

## Draft article

*This is a follow-up article to "Reenvisioning Theological Education, Mission and the Local Church". It is in draft form and needs more work. A polished version will likely be submitted for a journal publication so please don't quote from or distribute further this version without the writer's permission. Critique or feedback is welcome to [darren.cronshaw@buu.com.au](mailto:darren.cronshaw@buu.com.au). Thank you.*

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### Reenvisioning Theological Education, Vocation and the Kingdom of God

*There is growing interest in theology for everyday life, vocation and marketplace ministry, and a holistic understanding of mission centred around the Kingdom of God, but what does this mean for theological education? This article follows Robert Banks' *Reenvisioning Theological Education* and my previous article "Reenvisioning theological education, mission and the local church". It draws on innovative approaches at Forge Mission Training Network, Macquarie Christian Studies Institute and Tabor Victoria. And it discusses further principles for reshaping theological education, particularly around vocation and the Kingdom of God. Theological training and processes for leadership development will be at their best if they are missional in sending students into active mission as they learn; multi-cultural and engaging with global perspectives; and marketplace focused to empower the whole people of God for their vocations.*

#### More reenvisioning

In a previous article I focused on reenvisioning theological education through engagement with mission and the local church.<sup>1</sup> There is a fresh wave of interest in local churches reshaping themselves around mission, and I was eager to explore what this means for theological education. I was inspired by Robert Banks' book *Reenvisioning Theological Education*,<sup>2</sup> and drew on innovative approaches at Australian College of Ministries (ACOM) and Whitley College. There were six principles for reshaping theological education around mission and the local church that I discussed. I argued that theological courses and informal processes for developing leaders will be at their best if they are:

1. communal in the classroom, assessment and shared mission
2. conversational between students and with other sources
3. contextual and engaged with contemporary needs in society
4. character forming as part of the curriculum
5. contemplative both for prayer and space for reflection; and
6. congregationally connected for faculty, students and their research.

I would like to follow up and expand on that article in three directions.

#### Mission, Vocation and the Kingdom of God

Firstly, I want to consider reenvisioning theological education in a broader perspective of vocation and the kingdom of God.

As discussed in the previous article, there has been a welcome surge of interest in the significance of *missio Dei*, the "mission of God" or "the missionary God". In terms of mission and the local church, *missio Dei* reminds us that the church does not have a mission program as much as our God of mission has the church to help fulfil God's mission. Mission does not

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<sup>1</sup> Darren Cronshaw, "Reenvisioning Theological Education, Mission and the Local Church," (2011).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

just happen through local churches, but the church is still God's key instrument for mission. It was important, I was convinced, to consider how theological education can recalibrate around mission and the local church.

Nevertheless, mission and the Kingdom of God are bigger than the local church. We proudly claim the role of the church as God's agent for mission and for fostering the Kingdom of God.<sup>3</sup> But mission is not just about what happens in or through churches. Mission is all that God is doing in the world to reconcile all things to God's self, and the Kingdom of God is about God's dream for the world to be functioning with justice, peace and wholeness for all. How can we reshape curriculum and processes for leadership formation around this broader vision? What does it mean to reenvision theological education not just around mission and the local church, which remains foundational, but around mission and the broader Kingdom of God?

Furthermore, vocation has significant implications for reenvisioning theological education. Vocation is not just about religious work or "full-time ministry" but joining the purposes of God wherever God calls people to serve – in the church and in the world. It encapsulates all that people do in living out their calling where God sends them. Theological study usually focuses on God and Scripture and the church side of the equation. This is necessary for people preparing for vocational church ministry. People preparing for other vocations need this foundational knowledge too, but they also particularly need skills and practice in making connections between their faith and everyday work. How can we better equip the "scattered" people of God to foster the Kingdom of God wherever they are? What does it mean to reenvision theological education around the vocations of the whole people of God?

A story that inspires me to reenvision theological education around vocation and the Kingdom is about Rosa Parks. The sanitised version of her protest is often told that on December 1, 1955 she was 'just tired'. She stood up for her rights by sitting down, sparking the Montgomery bus boycott and catalysing the civil rights movement that changed her nation, the United States of America. But she was not merely 'just tired' but very active in the movement for justice and equality and tired of being treated unequally. Furthermore, five months previously she participated in a workshop at the 'Highlander Centre', an adult education centre for community workers advocating for social and economic justice. She picked up some skills, and perhaps more importantly said it was the first time she experienced "an atmosphere of equality with members of the other race"<sup>4</sup> I respect and am inspired by Rosa Parks' initiative on the Montgomery bus. But I am just as inspired by the training that helped shape and equip her and give her a vision for a better world. Rosa Parks' story prompts me to question how can we help students connect with their vocation and be equipped to transform the world more in line with the Kingdom of God?

### **Innovative Australian training providers**

Secondly, I am eager to learn from a broader range of theological colleges and training contexts.

Charles Sherlock, in his comprehensive study of Australian theological education *Uncovering Theology*, remarked that theological education providers are often ignorant of what is happening elsewhere:

If the research undertaken for this project has revealed one thing, it is that – beyond a good number of outward-looking research-active faculty – few of the many people who give themselves wholeheartedly to theological education in

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<sup>3</sup> Darrell L Guder et al., *The Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 183-220.

