

**LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF THE GRADUATE:
AN ANALYSIS OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE
AND TRAINING FOR MINISTRY IN CENTRAL ASIA**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship between professional practice and professional training of Christian ministers in post-Communist Central Asia. It responds to the call for study of the phenomenon of Protestant theological education in the post-Soviet bloc. Theological education in Central Asia has been developed without any research-led evaluation and is often found unsatisfactory by the emerging church, which calls for a more relevant, field-driven and contextualised training of its leaders. This study also responds to the gap in the literature on attitude development of ministerial students.

This is a qualitative inquiry. Its primary emphasis is on in-depth semi-structured interviews of forty graduates of four major theological colleges in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, who had spent several years in pastoral ministry after graduation. This research seeks to identify the most common problems they face in professional practice; to identify the attitudes and capabilities underlying their problem-solving processes; and to analyse how their training enabled or failed to enable them to develop those qualities.

This thesis argues that theological education can be viewed as a special case of professional training, with a unique cluster of spiritual qualities that are of paramount importance for the success of ministers. It also argues that, despite the graduates' generally positive appraisal of their training, there was little connection between the training and the capabilities that the graduates needed to succeed in their current practice. It therefore argues that the institutions in Central Asia have inherited the flaws of the "schooling" paradigm of theological education. A more integrated, context-specific and missional model is needed. By developing a model for investigating the practical knowledge of ministers, this study attempts to provide the training institutions in question with a framework of capabilities and attitudes. This will allow those institutions to have a useful starting point in the reformulation of their curricula.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ATLA	American Theological Library Association
ATS	Association of Theological Schools (in the US and Canada)
B.Th	Bachelor of Theology
CP	a church planter
CUREC	Central University Research Ethics Committee
EAAA	Euro-Asian Accrediting Association
ERIC	Education Resources Information Center
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
KNB	<i>Komitet Natsionalnoi Bezopasnosti</i> (National Security Committee)
KGB	<i>Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti</i> (Committee for State Security)
LiNEA	Learning in Nursing, Engineering and Accountancy
MA BS	Master of Arts in Biblical Studies
M.Div	Master of Divinity
M.Min	Master of Ministry
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
PBL	Problem-Based Learning
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

INTRODUCTION

THE RATIONALE

Following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990, evangelical Christians¹ have become the fastest growing religious minority in the predominantly Muslim republics of Central Asia. With this growth has come a need for pastoral training. As a result, new theological colleges offering all sorts of programmes began mushrooming – not only in Central Asia, but in all countries of the former USSR. Mark Elliott in his reports of Protestant theological education in the former Soviet Union describes the unprecedented growth of such colleges from *none* in 1986 to *over 100* in 1999; in fact he ranks it “as one of the more dramatic developments in leadership training in the history of Protestantism” (1999a: 37).

With such phenomenal growth came problems. Firstly, the supply has quickly outgrown the need – while in 1994 Elliott noted that many schools could only accommodate a small number of applicants, only five years later they were competing for students. Secondly, Elliott emphasizes “the mixed blessing of Western assistance,” e.g. dependence on Western funding, uncritical adoption of Western theologies and criteria for accreditation (Elliott 1995). He is also concerned that theological educators in the former Soviet Union tend to adopt a Western model of academic training that is removed from the context of ministry. Elliott points out that Western theological educators themselves have become

¹ The word “evangelical” originates in the Greek word *euangelion*, “the good news” or the “gospel.” Martin Luther used the term to reintroduce into the Church the emphasis of Pauline teaching on the indispensable message of salvation (Gerstner 1975). The British historian Bebbington (2008) views as “evangelical” those Christians who adhere to the four tenets of *conversionism* (an emphasis on personal conversion and faith), *activism* (the need to express one’s faith in actions), *biblicism* (a high view of the Bible), and *crucicentrism* (the centrality of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross). As Eskridge shows, the term “evangelicalism” can be used as “a wide-reaching definitional ‘canopy’ that covers a diverse number of Protestant groups” (source: http://www.wheaton.edu/isae/defining_evangelicalism.html, accessed on January 10, 2009). While the scope of this thesis does not allow the full treatment of the term and its history, I will use it for referring to the Christian groups of Central Asia that adhere to the four tenets of Bebbington: i.e. Baptists, Pentecostals, charismatic, and other groups broadly referring to themselves as “evangelical Christians.” I will also use this term for other newly established Protestant churches in the region (such as Korean Presbyterians) who, while preferring to use the term “Protestant,” would share the four tenets of evangelicalism as underlined by Bebbington. Because the terms “evangelical” and “Protestant” are often used in Central Asia (and elsewhere) interchangeably, I will do the same in my thesis.

increasingly critical of such an approach, and argues that ‘the West is hardly the place to look for its solution’ (1995: 70). Among other problems, Elliott mentions an unhealthy interest in formal recognition, poor admissions policies, poor seminary-church relations and a need for outcomes evaluation (1999b).

The problem remains particularly poignant since - due to the urgency of the training needs in the region - such training was developed without any research-led evaluation. Peter Penner, one of the first influential theological educators in post-Soviet Russia, emphasized that for the establishment of “new and healthy theological schools, there must be a critical evaluation of the present strengths and shortcomings of evangelical theological education” (Penner, 2001: 117). In 1997-1998 there appeared two doctoral theses: one by Miriam Charter, another by Penner himself, who provided a broad initial survey of the state of evangelical theological education in the former Soviet Union. Based on their research, these two scholars also voiced their concern about the uncontextualized and uncritical acceptance of Western academic models of theological education in the region. In 2005, commenting on Charter’s findings, Penner reflected on what followed as a result of that:

... I realised that we were actually preparing disciples of ourselves, of who we are: teachers. The model of a disciple ... was a theological educator. If a student were smart enough, s/he could become a teacher in one of the regional Bible schools. If the person were even better, s/he could be involved in one of the leading institutions and possibly become one of the key leaders. But if the person were not intellectual enough and did not get the best grades, s/he could go and minister in a church, mission or church planting, in youth work or some other ministry. Is this **actually** the model that we intended to communicate? (Penner 2005: 10-11).

This is a pointed remark, capturing the essence of the values of post-Soviet theological institutions. The obsession with established standards of Western academic accreditation resulted in marginalizing the central task of such institutions, that claimed to prepare people for actual ministry in the Church.

However, in writing about theological education in the former Soviet Union, the scholars have so far dealt almost exclusively with Russia and Ukraine, two countries that have clear ethnic and cultural differences from the countries of Central Asia (see Carter 1997, Penner 2001, 2005, Elliott 1999a, and others²). Because of both the newness of this educational enterprise - the oldest evangelical theological college in Central Asia was established only in 1993 - and the increasingly difficult access to these countries due to political instability, new theological institutions in Central Asia have hitherto received virtually no scholarly attention.

In Central Asia a particularly critical concern is voiced by national church leaders who express growing frustration in regards to the relevance of the theological training offered for the needs of the emerging congregations. Having worked in that area of the world since 1999, both as the principal of a theological college and as one of the participants in the training track of a major Central Asian evangelical conference,³ I have been in close contact with many prominent evangelical leaders of several Central Asian countries – primarily Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan – and have closely observed and analyzed the state of theological education. During this time, I observed a growing frustration. For example, a national leader of the major Tajik church association told me that their organization is planning to stop sending their people into existing training programs, because as graduates they “begin talking a strange language about strange problems, become useless in the ministry and want to emigrate to the West.”⁴ A church leader in Uzbekistan wants to start her own theological school and not let her people “get spoiled in these colleges,” by which she means that they become unfit for church leadership by the time they finish their education.⁵ Similarly, a leader of a major

² E.g. see “Theological Education as Mission,” ed. by Penner, the collection of papers presented at the conference held at the International Baptist Theological Seminary conference in Prague in February of 2005.

³ Due to the confidentiality agreement, I cannot disclose the name of or refer to the printed proceedings of that conference.

⁴ Conversation with “Artur” in March 2002.

⁵ Conversation with “Nazima” in February 2004.

association of churches in Kazakhstan expressed the opinion that those who do not undergo theological training are more successful in ministry than those who do.⁶ These and many other church leaders in this region perceived a misconnection between what current theological training offers and the real-life vocational skills which the graduates of these colleges need as they enter church ministry.

Just as in Russia and Ukraine, evangelical theological education in Central Asia was established and developed without any empirical research. It has become apparent to me that such research needs to be done. To increase the effectiveness of training, the first requirement is to identify the areas of need in current ministerial practice, and to find out to what extent the existing training institutions succeed in preparing people for that practice.

Thus, this study arises from the need of the emerging evangelical church in post-Soviet Central Asia for a more relevant, field-driven and contextualized training of leaders for professional ministry. Since I view theological education as a special case of professional training, I will also attempt to present a case of conceptualizing professional knowledge of pastors by analyzing their reports of their practice. In doing so, I will seek to distil a framework of professional capabilities and attitudes that ministers needed to deal with their problems. Such a framework could potentially be useful as a starting point toward further change and the development of theological training in the region, in order to make that training more contextually relevant and effective. Finally, I will seek to identify the areas of similarity and differences between the ministerial profession and other professions, thus making a contribution to the wider literature on professionalism.

⁶ Lecture by “Munir,” given in March 2002 at the [name of the conference].

STRUCTURE OF THIS THESIS

In Chapter One, "The setting," I briefly outline the broader historical context of the evangelical church in that part of the world, the current political and religious context in which it exists, and what issues it has to deal with. Then I look at the history, educational goals and challenges that the four theological institutions in this study are currently facing.

In the next two chapters I look at the literature that provides the basis for outlining the theoretical and conceptual framework for my study. In Chapter Two, "Theological education as professional training," I look at the literature discussing the relationship of theological education to professional training, the challenges of its assessment, and the need for study of the professional practice of graduates. In this chapter I propose that one can indeed view theological education as a special case of professional training. I also show that the current literature on theological education emphasises the particular importance of training and assessment of students in the area of "attitudes" or "character/spiritual formation," rather than in the areas of knowledge and technical skills. The former area of assessment presents unique challenges for theological education. I show that current research in that area is increasingly turning to the "backward" approach towards curriculum development - first investigating the needs of professional practice, and then looking at implementing necessary changes in the training curriculum.

In Chapter Three, "Conceptualizing the professional practice of ministers," I look at how the literature on professionalism informs my study. In this chapter I use of Eraut's premise that to understand professional practice one needs to pay attention to so-called "practical knowledge" which is mainly tacit, context-specific and hard to codify. Then I look at the literature on a competency-based approach as one helpful way to codify practical knowledge. I pay particular attention to the criticisms of the approach by Bolden and Gosling. In the light of these criticisms, I then look at two major US studies that attempt to

develop a framework of ministerial competencies. I then show how in my study, which adopts a type of competency-based approach, I account for and avoid the common pitfalls of that approach identified in the literature. In order to avoid common and unhelpful associations of the word “competency,” I use the term “capability” and pay particular attention to the values and attitudes that enabled the graduates to deal with their professional problems.

In Chapter Four I present my research questions and my research strategy, establish my credibility as a researcher, provide a description of data collection and data analysis, and discuss ethical issues related to the study. My research questions in this study are: “What problems do the graduates encounter in their professional practice and what enables them to deal with those problems?” and “In what ways does their training contribute to their ability to deal with those problems?” I first look at my strategy of inquiry – a qualitative study with a primary emphasis on in-depth semi-structured interviews of the graduates of theological colleges, and supplementing it with reviewing the educational documents of those institutions and with interviewing their principals. I then argue that the qualitative strategy was preferable due to the nature of the inquiry. Secondly, I establish my credibility as a researcher by describing my own background, my interest in the topic, and how I ensured that I obtained credible data from my participants. Thirdly, I describe issues related to my data collection, such as the interviewing strategy, sampling, choice of research sites, and the data collection itself. Fourthly, I provide an account of my data analysis, particularly my use of the template analysis technique, my use of qualitative research software, my use of numbers and building a framework of capabilities and attitudes. Finally, I discuss the ethical issues related to my research, particularly my strategies for protecting the participants.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven represent my findings. In Chapters Five and Six I attempt to answer my first research question. In Chapter Five, “Dealing with the problems of

ministry,” I begin my answer by categorizing the most common problems of professional practice of ministers into two groups - external and internal problems - and then describing in detail how the graduates were dealing with them. The first group includes wider societal problems affecting the church, as well as problems in their local church ministry; the second group includes personal struggles the graduates were going through that affected their involvement with ministry. In this chapter I paint a “big picture” of the problems the graduates face in their professional practice, and attempt to show how these problems are interconnected. I also describe and provide some preliminary analysis of *how* the ministers attempt to deal with these problems – what resources they use, what decision-making processes take place, and what actions they take. This picture allowed me to proceed to a deeper analysis in the next chapter.

In Chapter Six, “Ministerial attitudes and capabilities,” I attempt to more fully answer the first research question by developing a framework of thirteen attitudes and capabilities that enabled the ministers to solve difficult issues in their day-to-day ministry. In doing so, I show that this framework is grounded in the ministers’ description of their own professional practice. In this way, I attempt to make some of the “practical knowledge” available from the description given by the graduates, so that it may become codified, analyzed, and thus potentially be useful for discussion of educational outcomes for training institutions in the region. The chapter includes an analysis of spiritual, moral, and relational qualities, thus going beyond the common “behaviouristic” approach to developing competencies frameworks. Finally, at the end of the chapter I discuss possible relationships between the clusters of these qualities.

In Chapter Seven, “Looking back: the strengths and weaknesses of training,” I attempt to answer my second research question. To do so, I analyse the data related to the graduates’ reflection on the usefulness of their training for their practice, including “positive” as well as “negative” factors. In that chapter I also discuss the areas where the

graduates proposed improvements in the curriculum, paying particular attention to issues related to the “theory/practice divide.” I will then summarize the answer to my research question and outline the areas where the graduates perceived their training as contributing to their ability to solve problems in ministry. Finally, I will compare the graduates’ perceptions of their training with the claims of those institutions, using documentary data and data collected by interviewing the principals.

In the final Chapter Eight, “Conclusions and implications,” I will summarise the answers to my research questions, look at my findings in the light of the wider literature, and discuss the contribution of my thesis to the literature. I will also present a section on how the framework developed in this study could be used in Central Asian theological education, and make recommendations on how the institutions in question could improve their training. In this section I will also discuss the limitations of this study and make suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER ONE: THE SETTING

To understand this research and its implications, it is important to look briefly at the situation of the evangelical church within the broader political, social and religious setting of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The Protestant Church has its origin in the West, and the phenomenon of Protestant theological education has been researched in a very different cultural and political context from that of post-Soviet Central Asia. In this chapter I will look at this broader context, briefly outline the history of the Protestant church in the region before and after perestroika, and then will look at each of the four Colleges under scrutiny in more detail.

1.1 THE CHURCH

1.1.1 The Protestant Church in the region before perestroika

The territory of Kazakhstan was made part of the Russian Empire by the end of the 1860s. The Protestant church appeared there as early as the second part of the XVIII century, but before 1890 it was not very large, mostly consisting of Lutherans - German migrants, who were invited to settle in the Empire by the edict of Russian Empress Elizabeth II in 1763 (Andretsov 2004: 58). However, between 1890 and 1917 Kazakhstan was colonized by a large number of peasants migrating from Russia, with a substantial proportion of Slavic Protestants – Russians and Ukrainians. The colonization was caused by both economic factors and by religious factors – the Protestants were marginalized and persecuted by the Russian Orthodox Church, and were looking for greater religious freedom further away from the European part of the Empire, where the persecution was strongest (idem: 79).

By 1917, the Protestant church in Kazakhstan was largely represented by four denominations: Lutherans, Baptists, Mennonites and Adventists. Because of the weaker

control of the Orthodox Church in the region, the greater freedom, and fervent evangelistic efforts, the Protestant Church grew rapidly from a “small irregular group” to a significant religious entity (idem: 163). According to his dissertation based on extensive recent research in the Kazakh and Russian archives, Andretsov (2004) maintains that in some areas of Kazakhstan the Protestants were up to 8% of the population (Andretsov 2004: 163). He cites documentary evidence that only Baptist churches existed in at least 138 towns and villages before 1917 (idem: 97); they consisted mainly of Russians, but also some Germans. Andretsov claims that, before the Russian Revolution, the Protestants constituted the third largest religious group after Muslims and the Russian Orthodox (idem: 69).

Under Communism, the Church in the USSR was severely persecuted. Despite the initial relative tolerance of the Soviet government and the rapid growth of evangelical churches in the early 1920s, religious freedom was subsequently curtailed and turned into outright persecution, as “militant atheism” was propagated as the State ideology by the late 1920s - early 1930s. According one estimate, in the 1930s 22,000 evangelicals from all over the former empire were sent to Siberian labour camps, many never to return (Rowe 1994). Prominent leaders were either executed or sent into exile.

There was a short period during the World War II when the government persecution of the Church eased up: Stalin was willing to go to any length to foster national unity (Rowe 1994). In 1944, the Council of the Affairs of Religious Cults, which was instituted by the Soviet government to deal with all non-Orthodox religious groups, encouraged the formal union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists into one organisation. Thus, the Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists - the biggest Protestant denomination in the USSR - was created.

After the war, there was a resurgence of persecution. Even after Stalin's death, the situation did not improve: Khrushchev's anti-Stalinist "thaw" did not conflict with the active anti-religious campaign that he launched in 1959, boasting that he would fully eradicate religion in the USSR by 1980 and would "show the last Christian on television" (cited by Rowe 1994: 136). He boosted anti-religious propaganda, imprisoned hundreds of Christian leaders, and closed many churches. However, despite all his efforts to eradicate believers, and the later Soviet leaders' efforts to "re-educate" them into atheism, the Church continued to exist and to grow.

1.1.2 Current demographic and religious make-up of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

While religion was severely suppressed during Soviet times, after perestroika the situation in Central Asia seemingly underwent a radical change. For instance, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the re-establishment of independent countries, the number of mosques in the region grew from about 300 in 1990 to more than 10,000 in 2000 (Abazov 2007). The great growth of Islam in the area may be attributed to the political interests of the regional governments: in order to gain easier access to the international political scene, in the early 1990s they "courted Muslim countries such as Turkey, Iran and the Arab nations by emphasizing Islam" (Peyrouse 2007). As a result, a large number of Muslim missionaries were welcomed during that period. However, in subsequent years this trend was revised due to the fear of radical Islamic factions.

The religious makeup of the Central Asian republics after perestroika has been significantly influenced by a wave of emigration of the Slavic (Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian) and German inhabitants. At the present time, the Russian Orthodox Church still continues to be the second largest religious group in Central Asia. However, between 1991 and 2007 almost *half* of the Slavic population left Kyrgyzstan, and to a lesser degree

Kazakhstan (Peyrouse 2007). As the majority of Slavs traditionally belong to the Russian Orthodox Church, an expert commentator Abazov (2007) assumes that if this trend continues, many of the remaining Orthodox churches will close within the next 20 to 30 years. Likewise, many of the Germans who constituted the majority of the Protestants in Central Asia (Lutherans, Baptists and Mennonites), emigrated to Germany.

Kazakhstan

The current population of Kazakhstan is 15.4 million. As of 2005, ethnic Kazakhs represented approximately 50% of the population; the Slavs – around a third; Uzbeks, Uigurs (ethnic Turkic Muslims), and Tatars together – about 10%; Germans – 1.5%, and Jews – about 1% of the population. The demographics of the country continue to change due to the emigration of the Slavic and German population.⁷ Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Uigurs and Tatars (i.e. over 60% of the population) are traditionally Muslim; the number of registered mosques in the country currently exceeds 2200. The Slavic people largely consider themselves Orthodox; there are 257 Orthodox churches in the country. Approximately 2% of the population are Roman Catholics (mostly Germans and Ukrainians), with 82 registered organizations.

As for the Protestants, there are 964 registered Protestant organisations with 546 places of worship. According to the recent statistical report “EP: 2007 Project Overview,” which collected data from 887 Protestant churches, the total number of individuals associated with churches was 30,703. However, this report estimates that only about 50% of all Protestant churches submitted information, and that there are a greater number of unregistered and house churches. These organizations are largely represented by "charismatic" Protestant congregations of which there were 450 in 2005; the Union of

⁷ Source: Kazakhstan, International Religious Freedom Report 2008; released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; US Department of State; <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108501.htm>; accessed on 24.09.09.

Evangelical Christians and Baptists, which has 227 registered churches with an estimated 10,000 members; and other groups such as the Presbyterians and Lutherans.

The politics of the country are largely defined by its current President Nazarbaev, who has continued to stay in power since the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991. Amendments to the Constitution endorsed by the parliament, allow him to remain in power virtually indefinitely. Opposition groups “face constant pressure from the security forces,” i.e. the KNB (the successor of the KGB).⁸ According to the same source, the administration of the country remains weak and corrupt.

Nazpary (2002) describes the situation in Kazakhstan after perestroika: by the middle of the 1990s there was a state of "bardak" ('chaos'), characterised by violence, the accumulation of wealth by a few "new rich," widespread dispossession, an unpredictable future, the moral disintegration of society and nostalgia for the Soviet regime. It seems, however, that ten years later - by the time I was doing my research - the economic situation had changed for the better, at least in the major cities, as my interviewees generally reported. In a major recent ethnographic study of urban life in post-Soviet Asia, the researchers point out that large cities such as Almaty and Astana, where the capital was moved in 1997, have become much more prosperous. Thus, since 1995, when Almaty's industrial sector was virtually at a standstill, the situation of industry gradually improved, so that by 2000 the city had become the richest in Kazakhstan (Alexander 2007). Nevertheless, the researchers point out that these cities are not representative of the many “collapsed cities” in the region. They observe that, as a result of the governments' “shock therapy” (an abrupt change from the welfare state to privatization and a large scale market reform), the distinctions between social classes increased (Alexander and Buchli 2007), people lost trust in the state and its institutions, and that in general “citizens have seen their standard of living plummet as job security and the social

⁸ Source: <http://www.ciaonet.org/atlas/KZ/index.html>; accessed on 17.09.2008.

infrastructure, previously provided by state enterprises and the city administration, have both degraded (Alexander 2007: 96).

The present economy of the country is largely dependent on the use of its enormous energy and mineral resources, and is currently marked by an upward trend, with an increase in GDP of 8,5% in 2007 and 5.3% in 2008. The Economist Intelligence Unit⁹ sees the recent decline in GDP as a result of the global credit crunch; however, they expect it to rise to 6.1% in 2009 and continue to grow thereafter. However, annual inflation in 2007 was 10.8% and increased to 18.6% in 2008, with deflation expected in 2009.

Kyrgyzstan

According to the 2007 National Statistics Committee, the population of Kyrgyzstan is 5.2 million. These are represented by Kyrgyz, 67%; Uzbeks, 14.2%; Russians, 10.3%; Dungans (ethnic Chinese Muslims), 1.1%; Uigurs (ethnic Turkic Muslims), 1%; and other ethnicities, 6%.¹⁰ Islam is the most widely practiced religion with an estimated 80% of the population Muslim, 1,650 mosques as of May 2007, and 7 Islamic institutions for higher education.¹¹ About 11% of the population are Russian Orthodox, although the number may be as low as 8%, with only 44 churches. The Roman Catholics have 3 churches. In contrast to this, there are 226 registered Protestant churches, including 48 Baptist churches, 21 Lutheran, 49 Pentecostal, 35 Presbyterian, 43 Charismatic, and 30 Seventh-Day Adventist. There are also a small number of Jews, Buddhists and other religious communities.

⁹ Source: <http://www.ciaonet.org>; accessed on 17.09.2008.

¹⁰ Source: Kyrgyz Republic, International Religious Freedom Report 2008; Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; US Department of State; <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108502.htm>, accessed on 24.09.08

¹¹ Idem.

The former Soviet Republic declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and became the Kyrgyz Republic. As in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries, presidential authority has increased in Kyrgyzstan since the fall of the Soviet Union, and remains a dominant power. The former president, Akayev, weakened the parliamentary power, until he had to flee the revolution of March 2005. The current president, Bakiyev, despite initial promises of reforms, retains a strong presidential grip on power.¹²

The economy of Kyrgyzstan has also been improving, although it still remains the poorest country in Central Asia.¹³ Thus, the GDP has risen from US\$ 1.9 billion in 2003 to 3.7 in 2007. The GDP grew by 3.1% and 8.2% in 2006 and 2007 respectively, but consumer price inflation kept rising in tandem from 5.6% in 2006 to 10.2% in 2007. In 2008 it was expected to rise up to 22.5%. The Economist Intelligence Unit forecasts a slowdown in GDP to around 6% annually in the years 2008-2009, and a deflation in 2009.

1.1.3 Current situation for religious freedom for the Protestant church in the region

Abazov (2007) maintains that society in Central Asia remains divided with regards to the role of religion in social life. While the older generation raised under the Soviet Union considers religion a private matter, the younger generation is divided between those who are strongly committed to secularism and those who are committed to Islam and who call for a greater role for that religion in society. Besides, there is a large intermediate constituency of young people who are not concerned about politics and religion, but are searching for jobs and trying to improve the quality of their lives.

¹² Idem.

¹³ For comparison, in 2007 the estimated GDP per capita in US dollars in Kyrgyzstan was \$2,000 (source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/kg.html>); in Kazakhstan - \$11,100 (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/kz.html>), while in the UK - \$35,100 (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/uk.html>). However, these are the mean figures; the distribution of wealth in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan remains very uneven, with a sharp distinction of income between a small percentage of the powerful and wealthy, and a large number of the poor.

Peyrouse (2007), an expert on the relationship of Church and State in Central Asia, concludes that the religious freedom granted at the beginning of the nineties has been significantly restricted in subsequent years. Although at first glance, the authorities seem to have adopted the democratic stand of freedom of religion, his analysis shows that the structure of the Soviet state control of religion that disappeared for a while following perestroika, was in various degrees later *reintroduced* in Central Asian countries - from the outright persecution of religious minorities, as in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (the imprisonments and torture of religious leaders), to more covert forms of seriously limiting their rights, as in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Thus, the government authorities resurrected the infamous Committee for Religious Affairs – a Soviet-style institution, which essentially “implies the institutionalization of worldly power over religious authorities” (Peyrouse 2007: 104). He points out that “these structures of control formalize the interference of the state in religious affairs, and thus challenge basic principles of separation of church and state” (idem).

The authorities in Central Asian countries often employ “democratic” terms, but substitute their own meaning for the original one. Peyrouse (2007: 105) points out that, while the authorities of those countries claim that they have “religious freedom,” on their interpretation the term means “the opportunity to pray without incurring any risks, but not to develop individual or collective thinking, be it theological or sociological, on the transcendent principle of belief” (idem). The Forum 18 news service, an organization that monitors religious freedom in the former Soviet Union, provides a plethora of examples.¹⁴

¹⁴ For instance, below is a recent quote of the conversation between the Forum’s reporter with the deputy of the Lower House of Parliament of Kazakhstan, responsible for leading the parliamentary Working Group preparing the text of the new and severely restrictive Religion Law. Among many other restrictions of religious rights (that contradict the country’s own constitution), the law restricts the rights of individuals and organizations to carry out religious activities in public. When asked about the ban on “religious propaganda” in public, the deputy simply answered that in his view there was no need for anyone to preach his or her religion, for example on public transport: “Do people go to the toilet on a bus?” he asked. “No, they go to a toilet. Therefore whoever needs to meet their religious needs should go to a synagogue, mosque or church.” (Source: Forum 18 News from 10

Even as this thesis was being written, the evangelical church in both countries experienced a rising increase in pressure from both their governments and local communities. Thus, in Kyrgyzstan, which is working on a draft of a restrictive religious law, there has been an increase of intolerance and violence towards evangelicals and other non-traditional religious communities, from both local Muslim communities and government officials. For example, in August 2007 agents of the KNB (former KGB) raided the buildings of Grace Protestant church, seized documents and computers, harassed and interrogated church members and charged several people with unspecified “treason.”¹⁵ In June 2008, Forum 18 reported the sad news that the principal of one of the theological colleges in Kyrgyzstan, a Western missionary, was expelled from the country due to his refusal to reveal confidential student files to the national Secret Police.¹⁶

In Kazakhstan, Forum 18 recently reported that the government was frequently raiding church worship services,¹⁷ closing down and threatening to confiscate churches,¹⁸ demanding that church leaders disclose personal information about church members,¹⁹ and imposing large fines on unregistered religious communities.²⁰ Media outlets published stories criticizing evangelicals, depicting them as sects dangerous to society.²¹ Some advocates for religious freedom claim that these stories in the media are sponsored by the

June 2008, “Kazakhstan: Restrictive draft religion law to reach full parliament tomorrow,” http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1141; accessed on 13.06.2008). The rhetoric of the deputy strikingly resembles the attitude of the Soviet government in later years: “religious freedom” is understood as an individual right, to practice one’s faith in private, but not the right to share one’s view with others.

¹⁵ Kyrgyzstan, International Religious Freedom Report 2008, *idem*.

¹⁶ Source: http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1145, accessed on 1 July 2008.

¹⁷ “When is a raid not a raid?” 30 May 2008; http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1137; accessed 30.09.08.

¹⁸ “Nationwide religious property seizures continue”; 20 Aug 2008; http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1174; accessed on 30.09.08.

¹⁹ “Are intrusive questionnaires ‘a simple formality?’” 25.02.08 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1093; accessed on 30.09.08.

²⁰ “Economic war’ against believers continues”; 11 Sept 2008; http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1186; accessed on 30.09.08.

²¹ Thus, on 15 February 2008 a national newspaper published an interview with an anonymous KNB officer who claimed that foreign “sects” were foreign intelligence agents working undercover and equated new Christian and Buddhist organizations with Islamic extremists.

government as a part of its programme “to educate the public about the purported dangers of religious extremism in the country and to lay the groundwork for amendments to the religious law.”²²

Peyrouse’s (2007) analysis of the relationship of Church and State in Central Asia shows that the authorities in those countries *still maintain a Soviet-style classification of religions*. Religions are divided into two categories: the “traditional religions” – that is, Islam designated for Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, the Orthodox church for Russians, the Lutheran Church for Germans, etc; and “sects” such as the evangelical churches and other non-traditional religious minorities. While the “traditional” religious groups are considered to be more or less socially “safe,” the “sects” - particularly those aided by the foreign mission organizations that appeared after perestroika - are viewed as foreign movements that “would threaten social stability and challenge the independence of the republic” (Peyrouse 2007: 114). He points out that such a classification does not rest on any sociological study, but simply “allows authorities to marginalize any community that seeks to extirpate itself from the imposed structure of control” (idem). Peyrouse concludes that Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, that only a few years ago were considered “safe havens of democracy in the region,” currently “considerably restrict the expression of civil society and the undeniable freedom of the press accorded immediately following independence” (idem: 115).

To summarize, the evangelical Church, that appeared in Central Asia in the second part of the 19th century, has never been accepted by society in the same way as happened in the West. It was persecuted by the Orthodox Church under the Russian Empire, severely persecuted by the Soviet government, and, after experiencing a brief period of freedom in the 1990s - is still being persecuted in some Central Asian countries, and is pressurized, discriminated against and marginalised by the governments of the others. Nor has the Church ever been totally accepted by the wider society. Because of government

²² Kazakhstan, International Religious Freedom Report 2008, idem.

propaganda and the often-negative attitude of the more established religions who fear the conversion and loss of even their nominal adherents; and despite their widespread reputation for temperance, healthier marriages and honesty in the workplace, evangelicals are ostracized and are still often perceived as a suspicious and potentially dangerous “sect.”

1.2 THE COLLEGES

Protestant theological education in Central Asia experienced the boom that accompanied the rapid initial growth of the Church after perestroika. However, in trying to describe these educational institutions in the region, the researcher is presented with a major problem: the political, religious and economic situation in these countries is changing so rapidly, that the institutions in question constantly change their training programmes to adapt to these changes. No one can predict whether some of these Colleges will even survive political change in the very near future. Below I describe in more detail four institutions that I included in my research. For the sake of confidentiality, I have labelled the four institutions as “College I” to “College IV.” Colleges “I and II” were in Kyrgyzstan; Colleges “III and IV” – in Kazakhstan.

1.2.1 College I

Training

College I was started in 1997 as an initiative of several expatriate pastors to provide training for local pastors in Kyrgyzstan. From its very inception the institution has had an interdenominational character, currently drawing students from 35 different churches across the evangelical theological spectrum.

Since its inception, the College has developed several training programmes designed to serve a broad spectrum of people within the churches. Firstly, it runs a part-time and full-time Certificate level programme for regular church members in both Kyrgyz and Russian. Secondly, in 2003 it started a one-year programme in Kyrgyz that was enlarged to a two-year programme in 2005. This programme was designed specifically for training people for pastoral ministry in Kyrgyz churches. Finally, the main programme of the College is a three-year fulltime Diploma/Tertiary level programme that runs in Russian. This programme is “more rigorous” academically than the Kyrgyz programme, and is intended for training men and women for “pastoral and other leadership roles in the ministry of the church” (Information for Teachers: 2).

The Institution started with a group of 12 students in 1997. In the spring of 2007 it was training around 60 students, with roughly half in the Russian programme, and the other half in the Kyrgyz programme. As of March 2007, 51 student had graduated from the three-year programme, and 50 from the one-year programme (Background Information: 1).

Educational goals

The College seeks to “provide biblically-based, practically oriented and relationally-applied programs of study for Christians seeking to be pastors, and for those wanting to be more effective Christian leaders in Central Asian society” (Information for Teachers: 1). Initially, the institution sought to train pastors only, however eventually it broadened its scope and decided to include training for other lay ministries in the Church. The principal explained in the interview that the change arose from the broadening vision of the College – they sought to equip not only pastors, but also church members moving into secular professions, so that they would have “a strong Biblical basis for their ethical decisions.” On further prompting, the principal admitted that the decision to broaden the student

constituency was also influenced by the recent decline in church growth and the corresponding lack of people wanting to become pastors.

The principal described the educational philosophy behind their training programmes as “the total formation of people” as opposed to the communication of theological information or just the development of ministry skills. For him, they were trying to achieve such formation by integrating the transfer of relevant Biblical knowledge with practical ministry training and spiritual formation. The first aim was being undertaken by a traditional methodology of delivering lectures, writing papers, and sitting exams. As regards to skills development, their three-year programme included courses in preaching and 6-8 hours a week (extended to 12-14 hours a week during their third year) of supervised ministry practice in local churches, which was supplemented with internships during the summer months. He admitted that the “spiritual formation” component was the hardest to assess and to design learning opportunities for. One of the primary methods of achieving this was through the delivery of a specialized course on spiritual formation, as well as through the provision of designated pastoral helpers from among the staff.

Challenges

When asked about the major challenges his institution was facing, the principal specified two areas of concern. The first and immediate challenge was to make the transition from Western-led staff to national leadership. The institution was planning to transfer its leadership into the hands of national leaders “assisted by expatriates” by 2010. The second challenge was to keep in constant touch with the local churches to “ensure we are serving the Church and not just doing our programme.” The principal felt he was making a substantial effort to try and listen to the local pastors and their views of the current educational needs of the church. However, he felt that despite his efforts to organize a

regular forum for those pastors, there was a lack of consistent interest– often they simply did not turn up for the meetings. He felt that it was of low priority in their busy schedule.

Finally, his concern was for consistency in assessment amidst a multicultural and multi-denominational College staff. The College had “three or four” full-time teachers, with many others coming to teach on a part-time basis. The obvious challenge for consistency in assessment was that these people came “from about ten different countries probably reflecting about fifteen different theologies and about twenty different ways of approaching topics and assessment.” Besides, the College did not have a common language, with many teachers being Korean or English-speaking, and some students speaking Kyrgyz, and others Russian. As part of their efforts, they designed a handbook for teachers that tried to standardize assessment and provide guidelines for approaching theological differences among the students and the staff.

1.2.2 College II

Training

College II is also based in Kyrgyzstan, but in contrast with College I, it is a denominational institution. It was initiated by the leaders of the local [name of denomination], who in 1993 approached one of the largest mainstream [name of denomination] in the US with a request to establish a Bible training college in Central Asia. The College was started in 1996 by American missionaries; as of 2007 it had graduated over 230 students. The current principal is a national, who himself received training at the College, got involved in directing the distance programmes, got pastoral experience, and finally assumed his current role in 2006.

As with many other theological institutions in the region, this College has significantly evolved its training format since its inception. It started by offering a three-year full-time programme, but having graduated three cohorts of students, it changed the format of training in 2004 to a modular set-up, in the form of two-week training sessions with two weeks in between. One of the main reasons for changing the programme was the year-on-year declining number of applicants willing to study full-time.

The College organises its curriculum into four “divisions” - the Bible, Theology, General Education and Practical Theology. The current two-year Diploma programme covers 32 taught subjects, each taught intensively for one week. Those students who have ministry experience can continue their education to the Bachelor of Theology (B.Th) level by covering 32 more subjects, leading to a total of 64. Students without ministry experience are required to do two years of practical ministry after receiving their Diploma, in order to be accepted into the B.Th programme. In contrast to many other theological institutions, this College managed to obtain a teaching license from the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education, and therefore could officially teach and issue diplomas.

Some teaching is done by five local staff, all former students, two of whom were educated to a B.Th level; however, most subjects are taught by foreign teachers. The principal felt that although in the long term he wanted to increase the number of local staff, the diverse mix of local and foreign teachers was a strength of the College. He felt that teachers from different cultures stimulated the students to develop “broader thinking.” Besides, he appreciated the fact that the foreign teachers often had twenty or thirty years of practical ministry experience besides their education, something that the local teachers did not have.

Educational goals

The principal sees the long-term goal of his College as facilitating the development of “high level” theological education in local churches – so that each church would eventually establish its own training programme to teach people the Bible. The College therefore sees its goal as training leaders for these schools. However, in my most recent conversation (11.09.08), he admitted that this was difficult to achieve in practice – there were few people able to take this on, as most of the capable students were busy engaged in pastoral ministry. Most of the new graduates of the College were young and inexperienced, and not yet qualified for teaching.

In regards to their training values, the principal wanted the students to become “spiritually mature.” For him, this term meant more than an intellectual understanding of biblical truth by the individual. It involved his or her transformation by this truth, and his or her ability to apply this truth to the practical outworking of everyday life. “I want our graduates to become mature, resilient and able to withstand anything – people who will be serving God.” He felt that the current modular format of their programme, where the students were alternating two weeks of training with two weeks in their own church, was conducive to the achievement of that goal. Although he felt that College staff did not provide any significant monitoring of the students’ performance during their time spent in church ministry, his hope was that they used the time productively. He noticed, that those students who fully participated in ministry during their study asked “more intelligent” questions in class, and he felt that they were “growing.”

Challenges

For the principal, the chief challenge faced by his College was the lack of students. He felt that other problems the College was facing – such as a lack of funding – were not nearly

as significant. He related the decline in admission to the unwillingness of local pastors to send their people to study, which in turn arose for several reasons. First, many pastors did not understand the importance of solid theological doctrine, feeling that for regular church members the weekly sermons alone were sufficient for their spiritual nourishment. The principal was concerned that such “narrowness” and lack of theological education has already led many people in [name of denomination] circles to construct false doctrines based on poor hermeneutical principles. Second, he felt that some pastors were afraid of potential competition, fearing that the younger leaders might become more educated than themselves. Thirdly, he was concerned that many pastors had a short-term rather than long-term vision for developing leaders in their churches. They would not let the most talented and capable emerging leaders study, because they needed their help in the church. Instead, he felt that some pastors sent to their College church members who were not currently engaged in ministry and were not motivated to do so, hoping perhaps that the College itself would motivate them for ministry. However, in practice such people rarely changed their motivation after graduation.

The principal particularly regretted that his Church in Kyrgyzstan – perhaps because it was very young - had not yet developed “the culture of education” or an awareness of the importance of ministerial training, which he felt was acknowledged in the West, and even in the Ukraine where the [name of denomination] movement had been in existence much longer. In responding to this problem, he tried to adopt a long-term approach – meeting with pastors and educating them about the importance of training. However, he felt it would take a long time for things to change. Another hope was that the good graduates – those who had gone to the College and were currently effective in ministry – would be the best “advertisement” for the College.

In my most recent conversation with him (11.09.2008), the principal reported that for this current academic year they had only received a handful of applications. Because of this

they were considering changing the training format again, this time to an evening programme, and moving the teaching into the four main regions of Kyrgyzstan. He felt that there was still interest in training in the local churches, but because they were no longer growing, they had exhausted the pool of candidates wishing to study full-time, and so training had to become locally based, run as modules and evening classes.

Another strategy the principal was considering was including some “secular” subjects in the curriculum. He felt that in many cases the parents of young Christians did not consider the theological diploma as offering their children a sustainable future. By adding new, secular subjects to the curriculum, he hoped to increase the attractiveness of the diploma, so that – potentially - young graduates could be accepted into the third year of any secular university that would recognize their teaching programme

1.2.3 College III

Training

College III belongs to [name of denomination], one of the largest Protestant denominations in Kazakhstan. It was started at the beginning of the nineties in response to the need to train people for various ministries in the Church. In 1994 it started with a pastoral training programme. Today the College runs five departments, for the training of pastors, missionaries, choir directors, Sunday school teachers, and a Bachelor of Theology (B.Th) department, introduced in 2006. Right from the outset the College adopted a modular course format, running two-week long courses four times a year. The pastoral training programme runs for three years; with two additional years for those students wishing to receive a B.Th degree. As of 2006 the College had graduated over 400 students, including 118 pastors and 50 missionaries.

The College pastoral training programme generally follows a traditional Western theological curriculum, divided into Biblical Studies, Church History, Systematic Theology, Practical Theology and Missiology. However, the College also makes an effort to develop contextual training for ministers in Muslim contexts, having recently introduced courses on Islam. The College serves not only Kazakhstan, but also attracts [name of denomination] students from other Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

Educational goals

The College was founded in order to provide church leaders with “a quality Biblically-based theological education of the [name of denomination] tradition for a more successful and fruitful ministry as pastors, evangelists, Christian educators, missionaries and Sunday school teachers” (College Charter: 1).

I was able to interview the principal and the Academic Dean (both nationals) of the College together. They reported that the overall purpose of the College was the “formation of ministers,” which meant training church leaders for “reaching people for Christ” and helping them to grow as mature “disciples.” They viewed this overall objective as threefold, consisting of transferring academic knowledge, spiritual growth and practical training. “We feel that if we give them academic knowledge alone, we have not fulfilled our purpose,” said the principal. However, as the Dean admitted, “in practice it turns out that we mostly succeed in achieving our academic goals,” rather than the spiritual and practical component. For this reason, he stressed that they asked the churches to send those students who already had a certain level of spiritual maturity.

Challenges

According to the principal and the Dean, one of the main challenges the College was facing was strong opposition from among the senior leadership within the [name of denomination]. There were several regions of Kazakhstan that were reluctant to send their students to the College for training. The principal pointed out that many elderly pastors were not theologically educated themselves as so were suspicious of their younger church members receiving such an education – they felt they were competing with them, asking difficult questions that the pastors could not answer. Some of them viewed theological education itself as “liberal” – although the institution would be considered very conservative theologically by Western standards. For some pastors, the College was “liberal” simply because “some teachers were Americans and Calvinists” ([name of denomination] are traditionally Arminian in their theology).

The principal was addressing this problem by meeting with pastors and educating them about the benefits of theological training. The Academic Dean hoped that it was a matter of time: many leaders of the older generation were emigrating, and there was a steady influx of theologically educated pastors, educating their churches about the benefits of training. A year later, when I interviewed the principal on the phone (22.09.08), he confirmed that the problem was still there and “even getting worse” despite his numerous attempts to build trust with the senior denominational leadership.

Also, in my last interview he pointed out that political opposition to religious minorities in Kazakhstan had started to escalate during the last year, and since then has developed into a major problem for their institution. The College was unexpectedly visited by various officials, including members of the KNB. During this period the government also passed a new law forbidding religious institutions to function without a licence. Since it was practically impossible for religious minorities to obtain one, he viewed this new law as a

definite sign of the government's tightening control over religion. On his understanding, only the Islamic University was licensed, and perhaps the Orthodox college would be given a license too, but not the Protestant schools. He said that several Protestant theological colleges had just been shut down. He felt that this recently increased pressure was the result of the growing influence of Islam on the government, which initially (after perestroika) had been fairly secular and more tolerant towards other religions. At the moment, the government was also trying to make it impossible for the College to receive funding from abroad. He also feared that the government, at its whim, could easily change the laws even more radically and even confiscate buildings from the evangelical training institutions.²³

Although the principal was concerned about what he felt was a real possibility of the government shutting down the College, he remained calm about it. He pointed out that the [name of denomination] Church was no novice to government persecution during Soviet times: "If we are forced to close, we will be educating people anyway." Inspired by the success of the underground cell-church movement in Uzbekistan, he was considering opening up a new department designated for training leaders for small groups. Besides, the staff of the College were discussing the ways to make the College self-sustaining in case the government made it impossible for them to obtain any Western funding.

It is interesting, though, that the main problem that plagued the three other Colleges in my research project – a lack of students – did not affect this College to the same extent.

Although they did experience a certain decline in applications and decided not to admit any new students in 2007-2008 academic year,²⁴ they expected a bigger intake of new students (about seventy) to join them in the following academic year, starting in October

²³ He mentioned that recently their College had been slandered by one of the local TV stations: although the College legally purchased the unused kindergarten building from the local authorities several years ago, the journalist portrayed them as "sectarians" who "stole" the kindergarten from the children.

²⁴ Among the reasons for the decline of students in the last year were the reluctance of some leaders to send their people, the general decline of church growth in the region, and emigration.

2008. In common with the others, the principal of this College felt that many younger people did not see theological education as a good prospect for their financial future and many preferred secular institutions. The principal was considering several ways of addressing this problem, for instance, starting a new programme for training social workers, modernizing some of the old programmes such as transforming the “Sunday school teaching” programme into “Pedagogy,” and the “choir directors” programme into a “Music” programme. Responding to the demand of the local churches, the College was also introducing a new department – preparing people exclusively for a preaching ministry in the church.

1.2.4 College IV

Training

This College was established in Kazakhstan in 1995 by a large international US-based mission agency. Initially its purpose was to train church planters and pastors. The organization had planted numerous churches in Central Asia, and it had made an attempt to provide training at all levels of ministry in these churches. First, there was a basic follow-up of new Christians, carried out in the churches. Secondly, there were church-based discipleship training programmes. Thirdly, there was an extension-training programme – modular schools designed to equip lay church members. Fourthly, there was a full-time intensive residential programme run in two cities. Finally, there was a Masters-level programme. The central one was the Level Four programme - nine months of full-time training; before its closure in 2007 it had graduated over 250 pastors and other Christian leaders. My interviewees were all graduates of that main programme, and about half of them were either enrolled in or graduated from the Masters-level programme of this organization.

However, as with most other institutions, this College witnessed a decline in church growth and a corresponding decline in student admission. As the current principal (a national) admitted, the peak number of applicants was in 2001-2002. After the decline started, the Colleges moved its training into the regions and opened ten satellite schools in four countries of Central Asia. The programme is called “Christian Education in the Regions” and consists of short training modules for leaders and active church members, and is run by instructors coming from the central school in [name of the city].

Educational goals

According to the “[name of the programme] – General Information: 2,” the Level 4 programme espoused a fourfold system of values: “*academics* – a commitment to honour God with our minds”; “*character* – an imitation and zeal to resemble Christ”; “*ministry* – a focus to serve people in a local church,” and “*fellowship* – a desire to get to know other saints and God’s work in their lives.”

Initially, the main goal of the Institution was to train church planters and pastors. However, with the rapidly diminishing number of candidates for full-time study, the College reoriented its programme towards training small group leaders. The principal pointed out that this change did not occur only because of a lack of students, but also reflected the recent general shift in church-planting philosophy in Central Asia. He felt that the initially espoused “traditional” church planting model, where one establishes a hundred-strong church with its members eventually financially supporting their pastor, was “not realistic.” It was time-consuming for leaders, it would potentially lead to their burnout, and was “not viable economically,” while a cell group model²⁵ mitigated all those disadvantages. He felt

²⁵ The cell group model implies a departure from a traditional church structure viewed as one congregational gathering. A cell church consists of small groups of people (normally 6-12), each fully functioning as a little church, conducting their own meetings dedicated to worship, prayer and

very passionate about the cell-group model, viewing it as a paradigm for future church planting in Central Asia. He was particularly inspired by the success of one of their former students (whom I also interviewed), who was able to start a new cell church in Uzbekistan that grew to over a thousand members.

By 2008, the Level 4 programme virtually ceased to exist due to the lack of students. All training was now conducted in short-term seminars in the regional schools. The principal shared that his dream was to see students who would be able to lead, grow and multiply cell groups.

Master of Ministry Programme

Training

About half of my interviewees from this College also participated in the Master of Ministry (M.Min) programme. This programme used the American system of credit hours, running on a modular basis with two modules a year that covered two subjects each. The M.Min programme could be finished in 3,5 years.²⁶

The curriculum of the M.Min programme is divided into three main areas of study: Biblical Studies, Theological Studies and Leadership & Ministry Studies. The M.Min programme was first offered in the middle of the 1990s, but underwent a major conceptual redesign in 2007 in order “to include a stronger contextual component that will allow students to

the study of the Bible. The proponents of this model claim that the advantages of this model include a closer sense of community, distributed leadership (no paid leaders), virtually no costs (there is no building to keep up, no staff to pay), and high resistance to persecution (there are no big gatherings of people as they can meet in members’ apartments). Some cell churches function as part of a bigger church, which might meet regularly for worship where it is politically possible (i.e. in South Korea), or be unable to do so elsewhere (i.e. in China and Uzbekistan).

²⁶ The founding organization was also planning to offer a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies (MA BS) to a select group of students in the future. It would be based on the same courses as the M.Min, but with additional 18 credit hours of New Testament Greek, and it would last for one year longer.

answer questions that are relevant to their specific context” (College Brochure: 6). In 2007 the current Acting Dean of that programme told me that the educational philosophy of the new programme would be based on “social constructivism” and would borrow ideas from contemporary adult educators, such as Jane Vella. The new programme is oriented towards people currently in ministry, who have had some basic theological training. They are to work mostly on their own and report to their supervisor by using Web-based interactive software. The training sessions, that would run three times a year in [name of the city], were to be utilized “for higher level learning through discussions and group interactions” (M.Min Catalogue: 3).

The curriculum includes such interesting subjects such as “Cultural Exegesis,” “Theology for Life and Ministry,” “Advanced Church Growth Strategies” and “Theological Final Project.” The essence of these courses is to train the students to develop biblical theology and ministerial practices in relation to current cultural issues in Central Asia. Thus, the students would be required to conduct research on the cultural characteristics and demographics of their communities, and to work out how best to communicate biblical truths to them. They are to evaluate their ministry and revise their evangelistic, discipleship and church planting strategies. In their final project they will need to develop a “thorough theological answer to one of the most pressing and important questions that people in their ministry context are asking.”²⁷

²⁷ The redesign of the programme was initiated by the previous Dean of the seminary – an American specialist on theological education, who was concerned about the contextual relevance of their curriculum. He put together a team of people to redesign the programme, and thus they decided to make a shift in their educational philosophy. It was interesting to note, that all people in that team were foreigners: when I asked the Acting Dean in May 2007 whether any of the national leaders participated in the redesign, she answered that two of them were invited, but unfortunately did not show up.

Challenges

However, in my subsequent interview on 22.09.08 with the new Dean of the programme (since Summer 2007), he underlined a number of difficulties they had encountered when trying to implement the new programme. First of all, there was a worsening political climate and the tightening of government control on religion in Kazakhstan. Thus, he pointed out that in the spring of 2008 the government required all religious institutions to operate with an educational license. Not wanting to break the law, the organization stopped running their M.Min programme. However, they later realised that as a registered religious organization they could still run small informal seminars, without offering any certification or degrees. The Dean was considering a number of possibilities for moving forward, including relocating the programme out of the country altogether, or else trying to merge with some existing licensed University.

Another challenge in running the programme was that many students struggled with the newly redesigned course because it required them to commit a significant amount of time to independent study. As the Dean said, “they did not understand that it would take 50-60 hours of homework.” He also felt that they did not fully understand what was required of them, or how to do independent research; besides, some students seemed to lack the skills to succeed on the graduate level. As a result, the turnover rate in the programme was high: twenty new students enrolled in it in the last year, but another twenty dropped out of the initial forty-five. The Dean reported that one group of students dropped out because their leader was not willing to allow them time to do their homework. Other students lacked the technology. The staff of the programme also found it difficult to implement their student support function: in part, because some of the regions were politically tense and they hesitated to contact the students by phone or by email, fearing they would attract attention from the secret police. He also pointed out that it was hard to find suitable reading material in the Russian language – there was very little material

written by Asian theologians and sociologists. The Dean concluded that to work successfully, the course had to be redesigned again.

1.3 CONCLUSION

The evangelical church, which appeared in Central Asia in the second part of the 19th century, has always faced serious challenges from wider society, being persecuted first by the Orthodox Church, the Russian Empire and then by the atheistic Soviet government. After perestroika the Church used the brief opportunity of freedom and underwent a short period of dramatic growth, which led to the establishment of numerous institutions for theological and ministerial training by various international missionary organizations.

All four Colleges under scrutiny in this study are currently facing very significant challenges. The main challenge is a declining number of students wishing to enrol. The educators see several reasons for this, linking it to the dramatic societal, economic and political changes that have taken place in society and are affecting the Church. These reasons include the general decline of church growth at the start of the millennium, emigration, the poor financial prospects of ministry and the low value of the theological diploma in a secular job market, as well as the resistance or ignorance of some church leaders in allowing the next generation of leaders to be trained.

