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Theological Training in the Church of Ireland 1969 to 2019

(Essay by Áine Hyland, published in *Irish Anglicanism 1969 – 2019: Essays to Mark the 150th Anniversary of the Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland,* edited by Kenneth Milne and Paul Harron, and published by Four Courts Press, 2019.

The fifty-year period from 1969 to 2019 was a period of radical change in Irish society. During that period, a conservative and insular society became more outward-focused and globally engaged. The introduction of free second-level education in the Republic of Ireland in 1967 contributed to this change. Whereas in the mid-1960s more than 50% of young people left school by the age of 15 with no post-primary qualification, by 2018 the young population of Ireland was among the best educated in the western world. From the point of view of religion, in the 1960s the vast majority of the population, north and south, belonged to Christian Churches, and religious observance and church attendance was high. By 2016, church attendance had fallen off significantly, and the Church of Ireland population in the Republic of Ireland had fallen from 3.3% of the population in 1971 in to 2.8% in 2016. That year, the Church of Ireland population in the south was 126,400 and in Northern Ireland it was 260,000. Another major change that occurred during this period was the decision of the Church of Ireland in 1990 to accept women for ordination. The first women were ordained to the priesthood in June 1990 and the first female member of the Episcopate was consecrated in 2013.

It was not surprising that during this period there was considerable soul-searching within the Christian churches about their role in society and particularly about the role of ordained ministry. In the case of the Church of Ireland, those applying for ordination were no longer predominantly young male school leavers. A growing number of applicants were mature men and women who were already university graduates and who had been in the (secular) workforce for a number of years. The period was also one in which other professional bodies e.g. medical, teaching, engineering etc were reviewing their training models to ensure that the needs of an increasingly complex and demanding world would be met.

Prior to 1969, the preparation of candidates for ordained ministry for the Church of Ireland took place in the Divinity School of Trinity College Dublin, with students living in the Divinity Hostel in Mountjoy Square until 1964, when a new hostel was built in Braemor Park, Rathgar, Dublin 6. Initially, the programme for ordinands was at diploma level and was later extended to ordinary (pass) and subsequently honours degree level. The B.Th. at ordinary level was for many years the normative qualification for ordained ministry in the Church of Ireland.

The Church of Ireland Theological College at Braemor Park was established in 1979. With the transformation of the Braemor Park hostel into the college, a new era of training began. While the college continued to have strong links with Trinity College, the focus of training moved from Trinity College to Braemor Park. By the early 2000s, all training for Church of Ireland ministry for both stipendiary and non-stipendiary candidates was centred there. The training for stipendiary ministry culminated in the award of a B.Th. by the University of Dublin – teaching for which was split more or less evenly between the Theological College and Trinity College. Being the only theological college in the Church of Ireland, the college has always drawn ordinands from the whole of Ireland, north and south.

From the 1980s onwards, the course for those training for non-stipendiary ministry was also located in the Theological College in Braemor Park. Non-stipendiary ordinands pursued a

course for the Certificate of Christian Studies of St. John's College, Nottingham over 3 years, with liturgy and the history of the Church of Ireland as additional subjects. As well as spending at least six residential week-ends in the college in Braemor Park, students were supported by diocesan tutors, and were required to write 4 essays per unit (2 units per annum) which were submitted for outside assessment.

At the turn of the millennium, there was growing criticism within the Church of the approach to ministry training. This criticism could not be aired at the Irish General Synod because the College was the responsibility of the Bishops alone. Robert McCarthy, Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral wrote in a *Catalyst* pamphlet in 2002 that

> … the college has been subjected to open criticism by members of Reform (Ireland), an extreme "evangelical" some would say fundamentalist group … It has (also) lost (or never had) the confidence of many of those selected for training for the ministry … the old system of an examination by the Bishop's examining chaplains has been abandoned as hopelessly old-fashioned, but nothing has been put in its place … of those ordained between 1991 and 2001, some 36% have left the ministry of the Church of Ireland.