<sup>4</sup> Highlander Research and Education Centre, "A Tribute to Rosa Parks" accessible at <http://www.highlandercenter.org/n-rosa-parks.asp>. I have told this story as formative for Baptist Union of Victoria philosophy of training, accessible at <http://www.buv.com.au/ministries/leadership-training/>.

Australia are aware of what others are doing, and how much they have in common.<sup>5</sup>

This project is an opportunity for me to reflect on the pedagogical approaches where I teach or have been inspired by, but also a platform to celebrate and share what these colleges are doing. I hope it might inspire others to share similarly about their training contexts so we can learn from one another. In my previous article, I drew on ACOM and Whitley. In this article I will reflect on training in two further contexts where I have taught – Forge Mission Training Network and Tabor Victoria, and thirdly Macquarie Christian Studies Institute.

### **Tabor Victoria**

Tabor Victoria is a relative newcomer to the theological education sector, and is now broadening into education and arts. Tabor Victoria started in 1988 as a campus of Tabor Australia (started in Adelaide in 1979 under Barry Chant's leadership and as part of the Pentecostal denomination Christian Revival Crusade). For a decade Tabor's accreditation was overseen from Adelaide, but the college decentralised and operated independently from 2004. The college has seen significant growth, and by 2010 had thirty faculty and staff and 500 students (300 full-time equivalent).<sup>6</sup> It offers courses from VET Certificates to Master Degrees. It continues its traditional offerings in theology, ministry, mission and counselling. But it has added an education department with a BA and GradDipEd(Secondary), and is well known for its popular Year in The Son (YITS) program for school leavers and MA in Vocational Practice (majoring in Church Practice, Development Studies and soon Health, Media and Business streams).<sup>7</sup>

Tabor has valued collaboration and strategic partnerships. They formed a partnership and merged teaching with Kingsley College (for Wesleyan Methodist Ministry Training). They offered training in partnership with FORGE Mission Training Network for a number of years, and have ongoing partnerships with CityLife (Melbourne's largest church), Urban Neighbours of Hope (UNOH) and EQUIP (the training arm of SIL/ Wycliffe Bible Translators). They have also pioneered on-campus centres for the Victorian Council for Christian Education (VCCE) and TEAR.<sup>8</sup> Tabor were originally based in Fitzroy, then moved to the Ringwood property owned by Christian Life Centre/Urban Life. In 2010, Churches of Christ Theological College in Mulgrave made a generous and bold invitation to Tabor to share its campus, and this co-location of colleges has commenced for teaching side-by-side from 2011 but still as independent providers.

### **Forge**

Forge Mission Training Network developed an action-reflection training internship from 1996 to cultivate missionary identity and pioneering leadership skills. Co-founders Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost wanted to give priority to forming more apostolic, prophetic and evangelistic leaders and not just pastor-teachers that traditional theological education has focused on.<sup>9</sup> Forge assumed that people cannot learn mission removed from a mission context and so interns are placed in a missional placement designed to stretch them outside their comfort zones and heighten their motivation for learning. It commonly placed them in contexts of making disciples, serving the poor and experimenting with new forms of church. It is not about

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Sherlock, *Uncovering Theology: The Depth, Reach and Utility of Australian Theological Education* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2009), 217.

<sup>6</sup> Wynand de Kock, Interview with author (18 Jan 2011).

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.tabor.vic.edu.au/study/ma/church-practice>.

<sup>8</sup> "Tabor – Brief History", accessible at <http://www.tabor.vic.edu.au/about/history>.

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 4:11-13; Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 165-181.

thinking into new ways of acting but acting into new ways of thinking.<sup>10</sup> Forge supported interns through the year with three intensives with practitioner teachers, monthly cluster groups, regular coaching and reflective reading and assignments. Some did Forge for an accredited degree with a partnering college (mainly Tabor Victoria, Australian College of Ministries or Whitley College), but most do it for its own sake.

Participants express appreciation for grasping new paradigms for mission, hearing inspiring stories and learning innovation and sustainability from practitioners, and developing skills in cultural critique especially concerning consumerism. Approximately two hundred people between 1996 and 2009 did the year-long Forge internship, peaking in 2006 and 2007 with forty interns and twelve part-time staff around the country. Many others have done individual courses or attended the “Dangerous Stories” gatherings in 2005 and 2007 and the Forge Festival in 2008, all in Melbourne and attracting 500-800 people to each event. Forge’s field education and networking model was costly and Forge had to scale down Australian operations in 2009. But they tapped into an eagerness for innovation in mission and training and it will be interesting to see how Forge navigates its future.<sup>11</sup> Through 2010-2011 they continued to offer individual study subjects by distance through ACOM and are exploring relaunching the internship from 2012.

### **MCSI**

Macquarie Christian Studies Institute started in 1999 with an explicit focus on training and networking for marketplace ministry and public ethics.<sup>12</sup> MCSI was passionate about integrating faith, life and work. Their motto developed as “Bringing faith to life, putting faith to work”. Instead of another theological college for ministry students, the vocation-based vision was to train Christian leaders and everyday workers as role models and for influencing every sphere of life. To lead this new initiative, MCSI recruited Robert Banks as its first Director 1999-2004, then Gordon Preece 2004-2007, and finally Greg Clarke 2007-2009. Rather than going it alone, MCSI fostered strategic collaboration with university, theological education and industry bodies. They offered subjects to Macquarie and other university students on the Bible, religions, popular culture and ethics, and partnered with Macquarie education and finance departments to offer tailored courses. Student numbers rose to 212 subject enrolments in 2004, looked after by a lean staff team of three full-time and three part-timers and casual faculty of about twenty theologically qualified reflective practitioners.