Another recent and threatening challenge facing the Colleges is the tightening Soviet-like government control in regards to “non-traditional” religious groups. In both countries restrictive laws on religion are currently being introduced. Such political developments are very likely to make the work of evangelical ministers in both countries even more difficult than now. The government of Kazakhstan has recently introduced a new law prohibiting religious training institutions from functioning without a licence. This is essentially viewed

as a form of ban by the Colleges, as it is almost impossible for them to obtain such a licence as a “non-traditional” religion. The very existence of some of the Colleges is therefore under threat.

The Colleges are therefore under tremendous pressure trying to address those challenges. One College stopped running some of its programmes; another is preparing for a possible shutdown and is planning to continue its training unofficially. At the same time, leaders facing the decline of applications are responding to it by trying to build better relationships with local pastors and by adapting their training programmes to the needs of the local church. Thus, there is a general tendency among the institutions to shift their focus from training church planters and pastors to educating lay people and small group leaders. Two Colleges are moving away from the major cities and bringing their training to the provinces, closer to the churches. Two Colleges are considering introducing more secular subjects to make their programmes more attractive to potential students.

However, adapting the programmes is not easy. The Colleges, having been established by Western missionary organizations, still follow the traditional Western theological education format. The leaders of those Colleges follow the same general guidelines as theological educators elsewhere (see Chapter Two), namely, claiming to offer theological knowledge, the opportunity for developing ministry skills and spiritual formation. And as elsewhere, they seem to be more confident in presenting learning opportunities and assessing the first component, although they all emphasise the importance of the practical and spiritual components of training. The attempt to contextualize learning was undertaken in the M.Min programme of College IV; however, the implementation of the programme encountered significant problems. To sum up, the need to re-evaluate and redesign curricula to respond to pressing current demands has never been greater.

CHAPTER TWO: THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AS PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

In this chapter I will look at the literature on theological education²⁸ relevant to my research. I will survey the literature discussing the relationship of theological education to professional training. The rationale for this research suggests that national leaders are frustrated with the theological education currently offered because they feel it fails to equip the students with the skills for real-life ministry in their churches. This issue has a direct bearing on a major debate concerning theological education: what is the nature of theological education? Should it legitimately be viewed as professional at all? To begin the discussion of the theoretical perspectives underlying my research, I need to address this important issue. I will first provide a brief overview of the main arguments in the debate and then outline my own perspective.

In this chapter I will also underline the unique challenges of ministerial training, and the corresponding challenges of its assessment. I will provide a brief overview of existing assessment methods in theological schools, paying particular attention to the assessment of character formation. I will also examine the literature dealing with graduates' assessment of their training.²⁹ Finally, I will show how this review informs my research.

²⁸ Although "theological education" in its widest sense includes academic theology taught, for instance, in secular universities in a non-faith context, the specialized literature on theological education often uses the term in a more narrow sense, i.e. implying educating people for the ministry in the Church. Although people may study in a seminary without intending to become ordained clergy, normally such training *is* understood as preparing people for leadership roles in Christian ministry. Further clarification needs to be made about my use of the terms "education" and "training." Although elsewhere these terms might be used differently, (for example, with "training" understood as involving in part the actual activity for which one is being trained), they are often used interchangeably in the field of theological education, when it is understood in the narrower, more specialized sense I outlined above. Since it is so used in my research context - in evangelical theological institutions in Central Asia, - I will also use the terms "theological education," "theological training" and "ministerial training" interchangeably in this thesis.

²⁹ For my literature review I covered both general higher education and theological education literature, primarily using ERIC and ATLA Religion databases. I also did an extensive Internet

2.1 CAN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION BE VIEWED AS “PROFESSIONAL”?

Commencing in the early 1980s, there has been much debate in the literature on whether theological education should be regarded as *professional* or not. Thus, while one influential study of professional education (Stark *et al* 1986) includes twelve professional fields, but not theological education, another recent study (Sullivan 2005) does include clergy along with higher education for the preparation of doctors, nurses, lawyers and engineers.

Before discussing this issue, one needs to define *professionalism*. As Hoyle and John (1995) show, despite the best effort of philosophers, sociologists and historians, it remains a contested concept that defies common agreement with regard to its meaning. Discussing several meanings of the term, they pay particular attention to the *functional* and *ideological* aspects commonly discussed in relation to professionalism. The former is given its explicit elaboration in Parsons (1954), who defines a profession by its functional use in society. Thus, Lieberman (1956: 2-4) provides several criteria that distinguish professions from other occupations: professionals provide “a unique, definite and essential social service” with an emphasis on special techniques relevant to their profession, they undergo a long specialized training, they enjoy autonomy and are self-governed, they embrace personal responsibility for their professional actions, and emphasize service to their clients rather than financial gain.

Hoyle and John (1995) also point to the *ideological* aspect of professionalism that has been widely discussed in the literature. Thus, Larson (1977) in his historical study of professions in the UK and US shows that professions use their services to enhance their

search and contacted a number of researchers and institutions involved in theological education in Central Asia, the former Soviet Union, Great Britain and the United States.

own status and power. Chapman in her review of the literature on professionalism emphasizes that descriptions of professionalism normally include “examples of privilege, power and control” (2005: 7). For Jarvis, the issue of control is a part of what defines professions, which are “occupations which seek in some way both the mastery of identifiable body of knowledge and the control of its application in practice” (1983: 22). The autonomy of professions is what enables them to exercise such control, to set their standards for quality, assessment, training and even ethics (Cannell 2003: 30).

Several authors recently published by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in the US and Canada³⁰ view theological education as professional (e.g. Aleshire, 2003; Klimoski, 2005). Thus, Klimoski (2005) defines Christian ministry in professional terms; for him a minister with an M.Div degree³¹ is one who “has mastered a body of expert knowledge, demonstrated proficiency and artistry as a skilled practitioner after lengthy training, is accountable to a code of ethics, and is committed to a lifetime of learning” (2005: 44). A classical defence of theological education as professional is presented by Hough (e.g. 1984, 1985 with Cobb, 1988 with Wheeler) who calls for improvement in the professionalism of graduates, who should graduate from a seminary with:

a higher measure of confidence in their ability to convene good meetings, resolve basic conflicts, preach interesting and nurturing sermons, organize and mobilize people, and carry on the ritual life of the inherited tradition with dignity, spirit and integrity (Hough *et al* 2001: 114).

However, other scholars sharply disagree with categorizing theological training as professional. In his influential monograph on theological education, David Kelsey finds such classification “disastrous” (1992: 162). Supporting the influential critique of a “clerical paradigm” by Farley (1983), Kelsey believes that instead theological schools should train

³⁰ ATS is the largest theological accreditation association in the world; in 2004 it had 251 schools with total enrollment of over 80.000 students (Theological Education, Vol 40(2), 2005: vi).

³¹ The Master of Divinity (M.Div) programme has become a normative degree for people entering professional church ministry in the United States; it is offered now by most seminaries and schools of theology at the major American Universities. Chapman points out, that the M.Div curriculum “attempts to integrate liberal arts and professional learning in order to meet the leadership needs of the church” (Chapman 2006: 6).

students “to seek to understand God more truly” (1992: 15). For him, future ministers are to be trained to think theologically so that they can engage in ministerial functions as theological practices instead of being trained in professional skills that “tend to become outdated fairly quickly as cultural and social changes occur” (1992: 163). He emphasizes that today’s professionals seek to meet specific needs of individual clients, which, for him, is contradictory to the biblically defined nature of ministry. Instead, he insists, seminaries should develop leaders that will help the church to function as a healthy, united community where all members have a responsibility to serve each other. Kelsey fears that instead of valuing a Christian community of service and the pursuit of knowing God, the theological school, viewed as professional, may become focused on training for effective and successful practice for its own sake.

However, as Hough (1984) points out in his criticism of Farley, the study of divinity has always been understood as *professional*; since the rise of the medieval universities, it was one of the three great professions (together with medicine and law). In his view, the primary problem in theological education is not that it is viewed as *professional* education, but that “the notion of what constitutes appropriate professionalism in the church at present is distorted and confused” (Hough 1984: 64-65). In his careful historical analysis of the development of theological education, he shows that with the rise of the “scientific-technical worldview” of the 18th and 19th centuries (or what David Schon (1983) calls “technical rationality”), the seminary started teaching increasingly fragmented and practically irrelevant specialties of “scientific theology” that was designed to be a theoretical base for academic problems in university faculties of religious studies, *not* for problems concerning the ministry of the church. For Hough, therefore, the seminary lost touch with the real issues of the church and needs to rediscover its true purpose of training ministers for the real world.

Klimoski provides another, pragmatic argument for professionalism being a critical element in the assessment of theological education understood as ministerial training. He points out that if ministerial students are not assessed for their professional qualities, then the faculty “can be tempted to tag as unmeasurable all sorts of learning outcomes they would prefer not to consider” (Klimoski 2003: 35-36). He suggests that theological educators need to be confident that their efforts in the seminary prepare a person to exercise ministry leadership at a level of “informed, disciplined skill” that distinguishes such a person from lay ministers in the church (idem: 44). In other words, future church leaders must demonstrate tangible professional qualities in their ministry.

Although I agree with Kelsey’s (1992) warnings, outlined above, I however, see substantial dangers in his model. His proposed model of theological training that concentrates on “seeking to understand God more truly” (1992: 15), is in turn endangered by the possibility of becoming disconnected from the real life of the Church and could thus degenerate into a matter of a purely intellectual theological pursuit. I therefore turn to Banks (1999) for a model of theological education that, while remaining functionally “professional,” mitigates both the dangers of intellectualism on one hand, and of a “clerical paradigm” on the other hand.

Banks starts his thesis by discussing various models of theological education, mainly “classical” (e.g. Farley 1983, Kelsey 1992), and “vocational” (e.g. Hough and Cobb 1985) and then proposes a “missional” model (a similar model endorsed by Harkness 2001). This model, while admitting the importance of both the formational aspect and of professional skills development, emphasizes that effective theological education must be *field-based* and must involve “some measure of doing what is being studied” (Banks 1999: 142). He points out that while the “vocational” model of theological training rightly puts ministry in the centre, it still emphasizes the *intellectual aspect* of ministry preparation at the expense

of reflective practice. For Banks, the unity of theological education is not located in its *goal*, but in its *actual dynamics*:

Truest vision and discernment come to us as we engage in the work of ministry itself and reflect on it, as the example of the apostle Paul and many others so vibrantly demonstrates. And while knowing God truly is the foundation for both of these and for the work of service itself, it is only in and through the serving itself that full knowing of God takes place (Banks 1999: 146).

I believe that in this model Banks addresses the weaknesses of both Kelsey's and Hough's models. Moreover, he shows that this approach would be conducive to the spiritual formation of future ministers, who would not be artificially separated from the context of "real-life" ministry. One could argue that while the "knowledge of God" does come from studying the Scriptures and theological tradition, it happens most effectively when the students operate in a context conducive to their spiritual formation, i.e. being actively involved in and transformed by the living community of faith with all of its human "messiness."

Could then theological education be appropriately labelled as "professional," and if so, in what sense? I believe that Steckel, writing in 1981, still provides a helpful interpretation of the word when used of Christian ministers. He argues that ordained church ministry must be understood as a profession and calls for a more *traditional* rather than a more contemporary usage of the word. First, he rightly points out that the notions of *autonomy* and *public recognition* of the professions that particularly characterize the modern usage of the word, are "awkward and strained" when applied to clergy (Steckel 1981: 378). The clergy are not autonomous in the modern professional sense – it is the church that determines standards for entry into the profession. Chapman in her literature review agrees that unlike in the other professions, there is little unified control over ministry leadership. She shows that although church leadership is normally confirmed via denominational ordination, and the standards of knowledge in theological institutions are

provided by accreditation, such forms of certification are normally *not* required for vocational church ministry (Chapman 2005).

Furthermore, Steckel shows that, although ministers are paid a salary, they do not normally charge fees for their services. Moreover, there is *no clear public need* for clergy in the sense that there is a need for lawyers or doctors. Therefore, these two important contemporary notions of professionalism should not be used as defining characteristics of the ministry profession. Should we then discard the label altogether? Not necessarily. Instead, maintains Steckel, *more traditional characteristics* of professions, such as “integrating fundamental theory and research with skilled application and disciplined reflection” (idem), do apply to ministers. Although it is important to guard against a “distorted” understanding of professionalism in a church ministry, nevertheless, without a proper professional “self-understanding and practice, the ministry is just as threatened by incompetent practice as are other human service endeavors,” maintains Steckel (1981: 377).

Moreover, he proposes that, while ministers can be called professionals in that sense, their profession is marked by several historic symbols that go beyond the professional and express a distinctly *theological* meaning of their occupation, namely, *calling, character and charisma* (understood as “gifts” from the Greek *charismata*). In Steckel’s view, although these three correspond to characteristics in secular professions, nevertheless, in Christian ministry they are distinct by their attribution to God. Thus, *calling* is not simply a dedication to a larger purpose, but “a divine grounding of the ministry” (Steckel 1981: 380).³²

³² The concept of being called by God to one’s profession brings up the discussion of the term “vocation” (deriving from Latin *vocare*, equivalent to Greek *kaleo* meaning “to call”), that received much attention in the literature, but which is outside of the scope of this thesis. One of the most notable contributors to the recent discussion is Douglas Schuurman (e.g., 1994, 2004), who argues that a distinctly Protestant view of vocation has had a profound impact on Western society. Schuurman argues that, according to the Reformers’ (most notably Luther’s, and to the lesser extent, Calvin’s) understanding of the doctrine of vocation, all aspects of one’s life – domestic, economic, political and cultural “were religiously and morally meaningful as divinely given avenues through which persons respond obediently to the ‘call’ of God to serve the neighbor in love”

Character is not simply ethical integrity, but faithfulness – “a fundamental orientation of the minister to Jesus Christ” (idem). *Charisma* goes beyond talents and professional abilities – it denotes spiritual gifts “provided by the very Spirit of God which comforts, guides, enlightens, and inspires the people of God as they struggle to minister faithfully” (idem). Therefore, for Steckel, professional skill “can never make up for their absence” but professional ineptitude “can ... distort or block the full expression of ministry” (Steckel 1981: 381).

I believe that Steckel’s model provides a balanced understanding of the ministry as a distinct profession. While church ministers clearly need to acquire the proper body of theological and practical knowledge for conducting a responsible professional practice, the “spiritual” dimension of the ministerial vocation clearly makes it a distinct profession. Thus, Ballard (2004) calls ministers an “eccentric” (literally “off centre”) profession. Similarly, Pilli (2005) while broadly classifying training for ministry as “professional,” calls for the understanding of it as a *special case* of professional training. She proposes that other professional qualities specifically needed for ministers would include such ones as

a desire to know God; an understanding of the limitation of human possibilities and the need to trust in God’s power ... the ability to see the difference between reasonable human solutions and the possibility of faith; and courage to follow the latter (Pilli 2005: 176).

For the purpose of this thesis I will define theological training as “professional” in the broad and general sense. As Hoyle and John (1995) show, one use of the word “profession” is

(Schuurman 1994: 23). One of the fundamental implications of this doctrine was that all aspects of life were *holy*, not just that of the clergy: for Luther, the occupation of the cobbler was no less holy and valuable than that of the preacher. The Reformers thus rejected the dichotomy of the “Church” and the “world” and conferred an “inherent dignity upon mundane activities” (Schuurman 1994: 25). Schuurman argues, however, that modern secularism and capitalism stripped the meaning of paid work and other aspects of life from their original deep religious and moral connotations: a pragmatic emphasis on short-term objectives and efficiency have obscured “larger moral frames to which vocation relates character and action – the common good, the law of God and of reason, classically understood” (idem: 24). Of course, neither Schuurman nor the Reformers would object that God calls some people for dedicated leadership in the Church. For a full discussion see Schuurman 2004. For a further discussion of the historical development of the concept see Placher 2005; for the discussion of the vocation of a theologian see Hughes 2005.

purely *semantic* – the term has proved to be “particularly stubborn in persisting both as a theoretical concept and as a concept-in-use” (Hoyle and John 1995: 13). In their overview of the term “profession” in a secular setting, they point out that there is no list of criteria that can embrace all professions. In discussing a classic list of such criteria by Lieberman (see above), they conclude that while some professions will meet *all* those criteria, others will meet some but not all the criteria or meet them in part. Therefore, instead of conceptualizing professionalism within a narrow and specific definition, they propose using a *continuum*, at one end of which would be “undoubted” professions and then a whole range of other professions that meet only some of the criteria (Hoyle and John 1995: 5). Church ministers clearly do not meet *all* those criteria, but can be found somewhere along that continuum.

To my mind, the term “professional” when used in a *traditional* sense as outlined by Steckel (1981), provides a practical advantage for the study of theological education in Central Asia, as it reflects the real-life needs of the church. As seen from the quotations of Central Asian leaders (see the Introduction), their main concern is very practical, pertaining to the *vocational relevance* of existing theological training to the needs of the emerging church. At the same time, ministers in the evangelical churches in Central Asia are definitely *not* autonomous in the modern professional sense, and there is no clear public need for their services. In my research I will therefore view theological education as a *special case of professional training*, in which issues of professional autonomy and of the need of the public for this service are irrelevant, and where the “spiritual” or “faith” aspect plays an important role.

2.2 GOALS AND VALUES OF PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

To discuss the assessment of professional training, I first need to briefly discuss its general goals. Chapman (2005) states that professional training seeks to graduate people ready to be competent practitioners, and points out that the current literature divides the educational goal of competency into three main domains: academic/cognitive knowledge, technical/skills ability, and ethical/integrity attitudes (Jarvis 1983, Klimoski 2003; Shulman 1997). She points to Sullivan (2005: 208) who describes the ideal professional education as consisting of three “apprenticeships:” (1) the cognitive, which includes the knowledge base and habits of the mind; (2) the psycho-motor; which is the competent practitioner’s body of skills, with the recognition that they are often tacit; and (3) the affective, meaning the values and attitudes of the professional community.

In the literature on theological education, these three goals of professional training are usually expressed as training for *knowledge*, *skills*, and *character*. Thus, in 2003 Smith and Woods produced a report on learning goals and the assessment of learning in the majority of ATS (Association of Theological Schools) seminaries in the US and Canada teaching a basic ministerial degree. When the schools were asked how they would describe their learning goals, most of them used a similar threefold distinction. They spoke of what someone in the church leadership was *to be*, what he or she was *to know*, and what he or she was *to be able to do* (2003: 22). The researchers pointed out that this pattern was pervasive in all traditions (the ATS schools represent a wide spectrum of Christian traditions, i.e. Catholic, Mainline Protestant, Protestant Evangelical and Orthodox).³³

³³ However, the schools varied greatly in the emphasis they gave to these three goals. Many schools, although believing in the importance of all three, still regarded academic preparation as their chief priority. As Smith and Woods report (2003: 23), some believed that although character formation was fundamentally important for the training of ministers, theological schools could not bear the major responsibility for this task.

Following Sullivan, Chapman (2005) states that these three learning domains are based on the three sets of professional education values: “the values of the academy, the values of professional practice, and the ethical-social values of professional identity” (Sullivan 2005: 28). Each of these three values has been discussed in the recent literature. Below I adopt Chapman’s premise that “the distinctions between these sets of values provide the outline for investigating the professional education goals” (2005: 9). I also follow her in structuring the discussion below.

2.2.1 Values of the academy

Most professions (clergy included) require academic education today. The advantages of the *academy* (i.e. the academic subject-based approach) are in bringing about the systematic and efficient transmission of information, and in its promise of “some guarantee that the knowledge communicated to students is reputable and up-to-date” (Sullivan 2005: 197). However, the *academy* is strongly criticized for its limited value in developing “practical skills and capacity for professional judgment” (Sullivan 2005: 195-198; also Chambers 1997). In his influential monograph on theological education, Farley (1983: 16) blames the academy for being too analytical and specialized, which leads to experiences of theological education “as an atomism of subjects without a clear rationale, end, or unity.”

Thus, in one recent nationwide study of the Episcopal Church in the United States, Dreibelbis and Gortner (2005: 31) summarize clergy frustrations with their academic training: first, the academy imparts declarative knowledge, which is not equivalent to tacit knowledge and tools for action; second, it fails in training them for everyday church activities; third, it can instill idealized role expectations that do not match the real needs and expectations of the congregations. As shown earlier, although in a very different

context, similar concerns are heard in the voices of the Central Asian church leadership.

2.2.2. Values of professional practice

Next, professional education usually includes some form of *professional practice*; e.g. courses on skill development and various forms of supervised internships, which usually follow academic study. As Chapman (2005: 10) points out, the assumption that professional education requires this “linear learning progression” is very common in the literature (Sullivan 2005, Shulman 1997, Stark *et al* 1986). Sullivan describes this process as an “academically controlled apprenticeship: from the academic study of texts and examples, to the observation of practice, to assistance with practice, to highly supervised and monitored practice, to increasingly autonomous practice” (2005: xi). For Chapman (2005), this is ultimately describing a divide between theory and practice in professional education. While the scope of this thesis does not allow a full discussion of this divide, it represents such a major issue in the field that a brief outline of the main issues in both wider professional education, and in theological education in particular, is warranted.

2.2.2.1 Theory-practice divide in professional training

The nature of the relationships between “theory” and “practice” and the ways of connecting the two have long been one of the most fundamental concerns – if not the main concern - for educators in virtually all professional fields. Indeed, as Ryan points out, this issue is “such a common feature of all practice professions it should become part of the definition of a profession” (Ryan 1988: 185). Thus, in the field of education it was Dewey (1938) who pointed to the problem of the divide between “directly experienced situations” and “mental reasoning.” Literature on teacher training addresses this problem extensively (e.g. Fenstermacher and Richardson 1993, Shulman 1987, Baird 1992, Zeichner 1994). Wong (2007) in his recent dissertation provides a review of the literature discussing this issue in

the health disciplines, such as nursing (e.g. Brunk 1995, Carr 1996), occupational therapy (e.g. Louis 1998, Hollis 1991, Hooper 1997), radiotherapy (e.g. Baird 1996), etc.

What is the nature of the divide? In his influential work Donald Schon (1983, 1987) suggests an answer. He looks at such diverse fields as architecture, psychotherapy and administration, and proposes an epistemological distinction between so-called “technical-rational” knowledge, or “espoused theory,” and practical knowledge, that arises from the practice itself by the process of what he calls a “reflection-in-action.” For Schon, *reflective practice* is an answer to this dichotomy – he maintains that it can establish a connection between the academy and actual practice.

Schon’s thesis has had a major influence on the subsequent development of both theory and research in professional practice. However, Moon (2005) in her recent monograph on reflection in professional practice, challenges Schon’s view in several directions. First, she points out that his work is a *theory* that was not based on much empirical research. Second, she maintains that Schon’s construct of “reflection-in-action” may essentially be the same as reflection-*on-action* – that is, it is not a different kind of reflective process from reflection in the more regular sense. Finally, she proposes that “espoused theory” still has some value in guiding practice. She suggests that no real gap exists between theory and practice, and that professionals simply accommodate “theory” into a usable network of knowledge that guides practice, so that eventually it becomes unrecognizable via the accumulation of new knowledge from practice, mentors and other experiences (Moon 2005: 43).³⁴ Moreover, drawing on Ausubel and Robinson (1969), Moon suggests that there is no real epistemological dichotomy between learning from “theory” and from “practice,” rather all learning could be represented as a *continuum*, where some learning

³⁴ Using metaphorical language, Moon suggests that instead of viewing the “espoused knowledge” as a pristine book that one puts on the shelf to never be used, it is more accurate to suggest that a practitioner does refer to that book (Volume A). However, while engaged in practice, he or she effectively writes his or her own book (Volume B), which eventually becomes very different from the first volume.

could happen in the classroom by “reception,” and some in the “real world” by “discovery” (Moon 2005: 115). Similarly, Fenstermacher (1988) challenges Schon’s view and proposes that instead of viewing these as two different kinds of knowledge, there is a need for a better articulation of links between theory and practice.

The debate on the nature of the theory-practice divide continues.³⁵ Meanwhile, Carr (1986) provides a helpful typology that allows us to distinguish between the different ways in which the relationship between theory and practice in the literature are understood. First, there is an “applied science approach,” where theory is developed by “scientific” methods and must be used unidirectionally to guide practice. This approach corresponds to what Schon calls “technical rationality.” Second, there is a “common sense” approach, where the experience acquired in practice forms a base for further practice and is superior to academic “theory.” Thirdly, there is a “practical approach” in which while theory is viewed as a basis for practice, it is viewed as incomplete; therefore practice and theory inform each other in “mutually responsive ways” (Wong 2007). Finally, there is a “critical approach” where all knowledge is understood as shaped by social, cultural and historical influences, and therefore both practice and theory must be evaluated in the light of these influences. As Wong points out, Carr’s classification is very similar to McKeon’s (1952) four conceptions of knowledge, and to Schwab’s (1971) framework of deliberation on teaching practice.

³⁵ Thus, in the field of philosophy of knowledge Stephen Toulmin (1999), drawing upon the late philosopher Wittgenstein (1953) and Russian psychologists Vygotsky (1978) and Luria (1973), calls for reestablishing the primacy of *practice* in any new theory of knowledge and proposes to develop a new *praxiology* in place of the foundationalist theories that have held centre stage in science since Descartes. Toulmin suggests that the very notion of “appealing to theory” is only “one specialized language game,” and that much of the human sciences were misdirected by the effort to achieve universal abstract theoretical structures (Toulmin 2003: 62). Instead, he recommends starting human scientific inquiry from a “humbler” place of “giving accurate descriptions” of human activities (*idem*). Similarly, Brown and Duguid (2001), building on Ryle who maintained that “theorizing” was just “one practice amongst others” (Ryle 1949: 26), insist on the primacy of practice. They argue that, since any professional knowledge has a tacit and unarticulable dimension that can only be reproduced in practice, the circulation of explicit knowledge is only worthwhile if it is accompanied by spreading the practice itself: “Knowledge, in short, runs on rails laid by practice” (Brown and Duguid 2001: 204).

For confessional evangelicals, the Bible and its theological interpretation by the Church serves as a basis for “theory” which all areas of Christian life, professional ministry included, should be based upon. Nevertheless, I suggest that the actual experience and practice of ministers must serve as an important tool to inform ministerial training. Using Carr’s typology, I can therefore classify my approach in this research as a “practical approach,” where - while recognising the fundamental value of “theory” for theological education - I look at the description of the actual practice of the ministers and suggest that it needs to inform the way ministerial training is to be organised.

2.2.2.2 Theory-practice divide in theological education

In the field of theological education a theory-practice split is one of the greatest concerns; for instance, in the US much literature have been written addressing this issue (Barna 1998, Gibbs 2000, Lewis 2000, McNeal 2000). Thus, according to Schaller’s prognosis made in 1994, as the result of theory having little correspondence to the “real world,” by 2018 the seminaries will fail to attract the most competent, gifted and committed students.

Chapman refers to Cherry’s history of the divinity schools which shows “regular but largely unsuccessful attempts to bridge the theory-practice divide as the schools pursued the often conflicting purposes of both the university and the church” (Chapman 2005: 12, see Cherry 1995: 155). She points out that seminaries typically divide departments according to theory-practice categories. As a result, “practical theology” courses are often taught by practitioners from outside the academy, sometimes by those having less academic credentials (*idem*), which results in demoting the teaching of professional skills and judgment to “secondary, “applied” status” (Sullivan 2005: 204, 217). This value system in theological education increases the theory-practice divide.

Kelsey (1993) attributes this divide in theological education to its historic link with the university model, which traditionally required a mastery of theoretical knowledge before

learning practical skills. For him, this divide is ultimately irresolvable since theological schools are trying to adopt two irreconcilable models: the *university* (“Berlin”) model which focuses on academic and professional training, and the *paideia* (“Athens”) model, which focuses on character formation.

Some believe that today this divide is a particular distinction of theological education as compared to other fields of professional education (Cannell 2003). Similarly Hough’s (1984) view is that the problem with theological education runs deeper than simply the “theory versus practice” divide in other professional fields. As discussed earlier, Hough points out that, historically, to remain in the increasingly secularized universities, theology had to demonstrate its “positive scientific character” in the face of the criticism that it was simply dogmatic or ecclesiastical. As a result, theological faculties reoriented their teaching from the concerns of the Church to “scientific theology” and ministerial training lost contact with the professional ministry (Hough 1984: 56). Therefore, for Hough, the problem with theological education is not simply that it is too theoretical, but that it teaches the *wrong theory*, which has little relevance to practical ministry.

One response to the theory-practice divide is the call for a close integration of the two. A need for integration of the academic with purposeful practice and application is expressed by many in professional education today (Sullivan 2005, Shulman 1997). Similarly, a call towards integration of academic knowledge, character formation and effective skills development is voiced by many in theological education. Thus, Banks’ (1999) *missional model* is an attempt to present an educational model that provides such integration. The unifying center of that integration is *theological mission*; this model places the main emphasis on “hands-on *partnership* in ministry based on interpreting the tradition and reflecting on practice with a strong spiritual and communal dimension” (1999: 144). In a recent study Dreibelbis and Gortner (2005: 34) similarly call for an integrated approach, where the content of each model of training (i.e. academic, formational and professional)

would be “informed, critiqued, and reinforced by content from the other two models, framed by context, and focused toward developing competencies.” To develop such a model they first stress the importance of identifying competency strengths and needs of the clergy – a similar approach to the one taken in my own research. In my research I propose that classroom “theory” has to be informed by those capabilities of the ministers that they manifest while performing their actual ministry.

2.2.3. Ethical-social values

Finally, professional education seeks to foster particular *ethical-social values* pertaining to professional attitudes and commitments in the students (e.g. Stark *et al* 1986). Chapman (2005: 13) underlines that the literature discusses the shaping of the student’s professional identity in four areas: the visional, the ethical, the guild, and the learner.

The first area refers to a personal *vision* for, or sense of inner calling to, the particular profession for lifelong vocation (Sullivan 2005: 21). The second is the area of the *ethical*: professionalism “demands a moral commitment to a way of life, perhaps best exemplified by the Hippocratic oath or the ordination vows of the priest” (Jarvis 1983: 127). Thirdly, professional commitments include membership in a particular *guild*. However, the guild mentality presents a particular challenge for evangelical theological education, which holds to the Protestant Reformation doctrine of the “priesthood of all believers.” Kelsey finds the guild mentality in relation to training for ministry to be theologically problematic. He rightly points out that the entire church community is engaged in ministry and worship of God and therefore the stress on separating “professionals” from the “clients” is not appropriate in church leadership (Kelsey 1992: 247). The fourth area of social professional identity is that of the *learner*. Besides continually acquiring new academic knowledge, professionals must also learn from their own experience and reflection on their practice (Shulman 1997;

Sullivan 2005). Cannell (2003: 42) points out that a disposition for continuous learning is important for ministers; she proposes that it can be considered an act of worship as the learner seeks to grow in the knowledge and love of God. However, as she rightly points out, ironically, the Christian ministry is unique compared to other professions in that it has no systematic evaluation of performance and no requirements for continuing education

Having outlined the main domains and values of professional education as it is reflected in the literature, I need to proceed to the discussion of *assessment* in ministerial training.

2.3 ASSESSMENT OF MINISTERIAL TRAINING: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

In order to understand how ministerial training can be improved and made more relevant to practice, one needs to be able to have a framework for assessment of training. Of particular interest is the assessment of the ethical-social values or professional attitudes of ministers, as this is the area where the national church leadership seems to be the most dissatisfied. However, this area also happens to be the most challenging one for assessment.

2.3.1 ATS research

The most significant research in the area of assessment in theological education in the last thirty years has been done by the Association of Theological Schools in the US and Canada (ATS). In this section I will be focusing on the methodologies and findings of some of their studies relevant to my own work, particularly those that explore the challenges in assessing “character formation.”

The ATS’ interest in assessment has particularly grown in the last ten years, as reflected in their journal *Theological Education*, which recently dedicated several issues to it. It is

interesting to note the evolution of the *focus* of assessment that is reflected in the chronology of the issues addressed by the ATS researchers from 1996 to 2006: from institutional self-assessment and student assessment to listening to student voices and finally, turning to the graduates and the congregations.³⁶

In their report on the state of assessment within ATS member schools, Smith and Woods (2003) point to a *crisis of confidence*. They report that there was “a widespread suspicion ... that the assessment of ministerial students generally lacks method or rigor or both, and thus has little meaning or effect” (Smith and Woods 2003: 21). Researchers also observed that while many schools expressed high confidence in conventional practices of academic assessment – examination, research papers, etc., - they had lower confidence in assessment for pastoral competence and character formation. In the first area the most common complaint was the “unevenness of the quality of both supervision and assessment” (idem: 26), insufficient training for field supervisors and serious variations in the quality of the field experience itself. These factors were perceived as undermining the reliability of assessment of students’ ministerial competence.

However, the most serious doubts about the meaningfulness and accuracy of assessment were expressed in the area of spiritual formation. The researchers even commented that the degree of confidence in assessment seemed *independent* of the amount or quality of attention given by a school to this component of ministerial preparation. With a degree of irony they concluded that “if anything, there may be an inverse correlation: faculties in settings with the most experience in this area sometimes show the greatest reserve” (idem: 27). They also reported that in several schools without such extensive programs of

³⁶ Thus, in 1995-1998 the ATS launched a project focusing on eight institutions, called “Models of Assessing Institutional and Educational Effectiveness: The Pilot School Project.” Most projects were concerned with self-evaluation of the institutions; in one case the researchers included some quantitative analysis of the graduates’ opinions. In 2005 new studies were reported. This time several studies were oriented towards listening to the voice of theological students and faculty. It included two interview studies with the students, and one with the recent graduates of ATS Schools. Finally, a recent issue (Supplement to Vol 40: 2005) presented findings of five case studies that addressed the issue of the importance of the local church in theological education.

spiritual formation the faculty worried that although they were expected to make firm judgments about the students' character, in reality their judgments were often based on "skimpy, superficial, and anecdotal evidence" (idem).

It seems that one of the primary reasons theological educators find assessment so challenging relates to the very nature of theological education. Aleshire points to this unique challenge:

We can assess, for example, the ability to match thirty-five dates to the dates of birth of thirty-five historical figures. While I do not want to minimize church history, matching dates to people may not be as central to the work of ministry as the ability pastorally to help grieving parents deal with the death of their child. The second ability is much more difficult to assess than the first (Aleshire 2003: 9).

He summarizes two key problems that theological education presents for assessment: the identification of *outcomes* to be assessed and the *principles for assessing* those outcomes. Due to the specialized nature of theological education, he cautions, higher education assessment specialists do not necessarily have all the answers or appropriate strategies for theological educators.

2.3.2 Challenges of assessing the "heart matters"

The importance of meaningful assessment of "spiritual" or "character formation"³⁷ of students in theological education has received growing attention in the recent literature (Reisz 2003; Mercer 2003; Chapman 2006). However, there are more questions than answers, as well as little research done in that area. Jurkowitz' (2003) review of the assessment literature on higher education suggests that the goal of spiritual formation in theological education poses a unique challenge for designing both assessments and

³⁷ For the purpose of this study I use both terms in a sense commonly understood in theological education literature as referring to the formation and development of one's attitudes, values and motivations in relation to others and oneself (usually "character") and God (usually "spiritual"), as opposed to one's intellectual and psycho-motor abilities or "skills." However, both terms are sometimes used interchangeably or with a considerable overlap in meaning.

learning opportunities. She also points to an important underlying theoretical question that needs to be addressed: “What is the relationship between learning (a concept rooted in psychology) and spiritual formation?” (Jurkowitz 2003: 77). She points out that there is almost no literature which attempts to answer such theoretical questions. In regards to the *methodology* of assessment in this area, Harris (2003) likewise points to the scarcity of research.

Both the importance and difficulty of character/spiritual formation assessment are expressed by many in theological faculties today. Below is a telling quote from one of the seminary professors in Chapman’s recent study (2006: 160):

But what would I want to evaluate? Something that is really crucial to me is: do our M.Div students clearly understand that most things are *heart* matters and what does helping [others] in the process of change look like when those things are *heart* matters . . . And do they have some ideas about what that looks like; for what that process is and how they actually participate in it and assist people in changing? . . . But “heart” meaning in the sense of the whole person – not just emotion—the whole seat of personality. So how do you assess that? For me, if we had a way to assess that, that’s the only thing I want to know; that’s the only thing I want to assess. If they really get that, then I think they’re going to be effective in ministry.

This quotation well represents the key concerns of many theological educators regarding character/spiritual formation: its paramount importance in ministerial training, the need for its adequate assessment, and the inherent difficulties of such assessment. It also illustrates that the prevalent mood among theological educators in regards to the appropriate theoretical grid and methodology of such assessment is one of *confusion*. Indeed, *how* does one measure the matters of the heart?

Recent studies explore another specific problem in this area of assessment. In their review Smith and Woods (2003) observe that even the schools with well-articulated programs of spiritual formation still recognize that deep character problems in students may evade detection; as one of their respondents expressed it, the students may “cooperate to

graduate.” Mercer (2003) points out the same problem. He shows that since many M.Div students are training for denominational ministry, they are often not comfortable with exposing the areas of their lives that are in need of change or growth as they feel it may endanger their future employment, especially since denominational expectations from church leaders are particularly high in the area of personal integrity.

Chapman reports that most professors in her study recognized the limitations of student assessment and stated that the final assessment of their training would be *their alumni leading successful ministries several years after graduation*: “We have to evaluate our graduates after they’ve been in ministry eight or ten years. We just can’t look at it right when they get out” (2006: 167). For these professors the real educational outcome was more than a successful graduation; it was “a lifetime of ministry understanding the gospel and speaking into other people’s lives pastorally” (2006: 183).

Thus, there is a growing consensus among theological educators about the importance of a spiritual/character formation aspect in ministerial training and of the need to assess it. However, they have only begun to address this important issue. There is a vast research gap in this area; there seems to be no theoretical framework for such assessment, and little has been done to develop tangible criteria or methodology for such assessment. Moreover, there are inherent difficulties in such assessment during the years of study. Due to the fear of being rejected by their employers, students may “cooperate to graduate” and refuse to be open about the real struggles they may be going through.

In his manual for developing theological education curriculum, Ford suggests that “the elusiveness of affective goals and objectives and the difficulty in evaluating affective performance are not adequate grounds for avoiding them in an institution’s curriculum design” (Ford 1991: 18). As one of the recommendations of her study, Chapman (2006) suggests that the faculty of her researched seminary should articulate *explicitly the*

learning outcomes in the area of character formation and place them into the curriculum; she suggests this could result in better learning. However, there remains the paramount methodological question raised by Aleshire (2003): *how* does one even define what these outcomes should be?

2.4 LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF THE GRADUATE

2.4.1 Importance of the graduates' feedback

This brings me to an important assumption for this study. Since some of the most significant outcomes of theological education are related to “heart matters” which are elusive, difficult to *assess* and even to *identify*, it seems that an important strategy for their identification would be *to look at the graduates' own perception of what values and attitudes enabled them for effective professional practice*. The graduates of theological institutions who had spent several years in ministry after graduation, could point to those attitudes, which in turn would allow theological training institutions, following Chapman's suggestion (2006), to consider them in their curriculum.

Equally important is to look at their feedback on how they perceive *the influence of their training on those values and attitudes*. I propose that analyzing the graduates' feedback on their training and allowing this feedback to inform and shape educational policies is an important strategy in developing effective ministerial training.

The underlying assumption of listening to graduates' assessment of their training is that feedback is a critical component of both learning and assessment (Diez and Blackwell 2001). Mercer (2003) notes that the value of theological education *may not be assessable* except in terms of actual ministry and therefore suggests the need for further research to look at five and ten-year graduates to discover how their training aided them and how it did

not. He also calls for developing criteria in such an effort which, he claims, could improve the outcomes of theological education even more significantly. He admits the possibility that such research would fail to produce clear results, but insists on its importance, pointing out that without other guidance educators can only rely on their discernment. Harris suggests using assessment feedback from graduates with a key question: “What did you not get or not get enough of in seminary that you need in ministry?” (2003: 133).

Similarly, Dash *et al* (2005) in their analysis of literature from denominational offices and research institutes in the US report a growing consensus that “the first five years” of pastoral ministry, which are a time of transition, stress and new learning, are critical. They argue that, without careful attention to this period even the best seminary curriculum is lost or “wasted” (Dash *et al* 2005: 67-68). In their opinion, theological educators need to have good information from their recent graduates, as it is a reliable way of both finding out how effective they are in the initial years of ministry and making appropriate adjustments in the curriculum.

This concept is supported by the literature on so-called “backward” curriculum design both in wider educational settings (e.g. Wiggins and McTighe 2006), and in the theological education literature (Ford 1991). Thus, Wiggins and McTighe suggest three main stages of “backward” design, namely identifying desired results (outcomes), determining acceptable evidence (assessment), and planning the learning experiences and instruction. Writing in the context of theological education, Ford (1991: 72) recommends that the curriculum designers should determine “experience-based outcomes or competencies.” In his view, designers should ask the practitioners: “What do you *do* in your role in Christian ministry? What has *experience* taught you that you must do well in order to minister effectively?” (idem).

2.4.2 The need to hear the minister of the emerging church

The importance of continuing assessment and re-evaluation of training programmes to better suit the needs of the main stakeholders – in my case, the local churches – seems almost too obvious to mention. Aleshire (2003: 11) rightly draws the attention of theological educators to the importance of not only assessing the students' learning, but the educational programme itself: "It is altogether possible that a student could graduate knowing everything she was taught, and because she was taught all the wrong things, not function thoughtfully or well in ministry." This warning is particularly important since theological programmes in the former Soviet Union are mostly *aping* the standard, well-established Western theological curriculum.

Moreover, the most influential policymaker in the area of evangelical theological education in that part of the world, the Euro-Asian Accrediting Association (EAAA), seems to have made little attempt to take into account what the graduates themselves were actually getting out of the programmes; the main emphasis was being placed on the training programmes achieving some kind of academic recognition. Thus, in 1998, one of the leaders emphasized that the standards for the theological programmes' assessment would not be based on the graduates, but on various aspects of the "academic process," such as "hours in class, testing methods, pages read, organizational stability, organizational legality, office management, program leadership and administration, [and] student activities" (in Elliott 1999b: 51).³⁸

Interestingly, theological colleges in the Third World faced very similar challenges not so long ago; as a result, some of them did re-evaluate and change their curriculum. Thus,

³⁸ An event that might signify a better turn of events in EAAA happened in June 2007, when one of their seminaries hosted a seminar on curriculum design based around "the real goals of the educational institution rather than on imitating existing programmes." One of the participants said: "How much more effective we could have been, had we started developing the curriculum of our school like that ten years ago!" Source: <http://e-aaa.org/news/2007/Programme.html>; accessed on 24 June 2008.

Robert Ferris reports that the international missionary movement addressed the “the inadequacy of western programs for equipping leaders for the Church in the Two-Thirds World” (1990: 20). Ferris reports that ten theological institutions embraced the challenge to renewal and adopted various degrees of modification in their training programmes, primarily towards the development of practical skills and spiritual formation of the students. These institutions included chosen seminaries and Bible colleges *outside of the ATS* and from a wide geographical representation, including India, Nigeria, China, USA, UK, Germany and Canada. One of Ferris’ observations is that in these schools the focus is placed on the *effectiveness of graduates* in ministry, with freedom “to adapt programs and processes to improve graduate effectiveness” (1990: 129). Therefore Ferris recommends ministry training institutions to undertake “a carefully developed outcomes study” that can provide a “stimulating beginning point for faculty, board and constituent church reflection on institutional purposes and programs” (1990: 132).

Thus, there is a distinct call among theological educators to listen to graduates’ voices. Moreover, this assessment strategy seems particularly relevant to the situation in Central Asia where the national church leaders express concerns about the inadequacy of an uncontextualized and uncritical transferral of Western theological curriculum into a very different cultural and social setting. My assumption is that the graduates, who have had the experience of that training *and* have tested it in a real-life ministry context, can provide unique insights into the effectiveness of that training.

2.5 CONCLUSION

Below I will outline the way the reviewed literature informs the conceptual framework of my research. Firstly, the literature shows a current debate on whether theological education can be viewed as professional. Many believe that it can be regarded as a case of professional education and needs to be assessed accordingly. Those who reject this

notion insist that the primary goal of theological education lies elsewhere, for example, in developing capacities for theological reflection. They insist that viewing it as professional leads to a “clerical paradigm” and careerism. Although this caution is valid, a strong case can still be made for the former. Its proponents insist that it is important for ministers to display a certain level of professionalism in their knowledge, skills and attitudes. The church in Central Asia has an urgent need for leaders who are well qualified to handle difficult situations in a rapidly changing environment. The primary agenda of my study is field-driven and pragmatic; the overarching question is: how adequately do existing colleges prepare people for ministry in that region? In what areas does this training succeed? Where does it not succeed? What needs to be done to improve that training?

Thus, in this study I will approach theological education as a *special case of professional training*. Viewing theological education as professional enables me to draw upon the vast literature on professional training outside of theological education, make use of its conceptual and methodological tools, and to make a contribution to that literature.

Secondly, the literature shows that although theological educators generally recognize the importance of character/spiritual formation of the students training for ministry, little research has been done to develop a theoretical framework and criteria for its assessment. The research done so far is anecdotal and confusion regarding the appropriate methodology is widespread. The literature also points out the inherent difficulties in attitude assessment while the students are still in training: through fear of losing prospective jobs the students may “cooperate to graduate” and therefore that assessment would lack reliability.

Thirdly, the literature shows a growing awareness among theological educators of the importance of working closer with the graduates and the local churches and of implementing their input in the design of educational outcomes and institutional

improvement. This “backward” approach seems to be a long-needed strategy for improving theological curricula. This approach fits well with the overall pragmatic agenda of my study: ultimately what matters for the major stakeholders in ministerial training – the local churches - is how well the programme enables the graduates to perform in ministry.

For these reasons a major emphasis of my study will be placed on investigating the graduates’ perceptions of what capabilities and attitudes enabled them to do their ministry, and of the ways they perceive their training as having contributed to these. This approach seems to be of particular importance in researching ministerial training in Central Asia, where little consideration has been given to feedback from the graduates.

CHAPTER THREE: CONCEPTUALIZING THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF MINISTERS

To look at the professional practice of ministers, the attitudes and capabilities that enable them to engage in that practice successfully, one needs an appropriate theoretical lens, or conceptual framework. In this chapter I will look at some of the literature on conceptualizing professional practice. I will first look at the main theoretical concept underlying my research – the concept of *practical knowledge* as researched in the field of professional practice in the UK by Michael Eraut. Secondly, I will look at the widely used way of conceptualizing professional practice – the so-called “competency-based” approach. This approach to ministerial training is increasingly gaining interest in theological education, therefore I will briefly explore its origins, as well as its advantages and common criticisms, particularly in the literature on management and leadership. Thirdly, I will look at two significant attempts to develop a competency-based approach in theological education. Finally, I will show how this literature will inform my study.

3.1 LEARNING FROM PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

As I showed in the previous chapter, my research is based on the assumption that the theory-practice gap could be lessened and professional training improved by first researching existing professional practice. This assumption is supported by both theoretical writings and empirical research in professional knowledge and competence undertaken by Michael Eraut.

In his writings (1994, 2004, 2007 with Hirsh) Eraut suggests that practitioners develop a *different kind of knowledge* to what is taught in formal education. He points out that a similar concept of different kinds of knowledge is something that has not been previously

unknown: thus Oakeshott in 1962, following Aristotle, made a distinction between “technical” and “practical” knowledge. Such differentiation between the two kinds of knowledge is reminiscent of Polanyi’s (1958) concept of “explicit” and “tacit” knowledge, and of Anderson’s (1993) concepts of “declarative” and “procedural” knowledge. Eraut proposes that

Technical knowledge is capable of written codification; but practical knowledge is expressed only in practice and learned only through experience with practice. Some kinds of practical knowledge are uncodifiable in principle (Eraut 1994: 42).

Using this distinction, Eraut points to the common problem of the knowledge development potential of practitioners – due to its largely *tacit* nature it is underutilised. Although practitioners who solve individual problems constantly develop this kind of knowledge, and thus it contributes to their “personal store of experiences,” it remains unavailable to other practitioners as it is “not being codified, published or widely disseminated” (1994: 54). As a result, “there is no cumulative development of knowledge over time” and “the wheel is reinvented many times over” (1994: 54).

Moreover, Eraut maintains that very little is known about learning during the period of initial professional qualification and about subsequent learning: “how and why professionals learn to apply, disregard or modify their initial training immediately after qualification” (1994: 41). But without such knowledge, he insists, “attempts to plan or evaluate professional education are liable to be crude and misdirected” (*idem*).

Understanding practical knowledge is therefore important for the continual improvement of professional practice. However, there are serious difficulties related to the study of practical knowledge. Eraut points out that

... the intellectual problems of attempting to describe, share and develop practical knowledge so that it becomes more widely available are formidable indeed ... Practical knowledge is never tidy, an appropriate language for handling much of it has yet to be developed (1994: 56)

One of the difficulties is that due to the tacit nature of practical knowledge, “experts often cannot explain the nature of their own expertise” (Eraut 1994: 102). He provides examples such as eliciting a particular musical tone, facial expression, creating a piece of art, and so forth – the sorts of knowledge needed for these cannot be fully expressed by means of language and described in writing.

However, he shows that researchers are beginning to explore the possibilities of making practical knowledge more explicit, and therefore “more capable of being disseminated, criticized, codified and developed” (Eraut 1994: 47). For example, he points out that modern recording technology “transformed the nature of reflective self-evaluation and peer-group analysis of professional activities” (idem). He argues that despite the obvious difficulties of describing practical knowledge, attempts to do so should be made:

There will always be questions about authenticity when describing the ongoing thinking of the actor – crowded thoughts cannot be fully remembered, the tendency to reconstruct the logic of events after they happen is part of the way our minds work, quite apart from any possible intent to deceive. But such attempts at explicit portrayal of professional reasoning are important for the further development of professional knowledge” (1994: 47)

At the same time, he cautions that in these efforts one can only go so far, and that some aspects of practical knowledge will remain tacit (Eraut 2008).³⁹

Thus, for Eraut it is important to learn from the practical knowledge of professionals. He points out that practitioners are often engaged in learning without recognising it as such, unless prompted “to reflect on particular types of experience or specific changes in their capabilities” (Eraut with Hirsh 2007: 3). That was the strategy he adopted in his study of engineers, nurses and accountants during their first years of professional practice. His team combined initial observations of people in the workplace with subsequent

³⁹ Lecture given on 21 February 2008 at the Oxford Learning Institute.

interviewing of their trainers and managers.⁴⁰ Eraut (2008)⁴¹ points out that methodologically, prior observation is important, as interviews alone have a tendency to represent not a description of one's practice, but justification of one's actions. I will discuss this point in more detail in my methodology section later on in this thesis.

Thus, in my research I use Eraut's concept of *practical knowledge* as a helpful theoretical tool to look at the professional practice of ministers.

3.2 THE COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH

In the section below I will look at the most common approach to conceptualizing professional expertise – the so-called “competency-based” approach. In the early stages of my research I tried to use one of the competency frameworks to guide my study - Stark's conceptual framework for the study of preservice professional programmes in higher educational institutions (Stark *et al* 1986). However, later on I decided that the use of a more inductive strategy would be more appropriate for my research questions (see Chapter Four of this thesis).

In this section I will discuss current literature on the “competency-based” approach, and the strengths and weaknesses of this way of looking at professional practice. In this review I will refer extensively to the work of researchers at the Centre for Leadership Studies of the University of Exeter, who in the last several years studied the use of this approach in contemporary management (Bolden *et al* 2003; Bolden and Gosling 2006, 2007).

⁴⁰ The LiNEA Project. Available from <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/usie/linea>. Accessed on 20.02.08.

⁴¹ Lecture given on 21 February 2008 at the Oxford Learning Institute.

3.2.1 The history of the competency-based approach to professional practice

Eraut (1998) points out the confusion that exists in the literature with regard to the terms “competence” and “competency.” He observes that the US literature often uses the term “competency” as referring to a specific capability, while “competence” has a more holistic meaning. He shows that some Australian authors define “competencies” as particular attributes, such as knowledge, skills and attitudes, jointly underlying “competence,” or some aspect of successful professional performance (Gonzi *et al* 1993: 5-6). Eraut mentions that other authors make a distinction between “competence” – something that a person is *capable* of doing but what is not necessarily observable, and “performance” – something that can be *observed*. Thus, Messick (1984) in the field of educational psychology, expressed the difference between the two in the following way:

Competence refers to what a person knows and can do under ideal circumstances, whereas performance refers to what is actually done under existing circumstances. Competence embraces the structure of knowledge and abilities, whereas performance subsumes as well the processes of accessing and utilising those structures and a host of affective, motivational, attentional and stylistic factors that influence the ultimate responses. Thus, a student’s competence might not be validly revealed in either classroom performance or test performance because of personal or circumstantial factors that affect behaviour (Messick 1984: 227).

Eraut summarizes that in the usage of the term “competence” (or “competency”) it is important to be clear about why this term is used, for what particular problem in practice, and what theoretical assumptions are made.

Eraut distinguishes between the two main uses of the term in the literature. The first use is a *socially situated one*, or a “common public sense”: defined as “the ability to perform the tasks and roles required to the expected standard,” (Eraut 1998: 129); the term entails a social judgement. In this sense, someone is either “incompetent” or “competent,” or able to do the expected work to the expected standard, although not necessarily to “expert” standard.

