that most of the things mentioned, if not all, talk about the method of theology. And these indicate the elements of ecclesiology. One possible explanation of that phenomenon is that the content is something we share with other Christian denominations, whereas the method of doing theology is different, because the ecclesiology differs. But does the way we do theological education differ as well? And if yes, how?

Another feature of this list is the great emphasis on personality characteristics such as humility, servant attitude, creativity – all of which can be included in the characteristic of 'integrity of life and teaching'. If we believe the classic axiom of communication: 'The medium is the message', then we could easily say it also about students and teachers of theological education. Integrity matters and this is clearly one of the Baptist values. It is also true of the connection between Baptist theology and Baptist theological education.

Looking Back: Alumni Research from Estonia

It is one thing to talk about aims, competencies, and methods. Another perspective comes from the feedback of those who have studied theology in a Baptist theological school. I would like to present a small research study carried out in Tartu Theological Seminary, Estonia during the spring of 2018.

The school was established in 1922 as a seminary for The Union of Free Evangelical and Baptist Churches of Estonia and, after being closed during the Soviet years, re-opened in 1989.[27] Since its re-opening, the seminary has been functioning as a government-recognised, university level school.

The research was conducted with graduates of the years 1993-2016. Twenty out of 118 graduates answered and Table 1 illustrates the breakdown of respondents by date of graduation. I acknowledge that the number of respondents was not big, but I am hopeful that it still provides some insight. The gender of respondents was: seven women (39%) and eleven men (61%); two people did not indicate their gender. The questionnaire was sent in the form of an electronic link.

Table 1: Respondents by Year of Graduation

Year	Number of alumni answering (n=20)
1993-1999	9
2001-2008	6
2011-2016	5

Tartu Theological Seminary operated from its re-opening in 1989 with local (Estonian) teachers, while three of them, Rector Peeter Roosimaa included, were educated in East Germany in Buckow and/or Halle. Most of the faculty were members of The Union of Free Evangelical and Baptist Churches of Estonia. Slowly the school has moved towards a broader theological influence (several teachers studied at IBTS, Prague). During this process, finding the contextually relevant model has been one of the constant challenges.

[27] <https://kus.kogudused.ee/en/the-story-of-the-school/> [accessed 18 April 2019]

Alumni answered some retrospective questions about their learning experience at Tartu Theological Seminary. Table 2 presents a short overview of the questions asked and the answers given.

Table 2: Questions and Responses after Analysis

Question	*Answers (all except the last question were essay answers, the choices were not given)*
What has Seminary education given to you?	• broader view of the world • analytical thinking • courage • basic and holistic knowledge of theology • practical ministry skills Some mentioned that it has helped in work and has been useful in continuing their studies.
What did you miss in your studies?	• leadership skills • hermeneutics (during the first decade it was not part of the curriculum – author's note) • biblical languages (because of change to part-time study the amount of credit points for biblical languages was decreased – author's note) Some mentioned practical skills in the areas of communication, book-keeping, counselling, education, social work, and contextual approach to Mission and Theology.
How did your studies influence you spiritually?	• spiritual life developed further and deeper, even if it had gone through some crises Some said that the school had no direct spiritual influence; one respondent commented that her spiritual life influenced her studies, not vice versa.
How did the Seminary education influence your ministry at the local church?	The two words mentioned most often were *courage* and *responsibility*. Alumni members valued the role of education in getting greater responsibility and finding courage to serve in the role offered.
What was the biggest change that happened during your Seminary studies?	• critical thinking • courage • personal development In addition to these, some mentioned study skills; broader and deeper understanding of the world, Christian denominations, and the Bible. One respondent said that she became an independent thinker.
What do you consider being the biggest strength in your current work?	Out of the multiple choices, respondents answered: • communication (80%) • subject area knowledge (75%) • leadership skills (55%) • hard work (50%)

Maybe the most surprising aspect of the replies was 'analytical thinking'. It is not uncommon that local churches present one possible understanding of the Bible. Therefore, after confronting other perspectives, both in church history and among co-students, it has resulted in increased plurality and ability to find their own perspective. Of course, sometimes it does bring crises, but it also adds courage and spiritual growth. However, the emphasis on analytical thinking may also spring from the German model of understanding theological education in the early years after the re-opening of the seminary, which emphasised abstract knowledge and analytical thinking.

Another key word mentioned several times was also one of the generic competencies – courage. And then students talked repeatedly about leadership skills. These two go hand in hand: one cannot be a leader without courage. However, the content area – theological knowledge – is present in answers as well. It has been, is, and will be an important part of Baptist theological education. The alumni research results showed a great deal of similarities with the results of the two discussion groups. However, because of the type of questions, the method of doing theology was not as strongly emphasised.

Discussion: Towards the Baptist Model of Theological Education

In education there is always a temptation to want too much, to overload the curriculum and to try everything. But as in many other places, the phrase 'less is more' applies also in education. Therefore, here I try to gather the ideas, discussions, and research findings together into five key characteristics of Baptist theological education.

When Fiddes[28] identifies the convictions of the Baptist community, he says rightly that these convictions themselves are not unique to Baptists; however, Baptists hold these together in unique way. The same could be said about the list that follows.

1. Baptist theological education is rooted in Baptist ecclesiology

As ecclesiology becomes visible in theologising, it reflects method more than content. Baptist theology is characterised through the concepts of theologian-hood and priesthood of all believers, covenanting and dialoguing

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[28] Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, p. 12.

together, listening to each other, and finding a fresh theological expression for every new generation. Baptist theology needs to be done in the communal and covenantal contexts. It has to be embodied and practised, reflected and discussed. It means also the search for balance between freedom and responsibility, autonomy and co-operation.

This means that theological education needs to be tightly rooted in the local church and in a continuous conversation with it. Colin Bond writes: 'Educating Christians may well involve the seminary, but the seminary must go out into the churches and into the world, in order to ensure the appropriateness of the issues being explored in the learning.'[29]

In this communal model nobody dominates, theology is dialogical and a constant search for common understanding. And, even though professional theologians have an important role, Baptists believe that every Christian is also a theologian. Therefore, we may say that, as the ecclesiology is dynamic, so should be theological education.

2. Personal faith and integrity are the crucially important aims of theological studies

Personal characteristics of a student, including personal faith in God, discipleship, and a serving attitude toward others, are crucial parts of the expected learning outcomes of Baptist theological education. Of course, this means that the teachers are first and foremost teaching by personal example. Robert Banks[30] agrees that theology is more than a set of beliefs requiring practical application and is a holistic enterprise that integrally touches all aspects of the faith-directed life.

3. Biblical hermeneutics and knowing one's tradition in context are two important areas of study

As the world opens up and the range of different approaches and views are available in the living room of every student, the ability to analyse and evaluate becomes crucial. In spite of global openness, Perry Shaw contends that theological education needs to be rooted in the local context in order to be successful.[31] And, as every believer is a kind of theologian in Baptist ecclesiology, it means that the seminary-educated theologians do not only

[29] Colin Bond, 'What Can and Cannot Be Taught at a Seminary to a Future Worker?' in *Church-Based Theology for Ministerial Practice*, ed. by Pilli and Riistan, p. 97.

[30] Robert Banks, *Re-envisioning Theological Education* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), p. 59.

[31] Perry Shaw, 'Innovation and Criteria: Ensuring Standards While Promoting Innovative Approaches', in *Challenging Tradition: Innovation in Advanced Theological Education*, ed. by Perry Shaw and Havilah Dharamraj (Carlisle: Langham, 2018), pp 52-53.

need to know and use the hermeneutical tools, but they need to be able to teach these to their church members.

Some years earlier, Shaw expressed a value in the cognitive aim of learning on the side of the affective and behavioural, expecting 'a mind committed to reflective practice, which means that the graduate is able to interpret Christian life and ministry through the multiple lenses of Scripture, theology, history, and community'.[32] Knowledge is an important part of Baptist theological education, but it needs to be analytical and contextual knowledge more now than ever before.

4. Constant openness and search lead to even better understanding

Theological education has to remain open to change and generous to plurality of different voices. Humility and courage, combined with contextual hermeneutical skills, help to find the best approach to every new generation of theologians. And while doing that, analytical skills cannot be emphasised too strongly. The Beirut Benchmarks, which were formulated during consultations in Beirut in 2010 and Bangalore in 2011,[33] mention the need for 'creative and humble use of the rationality God has granted to humans in his own image' as one of the important aims of theological studies.

5. Baptist theological education is always missional

The four previous characteristics are in one way or another serving the purpose of mission. Whether it is the faith and life of the individual student or the discerned theological understanding of the covenanting community, these all serve the purpose of mission. The Beirut Benchmarks, mentioned earlier, emphasise 'appropriate living in the world to reflect God's calling and participate in God's mission' as one of the key aims of theological studies.

Missional theological education may mean the struggle with the balance between witness and service. It may include learning 'digital and media language', developing courage and contextual sensitivity, and developing the servant leadership attitude and skills. But none of the missional activities is possible without trusting the living God, who reveals himself for us and others. One of the central aspects of theological education is trust in God, who is the subject and aim of all Christian life and its reflection in the form of theology.

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[32] Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education: a Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning* (Carlisle: Langham, 2014), pp. 31-33.

[33] Perry Shaw and Havilah Dharamraj (eds), *Challenging Tradition*, pp 52-53.

Conclusion

This article started with the question of whether and how Baptist theological education is different from other approaches to theological education. Through an examination of the Baptist theological method and content the answer to the first part of the question is "yes". The process of answering the question "how?" took us quickly to Baptist ecclesiology. Ecclesiology, more than anything else, marks the distinctively Baptist form of theology and theological education.

Theological education, done in a Baptist way, has a specific approach more in method than content. This finding emerged from the empirical research carried out in two international discussion groups and with the alumni of Tartu Theological Seminary. Additionally, there was quite a strong emphasis on personal integrity and generic outcomes.

In the final section of the article I presented five suggested characteristics of Baptist theological education. These, I argue, could form the Baptist identity of the method and content of theological education:

- Baptist theological education is rooted in Baptist ecclesiology;
- Personal faith and integrity are crucially important aims of theological studies;
- Biblical hermeneutics and knowing one's tradition in context are two important areas of study;
- Constant openness and search lead to even better understanding;
- Baptist theological education is always missional.

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of the article, as to whether Estonian Baptists need their own seminary, the answer is: yes, because the ecclesiology is different. And the only way to have integrity in theological education is to use the methods suitable to the ecclesiology of the movement.

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Ministerial Formation as Theological Education in the Context of Theological Study

Simon Jones

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.[1]

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.[2] 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.[3] 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?[4] 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'.[5] 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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[1] 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.

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

[3] Ibid., pp. 1-27.

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

[5] 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.[6] 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*.[7] 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'.[8] 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.[9] 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.'[10]

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[6] Alan Roxburgh, *Missional Map-making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), especially pp. 3-18.
[7] Michael Volland, *The Minister as Entrepreneur* (London: SPCK, 2015).
[8] Ibid., p. 3.
[9] 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.
[10] 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.[11] 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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[11] The report is available here: <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'.[12]

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.'[13] 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.'[14]

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

[12] David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 2018), p. 68.
[13] Ibid., p. 94.
[14] 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.[15]

John Locke echoes Graeber in suggesting, 'Labour for labour's sake is against nature.'[16] 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.'[17] 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.[18]

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.'[19] 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?[20] 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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[15] Keith Thomas, *The Ends of Life: Roads to Fulfilment in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 78.

[16] John Locke, 'Of the conduct of the understanding', in *Posthumous Works* (1706) quoted in Thomas, *The Ends of Life*, p. 79.

[17] Thomas, *The Ends of Life*, p. 82.

[18] Ibid., pp. 82, 85-88.

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

[20] 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.[21] 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'etre*.

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 missiolology was just taking shape and it begins in the world as it is described in the language of other religious systems.[22] 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.'[23] 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.'[24]

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

[21] George Monbiot, *Out of the Wreckage: A New Politics for an Age of Crisis* (London: Verso, 2017).
[22] Peter Cotterell, *Mission and Meaninglessness: The Good News in a World of Suffering and Disorder* (London: SPCK, 1990), especially pp. 5-14.
[23] Monbiot, *Out of the Wreckage*, p. 1.
[24] 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'.[25]

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?[26]

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.[27] 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

[25] Ibid., p. 26.
[26] Roxburgh, *Missional Map-making*, p. x.
[27] 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.'[28]

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.[29]

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.'[30] 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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[28] Roy Searle commentary on 'Ignite' on BUGB website at <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/456614/Ignite_Commendation.aspx> [accessed 05 January 2019]

[29] 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).

[30] 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.[31] 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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[31] 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*.[32] 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'.[33] 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.[34]

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'[35] and connects that with the Word of God that calls

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[32] Simon Jones, see footnote 9.
[33] Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation*, p. 46.
[34] Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*.
[35] 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;[36] 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.[37]

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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[36] Ibid., pp. 60-61.
[37] Ibid., pp. 61-64.

'To communicate simply you must understand profoundly': The Necessity of Theological Education for Deepening Ministerial Formation[1]

Anthony R. Cross

This paper explores the vital role that theology has played for those called to serve the people of God as ministers. It seeks to demonstrate that, from their beginnings in the early seventeenth century, Baptists have believed that a theologically educated ministry is a necessity. This belief led Baptists to pioneer the dissenting academies, which in time became colleges, and to be key figures in the development of education which has benefitted the whole Baptist tradition and church of God. Contrary to misconceptions among Baptists, and, we should add, those of other traditions, Baptists have always had men, and in time also women, who have been highly trained theologically, and who have made significant contributions to the churches they have served. Finally, it argues that theology and an educated ministry have major roles to play in the renewal of Christian life and witness for which so many Christians today are praying.

Keywords

Theology; education; ministry; pastor-theologians; Baptist colleges; biblical languages; mission; Bible translation

Introduction

I feel a sense of urgency about this subject, as the amount of time allotted to theological study within education for the Baptist ministry has lessened markedly in recent decades – some feel drastically – from full-time to part-time, and sometimes even less, and sometimes now not even at a Baptist college or recognised theological college. Much of present-day British Baptist life does not emphasise the necessity of theology for ministerial formation or for Christian discipleship in the way it has for over 400 years.[2] Contemporary British culture does not place a high premium on education, and this pattern is undoubtedly mirrored among the churches. This often results in the dangerously erroneous view that theology is unimportant for,

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[1] This paper is a re-working of 'The Place of Theological Education in the Preparation of Men and Women for the British Baptist Ministry Then and Now', which appeared in *Perichoresis: The Theological Journal of Emanuel University* 16.1 (2018), 81-98. I am grateful to Dr Corneliu Simut for granting permission for the revising and publishing of it.

[2] Anthony R. Cross, *'To communicate simply you must understand profoundly': Preparation for Ministry among British Baptists* (Didcot: The Baptist Historical Society, 2016).

and even a distraction from, the real task not of ministry, but of what is increasingly seen as leadership, with its clear basis in managerial theory, and *not* biblical-theological study. It also often leads to believing in theology's irrelevance for mission. In recent years, then, many churches' attitude to the Baptist colleges has become one of indifference, and consequently they stop supporting them. This last observation raises the question of why they have stopped, and this itself is a theological question which involves ministry and the support of those called to pastoral and evangelistic ministries, for we must not forget Jesus' saying that 'workers deserve their wages' (Luke 10.7), and Paul's reiteration of this to Timothy (I Timothy 5.18), also stewardship (e.g., Luke 12.35-48), and discipleship, which always involves learning, for, as Jesus said, 'Take my yoke upon you and *learn from me* …' (Matthew 11.29).

Theological Study in the Life of the Church

Contrary to misconceptions among Baptists and those of other traditions, Baptists have always had men, and in time also women, who have been highly trained theologically. The testimony of Baptist history has unequivocally been for the necessity of strong theological foundations for gospel preaching, the deepening of discipleship, and effective mission work. This is evidenced in the fact, for example, that the founding of both the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS World Mission) and Home Mission work at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries was driven by theological renewal. This was led by The Bristol Tradition of Bernard Foskett, Hugh and Caleb Evans; the tradition in the North of England championed by Alvery Jackson and John Fawcett; the theology of the Midland Baptist Robert Hall Sr; and the impact of the theology of the American Jonathan Edwards on the Northamptonshire Baptists, chiefly John Ryland, John Sutcliff, Andrew Fuller, and William Carey, and their Midland friend Samuel Pearce.[3]

Why are such pastor-theologians needed? The answer is simple: II Timothy 2.15, 'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.' No one can rightly handle or use something they simply do not understand, for, as Peter Cotterell puts it, 'To communicate simply you must understand profoundly.'[4] The pastor-theologian – and all ministers should be pastor-theologians – is there to help the church grow in its understanding and enable its better handling of God's word: II Timothy 3.16, 'All Scripture is

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[3] Anthony R. Cross, *Useful Learning: Neglected Means of Grace in the Reception of the Evangelical Revival among English Particular Baptists* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017), *passim*.
[4] Ian M. Randall, *Educating Evangelicalism* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), p. 243.

God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.' The apostle Peter exhorts all Christians to 'grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ', so that to him will be 'the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen' (II Peter 3.18).

To illustrate our argument, the learning of the biblical languages will be a major, though by no means exclusive, focus of attention of this paper. This brings us conveniently to the Bible, which, Baptists assert, is the word of God and the basis for their life and practice. Yet they can condemn those who search the scriptures academically, and especially those who arrive at different interpretations as a result of their studies – seen, for example, in the protracted and bitter controversies between Calvinistic/Particular and Arminian/General Baptists,[5] over open or closed communion,[6] and, more recently, sacramentalism or anti-sacramentalism.[7] This state of affairs has been well summarised by Bill Leonard when he observes that British Baptist concern for education has been paradoxical, in that while many have promoted education others have 'remained suspicious of its benefits'.[8] Such people are not only in our churches, but also among the students training for ministry in its various forms, and also, it seems, may even include some teachers in our colleges.[9]

So, what about 'theology'? What do we understand by this word, which so many Baptist Christians, and Christians of other traditions, dismiss, ridicule, fear, denigrate, and even treat as a hindrance to the life of the church and the work of God's kingdom? According to John Colwell, 'theology, throughout all its various sub-disciplines, remains theology; and *theology is simply the study of God*'.[10] Bruce Milne expands this: 'Theology literally means "the science of God", or more fully, "thought and speech which issue

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[5] See, e.g., Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century* (A History of the English Baptists, 2; London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1986), *passim*; and John H.Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (A History of the English Baptists, 3; Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1994), pp. 96–157.

[6] See, e.g., Michael J. Walker, *Baptists at the Table: The Theology of the Lord's Supper amongst English Baptists in the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1992); and Briggs, *English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 43-69.

[7] Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (eds), *Baptist Sacramentalism* (Studies in Baptist History and Thought, 5; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), and *Baptist Sacramentalism* 2 (Studies in Baptist History and Thought, 25; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008); Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Studies in Baptist History and Thought, 13; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003); and Curtis W. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), pp. 311–38.

[8] Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), p. 143.

[9] Among them, e.g., Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), pp. 300-302, who criticises all theology done during the period that can be described as Christendom, implicitly including theology done by Baptists during the best part of 400 years, in spite of the fact that Baptists and their theology, like all the Free Churches and their theology, is a tradition that is antithetical to Christendom.

[10] John E. Colwell, *Promise and Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), p. 1 (italics added).

from a knowledge of God" (cf. I Corinthians 1.5).'[11] As such theology is *not* to be identified with the *academic* discipline of theology, what used to be called divinity, though, of course, it often involves it, and certainly benefits from it.

In his widely used *Know the Truth*, Milne begins this popular handbook of Christian belief with the exclamation: 'Of course, I'm no theologian.' He then continues,

> How often have I heard that comment over the years, *not infrequently from those who ought to know better*. It usually implies that serious thinking about Christian beliefs and the attempt to express them in an ordered form is altogether distinct from real Christianity, which is about practical concerns: our personal walk with the Lord, sharing the gospel, and so on. While the theologians may have their place, the serious study of doctrine is seen as something which need not bother ordinary Christians, and may even hinder their Christian life if they go into it too deeply.
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> This prevalent anti-doctrine spirit is a major departure from the Christian instincts of earlier ages and its roots go deep into contemporary Western culture. In face of the tremendous challenges and opportunities facing the church … this dismissal of doctrine is, in my judgment, nothing short of a recipe for disaster.[12]

In short, and 'as a matter of plain fact every Christian *is* a theologian!' But Milne does not stop there. He asserts that, through being born again, all Christians have begun to know God, 'that is, we all have a theology of sorts, whether or not we have ever sat down and pieced it together'. As a result, theology is 'everybody's business', not just the domain of 'a few religious eggheads with a flair for abstract debate'. Once this is grasped, 'our duty is to become the best theologians we can to the glory of God, as our understanding of God and his ways is clarified and deepened through studying the book he has given for that very purpose, the Bible'. He then cites II Timothy 3.16.[13]

Have Baptists Really Been Anti-Educational?

In the 1923 first edition of his history of British Baptists, W.T. Whitley believed that in the latter half of the seventeenth century

> The denomination was uncultured, and had no aspiration after culture. The fallacy gained ground that God set a premium on ignorance, that *piety and education were barely compatible*.[14]

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[11] Bruce B. Milne, *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), p. 11.
[12] Milne, *Know the Truth*, p. 11.
[13] Milne, *Know the Truth*, p. 11 (italics added).
[14] W.T. Whitley, *A History of British Baptists* (London: Charles Griffin, 1st edn, 1923), p. 184 (italics added).

However, the writings of Baptists, along with accounts of what Baptists have actually done, shows that Whitley, like so many today, was mistaken, and that Baptists have usually sought to be as well-educated as they can. In fact, when deprived of the opportunity to study at an academy, seminary, college, or university, many Baptist ministers educated themselves, many most successfully, and to the great benefit of the churches and kingdom of God. Self-education is still education, even if it is through the reading of the Bible and books, and through the practice of ministry. The Particular Baptists' most accomplished self-educated ministers include John Fawcett, Robert Robinson, William Carey, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, and Andrew Fuller.[15]

For instance, it was reported that after Thomas Grantham had finished his tailor's apprenticeship he 'gave himself to study' becoming 'a great Proficient in Learning'.[16] This is borne out by the large number and significance of the works Grantham published.[17] Though the General Baptist Richard Allen 'had not the advantages of a learned education', like Grantham he rectified this 'by his own industry, after he was called to the work of the ministry', attaining 'to such an acquaintance with the oriental languages, and other parts of useful learning, as to exceed many who enjoyed the benefits of a learned education in the schools'.[18] The Seventh Day Baptist, Joseph Stennett, was educated at Wallingford grammar school and also by his father, Edward, a physician, and his brother, Jehudah, who himself published a Hebrew grammar in 1685.[19] Joseph Stennett knew a variety of ancient and modern languages, including Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, and Italian.[20] Over time, Baptists became almost synonymous with knowledge of the biblical languages, such that Bishop A.C. Headlam once remarked that 'only Baptist ministers and regius professors know Hebrew and both are slightly mad'.[21]

The origins of the Bristol Academy (founded 1720)[22] lie in Edward Terrill's deed of gift dated 3 June 1679. Terrill was an elder in the

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[15] Cross, *'To communicate simply'*, p. 15.
[16] Giles Firmin, *Scripture-Warrant sufficient proof for Infant-Baptism* (London: Tho. Parkhurst, 1688), p. A2[v.]
[17] Clint C. Bass, *Thomas Grantham (1633–1692) and General Baptist Theology* (Centre for Baptist History and Heritage Studies, 10; Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2013), pp. 24–34 and *passim*; J.I. Essick, *Thomas Grantham: God's Messenger from Lincolnshire* (The James N. Griffith Series in Baptist Studies; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2013), pp. 34–54 and *passim*.
[18] Thomas Crosby, *The History of the English Baptists* (4 vols; London: For the Editor, 1738–40), IV, p. 346 (italics removed).
[19] Jehudah Stennett, *Dikduk mikhlol, or, A Comprehensive Grammar* (London: S. Roycroft for the Author, 1685).
[20] Crosby, *History of the English Baptists*: IV, p. 320.
[21] W.M.S. West, *To Be a Pilgrim: A Memoir of Ernest A. Payne* (Guildford: Lutterworth Press, 1983), p. 200.
[22] See S.A. Swaine, *Faithful Men: Or, Memorials of Bristol Baptist College, and Some of its Most Distinguished Alumni* (London: Alexander & Shepheard, 1884) and Norman S. Moon, *Education for*

Broadmead church, Bristol, and passionately convinced of the need for ministers to be theologically educated and theologically competent, which entailed their skill in the biblical languages, so that they would be enabled to preach the gospel and also train the next generation of ministers. His will made the following provision:

> For the use and subsistence of a holy learned man, well skilled in the tongues, to wit, Greek and Hebrew, and should profess and practice the truth of believers' baptism, as a pastor or teacher to the congregation aforesaid, and so to another after his death, successively, for ever; …[23]

The Seminary's 'plan of instruction' included 'the learned languages, so as to enable them to examine any passage of scripture in the original',[24] and in so doing they would realise Hugh Evans' aim which he bequeathed to The Bristol Tradition,

> not merely to form substantial scholars but as far as in him lay he was desirous of being made an instrument in God's hands of forming them, *able, evangelical, lively, zealous Ministers of the gospel*.[25]

This vision was implemented by the Academy's first four Principals: Bernard Foskett, Hugh Evans, Dr Caleb Evans,[26] and Dr John Ryland, and was passed on to their students, and through them the churches they served were built up. When combined with the theological work of those like Fawcett in the North, Robert Hall Sr and Samuel Pearce in the Midlands, and John Sutcliff and Andrew Fuller in Northamptonshire, the vision resulted in the renewal of Baptist life and witness in Britain, exemplified in Baptist foreign *and* home mission work.[27]

When the Bristol Education Society was formed in 1770,[28] its twofold purpose was 'the education of pious candidates for the ministry', and 'the encouragement of missionaries to preach the gospel wherever providence opens the door for it'.[29] Caleb Evans, the driving force behind the Society, and himself an able linguist,[30] exhorted students 'to the vigorous pursuit of your other studies in general', because

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Ministry: Bristol Baptist College 1679–1979 (Bristol: Bristol Baptist College, 1979). A tercentenary history of the College is being written by Anthony R. Cross and Ruth Gouldbourne for publication in 2020.

[23] 'Edward Terrell's Charity n.d.', in T.J. Manchee (ed.), *The Bristol Charities* (Bristol: T.J. Manchee, 1831), I, p. 281.

[24] *An Account of the Bristol Education Society: Began Anno 1770* (Bristol: W. Pine, 1770), p. x.

[25] Caleb Evans, *Elisha's Exclamation!* (Bristol: W. Pine, 1781), p. 31 (italics added).

[26] On the first three Principals and the Bristol Baptist Academy, as it was then known, see Roger Hayden, *Continuity and Change: Evangelical Calvinism among Eighteenth-Century Baptist Ministers Trained at Bristol Academy, 1690–1791* (Chipping Norton: Roger Hayden and The Baptist Historical Society, 2006).

[27] This is the argument of Cross, *Useful Learning*.

[28] *An Account of the Bristol Education Society*, pp. 1-7.

[29] Caleb Evans, *The Kingdom of God* (Bristol: W. Pine, T. Cadell, M. Ward/London: G. Keith, J. Buckland, and W. Harris, 1775), p. 24.

[30] Caleb Evans, *The Law Established by the Gospel* (Bristol: W. Pine, 1779), *passim*.

> Whatever hath a tendency to enlarge our ideas of the divine perfections, *to give us a clearer view of the meaning of Scripture* and the evidences of its authenticity, or *to enable us to speak and write our thoughts with propriety, perspicuity, and energy*, is certainly well worth the attention of every candidate for the ministry.[31]

A key figure in the revival of the eighteenth-century Baptists, Dr John Ryland moulded the thinking of many of the early Baptist missionaries.[32] A highly gifted scholar, and linguist, Ryland's work was motivated by the conviction that

> though we readily allow it to be unnecessary for every minister to possess much of what is commonly called learning, yet, in the present day, when the advantages of education are more common among our hearers, we think it at least highly expedient that every large body of Christians should possess some learned ministers; *and the greater their number and attainments the better*.[33]

Speaking in 1822, William Staughton, the founder of the Philadelphia Education Society in 1812, and one of Ryland's students at Bristol, identified another reason why education is so important:

> In the present age, when missionaries are passing into almost every region of the earth, it is evident that, to enable them with greater facility to acquire new languages, and to translate the scriptures from the original text, *a sound and extensive education is not only desirable but necessary*.[34]

Half a century earlier, Dr John Gill expressed matters in a wonderfully frank way:

> Here I cannot but observe the amazing ignorance and stupidity of some persons, who take it into their heads to decry learning and learned men; for what would they have done for a Bible, had it not been for them as instruments? … Bless God, therefore, and be thankful that God has, in his providence, raised up such men as to translate the Bible into the mother tongue of every nation, and particularly into ours; and that he still continues to raise up such who are able to defend the translation made, against erroneous persons, and enemies of the truth; and to correct and amend it in lesser matters, in which it may have failed, and clear and illustrate it by their learned notes upon it.[35]

This connection between education, mission, and Bible translation is nowhere better illustrated than in the life and ministry of William Carey and his colleagues. After coming to Baptist convictions, Carey continued his work as a cobbler, preaching in the surrounding area, while furthering his

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[31] Caleb Evans, 'An Address to the Students in the Academy at Bristol, April 12, 1770', in John Rippon, *The Baptist Annual Register* (4 vols; s.l.: s.n., 1790–1802), I, p. 346 (italics added).

[32] E.F. Clipsham, 'Ryland, John (1753–1825), Baptist minister and theologian', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*. < https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24412>

[33] John Ryland, *Advice to Young Ministers, respecting their preparatory Studies* (Bristol: E. Bryan, 1812), pp. 18-19 (italics added).

[34] William Staughton, *Address delivered at the Opening of the Columbian College in the District of Columbia*, *January 9, 1822* (Washington City [DC]: Anderson and Meehan, 1822), pp. 25-26 (italics added).

[35] John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity* (2 vols; London: For the Author, 1769), I, p. 45, also quoted approvingly in *An Account of the Bristol Education Society*, pp. v-vi.

own education. He was taught Latin by John Sutcliff, but he also learnt the two biblical languages, studying Hebrew with the help of John Ryland. In 1792 he completed his *An Enquiry*,[36] and the year after that he and his family went to Bengal, where he learned Bengali and Hindi, and began to preach in the vernacular. In 1794, Carey set up a school in Madnabati, North Bengal, a pattern he and other missionaries followed in India on a number of occasions, and when, six years later, he moved to Serampore, he joined Joshua Marshman and William Ward in the work there, and in 1818 they together founded Serampore College.[37]

'Human Learning under God': Examples from Baptist History

Because the only two universities in the country, Cambridge and Oxford, were closed to Baptists until the nineteenth century, many ministers took the initiative and opened their own schools and, in time, academies and colleges. Academies were run, for varying lengths of time, in the homes of ministers. Among those who ran such academies were John Fawcett at Hebden Bridge, then Brearley Hall, and finally Ewood Hall,[38] and he trained, among others, John Sutcliff, who is best known for issuing the Prayer Call in 1784 which eventually led to the founding of the BMS. He also taught William Ward, who went on to become one of the Serampore Trio. Sutcliff himself opened an academy, and he trained William Carey as an out-pupil.

