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DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP

Developing leadership is more than just training a person to do a job. Aspects such as human relations, organising ability and personality characteristics are also important.

Another question is that of cultural patterns of leadership. In Asia, age, social status, family connections are all important cultural factors. Two of the many problems that plague Asia are nepotism and corruption. But as we examine these problems, we see a pattern of social obligations and filial responsibilities emerging. The question is, not how to eradicate the problems by eradicating the social patterns, but how to transform the outworkings of the social patterns into healthy Christian manifestations.

RESPONSIBLE COMMUNICATORS

In the face of increasing government control of media, Christians need to be involved in media—not only at the technical production level, but also at the policy-decision levels. In this way, Christians can manifest the truth of Jesus' statement. "You are the salt of the earth". We need to encourage our journalists, radio script-writers, performers, technicians, and others in their professions and to help them be aware of their Christian responsibility within these areas.

THE INTER-RELATEDNESS OF THE MEDIA

Like it or not, mass media give a common face to all shades of Christianity. The man-in-the-street does not concern himself about the segment of the Christian theological spectrum to which a particular broadcast or publication belongs. To him, it is "Christian", and that is enough. What one group says will have the effect of building or destroying the credibility of other groups—there is no escaping this. What then can we do? How can we work together to present a Christian witness that is not self-contradictory, ambivalent and confusing?

CONCLUSION

The church in Asia is living in critical times. With the upsurge of nationalism and revivals of traditional religions, more and more the church will be questioned as to her validity, relevance, and even P. 300 right to exist. These are also days of unparalleled opportunity, as people shipwrecked on materialism and its attendant problems, and people made destitute by wars and corruption, search for a lasting meaning to life.

We are convinced that the Lordship of Jesus Christ gives the fullest meaning to human life. May God help us to share that conviction!

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Practical Theology and Pastoral Training

Ian D. Bunting

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In this article, Ian Bunting shares his goal of teaching an approach to pastoral training, in which reflection on practice and on theology complement each other.
Editor.

For seven years a single urgent question has pursued me in my work as a pastoral educator in the context of a theological college. What do we mean by that branch of theology which we describe as 'practical' or 'pastoral'? All sorts of issues relating to the content and method of pastoral training are associated with the question. I conclude that the task of the pastoral educator in the theological college is to teach an *approach to ministry* and to make it clear that this is just a part of the much wider range of practical theology which comprehends the Christian life and mission in relation to God's work in the church and in the world.

THE DEBATE ABOUT MEANINGS

It is helpful first to trace the history of the debate about meanings. In the past century the field has been dominated by Schleiermacher's definition of practical theology as the crown of theological studies comprising 'the method of the maintaining and perfecting of the church'.[1] The purpose of theology was to serve the church, and the application of it to the work of the church was the concern of the pastoral educator. Teachers designed pastoralia courses to equip students in a practical way for their future pastoral and preaching ministry. Many clergy now look back with some scorn upon this period as the 'hints and tips' era when teachers were attempting to impart a method of ministry without delving too deeply into the fundamental questions for the church thrown up by the modern study of theology and the contributions of the burgeoning behavioural sciences.

The next stage in the debate, which dates from The nineteen-fifties, represents a reaction against the 'pastoralia' understanding of practical theology but is in fact a sophisticated development of it. p. 302 Having recognized the impossibility of drawing prescriptive solutions from the results of theological research, pastoral educators turned to those sciences, particularly psychology, which were saying things about man and society on the basis of solid empirical enquiry. The deductive approach of the earlier period gave way to an inductive starting-point which well matched the prevailing theological trend. The educational goal, however, did not change. The objective was to equip the minister, by means of these new scientific insights, for his functional responsibilities. The sphere of practical theology was, in the words of Seward Hiltner, '… that branch or field of theological knowledge or inquiry that brings the shepherding perspective to bear upon all the operations and functions of the church and the minister, and then draws conclusions of a theological order from reflection on these observations.'[2]

Serious problems have arisen from this understanding of practical theology and pastoral training. In brief, it has been hard to establish the academic respectability of the subject in university theological faculties, and it has been hard to establish the professional standing and competence of pastoral counsellors alongside their secular

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[1] F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Die Praktische Theologie nach den Grundsatzeu der Evangelishen Kirche* (Berlin 1850) p.27.

[2] Seward Hiltner. *Preface to Pastoral Theology* (Abingdon Press: Nashville 1958) p.20.

counterparts. Whereas in the past the minister had a clear identity and profession as minister of the Word, today he has to search for a recognition which he has yet to be granted.

