



Guest Editorial

This issue of *Theology in Scotland* has a particular focus – namely, theological education in Scotland today and the key questions that are being asked by theological educators inhabiting various Christian traditions and academic environments. Whatever the particular situations, a common environment for most theological institutions not only in Scotland, but across the UK, Europe as a whole, and indeed much of the Western world, is that of significant change. As the number of practising Christians continues to decline – for some denominations dramatically – so does the number of those wanting to study theology and especially those undergoing ministerial training. At the same time, however, there is a growing awareness of different ways of being church and a vision for new, diverse and contextually relevant ways of doing Christian ministry.

Sandy Forsyth’s article provides an overview of the struggle within the Church of Scotland in recognising that inherited models and patterns are simply not working in the post-Christian culture. Instead, he argues, pioneering missional expressions of church need to be given space and priority. Such locally-rooted Christian communities and ministries require appropriate training for those that want to serve, both lay and ordained. Particularly focusing on the changes required of theological academia in this process, Forsyth pays attention to the need for apostolic and missional formation which necessitates a review of the curriculum as a whole, rather than a mere addition of ‘missional’ elements to an existing course. Such a curriculum would also need to seek to integrate intellectual, emotional, relational and character change – that is, a recognition that such education would be personally involving and transformative.

The goal of personal transformation is also explored in the article co-written by the core teaching team at the Scottish Baptist College – Ian Birch, Lina Toth and Graham Meiklejohn. They begin by making a case for convictional theology – that is, a theological approach that seeks to discover, understand and transform the deepest drives, emotions and persuasions which guide human thinking and action. Importantly, convictions central to one’s being may not be those one

wishes to declare to others and indeed oneself. From this perspective, theological education involves helping students to become aware of possible tensions between their own declared and lived convictions as a way of inviting them to a journey of personal transformation. Such a journey can be further assisted by other disciplines and theories, such as Transactional Analysis (TA), which Birch, Toth and Meiklejohn consider next. As a psychodynamic pedagogical approach, TA offers a means of working with the feelings, thoughts and behaviours of the three ego-states that students and teachers may operate in, with the purpose of achieving maturity – in the language of TA, the Adult ego-state, or, perhaps we could add, in Pauline terms, the diet of ‘solid food’ for those ‘whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil’ (Heb 5:14).

Offering a Scottish Episcopalian perspective, Michael Hull next explores the relationship between theological education and ministerial formation. For the latter to take place, he argues, attention needs to be paid to the ordinands’ formational community, or rather several such communities: the local church; fellow ordinands; and indeed the community of other practitioners (including those who would teach the ordinands). Hull also is also arguing for the vital role of formal theological studies which equip the ordinand with what Hull terms ‘theological proficiency’ – that is, professional learning that enables ordinands to achieve appropriate professional standards making them fit to serve.

However, whilst ministerial training represents an important area of consideration, one of the key issues in the light of the changing face of the church and mission is the support that needs to be provided to lay people. Whilst for some traditions, lay training has always played an important role, Liam Fraser argues that in the Church of Scotland’s thinking, formal theological education and ordination was always considered indispensable for such key practices as preaching and worship leading, with the result that attention to and interest in lay ministry and mission is largely missing. In the current realities the Kirk is facing, the role of lay training – as well as an effective link (or the lack of such) between the Kirk and its academic partners – needs to be seriously re-thought if the church is to take part in the mission of God in the post-Christendom context of Scotland.

Continuing the theme of theological education as formation for mission, John Drane similarly highlights the disconnect between traditional church structures and those who sense God's call into a ministry of a new kind. The contours of this emerging approach to ministry may not be fully clear yet, but what it is clear is that it seeks to address the yearnings of a culture which does not see traditional church expressions as in any way responding to those yearnings. Drane draws attention to the role that spiritual formation can – and should – play alongside other aspects of formal theological education so that it can be indeed transformational. It thus underlines a common thread running through all these articles – a concern and a case for missional, formative, and transformational learning.

One of the implicit questions behind a number of this edition's articles, however, is whether the Scottish theological institutions are able to respond to the need for alternative forms of theological education, or whether – like the parable of the old and new wineskins – new institutional arrangements will have to be found. Is the widespread recognition that ministry and mission in contemporary Scotland must be largely lay-led compatible with theological programmes that require full-time study and the abandonment of one's existing career? Do the financial pressures on theological institutions necessitate great ecumenical co-operation, or at least a lighter reliance on buildings and full-time staff? Does the decline in Scottish-born theologians and theological reflection on Scottish contemporary life necessitate the greater use of practitioners in teaching and training?

It is not only theological education itself that is interrogated by the articles contained in this special edition, however, but the ministry of the Scottish churches themselves. Theological education is shaped by the models of ministry it is designed to serve, and the clamour for change in theological education addressed by these articles is perhaps an indication that the traditional models of ministry used in the majority of Scotland's churches have outlived their usefulness. Changes in theological education, then, can be seen as 'signs of the times' – or, more cynically, canaries in the mine! – for the death, reform, and renewal of the ministry of Christ's Church itself. If that is so, consideration of the matters addressed by this issue may yield

important insights not only for policy makers, but for the women and men who Christ has called to preach, serve, and evangelise in his name in the secular and pluralist society of twenty-first century Scotland.

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