Formation for Enabling Ministry, Stage 3

Reviewing the Content of our Subject Areas for their Appropriateness to Discipleship and Ministry

We have seen that academic theology is a 'self-conscious scholarly enterprise' whereas as teachers in ministerial formation we are commissioned to model theology to our students as a 'habit of the human soul' through which we not only relate to God but learn to look at the world and everything in it through God's eyes. Having explored how this affects our interpretation of the aims and learning outcomes of the modules we teach, we now need to consider the content of our subject areas to discern those aspects of the discipline likely to be most appropriate and fruitful in ministerial formation and those that may not only be inappropriate but potentially disabling or even misleading.

To begin, I offer this extract from my book *Reimagining Ministerial Formation,* in which I attempt to place the study of theology in the Enlightenment university in context.

Beyond Athens and Berlin

The publication of Edward Farley's *Theologia* in 1983 sparked a period of intense discussion in the United States about the nature of ministerial formation. Farley had suggested that developments leading up to the establishment of the Enlightenment research university had resulted in a changed concept not only of ministerial formation but of theology itself.[1] After a decade of uncertainty the publication of two works by David Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological about a Theological School* and *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* set the agenda for the next stage of the discussion.[2]

Kelsey identified two powerful models of ministerial formation, which he christened 'Athens' and 'Berlin'. The Athens model followed a Christian version of ancient Greek methods of education, known as *paideia.* The aim of *paideia* was to inculcate the virtues required for good citizenship. In the hands of Christian teachers such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen, *paideia* became a conscious ideal focused on the inner and spiritual life. In *paideia* the teacher acts as a midwife to facilitate the growth of virtue, which can come about only through the student's contemplation of God. Christian texts are used as a source of wisdom in themselves and a stimulus to the pursuit of that wisdom in the student.[3]

The 'Berlin' model adopts the methods of the Enlightenment university. The agenda for the study of theology in the university was first set out by Friedrich Schleiermacher, who was himself

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[1] Edward Farley, *Theologia,* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.

[2] David Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological about a Theological School,* Lousiville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992; and *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate,* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1993.

[3] Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly,* pages 63-77.

instrumental in the founding of the University of Berlin. It was Schleiermacher's achievement to outline the terms on which theology was to play its part in the intellectual life of the reformed Prussian state.[4] Theology, he argued, had a place in the university as one of the professional faculties, along with law and medicine. As the university provides the required training for lawyers and doctors, so it is the place where clergy are trained to play their role in the life of the state. Theology then, cannot be understood as the pursuit of 'pure' theoretical knowledge but is an example of a 'positive' discipline, that is a discipline that arises to serve the needs of a professional endeavour. In the words of Edward Farley, it exists to, 'give cognitive and theoretical foundations to an *indispensable practice.*'[5]

Secondly, Schleiermacher insisted, theology must adapt itself to the Enlightenment's approach to knowledge. It cannot proceed by allowing authority to Scripture and Christian tradition and using these as the bases for an enquiry into the nature of God. The nature of knowledge requires that Christianity can only be studied historically, as a concrete example of a religious community.[6] The church's history and its notions of God thus become the focus of critical study, and the study of systematic theology is not to be taken as an account of God's ways with the world directly informed by divine revelation, but as a theoretical, and above all critical account of Christian belief and practice.

Kelsey concluded that contemporary theological training was uneasily poised *between* these two models of educational excellence. Most training institutions, he observed, attempt to honour both. Students are introduced to the critical study of theology on the one hand; on the other, through the corporate discipline of shared worship, reflection on practice and the 'hidden curriculum' of the training institution, they are to develop qualities of personality and character and learn to nurture healthy relationships. But these two approaches, Kelsey realised, are fundamentally incompatible. 'Between Athens and Berlin', he wrote, 'theological schools are caught between a rock and a hard place. The most that any school can do is negotiate some sort of truce, strike some sort of balance between them.'[7] This negotiation takes place not simply between two different approaches to *learning* theology, but between two fundamentally incompatible conceptions about *what theology actually is*: on the one hand the quest for a transforming knowledge of God, on the other the critical study of historical Christian practice. There is, he wrote, 'a deep *theological* incoherence' underlying the practice of theological training.

