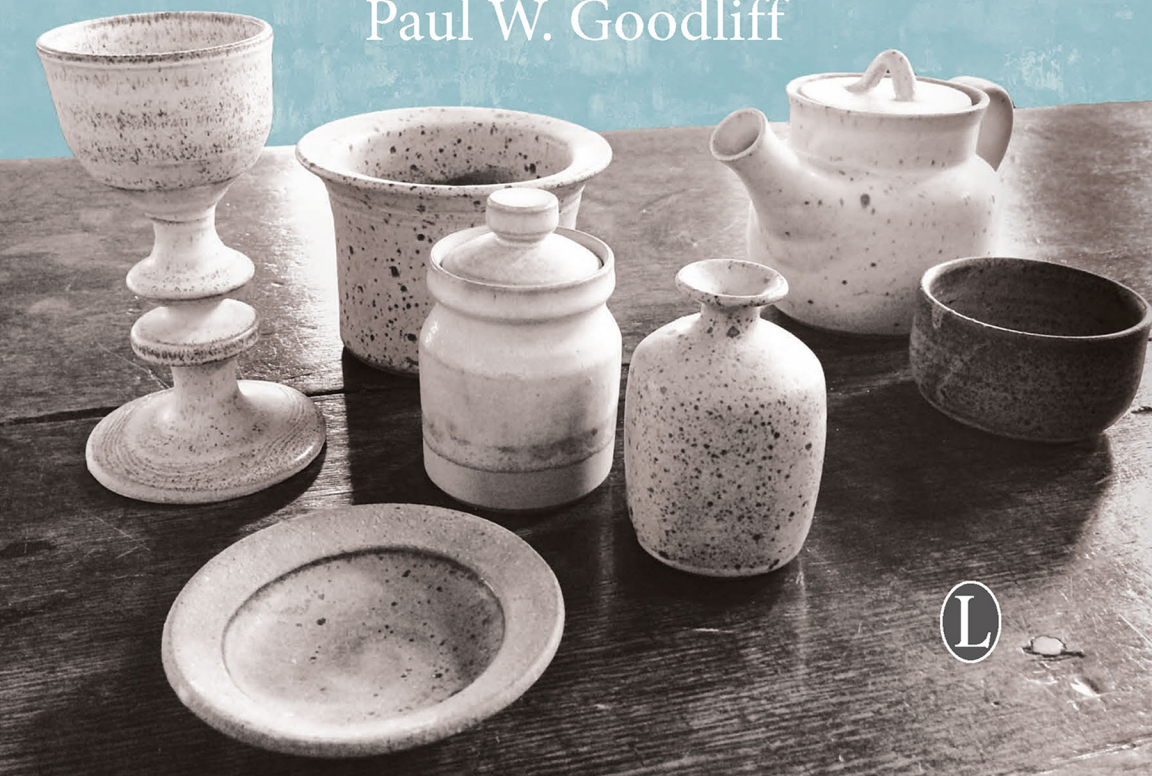
Shaped for Service

Ministerial Formation and Virtue Ethics

Paul W. Goodliff



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The Lutterworth Press

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To Gill, my wife and unfailing encourager,
and the members of those churches that have called me
to be their minister: in Streatham, London; Stevenage,
Hertfordshire; and Abingdon, in the county of Oxfordshire.

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Part Four: Forming the Practices of Ministry

Preface

This book explores the ways in which virtue ethics, with its focus upon the development of practices that shape a life, offers an overarching way of understanding the formation of ministers of the church. The language of formation has come to dominate much ministerial training, replacing earlier designates such as theological education or training. Formation signifies the shaping of the whole of life to the goal or end of godly and fruitful ministry, with character and spirituality as important as the acquisition of skills for the competent undertaking of the tasks of ministry, and the growth in understanding of the fields of knowledge appropriate for ministry (such as theology, biblical studies, pastoral psychology, and missiology), if not more so.

The shaping of such a life requires multiple modes of pedagogy, and not just the traditional lecture-hall delivery of knowledge or the field placement practice of ministerial roles, such as preaching and pastoral visiting. There is still plenty of room for the passing on of knowledge through a lecture, seminar or private study, but to this default mode of delivery of formation should be added apprenticeship, mentoring, supervision of practice, and awareness of the great significance in the personal journey of faith and growth in spirituality.

