



The end of theological education – is wisdom the principal thing?

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This article invites reflection on the theological purposes of the education of church leaders. It is conceived as a piece of practical theology that arises from the challenge to the Wesley House Trustees in Cambridge to reconceive and re-articulate their vision for theological education in a time of turbulence and change. I reflect on Wesley House's inheritance as a community of formation (paideia) and rigorous scholarship (Wissenschaft); and on the opportunities offered for the future of theological education in this context by a serious engagement with both the practices and concepts of phronēsis and poiēsis and a dialogical understanding of biblical wisdom, as Wesley House seeks to offer itself as a cross-cultural community of prayer and study to an international Methodist constituency.

ARISTOTLE • DIALOGUE • EMBODIMENT • ETHICS • FORMATION • PHRONĒSIS
• POIĒSIS • REFLECTIVE PRACTICE • THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION • WISDOM

Introduction

What should a theological college inscribe on its walls? This is an immediate question facing the Trustees of Wesley House, Cambridge, where I work, as we construct a new academic building. It is also a question that has deepened in significance for me in this last year as I have visited Methodist seminaries and universities around the world.¹ Looking at the words chosen by others – some recently selected and some inherited from earlier generations – I have been prompted to reflect on the implicit bearing that these words have on the deeper question of the purposes of theological education. For, if those of us engaged in theological education are not simply to follow the tide of public education policy, the latest fashions in theology or the demands of our sponsoring churches for certain skill sets, we need periodically to evaluate what we are doing and why. Academic qualifications may be seen as badges of honour in themselves; professional qualifications may make us more effective at particular tasks, but what are the *theological purposes*² of theological education – and how should that education be shaped as a consequence?

It is a debate that will be familiar to some, particularly from the North American context,³ and in Cambridge from the work of David Ford on the Christian contribution to the contemporary university.⁴ This paper seeks to contribute to that conversation by reflecting on the process through which the staff and trustees of Wesley House have gone since the review of learning and development in the British Methodist Church, known as the 'Fruitful Field', was announced in 2011. The main ideas within it were first presented in the form of the Fernley-Hartley Lecture delivered at Wesley House in 2012 on the occasion of its ninetieth birthday.

The lecture was delivered in the week that the recommendation was announced that the British Methodist Conference should withdraw the training of its candidates for ordained ministry from the Cambridge Theological Federation⁵ (of which Wesley House was a founding member) and from more than a dozen other places, and to consolidate that training in and through only two centres, giving more emphasis and resourcing to lay education, continuing development in ministry, and to the immediately discerned needs for Methodist ecclesial leaders in Britain today, chiefly evangelism.⁶

The original lecture formed part of an apologetic for initial theological education for Methodists training for ordination in Britain that is not utilitarian or anti-intellectual, and pays attention to the formation of the whole person

as a Christian leader, including to the development of the ability to think rigorously about the demands of the gospel and of the situation in which it is set, for the sake not only of church growth but for the integrity and health of the whole inhabited earth.⁷

Almost three years on, as I have prepared this material for publication, Wesley House is no longer involved in the theological education of those in initial training for ordination in the British Methodist Church. Now the plans of the Trustees are to offer theological education on a broader basis to Methodists and others of Wesleyan heritage from overseas and to those at stages of ministry other than in initial training. The process, therefore, of needing to articulate a vision for theological education did not end with the Conference of 2012 but has intensified as we have needed to reimagine the future of the college.

Is wisdom the principal thing?

In the building which was part of the original courtyard constructed in 1925 to house the library, there are carved two inscriptions. One is reputed to record the last words of John Wesley:

THE BEST OF ALL IS GOD IS WITH US.

The other is a quotation from Proverbs 4:7:

WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPLE⁸ THING, THEREFORE GET WISDOM
AND IN ALL THY GETTING, GET UNDERSTANDING.⁹

In September 2011 when I became the Principal of Wesley House, I was struck by these quotations, and by the two texts inscribed into the fabric of the college chapel dedicated in 1930. Above the door as you enter, from Matthew 11:29,

DISCITE A ME QUIA MITIS SUM ET HUMILIS CORDE¹⁰

and, running like a ribbon around the interior, from the Prayer of Azariah, sung, according to the Apocrypha, by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace,

O ALL YE ANGELS OF THE LORD BLESS YE THE LORD,
PRAISE AND MAGNIFY HIM FOR EVER.
O ALL YE WORKS OF THE LORD, BLESS YE THE LORD,
PRAISE AND MAGNIFY HIM FOR EVER.¹¹

These four prominent inscriptions were part of the environment which shaped the life of the college over the 92 years of its work training people for ordination in the Methodist Church in Britain.¹² Because we retain the chapel and will go on worshipping in it day by day, the latter two quotations will continue to have a role of their own in shaping the future ethos of the House. What we will lose, however, is access to the original library quotations. As we have considered the way in which memory needs to play a role if we are to practise what Walter Brueggemann considers to be 'hopeful imagination',¹³ it has seemed important to ponder the questions posed by the choice of Proverbs 4:7: should wisdom be the principal purpose of theological education? And how should such wisdom be understood?

Framing the conversation

In order to frame an understanding of the kind of theological education that has been offered and might be offered at Wesley House, I want to draw on the influential summary of the US debate on this subject that was published in 1993 by David Kelsey. The title of the book is instructive: *Between Athens and Berlin; The Theological Education Debate*. Kelsey analysed the various responses to the American cry that theological education had become fragmented by positing two ideal types to which he suggested American theological institutions are committed, yet which hold inherent tensions that are difficult to resolve.

'Athens' represents a model of theological education more properly called 'formation' (*paideia*). This takes place in communities of practice and its goal is the knowledge of God, together with the correlative formation of holy virtues. It requires a conversion towards God followed by a slow growth towards wisdom. In this educational process a teacher cannot impart wisdom, but only provide intellectual and moral disciplines that facilitate students in acquiring it.¹⁴ The devotional study of texts (chiefly Scripture but also other texts of the tradition) is understood to be the prime context in which the Holy Spirit can both convert and guide the development of Christian disciples and leaders. In

this sense, the Church is seen as a school, and a college focused on ordination training is an organ of the Church.

‘Berlin’ represents a model of education arising out of the Enlightenment in which ‘knowledge’ is understood not as the ability to intuit and explicate what is real and universally true in a metaphysical or theological sense, but as the ability to engage in orderly, disciplined and critical research that leads to the establishment of reliable data. In this model there are no authoritative texts; rather there is a drive towards abstraction and all-encompassing theories; great attention is paid to method. This, Kelsey argues, is the paradigm of the research university. It exists to establish reliable knowledge, whether historical, philosophical or scientific; it is independent of any external authority (eg the Church or state) and it requires of its teachers an ability both to communicate to students that body of knowledge already believed to be reliable, and, above all, the ability to critique it and establish new bodies of knowledge. This model was first incarnated in the University of Berlin in 1810 and occasioned a great debate about whether theology should be taught there at all as its foundations were revealed truth and metaphysical assumptions that were not susceptible of scientific investigation. In order to accommodate theology, the subject was conceived as an historical, philosophical and professional discipline, comprising the history of the tradition (including Scripture), philosophical and systematic thought about Christian belief, and application to clerical practice.¹⁵

Kelsey diagnosed that in the late twentieth-century American context fragmentation was a common complaint about the theological education enterprise because of the unresolved tension between these two models. This comprised an unwillingness to commit to either entirely at the expense of the other, but also an inability effectively to synthesise the two within a unified vision of a theological purpose for theological education. His framing of the debate set up two key oppositions that remain at the heart of arguments about theological education: first, between theory and practice, and second, between revealed wisdom and wisdom achieved through the processes of reason.

Wesley House – Athens or Berlin?

Wesley House has never been a seminary in the sense of itself being responsible for the curriculum and the bulk of the teaching of its students. It was founded to provide a ‘postgraduate course in which students would have the full benefit of University Life and tuition side by side with such distinctive

teaching of the history, constitution, theology and polity of that church as would enable them to maintain in the Church Universal, those doctrines of experimental religion and especially spiritual holiness upon which John Wesley laid emphasis' (Wesley House Trust Deed, 1919).

