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revised by CPAS Staff

resource sheet 15

pre-training reading

Theological study is a very broad ranging activity – especially as you're not doing it just as an academic subject. It is part of ministerial formation, in which your mind will be stretched, your critical faculties sharpened, your prejudices challenged, your ability to think theologically deepened, your faith explored and strengthened, and your prayer-life enriched.

The church does not need egg-heads, and certainly not know-alls, as its ordained ministers, but it does need men and women who have grappled in depth with the issues so that the Church can face with realism and confidence the tough spiritual, cultural and intellectual challenges of its mission today.

Therefore it is important to get two ideas about theological training firmly established to begin with. First, your time of training is going to stretch you in terms of reading and studying. Second, your training won't give you all the knowledge you need: its aim

is to encourage life-long patterns of learning. No one can read enough in two or three years to keep them going for the length of their ordained ministry!

As it's the patterns of learning that count, it's good to get these right from the beginning. Some find it best to have several books on the go at once, others need to concentrate on one at a time. But most need to take some kind of notes – as brief as possible is a useful guide.

Most of the books mentioned in this sheet are recommended for those who will shortly be beginning some kind of theological training. Inevitably they must be viewed as 'general' reading – particular training institutions and programmes of study will probably produce their own recommended lists.

Bible study

It is important to keep Bible study at the heart of your reading, preferably with a commentary to hand. One of

your aims over the next few years will be to build up a strong library of commentaries on individual books of the Bible. Consult someone who has just been ordained or wait until you start training to ensure that you get the best currently available!

Alternatively, two guides to which you can refer are:

Old Testament Commentary Survey by Tremper Longman (IVP, 3rd edition 2003).

The New Testament Commentary Survey by Don Carson (Baker Academic, 6th edition, 2007).

Most students beginning training are particularly weak on the Old Testament. Some colleges might suggest that it would be good to aim to read a 'selection' of key Old Testament chapters to gain an overview. If you want to go down this route, you might like to try the following, making brief notes as you go:

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...your training won't give you all the knowledge you need: its aim is to encourage life-long patterns of learning.

Pentateuch

Genesis 1-3, 12, 15, 17, 22;
Exodus 3, 15, 19-20, 32, 40;
Leviticus 1, 11-12, 16, 19;
Numbers 13-14, 16, 19;
Deuteronomy 5-6, 11, 27-28, 34.

Prophets

Joshua 1-11;
Judges 1-2;
1 Samuel 1-12;
2 Kings 18-25;
Jeremiah 39-44;
Ezra 1-6;
Amos 1-9.

Writings

Psalms 1-8, 19, 33, 93-100, 118, 150;
Proverbs 1, 7, 9, 16, 22, 25;
Ruth 1-4;
Ecclesiastes 1-3, 12.

Others suggest that it would be much better to aim to read the whole of three separate books, say Genesis, Amos or Hosea and Ruth. If you want our advice, go for the latter option!

The Bible

A good recent overview is provided by J W Rogerson, *An Introduction to the Bible*, (Equinox, revised edition 2005).

Richard Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* (SPCK, 2005). This is well worth reading, especially if you are new to basic critical study of the Bible.

John Goldingay, *After Eating the Apricot*, (Paternoster, 1996). This looks at a selection of Old Testament characters. It is readable, good fun AND doesn't duck the important issues.

Stephen Travis, *The Bible as a Whole*, (Bible Reading Fellowship, 2000). This is recommended by some DDOs. Working through it before beginning a course of training would give an excellent grounding.

John Drane's *Introducing the Old Testament*, (Lion, 2nd edition 2000) and *Introducing the New Testament*, (Lion, new edition 1999), are very readable. They tend to focus on background, content and message.

Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth*, (Zondervan, 2003). This looks more at issues of interpreting the Bible.

Doctrine

It's useful to own a good reference work (a suggested Christmas present?). Here are some recommendations:

The New Lion Handbook: Christian Belief, edited by Alister McGrath, (Lion, 2006). A readable exploration of Christian belief.

Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, (Blackwell, 2006,) is good, but is more advanced than the Lion handbook.

God Thoughts by Ian Aveyard, is a first class workbook published by St John's College Nottingham Extension Studies, 1997. It gives a good basic introduction and is available direct from St John's or from Amazon.

History and worship

For a sound introduction to the important periods of the early church and the Reformation, we suggest you have a look at these two books:

Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, (Penguin, rev edition 1993).

Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation*, (Penguin, 3rd edition 1990).

Many of you, sooner or later, will want to read *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, (Unwin Hyman, 1989), which is the authoritative history of British evangelical Christianity by the Baptist scholar, David Bebbington.

Alongside this you must read the important work by the (Roman Catholic) Professor of Theology at Leeds University, Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-2000*, (SCM Press, 2001).

The following two books are useful as an overall introduction to the study of worship.

Mark Earey, *Liturgical Worship: A Fresh Look, How it Works, Why it Matters*, (CHP, 2002).

Susan White, *Groundwork of Christian Worship*, (Epworth, 1997).

It is also worth mentioning here that Grove Books produce a regular series of booklets not only on liturgy but also on ethics, pastoral ministry, spirituality, evangelism etc. Information from:

Grove Books
Ridley Hall Road
Cambridge
CB3 9HU

W www.grovebooks.co.uk.

Ethics

Two books that will provide a useful introduction to the complexities of ethical issues and moral choices are:

John Stott, John Wyatt and Roy McCloyhry, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, (Zondervon, 4th edition 2006).

David Cook, *The Moral Maze*, (SPCK, 1983).

Mission

For a good start to a study of mission, have a look at:

J Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations*, (DLT, 1999). This is a good introduction.

Vincent Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, (SCM, 2001). This is an excellent, readable resource.

Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, (SPCK, 1989).

The next is a very influential 'must read':

Graham Cray (editor), *Mission-shaped Church*, (CHP, 2004).

Ann Morisey, *Journeying Out: A New Approach to Christian Mission*, (Geoffrey Chapman, 2004).

Steven Croft et al, *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age*, (CHP, 2005). Communicating faith in a changing culture.

Bob Jackson, *The Road to Growth*, (CHP, 2005). How churches can thrive and grow.

Pastoral theology

There's an enormous amount to choose from here, but for starters you could read:

Roger Hurding, *Roots and Shoots*, (Hodder & Stoughton, 2003).

Frank Wright, *Pastoral Care Revisited*, (SCM, 1996).

And on preaching:

David Day, *A Preaching Workbook*, (SPCK, new edition 2004), is highly commended.

John Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, (Hodder & Stoughton, new edition 1998). Though now quite old this is still highly regarded by many people.

Spirituality

The following five books give a good introduction to this subject which is both a study area in its own right and also one that points to the central need to be growing as women and men of prayer.

Theology will no doubt challenge cherished assumptions and make us question our interpretation of the Bible and faith.

pre-training reading

Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, (Cowley Publications, 2nd edition 2003).

Gerard Hughes, *God of Surprises*, (Darton Longman and Todd, 3rd edition, 2008).

John Pritchard, *How to Pray*, (SPCK, 2002).

Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, (Eagle Publishing, new edition, 2005).

David Runcom, *Spirituality Workbook*, (SPCK, 2006).

Ordained ministry today

All four of the books mentioned in this section might well have been read earlier in your 'journey', but if they haven't, all provide some food for thought on the nature of ministry.

John Pritchard, *The Life and Work of a Priest*, (SPCK, 2007)

Christopher Cocksworth and Rosalind Brown, *Being a Priest Today*, (Canterbury Press, 2002).

David Pytches, *Leadership for New Life*, (Hodder & Stoughton, 1998).

Steven Croft, *Ministry in Three Dimensions*, (DLT, 2nd edition, 2008).

Introduction to theological study and study skills

Steven Croft and Roger Walton, *Learning for Ministry*, (CHP, 2005). A practical guide for making the most of study and training, covering all aspects of theology and learning skills.

Mortimer J Adler, *How to Read a Book*, (Simon and Shuster Inc, 1972). Classic guide to how to read well.

Andy Northedge, *The Good Study Guide*, (Open University, 2005). A useful 'how to' book.

In conclusion

Phew! This is a formidable list and I hope it doesn't put anyone off doing theology! But do remember that the aim of theological education is to equip you for ministry. The aim is not to confuse, to drive sincere men and women into doubt and despair, or to replace faith with uncertainty. Theology will no doubt challenge cherished assumptions and make us question our interpretation of the Bible and faith. It will certainly make us suspicious of anything which is second-hand and superficial. But critical study is not to be feared. If Jesus Christ is the Truth, we have no business running away from it. So come into theological study. Come eager to learn and to grow. May it draw you closer to him and make you into a confident and developing student of Christ.

resource sheets

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