Because the delivery of formation takes place on a variety of ways, I decided that a range of approaches within the confines of the written word might offer a richer way of exploring formation and ministry than simply the mainstay of theological writing: the argumentation of theological discourse. So, as well as some personal narrative and story (present not simply out of egotism, although something of that might be detected, but as an example of how important is the life story of the minister-in-training or ordinand), I have used on a number of occasions analysis of paintings or music. The images that I refer to have not been reproduced here, but all are

readily available online through access to the worldwide web. Using a search tool should readily bring up the image referred to in, sometimes, multiple versions on many sites. Thus, reading this book with a tablet, computer, or smartphone to hand is recommended (or if using the e-book option, switching to your search tool). To reproduce the images in full color reproduction would have increased the expense of producing the book (and therefore its cost) and so I trust that readers will be glad that I have considered their pocket, as well as their eyesight, for the size of reproduction available to a laptop, or larger tablet, exceeds that of images matching the page size of 15 x 23 cm of this book. It also facilitates an enlarged view of aspects of any picture, and at times this repays the effort involved.

Acknowledgments

It is tempting to say that a book with such a long gestation demands the acknowledgment of the role played by all who have formed me in ministry, and so any list is bound to be selective. However, it is possible to identify a few significant players, to whom my thanks will ever be due. Two of the three most influential ministers are now dead: the vicar of the parish church in Patcham where my family worshiped when I was a teenager, and under whose preaching I came to faith and first sensed a call to pastoral ministry, E. Garston-Smith; and the minister at the first Baptist church I joined, in Streatham, South London, and where that call came to practical expression—Douglas McBain. Their influence is beyond calculation, and in many ways I was formed to be the kind of minister that I am through having seen aspects of ministry as they practiced it. The third influential minister is still very much alive, and for nine years I was his associate at Streatham Baptist Church—Douglas McBain's successor, Mike Wood. Here I saw ministry at much closer quarters, and while Mike's generosity of spirit and deeply committed pastoral ministry allowed me to be my own man, I also learned so much about ministry under his wise apprenticeship.

The three contemporaries who have traveled with me as we exercised Baptist ministry for over thirty years have played a very significant role, not least in challenging and encouraging me. So, thank you Geoff Colmer, Colin Norris, and Martin Taylor. Since the mid- 1980s we have met regularly, and for the past few years dreamed into being *The Order for Baptist Ministry*, which we hope goes some way to form spiritual depth in ministers new and old.

The book was started when I was still Head of Ministry at the Baptist Union, and gratitude to my colleagues in the Ministry Team there is due in abundance, especially to Viv O'Brien, whose support over ten years as

my deputy team leader was unfailing and rich. Upon leaving that post the Baptist Union funded some writing time during which a major part of this work was completed, and so I want to express my appreciation of that support. Latterly in that post, John Rackley was a much-respected colleague and friend as Moderator of the Baptist Union's Ministerial Recognition Committee, and in John I saw how pastoral ministry, generous orthodoxy, and spiritual depth could combine to great effect.

Some early chapters first saw the light of day as papers presented to the Spurgeon's College Post-graduate seminar, and I am grateful to Nigel Wright, whose offer of an associate research fellowship at Spurgeon's College I gladly accepted, for making that seminar available to me, and to his successor as Principal, Roger Standing, for continuing the deal. A most helpful seminar to explore the theme of the book was organized by Jim Purves in 2015, who, when I was Head of Ministry, was my opposite number in the Baptist Union of Scotland: a post he continues to fill. I am appreciative of his kindness and hospitality in organizing this, amongst many of other examples of the virtues exhibited in his life.

Most recently, as part-time Minister of Abingdon Baptist Church in Oxfordshire, an historic church established in 1650, but with a heart for renewal of its life in the twenty-first century, I have been able to test some of the material in the book as, once again, I find myself serving as a working local pastor (although, I daresay, they did not realize it). My colleague there, Stephen Millard, has been an unfailingly supportive friend and co-pastor, and I want to say thank you to him too.

There have been opportunities to play a small part in ministerial formation at Spurgeon's College, London; Regent's Park College, Oxford; Bristol Baptist College and Trinity College, Bristol, where I teach sacramental theology to the combined Anglican and Baptist ministerial cohort with my colleague at Trinity, Paul Roberts; and with the largely Pentecostal ministerial students at the University of Roehampton, West London. My thanks to those students and colleagues on the faculties there. I must also acknowledge the friendship and encouragement of Paul Beasley-Murray, who invited me to teach at Spurgeon's College for a year shortly after my ordination, and with whom I was involved in founding both the *Richard Baxter Institute for Ministry* (now *Ministry Today*) and, more recently, *The College of Baptist Ministry*. Paul's passion for professional and godly ministry stands as an example of much that this book commends.