In 1856, Spurgeon opened the Pastor's College,[39] as it was originally known. From the beginning, the aim of the College was

> to help *preachers*, and not to produce *scholars*. There are plenty of institutions for the promotion of learning for its own sake; ours is a part of the work of the church at the Tabernacle, and church-work is gospel-work, and nothing else. Let the world educate men for its own purposes, and let the church instruct men for its special service. We aim at helping men to set forth the truth of God, expound the Scriptures, win sinners, and edify saints. Hence it is important that men should be

[36] William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens. In which the Religious State of the Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicality of Further Undertakings, are Considered* (Leicester: Ann Ireland, J. Johnson, T. Knott, R. Dilly, and Smith, 1792).
[37] George Howells and A.C. Underwood, *The Story of Serampore and its College* (Serampore and Calcutta: The Faculty of Serampore College, 1918); George Howells and Members of the College Faculty, *The Story of Serampore and its College* (Serampore: s.n., 1927); and W.S. Stewart (ed.), *The Story of Serampore and its College* (Serampore: The Council of Serampore College, 1961).
[38] On Fawcett, see Peter Shepherd, *The Making of a Northern Baptist College* (s.l.: Northern Baptist College, 2004), pp. 8-33; and Cross, *Useful Learning*, pp. 182-267.
[39] See Ian M. Randall, *A School of the Prophets: 150 Years of Spurgeon's College* (London: Spurgeon's College, 2005); and also Mike Nicholls, *Lights to the World: A History of Spurgeon's College 1856–1992* (Harpenden: Nuprint, 1994).

> prayerful as that they should be studious, and as needful that they should be gracious in soul as healthy in body.[40]

His priority was, 'Let them become scholars if they can, but preachers first of all, and scholars only to become preachers'.[41] It is important that we note that Spurgeon did not equate scholars with theologians. As Ian Randall points out, Spurgeon was deeply committed to theological education, exclaiming, 'Be well instructed in theology, and do not regard the sneers of those who rail at it because they are ignorant of it. Many preachers are not theologians, and hence the mistakes which they make.' Implicitly, then, for Spurgeon the ideal minister was a theologian, because *theology serves mission*. He continued, 'It cannot do any hurt to the most lively evangelist to be also a sound theologian, and it may often be the means of saving him from gross blunders.'[42] Spurgeon's goal and that of his College was, therefore, very simple: 'the glory of God by the preaching of the gospel'.[43]

Like so many before him, Spurgeon was seeking to walk the tightrope between too great an emphasis on learning and deprecating it. He admitted,

> Time was when an educated ministry was looked upon by certain of our brethren as a questionable blessing, indeed it was thought that the less a minister knew the better, for there was then the more room for him to be taught of God. From the fact that God does not need man's wisdom it was inferred that he does need man's ignorance ...[44]

From 1856 to 1878, forty-eight new churches were planted by Spurgeon's students,[45] and even though Spurgeon understood pastors also to be evangelists he nevertheless called his College the Pastor's/Pastors' College, *not* the Evangelists' College.[46]

Spurgeon was also convinced that the study of the biblical languages was of paramount importance in his students' education and for their continuing ministry:

> Every academy for helping students to the ministry must largely cultivate THE STUDY OF LANGUAGES. I need not plead for the sacred tongues, since *no one*

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[40] C.H. Spurgeon, 'Report of Pastors' College, 1888–9', *The Sword and the Trowel* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1889), p. 311 (italics original).
[41] *Annual Paper concerning the Lord's Work ... 1870* (1870), quoted by D.W. Bebbington, 'Spurgeon and British Evangelical Theological Education', D.G. Hart and R.A. Mohler (eds), *Theological Education in the Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), p. 7.
[42] C.H. Spurgeon, 'Being the Address delivered by C.H. Spurgeon, at the College Conference, on Tuesday Morning, April 14, 1874', quoted by Ian M. Randall, 'A Mode of Training: A Baptist Seminary's Missional Vision', *Transformation* 24.1 (2007), p. 4.
[43] C.H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography: The Early Years 1834–1859* (2 vols; London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1962), I, p. 386.
[44] C.H. Spurgeon, 'Report of the Pastors' College, 1881–82,'in C.H. Spurgeon (ed.), *The Sword and the Trowel* April 1882, <http://gracebooks.com/library/index.php?dir=Charles%20Spurgeon/> [accessed 8 August 2013]
[45] E. Stetzer and D. Im, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, Kindle edn, 2016), chapter 5.
[46] I am grateful to Dr Brian Haymes for this observation.

> *will question the immense importance of reading the Scriptures in their original form*. Sufficient Hebrew and Greek to be able to read the Old and New Testaments *every man ought to acquire*.[47]

According to Hugh Evans, 'the importance and desireableness of human learning, may be further argued from the happy effects produced by it, when sanctified, and humbly devoted to the service of God'. This he illustrated with the English Bible, the result of '*human learning*, under God', as well as

> 'for those valuable commentaries, and expositions of the scriptures, which have been so eminently useful to the people of God in every age. – The excellent apologies which have been published in defence of Christianity, the elaborate treatises which have been wrote [sic.] upon the various doctrines of the gospel, and other branches of our holy religion' which are 'to be ascribed, under God' to learning.[48]

But there were two other reasons why Spurgeon believed in 'the acquisition of a language'. First, the learning of, in particular Latin, was 'not so much for the sake of the books which you will read, as for the sake of the language itself'. For him, Latin was needed in order to 'know the meaning of English' because 'what anatomy is to surgery, … the classical languages are to oratory', or,

> what the tools in the shop are to the worker in wood or metal, that words are to the preacher, and in the apprenticeship of learning a language he discovers the use and value of those tools. *Is not this a matter of prime importance?*[49]

His aim was to develop preachers of the gospel for which 'the medium of conveying the truth … is language, and therefore we ought to know the nature, and rule, and form, and composition of language in general, and of our mother-tongue in particular'. The acquisition of languages not only aided the unlocking of foreign languages, 'but that we may know the fabric of language itself'. Second, Spurgeon rejected those who sneered at and questioned the good of learning Latin and Greek, and added their importance for missionaries as they would make them more capable of acquiring foreign languages 'because he knows the way of the human tongue'.[50]

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[47] C.H. Spurgeon, 'What we aim at in the Pastors' College', *Annual Paper concerning the Lord's Work in connection with the Pastors' College Newington, London. 1886–87* ([London]: Alabaster, Passmore, and Sons, 1887), p. 7 (upper case emphasis original, italics added).
[48] Hugh Evans, *The Able Minister* (Bristol: W. Pine, T. Cadell, M. Ward, S. Edwards/London: G. Keith and J. Buckland, 1773), pp. 18–20 (italics original).
[49] Spurgeon, 'What we aim at in the Pastors' College', p. 7 (italics added).
[50] Spurgeon, 'What we aim at in the Pastors' College', pp. 7-8.

Ministerial Education to be Passed On

Theological education, however, is not just of benefit to ministers themselves. In an ordination charge, Ryland made plain that ministerial education is not an end in itself but is to be passed on to the church. He stated that guiding souls to heaven requires of the minister both knowledge and judgment, which includes acquaintance with the true character of God, and a knowledge of his holy laws. A pastor must also be able to instruct, for, he said, 'We must cultivate an extensive acquaintance with the whole revelation God has made of his will; and be able to direct the redeemed of the Lord, in all the ways of holiness and righteousness, in which they should walk before him ...' He prayed 'that we may teach our dear people the good knowledge of the Lord ...'[51] At the same ordination and in a sermon on Ephesians 4.11 ('He gave some – pastors and teachers') Samuel Pearce declared to the church, '*you*, my brethren, are put in possession of one to-day – a pastor, to feed you with knowledge and understanding',[52] all for the purpose of perfecting the saints for the work of ministry, edifying Christ's body. He continued, 'if he be a teacher, you must be learners; if he have a building to erect, you must be fellow labourers'.[53]

In his history of the English Baptists, Roger Hayden[54] approvingly quoted part of Richard Baxter's saying, which, in full, reads:

> If God would but reform the Ministry, and set them on their Duties zealously and faithfully, the People would certainly be reformed: *All Churches either rise or fall as the Ministry doth rise or fall, (not in Riches and worldly Grandure) but in Knowledge, Zeal and Ability for their Work*.[55]

Writing a few years after the end of World War II, Robert L. Child lamented 'the absence in many of our people of any real conviction concerning the *necessity* of a regular trained Ministry'. Infinite pains, he noted, were expended on the equipping of engineers, doctors, and bomber pilots, 'but we seem indifferent to the Church's *need* of trained leaders', without whom 'how can we expect to prosper?'[56] This indifference is reflected, for example, in what I think is an appalling part of the present National Settlement Team's latest 'Draft updated guidelines for ministers profiles 2.' Discussing the expectations of search teams, and under the heading 'Theological Principles, Values and Priorities', it states that 'an

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[51] John Ryland and Samuel Pearce, *The Duty of Ministers to be nursing Fathers to the Church; and the Duty of Churches to regard Ministers as the Gift of Christ* (s.l.: s.n., 1796), p. 25.
[52] Ryland and Pearce, *Duty of Ministers*, p. 41 (italics original).
[53] Ryland and Pearce, *Duty of Ministers*, p. 47.
[54] Roger Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage* (Didcot: The Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2nd edn, 2005), p. 165.
[55] Richard Baxter, *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ* (London: T. Parkhurst, J. Robinson, J. Lawrence, and J. Dunton, 1696), Part 1, p. 115 (italics added).
[56] Robert L. Child, *The Church's Commission To-Day* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1954), p. 21 (italics added).

Accredited Baptist minister' should 'have a *basic grasp* of Christian faith and discipleship …' How low is the bar to be set?[57]

Following his quotation of the original form of Baxter's dictum, Hugh Martin contended that Baxter's *The Reformed Pastor* 'should be read … for its statement of the fundamental motives and spirit of the ministerial calling', its two main themes being the minister's oversight of themselves, and their oversight of their congregation, based on Acts 20.28 ('Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood').[58]

Key, according to Martin, is what Baxter says about preaching. God cannot use the self-seeker, the preacher of unserious mind, or the one who is unfaithful to the call of duty. People will pay no attention to the teaching of one who does not live as they teach, 'for all that a minister does is a kind of preaching'.

> It is no small matter … to stand up in the face of the congregation and deliver a message as from the living God, in the name of our Redeemer. It is no easy matter to speak so plainly that the ignorant may understand us; and so seriously that the deadest heart may understand us; and so convincingly that contradictory cavillers may be silenced … The great truths are those that men must live upon, and are the instruments of destroying men's sins and raising the heart to God. If we can but teach Christ to our people; we shall teach them all. And all our teaching must be plain and simple, suited to the capacity of our hearers. If you would not teach men, what do you in the pulpit? If you would, why do you not speak so as to be understood?[59]

The founders of the Bristol Education Society appealed to history and God's normal means of working in and through his church.

> Consult the history of the church, and you will uniformly find through every period of it, with *very few* exceptions, that those ministers who have been the most laborious and successful in their work, have been as eminent for sound learning, as for substantial piety. Nor is it to be doubted but that, whenever there is a revival of religion amongst us, men will be raised up, not only eminent for spiritual gifts, but who will endeavour zealously to improve those gifts, for the attainment of all that knowledge, which, with the blessing of God, may render them able ministers of the new testament. For though we have no sort of doubt but that the great Head of the church could, if he pleased, carry on his work, not only without *learned* ministers but without *any* ministers at all; yet as he sees fit, for the most part, to fulfil his designs in the use of means, it is in this way we are to expect his presence and blessing.[60]

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[57] 'Draft updated guidelines for ministers profiles 2 _2016' (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2016), p. 3 (original italics removed, italics added).
[58] Hugh Martin, *Puritanism and Richard Baxter* (London: SCM Press, 1954), pp. 153-57.
[59] Martin, *Puritanism and Richard Baxter*, p. 153.
[60] *An Account of the Bristol Education Society*, p. ix (italics original).

My own minister at New Road Baptist Church, Bromsgrove, Keith Blades, said, ‘Few things are more precious and persuasive than an intelligent mind, fired by the Holy Spirit and fuelled from the reservoir of the wisdom of God.’[61]

Dr Leonard Champion was convinced that there could be no renewal of the church without serious biblical and theological renewal. In the late eighteenth century, this was evidenced in the emphasis placed on learning combined with use of the biblical languages, the study of theology, church history, philosophy, and the other arts and sciences. It was not about intellectual achievement, but about learning more of God, his word, and his ways in the world, for the purpose of making the gospel known within the churches and on the mission field – domestic and foreign. While this was the duty of all believers, it was especially so of the ministers who led the way as those entrusted with the preaching of the word, and pastoral care of the people. Times of revival have always involved new ways of theological thinking, the combination of heart and mind, right belief and faithful action.[62]

The centre of all Baptist life has *always* been theology. Faith precedes practice: it always has, it always should.[63] This is so for all believers, for we are all disciples of Christ, but it is especially so for ministers, those whom God calls and equips as ministers of the gospel, pastors of his flock. ‘From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded’ (Luke 12.24, nrsv). Sidlow Baxter’s opening statements in the ‘Introduction’ to his survey of the Bible states,

> No man’s education is complete if he does not know the Bible. No Christian minister is really qualified for the ministry of the Christian Church without a thorough study of the Bible. No Christian worker can be fully effective without a ready knowledge of the Bible. No Christian believer can live the Christian life to the full without an adequate grasp of the Bible.[64]

In Conclusion

Theology, then, needs to return to its central role in the preparation of men and women for ministry, and various works of service (Ephesians 4.12) in the church and the world today. No further justification, I believe, should be needed than the New Testament exhortations of those to whom has been entrusted the Christian tradition ‘through many witnesses’ which they are to

[61] Anthony R. Cross, Commonplace Book, MS in author’s possession, 1980s.
[62] L.G. Champion, ‘Evangelical Calvinism and the Structures of Baptist Church Life’, *Baptist Quarterly* 28.5 (January 1980); cf. Cross, *Useful Learning*.
[63] ‘The Baptist Doctrine of the Church (1948)’, *Baptist Quarterly* 12.12 (October 1948), p. 442.
[64] J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book: A Survey and Study of each book from Genesis through Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1966), p. 9.

‘entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well’ (II Timothy 2.2). Part of this is that we are to do our best to present ourselves to God as those approved by him, workers who have no need to be ashamed, ‘rightly handling the word of truth’ (II Timothy 2.15). No one can rightly handle or use something they simply do not understand. It is absolutely correct, therefore, to state that ‘to communicate simply you must understand profoundly’.

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Equipping the Saints Without a Theological Seminary

Henrik Holmgaard

There has been a dawning realisation among Danish free churches that we need future pastors and pioneers, and yet we do not have a seminary any more. Added to this, the next generation of young people have a hard time identifying themselves in the traditional image of a pastor. These, among other developments, initiated a reflection among Baptist and other free churches in Denmark almost ten years ago. Today the situation has changed, and a growing number of young people study theology and prepare for ministry within the synergy between local free church practice and academic theology at the university. This article provides a practitioner perspective on the theological formation of new pastors and pioneers within this context. It concludes that the Millennial, studying academic theology, could potentially be a great advantage for the free church movement, but at the same time challenge free churches to engage with academic work as a practice at the centre of the calling of the church.

Keywords

Denmark; theological education; ministry formation; Millennials; free church

Introduction

The intention of this paper[1] is to enquire, from a reflective practitioner's perspective, into how Danish free churches equip theological students to become future pastors, pioneers, and theologians within the context of theological training without a free church seminary.

This article begins with a summary of the background and historical development of theological education among Danish Baptists and the present collaboration of equipping new pastors across Danish free churches. Thereafter, it will discuss the 'Millennials', the new generation of theological students and potential pioneers of the reflective practices of the church. Last, this article will bring a perspective on how to engage the theological formation of Millennials between the local church and the academy without a seminary.

[1] This article is based on and reworked from the presentation 'Equipping the saints – theologically forming new pastors and pioneers with a synergy between academia and the local church', which was presented and discussed at The Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools (CEBTS) conference, June 2018 in Vienna.

Free Church Theological Education in Denmark

The Danish free churches are a minority in Denmark. Across the wide range of 300 Baptist- and Pentecostal-oriented Danish free churches, there are an estimated 20,000 members in all.[2] The Baptists are the only free church denomination in Denmark which has a lengthy tradition of academic theological education.[3] This summary is by no means comprehensive but serves to illustrate the general reflections about ministry formation and the hesitation towards academic theological education among Danish free churches. It also serves as a background for the contemporary theological collaborations.

1. The Danish Baptist Theological Seminary

The National Union of Danish Baptists was established in January 1849 at the Baptist Conference in Hamburg. The question of how to equip missionaries was discussed and a decision was made that every Union should be free to decide the issue for themselves.[4] Thus, the question about theological education has been central from the beginning of the Danish Baptist Union.

The Danish Baptists did not use the term ‘pastors’ at the beginning but preferred the terms ‘elders’ (*forstander*), ‘teachers’, ‘deacons’, and ‘missionaries’. These different ministers were at the beginning ‘self-made men’, educated in the ‘school of life’ and formed within different revival groups (*Gudelige forsamlinger*).[5] One of the first Baptist congregations, established by Ole Nielsen Føltved in Aalborg, decided on training preachers in the 1840s who would be able to travel around as missionaries. This initiative developed into a small mission school in Oppelstrup outside Aalborg.[6]

At the Baptist Union Conference in Hamburg in 1851, the topic of the education of preachers was once again on the agenda. The outcome of this made the Danish Baptists decide to establish a Union treasury for educating missionaries in 1852.[7] The Danish Baptists did not follow the example of the German and Swedish Baptists who established ‘Missionary Schools’, because of the lack of both funding and vision. Missionaries were primarily

[2] An estimate suggested by the Danish Free Church Network (*FrikirkeNet*) <https://frikirkenet.dk/side/hvad-er-en-frikirke> [accessed 18 February 2019]

[3] In more recent times the Danish Pentecostal Church has established a theological programme at the Pentecostal Bible College in Mariager in collaboration with the Australian Harvest Bible College and lately the Australian College ‘Alphacrucis’ <http://en.mariagerbiblecollege.com/> [accessed 18 February 2019]

[4] Bent Hylleberg and Bjarne Møller Jørgensen, eds., *Et kirkesamfund bliver til - Danske baptisters historie gennem 150 år*, (Føltveds Forlag, 1989), p. 36.

[5] Hylleberg, *kirkesamfund*, p. 60.

[6] Hylleberg, *kirkesamfund*, p. 61.

[7] Hylleberg, *kirkesamfund*, p. 60.

trained in Germany, Britain, and later from 1884 in Chicago, but minor Danish courses were attempted with less success.[8] The Danish Baptists continuously discussed the issue of urgency, vision, and finances in relation to training. During the 1890s the scepticism and criticism of theological education of preachers seems to have waned and the discussion moved instead toward the question of 'whom should we educate?' The choice was between equipping young men for new potential ministry or investing more in men already preaching and strengthening their skills. The latter suggestion was chosen, based on three main convictions: no Baptist becomes a preacher from only attending a school; good preaching presupposes good practice and experience of ministry; and further education sharpens the foundation of practice.[9]

The questions about the location of the school and the lack of candidates was a recurring issue. In 1893 it was decided to establish a training school in Copenhagen. The level of education in the general Danish population was now raised and made new demands on the education of preachers, who needed a thorough primary school education. The 'Grundtvigian' movement[10] contributed further to this development. They encouraged education of all common men – the improvement of the education of children and 'folk high school' of farmers and labourers – with the aim of making the common man more literary and empowered. It was not enough to be a zealous preacher to catch the ears and hearts of listeners. There was a need for logical arguments to meet critical opponents.[11] There was a growing need for both providing a 'higher exam' from the primary school (*realeksamen*), even a further education and exams (*gymnasium*), 'folk high school', and a school for preachers. The challenge was to find a location which could accommodate this need and keep everything under one roof.[12] For ten years the discussion went back and forth: should the school stay at the 'folk high school' at Gistrup near Aalborg or should it move to Copenhagen? Tølløse was chosen in 1928, outside of Copenhagen, and the requirements for the acceptance of new students at the school were sharpened. A one-year practical testing period with missionary work was necessary before acceptance into the preaching school.[13]

The work of equipping new pastors and missionaries continued, and in 1966 The Danish Baptist Seminary was established. The seminary continued to educate Baptist ministers, but the ongoing struggle for funding, among

[8] Hylleberg, *kirkesamfund*, p. 146.
[9] Hylleberg, *kirkesamfund*, p. 185.
[10] N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872) was a Danish pastor, theologian, politician, and prolific poet and writer. He is relatively unknown internationally but one of the most influential thinkers in Danish educational and theological history. <https://grundtvig.dk/grundtvig/who-is-grundtvig/> [accessed 18 February 2019]
[11] Hylleberg, *kirkesamfund*, p. 140.
[12] Hylleberg, *kirkesamfund*, p. 260.
[13] Hylleberg, *kirkesamfund*, p. 262.

other things, forced a transition into a Scandinavian ecumenical collaboration. The 'Scandinavian Academy of Leadership and Theology' (SALT) was established in 2000.

2. Free Church Collaboration

SALT was a theological education grounded in congregational and missional practices, where students trained for both ministry and leadership as part of the theological education, with the goal of formation of missional reflective practitioners.[14] SALT was connected through a broad range of free church partners and participants across Scandinavia with theological credential recognition by Sweden, via The Swedish Baptist Seminary in Örebro and by Norway, through SALT Oslo. SALT never obtained credential recognition in the Danish educational system and thereby the right for SU[15]. SALT was a visionary project, educating upcoming theologians, pastors, and leaders for churches which did not yet exist. Because of this SALT received some criticism; the vision and scope of SALT was not consistent with the current state of Danish free churches.[16] This challenge, combined with funding mainly by the Baptist Union, the lack of approval by the Danish government and thereby the right to SU, and lack of students forced the collaboration to end in 2009.[17]

The end of SALT left a vacuum regarding what to do about equipping new pastors and pioneers. In 2010 the Free Church Education Forum (FFU) was established by a group of free church denominations[18] to discuss possibilities and strategies to engage the challenges of a growing number of pastors retiring in the near future. The different denominations had very diverse traditions and strategies for education. The Pentecostals had their Bible College, which at the time had started cooperation with Harvest Bible College, Australia.[19] Other denominations had no strategies and still others invested in education outside of Denmark. The after-effect of SALT made it clear that the time for a new free church theological seminary had not yet come. In the meantime, other possibilities for theological education had

[14] Studiehåndbogen SALT 2008-09: med kursus beskrivelser (Unpublished), pp. 3-4.

[15] SU is the Danish Students' Grants and Loans Scheme. Every Dane over the age of eighteen is entitled to public support for his or her further education – regardless of social standing. http://www.su.dk/english/

[16] Personal correspondence with different partners and churches involved.

[17] Some of the staff and resources from SALT were invested in the development of a new BA in Christianity, Culture, and Communication (3K) at Diakon Højskolen in Aarhus and Diakonissestiftelsen in Copenhagen. <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/kirke-tro/danmark-f%C3%A5r-ny-uddannelse-i-kristendom-og-kultur> [accessed 18 February 2019]

[18] FFU was established by the Danish Free Church Network (*FrikirkeNet*) and consisted of Apostolsk Kirke, Baptistkirken, Missionsforbundet, Pinsekirken, Mariager Højskole and Kolding International Højskole.

[19] Harvest Bible College is now a part of Alphacrucis <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/colleges-plan-to-grow-stronger-together/> [accessed 18 February 2019]

emerged.[20] The agreement was to create a more visible ‘road to becoming a pastor’ and to point the incoming student in the direction of different educational opportunities, providing supervision, practice in a local church, and mentoring.

Millennials: Builders and Minecrafters

What are the characteristics of the present generation of young people considering becoming pastors, leaders, and theologians? The challenge of describing ‘Millennials’ is that they are a generation that is still being shaped and formed. Researchers disagree about how to divide the generational cohorts,[21] but there is somehow a consensus about including the generation of the 1980s and 1990s.[22] Consequently, Millennials as a generational cohort would now be between nineteen and thirty-nine years of age. In the following section, I will rely on a sociological description and my cultural observations to paint an image of this generation. One of the formative experiences which could be expressed as a symbol for this generation is the terror attack in New York on 9/11, 2001 – a symbol which illustrated the fact of growing up in a world of falling institutions, with the need for rebuilding a broken and uncertain world.[23] Millennials are also characterised as the children of the ‘baby boomers’, with both the benefits of the relatively economically successful generation and the relational outcome and complexity of rising divorce rates. Other more general factors which add to the complexity include globalisation, ever increasing numbers of women in the workforce, and accelerating technological and socio-economic change.[24]

The median age of this generation is twenty-seven, and often the description of this generation is made by the older generation researching the Millennials. For some people, Millennials can be experienced as apathetic, disinterested and selfish, characterised as the ‘me-generation’.[25] However, there are a few studies conducted by Millennials which explore their

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[20] Menighedsfakultetet in Aarhus developed a BA in theology in cooperation with The University of Wales in 2005. Dansk Bibel Institut in Copenhagen did something similar in 2001. Both places are private Lutheran Seminaries.

[21] ‘The Whys and Hows of Generations Research’, *Pew Research Center* (3 September 2015) <http://www.people-press.org/2015/09/03/the-whys-and-hows-of-generations-research/> [accessed 18 February 2019]

[22] Ronald J. Burke, Cary L. Cooper and Alexander-Stamatios G. Antoniou, eds., *The Multi-Generational and Aging Workforce: Challenges and Opportunities* (New Horizons in Management. Cheltenham, UK/ Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015), p. 121.

[23] Michael Dimock, ‘Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins’, *Pew Research Center* (17 January 2019) <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/> [accessed 18 February 2019]

[24] Ronald J. Burke, *The Multi-Generational and Aging Workforce*, p. 123.

[25] Joel Stein, ‘Millennials: the Me Me Me generation’, *Time Magazine* (20 May 2013) <http://time.com/247/millennials-the-me-me-me-generation/> [accessed 18 February 2019]

strengths and weaknesses. For this summarisation, I am indebted to U-Wen Low's discussions about Millennials.[26]

1. **Diverse, Inclusive, and Individual:** Millennials are used to, and embrace, diversity and have grown up with a high value of accepting others. This extends both to ethnic, racial, gender, religious, and socio-economic boundaries. This celebration of diversity is contributing to a strong sense of individualism.

2. **Expectancy and Purpose:** Millennials are self-conscious and have a great expectancy of life and opportunities for education, jobs, and the future. Throughout their upbringing, interaction with media and education, Millennials have been encouraged to discover their purpose and to participate in changing the world. They feel a sense of urgency to rally around causes which connect with their values.

3. **Adapters and Thinkers:** Millennials are quick to adapt, flexible, and used to rapid change both with technology and appropriating new information. Millennials are educated to question the status quo, not as contrarians but to understand before complying. They seek to understand and are motivated by the underlying reasoning.

4. **Tribal Collaborators:** Millennials prefer identification with others who share their interests or passions. The internet makes this easier for individuals and creates extended networks and tribes. Tribes make Millennials experience participation in causes which are more significant than themselves. Collaboration with others has high value, and it is important to make space for others to contribute and speak up. Feedback processes are important for communication and help to develop and achieve something great together. Millennials can come across as respectful of older generations unlike, for example, Generation X. They are able to come along with others in an egalitarian way and keep an open-mindedness to generations different from themselves.[27]

It is my observation that Millennials to a greater extent seek to create, compared to the former 'Generation X' which had a great need for deconstructing. It is fascinating how we see something like this reflected in, for example, the gaming industry and toys. 'Minecraft' has been one of the

[26] U-Wen Low, 'A Millennial Talks Back: Practical Theology as a potential strategy for engaging Australian Millennials in churches?', *Journal of Contemporary Ministry*, No. 4 (2018), 91-101.
[27] Although the author is Australian and quoting from an American context, this summarisation is applicable for reflecting on a Danish context.

most popular computer games among Millennials.[28] Minecraft is a game about building and creating cities, roads, and houses – with no end of what it is possible to build. With the arrival of 'Millennials', Lego has made a huge turnaround and begun to profit after re-focusing on the Lego narrative of creation.[29] This generation has grown up with tablets, smartphones, and apps, and anyone who has access to these technologies can make a music video, publish a book, or create a movie. Millennials are creators and settlers. They have come to a world where Generation X has deconstructed everything, and now there is time for building and creating.[30]

In the context of Danish theological students with free church background, we know from a survey that more than fifty per cent of this next generation of theology students have a goal of being pastors or church planters in the future.[31] This growing number of Millennials studying theology, characterised as a generation of 'builders', could be beneficial for academic work as a practice at the centre of the calling of the church. The essential task could be to provide this generation with tools and resources for developing the world and church as a building site.

Theological Formation for Ministry

More than 170 years of equipping preachers, pastors, and leaders in Danish free churches have come and gone, and yet some of the same issues continue to surface. For example, a lack of resources seems to be a continuing battle, though denominational cooperation could be the onward solution. The lack of people willing to engage with training to become pastors has also been a continuing challenge. With the coordinated work of FFU this challenge seems to have slowed, and maybe the tides have changed with the growing number of young people studying theology.

The conviction that theological education sharpens the foundation of practices is still the most distinctive mark of theological formation within Danish free churches, compared to the classic ideals of theological education which are the case when studying theology at a Danish university.[32] The

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[28] Clive Thompson, 'The Minecraft Generation', *New York Times* (14 April 2016) <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/17/magazine/the-minecraft-generation.html> [accessed 18 February 2019]

[29] Jonathan Ringen, 'How Lego became the Apple of toys', *Fast Company* (1 August 2015) <https://www.fastcompany.com/3040223/when-it-clicks-it-clicks> [accessed 18 February 2019]

[30] Thomas Willer, Generation Z – den næste generation, *Teologik*, 5 (Marts 2016), p. 4. <https://www.kristent.dk/upload/101195/doc/22899-019-Generation-Z.pdf> [accessed 15 February 2019]

[31] Unpublished survey of Free Church Education Forum (FFU).

[32] The formational aspect of academic education is more or less toned down. The 'Humboldt vision' of research, education, and formation as a union has been taken over by other ideals of more efficiencies of resources. Jens Erik Kristensen (ed.) *Ideer om et universitet* (Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2007).

importance of incorporating the local church as an actor is underlined, as is the key role of practices of theological formation.

1. Equipping Millennials

The Millennial cohort is a well-educated, competent, and courageous generation with the ability to creatively build. They move away from the more traditional role of the solo pastor, preferring teamwork and co-learning. They gather around and strive for meaningful communities and put themselves into living out their convictions and purpose.

Another challenge, which I have observed personally, is that free church students seem to leave their 'free church luggage' at the door on their way into the theological faculty. There is no harm done in studying theology at a Danish theological faculty with a leaning towards Lutheran theology. The problem begins when the student neglects or doubts that the free church tradition is robust enough to survive or is relevant for academic theological work.

