

Education and formation for ministry in theological education today

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Part One: The distinctive role of theological education colleges

The purpose of this paper is to help identify what is the unique combination of features that defines the tertiary education provided by Theological Colleges and Bible Colleges. I hope to show that the distinctive role of colleges means that it is unhelpful to interpret them in terms of contemporary universities, that their role brings many demands in terms of educational aims and pedagogy, and that they must be evaluated according to their distinctive role and supported in it. I then want to show how personal and spiritual formation for ministry might be achieved.

I argue that colleges are committed to:

- ▶ *Two dimensions* of education, the Intelligence/Academic and the Formational.

This is so that they can provide:

- ▶ *Three Apprenticeships*, those of: i. Bible and Christian Thought, ii. Personal spiritual, social and communal formation, and iii. Ministry skills in doing ministry, training other for ministry, reflecting on ministry, and developing new models of ministry.

This wide range requires:

- ▶ *Effective integration* of these varied elements.

This means that we can identify the presence of:

- ▶ *Seven educational traditions* in the varied yet integrated activities of colleges.

I want to demonstrate the wide range of legitimate expectations of colleges and their lecturers to teach, educate, train, form, and mentor their students by the community provided in the college as well as by personal interaction; provide community education service in writing, speaking and preaching for their church, denomination or constituency; as well as taking part in scholarship and research. This demands a varied and complex internal life in each college, as well as a varied output from them.

Two dimensions

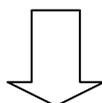
Colleges are committed to *two dimensions* of learning, the **Intelligence/Academic**,¹ and the **Formational**. Both are essential, and if we do one without the other we will fail to produce effective servants of Christ. Our students need both *dimensions*, and they also need the integration of both *dimensions* in their lives and ministries. The Intelligence/Academic includes information, skills, the ability to think, patterns of learning, etc. The Formational includes personal, social, spiritual, communal and professional formation and training.

Here are the *two dimensions*:

Intelligence/Academic study for degrees, including:

- Bible and language
- Christian Thought
- Ministry Practice

This demands time and energy from faculty and students, and access to a library.



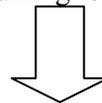
Here are the expected outcomes:

People who are learners, skilled in learning, life-long learners; able to think and to reflect, able to articulate and discuss ideas; skilled in every aspect of the Bible, Biblical Theology, and the Christian tradition; skilled in their cultural context of life and ministry. Knowledgeable enough to discuss the Da Vinci Code, the Gospel of Judas, the ethics of foreign aid, etc. Able to present arguments and debate, to present ideas in ways in which others can learn, able to train others in the skills they have learnt. Able to research ideas, to think deeply, able to communicate, able to distinguish between primary and secondary ideas and doctrines, able to cope with difficult and complex issues, able to live with unanswered questions, doubts, and paradoxes; able to conserve the Gospel, and also interact with current ideas and culture.

Personal and spiritual formation by:

- Community – shared values and experiences, activities, meal and space
- Chapel– worship, prayer, Bible, sacrament,
- Faculty – a counselling, mentoring, talking, Chapel, models of life and ministry.

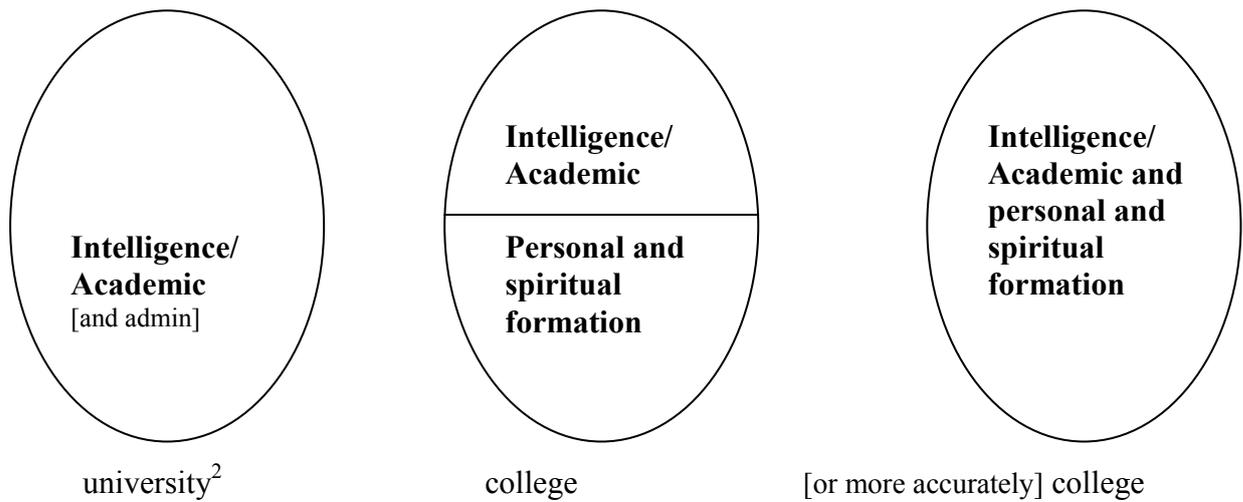
This demands time and energy from faculty and students, because the outcomes require deep, subtle and elusive changes in personal life. It involves chapel, dining room, student centre etc