Partly to counteract this criticism, the bishops set up a Theological College Council in 1999. The college management committee and the academic committee were answerable to the Council which was chaired initially by the Bishop of Meath, Bishop Richard Clarke. In the Church of Ireland Gazette in December 2000, Bishop Clarke wrote: "In conjunction with the college staff, the Council and its Academic Committee anticipates a major review of the current curriculum and the development of new models of ministry to meet the changing demands on the Church for the 21st century".

In December 2002, the Academic Committee, chaired by Bishop Michael Jackson, then Bishop of Clogher, met for two days to consider aspects of future training in the Church of Ireland. Arising out of these discussions, a number of recommendations were made which led to a decision by the House of Bishops to undertake a formal review of the Church of Ireland Theological College. The review team was to consist of the Venerable Bob Langley, Archdeacon of Lindisfarne (chair of the team); Rev. Canon Alan Abernethy, then parish priest of Ballyholme, Co. Down and subsequently appointed as Bishop of Connor; Professor Per Hansson, Professor of Education, Uppsala University; Professor Alan Hibbert, Professor of Mathematics, Queen's University, Belfast and this author, who was then Professor of Education and Vice-President of University College Cork. This review, which was based on the approach to inspection set out by the Church of England House of Bishops' Committee for Ministry Formation, commenced in June 2004 with a visit by the chair of the team to the Theological College in Braemor Park. Some months later the review team met (November 2004) to plan their approach to the review.

During the following months, there was widespread consultation with various stakeholders including the Principal and staff; the Theological College Council; the student body and the House of Bishops. A one-week visit by the review team to the College (from 28th February to 5th March 2005) was a central plank of the review. During this visit, the review team slept and lived in Braemor Park, immersing themselves in the residential life there, attending prayers and worship with the staff and students as well as lectures and classes both at Braemor Park and in Trinity College. At the time of the visit, there were 29 students (21 men and 8 women) for stipendiary ministry at the College with 26 students (18 men and 8 women) on the auxiliary ministry course. Of the 29 residential students, 24 were following the BTh course in Trinity College, while the remaining five were pursuing various further degrees

M.Phil., Ph.D., etc. The auxiliary ministry students followed a specially designed course, broadly based on the Certificate in Christian Studies of St. John's College, Nottingham course. The residential course and the auxiliary ministry course operated independently of each other and there was little or no interaction between the staff or students of the residential course and the auxiliary ministry course.

The report of the review team was completed by summer 2005 and sent to the House of Bishops. The main messages of the report were:

- An affirmation of the commitment of staff and students, and the achievements of recent years
- The need for greater clarity of the aims and objectives of the institution, where they are owned and how they are to be delivered
- A shift in focus in the way the task of theological education is perceived from content to formation and the integration of theology and experience
- A creative use of previous experience, not least of the different strands of Christian tradition
- A commitment to lifelong learning
- A shared approach to and responsibility for the life of the College, including the auxiliary ministry course, by the House of Bishops, College Council, staff and students
- The modelling in a variety of ways of a common exploration of discipleship, within the life of the College and the Course, and between the training institutions and the wider church.

Perhaps the most crucial area identified by the review team was that of the need for clarity about the aims and objectives of the College in serving the mission of the Church of Ireland. The review team pointed out that from those aims and objectives, everything else would flow, including not only the teaching and learning programme but the structures of governance, the broader issue of training for stipendiary ministry, the auxiliary ministry course and continuing ministerial education.

The report of the review team was considered by the House of Bishops at its meeting in November 2005. It was agreed that a Ministry Formation Team would be set up, but first the Bishops had to formulate a "Mission of the Church", which would underpin all the subsequent planning by the Formation team. Following consultation and reflection, the mission was formulated as follows:

> "The Church of Ireland, as an authentic part of the universal church of God, is called to develop growing communities of faith, in and through which the Kingdom of God is made known, and in which the whole people serve together as followers of Jesus Christ for the good of the world, to the glory of God".