Lutheran theology in itself is not the problem, rather the lack of consideration of the free church tradition within the academy is the problem. It leaves this generation without tools and resources for reflecting and transforming their tradition and practices.

The Danish free churches could potentially be missing out on a new generation of upcoming scholars who could work theologically, communicate the gospel, equip the saints, and develop ecclesiology. The potential of a growing group of students can be missed if they do not take up the theological tradition of the 'gathering community' and the distinctive way of doing theology within this tradition.[33] The responsibility for the exposure to free church theological reflections and methods rests with the free church.

2. Free Church Study Centre

To engage these challenges and accommodate the potential of the present generation, a new study centre has been established in cooperation between different Danish free church denominations.[34] The study centre is not a new theological educational centre in the classical sense – with buildings, staff, curriculums, and exams. The initiative has been grown from local church experience, initiated in 2011 with cooperation between churches as training grounds for theological students, mentoring, and apprenticeship. There is

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[33] This task is further discussed by Parush R. Parushev, 'Carrying out the Theological Task in a Baptistic Way', *Baptistic Theologies*, Vol. 6: 1 (Spring 2014), 53-71.

[34] The Apostolic Church (Pentecostals), The Baptist Union, and The Vineyard Churches in Denmark.

also a mandatory monthly regional learning community with special emphasis on reflection on theology, leadership practices, personal life, and developing a sense of call for ministry. The model seems fit because of the low budget, low maintenance, and high impact in both local churches and within the process of theological formation for ministry. The experiment has developed into a full national programme, which in 2019 will be expanded to four different areas of Denmark, as cooperation between local free churches, as a training ground for theology students studying at the university. The inclusion of local church leaders and free church scholars will provide additional teaching and supervision. In some ways, this amounts to a continuation of the SALT vision of theological education but within the 'gathering community'. Strategically it is much more lightweight because the formal theological education is provided by the university. However, the headlines of the SALT vision are still maintained in the following:[35]

1. Theological leaders are generalists rather than experts and have the congregation, its life and development in focus.

2. Missional leaders with the competencies to live into the biblical narrative within the contemporary world of life and create a meaningful missional vision in a dialogue with the faith community.

3. Theological leaders who understand and accept the premises that the 'location' or 'where' of theology includes the community of faith.

4. Theological leaders who understand that the 'what' of theology is not primarily formal, consistent theological systems or theories, but the living and life-giving faith as it continually unfolds, is created and exercised in the 'gathering community' around the Bible and the experience of the kingdom of God.

5. Leaders who can lead and motivate the community of faith in 'theologisation' and towards the creation of meaning formed by the gripping images of the future of God's eschatological hope.

The theological formation for ministry does not have its centre within a free church theological school. This could appear as a disadvantage because the formal theological education is out of reach. On the other hand it keeps the model's budget low and keeps the main focus on personal learning and ministry formation. The SALT model is transformed into the synergy between local church practice, learning community, free church scholar-

[35] These statements are reworked from the former SALT description and scope of theological education. Bent Hylleberg and Ib Sørensen, 'Menighedsbaseret og -praktiseret teologi og teologisk lederuddannelse', *Ny Mission* 14 (2008), 33-44.

network, and formal theological education at the university. Each denomination has its national gatherings for students, which can provide specifics and distinctive tradition. The local church focus brings close attention to each student's daily work, study, and practice.

With the rise of a new generation of theologically trained pastors, there is potential for changing the thinking and responsibility of the local church as a training ground. One of the existing ideas is that the national church association should 'create' and supply the local churches with new pastors. But the fact remains: the local church is the birthplace, and the local church has a responsibility in this process of calling and equipping. The primary place of learning the skills and identity of being a pastor or a pioneer is within the local church. No one becomes a good pastor without following a pastor and so the combination of theological education and apprenticeship is advantageous.

To develop and strengthen this theological formation process, a four-stranded strategy has been suggested by the new study centre, with the goal of equipping new pastors and pioneers and keeping the 'both and' of the role of local church and academia at the university in mind.

1. **Local church:** The students are anchored in practice and 'apprenticeship' in local congregations on a weekly basis, following the conviction that *you only become a good pastor/leader by following a pastor/leader.*
2. **Regional learning community:** The students gather in regional learning networks on a monthly basis. The focus is on the development of calling and skills as 'reflective practitioners' in theology and leadership.
3. **A network of 'free church scholars':** There is a need for establishing a national 'scholar' network for 'gathering community'-based theology. The focus of this network is to develop, equip, and contribute with knowledge, supervision, and additional teaching for students at BA and MA level.
4. **Re-establishing the relationship and collaboration** with the Scandinavian free church theological education network to win momentum for the study centre and scholar network.

Learning Community

The last part of this article will focus on the 'operating system' for the learning community. It is a practical theological process of reflecting on the experience of being an apprentice and a theologian. The process of

developing and identifying a 'calling' is introduced, and the notion of 'self-differentiation' is suggested as a conceptual language for this process.

1. Practical Theological Reflection

The learning community is functioning as a 'lab' for theological reflection, with the aim of a convictional discovery practice. It comes from the experience of a number of students, who sometimes find it difficult to reflect externally on both theological and personal issues with pastors who do not have sufficient theological knowledge or appraisal for any 'half baked' theological suggestion which needs to be ventilated and tested. Hopefully, the new generation of students can change this environment of learning within the church community when they become mentors for the generations after them. In this situation, the learning community becomes the 'lab' needed for testing and developing both theological knowledge and reflective skills.

The practical theological reflection within the learning community often follows a model similar to the pastoral cycle, which Richard Osmer argues involves the tasks of reflecting on four questions:[36]

- *What is going on*? – the descriptive-empirical task
- *Why is this happening*? – the interpretive task
- *What ought to be going on*? – the normative task
- *How might we respond*? – the pragmatic-strategic task of new practices

This becomes a simple but important tool for a consistent developmental process, which first of all is a personal reflection on practice and participating in the 'gathering community' and is also related to the role of pastor-theologian, reflecting theologically about practices and leadership.

2. Self-Differentiation

The 'lab' also challenges each student to personally engage with their own and shared convictions. The personal aspect of the process could be characterised as something similar to the notion of 'self-differentiation'.[37] Edwin Friedman describes the process of 'self-differentiation' as the lifelong process of keeping balance to one's self and being through a process of self-definition and self-regulation. To differentiate is knowing where one ends and another begins, and being clear about one's values and convictions.[38]

[36] Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), p. 4.
[37] Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve, Revised Edition: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Church Publishing, 2017), p. 194.
[38] Friedman, *Failure*, p. 195.

This is an emotional concept which is different from the often overly focused relying on the right data of knowledge and skill in ministry.

It is a personal process of developing a sense of calling and 'self' in regard to leadership experience and practical theological reasoning. The conceptual language of 'self-differentiation' makes sense for the convictional development of the individual pastor, pioneer, and theologian.[39] Friedman describes leaders who are poorly differentiated in their leadership as often:[40]

- Lacking distance to think out their vision clearly;
- Reactive and led by crisis after crisis;
- Reluctant to take well-defined stands;
- Developing blame displacement instead of taking responsibility;
- Having a hard time dealing with sabotage in the organisation.

This is contrasted with the well-differentiated leader who is characterised by the ability to both separate and self-regulate from surrounding emotional processes, to maintain convictional clarity and stand by his/her principles and vision. The well-differentiated leader will also demonstrate the ability to be both courageous and vulnerable – setting boundaries without disconnecting from the relationship with others, despite disagreement. According to Friedman, all this will be challenging in an organisational culture formed by anxiety, and the short-term temptation is for reactivity, a quick fix for more complicated problems.[41]

The learning community is not a therapeutic community and the notion of 'self-differentiation' functions as a conceptual language to describe the processes and challenge of leadership. Through conversation and fellowship with other theology students and apprenticeship throughout the five years of studying, the goal is that students develop skills which help to identify the challenges, avoid the temptation of being reactive, and engage with integrity.

3. Developing a Sense of 'Calling'

The integration of knowledge, skills, theological reflection, and 'self-differentiation' can be summarised in this model, which illustrates different

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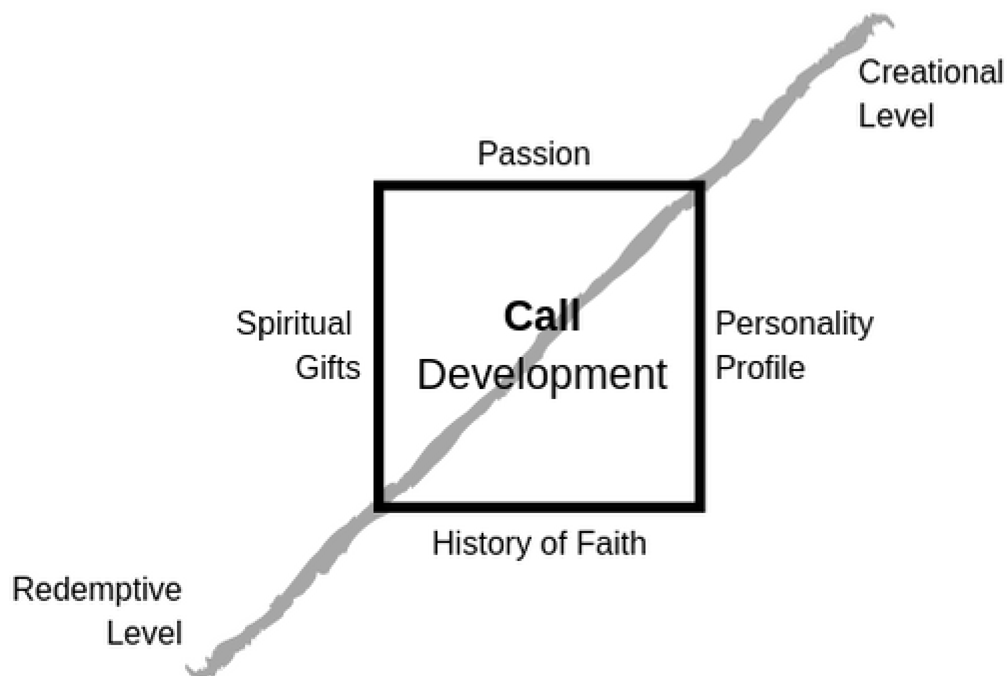
[39] Friedman has developed his model of self-differentiation from the systemic family therapy theorist Murray Bowen. The systemic approach to leadership provides a more holistic view on the leader and the organisation. Decisions and solutions are not necessarily in direct relation to the symptoms of e.g. a problem, but focus on the forces within the system of relationships and how the leader operates.
Edwin H. Friedman, Gary Emanuel and Mickie Crimone, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, 1st edn (New York: The Guilford Press, 2011), p. 27.

[40] Friedman, *Failure*, p. 60.

[41] Friedman, *Failure*, pp. 33ff; pp. 60; 96.

aspects of the concept of developing 'calling'. Sometimes the idea of 'getting a call' is trivialised as the Christian way to become something when you grow up. This model is based on the conviction that God has a purpose with his creation and re-creates through the redemptive work of Christ through the Spirit. In this way, the word 'calling' could be further qualified from the root of the word vocation – being called and named by someone; receiving and discovering identity. In Christ, every disciple gets a sense of *telos* – a direction and purpose. The development of this 'call' is an identity process. It is both an internal process within the apprentice and an external process through the community: identifying, encouraging, and challenging the calling.

To simplify the complex process of differentiation, the process can be illustrated as a square with four different aspects, which as a whole takes part in the developing process of self-knowledge. These four aspects are in no way a comprehensive list but serve as an illustration of some of the considerations for the process of identification and self-differentiation.



The first aspect is 'history of faith' or the history of faith and self. This is not in the fashion of the traditional testimony but a holistic reflection on the history of self and faith. The aim is self-examination, and the process of telling and listening to the story of others facilitates this process of identification.[42] The second aspect is a 'personality profile', which provides

[42] A constructive way to self-examination could be by reflecting, writing, and sharing a story of faith and self by responding to these questions:

language for the understanding of who one is – skills and preferences, among other things. Further, it provides language for the understanding of other people, whose differences will provide skills for accepting and differentiation.[43] The third aspect is the language of spiritual gifting and is based on the conviction that God, through the redemptive work of Christ through the Spirit, empowers people by gifts of grace. A spiritual gift is understood as God communicating his grace through one person to others in the community. Gifts of grace are discovered, identified, and recognised by the community and the functioning of the gift is strengthened by the freedom to participate and contribute. Last, the aspect of 'passion' is important. Passion has a dual meaning: it is both affections for a cause and the willingness to bear suffering for the cause. Passion functions in this model as an identification marker of what drives a person in a way that affects other people positively.

The square is defined by two primary sides of God's work through creation and re-creation. God gives something to a person through the creation of life, but there is also something which is re-created. The model helps to simplify a complex process and functions as a part of the operating system within the practices of the learning community.

Conclusion

The content of this article originates from a presentation and conversation about 'What is theological about theological education?' presented at the CEBTS conference in Vienna in June 2018. My ambition was to bring a practitioner's perspective on equipping pastors and pioneers for ministry without a seminary, but within the synergy between local church and academia. The original presentation has been extended with a historical summary of the Baptist seminary, which points to the fact that theological education within Danish free churches is still a challenge in relation to resources and demands. The growing number of Millennials with a free church background who are studying theology is a significant change for Danish free churches. At the same time this brings great potential for

- How did you find faith?
- What characterised the environment where you grew up? What characterised the environment where your faith developed?
- Who were your role models in faith? Why? What characterised them?
- To what degree is your story characterised by safety, doubt, crisis, change, growth, or stagnation?
- Which events have been formative for your faith?
- How would you describe your life of faith right now?
- Which people are a part of your journey today and what characterises these people?
- What are you longing for? What expectations do you have for the future?

[43] A personality profile can never be comprehensive, and it is important to note that it is an analysis and not a test. It provides language for a typology and is only helpful as long as a person identifies with this language and the description of themselves.

developing the practices of theological reflection at the heart of local free churches. The educational situation of being without a free church seminary, set alongside the potential of the Millennial generation, has pushed Danish free churches to act differently in regard to theological formation for ministry. This article brings a perspective on a model which is both low-budget and low-maintenance but at the same time brings a significant impact on students and local communities of faith.

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Resilient Readers: Spiritual Growth and the Bible

Marion L.S. Carson

How can we equip Christians, both as individuals and communities, to have a robust, honest view of Scripture which will enable them to withstand times of challenge to their faith? Drawing on faith development theory and taking John 14.13-14 as a test case, this essay argues that a solely foundationalist hermeneutic is inadequate to this task. It suggests that pastors should be taught an integrated approach to biblical hermeneutics, which will enable them to foster more mature readings of Scripture in the pastoral setting.

Keywords

John 14.13-14; faith development theory; theological education; pastoral ministry

Introduction

Just over twenty years ago now, while I was in the midst of doctoral studies, my father died. He passed away peacefully at home, and I was very grateful that I was able to be with him. A few months after this, my brother (my only sibling) became unwell. Medical investigations revealed that he was terminally ill with a rare form of cancer and he died within two weeks of his diagnosis. More was to come in this dreadful year. An aunt and an uncle also died but, most painfully of all, shortly after my brother's death my sister-in-law told us that we were not to have contact with his children any more, and, true to her word, we never saw them again. Within a year, then, my mother and I lost eight members of our family – either through death, or family disintegration. All these years later, the psychological and spiritual repercussions are still with me.

A few weeks prior to my father's death I had heard a sermon preached on John 14.13-14 which reads, 'I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.' The message of the sermon was that we should take God at His word, pray believing that God would do whatever we asked, and that if we did so we would see marvellous things happen. So, when my brother became ill, I and many friends prayed for healing, believing that the prayer would be answered. When family strife took a hold, we prayed for peace and unity. When these prayers were not answered, the question of the

trustworthiness of the Bible was unavoidable. We had taken this verse at face value, and it had proved unreliable.

In addition to the severe family crisis, therefore, there was another potential loss to face – deeply held beliefs about God and the Bible. The Word of God had let us down. For my mother this was too much. "It's not true, Marion", she said, "it's not true." She subsequently stopped going to church and lost her faith. I persevered, but my understanding of faith and of Scripture underwent a gradual but profound change. The idea (which had been instilled in me since childhood) that the Bible's primary function is to be a repository of reassurance and comfort for those who are faithful to the rules contained within it had proved inadequate, even cruelly misleading, and if it were to have any role in my Christian life at all, new ways of reading had to be found.

Looking back now, I consider that the pastor's handling of Scripture, and my eager, unquestioning response, reflected an immature mindset which was to prove inadequate in the face of life experience and changing views of faith. I have come to believe that there is a pastoral responsibility to help people to read Scripture in such a way that it will be a source of strength and encouragement in times of crisis, rather than the stumbling block it proved to be for us. In this essay, I will draw on the insights of faith development theory and suggest ways in which theological education can help prepare prospective pastors to enable their congregations to do this.

Faith Development Theory

Faith development theory is a modern way of describing what spiritual leaders have known since the time of the desert fathers — that believers can and should move away from a childish understanding of faith which primarily seeks reassurance and comfort, to a deeper spirituality which is God-centred rather than self-centred. The psychologist of religion Gordon Allport argued that immature religion is marked by a need to feel safe and certain, in other words it is a kind of emotional security blanket. Allport writes:

> Immature religion, whether in adult or child, is largely concerned with magical thinking, self-justification, and creature comfort. Thus it betrays its sustaining motives still to be the drives and desires of the body. By contrast, mature religion is less of a servant, and more of a master, in the economy of the life. No longer goaded and steered exclusively by impulse, fear, wish, it tends rather to control and to direct these motives toward a goal that is no longer determined by mere self-interest. [1]

[1] Gordon W. Allport, *The Individual and his Religion: A Psychological Interpretation* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1950), p. 72.

In other words, immature religion is marked by a focus on meeting personal needs, while more mature religion is characterised by a relational spirituality which is more concerned with the wellbeing of others.

Faith development theory accepts this premise and tries to chart the movement from immature to mature religion. The best-known theorist is James Fowler, whose book *Stages of Faith* (first published in 1981) continues to be highly influential in the fields of psychology of religion, pastoral theology, and Christian education. Drawing heavily on developmental theorists such as Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson, Fowler suggests that the nature of our faith changes as we develop from childhood to mature adulthood. Children learn the basic tenets of faith and the values of their community through the telling of stories in a secure and nurturing environment. Perception of what faith means at this stage is closely related to the experience of trustworthy and nurturing adults (Stages 0-2). In adolescence, faith is related to a sense of belonging and the influence of strong role models. There is a need to have a safe place in which to question what has been learned. The same applies to new converts and those who are still relatively 'young' in faith.[2] In the move from adolescence into adulthood, some will give up on faith altogether. For those who continue, the values and tenets they have learned over these years become the foundation for everyday life, which will be passed on to the next generation. Many will be content to accept what they have been taught without questioning, seeing it as foundational for their day-to-day lives. Some, however, will desire to explore further, either through reading or investigating traditions other than their own. Some may go into theological education, perhaps with a view to service in ministry or mission. People at this stage are learning to 'own' their opinions, learning to be able to defend them, and endeavouring to live by them with integrity (Stages 3-4).

Problems may come, however, when experiences of loss or disappointment challenge all that has been certain up till now. Some people react to crisis by clinging ever more tightly to their beliefs and principles, making it their business to defend them against any perceived attack. Others will be plunged into a period of disorientation from which they emerge with a loss of intellectual certainty and an openness to new ideas which they come to see as a gift rather than a threat. Characteristics of the latter stages are a willingness to let go the 'confines of tribe, class, religious community or nation', a greater altruism, and an ability to live with tension and paradox in their faith (Stages 5-6).[3]

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[2] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: HarperOne, 1995).
[3] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, p. 198.

The influence of Fowler's work is reflected in the huge amount of critical response it has received. For example, his definition of faith, which he describes as 'an orientation of the total person, giving purpose and goal to one's hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions', is problematic.[4] Such an understanding of faith may be useful in anthropological and psychological studies, but it is less satisfactory for use in pastoral contexts. The primary difficulty is that it seems to ignore the idea of the transcendent, focusing instead on the idea of aspiration on the part of the individual. With Craig Dykstra, I prefer the idea of faith as a dynamic relationship – an 'appropriate and intentional participation in the redemptive activity of God'.[5] In this view faith development comes about as a result of the interplay between the believer and God.

Fowler's theory is also criticised for being so focused on cognitive processes that it fails to take into account social and cultural influences on an individual's experience of faith. The German faith development theorist Heinz Streib calls for a more holistic view, emphasising that there are other factors at work in our changing experience and needs as the narrative of our lives unfolds – our social and educational backgrounds, the tradition in which we have been nurtured and to which we now belong, the influences which come into our lives, our relationships with others, as well as our responses to crises and life experiences.[6] Streib and others also insist that Fowler's schema is too rigid, linear, and sequential, failing to allow for fluctuations in our experience of faith and responses to it. For this reason, Streib prefers to use the term 'religious styles' which 'can be visualized as overlapping waves, rising and descending again to lower levels, when succeeding styles come to the surface'.[7] That is to say, we may move backwards and forwards between stages at various times in our lives, and, in fact, several aspects of these styles may be operative at the same time.

These criticisms are important for a broadening out of Fowler's basic insights, and we have a much richer view of faith development as a result.

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[4] Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, p. 14.

[5] Craig Dykstra, 'What is Faith?: An Experiment in the Hypothetical Mode', in *Faith Development and Fowler*, ed. by Craig Dykstra & Sharon Parks (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1986), pp. 45-64 (p. 55). See further Robert Davis Hughes III, *Beloved Dust: Tides of the Spirit in the Christian Life* (New York: Continuum, 2008), pp. 164-95.

[6] Heinz Streib, 'Faith Development Theory Revisited: The Religious Styles Perspective', *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 11 (2001), 143-158; Heinz Streib, 'Variety and Complexity of Religious Development: Perspectives for the 21st Century', in *One Hundred years of Psychology and Religion: Issues and trends in a Century Long Quest*, ed. by Peter H.M.P. Roelofsma, Jozef M.T. Corveleyn & Joke W. Van Saane (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2003), pp. 123-138.

[7] Heinz Streib and Barbara Keller, *Manual for the Assessment of Religious Styles in Faith Development Interviews* (Bielefeld: Universität Bielefeld, 2018), p. 8. See further Stephen Parker, 'Research in Fowler's Faith Development Theory: A Review Article', *Review of Religious Research*, 51 (2010), 233-52; Adrian Coyle, 'Critical Responses to Faith Development Theory: A Useful Agenda for Change?', *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, 33 (2011), 281-298.

For pastoral practice, Streib's and others' development of Fowler's work helps us to recognise the fluid nature of personal faith and the need to take into account the influence and impact of the whole of a person's experience on their understanding of their relationship with God throughout all stages of life.

The Bible and Spiritual Development

How does all this help us in our task of nurturing 'resilient readers'? The insights of faith development theory suggest that religious practices, for example how we pray or worship, are not static but are closely related to our stage or style of faith. The same must apply to how we read Scripture. How we read, and our response to what we read, should change as we develop psychologically, educationally, and spiritually and as we are influenced by life experience.

But why do we read Scripture in the first place? The 'orthodox' answer is to say that we read because we believe that Scripture is normative for our faith, and that God speaks to us through it.[8] We look to Scripture to feed our spiritual lives, to aid us in prayer, and to help point us to God's will for our lives, both as individuals and collectively as a community of faith. In practice, however, this may be something of an ideal. Our motives for reading change as we develop and our spiritual needs change. Children read Scripture because they are told to by adults. Motivation, therefore, is partly to please the adults, but also, we hope, to learn more. As we develop into adolescence and young adulthood, though, motives for reading the Bible tend to become even more mixed. For many, if not most, there will still be a desire to learn and to worship using Scripture, but there will also be a natural inclination to seek comfort in times of trouble and distress, and reassurance that we are on the right track, morally and doctrinally. This is a normal reaction to life events and it is entirely appropriate to do so. The trouble is, however, that if it is not balanced with a desire to go deeper and grapple with new ideas, it is possible for people to develop a view of the Bible as a kind of 'promise box', in which only familiar, comforting, reassuring texts are read. This applies just as much to those who enjoy the stimulus of Bible study and discussion, as to those of a less intellectual bent, for it is easy to fall into the trap of using biblical and theological argument to secure the psychological reassurance that we are in the right, and to gain power over others who must (of course) be wrong.

My point is that in each stage (or style) of faith there is a risk of regarding Scripture as existing for the fulfilment of our own psychological

[8] John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

needs, rather than to lead us to God. Consequently, the Bible becomes something it is not – a self-help book, a security blanket, or an intellectual arsenal to support our theological position. Just how impoverished this use of Scripture is can become very evident when cherished ideas are challenged in severe crisis, such as the one I have described here. The question is, therefore, how can we equip Christians, both as individuals and communities, to have a robust, honest view of Scripture which will enable them to withstand times of crisis and retain a prophetic voice which is rooted in the biblical tradition?

Foundationalism, Immature Reading, and Theological Education

In the sermon on prayer which I have mentioned above, the message was that John 14.13-14 contained a promise which could be taken at face value and applied in our lives. The approach to Scripture which was adopted by the pastor, and by myself as the listener, is one which is heavily influenced by what Nancey Murphy and Stan Grenz call 'foundationalism'.[9] This view looks for a foundation for faith primarily in propositions which provide certainty and justification for beliefs held.

> The goal of the foundationalist agenda is the discovery of an approach to knowledge that will provide rational human beings with absolute, incontestable certainty regarding the truthfulness of their beliefs. According to foundationalists, the acquisition of knowledge ought to proceed in a manner somewhat similar to the construction of a building. Knowledge must be built on a sure foundation. The Enlightenment epistemological foundation consists of a set of incontestable beliefs or unassailable first principles on the basis of which the pursuit of knowledge can proceed. These basic beliefs or first principles must be universal, objective and discernible to any rational person.[10]

Now, in many faith communities, this foundational approach to Scripture tends to be something of a default position. When Scripture is read, it is read in order to find out what we need to know and, by inference, what we should be doing. In the case I have described, the pastor adopted a foundationalist approach to the text, from which he expounded a universal and unassailable principle regarding prayer. The meaning of the text was clear and its message could be universalised without qualification. All that was needed was for us to believe it and put it into practice. From the perspective of faith development theory, the hallmarks of early stages of styles of faith on my

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[9] Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy set the Theological Agenda* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996); Stanley J. Grenz & John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Post Modern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

[10] Grenz & Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, p. 23.

part (and probably that of the pastor) are plain to see – the unquestioning appropriation of teaching, the desire for certainty and security, and the sense of belonging to a community which had found a formula for life. However, when a time of severe crisis came, it was to prove inadequate, to say the least. How then can we be helped to become resilient readers?

If it is part of the pastoral task to teach Scripture and help Christians to grow in their faith, it is the responsibility of seminary education to equip pastors with the tools to do so.[11] Traditionally, the core curriculum in Biblical Studies has consisted of biblical languages and the historical-critical method. We learn how to understand the text in its historical and literary context, to analyse the language used, and to try to ascertain its 'original' meaning. These are crucial skills for biblical interpretation, and it is to be hoped that they will educate pastors to avoid a shallow proof-texting mentality which treats Scripture as a monolithic whole, whose every verse can be applied universally. Nevertheless, to focus solely on these skills carries certain risks when it comes to teaching Scripture in the pastoral setting.

First, it can lead to a top-down understanding of the role of the pastor or teacher. Armed with specialist knowledge he or she becomes the expert whose task is to impart that knowledge to the congregation, rather than to be someone who is sharing the journey of faith with them. This gives less scope for members of the congregation to find their own voice and ability to appropriate Scripture for themselves; biblical knowledge becomes mere repetition of what is taught from the pulpit. Second, the atomising tendencies inherent in the historical-critical method are inclined to be replicated in sermons and Bible studies. Students are taught to take a small passage and exegete it, with often only cursory acknowledgement of the wider literary and historical context. This can and does contribute to a reduced view of Scripture, which fails to foster an appreciation of the sheer scale of the biblical meta-narrative of God's intervention in history. It can also lead to a neglect of the many voices within Scripture which tell the story from different perspectives and explore what it means to be part of it.[12] Third, an over-emphasis on historical-criticism can make the distance between the text and the contemporary reader's experience seem hard to bridge. Without hermeneutical strategies to enable us to apply the text in the present day, we can end up creating 'a canon within a canon' in which huge swathes of Scripture, deemed difficult, out of date or even distasteful, are ignored and

[11] I have explored the relationship between faith development and teaching in the pastoral setting further in 'Feed My Lambs: Some Pastoral Implications of a Biblical Metaphor', *Baptistic Theologies*, 17:2 (2015), 10-24.

[12] See, for example, Anthony C. Thiselton, 'The Future of Biblical Interpretation and Responsible Plurality', in *Hermeneutics in the Future of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by Stanley E. Porter & Matthew R. Malcolm (Downers Grove: IVP, 2013), pp. 11-27.

the voices within them silenced. We stick to those passages which offer comfort and instruction.

I am not for a moment suggesting that the historical-critical method should not be taught. In fact, I believe it to be an essential part of any theological education. I am saying, however, that to use it in isolation from other hermeneutical approaches could have the unintended consequence of promoting a view of Scripture in our churches and communities which inhibits development and growth. Alongside the teaching of the historical-critical method, therefore, we also need to teach basic hermeneutical theory as part of ministerial formation. It is crucial that students are taught to be self-aware in their reading – of their own interpretative presuppositions and the influence of their own backgrounds and traditions in their approach to scripture. They need also to know that there is a plurality of voices not only in the text itself but amongst its interpreters.[13] Introducing unfamiliar hermeneutical approaches to the text will help students to grasp the breadth of Christian tradition and the variety of cultures within it. In this way, theological education becomes a way of catalysing the development of more mature hermeneutics amongst those who will one day have responsibility for ministry.

Students can also be introduced to strategies for keeping the 'big picture' or meta-narrative in tension with the different voices which can be heard in Scripture. As far as doctrine and ethics are concerned, for example, a canonical approach, such that of Brevard Childs, which sees the whole of Scripture through a Christological lens, is fruitful.[14] Old Testament claims about the nature of God may be seen through the filter of divine revelation in Christ, while ethical or legal requirements regarding, for example, slavery or warfare are weighed up against Jesus' teaching. In addition, character ethics, which takes narrative and community as its starting point, offers an alternative hermeneutic to foundationalism which helps to avoid the traps of individualism and legalism.[15]

The role of experience in our appropriation of scripture (as well as 'objective' knowledge) must be acknowledged and explored. Here, the idea of the hermeneutical spiral is invaluable in helping students incorporate Scripture into their lives at an experiential rather than merely informational

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[13] See Richard S. Briggs, 'Biblical Hermeneutics and Scriptural Responsibility', in *The Future of Biblical Interpretation: Responsible Plurality in Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. by Stanley E. Porter and Matthew R. Malcolm (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), pp. 51–69.

[14] Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992).