The contribution to my intellectual development made by the John Colwell—friend, fellow *Order for Baptist Ministry* founder, and fellow Old Varndeanian—cannot go unacknowledged either. Much of the material in this book has been forged in dialogue with John, and though we were at the

same school for at least a year (John being older, we did not realize it until many years later) it was John's attempts to begin to teach me Greek when I first joined the staff at Streatham Baptist Church, and the instilling in me of the first glimmerings of a love of systematic theology, that joined our life's pathways. John's fingerprints might be detected at various points in the book, and always for the good.

But by far the most important thanks must go to my wife Gill, who has encouraged me in this project even as she developed her own interests as a university lecturer. At my lowest point over the past two years she was relentlessly encouraging and positive, assured me that God had something yet for me to do by way of service of Christ and his church, and proved me wrong when I doubted her. I would not have completed this book without that support, and I cannot begin to express my thanks to her adequately. "Thank you" must suffice.

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, missioner, 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 episcope 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.

PART ONE

Formation and Virtue Ethics

1

Formation for Ministry

This is a book about Christian ministry and its formation. Thousands of people each year embark upon this adventure, seeking to prepare themselves, or be prepared by others, to serve the worldwide church as its ministers, and about two thousand of those do so in Britain. What is this role, or rather, vocation, they envisage they will fulfil, and just how can a woman or a man be formed to serve Christ and his church? There are plenty of people who think that a little sanctified common sense will suffice, and in an age where it is assumed that "anybody can" (a common subtext in educational vernacular), the idea of the robust, challenging, and transformative process that ministerial formation should be is often met with mild suspicion or outright hostility. It smacks too much of a professionalized elite, withholding arcane information from others. The French postmodernist philosopher Foucault has popularized the notion that the acquisition of all knowledge is a bid for power, and the clergy are supposed to be no different.

This is especially true when theological educators begin to build the curriculum comprising areas for study considered essential in every ministerial education: learning the biblical languages, studying the Fathers, grasping the breadth of church history (notably that of the tradition to which each belongs), acquiring knowledge of philosophy, pastoral psychology, systematic theology or dogmatics, Christian ethics, biblical studies, and contemporary culture. There is much else besides deemed essential by special interest groups. Those engaged in urban mission think every ministerial student should be taught its principles, while their rural counterparts are equally passionate about their context. Church planters see their calling as the future of the church, so all students must be exposed to pioneer situations, and experience of overseas mission is obviously beneficial in a global world for a church with a global mission. If every aspect were included I

guess theological education and ministerial formation would last seven or eight years, not the two to four it currently occupies (Roman Catholics excepted).

Brian Harris, writing of a conversation with theological educators from around the world, gathered at a Lausanne Forum for World Evangelization working group in 2004, describes the various components of an adequate theological education, and concludes,

> It highlights the difficult task facing all theological educators. Their training is expected to produce Hebrew, Greek and Patristic scholars who are capable of ensuring that all in leadership positions have police and working-with-children checks while they rapidly plant growing churches filled with new converts eager to be disciples as they worship in contemporary and contextually relevant ways.[1]

For many Protestants such training seems excessively academic, while Catholics will have their own prejudices about what a good priest needs to know and do, and reading the Old Testament in Hebrew is probably not on the list. One approach to ministerial formation is, therefore, the minimalist approach, and this currency is all-too widespread in its circulation. The emphasis is upon basic skills acquisition for ministry, with a minimum of academic knowledge, just sufficient to preach an interesting sermon liberally laced with humorous stories. All of this could be acquired at the hands of an experienced and effective practitioner, so the necessity of a dedicated theological institution is avoided, with all of its expensive delivery costs and capital investment in buildings and resources, as well as the delay in getting hands-on experience and beginning to "do ministry."

Another concern is the relationship of the curriculum, be it academic or practical, to the wider church that its products—pastors and ministers—are being called to serve. Such is the pressure upon theological colleges and seminaries from their academic validating bodies (generally in Britain a University generous enough to validate external Higher Education institutes) that sometimes the prime task of forming ministers can become subservient to maintaining the partnership with the academy. So, theological curricula can reflect the concerns of the academy (and those who teach it, who wish to maintain their credibility within the academy) rather than the concerns of the churches that receive the ministers they commend. In addition, all of this can hide the mistake of forming "useful" ministers for a church eager to be seen as contributing to society, rather than truthful

1. Harris, "Defining and Shaping."

ministers with a passion for the church to first of all be itself. Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon write (albeit into the North American scene),