The Ministry Formation Team consisted of Bishop Ken Clarke of Kilmore, Bishop Michael Jackson of Clogher, Bishop Richard Clarke of Meath, Canon Alan Abernethy and a layman - Andrew McNeile. Andrew McNeile's considerable experience as a leader and expert on change management in the business world was to prove invaluable during the subsequent deliberations and work of the Ministry Formation Team. During the following year, the team met regularly and drafted and re-drafted its plan, in regular consultation with the House of

Bishops. By the end of 2006 the broad outline of the plan had been agreed and since its implementation would involve a wide range of stakeholders and partners, engagement with these partners was under way.

The broad "statement of purpose or intent" of the project plan was "To equip fully all members of the church, ordained and lay, to fulfil effectively the church's mission in the 21st century and to ensure that the methods used to train people will throughout, effectively connect learning and practice". The plan aimed to ensure that theology would not be learned in isolation but would be connected and applied to real ministry situations.

The plan took as its starting point the overall aspirations of the House of Bishops for those being trained for Ministry. These aspirations were:

1. To connect learning and practice
    i. To ensure that theology is not learnt in isolation but connected and applied to real ministry situations
    ii. To enable students in subsequent ministry positions to be able to apply their learning to the challenges they face and to connect culture and theology
2. To nurture gifting for ministry and mission in an entirely new and ever-changing social context
3. To deepen spiritual self-awareness and theological wisdom
4. To develop holiness and integrity of character
5. To initiate a process of lifelong learning and deepening vocation
6. To enable those who are trained to be open theologically to fresh challenges in a lifetime of ministry.

The Plan set out the characteristics of the ordained ministry under eleven headings:

- Spirituality
- Theological Reflection
- Pastoral Care
- Vision
- Leadership
- Worship and Preaching
- Worship and Liturgy
- Communicating the Faith
- Management and Change
- Administration
- Vocation

Each of these characteristics would be identified, developed and nurtured at three stages - selection, initial training and Continuing Ministerial Education (CME). The ministry formation plan was comprehensive and coherent and provided the guiding principles under which the new approach to training would be developed and implemented.

The implementation schedule provided guidelines on curriculum development; the appointment of a new Director; new facility construction; role of the Diocesan Director of Ordination (DDO); Key Implementation Changes and a staffing outline. The plan also

proposed solutions to issues which had arisen during consultation, e.g. issues relating to logistics and selection; managing change; legal issues; college and plant and finance etc. It was a carefully crafted plan which left nothing to chance. The plan was presented at the House of Bishops' meeting on 22nd November 2006, and a fuller version was discussed and approved at the Bishops' Residential meeting in February 2007. This document which had the full support of the House of Bishops, was to be the guide and check-list for all aspects of ministry formation in the coming months and years.

The new plan envisaged a radical change in ministry training. While there would continue to be two pathways towards ordination, the traditional separation of stipendiary and non-stipendiary candidates and the distinction between their academic qualifications would no longer exist. From now on, all candidates, whether for stipendiary or non-stipendiary ministry, would follow the same academic course – they could choose a full-time residential route or a part-time route with a more limited residential requirement. It was hoped that in this way, candidates who had family responsibilities (e.g. married candidates – male or female - with young children or other caring responsibilities) would be facilitated, albeit on a part-time programme that would take longer to complete than a full-time programme. Prior to selection, all candidates would be required to complete a one-year Foundation Course and if they successfully completed this course, they would then follow a three-year, 120 ECTS credit, level 9 degree course leading to the Masters in Theology (M.Th).

The proposed changes in ministry training mirrored similar changes in training for other professions. For example, at around the same time as the decision was taken to extend Church of Ireland ministry training to Masters degree level, Engineers Ireland had extended its requirements for registration as an Engineer to Masters level, and the graduate programme for secondary teachers in Ireland would shortly be extended to Masters degree level (the Professional Masters in Education). In the case of Church of Ireland ministry formation, by the beginning of the millenium almost all candidates for training were mature men and women who were already university graduates or equivalent and many had been actively engaged in lay ministry for a number of years. It was likely therefore that they would have the level of skills, competencies and understanding appropriate to academic study at postgraduate level.

