

Introduction

Ministerial Formation and Virtue Ethics

The nature of leadership in the church has always been contentious, but perhaps the questions that surround its character and purpose have never been so starkly put. For a few, an improvement in the quality of its leadership is the answer to most of the church's woes, while for others "leadership" is a taboo subject, promising little but a wholesale capitulation to the spirit of the age: secular, commercial and shallow. This book draws upon a range of ideas to construct an understanding of the preparation of men and women for the leadership of the church, construed as "formation" for Christian ministry. I take a less sanguine view of the merits of adopting secular and managerial models for the leadership of the church than many, but I do not underestimate the importance of formation for ministry as of key significance in the future growth (or even survival) of the church in the West.

Formation for ministry is a holistic understanding of the processes engaged in the preparation of men and women for ministry. It is the shaping of a whole life that is of concern here, not merely the imparting of knowledge or the acquiring of skills. It is a development of character, spirituality, ministerial skills, and growth in knowledge with understanding that is the task of the church in preparing such for the leadership, care, and service of its congregations, and the advancement of its mission.

The overarching framework I have adopted is that of virtue ethics, especially as mediated through the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, but along the way I will incorporate supporting structures to this argument from the work of the educational and psychological theorist, Leo Vygotsky, and its derivative: "communities of practice." The opening chapter lays those particular foundations. I will also place this within a narrative of the changing nature of the task of the preparation of ministers for their roles within the church,

tracing the story from apprenticeship to education, to training, and most recently, to formation. I do so in this opening chapter.

Subsequently we will continue to explore in Part 1 the history of theological education and formation, and then turn to describing virtue ethics and in particular, that version espoused by one of its foremost exponents, Alasdair MacIntyre. Finally, in Part 1, in the theological framework for ministerial formation, an outworking of the narrative of creation, eschaton and redemption, we give the overarching framework for the origins and goals of ministry. In Part 2 three ways of approaching ministerial formation will be discussed: ministry (i) as wisdom, (ii) as a form of focused discipleship, and (iii) ministry formation as a type of apprenticeship. Here are other models of ministerial formation that will give this argument's primary model of virtue ethics, a thicker resonance. In Part 3 we will analyze within a virtue ethics framework the formation of the minister's intellect, spirituality, and character, before turning in Part 4 to the practices of ministry as the roles through which formation takes place: the minister as liturgist, pastor, spiritual guide, and resident theologian, missionary, preacher, administrator, and leader. These final two parts give substance to the oft-used trio of overlapping circles of knowing, being, and doing that combine together in formation.

It is my hope that this book might be of interest and guidance to those whose task it is to prepare others for ministerial office. In addition, I hope that this book provides a map for those undergoing ministerial formation, and assist them in understanding quite what is going on in the processes to which they have submitted themselves in response to the call of God to serve him and his people. It is not intended to be a course in ministerial formation, nor a manual for any who might misunderstand that ministerial formation can be achieved in some kind of "self-help" way (although some might argue that ministry at times is a form of disorder that might benefit from its own self-help guide). Rather, this is an extended exploration of a way to understand formation for ministry, or rather the formation of ministers, as a communal and ecclesial process that seeks to create "the good" minister, in the sense of the one who personally embodies the practices of the church, and in whom the church might place its confidence and trust.

It is written from the perspective of a British Baptist, and I cannot but reflect my cultural and ecclesial presuppositions and prejudices, although I hope it has a wider currency than just addressing British Baptists. I have exercised pastoral ministry in two local churches for seventeen years during the period 1982 to 1998, and again, most recently, from 2015. After 1998 I offered regional oversight or episcopate for five years and during the past decade held the post of national leadership within the Baptist Union of Great

Britain for ministry (variously Head of Ministry Department and Ministries Team Leader). Within this latter responsibility I have worked closely with our denominational theological colleges through a period of great change, and while I have only briefly held a staff position within a college, I have taught occasionally at a number, and am presently associate research fellow at Spurgeon's College in London, where many years ago I was educated/trained and, perhaps even "formed" for ministry, and been a visiting lecturer at two or three institutions. I have also seen the quality and caliber of my colleagues in ministry on a regional, then national canvas, and have been generally impressed by what I have seen: dedicated, hard-working, and godly men and women, whose pastoral ministry and leadership has borne fruit in countless ways. I have also seen too often the damage that failure in ministry causes, both to individuals and to their church communities. That failure can be moral, when conduct that brings the gospel and the church into disrepute is perpetrated, often with profound self-delusion and harm. But it can also be a failure of capability and competence by those who are morally stable, but otherwise rather inadequate practitioners of ministry, and equally a failure in sustaining ministry through sheer overextension and burnout. My conviction is that if we take the formational process, and a virtue-ethics conception of it, more seriously, we might reduce the frequency of either kind of failure, and in a day of ever-increasing public scrutiny of our failures, and cynicism about the church, such a trajectory is vital.

I am convinced that a variety of approaches to this theme enriches its understanding, and so together with the familiar tools of description, argument, and analysis, I utilize discussion of visual images from pictorial art from time to time, together with something of my own story, which could be rather grandly described as auto-ethnography, or simply narrative theology. This is a deliberate strategy since formation for ministry also encapsulates a rich variety of approaches, from the imparting of information through traditional means (lectures, reading, and so forth), to the development of self-knowledge and self-critical reflection on practice and, at least in the formation of liturgists, the use of musical and visual imagery. In a small way I hope this mixed approach reflects the varied nature of ministry formation itself.