In the light of the discussion above, it is evident that the incoherence to which Kelsey draws attention stems from the incompatible requirements of two separate though related practices: the practices of theological scholarship and ministerial formation. The one values critical distance, the other obedience. The one works by analysis, the other requires integration. The one aims to train intellectual capacity, the other to integrate intellect, emotion and character. The one views theology as a theory to be refined through careful analytical enquiry, the other draws on theology as a resource for discerning the presence and activity of God.

Kelsey's distinction has set the terms for the ongoing discussion of ministerial formation in Britain and Australia as well as in the United States.[8] However, the assumption that, despite their uneasy

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[4] His approach is summed up in his *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology,* translated by Terence N. Tice, Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1966. A summary of his thought is given in Farley, *Theologia,* pages 84-94.
[5] Farley, *Theologia,* page 86.
[6] Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline,* §32 and 33.
[7] Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly,* page 97.
[8] See, for example, Gary Wilton, 'From ACCM 22 to Hind via Athens and Berlin: A Critical Analysis of Key Documents Shaping Contemporary Church of England Theological Education with Reference to the Work of

relationship, both models of excellence have their place in ministerial formation has rarely, if ever, been challenged. Nor has attention been paid to the considerable flaws in Kelsey's work. His comparison of the two models centred on one issue: the quest for unity in diversity. What he conspicuously failed to do was to analyse either 'Athens' or 'Berlin' from the point of view of the relationship between Christ and culture, asking which of the models conforms most closely to a theological understanding of the requirements of discipleship and ministry. Furthermore, he fails to probe their claims to 'excellence' from an educational point of view, conceding that the debate had not until then focused on pedagogical issues but had remained enclosed within the discipline of theology.[9] Thus he fails to consider which of the models best accords with recognised standards of good practice in education. Moreover, he fails to explore the approaches to teaching and learning that might play a part in a contemporary form of *paideia.* Instead, he contrasts an *ancient* approach to *paideia* with the *contemporary* practice of university education.

In hindsight, then, it is to be regretted that it was Kelsey, himself a practitioner within the 'Berlin' tradition, whose attempted resolution of the questions surrounding ministerial formation proved so influential, overshadowing the far more promising proposals of Craig Dykstra, mentioned above, and also those of Edward Farley and Charles Wood, each of whom advocated a version of reflective practice at the heart of formation.[10]

'Secular' theology

Kelsey explicitly treats his two models of excellence in education as 'non-theological' factors.[11] He describes the two approaches as culturally derived models of educational excellence, but without attempting to analyse either model from a theological point of view for its adequacy to a Christian understanding of human life and learning. When we make the attempt, however, it very quickly emerges that the terms on which theology was to be granted a place in the Enlightenment research university represent a surrender to the dominating principalities and powers of contemporary culture.[12]

David Kelsey,' *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 4.1 (2007), pp. 31-47; Kyle J. A. Small, 'Missional Theology for Schools of Theology: Re-engaging the Question "What is Theological about a Theological School?"' in Craig van Gelder (ed), *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation,* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009; David Hilborn, 'Beyond Athens and Berlin: Past, Present and Future Models of Theological Education, paper given at a colloquium at St. John's College, Nottingham, April 18th 2012; John Williams, 'Conflicting Paradigms in Theological Education for Public Ministry in the Church of England: Issues for Church and Academy', *International Journal of Public Theology 7,* 2013, pp. 275-296. Taking up a remark of Kelsey's, Robert Banks proposed a 'Jerusalem' model, in which mission would play a central part, in *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models,* Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999. Brian Edgar proposed the addition of 'Geneva' as a confessional model of training in 'The Theology of Theological Education'*, Evangelical Review of Theology, Vol 29 No. 3,* 2005, p. 208-217. Darren Cronshaw takes an eclectic approach to all four models, adding a contextual element in 'Reenvisioning Theological Education and Missional Spirituality', *JATE 9.1,* 2012, p. 9-27. In the United States itself, the debate has advanced beyond the comparison of different models: Charles Foster, *et. al.,* the authors of *Educating Clergy,* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006, acknowledge the influence of Kelsey's models but set out to study and reflect on examples of pedagogical practice in theological training.