The Ministry Formation Plan envisaged that the Church of Ireland Theological College would be phased out and replaced by a new Theological Institute, with a new Director and staff. It also envisaged that a new facility would be built which would include family accommodation and improved library facilities, possibly sharing a campus with the Church of Ireland College of Education in Rathmines. In the event, this never happened, as the collapse of the banking sector and the severe world economic downturn between 2008 and 2014 militated against any major capital investment. Moreover, in 2016, as part of a national programme for re-organising initial teacher education, the Church of Ireland College of Education became associated with Dublin City University's Institute of Education and was relocated on the St. Patrick's campus of the Institute in Drumcondra on the north side of the city. Instead, the existing residential accommodation in Braemor Park was refurbished and modernised and made more suitable for the incoming candidates for ministry training.

The task of convincing Trinity College to validate the proposed ministry formation programme and to collaborate in its delivery was more challenging than initially envisaged. From September 2007 until April 2008 a working party of which this author was a member, collaborated with a small team from the Aspirant School of Religions in TCD to flesh out the curriculum, ensuring that it was in line with the Bishops' Plan and also that it fitted the TCD structures. While in other professional degree programmes in the university sector, it was

accepted that integration of theory and practice would be the norm, and opportunities were provided in a practice setting for students to become reflective practitioners in their profession, it was not easy to convince some of the TCD academic staff that such an approach was appropriate in the training of clergy. But the Bishops' plan was unambiguous and the initial course outline which was submitted to Trinity College stated that the programme would "combine a strong academic emphasis which focuses on the foundation sources of Christian belief, namely scripture and the theological disciplines, with a practice-based model of learning. The aspect of personal formation is paramount in the programme as is the integration of belief with ministerial practice".

The academic aspirations for the course included the following:

- ✓ Full integration between theory and practice
- ✓ Universally recognisable levels of academic accreditation
- ✓ Different learning styles and approaches
- ✓ Active participation in the learning process
- ✓ Respecting different academic and theological viewpoints
- ✓ Principles of lifelong learning
- ✓ Engaging all age groups
- ✓ Distinguishing and linking intellectual enquiry and faith focused information.

Negotiations were not helped by the fact that within Trinity College, major administrative reorganisation was underway. Separate independent departments were being rationalised into a structure of Schools - and an Aspirant School of Religions had been set up to take overall responsibility for the Department of Religions and Theology (which had previously provided the B.Th) and the Irish School of Ecumenics. Negotiations had also begun with the Jesuit-run Milltown Institute about the transfer of that Institute to Trinity College. In 2011, that transfer was completed and the Institute was relocated to the Trinity College campus and renamed the Loyola Institute.

Following protracted negotiations and discussion, and some compromises, agreement was reached between CITI and TCD - and the new M.Th. was approved by TCD Council in October 2008. The M.Th. would be a three-year programme consisting of 120 ECTS – 40 in each year. In Years One and Two, 30% of the modules would be delivered on the Trinity campus by Trinity staff and the remainder of the programme would be delivered by CITI staff on the Braemor Park campus. The third year would be devoted to parish training during which candidates would reflect on and document their experience in a Ministry Portfolio. During the third year candidates would also write a dissertation (worth 30 ECTS credits) which would integrate the three strands of Biblical, Pastoral and Theological Studies. The assessment of the dissertation would include a 30-minute Viva Voce examination which would provide an opportunity for candidates to further discuss their thesis and to showcase their research and findings in verbal form.

Memorandum of Understanding with Trinity College

Parallel with these academic and programme-based discussions, a formal Memorandum of Understanding was being discussed between the Bishops and the Provost of Trinity College. Initial discussions took place in June 2006 and eventually in September 2008, the TCD Board agreed the Memorandum of Understanding. Under the terms of this memorandum, it was

agreed that all involved would be clear that the M.Th. would be a professional course to prepare candidates for ordination and that 30% of the teaching of this course would be undertaken by TCD. The memorandum, which covered the period 2008 to 2018, set out details on access, governance and staff appointments, as well as how a balance would be achieved in terms of oversight, admissions, management and governance. It was also agreed that the academic goals in the Bishops' Plan would form the basis of a course review at the end of five years.

