

## **Called on the Mountain to serve on the Plain – Priorities for Ministry**

### **Formation**

*Humphrey Southern*

#### *The Mountain*

Christian visitors to Mount Tabor in Galilee, the site traditionally associated with the Transfiguration, may respond to what they find there with a certain wry ruefulness. At least those blessed with a modicum of Biblical literacy and some sense of irony may do so. For at the top of the mountain is a great basilica divided into three unevenly matched chapels, one (the largest) for the transfigured Jesus and one each (smaller, and on either side) for Moses and Elijah. Seemingly Peter, gently mocked as he is by St Luke (especially) and by so many commentators and preachers since, has actually achieved the last laugh. His aspiration has been fulfilled: a 'dwelling' in three sections – one for the Lord, one for Moses and one for Elijah – has indeed been constructed on the site.

Peter's instinct, perhaps suitably for one identified as the Rock on which the Church is to be established, is thoroughly ecclesiastical. He aspires to encapsulate a moment, to catch it and build a structure around it so that it may be accessible and capable of being connected with long after the moment itself – the immediate experience – has passed. Moments of divine revelation are precisely that, *instants* of glory and insight, evanescent and transitory, in which revelation occurs. Most obviously modelled when it obeys the Lord's command, 'Do this in remembrance of me', the Church's aspiration is always to hang on to such fleeting but profound gifts of grace and to open them up to others – generations and communities far distant in time and space from the originating experiences – so that these successors may be as blessed as were the disciples who could say (of the

Transfiguration, in this instance) that they 'were with [Christ] on the holy mountain'.<sup>1</sup> The Church is in the business of bridging the eternal and the temporal, bringing the ineffable and uncontainable into the day-to-day reality of human life and experience, telling the 'old, old story' and re-living the truths once revealed to the saints.

This ecclesiastical instinct, to institutionalise and concretise passing moments of insight and gift, so that they may be reliably connected with and re-lived, is the instinct that lies behind much of what the Church does and has achieved over the two millennia of its existence. It is the instinct that drives the evolution of sacraments and scriptures, holy spaces and buildings, structures in word and community, in wood and stone and liturgy – and, indeed, ecclesiastical law in its various forms. In fact, despite the somewhat sneering tone of the Gospel writers (especially Luke), Peter the founder of the Church did seem to know exactly what he was doing, after all.

Of course such a defence of Peter against the traditional commentary is not without potential difficulty. A beautiful flying creature caught in amber may be an object of beauty still, but it no longer flies and the danger with a project to catch the evanescent and pin it down within structures and liturgies is that the process can itself kill off, or at least significantly curtail, the very life it seeks to communicate and make available. Worse, the creation of objects of beauty to hold and carry that which intrinsically cannot be wholly held or carried can easily lead to a sort of idolatry in which the vehicle – rather than that which it seeks to convey – becomes the object of devotion and attention. Whether it be a much loved building or a treasured liturgy or translation of scripture or way of celebrating the sacraments, many and varied Christian traditions will know how beguilingly easy it is for the structure to come to dominate the treasure that it seeks to communicate, to carry and (however improbably) to protect.

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 1. 18

Upholders of Tradition – not just specific traditions, but the very idea that the concept of Truth handed on is central to what Truth *is* – need to be conscious of this danger and of the countervailing and possibly corrective possibility of ‘new’ truth and new insight to be discovered and explored and conversed with. Alongside, and sometimes in opposition to, what we might call ‘dwelling-building’ voices in the Christian story are those more ready and confident to watch and listen for fresh Spirit-inspired revelation in the current moment and to look out for insight and wisdom in sources other than those hallowed by the magisterium of history. This is the instinct that is more ready to listen and to give authority (as the author of Revelation says) to ‘what the Spirit is saying to the Churches’<sup>2</sup> (or even to individual Christians) in the here and now, unmediated by too elaborate a process of community validation and institutionalisation.