> When seminaries do not get direction from congregations, they will go their own way—usually the wrong way. Our seminaries still arrange their curricula as if the world had not changed. In imitation of the secular university systems they aspire to be accepted by, our seminaries offer future pastors a mix of a little this, and a little that, psychology here, organizational management there, a little Bible, a little ethics. After all, we don't want our pastors to be narrow-minded or ignorant; in other words, we want them to be fully conversant in all aspects of modern American culture. Our curriculum is structured to produce people who can help the church continue to "serve the world" by putting a vaguely Christian tint upon the world's ways of salvation.[2]

A basic question must be, therefore, what is formation for? I am not arguing for an uneducated ministry, or a poorly trained ministry: far from it. But I am asking the question whether the current strategies of the churches for their survival are working: whether a great deal of our social action, designed to make the churches seem acceptable to a secular and multi-faith society, actually brings people to faith in Christ and deep conformity to his way and image. If the church is a faintly religious voluntary arm of social services, all well and good. And that *is* how the prevailing political culture wants the church to be: useful to its own agendas, but subservient. Woe betide if it speaks prophetically about the reasons why those services are necessary in the first place. That is "meddling in politics" when it should be "saving souls." But the church is something else entirely: it is the community of Christ crucified; a "colony of heaven" residing here on earth; a people formed by Scripture and sacrament to worship Jesus Christ as Lord, and reject the pretensions of Caesar to the lordship of human lives, be that Augustus Caesar of the first century, or the many Caesars of our own day. Such are the claims of the nation state for our absolute allegiance, or the gods of the international bond markets and their addiction to economic growth as our masters. If the church is truly to be the church of Jesus Christ, then it needs ministers who have been formed, not just as educated professionals, but as perceptive and courageous prophets and compassionate and confident pastors.

I may seem critical of the current approach to ministerial formation (and indeed, to an extent, I am) but I have been partly the product of such

2. Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*,115.

an approach. Having been a schoolmaster for four years following University, I was appointed Full-time Elder at a large charismatic Baptist church in South London. I had no formal theological education, and no senior staff colleagues initially (thank God for the appointment of my senior colleague nine months into the role), and faced major pastoral challenges from day one following a visit by John Wimber to the church during the weekend that preceded my first day in post. To say it was high octane, high-risk ministry is no exaggeration. I am not sure whether I am more impressed by the trust that this church placed in me or appalled by the sheer folly of what they thought they were doing in calling such a young and inexperienced pastor!

By the time, two years later, when I finally started at theological college (which had not really figured in my original plan—my arrogance was breath-taking), I had considerable experience of ministry, but little grounding in knowledge beyond that of a reasonably well-discipled Christian. Four years later I was a probationer Baptist minister, with a voracious appetite for theology, and a rather more "formed" minister. I guess the most one might say was that this was an appropriate pathway for me, but not one that I would entirely endorse for most. The church was large enough to hold a very green and young minister, and most do not have that context in which to learn their craft.

As will become evident, if I am critical of the minimalist approach, I am also critical of the current normal delivery of formation. Where a two to four year course at seminary or theological college is considered sufficient, I believe this is inadequate. There needs to be a recognition that formation begins long before embarking upon a college course, and that it continues long after the course has been completed. Indeed, life-long learning has become *de rigueur* amongst many professions, and life-long formation is the reality for all ministry. Brian Harris notes,

> In an ideal world, those sensing a call to ministry, would, like the early disciples, leave their nets and embark upon their new life. In the real world, a much longer delay is often inevitable. While this might cause frustration, it can be a very constructive period. A local church alert to the ministerial call of one of their members can provide invaluable in-house training. Where seminaries offer flexible training, it is also possible to undertake some training via part time or distance options. It is often wise to first put one's toe in the water before making the full body plunge. Pity those who have resigned career and sold house only to arrive at seminary to find that they cannot stop yawning through the Greek class. The seminary should not view itself in isolation from the local church. Both have key roles to play

> in ministerial training and formation, and it is as well for the partnership to begin as early as possible.[3]

The Baptist Union of Great Britain's 2014 *Review of Selection and Formation* of ministers, which I initiated in my capacity as its then Ministries Team Leader, and then wrote its Report (although I left that post before its full implementation) took a similar approach, recommending,