Setting up of the Church of Ireland Theological Institute and the Appointment of Director of CITI

The Church of Ireland Theological Institute came into existence on 1st September 2008 with a new Director, The Revd. Dr. Maurice Elliott. Dr. Elliott had studied languages in St. Andrews and theology in both Dublin and Belfast. He holds a doctoral degree from Queen's University Belfast. His academic interests include Anglican Reformation ecclesiology and the theory and practice of contemporary Christian leadership. Prior to taking up the post of Director of CITI, he had spent fifteen years in parochial ministry in Northern Ireland. In every way, he was the ideal candidate for the post.

The first cycle of the Foundation Course started in April 2008 and in autumn 2009, the first cycle of the M.Th. course began. To be accepted onto the M.Th. course, candidates would be required to successfully complete the Foundation course. Candidates would also be required to have either (1) an honours degree in Theology or another discipline (2) an appropriate qualification and at least three years ministerial experience or equivalent professional experience (3) otherwise satisfy the Course Admissions committee that they have the ability to complete and benefit from the course.

Review of the M.Th. - 2015

Two significant reviews of the M.Th. were carried out in 2014/5 - one by the House of Bishops and one by a review team set up by Trinity College, in accordance with a statutory requirement that all university programmes must undergo regular quality review on a regular basis.

The reviews commented very favourably on the progress that had been achieved since the setting up of the M.Th. The joint CITI/Trinity College review found the programme to be "a successful partnership" which was delivering on the aims and objectives of the M.Th. The reviewers gave "strong approval and commendation" of what was being achieved each year. The academics on the review team commended "the high academic quality attested by dissertation and degree results" and commended the "clear provision of integrated learning and formation" as well as the evident pastoral support and the development of a broad range of subject specific and transferable skills. The review found that the facilities – including the Library, IT, accommodation and catering – were of a high standard, with a strongly committed support staff. They also found that the commitment, input and quality of the academic staff to be "of the highest standard".

Student participation, achievement and satisfaction rates were found to be high, particularly by comparison with the previous BTh degree, with students being equipped both academically and professionally to a higher standard than was the case prior to 2008. The review praised the combination of professional training and academic education offered by CITI and Trinity as a model "which compares favourably with best practices in the sector" noting that "this partnership of church and academy appears to be one of the more successful, by comparison with other forms of ministerial training in the UK and Europe".

The reviewers made a number of constructive recommendations including a restructuring of the M.Th. which would allow part-time students to complete the course in four rather than six years. They also recommended the provision of further teaching in Biblical Studies as well as an additional module in Doctrine.

Re-Structuring of the M.Th. Programme, 2017

As a result of these recommendations, the M.Th. programme was re-structured in order to allow for more extensive teaching in Biblical Studies and Doctrine, and the part-time programme was reduced in length from six years to four years. The restructured programme took effect from autumn 2017. Both the full-time and the part-time programmes stress the role of the minister as a reflective practitioner who can articulate Christian belief within contemporary culture and who understands the challenges and opportunities which this presents. Within this framework the practice of ministry is explored in ways which enable an effective and creative response to the world in which we live. The course is ecumenical in its scope, is adaptable to the needs of other Christian denominations and to forms of ministry other than the ordained.

As of autumn 2018, there are a total of thirty candidates registered on the M.Th programme, studying either on a full-time or part-time basis. Nine of these are women. Eleven are Deacon Interns (in their final year); four are second-year full-time students; five are part-time in years 1 to 3; and ten are full-time first year candidates. (In contrast it is interesting to note that the number of men who entered the Roman Catholic Seminary in Maynooth in 2017 was 6). As regards staff, by 2018, there were four full-time staff in the Theological Institute – Rev. Dr. Maurice Elliott; Dr. Katie Heffelfinger; Rev. Dr. Patrick McGlinchey; and Dr. Bridget Nichols. It is clear that there continues to be a robust and healthy interest in ministry training in the Church of Ireland.

