

The pedagogical challenges of teaching ministerial theology to students from non-traditional community churches.

In the past decade or so in the UK there has been a proliferation of Christian congregations outside the historic established denominations (referred to here as non-traditional community churches, NTCCs). The majority belong to the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition, with a membership predominantly drawn from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community groups. Unlike most historic UK denominations, the leaders of NTCCs are typically appointed on the basis of criteria other than formal professional education. Recently, however, encouraged by widening access to higher education, there has been considerable interest on the part of many NTCC leaders to receive theological education. A number of universities (and other institutions with university-accredited courses) provide ministerial-theological programmes (referred to as MTPs) for this growing cohort of students. These students are predominantly mature-age, have extensive life experience, and often come from cultural and church backgrounds underrepresented in the wider student population. There are indications that their retention rates and attainment levels are lower than those of traditional students. They thus present particular pedagogical challenges for the design and delivery of theological education. In particular, they struggle with subjecting deeply-held convictions and familiar church practices to critical theological reflection.

The perceived benefits of MTPs are in the first place to the various NTCCs themselves. Well-educated leaders are more able to introduce their membership to the knowledge and understanding that will equip them to bear witness to the Christian faith in an increasingly educated society. There are, however, also potential benefits beyond individual congregations. NTCCs, with their wholehearted commitment and particular spirituality, have much to offer the wider church and our multi-faith society. Critically aware and outward-looking NTCC leaders are in a better position to engage in dialogue with their counterparts in the historic denominations and in other faith communities.

The research will investigate MTPs offered or validated by a university. The findings will inform the design of curricula and the approaches to teaching, the better to equip the students with the intellectual, personal, and spiritual skills that will make them more effective Christian leaders in contemporary Britain. The objectives of the project are to: (i) construct a model of students' learning and its effect on their intellectual and faith development; (ii) identify the specific pedagogical challenges confronting MTPs. On the basis of the findings, recommendations will be made concerning the design and delivery of MTPs. The project will address objectives (i) and (ii) through a qualitative study of data collected from interviews with students and teachers, focus groups, analysis of students' assignments, and classroom observations. The project will be of nine months' duration

(beginning in September 2016) and will be conducted by academics with extensive experience in teaching (including on MTPs) and educational and social science research.

The final report will include a series of recommendations for the design and delivery of MTPs. The findings will be further disseminated by the presentation of conference papers and an article submitted to a peer-reviewed journal (such as the *Journal of Adult Theological Education; Studies in Higher Education*).