The insistence of Michael Gutteridge, who provided the bulk of the money for the endowment, was that what mattered was access to the best theological scholarship available – in his view, this meant Cambridge.¹⁶ For this reason the original intention was that Wesley House men (*sic*) would study the Tripos¹⁷ in the Divinity School of the University of Cambridge, either as graduates or occasionally, as provided for by a gift of William Greenhalgh, as undergraduates.

In this sense, Wesley House's first generations of students were formed in part by a set of values which were not shaped theologically but oriented towards historical, philosophical and scientific canons of reason. Of course, it is also the case that many of the staff of the Faculty of Divinity (originally all Anglican clergy but then opened to other denominations and latterly to any scholar of theology or religious studies regardless of faith commitment) have been and remain committed to the truth claims of Christianity or to the practice of Christian communities or to the formation of clergy;¹⁸ however, there was nothing about the shape of the curriculum *per se*, nor the core activities of the institution that would give a shape and coherence to the educational enterprise beyond the *Wissenschaft*¹⁹ element of the 'Berlin' model.

This, however, is not the whole story. Although intentionally located within a research university, Wesley House was also deliberately constructed on the monastic lines evident in the design of the Cambridge colleges that themselves make up the University. These buildings clearly betray their inheritance to the 'Athens' model with chapel and refectory being as prominent as the library – signalling the importance of worship and the corporate life of faith as the context for study.²⁰

Moreover, the monastic heritage of those buildings was not incidental, for it is possible to trace an understanding of Christianity itself (and not just formal theological education) as *paideia*. Because *paideia* was the way in which Hellenistic Greeks conceived their own educational system,²¹ converts to early Christianity naturally thought of it not as a system of belief but as a new *paideia*.²² This way of thinking and learning was then disseminated through the monastic movements that founded colleges in Cambridge in the medieval period.²³

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Wesley House's modelling of itself on the medieval Cambridge colleges reflected, in part, a desire to announce the arrival of the Edwardian Wesleyans at the peak of academic life in a bid not to be left behind as educational standards in the population rose. But in this collegiate model there was also embodied a corporate formation in the Christian life that reflected the maxim put above the chapel door:

DISCITE A ME QUIA MITIS SUM ET HUMILIS CORDE.²⁴

In consequence, Wesley House has always had a hybrid heritage, symbolised by its own formational environment of prayer and common life in which faith is seeking understanding; and by its engagement with the Faculty of Divinity in which the students would learn more about the Christian tradition and learn to think rigorously and critically about it. In practice, of course, the Divinity Faculty has also been a hybrid environment because it is not only located in what is now a research-led university, but is populated by many teachers and students, themselves formed in Churches and theological colleges with a variety of views about *paideia* or the value of education as a virtue in itself.²⁵

A third part of the heritage has been the ongoing influence of the broader Church – the community of faith of which Wesley House has been part, and which it was founded to serve by educating its ministers. The relationship between the college and the Methodist (originally Wesleyan) Church was structurally present in a variety of ways throughout the 92 years of its use as a place of initial training for accepted candidates selected and then stationed by the Conference. In pedagogical terms the main contact that students of Wesley House had initially with the broader Church was by regularly preaching in local pulpits and by being part of the University MethSoc. In later years this developed into more comprehensive contact, not only with the worshipping life of churches, but with their pastoral, oversight and mission activities in supervised placements both in Methodist churches and those of our ecumenical partners.

One of the consequences of Wesley House's location within, and engagement with, the University of Cambridge, however, was that it acquired a reputation in the broader Church for elitism and intellectualism and was suspected by parts of the Church as an institution that would undermine simple faith and ruin good evangelical preaching. Embedded in these concerns are four strands that require some attention if an argument is to be made for a continued face-to-face engagement between the formation of Christian leaders and such a university environment.

First, although Wesley House's students over the years have come from some surprisingly modest backgrounds from which many would not have expected to attend such a university,²⁶ an active alertness to and engagement with less privileged contexts has also to be undertaken if Cambridge college life is not to create within the Christian community a separate class of ministers who consider themselves (or are considered by others to be) socially or intellectually superior. However, a belief in the importance of some Christian leaders being deliberately equipped to think at the highest level about the nature of faith and its relation to new developments in philosophy, technology and the sciences need not be tantamount to an assertion that all forms of Christian service require a university education.²⁷

Second, it should be noted that if the gospel is to have credibility among those who are university educated (in the UK, for example, 46 per cent of jobs in the economy require a degree²⁸), theological endeavour needs still to keep pace. This is partly for the sake of the proclamation of the gospel – to be fully itself, the gospel must enable discipleship that engages not only the heart and spirit but also the mind – but it also concerns the ability of Christian values and practices still to contribute to the formation of leaders for nations and businesses. At a time when wisdom for global living is much in demand: in the context of global warming; of widening gaps between rich and poor across the world; and of globalising conflicts between people of different faith, the cry for a wisdom that is beyond technical knowledge is often heard, yet there is little agreement about the sources for such a wisdom.

In this context David Ford suggests that a Christian wisdom that is attentive to the cries of wisdom in Scripture, to cries of the poor, and to the cries of Jesus Christ recorded in the gospels has a crucial role to play in helping address the deep problems facing the world,²⁹ but there is no doubt that simply presenting Christianity as a revealed packet of wisdom will not be convincing, either to those with other faith commitments or to those educated in the disciplines of critical thought and the rules of evidence. If Christian wisdom is really to contribute to the ways in which the world operates, then it must be able to speak not only the language of prayer and praise but in the language of reason. This is something of which I am starkly aware when broadcasting on the BBC's Radio 4 to an educated and thoughtful audience, most of whom do not share Christian presuppositions. If Methodists still believe that the Wesleyan emphases that were important to Michael Gutteridge have something to offer to the world, then an educated ministry capable of articulating that vision in ways that make sense within the public square remains a priority.³⁰

However, and this is the third point, it is true that studying in a research university involves not only the transmission of knowledge and the technical skills of scholarship, but being part of a community of practice in which intellectual virtues, such as the ability to cope with uncertainty and the willingness to live with complexity, are being nurtured.³¹ Such virtues may sit quite uncomfortably with the commitments of some Christians accustomed to conceiving of revealed truth in ways that offer 'clarity, security and certainty in the midst of the confusions and complexities of life.'³²

Part of Wesley House's historical answer to this problem for its students was its provision of a formational community of prayer and common life, but while this modelled faith seeking understanding it has not, perhaps, always necessarily helped students negotiate philosophically or in practice the relationship between reason and revealed religion, though the importance of both was clearly being asserted. Reflection on our more recent experience of students from other cultural contexts and from more biblicist backgrounds is that it is important to make explicit the kind of learning that takes place in the British university setting and to help students consider how to orient themselves to it.³³ In large part, this article is concerned with how to articulate a theological rationale for such an enterprise for the sake of our future students, but also as a contribution to continuing reforms of theological education in Britain.³⁴

Fourth, it is clear that the Naples businessman Michael Gutteridge (who himself was not university educated) was not primarily interested in the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, or for the sake of creating a social elite, but for practical reasons:

The primary aim is not to produce scholars in the technical sense, though it is hoped that this will be the result in some cases, but men (*sic*) who have first a love of God and the souls of men (*sic*), and secondly a wide outlook and a practical understanding of life, as a result of contact with all kinds of men (*sic*) at the University. It is not held that University training will of itself make a man a more efficient minister, but experience proves that if he has the root of the matter in him, it should make him a more effective preacher and increase his public influence, especially over young people, among whom the standard of education is rising so steadily today.³⁵

However, what is not clear is whether such practicality was necessarily and routinely the outcome of the educational model he set up.

In the classic 'Berlin' model, knowledge is established and then applied to practice. In Berlin in 1810 (and in many other places), this is something that was systematically developed as part of the university curriculum, but in Cambridge this was never a stated objective of the Faculty of Divinity. In consequence, theological colleges like Wesley House were left with responsibility for the application of this theology (and for also ensuring a denominational flavour). So while in continental, American and Scottish contexts practical theology developed as a professional discipline in which the historically and philosophically established Christian tradition was applied systematically to the disciplines of preaching, Christian education, pastoral care etc, in the British context neither the universities nor the theological colleges really took seriously – or in some cases actively resisted – the professionalisation of theological education as clergy training.³⁶ 'Pastoralia' remained very much at the edges of the curriculum and practical experience (with the exception of preaching) was largely thought of as something to be gained in the future.