> Other denominations selection processes seem far less hurried than ours, and there is some virtue in slowing our own process. For instance, in The Church of England the work of the Diocesan Director of Ordinands (DDO) to support the candidate and prepare them for the selection conference is much more intense than our own Regional Ministers routinely provide. It is not intended that to the already very full work-load of Regional teams a new and time-consuming task be added, but rather that, while Regional Ministers continue to provide the initial information and interview, the continuing support for the candidate be given to two figures: (i) pastoral support to be expected from their sending church (or network or association) in the form of a named pastoral accompanier throughout the selection and initial formational process, and (ii) a post similar to that of the DDO be created (we suggest naming this person The Association Selection Advisor, ASA) so that in the months that lead up to a Ministerial Recognition Committee (MRC), and in the months that follow a successful candidature before a college course is commenced, the person may be given greater opportunity to grow in their understanding of the nature and challenges of ministry, and where appropriate prepare for college spiritually, intellectually and/or emotionally and psychologically. For instance, for some candidates a deepening (indeed, perhaps, the establishment) of an appropriate raft of spiritual disciplines might be necessary, while for others some introductory reading and intellectual preparation might be valuable. It is recognized that this is profoundly counter-cultural in its ethos. We recommend (R8) that the posts of named pastoral accompaniers for candidates and Association Selection Advisor be established.
>
> 1.2.1 MRCs should indicate to a successful candidate that they should not embark upon formal training at college before completing a pre-collegiate formation period of at least 12 months' duration, normally in their home church while continuing in current employment, in order to continue formation process with the ASA. It is better to enter college prepared for

3. Harris, "Defining and Shaping," 159.

> the rigors of formation, albeit a little delayed, than to hurry the process and struggle. If the candidate has existing experience of being in pastoral charge for at least two years prior to attending the association MRC, then the requirements for a pre-collegiate formational period would normally be waived. The experience would have provided it sufficiently. Colleges would be expected to advise candidates accordingly, and only admit ministers-in-training once an adequate pre-collegiate formational process had been fulfilled.[4]

A recognition that ministerial formation is a much more extensive process than simply the period in college or seminary, and as such begins long before a call is heard, and continues long after ordination, while also intensifying the core of the formational process while at college, seems to me important.

However the duration and place of formation is conceived, the bigger questions are "What is formation for and how is it accomplished?" These are questions also asked in that Baptist Union Report, and which in a much fuller way I shall attempt to answer in this book. I do so by utilizing the lens of virtue ethics, and applying this to every aspect of ministerial formation. But first, while this book focuses upon ministerial formation, its prior question must be what is ministry?

I begin by reference again to that Baptist Union Report. For over ten years until 2014 I led the team at the Baptist Union of Great Britain that had oversight of its ministers and ministry. Towards the end of that time I was involved in initiating a review of ministerial selection and formation, and, on behalf of the Steering Group for that Review, I wrote its Report. This went out to consultation as I stepped down. It was the last piece of policy development that I was engaged with, and in the preamble to that Report I wrote the following:

> "*I feel a presence, a reverence humming within me that was and is difficult to articulate.*"
>
> This description of what it might be like to sense that a life has been captured by the call of Christ, a call to serve him and his church, ably voices the inner conviction which lies at the heart of ministry, often so difficult to articulate, yet profoundly experienced. We use language like vocation, or calling to frame it; offer Scripture to justify it and explain it; use language like captured, constrained and held to express how it feels to be caught

4. *Draft 6.1 Report of the Review of Selection, Formation, Funding and CMD*, Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2014, n.p., 11–12.

> by such a calling; perhaps we run away from it, like Jonah on his way to Tarshish, or rush into it without submitting to the proper "stature of waiting." However, we handle it, ministry is not simply a job we employ some people to do on behalf of those others, the majority of the church whose time, inclination or ability is in such short supply that they will find someone else and pay them instead. It is, rather, deeply rooted in the conviction that God is involved in this human endeavor, his call is mediated through the wisdom and discernment of the churches, and it is his Spirit that is most significantly at work. It might come as a surprise to know that the person who wrote that epigraph was Jane Fonda.[5]

There followed a longer section describing what ministry is and is not, and this reflects the interplay between ministry expressed in both inherited and pioneer church:

> In beginning to identify the kind of ministry that the current and future contexts require, we have looked to both the inherited tasks and character of ministry, and those insights developed from pioneering and global perspectives. We have recognized that ministry is as much about the kind of person exercising it as the tasks through which ministry is expressed. We have sought to track a path away from the equally foolish notions that "anybody can do ministry" (as if a modicum of common sense might suffice to equip a person to lead and pastor the flock of Christ), and an unhealthy professional elitism, that withdraws behind a cloak of esoteric language and practice detached from the everyday discipleship that ministry is meant to exemplify.
>
> We have been aware of those siren voices that always threaten to tempt the ministry away to shipwreck and ruin: from the latest management fad that promises seven steps to a growing church, utterly devoid of any sense of a cross to be carried, to the gaudy prizes of success built upon mere consumer preference.
>
> Amongst the distortions of ministry that we have sought to avoid are the unaccountable entrepreneur, for whom the congregation is little more than the body which funds the minister to do whatever he or she wants, building their own empire rather than the life of the local congregation, and is resistant to challenge and calls for accountability. Its polar opposite, the compliant minister who is merely the chaplain to the congregation, fails to bring the prophetic edge to ministry, and attempts at all costs to please the congregation. One is the cuckoo in the nest, with the congregation as the poor host parent attempting

5. Ibid., 1.

to feed the monster in its midst, while the other is the mother, continually attempting to feed an open-mouthed chick that should have been finding its own food long ago.