A polarization has taken place. Those who define practical theology in terms of pastoral care and counselling have tried to develop associations which will validate the skills and expertise of their members as professional practitioners. Those who teach practical theology in university settings have, on the other hand, drawn up new definitions and enlarged the scope of the subject in dialogue with their academic colleagues.[3] It is this latter development in the academic sphere to which we must now turn.

Karl Rahner, more than any other, has carried the ball of practical theology into the court of the academic theologians. He argues that it is possible to think of structuring the whole of a theological training programme around practical theology, thus rescuing the subject from the taint of being a sub-discipline. He maintains that practical theology extends to all that the church does and consists of an exact p. 303 scientific investigation into the concrete situation of the church, both interior and exterior, thereby becoming both a challenge to the academics and a unifying point of reference for the study of theology.[4] This concept of practical theology, as reflection upon practice, is the basis upon which university pastoral teachers have defended their discipline and promoted research. In a recent article Robin Gill has highlighted the distinction between what he calls the 'academic' and the 'professional' models of the practical theologian.[5] He asks for the 'academic' model, normally adopted in universities, to be accorded the same stress as the 'professional' model which is used, for example, by those engaged in practical counselling. He believes that the one can benefit the other. The 'academic' approach will save the 'professional' from easy assumptions just as the 'professional' approach will save the 'academic' from irrelevance. He contends that practical theologians should forsake the idea that we study the social sciences chiefly for their relevance to pastoral techniques. Rather we will need to value them for their descriptive function which, if duly observed, could benefit the whole study of theology as well as the practice of ministry. We will return later to the place of the social sciences in pastoral training but, in their descriptive functions, the social sciences provide a helpful perspective from which to view and evaluate both the practice of the church and the relation of theology to that practice.

GOALS OF PASTORAL TRAINING

Most practical theology is taught, however, within the environment of a residential theological college and directly relates to the training of ministers. Time, together with other academic pressures, forbids either a rigorous academic or professional approach as described above. Even if he accepts the widening scope of practical theology, the pastoral educator in the college must try to narrow down his educational goal to attainable proportions and decide upon a course-content and method which will enable students to achieve the goal. Pastoral training is, therefore, necessarily a limited enterprise. It can, however, equip every student to ask vigorously throughout his ministry, no matter what

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[3] See A. V. Campbell, 'Is Practical Theology Possible?' *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol.25, 1972, pp.217–27. J. A. Whyte, 'New Directions in Practical Theology', *Theology*, Vol.LXXVI, 197.3, pp.228–38.

[4] Karl Rahner, 'The New Claims which Pastoral Theology makes upon Theology as a Whole', *Theological Investigations*, Vol 11 (Darton, Longman & Todd: London 1974) pp. 115–36.

[5] Robin Gill, 'The Future of Practical Theology', *Contact*, No. 56, 1977, pp.17–22.

the field, two questions. First, *what* is happening in this situation? More particularly, what is happening that is P. 304 theologically significant? Secondly, *why* is it happening? With the answers to these questions the minister equips himself to evaluate his existing work and to reassess goals and methods for the future. This is what I mean by teaching an *approach to ministry* today. An example will serve to illustrate the point.

A student, Bruce Petfield, conducted a survey in 1978 of nine sets of parents who had had children baptized within the previous two years in Morpeth. The families were selected at random from the registers. In addition, the student interviewed the three clergy from the parish. The purpose of the study was to ascertain the degree of relationship between the perceptions of clergy and people on the nature of, and preparation for, the baptism of infants in the parish.

The answers elicited from the parents revealed that seven out of nine sets of parents had sought baptism as 'the accepted or done thing'. One parent believed that the church 'laid it down', while the ninth mother believed that baptism was a witness, to the child, of the parents' faith. None of the parents recalled the purpose of the pre-baptismal visit of the clergy beyond a discussion of the mechanics of the service. In no case were the godparents chosen for their Christian convictions. Seven out of the nine families reported that no one had made a follow-up visit. No parent was able to articulate the difference that baptism made to the child, and in six cases the child's baptism had not occasioned any further attendance at worship.

The answers elicited from the three clergy who had baptized the children were revealing when compared with the perceptions of the parents. All three agreed that, basically, the sacrament was for the benefit of the child and they were, in general, prepared to set aside the parents' short-comings. They all made efforts to convince the parents of the meaning of baptism and tried to emphasize the point of commitment to the church. They were prepared to admit that they could press the 'mission' aspect harder with their baptism contacts. The student concluded: 'Perceptions of baptism by consumers do not seem to tie in with the perceptions given by the priests involved.' The priests had, therefore, to live with an unresolved tension because, although they believed that baptism was for the good of the child, the fact was that people maintained no greater contact with the church following the baptism than they did before it.