It is not possible here to document the developments in pastoral theology at Wesley House through the years of the twentieth century in order to examine the various approaches to pastoral education taken. My own experience of being educated at Wesley House in the 1990s through the Tripos and then a PhD, however, was of a certain emphasis on theoretical wisdom (including sometimes about practical subjects) which was not yet properly practical.

For example, I remember going to visit the first funeral family I ever visited in my probationer's appointment. As I came to the end of the visit it suddenly occurred to me that I ought to offer to pray with this family. As I opened my mouth to formulate the words, I realised that my theological education had helped me to deconstruct the more naive prayers of my youth, but had not helped me to formulate new words. My prayers had become more of a silent waiting before God. This was fine for my personal devotions – and certainly something I could justify theologically as a critique of the wordy culture in which we live and which can be an effective defence against God, but hopeless for leading a bereaved family into the presence of the God for whose comfort they yearned. I had become a reflective thinker, but not yet a reflective practitioner.

The anecdote perhaps illustrates some of the fruit of a model of education in which the disciplines of devotion were practised (*paideia*) and in which critical thought (*Wissenschaft*) was developed. It also, however, highlights a weakness in the model in terms of the development of practical wisdom. In the 25 years

between leaving Wesley House as a student and becoming the Principal of the college, there was a whole raft of developments in the theological provision offered at or through Wesley House.³⁷ A key development which does deserve mention because of its relevance to the future was the impact in Cambridge of the emergence in Britain and Ireland of practical theology as a serious discipline.

One of the features of this development was the establishment by the Cambridge Theological Federation of degrees in pastoral and practical theology through a new partnership with Anglia Ruskin University.³⁸ The teaching and learning on these awards (in conjunction with the more traditionally structured degrees) have helped to reframe the conversation about and experience of the relationship between theology and practice (David Kelsey's first opposition) for Wesley House's students. One of the key features of this reframing has been a focusing upon the whole theological enterprise as primarily a *sapiential* (wisdom-seeking) activity rather than as a *scientific* (speculative) one.³⁹ Much of the work in this area has focused on the notion of *phronēsis* (practical wisdom) – a term adopted by practical theology⁴⁰ from the work of the fourth-century BC Greek philosopher Aristotle.

In the next section of this paper, therefore, I want to engage directly with Aristotle's work on *phronēsis*, exploring its potential as a purpose for theological education, and as a pedagogy (way of teaching). Choosing, at the outset, to engage with a dialogue partner from outside the Judaeo-Christian tradition is partly in order to explicate historical developments that have happened in the teaching of pastoral theology in the Cambridge Theological Federation; more importantly though, it exemplifies a commitment to a dialogical understanding of wisdom – a wisdom that is willing to engage with other truth and wisdom-seeking traditions and disciplines – an understanding that I shall go on to explicate in relation to a renewed interest in the biblical understanding of wisdom that has even more recently been receiving scholarly attention.⁴¹ This latter discussion will involve a consideration of David Kelsey's second opposition concerning the relationship between revealed religion and human reason.

Engaging with Aristotle

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*⁴² Aristotle was interested not in the education of philosophers, but in the development of political leaders who deal in the complex and messy world of human action. In that sense, as theological

education at Wesley House has been largely for the sake of the formation not of scholars but of Christian ministers whose primary roles involve them in the leadership of human communities, it makes Aristotle an interesting dialogue partner.

At the heart of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the question of what is good for human beings (*eudaimonia*).⁴³ For Aristotle this was not a question of human flourishing being based on what best serves an individual or even a corporate body in a given moment, rather it was about human beings being fulfilled by living in accordance with their true natures as rational and virtuous beings.⁴⁴ He believed, therefore, that the process by which people⁴⁵ discern how to live well and help others to do so is through a combination of attention to their natural dispositions (nature), habitual formation by wise teachers (nurture), and rational thought (education). In this sense Aristotle was concerned with *paideia*; his ideas, among those of others like Plato and Cicero, have contributed to Kelsey's articulation of the 'Athens' model.

Aristotle outlined five intellectual virtues which are involved in the discernment of what is true and how to lead and guide others in life. Three are associated with the development of theoretical wisdom (seeing unchanging things as they really are),⁴⁶ and two are directed towards getting things done (doing and making in the realm of contingent things that change). While *poiēsis* (making) is directed beyond itself towards the production of things and involves *technē* (skill), *praxis* (action) is an end in itself and involves *phronēsis* (practical wisdom). For Aristotle, *phronēsis* is 'an excellent state of the rational faculty insofar as it concerns itself with action.'⁴⁷ It results from a combination of the habitual virtues that are formed in community, together with the virtues of thought that are natural but need to be educated (drawn out) in order to develop. Together these attributes help us to reason about why a particular course of action is the right course and to undertake it. From this initial statement of Aristotle's understanding of how truth is apprehended and good leadership formed, what can be learned about the goals and processes of theological education?

First, Aristotle's understanding of leadership development has far richer dimensions than training for purely utilitarian and immediate ends. Such a utilitarian training is technical and concerns the 'how' of a thing combined with the 'what' of the thing: the contents that should be transmitted. The contents are learned as facts, and the techniques are learned as protocols. For Aristotle, however, this is not an appropriate way to think about the world of human action and community. 'How' and 'what' are relevant, but action (*praxis*), in

order to be properly and fully action, needs not only to be habitual but should engage with the question 'why?' or 'to what end?' He therefore advocates an understanding of the good leader as one who is able by instinct and formation to do what is right, but who is also able to articulate how and why an action *is* right. Moreover, this is not a matter of theory, but a matter of practice in two senses – the rightness of the action can only be right in the specificity and peculiarity of its context, attending to the totality of the factors in that actual situation. And, the leader only becomes wise by practising and reflecting on those practices.

This is already an argument against conceiving ministerial education as a purely technical training in which content and techniques are passed on – focusing on what and how to preach; what to say and how to speak as an evangelist; or the rules of the Methodist Church and how to chair a meeting in accordance with them. This is partly because no protocol can be complex enough to cope with the many contingencies of human situations and contexts – good leadership involves an ability *to reason well* in the sphere of action; it is also because good leadership involves the moral strength not only to know what one should do in any given situation but actually to do it.

For the theological educator, Aristotle's account of wisdom in the sphere of action also raises the pedagogical question of how such wisdom is acquired. In the first place, he places huge emphasis on the formation of character by the development of habits. By this Aristotle means that for a student to learn how to lead and structure a community such that the welfare of the whole is served, it is important that he (*sic*) has already learned how to act well within such a community.

One implication of this commitment for theological educators is that it needs to take place in face-to-face communities.⁴⁸ In the formation of leaders, however, it was important to Aristotle not only that the student experienced good practice as part of their development, but had the opportunity to reflect on the particulars of good practice, developing the intellectual habits of reading, reflection and critique. Such rigorous reflection would enable them there to recognise the principles enacted, so that they might be grasped in general and reinterpreted for different times and places. The role of the teacher was to help the student articulate what was good (or not) about the experience they had had, and to help them grasp the principles behind the particulars of the goods they had intuited (not simply to assert principles as good and demonstrate their effects in practice). They would do this as midwives of a

wisdom-directed knowledge, rather than as the transmitters of knowledge as content.

A second implication is that the community of formation and its leadership themselves become subjects of reflection. This has the effect of placing the leadership of a theological college under scrutiny – or, rather, of bringing the scrutiny under which the leadership of a theological college community lives into the open – so that it may contribute to the learning of everyone. While this may be humbling at times, it avoids the impression that because the theological teacher is ‘learned’, they are any less a member of the Christian community and still essentially a learner (disciple).⁴⁹

At one level this emphasis upon practical wisdom might be music to the ears of those who want a more skills-focused curriculum. But, in a conversation with Aristotle’s understanding of wisdom, two points must be made. First, for Aristotle, no one can be practically wise without being good – so skills are of little consequence without the habituated ethical knowledge learnt in community by which the exercise of those skills must be directed. Second, effective skills learnt and exercised – even in a way that leads to good results – are vulnerable if they are not grounded in an understanding of why and how they achieve the overall aim of the enterprise.⁵⁰ Moreover, in the formation of church leaders this must involve not only reflection on what works in pragmatic terms in relation to goals that remain uncritiqued, but an ability to think conceptually about those embedded goals.