The second and, as Eraut believes, dominant meaning of the term in the US and increasingly in the UK, is an *individualistic* one. It derives from the work of McClelland (1976) and his colleagues at McBer and Company, who define the concept of competence in behavioural and performance terms: competence is “an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to effective or superior performance in a job” (Klemp, 1980 as cited in Boyatzis 1982: 21). As Eraut stresses, the term “underlying characteristic” indicates that competencies “are ways of thinking or behaving which generalise across situations and endure for a reasonably long period of time.” (Eraut 1998: 123).

The influential work by Boyatzis (1982), describes such an approach. He reports a major study funded by the American Management Association and undertaken by McBer and Company, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Researchers used a large sample - over 2000 managers in 41 different management jobs in 12 organizations, in an attempt “to determine which characteristics of managers are related to effective performance in a variety of management jobs in a variety of organizations” (1982: 8). As a result of the study, they identified 19 behavioural competencies that related to managerial effectiveness and grouped them into five clusters – goal and action management, leadership, human resource management, the direction of subordinates and a focus on others.

The “competency” approach to professional training underlay the development of the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) system in the UK in the 1970s – early 1980s. West (2004) provides an overview of the rationale and development of the system in the UK as well as offering a critique. He points out that the NVQ system was an attempt by the government to standardize vocational training across all occupations at all levels and to develop “a single system of vocational qualifications” (West 2004: 4). Criticisms of the NVQ approach were legion; West categorizes them into three main groups: “technical,” “moral” and “market” critiques. “Technical” critiques accused the system of deficient

methodology. A notable critic of NVQ Alison Wolf (1995) pointed out that, instead of the originally intended clarity of training outcomes statements, they were becoming more obscure, which required the designers to add more and more clarifying detail, which made those statements too long, increasingly complex and therefore impractical. For her, the problem lay with a fundamentally flawed methodology: “this ever-receding goal of total clarity derives not from bad luck or incompetence, but is actually inherent in the methodology adopted” (Wolf 1995: 55).

The “moral” critics postulated that the whole intent of the system was misjudged educationally, was “fragmented,” characterized by the “behaviorist” lack of emphasis on knowledge and understanding” and that it was “inimical to growth, development and progression in learning” (Hyland 1994: 62). Finally, for others (e.g. Robinson 1996), the NVQ attempt to “nationalize” vocational training failed to produce any significant results in the commercial sense, that many employers were happy with the old system, and that instead the market should take its course.⁴²

Bolden and Gosling point out that despite extensive criticism from both academics and practitioners (summarized in the following section), the competency movement has increased its influence over the years, and now “appears to be fast becoming one of the most dominant models for management and leadership assessment and development in the UK” (Bolden and Gosling 2006: 4).

⁴² The scope of this thesis does not allow for discussing NVQ and its critiques in more detail, particularly since the context is very different from Central Asia, where no attempt has been made to standardize still less nationalize theological education. The next section of this chapter deals with critiques of the “standards” approach by Bolden and Gosling, many of which are similar to the critiques of the NVQ.

3.2.2 Common criticisms of the competency-based approach

Richard Bolden and his colleagues (2003) did an extensive review of leadership theory and competency frameworks to assist the development of the National Occupational Standards in Management and Leadership in the UK. These new standards were intended to serve as the basis for the NVQ awards in management. Since leadership and management correspond to some of the main tasks of the church leadership, there is much to be learned from this research if the “competency” approach is to be applied to ministry training.

In this study Bolden *et al* reviewed several ‘schools’ of leadership theory, such as the “great man” and “trait” theories, behaviourist theories, situational school theories, transactional and transformation theories, and the more recent “dispersed or distributed leadership” theories. They also analysed twenty-six competency frameworks used in various public and private sector organisations.

Having undertaken the analysis of these existing leadership competency frameworks, the researchers found that most of them had a tendency to be “a somewhat moderated version of transformational leadership” (Bolden and Gosling 2004: 4), but upon closer investigation had underlying features of a “great man” theory:

The leader ... is seen to act as an energiser, catalyst and visionary equipped with a set of abilities (communication, problem-solving, people management, decision making, etc.) that can be applied across a diverse range of situations and contexts ... In addition to “soft” skills, the leader is also expected to display excellent information processing, project management, customer service and delivery skills, along with proven business and political acumen. They build partnerships, walk the talk, show incredible drive and enthusiasm, and get things done. Furthermore, the leader demonstrates innovation, creativity and thinks “outside the box.” They are entrepreneurs who identify opportunities – they like to be challenged and they’re prepared to take risks. ... Of interest, too, is the emphasis on the importance of qualities such as honesty, integrity, empathy, trust and valuing diversity. The leader is expected to show a true concern for people that is drawn from a deep level of self-awareness, personal reflection, and emotional intelligence.

The researchers point out that to find such diverse skills, personal qualities and attitudes in one person is obviously unrealistic; such an “almost iconographic” (Bolden and Gosling 2004: 4) (or “almost evangelical” (Bolden *et al* 2003: 37)) picture of a leader faces a number of difficulties. They point out that this picture essentially represented a return to the early “heroic” notions of leadership, which “venerate the individual to the exclusion of the team and organisation.” Secondly, when one attempted to combine attributes from such frameworks, it generated “an unwieldy, almost over-powering list of qualities.” Thirdly, they pointed out that there was little empirical evidence that the “transformational” model of leadership was more effective than its alternatives (Gronn 1995).

Bolden and Gosling (2004) find that the “competency” approach in organisations is generally characterised by a number of common features: “an attempt to isolate and evaluate the qualities required of effective managers and leaders, use of a functional analysis methodology and a rationalist epistemology” (Bolden and Gosling 2004: 3). Thus, they summarise the common critiques of the approach into five areas (*idem*: 2-3):

- 1) It is overly reductionistic. Lester (1994: 28) points out that the approach: “has been extensively criticised for weaknesses in its ability to represent occupations which are characterised by a high degree of uncertainty, unpredictability and discretion, and its arguable tendency – contrary to the aims of the model on which it is based – to atomise work roles rather than represent them holistically.”
- 2) It is overly universalistic. As Bolden and Gosling point out, the statement of the Management Standards Centre “whatever the size of your organization you will find the standards have been written to meet your needs” (MSC website 2003), “implies an assumption that the management standards are equally relevant to managers in small and large organizations, senior or junior positions, different industrial sectors, different situations and facing different challenges. Whilst there may be some evidence to support a set of more generic leadership and management qualities, it would be

foolhardy to expect all situations to demand the same type of leadership response.”

Similarly, Eraut and Hirsh (2007: 11) point out that while much of the literature in the field assumes the generic character of competencies, there is little evidence to support that claim.

- 3) It is traditionalistic. With Lester (1994) they criticise the “manner in which standards may reinforce rather than challenge traditional ways of thinking about management. Their focus on current ‘best practice’ means that they may date quickly and, in effect, represent “driving using the rear view mirror” (Cullen 1992).
- 4) It is behaviouristic. They criticise “the manner in which standards tend to focus on measurable behaviours and outcomes to the exclusion of more subtle qualities, interactions and situational factors. ... the very processes of evidence gathering and assessment demanded by the standards approach may actually inhibit organisational learning and development by promoting a focus on observable behaviours and indicators to the exclusion of less overt aspects such as values, beliefs and relationships” (Bell *et al* 2002)
- 5) It is functionalistic. The approach offers *training* rather than *education*, and therefore represents a “limited and mechanistic approach to education.”

3.2.3 Lack of moral and relational dimensions in common leadership competency frameworks

In their 2006 study Bolden and Gosling admit that, building on the distinction made between the concepts of *management* and *leadership* by Zaleznik (1977) and Kotter (1990), the competency approach in recent years has expanded and incorporated the latter, with the competencies shifting the emphasis “from the mainly technical requirements of specific job roles to the softer inter-personal qualities sought from people at many levels across the organisation” (Bolden and Gosling 2006: 5).

However, they challenge the competency-based approach to leadership for its lack of *moral and emotional* dimensions and its persisting individualistic emphasis. They based their paper on the results of a study in which they undertook a comparative semantic and linguistic analysis of two very different sources: their earlier (Bolden *et al* 2003) review of competency frameworks, and the data from a series of reflective reports from retreats run for managers by the Windsor Leadership Trust in 2001-2004. The latter included the analysis of 38 reports representing the views of 250 practising managers.

They show a significant contrast between the value system underlying the competency frameworks and the values emphasised by the managers in the interviews. While the former primarily emphasised individual skills with a focus on performance and output, the latter stressed above all the moral and relational dimensions of leadership: “the leader makes sense of complexity and uncertainty on the basis of strong moral beliefs and an emotional engagement with others” (Bolden and Gosling 2006: 11). Among the “desirable qualities” of leaders were integrity, moral courage, self-awareness, reflection, empathy, emotional intelligence, humility, respect, trust, clarity of vision, an ability to influence, motivate and inspire. Among the managers’ primary leadership concerns were issues such as:

a genuine personal vision based on self-belief and moral courage; the ethical and social responsibilities of leaders; the importance of self-awareness and reflection; shared, emergent and situational leadership; balancing leadership dilemmas that arise from complex and uncertain situations ... (Bolden and Gosling 2006: 11)

Thus, Bolden and Gosling claim that, while the practising managers viewed their work as “the emotional and moral labour of creating choices and meanings for themselves and others,” competency frameworks “reinforced individualistic practices that dissociate leaders from the relational environment in which they operate and could, arguably, inhibit the emergence of more inclusive and collective forms of leadership” (*idem*: 13).

The researchers admit that supplementing the missing moral, emotional and collective aspects of leadership in the competency frameworks could improve them. However, they caution that "it will still fail to engage the more fundamental issues of power and control" (idem). With Wheatley (2001) they resist the global use of the "American management model," pointing out the difference between the US and UK images of leadership. They argue (Bolden and Gosling 2006) that in the US, where most leadership theory originated, people tend to view a leader as someone "distant" from their followers, while in the UK the style of leaders tends to be more inclusive. They point out that their study supports a shift from an individualistic model of leadership towards more inclusive and relational models, such as "distributed," "collective" and "emergent" leadership.

3.2.4 The potential of the competency-based approach

Both Eraut and Bolden *et al* suggest that such criticisms of the approach do not dismiss it altogether. Instead, they simply caution that it has to be used properly, taking account of the potential pitfalls. Eraut warns that the competencies list should not be treated in a mechanistic way, but suggests that it still has value for both managers and employers who need "some job related behaviours on which to base their discussion of recruitment, performance and development" (Eraut and Hirsh 2007: 10).

Bolden and Gosling (2004: 10) suggest that the competency frameworks can be a useful tool in the following three ways:

- They can offer a powerful means for engaging organisations and the individuals within them in a dialogue about the nature of leadership and management;

- They can offer guidance and examples of good practice that can prove helpful in the development of managers and leaders;
- They can provide a structure that offers a sense of security for both individuals and the organisation as a whole.

They also point out that, although generic frameworks could be a helpful starting point, they still need to be significantly developed and adapted to any *particular organisation*. Even though there could be a degree of similarity between frameworks, there is no “one size fits all model”; the very fact that many organisations invest significant resources in developing their own frameworks provides evidence for that (Bolden and Gosling, 2004: 7). They suggest that generic frameworks should be “tailored for each organisation,” they should be “more accessible” and “more inspirational rather than descriptive” (idem: 10)

Similarly, Eraut and Hirsh (2007) suggest that it is important to clarify the *domain* where the competencies are expected to be exercised. For them, the three key variables characterising the domain for any type or aspect of performance are likely to be the following (*italics mine – I.Sh*):

- The *contexts* in which the performer can currently operate, including likely locations and their salient features
- The *conditions* under which the performer is able to work competently, e.g. degree of supervision, pressure of time, crowdedness, conflicting priorities, availability of resources
- The *situations* which the performer has handled capably, covering such factors as client types and demands, tasks to be tackled, interpersonal events, emergencies etc (Eraut and Hirsh 2007: 11).

Another consideration in developing the competencies frameworks is related to their *length and the level of detail*. Eraut and Hirsh show that during the 1980s and early 1990s “some competence frameworks got very complicated indeed hence totally impractical” (Eraut and Hirsh 2007: 8; also see Wolf 1995). Similarly, Bolden and Gosling in their interviews of managers’ views on the framework (the so-called “functional map”) developed by the Management Standards Centre in 2003, report “an almost universal resistance to the excessive degree of detail provided within individual units” (Bolden and Gosling 2004: 7). Although the framework was generally well received by managers, they felt that because of too much detail it was “unworkable as a practical tool” (idem). They report that a number of organisations preferred to keep the framework to a manageable number of dimensions so it was easier to operationalize (idem).

3.2.5 Towards a framework of “capabilities and attitudes” for ministry training

As the previous discussion shows, despite all its drawbacks, there are still a number of useful aspects to the competency approach. The most important benefit is that it could offer guidance to good ministerial practice and provide some examples of such practice, which would help both churches and theological educators in their consideration of educational outcomes. The absence of such guidance could simply lead to incompetent practice. As Eraut pointedly mentions (1998):

Some opponents of the use of the word ‘competence’ have attempted to rubbish rather than redefine the term by branding it as essentially behaviourist, positivist and modernist; but it is unlikely that they would brand the term ‘incompetence’ in the same way (Eraut 1998: 127).

Besides, it is important to take heed of Klimoski’s (2003) warning: without clear guidelines theological educators will be tempted to ignore some important educational outcomes for ministerial students. I would argue that although this warning is, perhaps, relevant to any field of professional training, the danger is particularly strong in theological education, where some of the outcomes are by their nature character-related or “spiritual” and

intangible, and therefore can be conveniently ignored by educators, as my literature review (see Chapter Two) indicates as happening today.

However, the limitations of the competency approach need to be seriously taken into account. In this thesis I propose a way of conceptualizing ministerial practice both by taking careful account of those criticisms and by expanding the notion of “competence.” As was seen in the literature review above, this term is pregnant with too many established associations; moreover it seems to be too narrow a concept to describe some specific and intangible dimensions of ministry. Instead, I will be using the terminology of “capabilities” and “attitudes” and thus taking better account of the moral, relational and spiritual dimensions of ministry.

3.2.5.1 Capabilities

In his writing Eraut points out that most professions use two kinds of assessment; the first is based on the observation of performance, another on accounts of practice, reports on specific aspects, or discussions about practice (Eraut 1998). Eraut considers the latter as evidence of *capability* and points out that it serves a number of purposes:

It provided evidence of knowledge needed for practice and evidence of professional thinking, both of which added to assessors' confidence that performances observed in one context might be transferable to others. It also provided evidence of a critical approach to practice and a flexible mind, which would enable a person to adapt to change and to become a proponent of change and a creator of new professional knowledge (Eraut 1998: 134).

This leads Eraut to differentiate between the notions of *competence*, which is a socially situated and job referenced concept, and *capability*, which is individually situated, professionally referenced and therefore, transferable to other contexts. Therefore, *professional capability* is a broader concept than job-related *competence*: it includes competence, but goes beyond it. Eraut defines it as “what a person can think or do that is relevant to the work of a particular profession” (Eraut 1998: 135). In his later work, Eraut

expands the definition of capability even further: it includes “personal attributes, skills, knowledge, experience, understanding” (Eraut with Hirsh 2007: 2).⁴³

3.2.5.2 Attitudes, values, beliefs

The importance of less tangible characteristics of professionalism such as attitudes, or moral and relational factors has been increasingly recognized in the literature. Thus, in the influential work of Stark *et al* (1986) professional qualities are categorized into six competencies and five attitudes, namely, professional identity, professional ethics, career marketability, scholarly improvement of the profession and motivation for continued learning.

As the literature review in Chapter Two shows, spiritual and relational aspects of ministerial development are considered to be very important in theological education. In my research I attempt to capture and describe some of these characteristics that ministers exhibited in their professional practice, using the language of “attitudes,” “values” and “beliefs.” Below I will provide a brief overview of these concepts in the literature on social psychology.

Cooper *et al* observe that, “the concept of attitudes has had a long and venerable history in social psychology” (Cooper *et al* 2004: 244). They point out that in the past seven decades there has been a relative similarity in the definition of attitudes in the literature. A typical definition of “an attitude” is given by Petty and Cacioppo (1996: 7): “a general and enduring positive or negative feeling about some person, object, or issue.” Summarizing Thurstone (1928, 1946), an influential scholar in the study of attitude, Mueller (1986) states that an attitude is 1) an affect for or against, 2) an evaluation of, 3) a like or dislike

⁴³ In my thesis I use Eraut’s conceptualization of “capability”; it should therefore not be confused with the popular use of this term coined by Amartya Sen. Sen’s Capability Approach (e.g. Sen 1985, 1993) is a framework concerned with human capability and freedom, issues of poverty, inequality and human development, that was developed most notably by a feminist philosopher Martha Nussbaum, who suggested a list of ten “central human capabilities” (e.g., 2000, 2003). For a Christian perspective on Nussbaum’s list of capabilities see Warner 2002.

of; or 4) a positiveness or negativeness toward a psychological object. Eagly and Chaiken define the term as a “psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor (Eagly and Chaiken 1993: 1). It is a well-researched concept;⁴⁴ besides, there is a significant body of literature of a quantitative tradition towards attitude *measurement* (e.g. Oppenheim 1996, Mueller 1986, Henderson *et al* 1987).

More terminological and conceptual disagreement exists among social psychologists with regard to terms such as *values* and *beliefs*, and their relation to *attitudes*. Mueller (1986) points out that the term *value* is a more difficult concept to define, as it is viewed as a more abstract and higher-order construct than *attitude*, as well as more permanent and resistant to change. One classic definition of *value* was given by anthropologist Klukhohn, who defines the term as “a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable, which influences the selection of available modes, means, and ends of action” (Klukhohn 1965: 395). As Mueller (1986) maintains, values (understood in this sense) *cause* attitudes. However, there is not necessarily a one-on-one relationship between certain values and certain attitudes: a single attitude could be a product of several values, or of a whole set of values. He provides the following example:

If I am shopping for a new car, my value system tells me the relative importance of economy, power, comfort, durability, roominess, safety, style, and so forth. My attitude toward a particular car ... is determined by my hierarchical ordering of these values and by my beliefs regarding the extent to which each car is associated with the fulfilment of each value (Mueller 1986: 5).

While some other theorists also make a conceptual distinction between *values* and *attitudes* (e.g. Rokeach 1968, Rosenberg 1960), others do not. For instance, Eagly and

⁴⁴ As Cooper *et al* (2004) point out, the major development in attitude research has been a relatively recent shift from its initial focus with its *coemphasis on individuals and groups* to a predominant interest in the *individual*. They provide an overview of research and theory on the influence of social groups on individual attitude formation and change (Cooper *et al* 2004). However, in my research I will focus on individuals, so I will be using the term in its traditional sense.

Chaiken view *values* as a special class of certain *attitudes*, i.e. “attitudes towards relatively abstract goals or end states of human existence (e.g. equality, freedom, salvation)” (Eagly and Chaiken 1993: 5).

Instead, these scholars offer a clear distinction between *attitudes* and *beliefs*. For them, drawing on Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), *beliefs* are “associations or linkages that people establish between the attitude object and various attributes” (Eagly and Chaiken 1993: 11). That is, if someone believes that nuclear power plants provide cheap electricity, this belief links their attitude object (the power plant) with a positive attribute. Conversely, if someone believes that nuclear power plants cause nuclear contamination, their belief links that object with a negative attribute. Thus, attitudes are strongly linked with beliefs.⁴⁵

It may be seen from these different conceptualizations that they are similar in the assertion that behind particular attitudes there is a *cognitive conception* (whether it is named *values* or *beliefs*) that drives and defines those attitudes. In my research I will use the terminology of *attitudes and values*, and occasionally, *beliefs*, the latter virtually interchangeably with the former term.

3.2.5.3 Personal knowledge

In his later publications (1997, 1998, and 2007 with Hirsh), Eraut introduces a category of “personal knowledge,” that he defines so broadly that it can be viewed as encompassing both attitudes and capabilities. Eraut and Hirsh define “personal knowledge” as “what individual persons bring to situations that enables them to think, interact and perform” and thus contrast it with “cultural knowledge” (Eraut and Hirsh 2007: 6). For them, personal knowledge incorporates the following:

⁴⁵ For an overview of the models of the relation between attitudes and beliefs (e.g. the expectancy-value model, information integration theory, etc) see Eagly and Chaiken 1993.

- *Codified knowledge* in the form(s) in which the person uses it
- *Know-how* in the form of skills and practices
- *Personal understandings of people and situations*
- *Accumulated memories of cases and episodic events*
- Other aspects of personal *expertise, practical wisdom* and *tacit knowledge*
- *Self-knowledge, attitudes, values* and *emotions*

In my research, I will employ the terminology of “capabilities” and “attitudes” because it helps to maintain the widely accepted distinction in theological education between what ministers can “do” and who they “are” (or the “character/spiritual” aspect). However, I will use also use the term “personal knowledge” as an umbrella term, as it implies “a holistic rather than fragmented approach to knowledge” (Eraut and Hirsh 2007: 6).

3.2.6 The competency-based approach in ministerial training: two examples

In the following section I will look at two major studies that attempted to use the competency-based approach for the improvement of professional training for Christian ministry. Both of these studies were done in the US and were reported in the “Theological Education” journal. These studies have important differences in methodology that are directly related to the above discussion of the competency-based approach.

3.2.5.1 “Profiles of Ministry”

“Profiles of Ministry” was a major longitudinal study conducted by the Association of Theological Schools during the last thirty years. It was reported on several times in the journal “Theological Education” (2006, 41.2, 42.1; 2007, 42.2) as well as in other publications. Lonsway (2006) describes it as follows. It was a study of “thirty-eight characteristics, traits and sensitivities” that clergy and lay respondents (including the

faculty, students and graduates) “judge essential, helpful or likely to impede a successful ministry” in the churches served by the ATS schools (2006: 111). The ultimate goal of the study was the hope that, once desirable qualities for ministers were identified, it would be possible to “estimate the presence of the characteristics in those completing theological studies” (Lonsway 2007: 141-142).

The study consisted mainly of three projects done in 1973-74, 1987-88 and in 2003-04. The researchers used large samples (over 5.000) and quantitative data analysis techniques. The data was collected by surveys. The questionnaires of 440 items grouped in 64 “core clusters” in the first study and 330 items in the following two studies, were sent to participants, who were asked to mark each item (“characteristic”) by 1 to 7 on the Likert scale (ranking from “highly important” to “not applicable”). Then, lists of characteristics that the participants perceived as important for ministry were drawn up.

Although the study produced some interesting results – for instance, the researchers tried to identify the differences in perceptions between clergy and laity, and the differences in perceptions over time between studies, it nevertheless had serious methodological drawbacks. First of all, it was an attempt to build a generic list of competencies across a huge constituency of churches and a wide spectrum of denominations and theological traditions. As was seen in the discussion above, Bolden and Gosling (2004) point out the dangers of such an approach. As they make clear, the numerous problems of the “standards approach” are mainly due to such a generalist methodology: “the method generates a list of competencies from across many individuals in many jobs, the result being an “averaging out across multiple individuals” (Bolden and Gosling 2004: 6). They point to the unrealistic picture that emerges as a result of such a methodology: “imagine if a similar technique was used to determine the characteristics of the ‘lovable man’: he’d be caring, strong, gentle, attractive, kind, rich, etc. – in effect an unlikely, if not impossible, combination!” (idem: 6).

A strong criticism of this study's methodology comes from theological educators Dreibelbis and Gortner (2005). They point out that the study essentially produced a "wish list" of various stakeholders. The methodology employed in the study resulted in not only the danger of creating a "heroic" image of a minister possessing impossible qualities, but also the danger that those qualities would be *contradictory*:

The wish lists generated by laity, clergy, or theologians can produce an impossible and internally inconsistent set of ideals, for instance, desires for pastors of a specific age and lifestyle (forty, married, children) who are innovative while responsive to congregational concerns, entrepreneurial without making any changes in congregational life, with solid knowledge of both specific religious traditions and contemporary cultures, and love of people to the point of significant self-sacrifice (Dreibelbis and Gortner 2005: 35).

Dreibelbis and Gortner warn that the contemporary "competency" language could simply be used by theological educators as a "buzzword" that would allow them an opportunity "to reify their set assumptions and habits." In their opinion, the "Profiles of Ministry" study produced a list of qualities that simply "restated the shared religious institutional values of the theological educators, clergy, judicatory officers, and seminarians who generated the list" (idem: 36). They argue that such studies

cloud rather than clarify our judgment of competencies by focusing on generalized opinions and platonic ideals rather than experiences and lived behaviors and can end up reiterating unconscious, internally inconsistent, systemwide assumptions about religious leadership that, as other researchers have already found, hamper clergy development (idem).

Such criticism is entirely warranted.

3.2.5.2 "Toward a Higher Quality of Christian Ministry"

As the quotation above indicates, Dreibelbis and Gortner (2005) suggest that researchers need to focus on *exploring the competencies used by ministers in actual practice*. Eraut and Hirsh, who look at other professional fields, would support this suggestion. They argue that, if there is a clear method of developing competence frameworks, "it combines a top

down view of business needs with analysis of the behaviours shown in the job by people seen as being good performers” (Eraut and Hirsh 2007: 11). Dreibelbis and Gortner encourage the seminaries to develop competency-oriented models of education in which competencies are identified as “actions rooted in knowledge, character and skill contributing to positive outcomes in a congregational context” – which are for them (emphasis theirs) “the *ultimate testing grounds* of theological disciplines.” (Dreibelbis and Gortner 2005: 26).

Dreibelbis and Gortner (2005) have reported one such study themselves. In this study they listen to the voices of graduates and implement necessary changes in the curriculum in one seminary. The researchers undertook a research project, “Toward a Higher Quality of Christian Ministry,” a nationwide study in the Episcopal Church of the US conducted in 1993-2003, aiming to learn directly from clergy the practices, habits, and dispositions that contributed to effective ministry. They asked the following research questions: What do pastoral leaders say about their educational preparation for ministry? What are areas of relative strength and weakness in clergy competencies? What are the implications of these for the revision of the seminary curriculum?

As the first step of their study, the researchers conducted structured interviews with 54 congregational leaders cross-nominated as “effective,” and with 12 leaders cross-nominated as “struggling.” They asked them about their early perceptions of people and situations in their parishes, their decision-making processes, situations of conflict, their use of creativity, seminary education, mentor and protégé experience, articulation of a theology of ministry appropriate to their setting, and patterns of communication with and within their congregations. They also conducted shorter interviews with their church and community members. Using the results of these interviews and other published instruments, they constructed a survey and sent it to 1500 Episcopal priests.

They found that clergy reported a lack of skill in areas such as making or managing effective decision processes, negotiating and resolving conflict, managing personal anxiety and fear of opposition, developing strong lay leadership, and networking and organizing within the broader community outside congregations (idem: 44). The researchers report that as a result of these studies there was significant revision of their seminary M.Div curriculum towards a more integrated training model. The faculty also decided to specifically address competency deficits in congregational leadership by creating a specialized Doctor of Ministry programme for ordained clergy who had been practitioners for several years, where the students are also trained in how to develop skills for effective congregational change. However, researchers point out that their institution “has only begun to gather the fruits of disciplined research of congregations and contexts of ministry and to wrestle with the best ways to bring academic content and contextual experience together” (idem: 47).

3.3 THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THIS STUDY

In this section I will show how the literature reviewed above informs my study.

I based my research on the assumption that a careful analysis of professional practice is important for the improvement of training for that practice. As Eraut shows, a large part of what practitioners do refers to the domain of “practical knowledge” rather than “technical” knowledge. Because practical knowledge is difficult to codify and because it is context-specific,⁴⁶ training institutions are often out of touch in this respect. As I showed in the section on the rationale of my study, this certainly seems to be the case in Central Asia where evangelical ministerial training is in its infancy. In order to make training more relevant to practice, one needs to tap into the pool of practical knowledge of ministers in

⁴⁶ The context-specific aspect of practical knowledge is related to the broader issue of “transfer of knowledge” discussed elsewhere in the literature (e.g, Eraut 2004, Detterman 1993, Beach 2003).

the region, that is, to analyze their existing professional practice. In my research I will attempt to look at that practice, describe some aspects of the ministers' practical knowledge, and then look at the way they used, changed or dismissed their training.

To describe the graduates' practical knowledge, one needs a conceptual framework. One of the most popular and practical ways of describing professional practice is a "competency-based" approach. Bolden and Gosling summarise various criticisms of the approach, namely, its reductionism, functionalism, traditionalism, behaviourism and universalism. However, despite those criticisms, if carefully used, the competency-based approach still has important advantages. For instance, in the workplace it could offer guidance as an example of good practice, as well as structure and a sense of security. In the words of Bolden and Gosling, instead of attempting to apply the approach "deductively to assess, select and measure leaders" it could be used "inductively to describe effective leadership practice and stimulate debate" (Bolden and Gosling 2004: 2).

This is the approach I am taking in my research. Instead of using some pre-existing generic competency framework – the approach I tried to use in my early thinking - I decided to do a study of ministerial performance and derive such a framework inductively. I propose that in this way the resulting framework would be an attempt to conceptualize and represent some of the "practical knowledge" of the ministers. Developed in such a way, the framework could potentially be used as a tool for designing the curriculum of the ministerial training institutions in question.

One of the major criticisms of the competency-based approach is the attempt to apply one framework universally – the "one size fits all" approach. In congruence with the suggestions made above by Eraut and Bolden, I will attempt to develop a *context-specific* framework – it will describe the capabilities and attitudes of the graduates from four colleges in the same geographic region, sharing a similar theological tradition.

In building such a framework, I will be using the language of “capabilities.” Instead of focusing on “hard” professional competencies and behaviours only, I will be looking at the underlying decision-making processes that lay behind the particular actions, paying particular attention to how the participants themselves understood what enabled them to deal with problems. Thus, instead of using the language of “competencies” that is pregnant with associations, I will make use of Eraut’s term “capability,” which is a broader term, and implies “personal attributes, skills, knowledge, experience, understanding” (Eraut and Hirsh 2007: 2).

I will also seek to explore the participants’ “attitudes” and “values” that enabled them to deal with professional problems. As Bolden and Gosling show above, moral and relational factors are deemed to be increasingly important in the professional exercise of leadership. Similarly, when talking about what individuals bring into situations, Eraut and Hirsh use a helpful and encompassing concept of “personal knowledge” that includes elements such as “personal understanding of people and situations,” “personal expertise,” “practical wisdom,” “self-knowledge, attitudes, values and emotions” (Eraut and Hirsh 2007: 6). Such a broad definition could offer a more holistic perspective in understanding professional practice. It resonates with Dreibelbis and Gortner’s (2005: 26) broad definition of ministerial “competencies” as “actions rooted in knowledge, character and skill contributing to positive outcomes in a congregational context.” As I showed in the previous chapter, issues related to “character/spiritual formation” in ministerial training have been at the apex of concern for theological educators, for the Church in general, and for the church in Central Asia in particular.

Therefore, using Eraut's terminology,⁴⁷ in this research I will be looking at several aspects of the graduates' "personal knowledge."

I hope that my research will provide the training institutions in question with an analysis of the qualities that enabled the ministers to conduct their professional practice effectively. It will also provide them with an analysis of the ministers' feedback on how they perceived the role of their training in the formation of these qualities. I do not claim that it will be a definitive generic framework for that field, but hope that it will provide a starting point to stimulate discussion among theological educators in Central Asia about some of the desired training outcomes. In view of the literature reviewed above, I suggest that looking at actual practice provides a better reference point for training curriculum development, rather than an institutional "wish list," a traditional Western theological curriculum, or some other standard framework developed in a different cultural and social context.

⁴⁷ Although I extensively borrow Michael Eraut's concepts and terminology, such as his concepts of practical and personal knowledge, competency and capability, I use them heuristically and I do not use his other conceptual developments, such as "knowledge maps" (Eraut 1996), or "learning trajectories" (e.g., Eraut and Hirsh 2007; the lecture given on 21 February 2008 at the Oxford Learning Institute).

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this chapter I will present my research questions, research strategy, description of data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

The previous chapters show that many in theological education agree that the ultimate value of a ministerial training programme cannot be assessed without listening to the voices of the graduates. In this study I will take an approach similar to that of Dreibelbis and Gortner (2005), although on a smaller scale, and without the quantitative element. Firstly, I wanted to investigate what the problems were that the graduates had to deal with in their ministry, and how they were dealing with them. Next, I wanted to look at how the ministers described their professional practice in order to identify the capabilities they needed to have in order to solve their problems effectively. Finally, I sought to analyze how in retrospect the graduates perceived the influence of their training on their ability to deal with those problems. To summarize, in my study I attempted to answer the following questions:

1) What problems do the graduates encounter in their professional practice and what enables them to deal with these problems?

- What problems do the graduates encounter?
- How do they deal with them?
- What capabilities do the graduates use in the process of dealing with those problems?

2) In what ways does their training contribute to their ability to deal with these problems?

- In what respects did the training succeed?
- In what respects did the training fail and need to be improved?

To answer these research questions, I have studied the perceptions of graduates in ministry. I conducted in-depth interviews with forty graduates of four major theological institutions in Central Asia, supplementing this with interviews with the principal of each college, as well as by reviewing the documents which described their training.

4.2 STRATEGY OF INQUIRY

The strategy of inquiry for my research is a qualitative one, with a primary emphasis on in-depth semi-structured interviewing of the graduates of theological colleges. I maintain that a qualitative strategy was preferable to a quantitative one due to the nature of the inquiry, which is essentially an attempt to attain an in-depth understanding of the values, attitudes and capabilities underlying effective ministerial practice, which is in itself “more like art than technical skills” (Aleshire 2003: 10). In this research I attempt to get beneath the surface of the graduates’ experiences in their current ministry and past training. As Miles and Huberman point out (1994: 1):

... the findings from qualitative studies have a quality of “undeniability.” Words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to a reader – another researcher, a policymaker, a practitioner – than pages of summarized numbers.

Thus, the use of in-depth interviews as the main instrument of inquiry was preferable due to the nature of my quest – getting the graduate to “reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study” (Seidman 1998: 9). Although Eraut (2008)⁴⁸ recommends

⁴⁸ Lecture given on 21 February 2008 at the Oxford Learning Institute.

using mixture of observation and interviewing for researching professional practice, the use of observation was beyond my capabilities as a single person pursuing a doctoral study in two remote countries.

I had the option of pursuing a more quantitative approach, based on collecting data produced by questionnaires and surveys. However, such an approach was likely to encounter several substantial obstacles to obtain the data needed for my inquiry. First, a quantitative approach was unlikely to elicit in-depth perceptions from the participants, as I was interested in obtaining. In my personal experience, Central Asians may not fully entrust their inner thoughts and feelings to paper – filling in questionnaires is viewed as an impersonal exercise. Being myself a Tatar (one of the major Turkic ethnic groups widespread in Central Asia), I knew I was much more likely to receive open and honest opinions in a conversational context. This assumption was confirmed in my pilot interviews. Indeed, my interviewees were often willing to spend a whole day drinking tea and talking to me. Secondly, the survey approach was more likely to result in a positive bias, given the Eastern cultural tendency to be “polite” and to give the “right” answers to questions when presented in a written, and thus perceived as “bureaucratic,” form. Finally, if I were to conduct a larger-scale survey, it would have been physically difficult for one person to access many of the locations, as many church leaders in Central Asia live in rural areas, hard to access, with no Internet access or even a reliable mail service. Therefore, mailing surveys would very likely have produced a low response rate.

Finally, why focus on interviewing graduates? The primary goal of my research was to elicit the graduates’ own understanding of their professional practice and of the impact of their training. As several researchers discussed in Chapter Two suggest (e.g. Mercer 2003, Harris 2003, Dash *et al* 2005), feedback from recent graduates who transfer their learning into the ministry is vitally important for the continual improvement of theological

training. Ford (1991) advises that the development of the theological curriculum should take account of the outcomes, based on the experience of the practitioners. They are the primary recipients of the training and are in a unique position to comment on it. However, there are only a few studies that actually report such efforts, and I hope that my study will begin to fill in that gap.

Nevertheless, one limitation of such an approach is that it provides a point of view of only one body of stakeholders in theological education. To have a fuller picture of how current theological education could better serve the Church, it is important to complement it by studies of the voice of the congregations – how they perceive their pastors serving them - of the denominational leadership, and of the theological institutions themselves.

Again, given the practical constraints of being one person doing a doctoral research project, I had to focus my research and to make choices on what I could and could not realistically achieve. Another way to focus my research would have been to do a case study – to concentrate on one institution only, to interview all the major stakeholders, and possibly complement it with observations. However, since evangelical theological education in Central Asia is a very recent and virtually unresearched phenomenon, I decided to adopt a “broad brush” approach, and to concentrate on one body of stakeholders across several institutions.⁴⁹

4.3 THE CREDIBILITY OF THE RESEARCHER

As a qualitative researcher, I play a vital role in how I approach the research topic, data collection, and how I interpret the data. Contrary to the “scientific positivism” that underlines much of the quantitative research, qualitative researchers largely reject the idea that social research can be carried out “in some autonomous realm that is insulated from the wider

⁴⁹ I will discuss the limitations of this study and the potential for future research in more detail in a separate section of my final chapter.

society and from the particular biography of the researcher, in such a way that its findings can be unaffected by social processes and personal characteristics” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 16). Qualitative researchers thus need to practice “reflexivity” or make explicit one’s biases, presuppositions and personal interest in the topic:

... it is essential that we attempt to understand the subjectivities through which our research materials are produced. When doing research this means being aware of how our own experiences, knowledge and stand-points inform our behaviour with and interpretation of our informants (Pink 2004: 397).

By practicing reflexivity, therefore, the researcher “relinquishes the ‘God’s-eye view’ and reveals his or her work as historically, culturally, and personally situated” (Gergen and Gergen 2000: 1028). Since my perspectives inevitably influence the world that I am trying to describe, it is important for me to acknowledge them. In this section I will describe my background as it relates to the topic of this study, my personal interest in the topic, relationships with the Colleges chosen, and how I approached the interviewees and developed rapport and trust with them.

4.3.1 Personal background

I have a strong personal interest in researching theological education in Central Asia, since I have been a participant both in the great ideological shift that took place after the collapse of the atheistic empire, and in the development of the emerging church and ministerial training in the region. Although I was born in a secular Muslim home, I grew up ideologically within the Soviet schooling system and was a convinced atheist. However, having witnessed perestroika and the collapse of the old ideology, I found myself on a spiritual journey, searching for meaning in life. After several years on this journey, in 1993 I embraced Christianity in its evangelical Protestant tradition.

I then began ministerial training at St Petersburg, in one of the first evangelical theological Colleges in Russia. While at the College, I became particularly interested in the spiritual and practical dimensions of ministerial training. However, I found that my College, which followed a traditional Western theological curriculum, was mostly oriented towards the transfer of "head knowledge." This prompted me even further to the study of spiritual growth, which became one of my main interests in life.

After graduation I became part of a team that started a new church in Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, and eventually became pastor of that church. Thus I had first-hand experience of trying to transfer my theological training into the workplace, and both successful and frustrating experiences in so doing. During those years of active ministry, I also did a part-time Masters' degree in Theology at a UK university, studying the topic of discipleship in the New Testament.

In 1999 I founded a new ministry training College in Kazan. For the next five years I worked as the principal and a lecturer in that College. From the very foundation of the College, I was looking for ways to integrate aspects of practical and spiritual development into training in a holistic way.

Virtually since the foundation of the College, I got involved in dialogue with leaders of the emerging church in Central Asia. For several years our College educated a number of students from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, which gave me exposure to Central Asia. Tatarstan, although part of Russia, shares its roots of a Turkic-based language as well as a common Islamic religion and a similar cultural heritage with other Turkic-speaking nations of Central Asia. Since 1999 I have been an active participant at an annual conference bringing together church leaders from Central Asia. Since that time, I have been in close contact with both church leaders and theological educators in that

region. The struggles faced by evangelical theological education in Central Asia prompted me to do this research project at the University of Oxford.

Because of my previous experiences and observations of theological education in the former Soviet Union, I approached my research with two “hunches” - that the majority of the students would be dissatisfied both with their spiritual formation and with the practical aspects of their training. However, as I will show in my conclusions, my research proved that I was at least partly incorrect in both assumptions.

4.3 2 Building trust with the participants

Rubin and Rubin (2005) emphasise the importance of building trust with the interviewees in obtaining reliable data in qualitative interviewing. They maintain that, among other factors, sharing a common background and relevant job experiences with the interviewees makes them “more confident that you will understand their answers” (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 92). I certainly found this to be true in my research experience. My multiple commonalities with my interviewees enabled me both to get access to the research sites, and to establish very good rapport with my participants.

My identity as a fellow theological educator has helped enormously. Although I had never been in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan previously and had not known the principals personally, I was able to make a good connection with them. After I contacted them and introduced myself, the principals of those institutions were very keen to work with me, and two of them expressed their excitement about the potential usefulness of my research for the development of theological education in Central Asia. All were extremely cooperative; one principal even housed me with another faculty member, another principal in his College. The principals gave me full access to their Colleges, showed me around the sites,

made key educational documents available to me,⁵⁰ and helped me to locate many of their graduates. We were able to connect as colleagues and that enabled them to share their concerns and successes with me. In College I I was invited to give a lecture and to address the students during morning chapel. In College III I was invited to give a seminar to the faculty, and subsequently was invited to come as a visiting lecturer.

While my identity as a fellow educator gave me access to the institutions, my other identities – as a fellow Turkic-background believer, a former pastor, and a former graduate of a theological college - helped me enormously to establish trust with the graduates. Initially some of them were somewhat timid, viewing me as an “important researcher from Oxford.” However, as soon as I identified myself as a “Tatar pastor,” people started smiling and I was quickly able to build rapport with them. They perceived me as a fellow believer who had accepted Christianity from a Turkic background, and therefore felt we had much in common. Besides, there was virtually no language barrier, which is deemed to be an influential factor in qualitative interviewing (e.g. Patton 1990: 337). Although most of my interviewees were not ethnically Russian, they were fluent in Russian, as it is still a commonly spoken language – one of the legacies of the Soviet Union. I only had to use an interpreter once, when interviewing an elderly Kazakh man.

Another strategy I adopted in my interviews in order to build trust with the participants, was sharing an appropriate amount of my own experience. Aston (2001) points out the importance of mutual openness in qualitative interviewing, saying that “a certain amount of disclosure is essential ... It facilitates a sense of trust and mutuality and it increases the comfort level of the narrator” (Aston 2001: 147). Rubin and Rubin maintain that since the interviewees make themselves vulnerable by exposing their feelings, it is also ethically responsible for a researcher to show reciprocity (Rubin and Rubin 2005: 83). Thus, I started the conversations by introducing myself, and they often inquired on “how the

⁵⁰ E.g., descriptions of their history, training philosophy, guidelines for teachers, and the curriculum.

Church in Tatarstan was,” which allowed us to have an informal conversation and to “break the ice.” Sometimes, when introducing more personal questions, I started by saying that “leaders often have to deal with personal problems in ministry – when I was a pastor, I had to deal with quite a few! What sort of personal problems do you have to deal with in your ministry?”

During the interviews I often reminded the participants that I was not after the “correct answers,” but was genuinely interested in hearing their personal perspectives. I felt that the participants soon perceived me as “one of them” and shared with me on a deep level. I used an interview protocol (see Appendix II) as a basic guide to cover several areas I was interested in, but often used probing follow-up questions that led to in-depth, sincere and sometimes poignant conversations between us as two colleagues in ministry. Only in one case I did I feel a lack of rapport with an interviewee, and felt that his answers were quite rigid and formal. In a few cases after an interview, I spent some private time with interviewees and had an opportunity to help some of them by sharing my own pastoral experience and by preaching once in a local church.

4.4 DATA COLLECTION

In this section I will describe the process of collecting the data, the choices I made in that process and the reasons for these choices. I will describe the pilot study, the revision of my project after the pilot, constructing the interview schedule, choosing my research sites and participants, the actual process of data collection, the collection of supplementary data and how I recorded my data.

4.4.1 The Pilot

A pilot study is essentially “a try-out of what you propose so its feasibility can be checked” (Robson 2002: 185). The pilot helps researchers “to refine their data collection plans with respect to both the content of the data and the procedures to be followed” (Yin 1994: 74). My primary purpose in conducting a pilot study was to test my initial research instrument – two interview protocols developed using Stark *et al*'s (1986) framework of professional competencies and attitudes.

I did my pilot in August and September of 2006 during a trip to Tatarstan, Russia. I chose this semi-autonomous republic in Russia as a research site for two reasons. First, Tatarstan has an ethos similar to Central Asian countries. Although it is a part of Russia, its ethnic majority are Tatars – a nation with its own language of Turkic origin, and a distinct cultural and religious identity, with Islam as the dominant religion – characteristics that the region shares with both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Secondly, Tatarstan was a familiar and convenient research site for me, being my place of residence; therefore, this helped me with getting access to my participants.

I chose a sample of four pastors in Tatarstan, who had graduated from three different theological colleges in Russia. All those pastors satisfied my basic criteria: they had graduated from their institutions several years prior to the time of the study, and since then had been actively involved in pastoral ministry. I obtained a maximum variability sample in regards of both geographical locations and the sizes of their congregations:

- a large urban church in the city of N (\approx 100 in attendance)
- a middle-sized urban church in the city of K (\approx 40 in attendance)
- a small urban church in the city of K (\approx 10 in attendance)
- a small rural church in a small town of B (\approx 8 in attendance)

I conducted and recorded two interviews with each participant, which I subsequently transcribed and analyzed, asking myself two basic questions:

- a. Is this question clearly understood by the interviewee?
- b. Does this particular answer provide me with information that will help me to answer my research questions?

The pilot study led to a number of subsequent methodological and strategic decisions about the direction of my research. First of all, I decided to make significant modifications to some of my interview questions. I found I had a number of unclear or leading questions that were not understood correctly by my participants and which I had to reformulate. For example, I had asked the question, “What kind of management or organizational issues do you have to deal with on a regular basis?” This question required the participants to structure their responses according to my own predetermined categories (e.g. “management,” “on a regular basis”), which confused them. Eventually I made my questions much more generic and open: for instance, I simply asked them what sort of issues they had to deal with in their “ministry,” and then probed further in various areas of ministry.

Secondly, I also found that people felt very uncomfortable with demographic questions, particularly since I was initially asking them at the very beginning of the interview. For example: “What is your name? How many years ago did you graduate from your College? How long have you been involved in the ministry?” These questions made some of the participants very tense and “formal,” and I had to spend some time after that trying to “warm them up” again. Eventually, I decided to remove those questions entirely from my interview schedule, and put them into the written questionnaire (see Appendix IV) that I gave to my participants to fill in after the interview.

Thirdly, the pilot helped me to make a decision with regards to whether I should attempt to talk to the graduates about their personal life and spiritual formation. Despite the importance of the latter in theological education, I was not certain whether my respondents would be willing to talk about it and whether their answers would provide me with any meaningful insights. However, both of these fears proved to be unwarranted. Three out of four of my interviewees were very happy to talk about more personal issues; in fact, the second interview (about attitudes) seemed to be more interesting for some of them than the first one.

Thus, the pilot confirmed my initial assumption that interviewing graduates was a fruitful strategy for obtaining meaningful and interesting data about the influence of their studies on their preparedness for ministry. It also confirmed that I was well situated to interview the graduates and that they trusted me and were willing to talk to me on a deeper level.

Finally, my pilot and subsequent reflections prompted me to make the most important change in the interview strategy: from a more prescriptive approach, organized around an existing framework of professional competencies (Stark *et al* 1986), to a more inductive approach that would allow me to develop a framework from the data itself. Below I describe the factors that influenced my decision.

4.4.2 Change in methodology

Originally I intended to use Stark *et al's* (1986) framework for the study of preservice professional programmes in higher educational institutions, as both a conceptual guide for my study and as a methodological tool. Stark and her team conducted an extensive literature review of the educational and professional literature; abstracted from it concepts pertaining to expected professional outcomes and the structures needed to achieve them; and clustered them into content-based categories, seeking to ensure that these categories were “reasonably exhaustive, mutually exclusive and interdependent” (Stark *et al* 1986: 235). As a result, they identified eleven generic outcomes that professional educators across disciplines emphasized the most. Although Stark’s framework was not initially designed for ministerial training, two researchers in theological education recommend using that framework for the assessment of professional theological training (Klimoski 2003, Jurkowitz 2003). Recently Chapman (2006) used this framework in her doctoral research for the context of studying one seminary in the United States.

Initially, I used that framework as a defining guide for the formulation of my interview questions. For my pilot I developed two fairly structured and lengthy interview protocols organized around Stark’s categories of six “professional competencies” and five “professional attitudes.” Originally, I intended to interview each participant twice. However, when I tested this instrument in my pilot study, I started having doubts about the relevance of this framework to my research questions. My analysis of the data obtained from the pilot showed that, although some of the qualities that the graduates displayed in their description of how they performed their ministry, could be related to those of Stark, many others did not “fit” those categories at all. For example, while the graduates seemed to show some “conceptual” and “adaptive” competence, Stark did not have categories for some of the “interpersonal” qualities that were coming up in the data. The only quality in this area was Stark’s “interpersonal communication competence.” This was not quite the

same as the categories of “compassion,” “being open to receiving help,” “prioritizing relationships,” and “empowering others,” that were eventually formulated in the subsequent analysis of my main body of data. Neither did Stark have a place for “spiritual” qualities, that later proved to be paramount for the graduates’ success.

Another factor that influenced my decision to change the research strategy was the need to change the sample size. During my Transfer examination (1.12.2006), the examiners recommended that I should increase the sample to forty instead of twenty and collapse two interviews into one, as they felt that it would be a more appropriate sample size for my study. The increase of the sample meant another practical constraint on the length of my interviews.

Finally, further reading of the literature on professional competency persuaded me to change my conceptual approach in this study (see Chapter Three). Thus, Bolden and Gosling (2006) point out that there is no “universal” framework that would fit all possible professional fields or even different organizations within any field. They propose that instead, such frameworks are better developed from studying the professional practice itself. I decided that, instead of adopting a pre-existing framework that had proved to be an awkward fit in the pilot, my research purposes would be better served if I adopted a more inductive approach and derived the framework from the data itself.

Correspondingly, I changed my interview guide; as a result it became much shorter, and the questions became more exploratory and open-ended, with fewer predefined categories. Before my pilot, I grouped the questions into what I thought was a convenient classification of pastoral duties – for instance, I asked them to talk about “management issues,” “pastoral issues,” and “preaching.” However, this division confused my participants. Eventually, I grouped these questions into two broader categories, using the language of my participants in the pilot, i.e. they talked about “ministry” and “people.”

4.4.3 Interviewing strategy

My primary tool for data collection was in-depth semi-structured interviewing, as it seemed to fit both the cultural context and the focused nature of my interviews. I approached people with a set of mostly open-ended questions, allowing some time for probing, elaboration and new questions that often emerged during the interviews (see Appendix II). Using Patton's classification, my interview method was a combination of the "interview guide" approach with the 'standardized open-ended interview' approach:

thus a number of basic questions may be worded precisely in a predetermined fashion, while permitting the interviewer more flexibility in probing and more decision-making flexibility in determining when it is appropriate to explore certain subjects in greater depth or even to undertake whole new areas of inquiry that were not originally included in the interview instrument (Patton 1990: 287).

Patton (1990: 294) recommends starting an interview with questions about "noncontroversial present behaviours, activities and experiences" and then to move on towards more interpretative, opinion-based and feeling questions. The first part of the interviews was introductory; I asked the participants to *describe* what they did in ministry. The first question in my first interview was "Tell me about your ministry after College – what do you do?" By doing so I was hoping to achieve several goals – to get them talking, to refresh their memory by bringing to mind the broader picture of their ministry, and to elicit some concrete examples of their professional activities. By starting with simpler and more descriptive questions, I felt I was able to establish rapport with the interviewees. Some of them started touching upon some interesting themes at the very beginning of the interview. The flexible semi-structured nature of the interview allowed me to adapt to a particular interviewee: depending whether it "felt right" with a particular person, I either

probed into such themes “on the spot,” or made a note and came back to those issues later on in the interview.

After I asked my participants to describe the context of their ministry, I asked them to tell me about problems they experienced in their job, how they were dealing with them, and then probed into various areas of ministry. I asked them about what they perceived to be their successes and their challenges. I also asked them questions about their current learning needs – what they wanted to learn next in various areas of their ministry.

There were two areas in the professional practice of ministers that I was particularly sensitised to during my preliminary research. First, my frequent interaction with ministers in Central Asia through previous personal meetings and conferences made me aware of the fact that some of them were struggling with the temptation to leave ministry. Therefore I included a separate question about this issue in my interview guide. Secondly, just before I started my first fieldwork trip, a colleague in theological education recommended paying particular attention to the financial struggles of ministers: he felt this issue was of primary significance for the Church in Central Asia. Having been sensitised to this issue, I found that it was indeed surfacing strongly in the very first interviews, so I probed the rest of my interviewees in that area.

The second part of the interviews went deeper than the first one, into the areas of the graduates’ feelings and deeper personal attitudes. I was moving to more reflective and interpretative questions such as “How did your College influence your spiritual development?” I also inquired as to how they perceived their training contributed to their problem-solving ability, what was helpful and what was less helpful. At the end of each interview I asked them summarizing questions of how they perceived their training had influenced them. This provided me with the data for answering my second research

question.