Another parody of effective ministry is the sole minister who holds all ministry to themselves, and seems incapable of releasing others to grow in their own gifts, for fear of imperfection, perhaps; or their polar opposite, the minister who fails to bring any leadership or vision of their own, simply following where the herd wanders, and who allows "hired hands" to lead the sheep by means of management dogma or too close an attention to "the bottom line."

Ministry is not meant to reflect a clericalising of religion, whereby we select a heroic few to live, on our behalf, a life of sacrificial discipleship that the many are reluctant to embrace. True, ministry has often functioned like this, and church has in every age relied upon those who it sets apart to be what it aspires to, but fails in the main, to reach: the martyrs of the early centuries, the monastic communities at their rigorous best, the celibate priest or over-worked pastor, for whom the dictum of the congregation "Lord, you keep him humble, and we'll keep him poor" is still too real to be entirely funny.[6] Yet we are

6. Cf. P. Goodliff, "Baptist Futures, Networks," paper presented to BUGB Council March 2012: "It must be recognized also that Baptists have been tempted to enact a dichotomy between the unholy congregant and the holy professional, at least as unhelpful as the Catholic separation of the ordinary secular Christian and those for whom there are expectations of greater piety and holiness of life. There the Religious, or the clergy are called to a life of holiness, while ordinary Catholics go about their life without such demanding expectations. In other words, while most of us are sinners, for a few the expectation is of sainthood. The Baptist model in fact has attempted to make saints of all the members of the church, even if this is no longer really practiced with any vigor. This need not require a fundamental rejection of the recognition of ministry (as perhaps McClendon suggests as he rejects 'a set-apart ministry of those who work for God while others work for themselves, and not a flock of secular 'callings . . . tended by a shepherd with a religious calling . . . but a *people set apart*,' where, 'Every member is called to discipleship; baptism . . . is commissioning to this ministry; thus it occupies the place ordination must in churches that celebrate a "clergy"' (McClendon, *Systematic Theology. Doctrine*, 2:369), but it does place the ministry of the few called to the ministry of word and sacrament firmly within the context of the discipleship of all. Every member in the Gathered Church is called to holiness of life and a vocation to discipleship, even if those called to ministry are also called to exemplify that calling so that they in particular might be examples to the flock. Here is the way in which the sainthood of all recognizes the saintliness of some, those who are called to a life set apart in order that they might present every member complete. We might express that alternatively, the ministry of all is enabled by the ministry of some, the gifts of Ephesians 4:11 are to equip the saints for the work of service and ministry."

convinced that ministry should not reflect such an ideology, for all are called to be disciples and to serve his world.

If that is what ministry is meant not to look like, how should it be portrayed instead? Overall, we see ministry as gifted leadership that, by "equipping the saints" (Ephesians 4:12) enables the church to be truly itself: a prophetic and missional community engaged in the acts of the risen Christ, called to a living and profound worship of God and, living under the Scriptures in the power of the Holy Spirit, bearing the fruit of that one Spirit, who is always the Spirit of the risen Christ and the gift of the Father. Where such ministry is offered, we should expect there to be growth in the life of the church: both growth in holiness and spiritual vitality, and a sharing of the gospel that produces fruit. To such leadership God calls women and men from all conditions and cultures, and the church sets them apart by ordination and commissioning to a life lived in service of that calling. Not everyone is so called, and such are the demands of courage, determination, intellect, heart and will in living out that way of life, that the church searches for those of proven ability to fulfil that calling. Of course, even for the ablest of women or men, it is only ever by God's Spirit that anything truly eternal can be accomplished, yet God uses the character, gifts and abilities placed at his disposal as the agency by which Christ does indeed build his church. So selection will pay attention to those human qualities, and seek to enhance and develop them through formation and training, and encourage their sustenance by prayer and longing. A recommendation from the Formation Working Group asked for an articulation of ministerial virtues, to accompany the already-agreed ministerial competencies and the broad agreement around what a minister ought to be expected to know (ministerial comprehensions, one might say). While we may describe them in various ways, those virtues will include courage, humility and obedience; perseverance and self-control, patience and compassion, and above all, the virtue of love (Col 3:12–14).