Part of MCSI’s mandate was professional development and networking for Christian professionals. MCSI hosted networks for lawyers and offered focused training for lawyers, teachers, doctors, boards, aged care and IT workers. They hosted popular conferences with international speakers, and celebrated and published widely on the integration of faith and work. This all helped build MCSI’s reputation as *the* Australian centre for reflecting theologically on marketplace theology. Unfortunately, MCSI had to cease operations at the end of 2009 because of financial and logistical challenges, but its decade of teaching and resourcing was valuable and it pointed in important directions that hopefully others will carry on in the coming decade.

These three groups have admirably grappled with reshaping their programs to reflect fresh understanding of mission and the challenge of leading local churches to engage Australian society. I want to adopt an appreciative inquiry approach to see what we can learn from them.

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<sup>10</sup> Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 120-124; drawing on Richard T Pascale, Mark Millermann, and Linda Gioja, *Surfing the edge of chaos: The laws of nature and the new laws of business* (New York: Crown, 2000), 14.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.forge.org.au/>; <http://www.forgeamerica.org/>

<sup>12</sup> Robert Banks, MCSI AGM Director’s Report, 29 October 2003; Gordon Preece, Interview #1 with author (10 Jan 2011); Gordon Preece, Email to author (15 Jan 2011).

## More characteristics of missional training

Thirdly, I am eager to grapple with other characteristics of missional training.

In my previous article I discussed training that is at its best in being communal, conversational, contextual, character forming, contemplative and congregationally connected. My thoughts have begun to go in further directions. Reenvisioning theological education will also involve equipping leaders with training that is essentially missional in sending students into active mission as they learn, and marketplace focused to empower the whole people of God for their vocations.

So in this article I continue to explore the future of theological education, engaging freshly with vocation and the kingdom of God, illustrated with innovative examples from three colleges and training providers, and grappling with these two further guideposts for reenvisioning theological education.

### 1. Missional

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."  
(John 20:21)

*Missio Dei* is an imagination-grabbing concept that reenvisioning theological education. God is a missionary God, and God invites the people of God to join in mission. God is a sending God who sent Abraham to be a blessing to the nations and sent Jesus to usher in a new Kingdom (Gen 12:1-3; Matt 4:17). Jesus left his disciples with a co-mission that just as the Father sent him into the world, he was sending his followers on mission (John 17:18; 20:21). Thus the people of God are a sent people, sent into the world to work with Jesus to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Howard Snyder commented, "Church people think about how to get people into the church; kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world. Church people worry that the world might change the church; kingdom people work to see the church change the world."<sup>13</sup> Reenvisioned theological education will form leaders for church-based ministry but also for mission beyond the church. Lesslie Newbigin, legendary advocate for mission to the Western world, appeals for distinctively missional leadership formation: "Ministerial training as currently conceived is still far too much training for the pastoral care of the existing congregation, and far too little oriented toward the missionary calling to claim the whole of public life for Christ and his kingdom."<sup>14</sup> A missionally reenvisioned theological education will position itself not just academically but apostolically – the college as an apostolate.<sup>15</sup>

Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost, Australian missional church leaders, co-founded Forge Mission Training Network to cultivate missionary identity and pioneering leadership skills. Hirsch surveyed Melbourne's theological colleges and discovered only a small percentage of students were preparing for church planting (3% of the 2000 students in 1995), and that students perceived their training did little to prepare them for innovation and pioneering initiatives.<sup>16</sup> Frost and Hirsch appeal for training of apostolic, prophetic and evangelistic type leaders who can pioneer new ground, question the status quo and communicate the gospel in today's contexts, as well as pastoral and teaching leaders who care and preach.<sup>17</sup> There is a place for general pastoral training but contemporary mission challenges require pioneering

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<sup>13</sup> Howard A Snyder, *Liberating the Church: the Ecology of Church and Kingdom* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983).

<sup>14</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 231.

<sup>15</sup> Banks, *Reenvisioning*: 142.

<sup>16</sup> Alan Hirsch, Interview with author (10 May 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Drawing on Ephesians 4:11; Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 165-180, 218-223; discussed in Darren Cronshaw, *The Shaping of Things Now: Emerging Church Mission and Innovation in 21st Century Melbourne* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2009), 66-68, 219-250.

and visionary skills that are not necessarily cultivated in traditional theological education. This was why they started Forge, “to help birth and nurture the missional church in Australia and beyond”.<sup>18</sup>

Hirsch and Frost dreamed up Forge’s internship with a syllabus and practical placement shaped around incarnational mission. It sought to be action-reflection, grassroots, cross-cultural and embracing diverse expressions of mission. Interns were placed in stretching mission contexts and then given coaching and teaching intensives that helped them reflect on what they were experiencing in mission. The majority of lecturers and coaches were practitioners in a cutting-edge mission context, invited not just to share information but to share their stories and inspire interns to ‘act with passion for the Kingdom of God’.<sup>19</sup> Forge was thus consistent with Banks’ stress on teachers as coworkers in mission and the value of ‘reflection-in-action’ internship experiences.<sup>20</sup>

Full-time faculty can still teach as “coworkers in mission” when they are active practitioners. Banks encourages lecturers not to dwell on the academic “publish or perish” but to remember the need to engage “publish and parish”.<sup>21</sup> Different faculty have different opportunities and levels of engagement with ministry. For example, at Tabor, Wynand De Kock planted a church in Kew as he started at Tabor, and faculty members Les Henson and John Capper are non-stipended ministers in their local churches. Others are active volunteers or serve as denominational consultants and draw on these experiences in their teaching.