4.4.4 Choice of research sites

The four institutions I chose for my research are described in Chapter One. Two of the Colleges were in Kyrgyzstan, the other two in Kazakhstan. The choice of these two Central Asian countries out of a possible five was mainly dictated by the greater degree of political stability and freedom of religion that they experienced at the time I was doing my fieldwork, compared to the other three countries (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan), and consequently a relative ease of access.

Initially, I intended to look at only two Colleges. However, when I first contacted the Colleges, I realised that they did not have many graduates to choose from in the first place, and so I would not be able to physically access a sufficient number of graduates to fit my sampling criteria (see below). Besides, since I was interested in a diversity of participants, I decided to broaden the number of Colleges to four. My interest in diversity also affected my choice of colleges - I chose colleges representing a broad evangelical denominational spectrum.⁵¹

Another reason for choosing these particular institutions was a pragmatic one - these four Colleges were some of the very few evangelical theological institutions in Central Asia that satisfied my research criteria, as I was looking to interview pastors who had graduated at least three years prior to the time of interview. To answer my research questions, I needed graduates who had had a substantial experience of ministry after graduation, while several other institutions in the region had only started graduating their first students in the last few years.

⁵¹ To protect the confidentiality of the Colleges, I omit direct references to the names of particular denominations.

4.4.5 Collecting the data

I collected my data during three trips. First, I went to a major annual [name] conference (Turkey) from 28.02.2007 – 05.03.2007, where I interviewed two graduates from College IV. I also used that opportunity to make a formal presentation of my research project to other theological educators from Central Asia, to discuss it and get their input. Second, I went to Kyrgyzstan from 5.03.2007 – 20.03.2007, where I conducted interviews with the principals and with graduates of College I and II. I interviewed eleven graduates of College I and eight graduates of College II. Third, I went to Kazakhstan from 15.05.2007 – 30.05.2007, and interviewed the principals of College III and IV, eight graduates of the first institution, and eleven graduates of the second one. In total, I interviewed four principals and 40 graduates.

I also conducted eight more interviews that I decided not to include in my study. Three of those were interviews with graduates of two other theological Colleges in Kyrgyzstan that I decided not to include in my sample due to the lack of a sufficient number of graduates; the fourth was an interview with a principal of one of these Colleges. The fifth and sixth interviews were conducted with two graduates of Colleges II and III, who were involved in leading para-church organizations, but not directly involved in church leadership and who therefore did not fit my sampling criteria. The seventh interview was with a prominent Christian leader, currently studying in the Masters programme at College IV; however, he had not received any prior theological training and therefore also did not fit my sampling criteria. The eighth of these interviews was with a graduate of College II, who despite my efforts kept sidetracking the interview. As a result, I received almost no relevant data from him.

To answer my second research question, I supplemented my data by reviewing some of the official documents of those institutions, and by interviewing their principals in order to compare the claims of these institutions with their graduates' perception of what their training enabled them to do. I obtained their mission statements, descriptions of their educational philosophy, and samples of their curriculum. Below are some of the questions I asked each principal:

- What is the primary goal of your institution as you see it?
- What are the primary educational outcomes? What do you want to see in the students when they graduate? What are the priority areas?
- What is required for leadership in the churches you are working with?
- Tell me about the specific ways you hope your training will contribute to the development of such leadership.
- What are some of the successes of your institution?
- What are some of the challenges you are currently facing in regards to your training?
- What kind of assessment do you use to ensure the quality of your outcomes?

The data from these interviews and the relevant documents are summarized in Chapter One. In my Conclusions, I will compare the claims of the institutions with the perceptions of the graduates.

4.4.6 Sampling

As Punch points out, sampling is important in qualitative research: “we cannot study everyone everywhere doing everything” (Punch 2005: 187). He maintains that “the sampling plan and sampling parameters (settings, actors, events, processes) should line up with the purposes and the research questions of the study” (Punch 2005: 188). Miles and Huberman (1994: 34) suggest a checklist of criteria to verify sampling for qualitative research (*italics mine – I.Sh*):

- Is the sampling *relevant* to your conceptual frame and research questions?
- Will the phenomena you are interested in *appear*? In principle, can they appear?

- Does your plan enhance *generalizability* of your findings, either through conceptual power or representativeness?
- Can *believable descriptions* and explanations be produced, ones that are true to real life?
- Is the sampling plan *feasible*, in terms of time, money, access to people, and your own work style?
- Is the sampling plan *ethical*, in terms of such issues as informed consent, potential benefits and risks, and the relationship with informants?

Below I will show how my sampling meets those criteria.⁵² My sample was *relevant* to my research questions, as they were designed to find out how graduates who had been active in Christian ministry for several years after graduation, described their practice and the influence of their training on that practice. Thus, the great majority of my interviewees were pastors of churches, all had key leadership positions in the Church, and some were employed full-time by Christian organizations that were directly involved in church ministry. The phenomenon that I was interested in definitely *appeared* as I questioned the ministers about the role of their training in their professional practice. Only in one case did a participant not provide relevant data on that phenomenon; as stated earlier, this interview was not included in the data analysis. I ensured that *believable descriptions* and explanations were produced by identifying with and building trust with participants (see the section on researcher's credibility above).

As far as the *generalizability* of my sample is concerned, I am cautious about making a claim that my research will be generalizable to theological institutions outside Central Asia (see the section on "Limitations" further on in the thesis). However, I attempted to enhance the representativeness of my sample both by choosing to interview a relatively large number of participants and by using a maximum variability strategy as much as it was practically feasible. No less than forty interviews was suggested by my Transfer examiners as a "rule of thumb" that would allow me to potentially identify patterns in my interviewees' responses and also to understand some of the diversity. A bigger sample size would have

⁵² The ethical *aspect* of my sampling is discussed in a separate section further on in this chapter.

threatened the *feasibility* of the study, under the constraint of one person doing a DPhil, based in the UK, for three years. First, translation from Russian to English and the in-depth analysis of forty lengthy interviews is a considerable task. Second, it would have required much time and effort to access interviewees living in two countries and many different communities, some of which are remote and physically hard to reach.

In three cases (Colleges 1-3) upon my request the principals kindly presented me with a list of their graduates and were willing to help me contact those graduates I was interested in talking to. Although they helped me to narrow down the graduates to those who fit my basic research criteria (i.e. graduated at least three years ago and serving in a leadership role in a church), I myself chose which graduates to interview. Since I was interested in the potential for identifying patterns across a broad diversity of participants, in my sampling I looked for maximum variability and chose graduates representing a diversity of gender, age, nationality and ministry contexts. As I did my interviewing, I also did some snowball sampling, asking some graduates for their recommendations, particularly inquiring about graduates who had experiences different from their own.

Thus, my interviewees lived in three countries of Central Asia (mostly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and two graduates in Uzbekistan), were of a broad age spectrum - from 24 to 71 (mostly from the late 20s to early 50s); married and single, male and female, although the majority of them were male, which reflected the evangelical leadership make-up in those countries. They were of 10 nationalities (mainly Kyrgyz, Kazak, Russian, and Korean, but also some Tatars, an Uzbek, a Uigur, an Armenian, a Kurd, and an Ethiopian). They were all confessing evangelical Christians of several denominational and organizational affiliations such as the Baptist Union, Pentecostal Union, Korean Presbyterian, various other evangelical associations, and independent churches. They had various educational backgrounds, including secondary and technical school, College, and University (undergraduate and postgraduate levels). A few of them received further

theological training at Master's level. The churches they were leading also represented a broad spectrum in terms of setting (villages, small towns and large cities), national makeup ("national," mixed, or Russian-speaking churches), structure (i.e. traditional church, cell church), and the number of people attending on a regular basis (from 8 to 1000+). To enhance the representativeness of the graduates' views and experiences, I also included in my sample several graduates who left the ministry in the last 1-2 years.

Initially, I intended to look at those graduates who had finished their training three to five years prior to the time of the interview. However, there happened to be either not enough people that fit this criterion, or those people were physically unavailable for interviewing. Therefore I had to extend my limit (in one case up to 11 years since graduation), in the hope that people would still be in a position to comment on how their training prepared them for ministry. Still, the majority of my interviewees were within 3-6 years after graduation.⁵³

4.4.7 Data recording

I recorded all interviews using digital recording equipment, and taking very detailed notes. One of my interviewees was not comfortable with the audio recording, but gave his consent for an interview and agreed that I could take notes. All interviews were conducted in Russian, except one, for which I used a Kazakh translator. After each interview I did preliminary coding and analytical memoing, searching for emerging topics. Interviews lasted from fifty-five minutes to two and a half hours; on average I spent about one hour and forty minutes per interview. In most cases, I typed up the notes on the day of the interview; in several cases, I did it a few days later.

⁵³ For the full list of my graduate interviewees (names changed) see Appendix I.

4.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis procedures are highly important for conducting valid qualitative research.

Punch states that the process of how the researcher reached conclusions from his or her data is “a key question in assessing a piece of research” (Punch 2005: 195). Miles and Huberman maintain that “the creation, testing and revision of simple, practical, and effective analysis methods remain the highest priority for qualitative researchers” (Miles and Huberman 1994: 3). They point out that, although there are many different traditions and methods of qualitative research, there are certain analytic practices that may be used across several types of such research (Miles and Huberman 1994: 9):

- Affixing codes to a set of field notes drawn from observation or interviews
- Noting reflections or other remarks in the margins
- Sorting and sifting through these materials to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, distinct differences between subgroups, and common sequences
- Isolating these patterns and processes, commonalities and differences, and taking them out to the field in the next wave of data collection
- Gradually elaborating a small set of generalizations that cover the consistencies discerned in the database
- Confronting these generalizations with a formalized body of knowledge in the form of constructs or theories.

My general data analysis methodology has been informed by Miles and Huberman’s (1994) paradigm of “data collection, data reduction and data display” and guided by the template analysis approach, as expounded by Nigel King (2004) at Huddersfield University (UK).

4.5.1 Using template analysis

King describes template analysis as follows:

The essence of template analysis is that the researcher produces a list of codes ('template') representing themes identified in their textual data. Some of these will usually be defined a priori, but they will be modified and added to as the researcher reads and interprets the texts. The template is organized in a way which represents the relationships between themes, as defined by the researcher, most commonly involving a hierarchical structure (King 2004: 256).

King points out the advantages of that approach: while it is highly flexible and "does not come with a heavy baggage of prescriptions and procedures," it nevertheless "forces the researcher to take a well-structured approach to handling the data, which can be a great help in producing a clear, organized, final account of a study" (2004: 268). The simplicity, flexibility and yet, clear structure that template analysis allows, appealed to me, instead of taking, for instance, the more complicated and prescriptive framework of Miles and Huberman (1994). However, one of the disadvantages of template analysis is that apart from a few texts (e.g. King 1998, 2004; Crabtree and Miller 1999) it lacks a substantial literature.⁵⁴

The first stage of template analysis is producing the initial template with some pre-defined codes. As the best starting point for this, King recommends using the interview topic guide, which itself draws upon resources such as the literature, the researchers' own experience, anecdotal and informal evidence and exploratory research (King 2004: 259). He also suggests that the main questions of the interview guide could serve as higher-order codes (idem). King recommends using a few interview transcripts to produce an initial template, which would later be revised as new data are being analysed. This is the approach I took when producing my initial template. I was guided by my research questions and by my pilot study that helped me to devise a simple starting point for developing the list of generic

⁵⁴ Prof. King developed a website dedicated to template analysis: www.hud.ac.uk/hhs/research/template_analysis. Upon my request, on Nov 7, 2008, he kindly provided me with a number of articles of recent studies exemplifying that approach. The researchers use the technique for the analysis of qualitative interviews in studies in applied psychology and other medical fields, e.g., in researching perspectives of diabetic patients (King *et al* 2002), palliative care practitioners (King *et al* 2003), family therapy practitioners (Stratton *et al* 2006), parents of sick children (Gammelgaard *et al* 2006); and outside of medical field, in researching perceptions of managers (McDowall and Silvester 2006; Ray 2002).

preliminary categories, or *bins*, for analysis. After going through three or four interviews, I developed the initial template.

Some of the categories for the initial template started emerging even as I was doing my fieldwork and preliminary coding. I took very extensive field notes – on average, five to six pages per interview, - which I normally inputted into my computer and revised on the day of the interview. Below is an example of recorded interview notes with a summary of the interviewee’s response to one of my questions, followed by some preliminary coding (in capital letters) done after the interview (interview with Aida; 9.03.07; English translation):

- *How could the training of ministers be improved?*

– Christianity in Kyrgyzstan is now in the formation stage; in the future the teachers should be nationals [as opposed to the Westerners]. Also – the applicants – they must have been sent *by the church* [emphasis hers] – the church must see the need – that this person would justify God's confidence... [the church] needs to choose people with a strong desire [for ministry] – like Paul's [the apostle]. If a man is *open* [emphasis hers] – he may gain very much [from training]. It depends on student/teachers relationships.

TRAINING IMPROVEMENT/SELECTION PROCESS/LOCAL CHURCH
INVOLVEMENT/PERSONAL CALLING

As I was doing my fieldwork, I also frequently recorded my preliminary analytical insights in the form of *memos*, which are, according to the definition of Glaser (1978), “the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding” (Glaser 1978: 83). Miles and Huberman emphasise that memos can be “one of the most powerful sense-making tools at hand” (Miles and Huberman 1994: 72).

Below is an example of one of my analytical memos and preliminary theorizing done after the interview (interview with Leonid; 21.05.07; English translation):

The most valuable observation in this interview is that he [the interviewee] stands for close links [of his College] with the church, but thinks that his College is failing in doing this, because its current leadership does not take into account the views of the church and does not listen to those [College] staff who know what's going on in the church. A potential finding – the failure of an educational institution can happen not only because of a lack of links with the church, but also because there could be

a lack of unity of vision inside the organization itself, and because the leader [the principal] does not include his people in making strategic decisions. From his [the interviewee's] responses, it seems that he is quite a mature leader, who knows and understands a lot [of what's going on inside the College].

It can be seen from this memo that my analytical work started in the field. I was already making assumptions and interpreting the events in a particular way, that enabled me to produce some interpretative codes that I used later in my analysis. Below is my initial template that I produced after returning from the field and analysing a few interviews:

INITIAL TEMPLATE

1. PROBLEMS

- 1 In the Church
 - 1 Relational issues
 - 2 Managerial issues
- 2 Personal
 - 1 Lack of money
 - 2 Burnout
 - 3 Other problems
- 3 Societal

2 DEALING WITH PROBLEMS

- 1 Resources
 - 1 Consulting with others
 - 2 Literature
 - 3 Prayer
 - 4 Other resources
- 2 Processes
 - 1 Talking to mentors
 - 2 Praying
 - 3 Dealing with burnout

3 ROLE OF TRAINING

- 1 Positive
 - 1 Theology
 - 2 College environment
- 2 Negative
 - 1 Lack of practice
 - 2 Lack of spiritual development
 - 3 Other areas
- 3 Areas of improvement
 - 1 Connection with church
 - 2 Selection process

After the researcher has constructed the initial template, King recommends doing the following:

the researcher must work systematically through the full set of transcripts, identifying sections of text which are relevant to the project's aims, and marking them with one or more appropriate code(s) from the initial template. In the course of this, inadequacies in the initial template will be revealed, requiring changes of various kinds. It is through these that the template develops in its final form (King 2004: 261).

After I finished my fieldwork, I started a process of thorough coding of my data, using the initial template above, and constantly adding and revising new subcategories. As I worked with the data, I developed many new codes that were emerging from the actual data – there were particular topics that were mentioned frequently, and some of those topics were perceived as more important by pastors than others.

Although King recommends using the full transcription of all data, I made a decision not to do that. The primary reason for this was the great volume of work to be done in transcribing forty lengthy interviews. Instead, I fully transcribed three interviews, and then started coding the extensive field notes that I took during the interviews. Whenever necessary, I went back to the original interviews, listened to them and recorded extended quotes. This process took me four months (September – December 2007).

For my analysis I used NVivo 7 software. As King points out, although the software “cannot by itself make any kind of judgement,” it nevertheless helps the researcher to organize the data and “to work efficiently with complex coding schemes and large amounts of text, facilitating depth and sophistication of analysis” (King 2004: 266). I certainly found this was true in my case. I used the NVivo system of “tree nodes” to create a hierarchical template and to constantly revise it until I had coded all the data and reached the stage of the final template.

In the process of developing the final template, I used all four types of modification described by King (2004: 261-263): insertion, deletion, changing scope, and changing higher-order classification. *Insertion* implies adding a new code when identifying a new issue in the text that is of relevance to the research question. For example, I encountered a place in the interview where the participant offered an insight into a particular phenomenon that was exacerbating the financial struggles of ministers – he pointed to the prevalence of “poverty thinking” in the local evangelical ethos. Thus, I inserted a new code for “poverty thinking” under a broader category of “financial difficulties.”

On the other hand, an initial code might be *deleted* if the researcher had not found it useful. Thus in the early stages of template construction, I created a code for “theological ignorance” under the “ministry/problems” category. Later, however, I found that the data initially placed in that category, better fitted the broader category of “relating to superiors” (who were perceived to be theologically ignorant).

King points out that sometimes the code needs to be redefined at a different hierarchical level (*changing scope*). Thus, I initially included all problems related to ministers dealing with people within the “Church” category. However, as I was coding my data, I realised that it was a very substantial category and that it deserved to be brought out to the same hierarchical level of coding; eventually, I created one category for “ministry-related problems” (related to the organizational issues of ministry) and another for “people-related problems” (related to the pastoral issues in a congregation).

Finally, sometimes the researcher needs to *change the higher-order classification*, which happens when “a code initially classified as a sub-category of one higher-order code would fit better as a sub-category of a different higher-order code” (King 2004: 262). For example, initially I coded all the data related to financial difficulties under the third-level category “financial difficulties.” However, as I progressed with my analysis, I realised that

much of this data was related to the “temptation to leave” (the pastors talked about financial struggles as one of the primary reasons why they were tempted to leave the ministry) and thus was better suited to be coded under that third-level category.

After I coded all my interview data and thoroughly revised my template, I came to the following final template:

FINAL TEMPLATE

1. PROBLEMS

- 1 Personal
 - 1 Temptation to leave
 - 1 Lack of money as the main reason
 - 2 Other reasons
 - 2 Financial difficulties
 - 1 Difficulties of self-support
 - 2 Lack of organisational support
 - 3 “Poverty thinking”
 - 4 Other issues related to finances
 - 3 Need for mentors
 - 4 Spiritual and emotional needs
 - 5 Marriages
 - 6 Other
- 2 Ministry-related problems
 - 1 Leadership and management
 - 2 Passivity/lack of commitment
 - 3 Church growth
 - 4 Relating to superiors
- 3 People-related problems
 - 1 “Wounded souls”
 - 2 Relationships in church in general
 - 3 People’s marriages
 - 4 Poverty
 - 5 Dependency
- 4 Society-related
 - 1 Cultural issues
 - 2 Islamic influence
 - 3 Secular authorities
- 5 Other problems

2 DEALING WITH PROBLEMS

- 1 Ways of dealing with the problems/processes
 - 1 Temptation to leave the ministry
 - 1 Calling/personal conviction
 - 2 Positive attitude
 - 3 Using relational resources

- 4 Using spiritual resources
- 5 Other ways of managing the temptation
- 2 Superiors
- 3 Financial difficulties
 - 1 External ways of managing the problem
 - 2 Attitude change
- 4 Leadership and management
- 5 Spiritual issues
- 2 Use of resources in dealing with the problems
 - 1 Asking others
 - 2 Working with mentors
 - 3 Observing others
 - 1 Positive example
 - 2 Negative example
 - 4 Books
 - 5 Seminars
 - 6 Spiritual resources

3 TRAINING

- 1 Positive factors
 - 1 General value
 - 2 Bible & Theology
 - 3 “Shelves in the head”
 - 4 Particularly influential courses
 - 5 Learning tolerance
 - 6 Continued learning and critical skills
 - 7 Postponed benefits
 - 8 Practical skills
 - 9 Teachers’ influence
 - 10 Attitude to ministry
 - 11 Character change
 - 12 Improved relationship with God
- 2 Negative factors
 - 1 Lack of teaching on important issues in ministry
 - 2 Poor quality teaching
 - 3 Irrelevant courses
 - 4 Lack of practical training/theory-practice split
 - 5 Lack of spiritual formation
 - 6 Contextual issues
- 3 Proposed changes
 - 1 Improving practical training
 - 2 Closer church connections
 - 3 Admission policies
 - 4 Character formation
 - 5 Requested courses in
 - 1 Leadership skills
 - 2 Professional skills
 - 3 Self-learning skills
 - 4 People-related skills

I found that coding all my data and constructing the final template from the initial template was an extremely useful process in itself, as it allowed me to become thoroughly

acquainted with my data. If the initial analysis started as I was collecting the data and writing the memos, at this stage the analysis continued, and the process of template development enabled me to develop detailed categories for the subsequent, yet deeper analysis.

4.5.2 Interpreting the data and writing up findings

King emphasizes that the template itself is not the final analysis, but a means to it. He points out that sometimes researchers might use template analysis to produce a “very flat, descriptive account of the data, providing little more depth than would be gained from quantitative content analysis” (King 2004: 266).

I approached the answer to my first research question (“What problems do the graduates encounter in their professional practice and what enables them to deal with those problems?”) in two stages. First, I produced a descriptive account of the problems that the graduates were facing in the field, and of the ways they were dealing with those problems (Chapter Five). As King suggests, the writing-up stage is not a separate stage from the analysis, but the continuation of it, because “through summarizing detailed notes about themes, selecting illustrative quotes, and producing a coherent ‘story’ of the findings, the researcher continues to build his or her understanding of the phenomena the research project has investigated” (King 2004: 287). That was my experience – as I was writing up, although I relied extensively on the final template, I presented a story that reflected my own understanding of the research issues.

In doing so, I made careful use of numbers. At this point I disagree with King, who insists that the frequency of coded data within and across cases “can never tell us anything meaningful about textual data” (King 2004: 266). Miles and Huberman (1994) challenge

that view. They provide a simple rationale for this, pointing out that although in qualitative research the issue is not “how much,” but what are the “essential qualities,” people still consciously or unconsciously *do* use counting when judging those qualities:

When we identify a theme or a pattern, we’re isolating something that (a) happens a number of times and (b) consistently happens in a specific way. The “number of times” and “consistency” judgments are based on counting. When we make a generalization, we amass a swarm of particulars and decide, almost unconsciously, which particulars are there *more often*, *matter more* than others, *go together*, and so on. When we say something is “important” or “significant” or “recurrent,” we have come to that estimate, in part, by making counts, comparisons, and weights (Miles and Huberman 1994: 253).

They point to three reasons for resorting to numbers in qualitative research: to “see what you have,” to “verify a hypothesis” and to “keep yourself analytically honest” (idem). In my data analysis I did make use of numbers, particularly with regards to the first and the last reasons provided by Miles and Huberman. For example, the fact that 24 out of 40 of my participants emphasised the importance of studying the Bible and theology in their College, enabled me to “see what I had”; in this case, the importance of that factor in their training. The picture would have been different, if there were only 4 graduates who reported that. Also the numbers did help me to “keep analytically honest” – something that is more difficult for a qualitative researcher to do if no meaning is attached to the number of occurrences of a particular theme. Miles and Huberman point to the danger of exaggerating the importance of data that the researcher believes in and ignoring data that the researcher does not like:

A near-library of research evidence shows that people (researchers included) habitually tend to *overweight* facts they believe in or depend on, to *ignore or forget* data not going in the direction of their reasoning, and to “*see*” *confirming instances* far more easily than disconfirming instances (idem).

Numbers did help me in this. For instance, my initial “hunch” was that theological colleges produced little spiritual/character change – it was both supported by the literature, and by my own experience of theological schooling! However, in my research two-thirds of my participants reported substantial changes in that area, thus most of my participants

disproved my hunch. Had I stuck to my “gut feelings,” I would probably have given a disproportionate weight to those instances where the students were disappointed in their spiritual formation, when trying to paint a broader picture of the perceptions of the graduates in my Conclusions.⁵⁵

After I had produced a descriptive account of the problems and ways of dealing with them (Chapter Five), I attempted a conceptual interpretation of these data, trying to distil the “capabilities” that the graduates were using in their ministry. In so doing, I was using the analytical technique described as “clustering” by Miles and Huberman. They point out that clustering reflects a natural analytical process applied by human beings: “in daily life, we’re constantly clumping things into classes, categories, bins” (1994: 248). They maintain that clustering as a tactic can be used at many levels of qualitative analysis, - events, acts, individual actors, processes, settings or whole cases. The essence of clustering in qualitative analysis is that “we’re trying to understand a phenomenon better by *grouping* and then *conceptualizing* objects that have similar patterns or characteristics” (Miles and Huberman 1994: 249).

Still, it is obvious that such conceptualization of the “practical knowledge” of ministers was dependent upon my interpretation of their stories. In the previous section I established my credibility by showing my background in both church ministry and theological education. I, as a researcher, was instrumental in that interpretation. I looked at the data categorised by template analysis and upon many careful readings of it, came to see the patterns of “capabilities” that different graduates manifested in dealing with their problems. In other words, I was “seeing plausibility” (Miles and Huberman 1994: 246) within the explanation of relationships between data.

⁵⁵ King and other researchers (e.g., McDowall and Silvester 2006) in their use of template analysis, used small samples of participants – 14 or 20. In my research, I use a bigger sample of 40, that strengthens my case for using numbers in developing an argument.

For example, when asked how they dealt with various problems, several ministers referred to having used spiritual resources, such as prayer. It was interesting to note that prayer was mentioned in the context of dealing with many different problems both personal and ministry related, such as struggling with the temptation to leave ministry, dealing with personal crises, encountering baffling situations in ministry, or helping people in the church. Upon a careful reading of all such occurrences in the data, I conceptualized it as those ministers having a capability of “turning to God for help,” that they made use of across various situations.

In another case, the capability that I formulated was less obvious, more subtle and more inferential. For example, I noticed that several graduates mentioned spending “a lot of time” with the people in their congregations. When I closely scrutinized these data, I realized that there was evidence of a consistent effort that several pastors were making to prioritise building close relationships with their people and emphasizing that it was more important for them than running the church. I thus labelled that capability as “prioritising relationships,” defining it as “pastors making a conscious effort to prioritise relationships with their people above the organisational and strategic goals of ministry.”

It is interesting to note that I was able to draw these inferences from the data only after having done much work on it by writing the descriptive account, and thus getting very familiar with the material. After all that work, I was able to discern more subtle patterns in the data than I had been able to see at the outset. Methodologically, this approach is reminiscent of a “hermeneutical spiral” (from the Greek *hermeneia* – ‘interpretation’), an approach widely used in biblical scholarship. Here the text is read and re-read several times, and as parts of the text are related to the text as a whole and to its original context (a process that could be pictured as going forwards and backwards, or a spiralling movement), an ever deeper understanding of the text develops. Although I did not use the hermeneutical method intentionally, in retrospect I suspect that my former training in the

hermeneutical method as a biblical student, and my extensive experience of the use of that method in my own preaching and teaching ministry, have had its influence on the way I approached the “text” of the interviews.⁵⁶

Eventually, I identified thirteen capabilities and attitudes and clustered them into four categories:

Spiritual Cluster

- Ascribing ultimate value to God
- A strong sense of personal calling
- Exercising faith in hardships
- Turning to God for help

Interpersonal Cluster

- Prioritizing relationships
- Being open to receiving help
- Empowering others
- Compassion

Change/Learn Cluster

- Ability to learn from experience
- Openness and ability to change
- Learning from others

Strategic Cluster

- Proactive attitude
- Visionary approach

Finally, after completing Chapter Six with the description of these capabilities and attitudes, I answered my second research question: “In what ways does their training contribute to their ability to deal with those problems?” In so doing, I again returned to my final template, and interpreted the findings related to the second research question in a way similar to what I described above. Using the template, I organised their responses into three broad categories: what they perceived as positive, what they perceived as negative,

⁵⁶ For the discussion of a hermeneutical method in biblical studies, see Osborne 2006. For the “seven canons” of the method in qualitative interviewing see Kvale 1983. In the German-speaking qualitative research community, the process of “objective hermeneutics” is currently one of the most widely used approaches. However, as Reichertz (2004) points out, there is no “school” of objective hermeneutics, only a number of scientists using the procedure in their research. Reichertz states that Ulrich Oevermann, the most widely recognized authority on the subject, teaches a regular course in Frankfurt am Main, where his technique for data analysis can be learned, but he has not produced any formal written introduction on the subject as of yet. For the literature on the German hermeneutic sociology of knowledge, see Soeffner (1997), Soeffner and Hitzler (1994), and Bohnsack 1999.

and what they felt should be improved in training. In analysing those data I was constantly looking for the ways in which the graduates made connections between their training and their current practice. The findings are related in Chapter Seven.

4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Punch observes that, while ethical issues could arise both in quantitative and qualitative research, they are more acute in the latter, since by its very nature qualitative research “often intrudes more” (Punch 2005: 276-277). It sometimes “deals with the most sensitive, intimate and innermost matters in people’s lives, and ethical issues inevitably accompany the collection of such information” (idem). This is certainly true in my case, as I was conducting in-depth interviews in which people often shared personal details of their lives, their spiritual and emotional experiences, their worldviews and values. Besides, strict confidentiality was particularly relevant in my research setting for the protection of my participants, since the evangelical church in Central Asia is socially marginalised, discriminated against and in some cases persecuted by the authorities. Below I will show how I protected my participants.

In my study I interviewed the principals and graduates of theological institutions. The principals gave me their verbal consent for studying their institutions; however, I also asked for each participant’s written consent personally. All my participants were adults over 18 years old, whose ability to give free and informed consent was not in question. Prior to the interview, each participant was asked to read and sign a copy of the informed consent form that explained the purpose and ethical guidelines of my study (see Appendix III). This study was conducted in accordance with the regulations of the University of

Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC); it was reviewed and approved by that body on 2.02.2007 (see Appendix V).⁵⁷

The participation of all interviewees in this study was voluntary; I explained to them their right to withdraw freely without penalty at any time by advising me of this decision. I gave my participants the right to ask me any questions about my study before they decided whether to participate, or after. The study involved interviews that happened at a place and time convenient to the participants. Each interview, except in three cases, did not exceed two hours. In two cases (Stepan and Karim), the two parts of the interview took place on subsequent days; each of those parts did not exceed two hours. In one case (Alexey), the interview was conducted in one day and lasted for two and a half hours, but we took a break in the middle of the interview that allowed the interviewee to rest.

Besides, I did my best to ensure that I did not hurt my participants with questions that were too intrusive. Some of my questions touched upon personal areas of people's lives, e.g. "Tell me about your spiritual development – what events and people influenced you?" When I asked such questions, I made it clear that they were free not to answer them, or to say as much or as little as they wished. Sometimes I shared some of my own experiences to create a safe environment for them to share. In a very few cases my participants did not appear to want to talk sincerely about some of these issues, and I simply moved on to the discussion of other, less personal areas. However, in the majority of cases the pastors seemed to be very keen to discuss those issues – in some cases I felt that they opened up in a deeply personal and vulnerable sharing. In those cases, my identity as a former minister and a fellow Christian helped me to serve my participants by providing a listening ear.

⁵⁷ I submitted the CUREC/1 form to the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee before I started doing my fieldwork. According to CUREC regulations, my form showed that my project needed no further University scrutiny and I could begin my study immediately (Source: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/resrchapp/index.shtml>; accessed on 20.02.2007).

The interviews were audio recorded and some of them subsequently transcribed. All the data has been kept anonymous and held securely at Oxford University; it is confidential and held in accordance with UK regulations. The results of this study will be available in the public domain. However, I have done my utmost to protect the anonymity of the participating individuals and institutions. I have not identified my participants in this study and I have not disclosed their names or the fact of their participation in this study to third parties. In this thesis I use fake names for all my participants. I have not disclosed the actual names of the Colleges in this study, referring to them as “Colleges I-IV.” At the end of the project the data will be deposited in a secure, access-restricted archive.

4.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I described the research design and methodology used in my study. I used qualitative interviewing as the main strategy of my inquiry, supplementing it with the analysis of some documentary data. By employing an in-depth interviewing strategy, I intended to get below the surface of my participants’ experiences of their professional practice, and of their understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their training.

I acknowledged that, as a qualitative researcher, I played a vital role in the interpretation of the data. Therefore, my credibility as a researcher was established through the description of my personal interest in the topic and of how my professional background was relevant to my study. I also sought to demonstrate my credibility through the description of the strategies I used for building trust with the participants, thus eliciting a genuine account of their lives and experiences.

In addition, the account of my data collection is outlined – my pilot study, the changes I made in my methodology, my interviewing strategy, choice of research sites, sampling, supplementary data collection procedure, and the data recording procedure. Then, the

process of data analysis is described, in particular how my approach was informed by Miles and Huberman's framework, and how the template analysis technique was applied. Finally, ethical considerations relevant to this study were discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE PROBLEMS OF MINISTRY

In chapters five and six I attempt to answer my first research question: “What problems do the graduates encounter in their professional practice and what enables them to deal with those problems?” In this chapter I begin answering this question by providing a detailed descriptive account of the common problems the graduates had to face in their ministry and how they were dealing with them.⁵⁸

Although my research is not ethnographic, in this chapter I considered it important to provide the reader with a rich descriptive account of professional practice *as it is relayed by the interviewees*, in order to lay the foundation for the subsequent deeper analysis presented in the following chapter. Thus in this chapter I will paint a “big picture” of the problems faced by the graduates and will then attempt to show how these external and internal problems are interconnected. I also describe and provide some preliminary analysis of *how* the ministers attempt to deal with those problems – what resources they use, what decision-making processes take place, and what actions they take. This broad outline will allow me to proceed to the next level of the “hermeneutical spiral” in the following Chapter Six, namely, a deeper analysis of the capabilities and attitudes that the graduates exhibited in dealing with the problems.

In this Chapter I organize all problems into two main categories: “External” (or “ministry related”) and “Internal” (or “personal”) problems. The first category includes wider societal problems affecting the church, as well as problems in their local church ministry. “Internal”

⁵⁸ When describing their problems, only a few pastors mentioned government interference, so it does not emerge as one of their major problems in their responses. The most likely reason for this is that I finished interviewing them in early 2007, just before the governments of both countries significantly increased their pressure (see Chapter One), whereas before that time there was much more freedom.

problems are those that the graduates experience *personally* and that have a direct effect on their ministry.

5.1 EXTERNAL/MINISTRY RELATED PROBLEMS

5.1.1 Decreased interest in the church

Fifteen graduates referred to a decreased commitment to their church by regular church members and to a general decline of society's interest in Christian spirituality in the last few years. Some reported these as separate problems; others saw the two as closely related. Below, I will look at these two problems in more detail in two sections and discuss the ways the graduates were dealing with them in the third section.

5.1.1.1 Increased passivity within the church

The graduates used words such as "uncommitted," "inactive," and "introverted," when describing their church members. Some of the pastors were concerned that their people were not active in supporting the ministries of the church despite their best efforts to motivate them: "believers lack initiative; although I motivated them, I had to do almost all the work by myself," said a former pastor (Eugeny).

Most of these interviewees connected the lack of commitment in their people with the rapid economic growth and dramatic increase in the cost of living that have been taking place in both countries, especially in Kazakhstan with its rich oil resources, in the past few years. The result of all this was significantly increased busyness in the lives of people who, perhaps for the first time since the Soviet regime and the post-perestroika economic turmoil, were faced not only with skyrocketing prices and rampant materialism, but with unprecedented opportunities to reach a decent standard of living.

This tendency seemed to be particularly acute in big cities; a pastor in Bishkek (Ilnur) felt that his people were “overloaded with work,” particularly those whom he saw as the strongest contributors to church ministry. Another pastor (Azat) described Almaty, a city with a booming economy, as a city with “prevalent materialism” and therefore, spiritually, a “difficult” city where “people have no time ... people are more closed.” He pointed out that a huge recent price increase in the housing market made it extremely difficult for people without their own housing to survive – nowadays they had to work 2-3 jobs to pay the rent and make a living. He also observed that because of the sheer size of the city, poorly managed traffic and the resulting enormous traffic jams, sometimes it takes up to three hours to get from one place to another – and therefore it makes it increasingly difficult for people to attend a church at some distance.

Other pastors interpreted the problem of passivity along more “spiritual” lines. One graduate (Dmitry) saw it as the result of the inability of believers faced with society’s rapidly growing materialism, to set appropriate priorities with regard to their spiritual commitments and their work: “There is vanity – a person has no time to serve God – one has to make money; a new god ‘I Have No Time’ has appeared.” An associate pastor of another church (Gulnora) used the term “closedness:” “Believers [in our church] are very closed; they are only interested in their own problems; it is hard to reach their hearts ...”

Two graduates living in poor areas of Kyrgyzstan, when discussing reasons for people’s decreased commitment to the church, linked it to the problem of financial dependency. One of them (Efrem) told me that his church was established by Korean missionaries who offered a generally poor population some material support, which resulted in people coming to church not for spiritual, but for material gains. After the missionaries left and he was ordained as pastor, some people lost their interest in the church because it could not provide them with any more gifts. Another graduate (Sultan) pointed to a similar problem in a church and described it as “common to churches in his country.”

5.1.1.2 Decline of church growth

Several graduates reported a significant decline in the growth of the evangelical church in general over the last few years. Most of them agreed that the reason for the decline was the same as above, namely economic growth, an increase in people's busyness and materialism and the corresponding decrease of spiritual pursuits. "Today there is food, but people do not come to church," complained one pastor (Efrem). Another pastor (Kaisar) made the following observation that seemed to reflect the view of many other graduates:

Earlier [in the 90s] there was a big [spiritual] revival, but now there is materialism – a person has to work two jobs, no time to come to church – even for the believers. Earlier it was easy to gather 50-100 people [during the outreach events]; today no one might turn up. ... Now there is no growth at all. Only in Uzbekistan churches are growing – in other countries [of Central Asia] church growth has stopped – or is happening via transfer [from one church to another]. Ninety percent of all new churches were organized before 2000.

Moreover, this pastor found that the general decline of church growth in recent years in turn affected existing believers' initial spiritual fervour; they started "to cool down," one was feeding the other – "when your church is not growing, it's not encouraging." Several pastors viewed the increased spiritual passivity of believers and of society as essentially the same problem. When asked about the problems they face in their ministry, they did not distinguish between churched and unchurched people: "people" in general were described as not very spiritually committed. For instance, when asked to identify the most significant problem he faced in his ministry, one pastor replied: "The people are not very active. Not like before; now people listen [to the Christian message] – but there is not as much joy; it's like God is not working anymore."

Another graduate (Hamit) agreed that the decline in church growth was a "general tendency," and that the main reason for it seemed to be an economic one. However, he also pointed out that he felt there was also a generally growing indifference to Christianity

– “no hostility, but no interest either – earlier there was interest, when people were invited, they came [to church].” He also observed another factor for the decline in church growth:

Earlier there were fewer people in the mosques. Now if a person gets into the stream of God-seeking, one goes to mosque. There are many new mosques being built, they attract a lot of young people.

For him the rise of Islam as a competing religion, was an important factor influencing the perception of the church. Islam was viewed as culturally much more acceptable to the nominally Muslim Kazakh nation, than Christianity. Besides, he pointed out that the growth of Islam was aided by immense resources being poured into the country from other established Muslim nations, compared with relatively little resources available for the Church. Two other graduates working in the villages added to these observations, that secular people becoming committed Muslims often changed their attitude to Christianity from neutral to hostile and it was becoming increasingly more dangerous for people to become Christians, particularly in the smaller communities.

5.1.1.3 Dealing with the problem

The pastors described significantly different approaches and various degrees of change they had to make in their ministry to address the problems described above. Some of them had to *change some of their ministry strategies*. For instance, one graduate (Alik) decided that this problem prompted him to become less complacent and more proactive about reaching out to people. He said that after a while of “sitting home, praying and seeing nobody coming,” he started to go out to the community and to do much visitation of the existing church members. Another pastor (Dmitry) initially tried “pressing people harder” to get involved in ministry. However, later he realised that this strategy did not produce any results, on the contrary, people got even more defensive and reluctant to take responsibility. Having realised that, he changed his approach and began actively teaching the church about the priority of the spiritual life both in his preaching and in personal conversations: “I teach them that the most important thing is to pray and go to church –

and then God will bless your work as well.” He discovered that when he changed his strategy from “pushing” to “educating” people, eventually they started offering their help themselves and he achieved the results he wanted.

Another pastor (Azat), responding to the “big city problem” described above, decided to make a *radical structural change* in his church. He decided to divide his church into “cells” and instead of people travelling lengthy distances to attend church, they could meet locally in people’s homes. In his opinion, this model would also encourage people to take responsibility for ministry on the local level, and help them to build closer relationships with each other. He said that his church was in the process of transition to the “cell church” model, and that he was taking steps to develop leaders for the new cells.

Another graduate (Pavel) presented a case of a *systematic and planned approach* to involving the people of his congregation in ministry, motivating them both via his regular preaching and through strategic personal meetings. He described his church as having many successful professionals and “top managers” who were generally “super busy.” He intentionally looked for those people whom he perceived as “open” and having the potential to influence others. He met with those people, getting to know them personally, as well as learning of their plans and dreams. Despite people being very busy, he found that actually people often wanted to do something good in the church, but simply did not know how or where to begin. Then, taking into account their personal gifting, desires and the needs of the church, he made his suggestions and encouraged them to take on some form of ministry, providing them with appropriate training if needed.

Other graduates took a more *“spiritual” approach* to dealing with the problem. A female pastor (Gulnora) addressed her people’s “closedness,” in personal conversations, by talking to them about God’s love for them, praying for them and exhorting people to develop closer relationships with God. She felt that there was a deeper reason behind

people's spiritual passivity: it was difficult for people to be committed to God and the church because they lacked the experience of being loved, due to many of them coming from dysfunctional families. She referred to it as a problem of "wounded souls" that I will be dealing with in more detail further on in this thesis.

One pastor (Stanislav) *did not see any solution* to the problem. He reported the closing down of small groups that his church had initiated in the four villages surrounding their town, due to the lack of committed leadership and the unwelcoming attitude of the local authorities. During the course of the interview, he several times expressed his disappointment in his own pastoral and leadership abilities and repeatedly said he did not know how to tackle most of the problems he encountered in his ministry.

5.1.1.4 Summary

The graduates reported the problem of the decrease in people's commitment to the ministry of the church. Many of them saw this problem as being related to the reason for the generally observed decline of church growth, namely, rapid economic change, and the dramatic increase in the cost of living that prompted many people to spend an increasing amount of time at work. They also pointed out that these factors were accompanied by a rise of materialism as an attitude to life, which had a detrimental effect on people's spiritual pursuits. Another reason cited was the growth of Islam and the attraction of people to that more traditionally acceptable religion.

Some graduates were disappointed with their own ability to deal with this crisis and made no substantial progress. Others were more positive, and were making significant changes in their ministry strategies. Some graduates had to become more proactive in their outreach; others had to adapt their approach to the problem; for yet others it meant attempting radical structural changes in their churches. Some had a planned and consistent approach to dealing with the problem by actively seeking people with the

abilities and desires for ministry, and connecting them with appropriate ministries in the church. Others employed a more “spiritual” approach, trying to help people to deal with their underlying emotional and spiritual issues.

5.1.2 “Wounded hearts”

In this section, I will turn to a discussion of the range of societal problems that the graduates mentioned as significantly affecting the church and their ministry. I will then look at how the graduates attempted to deal with those problems.

5.1.2.1 A wounded society

Nine graduates pointed out that one of the key problem areas they encountered in their ministry was to do with the immense social problems of post-Soviet Central Asia: the society’s actual moral fabric had been destroyed. Some graduates specifically linked it with a former Communist regime (Gulnora), others viewed it as specific to their cultures (Malin). A female middle-aged single-parent pastor of a church in a major city (Aida) described the problem in the following way:

The land [i.e. Kyrgyzstan] is morally destroyed – there is alcoholism, drug abuse, a lot of occult practices. The family is destroyed – there is no father, or often there is a father, but he does not take his due responsibility in the family - a wife and children suffer. There is a high divorce rate.

These problems were even more pervasive in smaller towns and villages in both countries. One female pastor (Tatyana) in a small, predominantly Russian town, pointed to the extreme alcohol abuse in such communities: “Some people, who were coming to church in the early days, are now dead – they were either frozen to death while drunk, or just drank themselves to death.”

Another female missionary (Malin) in a predominantly Kurdish town in Kyrgyzstan, related in detail a picture of the horrifying reality of that place: high unemployment, illiteracy, drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution and widespread domestic physical and sexual abuse. “Theft and rape happen there all the time.” Drug abuse was perceived as something very common and “normal” in that village: “People do not want to live, they kill themselves with drugs.” She pointed out that women in that culture were treated as an inferior class of people to be used and abused by men, who would divorce their wives or simply throw them out on the street for reasons such as infertility or even an illness; for some people it was not unusual to get married three to five times. It was culturally appropriate for a man to simply snatch an adolescent girl he liked, bring her to his house, rape and force her to marry him – there was nothing she could do about that, but to accept her fate: “A Kurdish girl is expected to marry before she is seventeen – that defines her status.”

Five pastors noted that for a significant number of people coming to church from such backgrounds, it was difficult to “grow spiritually” or to get rid of specific self-destructive behaviours because they themselves had been damaged so profoundly. Two graduates independently of each other used the term “wounded hearts” for describing that phenomenon:

These people were wounded: a divorce, a wounded childhood – many were forsaken by parents, or grew up in a family where their parents did not want them. God showed me – people can’t change because *their hearts are wounded* [emphasis hers] (Tatyana)

Another pastor (Gulnora) saw the damage that was done to people in that society as one of the roots of people’s spiritual passivity. Moreover, she thought that the recent economic changes were contributing to the damage:

To see where one really is [referring to people’s being withdrawn into themselves], a person first needs to receive love. There is so much rejection in our society – women are rejected by men, children by their parents. People were much wounded during Soviet times; but nowadays it gets even worse – children are rejected because their parents are busy making money.

It is interesting to note that four out of five female interviewees pointed to this problem and shared about it extensively (Gulnora, Aida, Malin, Tatyana).

5.1.2.2 Dealing with the problem

These graduates felt deeply moved by these problems and were motivated to help suffering people both within and outside the church. Some of them saw it as a central focus of their ministry: “To be a pastor for me is to have deep compassion; the most important thing is to love” (Aida).

A few graduates described their attempts to offer *structured solutions* to these problems on a broader social level. Thus, one pastor (Lev) pointed out that his church had an alcohol and drug rehabilitation centre treating twenty people. Most of them, though, tried to help people with these issues by meeting with them *personally* – from personal instruction on Biblical family values (e.g. Aida) to various forms of counselling and “spiritual healing” (e.g. Gulnora, Abraham, Tatyana).

Thus, a female pastor (Tatyana) described her “ministry of soul healing,” that she practiced both in one-on-one sessions, and in a small group context in her church. At those meetings, people recalled difficult emotional episodes in their life and prayed for each other. For instance, she recounted one case when during prayer a 30-year-old man “suddenly had a very clear recollection” of an episode from early childhood when he was ridiculed by someone and closed himself off from other people; prayer helped him to come to heal from that formative experience. When prompted as to how she had come to that practice, the pastor said she had been concerned about “wounded souls” for a long time, even while studying at Bible College. However, it was when she started in pastoral ministry that she eventually found a book where the ministry of spiritual healing was described, and started practising it in her own ministry. She could not recall more than that, pointing out

that her church was at a significant distance from its founding church, and that they mostly relied “on the Holy Spirit’s guidance.”

Malin, the female missionary in the Kurdish village, a Kurd converted to Christianity in her twenties, attempted to help people both with their more “physical” as well as with their “spiritual” and emotional needs. Thus, with the help of a Western mission organization, she was able to purchase a house in the village and to receive those young women who had attended a special school for mentally handicapped children and were subsequently thrown out on the street, as no further structured care was provided for them by the government. She also organized an after-school club where she built many relationships with girls and young women and developed an informal counselling ministry. Many women, although not Christians themselves, often asked her to pray for them: infertile women asked her to pray for children – infertility often leads to marriage dissolution and the loss of honour; mature women asked her to pray for their drug-addicted sons.

She said that her success was due to her approach - she was offering them a listening ear (unusual in that culture) and that during the meetings she did not tell them what to do, but instead asked them the right questions, so that they would eventually see the damaging consequences of their practices and choices, and make better decisions. When prompted, Malin told me that she had learnt that from a professional counsellor for whom she had worked as an interpreter in the past – to ask the “right” questions, not to interrupt, and to use her own experience.

5.1.2.3 Summary

The graduates described various social problems that the church was trying to address, such as widespread alcohol and drug abuse, neglected children, missing fathers, divorce, promiscuity and violence. This deeply affected many people with the result that they were struggling with emotional and spiritual problems – this was referred to as people with

“wounded souls.” The pastors, moved by compassion, tried to use various strategies to address these problems. Some addressed it in their Bible studies and preaching, others practiced some form of “spiritual healing” and pastoral counselling, using counselling techniques and spiritual disciplines such as prayer. Others offered various relief and rehabilitation services such as drug rehabilitation centres and “half-way” houses. It is interesting to note that the most outspoken interviewees highlighting the moral problems of society and attempting to do something about it were female ministers: four out of five women interviewed talked extensively about their ministry in that area.

5.1.3 Poverty and dependency

Eleven graduates pointed out that one of the major problems they faced in their church ministry was poverty and how to help poor people without creating *dependency*. Below I will look at the problem of poverty and dependency and simultaneously discuss how the graduates attempted to address it.

More pastors in Kyrgyzstan than in Kazakhstan focused on this problem, which seemed to correspond with that country’s much poorer economy as compared with Kazakhstan with its rich oil resources. In Kyrgyzstan, some graduates, particularly in the rural areas, characterized many of their church members as “poor:” “people are very poor; some families live literally on bread and potatoes” (Sultan). Many people struggled with trying to find a job.

For some graduates, people’s poverty was a reason for deep distress. As Christian ministers, they sincerely wanted to help people financially, but they often felt unable to help them with a long-term solution. Besides, they sometimes felt that people who had

finally found somebody who was interested in their well-being, placed unrealistic expectations on them:

I tell people about God, I tell them to change their lives – but I can't provide an alternative. ... I tell a person 'Do not steal – you are a believer now.' But he goes on: 'But how am I supposed to survive? Find me a job.' Well, I can't really find him a job. These kinds of things make me really sad (Malin)

The unwillingness to take responsibility among the people asking for help was underlined by another graduate, who started a small church in a poor village (Alik). He shared the story of how a mission agency helped people at his church to buy cows to help them become self-sustaining. However, "when people saw that they needed to work, they backed out – people do not like taking responsibility and being accountable." Thus, the lack of finances was linked by this graduate to people's attitudes such as fear of responsibility and hard work. He, being Kyrgyz himself, mentioned that such attitudes are rooted in Kyrgyz culture, that he characterized as "lazy." When prompted, this graduate did not see a way out of this problem, other than just "give them the cows as a blessing" without attaching any accountability.

Another graduate (Stepan) provides an example of how he learned to deal with the issue of dependency. He was the pastor of a church that initially started as a charity providing poor people with free meals, and therefore had a number of poor and socially disadvantaged people, such as the physically disabled. He related that at the beginning of his ministry he was baffled by the large number of requests for financial help that the church simply could not handle. Moreover, after receiving financial help, people just kept coming back for more money with the expectation that the church would provide for them. Thus, the pastor developed three strategies for helping such people. First of all, he tried to encourage people to change the focus of their expectations from people (i.e. the church viewed as a charity) to God. Secondly, he tried to find resources *within* the church, so that its members would serve and support each other, not necessarily financially. For example,

when the passport of the sole provider of one of the church's poor families was stolen, which prevented that person from receiving social benefits, he connected her with another person in the church, who knew how to deal with the issue and who was happy to assist that woman at all stages in the lengthy bureaucratic process of reacquiring the passport. Thirdly, as "the last resort" the church would help people financially. However, by his own admission, the problem was often that "people just wanted the money," and they made no effort towards making long-term changes in their situation.

Helping people in the church by connecting them to resources, rather than helping them financially, was a theme in the responses of several other graduates. One female pastor (Tatyana) who supported herself with part-time work at a construction site, sometimes took needy church people with her on one-off jobs. Another pastor (Pavel) made attempts to encourage successful business people in his church to support the professional education of young people in the church so that they could get better jobs, hoping that this would help those young people and eventually benefit the church because of their better salaries and better tithing. One other pastor (Nurbek) was looking for ways to start new self-supporting business ventures, involving the church members and thus helping them to get on their feet financially.

Summary

Several graduates, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, mentioned dealing with the issue of the poverty experienced by many of their church members. Some of the graduates related that, with experience, they came to realize that simply providing people with financial help was not enough – it created dependency and did not provide a long-term solution for their problems. Through their own experience and consultation with other people, they came to see that a better solution would be to encourage people not to expect money from them, to help in ways other than financial, and to look for resources within the church. Several

graduates tried to develop self-sustaining programmes in their churches; however, one of them noticed difficulties with people's attitudes, their reluctance to take responsibility or to be held accountable.

5.1.4 Relational issues in the church

Twelve graduates pointed out that one of the common areas they had to regularly deal with in their ministry was that of relational problems between the members of their churches. These could be divided into two main categories: marital problems, and the general relational climate in the church. Below I will look into each of these areas and simultaneously discuss the ways the pastors were dealing with those problems.