People who are adventurous and servant-hearted in ministry, prayerful, people with intellectual, emotional, relational, and pastoral intelligence. Able to organise their lives and ministry, able to work hard and effectively, able to prioritise activities, not lazy, not overworking, efficient and effective; other-person centred, able to build community; mature in marriage, parenthood or singleness, family relationships and friendships; mature and wise in self-discipline and professional standards; able to communicate, teach, and train effectively; able to maintain confidences, to avoid gossip, able to hear criticism in a healthy way, not critical of others, able to recognise their own gifts and abilities with humility, not jealous of others, not defensive or insecure, able to deal with conflict; good members of teams and leaders of teams, able to respect authority, able to think and work strategically, able to work alone, able to work within and transform structures, emotionally healthy, resilient; able to work contextually and cross-culturally; wise, discerning, quick to listen, thoughtful, reflective, able, humble, loving, humane; committed to the love that builds up, rather than the knowledge that puffs up, etc

¹ I need to include both words, because successful academic performance does not always mean the use of intelligence. Both words are needed, because intelligence needs context, information and training, and academic also needs the stimulation to think! I often find that students who are weak academically are well able to think. We should challenge each student to the highest achievements according to his or her intelligence and academic capability in both.

We now see the comparison between university and college:



Three apprenticeships

We must be committed to these *two dimensions* so we can provide *three apprenticeships*. Dr Charles Foster has done extensive research in America on training for professional and priestly ministry. He described the need for *three apprenticeships*.³

I like the notion of *apprenticeship*, because it is relational, it conveys the investment that lecturers should make in students, and it also conveys that fact that students should be ready to be personally transformed and equipped for their future lives and ministries.⁴ For *apprenticeship* is not just about learning skills, it is also about learning the values and standards of the craft.⁵ It is also a communal *apprenticeship*, in which students learn together from many who have gifts of teaching, training, and mentoring.

Here is my version of his ideas. Colleges should provide:

- i. A demanding *apprenticeship* in Bible and Christian thought, and the skills to think, read, understand, reason, and evaluate. This provides two significant challenges: students need to learn a lot of information to have the material to work on, and they need to learn to think deeply, creatively, critically, and discerningly.
- ii. A demanding *apprenticeship* in personal, spiritual, social and communal formation. This happens in the model provided for students by lecturers, by the quality and culture of college community life, and by personal interactions within the college, including between lecturers and students.

² I am aware that some faculties in some universities do provide effective personal formation. However it is not universal in all faculties in all universities and I am generalising to make a point! Harry R. Lewis, *Excellence without a Soul: Does Liberal Education have a Future?* PublicAffairs, 2006 argues that university education in the USA has lost its person-forming intentions. See also Andrew MacGowan at <http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=11555>

³ Foster, Charles, et. al., *Educating Clergy: teaching practices and pastoral imagination*, Jossey-Bass, 2006.

⁴ I also take it to imply that those who mentor apprentices are also still learning!

⁵ I wish we could find a better word than 'lecturer' to describe our task. That word only describes half our job.

- iii. A demanding *apprenticeship* in the skills needed for ministry, and in the ability to reflect on the theology of ministry, and to develop new patterns of ministry. This happens in both intelligence/academic teaching and practical ministry training, in community life and interaction, in chapel, and in placements and the learning that comes from reflecting on ministry.