Ideally, of course, there needs to be conversation – and (inevitably) some tension – between these two instincts and the Church at its best manages to maintain just such a discourse. The discussion and flow of wisdom between the so-called ‘liberal’ and so-called ‘conservative’, the relatively Charismatic and the more self-consciously Catholic, is one that at its best enriches the community of the faithful as a whole and shapes its shared life of faithfulness. There can be no permanent dwelling in Petrine shelters to enclose and pickle beyond development the experience once given to the saints any more than can it be said that the truth of God’s revelation is an entirely unmediated thing, experienced by each isolated believer in his or her own personal encounter with the Spirit of God without reference to that which the community has learnt and come to receive as authoritative through time and shared discipline.

### *The Plain*

It is perhaps in relation to what happens *off* the mountain that the importance of health in this dialogue is most critical. In the final verse of his famous Transfiguration hymn Joseph A. Robinson prays: “Tis good, Lord, to be here | Yet we may not remain; | But since Thou bidst us leave the

---

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 3. 13

mount, | Come with us to the plain.’ In the Gospel accounts, the Transfiguration is followed by messy and gritty encounter on the plain with suffering and need in the shape of a boy possessed by a demon whom the other disciples were unable to cure, apparently because of their lack of sufficient faith.<sup>3</sup> Missional engagement – the Good News impacting on human life and the life of the planet – is central to the purpose and calling of the Church and central, therefore, too, to how the Church sets its priorities and looks to its sources of authority. The purpose of that instinct to capture and preserve, to communicate and hand on that which God has given – the instinct that has given us scriptures and sacraments and so much of the essential paraphernalia of the Church – is, therefore, entirely missional. There is a story to tell, there are lives to be transformed, salvation to experience, and these are the tools we have – ‘dwellings’ such as Peter aspired to construct – in which and through which to achieve this missionary purpose.

### **Ministers of character for a Church of service**

With this in mind we may turn to the question of what is the object – the desired outcome – of ministerial formation? What do we want ministers to be competent to do or to be?

It seems that it is often with this question, or some version of it, that discussion of methods and priorities in ministry formation are apt to begin. Though sometimes, more worryingly, and perhaps with increasing urgency in our times, the discussions do not start even as far back as this, but rather further down the line. The *primary* obsession often appears to be with (and most energy devoted to) speculation about what kinds of ministers the Church needs *for its current immediate strategic purposes*, and the characteristics and skill sets that are desirable to ensure these.

I make no apology for focusing first on the question that the first section of this essay tried (however summarily) to address. This must be what gives us the essential orientation for how we first imagine

---

<sup>3</sup> Mark 9.14-29, especially vv. 18, 29 and *par.*

and dream, and then plan and resource, the business of ministerial and theological education and formation in our times or at any time, come to that. From that sense of being mountain-called to a plain-based ministry all else must follow, both for ministerial formation and the larger (and, indeed, prior) business of building Christian community in all its aspects, including evangelization, catechesis and missional engagement.

### *Developing disciples and forming ministers*

Thus it is that any reflection on priorities for ministerial formation and training, whether of clergy or lay ministers, or in the context of the ministry and discipleship of the whole baptised people of God, needs to take account both of the Petrine instinct with which I began and the dangers of distortion to which that instinct is vulnerable. My purpose in this paper is to focus on ministerial formation and training in the Church of England, with particular interest in the training and formation of ordained ministers, but although this is my focus, my intent is not to be exclusive, still less to suggest there is any lesser importance in how we apply this thinking to lay ministry formation or Christian discipleship more generally. These are not different categories of enterprise, after all: the whole *laos* of God shares its calling to be the Body of Christ, incarnating the reality of God sacrificially committed to the salvation and reconciliation of God's *cosmos*, to making real and reliably accessible that which God has revealed in time and space.