[9] *Athens and Berlin,* page 2.

[10] Farley, *Theologia,* pages 156-159; Charles Wood, *Vision and Discernment: An Orientation in Theological Study,* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1985, pages 57-77.

[11] *To Understand God Truly,* page 63.

[12] See Heywood, *Reimagining Ministry,* London: SCM, 2011, pp. 91-108 for a treatment of the 'powers' drawing on the work of George Caird, John Howard Yoder and Walter Wink, among others. In brief, they are to be seen as idolatrous corporate mindsets with the power to blind people to the truth.

The existence of the Church, the role of the clergy and the method of their training are all to be defined from the point of view of their role in the state. The role of the Church is the conduct of the religious dimension of social life and the clergy are to function as professional religious practitioners. That Schleiermacher should propose this as the basis of theology's role in the university is not surprising in the context of his time. Since the Reformation, the decision as to the form of religion to be followed in the German States – Catholic, Lutheran or Calvinist – had been in the hands of the governing authorities. Church and State were thereby integrally related.

However, a view in which the role of the church is to serve society in this way is very different from one in which the church's role is to serve the coming of the kingdom of God, which will supplant all human authority. Although the church does aspire to meet human need in a variety of forms as part of its God-given mission, it does so not as an agent of the state or even to fulfil an acknowledged role in society, but from commitment to God's kingdom. While churches may work in partnership with community and secular agencies, there must always be an element of reflection on the church's engagement with society to ensure that it is the values and purposes of the kingdom that are taking priority.[13]

Secondly, in the Berlin model, fidelity to standards of critical reasoning has been allowed to replace fidelity to Christ as the ultimate standard of truth. Rather than taking Christ as the one 'in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Colossians 2:3), the ultimate truths of the human condition are to be found through the process of scientifically conducted research. And rather than taking Jesus the *logos* as the world's inherent principle of rationality and revelation of the truth in person, theological study itself is to be subordinated and redefined according to the principles of Enlightenment critical reason. The authority of Scripture and tradition has been replaced by the authority of 'critical thinking'.

Constrained by the epistemology of the Enlightenment, for which human reason was the incontestable and indispensable foundation for critical study, much academic theological study became imprisoned within what Charles Taylor calls the 'immanent frame'.[14] To adopt the standpoint of the Enlightenment required assent to the beliefs that God cannot be personally involved in the world of humanity, that Jesus could not have been both human and divine, have worked miracles or have risen bodily from the dead. If the study of theology were to fit the immanent frame, a radical reinterpretation of some of the fundamental tenets of Christian faith became necessary.

Moreover, the terms on which theology maintains its place in the university continue to be set by the State rather than the Church. In the secular university, the theologian is constrained by the insistence of the wider society on a 'value-free' approach to the study of religion, undergirded still by the Enlightenment ideal of rationality. In practice, that 'value-free' approach means that while the teacher of theology may be known as an adherent of a particular religious tradition, this may not be seen to affect their teaching, either in content or manner. Gavin d'Costa retells the anecdote of a theology lecturer who used to begin his lectures in patristics with a prayer until students complained and he discontinued the practice.[15] What is significant here is that in beginning with prayer the

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[13] Ann Morisy, *Journeying Out,* London: Continuum, 2004, pages 26-41; *Bothered and Bewildered,* London: Continuum, 2009, pages 22-48. See also Paul Ballard and Lesley Husselbee, *Community and Ministry,* London: SPCK, 2007, pages 21-25.

[14] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age,* Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007, esp. pp. 539-93.