[15] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

level.[16] Recent work by practical theologians on the use of the Bible in pastoral practice offers various tools for keeping Scripture central to the Christian ministry, while avoiding the pitfalls of fundamentalism.[17] Students should also be encouraged to write about their experience of using Scripture in various ministry settings as part of their reflective practice. Integrating Biblical Studies and Practical Theology skills in this manner will equip students to bring scriptural insights into their pastoral practice in less prescriptive, more imaginative, and reflective ways.[18]

Theories and Practice

How can these skills be brought to bear in the pastoral setting? In large part it is a matter of creating an open ethos in which discussion and exploration are encouraged. Education for children and new believers will be based on biblical narrative and ethics for living in community, and as people develop (in terms of education or faith style), the sheer variety of biblical literature and the meta-narrative which holds it all together can be explored. Encouraging discussion groups and exploring different methods of Bible study will help people develop their understanding of Scripture without becoming too reliant on one particular hermeneutical standpoint or leader. For example, conducting contextual Bible studies encourages people from different backgrounds to find their own voice with regard to reading Scripture in their own situation.[19]

When it comes to leading studies of individual texts, the insights of historical-criticism remain crucial as part of the pastor's interpretative toolkit. There is, of course, a pastoral responsibility to use them wisely. For example, to introduce questions as to the authenticity of Jesus' words in John 14.13-14 would, in most settings, serve only to bring in unnecessary and even harmful confusion.[20] But in the sermon which I have been describing here, had the pastor set these verses in context, and noted that the statement

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[16] On the hermeneutical spiral, see Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical* Interpretation, rev. and exp. edn (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006).

[17] See, for example, Zoë Bennett, *Using the Bible in Practical Theology: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013); Stephen Pattison, Margaret Cooling & Trevor Cooling, *Using the Bible in Christian Ministry: A Workbook* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007); Paul Ballard & Stephen R. Holmes, *The Bible in Pastoral Practice: Readings in the Place and Function of Scripture in the Church* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2005).

[18] See Richard S. Briggs, 'Biblical Hermeneutics and Practical Theology: Method and Truth in Context', *Anglican Theological Review*, 97 (2015), 201-217.

[19] John Riches, *What is Contextual Bible Study? A Practical Guide with Group Studies for Advent and Lent* (London: SPCK, 2010); Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* (Sheffield: Continuum, 1999).

[20] See, for example, Ernst Haenchen (trans. Robert W. Funk), *A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 7-21* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 126: 'it almost goes without saying that the earthly Jesus did not speak sayings like those recorded in verses 13f. The later Jesus tradition is coming to expression here…'

about prayer refers to the disciples' and therefore the church's mission of evangelism, I might have been less inclined to believe that God would do whatever I wanted in my personal life. As Schnackenburg, for example, notes, 'the evangelist does not have every possible intention in mind here. He is thinking rather of the tasks and the difficulties of proclaiming the gospel.'[21] I might also have learned to see the phrase 'in my name' as pointing to a close relationship with Christ through prayer, rather than as a quasi-magical formula (cf. Acts 19.13-20).[22]

Insights of this sort would have been invaluable in the task of gently moving me away from the kind of self-serving interpretation which is so symptomatic of less mature faith. However, serious problems remain. Not only is there many a missionary who will tell you that their petitions have gone unanswered; similar verses, for example, 'Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you' (Matthew 7.7-8; Luke 11.9-10) and 'Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith' (Mark 11. 23-24/Matthew 21.22 cf. John 15.7,16; 16.23) cannot be so easily 'explained away' by means of reference to literary and historical context.

What, then, are we to do with these texts about prayer which seem so straightforward, but which prove to be so perplexing in the face of personal experience? Certainly, we can invite people to balance these verses with other evidence from Scripture itself: Paul's thorn in the flesh (II Corinthians 12.6-7), for example, or Jesus' own desire that the cup of suffering be taken from him (Matthew 26.39 and parallels). We can explore together possible 'exemption clauses' – discussing what requests might be in line with God's will and what might not. And we can support one another as we come to the sometimes painful realisation that God's ways are not ours.

Ultimately, however, we may also have to admit that all our attempts to understand Scripture are flawed – simply because we are human – and that some aspects of it remain beyond our comprehension. In his essay 'Petitionary Prayer', C.S. Lewis ponders what these verses have to say about prayer and asks a direct and painful question.[23] Why are these assertions retained in Scripture when experience often tells against them? In his perplexity, he toys with the idea of faith as a gift rather than personal effort and wonders if those who do not receive what they ask for have not been given enough faith by God. He suggests that we might understand 'in His

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[21] Rudolph Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John* Vol. 3 (London & Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1982), p. 72.
[22] Schnackenburg, p. 73. See also Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), pp. 432-34; Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), p. 312.
[23] C.S. Lewis, 'Petitionary Prayer: A Problem without an Answer', in *Christian Reflections*, ed. by Walter Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1967), pp. 142-151.

name' to refer not to a formula to render our prayers effective but to being 'in Christ'. In the end, however, these musings prove unsatisfactory and he has to confess that he does not understand why these statements are made at all, and that he is left wondering how he should pray. I am comforted to be in such good company and reminded once again of Paul's teaching that as we grow, we realise all the more just how incomplete our understanding is (I Corinthians 13.11-12). Such is the stuff of maturing faith.

Conclusion

I have been arguing that there is a pastoral responsibility to enable people to have a robust view of Scripture which will help them to grow in faith and withstand spiritual crises. I have suggested that in order to equip pastors for this task, seminaries need to have a much more integrated approach to teaching Biblical Studies than is commonly employed, one which is grounded in hermeneutical theory as well as traditional historical-critical skills, and which cooperates with and benefits from the insights of pastoral and practical theology. I believe that this kind of integrative approach will better equip pastors and teachers to promote environments in which Scripture is taught and read with openness, integrity, and pastoral sensitivity. I hope that it will enable pastors to bring the fruits of their theological education to bear on how Scripture is read within their congregations, but without a top-down approach which discourages freedom and growth.

As we have seen, less mature reading is likely to be individualistic and self-serving, preoccupied with certainty and absolutes, while more mature reading is likely to revel in mystery and to see lack of understanding as an opportunity rather than a threat. Now, it is hard here to avoid the accusation of hierarchical thinking which is so often levelled at faith development theory — the suggestion that the later stages or styles might be superior to the earlier ones. In general terms, we are right to be suspicious of such an inference. The child or new convert is no less a child of God than the person who has learned openness and flexibility. Nevertheless, the traits of these less mature stages or styles can, if no growth is encouraged, lead to a brittle, inflexible fundamentalism which is at odds with the freedom which is at the heart of the gospel and is ill-equipped to withstand trauma and challenge.[24] We have a pastoral duty to guide and protect people with sensitivity and grace.

It should be evident that I am not suggesting that we no longer see Scripture as normative – but that we should reconsider *how* we read it in the

[24] On the relationship between immature faith styles and fundamentalism, see Streib, 'Faith Development Theory Revisited'.

pastoral setting. Thankfully, we are now able to draw on many different hermeneutical approaches which can help people be resilient readers as their experience of faith changes and (we hope) matures. I have noted some of them here. While it remains important for children and new believers to be taught the fundamentals of faith, a non-foundationalist approach to the Bible might enable people to acknowledge the tensions which appear within the text with openness and honesty, and to seek help from the Spirit for discernment and guidance. An appreciation that our lives are part of the story of God's working in the world should, I hope, encourage a mindset which is better able to see beyond its own individual, family, or community needs, and so prepare the ground for maturing spirituality. An awareness of our fallibility as readers will help us to continue to hear Scripture's prophetic voice when everything around us seems to collapse.

As I look back over my experience all these years ago, I wonder if, had I been equipped with a less foundational, more holistic view of Scripture, I might have been spared some of the severe spiritual struggle which came to compound the suffering of multiple loss. I might still have been perplexed and troubled, but I may not have been so ready to conclude that all I had learned of a faithful God as attested by Scripture was untrue. Perhaps if my mother had not been fed a diet of memory verses and taught to see her religion primarily as a means of personal protection, she might have been more able to maintain her faith during that terrible time and thereafter. But times have changed, and we now have much greater understanding, not merely of spiritual development, but of pedagogy and hermeneutics, and I feel hopeful that future generations of Christians will be given a better grasp of the nature of Scripture, which will enable them to be faithful and resilient readers – no matter what their circumstances might be.

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Effective Research Supervision

Stuart McLeod Blythe

This is a research paper report into what constitutes the effective supervision of international, part-time, PhD theological students in a largely distance learning environment. A qualitative research case study was carried out among students and supervisors at the International Baptist Theological Study Centre (IBTSC) in 2016. From the responses, I identify the importance of supervisory knowledge, skills, attributes, and the two key practices of timely and detailed feedback, along with managed team supervision, as central to effective research supervision. In addition, I highlight the significance of the part-time and largely distance, international, and theological nature of the student participants. In discussing these findings, I relate them to wider educational research and literature on research supervision.

Keywords

Research supervision; theological education; qualitative research

Introduction

In 2016, I researched the supervisory experience of PhD students and supervisors at the International Baptist Theological Study Centre in Amsterdam (IBTSC). IBTSC offers PhD studies in conjunction with the Faculty of Religion and Theology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). The research was carried out for a dissertation required to complete a Master of Education at the University of the West of Scotland (UWS). The research question was: 'What constitutes the effective supervision of international, part-time, PhD theological students, in a largely distance learning environment?'[1] My motivation was personal and professional. On the one hand, I wanted to enhance my practice as a research supervisor. On the other hand, as the then Rector of IBTSC, I wanted to be able to develop research-led policy concerning the practice of supervision in this specific context.

In an article published in *Practical Theology*, entitled 'The Research Supervisor as Friend', I present some data and offer an explicit theological reflection upon my findings.[2] In that article, I seek through the metaphor of 'friend' to offer a theological, ethical, and vocational understanding of

[1] It is now the practice of IBTSC to refer to PhD 'students' as 'researchers'. I will retain the language of 'student' in this paper as it is consistent with my research question.
[2] Stuart Blythe, 'The Research Supervisor as Friend', *Practical Theology*, 11 (2018), 401-411.

research supervision. In this article, I will do something different. First, I introduce my research methodology and methods. I do this because methodology and methods have become increasingly important in research into practice at IBTSC. I hope, therefore, that exposing the strengths and weaknesses of my approach may be helpful to others. Second, while repeating some data, I present a fuller summary of my findings than has hitherto been published. Third, in the presentation of my findings, I discuss how my findings relate to those in broader educational literature. In all of this, I acknowledge my continuing reflexivity as an ongoing participant in IBTSC beyond the specific period of the research and my original reporting.

Research Process

The research I carried out in 2016 involved fifteen students and thirteen supervisors. The students were all international, part-time, PhD theological students, in a largely distance learning environment. They were all students who had been registered with IBTSC and VU by the end of January 2015. Since IBTSC students are supervised in teams consisting of IBTSC supervisors and VU promoters, both groups were invited to participate. In response, nine IBTSC supervisors and four VU supervisors agreed to participate.

The research was a small-scale, qualitative, 'instrumental' case study.[3] The choice of the qualitative methodology can be explained in part with reference to epistemology.[4] On the one hand, I was quite content to adopt an approach to educational theory which is 'grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly "interpretivist" in that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted'.[5] On the other hand, this way of approaching the social world and the qualitative or ethnographic approaches it fosters is variously advocated and supported by proponents of practical theology as particularly suited to the nature of theological knowledge and pastoral practice.[6] These epistemological reasons notwithstanding, the qualitative case study also had the 'practical' advantage that it fitted the situation I was exploring.[7] The research being pursued aligned more closely with the nature of qualitative

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[3] David. Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research*, 4th edn (London: Sage Publications, 2013), p. 143.
[4] Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 2nd edn (London: Sage Publications, 2002), p. 16.
[5] Mason, *Qualitative*, p. 13.
[6] See for example Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2008); *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. by Pete Ward (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2012); J. Swinton and Harriet Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2nd edn (London: SCM Press, 2016).
[7] Silverman, *Qualitative*, p. 122.

rather than quantitative research interests in terms of the 'question being asked'.[8]

In carrying out this research, I sought to adhere to widely recognised standards of ethical research.[9] The research design was approved and guided by the Ethics Committee of the School of Education, UWS.

The research took the form of two questionnaires with 'open questions'.[10] The questionnaires sent to students and faculty were similar but worded to suit their specific role. The first questionnaires were issued, received, collated, and initially coded and analysed before the second questionnaires were devised. These were then sent, received, coded, and analysed along with my initial results. While I did not strictly follow a 'grounded theory' methodology for the research, I followed in general terms a grounded theory approach to coding and classifying the data. The attraction of this approach is that it proceeds from more general to more specific concepts and categories and their relationship with one another.[11]

I had also planned to review institutional literature regarding supervision and to follow up on my analysis of the questionnaires with a focus group at the annual IBTSC colloquium. The primary IBTSC document, however, was somewhat dated, given the change to a new validating partner. It was also more of a formal policy document and as such gave little information regarding institutional aspirations or supervisory practices. Concerning the VU, in 2016 they had only recently introduced new policy and process for a 'graduate school' which was still mostly undeveloped. As a consequence, I was not able to triangulate institutional policy and aspirations regarding supervision with the quality of student experience. Also, an administrative delay in receiving ethical approval from UWS in 2015 meant that the timing of my research could not include the focus group without delaying the final submission of my dissertation. Following the submission of the dissertation in 2016, however, I was able at the annual colloquium in 2017 to report back my finding to students and faculty and engage in some conversation around my findings as part of my ongoing role as Rector.

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[8] Beverley Hancock, Elizabeth Ockleford and Kate Windridge, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (The NIHR RDS EM / YH, 2009), p. 6 <https://www.rds-yh.nihr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/5_Introduction-to-qualitative-research-2009.pdf> [accessed 30 January 2019]

[9] Stephen Webster, Jane Lewis and, Ashley Brown, 'Ethical Considerations in Qualitative Research', in *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science and Research*ers, 2nd edn, ed. by Jane Ritchie and others (London: Sage, 2014), pp. 77-110 (p. 78).

[10] Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 4th edn (London: Sage Publications, 2009), p. 156.

[11] Flick, *Qualitative*, pp. 306-318.

Findings and Discussion

Three significant features of research supervision emerged in answer to the research question. These were the importance of knowledge, skills, and attributes.

1. Knowledge

Supervisors expect to provide, and students expect them to provide, a variety of types of knowledge. One supervisor wrote:

> My academic experience should provide me with the knowledge of some field in depth, and also with a knowledge of belonging or/and the difficulties of belonging to an academic culture, and with knowledge of what has and what has not been helpful in helping someone else to grow into a mature teacher/academic.[12]

In turn, student comments regarding what they expect of their supervisors include: 'expert engagement', 'guidance in areas of methodology, method, theory, issues and sources in field of study (expertise in area of study)', 'knowledge about the subject area', 'direction toward relevant resources', 'expertise', and a 'high academic level'. While such comments relate to the content and method, a number of students indicated that they look to their supervisors for 'clarity about the processes of the seminary/university' including 'university rules and regulations, graduation requirements, etc.' This explicit desire for guidance about institutional knowledge would seem to relate at least in part to the fact that these students had recently relocated from one accrediting institution to another and were not clear on the process. One wrote, 'For me, the biggest hassle has been the boatload (i.e., colloquially referencing an overabundance) of ambiguity in what is going on'.

This emphasis on the importance of knowledge as highlighted by supervisors and students resonates with the work of Bastalich, who argues that some of the pedagogical approaches to research supervision unhelpfully downplay the necessity of supervisors having methodological, institutional, and subject-specific knowledge.[13] If, however, my research highlights the importance of high quality, multi-faceted knowledge as one feature of effective supervision, another is the presence of appropriate supervisory skills.

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[12] I have not corrected the spelling or grammar of responses.

[13] Wendy Bastalich, 'Content and context in knowledge production: a critical review of doctoral supervision literature', *Studies in Higher Education* (2015), 1-13.

2. Skills

The supervisor participants clearly understood that effective supervision requires more than providing knowledge. Instead, they require to practise what I am describing as 'skills' to motivate the sort of self-directed research, learning, and articulation required of a PhD candidate. One wrote:

> My task is to help the other person to see more clearly HOW to say things so that WHAT he or she wants to say may fall more easily into place. That he or she finds the right questions to ask, and the right methods for seeking the answers.

Students indeed appear to be looking for such 'help', even if they use a fairly limited language to describe the skill required in providing it. Students frequently used 'guidance' to describe what they were looking for. Other terms included 'steer', 'encourage', and 'help'. One student wrote that an effective supervisor could 'inspire confidence', 'stimulate critical thinking', and 'help me keep focussed'. While there is some vagueness in the terminology, students are looking for their supervisors to be more than just knowledgeable.

Here again, the perspective of the supervisors can help fill out a bit more the necessary actions required if guidance is to be given and received. One supervisor wrote about the 'ability to motivate the student'. Others wrote about the ability to listen or to ask questions. As with the students, the general language of 'encourage' is used by a number. One supervisor, however, wrote more explicitly: 'Do not underestimate the primary psychological role/coaching function of the supervisor-Doktorvater. Sometimes, her/his academic research expertise even seems secondary.'

The language of 'coaching' was only used by one student and two supervisors. Yet, it appears to capture something of the essence of the desired proficiencies identified in my findings. The guidance sought is more than direction but accompanied by motivation and encouragement. In terms of the literature, along with the critical knowledge of 'content' and 'context', these sorts of required abilities can be related to the pedagogical 'skills' required in research supervision.[14]

3. Attributes

In addition to appropriate institutional and discipline specific knowledge, and pedagogical skills, my research indicates that students expect their supervisors to demonstrate certain attributes in effective supervision. These include: 'sincerity', 'openness', 'compassion', 'sympathy', 'honesty', 'respect', and 'availability'. One student wrote about wanting 'clarity and

[14] Bastalich, 'Content and context', p. 7.

openness…accompanied with encouragement and gentleness, but clarity and sincerity is very important'. Another wrote more critically, 'Even helpful and nice (as in compassionate) would be a novel nuance'.

The supervisors mentioned, but did not emphasise to the same extent, the importance of such attributes. They did, however, make some reference to characteristics such as 'pastoral sensitivity', 'trustworthiness', 'availability', and a shared context of 'honesty and integrity'. This said, the supervisors' responses indicate fairly high expectations concerning student attributes. Accordingly, they are looking for 'patience', 'creativity', 'openness', 'intellectual honesty', 'motivation', 'initiative', and 'stamina'. Supervisors, therefore, also see the importance of personal attributes in (their own) effective supervision but also in students.

The emphasis on attributes found in the research points towards the relational nature of research supervision. A variety of educational writers highlight this aspect of supervision. The relational aspect goes beyond the knowledge and skills of the supervisor. Perhaps the contribution of Mackinnon might be particularly attractive to a theological community in that she describes this as a 'fiduciary' relationship.[15] A fiduciary relationship is based on trust. It recognises the skill and knowledge of the academic and recognises the significant role of the student in decision-making, but the emphasis is very clearly on mutual obligations rather than on (potentially conflicting) rights. Both parties have responsibilities and legitimate expectations that they must consider, but the supervisor has a special obligation to the student, and the student places trust in the supervisor.

Practices

In addition to the knowledge, skills, and attributes discussed above, two inter-related practices were associated in particular with effective research supervision. These were timely and detailed feedback, and managed team supervision.

1. Timely and Detailed Feedback

In the first questionnaire, I did not ask any specific question about feedback. The term, however, appeared regularly in student responses. As a consequence, I followed this theme up in the second questionnaire to both students and supervisors.

[15] Jaquelin Mackinnon, 'Academic Supervision: seeking metaphors and models for quality', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 28:4 (2004), 395-405.

In response to what constitutes effective supervision, the comments by this student reflect what others also foreground:

> Prompt response and evaluation of written work is very important. Communication even in the form of 'I'll get back to you in a few days' is needed, as lengthy delays are frustrating after working intensely to get material to supervisors for a deadline.

This desire for a prompt response may have a particular poignancy for distance and part-time students, who have less opportunity for formal and informal face-to-face contact with supervisors and peers. This should not be underestimated, for as another student wrote:

> I would consider feedback to written work to be the most important feature. Since so much of the actual work is independent, supervisors function as the only tangible external voices that carry 'weight' or authority. They are the only tangible indicator of progress. A word from a supervisor carries incredible weight in a context where the vast majority of the work is done in isolation.

This quotation begs the question of what students consider to be good feedback. One summarised what several, if not many, of the students expressed:

> Effective feedback is prompt, detailed (e.g. written into the document, as well as summarized elsewhere), constructive (e.g. proposing alternatives), includes positives as well as negatives, clarifies which feedback 'must' be heeded and which is open to discussion or negotiation.

Time and again, students indicated the desire for honest, 'detailed' or 'specific feedback':

> Specific feedback includes not only a reference to statements made in the dissertation but why they are less than effective, why they need to be revised, and a suggestion of what that revision might need to be. Honest feedback, though painful, is something I want because it will prevent me from difficulty later.

Conversely, students considered general comments such as: 'I don't like the style of this paragraph', or 'chapter 5 is better but it is not quite there yet', or 'this is vague' unhelpful.

In response to the question: 'Can you describe what you consider to be the features of effective feedback on written work?' supervisors highlighted the following areas as requiring supervisory guidance: 'methodology', 'arguments', and 'presentation'. One described this in terms of 'the formal – affecting structure, style, footnoting, etc., and substantial – related to the flow of the argument in a particular chapter and of the dissertation overall'. Only a few supervisors mentioned the importance of recognising and praising good work.

The supervisors expect to give detailed feedback but did not mention the need for their feedback to be 'timely'. Some, however, expect students to respond quickly to feedback given. One supervisor responded to the

question, 'Can you describe what you would consider to be the features of good student response to feedback given on written work?' by saying:

> Timely reaction if it is a complex issue because we all are busy and it is difficult to recall what you did to someone's paper 3 months ago if there was no response. Generally, no response in two weeks means acceptance to me.

Reviewing the responses on feedback in the light of other responses, it appears supervisors and students may have a slightly different perspective of what is happening through feedback. While students appear to be looking for feedback that enhances their writing, supervisors want to provide feedback that develops the student as an independent researcher. Students are clear that they have a responsibility for their work. One student put it: 'My PhD, my problem if I fail, so my responsibility to make sure that all goes smoothly as possible'. Yet, it is not so clear students expect, as some supervisors expect of them, that during the process they will become 'colleagues', 'experts', if not the 'teachers' in the relationship. Insofar as supervisors see this as part of their task, it adds a complexification to what feedback is – beyond simply commenting on the work. Several supervisors, therefore, see feedback as 'dialogical', where students are invited to push back. One wrote: 'I want them to push back and defend their work so that we can come to a mutual decision'. Another said,

> The student, of course, is free to accept or reject the advice, and either is fine as long as they know why, and can defend their choice. It is nice to see when one's points are taken into consideration, and at least issues recognised, even if not dealt with.

Perhaps to facilitate such dialogue, several supervisors wrote of the need for written feedback to be accompanied and supplemented by some form of 'verbal', 'face-to-face' conversations, whether physically or virtually through 'Skype'. Several students also wrote of the value of face-to-face or Skype conversations, particularly in bringing clarity over difficult issues. This said, there is not a general agreement, certainly among the students, on whether Skype is an adequate substitution for physical, face-to-face meetings.

Given that IBTSC has an annual colloquium that facilitates physical face-to-face meeting, I would have expected more direct references to this in the responses, even though I did not ask any specific question about the colloquium. One student did write, 'My best times with supervisors have been during the annual colloquia where we meet face to face and discuss my work.' Some others did refer to the colloquium explicitly or implicitly. It is clear, however, that not all students felt the common group aspects of the colloquium were helpful, when supervisors not directly involved would give 'ad-hoc advice' in contrast to the detailed attention given by their supervisors.

Discussions in educational literature support the idea that effective feedback requires written feedback to be followed by face-to-face meetings with 'feed forward' advice in what constitutes an ongoing conversation of learning and dialogue.[16] Technology can be used to close the distance and bring a presence. It may offer some advantages over physical face-to-face communication, in that sessions can be recorded, although different situations will require different and varied approaches.[17] 'To balance the supervisor work-load with students' needs and expectations, a blend of various feedback approaches in terms of speed, length, and depth should be performed.'[18] While there are many variables, it also appears from some broader research that student satisfaction with supervision is greater in 'blended' programmes with some 'residential' components than in programmes which are solely 'online'.[19]

2. Managed Team Supervision

If one practice which emerges from the data about effective supervision is timely and detailed feedback, another is managed team supervision. Team supervision was part of the practice of IBTS Prague before its move to Amsterdam. It is also a requirement of VU. One supervisor explained it as follows:

> VU Doctoral Regulations prescribe a minimum of two and a maximum of four (co) supervisors, not only to 'protect' the student from negative effects of single supervision (positive and negative bias, prejudice, neglect, violation of scientific integrity, tunnel vision of the supervisor, etc.), but also to enhance the quality of the supervision by complementary and expanded expertise/experience ('training' of starting junior supervisor).

Team supervision, therefore, is advanced not merely as a regulatory necessity but as a practice which contributes to effective supervision. Many supervisors support this idea. This is particularly so when the research topic is 'interdisciplinary' or requires a particular 'method' of research to which an additional supervisor may bring particular expertise.

However, despite most, if not all, supervisors supporting team supervision, there is also caution. One frequently identified danger is the

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[16] Martin East and others, 'What constitutes effective feedback to postgraduate research students? The students' perspective', *Journal of University Learning & Teaching Practice*, 9:2 (2012), p. 12.

[17] Roland Sussex, 'Technological options in supervising remote research students', *Journal of Higher Education*, 55 (2008), 121-137.

[18] Fuzhan Nasiri and Fereshteh Mafakheri, 'Postgraduate research supervision at a distance: a review of challenges and strategies', *Studies in Higher Education*, 40:10 (2015), 1962-1969 (p. 1966).

[19] Elizabeth Anne Erichsen, Doris U. Bolliger and Colleen Halupa, 'Student satisfaction with graduate supervision in doctoral programs primarily delivered in distance education settings', *Studies in Higher Education*, 39:2 (2014), 321-338.

‘confusion’ created for students in receiving ‘contradictory’ advice from different members of the team. Several supervisors, therefore, indicated the necessity of clarity in terms of coordination, roles, and leadership. The need for such coordination is perhaps why some supervisors argued that two or three should be the optimum size of a team. The difficulties in establishing such coordination are intensified by the physical distance of IBTSC and VU supervisors from one another, notwithstanding the distance from their shared students.

As with the supervisors, the students gave almost universal but qualified support for the benefits of team supervision. As above, the benefits are widely regarded as being the ‘complimentary [*sic*] and expanded expertise/experience’ with respect to discipline-specific subject matter, methods, and perspectives. Some describe team supervision as having been ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ ‘helpful’, ‘good’, or ‘valuable’ if not ‘essential’ to their research. While affirming the process, many students expressed the need for such team supervision to bring clarity rather than confusion. The dispiriting impact of such confusion was expressed very strongly by one student:

> Still, there are times when there are too many chiefs all wanting to change and start over which they decide to do after much work has been completed. Such actions cause confusion and much frustration.

Indeed, this student likened their experience to a comic ‘state of disorder’. This following comment by one student in response to the question, ‘From your experience do you think that ‘team’ supervision is helpful?’, echoes the sentiments of several:

> Generally yes, provided that the supervisors know each other adequately and communicate with each other to check that they’re providing coherent/consonant guidance, and provided that there is clarity about who is the team leader. When supervisors provide differing advice, they need to do some processing amongst themselves for the sake of the student’s clarity. Also, they need to demonstrate appropriate give-and-take among themselves. In my case, receiving feedback from the various supervisors has enriched my work, but at times has created some confusion (mixed messages), so that I’ve had to go back and seek to find clarity and consensus amongst the supervisors.

It appears clear that what students are looking for is not simply team supervision but helpful team supervision.

Furthermore, several students indicated that they have had to try and find ways to manage their different supervisors, not simply in terms of clarity but in terms of the nature of the different feedback they did or did not provide. While, therefore, students appreciate different perspectives on their research topic, ultimately they want to know which supervisor leads the team, not only in administrative terms but concerning authority in the direction they should follow. For the students, the potential for real confusion

is intensified by the IBTSC/VU relationship, as they want to complete their work in keeping with the demands of the awarding institution. One student wrote, 'it would be helpful for me to understand if there is (officially) a hierarchy of authority among my supervisors and what that is'. They then offered their suggestion as to how they thought this hierarchy worked, saying, 'This in view of the need to see the book be accepted in the context/culture of VU.' Students do not merely want to research, but to complete their PhD, therefore whom they are to follow, matters.

Some of the research on team supervision in the educational literature reflects the benefits and problems of team supervision found in my research. This more extensive research indicates that it is differentials in power and knowledge and the need for students to know that their supervisors are working for them that make disagreements among their supervisors unsettling, for indeed 'They are the bosses.'[20] Guerin and Green suggest, therefore, that effective team supervision requires: an agreed procedure for dealing with difference, student involvement in the decision making process, and a recognition that the differences can be threatening.[21]

Particular Issues

In the second questionnaires I asked explicitly about the perceived impact on effective supervision of the students being international, part-time, theological, and largely distance learning. I will discuss these issues here in what it appeared to me was their order of importance as revealed in the responses.

1. Part-Time and Distance

To some extent, the issues raised by part-time and distance students in terms of effective supervision relate directly to feedback as discussed above. Be that as it may, one student captured something of the dynamic of part-time, distance study from the student perspective:

> Students must be driven towards supervision. One cannot drop into office hours, and can easily avoid a supervisor, if little or no work is done. This can compound a lack of meaningful progress. Being part time often results in prioritizing the research below regular full-time work, family, or other more immediate and consuming responsibilities.

It would appear that the major impact on the vast majority of the students of their part-time and distance status is that their research is sporadic and

[20] Cally Guerin and Ian Green, '"They're the bosses": feedback in team supervision', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 39:3 (2015), 320-335.
[21] Guerin and Green, 'They're the bosses', pp. 331-332.

prolonged. A number of students indicated that this sporadic nature of the work must make supervision much more difficult: 'Gaps in time make it more difficult for the supervisor to track with your thinking and work.' Several supervisors also echoed this sentiment. One supervisor conveyed the sentiments of many when they stated:

> The problem with part-time students is that they sometimes can only focus irregularly at their research and this influences the effectiveness, as well for the student as for the supervisor. Especially if there is a long time laps [*sic*] between supervision sessions.

This situation of the sporadic nature of part-time study is further complicated in that students and supervisors may be working with different rhythms to their year. A time convenient for a student to write may not be convenient for a supervisor to respond. Given the sporadic nature of work and feedback, a breakdown in communication can occur. This breakdown can lead to a situation of students feeling alone and powerless. One student wrote:

> I am an independent researcher and don't need my hand to be held. On the other hand, there were definitely times when it felt like I was on my own and wouldn't be getting much in the way of concrete guidance or suggestions. It was difficult to ask for increased 'attention' because of the power differential in the relationships.