Intentional training for ministry and mission in the Church of England is, perhaps surprisingly or even shockingly, not a project with a very extensive history. The first Theological Colleges in England were established in the mid-nineteenth century: Chichester in 1839, Wells in 1840 and Cuddesdon (the first to be purpose built) in 1854. All were significantly preceded by other institutions elsewhere in what later came to be known as the Anglican Communion, for instance Bishop's College Kolkata in 1820, Virginia Theological Seminary in 1823 and Codrington College in Barbados, which became exclusively a clergy training institution in 1830, having been endowed as early as 1715 and opened in

1743. It is no part of my purpose to rehearse this history in any detail<sup>4</sup> but it is worth noting that the subject has – pretty much from its inception – been highly contested, both in terms of method, priority, cost and culture. The subject is still contested, and still expensive, and it is into this discussion that this present paper offers a modest contribution.

As stated, my concern here is not historical but contemporary. What should be the priorities and approaches *now* to ministerial formation to achieve the best and most productive balance between the building and preserving of Petrine shelters and more pioneering exploration in service of the injunction to preach the Gospel and make disciples, celebrating the truth of the saving work of God through the cross and resurrection of Christ? Are there particular approaches, methods and cultures that are or are not particularly well suited to the challenges of our times? What considerations do we need to attach to the question of cost in evaluating our options?

#### *The post-Christendom context*

The key distinctive as we reflect on the challenges of our times and culture must be the steady – even precipitous – collapse of what has been called the ‘Christendom’ model in the west in recent decades. In 1992 Wesley Carr with a number of collaborators produced a book called *Say One for Me*<sup>5</sup> which looked ahead to priorities for the Church of England in the coming new century. The title aimed to catch a key characteristic of the vocation of the Church of England which the writers believed even then to be under threat. It is a vocation with two distinct but connected aspects that could be labelled the *intercessory* and the *vicarious*. A public minister, asked to ‘say one’ for the person making the request, is being asked both to *intercede* – to offer prayer for the other’s blessing and benefit – and (in a sense) to do the person asking’s religion *for them*, that is vicariously. Central

---

<sup>4</sup> For a good introductory summary see Chapman’s chapter ‘Living the Truth’ in Mark D. Chapman (ed.) *Ambassadors for Christ* (Farnham. Ashgate. 2004), which also rehearses and elucidates well much of the background debate on the purpose and shape of theological education for ministry. For more general background on the developing professionalization of the clergy, see also Anthony Russell *The Clerical Profession* (London. SPCK. 1980), especially chapter 2.

<sup>5</sup> Wesley Carr et al. *Say One for Me: The Church of England in the next decade*. (London. SPCK. 1992)

to the role of the national church, the book argues, is responsibility both to pray for the nation and to do the nation's praying – its religious duty – for it.

Nowadays the so-called Christendom model on which this view rests is by no means any longer self-evident, a much sharper divide having developed between the community of Church and that which is not-Church. Consequently, a new set of skills and aptitudes is required for those who must work across the boundary. There is renewed emphasis on Mission and Evangelism: the responsibility of the Church of God to engage with the wider world outside itself, to live, proclaim and demonstrate Good News and to bring men and women into the community God has called into being for this work. Growing the Church – both its numbers and its impact – has become the high priority, with Carr's and his colleagues' insights apparently beginning to appear out of date and out of touch, at least to an influential cohort of contemporary commentators and decision makers.

Whatever the truth of this, it is clear that our battered world and nation are in sore need *both* of intercession (being prayed for) *and* of a confident, dynamic model of reconciled, hopeful living within the surrounding chaos. This is what we might call religion, the order and Good News it embodies being a blessing not just for church people but also for the communities they are called to bless as salt, light and leaven. The globe paralysed by Coronavirus, brutal war returned to our continent and the world's economic systems laid waste in consequence; a national community divided over Brexit; Parliament, Government and 'People' claimed to be at odds with one another; developing consciousness of Eco-Crisis with little consensus about how to address it; ongoing fear of terrorism and the powerlessness and injustice in which it is gestated ... There is much to list (well beyond this short catalogue) as challenging backdrop against which to 'say one' as ministers of the Good News. The point is that it is an essential aspect of the Gospel that it is corporate and communitarian in its scope, offering and working towards a Christian model of ordered, humane community in which justice, mercy and the values of the Kingdom may flourish. Perhaps especially in our times this needs to be insisted upon with renewed zeal, alongside the specific good news of