[15] Gavin d'Costa, 'On Theology's Babylonian Captivity within the Secular University', in Jeff Astley *et. al.* (eds.), *The Idea of a Christian University,* Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004, p. 184.

lecturer was remaining true to the essential insights of Christian faith and demonstrating these to the class. The Bible and Christian tradition are clear that knowledge and understanding of God only come about with the help of the Holy Spirit. God's thoughts are not our thoughts and his ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8). Prayer for the help of the Spirit is therefore an indispensable starting point.

In addition to the *a priori* beliefs I have listed above, theologians of the Enlightenment period and since have also been subject to some grave epistemological errors deriving from the Enlightenment's erroneous understanding of knowledge. One example is the claim of Gotthold Lessing that an 'ugly ditch' lies between contingent historical facts and the 'necessary truths of reason'. The truths of Christian faith, which in his view could only be of the latter kind, could therefore not be established by the historical facts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, nor yet by the whole sweep of biblical revelation. Another is the positivist approach to history, the belief that it is possible for history, in the words of Leopold von Ranke, 'merely to show how things were.'[16] The immanent frame gives rise to the assumption that the 'Jesus of history' could not possibly be the same as the 'Christ' who was the centre of the faith of the early Church; and the positivist idea of history led to the search for a 'historical Jesus', whose outcome reflected almost entirely the motivation and world-view of the individual searcher.[17]

A third aspect of the legacy of the Enlightenment is the fracturing of academic study into increasingly narrow and specialised fields. The factors contributing to this tendency include the pursuit of knowledge 'for its own sake' and the approach to knowledge as abstract theoretical generalisation. These two tendencies combine to push research in the direction of analysing the conceptual implications of aspects of the overarching theoretical framework of the discipline. With the explosion of knowledge in the contemporary world it becomes impossible for any but the most practiced expert to hold a detailed overview of the whole field of the discipline. This means that research degrees, the criteria for which include mastery of the relevant subject area, tend to focus on specialised areas within it. This yardstick for progress in the academic community is reinforced by the expectation of regular publication, pushing academics in the direction of increasingly specialised areas of experience.

The discipline of theology is no exception to this rule, divided as it is between biblical scholars, further sub-divided into Old and New Testament specialists; systematic theologians; ethicists; philosophers of religion; church historians and, in some places at least, practical theologians; with little in the way of cross-fertilisation taking place between them. This feature of academic theology as a community of practice is completely antithetical to the requirements of Christian ministry. There the aspiring minister is required to integrate his understanding of the Bible, history, ethics and systematic theology, so as to bring the resources of his study to bear on the practical everyday problems of ministry.

Finally, the way in which academic theology is taught reflects the history and trajectory of the sub-discipline under study. The community's aim is to initiate the novice into the practices of academic study. For this to be successful, he must learn the issues at stake and the big names involved in the most significant controversies within the discipline; build a picture of how the discipline has been shaped by these, and what are its present interests and most important issues. All this is very

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[16] Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichte der romanischen und germanishen Völker,* Berlin: Reimer, 1824, page vii, translated and quoted by Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace,* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996, page 240.
[17] A summary and typology of the various 'searches' is given in Tom Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God,* London: SPCK 1996, pages 3-124.

different from the requirement of the Christian minister to be resourced by the key methods and insights of the discipline for the practice of ministry or of the disciple to draw on its resources for the practice of faith in everyday life.

