

## EDITORIAL:

# Spiritual Formation

Ray Anderson defines the 'Soul of Ministry' as 'Forming Leaders for God's People'.<sup>1</sup> In our contemporary context, the training of leaders within the church has often stressed the issues of professionalism, management and organisation. Sometimes, not always, this has led to a neglect of spiritual formation, acquiring skills and expertise rather than developing grace and godliness. As vital as administration and techniques might be, pastoral leadership is never to be defined by their acquisition.

In a similar vein, David Fergusson has commented that 'The tendency [in theological education] to allow models of research excellence and professional training to dominate our curricula militates against the possibility that the study of theology might actually contribute to our sanctification.'<sup>2</sup> Even as evangelicals, we have not always emphasised the importance of both belief and behaviour. At various times, and in different contexts, we have stressed one over against the other. Yet, theology and spirituality, doctrine and life, belief and behaviour belong together. Thus those who are involved in theological education 'must think of themselves as spiritual directors',<sup>3</sup> and reclaim the truth that theological education is much more than gaining intellectual knowledge and includes the 'skill of living well'.<sup>4</sup>

This model of theological education may presuppose a believing community of scholars and students who are not only learning together in lectures and tutorials but praying and worshipping together. As more and more theological education is taking place in the context of secular faculties, and within the structure of university validated courses, we must be careful not to lose the cutting edge of spiritual formation as the foundation of effective ministry.

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<sup>1</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry*, (Louisville, Kentucky, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> David Ferguson, 'Reclaiming the Doctrine of Sanctification', *Interpretation*, 53 (1999), p. 388.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen T. Cherry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (Oxford, 1997), p. 239.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

There is no doubt that the Christian church desperately needs to discover a clear and cogent understanding of her faith, contextualising that message and communicating it clearly to our congregations and society. Yet, as Martin Luther pointed out in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, 'By living... doth a man become a theologian, not by knowing, reading or speculation.'<sup>5</sup> Luther was not condemning study, learning or knowledge but he was indicating that the spiritual disciplines of prayer, meditation and the experiences of daily life enable us to be like Jacob and 'wrestle with God', emerging from the experience 'limping but blessed'.<sup>6</sup>

In his own inimitable way, Henri Nouwen speaks of the 'future of Christian leadership' and calls for 'seminaries and divinity schools... to become centres where people are trained in true discernment of the signs of the time. This cannot be just an intellectual training. It requires a deep spiritual formation involving the whole person – body, mind and heart.'<sup>7</sup> When we recapture such a vision of theological education as the spiritual formation of mind and heart, we will truly be 'forming leaders for God's people' within the twenty-first century.

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<sup>5</sup> Cited by Jurgen Moltmann, 'What is a Theologian?' *Irish Theological Quarterly* 64 (1999), p. 193.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Henry Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (London, 1989), p. 69.