This quotation perhaps illustrates the sort of 'isolation' spoken about in the educational literature when there is a lack of 'proximity' and it is simply not the case that

> the supervisor's office may be in an adjacent building; a learner encountering administrative problems with enrolment can pay a visit to the office; and questions about research methodologies are discussed over coffee in graduate student lounges.[22]

To be sure it could be argued it is a feature of a student becoming an independent researcher that they take the initiative. Given the power 'differential', however, I would argue in agreement with Watts that, given the challenges of part-time distance education, the responsibility for maintaining the communication lies with the supervisor and that 'communication, planning, and empathy' can help keep the progress on track.[23]

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[22] M. Gregory Tweedie and others, 'The "dissertation marathon" in doctoral distance education', *Distance Education*, 34:3 (2013), 379-390 (p. 385).

[23] Jacqueline H. Watts, 'Challenges of supervising part-time PhD students: towards student-centred practice', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 13:3 (2008), 369-373 (p. 371).

2. International

Another specific particularity of this research relates to the international status of the students. In terms of how they perceived this to impact the effectiveness of their supervision, one or two students highlighted issues of having to adapt to a different institutional culture. Many students, however, were unable to articulate any apparent significant impact of their international status on their experience of effective supervision. These responses, however, are not straightforward because, despite the variety of nationalities who participated in my research, there was a large amount of broad European or North American cultural commonality. Some students, however, indeed indicated that studying in an international context has been the very thing that has enriched their overall experience and gives added value to their work. One wrote:

> Overall (despite the possibility of the occasional disconnect due to culture or language) it is enriching to engage with people from other countries and contexts. Particularly at the doctoral level, having exposure to those whose perspectives may differ from my own due to different socio-cultural and educational experience/formation, should help stimulate critical thinking.

This comment is interesting, not only because it speaks of perceived benefits, but because the student focused less on their own international nature and more on that of others. I will return to this issue of who or what is ‘international’ below.

Supervisors identified some issues in response to the question of the impact that they thought the international status of students had on effective supervision. These relate to a poor command of the English language, different educational cultures, different approaches to critical thinking, and different views of authority. Such concerns are reflected and discussed in the broader literature.[24] While supervisors raised issues that might need attention, none saw them as insurmountable if due supervisory attention was given to negotiating the situation. Indeed, for some supervisors, their own experience is enhanced through supervising international students with alternative approaches to knowledge and sources.

Following on from the above, one student made this comment:

> I don't believe that my supervision was impacted by the fact that I'm an ‘international’ student. This is largely due to the fact that both my supervisors have lived in multiple cultural settings and are highly sensitized to cultural issues.

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[24] Margaret Cargill, ‘Cross-Cultural postgraduate supervision meetings as intercultural communication’, in *Quality in Postgraduate Research: Managing the new agenda*, ed. by Margaret Kiley and Gerry Mullins (The University of Adelaide: Adelaide: 1998), pp. 175-187; Yanjuan Hu, Klaas van Veen and Alessandra Corda, ‘Pushing too Little, Praising too Much? Intercultural Misunderstandings between a Chinese Doctoral Student and a Dutch Supervisor’, *Studying Teacher Education*, 12:1 (2016), 70-87.

This quotation raises the question of what is meant by the term 'international' students. This not least in an international institution where many of the supervisors as well as the students come from cultural contexts other than the one in which the institution is located. 'International' is something of a contested term. It is used in some contexts to define 'non-European' students but in others to define students who come from contexts where English is not the first language.[25] Who is or is not 'international' depends upon who is making the designation. In the literature, the problematising of the term goes further. For even if a context specific definition of international student can be reached, such students are not a homogenous unit.[26] To reflect upon intercultural supervision, therefore, can be very worthwhile. Manathunga, for example, points out that research studies can be a transformative event, a 'liminal space' in which students' identities experience '(re)formation'[27]. It is, however, not simply students who are transformed but rather through the experience of 'transculturation' supervisors can also be changed.[28] This understanding of variable and changing identities, however, need not concede to what Manathunga describes as 'a liberal *disavowal of difference*'[29] but indeed requires difference to be recognised.[30] All of which is to say that the 'transcultural' nature of IBTSC offers a particular environment, the challenges of which may offer rich opportunity beyond traditional categories of 'international' students.

3. Theological

The last particularity that requires some discussion is the fact that the students are theological students. Some students, when asked what impact they thought that this had on their supervision, made the point that they had no other experience to compare with it. Others said that it made no difference to effectiveness, not least as they were studying 'history'. Some, however, reflected that theology involves dealing with issues to which they have a personal convictional commitment. On the whole, the few who commented thought that this brought a commonality with their supervisors, even when differences existed, and as such enriched their experience.

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[25] Viviene E. Cree, '"I'd Like to Call You My Mother": Reflections on Supervising International PhD Students in Social Work', *Social Work Education,* 31:4 (2012), 451-464 (p. 452).
[26] *The Doctorate: International Stories of the UK Experience*, ed. by Sheila Trahar (Higher Education Academy. Education Subject Centre, 2011), p. 5.
[27] Catherine Manathunga, 'Intercultural Postgraduate Supervision: Ethnographic Journeys of Identity and Power', in *Learning and Teaching Across Culture in Higher Education*, ed. by David Palfreyman and Dawn Lorraine McBride (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 93-113 (p. 94).
[28] Manathunga, 'Intercultural', p. 97.
[29] Manathunga, 'Intercultural', p. 95, italics original.
[30] Trahar, *Doctorate*, p. 5.

Supervisors' responses reflect similar views to those of the students. Some think it has little or 'no impact' or that it depends on the specifics of the discipline, such as whether 'historical' or 'ethics'. Some see a shared set of beliefs between supervisor and student as having the potential to help the process: 'There is an assumed camaraderie as part of the same faith-family, which engenders an immediate affinity'. One supervisor warned that this sort of affinity may make the supervisor not critical enough of the work. One or two reflected upon the possibility that exploring issues to which one is personally committed might mean students cannot be suitably critical or have to undergo a personal, painful transformation. One stated, however, that bringing personal perspectives to the surface can offer a student contextual grounding for their research.

One feature of qualitative research is 'reflexivity'. During the research, the responses to this question raised for me the wider question of what is 'theological' about theological education. Is it simply a matter of content or also of context and approach? The answers provided suggested primarily 'content', with rare implications that context and approach could be theologically significant. One student, however, wrote:

> There was for me a very strongly shared conviction – a sense of shared spirituality – between myself and supervisor (which I hope flowed both ways). Supervision in this sense moved well beyond the strictly academic project to open up a shared space of friendship which included reflection and discussion about the deeper journey of faith and the place of study as part of that journey.

Such comments were scarce. In the literature on theological education, the language of 'formation', relating not least to spiritual character, is commonly used.[31] The actual nature of such formation, the extent to which it can be achieved in a distance learning environment, and how such affective learning can be measured are all issues requiring some discussion. Perhaps an alternative approach to the 'theological' in theological education is to explore the nature of the learning community in terms of ecclesiology and the practice of supervision as an expression of that. This has been my own approach in my other writing on this topic. Significantly, one supervisor responded to the question regarding the theological nature of the students by saying, 'Wow – this is an IBTS questionnaire isn't it?' and went on to talk about the fact that one feature of the institution historically is that theology is expressed in and through practice. This emphasis being the case, further reflection on the theological understanding of the practice of research supervision would indeed appear warranted.

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[31] Marilyn Naidoo, 'Ministerial formation of theological students through distance education', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 68:2 (2011), 65-73; Stephen D. Lowe and Mary E. Lowe, 'Spiritual Formation in Theological Distance Education: An Ecosystems Model', *Christian Education Journal*, 7:1 (2010), 85-102; Roger White, 'Promoting Spiritual Formation in Distance Education', *Christian Education Journal*, 3:2 (2006), 303-315.

Conclusion

The research which I carried out highlighted knowledge, skills, attributes, and certain practices as central to what constitutes the effective research supervision of international, part-time, PhD theological students, in a largely distance learning environment. While students and supervisors were mostly in agreement, at times they perceived these factors differently. Such differences in perception, although small, could be exacerbated in practice – not least through the lack of regular proximity. The findings generated were mostly consistent with other writing and research as reported in educational literature. As a consequence, there are steps which might be taken to enhance the quality of student experience through supervision, while securing the supervisory goals of the development of researchers seeking to gain a qualification. In addition, the particular international and theological nature of the institution may offer not only specific challenges but also opportunities for such learning communities.

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Hans-Georg Gadamer and the Mind of Christ: How the Baptist Tradition of Discernment Can Serve as a Resource for the Dialogue between Practical Theology and the Social Sciences

Roger Jasper

Recent conversations in practical theology have wrestled with how to allow social scientific research to critique theological beliefs and practices without allowing theology to adopt a naturalistic world view. This article proposes that enough attention has not been paid to the theological assumptions of the epistemology used in these conversations. The article suggests that the hermeneutical theory of Hans-Georg Gadamer provides a framework for understanding how the Baptist tradition of discerning the mind of Christ can serve as a resource for integrating knowledge gained from the social sciences with theological beliefs in a way that resists passively adopting an essentially deistic view of the world.

Keywords

Discernment; hermeneutics; ecclesiology; ethnography

Introduction

Practical theology for the last forty years has wrestled with how to integrate knowledge gained by social scientific investigation into practical theology in a way that allows empirical research to critique more abstract theological theory without ceding epistemological primacy to the social-historical and succumbing to a world view that is essentially deistic or atheistic. A discussion of how the process of mutual critical dialogue should preserve theology as a central source of knowledge and criteria for analysis in both epistemology and methodology will be reviewed below. I propose that the solutions offered have dealt with questions of research and reflection methodology but have not adequately addressed how the underlying hermeneutical epistemology can be more robustly theological. I suggest that reading the hermeneutical theory of Hans-Georg Gadamer in light of the Baptist tradition of discernment by seeking to know the mind of Christ through the reading of the Scriptures and dialogue in covenant community can be helpful in avoiding a naturalistic world view.

Browning's Influence on Practical Theology

Often, in the past, practical theology has taken an applied approach, using

the conclusions of more abstract fields like biblical studies, systematic theology, or historical theology and applying those insights to the practices of ministers and lay Christians, hoping for improved outcomes in those practices. John Swinton illustrates his growing dissatisfaction with idealistic accounts of church by telling of a panel discussion he joined with Stanley Hauerwas on the topic of Hauerwas' writings on disability and Christian community. The entire panel of brilliant theologians was left rattled when the question came from the audience, "Where is this community you talk about? Where is your church?"[1] The woman asking the question spoke from a place of pain and disappointment. Her experience of Christian community was not reflected in this developed ecclesiology.

Practical theology in the last forty years has seen a movement toward using the qualitative methods of the social sciences to explore the embedded meaning of Christian practices first. It recognises that there is much to learn about faith from the way it is actually lived. Don Browning has been an important influence in this shift in practical theology as an early advocate for moving the starting point of theological study from systematic theology, historical theology, or biblical studies to current practice. For Browning all theology is a branch of practical theology. We first should observe lived practice and then enter into dialogue with the more theoretical theological disciplines with the goal of allowing theory and practice to critique and affect one another. Miller-McLemore describes this model as a movement from 'theory-laden practice to practice-laden theory back to theory-laden practice'.[2]

Following Browning, there has been a more extensive use of social scientific methods of observation to provide a robust description of the practices of believers and others. Empirical theology was expanded by Johannes van der Ven, using statistical analysis and other methods, and by Hans-Gunter Heimbrock, working from a phenomenological perspective.[3] Within a few years Elaine Graham and Bonnie Miller-McLemore had moved the field further in paying close attention to practice, with a greater awareness of 'embodied, relational and contextual sources and norms, and accounting more carefully for power and difference in the context of lived experience'.[4]

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[1] John Swinton, 'Where Is Your Church? Moving toward a Hospitable and Sanctified Ethnography', in *Perspectives in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. by Pete Ward (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), p. 71.

[2] Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *Christian Theology in Practice: Discovering a Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), p. 155.

[3] Eileen R. Campbell-Reed and Christian Batalden Scharen, 'Ethnography on Holy Ground: How Qualitative Interviewing Is Practical Theological Work', *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 17 no. 2 (2013), 232-259 (p. 234).

[4] Ibid., p. 234.

The ecclesiology and ethnography movement in practical theology has developed in recent decades to address the concern that modern ecclesiology was still too abstract and remained too disconnected from the lived reality of the church and its members. This movement, driven by theologians like John Swinton, Pete Ward, and Christian Scharen, building on the work of those above, has sought to use methods developed in ethnography and other social sciences to observe the experiences of communities and individuals and to create dialogue between those experiences and Christian theology.

So, how does one bring ecclesiology and ethnography into dialogue? In *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* John Swinton and Harriet Mowat lay out a 'revised model of mutual critical correlation'.[5] This model adapts the model developed by Seward Hiltner and David Tracy. Whereas Paul Tillich had suggested that reason and experience produce questions and Christian tradition and Scripture seek to provide answers that correlate to those questions,[6] Hiltner and Tracy were concerned that this correlation was one-directional and left Christian tradition unquestioned. Instead, they suggested allowing mutual criticism between tradition, Scripture, reason, and experience.[7]

Where Swinton and Mowat take exception to Hiltner and Tracy's methodology is in that these dialogue partners are not symmetrical. For theologians, knowledge acquired through revelation maintains a 'logical priority' ahead of information gained by social scientific research.[8] Swinton and Mowat revise this mutual critical method in an attempt at keeping Scripture and tradition 'logically prior to and independent of qualitative research data'[9] as sources for practical theology.

Swinton and Mowat suggest four stages for their revised model of mutual critical correlation. The first is to locate the practice that is to be explored and observe what seems to be taking place on the surface level. Second, qualitative research methods are used to uncover more complex meaning at work behind the practice being observed. Third, this practice and the meaning being ascribed to it are critiqued in light of Scripture and Christian tradition. Finally, revised practices can be proposed, based on the interaction between the social scientific discoveries and the theological reflection.[10] All of this is intended to keep practical theology theological. Yet, the problem remains that what we believe to be revealed can (and does)

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[5] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (2nd edn) (London: SCM Press, 2016), p. 83.
[6] Ibid., p. 74.
[7] Ibid., p. 75.
[8] Ibid., p. 82.
[9] Ibid., p. 83.
[10] Ibid., pp. 89-94.

become obscured by our social constructs.

Insufficiently Theological

Some have been concerned that these attempts threaten to make theology a second order science to the social sciences and assume a naturalistic world view. Campbell-Reed and Scharen point out that with all of the insights gained in the 1990s, it was not until the mid-2000s that practical theologians began to explore how the very methods of empirical research themselves should be transformed in order to be properly theological.[11]

Theologians want to have a mutually critical dialogue with the social sciences, but few social scientists are interested in receiving insights from theology. So, theologians are left to passively receive information from the perspective of social science and then to theologically reflect on it as an afterthought.

> If theological reflection occurs *after* the event has been observed, recorded, interpreted, and explained, then theology becomes a second-order activity that is dependent on a particular account of the world that is generated via ethnographic methods that are far from neutral.[12]

To do this means we are ceding our basic world view to one that is essentially atheistic or deistic.

Swinton and Mowat recognise the difficulty of resolving the basic epistemological tension when integrating knowledge from Christian theology that claims to be revealed by God and knowledge from the social sciences that claims to be empirical. They insist that this kind of dialogue between two disciplines will require 'hospitality, conversation, and critical faithfulness'.[13] Still, this leaves much to be resolved. Even Andrew Root, an advocate for this kind of integrative work, points out:

> While the issues of interdisciplinary and articulation of possible perspectives was rich, the constructive proposal was not. The authors simply assert that hospitality, conversation, and critical faithfulness should frame the dialogue between practical theology and qualitative research, but they fail to articulate how this would be done.[14]

John Webster has been critical of the use of ethnography in ecclesiology more broadly. Webster is concerned that not enough is done to ensure that the theological maintains its place of logical priority. He writes:

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[11] Campbell-Reed and Scharen, 'Ethnography on Holy Ground', p. 242.
[12] Swinton, 'Where Is Your Church?' p. 88.
[13] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, p. 86.
[14] Andrew Root, 'Practical Theology and Qualitative Research', *The Journal of Youth Ministry*, 6 no. 2 (2008): p. 114.

> Christian dogmatics does not concede the ontological primacy and self-evidence of the social-historical; and it considers that apprehension of the phenomenal visibility of social-historical realities is not possible in the absence of reference to their ordering to God, that is, in the absence of reference to their creatureliness.[15]

Webster insists that fundamental to the discipline of theology is recognising Christian doctrinal claims, not as less real than sensory experience, but more real. One cannot speak theologically about sensory experience of the physical world without recognising that the physical world we experience is defined as creation and as being in relation to the Creator.

Furthermore, ecclesiology is a theological discipline that follows out of core beliefs about who God is. 'Ecclesiology has its place in the flow of Christian doctrine from teaching about God to teaching about everything else in God.'[16] According to Webster, the church does not find its basic meaning in its social and cultural realities, but rather, what it means to be the church is grounded in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The relationship of God with God's self is intrinsic to the triune nature of God and is reflected in the community that God gathers on earth. All of this being so, to begin Christian theological inquiry with observations of social phenomena and attempting to defer, until after these observations are complete, the input of Christian doctrine about the nature of these phenomena in God, denies the very premise of Christian theological inquiry itself.

So, Webster warns that ecclesiology must be undertaken with the question of the origin of the church first and then inquiry about the phenomena of the church. If ecclesiology jumps ahead to the phenomena without reference to the church's origin in the nature of God, ecclesiology easily becomes 'naturalized'.[17] He suggests that ecclesiology resists being 'naturalized' by keeping this ordering that reflects the distinction between Creator and creation, by being mindful that the phenomena observed are only signs of deeper realities, and by grounding ecclesiological descriptions in robust language that makes direct reference to God. One who wants to make use of ethnography must be clear that the cause and nature of observed phenomena are rooted in God and that much of what the church is will always be a mystery beyond the scope of social scientific investigation.

Hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer

While Webster makes important points, he seems to want to use the

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[15] John Webster, '"In the Society of God": Some Principles of Ecclesiology', in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. by Pete Ward (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), p. 204.
[16] Ibid., p. 205.
[17] Ibid., p. 221.

categories of theological beliefs and sociological data as discrete containers of knowledge that can be kept uncontaminated by the one bringing them into dialogue. However, much of the ecclesiology and ethnography conversation builds on the hermeneutical theory of Hans-Georg Gadamer. To Gadamer's way of thinking the researcher cannot so easily disentangle the data they produce from their perspective or 'horizon'.

The use of Gadamer's hermeneutics in this movement goes back to Don Browning's *Fundamental Practical Theology*. Browning underpins his thinking with Gadamer. Browning's project was to approach practical theology as a critical reflection on the interaction between the church and its tradition and experiences, with the goal of improving future action.[18] This understanding of the nature of practical theology is behind Browning's use of Gadamer's dialogical thinking.

For Gadamer, being human means practising hermeneutics. We are interpreting creatures. This means that our preconceptions, fore-understandings as Gadamer calls them, cannot be avoided and must be owned and acknowledged. What we already know is critical to what we will come to understand. This is a direct challenge to the Enlightenment demand for objectivity. Gadamer works to move beyond certain aspects of Enlightenment thinking: Browning says that he and others undercut '"foundationalist" preoccupations with anchoring knowledge on pure and undistorted sense impressions or something like *a priori* first principles or transcendental notions, that is, something certain, objective, and neutral'.[19]

We do not even think to question our fore-understandings of texts, events, or other people's perspectives until there is a breakdown in understanding and something does not quite fit. When people use a particular word, we assume we know what it means until it does not make sense in context. Gadamer calls this an incongruence. Then dialogue is needed to reach understanding. The same thing happens when we are reading a text from a different time and place. Gadamer says we need a fusion of horizons between the text and interpreter. This fusion is accomplished through constructive, critical dialogue between the two.

Interpretation to Application

There are two key insights of Browning regarding Gadamer that I believe are important for practical theology. The first is that interpretation is not an end in itself. It is always wrapped up in application. The process of application

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[18] Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 36.
[19] Ibid., p. 40.

is present and active in the interpretation through and through.

> The hermeneutic process aimed at understanding any kind of human action – a classic text, work of art, letter, sermon, or political act – is like a moral conversation, when the word *moral* is understood in the broadest sense... In both hermeneutical conversation and moral judgment, concern with application is there from the beginning.[20]

To make his point, Browning cites Gadamer: 'We too determine that application is neither a subsequent nor merely an occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but codetermines it as a whole from the beginning.'[21] This insight into the co-determination of application and understanding is what grounds Browning's proposal that all theology is practical theology and forms a practice-theory-practice movement.

Communal Hermeneutic

A second key insight by Browning is that a communal hermeneutic is implied in Gadamer's dialogical understanding but it is never fleshed out.[22]

> Hermeneutics, even in Gadamer's sense of dialogue and conversation, is a community process. The community as a whole, with members participating to varying degrees, enters a dialogue toward the end of achieving a working consensus – a consensus that may break up and be reformulated repeatedly.[23]

He notes that Robert S. Corrington, especially in *The Community of Interpreters*,[24] has pointed to the American pragmatism of Charles Peirce and Josiah Royce as being helpful in advancing a more communitarian application of Gadamer's hermeneutics.

It may be fruitful to consider further how Peirce and Royce can add insights to this discussion. Peirce advances the notion that the individual cannot, on their own, sufficiently perceive reality because we approach reality through symbols and it is only in community that we can adequately interpret them. Royce applies this to the church as doing the practical work of interpretation for the purpose of building a loving community together. Browning believes these resources should be brought alongside Gadamer to aid practical theology in understanding its work as a community endeavour.[25]

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[20] Ibid., p. 39.
[21] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 333.
[22] Dr Tim Noble rightly points out that, though Gadamer does not focus on a communitarian aspect to interpretation, his work does presuppose the community of classics and philosophers with which he engages.
[23] Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 50.
[24] See Robert S. Corrington, *The Community of Interpreters on the Hermeneutics of Nature and the Bible in the American Philosophical Tradition* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1995).
[25] Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 51.

More work needs to be done to see how Peirce and Royce might advance the conversation around this aspect of Gadamer's thinking.

An Epistemological Question

Swinton suggests that in ethnography and ecclesiology we bring the horizons of our theology, ethnographic methods, and the object being observed into conversation from the beginning and through observation, analysis, and interpretation.

> All ethnographic data is seen to be co-construction; a mutually constructed narrative that emerges from the merging of the researcher's horizon and the horizon of the text. If that is the case, rather than bracketing off theology from the process of looking and interpretation, the most authentic hermeneutical movement will be to draw it into the observation and analysis and allow its voice to enable clarity of vision and emerging understanding.[26]

Knowing that Gadamer's hermeneutical theory is operating in the background of the discussion concerning integrating social scientific research into practical theology, we can see that it is not enough to be mindful of our theological convictions when we get to the point of constructing and executing a methodology. Webster's disagreement with others regards how sources interact methodologically. However, there is a deeper epistemological question: What sources of knowledge are we bringing to our methods and are these sources consistent with our stated theological convictions? John Swinton echoes this concern:

> If this hermeneutical perspective is correct, in order for Christians to do ethnography faithfully they should develop a mode of reflexivity within which the theological is assumed as a normal and primary reflective dimension of the researcher's epistemological and methodological assumptions.[27]

Even and especially at the level of hermeneutics we cannot leave our theological convictions at the door. Belief that there is a God who is active in the world will have definitive consequences for what sources will be seen as authoritative when we interpret a text or situation. To introduce the activity of God into Gadamer's epistemology it would be helpful to have an interpretive tradition which recognises the presence, application, and communal interpretation as foundational to hermeneutics.

Ryan Andrew Newson points to the baptistic tradition of discernment as a hermeneutic which ties observation to application and is communal in nature. While we are seeking to ensure theology's logical priority, Newson similarly indicates that the key difference between the discernment and

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[26] Swinton, 'Where Is Your Church?' p. 83.
[27] Ibid.

phronesis in general, is that Christian discernment is always understood to be faithful response to the work of God.[28] Just as Gadamer relates his mingling of interpretation and Aristotle's understanding of practical wisdom or *phronesis*, Newson calls discernment a 'communal *phronesis*'.[29]

Discernment in the Baptist Tradition

The Baptist theological tradition of discernment has claimed that there is one authority that is superior to all others: the person of Jesus Christ. So, the work of all hermeneutics in the context of Baptist congregational life seeks to know the mind of Christ with an eye toward faithful application. Paul Fiddes describes the work of discernment in the Baptist tradition as an interaction between three sources of authority: the congregation, the Scriptures, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

> The point is to find together the mind of Christ, who is present in the midst of his church as the risen Lord to whom "all authority is given," and to use the scriptures to help us in this search for the purpose in our world today.[30]

This discerning movement from formation in the context of a community through scriptural interpretation to discerning the mind of Christ is deeply rooted in the Baptist tradition. The Particular Baptists of the early seventeenth century were shaping their own brand of Covenant Theology. For these Baptists, God in Christ had initiated a new covenant with his church 'through the blood of the everlasting Covenant'[31] between the Father and the Son. The *London Confession, 1644* paints a rich and beautiful picture of the covenant relationship in Baptist churches in the first half of the seventeenth century. Christ's covenant with his universal church called believers to actualise visible communities in covenant with the Lord and one another. In the opening letter to this confession, the Particular Baptist churches tell the reader that they are all in one communion and that Jesus Christ is their 'head and Lord'.[32]

Article XXXIII of the *London Confession, 1644* tells us that 'visible profession of faith' is 'being baptized into that faith, and joined to the Lord, and each other'.[33] Paul Fiddes points out that this kind of talk refers to the dual dimensions of the church covenant. The believer enters both a 'horizontal' and a 'vertical' contract with God and his or her brothers and

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[28] Ryan Andrew Newson, *Radical Friendship: The Politics of Communal Discernment* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), p. xix.
[29] Ibid., p. 47.
[30] Paul S Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2005), p. 52.
[31] William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1959), p. 164.
[32] Ibid., p. 155.
[33] Ibid., p. 165.

sisters.[34] We see also how inseparable baptism is from covenantal church membership. In many places the covenant was never written; baptism was the covenant. Though the document may have been optional, being joined to one another in covenant was not an option, 'thither ought all men to come'.[35] They were to surrender their lives and talents to the service of the church and become like limbs of a single body.

The General Baptists did not use as much 'covenant' language as their more reformed Particular Baptist brothers and sisters, but the concept was still present. The language of 'walking together' and giving oneself up to Christ and the church is used in the General Baptist confessions known as *Thirty Congregations*[36] and *The Midland Confession*.[37] *The Orthodox Creed* says of baptism,

> Baptism is an ordinance of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized, or dipped, a sign of our entrance into the covenant of grace, engrafted into Christ, and into the body of Christ, which is his church.'[38]

Notice the presence of the new covenant with all the church and baptism serving to join the believer to Christ and his body, the church.

In 1677, in the *Second London Confession*, the Particular Baptists admit that every gathered church is prone to error, but that the authors are committed to the journey. They refer to themselves as, with other Christians, 'living and walking in the way of the Lord that we profess'.[39] The believer is called out of the world by the Word and God's Spirit, but he or she is called out to be together. 'Those thus called he commandeth to walk together in particular societies, or Churches,' and to 'willingly consent to walk together according to the appointment of Christ, giving up themselves, to the Lord and one another by the will of God.'[40]

This language is so rich, so relational. In baptism one died to self and took on the vocation of service to others through the covenant church. Believers were bound together, they belonged to Christ and so they belonged to the church of which He was Lord. Members were accountable to that lordship. Article 12 states that 'all that are admitted unto the privileges of a Church, are also under the Censures and Government thereof, according to the Rule of Christ'. Christ was the real and present Lord of these churches. There is an emphasis on acting in accordance with the 'mind' of Christ as discerned together.

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[34] Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, p. 29.
[35] Lumpkin. *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 166.
[36] Ibid., p. 183.
[37] Ibid., p. 199.
[38] Ibid., p. 317.
[39] Ibid., p. 244.
[40] Ibid., p. 286.

Baptists in America were similarly 'church-centered'.[41] Robert Handy describes the relationship between obedient believers and churches in the early American Baptist mindset like this:

> The church was free of external human control, but free only to follow Christ. The whole life of the church was to be conducted in response to divine command and under divine guidance according to Scripture. With such a firm conviction, these Baptists were bound to take their churchmanship with deep seriousness.[42]

Seeking the Mind of Christ

We have seen that the theme of seeking the mind of Christ by the reading of Scripture in covenant community is a consistent theme among Baptists in the first one hundred and fifty years. However, during the modern period the goal for many was to uncover objective evidence of the empirical reality that could be rationally assessed in methodologically consistent ways, such that any rational person would come to the same conclusion about the truth. The naïve assumption is that the traditions we are formed in can be set aside and we can assume an objective, balcony-level perspective.

For Gadamer, since we cannot be fully objective, to pretend to be so and ignore our prejudices inhibits our ability to come to better understanding.

> The overcoming of all prejudices, this global demand of the Enlightenment, will itself prove to be a prejudice, and removing it opens the way to an appropriate understanding of the finitude which dominates not only our humanity but also our historical consciousness.[43]

Baptists have wrestled mightily with this Enlightenment temptation. The Restoration Movement of the nineteenth-century American frontier could be said to have largely grown out of the Baptist tradition, as an attempt to find unity through jettisoning tradition and relying on reason as a common ground for finding a universal consensus on Scripture's meaning. However, this movement for unity based on objective reasoning not only led to division with Baptists, but the Restoration Movement itself fractured into at least three separate movements over the next century.

As I discussed earlier, Gadamer believes our tradition is indispensable in how we interpret the world around us. This includes the authority of persons:

> Admittedly, it is primarily persons that have authority; but the authority of a person is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason but on an act of acknowledgment and knowledge – the knowledge, namely, that the other

[41] Robert T. Handy, *'The Philadelphia Tradition', Baptist Concepts of the Church*, ed. by Winthrop Still Hudson (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1959), p. 35.
[42] Ibid., p. 37.
[43] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 288.

> is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence – i.e., it has priority over one's own. This is connected to the fact that authority cannot actually be bestowed but is earned, and must be earned if someone is to lay claim to it. It rests on acknowledgment and hence on an act of reason itself which, aware of its own limitations, trusts to the better insight of others.[44]

So, to accept another person as authoritative is entirely reasonable, if that person is understood to have knowledge or an understanding of knowledge greater than our own. Baptists have always claimed that the truth itself is a person. This is not a static set of facts but a person that can be known and interacted with, whose perspective is the fullness of reality.

The claim here is that Jesus Christ is not just a historical figure whose teachings are preserved in texts and traditions, but that the resurrected Jesus Christ is immanently present as a person. This is a difference between mere observation of a subject and interaction and dialogue with a subject open to self-disclosure. As a matter of fact, we have to invert Gadamer's concept of authority when we speak of Christ. It is not that Christ is the authority because of his familiarity with the tradition, but that the tradition is authoritative because of its familiarity with the person of Christ.