salvation through individual, personal relationship with God in Christ Jesus. Indeed, this may be an aspect that should be particularly salient within the preoccupations of the Church of England. Much could be said in lively debate about the benefits, problems or otherwise of 'Established' status, but for now it is simply worth noting that this element of our inheritance and corporate formation has been influential for many more than just Wesley Carr and his fellow writers as they explored the implications of being asked to 'say one' in the context of public ministry.

The post-Christendom narrative is challenging for this project and calling. Yet even with post-Christendom and its implications for the institutional Church as the underlying reality – a Church which has lost influence and impact and which needs to be 'grown' so that its hopeful message of salvation and redemption may be known more effectively amid the fractures of the world – there are still some questions to be asked about the essential culture of mission and evangelism that needs to be fostered in our times. Perhaps most particularly it is necessary to face up to the charge that the priority of Church growth, un-nuanced and without good theological grounding, can all too easily look like institutional self-serving, or (even more starkly) anxiety-driven obsession with survival.

It follows – and especially from this passing acknowledgement of institutional anxiety – that before all else we need ministers and disciples who are confident *of* and *in* the presence of God. In terms of ministerial formation this demands that the highest possible priority be given to developing ministers who are men and women of prayer. Private devotion and the cultivation of godly habits of personal prayer, Bible reading and meditation is key to this, as is the practice of corporate worship. This last is perhaps of especial importance to public ministers, lay and ordained, who have the responsibility to preach and to minister pastorally in the fractured world we inhabit, as well as to pray for it (in both Carr's senses of the expression). Corporate prayer is the habit through which we articulate and explore the reality of God within the cacophony of the world, as well as being the



metronome to give shape to communities (including seminaries) in which theological reflection and growth are the key shared enterprise.

*Ministers of character: Prayerful – Theological – Altruistic*

Alongside the discipline of shared prayer and worship (and as part of it) must be the facility to reflect theologically, to relate lived experience and observation to the wisdom and authority of Scripture and the Tradition of the Church that constitute the bedrock of any worthwhile curriculum of ministerial training, or any discipleship, come to that. So there needs to be an essential unity between the spiritual and theological formation of ministerial students – what and how they pray with what and how they learn – that by the grace of God builds awareness of and sensitivity to the God who is faithful in all things.

Currently there is (perhaps especially and reasonably among ordinands, though – to my mind – much less laudably in the discussion more generally) a strong emphasis on the need for training that is highly focused on the delivery of ‘hard’ skills and competencies. This connects, of course, to a preoccupation with mission that is understandable (and appropriate) in the post-Christendom age, but may suggest an unfortunate foregrounding of skill over wisdom, technique over habit.

Missionary commitment and practical ministerial capability are not unimportant, of course, but the development of character and personality, and the *habitus* to give these real rootedness and resilience, is surely considerably more significant, especially in the first (pre-ordination) phase of training. I have touched on the centrality of prayer and worship in this respect but other aspects are also very important. How students learn to know themselves and their own God-given, God-loved character and make up, and to do that with real psychological and spiritual depth and insight is at the heart of formation, rather more so than how to hold the baby at a baptism, organise a Mission effectively, fill in a strategic funding application or sing Compline beautifully (not unimportant as these things may be). With a sometimes quite dark ruefulness, ‘formation’ is often referred to as the

only really significant 'F-word' in the ordinand's lexicon and this is revealing. It is through experience and reflection on that experience – self-knowledge – that true growth occurs. The challenge is that whilst this kind of progress can be noticed and celebrated, it is harder to measure and to record in grades and marks to impress bishops, their advisers and (crucially) those making funding decisions about the processes.