These three demanding *apprenticeships* require lecturers to focus on forming students and investing in them. This takes aptitude, training, time, energy, and therefore resources. Each *apprenticeship* requires a different kind of pedagogy, special gifts for ministry, and the patience to invest in long-term outcomes in the future ministries of the students.

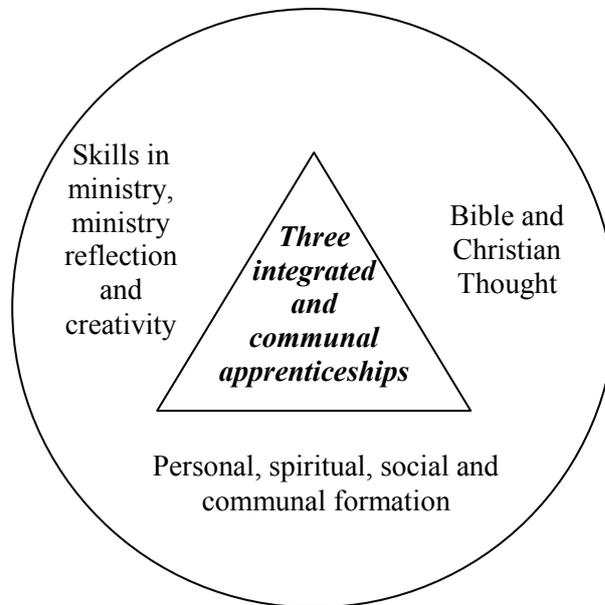
Dr Foster also pointed to the need for **continued integration** of these three *apprenticeships*, so that none grows in isolation from the others, and each shapes the others.

It is this breadth of content and the integration of this content which has largely been lost from universities, but which is essential for our colleges. At first sight, it may be thought arbitrary to combine this broad range of content. In fact, it is arbitrary to divide this content and only communicate one part of it. Universities have had to do this in response to the pressures of modernity, secularism, and postmodernity. Colleges must resist these pressures. For in the Biblical traditions of wisdom and discipleship, and in all human cultures, learning has not been confined to intelligence/academic or professional training. It has always included personal, social and communal development, the creation of shared communal and personal values, and useful skills.

It is easy to see the distinctive role of our colleges at this point. When we are asked to provide a reference for a graduate, an academic transcript is of limited value! The potential employer wants to know if the three integrated college *apprenticeships* have been successful. The acquisition of information is very low on the list of expectations, even though it is of fundamental importance. It is the use, integration, and responsive and good presentation of that information which is required. And it is obvious that people in ministry tend to fail, not because of a lack of academic preparation, but because of failures in personal or relational abilities.

These integrated *apprenticeships* need lecturers who exemplify and communicate these apprenticeships, and are able to form and train their apprentices in them.⁶

⁶ The notion of *apprenticeship* is also useful to describe pre-college training and post-college training as well. Ideally students will have received some kind of preliminary *apprenticeship* in their local church or specialist ministry. It is from this experience that they learn the basics of ministry, discover their gifts for ministry, and develop a vision for ministry. Students then come to college, to receive the three *apprenticeships* described above. It is often better to spend the first two years in college gaining the basics of the first two *apprenticeships*, in order to develop the third *apprenticeship* at a higher level later in the course. Ideally a student would then receive higher-level *apprenticeship* after he or she has left college, and has started on a new ministry. This requires senior people in that ministry to provide it.



Effective integration

The diversity and range of these *two dimensions* and *three apprenticeships* demands *effective integration*.

This is achieved by:

- i. Faculty modelling integration [*who we are* is of fundamental importance].
- ii. The structure and allocation of resources valuing and being seen to value every aspect.
- iii. All faculty showing that they value each aspect of the ministry of the college, even if they have special gifts in some aspects.
- iv. The conscious focussing of the different aspects in central activities of the college community, such as Chapel, Principal's Hour, or some other regular communal activities.
- v. The articulation and constant repetition of the ministry aims of the college.
- vi. The continual implementation of these aims in all the activities of the college.