De Kock says Tabor does not operate with a teacher-learner paradigm but with a model of experienced learners and apprentice learners. Faculty are not specialist sages but experienced learners helping apprentices in their ministry growth. Moreover, De Kock’s method in vocational learning is to start with student questions that emerge from contemporary life and ministry practice rather than traditional answers and biblical sources. He is committed to sourcing appropriate theological responses from Scripture and tradition, but wants to train students to start with the emerging questions of our time.<sup>22</sup> This is important for vocational development. Some of the best questions and conversation will centre around the student’s vocations and how they can foster the Kingdom of God in their context.

MCSI saw it as their role to apprentice students for mission in their university context. The agenda was help students think differently and raise questions in their studies, as preparation and practice for later workforce engagement.<sup>23</sup> The underlying philosophy of mission was broad, encompassing the Creation or Cultural Mandate to exercise dominion in the world (Gen 1:27-30) as well as the Great Commission or New Creation mandate (Matt 28:19-20). Paul Stevens adds what some call the “greater commission” for justice and holistic transformation (Luke 4:18-19) and “the *greatest* commission” of Jesus sending his people into the world (John 17:18; 20:21).<sup>24</sup> MCSI was committed to equipping students for *missio Dei* in all of society, in broadly missional terms and not just verbal witness. Thus they taught World Religions, but also welcomed Muslim students into courses like Faith and Education and discussed in Media classes how Muslims are depicted. They taught Science and Faith, but also hosted a popular dinner conversation between leading theologian NT Wright and

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<sup>18</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 219.

<sup>19</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 221.

<sup>20</sup> Banks, *Reenvisioning*, 147.

<sup>21</sup> Banks, *Reenvisioning*, 236-239.

<sup>22</sup> De Kock, interview.

<sup>23</sup> Gordon Preece, interview #2 with author (10 Feb 2011).

<sup>24</sup> R Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1999), 201.

Macquarie University Cosmologist Paul Davies.<sup>25</sup> MCSI took seriously their mandate to equip people for serious thinking across different vocations.

The best missional training that helps students find their vocation and foster the Kingdom of God will involve experiential learning. People learn best when they learn by doing and practice, combined with reflection and theory. It is not about orchestrating action-then-reflection, but learning from and while doing ministry, or “reflection-in-action”.<sup>26</sup> This is what Banks means by “missional” training, not just mission-oriented or missiological but training that is field based and stretches students by getting them to do some of what they are studying. This makes learning more immediate than preparing for future ministry; it is in-service training for what God is doing now.<sup>27</sup> It is not about acquiring all the knowledge needed for a life-time of service, but making the most of “just-in-time” learning and cultivating a life-long commitment to growing and adapting.<sup>28</sup> A posture of experiential and lifelong learning is essential for the changing world we live in.

Tabor’s second value statement is “Lifelong learning is an act of worship and prayer”. Lecturers appreciate that classes have seventeen year old school leavers alongside seventy-one year old mature students. They encourage students to spread out their studies and integrate them with ministry and life experience rather than cramming in as much as possible for speedy completion. Tabor’s Ministry Field Education units offer an action-reflection class that seek to bridge the gap between action and reflection, teaching and practice. As a separate subject it fosters the practice of theological reflection in the midst of action, but it is a paradigm that is used across the syllabus. Moreover, the Kingdom of God is a key concept that is treated as both its own subject and as an underlying principle for equipping people to respond to God’s call. Tabor’s courses teach salvation as social as well as personal, horizontal as well as vertical. Tabor guides students to discover and pursue their vocational interests to foster the Kingdom of God in church and society.<sup>29</sup>

Theological education at its best will help students join in with *missio Dei*, live out their vocation and contribute to the Kingdom of God. This will look different for different students. The Apostle Paul said, “My ambition has always been to preach the Good News where the name of Christ has never been heard, rather than where a church has already been started by someone else.” (Romans 15:20). But Paul had a unique call and we are not all Pauls. Parker Palmer suggests we need to build our vocation on the basis of how God has made us and where God is calling, rather than some image of what we “ought” to be based on the expectations of others or the needs of the world. Palmer quotes Frederick Buechner’s popular definition of vocation as “the place where your deep gladness meets the world’s deep need.”<sup>30</sup> This is a liberating framework for vocation and guidance. It suggests vocationally discerning how we are created and what passions God has put on our hearts, but it also steers us in directions that will most effectively help bring the world more into line with God’s dream for it – the Kingdom of God. A missionally focused theological education will help students discern where their “deep gladness meets the world’s deep need”.

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<sup>25</sup> "Does the world have a future? Gordon Preece interviews Tom Wright and Paul Davies," *Zadok Paper* S157(Summer 2007); Preece, interview #2.