5.4.1.1 Marital problems

Seven graduates reported often having to help people with their marriage problems. As one pastor (Petr) shared, "80-90% of the problems" he had to deal with as a pastor were family problems" One pastor (Roman) made a general observation that, although people's financial situations had improved in recent years, their family relationships were often very difficult. This observation was supported by other pastors. Such problems included both relational issues between husbands and wives in the church, and problems between church members and their non-believing spouses: normally women who became Christians and started attending church, with their husbands being opposed to this, sometimes violently so. One pastor (Stanislav) also mentioned the problem faced by his church in a small town where some men could not find themselves wives in the church, ended up marrying non-Christians, and stopped coming to church.

The most common way the graduates were helping people with these problems was through personal meetings or *pastoral counselling* sessions, which sometimes included

their own wives. Thus, one graduate (Karim) shared a story about having counselled a young couple, both recent converts, who were experiencing a serious problem in their marriage, where the husband was getting angry and physically abusive with his wife because she was unable to have children. The pastor and his wife had many meetings with that couple over a period of several months, where they helped that couple talk through their issues. Sometimes the pastor had to be very firm with the husband, insisting that the abuse must stop. In most of the sessions, however, he and his wife shared the struggles they had experienced in their own marriage at the beginning of their Christian life. At that point, an American couple – teachers at his seminary – had helped them to work through their issues. The pastor told me that his and his wife applied the same principles with that troubled couple in the church:

We did not force them – we opened up to them. And in the same way that [American] couple had helped us – by “digging in” – we were trying to help them, by “digging” into their problems.

Eventually, the abuse had stopped, the relationship of that couple improved, and now that couple was very active in the church, even training at the same seminary where the pastor had trained several years previously. The key strategy for that pastor was the one that he had personally benefited from – being open about one’s struggles, and being able to talk honestly about them with someone else.

Similarly, in helping church members with unbelieving spouses who held hostile attitudes, two pastors (Petr and Egor) were addressing this problem by visiting the husbands and trying to *build relationships* with them. Another pastor (Roman) learned from experience that *the small group context*, with its emphasis on the relational and the spiritual, provided a good setting for helping people to address their family problems in sharing and praying for each other.

5.4.1.2 Relational climate in the church

Six graduates mentioned they often had to deal with problems arising between their church members. Some of them identified one of the major sources of these conflicts as related to people's attitudes towards money. Others identified these problems as "envy," "resentment" and "a judgmental attitude." Most of these pastors dealt with those in personal meetings.

Thus, one pastor (Kim) said that relational problems between church members comprised a large portion of his pastoral duties and that he dealt with them in personal meetings. He reflected on the change in his own approach to such conflicts. Initially, he would listen to one side, making snap judgments that would result from him trying to find the "wrong side." Later on, however, he realized that such an approach was often fruitless: "you may never find that 'truth' about who really was right and wrong." Now he is *trying to listen to both sides*, encouraging them to open up to what they really feel about the situation, and placing the emphasis on reconciliation rather than on finding fault: "Well, what are you going to do with it *now* [emphasis his]?"

However, he admitted that the prerequisite for genuine conflict resolution - being open and honest with each other - was extremely countercultural: "People would not tell you how they really feel - they will keep smiling and keep on withholding their real attitude towards you." Similarly, several other graduates pointed out that certain characteristics of Asian culture, such as the lack of open communication and "Asian cunningness" (Anton) complicated their task of creating a new culture of Christian love and openness. For one pastor (Alexey), these problems were "sad" but nevertheless expected, as these were brought by people from "the world" they came from. He was addressing those issues in his preaching, Bible studies and personal meetings, by "reminding" people of the new nature

of their relationships as they were now members of the spiritual family brought together by God.

Several graduates related their concern that the church should be a loving community of God's people and of their own effort to prevent or deal with the danger of the church representing just another "interests club." Another graduate (Vitaly) related that his newly established church regrettably preserved the same social stratification as society at large. People did not mix in his church, but formed relational circles according to their social and economic status – "there were wives of rich people, the ones in the middle, and the poor people – even the homeless." He said that despite his efforts to address the situation in preaching, things did not change. Eventually, his church decided to cease existing as a separate entity and its members joined another church.

It is interesting to note that several pastors tied the atmosphere in the church *to their own success in relating* to people. Thus, Petr claimed that in his own church he had close relationships with many church members, and that his church had "a community feel" where people knew about each other's problems, needs and interests, and helped each other. To him, his church was more of an exception than the rule: he regretted that most of his fellow "Coalition"⁵⁹ churches "departed from such a communal way of life." When prompted as to how he had achieved that, he replied that he had been making a conscious effort not to be self-important and to relate to people on their level, unlike some of his peers:

I have never understood that attitude where [evangelical] pastors create a distance between themselves and their people. It's like in the Orthodox or the Catholic Church – "Look here, I am the anointed one!" [sarcastically].

Similarly, a pastor and planter of five churches (Anton) pointed out that the success of his ministry was largely due to his own change of attitude towards his leadership team. He

⁵⁹ A particular large church denomination in the region. To preserve confidentiality, I will refer to it as a "Coalition" elsewhere.

shared that initially he built his relationships with people in the church on the basis of power. However, through painful experience he learned the importance of trust and reciprocity in leadership: “Now we are foremost friends. There is trust and respect.”

5.4.1.3 Summary

Several graduates reported that one of the major areas of their ministry was dealing with relational problems, concerning families and their relationships within the church. Some of these problems were seen as products of characteristics of the local culture, prone to a lack of honest communication and deceit. The graduates utilised a variety of strategies to deal with these problems, addressing them in their regular preaching, teaching sessions, and personal meetings, which were perceived as generally the most effective way of addressing those problems. Most of the graduates emphasized the importance of building relationships with people when helping to deal with these problems: spending time with them, sharing their own experiences and simply “being there” for them. Some of them pointed out that their own attitudes towards people were instrumental – being on the same level with people was helpful. For some of the graduates it meant a change in their attitudes: a change of emphasis from exercising power to becoming their friend.

5.1.5 Problems with the church authorities

Eight graduates pointed to issues they had to deal with in relation to their superiors. It is noteworthy that four out of eight of those graduates belonged to a “Coalition.” They pointed to a cluster of issues that seemed to be unique to this organisation as compared with other newer evangelical denominations in the region. Since that “Coalition” is one of the oldest

and largest evangelical denominations in the region, I considered that case worth discussing in more detail.⁶⁰

One graduate (Roman), who started his ministry in a large church under the leadership of a senior pastor, complained that the older generation of leaders displayed a lack of trust in the younger ones, that manifested itself in “cold, formal, un-brotherly relationships and an atmosphere of suspicion,” and a lack of teamwork; a situation that made it difficult for him to work effectively. In his opinion, it was a manifestation of “Eastern despotism.” He felt that the older generation of leaders were afraid of potential job competition from the younger, more educated leaders.

When prompted as to how he was dealing with it, he responded that initially he tried to build personal relationships with those leaders, but eventually he “got burnt” and now his strategy was to stay as far away as possible from them:

I do not see any way out of it. The only way is to start a new church. In this old [name of the denomination] church there are several old families that stand firm for their tradition; it is impossible to change them – either the entire leadership should be replaced, or one should start a new ministry.

Three other pastors, who belonged to that organisation, expressed similar frustrations towards their denominational authorities. Thus, pastor Petr felt resentment to the point of wanting to quit his job. He did not see the leadership as offering any tangible service to the churches either in “spiritual” or organizational matters. He described various attempts to urge them to organize a forum for the fellowship and mutual encouragement of the ministers (a desire, expressed by another interviewee, Stanislav), or to provide pastors with some training on certain burning issues such as management, working with legal documents, etc., but felt that all of his efforts fell on deaf ears.

⁶⁰ Nevertheless, only 1 of 4 Colleges and 9 of 40 of my interviewees belonged to the “Coalition” churches; therefore, this section mainly describes the problems unique to that organization.

Beside, he and three other graduates felt the “Coalition” leadership was traditionalist and anti-intellectual, which created two problems detrimental for the development of the church. First, these attitudes made it difficult for more educated people to adapt to the “Coalition” churches:

Today there are intellectuals coming to church, but they just do not fit the system. They sometimes see the root of the problem – ignorance - but these people are squashed (Petr).

Secondly, these attitudes prevented the emergence of a young, theologically educated leadership. Reportedly, many pastors of the older generation resisted the very idea of theological education, fearing that it would “destroy the Church.”⁶¹ They treated theological knowledge with contempt, or simply could not understand why they or their church members needed it. Several graduates reported that church leaders could not enrol in the Institute without being approved by the denominational board, which, in the year of the interview, screened out half of the applicants.

One graduate, a Kazakh man in his 50s, offered an insight into the older generation’s contempt for education: that generation had led the church during the period of Soviet persecution, and therefore did not have a chance of receiving education themselves. They could only learn from each other, or attend occasional conferences, or read the one and only journal published by the “Coalition.” Therefore, the older generation felt that their own experience *proved* that education was not necessary.

⁶¹ It has to be noted that the theological issues that raise concerns for that generation do *not* lie along the same lines as the Western “conservative versus liberal” debates over issues such as the historicity of the Bible, the same-sex controversy, etc. The differences in question lie within what in the West would be considered a conservative theological spectrum. One of these issues, for example, is the controversy between the so-called “Arminian” and “Calvinist” views of salvation. Many in the “Coalition” leadership, traditionally holding to the “Arminian” view of salvation (which in Russia is probably due to the historical influence of Russian Orthodox theology), reject the “Calvinist” view as “unbiblical” and “liberal,” although Calvinism is accepted as a standard theological system by many conservative evangelicals in the West.

However, he did feel that the situation was slowly changing. For example, the older generation who initially resisted the cultural contextualisation of Kazakh churches – namely, using Kazakh language and traditions during the services, using the word “Allah” etc., eventually changed their views and accepted such changes. He also pointed out that some of the “older” pastors after attending a training seminar, began to change their mind about theological education and even enrolled in the College III. He also shared a story of how he influenced one traditionalistic pastor to change his mind on a certain issue. Instead of using a confrontational approach, he spent some time with the pastor, trying to convince him of a new idea, and then later he found that the pastor taught that idea in the church as his own!

Although the problems described above were reported by the pastors of one particular church organization, four other graduates also pointed to difficulties with their authorities. They attributed it to the abuse of power and corruption, prevalent in the wider culture. Thus, one graduate (Usen) related a story of such corruption by his former leader – the pastor of an independent church that was initially supported by foreign donors. That pastor, who developed a serious theological error, was confronted by the church members, and was eventually asked to leave. However, since he had not been accountable to the church and therefore had managed to list the church building under his own name, he simply kicked the congregation out of the building. Prompted by such a painful experience, the congregation had to find a new place for worship, and decided to reorganize its structures. Instead of being led by a single pastor, they elected seven elders (one of them was my interviewee) who took turns in leading the church until they could elect a more responsible and accountable pastor. The church also changed their financial policy and now conducts all their financial dealings via the bank, to create transparency and minimize the risk of financial mismanagement.

Summary

Eight graduates indicated that struggles with their superiors were one of the major problems they had to face in the ministry. They struggled with issues such as abuse of power, psychological pressure, and the traditionalism of senior leaders. Four of these graduates who belonged to the “Coalition” churches particularly pointed to issues as authoritarianism, lack of trust, anti-intellectualism, poor organizational management, and the inability to provide the necessary further professional training. They particularly emphasised their superiors’ suspicious attitude toward theological education, sometimes to the point of them preventing and discouraging some leaders from receiving such education. It seems that there was a clash of two generations – the theologically educated younger generation, and the uneducated older one, who may have perceived the younger generation as competition and as a threat. Two graduates described their attempts, and subsequent despair, in trying to change the situation. One graduate, however, pointed out that some changes were possible and were in fact happening. In support, he cited the example of the leadership allowing Kazakh churches to maintain certain cultural expressions, and also his own strategy of persuading leaders on a personal level that resulted in some change in their thinking.

5.2 INTERNAL/PERSONAL PROBLEMS

In this section I will look at four major areas where the graduates experienced personal problems affecting their ministry: the chronic lack of regular income, the lack of leadership and management skills, the lack of personal and professional support, and the temptation to quit the ministry. I will also look at the ways in which the graduates attempted to deal with these problems.

5.2.1 Chronic lack of regular income

Nineteen respondents reported a chronic lack of regular income as a significant problem in their life and ministry. Below I will look into various issues related to this problem, such as inadequate organizational support, “poverty thinking,” difficulties of self-support, and also look into the ways the graduates were approaching those issues. Many graduates viewed the lack of income as contributing to another issue – their desire to quit the ministry. However, that issue was so prominent in the interviews that I decided to look at it in a separate section further on in the thesis.

5.2.1.1 The problem

A chronic lack of financial support was reported both by *independent* church planters/pastors, as well as by the ones employed by larger churches or organizations. Some independent church planters observed that they had to go through several tough years before their churches grew to the size where they could afford to support them. For some of them their churches have never grown to such a size.

Several graduates were at some stage supported by *foreign missionaries*, but reported serious problems associated with this. Thus, two graduates (Efrem and Alexey) serving in two different churches, shared a similar story. Both had initially been supported by South Korean missionaries, but soon after their graduation from seminary, they were left as leading pastors, and the initial financial support was cut off unexpectedly, not allowing these graduates to adjust to that situation. Since their churches at the time were young and small, they could not support them financially either. Their feeling of spiritual duty did not allow them to quit the ministry. One of them (Efrem) said that he faced serious struggles for a period of two years and eight months, with some days when his family could only afford “turnip and fried onions” as a meal. Another pastor (Alexey) reports

having had to work for ten years without taking a vacation simply because he could not afford it.

Several other pastors, working for *established church organizations*, whether international or national also found that their support was far from adequate. The problem has intensified in the last few years when, due to a rapidly changing economic situation, the cost of living has multiplied several times, but their salaries have not increased accordingly. Thus, two graduates, employed as associate pastors by a large church led by a South Korean missionary, pointed out that they were expected to be satisfied with very inadequate financial income; however, their pastor strongly discouraged them from finding any outside part-time employment.

The strongest criticism came from the pastors working with the "Coalition." A middle-aged pastor of a growing church (Petr), pointed out that the 150 US dollars a month that he was receiving from his organization, was only enough to pay his utility bills, while he had a family to provide for. He strongly criticized his organization for "making people work in a situation of poverty," while some of its church-planters "literally have to live in huts." With regret, he expressed the opinion that many younger ministers begin the ministry with idealistic fervour, willing to sacrifice their well-being, but eventually they come to face grim reality: "While he is a boy, there are only ideals in his head. But after five years of living on beggar's salary, what is he going to do with his family?"

Another pastor of the "Coalition," a male in his fifties (Hamit), agreed with that observation. Although he had a big workload - serving as a pastor and having another responsible post at the "Coalition" - the primary source of his income was his small disability pension, inadequate to provide for his family, which made him work as a freelance taxi driver in his spare time. He pointed to his unfortunate work situation, sadly commenting on the difference from secular employment:

Unfortunately, financial security is not a priority in the “Coalition” ... When I worked as a supervisor in my secular job, I cared about my employees. It does not happen in the Church today – when missionaries suffer due to a lack of finances, they are given an answer like “Well, [St] Paul was beaten – and you should also be patient.” This is not a civilized approach. We do not live 2000 years ago – there are planes flying today.

It was interesting to observe that, although this problem was most acutely stated by the “Coalition” pastors, the ministers of other evangelical denominations pointed to a similar problem with their organizations.

In this connection, a graduate of another College, who belonged to yet another evangelical association (Kim), made an insightful comment about what he considered to be one of the root causes of this situation. He felt that it had to do with a particular worldview: “poverty” values (a belief that it was somehow “spiritual” for Christian ministers to be living in poor conditions) were ingrained in the local evangelical subculture:

Our thinking is *poverty thinking* [emphasis his]. We grew up – and I really regret that – with such thinking. For me the image of a Christian minister was an image of a poor man, who for the sake of his ministry would sacrifice himself and his family’s well being.

Finally, several graduates remarked that the key issue in their struggle for survival was securing a place to live. For example in Almaty, in recent years property prices reached such a level that the majority of people could no longer afford to buy their own accommodation. One pastor (Azat) told me about the serious disappointment he had experienced: when the prices were low, he was promised by his foreign supporting agency a certain amount of money to buy his family a three-room apartment. However, during a delay in getting the money, property prices skyrocketed, and by the time he received the money, it was not enough to buy even the smallest one-room place. Thus, the graduates agreed that once a person had his or her own place, it became possible to support oneself with a part-time job; otherwise it was nearly impossible.

5.2.1.2 Dealing with financial problems

In the section below, I will look at the different ways the graduates attempted to deal with their financial problems. These ways could be divided into two categories – seeking for internal support from their local church, and seeking for some external means of support, such as outside employment or starting a small business. Below I will describe these attempts, as well as the challenges associated with them. Finally, I will look at the *value* the graduates discovered in having gone through financial struggles.

5.2.1.2.1 *Seeking support from the local church*

Some pastors who planted new churches, were initially supported by foreign mission agencies. Most of these agencies generally had an exit strategy and with the passage of time were reducing their giving and encouraging the pastors to seek support from their own congregations, thus seeking to avoid dependency and promoting self-sustainability in the churches. However, many pastors were initially (or still) reluctant to actively look for support from their churches, strongly fearing they would be perceived by their church and by society at large as taking advantage of people. Nevertheless, several graduates reported that the awareness of their churches - of taking responsibility for supporting their pastors - has grown in the last few years. One pastor (Leonid) reported that in some churches the growth in giving was “up by 70% annually.”

Two interviewees (Pavel, Anton) reported changes in their own attitude and practice in regard to this issue. For example, when Anton’s church organization stopped supporting him financially, he was hesitant to ask for support from his small church, and at first tried to support himself with low-grade construction work. However, he found it extremely challenging to do both well, and consequently he grew very tired and depressed. Eventually, he turned to God in prayer: “I sold my TV, paid the rent, sat before the Lord

and asked him what to do.” In the course of prayer he felt that God wanted him not to be afraid to teach people about financial giving, since by *not* teaching them he was “stealing from them,” that is, he prevented them from experiencing God’s blessing to the giver. As a result, he started preaching about giving in his church. He felt that God blessed that decision - although some people did not like it and left the church, the financial giving dramatically increased. Later, several successful business people joined the church, and although the church was still small – about 30 people - it came to the point of fully supporting their pastor, and even bought him a car. Moreover, the church was able to purchase a house for church meetings, and to support several daughter church plants.

However, it should be noted, out of all the interviewees there were only very few cases like that and they were based in large cities – Almaty and Bishkek - where people in recent years have become significantly more established financially than people in the provinces. It was a much more difficult thing to do in smaller and poorer communities. Thus, one graduate (Alexey), who founded a church in a small town, pointed out that it takes “much effort throughout many years” to bring such a church to the point where it would be able to fully support their pastor. He also believed that in such communities where everybody knows everyone it was essential that a pastor had a secular job, even a nominal one, so that people would not see him as a busybody: “If you do not have a job that people understand, then it is anti-preaching.”

5.2.1.2.2 Seeking outside employment and developing self-support

Many graduates discussed their thoughts and experiences on supporting themselves either via finding outside employment, or by developing their own small business ventures. Some graduates were already doing that with some degree of success: one pastor (Dmitry) taught himself decorating skills, got involved in part-time construction work, and at one point took part in a well-paid project in Russia and was able to buy his own apartment. Another (Efrem) learnt how to raise cows and was supporting his family from that small

venture. Other graduates were giving this option serious consideration: one (Kaisar) was actively looking for business opportunities and talking to other ministers who had been involved in business and who were willing to share their ideas and expertise in this area. Another pastor of a small church (Nurbek) considered opening up a farm in his village together with other church members. Several pastors were either doing a part-time degree in economics or law or intended to do so, with the purpose of getting a secular job on the side.

The pastor who described his former thinking as “poverty thinking” (Kim), provided a detailed account of the change in his attitude and practice. Upon reflection, he came to the conclusion that such way of thinking was damaging both for ministers themselves, and for the Church’s witness to the world. He came to the conclusion that it was very important for a minister to provide a positive role model for society even in the “material” sense: “if you are a man, it is your duty to provide for your family.” As the next step, he decided to exemplify that change of thinking in his own life and to do “an experiment – to see whether / [emphasis his] could do it.” He declined all personal financial support and decided to start his own business. First, having had no business background, he did extensive research in that area: “I bought and read about twenty books on business, how money works, who is successful, what is honest and dishonest in business, etc.” When he started the business, initially it was very hard to combine it with ministry, as it put “two or three times more pressure” on him. Eventually, however, the business took off, so that he reached the point of being able to fully support his family and even three other pastors: “God gave me success.” Inspired, the pastor ran a business-training seminar in his church, where he shared his experience and encouraged the other leaders to pray for a year that God would give them an idea of what they could do business-wise to support themselves.

Thus, for this pastor the “experiment” of starting a small business and supporting himself turned out to be a very positive experience: together with bringing him better financial

security, it brought him feelings of dignity and financial independence, as well as the additional opportunity to serve and to provide a positive example to his leaders.

5.2.1.3 Challenges related to having outside employment and self-support

However, many other graduates who attempted to support themselves with a secular job or by establishing other means of self-support, reported some serious difficulties in doing so. The primary difficulty was that essentially they had to run two full-time jobs, which put them and their families under extreme pressure. Thus, one pastor (Alexey) tried to support his family by growing vegetables in his garden and had to literally work on it at night time, as he was church planting during the day. He spent ten years with no vacation, as he simply could not allow himself any time off if his family was to survive.

Similarly, two other graduates (Nurbek, Petr) reported that it was very challenging to support themselves with construction jobs. The small companies employing part-time or seasonal construction workers, would normally require them to work seven days a week during the construction seasons. This made it an impossible job for pastors who had to be in church at least on Sunday: "I can't just dump the ministry" (Petr). Moreover, working for these companies one could make substantial amounts of money only by doing big and speedy projects such as building a house for very affluent people, that often required them to spend twelve hours a day for two months without any interruptions. One pastor (Dmitry) mentioned above, was able to do such work and was finally able to purchase himself an apartment, but reported that it was "extremely difficult" for him and his family.

Pastors, trying to develop means of self-support also encountered significant challenges. Thus, two graduates planting new churches reported that an agency gave them some cows in the hope that it would provide them and their families with milk and with a small income from selling it in their villages. It seemed to have worked for one pastor (Efrem), but not for the other (Nurbek). The problem was the *lack of research*: when he accepted

the money for the cow, he did not know the village well and was not sure whether this means of support would actually work there. As it turned out, the amount of time it took for him to provide fodder for his cow was not worth the results. Finally, to his relief, the cow was stolen: “Thank God!” – he told me this story with a smile.

He added that only now, after having lived in a village for a while, did he know what was worth investing in; and, if given money *now*, he would be ready to invest it in the right business. He reported that he was now actually conducting some market research and, with his church members, assessing various options for investment. He said that what he had learned from his experience would shape the direction of his work with potential future ministers. A strategy he would adopt would be to help them settle in a new place, to have them look around, and to conduct some research into what kind of small business would potentially make a profit in that village, and then help them financially to invest in it. He also added that he would only do it after he had observed diligence and a proactive attitude towards their hardships, and if they were “ready and confident” that the business would work.

Another problem was the *lack of basic business acumen, skills and experience*. One graduate (Sultan) detailed a number of business projects undertaken by his church, which hoped to attain the goal of self-sufficiency after its founding missionaries left. They tried to launch various programmes with some Western loans. However, all of these projects failed, except one; the pastor ascribed it to a lack of elementary planning, business knowledge and experience. He pointed out that it was not something to be taken for granted in the local people – something the Western agencies did not realize. For example, he related how they tried to grow wheat – but the person responsible for this had no previous experience and did not know that to make a profit he needed to sow a larger quantity than he actually did. At the end of the year, he could not even break even and the funding stopped.

Similarly, another graduate (Malin), a female missionary in a Kurdish village trying to combat poverty in her village, attempted to set up various means of self-support for the community such as a sewing workshop, a farm, and even a poverty foundation – but failed in all of them, thus creating “huge problems” with the tax authorities. The reasons were the same – the lack of business knowledge and skills:

I am not a business person. I wish I were taught some practical things – like management – how to manage, how to make things happen. We are amateurs in these things – we have commitment – ‘Halleluia, Hurray!’ – but *how* [emphasis hers] to do them? When I failed with the foundation, I wasted a lot of money...

Finally, two graduates expressed concerns in relation to the common tendency among the pastors to combine ministry with self-supporting options. One graduate (Kaisar) felt that for some of them such attempts weakened their commitment to their ministry and its quality, as they simply did not have sufficient time to invest in its proper development. Another pastor (Anton) felt that involvement in business endangered pastors’ priorities “Their heart is no longer in the ministry, they think about money.” He knew some pastors who were “deluded” into an involvement with business and subsequently left the ministry altogether. In his opinion, one needed to be certain of his or her calling from God and to commit to either one thing or another – that is, either to make a full commitment to the ministry, or to be a full-time businessman and support the church financially.

5.2.1.4 Growing through facing financial difficulties

Finally, when asked how they were coping with the lack of money, seven graduates spoke about the issue in terms of what they “learnt” from it. Thus, two pastors whose outside support was cut off abruptly reported that, although it was very hard to adjust to living without it, eventually it led their churches to learn how to support themselves and to live within the budget. Another pastor (Efrem) said that now he feels “grateful,” because as a result he “learnt to be dependent on God, not on the [foreign] missionary.”

It is interesting to note that having gone through such experiences, two of these pastors even recommended them to the younger ministers. One pastor (Anton) suggested that it was of spiritual value to have gone through what he called a “desert experience,” as it would teach them dependence on God. Another pastor (Alexey) recommended a balanced approach to the care of younger ministers graduating from seminary. Instead of, on one hand, sending them off without any support, or on the other hand, supporting them long-term and thus creating dependency, he suggested providing them with the means for self-support and helping them financially at the initial stage of settling in and establishing a self-supporting venture.

5.2.1.5 Summary

Nearly half of the interviewees experienced a chronic lack of finances in their life, either in the present or in the recent past. This problem transcended particular organisational structures or denominations: it was shared by the independent church planters, and by the pastors working for larger church organizations, who complained that they were often expected to work for a very inadequate salary. One explanation for this phenomenon was labelled as “poverty thinking” by one graduate. He felt it was the value system persistent in the local evangelical church.

There were mixed reports of the attempts to combine ministry with a secular job or developing self-supporting options. A few graduates in the large cities were successful in establishing support from their churches and pointed to it as a spiritually healthy thing to do. It seemed that there was a generally growing awareness in the churches about the importance of supporting their pastors. However, in most cases, particularly in the smaller communities, the churches were too small to be able to fully support their ministers. Besides, in such communities it was important for the pastor to be perceived by the wider community as having a secular occupation.

Other graduates tried either to find outside employment or to establish some kind of self-supporting structure, such as a small business or a farm. A few of them succeeded, and achieved financial independence. However, most graduates encountered a number of serious difficulties in doing that. It produced a serious time conflict for some, or they had to put an unreasonable burden on themselves and their families. Supporting themselves with secular jobs was thought by some to be detrimental to the effective running of the ministry, as it was producing confusion in regards to their commitment and priorities. Many graduates admitted that their attempts to establish self-supporting ventures for themselves or the church failed due to a lack of elementary business acumen, basic skills such as market research and planning, and lack of experience.

Another interesting finding was that although many graduates lived through times of financial difficulties, some of them still valued these times and viewed them as learning experiences where they grew in patience, contentment, and deeper trust in God. Some of them considered the experience of such value that they did not recommend that younger ministers should be protected from it.

5.2.2 Lack of leadership and management skills

About a third of all graduates mentioned a lack of skills in the areas of church leadership and management. In the section below, I will look in more detail at the areas the graduates experienced problems with, namely lay leadership development and delegation, lack of vision, lack of people skills and teamwork, problems with planning and with time management. I will also look at the ways they were dealing with these problems.

5.2.2.1 The problem

The chief problem reported in the area of leadership was the *lack of ability to facilitate leadership development and to delegate leadership responsibilities*. Many leaders complained about the lack of lay leaders in their churches, and recognized the importance of local church leadership development for successful church growth, but felt they lacked the ability to promote this.

Another graduate, a senior pastor of a large “Coalition” church, delegated leadership responsibilities without providing any training. This pastor started by giving certain men in the church small tasks like preparing five-minute talks for various church meetings. If the person did an adequate job, he was to be given a bigger task. After a while, that pastor suggested a certain number of men for “candidacy” in the ministry of the church. Subject to church approval, they were then given a specific ministry to lead. If after the probation period a particular candidate was successful, he could be ordained as a deacon or as a *presbyter*,⁶² and became a member of the church board. Although the pastor would not give them any systematic training or feedback, he was willing to talk to them if they encountered problems while carrying on their tasks. When prompted, he admitted that “ideally” he would have liked to give them some training similar to “a hen gathering her chicks under her wings,” but he simply could not make a practice of doing it. He likened his current style of delegation to “an eagle throwing her children out of the nest” – i.e. hoping that they would learn how to do ministry by themselves.

I was aware that this model was typical of a traditional “Coalition” church, going back to Soviet times when any kind of training was very hard to organize due to severe persecution of Christians by the state and the prohibition of formal training. Another “Coalition” pastor (Petr), expressed a strong concern for the lack of systematic discipleship

⁶² The term historically used for a person in a pastoral role in the “Coalition” churches; the term comes from the Greek *presbuteros* (“an elder”).

and leadership development in their churches, and the prevailing notion of *one-man leadership*, that in his opinion was clearly inadequate for the success of the church: “We can’t expect one man to do all the work. If everything stops, that means that the person did not do God’s work, but his own.”

Nevertheless, this problem was expressed by pastors of other denominations as well.

Thus, pastor Ermek pointed out to the unwillingness of some leaders to delegate leadership responsibilities. He recently consulted two pastors who, in his view, despite having received a proper theological training, were still unwilling to delegate responsibility to other church members, thus hindering further growth in their churches. For this pastor, the problem was not rooted in a lack of knowledge, but in the area of attitude – they were not willing to share their power with others.

Many other graduates admitted difficulties with and wanted improvement in such areas of leadership as *lack of vision* (Adilet, Tatyana), *leading and motivating people* (Adilet), *managing human resources* (Stepan), and *teamwork skills* (Adilet, Sultan). Sultan told me of a crisis in his church where, after the sudden departure of the foreign missionaries who established the church, the inexperienced national leadership team made a number of serious management mistakes. One of the chief troubles was the team’s inability to work as a team and to resolve interpersonal issues.

Several graduates mentioned difficulties in *planning, prioritizing and managing their time and other resources* they had at their disposal. “Something big falls on me and I begin to work on it” – admitted Adilet. Another pastor (Leonid), who was involved with a mission agency helping other churches with various problems, observed that the tendency not to plan was very common: “This is a specific problem of the churches in the former Soviet Union – they just go with the flow instead of planning, and then they have to deal with crises.”

My observation was that time management seemed to be an issue for many of my interviewees. Thus, I asked them to state the number of hours they spent on ministry in any given week. The majority of them found it too difficult to assess: they admitted they had no idea how much time they spent on ministry. Inability to manage time was commonly referred to as a “cultural” issue.

While in the “Coalition” churches the issue was traditionalism in leadership, the new churches had the opposite problem. Three graduates (Adilet, Anvar, Karim) felt that because they were from among the very first generation of ministers, they either lacked good role models and senior persons with experience who could guide and train them in their current jobs, or had to learn from their own leaders who had only a little more experience, competence and spiritual maturity than themselves.

5.2.2.2 Dealing with the problem

Regarding the leadership development issue, the pastors provided examples of various approaches they used, revealing various philosophies of leadership, as well as varying degrees of involvement by the pastor and varying degrees of intentionality in the process.

Thus, Karim came to a point of *crisis* where he could no longer manage all the leadership responsibilities, and it helped him to start the process of delegating. Other pastors (Atabai, Farhod, Leonid, Kim) reported providing a more *intentional and systematic training* of assistant leadership in the church. Thus, Atabai, who initially had a large church with very few leaders, prompted by the leadership training he received at his institution, engaged his church in specific discipleship training, and as a result, developed several new leaders.

Another pastor (Kim) developed a highly systematic and intentional approach in developing his leadership. In his church, that consisted of over a thousand members and over a hundred small groups, they were formed into a structured system of several

“regions” led by regional pastors, responsible for the oversight of several other leaders.

The senior pastor spent most of his time training and encouraging those regional pastors, who in turn trained small group leaders accountable to them.

This pastor (Kim), cross-nominated as a very successful leader, provided an insight into how he achieved such success. He stated that when his church had just been started, he was afraid to delegate power. However, eventually, he realised that his attitude prevented young leaders from emerging, and it resulted in stagnation in church growth; so he began delegating responsibilities. He reflected on the problem in the following way:

I think Maxwell [a popular writer on leadership] has this “principle of the lid – when you cover people with the “lid” and nobody can outgrow it ... I think I was doing that without even realizing it. Eventually, I started to realize that even my own growth would only happen when I allow people to grow beyond that “lid.” Therefore, I will challenge them to grow beyond – and then I will grow myself ...

It is interesting to note that several other pastors discussed the problem of leadership development in the light of *their own attitudes to people and power* – for them it was more than about learning a new training technique. Thus, a “Coalition” pastor (Petr) reported that from the beginning of his ministry he made a consistent effort to promote leadership development, and that he now had many leaders helping him in church ministry.

Interestingly, he did not undertake any formal training of these men. He felt that his success was the result of his emphasis on close and reciprocal relationships with them, “living life together,” which in turn made their growth possible, and that they “grew themselves” in the process.

5.2.2.3 Summary

The graduates reported various degrees of intentionality and competence in their approach to leadership training – crisis-induced delegation, delegation without training, relationally based “life” training, and a more systematic approach where the leaders look for promising trainees, and provided them with structured regular training balanced with

measured delegation of responsibilities. However, about half of the graduates who experienced problems with leadership training, admitted they struggled to address this problem effectively and wanted to learn more about it. Other pastors complained about a lack of vision, an inability to plan, manage time and prevent crises instead of reacting to them. They expressed a strong need to learn more in this area.

Only a few pastors reported having trained well-organized and competent leadership teams. An interesting finding was that several graduates who felt they succeeded in leadership development, related it not only to their organizational abilities, but to their attitude towards power. They had to come to an understanding of their tendency to hold on to power and made a conscious effort to release it in order to empower their followers and delegate responsibilities – it was not something that was commonly practised or natural in their culture.

5.2.3. The lack of personal and professional support

Fifteen graduates expressed a strong need for some sort of personal or professional support. Most of them wanted a senior figure to help them; they used terms such as “a mentor,” or “a coach.” Some of them wanted a mentor for professional advice, others for helping them in their spiritual development, yet others simply wanted an understanding person in whom they could confide. Others wanted better peer support. Below I will look into this problem and into the graduates’ attempts to deal with it, in more detail.

5.2.3.1 The need for mentors

Some graduates wanted someone to consult about the problems they encountered in their professional practice. Pastor Efrem shared that he made some unnecessary mistakes in his early ministry, simply because he was a novice and there was nobody around to ask for advice. For example, he excommunicated several people from the church, and only

later learnt that his decisions were too hasty and he could have spent more time working with those people. Advice was not available even when he was actively seeking it. When he turned to his own pastor, the South Korean missionary, this man advised him to pray. When he turned to other missionaries, they refused to give him advice because he did not belong to their organizational circle. Eventually, he decided to join another church network in order to have that kind of support available.

However, most graduates wanted somebody to help them in their spiritual or personal life. In Karim's view, many pastors in Kyrgyzstan lacked what he called "spiritual parents," and as a result, either eventually left the ministry, or "lived with sin in their lives," which in turn was a spiritual obstacle for the believers they were leading. Anton, a pastor who started five new churches, felt that lately "there was something wrong" with his "heart," that he was "full of fears and a lack of trust." He felt a strong desire to have a mentor who would help him in his spiritual life:

I need a mentor – someone who would not only teach me, but also pray with me and lead me in my spiritual life. I've been trying to do it by myself – but I can't to do it alone. You know, once I realized I got overweight and tried to get into shape. I bought running shoes, but they just lay in my wardrobe for a year. Then I went to a gym and asked a coach to train me. That guy started driving me to work up a sweat – that was great! I need a spiritual leader like that – someone who would lead me, who would say – 'let's pray, let's fast together!' [emphasis his].

These graduates were expressing the need for mentoring support, and although some of them were able to solve this issue, many found it difficult to do it for several reasons.

5.2.3.2 Difficulties in finding personal support

First, there simply were not many senior mentor figures available. As one pastor (Ilnur) pointed out, referring to the evangelical church other than Baptist or Pentecostal churches,

there was “no institution of Christianity in Kyrgyzstan” before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and that he belonged to the first generation of Christian leaders.

Second, pastor (Anton), who belonged to a church organization that existed during the Soviet era, complained that most of their senior leaders emigrated to the West soon after perestroika, being “seduced by money.” He felt that their pastors “abandoned them too early” and therefore many spiritual problems arose amidst the younger generation. He maintained that many of his college classmates left the church altogether when their “spiritual fathers” left.

Third, although some graduates found mentors among the foreign missionaries, others pointed to the cultural differences that prevented them from doing so. One of them, a pastor in his fifties (Alexey), who strongly believed in mentoring, nevertheless felt that such mentors should be “people of our mentality, formerly Soviet people.” Another graduate (Ilnur), although feeling it was unfortunate he did not have a mentor, felt he could not trust the foreigners: “Foreigners are no good – Americans have one mentality, we have another. And if you take South Koreans – their mentality is totally mysterious – some sort of an ‘Asian’ mentality, which we do not understand.”

Fourthly, there was a lack of a culture of openness in some churches. Thus, two graduates (Stanislav and Petr) wanted to have better peer support, but felt their church organization (“Coalition”) did not consider it a priority or provide any structures for this. Stanislav, who admitted he was having serious struggles in his life and ministry, complained:

There is not enough fellowship – and I am not talking about the planning meetings. I would like to find a person with whom I could just sit down with and talk on any subject, without the fear of being interrupted ... a person who would just listen to me and accept me, not judge me [emphases his].

He felt that though his organization provided enough meetings, it was not what he needed. Besides, he felt he had nobody around him to turn to for emotional support and pointed to the lack of a culture of openness and acceptance among his peers. He told me that once when he tried to share some of his personal struggles with a fellow minister, he saw “his jaw drop” and realized the other person was not ready for it.

Finally, mentoring was felt to be of low priority among the foreign agencies supporting local churches. Thus, Ermek felt that most of these agencies emphasised training, understood as short seminars and conferences, rather than mentoring. He pointed out that currently there were “too many conferences, seminars and training events in Almaty” and as a result some pastors spent too much time attending those events that had little effect on their long-term ministry. Besides by doing that they neglected the work of actual leadership development in their own congregations. Moreover, he felt that with regard to helping pastors in dealing with some deeper personal issues some of them were struggling with, it was impossible to do so on the level of formal training. Instead, he suggested that a more effective support strategy for those agencies would be in developing long-term mentoring programmes. A minister participating in such a programme would attend no more than one training event in three months – for “a boost of encouragement” - but that the main essence of the programme would be having regular one-on-one meetings with a mentor in between those seminars. That person would live in close physical proximity to the minister and provide him or her with an ongoing mentoring relationship.

5.2.3.3 Successful examples of mentoring

Several graduates succeeded in finding mentoring support. Four of them (Karim, Malin, Ermek, Kaisar) enjoyed having productive mentoring relationships with foreign missionaries. Thus, a Kyrgyz pastor (Karim) related how an American missionary couple helped him and his wife to survive a crisis in their marriage and have been a great help to them since. When he enrolled in the seminary, he was at a difficult stage of his life,

separated from his wife, and heading for a divorce. Then this married couple – teachers from his College - invited him and his wife for dinner, "unimposingly" initiated talking to them about their family concerns and offered them some counselling. Initially Karim was not comfortable with it. He felt that openly discussing issues with his wife was an "American method" foreign to his culture. However, over the course of time he started appreciating these conversations, learnt to communicate better with his wife, changed his attitudes, and reconciled to his wife. Eventually, he and his wife went on to use that experience in order to help other struggling couples in their church.

Another graduate (Malin) had likewise experienced a successful mentoring relationship with another foreign missionary and his wife for the past seven years. This mentoring relationship was ongoing: the couple lived in Almaty, regularly visited her in her town, and likewise she regularly visited them and spoke to them on the phone. She reported that that couple also mentored two other pastors living in other places. Malin, who had had extremely traumatic childhood experiences, and difficult relationships with the leader of a Christian organization she had previously worked for, emphasized that it was very important for her that this couple helped her to see that she was "*personally* [emphasis hers] precious to God," regardless of what other people thought of her. She felt their support held tremendous significance for her in her current ministry:

Sometimes when I feel that God is not on my side, they encourage me and prevent me from doing something stupid – I am like that – I can make quick and hasty decisions. When I feel bad, I can always come to them; when I am in Almaty, I stay with them. They minister to me, pray for me, phone me and ask me whether something is wrong. I am greatly helped by a feeling that I am no longer alone, that I can trust them and believe that if I do something wrong, they will still love me.

Finally, Usen and Dmitry reported that they did not have regular mentors, but at some critical points of their life and ministry they sought advice from senior leaders: in both cases these were the principals of their Colleges (I and II respectively).

5.2.3.4 Developing peer support

Other pastors were successful in establishing peer support. Thus, pastor Kim after he could not find an appropriate senior figure to be his mentor, settled for a good friend, a former co-pastor of his church, with whom he had a very close relationship. Azat and Anvar participated in a more structured form of peer support – *kurultai* - a regular meeting of pastors in [name of a city]. These pastors felt that this meeting fulfilled an important need for having both personal and professional peer support, where ministers “learned from each other.” During these meetings, relationships were formed and extended beyond the meeting. Anvar, a pastor in his twenties, who felt he lacked ministry experience in several areas, said that that fellowship was the preferred tool of ministry development for him: “I find much more in these meetings than in books.” Whenever he had a problem, he got in contact with some of these pastors, either meeting them for a meal, or by phone or email, and inquiring “what would they do in a situation like that.”

Finally, two graduates used both mentors and support from various peers, actively developing relationships with people they felt they could learn and get support from. Thus, Tatyana had two mentors – an older pastor of another church, and a female leader of a small group in her former church, who had helped her extensively in the past when she had just become a Christian.

5.2.3.5 Summary

Fifteen interviewees expressed a strong need for ongoing personal and professional support. Most of them wished for a senior mentoring figure. Others wanted better peer support, or just another person they could talk to about their problems. In trying to obtain such support, they reported a number of difficulties. First of all, they felt there were very

few senior Christian leaders available: they themselves were the first generation of church leaders, and many of the older generation had emigrated to the West. Some of them felt that the cross-cultural gap was too great for them to develop mentoring relationships with the available foreign missionaries. Besides, in more traditional churches there was also a perceived lack of a culture of mentoring. Finally, there was a lack of attention to mentoring in the mission agencies, which provided an abundance of training seminars, but had little to offer with regards to ongoing mentoring opportunities.

Nevertheless, several graduates did enjoy successful mentoring relationships. There were at least four graduates who had such relationships with foreign mission workers. Two of them reported that that support was very helpful and of paramount importance for their life and ministry; these relationships were the lifeline of their personal development. Other graduates sought and found peer support: either informal, or more structured, such as from participating in the regular pastoral meetings in [name of a city] and from building a network of ongoing relationships developed in those meetings.

5.2.4 Temptation to leave ministry

The most common problem that graduates referred to was the temptation to quit their ministry. This particular problem stands on its own, though it was at least in part the consequence of the problems discussed above. Nevertheless, I felt it was important to discuss this problem separately and to pay it special attention, as it presented a serious threat to the professional sustainability of the ministers. When asked whether they were tempted to leave their ministry, twenty-four out of forty interviewees responded affirmatively. This issue generated a wealth of data – the graduates were very willing to discuss it. Major reasons for the desire to quit were the lack of regular financial income, various conflicts, tiredness and unrealistic expectations. Below I will look into these

reasons in more detail and then look more closely at how the pastors were dealing with this problem.

5.2.4.1 *The reasons*

5.2.4.1.1 *Financial insecurity*

Earlier I underlined the problem of a chronic lack of finances as a major problem the graduates encountered. For ten of them it was the major contributing factor in their desire to quit the ministry.

For example, one pastor (Alexey), a male in his fifties, said that “the desire to quit everything was many times” due to a serious lack of money in the family. He mentioned that there were times when he did not even have enough money to provide his son with an adequate school lunch, and he felt much shame that his son “could not even eat lunch together with his friends – for 10 sum [local currency] he could only buy a weak [i.e. cheap and low on nutrition] pastry.” He commented that the desire to leave the ministry was particularly strong at times when he experienced pressure from his extended family and felt he was presenting a poor Christian witness to them: “It was especially painful to hear my relatives saying things like: ‘You have such serious [financial] problems in the family – what kind of a pastor are you?’” He added, that as an ex-Communist Party activist, with his engineering experience and connections in the *nomenklatura*, he could make “20-30 times more money” in the secular setting.

Many graduates similarly observed that the temptation to quit ministry was particularly strong due to the *sharp difference* perceived in the amount of money one could earn in the ministry and in a secular setting. As I have mentioned earlier, this discrepancy has become acute in the last several years, because of the vast economic changes in this part of the former Soviet Union. Thus, three pastors (Azat, Kaisar, Pavel) observed independently of each other that at the beginning of the nineties, when the economy was

in chaos, the unemployment rate was high, most jobs were underpaid, and people had much spare time on their hands, the situation provided an additional impetus for new Christians to get involved in ministry, especially since some foreign mission agencies offered them adequate financial support. However, with the recent growth of the local economy, there was a dramatic increase in the number of jobs available, of the average salary, and of the cost of living. Ministry pay could no longer provide an adequate source of income compared to the secular job market. One graduate observed that the number of people wanting to get involved in ministry was therefore declining: “Why be eager if you can easily make 2-3 times more in the secular world?”

Several interviewees expressed *strong feelings of financial insecurity*. Thus, one respondent, a young female with a postgraduate degree (Gulnora) described her feelings in the following way:

A desire to quit the ministry arises every day – the thoughts come: ‘You should make money, you should provide for your life – what are you doing - where are you investing your youth!?’ During the period 1998 to 2007 I seriously wanted to quit on four occasions.

Another pastor (Petr), who was receiving a very small amount of monthly support from his church organization and who supported himself with a part-time job, expressed his fear of the future and his concern for his family’s well-being: “Sometimes I just don’t know what to do ... I don’t know what the future holds for me. Sometimes I can’t sleep at nights, thinking about the future.”

5.2.4.1.2 Conflicts

Eleven graduates mentioned situations of intense conflict they were involved in as a major incentive to quit their ministry. These included conflict situations with their church authorities, with church members, and conflicts with the society around them.

Earlier I described some areas of conflict the graduates who belonged to the “Coalition” experienced with their superiors. Three of those graduates indicated that these conflicts tempted them to resign. One of these pastors (Petr) strongly emphasized that it was not the ministry *itself* that he found difficult, but the lack of understanding and cooperation from his superiors:

I have never grown tired of ministry. Sometimes I had conflicts with the [denominational] leaders – serious conflicts – then I wanted to quit everything. Sometimes I want to work in a secular profession, but still stay in ministry ...

The conflicts and the resulting strong feeling of discouragement came from his unsuccessful attempts to bring about change in the organization: “Sometimes I want to do more – but they would not let me. Then you begin to hit the wall with your forehead – which is useless and tiring.”

Four other graduates referred to some major *church conflicts* they had to deal with. One graduate, a male in his fifties (Sultan) experienced burnout, and in fact quit his pastoral ministry six months before the date of the interview. The reasons for him leaving the ministry were complex, and included an unsuccessful transition from foreign to national leadership and a decline in church attendance. However, one of the main contributing factors was his conflict with the church members, who were not happy with his leadership. The situation eventually led him to resignation and subsequent depression: “It was painful to watch a church falling apart ... Sometimes I feel that I am finished as a person. ... After it happened, I locked myself in my room, I have not gone out for half a year ...” Other conflict situations involved personal conflicts (Inur) and the need for a disciplinary action that the church members strongly resisted (Dmitry), that almost brought those pastors to resignation.

Finally, some conflicts were with the *local community*. Thus, Malin experienced a hostile attitude from some people in her village. She had a strong feeling of fear after she was

threatened with physical violence – “they told me they would kill me and my son if I stayed there any longer.” The hostility arose because, as a Kurd who converted to Christianity, she was perceived as a traitor by some members of the local Kurdish community.

5.2.4.1.3 *Burnout and unrealistic expectations*

Burnout was a strong theme among the graduates and was labelled the “number one problem in the last three years” (Leonid). Thus, some graduates wanted to quit because of strong feelings of *discouragement* resulting from the perceived low results of their ministry. Thus, Stanislav, a male in his forties, experienced a significant decline of attendance in his church in recent years – initially he was the pastor of a church in the administrative centre of the region, and oversaw four smaller church groups in the surrounding villages. However, over the years those church groups ceased to exist. In the interview he also referred to other problems, such as the apathy of the people and personal problems that he felt burdened about. He repeatedly used expressions such as “I don’t see a solution,” “I don’t see a way out,” “I feel inadequate;” and he considered himself to be currently experiencing burnout.

Two other graduates offered helpful insights into what they felt were contributing factors for the burnout of many ministers in Central Asia in the years after *perestroika*. They mentioned high and *unrealistic expectations* that both foreign missions and national church organizations placed on young converts to Christianity. One graduate (Kaisar), a male in his late twenties, who experienced it himself, made a following observation:

Since there were very few ministers in Central Asia, as soon as a person became a Christian, they stuffed one into ministry. People were not ready; as soon as their ‘first love’ faded, they had to face real problems, especially financial problems ... But there is pressure – or expectations: if a church is not growing, that means something must be wrong.

Another graduate, a man in his thirties (Leonid), who alongside the pastoral ministry was working for a mission agency, being responsible for its connection with local churches, provided an insightful observation:

The biggest problem with ministers is tiredness. ... We have created the first generation of churches in Central Asia, and every one of us has made a tremendous effort. But the results are changing – if earlier [in the early 90s] society was more open [to Christianity], now it is more closed, and the results are diminishing. Pastors got tired. It impacts their families and their relationship with God. It is the number one problem in the last three years. Many pastors quit their ministry exactly for that reason. There is pressure – the expectation of big results.

This observation seems to tie together several strands of data – the “tiredness” of the pastors was seen as the result of the pressure put on pastors to grow their churches at the same rate as they were growing in the early nineties. However, that pressure was based on unrealistic expectations – social dynamics have been rapidly changing over the last several years, and there has been an observed decline in the initial interest in Christianity. Thus, pastor Leonid summarized a common feeling as follows: “In Kazakhstan nowadays it is unprofitable to be a pastor – both financially and emotionally.”

5.2.4.2 Dealing with the temptation to leave ministry

Why did the graduates still persevere despite such overwhelming difficulties? What helped them to go on? I have arranged these data into several categories: personal spiritual calling and conviction, turning to God for help, other ways of dealing with the problem, and the retrospective spiritual value derived from having gone through this temptation.

5.2.4.2.1 Sense of calling and conviction

Sixteen graduates referred to a strong sense of personal calling to ministry that helped them to persevere during the hard times. Some of them had a strong conviction that they were *called to their ministry by God*. For example, Malin, who received death threats, kept

reminding herself that it was God who called her to that ministry, and therefore he would take care of her and her son. Similarly, another graduate (Kim) related that in order to continue his involvement in ministry, he had to have a sense of “utter conviction” that he was doing what God wanted him to do.

Other graduates pointed out that a *spiritual perspective* on life helped them to overcome the temptation to leave their jobs. Doing ministry was for them an expression of their grateful response to what they believed God had done for them, and for the dramatic changes they had experienced in their lives since becoming Christians. Another graduate (Hamit), when elaborating on why he was still in ministry despite financial problems, shared: “When I came to God, I was a total failure. Everything I have now is what God gave me. I do not bargain with him.” Adilet felt it was “an honour and privilege to be on God’s team,” and that she was so sure of her calling that if she left the ministry and made a lot of money, she knew she would not have the same joy.

Several graduates emphasised that their personal *trust* in God helped them to remain in ministry when they were going through difficult times. Describing his struggle with the temptation to leave the ministry at times of financial difficulty in his family, one graduate (Stepan) shared: “I always had that strong conviction that God controls everything; so I would sit down, cry, pray and go on.”

Finally, several graduates said that when they were tempted to leave the ministry, they were helped by their sense of responsibility and *duty* before God. In their responses they used expressions such as “I had no right to go back” (Dmitry), “I do not want to let God down” (Azat), “I was helped by a sense of duty before God” (Vitaly). Thus, Karim pointed out that whenever he felt strongly tempted to quit because of various church problems, he remembered his past – his life “before Christ,” his conversion, and the promise he made God to serve him.

5.2.4.2.1 Turning to God for help

Most of the graduates who struggled with the temptation to leave ministry, found help in the act of turning to God in prayer and in reading Scripture. Some of them talked about seeking to *restore their emotional and spiritual strength in God*. Pastor Taras used this strategy on a daily basis as a means of preventing burnout. He used the metaphor of a minister often serving as a “rubbish bin:” people often came to pastors when they needed to unload their problems and negative emotions on someone. For a pastor, however, it meant taking in all those emotions that could damage him in the long term, and therefore he felt he needed to turn them over to God:

I came to realize that it was very important for me to bring that ‘rubbish bin’ to Golgotha at the end of each day to be freed of the rubbish myself. Then I am able to absorb the ‘rubbish’ again the next day.