Lest it appear that I am seeking to convey a wholly negative picture of academic theology, I should confess that I found the study of theology in the University of Durham as part of my own training for ordination one of the most stimulating and satisfying experiences of my life. It should also be acknowledged that the epistemological errors of the Enlightenment are in the process of breaking down, creating room for approaches in which faith and critical reasoning are avowedly interconnected. Moreover, most professional theologians and biblical scholars are also Christians for whom the practice of discipleship exercises a considerable influence on their work. Recent biblical study has begun to rebalance the dogmatic scepticism surrounding the historical nature of the Gospels. Scholars such as Richard Bauckham and Tom Wright have ably summarised the evidence that suggests that the gospel accounts, including the resurrection stories, bear all the marks of eye-witness testimony.[18] Mark McIntosh is one of several scholars who set out to introduce the study of theology as a search for 'theological virtue'. 'Theology,' he writes, with a degree of irony, 'is in constant danger of getting carried away – from a respectable discipline managed by theologians to a mysterious sharing in God's way of life.'[19]

The point I wish to make is that, while it is undoubtedly necessary to draw on the resources of theological scholarship in the course of ministerial formation, there are dangers in so doing. There is always the risk of forgetting the distinction between formation for ministry and training in theological scholarship: of constructing courses of teaching which focus more on the history and methods of a particular theological sub-discipline rather than the application of theology to ministry. Within that, there is the danger of initiating students into the mistakes of the past simply because they are an integral part of the history of the discipline.

As an example, I was once asked to review a course of teaching in Christology for students preparing for ordination who were studying a module entitlted Topics in Christian Doctrine. The course was wholly structured around the relationship between the 'Jesus of history' and the 'Christ of faith', tracing the question through the work of a series of theologians. It was the study of the way in which theologians had tried, with limited success, to reconcile an epistemological error originating in the Enlightenment with the traditional content of Christian faith. As an initiation into the practice of theological scholarship it could not be faulted, but one wonders what value the exclusive focus on an epistemological and theological mistake could have as an element in ministerial formation, especially when compared with the wide field of alternative possibilities with a greater potential for resourcing ministry: the role of Christ in creation as the origin of all things; in revelation as the image of God; in reconciliation through the atonement; in the new creation as the second Adam; in mission through his Body in the world; in ministry as the Servant of God; as King, victorious over powers and principalities.

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[18] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses,* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006; Tom Wright, *Victory of God*.

[19] Mark McIntosh, *Divine Teaching,* Oxford: Blackwell, 2008, page 7.

Some sample issues

If you accept this analysis of academic theology and its relationship to ministry and discipleship, it follows that there is a need carefully to examine the content of our subject areas to discern which areas are most appropriate to equip people for ministry.

The thoughts below are offered as examples of what is known as 'triple-loop' thinking. Single-loop thinking examines the results of current strategies to see whether these can be improved. Double-loop thinking examines the assumptions, values and beliefs of the system as a whole. Triple-loop thinking goes further still. It questions our governing paradigms. It asks to what extent the assumptions behind what we do have been shaped by our history and context and may need to change.

In relation to ministerial formation, the assumption governing theological seminaries in many parts of the world has been that induction to the subject disciplines of academic theology adequately prepares people for ministry. Ever since the 1950s, voices have been raised suggesting that this is not the case, and recent research amplifies and gives substance to these doubts. It seems appropriate, therefore, to invite the Church to wrestle with these questions.

I am not a specialist in any of the core theological disciplines, although I have taught Old Testament to both ordinands and trainee readers. Apart from education, my field of expertise lies in philosophy. As subject specialists, you will have a better grasp on whether the issues raised here are cogent and relevant. They are introduced as a stimulus to examining the content of the subject areas of academic theology for their appropriateness to ministerial formation.

The Doctrine of the Trinity

In both the study of early church history and systematic theology, the debates surrounding the doctrine of the Trinity usually receive a great deal of attention. If our intention were to induct students into the discipline for its own sake, it would be right that this should be so. It would be important that they gained a clear sense of what was at stake in these disputes, and, for systematic theology, the philosophical issues involved. Without this, they could not be said to be competent practitioners in these fields.

However, in both the period of the early church and the Enlightenment, the prevailing philosophy was atomistic. This meant that the idea of something or Someone being a plurality in unity was problematic. In the contemporary context, physicists have no difficulty in describing the nature of quantum reality in terms of relationships within a field. This means that the issue that appeared so problematic to theologians in these earlier periods virtually disappears. Instead, the idea of God as plurality in unity takes on new significance. God may be seen as the Creator of a world in which virtually every part, from the makeup of physical matter to the working of the plant and animal kingdoms to the structure of human life, exists in relationship.