Aristotle’s account of how *phronēsis* is attained raises the question of the relationship between theoretical and practical wisdom. Sometimes in his writing it seems that the two spheres are separate, with the theoretical being higher than the practical and more godlike or conducive to happiness. At other times it appears that the same intuitive capacity (*nous*) is needed in both spheres for the grasping of the patterns embedded in complexity, as well as the same ability to think critically and build a systemic approach (*epistēmē*), even if, in his view, the kind of knowledge attainable in the practical sphere is contingent in a way that in the theoretical sphere it is not.⁵¹

If, however, in Aristotle’s work there is a separation between theoretical and practical wisdom, once placed in the Christian milieu this separation is immediately challenged. For, while the subject of contemplation for Aristotle is thought itself (or God as intellectual being or first cause), in Christian theology, the God who is worshipped is a God of action and compassion, and above all a God revealed in the lived life of the Word made flesh.

The embracing of Aristotle's notion of *phronēsis* by some key practical theologians⁵² has led to a recovered understanding of all theology as essentially practical (a way of living or *paideia*), yet a practice that needs not only to be inhabited but to be conceptualised and critiqued intellectually in order to be lived.⁵³ In this way of thinking, while abstraction plays a role as faith seeks understanding, theology is not primarily understood as a set of propositional beliefs. In fact, from this perspective, the dichotomy between theology and practice is perceived as a false one. Rather, the Christian life itself involves a dialectic between the living of that life (which requires discernment among the complexity and detail of daily choices), and a conceptualisation of that life (that allows one to think about particular actions in its light). The dynamic is not one of the revelation of theoretical truth that then needs to be put into practice, but the revelation of a lived life (the Word made flesh) that needs to be formed and shaped in us by the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace, and that needs to be thought about and conceptualised if we are to live it reflectively and faithfully with all our mind as well as with our heart, soul and strength.

In terms of curriculum, this does not suggest that detailed attention not be given to biblical studies or to other traditional disciplines, but it does suggest both that these studies are themselves practices in and through which God may be encountered (theology as doxology and for God's sake) as well suggesting that these disciplines help with the conceptualisation of the Christian life that is itself subject to critique from other disciplines and from the lived Christian experience of contemporary Christians. The study of the Bible and the beliefs of the Church become one movement in the evolution of the dance of theology in a dialectic of action and thought. Both action (how the Christian life is lived in the particularities of all kinds of contexts) and thought (how the Christian life is conceptualised) are subject to critique and enrichment through the canons of secular reason (philosophy, psychology, economic theory...). Yet, at the same time, God is understood actively to be self-revealing Godself through the disciplines of both thought and action and in the dialogue between them.

Through our association with Anglia Ruskin University – a university concerned, among other things, with vocational learning in the fields of business and health care in which *phronēsis* has also received considerable attention⁵⁴ – the Cambridge Theological Federation has been able to give considerable attention to questions of praxis.⁵⁵ Together, we have been able to develop modules in pastoral skills, measured by a series of practical competencies in

live contexts. Was the candidate able to greet the patient and establish a rapport? Was the candidate able to ask open questions? Was the candidate able to leave silences when appropriate? Was the candidate able to name God in a natural and timely manner? Was the candidate able to judge whether offering prayer or other religious resources was appropriate?

However, what is measured is not only whether or not a successful pastoral encounter has taken place, but whether or not the student is able to reflect on the interventions they have made, the context and other conditions that have contributed to the outcome, and the worthiness of the aims of their encounter, even if those have been met. The paradigm is reflective practice⁵⁶ as we examine the gaps between what we say is important and what we actually do; as we pay attention not only to the critical self, but to the aware self:

Performance professions such as music, acting, surgery, engineering and leading liturgy call for the development of the *aware self* alongside the *critical self* ... for example, the liturgist's critical self may suggest the aims and content of a service but their aware self may focus on the quality of silence or movement or cooperation needed to make the service happen in ways conducive to worship for the congregation actually present.⁵⁷

This takes us beyond the Aristotelian framework of reflecting on the practices that have shaped and continue to shape one's community, and into the realm of reflecting on one's own interventions as a practitioner. While reflective practice has been critiqued by some as being too individualist a paradigm for the formation of leaders in the Christian community,⁵⁸ the encouragement of detailed reflection on one's Christian discipleship as it expresses itself in action has many noble precedents, not least in the band meetings of the early Methodist movement, and need not be seen as an inappropriate professionalisation of Christian ministry, but an appropriately serious examination of our motives and interactions before one another and before God in the light of deep reflection on the nature of the kind of Christian practices (prayer, hospitality, justice-making) that are about life in all its fullness.

For me this engagement with Aristotle's understanding of *phronēsis* and with the culture of Anglia Ruskin University has been a key step towards realising the purposes of theological education as expressed by Michael Gutteridge. Whereas, at the turn of the twenty-first century practical theologians in the Cambridge Theological Federation used case study as a prime method in which

the teacher could help the class identify the underlying principles in a context that was not their own, in recent times we have preferred to work with the practice of the students themselves. One of the implications of this is that as they engage with the material, students are not cut off from the great store of wisdom they have which is embodied and relational.

Faced with an impersonal case study and asked the question, 'What would you do?', students would answer, 'It depends...' on a whole range of factors undisclosed in the case study, from the history of their relationships with those people in that place to the way in which the body language of those involved would give them clues to interpretation.⁵⁹ This is not a substitute for the study of Christian practices and the establishment of principles by which to live, but represents an examination of the reciprocal movement by which attempts to make interventions as those who live by such principles are embodied in practice.⁶⁰

Facing towards the future

Learning from Aristotle has already developed into a conversation about theological education as it had developed at Wesley House in the last years of initial formation. As we face the future, though, two contextual questions and one fundamental question need some attention – all of which concern the matter of diversity.

First, anecdotal evidence suggests that the depth and range of Christian experience with which students enter preparation for Christian ministry in the UK context has declined in recent years, and has also fragmented – Methodist congregational practices in the UK are not as like one another as they used to be. As a teacher this presents problems when trying to elicit principles from practice. For example, asking students what they consider to be the principles of a 'good pastoral visit' reveals not only different accounts of what a pastoral visit is, but a lack of personal experience of either being visited or visiting oneself. Doing this with a cross-cultural community adds complexity as different Methodist traditions are put on the table. In the process it becomes apparent that there is not necessarily a shared praxis on which to reflect.

The second contextual point concerns how such a diverse community can function effectively as a community of formation at the level of character. What are the disciplines of the Christian life in which the students have been formed

and how is a common life to be established? What attitudes towards women are to be considered faithful to the tradition? At what time in the morning should prayer begin and for how many hours should it last? Is plagiarism a moral issue? While there has always been at Wesley House a variety of views and 'Methodist' practices among the student body, there has also been a normative position established by the British Methodist Church and its standing orders.⁶¹ As Wesley House was forming students for this context, although the wisdom of its practices and rules could be debated, there was, at least, a clear set of markers to which we could all relate. In the creation of a formational community at the service of a range of Methodist and other denominations around the world, such a base cannot be assumed.

Does this then mean that the *paideia* of 'Athens' should be abandoned in favour of the *Wissenschaft* of 'Berlin'? Does it mean that Wesley House should not lay claim to a role in the formation of character or wise leadership, but only in the development of rigorous thought at the service of whatever purpose the individual or sending church has in mind? Despite the attractive simplicity of such a position, it is one that the Trustees have resisted, arguing consistently that those who live in the college should be required to adopt a rule of life that involves common worship, service and shared life. This maintains a commitment to a view of theology that is firmly rooted in the 'Athens' tradition: that theology is not best conceived as a series of propositions and doctrines that can be abstracted from the Christian life and studied as such, but is fundamentally a corporate matter of faith seeking understanding. It also retains a commitment to the possibility of Methodist thinkers (teachers and students) making a contribution to the development of wisdom in the university context.⁶²

Underlying these practical considerations is a third, more fundamental challenge that such diversity of experience poses to the process of becoming wise outlined by Aristotle. Belief that the Good was one, and accessible by metaphysical reasoning, may have been a sustainable belief within a small city state in classical Greece, or even in a medieval Christian university. However, in a college environment that inherits both Enlightenment commitments to the painstaking establishment of knowledge, historically, philosophically and scientifically, as well as the different cultural and philosophical orientations of Christians from around the world with different notions of the relationship between reason and revelation, it would be short-sighted not to ask whether in such a college any common basis for living and conceptualising the Christian life can be established at all.