For example:

Aims and values.	The intelligence/academic program:	Other college activities: such as Chapel, sermons, conversations, teams, Ministry Groups, mentoring, counselling, Bible studies, etc.
From above:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Bible ▶ Christian Thought ▶ Ministry and Practice 	
Two Dimensions	>	>
Three <i>Apprenticeships</i>	>	>
Or we may think of specific values:		
Loving God's people	>	>
Training people to teach and train others	>	>
Cross-cultural ministry	>	>
Global mission	>	>
Learning in community	>	>
Learning personal discipline	>	>
Clarity of thinking and depth of reflection	>	>
Collegiality in ministry	>	>

Seven educational traditions

We can identify *seven traditions* of education and pedagogy in colleges today, and the confluence of these varied traditions makes for stimulating and challenging times! From the universities of the West we have inherited a mixture of **three traditions** of education:

- i. From Athens⁷ we have inherited the tradition that tertiary education is designed to produce **educated people, well formed to contribute to human community by a liberal training**. In the words of John Henry Newman, in his *The Idea of a University*, students are trained to be people of ‘cultivated intellect,’ with ‘delicate tastes,’ with ‘candid, equitable, and dispassionate minds,’ and ‘noble and courteous bearing.’
- ii. From Berlin [Kelsey again], we have received the tradition of providing **high standard professional training**. [Since the integration of institutes of technology into universities, they also now have the tradition of **practical workplace training**.]
- iii. From Berlin [Kelsey again], we have inherited the tradition of a university as **a centre of scholarship and research** for the national and international academic community.

From the world of seminaries and colleges we have inherited **four traditions**:

- i. **An intelligence/academic community**, with high standards in Bible, languages, history, theology, and theological and denominational distinctives.
- ii. **A liturgical community**, based on common [daily] prayer and worship, with an emphasis on personal and communal spiritual formation.
- iii. **A centre for practical ministry training skills**, such as education, counselling, evangelism, preaching, leadership, etc.
- iv. **A community education service** for a church, denomination, or constituency.

You will find all of these *seven traditions* in colleges today, to varying degrees. This indicates their distinctive role.



⁷ Kelsey, David, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate*, Eerdmans, 1993.

So far I have argued that colleges are committed to *two dimensions* of education, the Intelligence/Academic and the Formational, so that they can provide *three apprenticeships*, those of Bible and Christian Thought, formation that is personal spiritual, social and communal, and skills in doing ministry, training other for ministry, reflecting on ministry, and developing new models of ministry. This wide range requires *effective integration* of these varied elements, and means that we can identify the presence of *seven educational traditions*.

All this shows the distinctive nature of the ministry of theological education for ministry, the kind of people who make good lecturers, the required provision in terms of resources, time, energy and timetable, and the kind of sacrificial commitments that our students need to make to participate effectively in the educational aims of the colleges. This shows the vital and strategic role of such colleges, for godly people who are formed and trained to do good ministry are essential to God's plan.

We may agree that we want to teach at an intelligence/academic level which matches contemporary universities, but we also need to recognise that the current general model of university education does not provide an adequate model for colleges, and that personal and spiritual formation of students is essential.

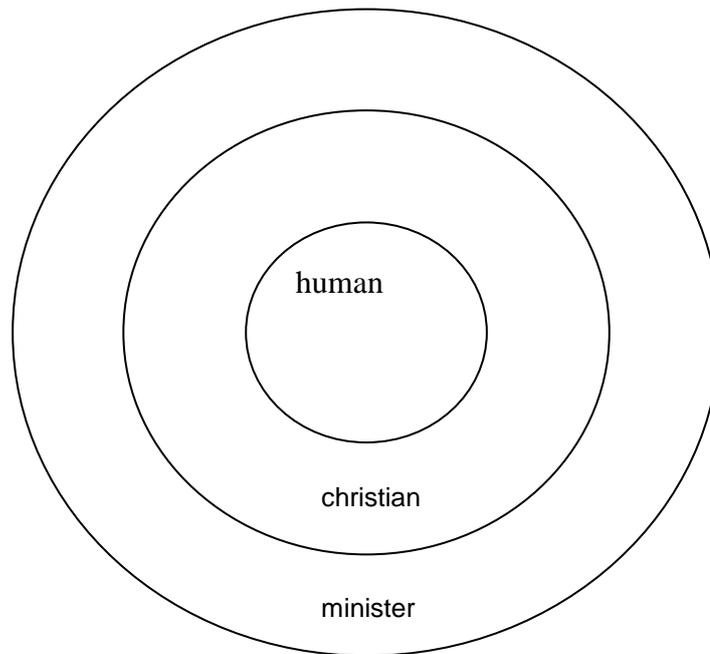
Part Two: Personal and spiritual formation in theological education today

