



## Editorial

### The Doctor of Ministry Degree

In *Education the Reflective Practitioner* (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco 1987) Donald Schoen argues that within many of the major professions - he mentions law, education, business and engineering - there is an educational crisis. A wide-spread criticism is that what aspiring practitioners need most to learn, professional schools seem least able to teach. The problem, it is argued, can be located in a model of professional education which moves from theory to practice. Parallel with this developing critique of basic professional education, no doubt partly as a result of it, there has been a significant growth in continuing professional education. This has been based upon a different educational theory, the so-called 'reflective practice' approach, in which people in the midst of their careers have been invited to reflect upon their professional practice and then to re-engage with their underlying theories in a new and creative way.

Education for ministry has not remained immune from this process and nowhere has this been more marked than in North America. Seminaries in the United States and Canada have over the past thirty years made a major investment in a distinctive approach to continuing ministerial education aimed at ministers a number of years into their professional work. There are now literally hundreds of Doctor of Ministry programmes in North America. They vary considerably in quality and emphasis. Some specialise in preaching, some in counselling and some are of a more generic nature. A common feature is that they are undertaken concurrently with their ministries with consequent opportunity to reflect upon what they are actually doing. Participants meet together, occasionally but regularly, for a week or two of intense study but in between spend time reflecting within a carefully supervised structure.

One of the best and longest established courses has been that offered by Princeton Theological Seminary which has had strong historic

links with the Church of Scotland. Participation in the course has become an increasingly attractive proposition for C of S ministers, facilitated by the increasingly generous study leave arrangements set in place by the Board of Ministry. This issue of *Theology in Scotland* features the work of six ministers who participated as a group in the Princeton D.Min. course. For this issue they have all worked under the constraint of reducing much longer final dissertations to articles of a length appropriate to the journal. I suspect that, inevitably perhaps, they have all suffered a little in the process because each contributor could have said more, much more. Nevertheless the six papers, together with the first paper on method – jointly written and jointly owned – convey something of the flavour of the D.Min. process. Every one I have met who has participated in such a programme testifies to its value in helping to reflect theologically and personally upon their ministry and of the increased professional confidence which comes through participation in such a course of study.

It is good to know that there are stirrings both in Scotland and in the wider U.K. to develop a professional doctorate set in our own context. There are also spin-offs in initial ministerial education particularly in the current developments in supervised placements. However, we should not undervalue what is already at the heart of the current divinity courses, a never-to-be-repeated opportunity to study in depth the major theological disciplines. And before ministers can become reflective practitioners they must have engaged in some real practice on which to reflect! The six papers in this issue demonstrate the potential value of this kind of continuing ministerial education for those with the energy and inclination to make the considerable commitment involved.

*David Lyall*