This dilemma pushes sharply the problem perceived in the Berlin context in 1810 and in the American context in the late twentieth century: how can a revealed religion like Christianity flourish with integrity within a post-Enlightenment framework of assumptions? In particular, with resident students from Asian and African contexts and from some biblicist traditions, the question is likely to focus, in practice, around the role and authority of the Bible.

Biblical wisdom

One possible answer to the Enlightenment challenge to biblical authority, most acutely framed by Ernst Troeltsch, that all interpretations of events are relative to the perspective of the interpreter,⁶³ is to retreat from the critical environment of the research university into a pre-reflective assertion of revealed truth. Although this might be a strategy open to other theological communities, it was clearly the intention of Wesley House's founder that Wesley House be placed in the orbit of a research university and so the choice of a quotation from Scripture about wisdom to place in the library at Wesley House cannot legitimately be read as a retreat into a single (biblical) source of authority in which wisdom is understood as propositional content:

WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPLE THING, THEREFORE GET WISDOM
AND IN ALL THY GETTING, GET UNDERSTANDING.⁶⁴

This quotation about wisdom chosen by the first Trustees comes from the opening chapters of the book of Proverbs in which pithy and sometimes contradictory instructions about very human things are introduced by an essay on the cosmic nature of wisdom in which God's wisdom is personified as Lady Wisdom (*chokmah/sophia*) who was present at the foundation of the world (Prov 8:22) and who invites the young men to whom the book is addressed to follow in her paths (Prov 8:1–12).⁶⁵

For some interpreters the primary relationship between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of human beings is that of true to false content. This is particularly sharply seen as New Testament writers sought to cope with the scandal of the crucified son of God: 'but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles' (1 Cor 1:23). It is also, though, undoubtedly present in the wisdom literature. In the late Deuteronomic writings and during the exilic and post-exilic periods there were certainly

writers, such as Baruch,⁶⁶ who identified wisdom completely with the keeping of God's commandments and contrasted this with the false wisdom of the world which leads to destruction:

Hear the commandments of life, O Israel;
give ear, and learn wisdom!
Why is it, O Israel, why is it that you are in the land of your enemies,
that you are growing old in a foreign country,
that you are defiled with the dead,
that you are counted among those in Hades?
You have forsaken the fountain of wisdom.⁶⁷ (Bar 3:9–12)

In this version of reality, truth is one, and it is contained in the Torah⁶⁸ which alone is the fountain of wisdom and the source of salvation. In Christian thinking this line of argument has sometimes been taken up to characterise Christ, the incarnate Word of God, as the replacement for Torah and the sole way of accessing God's wisdom and salvation.

However, within the mainstream of the wisdom literature there is an alternative understanding⁶⁹ whereby Torah is understood to be an accessible and compact (though not the sole) area of wisdom to turn to amid the universal wisdom that is sometimes hidden within the complexity of the world: 'upon *all the living* according to his gift; he *lavished* her [wisdom] on those who love him' (Sir 1:10).⁷⁰

Building on this broader interpretation, the Incarnation may be understood as a concentration of that wisdom that is to be found at the heart of all things with Christ being

the bodily text which gives the clue to the whole text and body of the world. This is not because he is a cosmic mediator, bridging a gap between two worlds, but because the pattern visible in the actions and words of Christ is the rhythm in which the world comes to its fullness.⁷¹

So, for example, however difficult some of the biblical proverbs may be for the cultural and social environments we now inhabit (not least for women), it is instructive to note that in the book of Proverbs the kind of theoretical wisdom that dances on a cosmic scale is considered to be intimately connected with the human wisdom that concerns practical daily tasks. In this way, according

to the Baptist theologian Paul Fiddes, the writers of ancient Israel offer an interplay of *phronēsis* (practical wisdom) and contemplative wisdom (*sophia*), in which there is issued an invitation to an *embodied* participation in the wisdom of God that suffuses the created order (rather than only an opportunity to contemplate the Good as in Aristotle or Plato).⁷²

According to Heather Walton (2014), this invitation also opens up the possibility of encountering God not just in action (*praxis*), but through a sacramental making (*poiēsis*). She points to the possibilities for *poiēsis* in practical theology with reference to the work of Henri Lefebvre, the dialectic materialist, for whom *poiēsis* refers to the 'supreme, restless, transformative capacity of human beings to reshape their world and create meaning out of the mundane.'⁷³ She quotes Lefebvre saying that in our playful creativity 'another reality is born, not a separate one, but one which is "lived" in the everyday, alongside the functional ... It is a domain without limits.'⁷⁴

Such an approach to *poiēsis* clearly moves beyond Aristotle's discussion of crafts and is conceived as a genuinely creative engagement between God, the human community and the rest of the material world that might theologially be described as sacramental. Although 'sacramental' might, in Methodist circles, be taken more often to refer to the dominical sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, more broadly, a sacramental understanding of the world concerns the way in which God reveals Godself as human beings engage with their own physicality and that of the world around them (eg for St Augustine there was a much broader range of *sacramenta* than bread and wine and water, including ashes, oil and the kiss of peace).

To articulate this theologially Rowan Williams, drawing on the scholastic tradition, argues that both the mind and the world are understood to be formed of underlying structures and relations which go beyond surface harmonies and which 'resonate with the patterns of God's action in the created world.'⁷⁵ In this way of thinking, God, therefore, is understood not to be confined to operating solely within the mind of the human being, nor to be contained as propositional truth within the authorised meaning of a text, but is genuinely at work in the created order, not in the sense of miraculous interventions but in the sense of weaving together all things for good with those who love God. While the dominical sacraments represent reliable corporate means through which God discloses Godself, any dimension of materiality (such as a burning bush) might be an occasion for such an encounter.

This orientation towards wisdom has important theoretical and practical consequences. Holiness, for example, becomes not a question of only attending to a narrow and religiously defined set of matters – that would be creating propaganda for God – but, rather, becomes a question of attending to the truth of all things in their detail and particularity in the confidence that they are held in being by God, and that though we may not be able to put them easily or neatly together they belong together in God and are being drawn into God's future.

Such a way of thinking means that Christian wisdom will be directed towards recognising, and helping others to recognise, the texture of God in the everyday complexity around us but without the need to discount the efforts or findings of other truth-seeking communities (whether religious or academic) from the outset. This does not excuse us from rigorous thought, either about what Christians understand to be true, or about how that life is lived and experienced, or about the truth-claims and assumptions of other wisdom-seeking communities, but it invites us into a deep conversation with everyone and everything in the confidence that, in and through that dialogue, God, as wisdom, will be encountered.

One consequence of this argument for Christian theological education is that it need not be seen and practised as a narrow learning about religious things in defence against the false truths of the world, but may be seen as a dialogical process between different voices and articulations of wisdom, both reasoned and revealed, in which, to use Paul Fiddes' phrase, 'the pattern visible in the actions and words of Christ is the rhythm in which the world comes to its fullness'.⁷⁶

One advantage of the claim that God's wisdom is dialogical, for a cross-cultural community of theological formation like Wesley House, is that we need not defend the processes and contents of any of our attempts to articulate Christian wisdom as being 'pure'. We can acknowledge that our wisdom has been lived and formulated by particular people in particular times and contexts and embodiments. This takes seriously the Enlightenment discovery of the historical character of human reasoning but it does not deny God as the source of wisdom. Rather it highlights the need for wisdom to pay attention to our own voice and the voice of the other in order to prevent its distortion.

The Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann affirms this when he contends that even though it is God who initiates revelation, human beings cannot naively abdicate responsibility for discerning the meaning of such moments

of transfiguration. In fact, we must not seek to collapse the essential distance that must be preserved between us and the other for the voice of God to be heard. In the case of preaching, for example, he warns that if

the voice of our listeners has been silenced by alienation or suppressed rage, then the voice of God alone will not evoke praise or permit transformation. We should remember that we can only preach the word of God as such a conversation if our own voice, too, has not been reduced to silence.⁷⁷

Further, the Roman Catholic theologian Mary Grey writes:

Transforming the process of coming to know gives us new eyes for reading the sacred texts. How we read these texts, how we transmit tradition, is influenced to a great extent by our position in the world – our genderedness, race, societal status, sexual preference, health and so on ... 'Feeling the world', 'letting the world in' is a thoroughly embodied process.⁷⁸

A second consequence for theological education of this way of conceiving wisdom is the need to incorporate embodied methods of learning that enable both right- and left-brain engagement.⁷⁹ These we have developed at Wesley House since 2011 and such methods will continue to have an important place as we seek to allow students from different parts of the world to find their voice in the Cambridge context, and to do so not only through shaping and being shaped through the disciplines of *paideia*, through learning the disciplines of *Wissenschaft*, and through the dialogical activities of *phronēsis*, but also through the opportunities of *poiēsis*. One of the most moving communications of theological meaning I have witnessed in recent years, for example, was the creation of a chair out of thorns by a Korean student using a traditional method of chair-making with sticks and string, binding together rosebush cuttings from the college garden. This act of *poiēsis* articulated, in a visceral way, a sacrificial emphasis that he felt was lacking in the expressions of Christian life he found in the UK – an emphasis that he both rediscovered and was able to communicate through the process of making and sharing what he had made.

In this account diversity becomes a strength. The more people are engaged in seeking God's wisdom, authentically, out of their different embodiments and experiences, the more likely we are to hear God speaking.⁸⁰ While hearing our

own voice can be a costly matter (it can be easier to conform to external demands – even those we think are from God – than to face our own truth), there are no short cuts to a practical wisdom which involves the willingness to ask powerful questions of ourselves and of others. This points not only to a different pedagogy (way of teaching) but a different way of understanding how we know what wisdom is (epistemology), which is not totalising (from one point of view), but essentially dialogical (engaging many voices), and which is not only concerned with content (what is wise?), but also with process (how does one *participate*⁸¹ in God's invitation to wisdom in a changing and complex world?).

Conclusions – is wisdom the principal thing?

I began this article with a question prompted by the quotation on the original library wall at Wesley House and by asking whether wisdom should be the principal thing in theological education and, if so, what kind of wisdom that might be. Having framed the conversation by explaining the ways in which Wesley House has inherited aspects of the 'Berlin' and 'Athens' models, I have sought to consider the oppositions set up by those models in relation to theory and practice, and to revealed and reasoned accounts of wisdom. I have done so through a conversation with Aristotle about *phronēsis* and *poiēsis* and a conversation with the Bible about the dialogical and participative nature of wisdom.

Despite the (pragmatically understandable) preoccupations of the Methodist Church in the British context with evangelism as the 'main thing'⁸² I have become convinced, with Michael Gutteridge, that wisdom *is* the principal thing with which theological education (whether of lay or ordained people) ought, in general, to be concerned. This is because, without the capacity to discern in detail and in particular how the Christian community should engage, and without the capacity to articulate afresh for new generations what the Christian vision is about – in terms that are contextually intelligible and involve a non-defensive search for truth through all the ways that God provides (heart, mind, soul and strength) – the leadership of the Churches will be disastrously short-sighted.

In an international and residential⁸³ community, in which Methodists from all over the world are going to be living in close proximity, I think there would be considerable merit in finding a new location for the quotation from Proverbs 4:7:

The end of theological education – is wisdom the principal thing?

WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPLE THING, THEREFORE GET WISDOM
AND IN ALL THY GETTING, GET UNDERSTANDING,

preferably sited in close proximity to the chapel entrance where the injunction is to learn from Jesus:

DISCITE A ME QUIA MITIS SUM ET HUMILIS CORDE.⁸⁴

The interplay between the two texts perhaps comes as close as I am able to get to the four aspects of wisdom that I would want to draw out as they relate to theological education: (1) the practical and embodied nature of that wisdom as *paideia* and as *poiēsis* that needs to be experienced in communities of practice; (2) the need to think rigorously both about how we live the Christian life and how we lead others in it (*phronēsis*), but also about how we articulate what the Christian wisdom is in ways that make sense not only to us but are also intelligible to those who do not share our presuppositions; (3) the suffusion of the wisdom of God throughout the world beyond the canon of Scripture and the Christian community, and discoverable in art, literature, science and the dialogue between truth and wisdom-seeking communities of all kinds; (4) finally, wisdom's genuine accessibility through the life of holiness as disciples of Christ as we open ourselves to the transcendent Other through the means of grace.

If others disagree, I look forward to the dialogue.

Notes

1. Methodist Theological University in Seoul; Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary in Pietermaritzburg; Kenya Methodist University; The Candler School of Theology, Atlanta; Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington.
2. A theological purpose might be variously defined. My assumption here is that a theological purpose concerns the overall meaning of an enterprise in relation to God.
3. For a summary of the debate in the 1980s–1990s, see Kelsey 1993.
4. Ford 2007. See especially chapter 8, 'An interdisciplinary wisdom: knowledge, formation and collegiality in the negotiable university', pp. 305–349.
5. The Cambridge Theological Federation, www.theofed.cam.ac.uk/, was formed in 1972, originally between Wesley House, Westcott House and Ridley Hall in the context of conversations about Anglican–Methodist union. Now more than 40 years on, it is a collaboration of 9 institutes (Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Orthodox and Reformed, Jewish and Muslim) in the areas of theological

- formation for ministry and mission, research in theology and religious studies, encounter between people of different Christian traditions and between people of other faith. In many ways it was a fulfilment of Michael Gutteridge's desire, as the original benefactor, that Methodist students should be educated with those of other traditions also being formed in Cambridge (unpublished letter of 1922).
6. To read the vision as it was set out, see www.methodist.org.uk/conference/conference-reports/2012-reports, 57, 'The Fruitful Field'.
 7. This was an apologetic made despite the acknowledged costs – in terms of finance and of imagination – in a world (and a Church) that is increasingly conformed to the commodification of everything including education. As David Ford says, 'The creation and sustaining of physical and social settings where they [theological values] actually flourish is an extraordinarily demanding task, and the timescale involved is nearly always transgenerational. The socially and personally embedded nature of the values means that they are rarely well learnt except through face to face contact in settings structured and shaped through experience of embodying the values and resisting whatever undermines or distorts them. The values and their settings are continually under threat from many angles, and decades of building can be destroyed at any time.' Ford 2007, pp. 314–315.
 8. This was the spelling used on the frieze in the library.
 9. While other quotations from the Bible in this text will be from the NRSV Anglicized Edition, where they are inscriptions, they are reproduced in the form used on the walls.
 10. 'Learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart.' NRSV.
 11. Prayer of Azariah, vv. 37 and 35.
 12. Founded in 1921, in anticipation of Methodist Union in 1932, Wesley House accepted students to train from all three branches of what was to become The Methodist Church in Britain: Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodist. The Trust Deed was amended in 2014 explicitly to include students and scholars from any church or institution associated with a church eligible to join the World Methodist Council.
 13. This is a phrase borrowed from the work of Walter Brueggemann (1986) who in his book of that title commends the necessity for memory and imagination to be held together if a community is to be faithful to its calling. In its first submission to the Fruitful Field consultation process, the paper produced by the staff and trustees of Wesley House (Leach et al. 2011) quoted the Australian Catholic theologian David Ransom (2001, pp. 605–606), 'Where memory's lacking, distorted or ruptured the present loses its potential to become pregnant with possibility ... But if memory is to become future it requires the engagement of that other profound human faculty, imagination. Memory and imagination give birth to the future.'
 14. Kelsey 1993, pp. 6–11.
 15. Kelsey 1993, pp. 12–18.
 16. Cambridge's Faculty of Divinity is consistently ranked in the top two in Britain; see www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/rankings?s=Theology%20%26%20Religious%20Studies, accessed 12 February 2015.

The end of theological education – is wisdom the principal thing?