A female minister (Aida) told me that the best way for her to deal with her excessive tiredness was to have occasional breaks to “be alone with God.” Thus, she told me that she recently spent a short vacation near the lake, where she felt that “God renewed” her “strength and joy” in him. Similarly, another pastor (Ernek), when feeling overwhelmed with ministry tasks, experiencing inner turmoil and “getting further from God and getting too much into ministry,” practiced regular half-day breaks. During such breaks, which he also spent outdoors, he would rearrange his work according to the priorities he felt were important to him and to God.

Finally, two pastors emphasized the importance of a *personal spiritual change* that needed to happen to effectively combat burnout. Thus, Atabai recalled a particularly difficult time when some people in the church were opposed to him, there were organizational problems, he felt that nothing was changing for the better, and he was considering leaving the ministry. However, through prayer and reflection he felt that God directed his attention to the Holy Spirit. As a result, he experienced the renewal of his relationship with God, and

felt that God started a process of internal change in him. For him, the driving force of that change was the experiential and relational knowledge of Jesus, as opposed to “academic knowledge” about him. He felt that, as he “knew Jesus through the Holy Spirit more,” his character was changing and as a result of that he wanted to show his love to others in a “practical way;” therefore his whole outlook upon ministry changed:

When your character is not changing, it is hard to minister to people. We relapse into formalism and pharisaic religion; we begin to feel the ministry as a burden. But when your character is changing – it becomes easy ... give me a hard person to work with - I even enjoy that! Now I do not even admonish people anymore – God does that, I only encourage them. And God gives me a lot of strength – I visit people from morning to evening

Thus, this dramatic internal transformation led that pastor to the point where he changed his outlook upon God, and found a new passion for his ministry.

5.2.4.2.2 Other ways of dealing with the problem

Several graduates mentioned *relational* support that helped them to overcome the temptations to leave their ministry. Some of them turned to their mentors (Malin, Karim), to peers (Tatyana, Leonid, Roman), and to their wives (e.g. Eugeny, Kim and Dmitry). For four other graduates (Nurbek, Azat, Ermek and Hamit) the most helpful restorative activity was, on the contrary, avoiding all human interaction and taking regular periods of *physical rest* or getting involved in relaxing things such as gardening. Adilet mentioned that in order to have regular rest, she had to set up appropriate physical *boundaries* – limiting the hours when people could visit the church office where she lived.

Other pastors found help in forming healthy *expectations* towards ministry. Two graduates of the same College (Vitaly and Malin) recalled that some of their seminary teachers helped them to survive hard times in ministry by having instilled *realistic expectations* of ministry in them. Talking from experience, those teachers explained to their students that ministry was, at times, a very hard and unglamorous business, that they should be

prepared to quietly serve God, maybe even in a humble way such as being a “cleaner.” As a result, they did not have any “rose-tinted illusions” (Vitaly) when starting in ministry.

Finally, pastor Azat, who used to struggle with depression, emphasized that the development of a *positive outlook* upon life was helping him to prevent burnout. He felt that burnout was primarily the result of internal predispositions, namely of “wrong relationships with God, wrong emotional life, constant tiredness and judging others.” What was helping him was a conscious effort to change his perspective – “to see that the glass is half-full.” Whenever he felt he was slipping into a negative outlook upon life, he looked back on his life to remind himself about “what God has done” in his life. When he looked at other ministers, who lived in much worse conditions than he did, he felt “ashamed,” and it helped him to regain a grateful attitude towards life.

5.2.4.3 Summary

In this section, I reviewed the data related to the most prominent issue that my interviewees expressed – the temptation to leave the ministry. Twenty-four graduates affirmed that they had considered that possibility due to the many difficulties associated with ministry. Two major reasons were the low financial security of the job and emotional pressures in pastoral ministry, particularly various conflicts they had with their superiors, church members and the wider society. Another significant issue was burnout – a state of physical and emotional exhaustion that some of the graduates experienced at some point in their ministry. Some of them linked it to their frustration with what they perceived as low results from their ministry, others pointed to unrealistic expectations and pressure put on them in that regard.

The graduates also talked about the ways they were dealing with this temptation. Most of them were sustained by having a consistent spiritual perspective on the importance of their occupation – they felt they were called by God, and therefore ministry was much more to

them than a job. Many felt it was something they could do for God as an expression of gratitude for what God had done for them, and serving God was of the utmost value in their worldview. Others felt their ministry was their duty to God.

Having a strong faith, many graduates consequently found sustaining help in their personal relationship with God through prayer and the Scripture. Some intentionally took short breaks from ministry for those activities in order to restore their emotional and spiritual resources. A few used physical rest and a change of activities, others found help in relationship with other people.

5.3 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I attempted to answer the first two subsidiary questions of my first research question:

What problems do the graduates encounter in their professional practice and what enables them to deal with these problems?

- What problems do the graduates encounter in their professional practice?
- How do they deal with them?
- What capabilities and attitudes enable them in the process of dealing with these problems?

In other words, I described or painted a “big picture” of the problems in the professional practice of the graduates. I have divided all the problems most commonly referred to into two sections: “External/Ministry Related Problems” and “Internal/Personal Problems.” In the first section I described the problems of decreased interest in the church, “wounded hearts,” poverty and dependency, relational issues in the church, and the problems they

had with their superiors. In the second section I described more “personal” problems affecting their professional practice, namely a chronic lack of regular income, lack of leadership and management skills, lack of personal and professional support, and the temptation to leave the ministry.

The two most common problems affecting professional practice were, perhaps surprisingly, the financial problem and the temptation to leave the ministry. These two issues presented a serious challenge, even a threat to the career sustainability of the ministers. The fact that these problems were mentioned and talked about by the interviewees the most (nineteen and twenty-four people respectively), seem to suggest that these were systemic problems that the pastors had to deal with on a day-to-day basis. Financial problems were one of the major influences on the ministers’ temptation to leave the ministry and find better-paid jobs. The emerging economy exacerbated the problem: there was a huge rise in the cost of living and growing opportunities to earn a decent salary elsewhere.

The analysis of how they attempted to deal with those problems shows that there were no easy answers for them. The most common answer to the financial problem in the missiological literature has been the so-called “tentmaking” approach, i.e. encouraging pastors to earn money elsewhere, or to set up their own business and do the ministry either part-time or in their spare time (e.g. Lewis 1996, Wilson 2002). Among my interviewees there were only a few people who were able to do that successfully. The problems associated with this were very substantial. For instance, several graduates mentioned the efforts of Western mission agencies to help them with small loans to develop some means of self-support. However, three of them underlined the fact that when such attempts were made, they often failed due to a lack of business thinking, experience, and skills, for example, a lack of proper market research.

The lack of business knowledge and skills was only one of their problems, and it could be addressed by training. However, trying to combine outside work with the ministry resulted in significantly increased pressure on the pastors and their families, on their ability to do quality work in ministry, physical and psychological tiredness, and consequently, the possibility of burnout. Out of forty graduates there was only *one* successful example of that approach, which could simply be the result of the multiply-gifted personality of that pastor.

The graduates also pointed to the serious psychological pressures of their ministry – caring for the traumatised people of post-Soviet society in the face of the still prevalent poverty in smaller communities, growing Islamic influence and traditionalism of Central Asia.⁶³ In addition, leaders experienced the pressure of expectations to “perform” better and to grow the church at the rate it was growing in the first few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, there was a widespread feeling of a fading interest in the church in society, as well as the increased busyness of people attending the church, which in turn made lay leadership development more challenging. To add to all this, there were the “normal” pressures of pastoral ministry such as helping people resolve conflicts, and managing and leading the church, for which many felt they did not have enough skills. Besides, some graduates experienced serious difficulties with the issues of authoritarianism, traditionalism and reactionary attitudes towards them from their less educated superiors.

For many graduates, who were the very first generation of Church leaders in these countries, converted only a few years ago, and often being in their twenties and early thirties, all this was happening in the context of a shortage of personal and professional support. Only a few had mentors, and many could not find appropriate people around

⁶³ In addition, as I was finishing the thesis, I became aware of the fact that the political situation in both of these countries has been changing and there is much evidence of growing pressure from the government towards religious minorities, including significant human rights violations and signs of a return to the old Soviet way of the government meddling in the religious life of its citizens (see Chapter One). Undoubtedly, the work of ministers has become even more difficult since I did my research, due to increasing legal restrictions and the financial crisis of 2008.

them. The culture of mentoring had not yet taken root in the Church, nor was it promoted by the foreign support agencies, who chose to promote training courses instead.

Thus, the graduates faced a complex set of interrelated issues in their ministry. Many of those issues were related to larger societal, economic and political problems that the graduates had little power over – they could either accept those circumstances, adapting their ministry accordingly and doing their small part, or to succumb to burnout and leave the ministry. They had more direct influence in dealing with “internal” problems, but even some of those issues - such as the lack of financial support or difficulties with church superiors - involved their supporting agencies and denominational authorities, and therefore could not always be solved by single individuals. I will now turn to the analysis of the qualities that the graduates required to deal with those problems.

CHAPTER SIX: MINISTERIAL ATTITUDES AND CAPABILITIES

In answering my first research question, I want to go beyond a descriptive account of professional problems and how the graduates dealt with them. In this chapter I will delineate my attempt to analyse what *enabled* the graduates to deal with these problems. In so doing, I will attempt to extract from my data a list of various qualities that the pastors needed to possess or develop in order to achieve this. As will be seen, these qualities will be termed *attitudes, values/beliefs and capabilities*, according to the definitions provided in Chapter Three. I will also use a more generic term “qualities” as encompassing both “capabilities” and “attitudes.” In my attempt to categorize this list of qualities, I clustered them into four main groups: “a Spiritual Cluster,” “an Interpersonal Cluster,” “a Change/Learn Cluster,” and “a Strategic Cluster.”

6.1 SPIRITUAL CLUSTER

In this cluster I put together the qualities related to the graduates’ explicit reference to the “spiritual” means that they felt enabled them to deal with problems in their ministry. “Spiritual” in this context refers to the graduates’ references to their God-centred worldview and to their perceptions of their own personal relationships with God based on the Bible and interpreted within the evangelical Protestant tradition. In one sense, this conceptualization is reductionistic, because a God-centred worldview permeated the graduates’ other values and capabilities. However, to operationalize these qualities, I decided to cluster those of them distinguished by direct references to God as “spiritual” qualities, as distinct from those referring to the relationship with other people or to the ability to change and think strategically.

As I listened to pastors and subsequently analyzed the interviews, I realised that they perceived these “spiritual” factors as fundamentally important for their ability to deal with the problems of ministry. These included both *values/beliefs* such as “ascribing ultimate value to God” and “a strong sense of personal calling,” and *capabilities* such as “exercising faith in hardships,” and “turning to God for help.”

6.1.1 Ascribing ultimate value to God

(E.g. Alik, Karim, Hamit, Ilnur, Adilet, Roman, Azat, Dmitry, Vitaly.) This reflects the pastors’ *overall value system, their spiritual perspective on life that defined their fundamental priorities*. The pastors believed that in serving God and his people they were fulfilling the ultimate purpose for man in this life; nothing else they could do with their lives would be as important as that. This conviction gave them the motivation to persevere in ministry despite all the difficulties they had.

This value system helped them to deal with the temptation to leave their financially insecure and emotionally draining jobs. Faced with the alternatives, one pastor (Alik) shared:

I know that there is nothing else worth doing on this earth, only to serve God; there is no meaning in anything else. God has done so much for me; he lifted me up from the mud – it would not be fair if I left now.

Thus, for him, as for many of them, engaging in ministry was a *privilege*, a grateful response to what they believed God had done for them, and for the dramatic positive changes they had experienced in their lives since becoming Christians. Similarly, another pastor (Ilnur) said that although his financial support was always low, he did his ministry gratefully: “I do it for the sake of the Lord, knowing what a sacrifice he made for me” – referring to the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross.

Other graduates spoke of overcoming the temptation to leave their ministry by using the language of personal responsibility and “duty” before God. In their responses they used expressions such as “I had no right to go back” (Dmitry), “I do not want to let God down” (Azat), “I was helped by a sense of duty before God” (Vitaly), “I promised God” (Karim). Such a sense of duty stemmed from their belief that serving God was of supreme value in this life, and this sustained them during the most difficult times in their ministry.

6.1.2 Strong sense of personal calling

(E.g. Karim, Efrem, Tatyana, Adilet, Anvar, Kim, Ermek, Roman, etc.) This factor refers to the pastors’ *strong sense of being personally called to Christian ministry by God*. At least sixteen graduates used the word “calling” or another conceptually related term. Again, this belief was most often mentioned in connection with dealing with the temptation to leave their ministry. The graduates referred to a clear sense of God calling them to ministry as something that kept them going despite various difficulties. Thus, a female graduate (Tatyana) who was many times tempted to leave her ministry in a Russian village, recalled:

The desire to leave frequently arises – sometimes it feels it [the ministry] does not make any difference. But I am grateful to God, that when I went to [name of the village], I had a revelation from God. It sustains me. If I had simply been told by someone: ‘Go!’ but did not have that inner assurance, I would have already left the ministry, but now I am surviving. It is certainly God’s revelation that keeps me here. When I am having difficult times, I do try not to be alone, I go and visit another female pastor. But if I had not had that *revelation*, these meetings would not have helped [emphasis hers].

Thus, for Tatyana, human support alone would not help if she did not sense that God had called her into ministry. Despite the difficulty of living on a low wage in the hostile and depressing social environment of a poor Russian village, she chose to stay and continue her ministry because of her sense of God’s call. Other graduates referred to “feeling Jesus

called me” (Efrem), or to “God’s call” (Karim), or to having the “utter conviction” that what he was doing was God’s will for him (Kim).

6.1.3 Exercising faith in hardships

(E.g. Dmitry, Stepan, Malin, Efrem, Alexey, Ermek, Anvar, Taras, Danil.) This quality refers to the pastors’ ability *to persevere in ministry in difficult circumstances due to their belief that God would sustain them, and that their suffering has an ultimate purpose*. Thus, there was both a belief, and a capability that reflected that belief, involved in the pastors’ perseverance through difficult times. Again, this quality helped them in their struggle with the temptation to leave the ministry. During times of financial difficulty in his family, one graduate (Stepan) shared: “I always had that strong conviction that God controls everything; so I would sit down, cry, pray and go on.”

Another graduate (Dmitry), recalling a particularly hard time in his ministry when he had no money and no source of support, and also faced problems in his church and problems in his relationship with his parents, said the following:

I trusted God, knowing that I had no right to go back. I was praying – there was a thin thread of faith remaining. Faith, which welled up during those hard moments, helped me to go on.

Eventually, he did get through that time of difficulty, resolving his financial problems and the problems in the church.

Moreover, several graduates pointed out that their faith helped them to find meaning in and to learn from their experiences amidst hardships, particularly during times of financial struggle and when undergoing the temptation to leave the ministry. Thus, pastor Efrem recalled with gratitude the time of extreme financial difficulty he had experienced at the

beginning of his ministry: he felt that through that experience he had learned “to be dependent on God” and not on the foreign missionary who put him in charge of the church.

Another pastor (Danil) who spent much of his time engaged in a difficult cross-cultural ministry in a village, recalled attaining a point of despair and a desire to quit. He reflected on that experience in the following way: “At that point God reminded me of *who I am – a learner, not the teacher*. Even if there are no results around you, there are results within you. It is important to see *meaning* in any experience [emphasis his].” He was later told a fable that he found to be very helpful to conceptualize his experience:

A rabbi preached to people for many years, but they did not change. One day a boy asked him: ‘Rabbi! Why do you keep doing it if people do not change?’ And the rabbi answered: ‘I don’t preach just to change the world. I also preach so that the world will not change me.’

Thus, this graduate found that having faith in God’s sovereign control enabled him to interpret his difficult experience in that light, to find personal value in that experience, and to persevere. Their God-centred worldview helped the graduates to see meaning in the situation regardless of the visible results of their ministry.

6.1.4 Turning to God for help

(E.g. Efrem, Gulnora, Tatyana, Anton, Karim, Atabai, Taras, Aida, Ermek, Ilnur.) If the previous quality refers to the pastors’ *trust* in God and perseverance, this capability refers to their actual *activity* of turning to God for help either through prayer or reading the Bible. This activity was used as a means of addressing a wide range of external and internal problems, besides the “temptation to leave the ministry.”

Thus, the pastors prayed sincerely when responding to their *ministry problems* such as spiritual passivity in the congregation (Efrem) or the deep emotional problems of church

members (Gulnora). Pastor Gulnora used to spend a considerable amount of time each day praying for her people, believing that it was an important and effective activity: “God is *not a concept* [emphatically] – he is alive and real – he *does* help when we ask him.” She also approached God in situations of uncertainty, where there was no obvious solution: “I have encountered many problems that the seminary did not teach me about. The only way to approach these problems was to go straight to God.”

Three other graduates (Anton, Karim and Atabai) recounted stories of how they turned to God in situations of *personal crisis*. As a result of these prayers, and subsequent reflection, they felt they received guidance from God that resulted in a profound change of attitude (more on these cases in the “Change/Learn” cluster). In all three cases, however, the pastors ascribed these changes not to the reflective process itself, but to intervention from God through the Bible, prayer and direct revelation; or else through God “prompting” them to that reflection.

Other graduates (Taras, Aida, Ermek, Ilnur) recounted turning to God for help in prayer and Scripture as a regular way of restoring their inner strength and *preventing burnout* that they felt was likely to happen due to the emotional and spiritual intensity of the ministry. Furthermore, some of them emphasised that the spiritual aspect was the key to that process; physical rest or human relationships alone could not fully restore them. Two metaphors were used in the attempt to conceptualise this idea. One pastor (Taras) used the metaphor of a minister serving as a “rubbish bin:” a pastor needed to come to God daily to “empty” the internal emotional “rubbish bin” that was “loaded” by problems and negative emotions during his or her interactions with people.

Another pastor (Ilnur) found through experience that he could not fulfil his deeper spiritual needs through other people alone. He conceptualised his experience by borrowing a metaphor from Christian psychologist Dr. Larry Crabb: trying to fulfil his deeper needs

through other people was like “digging waterless wells,” – a tiring and fruitless exercise. A personal relationship with God himself was essential:

If I did not fully trust Jesus, I would have gone crazy – the spiritual and psychological pressure on pastors is huge. ...Only Jesus can give help ... It happens through prayer, in fellowship with him, through contemplation – when I “consider the One who has suffered” [quoting Hebrews], when I remember how Jesus was treated, reading those Bible passages describing how people insulted him and how he reacted to them.

Although this change of thinking did not stop this pastor from sharing his problems with others, he found that his primary help in dealing with the pressures of ministry came from turning to God and reflecting on the suffering of Jesus.

Summary

As was shown in this section, “spiritual” qualities were certain beliefs and capabilities stemming from the pastors’ faith-based worldview and perceived experiential knowledge of God. These qualities were fundamental to their ability to do effective ministry and deal with its severe pressures. They believed that God was of ultimate value for them, that he had called them into ministry, and therefore their ministry was important even if they could not see any immediate fruit from it. These values allowed them to make sense of their profession, to remain in the profession during difficult times, and to make use of “spiritual” resources to solve various problems in their professional practice.

6.2 INTERPERSONAL CLUSTER

In this cluster I grouped the interpersonal qualities that enabled the graduates to solve problems in ministry. Such qualities were “being open to receiving help,” “prioritizing relationships,” “compassion,” and “empowering others.”

6.2.1 Being open to receiving help

(E.g. Karim, Kim, Nurbek, Malin, Tatyana, Leonid, Roman.) This attitude refers to *being open with others about one's struggles, and the ability to seek emotional support*. It was mentioned particularly in relation to overcoming the temptation to leave the ministry. Some graduates (Malin, Karim, Nurbek) regularly turned for emotional support to their *mentors* (more in the “change/learn” cluster). Other graduates (Tatyana, Leonid, Roman), primarily turned for support and encouragement during particularly hard times to their *peers*: “When I get tired of ministry, I try not to be alone – I visit another female pastor” (Tatyana).

Some graduates (Karim and Nurbek) had to go through a process of significant cultural attitude change in regards to the whole concept of asking for emotional help. Thus, Nurbek, who described himself as coming from a strict Muslim background and who therefore perceived sharing his struggles as a weakness, was initially very reluctant to share with others. Eventually, however, he discovered the relief that came from sharing with his pastor. As a result, during his current ministry, he has several friends with whom he regularly shares his burdens.

Two pastors pointed out that when they openly shared their own struggles with others, it resulted in those people opening up, with deeper relationships being built and a more effective ministry emerging as a result. Thus, Karim and his wife, who had themselves been helped by a missionary couple who had been open with them about their own struggles, were able to use this strategy to help a struggling couple in their church. With pastor Kim (as will be discussed in more detail further on) it was seen as an important strategic tool for establishing a better relational climate in the church – when he opened up about his struggles to his leaders, it gave them permission to do the same.

6.2.2 Prioritizing relationships

(E.g. Kim, Petr, Karim, Anton, Adil, Pavel, Tatyana, Aida.) This quality refers to the pastors' *relational emphasis, to their conscious effort to prioritise relationships with their people above the organisational and strategic goals of ministry; being centred on people, rather than on "the business" of ministry.* This attitude helped the graduates to address interpersonal problems and conflicts between church members, to help them with their family issues, and with emotional problems.

Pastors who had this attitude committed a major portion of their time to being with people, helping them, and building relationships with them. Spending much time with people was in itself an important factor in effective pastoral ministry. A good example of this was given by pastor Kim. He recounted an incident when a young man came to see him one day. This man was going through a difficult process of reconciliation with his wife after her marital infidelity. The man had forgiven her but was struggling emotionally in trying to relate to her. The pastor said that he decided not to tell him what to do, as the "right knowledge" would not have helped the man whose heart was broken: "What could I say? That 'as Christ loves the Church, you husbands should love your wives'? Well, the guy already knows that."

Instead, the pastor decided to offer that man as much time as he wanted. The man even stayed in the pastor's home overnight, the pastor took him out for dinner, and stayed up with him until 3 a.m., talking. As the pastor shared, his main intention was not to discuss the man's situation, but just "to spend time with him" – and they ended up talking about many things, including this man's situation. When the man was leaving, he said to the pastor: "Thank you for spending time with me - I realize how busy you are ... I feel much better now." Thus, the relational aspect, the very fact of his presence and human support was the key factor. The young man particularly appreciated the fact that his pastor, a very

busy man overseeing a church of over a thousand people, allocated him as much time as he needed. The pastor himself emphasised in the interview that he *deliberately* had to change his typically “business-like” style of leadership to a more “relational” one in order to effectively develop the church – he saw it as a very important priority.

It is interesting that for pastor Petr, making relationship building a primary priority of his ministry seemed to be the solution for the problem many other pastors experienced, namely, a lack of lay leadership in the church. He viewed his church as a “family,” where people lived as a community taking part in each other’s lives and sharing whatever limited resources they had. When asked how he achieved his goal of having many lay leaders helping him minister, his response did not refer to any specific managerial or “leadership development” techniques. Instead, he stressed that it was more the natural result of his emphasis on developing close relationships with his people. For him, “living life together” was what made their growth possible; and they “grew themselves” in the process.

6.2.3 Empowering others

(E.g. Kim, Petr, Anton, Aida, Karim.) This quality refers to the pastors’ *emphasis on sharing power with other people*. Moreover, for them it implied more than the ability to delegate, indeed it involved an *attitude of consciously demoting oneself and of empowering others rather than of holding on to power*. It thus was closely related to *humility* (as the quality contrary to “arrogance” and “pride”) and could be viewed as a capability resulting from that attitude.

For instance, one pastor (Kim) reflected on his development of this quality and the effect it had on the development of lay leaders in his church. As a young pastor he was afraid to delegate power, feeling he could do everything better by himself. However, in the course

of time he realised that as a result, his attitude - often unconscious - prevented young leaders from emerging, and the church stopped growing. Upon reflection, he started delegating responsibilities and church growth resumed. What he learnt from that experience was that the inability to delegate was related to his own internal attitude: "There is always a temptation to control everything by myself. I think I will always have this temptation ... " However, through that experience he learnt to resist that temptation and learned "to follow the people, who are better than I am."

Another pastor (Ermek) told me that he recently consulted two pastors of different churches who, in his opinion, had the same problem:

They do not trust people but try to do everything by themselves; they do not empower people – I am not sure if it's pride or a lack of ability. I think it is pride – both of them are studying [at the ministry training college] – they just do not want to trust people. It is a problem, because their churches will not grow any further. I think it is a spiritual problem.

For this pastor, the lack of ability to delegate power went beyond the issue of skill, but was rather a "spiritual" problem; it was more a problem of "attitude" rather than one of the right "knowledge" or even "competency." For him, people could know about the importance of delegation, but still fail to do so due to their desire to hold on to power.

The ability to empower others was particularly important when pastors were dealing with lay leadership development in their church. Moreover, empowering lay leaders helped in turn to address another problem: the one of church growth. When leadership was delegated, it resulted in a more active and growing church. It is noteworthy that pastor Kim has been consistently cross-nominated by his peers to be one of the most successful in Central Asia – the church grew from zero to more than a thousand people in the country of Uzbekistan where the government openly persecutes religious minorities.

6.2.4 Compassion

(E.g. Aida, Tatyana, Malin, Gulnora.) This quality refers to the pastors' *deep personal motivation of love and compassion towards people*. This attitude was particularly important for those pastors who were helping people with "wounded hearts."

All four graduates who explicitly referred to their compassion for people were female ministers. For instance, Aida, when describing the reasons for her decision to become a minister, said she was *moved to it* when she "saw the spiritual poverty of the nation."

When asked what it meant for her to be a minister, she answered: "To be a pastor for me is to have deep compassion ... the most important thing is to love." She told me that a part of her recent ministry had been to encourage and support some other ministers who "fell" [into sin] and were not involved in ministry anymore.

Another minister, Malin, said that she felt deep compassion for her (Kurdish) people, living in dire social and economic conditions. This compassion motivated her to help those suffering people. Her concern was for their spiritual well-being: "I can tell them about God who can truly help," as well as their "earthly" well-being: "My dream for them is that they receive an education and discover some purpose in life." In the case of Tatyana, a sense of deep concern for people's emotional well-being motivated her to help people with "wounded souls." Compassion helped her to identify the need for such a ministry and prompted her to find resources and develop a ministry of "spiritual healing."

Summary

The qualities discussed in the "Interpersonal" cluster referred to both graduates' internal *attitudes* and the *capabilities* allowing them to effectively relate to other people. Having those qualities played a significant part in their ministry: it motivated them to serve people;

it contributed to their own emotional health – which in turn contributed to their career sustainability; it helped them to provide an atmosphere in their churches that was conducive to relationship building, “spiritual growth,” and effective leadership development.

6.3 CHANGE/LEARN CLUSTER

In this cluster I have put together a number of attitudes and capabilities that the graduates displayed in the area of learning new things and experiencing change. I will dedicate considerable space to the discussion of these issues as they are supported by a vast amount of data.

6.3.1 Ability to change

The qualities described in the following section refer to the ministers' *willingness and ability to change their methods of ministry, their concepts of ministry and their own internal attitudes.*

6.3.2.1 Changing methods

(E.g. Alik, Dmitry, Azat, Atabai.) The ability to change and adjust the *methods* of ministry was an important capability for those graduates who had to deal with the issues of “growing passivity” and “church decline.” Several pastors came to realise that since times had changed, as had church growth dynamics, they had to make adjustments in their outreach strategies. Thus, Alik realised that he needed to make more effort to go out to the community, rather than expecting people to come to church. Another pastor (Dmitry) changed his approach from pressuring people to take more responsibility for ministry to educating them about the issue, which he felt produced much better results.

Several pastors (e.g. Azat, Atabai) decided to introduce more radical changes, such as the complete restructuring of their churches – instead of the traditional one-place meeting format, they decided to divide the church into “cell groups” so that people would meet locally in each other’s homes. For Azat, this restructuring would save people travelling time, encourage people to take responsibility for ministry, and help them to develop closer relationships with each other.

It seems that the inability to adapt to a rapidly changing social, economic and spiritual environment was a part of the reason why two of the pastors interviewed were struggling. One of them (Sultan) was unable to adjust to the new leadership situation after the foreign missionary team left. Another pastor (Stanislav) admitted that he simply “did not know what to do” after his church shrank in size, and its four satellite home groups closed.

6.3.2.2 Changing ideas

(E.g. Kim, Stepan, Anton.) For other graduates, changes had to go deeper than simply revising methods; some of their *conceptual thinking* in relation to Christian ministry had to change. Such changes were needed to enable them to deal with certain issues – particularly the ones related to money, such as “a chronic lack of income” (Kim and Anton) and “dependency” (Stepan) – on a deeper level.

Such change is exemplified by pastor Kim and his reflection on “poverty thinking” in our conversation on how he dealt with the issue of a chronic lack of income. In the interview, he described the process of change. He admitted that at the beginning of his ministry he shared the view that a truly spiritual Christian minister must be poor; at that time he even tried to look poorer than he was to the members of his church. However, he later became concerned for the well-being of his leaders and started questioning the validity of his own view:

I looked at my ministers – they lived in even greater poverty than I did - and I thought: ‘They will never straighten up; if they do not have a good source of income, they will not live well – it’s all because *our thinking* [i.e. of the senior leaders; emphasis his] is like that.

The pastor started reflecting on the issue and came to the conclusion that "poverty thinking" was not really something inherent in the biblical value system itself, but was simply an inadequate interpretation of these values in the local evangelical subculture. He saw that such thinking was damaging both to the long-term well being of the church, and to its witness to the world. To be fully consistent, he decided to exemplify his new thinking and started a small business himself. Eventually, he was able to come to the point of fully supporting himself financially and could encourage other ministers to follow his example. Having achieved that, he experienced a feeling of “great freedom” deriving from the fact that he was now supporting himself and did not have to be dependent on any sponsorship: “Of course I believe in accountability, but I prefer to be dependent on the church *spiritually* not financially. Now I can do ministry simply because *I like doing it* [emphasis his].” Hence, as a result of reflection, he came to examine and rethink one of the values that he adopted at the beginning of his ministry from the previous generations of ministers who taught him.

6.3.2.3 Changing deeper personal attitudes

(E.g. Atabai, Karim, Anton, Kim, Pavel.) This refers to the pastors’ *ability to undergo deep personal change that, in their opinion, allowed them to deal with difficult situations in ministry*. This quality refers to attitudinal change and character transformation, which went deeper than changes in their professional skills or even change in their conceptual thinking about ministry. This personal change was initiated either by a crisis, or by a critical self-evaluation.

6.3.2.3.1 Crisis-induced change

Three graduates (Karim, Atabai, Anton) ascribed such a change directly to God's intervention in their life at a time of dire need or crisis. These changes helped them to overcome burnout and the temptation to leave the ministry, to renew their passion for ministry, to reinvent themselves, and to find new strength to go on.

Thus, one graduate (Karim) described the burnout he experienced after two years of active church planting and pastoral ministry. During that time he spent so much time doing ministry that it became damaging for himself and his family. Eventually, he "hit rock bottom" and turned to God for help. One day when he was travelling in the mountains and his car broke down, he had an experience while praying and reading the Scriptures; he felt he "received the answer":

When I was reading the story of how Jesus healed the hunchback woman, God revealed to me through his Word: 'I do not need what you *do*, I need *you* [emphasis his]. You are a spiritual hunchback, and when you are crippled, you cannot look up and see heaven. I want to heal you from that illness.'

Following that, the pastor returned home and reflected on this experience. Finally, he was able to understand his problem: his priorities had not been right - the ministry itself had become more important to him than his relationship with God and with his family: "To put it simply, through my fanaticism – only ministry, ministry, ministry - I departed from the Lord." As he reflected on that experience during the interview, he described his former attitude as "immature" and his former priorities as "wrong." Eventually, with the help of his mentors he was able to change his attitudes, resolve the conflict he had with his wife, and developed a healthier approach to ministry.

Another pastor (Atabai) described a tough time in his ministry when he faced a number of organisational and personal problems with his church members and was considering leaving the ministry. Through prayer and reflection he realised that the root of the problem was his internal resistance to personal change, that made it difficult for him to minister to

people. He realised that he had "relapsed into pharisaic religion" as opposed to experiencing the ministry as a product of a dynamic personal relationship with God. As a result of such reflection and prayer, the pastor experienced the renewal of this relationship, he felt his character started changing and therefore his outlook upon ministry changed: "... when your character is changing – it becomes easy ... give me a hard person to work with – I even enjoy that!" A dramatic change of attitude allowed the pastor to renew his passion for ministry and to overcome burnout.

Another example of changed attitude is pastor Anton, who was dealing with the problem of "dependency" in raising a new generation of leaders. He had a painful experience when younger leaders whom he felt he "spoiled" with money, divided the church. Upon much reflection the pastor decided to change his approach towards dealing with people who approached him with financial needs:

I realized that it was important to teach people to turn not to men, but to God. Young leaders should have the opportunity to have a 'desert' experience so that they would really pray. I no longer give them a chance to expect things from me. Before, I focused their attention on myself; now, on the Chief Shepherd [i.e. God]

Hence, the pastor had a change of attitude – he realised that a part of the problem was his own internal disposition. Initially he focused people's expectations on himself, thus creating an unhealthy dependency and frustration in them. As a result of this painful experience, he realised he could no longer "play God," so he changed his attitude and started encouraging people to shift their expectations from himself to God – he was the true Giver. He felt that his change allowed him to deal with the problem of dependency, gave him a better perspective on raising junior leaders, and took away the extra pressure of feeling responsible for providing for them financially – which helped him to prevent his own burnout.

6.3.2.3.2 *Strategic change*

Two graduates (Kim and Pavel) provided insights into the process of change in their attitudes that was initiated not by a crisis, but by their critical self-evaluation. In the first case, it helped the pastor to deal with the problems of “spiritual passivity” and “church growth.” In the second case, it helped the pastor to deal more effectively with conflicts and gave him the means to prevent his own burnout.

The first pastor (Kim) described a situation where he was able to see the signs of a growing problem in his church that required him to initiate a major change in his attitude. Being the pastor of a large “cell church,” he said that at a certain point in his ministry he noticed that his church started to lose its warm family-like atmosphere, that relationships among people became “more superficial,” and that “people were afraid to reveal their weaknesses to each other, afraid to look funny.” He also noticed that at the same time the church stopped growing, and he began receiving feedback from people complaining they were losing interest in the church. After some reflection, he realized that the reason for this alarming development could be related to his own tendency to place too much emphasis on the organizational excellence of the church at the expense of the relational aspect. Upon reflection, he realised he had to start with a change in his own attitude, which was not easy:

I am not really a “natural” pastor. I am more a strategic kind of person – I always ask the question: “where do we go from here?” But when I was like that with people, I noticed that they were becoming cold and closed. I observed others [other leaders] – they were very open, they could share everything about themselves, even confess their sins. ... I started changing my character – some things I was very reluctant to change.

Having decided to change his not naturally “relational” personality, the pastor made much conscious effort in that direction. He started telling his leaders openly about his own struggles and problems. He became less “business-like” in his team meetings and instead

concentrated his efforts on building personal relationships with his leaders, both in formal and informal settings. And the results followed:

... and then I immediately saw the results – at once three guys approached me and confessed that they had been sleeping with women for a year. I thought – would they have approached me three years ago? Don't think so – they would have been scared and would have continued living in sin.

As a result of his efforts to change, he saw the desired change in his leaders who in turn became more open and relational, and eventually the atmosphere of the whole church began to change.

Pastor Pavel gave another example of a strategic personal change. When he started pastoral ministry after having spent several years teaching at a seminary, he realised that the new situation “was not a natural comfort zone” for him. He came to that realisation through having to deal with situations of conflict with people, when he realised how emotionally difficult it was for him to confront people – he felt drained, highly uncomfortable and tempted to leave pastoral ministry. Upon reflection, he discovered that his problem was rooted in his *epistemology*, and that for him to be effective in ministry he had to change some of his deepest internal attitudes:

I have largely been formed as a positivist – I am rather a rationalist - I am used to being led by programmes, strategies and methodology – the transcendent element was missing. I acutely felt that gap in me when I became a pastor, because when I was in education, I could deal with problems simply by applying my *knowledge*. I came to the point of realising my lack of ability, my powerlessness. I now realise how dependent upon God I am, I see how important it is to work on my *heart and emotions* – especially when I encounter conflicts, confrontation and rejection. That's what is characteristic about the pastoral ministry – you invest much, but gain little, and you head towards burnout. I am now learning how to restore my resources in my relationship with God – how to renew myself and not to fall apart ... [emphasis his]

Pavel identified his problem as going deeper than a lack of knowledge or even lack of a particular interpersonal skill (e.g. skill in conflict resolution). Upon reflection, he realised that the source of this discomfort was his lack in the “transcendent” or “spiritual” area –

such as the ability to restore one's strength in God. Using his metacognitive ability, he was able to reflect on his own epistemology, trace the problem back to his rationalist education, and made a decision to grow in the "spiritual" area of life.

6.3.2 Learning from experience

6.3.1.1 Learning from current ministry experience

(E.g. Stepan, Anton, Nurbek, Tatyana, Pavel, Kim, Efrem, Dmitry.) This quality refers to the *pastors' ability to reflect on new problems, learn from the process of solving them, and to use that newly acquired knowledge for further ministry.* This capability was of particular value in the context of learning from one's mistakes in dealing with a wide range of problems such as "leadership development," "decline of church growth," "dependency," and "lack of income." These graduates provided an account describing the initial problem, their unsuccessful attempts in solving it, engaging in the reflective process, and developing better ways of dealing with the problem.

This quality was exemplified in pastor Stepan, who had to address the difficult issue of tackling poverty in the congregation without creating dependency. His church largely consisted of socially and physically disadvantaged people. Simply giving away money and food proved to be an inefficient way of dealing with the problem, since some people simply wanted more, did not take responsibility for their financial problems, and were jealous of those who they felt were receiving better support from the church than they were. The pastor was looking for a way to solve this problem. A Western missionary, whom Stepan approached with a request for funds, helped him to see the nature of the issue by refusing to give, because giving would have created even more dependency and would not have helped to solve the problem in the long term. He suggested that Stepan needed to do

something different, rather than constantly looking for outside support and pouring it into the church. Stepan described his reaction to that conversation in the following way:

First, I got resentful. But later I reflected on it and saw that *some* people [in the church], despite their hard living conditions, are being smart, they are optimistic, they don't ask for money. I saw this as *the key* [emphasis his].

The pastor, prompted by the missionary, came to realise the validity of his advice.

Furthermore, upon reflection he noticed that not all poor people in the church had the same attitude towards their condition: some did not ask for money and proactively tried to solve their own problems. Therefore, he realised that what he could do differently was to encourage those people who *were* constantly asking for money to change their outlook. Thus, first of all, he tried to encourage those people to change the focus of their expectations from people (i.e. the church viewed as a charity) to God. Secondly, he realised that he could indeed find some resources *within* the church itself, so that its members would serve and support each other, both financially and in other ways. Still, when someone's need was dire, he recommended the church to help financially with the limited resources available. Thus, the pastor, prompted by his former unsuccessful attempts to solve the issue, received outside input, reflected upon the situation, came to a better understanding of the nature of the problem and developed more effective strategies for dealing with it.

6.3.1.2 Learning from previous life experiences

(E.g. Malin, Ermek, Alexey, Gulnora.) This capability refers to the ministers' *ability to effectively utilise their previous life experiences in dealing with their current ministry problems*. For example, Ermek shared that his own difficult childhood experiences – growing up with an alcoholic father and then as an orphan – helped him to be more helpful in his ministry to suffering and grieving people in his church.

Alexey's former experience of being an activist in the Communist Party helped him to gain wisdom in how to prevent financial mismanagement; a wisdom that he transferred into his ministry. Back in Soviet times he developed a deep distrust of Party leadership through observing its corruption in dealing with the membership fund. Together with a few other "lay" Communist activists he then challenged the leadership to be more accountable with the membership funds. Although they "almost got themselves into prison or a psychiatric ward" for challenging the mighty Party, since that time he had held a clear conviction that the leadership should *not* be in charge of the organisation's money. Thus, when he became a pastor, he quickly found a good accountant in his church and handed her the church's money – the situation unusual for new church plants.

Malin was a poignant example of the ability to utilise past life experiences – in a very different area. She was serving people in a Kurdish village where horrendous social problems were present: theft, physical and sexual abuse of women, high unemployment, street violence and widespread drug addiction. She pointed out that "it usually takes seven to ten years" to gain the trust of Kurdish people; besides, she carried a huge social stigma for having converted to Christianity from Islam in her twenties: many people viewed her as a "traitor," and some threatened her with physical violence. Nevertheless, she was very quickly accepted by many women in the community because they could identify with her: she was Kurdish and was similar to many of them - snatched from her home as a teenager, raped and subjected to an attempt to marry her by force. She said that this experience not only gave her an entrance into that closed community, but motivated her to help those people in the first place. Being freed from her past by her new faith, she felt she could help those suffering women to find the way of faith, forgiveness and healing. Thus, her pre-conversion experiences, although horrible, allowed her to gain access to an otherwise very difficult people group and enabled her to help the "wounded souls" among them.

6.3.3 Learning from others

This capability refers to the pastors' *ability to learn from other people in dealing with problems of ministry*. This source of learning was cited by the majority of graduates. The pastors learned from consulting with others, from formal and informal mentoring, and from observing other leaders. It was sometimes difficult to distinguish between the three subcategories, as they often overlapped – some pastors used two or all three ways of learning, sometimes involving the same individuals – e.g. some were learning both from the example and from the direct instructions of their mentor. In the following section I define "mentoring" as a more structured and regular way of obtaining advice and receiving support from a particular person, while "consulting with others" is a more haphazard and situational way of obtaining such support. A large number of graduates said they learned much "from the example" of other leaders, although they did not necessarily consider them their mentors.

6.3.3.1 Learning from consulting with others

Several pastors (Nurbek, Usen, Kim, Stepan, Dmitry, Azat, Anvar, Kaisar, Nadir) provided examples of situations when they faced problems in ministry, turned to others for advice, and subsequently implemented this in solving the problem. Some turned to others for advice only in critical situations (Dmitry), others did it regularly (Kim, Azat, Anvar). Some turned for advice to foreign missionaries. For example, Dmitry and Usen did this when faced with serious disciplinary problems in their churches. Many turned for advice to their peers. The problems in question included learning how to support themselves through starting a business (Kaisar), or solving ministry organisational problems (Nadir, Anvar). Two pastors (Anvar, Azat) mentioned the particular importance of the *kurultai* – a regular monthly meeting of pastors in [name of a city], which enabled them to develop a network of relationships and of mutual support that extended beyond those meetings.

6.3.3.2 Learning from mentors

As was shown in Chapter Five, mentoring had an important influence on several graduates. Some of them had more structured, regular meetings with their mentors (e.g. Karim, Malin, Ermek, Kaisar, Tatyana). Others had been influenced by regular personal interaction with their pastor, although they did not conceptualise it as mentoring (e.g. Gulnora, Efrem, Ilnur). Mentors played an important part in influencing the graduates' "spiritual" and interpersonal attitudes, as well as helping them in dealing with various ministry problems.

It is particularly interesting to note that, in two cases, mentoring seemed to be instrumental in deep attitudinal change in the pastors, without which they probably would not have survived in ministry. In the case of Malin, who had extremely traumatic experiences while growing up and was also hurt by the possessive attitude of her previous employer, her new mentor was able to teach her about the unconditional love of God for her and exemplify that love in his ministry to her. As a result, Malin was not only able to overcome her emotional and spiritual problems, but to survive in ministry in a very tough environment. When asked what this relationship meant to her, she said: "Virtually everything."

In another case, Karim experienced a profound transformation in his character, which was initiated by crisis, but sustained and developed by his mentors. Some of his old cultural prejudices were challenged and changed. When he and his wife started a mentoring relationship with an American couple, he initially felt extremely uncomfortable with the whole idea of counselling. For instance, when that couple asked him to share his feelings with his wife or to ask her for her opinion, he "angrily" left the room, feeling it was "an American method." Had Karim remained unwilling to take on a new counter-cultural idea (counselling), he would have probably lost his wife.

It is interesting to note that this relationship made a more profound impact on him than the intellectual knowledge about interpersonal relationships he received at his seminary. When Karim reflected on his change of attitude in regards to his wife, he pointed out that initially he was opposed to the very concept of respecting women and that new teaching *in itself* was not enough for that change to happen:

I was raised as a Muslim, my thinking used to be ‘a woman is nothing.’ The Bible teaches differently, but I could not understand it *even when I was training at the seminary* [emphasis mine – I.Sh]

Thus, transformational learning happened not simply as a result of receiving information about the proper attitude to women in a classroom, but as a result of working with mentors who both challenged his old attitudes and supported him as an individual.

6.3.3.3 Learning from the example of others

This source of learning for impact on ministry problem-solving was mentioned by at least fifteen pastors. Besides those explicit references to learning by example, many others implied that they experienced this when they described learning from their mentors. Learning by example had a major influence on these graduates, particularly in the area of character development, attitude formation and the development of such “spiritual” qualities as “ascribing ultimate value to God” (Ilnur, Adilet, Azat, Kaisar, Leonid, Roman, Lev), “turning to God for help” (Efrem), and in relating to and serving others (Alexey, Roman). These qualities, as was shown in the discussion of the “Spiritual Cluster,” in turn helped them to deal with such issues as the “temptation to leave the ministry” and “conflict resolution.” In addition, the example of others helped the graduates in dealing with other ministry issues such as leadership and management (Stepan, Kim), and dealing with finances (Eugeny). Several graduates (Kim, Tatyana, Nurbek, Petr, Roman, Dmitry), described having learned from many personal examples, not just from a single one.

Thus, Roman described the importance of personal example for the sustaining and development of his commitment to God and to ministry. He described the inspiring influence of the example set by certain senior ministers who lived in poor areas of Kazakhstan:

The example of others is the most powerful witness for me – it has influenced me enormously... There are great examples in Central Asia. Those brothers have a continual undying *integrity* – in how they live and what they say. They are very self-disciplined, they are able to live on very little and to be *very* sacrificial – I want to learn those beautiful qualities. How they love the Lord, how modest they are – they could have emigrated to Germany, but instead they continue living in those slums – why? – they love Jesus and “hated their lives” – they think not of themselves, but of their sheep. The power of their preaching is not in eloquent speech, but in consistency [emphasis his].

Roman felt that this inspiration was instrumental in his own commitment to the ministry in this country. This was the case with many other graduates – they were much more impressed and found more learning value for themselves in the integrity and life experiences of their role models, rather than in their *knowledge*. It is interesting to note that, in the case of many graduates, one of the major influences during their time in seminary was *the life example* of their teachers rather than what they taught. As one pastor (Ilnur) said: “My teachers were not just some theoreticians – I am impressed when a man from prosperous America chooses to live in Africa for thirty years.”⁶⁴

The strong power of example as a learning influence was implied by several pastors. For instance, Kim, when describing how he changed his “poverty thinking,” was motivated by the desire to be a good model for his junior leaders. He assumed that, if he changed his convictions, his leaders would be influenced by that. In another instance, when he described his change towards becoming more relational, he pointed out that as soon as he started opening up and sharing his weaknesses, three men approached him and confessed their wrongdoing. Another pastor (Abraham), saw the core of the “spiritual passivity” problem in the fact that the leaders in his church were not “spiritually well”

⁶⁴ I will discuss this issue in more detail in the chapter on the influence of training.

themselves and therefore the change had to start with them. Again, he assumed that their followers would be strongly influenced by their leaders' example.

6.3.3.3.1 Learning from negative examples

The power of learning from example is seen in another piece of data: seven graduates (Karim, Ilnur, Vitaly, Ermek, Roman, Petr, Stanislav) mentioned that they learnt from the *negative example of others*. For some pastors it took time to realise the negative influence their leaders' example had on them. In one case, Karim described that when he began his ministry, he initially adopted his old pastor's leadership style – holding on to power and refusing to delegate responsibilities to other church members. After reaching a crisis, he realised this was not working and he changed his approach.

Pastors also learned from negative examples in the sense that they *did not want to be like that*. For instance, Stanislav pointed out that he “tried to stay away from handling big money,” because he learnt from the example of other leaders who were not careful and who committed acts of financial mismanagement. Another pastor, Ilnur, related that when he helped people in his church to solve interpersonal conflicts, he would always listen to both parties, thereby trying to get an even-handed picture of what had happened. When asked how he learnt this technique, he replied that he did not want to be like his former pastor, who dealt with conflicts “impulsively:” “Without careful consideration, his eyes would pop out and he would start yelling. And I thought – ‘I will not behave like him.’”

Summary

The qualities of the “Change/Learn” Cluster embraced both capabilities and attitudes, which allowed the graduates to learn in the workplace in order to deal with a wide range of professional problems. Due to the pioneering nature of their ministry, and to its rapidly changing social and economic context, the graduates often faced situations which they did

not know how to deal with. Therefore, this openness to learning and the ability to adapt, change and learn new methods, ideas and even attitudes played a very essential part in solving problems for the majority of the graduates.

6.4 STRATEGIC CLUSTER

This cluster denotes the “higher-order” capabilities and attitudes that enabled some of the graduates to solve problems in ministry. Those who had a “proactive attitude” were actively engaging with their problems instead of *reacting* to crises. The graduates with a “visionary approach” were capable of detecting emerging problems, assessing their potential impact and implementing preventative strategies to solve them. I chose to use the language of “strategy” here because that was what one of the graduates (i.e. Kim) used for describing his thinking, under the influence of Western literature on leadership.

6.4.1 Proactive attitude

(E.g. Tatyana, Nurbek, Malin, Kim, Pavel, Ermek, Azat, Dmitry, Petr.) This refers to the *pastors' proactive attitude towards solving their problems in ministry, an entrepreneurial spirit, resourcefulness as opposed to passive “waiting” until the problem solved itself or until the crisis hit.* These pastors described using a wide variety of resources, including asking other people, attending seminars and conferences, looking for answers in books, the Internet, etc.

The pastors applied a proactive approach in dealing with a variety of issues, but particularly when dealing with the lack of financial income. For example, pastor Kim decided to start his own business, although he had no business background. Instead, he did extensive research, read “about twenty” books on business, finances, and related

ethical issues and ventured to get involved in business. Similarly, pastor Dmitry got involved in construction work, taught himself decorating skills, and was even able to make enough money to buy his own apartment.

Other graduates showed this quality in dealing with the issues related to their lack of knowledge or skills in a particular area of ministry. Hence Tatyana, who was concerned about the “wounded souls” in her village, did her research, found the necessary books dealing with the problem, and started applying this new knowledge first in one-on-one counselling sessions, and then in the context of church meetings.

6.4.2 Visionary approach

(E.g. Kim, Pavel, Stepan, Nurbek, Ermek, Petr, Azat.) This capability refers to the pastor’s *ability to look beyond the immediate situation, foresee the potential outcome of emerging problems, and implement appropriate solutions before the problems reach their full impact; being strategic, seeing the “big picture.”* Most of these pastors showed some elements of strategic thinking in their grappling with problems. However, two pastors in particular (Kim and Pavel) provided extensive examples of a visionary approach to dealing with problems. What is particularly interesting is that they were able to apply this approach not only to external ministry, but also to their own inner attitudes affecting that ministry.

Thus, Pavel provided examples of both. He saw that the rapidly changing economy and growing busyness of people resulted in a tendency towards increased spiritual passivity and decreased involvement of lay people in the ministry of the church. He was also perceptive enough to see that at the same time many professional people coming to his church *did* want to make a difference, but simply did not know how. He approached the problem strategically and holistically. He started both teaching on the topic in his church,

and meeting with people one-on-one, inquiring about their aspirations. Then he encouraged such people to get involved, and matched them to appropriate ministries, providing them with an ongoing tailored support and training. Similarly, when dealing with the problem of financial giving, one of the things he did was to encourage affluent business people to support the professional training of younger people in the church, hoping that in the future it would give these people better jobs, and they in turn would be better able to support the church.

Pastor Pavel, as was shown earlier, would also think as a visionary about his own fit for the role of pastor. He was able to identify his shortcomings – tracing it to his epistemology – and made steps towards implementing solutions to prevent his potential burnout.

As seen in several examples in the previous sections, a visionary in both ministry and personal growth was pastor Kim. He was able to see that “poverty thinking” was leading ministers into serious long-term problems, was able to change that thinking, and implemented solutions for himself and his followers. He also thought strategically about his own internal attitudes – he could see that the weakening relational climate in the church was partly the result of his own lack of relational qualities. He saw that if things continued that way, the church would have become more and more “institutional” and stagnant. He was able to transcend that weakness, became more open and relational and saw the resulting change in the church.

Summary

The “Strategic” Cluster includes two qualities – a “proactive attitude” and a “visionary approach.” The graduates who had those qualities were characterised by their entrepreneurial, proactive and strategic approach to problem-solving. These qualities did not seem to characterise most graduates; as was shown in the discussion of the previous

clusters, most of the graduates *reacted* to problems and had to learn how to deal with them *when* the problems presented themselves in an acute form. Those graduates who had “strategic” qualities seemed to be *particularly* successful in their ministry.

6.5 CONCLUSION

6.5.1 Capabilities and attitudes that enabled the ministers to address their problems

In this chapter I have attempted a systematic inductive analysis of the “practical knowledge” (Eraut 1994) of the graduates, seeking to understand what capabilities and attitudes the graduates needed to possess and develop in order to deal with the wide range of ministry problems described in the previous chapter. Having analysed the pastors’ responses on how they were dealing with these problems, I formulated four clusters of qualities they demonstrated: “Spiritual,” “Interpersonal,” “Change/Learn,” and “Strategic.”