Faithfulness in the Baptist tradition is not primarily about certain theological propositions, but about a yielding to the lordship, or authority, of the person of Christ. So, all theological inquiry in the Baptist tradition has to be, from the beginning, about application to faithful living. We seek to understand the mind of Christ. In Gadamer's terms, we seek to merge our horizon with the horizon of Christ. This re-orients our methodology. Swinton writes, 'Indeed, it may be that the honest methodological position from which Christians should begin their ethnographic practice is not neutrality but prayer.'[45] This is the only reasonable way to proceed if one has the conviction that the creator of heaven and earth is immanently present as a personal force. To seek and trust the authority of the mind of Christ 'is an act of freedom because he has a wider view of things or is better informed'.[46] Whereas Gadamer's epistemology reintroduces the authority of a person who 'knows more',[47] trust in Christ is even firmer as he has not merely a greater quantity of knowledge, but knowledge of a quality that is intrinsically superior – the knowledge of one through whom 'all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made'.[48]

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[44] Ibid., p. 291.
[45] Swinton, 'Where Is Your Church?' p. 84.
[46] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 292.
[47] Ibid.
[48] John 3.1 (NIV).

Scripture and the Body of Christ

In the Scriptures we have the record of God's fullest self-revelation. The Scriptures are authoritative because they are written by a community inspired by God, but inspiration is not how we first come to believe in their authority. We, in fact, believe that the Bible is authoritative because we are members of a community that sees the Bible as authoritative. Often inspiration, and thus authority, is argued using Scripture itself. However, this line of reasoning is circular. We do not come to believe the faith of the Bible through first accepting its authority. Rather, the Holy Spirit leads us to experience Christ. In Christ we find meaningful community and see our lives and our redemption as part of the greater story of the Gospel. We begin to better understand our experience with Christ as the Holy Spirit works though the Scriptures. We can believe the Bible because we believe in Christ and the Bible is the work of his Spirit in his body. It is through this Spirit working in this body that the message of the Bible has been protected and transmitted by and for the community. So, the authority is grounded in and contingent upon a community in relation with Christ.

The church is called to wrestle with the Scriptures to discern the truth of the Gospel in them. To seek the truth in the Scriptures is more than just asking what the text 'means'. Seeking the truth in the Scriptures is being open to not just what the ancient author intended, but also being attentive to how the Spirit has used and is using the text to reveal the mind of Christ to the church.

In the Scriptures the community expects to meet the living person of Jesus. Stuart Blythe warns us to expect more than a static historical record: 'To discern the mind of Christ, therefore, is certainly not less but is more than trying to understand together "the inescapable authority of Scripture". It is to bring oneself with others into engagement with the living Jesus Christ.'[49] The living Lord is revealed in the Scriptures and the wider tradition, but since he is beyond the Scripture and traditions, he also challenges them. 'More generally speaking, to seek the mind of the risen Lord exposes all of our traditions, interpretations, and institutions to the guidance and judgment of Jesus Christ.'[50]

Gadamer's discussion of historical consciousness is helpful in understanding how a community reading the same Scripture texts across time and under the lordship of Jesus can come to evolving and seemingly contradictory interpretations.

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[49] Stuart Blythe, 'Your Will Be Always Done', in *Gathering Disciples: Essays in Honour of Christopher J. Ellis*, ed. by Myra Blyth and Andrew J. Goodliff (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017), p. 80.
[50] Blythe, 'Your Will Be Always Done', p. 82.

> We accept the fact that the subject presents different aspects of itself at different times or from different standpoints. We accept the fact that these aspects do not simply cancel one another out as research proceeds, but are like mutually exclusive conditions that exist by themselves and combine only in us. Our historical consciousness is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard. Only in the multifariousness of such voices does it exist: this constitutes the nature of the tradition in which we want to share and have a part.[51]

For the congregation to discern the mind of Christ in light of tradition is to hear voices of the past that may seem mutually exclusive, but that demonstrate how Christ's presence was uniquely perceived in the contexts that God's people found themselves in at a particular place and time.

As I have pointed out, hermeneutics is always about application and in Baptist tradition discernment is seeking the mind of Christ to know how to be faithful. In Gadamer's model of co-determination we do not read the text, understand fully the mind of Christ, and then act as a community. Rather, our understanding of the text, the mind of Christ in and beyond the text, and what action is required are co-determined. For Gadamer, fuller understanding is uncovered as we apply our understanding. Browning tries to get at this with his practice-theory-practice model of practical theology. However, I believe what Gadamer suggests is less clearly cyclical and more co-mingled than Browning implies.[52]

Our existing knowledge and perspective shapes our pursuit of new knowledge in that our fore-understandings shape what questions we even think to ask in our research. Browning applies this to reading Scripture, especially in the Western world. The Scriptures have influenced our culture, our culture influences our fore-understandings, and our fore-understandings influence questions we think to ask when interpreting the Scriptures.[53] Frequently we do not think to question our interpretation of Scripture until there is a breakdown in interpretation.

When people with different horizons and pre-understandings come into dialogue, there can be breakdowns and incongruities in understanding. If knowing the mind of Christ is the goal in congregational discernment, then this dialogue is not aimed at simply fusing horizons with one another, but at the mutual fusion of our horizons with Christ's horizon. The practice of congregational dialogue for discernment is a character-forming spiritual discipline. Blythe writes, 'the practice of congregational discernment should be both expressive and formative of discipleship'.[54] Our character and our discernment share in this co-determination relationship that is so central to

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[51] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 296.
[52] Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 39.
[53] Ibid., p. 41.
[54] Blythe, 'Your Will Be Always Done', p. 86.

Gadamer's approach to understanding through the unfolding of lived experience. There must be a mutual humility among congregants, recognising that no one person's word is the last word and that we may be wrong. In this humility we recognise the distance between the mind of Christ and ourselves.

For those seeking the mind of Christ there are times when what we discern to be the horizon of Christ comes into conflict with our received understanding of Scripture. Out of this incongruence comes dialogue to reach understanding. The community has to decide how to renegotiate its understanding of Scripture, the practices of the community, the mind of Christ, or all of the above. Often incongruence is sensed in the form of personal sin again the community or in the community's corporate sin. The world's largest denomination of Baptists was formed to protect the institution of slavery and for many years interpreted Scripture to do so. It has taken many decades, but Southern Baptists have come to see that their interpretation of Scripture and community practice could not be fused with the horizon of the mind of Christ. Browning describes the hermeneutical process: 'When these practices become problematic, we try to orient ourselves by reexamining the classic sources that have shaped our present practices.'[55] Browning rightly observes:

> A hermeneutical dialogue with classic texts is not just a solitary conversation between one interpreter and his or her texts. In the situation of a congregation, it should be a community effort involving several people and their respective horizons in a dialogue with the classic text.[56]

However, the work of the congregation is not merely a case of communal reading. Again Webster reminds us that 'ecclesiology cannot be only a matter of historical sociology or practical reasoning: to make it such is to neglect the principle that all creaturely being is grounded in God'.[57] The church has its origin in God.

Browning offers key insights as to how Gadamer's hermeneutics work in a congregation. However, he leaves a congregation as simply a community of people and does not incorporate an understanding of the congregation to be the body of Christ. As we have seen, for Baptists baptism joins the believer to Christ and to Christ's body on earth and is a sign of the vertical and horizontal covenants. As such there is the belief that, by the Holy Spirit, Jesus is present and active in and through the gathered Christian community. This makes possible the communal discernment of not merely 'the "mind of

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[55] Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 39.
[56] Ibid., p. 50.
[57] Webster, 'In the Society of God', p. 202.

the group" but indeed of the "mind" of Jesus Christ himself'.[58]

Conclusion

Understanding the congregation as the body of Christ also has implications for applying Gadamer's thoughts on historical consciousness. As the body of the resurrected Christ, the congregation is an eschatological community.[59] The church must wrestle not only with voices of the past, but with projection of a future that is believed to be already assured. As an eschatological community, the church believes that history has a direction and purpose that will be fulfilled. The horizon of Jesus as Lord includes the hope that the Jesus who was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven will come again to judge the living and the dead. This Jesus will fully consummate his reign of peace and justice. If this is a central theological conviction of a congregation, surely it should have a profound impact on how decisions are made, what risks are taken, and what is valued in the long term.

With theologians still struggling to work out a methodology for practical theology in dialogue with the social sciences that is sufficiently sensitive to lived experience, but appropriately theological, we should be careful to not bypass epistemology. With Gadamer preserving a reasonable place for informed persons to have earned authority, the door is opened for those with the conviction that Jesus Christ is living and active in the world to seek the mind of Christ as not only a legitimate source, but as the most authoritative source for knowing and applying knowledge. The Baptist tradition bears witness to this way of knowing as discernment and to sharing in covenant community as the Body of Christ and reading Scriptures in the community of the Body of Christ as chief ways of knowing together the mind of Christ. Gadamer's understandings of historical consciousness and disruptive power of incongruence in understanding, leading to dialogue for a fusion of horizons, can help us to make sense of how these Baptist convictions can fit into a robust and relevant philosophical framework for how we understand and act in the world around us.

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[58] Stuart Blythe, 'Overcoming Incompetence', *Politurgy* (blog), 24 April 2018 <https://politurgy.wordpress.com/2018/04/24/overcoming-incompetence/> [accessed 15 November 2018]
[59] Blythe, 'Your Will Be Always Done', p. 85.

Christ-Centred Concreteness: The Christian Activism of Harriet Tubman, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Martin Luther King Jr[1]

Reggie L. Williams

Harriet Tubman, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Martin Luther King Jr were Christian leaders whose lives insisted on faithfulness that led them against the laws of their time. They were advocates of social justice and human rights who resisted the temptation towards a secularising, two-realms split that makes Christianity a private life religion; they defied contemporary norms, and they faced opposition to their work from their fellow Christians. Yet, today we see that they were right, and their contemporaries were wrong. We may learn from their prophetic witness for Christian faithfulness in our contexts, by paying attention to their respective interpretations of the way of Jesus.

Keywords

Harlem Renaissance; Harriet Tubman; Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Martin Luther King Jr; agape; justice

The Inherent Virtue of White Christian Men

I once attended a large two-day evangelical men's conference in Oakland, California with a group of friends. One particular conference speaker left a strong impression on the gathering as he described the correlation between Christian men and virtue. "Imagine walking through a dimly-lit alley late at night," he said, "only to encounter a group of guys approaching at a distance." He continued, "Would it make a difference to you if you knew that they were coming from a bar, or from a Bible study?" The answer was supposed to be obvious: "Of course it would make a difference!" he said. "You'd want them to be coming from a Bible Study!" Because, according to the speaker, Christian men don't harm; they are inherently people of virtuous character.

The speaker framed a picture of Christian men in the world that was a one-sided account of Christian men. As such, it was a bias-driven self-assurance. He made no provision for those who would not feel comfortable

[1] This material was first presented as the keynote McClendon lecture at the Baptist House, Amsterdam on 19 November 2018.

with Christian men approaching them in the alley. We need not look far, especially historically, to find people who would indeed be terrified.

The antebellum South of the USA is one of those places where black people would not want to see white Christian men approaching. White Christians argued that a slave society was a God-ordained system, and because of it, everyone flourished within their natural, God-given capacity.[2] Enslaved black people, and any abolitionist within reach of what became the Confederacy, who argued that the gospel contradicted the grand claims of the slave society, exposed themselves to the very real possibility of a violent death.

Years later, the children of slave-owners maintained white space as holy space. Accordingly, Jim Crow racial segregation was as moral as it was legal. The refrain, "No-blacks-allowed", was echoed by its European progeny in 1935 when the Nazis enacted the Nuremberg laws in Hitler's Germany to legislate a *Herrenrasse* (master race) nation, and to render sacred their anti-Semitism. The Nuremberg laws were made possible by German Christian support for a strong moral leader to make Germany great again. What comfort would antebellum black people, Jim Crow era black people, or Jews in Nazi Germany find in that alley as white Christian men approached? The passing of time is not sufficient to correct the blatant errors in an earlier Christian witness; we must identify a more significant mechanism for the necessary correction.

The speaker at the men's conference in Oakland gave reason to the men at that gathering for their strong in-group resolve to claim their divinely ordained leadership roles by stoking devotion to unproven, moral high ground. And, if they indeed rested upon such moral foundations, they were not only deserving of authority and leadership roles; the well-being of society depends upon them in leadership. Yet, given the history of Christian social and political impact, claims of intrinsic Christian morality should arrest all who hear that assertion. How does the speaker validate his claim about the connection between Christian identity and virtuous character in the laboratory of world history? Who is this 'we' he was referring to, who would obviously feel safe as Christian men approached?

The Three Witnesses

Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King Jr, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer were Christian leaders who belied the rhetoric of intrinsic Christian virtue. Within

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[2] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, 'The Divine Sanction of the Social Order: Religious Foundations of the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Volume LV, Issue 2 (1 July 1987), 211–234.

their contexts, the three leaders modelled a faith that resisted injustice. Their hermeneutic of the way of Jesus was tethered to concepts of love, freedom, justice, and community, yet they faced violent opposition from sources that identified chiefly as Christian. Harriet Tubman's opponents comprised an entire nation, its government replete with legal and political systems that were reinforced by a Christian imagination that defined humanity according to hegemonic norms, for whites only. Accordingly, whites alone were gifted with God's image, and black people were to serve them. Harriet Tubman defied that slave world as a fugitive and outlaw Christian leader. She became the best-known conductor of the infamous Underground Railroad.

Bonhoeffer's opponents comprised members of the German Christians' Movement, who sought to apply the Führer Principle within a unified Protestant church, making Adolf Hitler the leader of the nation's Protestant church as well as the Reich Chancellor.[3] They saw no inconsistency between the Nazi social and political goals and the claims of the gospel. But Bonhoeffer did. Service to Christ meant being and doing something very different from what was popular in the context of that totalitarian government.

In the United States, Martin Luther King Jr was the most recognised spokesperson for the civil rights movement that promoted non-cooperation with the political, economic, and social structures organised and maintained by Jim Crow. As with Tubman and Bonhoeffer before him, King was propelled by Christian devotion as he led many others in the country in non-violent defiance of legal, even theological obstacles. The resistance that Tubman, Bonhoeffer, and King met from Christians illustrates that the mere label 'Christian' does not indicate that one is, or could ever be, virtuous, or concerned about the well-being of others. What matters is our understanding of what it means to follow the way of Jesus.

The Argument

This essay will look at Harriet Tubman, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Martin Luther King Jr to inquire of them what inspired their Christian witness, in order to mine their witness for content to guide our Christian leadership today. All three of them interpreted the gospel to advocate behaviour that was illegal in their context, which made their Christianity antithetical to what was commonly understood as decent Christian living. They represent different hermeneutics of the work of God in the way of Jesus. Christian hermeneutics are regularly in service to economic and biological goals, but

[3] See Reggie L. Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance Theology and an Ethic of Resistance* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

the Christianity I am examining here employed a hermeneutic that opposed ideological hegemonies that typically support harmful politics. Their Christian hermeneutic was inspired opposition to the biological anthropology that gave ideological support to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The prophetic Christian witness of Tubman was present within the Christian tradition that Bonhoeffer met in New York as a student at Union Seminary and lay leader at Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church. Martin Luther King Jr was formed within that prophetic black tradition as a black Baptist preacher, raised in a family tradition of black Baptist ministers. Their Christian witness is first shaped, and later influenced, by an interpretation of God with us in the struggle, working to remove obstacles that prevent our ability to be together in community.

Delivering Love as Liberation

The concept of community is a basic conviction that is shared between the three leaders. Enslaved Christians embraced a hermeneutic of Christ with and among them in the day-to-day, not authorising the hierarchy and abuse of a slave-owning Christian world but sharing in their suffering at the hands of the state. In the hidden 'hush harbors', enslaved Christians gathered for worship without whites present. Such worship was illegal, following Nat Turner's uprising in 1831. Yet in the 'hush harbors' they risked life and limb to celebrate an outlaw Christianity, one that saw the image of the divine in the community bought and sold by whites, and daily encounter was the site for discerning Christian faithfulness, rather than concepts of doctrinal or biblical purity. Accordingly, receiving one another with love and liberation from bondage were divine as well as human goals.

The theme of encounter is later seen with Bonhoeffer and King during their most active years of protest. Like Tubman, Bonhoeffer and King demonstrate an interpretation of the way of Jesus seen in the connection between love and justice that interprets *agape* as 'delivering love'.[4] Tubman, Bonhoeffer, and King acted on the meaning of delivering love in their context, to resist injustice and encourage freedom and justice for social transformation. Tubman's role as a conductor on the Underground Railroad was not to secure social transformation; it was a pursuit of freedom. With Bonhoeffer and King, the way of social transformation comes through engagement with agape. Bonhoeffer described Jesus with historical concreteness as 'vicarious representation', or *Stellvertretung*, while King

[4] Glen Harold Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 333ff.

interpreted Jesus as the one who embodied 'love correcting what would work against love'.[5]

A Singular Problem

The problem that the three faced was informed by ideological developments from the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It was then that the claims of a sovereign figure as representation of human beings was stabilised. This sovereign, the European white man, named and organised all of human life as it corresponded aesthetically to himself. He became the template for humankind. Theology, as shaped within the community of European empires, gave sacred licence to his ideological development. It was the foundational Christian imagination that animated the newly emerging western world. That is the situation within which we find the antithetical Christianity of Harriet Tubman and the enslaved of the United States.

The European sovereign was the fantasy of a self-possessed, autonomous, masculine that aided in the division of the world into what we know today as the global south, east, the middle east and the west. His model of social engagement was consumption, in a practice of defining himself with the knowledge content he crafted of others, as he explained the world and his place in it. During the trans-Atlantic slave trade, he seized, marked, and claimed epistemological ownership of African bodies as he worked to stabilise himself as the ideal and the template for all of humanity. His conceptual rendering of human beings measured all of life in aesthetic proximity to himself. To quote Du Bois, he views himself in 'ownership of the Earth forever and ever, Amen!'[6] And by his word he speaks into being all others in relationship to himself. This was the central problem faced by all three figures. It developed into three overtly racist regimes in the twentieth century in the Jim Crow South, Nazi Germany, and Apartheid South Africa, but it emerged during slavery.

Harriet Tubman deployed an epistemological intervention through a hermeneutic of God with us. She knew the fugitive Christianity of the 'hush harbors', which was a departure from white Christian worship, and eventually emboldened her to depart physically from the place of her enslavement. She was nearly thirty years old when she first navigated dangerous unknown terrain, and violent slave patrols that had legal authority

[5] James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 62.
[6] See W.E.B. Du Bois, 'The Souls of White Folks', in *Darkwater: Voices From Within the Veil* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1999), pp. 17-30.

to kill her on sight, as she made her way towards freedom in the North. Freedom was new terrain. But she became familiar with it, and the dangerous route to see it, on the Underground Railroad. Freedom was not a possession to be held but a way of existing in relationship to others. It was for the well-being of community. Tubman enacted freedom as pursuit of liberation for the people of God in bondage to white slavers in the antebellum South. She made more than a dozen long, dangerous treks back into the land of captivity to travel the Underground Railroad. As a conductor on the Underground Railroad, she plundered a southern economy that relied on the stolen humanity of her passengers. As she saw it, freedom is something for which we are all made. To say otherwise is to slander God's very image, which was given to all human beings. In her life, she was also a spy for the Union during the Civil War, a nurse for the military, in addition to founding a home for the formerly enslaved as they transitioned to freedom. Harriet Tubman passed away in 1913 as the most celebrated conductor of the Underground Railroad.

Some Shared Understandings

The tradition that shaped Harriet Tubman had an effect on our other two figures. Bonhoeffer did not have direct impact on King, but the two theologians shared lots in common. Both argued that the Christian faith is lived faithfully only as engagement with the world. They sought to live the story and meaning of Jesus concretely in the world, in contrast to versions of the faith that reduced the social demands of the gospel that call us to act in favour of what Bonhoeffer called the *sanctorum communio,* communion of saints, and what King described as the beloved community.[7]

The two men dealt with legalised cruelty against socially marginalised people, and Christian apathy towards it. Both were influenced by a black Baptist tradition; King was raised in a family lineage of black Baptist pastors,[8] and during his year of study in America, Bonhoeffer was a lay leader at Abyssinian Baptist church in Harlem, New York. Bonhoeffer was an active participant in the ministry of Abyssinian, while he was a Sloane Fellow in 1930-31.[9]

It was during his time as a Sloane Fellow in New York that Bonhoeffer was exposed to the Harlem Renaissance literary movement, with its critical interrogation of the lethal combination of race and religion. The literary

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[7] See M. Shawn Copeland, 'Bonhoeffer, King, and Themes in Catholic Social Thought', in Willis Jenkins and Jennifer M. McBride, *Bonhoeffer and King: Their Legacies and Import for Christian Social Thought* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), p. 83.

[8] Rufus Burrow and Lewis V. Baldwin, *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p. 78.

[9] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, rev. edn (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), pp. 150ff. See Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*.

movement was ongoing during Bonhoeffer's Sloane Fellowship year and, at Union, Bonhoeffer formally processed the Renaissance movement's analysis of race oppression, politics, and religion in class with Reinhold Niebuhr. That Harlem-world engagement also piqued his abiding interest in Mohandas Gandhi's work in India and helped to inspire Bonhoeffer's sympathy for a justice-oriented, non-violent interpretation of the Way of Jesus.[10]

With the exception of the time period, much of the same things can be said about King. He too was influenced by Dr Reinhold Niebuhr, held Gandhi in high regard, and was an advocate of non-violence.[11] Both Bonhoeffer and King were sympathetic towards Walter Rauschenbusch's interpretation of the social gospel.[12] Both were aware of individual sinfulness, yet they placed a primacy on collective, social responsibility in a mutual insistence on the importance of community. For King, the means we employ to resist injustice must be the same that will guide our social relations once the injustice is removed. Christ provided the means; love, mutual concern, and peacemaking are what he understood as the means and the goals of the beloved community.[13] Christianity was for Bonhoeffer, community, in and through Jesus; Christ is foundation and mediator. Their insistence on the concrete social expression of love for others was the direct result of their faith. Conversely, freedom from others was the definition of sin, as it turned the heart inward on itself.[14] Publicly, sin is the abandonment of social concerns, and apathy towards the neighbour in need. Their emphasis on a public, active faith in Christ as love-in-action on behalf of the oppressed was, for both of them, a cause for which they gave their lives. Both were killed in April of their thirty-ninth year of life.

Some Differences

Bonhoeffer and King also varied from one another. Bonhoeffer did not have much support as he opposed the Nazis. Most Christians in Germany

[10] See Jenkins and McBride, *Bonhoeffer and King*, pp. 81-82.
[11] Bonhoeffer's friend, Al Fisher, is a direct link between the two men. See Charles Marsh, 'Bonhoeffer on the Road to King: Turning from the Phraseological to the Real', in Willis Jenkins and Jennifer M. McBride, *Bonhoeffer and King: Their Legacies and Import for Christian Social Thought* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), pp. 123-138.
[12] Bonhoeffer was also very critical of the Social Gospel. I am referring to Bonhoeffer's claim that '*The Prayer for the Social Gospel*, by W. Rauschenbusch, is one of the most passionate and beautiful witnesses of this thinking.' See Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English (DBWE), Vol. 10: 318.
[13] See Martin Luther King Jr, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press), pp. 67ff., pp. 89ff. See Martin Luther King Jr, *Strength To Love* (Cleveland, OH: Fortress Press, 1981), pp. 39-48.
[14] Bonhoeffer described sin in the Lutheran tradition of 'the heart turned in on itself'. Freedom from others is the inability to be for others. See Clifford Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 122.

supported Hitler's regime, which helped to propel his Nazi movement to the juggernaut of power that it became. Unlike King, Bonhoeffer struggled for recognisable theological ground to stand on within his German Lutheran tradition, to help inspire German Christians to confront social and political evil.

Bonhoeffer's tools for resistance were foreign imports. His early mentors were men who had 'incorporated the history of the state into their theology to such an extent that they could virtually equate the foreign policy of the Reich with the kingdom of God on earth'.[15] Like many other influential German theologians, Bonhoeffer's mentors blended nationalism and religion in a way that 'elevated Luther's version of the two kingdoms to dogmatic status'.[16]

The combination of Luther's notion of the two kingdoms and German nationalism nurtured a mutually reinforcing sympathy for a Prussian-German Empire and its imperialistic destiny in the world.[17] And, although a barrier was theoretically in place between church and government, the reality was a sanctified social Darwinism in which national and economic struggle occurred in accordance with God's 'orders of creation'.[18]

Bonhoeffer had to confront and modify these harmful elements within his own theology, and that of his fellow Christians in Germany. In addition, the anti-Semitism that was popular within Bonhoeffer's context limited his use of the Old Testament. When he made use of the Old Testament as a professor at the University of Berlin, Bonhoeffer was careful to address the corrupt notion of *orders* derived from the Old Testament that argued in favour of Aryan superiority.[19] He made use of the Old Testament to argue his Christology, and not for the rich witness to justice in the prophets. King did not suffer from these disadvantages.

King had full use of the Bible, and a black Baptist church tradition that linked the message of love in the New Testament with the words of the Old Testament prophet Amos: 'Let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.'[20]

But the influence that Bonhoeffer and King placed on the Sermon on the Mount helped both of them to see love and justice as core to the way of

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[15] John W. De Gruchy, *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 18-19.
[16] Ibid., p. 19.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Glen Harold Stassen, 'Healing the Rift between the Sermon on the Mount and Christian Ethics', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 18, no. 3 (2016), 89-105 (p. 90).
[19] J. Deotis Roberts, *Bonhoeffer and King: Speaking Truth to Power* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p. 126.
[20] Amos 5.24 quoted in Roberts, *Bonhoeffer and King*, p. 127.

Jesus. King's advocacy for social justice drew directly from it, connecting what he admired of Gandhi with the 'love ethic' he saw in the Sermon, to provide guidance to confront evil in society.[21] Bonhoeffer's perception of Hitler's evil and opposition to him was indebted to the Sermon, but his interpretation of it did not provide him with the same tools to confront the injustice and social evil of his time.

We may again attribute this disparity to their different contexts. Given his context, the question: Who is Christ actually for us today? for King was a quest for Christ-centred guidance as a black man, within the tradition of Christianity inherited from 'hush harbors', living in a violently racist, segregated society. Bonhoeffer travelled a similar route of discovery for guidance in the context of a warmongering, racist, and homicidal government, but his understanding of Jesus' relevance in pursuit of justice outside of the church came much later than it did for King.

Delivering Love

Stassen argues that Jesus' love ethic is the hermeneutical key to his social commands. Stassen claims that agape is often defined as sacrificial love, which sees the normative way of Jesus as sacrifice for the sake of sacrifice.[22] By contrast, Stassen advocates an interpretation of agape as delivering love, which is a theme that echoes the Christian concept of liberation embraced in the 'hush harbors'. He describes the work of God in Christ as the norm for Christian love occurring as the drama of deliverance in four parts.[23] Delivering love sees with compassion and enters into the situation of the outcast and oppressed; it does deeds of deliverance on behalf of the other; it invites the other into community with freedom, justice, and responsibility for the future, and it confronts those who exclude.[24] Thus, the drama behind the word love is not sacrifice without expectation; love is behaviour that is done for the well-being of others.

Different Contexts for Ministry

The civil rights protests led by King, the Montgomery Improvement Association, and the Southern Christian Leadership Council, had liberation as their goal. King echoes the argument for a Christian praxis of delivering love, in the face of Southern racist hate, by claiming that agape love is

[21] Martin Luther King and Clayborne Carson, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr* (New York: Intellectual Properties Management in association with Warner Books, 1998), p. 23.
[22] Anders Nygren's book *Agape and Eros* has been very influential in promoting this definition of agape. See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953).
[23] Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, p. 333.
[24] Ibid., pp. 333-339.

> Christian love, it is…the love of God operating in the human heart…The greatness of it is that you love every man, not for your sake but for his sake…you love every man because God loves him…and so it becomes all inclusive.[25]

Delivering love empowers freedom for others.

The context of the civil rights movement was different from Bonhoeffer's in Nazi Germany. But their resistance placed them in similar struggles. King learned and appropriated Jesus' way of approximating delivering love in his Christ-centred resistance. His interpretation of the Sermon resembles what Stassen calls 'transforming initiatives'.[26]

Transforming Initiatives: King to Bonhoeffer

In *Discipleship,* Bonhoeffer argues that the Sermon on the Mount represents concrete commandments that Jesus expects followers to observe.[27] He argues that the Sermon is for guidance in daily life, not high ideals that demonstrate the impossibility of pleasing God, which leads to 'cheap grace'. Cheap grace is grace as presupposition that we may do as we please, rather than follow Christ. Stassen agrees with Bonhoeffer about the errors of cheap grace, but he adds a correction to the way that Bonhoeffer interprets the Sermon. For Bonhoeffer, the Sermon teaches 'dyadic antitheses' of renunciation. He read the Sermon to highlight negative behaviour that we are to avoid. Instead, Stassen argues that the Sermon consists of fourteen teachings that are triadic in their structure, highlighting transforming initiatives that we are to do. 'You have heard it said' is a recognition of *traditional righteousness*, which is typically followed by a *diagnosis of a vicious cycle* with the words 'but I say'. The vicious cycle refers to attitudes and behaviours that we indulge in and that do harm. In light of the prophetic witness of Tubman, Bonhoeffer, and King, the vicious cycles that they addressed were characterised by dominating systems and structures that conditioned privileged subjects to treat social others as objects and pollutants rather than as people with whom to relate as fellow humans. The third moment addresses the vicious cycle. It is the commandment that we are to follow, the *transforming initiative* of confrontation that typically begins with 'therefore', and commonly addresses power differentials.[28] For example:

> Consider [Matthew] 5.38ff., on the traditional teaching of eye for an eye; the vicious cycle of resisting revengefully, and the transforming initiatives of the cheek, the cloak, the second mile, and the gift to the beggar. The emphasis there is not on renouncing revengeful resistance, but on taking transforming initiatives

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[25] Martin Luther King, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr Volume VI: Advocate of the Social Gospel, September 1948-March 1963* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 437ff.

[26] Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, pp. 132ff.

[27] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship.* DBWE Vol. 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

[28] Stassen, 'Healing the Rift', p. 97.

> toward the enemy. It is not on allowing the enemy to hit me again, but seizing the initiative and turning the cheek of nonviolent equal dignity. The emphasis is not on complying with the demand to carry the Roman soldier's pack one mile, but on going a second mile on my own initiative, and surely talking and seeking peace and justice on the way. It is not on giving up the demanded coat, but taking the initiative of giving the shirt too, thus stripping naked and nonviolently confronting the unjust, rapacious greed.[29]

Because Bonhoeffer's dyadic antithesis stopped short of seeing a diagnosis of vicious cycles, Bonhoeffer failed to recognise the efficacy of the Sermon to provide concrete guidance; he surrendered vital Christ-centred norms when they may have been most helpful. But that was not the case for King.