For growth in self-knowledge to avoid being merely self-obsessed and hopelessly narcissistic it needs to be benchmarked, enriched and informed by deep theological wisdom. The traditional elements of any programme of ministerial training – serious engagement with the Bible and its languages, Doctrine, Church History, Ethics, Pastoral Theology and the like – are as important as ever they were. Not simply so that we may have clergy who as mere intellectual exercises can knock off a Hebrew gobbet, succinctly rehearse the Chalcedonian definition of the two natures of Christ, or rattle through a sophisticated critique of Utilitarianism, but so that they may be faithful and confident in what they teach and how they use such wisdom to relate human experience (their own and future parishioners') to the mind of God as the Church has known it. This synthesis of theology and experience – scripture, reason and tradition in the classic formulation – is key to ministry and (though it is not so often referenced in connection with this particular phrase) to 'ministerial effectiveness' as well. It needs to be at the heart as much of pastoral ministry as of apologetics, as relevant to parish clergy and lay ministers in their daily ministry of leading and growing Church and proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed as to so-called 'potential theological educators' in their allegedly more specialised calling. These things are not easy to measure, however, and so are (again) hard to demonstrate in terms of cost- benefit analysis when it comes to evaluating training programmes or styles or institutions. But they are essential and need to be given serious weight in any discussion of how we structure and resource ministerial training.

Informed wisdom and disciplined prayerfulness are not all, however. It seems clear, next, that Christian ministry in our times needs to be characterised by radical and sacrificial generosity, rooted in real humility and altruistic commitment to a transformed world. This means a Church that is rooted in and reflective of the huge diversity of God's creation and God's Kingdom. Perhaps more than many other Christian denominations, the Anglican Communion and Church of England revels in – and sometimes puzzles over – the variety of those God calls into the community of the Church. God in Christ calls into *koinonia* a staggering – and sometimes startling – variety of disciples and the process (and institutions) of ministerial formation need to be committed to reflecting that variety and comprehensiveness as richly as possible. That can be difficult: there is untidiness, even incoherence sometimes, about the way we are together; and there are times when our differences – whether of theology, aesthetics, ethical positions, politics, liturgical preferences or a whole lot more – become problematic. There are times when we do not manage difference well or achieve the abundant living of each. But our aspiration must always be to generous, humble collaboration, offering a rich Gospel pattern for the world that is in such need of reconciliation and hope.

### *Delighting in diversity ...*

'Collaborative ministry' has long been a watchword and claimed as a key aspiration of the Church of England. For an equally long time, it seems, there has been loud and lively lament about how ill prepared so many of its ministers – especially ordained ministers, it is often claimed – have proved to be to engage in it. The twin enemies of collaborative ministry would seem to be the evils of clericalism and tribalism, which see ministry as solely or primarily an activity of the clergy, and/or so precious that it can only be shared amongst participants who overlap with each other extensively in terms of theological outlook, religious culture or (sometimes) downright prejudice. The best programmes and institutions of ministerial formation will be intentionally constructed to counter such attitudes, with trainees and faculty of rich diversity both of approach and vocation (in terms of

ministerial order). Working, learning and (especially in the residential seminary mode) living together with ministers and trainee ministers of great difference, cooperating on activities from planning worship to animating the social life of a community to staffing the local village fete (a speciality of my own institution) make for a good grounding for practical collaboration in ministry, better informed by gritty experience than by what is often somewhat romantic theory.