How might formation be implemented? It would be easier to limit ourselves to the educational requirements of the degrees and diplomas we teach. It is costly and expensive to achieve personal and spiritual formation. However if we do not attempt to achieve it, we will fail our students, and they more likely to fail in their future ministries. I want to stimulate discussion and reflection on formation, to help us recognise what is already happening in our colleges, and to prod us all to make better use of the opportunities we have before us. I do not claim expertise for myself, nor excellence for Ridley. However I am thankful to colleagues at Ridley whose insights have informed this paper.

Two quotations may help us. The first is from a secular book on business management. 'People are appointed for their gifts, and sacked for their character.' The second attributed to Arthur Wellesley, 'Educate men without religion and you make of them but clever devils'. We could amend the latter to read, 'Educate someone for ministry without tackling the human person and the believer, and personal or ministry failure is likely to be the result.' For gifts without mature love provide clashing cymbals and also clashing symbols! Not many people have to give up ministry because they have forgotten the date of the Exodus, but many ministries fall apart because of personal failures or sins, or the failure of active faith and obedience.

With these issues in mind, we tackle the issue of formation: **It is 'personal' formation, because it concerns with the student as a human being, and it is 'spiritual' formation because it concerns the student as a believer in Jesus Christ.**

We have to recognise that students are fundamentally humans, and that their humanity shapes how they live as Christians and so how they do ministry.
Then of course how they live as Christians will shape how they do ministry.
It is not enough to give people skills in ministry if we do not also tackle their human issues, and their lives as Christians. Often problems in ministry come out of how students live as Christians, and what kind of humans they are.



Here is a map of the personal and spiritual formation of students before they come to college. The three areas are distinguishable, but of course, not separable. I distinguish them, because all are important to recognise. The central column is the most formative.

Training and work, from workplace, paid or unpaid.

Role of work, gifts used in work, response to supervision or no supervision, work role, work responsibility, strengths gained in training and work, reliability, focus and self-discipline, level of responsibility, team-work or alone-work, work with people or work with objects or ideas, what success or failure in work means, social role in work, work at home or away from home etc. [Compare the likely ministry styles of: surgeons [invasive action], teachers [control and convey], plumbers [fix the problem], psychologists [psychologise], musicians [perform], research scientists [do research], accountants [be conservative], home parents [parent], bureaucrats [organize]!!! People bring their strengths, but also need to recognize the weaknesses that accompany those strengths.

Human person, from home and school

Background, family of origin, marriage and family, friends, culture, race, primary and secondary school, etc.

Genetic makeup, personality, character, experiences, reactions, traumas, social and family roles, sources of security and insecurity. **Qualities:** good relational abilities, self-motivated, able to work alone, able to work in a team, self-aware, aware of others, good at social interaction, humble, teachable, open to correction, able to endure pain and suffering, patient, strategic, hard-working, open to delayed gratification, resilient, able to teach, etc.

Warnings: fears, prejudices, sinfulness and habitual sins, desire to control, weakness in maturity and stability, resentment, avoidance of conflict, enjoyment of conflict, unteachable, anger, lack of self-discipline.

Christian life and experience, from Church and/or influential Christian ministry of origin.

Christian life and practice: faith, obedience, love, trust and prayerfulness, awareness of sin, repentance, love of God, love of Christ, and love of neighbour, in step with the Spirit and showing the fruit of the Spirit, love of truth, worship, joy, peace, freedom, grace, self-control, humility, patience, love of fellow believers, active participation in church and personal Bible reading and prayer, Christian maturity, etc.

Basic Christian ministry training.

Intercession, commitment to global mission, witness, evangelism, discovery of natural and spiritual gifts, training to use them, and growing maturity in ministry, able to encourage and teach others, able to engage in public ministry, able to mentor, disciple and train others, further training in Bible, theology and Christian world-view, etc.

Then they come to college for education and formation!