Bonhoeffer to King

King's interpretation of the Sermon's love ethic approximated delivering love practised with concrete guidance, but he could have benefitted from Bonhoeffer's incarnational emphasis on Jesus' 'vicarious, empathic representation', or *Stellvertretung*. Bonhoeffer interpreted the incarnation as a moment that changed reality. Christ took 'the world up into himself … [thus] establish[ing] an ontological coherence'[30] of God's reality with the reality of the world and the reunion of God with the world. The reunion between God and creation was accomplished in Christ, and Christ became the new reality for all of humanity in a concrete sense. Thus, to behave responsibly is to act in correspondence with what is now a Christo-morphic reality resulting from the incarnation. Christ is now the way to see, and to experience the world and all of our relationships. Responsible action is 'the entire response, in accord with reality, to the claim of God and my neighbor' as demonstrated by the reunion of God and creation in the incarnation. [31] *Stellvertretung*, translated as 'vicarious representative', fits Bonhoeffer's emphasis on Christ's incarnational entering into our reality and acting in solidarity with us, thus representing the Christian's responsibility as a disciple. *Stellvertretung* is who Christ is and what Christ does, as empowered by delivering love. Jesus' vicarious representative action frees disciples' hearts for others, and 'restores communion'.[32] As followers of Christ, disciples recognise Christ as mediator; we encounter our neighbour in and through Christ. Unmediated interaction is the rejection of Christ and freedom from others in captivity to the *cor curvum in se,* the heart turned inward on itself. In that state we are unable to love, only able to consume the other in

[29] Ibid., p. 99.
[30] See quotation from Eberhard Bethge in Larry L. Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p. 16.
[31] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics.* DBWE Vol.6: 280.
[32] Rasmussen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, p. 38.

an act of self-reflection. Christianity that sees freedom as a personal possession rather than a social condition is vulnerable to seeing others as objects to use for self-revelation rather than people to whom we owe responsible action. It is poised to weaponise the faith against society's most vulnerable. For Bonhoeffer, *Stellvertretung* describes the incarnational emphasis on Christian community; when I encounter another person, I face a decision for or against Christ whom I can only know in our life together.

King and Christ

King's Christology also emphasised the social implications of discipleship. But in doing so, he emphasised Jesus' humanity more than his divinity. Many scholars attribute this to the positive influence of Howard Thurman on his Christology. Thurman claimed that Jesus was among those whose backs have historically been pressed to the wall by politically oppressive regimes.[33] Like Bonhoeffer, King emphasised knowing Jesus by his work, yet they both placed an emphasis on Jesus' suffering, which left them vulnerable to problems related to Christian praxis. Bonhoeffer's hermeneutic of renunciation in *Discipleship*, coupled with his emphasis on the suffering of Jesus, was an inadequate guide for action in the face of Nazi domination. King advocated non-violent resistance to social evil, emphasising the value of redemptive suffering.[34] Yet, we may ask: 'Which suffering is redemptive?'[35] Is it the torment of slaves and Holocaust victims or the suffering of pacifist activists in the practice of non-violent direct action? Was it the anguish of protestors who chose to suffer at the hands of the police, or that of oppressed people who had no choice? What is the role of agency in redemptive suffering? King's advocacy of redemptive suffering was problematic to many black people who had no agency in a violent white racist society, and therefore no choice in suffering. This is where he could have learned from Bonhoeffer.

When compared to Bonhoeffer, King's emphasis on redemptive suffering becomes a principle to guide Christian discipleship, which moves us away from the concreteness that Bonhoeffer emphasises. In his essay, 'After Ten Years', Bonhoeffer argues that principles are not enough, in trying times, to provide guidance for followers of Christ. Adherence to principles can provide a false sense of obedience by securing our fidelity before we encounter the need to act that life will demand of us. Adherence to principles takes the moral life outside of the real world and makes it into

[33] Roberts, *Bonhoeffer and King*, p. 127.
[34] Martin Luther King and James Melvin Washington, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 41.
[35] Roberts, *Bonhoeffer and King*, p. 128.

something that is accomplished in the abstract, before we engage life.[36] An emphasis on redemptive suffering as a fixed principle of non-violent direct action may be interpreted in this manner, as an abstraction that justifies the Christian prior to action. Redemptive suffering, as a principle of engagement, becomes especially problematic when it is valued without evidence of respect for the lived reality of people who have no choice in suffering. This was the criticism levelled at King by Stokely Carmichael and Malcolm X, two black leaders who argued instead for Black Power, which gave agency to black people. King's Christian witness for non-violence took Gandhi as the model and Christ as the content, yet Black Power sought to enable black people in a brutal and unjust society that gave black people no rights beyond the right to suffer the abuse of white supremacy.

But action that corresponds with reality is practised in the concreteness of daily life in the world, respecting real needs, while seeking to know the will of God. With Bonhoeffer, we must not pursue principles; we are to say yes to Christ who is life, in the concrete, dynamic, reality of God in the world, asking: What is the will of God? And as a consequence of the question, our incarnational participation in and with Christ will include suffering; yet, we are not justified on principle, we are justified by participation with God in Christ who is our concrete reality.

Bonhoeffer and King Synthesised: An Aesthetics of Welcome

Yet both men share in the prophetic efforts to remove obstacles that prevent our ability to be together in community. The efforts that Bonhoeffer and King made towards justice put them at odds with fellow Christians and authorities in their overtly racist countries. They willingly broke laws. But they did so guided by their Christ-centred resistance of injustice. The Christian tradition that informed Martin Luther King Jr's black Baptist upbringing had roots in the 'hush harbors' that produced Harriet Tubman. It also had a significant formative effect on a young Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A black Baptist tradition helped cultivate Bonhoeffer's theology towards political resistance during his stay in New York from 1930-31.

However, there is much more to investigate within the interpretation of Christ that was guide to our three Christian leaders. If space allowed, it would help to interact with the aesthetics of the black Christian tradition that influenced them. That aesthetic indicates a foundational stimulus that moves beyond the cognitive, which is to say, their theological reasoning, to examine the lenses through which they viewed Christ. Their theology was shaped by a hermeneutic of Christ set within lenses that belied white racist Christian

[36] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics.* DBWE Vol. 8:37ff.

hermeneutics as devoted to a white Jesus who gave religious endorsement to social and political evil. King's black church tradition revealed that the Christ of white racist Christians was the product of harmful ideology, and manufactured by a racialised aesthetic, as the physical representation of the Enlightenment's ideal human. It is finally in the category of theological aesthetics that we acknowledge visible obstacles to community. Slave-owning Christianity was justified theologically by a white aesthetic that rendered Christ as its progenitor. But the 'hush harbors' saw Christ present in and with black people, which shaped an aesthetic that brought value to the body in the form of an ocular counter to white supremacy, and to the visual impediment to community.

We can hear this aesthetic with King. A year before his death, King delivered a speech several times in different settings, in which he addressed a black aesthetic as valuing black bodies:

> Now this is all I'm saying this morning that we must feel that we count. That we belong. That we are persons. That we are children of the living God. And it means that we go down in our soul and find that somebodiness and we must never again be ashamed of ourselves. We must never be ashamed of our heritage. We must not be ashamed of the color of our skin. Black is as beautiful as any color and we must believe it. And so every black person in this country must rise up and say I'm somebody; I have a rich proud and noble history, however painful and exploited it has been. I am black, but I am black and beautiful.[37]

King's reference to beauty addresses the body beyond what is seen. Aesthetics refers to principles and rules that we affirm visually, often without recognising their presence. Immanuel Kant linked beauty and morality by claiming that beauty is the symbol of morality, and that it is self-evident. Kant's link between beauty and morality corresponds historically with the formation of a white aesthetic that shapes the way we view and value bodies differently in a racialised society. The aesthetics of whiteness had its architects who normalised a racist anthropology as guide to group people into physical categories that also described their character and cognitive abilities as intrinsically moral and intrinsically immoral; those who are biologically predisposed toward goodness and virtue, and those who are biologically immoral and criminal; those who are a law unto themselves, and those who must have the rule of law imposed upon them; those who are natural rulers and authority figures, and those who are naturally hewers of wood and drawers of water; those who are gifted with intellectual abilities, and those who are dumb as rocks; those who are gifted with the image of the Divine and burdened with the task of saving the world, and the heathen who

[37] John Kroll, 'Martin Luther King Jr.: April 26, 1967, Cleveland Speech, Annotated'. *Cleveland.com*, Advance Local Media LLC, 13 Jan. 2013, blog.cleveland.com/pdextra/2012/01/martin_luther_king_jr_april_26.html [accessed 05 November 2018]

need the religion and culture of the holy ones in order to avoid a burning hell. This configuration speaks of something essential about types of human beings that is aesthetically identified and mapped onto our bodies as an indication of who and what we are and the boundaries of our potential. White is always already good, and black is its antithesis. Since the slave trade, the white aesthetic has seized, marked, and claimed epistemological ownership of darker bodies as it worked to stabilise white masculinity as the divine ideal, and the template for all of humanity. It was birthed as an aesthetic that depended upon the most sophisticated reasoning of its time, and it fuelled the oppressive regimes that Tubman, Bonhoeffer, and King resisted. King's assertion that black is beautiful runs counter to the claims of white aesthetics; it unsettles it as normative.

King was speaking from within the tradition that Bonhoeffer met in New York during the Harlem Renaissance, when he read W.E.B. Du Bois. At the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance in 1926, Du Bois argued that black America must begin a 'great work of the creation of Beauty, of the preservation of Beauty, of the realization of Beauty'.[38] To accomplish this effort, the black creators of beauty must use truth and goodness, 'goodness in all its aspects of justice, honor and right' in opposition to those who traffic in aesthetic lies and propaganda. Du Bois commissioned the aesthetic truth-tellers as apostles as he continued: 'The apostle of Beauty thus becomes the apostle of Truth and Right... His freedom is ever bounded by Truth and Justice; and slavery only dogs him when he is denied the right to tell the Truth or recognize Justice.'[39] With this claim that beauty is in the service of truth and justice, Du Bois commissioned black artists and intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance to go about their work of a different cultural aesthetic, one founded in reality, taking concrete human encounter with people as the point of departure to help people see real human beings instead of stereotypes, and thus to interpret healthier moral interaction. Abstract representations are what stabilise racist norms and give people a sense of being good before an encounter with real life is had, where we are called to be disciples. The white aesthetic presses lives into epistemological slavery to an idealised world. Biological markers like skin colour signal different levels of social worth and moral responsibility in that imaginary world, and the result is actual brokenness for the entire community.

Our three Christian leaders demonstrate that what is good for Christian community may cost the disciple everything. They were willing to give their lives as advocates of an interpretation of the gospel that values embodied

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[38] W.E.B. Du Bois, 'The Criteria of Negro Art', in *The Crisis Reader: Stories, Poetry, And Essays From the NAACP's Crisis Magazine,* ed. by Sondra Kathryn Wilson (New York: NY Random House Press, 1999), p. 323.
[39] Ibid.

encounter. Theirs was a faith grounded in a praxis of the Lord's supper as reception of the body of Christ as a gift, not as mere consumption. The gift of Christ's body in the Lord's supper invites us to remember the body that carries the marks of violence. With them we see how living communion as a praxis of solidarity may help us in our efforts in Christian leadership. By orienting our lives in this way, in a praxis of communion solidarity we move far beyond claims of intrinsic Christian virtue, to open ourselves to the work of removing the obstacles that prohibit our ability to really encounter one another.

Conclusion

Tubman, Bonhoeffer, and King provide us with different lenses through which to look at the way of Jesus in a way that does not conform to political expediency in troubling times. They were inspired by faith in Christ to pay attention to embodied needs of marginalised neighbours, which led them in opposition to their government. From them we learn that following Jesus requires an interpretation of holy living that includes the pursuit of liberation, and a boldness that takes us beyond ourselves, perhaps even into political and social resistance as fugitives with a fugitive faith. If we are to take their lessons to heart, we must not rely on empty claims of intrinsic Christian moral virtue; rather we must ask and be open to the answer that comes after the question: What are we to do in our present context to follow Jesus?

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Strands, Powers, and Their Shades of Grey

Nancey Murphy

Reggie Williams' reflections on the lives of three significant activist-theologians – Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King Jr, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer – serve as the starting point for a consideration of the anti-racist elements in the ethics of James Wm McClendon Jr. Both Williams and McClendon exemplify a narrative approach to Christian ethics out of recognition of the possibilities and limitations that both our embodied selfhood and our cultural heritages bring to the ethical task. Other voices incorporated here are those of Glen Stassen, John Howard Yoder, and George F. R. Ellis.

Keywords

Countercultural Christianity; James McClendon; three-stranded ethics; Reggie Williams

Introduction

I was honoured to be invited to contribute this article to *The Journal of European Baptist Studies*.[1] It gives me the opportunity to compare the thought of two theologians: Reggie Williams, a beloved graduate of my own Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, and my late husband, James Wm McClendon Jr. Although the two never met, their approaches to the question of what Christianity is (or ought to be) overlap considerably to reinforce and amplify one another's in various ways. There are similarities that can easily be detected.

First, they agree in emphasising that Christian 'belief' cannot truly be belief unless it is lived out in practical ways. That is, the words of the Bible and those of the doctrines of many churches are the same, but in order to know how to live them out one needs, in Williams' terms, a particular hermeneutic, and in McClendon's words, images and metaphors. Both insist that theology must enjoin works of community formation, forgiveness, and care of one another, and as Williams strongly insists, work for liberation of those who are burdened and oppressed.

[1] This article is revised and expanded from a presentation I gave at a conference in honour of the James Wm McClendon Chair for Baptistic and Evangelical Theologies held by Prof. Henk Bakker at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam. The conference was held in the Baptist House, Amsterdam on 19 November 2018. I was asked to respond to the presentation by Prof. Reggie Williams, but also to add references to my late husband Jim McClendon.

Another parallel is the fact that two of the exemplary lives in Williams' focus were also two of McClendon's: Martin Luther King is one of four lives examined in *Biography as Theology*;[2] Dietrich Bonhoeffer merits a chapter in the first volume of McClendon's systematic theology.[3] This use of life stories involves them in a common approach to the theological discourse of narrative theology.

Another of McClendon's theses, perhaps not so well known, was that for baptistic churches, 'apostolic succession' does not require an official handing on, as with Catholics, and not even historical continuity of the sort one could map out for mainline Protestants. Rather, if one has eyes to see, baptistic churches often spring up independently of one another in different times and places. All that is needed is to have in common the teachings of Jesus and a particular reading strategy, which Williams calls a hermeneutic, while McClendon speaks more of images and metaphors. It was one of his major goals to make the Radical Tradition more visible.

It should follow from this thesis that similar baptistic theologies should sometimes arise independently in different times and places. McClendon could never shake off his Southern Baptist roots, and therefore he was constantly concerned for Baptists in the United States who were trying to make their way to something they could believe in and live out after they had fled the fundamentalisation of the Southern Baptist Convention. So that was the primary context shaping his work. Nonetheless, he and I spent three months in Europe, largely based at the International Baptist Theological Seminary (IBTS) in Switzerland, trying to get a sense of European Baptist life by attending as many worship services as possible. So the establishment of a chair in his name at the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam, mostly by people who had never met him, would have meant to him that, despite his unavoidable local concerns, appreciation for his theology in this time and place has contributed to its validation. At the end of the preface to *Biography as Theology* he invites his future readers not only to read but 'also to enter critically ... into the investigation of which [the book is] only a part'. And, he says, 'I *hope* you will consequently be inclined to join me in saying, insofar as it is right, *soli deo gratias*.'[4]

So although Williams' article could scarcely be deemed wholly independent of McClendon's, given that Glen Stassen was Williams' mentor and was also an admirer of McClendon's work (and that both McClendon and Stassen were influenced by John Howard Yoder), the parallels between

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[2] James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), p. 9.

[3] James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology, Volume 1* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986; rev. and enl. edn, Abingdon, 2002), ch. 7. Quotations here are from the latter.

[4] McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, p. 9.

Williams' article and various works of McClendon's would please him all the more *because* there are no references in it to McClendon's writings.

In what follows I shall note some commonalities that are less obvious than the ones I have mentioned. Then I shall bring several other voices to the table, along with McClendon's, to address problems that Williams has identified in the thinking of Bonhoeffer and King. I end with some reflections on the relations between aesthetics and ethics.

Less Obvious Parallels

Williams' third exemplar is Harriet Tubman. The main emphasis in his article is on her formative role in black Christian leadership, but her inclusion demonstrates his openness to the full inclusion of women in leadership and appreciation of the tremendous effects they can have on a whole country.

McClendon's *Ethics* also includes three illustrative biographies, and two of these are women: Sara Edwards and Dorothy Day. Day's reputation rests, first, on her concerns with poverty, but another striking element of her witness was pacifism, and one sort of war she condemned was race war.

There are differences between Tubman and Day. Tubman was raised in the tradition of radical (black) Christianity, but Day was raised by parents who did not attend church, and her father's roots were 'in the established white citizenry of the upper South', while her mother's 'household deity was conformity'.[5]

The similarities are more striking. Both were willing to break the law, whatever the penalties, and to suffer criticism from many fellow Christians. Both established homes for those in need. Both worked for the liberation of others. Tubman saw freedom as a means of allowing for the well-being of community; Day saw it as denying one's own will, when necessary, to take up the way of the cross. The most important similarity was their devotion to living out the way of Jesus, accompanied by the conviction that God was already working in those who sought to follow him.

A second and very important parallel between Williams and McClendon is a special concern for the injustices done to black people in America. While this may not be as prominent in his writings as it is in Williams' article, McClendon often used examples drawn from the lives of blacks. For example, he begins his account of 'the body strand' in Christian ethics (to be explained below) with a section titled 'Black Religion as Embodied Ethics'. Here he notes the ambiguity of the spirituals: for example, 'Steal Away to Jesus' can be interpreted as otherworldly escapism, or as code

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[5] McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 281.

for secretive slave meetings ('hush harbors'?) and escape (the Underground Railway?).[6] It is this surplus of meaning that gives the spirituals their power.

McClendon also used practices of the black church to illustrate the meaning he gives to Christian virtues. He writes of *presence* as a virtue (chosen because readers will have fewer preconceptions about it than those on classical lists of virtues). It is a dimension of the embodied Christian life, and could simply be described as *being there*, but he contrasts it with *mere* bodily presence, for example, in the case of an estranged couple together at a table who are mentally and emotionally withdrawn from one another; and with nosiness – butting into others' lives not for the sake of the other but to satisfy one's desire to be noticed.

McClendon claims that the black church, at its best, carries on the tradition of Christian slaves; when they had no other earthly resources, they knew how to be present to and for one another, without shame, and thereby witnessed to the presence of God with them.[7]

Special concern for black Americans was a constant, a powerful constant, in McClendon's life. He bore the shame of white racism from the time of that eight-year-old boy's discovery that his black nanny was not allowed to sit in church with the white people, through the writing of instructions for his death: to have his funeral in a black Baptist church he attended in Louisiana and to have his books sent to a black Baptist Bible college associated with the church. His life was characterised by the *shame* of realising he was a descendant of slave-owners, caught up in a *system* that he had no part in making.

These references to shame and systems introduce a third important aspect of McClendon's thinking, probably known to many readers of this journal, that Christian ethics needs to be understood as something like a three-stranded rope: the body strand, the social, and the resurrection strand, referring to the differences made to our ethics by God's action in the world, and intrinsically entwined.

The body is equipped by its Creator with certain characteristic needs, not only for food and air, but for companionship and prayer. It has built-in drives or impulses, such as sex and aggression. And in

> the adventure in which we seek to meet these needs and cope with these drives, our selves acquire a range of feelings and may develop relevant powers of judgment – moral feelings and moral judgments, constituting the moral equipment or *capacities* of the body.[8]

[6] McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 87-8.
[7] McClendon, *Ethics*, pp. 115-17.
[8] McClendon, *Ethics*, p. 97.

All of these factors need to be taken into account when considering social structures.

We cannot be truly human without social structures. A continuing quest for the Christian ethicist is to relate normative Christian practices to the cultures with which they interact. The structures that make human life possible are divine creations, but, to the extent that they pursue their own goods at the expense of individuals, they are fallen. The church at its best provides a blueprint for the structures and powers of society. Yet without the constant presence and action of God in individuals and groups, the church itself becomes a fallen structure.

The epitome of God's presence is the risen Christ Jesus. McClendon stresses the interweaving of body, social, and resurrection strands because God's presence is (or should be) woven into both organic and social aspects of human life. He criticises Christian ethical theories that neglect any of these three strands.

This is not a criticism that can be made of Williams' work. As I read the first draft of his lecture, I marked numbers in the margins, from one to three, indicating his recognition of issues pertaining to each of McClendon's strands, and especially emphasising the passages that relate one strand to another. For example, his beginning with the question of the difference it makes when encountering a group of men in a dark alley if one knows whether they are coming from a bar or a Bible study is a reminder of the possibilities for the fallenness of the church (second strand), and for failing to cope adequately with bodily drives such as aggression or sexual desire (strand one).[9] When he describes slave worship in the 'hush harbors' he is describing the inseparability of McClendon's three strands: risking *life and limb* to defy a fallen *system* in order to create an exemplary one, with the knowledge of *God's day-to-day presence among them*. Many more examples of his recognition of these strands will be obvious to readers of Williams' article.

Helpful Contributors: John Howard Yoder and George F. R. Ellis

My plan in this section is to bring into the conversation two voices that might provide useful resources for deepening or clarifying the insightful theological points Williams has made by means of his biographical sketches, and that I believe help to address the (few) deficiencies Williams notes in

[9] This is a particularly poignant question for me. My brother Tom died in October 2018, and, given the lovely community that had developed in a nearby bar – the people who drove him to doctors' appointments and checked on him regularly – that is where his memorial was held. He had no church funeral and was cremated rather than buried in the plot my parents had bought for him in the Catholic cemetery.

Bonhoeffer's and King's positions. One voice is theologian John Yoder's, and the second is the combined voice of myself and my co-author, George Ellis, a mathematician and cosmologist in South Africa.

It would have been helpful in addressing McClendon's social strand of ethics to have first incorporated Yoder's use of the Pauline doctrine of the Principalities and Powers. These involve a variety of terms in the Pauline corpus, including 'principalities and powers', 'thrones and dominations', 'angels and archangels', 'elements', 'heights and depths', 'law and knowledge'. In intervening centuries many of these ancient terms were taken to apply to demons and angelic beings, and thus were ignored in modern 'demythologized' theology. Beginning after World War II, however, biblical scholars have reinterpreted these terms to refer to what a naïve reader may have thought: rules, rulers, authorities. However, this is a bit more complicated because the New Testament concept of the powers apparently developed from Old Testament concepts of the alien gods of other nations; hence there is a lingering sense of their being spiritual realities. Their most significant function, however, is in application to what Williams refers to as 'dominating systems and structures'. The twentieth-century interpretations include human traditions, the state, class and economic structures, and even religious structures. I have found the term 'the power(s) of the air' (Ephesians 2.2) particularly useful. In line with the interpretation of these words in terms of the powers we recognise today, I take the power(s) of the air to include the sorts of social conventions and expectations that are never written down anywhere, yet dramatically shape our perceptions and behaviour: the 'household deity' of Dorothy Day's mother. As such, it serves to parallel Williams' use of the concepts of white versus black *aesthetics*, as I hope to show.

This recent re-interpretation puts us in position to appreciate Paul's sociopolitical theory and to see Jesus' relation to the power structures. As noted above, the powers were created by God for good purposes, since human life is impossible without them. They are 'fallen', to the extent that they do not serve the good for which they were created but seek instead their own self-aggrandisement. They have become idols in that they require individuals to serve them as though they are of absolute value.

The 'most worthy' powers of Jesus' day were the Jewish religious establishment and the Roman empire. Yoder's account of atonement is based on the fact that it was these two powers that collaborated in Jesus' death, thereby revealing their lack of absolute moral standing, and opening for us the possibility of living lives free of the illusion of their absolute legitimacy. Nevertheless, the predictable consequence of defying the powers is retaliation, even death on a cross. A recurring set of themes throughout Williams' article is the dangers faced by those who defied slavery, Nazism,

and the more ethereal 'power of the air' of an aesthetic of whiteness. He describes multiple struggles against the powers, even the powers of churches, and of hardships, often ending with death.

Note, though, that the powers are corrupted to varying degrees – thus in my title '*Shades* of Grey'. The church is meant to give an alternative vision of social reality, but churches fall along a spectrum, from the official Lutheran church supporting the Nazis at the negative end, to small and often fleeting church bodies that do indeed give one a vision of the Kingdom.[10]

So there can be no H-Richard-Niebuhrian typology of Christian attitudes to culture. The varying degrees of fallenness versus redemption of each structure in a culture need to be discerned. In some cases the fall is so deep and the means of calling them to redemption so few that resistance entails inevitable death. Williams does not address here Bonhoeffer's rejection of non-violence in the end. Most of those who use powers language, I think, would focus on the depth of the fall in Hitler's power system. McClendon focused instead on the lack of communal resources for non-violent resistance – skills he might have learned, had his planned trips to meet Gandhi taken place. Similarly, Williams says that Bonhoeffer was almost alone in his Christian opposition to the Nazis. Also, he says that Bonhoeffer failed to distinguish what Stassen called the triadic structure of the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. A common misinterpretation is that they present impossible ideals rather than concrete instructions on how disciples should live; the missing element in Bonhoeffer's interpretation was attention to what Stassen called the 'transformative initiatives' that provide ways of disrupting common cycles of violence, lust, hatred, greed, and so forth. Thus, 'he surrendered vital Christ-centered norms when they might have been most helpful'.[11]

However, I have tried to think of what sort of transformative initiative the nearly solitary Bonhoeffer could have imagined by the time the Third Reich was so well established. This brings me to the issue of context, to which Williams pays due attention in his comparison between Bonhoeffer and King. It also brings me to the second part of what I hope to contribute to the conversation.

A large part of human sin is due to false dichotomies (and I have to blame Jesus himself for making it so easy to interpret his teachings as radical dichotomies: pluck out your eye, cut off your hand). So one often hears in churches 'slippery-slope' arguments. For example, we cannot obey Jesus'

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[10] Ellis's small Quaker meeting house is one of these. For example, the group bought a van, painted it white with a red cross, and rescued black youths who were wounded during government-instigated violence. If they were 'rescued' by the authorities their injuries generally proved to be fatal. His wife Mary was a physician and provided the life-saving treatments they needed.

[11] [Williams' typescript, p. 10]

injunction to give to everyone who asks because, while the church could give to a few people, we would soon be swamped by others asking for help. We cannot help them all, so 'let's just not get into that'. Yoder strenuously objected to the extension of the word *violence* beyond its usual meaning (I have even been accused of doing violence to Yoder himself by presenting his theology in a more systematic way than he did). But if promoting a thesis is intrinsically violent, then we academics cannot help but be involved in violence, and hence the call to live non-violently cannot be followed, except perhaps by a few heroic individuals.

George Ellis and I met at a conference on cosmology and theology. We noted that all of the other participants were either Catholic or mainline Protestant. He asked me what difference it might make to consider the science through the eyes of a Radical theology (he is Quaker and I am now in the Church of the Brethren). He persuaded me to write a book with him, which we titled *On the Moral Nature of the Universe: Cosmology, Theology, and Ethics.*[12] A general thesis is that ethics needs to stand as an intermediary discipline between theology and the value-laden human sciences.

One of Ellis's main contributions was to show how to defeat the slippery-slope arguments that create impossible either-or statements regarding moral behaviour. We considered interpersonal relations; sociopolitical ethics (with a focus on non-violent resistance); economics; and jurisprudence. Ellis noted that there are nearly always a variety of intermediate steps that can be taken toward what *at the present moment* can only be thought of as an impossible ideal. For example, there are three systems for state responses to criminality: retributionist, reformist, and restorative. The type found in the United States, despite intentions of the original reformists, has become largely retributionist. The whole system cannot be reformed at once, but small steps can be taken within individual prisons or more broadly via legislation to move from retributive justice to reformist. One current discussion is whether solitary confinement should be prohibited as 'cruel and unusual'; another is discussion of the age at which young people can be given adult sentences. Ellis and I claim that when there is more than one option, taking the one that comes closer to the ideal will change the situation so as to show further movement in that direction to be more possible and reasonable. Restorative justice is the ideal; it involves communication between the victim and offender. Experience among juveniles in New Zealand include reports of remarkable transformations; for example, a woman who had been robbed refused repayment when she found that the offender was unemployed. There is even a case of a woman who had

[12] Nancey Murphy and George F. R. Ellis, *On the Moral Nature of the Universe: Cosmology, Theology, and Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996).

been robbed at gunpoint, but then offered the offender a place to live in her own home.[13]

We gave our most extended treatment to the issue of non-violence. A number of authors have scales of resistance, from persuasion, to non-injurious coercion, to injurious coercion. Consider Clarence Marsh Case's list of practices. Under the heading of persuasion he includes argument and suffering, either inflicted by the opponent, or self-inflicted, such as a hunger strike. Under non-violent coercion he lists, first, indirect action, including strikes, boycotts, and non-cooperation. Second, there is political action through institutions and culture – combining persuasion and impersonal coercion by means of law, such as use of force or 'legitimated violence' by police, courts, and prisons. Third, there is social coercion by means of ostracism, or collective pressure through passive resistance. He recognises violent coercion only as a last resort.[14]

C. J. Cadoux lists thirteen types of non-coercion, including personal example, intercessory prayer, conciliatory discussion, direct acts of love, non-resistance, unmerited suffering, self-imposed penance, arguments and appeals, mediation, arbitration, promises, and rewards. He claims that many more could be added.[15]

We claim that the consistent policy of using the lowest degree of coercion needed in order to have a chance of effectiveness will have a cumulative effect, increasing the effectiveness of less coercive means in the long run. One of many rationales for this is that violence regularly escalates, as the protesters arouse the ire of their opponents, and also give the opponents justification both for their past abuses and for escalated retaliation. Second, a goal of non-violent protest is to raise the moral level of both the opponents and bystanders.

This material relates to Williams' comparison between King and Bonhoeffer. He has said that a biographical approach to theological ethics is helpful, or even necessary, because different contexts change the way in which a theological ethic can be embodied. The difference between King's and Bonhoeffer's contexts is that King was working within a community with long experience in subverting the Powers, beginning with illegal worship by slaves in the 'hush harbors'. Consider the extent to which these slave practices employed principles only later enunciated in the twentieth century: first, accepting the suffering inflicted by the slave owners if they were caught – often lashings, but sometimes death. Second, while their

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[13] Murphy and Ellis, *Moral Nature*, pp. 125-6. Taken from Jim Considine, *Restorative Justice: Healing the Effects of Crime* (Littleton, New Zealand: Ploughshares Publications, 1995).
[14] Clarence Marsh Case, quoted in William Robert Miller, *Nonviolence: A Christian Interpretation* (New York: Schoken Books, 1964), p. 60.
[15] C. J. Cadoux, in Miller, *Nonviolence*, p. 59.

prayer likely focused on their own freedom, it surely included intercessory prayer for the slave owners and for others who sanctioned the system. Third, it involved non-cooperation with their opponents; slaves praying with no whites present was made illegal during that time. Surely the risks faced together, the communal prayer, dancing, and singing, their cooperation in leading others to the locations (each different) of the 'hush harbors', created strong communal bonds that have apparently been passed down through the generations, and have helped to constitute the widespread communal support that Bonhoeffer lacked.