<sup>26</sup> Donald A Schön, *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action* (New York: Basic, 1983), 68.; in Banks, *Reenvisioning*. 139.

<sup>27</sup> Banks, *Reenvisioning*, 142, cf. 227; discussed in Cronshaw, "Reenvisioning Theological Education, Mission and the Local Church".

<sup>28</sup> E.g., John E Paver, *Theological Reflection and Education for Ministry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 30-32, 59; Sherlock, *Uncovering Theology*, 173.

<sup>29</sup> De Kock, interview.

<sup>30</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 95; Parker J Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 16.

The story of Patch Adams embodies an innovative approach of learning by doing and serving those on the margins.<sup>31</sup> Made popular by Robin Williams' 1998 comedy film, the real Dr Hunter "Patch" Adams is famous for his unconventional practice of medicine and founder of the Gesundheit! Institute, a free community hospital and context for teaching health care design. Instead of distancing himself from patients, he is convinced compassion, humour and play are central to health care. Adams came from a difficult childhood and after multiple suicide attempts he decided "you don't kill yourself; you make revolution". He says he has been unceasing in that vision with no breaks in his revolution for love, peace, and justice. Adams is honorary chair of the "International Association for the Advancement of Creative Maladjustment", which Martin Luther King had called for to support social change. Callian suggests that just as Adams trained doctors in compassion and competency without squeezing out their passion, our colleges need fresh imagination for forming compassionate, equipped and passionate leaders who can lead the people of God in their calling.<sup>32</sup>

## 2. Marketplace

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

Finally, theological education needs to be reenvisioned with a focus on the marketplace and equipping the whole people of God for their vocations. Theological study and vocational discernment are not just for theological students, overseas missionaries and local church ministers. Vocation is not limited to so called religious callings. God calls people to serve in education, health and politics. Kingdom-minded people are needed in engineering and environmental science, parenting and plumbing, indigenous health and IT. The reality is that only about 20% of the 14,000 students studying in Australia's 69 theological colleges are preparing for professional ministry. The remaining majority are studying for their own Christian life and vocation. They are not all called to pastoral ministry but they are called "to lives of ministry as the church" in their offices and schools, shops and sportsgrounds.<sup>33</sup>

It is important to ask how colleges are helping students make connections between their theological studies and the rest of their lives. As a pastor I am intrigued by ecclesiology and congregational dynamics. When I study congregational leadership I can make immediate connections with my work and vocation. But most people have a lot else on their minds. How can theological education help the whole people of God faithfully live out their calling? And how can it equip ministers-in-training to empower the whole people of God to foster the Kingdom of God in the marketplace?

When theological courses are church-centric then the only imagination graduating students have of where they can apply their studies is church ministry. Preece suggests a problem is that students graduate and are eager to apply their newfound knowledge and skills, and so compete for opportunities for Sunday preaching and leading worship.<sup>34</sup> To the congregation this shows the church is not reliant on the pastor as hired holy-person and demonstrates the ministry of all believers, but only in the life of the gathered church. The ministry of the whole people of God is not just about laypeople helping the clergy to run church, but about all followers of Jesus acting as agents of the Kingdom of God in all spheres of life. Making theological education accessible to all believers is not just about economics and weekend classes, but offering relevant courses that engage ministry for the marketplace. College

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<sup>31</sup> "Patch Adams (film)", [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patch\\_Adams\\_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patch_Adams_(film)); "Patch Adams", [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patch\\_Adams](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patch_Adams).

<sup>32</sup> Carnegie Samuel Calian, *The Ideal Seminary: Pursuing Excellence in Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 105-108.

<sup>33</sup> Sherlock, *Uncovering Theology*, 12-13, 111-112.

<sup>34</sup> Preece, Interview #1; cf. Stevens, *Six Days*, 248.

processes can direct people into local church work when their vocation may be to extend the Kingdom of God in another sphere of society.

Theological education at its best will engage the academy, local churches and the marketplace.<sup>35</sup> Just as involvement in local church ministry will enhance the teaching of faculty, so too will engagement with workplace and justice issues. Faculty could do well to engage in a work context outside the church for a sabbatical. To help foster the Kingdom of God they could consult with different professions and help them grapple with the ethical and lifestyle choices from a faith perspective. This would help workers, but also give faculty insights for their teaching and model to students equipping God's people for their vocations. Colleges need to connect with what God is doing in the world, but the world also needs help in fostering the Kingdom of God. Stevens suggests, "For systematic integration of academy, marketplace, and congregations to take place in Western institutions, the faculty must lead the way by experiencing that integration within themselves individually and among themselves communally."<sup>36</sup>

I have researched case studies of congregations, but realised more research is needed for developing tools that recognize and survey the mission of God's people in the world. Mission is broader than gathered church on Sundays, and we need indicators of effective scattered church life. *Missio Dei* of the emerging ecumenical paradigm was crucial for seeing mission not limited to, albeit including, the church. David Bosch commented, 'It is inconceivable that we could again revert to a narrow, ecclesiocentric view of mission'.<sup>37</sup> We need a theology of incarnational mission but also tools to foster and evaluate its effectiveness through congregations and the people of God scattered in the marketplace.<sup>38</sup>

Colleges are well placed to lead the church in reflection on the engagement of faith with the marketplace. This needs some of our best thinking and rigorous scholarship. Fresh approaches to theological education for the marketplace will mean curriculum reform that add practical subjects on marketplace ethics and global issues to homiletics and counselling. If theological courses look churchy then it is likely they will produce people ready to serve in churches but not necessarily equipped to engage the marketplace. Courses need to develop connections with Christian leaders in the marketplace of business, politics, the economy and other professions.<sup>39</sup> I valued the biblical, theological, historical and practical training I received at college. But I would also have loved exposure to marketplace ethics and reflection on the place of faith in my work worlds of education, farming and youth work.