17. The traditional way of describing the originally three-part undergraduate degree – perhaps examined while seated on a three-legged stool. In fact most Wesley House students who have taken the theological Tripos did so as graduates in other subjects and so were excused Part I.
18. For example the current Regius Professor, David Ford, sets out his commitments in Ford 2007, p. 4.
19. *Wissenschaft* is defined by David Kelsey (1993, p. 12) as ‘orderly, disciplined, critical research’.
20. David Ford describes the colleges as ‘long term environments of conversational culture centred on meals’ (2007, p. 324). Although many Cambridge colleges retain a chapel, the fellows are no longer required to be in holy orders and not many of them (or their students) are participants in the life of the chapels.
21. *Paideia* was a common and long-lived classical practice debated, for example, by Plato, Aristotle and Cicero, among others; see Kelsey 1993, pp. 6–7.
22. So, for example, Clement of Rome’s letter to Corinth in ad 90 speaks of the *paideia* of Christ (Jaeger 1939–1963, vol. I, p. 25).
23. The first students arrived in Cambridge from Oxford in 1209. Walter Rüegg summarises the main values of the medieval university as: rational investigation of the world; ethical values of modesty, reverence and self-criticism; respect for the dignity and freedom of the individual; rigorous public argument appealing to demonstrated knowledge and rules of evidence; recognition of the pursuit of knowledge as a public good irreducible to economic interest; the need for continual self-criticism in the course of improving our knowledge; equality and solidarity. These values were embedded in Christian doctrines such as creation, human imperfection, the connection between knowledge and virtue, a collegial commitment to the pursuit of truth and knowledge in communities (Rüegg 1992).
24. ‘Learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart.’ NRSV.
25. This is a virtue celebrated influentially by John Henry Newman in *The Idea of a University* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1899), in which the overall goal is the cultivation of students’ intellectual capacities for their own sake and to fit them for a generic leadership through learning to think (rather than in terms of any specialist professional training or specific readiness for independent research within an academic discipline).
26. This has been evidenced in correspondence I have received as Principal in the context of the Fruitful Field about the value of Wesley House to its alumni.
27. It was never asserted by Wesley House’s founders that all ministers should receive this kind of education but only those who would most benefit. Moreover, an intellectual wisdom need not preclude or be in conflict with a relational or interpersonal wisdom that might be learnt, for example, from children or those with learning disabilities. See David Ford’s chapter on the wisdom embodied in a L’Arche community (Ford 2007).
28. www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/jun/04/higher-education-participation-data-analysis, accessed 16 February 2015. Article by Charlie Ball, deputy director of research at the Higher Education Careers Services Unit.

29. Ford 2007, pp. 4–5.
30. For David Ford the health of society itself also depends on the health of its universities, which, if reduced to utilitarian, technical or essential ‘bought’ interests, is unable to produce broad and wise thinkers (Ford 2007, p. 319).
31. For example, the Russell Group of which the University of Cambridge is a member, says, ‘Russell Group universities offer a high-quality learning experience with a deliberate emphasis on independent learning through research to encourage their students to develop into self-reliant graduates, able to pursue new knowledge and cope with uncertainty.’ www.russellgroup.ac.uk/uploads/Learning-in-a-research-intensive-environment.pdf, paragraph 56.
32. Ford 2007, p. 2. For those students brought up in a cultural and educational environment that largely assumes the scientific world-view of the ‘Berlin’ model this may not be new, but for those coming to Britain from Africa or Asia the experience can be bewildering. Further, those formed as Christians within a broadly liberal Protestant tradition into which scientific ways of thinking have been introduced will have fewer difficulties with the environment of a research university than those coming from Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic or biblicist traditions in which sources of authority may not have been subjected to that kind of critique.
33. A useful model in this respect is that of the four voices of theology offered by Helen Cameron and colleagues, H. Cameron et al. 2010, pp. 53–56. The four voices are *normative* (Scripture, the creeds, formal church teaching, authorised worship materials of my denomination); *formal* (individual contributions of theologians, dialogue with other disciples, eg philosophy, psychology, biology); *espoused* (the theology embedded in the beliefs expressed by my immediate church or group); *operant* (the theology expressed through the practices of that church or group).
34. For example, the Green Report of the Church of England, www.churchofengland.org/media/2130591/report.pdf, published in January 2015. The Methodist Church in Britain is also due to review the implementation of the Fruitful Field at the Conference of 2017.
35. Gutteridge 1922.
36. See note 10.
37. The themes of these developments were broadly speaking diversification and regionalisation. Originally the community was entirely resident, male, young, single, comprised of accepted candidates for ordination to the presbyterate and intellectually able to engage in degrees offered by the University of Cambridge. From the 1960s onwards, the requirements of the British Methodist Church meant that the community became more diverse, embracing married, female, and students of all ages, people in formation for a range of ministries or discerning vocations, and people from the region whose learning needs were not going to be met by University of Cambridge programmes. This led to a proliferation of patterns of residence, full- and part-time engagement, and new programmes of study. So, while Wesley House had historically been associated with intellectualism and elitism, ironically by the time of the Fruitful Field there

- were also criticisms that Wesley House was no longer sufficiently engaged with the University of Cambridge to justify its existence. The release of Wesley House from meeting the diversified needs of the British Methodist Conference has allowed a re-engagement by the Trustees with the original charisms of the college and an opportunity to make the best of those for a global constituency.
38. These terms are used quite precisely by some and interchangeably by others. In general I would favour the use of practical theology to describe theology that is attentive to the breadth of the practices of the Christian faith and to the theological treatment of other human practices, and pastoral theology to describe a narrower activity concerned with pastoral care or pastoral responsibility. The degree programmes referred to here are an MA in Pastoral Theology and a Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology.
 39. Heather Walton (2014, p. 8) summarises the views of empirical theologian Johannes Van der Ven in order to locate practical theology: 'Van der Ven makes clear that he views Practical Theology in pre-Thomistic terms as *sapientia* (wisdom) rather than *scientia* (speculative knowledge) and it is a wisdom that is concerned with understanding and indeed celebrating how people find spiritual meaning, faith, God in the midst of contemporary life (1998: 30–1). This work is done in order that we can do better theology, offer better pastoral care and (as is extremely important to empirical theologians) communicate effectively in a world that no longer comprehends the categories upon which theology is based.'
 40. Such as Elaine Graham 1996 and Don Browning 1976.
 41. In the last decade two significant books on sapiential wisdom have been published in the UK that engage with biblical wisdom literature – one by the Regius Professor of Divinity in Cambridge (Ford 2007) and the other by the Professor of Systematic Theology in the University of Oxford (Fiddes 2013).
 42. References are to the translation by Roger Crisp 2000.
 43. This is usually translated 'happiness'. Scholars debate whether the highest happiness for Aristotle is a contemplative happiness rather than a composite of intellectual and practical elements. For further discussion, see Curzer 2012, pp. 14–15.
 44. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.8.1178a.
 45. Crisp (ed.) 2000, p. viii.
 46. The first two, 'scientific knowledge' (*epistēmē*) and 'intuitive reasoning' (*nous*), contribute to the third, 'theoretical' or 'philosophical wisdom' (*sophia*).
 47. Curzer 2012, p. 295.
 48. A similar point is made by David Ford in relation to the formation of rounded characters in the university setting: 'The socially and personally embedded nature of the values means that they are rarely well learnt except through face-to-face contact in settings structured and shaped through experience of embodying the values and resisting whatever undermines or distorts them' (Ford 2007, p. 314).
 49. During the period between the announcement of the intention of The Methodist Church in Britain radically to reconfigure theological education (September