Ministry embraces pastoral care of the people of God, and leadership in the mission of the church. It is a ministry that offers leadership, while avoiding a contractual obligation that such an offering must be accepted. In this way, it is reflective of the ministry of the Chief Shepherd, whose "sheep hear my voice" (John 10:4), and who "lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:15). The much over-worked phrase "servant leadership" is most often employed to describe the marks of such leadership. Ministry embraces the gifts of the risen Christ that Paul distinguishes in Ephesians 4 (pastor, teacher, prophet, evangelist and

> apostle) and is characterized by a devotion to "the Word and to prayer" (Acts 6:4), held in balance with an active fulfilment of the tasks that comprise the practice of ministry. It serves both inherited church (perhaps most urgently and needful by challenging it) and pioneers new ways of expressing church; it both cares for the people of God and reaches out to those yet to be found, and those who may be the never-found, alike; and it lives out the Word in the parlor, the pantry and the pew before it ever declaims it from the pulpit.[7]
>
> Above all, we saw ministry as the living out in a consistent and loving way what it means to be a woman or man of God. Meet a minister, and in some way you should encounter Christ, and catch "the whiff of Jesus" (to use a memorable phrase from Glen Marshall).

That is a beginning, at least, in answering this question, "what is ministry?" or its associated question "what is ministry for?" It is gifted leadership that enables the church to be truly itself, enabling its mission and caring for its community. It is servant leadership that recognizes the gifts of the many and seeks to develop and enable them for the good of the whole. It is prophetic leadership that challenges the church and the world with the good news of Christ and the call to live a life of discipleship. It is wise leadership that draws upon the whole council of God in shaping, with others, the path the church must tread. Above all, it is "virtuous" leadership, embodying first in itself what it subsequently calls the whole church to be and to do. If ministers are under-shepherds of the one Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, then they, too, must be "good" in two ways. First good in the sense of effective, professional, accomplished. Good in the sense that one might say of an accomplished pianist, "John is a very good musician." However, that very good musician might also be a serial philanderer,

7. We toyed with ideas of ministry from such varied images as the electrician (who attends to the wiring so that everything is connect to the mains, and who ensures that a new extension is connected to the original home); to the midwife (who assists at the birth of a new life, but is not the mother, and who, following intensive support, has a decreasing engagement as the mother and child become self-sufficient); to the weather forecaster (who makes calculated assessments of what the climate will be like in the near future) or the occupant of the crow's nest (who sees further than those on deck, so has a wider vision); and to the apprentice-master (who takes unskilled people and enables them to become skilled practitioners in the life of faith and discipleship). We wondered if ministers were cooks, preparing nutritional meals for their congregations; building inspectors, who ensured the foundations were strong enough; or ambassadors, who represent another state in a foreign land, and embody its values and characteristics, speaking both their own language and the language of the foreign country where they are placed.

devious, and deceptive in their private life and relationships. It does not, in their case, detract from their musicianship. It cannot be so for ministers. Another, more significant, understanding of "good" must be applied: that of moral propriety, personal integrity, and godly character. The "good minister" is both proficient at the tasks of their calling, and righteous in their living–to use a word often on the lips of the Psalmist. The thesis of this book is that in both senses of that word, virtue ethics and its outworking is the best model to apply in seeking to enable proficiency and deepen character and spirituality. The next chapter explores in greater detail what is meant by virtue ethics, and why and how it might be helpfully applied. Meanwhile, let me continue to describe what ministry is and what shape it takes. As in so many other answers to this question, I will do so by means of metaphor.[8] The first is drawn from music, the second and third from the visual arts. A feature of the way in which this book will examine formation is to refer to the arts, as I have already suggested in the introduction. This is in part because of a conviction that formation itself is much more than a cerebral acquisition of knowledge, and that a varied approach will deliver formation more deeply: the book, therefore, mimics the approach I will advocate, within the limits of a book, of course. The tangential approach afforded by looking at paintings or listening to music is itself a kind of formation, a meditative and even prayerful consideration. I shall argue throughout for an approach that is deeper than often is the case, and the careful attention to a painting or the listening to music is an expression of that approach. It is also, partly, because this conveys my own interests, and if that has itself a hint of self-indulgence, then perhaps the reader will forgive this: I believe it pays dividends in broadening the approach to our analysis, coming at the issues from a different perspective.