A distinctive of Forge's teaching was a non-dualistic 'messianic spirituality' that engages the marketplace and everyday life and not just church and private devotion. Frost and Hirsch, inspired by Hebraic frameworks, say there is no 'secular' sphere because all of life is sacred. Messianic spirituality relates to the implications of Jewish monotheism that God is the one God over every aspect of life.<sup>40</sup> The first element of Hirsch's missional-DNA is the related confession, "Jesus is Lord", recognizing Jesus' claim over all of life as sacred rather than limiting God's presence to certain sacred spaces on Sundays.<sup>41</sup> Frost similarly expands on a life-embracing approach to faith which encompasses missional service as well as singing, and Monday to Saturday routines as well as Sunday. He critiques the limits of Sunday-based and music-focused worship and 'clericalism' which fails to affirm the sacredness of other

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Stevens, *Six Days*, 19, 251.

<sup>36</sup> R Paul Stevens, "Marketing the Faith - A Reflection on the Importing and Exporting of Western Theological Education," *Crux* 28: 2 (June 1992), 15; cf. Banks, *Reenvisioning*, 185-186.

<sup>37</sup> David J Bosch, *Transforming mission: Paradigm shifts in theology of mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 393.

<sup>38</sup> Identified for further research in Cronshaw, *Shaping Now*, 235.

<sup>39</sup> Banks, *Reenvisioning*: 185-186.

<sup>40</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 111-162.; discussed in Cronshaw, *Shaping Now*, 235.

<sup>41</sup> Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*: 95.

vocations. Frost applauds architects, shop-owners and beer brewers who integrate their work and vocation and contribute to social justice and environmental conservation.<sup>42</sup>

Frost and Hirsch teach messianic spirituality, but another theological anchor for everyday spirituality and vocation is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God broadens faith beyond a privatised and individualised approach to encompass mission in all of life. Instead of evangelising people by challenging them to think about eternity after they die, the challenge is to invite people to think about what they are living for now.<sup>43</sup> Making the world beautiful and pleasing to God is the role of all God's people, as Brian McLaren suggests in his affirmation of diverse vocations:

What if the real difference is made in the world not by us preachers but by those who endure our preaching, those who quietly live out the secret message of the kingdom of God in their daily, workaday lives in the laboratory, classroom, office, cockpit, parliament, kitchen, market, factory, and neighborhood?<sup>44</sup>

God is a worker, as Banks explains, and the vocation of God's people is to apprentice with God to foster the kingdom of God.<sup>45</sup>

MCSI saw its role to apprentice students for the university and workplace. Robert Banks, the first director, had come from Fuller Seminary where he was Foundation Professor of the Laity and founder of the De Pree Leadership Center. He has published widely on theology of work and everyday life.<sup>46</sup> He came with the mandate to lead MCSI to become *the* centre for marketplace theology in Australia. MCSI's motto was originally "Bringing faith to life" and when Gordon Preece started as director he added the second phrase "Putting faith to work" to enhance the marketplace focus. Training students as apprentices of Jesus to integrate faith with study and life was still a major activity, but the growing edge was marketplace ministry and resourcing workers theologically. For Preece vocation is firstly a call to Christ (Ephesians 1-3), but this is outworked and shown in relationship with family, work and the powers of this world (Ephesians 5-6). Preece said he sought to help Christian leaders and workers grow in wisdom and become role models and influencers in every sphere of life.<sup>47</sup>

MCSI's subjects and courses were tailored to equip leaders working in the marketplace. Popular foundational units offered especially through Macquarie University were "The Living World of the Bible" and "The Quest for Meaning in Western Culture". Electives included "Work, Money, Sex and Friendship"; "Popular Culture", "Da Vinci Code", "World Religions", "Spirituality & Ethics of Business", "Ethical Risk in Finance", "Science and Religion" and "Ecology". MCSI partnered with Macquarie to offer a Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Studies for teachers in Christian-based Schools and a "Values in Education" subject for all postgraduate education students. They later became accredited with Australian College of Theology (ACT) and in 2005 offered online units and developed a Bachelor of Christian Studies and Master of Arts in Christian Studies, for which students studied through MCSI, an ACT college and a university. Preece said the new courses were practical alternative to

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<sup>42</sup> Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), 97, 177-200.

<sup>43</sup> E.g., Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 43-70.

<sup>44</sup> Brian D McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the truth that could change everything* (Nashville: W, 2006), 82, also 140-142, 203.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Banks, *God the Worker: Journeys into the Mind, Heart and Imagination of God* (Sydney: Albatross, 1992); Frost, *Exiles*: 177-200; discussed in Cronshaw, *Shaping Now*: 235.