Please note:

- i. Pre-college learning and formation is powerfully formative. It is earlier, longer, and slower learning; it has had a lot of human investment from a variety of people; it has been learnt through experience as well as instruction; there has been a lot of motivation to receive it; and it has become so ingrained and habitual that it is unrecognised by the student. What happens before college is very powerful.
- ii. In terms of usefulness for ministry, good pre-college learning and formation is essential. If it is defective, then college learning and formation is impeded, and any subsequent ministry will suffer deeply. Prior learning can be unhelpful, and some needs to be unlearnt!

Does this focus on personal and spiritual formation of both the individual and the community reflect Biblical priorities? Yes:

- Humans, male and female, are made to be in God's image, to represent God and serve God in the world.
- Matthew 12:34 tells us that 'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks', and James 1:7 warns of the dangers of the 'double mind'.
- Matthew 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount, precede Matthew 10, the sending out of the Twelve.
- Matthew 23 is a warning against ministers who are active and corrupt.
- 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 provide the formation needed for the productive use of gifts at Corinth.
- Titus 1 gives a priority to personal and spiritual maturity [15 out of 18].
- James 3 warns of dangers that are present in special power for teachers.
- Colossians 3: 9,10 encourages us that we have 'stripped of the old self with its practices, and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator'.
- In Mark 12: 30 Jesus taught that we should love God with heart, mind, soul and strength, and our neighbours as ourselves.

Achieving communal and individual personal and spiritual formation.

[It needs to be 'communal' because the community is a powerful influence in individual formation, and it needs to be 'individual' because it will not happen without interaction with and participation by the individual student.]

Some suggestions:

A. Within the academic program

i. Bible: Questions for a 5 minute segment in a lecture:

What sort of people like this part of the Bible? Why?

What sort of people don't like this part of the Bible? Why?

What personal questions strike you as you read these verses?

Would your church identify with this part of the Bible? Why? Why not?

What do you think someone outside the church would think of this Bible verse?

Write a prayer based on these four Bible verses.

ii. Christian Thought: Questions in a lecture on eschatology [the last days].

What are some contemporary non-Christian eschatologies?

Why are unrecognised [Christian or secular] eschatologies so powerful?

What is the eschatology of your church?

What is the eschatology of your family of origin?

What is your own real and practised eschatology?

Of course these questions must not dominate the lecture, and some students will naturally move to these areas, and away from the challenges of the academic requirements of text, history and ideas. However these questions do earth the units in the complete humanity of the students, and so help deeper learning.

iii. Practical Ministry: Questions for formation in any practical ministry.

What do you as a person bring to this ministry?

How does your family of origin influence the way you do this act of ministry?

How does your family of origin influence the way you relate in ministry?

What aspects of your previous work or training for that work could you use in preparing for and doing this ministry?

What aspects of your previous work or training for that work would be in appropriate in this ministry?

What fears or sins or traumas might influence the way you do ministry?

B. Within all activities, the key ingredient is shared lives, in personal relationships and interactions between the individual student and lecturers, other students, the college community, good ministry models, and supervisors.

i. Lecturers

- *Who we are* is more important than what we say. *The example of our lives and ministries* speaks louder than our words.⁸ Our character, Christian obedience, strengths, weaknesses, sins, virtues and gifts have the greatest impact.
- We have to *exemplify, demonstrate, name, explain and emphasise* the personal qualities we want our students to have, and the models of ministry we want them to follow, and challenge them to consider these qualities, in a pastorally respectful way.
- This means that lecturers need to be people of ministry competence as well as academic competence.
- This also means that the position description and time allocation for lecturers needs to include time for communal and personal formation, and their professional development needs to help them do this ministry.

ii. The community

We have to work hard to create a cohesive and positive college and student community which will influence the students for good. Good human and Christian community will have a profound effect on individuals: an ineffective or destructive community will have a profound effect on individuals.

iii. Seeing good models of ministry

- Most people cannot do what they have not seen someone else do.
- Inadequate or bad models of ministry will only be displaced and replaced by good models.
- Students also need to learn the contextual nature of good ministry, or they will apply the good model they have seen at the wrong place and time. They need

⁸ Nicholas Wolterstorff, writing in 'Teaching for justice,' in eds. Joel Carpenter, and Kenneth Schipps, *Making Higher Education Christian: the History and Mission of Evangelical Colleges in America*, Grand Rapids, Christian University Press, 1987, 201-216, clarifies that lecturers who want to impact their students need to give them reasons for changing, to give the issues of the day a human face, and to model the kind of actions they commend, in pp. 212-213.

to learn to reflect on the good values that shape good ministry, and learn to apply them differently in other contexts.