Ordained Local Ministry

In 2018, following a decision of the General Synod in 2016, a new route to ministry was introduced – ordained local ministry. An ordained local minister will not be an incumbent of a parish but will be someone who can exercise some leadership role within a local congregation. The nature of their deployment is likely to vary from diocese to diocese.

The route to ordained local ministry will be via an open learning course, the underlying philosophy of which is that it will be integrated so that the development of learning and understanding takes place beside the honing of practical ministerial skills and continuing spiritual formation. There will be a blended form of learning with the use of lectures, tutorials, workshops, online learning and self-study. It will be a flexible open learning certificate course provided through Queen's University Belfast. Five modules may be undertaken in Years 1 and 2 with a further two modules in Year 3. The modules provided in September 2018 are Biblical Studies, Theological Reflection, Worship and Preaching 1, Introduction to Pastoral Skills and Church History. Staff from both CITI and Edgehill Theological College were involved in the module preparation. (Edgehill Theological College is the institution for training for the ministry of the Methodist Church in Ireland).

In September 2018, 26 candidates registered for the ordained local ministry course. They come from eight different dioceses and ten of them are women. At the time of writing, the ordained local ministry course had only just begun and it is too soon to make any judgment about the effectiveness or otherwise of the course.

Lay Reader Training and training for Children's Ministry

CITI also provides training for lay readers and other lay men and women who support the church in various ways. The office of a lay reader is one of a number of lay ministries within the Church of Ireland which is authorised and voluntary. There are currently over 300 Readers in Ireland, north and south. The training course for lay readers is offered jointly by CITI and St John's College, Nottingham and leads to either the award of a Graduate Certificate in Ministry through Durham or a fully equivalent self-accredited version of the same course as a Foundation Programme in Theology and Ministry. The course is run over two years and consists of one residential weekend and six study days at the Institute. Study areas include Theological Perspectives, Christian Ministry, Homiletics, Liturgy, Church History and Spirituality. The modules are introduced by lecturers from St John's College, Nottingham with additional input from the academic staff at the Institute.

The Institute also provides training for children's ministry. The Children's Ministry Certificate was originally co-ordinated between CITI, Church of Ireland Children's Ministry Network, Building Blocks and the Consultative Group on Ministry among Children. The training course is run over seven Saturdays from October to May and has taken place in regional centres such as Dublin, Lisburn, Moira and Cork. The training is based on Core Skills for Children's Work.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there have been significant developments in theological training in the Church of Ireland during the past fifty years. In 1969, preparation for ordination was at Diploma level whereas today, candidates are required to complete a Masters degree in Theology, the final year of which is parish-based. There is greater flexibility in the routes to ordination than there was in the past. It is now possible for candidates to study either on a full-time or a part-time basis and the new ordained local ministry route (introduced in 2018) is clearly very popular although it is too early to make any judgment about its long-term success or viability.

The numbers registering for the M.Th continue to be high- there are currently thirty students registered (part-time and full-time) for the M.Th. In 2018, 14 candidates were ordained to the Priesthood; in 2017, 16 were ordained; and in 2015, 14 were ordained. The future of ministry training in the Church of Ireland looks good and is in good hands in CITI.

Short CV for Áine Hyland.

Áine Hyland is Emeritus Professor of Education and former Vice-President of University College Cork. She is a Member of the Royal Irish Academy and holds a Ph.D. from Trinity College Dublin. She has been awarded honorary doctorates by University College Dublin and the Royal College of Surgeons and an Honorary Fellowship by the National College of Ireland. She was a member of the Team that reviewed the Church of Ireland Theological College in 2002 and was a member of the first Governing Board of the Church of Ireland Theological Institute.