<sup>46</sup> E.g., Robert Banks, *All the Business of Life: Bringing Theology Down to Earth* (Sydney: Albatross, 1987); Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens, eds., *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity; an A-to-Z guide to following Christ in every aspect of life* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997).

<sup>47</sup> Preece, interview #2.

theology degrees usually designed “for those in the pulpit rather than in the ‘pews’”. The MCSI focus was clearly on equipping for marketplace or Monday ministry, not Sunday church.<sup>48</sup>

Part of MCSI’s contribution was serving the non-academic community with networks and conferences. In 2001 Banks hosted the first International Marketplace Conference.<sup>49</sup> MCSI offered professional development seminars for teachers, lawyers and others like IT professionals. Staff spoke regularly in churches on workplace issues and led a group for Christian workers that invited sharing on what it’s like being a Christian in different work contexts. They celebrated the integration of faith and work with an annual Faith, Life & Work Award, awarded to Prof Graeme Clarke inventor of the Bionic Ear in 2005 and to John Anderson as a respected politician in 2006. Preece consulted on ethical investing and IR practices and MCSI staff wrote extensively on marketplace issues.<sup>50</sup> And they hosted popular conferences with international speakers including Rob Johnston and Rikk Watts on “Ecclesiastes and the movies” in 2004 and perhaps the best year of theological speakers put on by any organisation in the past thirty years in the Australian scene with Bishop Tom Wright for a week of addresses to 300+ audiences, including a dialogue with Paul Davies, the cosmologist, conferences with the producer (and C.S. Lewis’ stepson) of the *Lion, Witch & Wardrobe* movie, Denholm Grierson and others who worked on it, and Os Guinness, William Cavanaugh on public theology, and Kevin Rudd and John de Gruchy for the Bonhoeffer centenary. Rudd’s address became headline news as his new paradigm for Christian political involvement. All of this helped build MCSI’s reputation as *the* Australian centre for lay theological education for marketplace ministry and public ethics, or a kind of Regent of the Sothern Hemisphere.<sup>51</sup>

Preece said one inter-cultural marketplace-oriented encounter embodied the MCSI ethos. In 2001 MCSI hosted the first International Marketplace Conference, with keynote speakers Robert Banks and Paul Stevens. Preece recalls an American and Czech business pair explaining the complexities of operating their business “Integra” in the post-Soviet world. They had a garage that offered patrons coffee and a glass wall between them and the service floor so they could see what was happening to their cars. Often garages corruptly swapped good parts with old parts. Integra modelled initiative and anti-corruption in a Communist context where that seemed rare. Interestingly, a Latin American conference participant responded and said his problem was not Communism but Americans. He bemoaned his country’s massive unemployment and the oppression of multinational corporations, and reminded the conference of how developing countries can be oppressed by Western powers. The conference had to recognise the marketplace complexities of a globalised and multicultural world.<sup>52</sup>

As well as addressing business issues, any college has to set themselves up in a businesslike way. Unfortunately, MCSI were too reliant on Macquarie University and their business plan does not seem to have been sustainable and so they had to close in 2009.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly Forge had a similar story. Other colleges could pick up on the need for resourcing missional leadership and marketplace ministry.

Tabor is extending into marketplace theology through a range of specifically vocationally-focused programs. They have offered theology and counselling courses for years, but have recently developed teacher-training programs and accompanying courses in English, history

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<sup>48</sup> Gordon Preece, MCSI Director’s AGM Report, 26 October 2005.

<sup>49</sup> Preece, interview #2.

<sup>50</sup> “Bible@Work” Bible Studies; Gordon Preece, *Changing work values: a Christian response* (Brunswick East: Acom, 1995); Gordon Preece, *The viability of the vocation tradition in trinitarian, credal, and Reformed perspective: the threefold call* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1998).

<sup>51</sup> Gordon Preece, “From MCSI Dreaming to MCSI Reality”, Director’s Report, 2005.

<sup>52</sup> Preece, interview #2.

<sup>53</sup> Preece, interview #1.

and other secondary teaching subjects in a new School of Art, Social Science and Education. Moreover, De Kock developed a Master of Arts in Vocational Practice (MAVP), a six semester cohort based course with specialisations in church practice, aid and development (with Steve Bradbury from TEAR), Media (in a partnership with Trans World Radio), Health (under Art Wouters) and business. So the MAVP has five specialisations, four of them not church focused. Tabor's mission is to equip men and women to respond to the call of God in church, community and society. De Kock says "Tabor wants to be a comprehensive Christian college that equips men and women to respond to the call of God wherever the voice of God calls them to."<sup>54</sup>

Underlying Tabor's new course directions is a commitment to helping people discover and live out their vocations. De Kock says a defining feature of Christians, since sheep know the voice of the shepherd (John 10:27), is that they follow the voice of Christ into any spheres of engagement. The word "vocation" is derived from the Latin *vocari* meaning voice, and vocation relates to hearing the voice or call from God and how God made us about how we will best contribute to the world.<sup>55</sup> This is why Palmer titles his book on vocation *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. It is why Stevens has such a high view of work and vocation: "Vocation proposes that the whole of our lives finds meaning in relation to the sweet summons of a good God".<sup>56</sup> Social Trinitarianism teaches that God relates within God's self and sustains the world as three persons, and invites people into this life and community of God, or more poetically the *perichoresis*; the movement or dance of God.<sup>57</sup> This is our vocation – to be called to God and to join in what God is doing in the world in bringing the Kingdom of God to fulfilment. De Kock's view is that God's first act of creation was to make space for life, and theology and vocation is thus all about creativity and making space for ourselves and others to live: "As missionaries our job is to make space for life". Tabor have been influenced by these streams of thought and De Kock calls for a conversation not just about missional churches but about vocational churches. He suggests missional church helpfully remind the people of God that they are sent. But vocation reminds the people of God that we are called and drawn to where Jesus is already, not just in church but in the marketplace, media and health. <sup>58</sup>