Crucially, also, it will be important for as long as the Church of England retains a two-stage pattern for training (college or course, followed by curacy) that the same values and priorities are modelled and espoused in each phase. It is no good if an ordinand's healthy formation in collaborative approaches to ministry, fostered through cooperation with colleagues and others in all sorts of activities and aspects of college or course life, is undermined by the example of a training incumbent whose outlook is different. It is not unknown for curates to be placed with incumbents whose energy and skill as parish priests – including growing church, running initiatives, forming partnerships and so on – has been characterised more by individualised energy and focus than by the rather different pace and style that comes with fostering collaboration and enabling the talents of a wide range of colleagues.

*... and avoiding being part of the problem*

At this point it is necessary to acknowledge that the ways in which many of our training institutions have developed have not, on the whole, served well the idea of healthy appreciation of difference within the community of the Church. Alongside the contemporary failing of anxiety, a longer-term besetting institutional sin for the Church of England (and Anglicanism more generally) has always been to allow our varieties of theological tradition, ecclesiological preference, liturgical taste and similar considerations to become tribal, and many of our training institutions are the product of this tendency. This is particularly obvious in respect of some of the older colleges which were explicitly formed to promote particular 'parties' within the ecology of the Church of England. My own

institution, Ripon College Cuddesdon, is an interesting case in point: founded (as Cuddesdon College) specifically in the intention of its founder to be 'a non-party diocesan seminary' it came quite rapidly under the influence of the resurgent Catholic tradition in the Church of England, only some time later and following mergers with other training institutions rediscovering and very intentionally seeking to develop an ethos that honours and delights in a very broad sweep of the traditions of Anglicanism.<sup>6</sup>

Generosity and altruism require both imagination and attentiveness to the world, to Scripture and the Tradition, and to God's ongoing self-revelation. Servants of the Gospel need to learn to listen and to hear, developing theological and spiritual suppleness in their responses to all that God lays before them. Of late the Church of England has embraced the rhetoric of 'good disagreement', with varying degrees of enthusiasm or cynicism. Whatever one's position within that scale, there can be no denying that the Church is full of people whose positions and dispositions are different from one's own, and that is a reality that needs to be acknowledged and lived with if Christendom is not to degenerate into a fractious collection of sects and tribes.

This is essential for the sake of the unity of the Church, 'that the world may believe'<sup>7</sup>, as Jesus prayed. It is also key to missional effectiveness, pastoral attentiveness and to faithful prophetic engagement. At the root of all of these priorities – and of any ministry that takes the idea of incarnation seriously – is a passionate interest in and love for the world.

---

<sup>6</sup> Cuddesdon College was founded in 1854. It merged in 1975 with Ripon Hall, a college in a more intentionally Liberal tradition, and with the St Albans and Oxford Ministry Training Course in 2\*\*\* and the West of England Ministerial Training Course in 2\*\*\*, the latter two institutions being non-residential regional courses which by their nature had a tradition of including students from all 'parties', a tradition Ripon College Cuddesdon now consciously and intentionally inhabits with enthusiasm.

<sup>7</sup> John 17. 21

## **Where do we go from here?**

The primary question was to establish what were the priorities for the formation of mountain-called ministers to serve on the plain. The concomitant challenge now is to ask whether ‘the Church’ (however we conceive of this entity, theologically or organisationally) has the right relationship with its training operation?

Initial training is ‘delivered’ (this commercial terminology seems highly appropriate) by a number of what are effectively para-Church organisations that are answerable to their own, largely closed governance systems. True, some of them have close relationships with particular dioceses, effectively being ‘owned’ by them, and so are enabled to be especially responsive to local and immediate priorities and needs, but this fact itself may have the effect of limiting their ability to focus on the wider Church in which many of their trainees are nevertheless to be deployable. A number of the larger, more nationally-focused colleges have a specific and intentional purpose (dating back to their foundations) to promote particular traditions within theology or formational mode, or both, that at best perpetuate incoherence and at worst tend towards sectarianism.

