

Is this relevant to ministry?

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

August 12, 2011

I'm a part-time student at a denominational seminary, where I'm working (very slowly) on an academic-track masters. It's generally been a good experience, but the school's not a perfect fit. Again and again, professors and coursework assume a ministry context. That's understandable in worship or preaching class, maybe even in biblical studies (where the many M.Div. students in the room all have homiletics on their minds). But theology, or church history? I'm constantly wishing we could just study the subject at hand without putting on our future-pastor hats. Especially because some of us don't have one.

But when professors fail to put things in ministry terms, it's not long before an M.Div. student raises a hand to object. "How is this relevant to the people in the pews?" he or she asks.

There probably isn't a solution to my particular frustration as a non-M.Div. student in these classes (other than to go to a different school). But a [great post](#) by *Century* contributing editor Jason

Byassee addresses the issue for *ministry* students. Jason's an academic and a writer who recently took his first full-time appointment as a Methodist pastor. Here's how he describes the transition:

The single most striking thing to me about my new appointment is the level of specifically intellectual demand that's been placed on me from the word "go."

I sat down to a men's Bible study my first Saturday, expecting good biscuits, lots of hearty laughs, and a little discussion of Scripture. And I got this:

"Jason! Explain predestination to our brother Henry here." It was a joke, of course-who wants to talk about God's choice of individuals for salvation or damnation at 7 o'clock in the morning?

Well,

Henry did. The question drove him out of his former church.

Jason goes on to tell of other parishioners who didn't hesitate to call on the theological training of their pastor. My own response to the make-it-relevant police might be, "How could big questions like 'who is God' and 'what is the church' *not* be relevant to ministry?" But I'm aware that I'm more than a little naive about the realities of parish ministry. So I was glad to read Jason's concrete examples of how his theological education is serving him well.