As well as the writers just mentioned, James Fowler's work was foundational for De Kock, especially *Becoming Adult Becoming Christian*.<sup>59</sup> Fowler explores maturity and adult development and reclaims "covenant" and "vocation" as unifying ideals. Ancient Israel was called together in a covenantal relationship with God, and in Christ this call became universal. God's work is as creator, governor and redeemer, and God calls people to partnership in those roles. Vocation is thus partnering with God in what God is working in the world, including caring for creation, restraining evil, and releasing people from bondage. Vocation is not just a job or career, though it may relate to that. It is not just work but encompasses also relationships, spirituality and leisure as well as work. It is not about self-actualization, self-fulfilment, self-drive or self-comparison with others. Vocation is about what God has made us for and draws us to. Fowler describes vocation as a person's response with their total self to God's address and God's call to partnership.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> De Kock, Interview.

<sup>55</sup> De Kock, Interview.

<sup>56</sup> Stevens, *Six Days*, 72.

<sup>57</sup> Miroslav Volf, *After our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998)., popularised at Tabor by C Baxter Kruger, *The Great Dance: The Christian Vision Revisited* (Blackwood: Perichoresis, 2002); discussed in Cronshaw, *Shaping*, 61-62.

<sup>58</sup> De Kock, Interview.

<sup>59</sup> James W Fowler, *Becoming Adult Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith* (Blackburn: Dove, 1984).

<sup>60</sup> Fowler, *Becoming*, 85-104.

Fowler's idea of vocation is a unique and individual calling, but it is not individually discovered or directed. Part of discerning a vocation to pastoral ministry involves an inner call (the person feeling called) and an outer call (the broader church recognising and affirming the call). Similarly, the ideal of marketplace vocations is that they would be worked out not just individually but in community. Fowler stresses the role of community in anyone's vocational adventure:

Communities play a critical role in this process by providing relational contexts where we are known personally (over time), where we are taken seriously, and where we are invited to submit our images of ourselves and our vocations to rusted others, who are informed by the community's "script" and core story, for correction and/or confirmation. The community of faith, at its best, is an "ecology of vocations." In a microcosmic way, the Christian community is a sign and anticipation of a universal community in which our callings will be complementary and where our talents, energies, passions, affections, and virtues will coalesce in the praise and service of God.<sup>61</sup>

Part of reenvisioning theological education is fostering community that helps people discern and practice their vocation at home, church and marketplace.

God is at work in the marketplace of business and government, education and health, construction and design. Church structures and theological education courses readily form leaders for church, but the kingdom of God also needs people who express their vocations to serve God in the world. Thomas Gillespie comments on the need to empower the whole people of God:

It will be realized only if the 'nonclergy' are willing to move up, if the 'clergy' are willing to move over, and if all of God's people are willing to move out. For the ministry of the community is rendered first and foremost in the world and for the world. It is performed in the daily lives of its people, in their participation and involvement in the structures of a complex society, in their sacrificial obedience in 'worldly affairs,' in their mission to reclaim the world for the God who claims the world in love.<sup>62</sup>

### **Conclusion – Vocational training at its best**

A fresh vision of vocation and the Kingdom of God has potential to reenvision theological education and help emerging leaders address the missional and marketplace challenges of our time. Training programs and formation processes for leaders will be most effective if they are vocation-oriented and missional in sending students into active mission as they learn and marketplace focused to empower the whole people of God for their vocations. I would like to hear more of what other colleges are doing, but as a start Tabor Victoria, Forge and MCSI illustrate different elements of these characteristics of reenvisioned theological education.

Reenvisioning theological education is a significant basis for rediscovering vocation and fostering the kingdom of God in Australia. Pondering the complex dilemmas, I find encouragement in one of Leunig's prayers:

God help us with ideas, those thoughts which inform the way we live and the things we do. Let us not seize upon ideas, neither shall we hunt them down nor steal them away. Rather let us wait faithfully for them to approach, slowly and gently like creatures from the wild. And let them enter willingly into our hearts and come and go freely within the sanctuary of our contemplation, informing our souls as they arrive and being enlivened by the inspiration of our hearts as they leave. These shall be our truest thoughts. Our willing and effective ideas. Let us

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<sup>61</sup> Fowler, *Becoming*, 126.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Gillespie, "The Laity on Biblical Perspective", *Theology Today* 36.3 (October 1979) 327 (315-327); cited in Stevens, *Six Days*, 158.

treasure their humble originality. Let us follow them gently back into the world with faith that they shall lead us to lives of harmony and integrity. Amen.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Michael Leunig, *When I Talk To You: A Cartoonist Talks to God* (Pymble, NSW: HarperCollins, 2004).