By and large, it could be said that the TEIs (Theological Education Institutions) are politically and – increasingly – culturally and organisationally peripheral to the leadership and management of the church as a whole and there is evidence of real frustration both in dioceses, the central bodies and in the TEIs themselves about this state of affairs and its implications. Who decides what TEIs should be doing, and how? What mechanisms are there for taking counsel about these things? Or are the resolution of such questions to be achieved only in individual decisions about individual ordinands and what those sponsoring them believe will be most beneficial for them? How much confidence is there that such decisions will not be unduly influenced by financial considerations? How does the Church as a whole rate the value of character formation and the development of prayerful wisdom (for instance) against hard skills competency in mission and evangelism? Few would deny that both need to be in the mix for ordination training, but how that mix is calculated and expressed in terms

of curriculum and ethos is a matter for careful judgement, in which most TEIs currently are left to make decisions and shape themselves without much input (or feedback) from the 'client'.

It would be hard to imagine other organisations operating in a similarly disconnected way. The military, for instance, would be most unlikely to outsource its training of leaders to the periphery of the armed forces, recognising that thinking about strategy and tactics and the underlying science and function of defence belongs with and alongside how these things are taught to emerging leaders of the future. Sandhurst, Dartmouth and the like are close to the centre of the life of the armed forces, rather than semi-independent service providers operating in an internal market, as is the case with Cuddesdon, St Mellitus, Oak Hill or wherever in relation to the Church of England.

The same holds true in other fields. Research and development, including deep reflection on purpose and priorities, belongs with training, rather than somewhere at a distance from it. In the world of the church, where there has long been a developing split between the practical mission and ministry on the ground and the work of academic theologians in the university faculties, this seems especially important. There is all the more need for closeness between theology and ministry as taught and practical intellectual and spiritual exploration of the things of God and how they are to be brought to bear in the priorities of the Church just at the time that the institutions intended for bringing these activities together are being more and more marginalised.

*What would a more joined up future look like?*

It is reasonable to ask how a more closely connected TEI sector might operate in relation to the wider church, if some of the structural weaknesses identified here were to be addressed. A fundamental challenge is to culture, both in relation to the TEIs and the institution of the church. In both worlds (and it is ironic to be thinking of them as separate worlds at this point) there is a well-developed sense of independence, dioceses jealously maintaining the individuality of their mission

strategies as shaped by their unique contexts and TEIs (as has been noted) often proving reluctant or unable to cooperate effectively with one another in ways that are economically advantageous or appropriate in terms of the imperative of collaborative ministry.

Clearly the Church of England is not a corporate body in any normally understood use of the term and there is a long history of episcopal and diocesan protection of individual authority and identity. Yet there may be signs of things beginning to change. The recent upheavals around Safeguarding have both highlighted and challenged (and to an extent maybe begun to undermine) the culture of a church that operates exclusively through diocesan 'silos'. Over a slightly longer period there have been moves to bring more coherence and effectiveness to the central structures, not least through the establishment of the Archbishops' Council and a rethinking of how the Church Commissioners operate in relation to it and the General Synod. Whether one finds oneself welcoming or deploring these developments, they may be seen as indicators of a slow shift towards a more corporate identity for the church and how it is organised and lead.

If the enterprise of theological training and formation is to be brought more effectively 'in house' these trends will need to be accelerated and made more intentional. The likelihood of the House of Bishops having the capacity or willingness to take over corporate strategic direction of the TEI sector will probably remain remote, but an enhanced Ministry Council with much stronger episcopal involvement<sup>8</sup> may be a credible way forward, particularly if its work is supported by a better resourced and stronger executive in the shape of Ministry Division, now (currently) retitled Ministry Team. The limited work the Ministry Team is currently able to do in coordinating TEIs and providing a forum for discussion, learning and input into other conversations is valuable, but to be truly

---

<sup>8</sup> There is encouragement to be drawn from the fact that the number of bishops – albeit mainly suffragan – serving on the Ministry Council has been increased in recent years.



effective in the terms for which I am advocating it will need to be significantly developed and enhanced in its operation.