Mission and Kingdom

Modern Western theology took shape in the era of Christendom, in which adherence to Christian faith was virtually universal. As a result, what we might call the structure of systematic theology reflects this context. Tom Wright has remarked that the creeds pay little attention to the events of Jesus' life. Rather, they focus on the doctrines most in dispute in the early church. As a result of this, academic theology gives central place to these doctrines. Meanwhile, the doctrines of mission and the kingdom of God have until recently been practically relegated to a footnote. Mission was

something that happened overseas, in the non-Christian world, whereas the kingdom was held to be a present reality and the study of eschatology focussed on issues of judgement and salvation.

Yet, if we examine the New Testament, we find that mission and the coming kingdom of God are the two most important themes. This implies that to construct a systematic theology in which these themes are peripehral is to distort the nature of Christianity and makes it doubtful whether induction into the traditional structure of systematic theology is the most fruitful and effective way of preparing people for ministry in post-Christendom society.

Traditions of Ethics

The scholarly study of ethics would need to include an introduction to both the utilitarian and deontological traditions in ethics. However, each is dependent on a particular epistemology, the one on empiricism the other on Kantian idealism, each of which is now known to be mistaken. Where the principal aim is decision-making in the contemporary world, these traditions could be seen as having only marginal importance.

The dominant ethical tradition in the contemporary Western world appears to be the idea of human rights. Many of the problems we encounter stem from the incoherence of this tradition. In effect, the idea of rights becomes a struggle between different groups, each attempting to assert its 'right' most effectively. Thus Moslems prevail over animal rights activists on *halal* meat, while the LGBT+ community prevails over Moslem beliefs on human sexuality. Meanwhile feminists and the transgender community are locked in struggle over safe spaces for women and 'cancel culture' reflects the determination of various groupings to prevent the voices of their opponents being heard. In contrast to the radical individualism embodied in the human rights tradition, Christianity proposes an ethic of love in community. Imagine the effect on society if the various rival groups were willingly to yield preference to each other!

The 'Jesus of History'

The study of the New Testament was dominated for much of the modern period by a search for the 'historical Jesus'. The search is dependent on two glaring epistemological errors: the 'immanent frame' characteristic of Enlightenment thinking, which made the claim of Jesus to be the Son of God problematic; and the positivist theory of history, which understood history to be a quest for 'what really happened'. These two unexamined assumptions lead to the assumption that Jesus had to be someone other than the person portrayed in the Gospels and the object of Christian faith.

If the aim were to induct students into the study of the New Testament as an academic discipline, the search for the historical Jesus would unquestionably take a prominent place. Likewise, in the study of Christology, the efforts of theologians to square these supposed epistemological imperatives with the traditional content of Christian faith. However, since the quest for some 'historical' Jesus other than the Christ presented to us in the Gospels is now seen to be not only a fruitless but a pointless search, it is questionable whether it needs to occupy more than a footnote in the context of ministerial formation.

History of the Church or History of Doctrine?

The traditional approach taken to the teaching of Church history in ministerial formation has been to treat it as the history of doctrine. However, it is worth asking the question as to whether this ought to be so. As an institution, the Church's role is to sustain the central Christian practice of participation in the mission of God. The development of doctrine and the conflicts that have arisen

from this are but one strand in its history. An alternative to history of doctrine would be the history of the Church's success or otherwise in fulfilling its call.

I once led a Bishop's Certificate group, few of whose members would have left school after the age of 16. The two-year course separated the study of Church history from the study of doctrine, devoting a term to each. Approaching the term in which we were to study Church history, I found it hard to imagine that the group would find much to interest them. I could not have been more wrong! They loved it, and when it came to choose which of the topics in the Bishop's Certificate they would take as the subject of a presentation to their local church, it was Church history that they chose. 'These are our brothers and sisters in Christ,' they declared. The study of the Church's history had helped to affirm their identity as members of Christ's Body.