- They need to know the big picture aims and goals, and see that there are a variety of ways of achieving these.

iv. Chapel

- Chapel formation includes providing a model of the centrality of praising God, thanking God, hearing from God, and praying to God in the life of the community. It should provide good models of leadership, prayer, Bible reading, preaching, intercession, and encouragement.
- It should reflect the values of the college, such as global mission, interaction with the world, evangelism, faith in Jesus Christ, the Bible, honesty, dependence on God, integration of heart, mind, soul and strength, etc.

v. Trained ministry supervisors/trainers for ministry placements the students do outside the college

Supervisors need to be well trained so that that can help students in the following:

- To assess their own impact and ministry maturely.
- To work out how their ministry needs to adapt to the people they are serving.
- To work out why the ministry is shaped the way it is.
- To reflect on how their own humanity is influencing their ministries.
- To reflect theologically on their ministry.
- To learn to serve as a public person.
- To learn contextual and cross-cultural awareness.
- To respond in a godly way to ‘success’ and ‘failure’.
- To learn to love people and to serve them for Christ’s sake.
- To trust God in ministry, and to repent of sins in ministry.
- To learn trustworthiness, patience, hard work, wisdom, and cooperation.
- To respond in faith to personal issues which arise from the ministry.
- To learn the principles of good ministry, and the flexibility to apply them in different situations.
- To learn how to transfer good ministry, rather than reduplicating it.

vi. Informal conversations over meals, activities, mentoring, in Pastoral groups or Ministry Development Groups

These provide many opportunities for ministry values to be fed into discussion of ministry, and for students to raise questions and issues of ministry for thoughtful discussion and prayer.

vii. Serving on a mission team with faculty and other students.

viii. Other activities.....

Our hope for our students in their future life and ministry is that they will be integrated people:

- That they will die to sin and live to righteousness sufficiently to sustain authentic and credible ministry.
- That their damaged humanity will be healed enough for them to be healthy and effective in live and ministry.
- That there will be no dissociation or disconnect between their lives and their ministries, for people are looking for authenticity.

- That their humanity will not get lost or damaged because of their ministry style.
- That they will not adopt an alien style of humanity in order to do ministry.
- That they will practice what they believe, and practice what they preach.
- That they will be able to use their rich human gifts to the full in their ministries.

In theological education, we often have to make up for the deficiencies of the local church and of the University.

- We often have to provide basic training in Christian living and obedience, Bible knowledge, Christian understanding, morality, and ministry attitudes and skills for those who have not received this basic training in their local church of origin.
- We often have to train students to think, write, speak in public, understand texts, ideas, history and morality, communicate, and leadership and people skills. This is for students who have not been to university, or who have not learnt these skills at university.

If universities and churches have not succeeded in these basic elements of training and personal formation then theological and Bible colleges have to provide them!

Finally please note that:

- i. This focus on formation complements the need for rigorous training in Bible, Christian Thought and Practical Ministry in order to be competent in ministry.
- ii. We do not have to be perfect to do ministry. God's treasure is in clay jars. It is those who do not know they are clay jars who are likely cause damage.
- iii. Colleges do not have sole responsibility for personal and spiritual formation. The student has responsibility, as does the church they belong to and its minister, as do friends and mentors.
- iv. Colleges train and form, but it is others who appoint students to various ministries. It is those people who are responsible for those appointments, and for the supervision of those they appoint.
- v. These issues point to the need for a rigorous admission policy. It is of no benefit to students to admit them if they will not be able to receive all that the college offers.
- vi. Colleges might decide to have two streams of students: those who are receiving academic education and formation for ministry, and those who receiving academic education alone. We need to clarify to ourselves and for our students what we are attempting to achieve, what they may expect, and what we expect of them. However if colleges do have two streams, it is important that the academic education alone stream does not lower the level of formation for ministry.

May God sustain us in this challenging ministry, and provide the resources we need to do the good works of ministry that are our calling.