The TEIs, for their part, need to be helped to see their aspiration to serve the church in new and possibly less reactive ways. Most importantly, we need to be helped to identify and develop ways of working together, both in terms of our formal training function and in how we minister to the wider church as a 'research and development' resource and service. Properly resourced this could (and should) expand to incorporate aspects of post-ordination, post-licensing training and formation of ministers – through IME2 and CMD – in close and developing partnership with dioceses and in relation to more coherent national curricula that could be developed for these stages.

Renewed patterns of cooperation between individual TEIs and between TEIs and dioceses, as well as with a more effective structure of strategic direction for the sector as a whole, would be likely to involve changes to the ways in which accountability works in the institutions. Currently institutions' primary accountability is to their own governing bodies and trustees, albeit with acknowledgement of Ministry Division and University partners' interest in aspects of their performance. Most governing bodies include members nominated by the General Synod and it would be a significant positive first step if critical consideration were given to how these appointments are made, what role description is evolved for them and how accountability to such role descriptions is exercised (none of which things is currently the case). There would certainly be much to be said for ensuring a degree of relevant overlap (and developing expertise) by ensuring that General Synod nominees to TEI governance be individuals who also serve on Ministry Council or have close familiarity with its work.

There may also be merit in thinking about how TEI Principals, as a body, relate to leadership structures in the church. As things stand, almost all involvement is informal, or little more than honorific. Some Principals may be invited to serve as honorary canons of the Cathedral of the diocese in which their TEI is situated and sometimes a Principal of a TEI with a particularly high local

profile may be invited occasionally or regularly to meet with the bishop's senior staff, but there is seldom any more developed a relationship than this. In The Episcopal Church of the United States the situation is different. Seminaries are led by Deans (rather than Principals), who, significantly, are styled – like Cathedral Deans – 'Very Reverend'. It is not the honorific that is important of itself, of course, so much as the sense that these leaders belong to some kind of community or college that has a recognised and important place within the wider body of the Church.

### *Conclusion*

This essay began with a reflection on the tension at the heart of the Church's vocation between (on the one hand) evolving and maintaining structures – Peter's 'dwellings' – to institutionalise the gifts of God given 'on the mountain', and (on the other) remaining supple and attentive to both to the changing needs of a changing society 'on the plain' and the prompts of the Spirit in response to such developments. I went on to suggest that ministers in such a Church will be more appropriately formed in terms of character, habit and wisdom than – necessarily – as ministry technicians programmed to serve immediate (and passing) ministry priorities. (As someone who in a former calling shared responsibility for diocesan leadership, and particularly the development of diocesan strategy, my estimate would be that the average 'shelf life' of a Diocesan Mission Strategy is approximately 7-9 years, a little less than the average length of most diocesan bishops' terms of office, as it happens.)

I have noted that the relationship of its ministerial training institutions to the Church corporately is not conducive to a shared creative approach to the challenges presented by these observations. Insofar as TEIs are structured to function as semi-detached service providers for the Church, rather than integral to it, operating as a semi-regulated internal market, the problem is exacerbated. Although there may be signs (perhaps) that the ethos that assigns 'client' and 'provider' status to

dioceses and TEIs respectively may be breaking down, such signs are uncertain and fleeting, with the competitive market model still powerful and normative.

Far more important than the structures, I have wanted to argue, is the question of what we identify and coalesce around as the key values and priorities in which we would want our ministers to be formed. Here I have highlighted prayerfulness, wisdom, character and collaboration, amongst others, but there is a much larger discussion to be had. The implication of these possibly somewhat random and personal observations is, I believe, a need for precisely such a conversation. It needs to be principled, comprehensive, theologically grounded and non-anxious, inclusive of a wide range of interested parties: dioceses, TEIs, partner universities, the central Church and others. As things stand, I do not believe we are currently well set up for a conversation of this degree of sophistication and seriousness, and this worries me greatly.