- 2011) and the completion of its implementation at Wesley House (July 2014) this brought into sharp and painful focus a number of demanding questions: how to live with integrity while in conflict with denominational decisions; how to deal with anger and loss; how to make good enough institutional endings; how to discern personal and institutional futures amid competing demands and complexities... It seemed crucial to the health of the institution for these issues to be handled as transparently as possible within the staff and student bodies.
50. One of the key thinkers who has helped recover a sense of the need for practical wisdom rooted in virtue that is beyond technical knowledge is Alasdair MacIntyre (crucially, MacIntyre 1985) whose work has resonated beyond a theological context to inspire ventures such as business schools. See, for example, Geoff Moore 2002.
 51. In Book X, Aristotle states that the happiest life consists in the exercise of intellectual virtue or contemplation (*theoria*), while the political life of *phronēsis* is only a secondary kind of happiness (*NE* x.7–8, 1178. 10a6–10). However, scholars disagree about the extent to which the bulk of the *Nicomachean Ethics* can be read in this way. For a discussion of this debate, see Long 2011.
 52. The adoption of *phronēsis* by American theologian Don Browning was a way of emphasising the Christian community as the context in which its fundamental truth claims come to be known, not only as theoretical truths but as lived experience. For Elaine Graham, who did much to introduce a British audience to this application of *phronēsis*, Browning was still too committed to a model of practice in which morals (ideas) were wrapped up in practice, rather than to an examination of broader practices such as the liturgical and affective. Drawing on the work of Edward Farley (1983), she argued that what we need is ‘a model of practical wisdom which is both “indwelt” and “constructed”: habitus as handed down and reinterpreted anew for every generation’ (Graham 1996, p. 95).
 53. I find Charles Wood (1985) a helpful contribution to the breaking down of the dichotomy between theory and practice in Christian education.
 54. See, for example, Moore 2002.
 55. This happened through the MA in Pastoral Theology and then the BA in Christian Theology. Our engagement with the pedagogy of *phronēsis*, however, has also influenced the development of new degree programmes with the University of Cambridge, so now the Bachelor of Theology and Diploma in Theology for Ministry programmes benefit from a hybrid approach that takes seriously the traditional strengths of the Faculty of Divinity and an attention to *phronēsis* and *poiēsis*. For an exposition of the impact on Cambridge awards, see Leach 2010. To explore the reference to *poiēsis*, see further below.
 56. The terminology is borrowed from teacher education and is widely used as a tool in professional development. For example, ‘Unless teachers develop the practice of critical reflection, they stay trapped in unexamined judgments, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations. Approaching teaching as a reflective practitioner involves fusing personal beliefs and values into a professional identity’ (Larrivee 2000, p. 293).
 57. Henderson 2003, pp. 110–111

58. For example, Edward Farley complains about a professional practice focus as being unduly functional and thereby uncritical in relation to an understanding of the essentially theological nature of the Church as a redemptive community (Farley 1983, p. 127). Dykstra and Bass (2008, p. 7) argue for a reorientation of attention to practice, not as any intervention made by an individual practitioner but as a definitive activity of the Christian community, saying, 'A practice is a practice in our meaning of the term only if it is a sustained, cooperative pattern of human activity that is big enough, rich enough, and complex enough to address some fundamental feature of human existence.'
59. For a practical outworking of this in theological reflection, see my work on pastoral theology as attention (Leach 2007).
60. This is the process that Elaine Graham describes as helping the Churches to practise what they preach (Graham 1996, p. 11) (though it is simultaneously the process of helping the Churches to preach what they practise).
61. As Professor Peter W. Stephens remarked to the British Methodist Conference of 2003, the fact that some Methodists engage in certain practices does not make those practices Methodist.
62. 'Overall the health, not only of the economy but also of democratic polity and its accompanying civil society depends on a well-educated population. There are very few other institutional settings where a wide range of fields, professions and applications come together, so if the university fails here, the flourishing of a whole society is at stake' (Ford 2007, p. 319).
63. For the significance of Ernst Troeltsch and other Enlightenment figures in the development of the doctrine of revelation, see Stroup 1982.
64. There is not room in this article for a detailed discussion of the different Hebrew and Greek words used in the Bible to describe different aspects of wisdom. Here 'wisdom' is the translation for *chokmah* and 'understanding' is the translation for *biynah*.
65. In this passage a variety of Hebrew words are used that are variously translated wisdom, prudence, understanding and knowledge. These words are not necessarily translated into Greek in the Septuagint nor into English with consistency as if they were technical terms. The most consistent translation is *chokmah/sophia/wisdom*, which is particularly associated with the personified figure of Lady Wisdom and with God. The implication is that a response to the invitation to follow or learn from Lady Wisdom (God's wisdom) brings with it all kinds of practical prudence, understanding and knowledge useful in governing and living.
66. A date in the first century BC seems most likely. See Burke 1982.
67. There is scholarly dispute as to whether Baruch 3:9ff was ever written in Hebrew. Emmanuel Tov argues that the Greek is the original (which uses *phronēsin* in 3:9 and *sophias* in 3:12), whereas Kneucher and Pfeiffer have separately argued there was an original Hebrew version.
68. There is not room in this article for a more extended discussion of the way in which wisdom, Torah and prophecy are related in Old Testament literature.
69. For a detailed discussion, see Fiddes 2013, chapter 10.

70. The meaning is perhaps more clearly expressed in the NEB translation: 'To all humankind he has given her in some measure but in plenty to those who love him.' The Greek text of Sirach uses *sophia* to render 'wisdom' throughout this passage.
71. Fiddes 2013, p. 346.
72. To interpret the wisdom literature of the Old Testament and the Apocrypha in this way is not uncontroversial, not least because it involves accepting the argument of Paul Fiddes that the figure of Lady Wisdom is not evidence of a necessary mediator between heaven and earth which otherwise would be entirely strange to each other, but a Hebrew way of talking about God's very self – God is both beyond the creation and thus able to see it whole, and in the midst of daily life, revealing herself in the embodied business of living. Thus, in Proverbs 8, wisdom, for Fiddes, is not a demi-God borrowed from earlier goddess traditions, but a personified attribute of God's very self: 'in daily practices, in a created context which is "other-than-God" we are participating in a self-giving movement of God. This is a giving of God's self which is partly pictured in the dancing and travelling Lady Wisdom.' The consequence of his exegesis is that seeing the world in all its complexity is itself a way of being drawn into the contemplation of God's wisdom because wisdom not only sees all, but invites a journey into the manifold delights of the world which she knows intimately because she pervades them.
73. Walton 2014, p. 13.
74. Lefebvre [1961] 2002, p. 204, quoted in Walton 2014, p. 13.
75. Williams 2005, pp. 23–24.
76. Fiddes 2013, p. 346.
77. Brueggemann in Cocksworth and Brown 2004, pp. 92–93.
78. Grey 1993, p. 85. This allusion to embodied knowing is an important corrective either to the paradigm of sight or speech as metaphors. For a discussion of haptic knowledge that takes touch seriously, see Pattison 2007.
79. For an example of this kind of learning in practice, see Leach 2014. For a theological explanation of why embodied learning might matter in Christian communities, see Leach and Paterson 2015, chapter 6, 'Attention to the body'.
80. Mike Higton (2004, pp. 112–114) highlights the use of the metaphor of an orchestra in Rowan Williams' thoughts about peace. He speaks of the attentive listening that is required that can both hear the distinctive contribution of each instrument, but also imagine how, out of the cacophony of tuning up, a symphony might emerge.
81. Paul Fiddes explores the notion of participation in God and in God's wisdom through the Hebrew verb *yada* – to know and to be known. This implies a relational way of knowing that involves God, the self and the other. Rowan Williams (2005) explores this participative kind of knowing in relation to art and the world of 'things'.
82. This line of thought was sharply in evidence at the British Methodist Conference in Birmingham in 2014. Under the heading 'The main thing,' the General Secretary said, 'However the Statistics for Mission report is understood and interpreted it

does not make for easy or comfortable reading. If ever we needed any encouragement to continue to focus on those things that make for an ever better Church which is a discipleship movement shaped for mission today, then these statistics provide that' (Atkins 2014, p. 266). In a post-Christian context where numbers of regular churchgoers are in free-fall, this priority may well be the right one, but how do we discern that evangelism is the response that God requires of us to this situation? How do we know that it is not repentance or a deeper commitment to the common good that is required, or some other response? The question is sharpened when we look at other parts of the world, or different moments in history when the contextually discerned priorities of the Church have been different from those being discerned in Britain today. Behind immediate priorities lies the question of how we discern what God requires of us at all.

83. Wesley House will remain, at its core, a residential community in Cambridge for long-term and short-term residents, though key expressions of its ethos and life will also be through the more dispersed activities of research and learning, for example through the sponsorship and ownership of this journal and the activities of part-time non-resident students.
84. 'Learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart.' NRSV.

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