The Civil Rights Movement had these memories to build on, and its participants more intentionally employed (and possibly invented) nearly all of the techniques of resistance recognised by contemporary analysts: argument, voluntary and involuntary suffering, strikes, boycotts, non-cooperation. Eventually there was legitimated punishment imposed on those who refused integration.

In particular, the patient endurance of suffering provided what Gene Sharp called 'shock therapy' to shatter the indifference of both oppressors and bystanders. Often the initial response is increased violence toward the protesters, so such campaigns need to be planned for the long term, but eventually sympathy can be aroused, even leading to lasting character change.[16]

For Bonhoeffer there had been little long-term community preparation for resistance to the state. The 'theological imagination', to use Williams' term, of German Christians had not been primed to see Jesus' ministry as non-violent rebellion against the Powers; to see the cross not merely as self-sacrifice for sin, but rather suffering the sinfully imposed penalty for his non-cooperation with oppression of the poor, of women, of outsiders.

Williams notes that both King and Bonhoeffer placed great emphasis on Jesus' suffering as a guide to Christian discipleship. Despite King's greater familiarity with actions akin to Stassen's transforming initiatives, he says that King's emphasis on redemptive suffering put him in danger of making it into a single principle that would move him away from Bonhoeffer's (and Stassen's) concreteness. In this he echoes a theme of McClendon's: that Christian ethics cannot be derived from abstract principles. Williams writes that an 'emphasis on redemptive suffering as a fixed principle... that justifies the Christian prior to action' becomes

[16] Gene Sharp, *The politics of Nonviolent Action*, 5th printing (Boston, MA: Porter Sargent, [1973] 1984), pp. 709-10.

especially problematic when it is valued without respect for the lived reality of those who have no choice in suffering.[17]

The Poisoning of Theology by a White Aesthetic

As Williams writes: 'Since the slave trade, the white aesthetic has seized, marked, and claimed epistemological ownership, of darker bodies as it worked to stabilize white *masculinity* as the divine ideal, and the template for all humanity.'[18] In contrast, King preached of the beauty of black skin, and of the rich and noble history it represents. Note that Bonhoeffer was formed both by the Abyssinian Baptist Church, whose name harkens back to the earliest days of Christianity, and by the Harlem Renaissance literary movement during his time in the US in the early 1930s.

Williams traces the association of the white male with all that is good, beautiful, intelligent to Immanuel Kant and other Enlightenment thinkers. I, however, suspect that the association has a much longer history. Williams writes that aesthetics goes beyond what is literally visible and, often unconsciously, associates what is taken as a universal principle of physical beauty with all else that is to be valued.

Psychologists have a well-established term for such associations: 'the halo effect'; a person with one good quality is automatically expected to have all good qualities – and vice versa. The starting point for triggering the halo effect (one of the powers of the air?) need not be physical beauty. As I was taught this theory I realised that I was assuming the intelligence of professors to be associated with high moral standards. This relates, in virtue theory, to the question of whether a person exemplifying one virtue will exemplify them all. Nonetheless, even if the Nazis did not have an equivalent term for this cognitive bias, anti-Jewish propaganda began with gradually caricaturing representations of Jewish faces, making them appear less beautiful, and then even less human, than Aryans.

The halo effect has also been shown to affect judgments of religiosity, so it is not surprising that, as Williams notes, the white aesthetic predisposes all who are gripped by it to attribute the gift of the image of God to whites and to see the Other as in need of the religion and culture of the white race.

Here we find yet another way of interrelating McClendon's three strands of ethics: if we accept as true the presence of God in all people, the socio-psychological theory requires us to work backwards, evaluating the

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[17] [taken from p. 13 of Williams' typescript] As one of the privileged few, I would not have considered writing a book on non-violence except with the support of Ellis, who knew that his anti-apartheid works had led to his being put on his government's hit list.

[18] [Williams' typescript, p. 13; my emphasis.]

extent to which we welcome those of another colour (or gender) into our fellowships, and to seek means of adjusting our intrinsic feelings and moral judgments to come closer to seeing the face of Jesus in all the women and men we are called upon to love and serve.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this article has been to bring Williams' and McClendon's work into fruitful dialogue. Many parallels and complementary emphases are obvious. I have attempted to dig a bit deeper to find more points of agreement and support, particularly using Yoder's theology, shaped by his Mennonite context, and Ellis's insights, shaped not only by his anti-apartheid struggles but also by his broad familiarity with the sciences.

I conclude with a thank-you to my friend Reggie, for an interesting piece in its own right, but also for giving me some new ways of examining some of the works of my long-lost husband Jim.

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Book Reviews

Anthony E. Clark (ed.), *China's Christianity: From Missionary to Indigenous Church*. Studies in Christian Mission 50 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 300 pages. ISBN: 978-9004340022.

Anthony E. Clark (Edward B. Lindaman Endowed Chair and Associate Professor of Chinese history in History at Whitworth University) has gathered ten authors to consider, from a variety of disciplines and methodologies, 'What happened after the agency of manufacturing a Christian culture in China was removed from the foreign missionaries and transferred into the hands of native Chinese Christians?' (p. 2). This writing was conceived during a 2015 symposium at Whitworth University on the topic.

The chapters are written by historians, theologians, a library director and art historian, an American Studies scholar and the director of the Ricci Institute at the University of San Francisco, and the director of the United States Catholic China Bureau. Clark rightly considers this variety of scholars and approaches to be one of the particular strengths of the book, as it both avoids simplistic pictures of what is happening with Christianity in China and challenges assumptions in various disciplines. For example, Joseph Ho's examination of photographs and films from two Presbyterian missionaries in the early twentieth century, suggests relational realities in missionary encounters often neglected in academia.

Overall, descriptions of the various attempts at establishing Christianity in China portray varying degrees of indigenisation. Success, we read, often depended more on ecclesiastical power structures than on Chinese families turning to Christ. Ricci was shut down by Rome; Presbyterians were threatened by theological struggles in the United States. Only when all the foreign ecclesiastical powers were expelled did Christ's robe begin to fit the Chinese more comfortably.

The final two chapters, by Jean-Paul Weist, Emeritus Research Director of the Beijing Center for Chinese Studies in Beijing, and Xiaoxin Wu of the Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History at the University of San Francisco, bring good news to those who hope for a genuine Chinese Christianity. Weist turns his research from foreign mission societies to Chinese Christians, particularly Catholics. We read stories of faithfulness and suffering, and of the fear that can still inhabit Catholic communities in light of the underground churches and of government control

of the Three-Self Church. Wu explores the impact that Christians have on mainstream Chinese culture, offering a hopeful portrayal of new openness to academic studies of religion.

My interest in the book stems from my interest in seeing the Christian faith take shape in the Muslim world and I thought I might find some hope in the story of how it has happened in China. From that viewpoint, I was disappointed. The inculturation described is only to the level of staffing western structures with Chinese Christians. To that extent, the book is well written and worth reading. But I was left wondering about deeper levels of inculturation that might be seen in the underground churches. After reading this, I still don't know.

Reviewed by Dave Keane – PhD researcher in the field of mission history at IBTS Centre, Amsterdam.

Rodney Stark, *Reformation Myths* (London: SPCK, 2017), 194 pages. ISBN: 978-0281078271.

The back cover describes this as an 'enlightening and entertaining antidote to recent books about the rise of Protestantism and its legacy'. Amongst the abundance of books celebrating Reformation 500 this one has more than a whiff of iconoclasm but is stronger on entertainment than enlightenment.

In this work Stark deals with certain 'myths' about the impact of the Reformation, such as the Weber hypothesis on the Protestant work ethic. He acknowledges that many of these myths have long since been overturned, although he argues that they continue to persist in some (mostly unnamed) quarters. It is this persistence that he seems to find especially irksome.

The unevenness of the book is, in many ways, typified by Chapter 3. Stark begins by saying that he does not mourn the passing of Christendom, although he immediately admits a certain amount of nostalgia for it. He then states that he mourns its replacement by powerful nation states. He sees these as the product of the Reformation, which broke the consensus of Christendom. Having said this, he then acknowledges that the seeds of nationalism pre-date the Reformation. This kind of unsettled approach runs throughout the book.

Stark, it turns out, is also capable of perpetuating myths of his own. At one point he accuses Calvin of a range of salacious crimes in Geneva. The rumours about these have long been in circulation but no Calvin scholar takes them seriously today. Stark's own reference for these accusations points the reader to a popular blog. This highlights the issue of Stark's sources. While

his bibliography mentions fourteen of his own works, there are only a handful of recent scholarly works on Reformation history. Stark seems unaware of the changes that have taken place in the interpretation of the pre-Reformation and Reformation periods. For example, he makes an argument based on the irreligion of medieval society. This was once a standard interpretation; however, this view has now been overturned and, the peasants who slept in church aside, the deeply religious nature of the medieval world is now recognised.

The purpose of Stark's work becomes clear in the Conclusion where he acknowledges that this is, in part, a continuation of an earlier work exposing what he perceives as persistent anti-Catholicism amongst English-speaking intellectuals. It is a prejudice that, while he views it as akin to anti-Semitism, remains an acceptable one.

This is a provocative read in places, but unfortunately it tends to reflect rather dated scholarship on the Reformation. There are also some sweeping generalisations; for example, when he traces the roots of two world wars to the Reformation. The book will have little appeal to serious scholars of the Reformation and could prove misleading to those with limited knowledge of the historiography of the period.

Reviewed by Dr David Luke – Director of Postgraduate Studies at the Irish Baptist College.

Mark McClintock Fulkerson and Sheila Briggs (eds); *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 580 pages. ISBN: 978-0199677979.

This handbook takes as its central theme globalisation, citing this as the foremost characteristic in which contemporary feminist theology takes place. With 27 contributors from around the world, and organised into three main sections, the handbook presents a diversity of feminist theological engagement. After an introductory chapter, the first section of three chapters focuses on the development and contemporary challenges of western feminist theology. Serene Jones's chapter offers a definition of feminist theology and suggests eight characteristics that are core to the work of feminist theological enquiry (including awareness of contextualised knowing, difference, de/construction, particularity, and convictions about our humanity – things that feature throughout the handbook) and which are shared by the variety of expressions that come under the term feminist theology found in the handbook. She then turns to distinctively Christian

theological imagination formed from a faith-perspective, and she draws all of this into conversation with the implications of globalisation. Melissa Raphael's chapter concerns the development of Jewish feminist theology in the post-Holocaust context and the characteristics of the Jewish feminist theological task for Judaism as a social, cultural, spiritual, and historical identity. As someone who has engaged with feminist theology as it has developed in Britain and North America over the past thirty years, I found these two chapters enormously helpful in their overview and critical analysis, and both would serve as essential reading for those seeking to understand or be introduced to western feminist theological work. At the same time, such work is further interrogated and challenged, both implicitly and explicitly, in many of the chapters that follow.

The second section turns to contexts across the globe and feminist engagement with theological imagination and praxis as it encounters globalisation. Twelve chapters cover Asian feminist theology; Indic Gynocentric theology/thealogy; a Latino Afro-Caribbean perspective; Latin American Women; the Middle East; the continent of Africa (3 chapters); Europe; Aotearoa New Zealand; First Nation (North America); and North American feminism.

The essays are hugely informative about the economics, politics, history, culture, and religion of the regions, and of women's position within each context, as well as offering critical engagement with globalisation. They show how 'gender is both *embodied* and *embedded* in capitalist globalization' (p. 181). Globalisation itself is variously examined throughout the book, with Muse Dube's chapter providing a succinct discussion of its impact on women and an analysis of how it fits in the 'family of imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism' (p. 383). The feminist responses occurring in these contexts are discussed with various emphases, such as the role of Christianity, patriarchy, religious fundamentalisms, and colonial legacies and mindsets.

The third section has eleven chapters which reflect on the challenges and opportunities presented by globalisation on feminist thinking as a theological enterprise. Themes considered include: the nature of inter-religious engagement; religious subjectivity, agency and transcendence; the place of scripture as written and oral traditions; the challenges of globalisation for Muslim women; liberation theology and identity politics in the context of kyriarchal globalisation; theology, sexuality, globalisation and women's bodies in Latin America; a womanist perspective on globalisation framed by theology and narrative; women's popular Marian piety with its complexity and possibilities; feminist ritual practice; and religious de-traditioning (refiguring) bound up in women's transnational migration.

Each chapter can be read on its own and yet it is in reading them together that the enormity of globalisation's adverse effects on women is relayed. Throughout, there is an emphasis on women's material conditions, how struggles of race and class – intertwined with historical and political legacies – impact on gender, and on the importance (with examples) of feminist activism that advocates on behalf of women (and also children, men, and the planet). Indeed, with global situations showing the inadequacies of a simple identity politics around femaleness, the handbook authors 'argue for activist/praxis-defined "communities" as an alternative to identity and representative politics' (p. 17). Strenuously critical of the harms contained in globalisation, and acutely challenging, the handbook showcases feminist theological imagination engaging with concrete realities of everyday lives.

Reviewed by Dr Fran Porter - Research Fellow at The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, Birmingham, UK.

Perry Shaw and Havilah Dharamaj (eds), *Challenging Tradition: Innovation in Advanced Theological Education* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2018), 487 pages. ISBN: 978-1783684137.

This book looks at advanced theological education from the perspective of the Majority world and asks the dual question: Why does the Minority world or Western model dominate theological education and how can we find contextually appropriate ways of doing Master's and Doctoral level research? Both editors and chapter authors take time to draw out the width and depth of the problem, which is caused by importing a Western, analytical, linear, low-culture, white male model to high-culture and a much more diverse model.

However, they complain not only about cultural insensitivity. In addition, the authors see the pattern of a written, in-depth dissertation norm as the reason why graduates of advanced theological education are not always successful in working together in teams and across disciplines, teaching well, and engaging with the real questions of theological leadership. Therefore the book is not only suitable for those from the Majority world, but for everybody, including myself as a theological education leader.

The main purpose of the book is to find more diverse, culturally and missionally relevant models of doing advanced theological education. The book consists of three sections and twenty-three chapters. The first section looks at the broader philosophical, theological, and social-contextual issues,

which are shaping advanced theological education. The second section imagines some innovative possibilities for the dissertation, and the third section asks if a dissertation is the only option. As the book is designed primarily for leaders of emerging programmes of advanced theological studies in the Majority world, the authors are drawing out possible limitations, which come with the adoption of the Western 'classical' model of dissertation. These include that the dissertation is often written alone, not together as a team; the research topic is usually chosen as a result of detailed questioning within one discipline, not crossing the borders of different disciplines and thus not offering wider solutions; and in striving for maximum objectivity, the dissertation does not bring out the richness of the author's culture.

However, the two following sections of the book offer some possible solutions to these problems. The authors are convinced that creative innovation is the only way forward: 'If the church is to benefit from the full richness of its resources – male and female, from every tribe and nation – then it is imperative that innovative forms be embraced and extended' (p. 327). Several ideas are offered – including story-telling, poetry, portfolio, problem-based learning, interdisciplinary and collaborative writing. The word *ethno-hermeneutics* runs through the book.

Personally, as a theologian and educationalist from the Western theological tradition, I missed a recognition of the strengths of 'classical' dissertation culture. Analytical and writing skills are still needed 'for reflecting theologically for the church' as well as in 'forming leadership for the church' (p. 32). The standards of academic excellence need to be acquired, whatever the form and context.

Nevertheless, the book is a very good attempt to balance the earlier unbalance towards a Western model in advanced theological education and thus I consider it to be extremely helpful. Its value lies not least in helping to challenge the Western model for Westerners themselves. At least, this happened to me while reading the book.

Reviewed by Dr Einike Pilli – Rector, Tartu Theological Seminary, Estonia.

Keith Ward, *Love is His Meaning: Understanding the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2017), 97 pages. ISBN: 978-0281077632.

This short book by philosopher and theologian Keith Ward is a gentle polemic against literalist readings of the Bible. While recognising its popularity, Ward believes that this hermeneutic is responsible for the decline

in the church. Literalism is not congruent with good contemporary scientific and moral thinking. Ward concentrates on understanding Jesus' teachings, convinced that if we take them literally, we will miss His meaning. They are, says Ward, full of figures of speech – symbol, metaphor, and much more. The gospels are not neutral historical accounts but are intended to evoke a personal encounter with Christ who 'taught in a non-literal way about God's absolute love'.

Thus, the Sermon on the Mount does not give us a new set of rules but prompts us to ask ourselves if we are treating others in a loving way. The kingdom of God is a spiritual rather than literal entity. Jesus' life fulfils Old Testament prophecy, but he preaches the restoration of all humanity, rather than the defeat of Israel's enemies, or the restoration of physical Jerusalem. The complex symbolism of Jesus' eschatological teachings looks to the end of the cosmos, when there will be a 'new heaven and new earth'. If we want to understand Jesus' teachings, we should look at his life: Christ's self-sacrifice points to God's absolute love.

Ward's agenda is pastoral as well as intellectual, and his argument is clearly and carefully articulated. A difficulty arises, however, when he presents five 'principles' to the reader: the gospels are not verbally inerrant; there is no eternal hell; Jesus left no specific moral rules, about sex or politics or anything else; there is no imminent end of the universe or physical return of Jesus on the clouds; there is no exclusive salvation for Christian believers. The problem here is not the ideas themselves (they are hardly new), but the use of the word 'principles'. This has an inflexible feel to it, which is at odds with the sensitive tone of the rest of the book, and I worry that this might alienate some readers who might otherwise have been willing to engage with its ideas. The term 'propositions' might have been more tactful. I hope the book will be used in seminaries and church groups, for it is full of rich insight and stimulating material.

Reviewed by Dr Marion Carson – member of Adjunct Faculty,
IBTS Centre, Amsterdam.

Andrew Hardy and Dan Yarnell, *Missional Discipleship After Christendom* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 239 pages. ISBN: 978-1532618932.

Co-written by two staff members at ForMission College, Birmingham, England, this work is an extensively referenced overview of appropriate

ways of participating in the *Missio Dei*. It forms part of the *After Christendom* Series, edited by Stuart Murray.

This work has the sense of a body of material that has been formed out of materials prepared for use in lectures. It seeks to build on biblical perspectives gleaned from the New Testament Scriptures, going on to engage with contemporary missional hermeneutics, steering the reader towards an understanding of mission that is strongly rooted in a participationalist, Christomorphic identity.

The work is particularly strong in looking at how church might better engage with Generations Y and Z, the age-groups that are most commonly missing from church. Insights as to how different generations view the meaning and purpose of life are clear and valuable.

For those familiar with the work of James McClendon, there is an interesting reading of his methodology, correlating his understanding of communities of practice to the work of the social learning theorist, Etienne Wenger. This indicates something of the strength of the work, in combining practical insights into how to engage with different age groups, while at the same time drawing the reader into considering varying hermeneutical tools that might be of use in analysing and developing good, missional practice. The work engages positively yet not uncritically with traditional models of church, and reflects on styles of discipleship and mentoring that are appropriate to missional methods, to be held constantly under review and subject to revision.

In providing extensive referencing to secondary material, much of which is of recent publication, the authors provide a full bibliography. The ensuing weakness is, perhaps inevitably, that a thorough discussion of the merits and demerits of particular methodologies and theories of learning in disciple making does lack critical depth.

This volume is a strong and practical work, providing a good addition to the *After Christendom* Series.

Reviewed by Revd Dr Jim Purves – Mission & Ministry Advisor, Baptist Union of Scotland.

Joshua T. Searle, *Theology After Christendom: Forming Prophets for a Post-Christian World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 211 pages. ISBN: 978-1498241953.

Joshua Searle, Tutor in Theology and Public Thought at Spurgeon's College, London, states that the aim of this book is to present 'the challenges and

opportunities confronting theology in a post-Christendom context and to offer proposals about how to address the current state of crisis' (p. 11). He also points out that his writing is rooted in the conviction that 'theology has reached a crucial phase in its historical development' (p. 11). The conviction behind the text is as compelling as the purpose. Much of the argument will be familiar to those who have been engaged with all things post-Christendom over the last two decades, but Searle's book reads like a manifesto. It is impatient, sees change coming and offers new, and sometimes not so new, directions of travel.

Searle associates Christendom with the Modern rationalistic tendency to formulate truth, doctrinal or otherwise, as propositions and proposes instead that in the new context theology should be concerned with character formation. The emphasis for theological education should be on the formation of prophets rather than priests, and on shaping the imagination rather than getting doctrines straight. Searle argues insightfully for a shift in attention from the church to the world, and for reconnecting theology to mission, discipleship, and the kingdom of God. Beyond these large concepts, the book's most striking arguments are in favour of reconnecting faith with life outside the church. He points towards, though does not describe in any detail, a theology that can nourish a 'Christianity as a spiritual movement for the transformation of the world' (p. 192). Chapter six, focusing on Freedom, Compassion and Creativity, offers many points of departure for fruitful reflection and practice. At times Searle presents Christendom as a straw man, equating it to Modernity and to the intellectualism of evangelicalism. A more nuanced consideration of Christendom and its passing may have added something to the exploration of the issues of formation and how the gospel is made visible in the public square.

A highlight of this book is the fascinating range of sources, showcasing not only Searle's wide reading but also his life experience, which spills over from Western evangelicalism to lived engagement with new monasticism and Eastern European Protestantism. His reflections on the Northumbria Community, rooted in personal engagement, offer insights into a movement that has had sustained and creative engagement with the context of Post-Christendom.

Reviewed by Revd Mark Ord – Director of BMS World Mission, Birmingham, UK.

Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Integration* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 218 pages. ISBN: 978-0691176222.

This closely argued text is a challenging one but repays careful reading. Hurd's core concern is the way in which 'religion' and 'religious freedom' have increasingly become defined according to the interests of national and international policy and law. The background to this in the past twenty years is partly the growth of violence and terrorism in the name of religion and the double response to this by Western governments in what Hurd calls *expert religion*, dominated by 'the agenda of reassurance which celebrates religion as sources of morality and cohesion, and, simultaneously, the agenda of surveillance, which fears religion as a potential danger to be contained and suppressed'. But she suggests that this has been done in an unhelpful way that has divorced religion from other important dimensions of human life with which they are set and constantly interact. Social tensions and community violence cannot be explained simply by recourse to religion.

This is contrasted by Hurd with *lived religion*, and the 'complex and unstable relation' between the 'religion that is authorised for legal and political purposes and a broader messier world of religious belonging, belief and practice'. There is pressure to fit these lived practices into categories of religion determined by policy-makers.

The third category defined by Hurd is *governing religion* in which 'government is seen as the handmaiden and governor of tolerant, democracy-friendly legally supervised religion' She correctly identifies the problems with this, that will resonate with Baptists in some settings: 'Who defines orthodoxy? Who is transformed through definitions into a "minority" or a "sect" and with what social consequences?'

Hurd concludes that there is too often a clear message that secular policy-makers will privilege those religious groups that accept the framework defined for them by the powers that be. She advocates situating religion in a series of broader interpretive fields beyond the definitions of both sectarianism and religious freedom authorised by political power.

This short review cannot do justice to a meticulously well-argued thesis, even if I would want to respond that perhaps it changes our definition of 'religious freedom' and emphasises its necessary setting in wider contexts of social and cultural factors and human rights, rather than taking us 'beyond' it.

But it is very relevant to some Baptists who do not 'fit' into the government definition of religion (often supported by 'traditional' churches)

and are left either outside the law or discriminated against within it. They are part of the 'much larger story' that Hurd urges us to engage with and recognise. At the same time there is a cautionary word to us, too, that we cannot isolate all discrimination against our churches as being purely concerned with religious freedom. There are often much more complex factors at work that we need to recognise more than we do.

Reviewed by Revd Tony Peck – General Secretary, European Baptist Federation.

John Coffey (ed.), *Heart Religion: Evangelical Piety in England and Ireland, 1690-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 232 pages. ISBN: 978-0198724155.

This is a superb volume of essays by leading historians, with each of the contributors offering valuable insights into evangelical spirituality. The opening essay by John Coffey on 'Sources and Trajectories of Evangelical Piety' sets the scene in a masterly way. After enjoying it I was eager to carry on reading. The rest of the essays lived up to the high standard set by Coffey.

I was particularly pleased to see the way in which a number of the authors looked in detail at experiences across Europe. This is central to Patricia Ward's 'Continental Spirituality and British Protestant Readers' and to Daniel Brunner's essay on Anthony William Boehm. It is also crucial in Tom Schwanda's exploration of the hymns of John Cennick and their connection with Moravian spirituality.

In the case of essays which cover themes that are more familiar to those interested in British evangelicalism – 'George Whitefield and Heart Religion', by David Ceri Jones, 'Inward Religion and its Dangers in the Evangelical Revival', by Isabel Rovers, and a study of conversion, revival and the Holy Spirit in Ulster, by Andrew Holmes – the authors offer important new perspectives on their topics.

The reader will also find here aspects of the evangelical scene that are not necessarily covered when the spirituality of evangelicalism in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century is discussed: John Coffey writes on 'Dissenting Communion Hymns, 1693-1709', Phyllis Mack has a fascinating exploration of dreaming and emotion, and David Bebbington analyses 'deathbed piety' among Victorian Evangelical Nonconformists. Coffey and Bebbington include Baptist experiences.

As befits a book of essays on 'heart religion', I found spiritual nourishment woven into what is a splendid tapestry of historical scholarship.

This review was first published in *Baptist Quarterly*, 49:3 (136) and has been reprinted with permission.

Reviewed by Dr Ian M. Randall – Senior Research Fellow (IBTS Centre, Amsterdam and Spurgeon's College, London) and Research Associate (Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide).

Geoffrey R. Treloar, *The Disruption of Evangelicalism: The Age of Torrey, Mott, McPherson and Hammond* (IVP: London, 2016), 320 pages. ISBN: 978-1783594320.

The Disruption of Evangelicalism by Geoffrey Treloar is the fourth volume in the series under the general title *A History of Evangelicalism*. The first volume, *The Rise of Evangelicalism* by Mark Noll, appeared in 2004, and now all five volumes are available for readers. The book by Treloar narrates the story of English-speaking evangelicalism, covering approximately four decades, from the turn of the twentieth century until the Second World War.

The first part of the volume serves as a good introduction for understanding evangelicalism as a phenomenon – exploring issues of revivalism, especially as shaped by Reuben A. Torrey and other leaders, analysing the role and methods of mission, discussing aspects of social engagement and devotional life. All this helps to reveal the roots and branches of present-day evangelical life. Evangelicals sustained vigorous theological discussions, some of them moving towards narrowing their positions towards fundamentalism, others broadening their horizons towards liberal convictions. Through the whole volume the author pursues the argument that, in the first decades of the twentieth century, Anglo-American evangelicalism faced new situations, such as losing its former position in wider society, and going through major crises – such as experiencing the devastating effects of the First World War and its aftermath. Theological, social, and political influences, in the whirlwind of turbulent times, only deepened what Treloar describes as disruptive forces within evangelicalism. For example, while the majority of evangelicals defended the war as 'a fight for justice and righteousness' (p. 122) and were involved in 'war sevice in many forms' (p. 152), there were considerable cases of conscientious objection, which seems to have been a more significant facet of evangelical response than Treloar shows.

In many ways, by the 1940s evangelicalism had emerged as a drastically more diversified movement when compared to the nineteenth century. The hopes to regain evangelical cultural authority did not

materialise, there was no 'great reversal' in interwar evangelicalism. However, 'lack of impact is not the same as absence of interest', as the author aptly summarises. The evangelicals continued to 'think that Christian beliefs and values should shape social attitudes and behaviour in their communities' and they 'maintained the tradition of evangelical engagement with society' (p. 277).

In conclusion, this is an informative and scholarly account of English-speaking evangelicals, combining broader generalisations with specific examples. And, as always, moving closer to contextual and local phenomena the picture becomes more colourful, multifaceted, and diversified.

Reviewed by Dr Toivo Pilli – Director of Baptist and Anabaptist Studies at IBTS Centre, Amsterdam.

Gert-Jan Roest, *The Gospel in the Western Context: A Missiological Reading of Christology in Dialogue with Hendrikus Berkhof and Colin Gunton*. Studies in Reformed Theology 37 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 425 pages. ISBN: 978-9004386471.

Gert-Jan Roest, for fifteen years a church planter and evangelist in Amsterdam (and now part-time teacher of missiology at the Theological University Kampen), finished his PhD at VU University Amsterdam with this scholarly volume on the contextualisation of Christology in the post-Christendom West. The research unfolds by shaping two critical lenses for doing analysis of culture and gospel in the high tide of secularism, viz. the reading of the Western context by Hendrikus Berkhof (1914-1995) and Colin Gunton (1941-2003). Part 1 of the book offers an in-depth study of Berkhof's thinking, in particular his Christology; Part 2 looks into Gunton's Christology; and Part 3 describes the 'contours of a Western gospel at the beginning of the 21st century'.

The two are challenging dialogue-partners, because (1) both Reformed theologians take a clear ecumenical stance; (2) both incorporate in their theology insights from other Christian traditions; and (3) both demonstrate pioneering insights in contextual theology revolving around binaries such as gospel-and-culture and experience-and-revelation. As a consequence, Roest's approach is thoroughly based on theological reflection of Berkhof's and Gunton's legacies, combined with much praxis-informed analysis. The results are quite intriguing, for the gospel-centred model for reading the context – with the help of keen specialists like Lesslie Newbigin, Chris Wright, James Dunn et alia – turns out to be a promising avenue, because the

hermeneutical key to the proposed model is provided by the gospel story. The model carefully weaves together basic dimensions of Christian life which substantiate meaningful Christian presence in the secularised West (p. 315). First there is the meta-narrative of worship of Israel's God of grace, as embedded into God's story with Israel. Subsequently, Christians seek to live a gospel life of hope and expectation and make efforts to contextualise their hope by lifestyle. In interaction with their life context they (tangibly) exhibit a cruciform spirituality as is seen in Jesus, and henceforth are the clear embodiment of what gospel-centredness is all about. The story of Jesus is re-enacted as a power of hope and change by a people whose life is oriented to 'the mystery of Jesus Christ in their midst'.

The model is profoundly informed by Berkhof and Gunton as it pulls vital strings and strengths together. It develops a workable hermeneutical interpretament of 'cross' and 'new creation', by which pivotal Western notions such as 'unease with individualism' and 'social-economic-political issues' (and crises) are anticipated. The concept is quite dynamic, particularly conforming to Berkhof's thinking about nature and history, and does not look into the details of contextual processes of language, practices, and traditions. Crucial to these dynamics is the way in which the story of Jesus is being told, the way in which he is portrayed and communally embodied by the Church. A contextualised gospel-frame has at its core the Western need for the forgiving presence of Jesus, and therefore at its similar core the forgiving presence of the community of believers.

Reviewed by Revd Prof. Dr Henk Bakker – holder of the James Wm. McClendon Chair for Baptistic and Evangelical Theologies at VU University Amsterdam and lecturer at the Dutch Baptist Seminary, Amsterdam.

The Journey of the Mennonite Brethren, 1954–2010

Douglas J. Heidebrecht

Winnipeg, Manitoba: Kindred Productions, 2019
ISBN 9781894791533

We congratulate our former PhD student Douglas J. Heidebrecht on the recent publication of the results of his PhD research.