The Art of Fugue

I want first to liken the character of ministry and the formation of ministers to a piece of music. Bach's final monumental work in the medium of the fugue, *Die Kunst der Fuge*, *The Art of Fugue*, will suffice for illustration. This is not an arbitrary choice, for Johann Sebastian Bach is the Christian

8. Together with the classic metaphor of shepherd, pastor, a common way of describing ministry in the recent past has been as a profession. Russell analyzed this from the perspective of the Church of England and the development of the professions in the nineteenth century: Russell, *The Clerical Profession*. Others have emphasized its relationship to the laity: Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*; while Thompson and Thompson have explored ministry as a mindful interaction between God, the church, and the minister: *Mindful Ministry*.

composer *par excellence,* and it was that extraordinary German theologian and pastor of the Confessing Church, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing to his friend Eberhard Bethge from prison in Berlin on 23rd February 1944, who noted that,

> The important thing today is that we should be able to discern from the fragment of our life how the whole was arranged and planned, and what material it consists of. For really there are some fragments that are only worth throwing into the dustbin . . . and others whose importance lasts for centuries, because their completion can only be a matter for God, and so they are fragments that must be fragments—I am thinking of, e.g., of the art of fugue. If our life is but the remotest reflection of such a fragment, if we accumulate, at least for a short while, a wealth of themes and weld them into a harmony in which the great counterpoint is maintained from start to finish, so that at last, when it breaks off abruptly, we can sing no more than the chorale, *Vor deinen Thron tret' ich allhier*, we will not moan the fragmentariness of our life, but rather rejoice in it.[9]

This is a work whose importance has lasted for centuries, and Bonhoeffer refers to its sudden unfinished character. The final fugue is left incomplete in the published edition: it just dies on the page mid-exposition, just as Bonhoeffer's life was ended so suddenly under the hangman's noose in Flossenburg on 9th April 1945. Ministry seems something like this: fragments, some of which are only fit for the rubbish, but others that last, a very few, perhaps, far beyond the life of the minister. Those fragments are woven into a larger counterpoint whose theme is given by the Christian gospel, and each section a fresh variation on the one great theme.

The Art of Fugue is Bach's great tour de force, its theme Bach's own[10] and composed in the early 1740s until around 1745, by which time Bach was sixty. It has fugues of all sorts (fourteen in all), some simple, others inverted, double, triple and quadruple of great inventiveness and complexity, together with four canons. Yet the theme is always present; sometimes obviously so, at other times more obscure. Bach was considered "old fashioned" by this stage of his life, and it may be that "In this rather austere, abstract

9. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 135–36.

10. The third subject of the final fugue, Contrapunctus XIV, a four-voice triple fugue, is based on the German musical notation of BACH (Bb – A – C – B, in German, H) which had led to some speculation that Bach was writing the work at his death. Almost certainly this was a transcribing error, not a compositional one, as Bach was preparing for publication a text that was already over five years old.

work it could well be that Bach was setting down models of his fugal art, for a generation that no longer cherished it."[11]

Perhaps this book on formation and virtue ethics also has something of this tenor about it. Ministry as I shall be describing it, and the formation of those who are called to it in particular, places itself firmly in a tradition that seems old fashioned to some, those enamored of all things "emerging" and "fresh." The personal demands of it seem too great, the theme too unvarying, the complexity in effectively exercising such ministry seems bewildering. Yet, a quarter of a millennium later, Bach's *The Art of Fugue* remains a towering achievement, a lasting fragment of a Christian culture, where easier, less demanding music has been consigned to the land-fill of history. Similarly, the core traditional ministry tasks have stood the test of time, and the heart of what it is to be a minister likewise.

It is a vision of such challenge, such beauty and such Kingdom fruitfulness that I want to set out. To those who limit the preparation of those entering Christian ministry to an academic education, or even training in the skills and tasks of ministry, I want to say "not enough." It is the preparation of men and women as living symbols of the gospel, embodying in their lives and actions the very character of Christ that we should aspire to. This is an unashameably sacramental understanding of ministry: the minister is not simply tasked to fulfil certain functions, even if those functions are representative of the church, but to live a life through which the gracious presence of Christ by His Spirit might be encountered. True this is mediated through the actions of pastoral care and prayer, proclamation of the faith, and leadership of the church; evangelism, and liturgical presidency; but that is not the essence of what ministry is.

Remaining with Bonhoeffer and music, Jeremy Begbie explores how Bonhoeffer uses the metaphor of polyphony and the *cantus firmus* in another letter to Bethge:

> There is always the danger that intense love may cause one to lose what I might call the polyphony of life. What I mean is that God wants us to love him eternally with our whole hearts – not in such a way as to injure or weaken our earthly love, but to provide a kind of *cantus firmus* to which the other melodies of life provide the counterpoint . . . Where the *cantus firmus* is clear and plain, the counterpoint can be developed to its limits.[12]

What Bonhoeffer envisages is,

11. Stacie and Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, 203.
12. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 162.