The framework presented here was developed from the description of actual practice by ministers, rather than arising from some sort of “wish list” (using the expression by Dreibelbis and Gortner 2005). It included both capabilities and attitudes, thus extending beyond the common “behaviouristic” fallacy of a competency approach to professional practice. Some qualities reflected the “moral and relational” dimension in leadership (Bolden and Gosling 2006). Other qualities reflected the “spiritual” dimension, which was perhaps unique to this particular professional field, but was nevertheless considered very important in the current literature on theological education (e.g. Chapman 2006, Harris 2003, etc).

The “**Spiritual Cluster**” included qualities such as “a strong sense of personal calling,” “ascribing ultimate value to God,” “exercising faith in hardships,” and “turning to God for

help.” These four qualities were closely related. All pastors referred to in this section (except one) made a conscious decision to convert to Christianity from either atheism or Islam in their late teens or during adult life. They embraced and internalised a biblical worldview and spirituality very seriously, therefore they believed that to serve God was of high importance for the believer. Many of them felt personally called by God to ministry. Such a profound internalisation of a biblical worldview and the sense of being called to ministry helped them to persevere through difficult times of ministry, and to resist the temptation to leave their often highly stressful, unprofitable and financially insecure job. They were sustained by believing that since God had called them to ministry, he would help them through – and they turned to him for help.

The “**Interpersonal Cluster**” included capabilities and attitudes such as “being open to receive help,” “prioritizing relationships,” “empowering others,” and “compassion.” These qualities enabled graduates to help people with “wounded souls” and to help people in solving interpersonal problems. The ability to be open and receive help from others contributed to the pastors’ own job sustainability and helped them to prevent burnout. It was interesting that these interpersonal qualities seemed to have helped them with leadership and organisational issues: “relational” pastors had a good climate in their congregations, and linked the growth of their churches to it.

Another interesting finding was that the pastors’ ability to “empower others” seemed to be more than simply possessing a leadership technique or a “skill”; it touched on one’s internal disposition towards power. A few pastors realised they had to change their attitudes towards people in order to give away power, which in turn enabled the church towards better qualitative and quantitative growth. These findings confirm the findings of recent research in the field of leadership (Bolden and Gosling 2006) that emphasises the importance of “soft” relational qualities for leaders, and the need for organisations to

depart from a “heroic” one-man notion of leadership towards a more “dispersed” or “distributed” model.

The “**Change/Learn**” **Cluster** included a number of qualities related to learning and change, which is reminiscent of the ability for “experiential learning” (Kolb 1984), the ability to change one’s methods of ministry, and also one’s ideas and values, as well as deeper personal attitudes. The graduates displayed a broad spectrum of ability to learn from other people, such as learning from consulting with others, learning from formal and informal mentoring, and learning from the example of others. Learning by example was reported by a large number of graduates and was one of the most significant ways of learning.

The ability to learn on-the-job and to be adaptable was highly important for the vast majority of graduates. The qualities in this cluster seem to have contributed to the pastors’ ability to deal with almost *all the problems* described in Chapter Five. Due to the diverse, highly stressful and rapidly changing economic and social environment, and due to the pioneering situation many pastors were in, to succeed in ministry they had to be highly adaptable and willing to learn and change. Faced with new, poorly structured and uncertain situations, the graduates had to develop the ability for “reflective thinking” (Schon 1983, Moon 2005). In two cases where the graduates experienced burnout, it seems that they lacked that ability.

The most interesting finding in this respect was that in order to cope with some of their problems, several graduates had to change not only the *methods* of their ministry, but also some of their *values* and even *internal attitudes*. This led to change in the “meaning perspective” and could be described as “transformative learning” (Mezirow 1991, Cranton 2006). Such transformative changes were in several cases initiated by *crisis*, which supports Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning. These changes allowed these pastors to deal with critical situations when some of them felt they were on the verge of

leaving the ministry. As is evident in these examples, the pastors came to see that their underlying attitudes were contributing to these crises, and that transformational change in their attitudes was needed.

However, with two individuals, transformational change seemed to have happened *without being prompted by a crisis* – their self-awareness and metacognitive ability allowed these pastors to detect serious problems and implement necessary changes before crises hit. It is interesting that these two individuals used their metacognitive skills for preventing problems *both* in ministry (e.g. developing leadership; developing self-supporting business ventures) and in their personal life (learning to live in reliance on God, not on one's rational abilities; developing "prioritizing relationships"). In both cases the transformational change seemed to have enabled the pastors to deal with problems that might otherwise have led to them prematurely leaving the ministry.

Finally, the qualities of the "**Strategic Cluster**" – a "proactive attitude" towards problem-solving" and a "visionary approach," enabled graduates to find creative solutions to issues such as the lack of financial support, to start new ministries, and to address issues requiring their own internal change. There were only a few graduates who seemed to have these qualities. On the whole they seemed to be highly successful in their ministry and in dealing with the new type of problems emerging due to their ability to anticipate these problems, to look at them holistically, design solutions and to implement those solutions in a creative way.

6.5.2 The relationships between the clusters

In conclusion, it seems appropriate to briefly discuss the relationship between the clusters, or their potential "hierarchy." It seems plausible to suggest that "spiritual" qualities were

foundational for the ministers. These qualities were discussed by the interviewees when they were describing why – despite all the difficulties – they were still in the ministry, and how they were dealing with the temptations to leave it. It seems that these qualities, therefore, reflected the core values of the ministers: personal faith in God was the foundation of their lives. Faith got them involved in the ministry in the first place. But it did more than that – the deeply held belief that God was in control of their lives, and that it was his will for them to be in ministry, sustained many of them through difficult times. Besides, they were helped by what they perceived as their personal relationship with God, which they expressed through turning to God for help through prayer and reading the Scriptures.

Perhaps all of these qualities were seen in the following statement by Malin who recounted why she remained in ministry in a Kurdish village even when she was threatened by physical violence:

I remind myself – God has called me here, so he would not leave me. Sometimes it was very scary – when they [some villagers] threatened to kill me and my son. I read Psalms – it also helps. Besides, one just needs understanding – everything is vain – what seems to be desired does not really satisfy ...

As seen in this quote, the determination she needed to remain in this ministry in spite of real physical danger, was based on her conviction that 1) God was more important than physical and material security, 2) that he had called her personally to serve him, and therefore 3) she could trust him to protect her, and these values prompted her 4) to turn to him in prayer and find help in the Bible to sustain her.

Although the “Spiritual” cluster was the most crucial for the ministers, it seems that the qualities represented in the other two clusters were also very important for the success of the graduates' ministry. The abilities in the “Change/Learn” cluster – the ability to adapt and learn from multiple sources, including their own experience; the ability to change one's methods, ideas and attitudes seemed crucial for the success of the majority of the

graduates. The qualities listed in the “Interpersonal Cluster” were also important. Those graduates who possessed the qualities in these two clusters in addition to the “spiritual” qualities, seemed to be successful in their ministry.

The “Strategic” Cluster seemed to be the “cherry on the pie” – although most graduates seemed to be able to solve problems without possessing these capabilities, those who did possess them, seemed to excel in particular. Instead of waiting for a crisis, these individuals were capable of identifying problems, reflecting on them and analysing them; they made decisions about necessary actions, found the needed resources and actively implemented the decisions taken.

Particularly successful graduates were the ones who were proactive and strategic both in their own “spiritual” life and in ministry. They turned for help to multiple resources, such as the “spiritual” resources of the Bible and prayer, and also extensively sought solutions in consulting with other people, finding themselves mentors, studying printed materials, drawing resources from the Internet, etc. Moreover, those individuals who possessed a “visionary” capability, were able to use it to look at themselves critically and to make efforts *to supplement those capabilities they felt they lacked in other professional areas and even change their attitudes when needed for success in ministry* (e.g. those in the “Spiritual” and “Interpersonal” clusters). Arguably, those graduates who possessed a wide variety of capabilities and attitudes from all four clusters, were the most successful in ministry.

CHAPTER SEVEN: LOOKING BACK: THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF TRAINING

In this chapter I will look at the ways the graduates themselves evaluated their training and the extent to which it enabled or failed to enable them to deal with the problems of ministry they had described. I will structure the discussion in five parts. First, I will look at the factors in their training that the graduates consider positive, or helpful for them in their ministry. Secondly, I will look at the negative, or hindering factors. Third, I will look at the ways the graduates propose to improve current training. Fourthly, I will use those data to answer my second research question: “In what ways did their training contribute to their ability to deal with the problems of ministry?” And in conclusion, I will compare the institutions’ educational goals with the graduates’ own perception of their training.

7.1 POSITIVE FACTORS

7.1.1 Bible, Theology, and Biblical Interpretation

The factors discussed in this section were prominent in the pastors’ responses. Twenty-four pastors across all four Colleges found that one of the most important and helpful things they received in their training was ***biblical and theological knowledge***. Since they all viewed the Bible as the foundation of the Christian faith, they felt it was of great benefit to them to better understand the Bible both for their personal faith, and for their ministry in the Church. Some pastors, who before coming to college were already involved in active ministry, felt that they were seriously lacking in knowledge of the Bible, and their main expectation from the study – to get that knowledge - was fulfilled. Thus, one pastor (Dmitry), who was initially reluctant to go to college because he did not want to “waste

three years” at the expense of developing the ministry at his church, changed his mind entirely afterwards:

The College [II] provided me with a good theological basis – this is a great advantage. If I had not gone to College, I would have spent about ten years learning the same thing. College saves you many years of ministry.

Many pastors felt that they did not have sufficient understanding of methods of **biblical interpretation** before they went to College. Often their previous church’s tradition of reading and understanding the Bible was unsystematic and fragmentary, leading to their adopting existing doctrines or “teachings” from church leaders without any critical analysis. Thus, one graduate (Ermek) said the following:

We usually read the Bible through spectacles. Before I studied here, I was receiving ready-made knowledge [interpretation] from other people ... Now I can study the Bible, do my own commentary – not just rely on what other people or books say, but what the Bible itself says.

Another graduate (Kim) spoke about the change in his approach to interpreting the Old Testament, which he perceived as one of the most helpful things he learnt at his College and transferred into his preaching in the church:

The Baptists [his former church] study each word, and it gets really complicated when one starts reading the Old Testament. But when I was in [College IV] – we learnt how to look at whole books, how to analyze their plots and story lines. I have now forgotten the terminology, but I have learnt how to read those Biblical stories and how to apply them to our [congregation’s] daily life.

Several graduates made a connection between better understanding of the Bible and their own spiritual transformation. Thus, one graduate (Azat) shared how the study of methods of Biblical interpretation had an emancipatory role in his personal development; it led him from a legalistic understanding of salvation accepted by him in his previous church to a “radical change of thinking” and to “understanding grace.”

For many graduates their training provided them with a solid ***theological framework***.

Studying Christian doctrine and theology helped many graduates to create what several graduates described as “the foundation” that served as a basis for any further accumulation of knowledge. “It gives you the foundation – without this foundation the house will collapse” (Aida). It is interesting that several graduates from different Colleges also used the expression “shelves in the head”:

The most important service the [College III] did for us was that it helped to create “shelves” in our heads. This education helped to systematize the knowledge – there was a mash in my head before. Now I read any book, and the new knowledge get sorted in my head automatically. You begin to structure even your own thinking and speech in a more logical way (Petr).

Next, such a theological foundation served several pastors as an ***apologetic tool***, a measuring stick against “false teachings,” or Biblically unsound doctrines, thus giving ministers the confidence for guiding the church with regards to Biblical doctrine: “I have learnt to discern truth from falsehood. The Bible is the criterion” (Gulnora).

One pastor (Dmitry) provided an example of how he used that knowledge in his pastoral ministry: at one point in his ministry somebody brought books on the so-called “prosperity gospel” into the church, which created great interest among the church people. Although initially the pastor was himself interested by that teaching, eventually, upon closer scrutiny of the Biblical texts that allegedly supported that teaching, he came to the conclusion that the teaching was unsubstantiated by the Bible. As a result, he was able to refute the teaching in his preaching ministry. He said that he was only able to do so because of the exegetical tools and theological knowledge he received at the College [II]. He said he was “very grateful” for that to his College and believed that such knowledge was extremely important for the Church enabling it to adhere to “sound teaching.”

Finally, with regards to the knowledge received at College, the importance of some of it was recognised later. Kim graduates referred to this phenomenon that could be called the

postponed benefits of training. They said that later on in their ministry, when they encountered particular problems, they referred to the knowledge received at their College, and applied it:

When they [teachers] taught us some New Testament and Old Testament books, I did not understand why we needed this; I was even scornful about it. But now – I take out my notes, read them and understand why we needed it (Gulnora).

Many still used their old notes, when preparing for sermons and teaching in church.

Another pastor (Pavel) felt that the course on church planting “went over his head” while it was being taught, but when later he actually started doing church ministry, he reported getting back to his old notes and doing a lot of the recommended reading. Two other pastors reported using the materials on conflict resolution that they had ignored while in their student years.

7.1.2 Skills and attitude for continued learning

Nineteen graduates reported that one of the greatest benefits of training for their current ministry were the skills and attitudes related to independent study, such as research skills and critical thinking.⁶⁵ This was reported by the students of Colleges II, III and IV in particular. They pointed out that their teachers emphasized the importance of independent research, critical thinking and the ability to articulate and defend their theological views from a biblical perspective. The training enabled them to use those skills after graduation: “[College IV] has given me a lot – it taught me how to study, it gave me the methodology that I now use to grow further,” reflects one graduate (Pavel). Another graduate, who was

⁶⁵ The ability for independent research is not something to be taken for granted in a post-Soviet society. Soviet education required people to accept Communist dogma without questioning, and such a dogmatic approach was and to a large extent still is prevalent in the post-Soviet educational system. Children at school are encouraged to listen to the lecture and to reproduce it in their tests. So, many adult students who enrol in a Western-style educational institution (e.g. a Protestant theological college) often find themselves on a steep learning curve trying to acquire skills for independent study.

quoted above as having changed certain theological views while studying at his College, observes that he was able to use critical skills afterwards to defend his views:

... After [College IV] I began growing independently – they taught us how to read the Bible. I was not afraid to contradict some ideas from [the name of the church organization] – if the Bible was saying things differently, I could stand my ground” (Azat).

As the graduates recall, their teachers stimulated the development of these abilities by making them write papers, and encouraging them to use the library and the Internet. One graduate (Kim) recalls with enthusiasm the mock theological debates they had to prepare for in order to sharpen their argumentation skills. Many graduates continued using their library and their Internet research skills after graduation, when encountering problems that they needed to read about.

The teachers helped them to develop not only skills, but also a **love for learning**. One graduate (Pavel) says: “They passed on to me a love for reading and for broadening my horizons. Now, if I haven’t read 2-3 books a month, I feel discomfort.” Several graduates reported that a love for learning they received at the College, inspired them to pass that attitude on to others. Thus, a female pastor (Tatyana) exclaims: “I studied [in the College] myself – now I make everyone [in church] study – even my husband! This is so important!”

Several people mentioned that training helped them to develop **intellectual humility**: “I thought I knew everything when I came to [College I] – later I realized I knew nothing” (Usen). Another student shares: “Education has taken me down a peg – there was a time when I thought: “What else don’t I already know?’ Here I realized I knew nothing. Even today it [education] keeps me from arrogance” (Stanislav). One graduate puts it in this way:

It is so important to have the heart of a learner ... this helps me to stay away from pride; the first sign of pride is when you only teach others, but stop learning yourself (Ermek).

He also pointed out that training in their College [IV] changed the attitude towards learning in many of his classmates. He observed with gladness that many students enrolling in their College, who usually came there without any prior higher education, afterwards realised the importance of further learning and applied for further study – either to advanced theological educational institutions, or to secular universities.

7.1.3 Ministry skills

Seventeen graduates stated that one of the greatest benefits of training for their present ministry was the acquisition of practical skills. In many cases the graduates referred to the *knowledge* of a particular “practical” subject, which was later used as a foundation for developing a particular skill. In particular, the areas of preaching, teaching, conducting church services and evangelism were referred to. Several graduates also mentioned practically useful knowledge they acquired from lectures on time management, counselling, conflict resolution, church planting and organization. Thus, with regards to preaching – a major responsibility of a pastor - most graduates were satisfied with the extent their training enabled them to perform that task. Biblical interpretation classes provided them with tools for analyzing the text; preaching classes provided them with the theory of preaching and with some practical training in that area.

It is noteworthy that most of the graduates who mentioned acquiring actual *practical skills*, were represented in two substantial groups. The first one (five graduates) acquired those skills because of the strong practical component in their curriculum. All of them were graduates of College II during the first few years of its operation - before it changed its format to a modular one (see Chapter One). From their reports it was clear that, although

they had three years full-time academic training, the faculty required of them a heavy involvement in ministry. This is the account of one of them (Anton):

- The *most valuable* [emphasis his] part of the training was that we were obliged to do practical ministry, and it taught us to apply theory to practice immediately. It was the [name of the principal]'s and the administration's decision – "Guys, start ministering now! No ministry, no practice, no grades - because a minister is a practitioner." ... We studied during the day, did ministry in the evening, and our homework at night.

[interviewer] *Wasn't it hard?*

- No [emphatically]! For example, some of the students were serving in a local hospice – they brought to faith people who had 2-3 days to live. And then we constantly witnessed about our practice during chapel – so that spirit of ministry was always present in the College. God gave us strength! I did my homework until 2 a.m., slept little, but I so much enjoyed serving God, and so much enjoyed receiving knowledge and immediately giving it away! I still maintain this beautiful habit.

It is clear from this account that this graduate not only acquired the skill of the immediate application of "theory" to "practice" but that he carried over this skill into his further life and ministry. Four other interviewees who graduated from College II during its early full-time format, supplemented this account by stories of how they did active street evangelism in the local villages, undertook various mission trips as far as Kazakhstan, preached in remote churches, and did evangelistic drama and children's clubs. They pointed out that they learned various ministry skills, such as children's work, preaching and evangelistic skills during those trips. All of them were emphatic about how much they enjoyed those times, and how valuable the skills they received during those times proved to be for their subsequent ministry. "It was an encounter with real life" – recalls one of them (Vitaly). Later, the College changed its curriculum and dropped the requirement for practical ministry during studies.

Another substantial group of graduates (six) who felt they acquired good ministry skills were those who studied at College I and College III and had existing leadership responsibilities in their churches *during* their studies. The fact that they had to do ministry

simultaneously with their training, helped them to effectively transfer learning into their ministry context. These graduates were eager in their quest for knowledge and had a context for its immediate application. They found it particularly helpful that the process worked in both directions – they could also bring questions born in their everyday ministry experience to their classroom, discuss them, and apply the answers straight away. A graduate of College I (Alexey) recalls:

We had the opportunity to share our current issues with other students and teachers. For example – how to serve communion if the pastor is absent? How to bury a [Christian] person without a conflict with his [non-Christian] relatives? Once I raised an issue about dealing with finances in church – and they [the teachers] ran a seminar on that in response. ... In other words, we had a constantly ongoing discussion forum – during class, after class, at picnics, etc...

Another benefit that those graduates received from participating in ministry while training was that it served as a sorting device and allowed them to separate useful “bits” of classroom material from what was not useful. A female pastor (Tatyana) who was involved in ministry while she was studying, had a very firm conviction that to do so was “absolutely necessary,” because learning was “very hard” without practice, and that “when you are engaged in it [the practice], the *useless stuff gets sifted out* [emphasis mine – I.Sh]”

Finally, several graduates (e.g. Ilnur, Taras, Malin) noticed that their practical involvement in ministry served as a “reality check” against the temptation of pride that could develop with the acquisition of theological knowledge:

Nowadays I see many students who become proud while studying – they value themselves according to what they know. Why did I not fall prey to that “student disease?” – I was in the pastoral ministry. The people at the church immediately put me in my place – nobody was kowtowing to me (Ilnur).

This pastor felt that the fact that people in his church were giving him honest (sometimes painful for him) feedback about the quality of his preaching ministry, ultimately served a good purpose in that it helped him to resist the temptation to become intellectually arrogant and proud. He saw that this danger increased with later students who were educated in

isolation from church life. These students felt superior to their (uneducated) pastors: the feeling that they now possessed theological knowledge gave them the illusion of being *competent* in ministry. But for this pastor, his grounding in the life of the church helped to prevent that problem.

7.1.4 Personal and spiritual formation

Almost two-thirds of all graduates referred to their training experience as having an impact on their personal and spiritual formation. In this broad category I have included data related to their attitude to and motivation for Christian ministry, their relationship with God, denominational tolerance, and the development of such qualities as grace, humility, accountability and discipline.

Seven graduates mentioned that their College experience significantly influenced their ***attitude to and motivation for ministry***. Thus, one graduate (Kaisar), who at the time of the interview was considering starting a new business due to a lack of income, pointed out that even if he were to abandon his current full-time employment with the missionary organization, he would still continue “serving God” in church – he felt that it was a life-long attitude that he had acquired during his studies at College [IV]. Another pastor felt that his training prepared him to face difficult times in ministry – his teachers spoke openly of hardships in ministry – and as a result, when he started serving in a church, he “did not have rose-tinted spectacles” (Vitaly).

Five graduates said their studies had a direct impact on their ***growth in relationship with God*** – they learnt to pray, to study the Bible devotionally, they felt they had become “closer to God” (Gulnora). One graduate pointed out how knowledge about Jesus helped to transform the false spiritual expectations he held prior to beginning his studies:

“Through fellowship and study I realized who Jesus really was – not how I wanted him to be. Earlier I thought Jesus would take away all my problems” (Anvar). It is noteworthy that, although only five graduates mentioned their growth in relationship to God directly, many others implied it, using the term “spiritual growth.” Those who used this terminology did not seem to distinguish their growth in their relationship with God from their relationships with other people. Below I will have a closer look at this.

Seventeen graduates spoke of the significant effect of their training on their **personal formation** – most of them described very significant changes in their lives. For some of them this meant a profound change in their attitude towards their faith: “I was not very serious about it after finishing university,” – tells one graduate (Farhod). “[College IV] was a key moment of change in my amateur attitude towards my faith ... I developed a serious and disciplined attitude to my Christian life.” For several other graduates (e.g. Anvar, Adilet, Atabai, Ermek), training helped them to develop such traits as self-discipline, accountability, and daily habits of study, prayer and reading the Bible. Several graduates report having experienced significant character changes in relation to other people. They learnt “how to relate to people” (Ilnur), make friends (Dmitry), and how to deal with people who were culturally different from them (Malin).

In several cases the graduates provided examples of the changes in their character, which had been negatively affected by their childhood environment and later transformed during their ministerial training. The whole College environment was influential in this – studying the Bible, relating to the teachers, engaging with other students during practical ministry and in everyday living, participating in chapel ministry, etc. Thus, one graduate – an Armenian man who grew up without a father in Azerbaijan surrounded by hostile nationalistic neighbours - reports that the most important thing he learnt at the College was relating to other people. He recounts that initially he was extremely shy and closed to other people, “walking around the College with earplugs in, listening to the radio all the time.”

However, later on he was able to open up, and started taking interest in other people - to his mind, this newly acquired ability enabled him later on in his own pastoral ministry to “successfully help other closed people to ‘open up’” (Vitaly).

Another graduate (Nurbek) tells of his pre-College attitude to life as being “sombre” and ascribes it to his religious upbringing and training as a devout Muslim cleric before his conversion to Christianity. He points out the transformative change that happened to him during his time at the College [I]:

I learnt how to trust people... I learnt what grace was. Before [the College] I was very closed, I never laughed. Here I opened up – through fellowship with teachers and other students.

Another graduate, a middle-aged female pastor (Aida), grew up in a children’s home. She felt that the College experience changed her life and enabled her to give herself to the people of her country:

In the [College I] I saw the soul of Jesus, I learnt how to value people’s souls ... The teachers came from afar – they were literally *crying for Kyrgyzstan* – it was such a great example! They encouraged me – spiritually, morally, and financially; what I’ve received from them I am now giving to others [emphasis hers].

She points out that, before studying at College, when non-believers asked her what she did, although she was a church leader, she anticipated their rejection and answered that she was “a teacher.” Her time at College affected her sense of identity in such a way that now it became possible for her to say “with that sense of inner serenity” – “I am a pastor.”

In a similar way, another pastor (Abraham), an Ethiopian who got stranded in Kyrgyzstan after the revolution in his own country made it impossible for him to return there, recounts that Christian training for ministry enabled him to find his new identity: “The College helped me to find myself. It revealed the truth to me, the purpose of life – who I am, where I am

going ...” He felt he was not a stranger anymore – he belonged to the new community of people who were serving God in this strange new country.

Finally, for eleven graduates their time in College served as an opportunity to broaden the scope of their **denominational tolerance** and acceptance of people from other Protestant denominations:

Before I thought our church was the right one – that’s how my pastor taught me. Here [in the College] I realized that we are not the only ones who are right. I have learnt to respect people from other denominations (Usen).

It is noteworthy that, out of these eleven pastors, eight were graduates of the same College [I] – the only College out of the four in this study that was an interdenominational one. The graduates found that - although initially they had various conflicts and arguments with each other – eventually they learnt to concentrate on the similarities, not the differences: “I was only thinking about my own church before – now my heart has widened” (Alik).

It is interesting that some of these pastors noticed that this phenomenon contributed to their own spiritual richness. One pastor reports that fellowship with Christians of other denominations enabled him to develop a broader vision of the Church and contributed to his ability to prevent burnout (Ermek):

I can now see beyond my own narrow views. I now see things in the context of the city, the country, Central Asia. It affects my spiritual life. I now understand I am not just a single man struggling on his own – there are lots of people in God’s Church, we can work together. I have learnt to be tolerant of other confessions – we all understand things differently – the Lord will judge who was right and wrong.

These graduates reported they developed tolerance and trust towards each other:

“Ultimately we developed a spiritual unity – now I am happy to invite any of my former classmates to preach in my church – I am sure that they would not preach heresy”

(Alexey). He also felt that this could be attributed to the founders of the College who right from the start developed a tolerant attitude among the students.

7.1.5 Factors affecting personal and spiritual formation

For the purpose of answering my research questions, it was important for me to understand not only what the graduates learnt from their training, but what were the most influential factors in the learning process. As the literature on theological education shows (see Chapter Two), the transfer of biblical knowledge and skills is more straightforward – it is the process of personal or spiritual formation that puzzles theological educators. Therefore one of my areas of interest was to investigate what the graduates considered influential in their spiritual and character formation.

7.1.5.1 The role of the teachers' personal example

It was very telling that in this area only a few people pointed to the influence of particular *lectures* on them. Three students from College I specifically pointed to the course on spiritual formation as being very helpful. However, twenty-five pastors – the great majority of those pastors who reported personal change during their studies - ascribed it either to their teachers' personal influence, or to the combination of the teachers' personal influence and the subject matter they were teaching. One graduate put it in the following way (Ermek):

I was strongly influenced by our teachers' relationship with God and by their family life – not so much by their material, but by their experience and testimony. We had meals together. I asked them questions about family life. For example, there was a very gifted teacher and pastor. I asked him how he was going to grow further – perhaps he was thinking about doing a PhD? But I was astonished by his answer. He said that at the moment it was not that important for him – he had young children and he wanted to develop his relationship with them – maybe he would do a doctorate later. It [this perspective] was very helpful to me.

As can be seen from this example, the student was most affected by informal interaction with his teacher, being able to ask questions of concern to him and learning from the teacher's own experience – in this case, in regards to priorities in life. Similarly, many students reported that they *observed* how their teachers lived and imitated their values and behaviour. A female pastor reports (Gulnora):

I learnt a lot from one married couple [teachers] who taught Missiology and a class on marriage. They showed us how a man and a woman should treat each other – by example. They invited us to their home – we saw how they were raising their three children. It left a huge impression on me. I was learning how to love, how to express love.

A graduate of College I pointed out that the warm relational environment his teachers and class mentors provided, enabled him to open up to them and to trust them. “It was a great environment – one couldn't hear any bossy tones from the teachers – they were like fathers and mothers to us.” (Usen). He pointed out that for a person of his (Kyrgyz) culture it was particularly important when his mentor invited him to visit him at his home.

Several students pointed to the *impact of the teacher's personality on their learning of a particular subject*. The extent to which the students were affected and even transformed by the subject matter was, in many cases, directly ascribed to the personality and character of the teacher. In this regard several students mentioned how much they were affected by their teachers' *passion for the Bible and mission*. Thus, a student (Eugeny) described how certain teachers had a “contagious love” for the Bible and therefore successfully “passed that flame” on to the students.

Several students pointed out that the *relationality of the teachers* helped their learning. Thus, one student (Adilet) pointed out that, unlike the teachers at the secular university she had previously graduated from, the teachers at the College [IV] sought to build relationships with the students and were “interested in us as persons.” As a result, she

points out, their lectures were “really interesting – we felt that the teachers were interested in teaching us.”

Another factor influencing the “spiritual” aspect of learning was the *integrity of the teachers*. One graduate (Pavel) pointed to the continuity between the subject matter and the personal example of the teachers, who lived according to their espoused values, which made a strong impact on him:

They have very strongly influenced me by their example - their life, pastoral ministry, teaching – they inspired and fanned the flame in us ... There was a *wholeness* between the material and the character of the teachers – it formed a personal orientation towards mission [emphasis his].

In some cases, the graduates could not even distinguish one from the other. One graduate (Petr) was describing a particular teacher who had a profound effect on him, and when probed for more details on how he thought the teacher affected him, responded in this way: “I can’t really distinguish between how [name of the teacher] affected me as a teacher and as a Christian! [laughing].”

Similarly, several students mentioned that they took biblical knowledge to heart because they were affected by the *sacrificial attitude* of the teachers. As one middle-aged pastor (Atabai) shared, he was extremely impressed that he had very high quality “professors” at his College [IV] who came to teach their students without charge, even paying their own airfare. This resulted in him taking what they taught very seriously, and aspiring to imitate them.

Finally, an influential factor for many students was the fact that the teachers were *practitioners*. Thus, one student points out that he simply would not have accepted the same truths from “theoreticians:”

It wasn't so much the information itself, but fellowship with those wise people – veteran missionaries. They do not show off, nor do they make hasty proclamations, but they act out of their experience of walking with Christ. They have laboured 30-40 years on the mission field – it was not a theoretical knowledge. I learnt a lot of practical things from them – how to relate to people, how to understand them and their troubles. ... I learnt patience, forgiveness – without pride and arrogance – that was the most precious thing (Ilnur).

For students such as Ilnur, the most important quality in their teachers was the authenticity of their life with God and its practical outworking. Since the ministry was about living a real life with God and serving God's people, he felt that only those who had had considerable spiritual and practical experience had the right to teach in that area.

7.1.5.2 The holistic impact of the training experience

Fifteen graduates, when asked what was most beneficial in their training, referred to the experience of being in a training institution as a *whole*. "Being in the College [II] changed my life – I became close to God. It was like a hothouse experience being there for three years" (Stepan). Another graduate (Tatyana), who was doing church ministry in tandem with her study, put it this way:

The very fact that *I was in there* [in the College] was very important. ... There was no isolation from ministry. I was away from the world's bustle, I was seeking the Lord. The Word, prayer, classes – everything together ... sort of [looking for the right word] *in harmony* changed me [emphasis hers].

A related factor was the communal environment of the Colleges – not only with the teachers, but among the students. "My favourite time was lunch time," – shared a female pastor (Gulnora), - "we could talk and argue about the matters we had just heard in class and beyond." Another graduate made a direct link between his ability to stay in his current "unprofitable job" with the lasting impact the whole training experience made on him.

Through that experience he grew in his commitment and recognised his calling for ministry (Anvar):

It was the whole experience – the people I met, the environment, the information – I saw that I was called to ministry. Before that I only went to church on Sunday – people did not even know me. But in [College IV] we lived together - you begin to really understand who you are. It changes the way you think; before that I was thinking like a non-believer. Here you get lectures about the Scriptures, then you do your homework, think about it with other guys. That year you sort of form the right habits – reading Scripture, praying, getting up early, eating your lunch on time – everything together.

Another lasting impact of the whole educational experience was the creation of a common bond and understanding between the graduates. An elderly graduate of College III related (Hamit): “What I see is that those [pastors] who graduated from our [College III] – they always understand each other – it’s like they have one spirit – they have fellowship even many years after graduation.”

Having discussed the positive training factors that helped the graduates in their ministry, I will now turn my attention to factors that they perceived as negative, or inadequate in preparing them for ministry.

7.2 NEGATIVE FACTORS

7.2.1 Lack of practical training

Many graduates felt that their training was disproportionately “academic” at the expense of practical and spiritual components. Many felt that although the institutions proclaimed practical and spiritual development as their priority, in reality their actual curriculum proved otherwise.

Fourteen graduates across all four Colleges specifically pointed to a lack of practical training and to a lack of connection between the knowledge they received and a practical ministry. Common complaints among them were that there was “too much theology, too

little practice” (Malin), that the Colleges neglected the practical side of training, and that some teachers were “theoreticians and did not know real life” (Egor).

It is interesting that although all four Colleges wanted their students to be involved in practical ministry during the course of their studies, and some even made that a requirement, it did not always work effectively. Thus, a graduate of College IV (Kim), describes it in this way:

I think the College gave me purely theoretical knowledge. With regards to practice... well, practice was, so to speak, a formality. We had to be attached to a local church, and to spend so-and-so many hours there. In fact, we did only one evangelistic project with other students; well, we got some people together, told them the Gospel, etcetera ... [without enthusiasm]

You don't seem to be too excited about it, do you?

No. That was a weird thing to do. In our church we do it very differently – we do it through relationships, actions and attitudes – eventually you end up sharing the Gospel.

As this quote shows, this graduate (a very successful church planter) pointed out that the practical ministry they undertook in his College was somewhat *artificial* and removed from the reality of how they did ministry in his church. This was the experience of many other graduates – they either had a very “formal” practice, or no practice at all. Besides, they pointed out that there was very little or no supervision of the practical ministry by the College staff. Finally, as the discussion above shows, the majority of the graduates who had a positive experience with practical training were those who were already engaged in ministry even before they began their studies, and who continued with this during their studies. On the whole, the graduates did not feel satisfied with the practical training that the Colleges themselves tried to arrange for them.

Many graduates felt an acute need in certain areas of knowledge and skill that could be practically helpful in their ministry, but they did not receive training in these. Such areas were skills in working with people – communication, counselling, conflict resolution,

teamwork; leadership and management in the church, and financial management; legal issues on how to deal with government officials, and business skills.⁶⁶ Of particular importance were skills in *relating to people*. One pastor (Inur) put it this way: “Real knowledge lies not in the theoretical understanding of theology – it’s about love. ... It would have been great to learn how to relate better to people.” He felt that one way of doing this could have been discussing various scenarios of relational issues in the church – helping people to deal with certain emotional and spiritual issues, resolving conflicts, and so forth.

7.2.2 Lack of spiritual formation

Ten graduates felt that their training experience failed to provide them with adequate spiritual development. It is interesting that, out of the nine, six were graduates of College IV in its early years. They emphasized that it was a very common experience of other graduates of their College as well. As a female graduate (Adilet) states:

A big weakness of [College IV] ... is a spiritual one. After returning from [College IV], my devotional time with God was not regular – I lost the desire for it, because for a whole year I had got used to looking at Scripture as something to *study*. After graduation I would start reading the Bible and would habitually begin to scrutinize a passage, but eventually I just got tired of that. I wanted to *just hear God personally*, to have an emotional connection with him [emphasis hers].

She felt that there should be some “instruments” (i.e. arranged opportunities) during training that would encourage students in their spiritual development, although she did not provide any particular examples of what these could be.

Another graduate of that College (Kim) provides insight on why spiritual development was suffering there. On his analysis, although the College espoused four educational goals – character, ministry, fellowship and knowledge - and the teachers always emphasized the

⁶⁶ Out of the “academic” subjects, there was only one area where the graduates would like to have received more knowledge - Islamic history and theology (three graduates).

priority of *character* development, “in reality knowledge was always in first place.” He felt that because the emphasis lay in practice on knowledge and academic success, the students were engaged in an “unhealthy competition for grades – just like in a regular Soviet school.” The observation that the actual emphasis in their training was on academic knowledge, despite the espoused emphasis on character, was confirmed by another graduate of that College (ErmeK). He pointed out that the real educational priorities were evident in the amount of time they were given in the curriculum:

In practice, the emphasis was on academic excellence. ... When you are required to read seventeen books on history in two weeks, you begin to think, “Why do I need to bother reading the Bible on top of that? – I read enough already.” When we strongly emphasize studying theology, we can lose our relationship with God.⁶⁷

In his view, the way to counter this tendency would be to provide “wise mentors” and teachers who would warn of the danger and share their own experiences with the students.

Finally, as was already mentioned earlier, several graduates spoke of the danger of becoming “proud” as a result of accumulating much theological information without the corresponding development of a humble attitude towards that information – the knowledge they were receiving was not designed to boost the ego, but to enable service. A female graduate (Tatyana) said that she saw that happening in some of her classmates, who after the graduation were no longer satisfied serving in a small church, but sought a “big ministry”; she felt this it was a wrong attitude.

⁶⁷ In my discussion with one of the current staff of College IV he pointed to that danger and said that in the last few years the College had taken steps towards remedying that situation.

7.2.3 Irrelevant subjects and poor teaching quality

Nine graduates felt that certain courses had little value for them. For instance, one graduate (Kim) reports that during his training course he had “about twenty” subjects, but in retrospect found only three that were of value to his ministry afterwards – Bible Study Methods, Old Testament and Homiletics. The rest of the subjects had little practical value.

Several graduates pointed to the poor quality of the curriculum design. “Most subjects duplicated one another – some of them were more or less about the same thing” (Pavel). Another graduate pointed to the courses that were not relevant to their ministry at all and just took up space in the curriculum. He gave an example of a course “against abortion” that lasted for a week and was “preaching to the choir – we did not believe in abortion anyway!” (Leonid).

Some graduates complained that some classes were of little value simply because of the low quality of teaching: some of the teachers “just could not teach” (Aida), or they “read from the book” (Petr), or were “pouring water” (Eugeny), i.e. gave little solid content in their teaching. Sometimes teachers were experienced pastors, but poor educators. Thus, Alexey commented that several of his teachers were pastors from South Korea, who had planted churches but “never taught before,” and therefore the quality of their teaching was inadequate.

Although, as was shown above, a few graduates complained that sometimes practitioners were poor teachers, a much more common complaint was precisely the opposite: some subjects were too “academic.” The students felt that although certain subjects could potentially be very useful in ministry, they were taught from such a highly “theoretical” perspective that it was not at all clear how to bridge the gap between knowledge and its application. Thus, one graduate who committed much of his time to pastoral counselling,

reported that his counselling course at College [II] lasted only for six days and consisted mostly of “rules” – he did not feel he acquired any skills of how to actually *do* counselling (Stepan). He said he learnt those things exclusively from doing them and observing other ministers doing them.

Another pastor (Kim) observed that “useless” subjects were made so by teachers who had little experience of actual pastoral ministry:

I did not get anything from those courses – I just sat there. I had to hear *how to apply it* – I immediately ask this question. If I can't apply something – it sort of automatically goes into the wastebasket. I think it's a problem of *who is teaching the course*. If that subject had been taught by an experienced pastor, I think I would have unearthed tons of principles and ideas. The problem is when the subject is taught by somebody who does not deal with it in real life – they just know it on paper [emphasis his].

This perception was common among the graduates. Many felt that if their teachers had had more experience as practitioners, they would have made their classes much more useful by showing the connection between the subject matter and the “real life” ministry of the church. This issue, as well as the lack of practical training discussed above, has a direct bearing to the theory-practice divide that was discussed in Chapter Two. I will look at this issue in more detail in my Conclusions.

7.2.4 Cross-cultural issues

Nine pastors reflected upon the negative effect of the cultural differences they experienced with some of the foreign teachers. They felt that sometimes the material taught by either Western or South Korean teachers was not culturally adapted, and was therefore confusing or difficult to apply to Christian ministry in Central Asia. For example, one pastor (Vitaly) told me that in his preaching classes the students were recommended not to exceed 30 minutes in their Sunday sermon, on the assumption that people would get tired

of listening. After several years of following this rule in his ministry, he realised that the advice had been based on the time-frame acceptable to a Western congregation, and that people in the local culture had a different perception of time, and were in fact more than willing to listen to longer sermons, and to spend more time at the church. He had constantly struggled to pack enough material into his sermons to give his people the teaching he felt they seriously needed, and he felt that because of the advice he had wasted much valuable time that he could otherwise have made good use of.

Besides, some of the teachers tried to import elements of their culture that were perceived as foreign and negative by the students: for example, one graduate (Karim) reported that he was offended when a South Korean teacher required the students to bow to him when he entered the class. Therefore, several graduates expressed the desire to be trained by *national* teachers and provided examples of a few gifted national teachers, who were able to teach very effectively precisely because they were able to contextualize the material.

However, other graduates experienced the opposite. For example, several graduates of Colleges II and IV pointed out that they actually *preferred* foreign teachers with much pastoral and teaching experience to young national teachers. Those graduates complained about exactly the opposite problem – that the national teachers were sometimes given the opportunity to teach too early, simply because they were nationals, but it was not always beneficial for the quality of the training. Some of those nationals were young people with little experience, who had only just graduated from those Colleges themselves and who were recruited as teachers by the Western organizations who founded the Colleges and who made strategic efforts to transfer the leadership into the hand of the nationals as soon as they possibly could. One pastor (Kim), reported that in his time there was approximately a “fifty-fifty” ratio of national staff to foreigners, a fact that he regretted:

I felt it was a pity that the nationals were teaching at all – it would have been better to maintain a high level [of instruction]; I wish we had had those PhD's [Westerners] who had taught previously ... I saw that the school was getting seriously weaker because of the locals.

Although the young nationals had the advantage of knowing the language and the local culture, good quality foreign teachers had the advantage of much deeper theological knowledge and ministry experience. There were only two or three national teachers who were commended by the graduates: they were described as intelligent; they had good communication abilities, and were able to successfully “translate” the training material into the local culture. To summarize, poor and excelling teachers were reported *both* among the nationals and among the foreigners. In general, it seemed that the graduates ascribed more importance to *expertise and talent* in teaching and practical pastoral *experience* in their teachers, than to their *nationality*.

7.3 CHANGES PROPOSED IN CURRENT TRAINING

The final piece of data that I will discuss below is not directly related to the actual experiences of the graduates during their studies, but covers their concerns about the current state of training in the Colleges and their suggestions for ways of improving that training. I considered it a valuable piece of data to include in this thesis, because it reflects the all-important voice of the recipients of the training, the practitioners who tried to use their training, and who therefore are in a unique position to provide insights into further policy development.

The graduates expressed a concern for improvement in current training in two main spheres: improving practical training and increasing the connection with the local church.

7.3.1 Increasing the practical training component

As was described above, about a third of the graduates felt they had an inadequate amount of practical training. Many graduates, on looking back at their training, strongly recommend their Colleges to increase and improve the practical side of training. This concern is particularly vocal among that group of pastors who were already involved in practical ministry while studying at the College.

Twelve pastors – across three Colleges - expressed serious concerns about the current tendency of theological Colleges to lower their practical requirements even further. For example, one graduate (Lev) recalled that during his years of study at a missionary department of College IV, the students used to make regular trips to local villages, thus developing their evangelistic skills. He was critical of his College nowadays, since they had dropped that practice and the students used the time for retreats instead. Although the College did encourage the students to get involved in the practical ministry in between training sessions, he felt that in practice the students were simply doing their own thing – the practical ministry had to be organised and supervised by the College to be effective.

Similar sentiments were expressed by the early graduates of College II: after they graduated the format changed (and the practical requirement was dropped), so that they felt that the current students were missing a very important part of their training. Along with the graduates of College III, they felt that although the current expectation was that the students would do practical ministry in between the courses, in practice it just did not work out for many people: the institution needed to take charge and to make this a requirement.

One graduate, who first finished at College II and then started in ministry, actually *regretted* that he did not undertake some ministry before training: “Had I served before going to College, it would have been clearer what exactly I could take from my studies. If I

went back to College now – after pastoral ministry – I would benefit so much more from it.”
(Vitaly).

This concern was also expressed by a pastor from College I (Efrem):

I studied during the day and preached at night, I transferred what I learnt *immediately*. I did not even have to do much homework! I was helped tremendously by the practice. Today the students just get knowledge. The trouble is that practice is so *very different* from knowledge [emphasis his] ...

Other graduates used strong expressions such as “practice is absolutely necessary” (Tatyana), “under no circumstances should the academic part be put first” (Roman), “they should have a very strong emphasis on practical ministry” (Danil).

Finally, three other graduates suggested including in the curriculum some craft and business skills training that would equip the students to support themselves alongside their pastoral ministry. Thus, pastor Petr was acutely aware of the difficulty the ministers had in supporting themselves, and he himself struggled trying to support his family with a part-time building job. He strongly believed training institutions could do an important job if they provided such training. He believed that it would not only serve to support pastors’ families, but would also provide a helpful service for local communities, would allow pastors to build up a network of relationships and give credibility to their message:

Why not give them professional skills – such as a welder, or a heating-stove specialist? ... I know an American [missionary] – he is a great welder – he will always be able to provide for himself! There are lots of Kazakh villages without heating – if a missionary came and installed heating-stoves for them – they would listen to his message! Or I know a [Christian] vet who treats cows in a Chechen village – they listen to him ... Or even give them [the students] a psychology certificate – or obstetrician training, or a First Aid certificate. In short, a [secular] profession is absolutely essential for ministers!

However, it was interesting to note that several pastors, who were complementing their pastoral ministry with teaching at their Colleges, warned against de-theologizing ministry training. Thus, two graduates of College IV expressed a different expectation of what

theological training should provide. They felt that theological knowledge was the most valuable thing one could get out of such training: “Everything else [i.e. the practical skills] I can develop in the church” (Leonid). Another pastor (Pavel) agreed; he pointed out that his expectation of the people he sent for training was that they would get to know the Bible, get a basic doctrinal foundation and solid exegetical tools:

It is important for me that people understand Christian doctrine. There are many people in the church – they appear to be very mature adults, but have a very immature understanding of doctrine. Practical skills are not really a priority for me – we provide that in the church. Although people love practical training! ... I think we need a balance. One cannot escape the classical seminary formula – introductory courses, exegesis, systematics, and practical courses.

The need for balance was expressed by another pastor (Ernek) who, alongside with doing pastoral work, was currently involved in organising training at College IV. He pointed out that with too much emphasis on theology, the practical part was missing, but if the *theological* component of training were lacking, it would eventually lead to disastrous consequences, particularly in the context of the church in Central Asia, where solid theological knowledge was not ingrained in church tradition. “We need to find some balance,” – he concluded, and described various efforts his College was making to implement a stronger practical component in its curriculum, such as requiring several week-long mission trips of all students during the academic year, and awarding the diploma only after one year of subsequent ministry, when the graduates had sent in reports of their ministry each month and had met other requirements.

Another graduate (Roman), also involved in teaching (at College III) alongside his pastoral work, suggested his own view of how to achieve a balance. First of all he recommended a “definite increase” in the amount of practical training by expanding courses on church planning, counselling, and apologetics, and by shortening the time devoted to “academic knowledge” courses, such as systematic theology – instead of teaching long hours, teachers could do short introductory courses on systematics and provide the students with

a list of good recommended literature on the subject. However, he emphasised the particular importance of leaving in the curriculum a few fundamental courses for developing the exegetical and preaching skills of the pastors; he suggested it was important to allow more time and to make training in those skills more thorough and solid, as those skills would allow pastors to develop their own material for teaching and preaching later on in the ministry.

7.3.2 Need for a closer connection with the local church

Another major sphere where fifteen graduates felt a significant improvement was required was the need for a much closer collaboration of their training institutions with the local churches. The concern of the graduates, many of whom were now themselves in a decision-making position, deliberating whether or not to send their people to the Colleges, lay in two main areas: weakening admission policies, and the lack of practitioners' input in the curriculum, given the Colleges' inadequate attention to building relationships with local pastors.

First, a major area of concern was related to **current admission policies**. Across all four Colleges, particularly from College I, graduates expressed concern and often disappointment with their Colleges significantly lowering their admission criteria. Many felt very strongly that the Colleges were simply trying to fill their classrooms and therefore accepted students with poor or no recommendation from local churches, students with no ministry experience, and most importantly, those who did not seem to have a calling to ministry at all (Nurbek):

Some people come to study simply because they have nothing else to do. I think it is very important to monitor whether people are called to ministry, at the admission stage. A person must clearly know his calling and be fired up for ministry ...

[Interviewer] - *But some people say – “Let's accept everyone and*

motivate them for ministry in here.”

I think it doesn't work. A person must be on fire for God – he should be seen to be making an effort in ministry already – even if it is sweeping the floor of the church. But if a person does nothing, and does even not come to church – it's a waste [to accept them for training].

The importance of prior calling was emphasised by several graduates: “these people should have a strong desire to serve” (Aida), “they should be *called*” (Alik). The result of poor admission standards was a poor quality of graduates (Efrem):

In my class there were 15 students; 8 of them graduated; now there are only 3 or 4 of them who serve [in church]. But still later – when my son was studying – I saw all of them [graduates] working in a bazaar.

Some graduates felt it was the fault of the Colleges, others felt it was more the responsibility of the local churches: “The College is not to blame – they accept those sent by church. Today they [pastors] say: “Who wants to study? Go ahead!” (Efrem). Several graduates observed that many pastors did not send quality people for training, because those people were already engaged in ministry, but they were sending “idlers” (Gulnora). The resources were spent, but few results followed.

Often those who applied to study were only very loosely connected with the church. The pastors insisted it was extremely important for the churches to invest in the applicants – exercise discernment of whom to send, send those who are already showing success in ministry, pray for them (Efrem). Alik maintained, that it was better to train fewer people of higher quality and work with them individually, than to have a large number of students without attention to individual development.

Secondly, the graduates felt the institutions could benefit from ***building closer relationships with the local pastors and having their regular input into their training.***

They felt that often pastors simply did not have sufficient information about the training programme and therefore were suspicious of the Colleges. Several graduates suggested

creating a “mechanism” (Alexey) or a body that would allow the pastors to share their views about the training programmes and provide their input. “If a pastor knows what is taught here, he will be sending people” (Alexey). He felt that the Colleges could organize such meetings regularly; they could ask pastors for their feedback about particular courses taught.

One graduate (Lev) who was working in a church-planting organization, insisted that the ministerial training institutions must make an effort to closely monitor what happens in actual ministry and adjust their curriculum accordingly. He pointed out that in his organization “theory” was very closely linked with “practice” – it was so because the leaders of that organization stayed in close contact with the church-planters they were sending out, analyzing their work and “constantly adapting” their training curriculum as a result. He felt that his College [III] could learn from their practice.

Graduates felt that the Colleges could be more proactive in pursuing those relationships – visiting churches and spending more time developing relationships with the pastors. They could invite pastors to preach in the College chapels regularly, teach and get them involved in other ways. Moreover, the graduates – now pastors themselves - felt they themselves would benefit from such regular forums, particularly if they were provided with some form of continuing development, or the opportunity to discuss their current issues in ministry.

7.4 IN WHAT WAYS DID THE GRADUATES' TRAINING CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR ABILITY TO DEAL WITH CURRENT MINISTRY PROBLEMS? ANALYSIS.

On the whole, graduates evaluated their training experience as a positive one – there was much more praise than criticism in their comments. They felt that the training was definitely worth it. It was beneficial for their personal growth and ministry – as opposed to the worry of some church leaders who feared that “[theological] education will destroy the Church.” Below I will summarize their experiences and attempt to provide an answer to my second research question: “In what ways does their training contribute to their ability to deal with those problems?”

7.4.1 Knowledge

It is noteworthy that twenty-four graduates across all four Colleges emphasised the pivotal importance of studying and sound interpretation of the Bible, both for their personal lives and for their ministry in the Church. This was perceived as the greatest value of their training. This knowledge enabled them to better understand their own faith, to better articulate it, and to better explain it to others. In several cases a deeper understanding of Biblical teachings seemed to have played an important part in character change in the graduates. For many it provided a sound framework for the subsequent accumulation of theological knowledge. It enabled the graduates to discern between sound and false teaching in the church. Ten graduates noted that even those subjects that seemed irrelevant at the time of study, were found to be useful when they encountered related issues in their ministry.

However, even among those graduates who greatly appreciated the theological knowledge, only a very few made explicit links between that knowledge and the actual

problems they were dealing with in their current ministry. It seemed that in the minds of the graduates there was a sharp dividing line between the “theory” or “theology” they were studying in their College, and the “real life” of actual ministry. Frequently, when asked a question about how they felt their training contributed to their ability to deal with a particular current problem, they either struggled to give an answer, or referred to some other means of help – only a few graduates mentioned that the content of some of the more “practical” courses e.g. preaching, counselling, helped them with that. The possible reasons for this phenomenon will be discussed later in a separate section in this chapter.

7.4.2 Continued Learning

Roughly half of the graduates (nineteen) emphasized that a positive aspect of their training was that they acquired skills and attitudes for continued learning. They learnt how to think independently and to defend their theological views. The awakened "heart of the learner" prompted some of them to engage in further study, either theological or secular. Training enabled some of the students to develop intellectual humility – they saw that there was still much to learn.

A few students reported that they developed a love and passion for learning that enabled them to look for answers to their current problems in the literature. Because they learnt how to study, they could now use these research skills; for example, Tatyana was able to find information in books needed for helping people with “wounded hearts,” and Pavel unearthed the information necessary for dealing with his lack of skills in church leadership. It seems possible that the acquisition of attitudes and skills in this area during the training period contributed to the development of important capabilities, described in Chapter Five in a “Change/Learn” cluster, which in turn enabled the graduates to deal with a large number of issues they were facing in ministry.