Worship = Liturgy?

The study of liturgy reflects the focus in ministerial formation on the gathered church rather than the 'dispersed' or 'sent' church. It also reinforces the widespread conception of a Christian as someone who 'goes to church' rather than someone who is a 'follower of Christ'. As a result 'worship' is identified as what takes place in church, mostly on a Sunday. In contrast, both Old and New Testaments state repeatedly that the worship God looks for consists of thanksgiving and obedience and that without these participation in liturgical ritual is vain.

Should the focus of ministerial formation therefore be on the study of liturgy or the study of worship? To state this in terms of the theory of learning in communities of practice, on reification or participation, or the relationship between the two?

Where are the 'So what?' questions?

The reinterpretation of the module aims and the learning outcomes we thought about in Task 2 and the review of our subject areas for this Task has taken place against the background of the overall question, 'How can we adjust our teaching strategy so that it becomes life-centred or ministry-centred rather than subject-centred?' One way of achieving this is to identify the life-centred themes that crop up in our subject areas. To do this, we need to think, 'What is the potential impact on Christian discipleship and the life and mission of the Church of this passage of Scripture, believing this doctrine, engaging with this period of Church history or wrestling with this ethical problem?' Briefly, it is about finding the 'So what?' questions most relevant to our students and those they are being trained to lead.

Here are three sets of suggestions, for a study of Mark's Gospel, a Church history curriculum and a course in doctrine. The outline for Mark's Gospel is taken from the timetable of one of the TEIs involved in the project that gave rise to this programme.

Date	Topic	Pre-reading
Oct 13	**Introduction to the Bible, to the NT, and to Mark** Introduction to the module - Introduction to Mark - Critical issue: what is a 'Gospel'?	
Oct 20	**Who is Mark's Jesus?** Calling, teaching, healing Critical issue: the 'messianic secret' A model for ministry?	Mark 1-4 Green, Gospel of Mark
Oct 27	**Why has Jesus Come?** Jesus 'on the way': his mission Critical issue: the 'Synoptic problem' Jesus's agenda, the disciples', and ours	Mark 8-10
Nov 10	**Mark's Ending: Climax, or Anti-climax?** Passion narrative and resurrection Critical issue: Mark's ending(s) and textual criticism Weakness, forsakenness, and ministry	Mark 14-16 Blount, 'Is the Joke on Us?'

A survey of Church history focussing on the history of the Church in England might use the study of different periods to introduce some key issues in the life of the Church:

the formation of the canon in the first two centuries	can we trust the Bible? what is its authority?
the formation of the creeds	what is the function of doctrine in the Church?
the Anglo-Saxons and the conversion of England	how best can the Church participate in God's mission: comparison between the methods of the earliest missionaries and mission in the contemporary context
the mediaeval period	Christendom and the end of Christendom issues of authority in the life of the Church
the Reformation	the differences between Protestantism and Catholicism how should the Church cope with difference?
the Victorian Church	the Church's role in social reform what should the relationship be between Church and State?

And for doctrine:

creation	what difference does it make to experience the world as the creation of a good and wise God?
creation / Trinity	what does it mean to made 'in the image of God'? themes of human dignity, created sociality
sin	how do we explain what is wrong with the world? what do we mean by evil?
mission / kingdom / eschatology	what is God's purpose for the world? how do we recognise the presence and activity of God in our context? what do we have to hope for?
Christology	what part does Jesus play in God's purposes for the world?

And finally

Among our students will be some with a call from God to engage with the world of theological scholarship. Some may go on to become the theologians of the future. However, I think we need to assume that at this stage of their lives, they are being formed for ministry, and that their introduction to the world of academic theology (for those who do not have an existing degree in the subject) needs to reflect this. If they then go on to become theologians, a clear sense of the ways academic theology relates to everyday theology will enable them to serve the Church more effectively.

David Heywood, February 2023