7.4.3 Ministry skills

Seventeen graduates mentioned having acquired ministry skills, particularly in the area of teaching and preaching. These graduates were mostly represented by two groups. The first group was the one that trained at College II during its early years, when it placed a heavy emphasis on practical training. The second group were the students who were already involved in ministry and who continued that involvement during their studies. The students reported several ways in which they felt involvement in practical ministry greatly increased the effectiveness of their training.

First, it provided them with an opportunity to seek for the immediate application of the knowledge received, thus minimizing the theory/practice gap (Efrem, Anton, Danil, Egor). Secondly, ministry during study served as a lens through which they looked at their training and filtered elements of “what worked” (Danil) from what was useless and therefore did not justify much effort to learn, thus increasing the effectiveness of the training by allowing them to concentrate on what really mattered for ministry. Thirdly, they used their classroom as a forum to discuss fresh issues arising in their ministries and to seek answers for them (Alexey). Finally, it was beneficial for them as a tool for spiritual growth: “real life” ministry served as a spiritual “reality check” for them, to prevent them from becoming intellectually arrogant (Tatyana, Ilnur).

Surprisingly, however, only a few of these graduates pointed to a direct link between those ministry skills they acquired during their training and their ability to deal with *current* problems in their ministry. Most of the time they pointed out that the ministry skills they received during their training helped them in conducting their *regular* ministry duties – such

as preaching, counselling and evangelism - but helped little with the current, acute issues they were struggling with.

At the same time, fourteen graduates complained about the lack of ministry training, artificial practical training opportunities, and little supervision and accountability during the times when they were supposed to be engaged in practical ministry.

About a half of all graduates felt they did not have training in areas that would have helped them in dealing with the problems they were currently encountering. They pointed to areas such as relational and communication skills; leadership, management and teamwork skills; dealing with legal issues; business and financial management. Several graduates proposed that their Colleges should introduce training in some professional skills, such as a welder, heating-stove specialist, starting a small business, etc, in order to enable future ministers to develop means of self-support to deal with the acute major problem of a lack of finances.

Many pastors used very firm language to emphasize the importance of a strong practical component in training. They insisted it was indispensable and necessary for effective ministerial training.

7.4.4 Spiritual/Character formation

Although all the Colleges placed “formation” as their top training priority, only a third (fifteen) of the graduates described their education as formative, or as having a holistic influence on them. Many noticed improvement or even transformational change in their character – learning how to relate to others, opening up, learning “grace” and “humility.” Several graduates became more serious and committed about their faith. Another third of

the total number of graduates, although they did not describe their experience as formative, nevertheless mentioned various degrees of character/spiritual benefit from their training. Some grew in their relationship with God. Some graduates learnt tolerance towards other denominations.

The most interesting observation, though, is that the great majority of changes in these areas were ascribed by the graduates not to the content of their training per se, but to the *personal influence of their teachers*. The teachers, who were relational and showed wisdom and maturity in their life, were listened to and imitated. The personal and spiritual qualities of the teacher, as well as their experiences, had a great impact on how the students perceived the subject matter taught. This finding seems particularly important because it was observed across all four Colleges.

Only ten students felt their spiritual development was lacking at College. Their criticism was not primarily directed to the lack of specific spiritual formation activities, but simply to the excessive and disproportionate amount of time for academic study, that got in the way of having time for spiritual reflection and growth. Several students noticed that the overall excessive emphasis on academics, especially in the context of a lack of practical training, was spiritually counterproductive and promoted intellectual arrogance.

It is interesting that, in regards to “spiritual and personal formation,” more graduates could see a clear link between their training and their ability to deal with current problems. For example, the teachers at the seminary helped some of them to develop relational and spiritual qualities that were used to solve problems later in the ministry. Thus, counselling from teachers helped Karim later on to help “wounded hearts” in his church. The example of teachers who struggled through hardships and remained faithful to God inspired some graduates to persevere in ministry despite the temptation to quit (e.g. Inur), or instilled realistic expectations about the hardships of ministry (e.g. Vitaly). The love for the Kyrgyz

people that some teachers displayed inspired Aida to be compassionate in helping people in her church.

7.4.5 The missing link

As was described in the previous sections, despite the fact that the graduates generally highly valued their training, the majority of them could provide little explanation as to how their training contributed to their ability to deal with the most acute issues in their current ministry. This is a striking phenomenon, particularly since all the Colleges claim to have as their primary goal the equipping people for ministry. Below I will briefly look at a few possible explanations of this phenomenon.

First, it is possible that the knowledge received during training did contribute to their ability to solve ministry problems, but the graduates were not aware of that link. In other words, the espoused **knowledge became unrecognizable** as a result of its use and the subsequent assimilation of new knowledge. In other words, the knowledge received during their training became so ingrained in them that they no longer recognized it when using it (for a description of that phenomenon in professional training, see Moon 1999). For instance, it might be that the *attitude for continued learning*, that a half of all graduates emphasized as beneficial in their training, influenced the development of some of the “Change/Learn” capabilities that allowed the graduates to deal with various problems in their current ministry. It is also entirely possible that the knowledge acquired during training and become tacit, enabled the graduates *to prevent* certain problems from arising in the first place.

Another example of this could be that the biblical knowledge received during training, strengthened the Christian worldview of the graduates and thus may have influenced the

development of some of their “spiritual” capabilities - for instance, “ascribing ultimate value to God” - which in turn helped them to resist the temptation to quit ministry. One graduate seemed to espouse such a view (Pavel):

By imparting values, forming a worldview you [as a teacher] give people so much more than just skills. ... Practical skills are not really a priority for me – we do that in the church.

The second possibility is that ***the graduates distinguished sharply between two kinds of knowledge*** - “theological” knowledge and “real life” knowledge, the latter being born in the experience of the practitioners. As they reflected on their training, they considered only some of the content of their learning as of practical value for their own life and ministry. “Theological” knowledge, on the other hand, was viewed (sometimes in a pejorative sense) as “theory,” as something that was supposed to be important and hopefully having some vague influence on practice, but there was little understanding of the nature of that connection. Thus, when asked what the role of his training was in his ability to deal with the issue of “dependency” in the church, one graduate answered in the following way: “No, College was *theological* rather than practical. It helped me more with things like studying, understanding and interpreting the Bible [emphasis his].” Similarly, when asked whether his training addressed the issue he was currently struggling with – namely, relating to one’s church superiors, - another graduate (Roman) gave the following answer:

No, we did not cover these issues – we had a purely academic training. [Life after graduation] is like being a boxer in a ring; they throw you out - you must learn how to survive as the situation unfolds.

On the other hand, a large number of graduates related that the “real life” knowledge, conveyed to them by mature and pastorally experienced teachers, was much more helpful. Thus, Ilnur was certain that missionaries who had worked for many years in tough conditions gave them not “some theoretical knowledge,” but the knowledge of “practical things” – such as relating to people, understanding them, and qualities such as patience and forgiveness.

One explanation of why the graduates could not make the connection between “theory” and “practice” could be that the institutions were out of touch with the most current issues of professional practice affecting ministers, or that they did not possess the means to effectively address these issues in their training. One possible reason for this might be the rapidly changing social and economic context of Central Asia: the schools simply were unable to catch up with the changing demands of ministerial practice. In this case it seems that, although the knowledge the graduates acquired during their training helped many of them to strengthen their faith and spiritual commitment, provided them with personal Biblical knowledge and with the tools for teaching their congregations, it gave them little when it came to the “nuts and bolts” of dealing with the most acute issues they were struggling with. I will discuss the consequences of each of these explanations for the reform of theological training in Central Asia in my final chapter.

7.5 COMPARISON BETWEEN THE CLAIMS OF THE INSTITUTIONS AND THE PERCEPTION OF THE GRADUATES

Finally, I would like to compare the training objectives of the Colleges with the pastors’ own perception of what they received during their training.

It is interesting that all four Colleges espoused a very similar system of values; their primary goal was *spiritual/character formation*: i.e. “the total formation of people” (College I); “to make spiritually mature people” (College II); “formation of ministers, mature disciples” (College III); and four values with the formation of “character” as a primary value (College IV). All four Colleges aspired to training people in the traditional threefold fashion of theological education elsewhere, namely spiritual/character development, ministry skills and theological knowledge (College IV added “community”). In short, the Central Asian

Colleges had the same generic educational goals as most theological institutions elsewhere (see Chapter Two). Following the traditional values of theological education, they all prioritised the transformational aspect of the training, hoping that the students would not only understand the Bible or acquire ministry skills, but that their character would be transformed and they would become more mature Christians.

However, as seen in this chapter, the students reported that their training institutions succeeded primarily in the area of “knowledge.” Knowledge of the Bible and theology was valuable for them, as it allowed them to understand their faith better, and to explain it to other people in their teaching and preaching ministry. A few students also pointed out that this knowledge *in itself* played a part in their spiritual formation. The leaders of the institutions admitted to the same conclusions as the ATS research (see Chapter Two), that the “knowledge” aspect of the training was the easiest to teach and assess, unlike the practical and – especially - the formational aspect.

While the Colleges emphasised the formational aspect as the most important one in their training programme, only about a third of all students reported significant or profound spiritual/character change during their studies; another third reported some change in that area. It is one of the most interesting findings of this study, that the graduates attributed it not to the formal training itself, but to the *personal influence of the teachers*. Those teachers who took a personal interest in their students and who had experience and maturity, were imitated. As a result, the subject matter taught by such teachers was taken seriously by the students and affected them the most. However, the factor of the teachers’ influence was not recognized as important either in the interviews with the principals, or in the literature of the institutions; it seems it was largely an *unintended* outcome.

The area of least satisfaction for the graduates lay in the acquisition of ministry skills and of knowledge that could be practically applied in the context of ministry. Although the

principals viewed practical training as an important part of their curriculum, the majority of the graduates (11 out of 17) who reported they had significantly developed practical skills, were either the graduates of College II during its foundation years, or the graduates who were already involved in active ministry even before they applied to their institution. Involvement in actual ministry during their studies was viewed as indispensable for them for the development of practical skills. The practice of ministry served as a means for the immediate application of knowledge, as a place of generating new questions and thus stimulating classroom learning, and as a 'filter' to sift the "useful" from any useless knowledge received in the classroom. Moreover, for some graduates, being involved in practical ministry also served as an environment conducive to their spiritual development: constant involvement with the reality of ministry protected them from developing intellectual pride.

On the other hand, while practical ministry involvement was in theory encouraged by all the Colleges, most of the time it was not given priority in the curriculum, was not constantly reinforced, and was not supervised. Therefore, it was not taken seriously by the students, was considered "formal," and eventually had little influence on the development of their practical skills.

7.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I provided an analysis of the graduates' reflections on the extent to which their training equipped them for approaching problem-solving in their ministry. I also provided an analysis of their recommendations for improving training, and compared their perceptions of training with the claims of their institutions.

The graduates in general perceived their training as helpful and beneficial for their own spiritual life and ministry. In particular, twenty-four graduates appreciated the Biblical and theological knowledge and the skills in Biblical interpretation they acquired. Almost half of the graduates (seventeen) benefited from the practical ministry they were involved in during their studies. About a third of the graduates reported significant changes in their character and spiritual development; another third experienced some improvement in those areas.

Although the graduates to a large extent perceived their training as helpful and important, strikingly the majority of them could not make an explicit connection between their training and their ability to solve their current problems. This phenomenon could be explained in several ways: the knowledge they received became “unrecognizable” or tacit over time, there was a gap in their perception between “theoretical” and “real life” knowledge, or the institutions simply were not adequately in touch with current professional issues or did not have the means of addressing training in these areas.

One significant finding is that the majority of the graduates who reported changes in their character and spiritual development, ascribed this not to the content of the knowledge they had received, but primarily to the personal influence of their teachers and to the influence of the wider College environment in which training took place. Mature and experienced teachers were their role models, from whom they accepted knowledge much more readily, and perceived that knowledge as much more related to “real life.” It is interesting that there seemed to be little concern among the graduates about cross-cultural differences.

Although about a quarter (nine) wished they had had a more contextualized training, the major concern was to have “experienced,” “spiritual” and expert teachers, rather than necessarily national teachers.

Only a quarter of the students (ten) complained about the lack of spiritual development. But mostly the criticism of the graduates was directed to the area of practical training. They criticized the lack of integration of theory and practice, the inadequate amount of practical training, and the excessive academics at the expense of practical and “spiritual” development. Half of the graduates wished they had received more training in the issues they were currently facing, particularly in the areas of “relating to people,” leadership, management, finances and business skills. Several graduates proposed that the institutions shifted the balance towards practical training, while retaining the core theological disciplines, training the students in research, and providing exegetical and preaching tools.

When making their recommendations for their institutions, the graduates expressed particular concern about the recent changes in the curriculum of their institutions. They noticed that, in the years following their graduation, because of the diminishing number of applicants, the Colleges relaxed their admission policies and requirements for practice during study even further. The graduates unanimously viewed these measures as negative. They pointed out that these policies led to the Colleges producing a generation of lower quality students than the previous generation. These most recent graduates, in their opinion, lacked practical skills, were unmotivated, and unwilling to engage in ministry after graduation. Seeing the new graduates doing nothing, the local pastors started losing confidence in the training institutions and became demotivated as regards sending any more people for training.

However, the graduates also pointed out that the local churches themselves contributed to the vicious circle. Some pastors held a short-sighted perspective on leadership development: they were unwilling to send their *best* people for training as they were already busy doing ministry in the church, but instead they would send *unmotivated* people, in a hope that “the College will change them.” Besides, some churches were

initially prejudiced against education for their leaders. In spite of some of the principals' attempts to invite pastors for dialogue, the pastors viewed it as a low priority in their schedule. The graduates recommended that their institutions should improve their contact with local churches, devote more effort to building relationships with church leaders, regularly receive their input and implement it in their curriculum.

In my final chapter I will summarize the answers to my research questions, discuss my findings in the context of the wider literature, discuss the implications of these findings for theological education, and for the policy of the institutions in question.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this Chapter I will summarise the findings of this thesis. I will answer my research questions. Then I will discuss the contributions of this study to the literature on professionalism and on theological education. After that I will look at the implications of this study for policies of evangelical theological training in Central Asia. Finally, I will discuss the limitations of this study and areas for future research.

8.1 ANSWERING MY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this thesis I attempted to answer two research questions. Firstly, “What problems do the graduates encounter in their professional practice and what enables them to deal with those problems?” I found that the graduates faced a wide range of problems in their ministry, and in their own personal life that in turn influenced their ministry. The first category included such diverse issues as a decline of interest in the Church in the general population and an increased spiritual apathy within the congregation, the need to help people with significant emotional and relational problems, to help them to deal with their poverty without creating dependency, and finally, problems that some graduates had with their church superiors. Internal problems included a chronic lack of income, lack of leadership and management skills, lack of mentoring and the resulting strong temptation among many to leave the ministry and find another job. The graduates faced a complex set of problems, many of which were interrelated and linked to the wider problems of society in the two countries, such as major changes in the structure of society, corruption, a lack of honesty and abuse of power that were inherent in the culture, economic turmoil, poverty, and the rapid growth of materialism. The ministers, mostly first generation

Christians, faced the incredibly difficult and demanding task of leading their churches, while generally finding little professional support, or financial and social security.

To deal with these issues and even to survive in their profession, the ministers had to develop a number of attitudes and capabilities in the spiritual and interpersonal areas, to be able to learn, change and grow quickly, and to think about their ministry strategically. I found that the “spiritual” qualities, i.e. those related to the graduates’ God-centred worldview, were of fundamental importance for their professional practice. Their faith in God and their belief that they were “called” to this ministry, allowed them to find strength and persevere in their difficult job in the first place. However, interpersonal qualities such as “being open to receive help,” “prioritizing relationships,” “empowering others,” and “compassion,” were also important and critical not just in their counselling ministry, but also in their ability for successful leadership development. Those pastors who tended to be highly relational or made efforts to develop those qualities, had a better climate in their churches, a high level of lay involvement in ministry, and several developing leaders. Another important set of capabilities and attitudes that helped the graduates was the ability to learn from a wide range of sources – including other people, peers, books and training opportunities - to quickly adapt to new situations, and to constantly develop new knowledge. In so doing, graduates sometimes had to change not only their methods of ministry, but also their concepts of ministry and even their personal values and attitudes. Finally, some graduates used their strategic abilities – their proactive attitude to problem solving and a visionary approach to ministry - to deal not only with current problems, but to anticipate and prevent problems before they reached critical levels.

My second research question was “In what ways did their training contribute to their ability to deal with the problems of ministry?” I have found that the graduates generally shared a positive view of their training: they felt that it had provided them with helpful biblical knowledge, with certain ministry skills, with skills for continued learning, and that it had an

impact on their character formation. Strikingly, however, most graduates could not articulate links between the training they had received and their ability to deal with their current professional problems. As I suggested earlier, there might be two possible explanations of this phenomenon. First, the knowledge did contribute to the graduate's development, but after frequent use and subsequent accumulation of new practical knowledge, it became unrecognizable – the process described by Moon (1999). Second, the “theoretical knowledge” they received simply was not relevant to practice, or the connection was minimal: the graduates had to develop their own arsenal of practical knowledge as they engaged in ministry.

Based on the graduates' own perception of what was most useful in their training, the majority of the graduates pointed to the particular value of the knowledge they received from *experienced practitioners*, or the knowledge they acquired *while involved in practical ministry during their studies*. In this respect, although the first explanation given above might adequately account for at least part of the phenomenon (the formation of values and worldviews when studying theology influenced subsequent practice), the second explanation seems more plausible. The fact that most graduates learnt best while being involved in practice, shows the prevalence, using Carr's typology, (1986) of the “practical approach” to ministry among them. Theory (i.e. the biblical and theological knowledge presented to them during training) was viewed as an important basis for practice, but in itself was incomplete and inadequate, and had to be continually informed by practice.⁶⁸

This approach explains why those graduates who were involved in ministry as students, reported the most satisfaction from their training: involvement in practice continually raised new questions that they brought to the classroom, looking for solutions. In other words, the most important for them were the “bits” of “theory” that were produced on demand as the

⁶⁸ There were only four graduates (Pavel, Eugeny, Leonid, Dmitry) who seemed to take an exception to this pattern and, using Carr's typology, espoused a more conventional “applied science approach,” i.e. understanding the primacy of theory over practice. One other graduate (Ilnur) seemed to hold to the “common sense approach,” i.e. practice as a basis of theory.

students were engaged in ministry and which they experienced as most acutely relevant to it. Likewise, when the teachers were experienced practitioners, the knowledge received from them was perceived as *more practical and therefore more important* than other “purely theoretical” “bits,” that were presented without having been *proved* to be working in the teachers’ experience.

Thus, to summarize my answer to my second research question, training *positively* contributed to the graduates’ ability to deal with their professional problems in the following ways:

- 1) by providing biblical and theological “theory;”
- 2) by offering the opportunity for continual interaction of the students with the more experienced teacher-practitioners
 - who helped the students to find answers for issues in current ministerial practice
 - enabled the students to tap into their own pool of practical knowledge
 - helped the students in their spiritual formation by being role models and mentors
- 3) by providing the opportunity to be immersed in the learning community of faith;
- 4) by enabling the students to develop attitudes and skills for continued learning.

Conversely, in many cases training *failed* to equip the students precisely by failing to offer the opportunities described above, namely to integrate practical ministry with classroom studies and to provide spiritual mentoring; and by placing a disproportionate emphasis on subjects that had few obvious links to practice.

8.2. THE FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE LITERATURE

8.2.1 “Eccentricity” of the ministerial vocation

This study confirms the special place, or “eccentricity” (Ballard 2004) of the ministerial profession, using Hoyle and John’s (1995) analogy, on the continuum of professionalism. On the one hand, to be effective in their professional practice, the ministers needed some capabilities and attitudes that overlapped to a considerable degree with those of other professions. For instance, Stark’s *et al*’s (1986), “integrative,” “contextual” and “adaptive” competences and “motivation for continuing learning” loosely corresponded to several capabilities and attitudes in the “Change/Learn” Cluster in my study. Stark’s “conceptual” and “technical” competences, although they did not appear explicitly in my framework, could loosely correspond to the “theological knowledge” and “ministry skills” that were acquired by the graduates during their studies.

On the other hand, other concepts in Stark’s framework did not match the ones found in this study. Thus, Stark’s “interpersonal communication” understood as “the ability to communicate one’s ideas effectively to other people through a variety of symbolic means” (Stark *et al* 1986: 247), despite the semantic similarity with my “interpersonal cluster,” was not the same thing. The latter pointed not simply to a technical ability to communicate, but to “softer” attitudinal dimensions of interpersonal communication, such as prioritizing relationships, openness to receiving help, empowering others and compassion.

Stark’s “career marketability,” a concept that suggests that the graduates “have an education that makes them competitive candidates for professional practice” (Stark *et al* 1986: 249), was entirely absent from my participants’ responses. The graduates experienced no market competition for the available ministry jobs, as the demand for church leaders in Central Asia was still great. Stark’s main “attitudes,” such as

“professional identity” and “professional ethics,” were not the same as the “spiritual qualities” in my study. At this point my conceptualisation was close to Steckel’s (1981) categories of “calling” and “character.” He points out that, in Christian ministry, these characteristics are distinct from their counterparts in secular professions by their direct attribution to God. Thus, my category of “a strong sense of personal calling” corresponded to Steckel’s “calling,” and “ascribing ultimate value to God” corresponded to Steckel’s “character,” understood as more than ethical integrity, but as *faithfulness* – “a fundamental orientation of the minister to Jesus Christ” (Steckel 1981: 380). In particular, this study confirms the paramount importance of *calling* for the professional sustainability of ministers. The sense of calling helped the graduates to remain in the profession when other motivating aspects (financial, emotional, etc) were challenged. To summarize, “spiritual” qualities, unique to the ministerial vocation, were fundamental for their success as practitioners.

8.2.2 Developing a model for researching practical knowledge

The literature on professional training shows that to a large extent the “practical knowledge” developed by professionals is tacit and hard to codify (i.e. Eraut and Hirsh 2007). The research model I present in this study – interviewing practitioners and identifying capabilities they needed to be successful in their job - is an attempt to “reveal” some of their tacit knowledge and therefore could, arguably, be replicated in other professional contexts and contribute towards the development of context-specific training. As I show in this study, in developing my framework I accounted for several common pitfalls described in the recent literature, such as reductionism, universalism and behaviourism (Bolden and Gosling 2004).

My study is of particular value to theological education, inasmuch as it presents an attempt to tap into the attitudinal aspects of ministerial practice. As Chapter Two shows, there is little theory and methodology developed in theological education with regards to the assessment of spiritual/character aspects of training. Although these aspects are recognized as highly significant (e.g. Reisz 2003, Mercer 2003, Chapman 2006), it is difficult to assess them, *or even to know what outcomes to assess*, as this area is so personal and elusive for codifying. Thus, Chapman (2006) recommends that faculty should first articulate learning outcomes in the area of character formation; Ford (1991) recommends doing so by looking at the actual practice of ministers and implementing the findings in the theological curriculum. Harris (2003) and Dash *et al* (2005) call for studies of how training influenced the pastors' formation based on researching the graduates.

In my research, I attempt to address this conceptual and methodological gap in the literature by providing an example of how it could be done. I suggest a way of applying qualitative research methodology to the investigation of those "softer" aspects of ministerial practice, which are particularly difficult to codify. It can be done by in-depth interviews and subsequent qualitative analysis. The pastors are asked to describe their ministerial practice, and to provide concrete examples of how they are dealing with certain issues, while the researcher is paying particular attention to those attitudes and values that enabled them in that process. The data is subsequently analyzed (in my case with the help of template analysis) and categories of "practical knowledge" emerge, allowing the development of frameworks of capabilities and attitudes. The development of such frameworks could serve as helpful orientation points towards identifying training outcomes for theological institutions.

8.2.3 Theory-practice divide in theological education

This study shows an interesting phenomenon: although the students in general *highly valued* their training, they could rarely articulate the connection between their training and their ability to deal with actual problems in ministry. As I showed in the Introduction, the lack of this connection was one of the main reasons that prompted me to undertake this study: many national leaders complained about the impracticability of theological training. What was the reason for this? The reason most commonly offered is the uncontextualized transfer of Western theological education, and the solution offered is to *culturally adapt* the theological curriculum to the local context. Such adaptation is usually understood as translating the curriculum into the local language, substituting nationals for the foreign teachers, and finding local examples to illustrate the teaching. Others go further and suggest having the local nationals write the curriculum and develop their own “indigenous” theologies. This is the point of view that I heard from both national leaders, and from many foreign expatriate missionaries involved in church development and theological education in the region. That was what I was expecting to find in this study.

However, one of the most surprising findings of this study is that only a quarter (nine) of the graduates pointed to cross-cultural issues as bearing any significance for effective learning. The majority of them were more concerned with the practical applicability of what their teachers taught, which in turn was linked *not* to the teacher's cultural background, but primarily to his/her practical experience, personal spiritual maturity and teaching expertise. Although the graduates did praise a few talented and experienced national teachers, many pointed out that it was better to have experienced and seasoned foreign teachers than young and inexperienced national teachers. (Even worse was to have foreign teachers with no serious ministry or teaching experience!) Moreover, counter to my initial assumptions, many graduates commended and used the ideas they borrowed from popular Western Christian authors (e.g. Larry Crabb, Philip Yancey, Rick Warren, John

Maxwell, and others) in developing their own thinking and practice. The graduates were intelligent and reflective enough to be able to contextualise these ideas to their local situations for themselves.

This leads me to suggest that the lack of connection between the graduates' experiences of training with their subsequent practice, points to more than just an inadequate adaptation of theological education for Central Asia. I suggest that it is a reflection of the even deeper problem of the traditional "schooling" model of theological education *per se*. As I pointed out earlier, the graduates who felt they received the most benefit from their training for their later professional practice, were the ones who were either actively involved in a local church ministry, or who actively participated in student mission activities during their training. The theory-practice gap was minimal for them, as they were able to quickly transfer the learning that they needed, and to rapidly contextualise the knowledge that they needed for immediate use. At the same time, the majority of the criticisms from the graduates were directed not to the culturally uncontextualized theological training, but to the larger issue of the *theory-practice divide*, which is relevant not only to this region, but to theological education elsewhere (e.g. Banks 1999, Harkness 2001, Cannell 2003, etc). Compared to other professional fields (e.g. the training of doctors, nurses, teachers, etc), ministers are seriously lacking the practical training component and the connection with the field of practice.

Therefore, this study suggests that theological education in Central Asia seems to have inherited the common flaws of theological education elsewhere. The major concerns - for the applicability of theological knowledge, lack of practical ministry, and concerns for spiritual formation - were the same as in the United States (see the discussion in Chapter Two). In other words, the challenge seems to be not so much in contextualising theological education for Central Asia, but in contextualising theological education to real-life ministerial practice.

8.2.4 Importance of experienced teacher-practitioners

Another finding of this study is that although the institutions were relatively successful at the spiritual formation of their students, it was largely due not to the *formal content* of their training, but to the personal influence of their teachers, which seems to have been an unintended result. The experienced and spiritually mature practitioners served as 1) models, 2) mentors 3) a source of authoritative practical knowledge for the students. The importance of modelling and mentoring for the training of ministers was confirmed by another piece of data: about a third of the pastors found mentoring support essential for their further professional and personal development *after graduation*.

The importance of mentoring for the development of novice professionals is widely discussed in the literature on professional training, and in many cases is accepted as an integral part of professional development (e.g. in teacher training; see Maynard and Furlong 1993, McIntyre and Hagger 1993, Brooks and Sikes 1997). Unfortunately, this is not the case in theological education in general, where mentoring is often viewed as a “nice thing on the side” but not as an essential part of training for ministry. As my findings show, theological institutions in Central Asia were not an exception to the general rule. College I made the most effort in that direction by instituting the function of the “curator,” or spiritual supervisor of the students. Nevertheless, most of the modelling and mentoring that did happen at the Colleges, happened in an informal way and was virtually a *by-product* of the training experience.

8.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTIONS IN THIS STUDY

Evangelical theological education in Central Asia is at a critical stage due to the severe shortage of students, the increase of governmental pressure, oversupply of various training courses impacting the quality of training,⁶⁹ and weak ties with local churches. It seems that this is a time for major changes: the Colleges might want to rethink more profoundly than merely adding a few new subjects to the curriculum, lest they face extinction. Arguably, the Colleges in Central Asia can do it more easily than their Western counterparts, as these institutions are very young, small in size, are not yet burdened by traditionalism, are in fact willing to change, and are actively looking for ways forward. This study was initiated by the desire to help these institutions to achieve this.

The Colleges could choose between four conceptually different directions, or perhaps create a combination of them. For example, they could attempt to change their orientation on ministry training and tap into a new market, targeting the younger generation of Christians who want a good general higher education, provide secular subjects, get accredited by a secular institution and drop the expectation that people will go into ministry. In short, they could become like Christian liberal arts Colleges in the United States. Some elements of this vision of education were being considered by two of the Colleges in my study. However, this might also create significant tensions with the expectations of all the major stakeholders, such as the local churches, denominational authorities, Western financial sponsors, and even the staff of the Colleges.

⁶⁹ This refers to another problem that several graduates considered detrimental to the quality of training for ministry in Central Asia: the *sheer number* of educational courses, seminaries and institutions. Because church growth has slowed down in recent years, the supply of training opportunities has quickly outgrown the demand. Because most of those institutions were charitable organizations and did not charge a fee for training, church leaders often chose to send their people to a particular course not because of the quality of training that the institution provided, but because it was free and everybody was welcome. That created a problem with negative competition: the institutions with higher admission standards were losing applicants because there were plenty of other training courses with generous Western funding.

Another way would be to move in the direction of a more generic professional training – for example, to give a diploma in leadership development, that could be used both in ministry and in secular contexts, for example, for work in the business world. Alongside with providing some biblical knowledge and ministerial skills, such Colleges could use the space available in the curriculum to add the “practical” courses requested by the graduates in this study, such as those related to working with people (counselling, teamwork, leadership and management), organizational development, strategy, time management, the basics of financial planning, starting a business, and possibly even some “craft” professional qualifications (e.g. heating system installer, welder, etc).

Thirdly, the Colleges might shift their emphasis entirely from leadership development to educating lay people by providing short-term training courses in the churches – this seems to be the direction at least two colleges in my study are considering at the moment. In this case, they will remain within the “schooling” model, primarily providing the transfer of biblical knowledge, which is in itself valuable in the context of Central Asia.

Finally, the colleges could still retain their major emphasis on ministerial training, but in this case the changes need to be very significant in order for these institutions to survive. I will devote the rest of this section to thinking through the nature of such changes in the light of my research.

8.3.1 Challenging the underlying “schooling” model of theological education

Mark Elliott (1995), looking at theological institutions in the post-Communist countries, rightly warns against the indiscriminate transfer of “Western theological education.” Instead, among other suggestions, he recommends that theological educators in the region should develop culture-specific criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of training

programs, provide more courses on the local religious traditions of Christianity, and shorten the length of Western teaching (Elliott 1995: 71). Although these suggestions in themselves are good and useful, as my research shows the lack of cultural adaptation in the training was not perceived as a core problem by the graduates.

Without denying the importance of contextualization, I suspect that today's preoccupation with contextualizing theological education might be obscuring a much more significant systemic issue in theological education. While efforts directed towards encouraging national churches to develop their own contextualized theologies are commendable, in themselves they are not likely to initiate the much-needed systemic paradigm shift in the national seminaries, from the "schooling" model to a more praxis-oriented model. Instead, these efforts may result simply in developing national theological faculties with their own indigenous contextual theology, but that will retain fundamentally the same "academic" approach to training their ministry students. Instead of reading Calvin, they might start reading indigenous Asian theologians, but without constant, carefully supervised and reflective involvement with ministerial *praxis*, these institutions are as likely to produce the phenomenon that Elliott refers to as a "trained incapacity to deal with the real problems of actual living persons in their daily lives" (Elliott 1995: 70).

While it is beyond the scope and aims of this study to provide a sustained defense of a particular model of theological education, the findings support Banks (1999) and Harkness (2001) in their insistence on a paradigm change in theological education, from the "schooling" model - still prevalent today - to the "missional" model. Thus, I support Harkness (2001) in his call to challenge the traditional framework of ministerial training with its fourfold division into biblical studies, systematic theology, church history and practical theology, and to replace it with a more holistic model, centered on the actual ministry of the Church:

Instead, the curriculum will be shaped more by a praxiological agenda, the issues and concerns arising in and from the ministry involvement of learner and teacher alike, so that, for example, theology is taught pastorally and missiologically, and biblical studies both drive and are driven by the pastoral and missiological concerns – in an integrated rather than balanced way. (Harkness 2001: 152).

The institutions could therefore make a serious attempt to reform and redesign their curricula and make them more oriented towards solving the problems of actual ministerial practice in the region.

8.3.2 Changing the educational model and reforming the curriculum

The institutions should do this *without sacrificing the transfer of fundamental Biblical and theological knowledge and exegetical tools*, which is particularly important in a region that has little evangelical theological tradition. But instead of following the traditional and fragmented formula of a theological encyclopaedia, they could integrate the “academic” element of theological study with the development of the students’ ability to exegete Biblical texts, and their research and preaching skills. To do so, the faculty could use the so-called problem-based learning (PBL) approach, recently advocated for use in theological education by Pilli (2005). For instance, the students could start by describing a certain problem arising in their ministry, discuss possible reasons and look for solutions. They could start with researching Biblical texts, reading the literature on the subject and discussing it with their teachers and other students, considering to what extent and in what ways various ideas or concepts are applicable to the solution of the problem. They could conclude the process by writing a paper, developing a sermon and preaching it to their congregation, or by developing a material for the small group study. They could develop a practical short-term or a long-term strategy for addressing this problem, and follow it in their actual church ministry. In the process of so doing they could learn a number of important skills in an integrated way: understanding the biblical text, applying exegetical and hermeneutical principles, learning critical and reflective skills, learning to do their own

research, communicating ideas in writing and preaching, and devising and implementing practical strategies in ministry.

For instance, College IV did attempt to redesign its M.Min curriculum in line with contemporary adult learning constructivism-based models. It provided short residential courses and required most of the subsequent learning to be done by the students off-campus, by correspondence with their mentors. However, the graduates both praised and criticised this approach, and much is to be learned from their comments. The first point of criticism was that the method placed a significant level of responsibility on the learner, which is simply not to be taken for granted in the post-Soviet Central Asian educational environment. As a result, as the current Dean of the programme told me in a phone interview (22.09.08), many students dropped out of the course because they did not have enough diligence and skills for doing independent study. I suggest that this problem might be solved by changing the training format: the teachers should be in much more frequent *physical* contact with their students, both helping the students to think their issues through, and holding them accountable. For instance, they could adopt a format where the students spend half a week in class, doing reflective learning, and another half doing actual part-time ministry (e.g. in the format used by Regent's Park in Oxford to organise the training of its ministry students).

The second point of criticism was expressed by one of the graduates (Pavel), who pointed out that in a confessional evangelical context it might be dangerous to encourage students with little prior theological and exegetical training to construct their own "little theologies," which could be methodologically undisciplined and Biblically incorrect. This is a valid warning. Therefore, such a programme might begin with several introductory courses in systematic theology and with training the students in basic exegetical and hermeneutical principles.

I suggest that the framework of capabilities developed in this study *could be one helpful reference point for curriculum redesign*, since it is an attempt to conceptualize some of the “practical knowledge” that the graduates needed for effective ministry. This framework makes the “practical” and “spiritual” qualities important for ministerial practice less tacit and more tangible, and therefore easier for the formulation of opportunities for the learning and development of such qualities in the training institutions.⁷⁰ Alternatively, the institutions might want to conduct similar studies themselves. Such studies would allow the institutions to be in touch with the practical needs of the ministers.

One could argue that, in view of the rapidly changing political, social and economic environment of Central Asia, it is nearly impossible for the institutions to keep in touch with all current issues. Given this situation, it is of particular importance for the institutions to work towards developing training models in which they would equip the graduates with the *reflective and research skills* needed to enable them to interpret the constantly changing environment, to adapt their existing knowledge and to acquire new knowledge to respond to new issues as they arise.

Although this research shows that the graduates’ evaluation of their teaching was mainly positive, they perceived as one of the most important factors in their learning their constant involvement in practical ministry. Unfortunately, instead of strengthening this key aspect of their training, most Colleges are currently moving in the opposite direction – relaxing practical requirements in the hope of attracting more applicants. It is recommended that

⁷⁰ This study, however, does not suggest that *all* the capabilities and attitudes described in the above-mentioned framework can necessarily be developed or improved with training. Thus, Eraut and Hirsh (2007) challenge the assumption that all “skill gaps” should or even could be necessarily fixed in this way. The research done by the Gallup Organization (e.g., Buckingham and Coffman 1999) challenges the common assumption that anybody can and should be trained in every skill the person lacks; instead, organizations should find a better *fit* for people according to their particular strengths, and should focus on the development of those strengths, rather than wasting resources in an attempt to improve their weaknesses. Some of the qualities described in my framework could be natural abilities, or else the capabilities that the pastors in this study developed *prior* to their training. It is not clear to what extent training can improve these qualities – this could be an area for further research.

the Colleges dramatically *increase the amount and quality of practical training*. It should become an indispensable part of the curriculum, and this should be reflected by a significant increase in the proportion of time allocated for practice, mentoring and supervision by staff. As Eraut and Hirsh maintain (2007: 80), the rule of thumb for effective professional training is that every hour of formal training requires 2 hours of intensive coaching for the effective transfer of knowledge in the workplace, and 7 hours to implement that learning in actual performance. Although such a proportion of formal training, coaching and practice is very far from the current practice of ministerial training, significant changes in that direction should start happening. Closer links with the local churches could provide the Colleges with better opportunities for developing such models of training.

In addition, the praxis-oriented curriculum would serve as an environment conducive to the character/spiritual development of the ministers. As several students in this study pointed out, active involvement in ministry during studies not only helped them to ask the “right questions” about ministry, but also prompted them to develop an attitude of prayer and dependence on God and prevented them from developing intellectual pride.

8.3.3 Selecting the right teachers

As I mentioned above, the teachers played a pivotal role in the graduates’ learning, serving as models to imitate, providing practical wisdom, and as mentors, helping the graduates to deal with the current issues they faced in their personal lives and ministry. However, this was an *unintended* influence, happening, so to speak, on the sideline of the educational process. Therefore, I suggest that the institutions *articulate* modeling and mentoring in their curriculum and *intentionally* develop appropriate learning opportunities and structures for this to happen. For instance, some of the teaching staff could work with

designated small groups of students (3-5) throughout the whole duration of the training programme. A mentor could help his or her students to reflect on their learning, help them to make the connection with actual practice, and participate in ministry together with the students.⁷¹ Mentoring should move from the outskirts to the *centre* of a missional model of training.

Therefore the *selection of the right teachers* is of paramount importance. As much as the institutions in question would like to transfer teaching responsibilities to the nationals as soon as possible, the emphasis should be on spiritual maturity, the depth of pastoral and teaching experience of the teachers, and on their ability to relate to the students. It means that the nationals may not always be the best choice. Although it would have been ideal to have teachers who were both nationals and highly experienced (in my study the graduates did identify a few gifted national teachers), it would take a considerable time before sufficient numbers of such individuals became available. As Smith and Alred (1993) write with regard to teacher training, “first of all, the mentor offers a model of what the trainee may some day become” (Smith and Alred 1993: 109). This was certainly confirmed in my study. The students wanted *role models* - wiser, older, experienced ministers - not their own peers who had finished at seminary only a few years ago and who, despite having degrees, could not offer the practical wisdom that the students were looking for. Besides, as Penner points out (2005), expatriate teachers help the students to broaden their perspectives in an increasingly globalised world – a notion that was also expressed by several students in my study, who desired a healthy mix of nationals and foreign staff. This seems to be the best solution at the present time.

⁷¹ One example of missional training is the Eurasian College in Kazan, Russia, the institution I worked at from 1999-2004. Our one-year residential programme consisted of four cycles of six weeks “in-the-class” – three weeks “in-the-field.” During the three-week modules, mentors spent a significant amount of time with their designated teams of students *on the mission field*, both participating in ministry and helping the students to reflect on it. During classroom periods mentors continued a close interaction with their students, working with them in local ministry projects and providing personal spiritual mentoring.

Nevertheless, one still has to take into account the harsh reality of a shrinking religious freedom in the region that makes the expulsion of foreign missionaries a real possibility, just as it has already happened in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. In this light, individual selection and customized training of national teachers and mentors with high potential, remains an important priority.

8.3.4 More rigorous admission practices

It seems that when the Colleges lowered their standards in order to attract more students, it eventually created a vicious circle – the pastors did not like the new graduates who were not motivated to engage in ministry and were not trained in ministry skills, and it even further reduced their desire to send their people for training. Therefore, despite the temptation to fill up the classes, the Colleges should, perhaps counter-intuitively, *increase* admission standards, something that in the long term would attract more quality people.

A particularly important quality for the new applicants is a sense of *being called to ministry*. This study shows the importance of that quality for the long-term sustainability of the graduates in ministry. Many of my interviewees emphasized that the fact they were convinced they were “called” by God to ministry even before they started training, later proved to be of an immense importance when they were faced with the temptation to quit the ministry. Therefore, it makes sense to give preference to those candidates who have a distinct sense of calling when they apply to the training institutions. As this study shows, many graduates were sceptical about the efforts of their Colleges to motivate students who did not already have distinct signs of calling; it did not work and it was a “waste” of resources.

Again, the framework developed in this study, might be helpful at the selection and admission stages. It could be that the students who already have a predisposition towards some of the capabilities and attitudes underlined in this framework, might be more productive ministers in the future. Although structured instruments for testing for such capabilities might yet need to be developed, some of these qualities may be identified during the initial admission interviews, or through interviewing their church leaders.

8.3.5 Increasing communication with local churches and other bodies

Finally, it should be emphasized that some of the problems described in this study, such as the decline of church growth, financing pastors, increasing government restrictions, etc., clearly cannot be addressed by the training institutions alone. Discussions on how to deal with these problems needs to include not only them, but also the denominational leadership and mission agencies. Therefore, institutions must *make a significant and sustained effort to increase the level of communication with the local churches and other agencies involved in developing the Church in Central Asia*. Without such an effort not only will the quality of training continue to suffer, but the very existence of the institutions could be in question.

Admittedly, this is easier said than done – three out of four principals of the institutions interviewed pointed to their efforts in that direction and to the obstacles they encountered. Some church leaders do not value theological training or are suspicious of it. Some are afraid of competition from the young graduates. Others simply do not have a long-term vision for leadership development, and therefore send to the Colleges not their best people, but “idlers” who have nothing else to do. This problem seemed to persist across denominational lines.

Another important activity that the institutions might benefit from is organizing a forum for *regular communication with local churches and other Christian agencies*. Such a body does not need to offer formal accreditation (although this could help gain better credibility for the institutions in the face of a worsening political climate), but it would serve primarily for developing relationships, sharing experiences, and discussing issues such as the decline in admissions, improving local church participation in training, and other acute issues facing theological institutions.

8.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Given the constraints of one person doing a doctoral study, this research was limited to looking only at the graduates' own perceptions of their training. To investigate the influence of training on graduates' capabilities and attitudes from different perspectives, a more comprehensive research design is needed. Such a design would include collecting data from interviews of people connected with the graduates, e.g. their spouses, people from their congregations, and regional/denominational leaders. It would also be interesting to include observational data, obtained by following the graduates as they engage in their ministry responsibilities, such as preaching and conducting organizational meetings. However, it would be difficult to undertake observation of other pastoral activities, such as personal counselling.

Since this is a study of the graduates' perceptions of their training in only four institutions, the findings will not be generalisable to other theological colleges. However, they may provide a helpful starting point for researchers to pursue similar studies in other colleges; by comparing such studies the data for developing a curriculum for ministerial training programmes in the region could be obtained.

The ultimate research design for assessing the impact of theological education on the students' capabilities and attitudes would be a longitudinal study in which the students would be interviewed at the beginning, then at the end of their studies, and after a few years in the ministry. That research design would also need to include data from the people involved in the graduates' lives.

Another interesting area of research would be a closer look at mentoring in the context of ministerial training in Central Asia. What are the culturally relevant modes of training? What does effective mentoring look like in practice? It would be of great interest to see some in-depth qualitative case studies of the existing mentoring relationships of ministers, and to see what practices can be adopted into ministerial training.

The challenges for theological educators in the region are enormous. I hope that this study will be a first step towards building a body of empirical and theoretical research in the region that other scholars will undertake in the future. It is my sincere hope that such research will not only increase our body of knowledge, but also provide real and tangible help to theological institutions in building the Church of Jesus Christ in Central Asia.

APPENDIX I: THE INTERVIEWEES

		Colle- ge	Gen- der	Age	Nationali- ty	Marital status	Years after grad.	Vocation	Church setting	Church size	Previous educational background
1	Karim	1	M	30s	Kyrgyz	Married	7	Pastor/CP	Village	7	Technical school
2	Alexey	1	M	50s	Korean	Married	3	Pastor, teaching part-time at theological college	Small town	30	University
3	Aida	1	F	40s	Kyrgyz	Single	4	Pastor	Large city	50	Higher professional institution
4	Alik	1	M	30s	Kyrgyz	Married	3	Pastor/CP	Village	16	Secondary school
5	Nurbek	1	M	20s	Kyrgyz	Single	3	Pastor/CP	Village	10	Technical school
6	Efrem	1	M	50s	Korean	Married	8	Pastor/CP of 3 churches	1 town, 2 villages	10-70	Secondary school
7	Sultan	1	M	50s	Kyrgyz	Married	7	Ex-pastor	Large city	60	University
8	Valentin	1	M	30s	Korean	Married	4	Pastor	Small town	50	University
9	Gulnora	1	F	30s	Uzbek	Single	5	Associate pastor	Large city	150	University Master's
10	Abra- ham	1	M	30s	Ethiopian	Single	4	Associate pastor	Large city	150	Specialized professional institution
11	Usen	1	M	40s	Kyrgyz	Married	4	Acting Pastor	Large city	100	Secondary school
12	Vitaly	2	M	30s	Armenian	Married	7	Ex-Pastor	Large city	30	Secondary school
13	Ilnur	2	M	30s	Tatar	Married	7	Pastor	Large city	50	Technical school
14	Stepan	2	M	30s	Russian	Married	8	Associate pastor	Large city	65	Technical school
15	Anton	2	M	30s	Korean	Married	7	Pastor/CP, supervisor of 5 churches	Large city	30	Secondary school
16	Dmitry	2	M	30s	Russian	Married	8	Pastor	Town	50	Technical school
17	Tatyana	2	F	30s	Russian	Married	3	Pastor/CP	Small town	10	Secondary school
18	Eugeny	2	M	20s	Russian	Married	7	Ex-pastor	Small town	20	Technical school
19	Malin	2	F	30s	Kurdish	Married	3	Missionary	Small town	10	Secondary school
20	Roman	3	M	30s	Russian	Married	7	A church leader, teaching at theological college	Large city	800 - 1000	Technical school
21	Stani- slav	3	M	40s	Russian	Married	6	Pastor	Small town	27	Secondary school
22	Petr	3	M	40s	Russian	Married	11	Pastor/CP	Small town	50	Technical school

23	Taras	3	M	40s	Russian	Married	11	Pastor	Large city	800 - 1000	Technical school
24	Lev	3	M	50s	Russian	Married	6	Associate pastor, leader of CP organization	Large city	600	Technical school
25	Egor	3	M	40s	Russian	Married	3	Pastor	Large city	30-50	Choir director
26	Hamit	3	M	50s	Kazakh	Married	6	Pastor, employed part-time by mission org.	Village	8-10	Technical school
27	Danil	3	M	30s	Russian	Single	7	Pastor/CP, missionary	Small town	Small group	Secondary school
28	Kim	4 currently M.Min	M	30s	Korean	Married	6	Pastor	Town	1000+	University
29	Adil	4 currently M.Min	M	20s	Kazakh	Married	6	Pastor, employed part-time by mission org.	Large city	40	University
30	Kirill	4	M	20s	Russian	Married	3	Associate pastor	Large city	200	University
31	Leonid	4 graduate M.Min	M	30s	Russian	Married	11 6	A church leader, employed by mission org.	Large city	60	University
32	Kaisar	4 currently M.Min	M	20s	Kazakh	Married	5	A church leader/CP, employed by mission org.	Large city	35	University
33	ErmeK	4 currently M.Min	M	30s	Kazakh	Married	6	Co-Pastor/ employed by mission org.	Large city	50-80	University
34	Anvar	4 currently M.Min	M	20s	Uigur	Married	6	Pastor	Large city	50	Secondary school
35	Pavel	4 graduate M.Min	M	30s	Russian	Married	9 1	Pastor/ teaching part-time at theological college	Large city	60	Secondary school
36	Azat	4	M	40s	Tatar	Married	9 5	Pastor/ employed by mission org, planted 3 ch	Large city	50-80	University
37	Farhod	4	M	30s	Uzbek	Married	7	Ex-associate pastor/mission worker	Town	100	University
38	Adilet	4 graduate M.Min	F	20s	Kyrgyz	Single	6 2	Ex-church leader, currently employed by mission org.	Large city	50	University
39	Atabai	4	M	50s	Kazakh	Married	3	Pastor/CP	Small town	50	(did not provide info)
40	Nadir	4	M	70s	Kazakh	Married	5	A church leader	Village	30	Technical school

APPENDIX II: GENERAL INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Introduction

- Tell me about your ministry since leaving the College – what do you do?
- How do you see your role in the church?
- What is the structure of your church?
- Do you have any people working with you? What is their role?
- Tell me about your successes in ministry
- What role did your training play in that?

Problems

- What problems do you have to deal with in your ministry?
- How do you go about solving them? Where do you go for help?
- What role did your College play in that?

Some questions for further probing:

Working with people

- Tell me about how you work with people
- What kind of problems do people talk to you about?
- How do you help them?
- How did your training equip you for that?

Finances

- In what way are you financed? How do you deal with this issue?
- What is the role of your training in that?

Personal/spiritual life

- Tell me about your spiritual development – what events and people influenced you? In what way?
- How did your College affect your spiritual development?
- It is hard to be a Christian minister; sometimes leaders experience temptation to leave the ministry altogether. Do you ever experience such temptations? What do you do when it happens?
- What are the areas of your spiritual life you would like to grow in?

Concluding questions

- What was the most helpful experience in your training for your life and your ministry?
- What was less helpful/unhelpful?
- If you had a chance to go back in time to the point of your graduation, what would you have done differently? (Why did nobody tell me that?)
- In what areas would you like to improve your own knowledge and skills?
- In your opinion, how could training in the College be improved to train people for ministry more effectively?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me about how your training affected your life and ministry?

APPENDIX III: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

OUDES Letter Head

Date _____

Oxford University PhD Research

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of this study.

Your institution has kindly agreed to participate in my doctoral research project supervised by the University of Oxford. It is a study of the way graduates of theological Colleges in Central Asia perceive the impact of their training on their life and ministry. I hope that this study will help theological educators in Central Asia better understand the impact of their training on church leaders and help them make improvements in that training. This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw without penalty at any time by advising me of this decision.

I am asking you to be a part of this study as you have been a graduate of this College, spent several years in ministry and therefore can provide very valuable input into my study. The study will involve two interviews that will happen at a place and time convenient to you. Each interview will not exceed 2 hours.

The interviews will be audio recorded and subsequently transcribed. All the data will be anonymous and kept securely at Oxford University; it will be confidential and held in accordance with UK law. The results of this study will be available in public domain. However, I will not identify you in this study and I will not disclose your name or the fact of your participation in this study to third parties. At the end of the project the data will be deposited in a secure, access restricted archive.

Feel free to ask me any questions about this study before you decide whether to participate, or after that.

Please sign and return the attached consent form to me.

Yours sincerely,

Insur Shamgunov

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Oxford University PhD Research

Name _____

I have read the participant information provided and I understand that my anonymity will be guaranteed. I also understand that participation is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw at any point.

I give my consent to be interviewed.

Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX IV: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Name _____

Marital status/children _____

Theological College _____

Degree/qualification _____

Year of graduation _____

Please list any previous educational experience (school, College, university etc), years of study and qualifications

Institution	Years of Study	Qualification/s

Name and affiliation of your church _____

When was your church established? _____

Your position in the church _____

How long have you been in this ministry? _____

How many church members are there? _____

Are you a full-time minister? _____

Do you have another job? If yes,

What do you do? _____

How many hours a week do you have to work? _____

Thank you!

APPENDIX V: ETHICAL APPROVAL

University of Oxford

Social Sciences Divisional Office
34 St Giles', Oxford OX1 3LH

From the Social Sciences Division



Dr Hubert Ertl
Department of Education
Wycliffe Hall
54 Banbury Road
Oxford
OX3

Ref. SSD/2/3/IDREC

2 February 2007

Dear Dr Ertl,

Application for research ethics approval

Ref No.: SSD/CUREC1/07-008

Title: The voice of the graduates in the assessment of training for ministry in two theological colleges in Central Asia

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional Research Ethics Committee (IDREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to the IDREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly approval has been granted. Should there be any subsequent changes to the project, which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application, you should submit details to the IDREC for consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Jane Dale'.

Jane Dale
Assistant Registrar

cc: Ms Tracy Killip
Insur Shamgunov

JED/MAS

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