The survey illustrates the nature of the 'What is happening?' question. Priests and people are working at different levels of understanding and there is no engagement of the one with the other. But there is a deeper theological uncertainty. The three priests perceived baptism as a transition from death to resurrection, from darkness to p. 305 light, and, in one case, commitment to membership of the church; but the fact was that the parents did not understand or act upon the consequential implications. Why do they not understand? No one may stand in judgement upon the three priests of Morpeth, but it is a legitimate question for any priest who finds himself in their position—and most of us do. The answer could lead to a change of theology on the one hand or, more logically, a change of policy on the other.

Even if we accept an *ex opere operato* view of baptism, we dare not say that the fruit of that doctrine is of secondary importance. Nor may we rationalize the parents' failure in commitment on the basis of their spiritual blindness when they simply do not hear what we are saying. We need to feel the force of this theological issue that pastoral practice does not match doctrinal conviction and, in the parishes, we need to make changes which bring our practice into line with our theological convictions.

The pastoral educator is trying to challenge his students to ask these hard questions so that they may prepare themselves to hammer out an *approach to ministry* which is probing, flexible and open to change.

Reflecting upon the development of pastoral education in the seventies, a former student wrote:

> Theological education and pastoral training are like every other branch of education; suffering from a constantly growing mass which totally threatens any truly educative process. Proliferation of curricula and syllabuses is no way at all to tackle future needs of the pastor. The aim must be to train the person *qua* person to be able, when need arises, to educate himself in the particular subject, skills and areas at that time. Therefore, selectivity is the guiding principle. I believe myself that for pastoral studies this leads inevitably to only two major requirements for the future ministry:
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> 1) Training in the area of personal and inter-personal relationships.
> 2) Training in openness and readiness to find out.
>
> This is a heartcry. I am utterly distressed at the apparent inability of many clergy even to consider in any valid way a new idea or thought.

Gordon Watt Wyness is making many good points. The theological college is incapable of producing the complete clergyman. More detailed training is better undertaken within the context of actual ministry. The college can, however, foster by courses and learningexperiences the kind of openness which will approach the ministry equipped with tools rather than ready-made solutions. p. 306

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Pastoral educators have welcomed the contributions of psychology and sociology as offering just such tools for ministry. We have yet, however, to resolve the problem of how to integrate them into the programme in a way which will serve the intended aim. Two pitfalls confront the college which introduces these subjects into the college curriculum. First, we shall teach the subjects in a way which fails to reach the educational goal I have outlined. An imported teacher, even if he is a Christian concerned about ministry, is unlikely to be theologically equipped to ask the right 'what' and 'why' questions. Let us say that the teacher offers information on a subject which seems to be related to the needs of ministry: motivation, mental illness, bereavement, class, or education, for example. The students tend to respond with questions designed to gain insight into the context in which they are called to minister and, even more, to gain some skills for their future work. They are not likely, unless prompted, to ask 'what' and 'why' questions about what the church is already doing and how this matches up to their theological understanding. In other words, the insights of the behavioural sciences and theology do not feed back upon each other. One way to overcome this divorce is to use team teaching methods, so that a theologian sits in with the imported teacher with the specific objective of asking searching questions for the church and her ministry.

Recently a psychology teacher was giving a class solid information about the incidence, symptoms and treatment of the mentally ill. In the middle of one session the teacher threw in a question about demon possession and Jesus' handling of the phenomenon. The reactions fell broadly into two predictable camps. Some students concluded that Jesus healed the possessed much as a psychiatrist relieves some forms of mental illness today. Others protested that this was tantamount to a denial of the supernatural. The issue led into a fruitless debate; fruitless because it hardly touched on the church's ministry to the mentally ill or attempted to evaluate what the church was in fact doing in this particular field. Indeed, when the teachers made this point it soon became clear that there was no hard evidence such as was available in respect of the medical treatment of the mentally ill. The class could only discuss the matter on the basis of impressions and individual incidents. We just did not know what was the effect of

Christian ministry to the mentally ill or the possessed. Nor had we any hard evidence about Christian attitudes and behaviour to such people which might, one suspects, have thrown p. 307 some sharp questions against the church's self-understanding on the one hand and her concept of the Christian mission on the other. In brief, the important educational goal of this particular part of the psychology course was not to teach students about mental illness, nor to demarcate the boundaries beyond which they ought to seek professional help, nor to equip them for a ministry to the mentally ill, but rather to give an understanding of what the church could do and ought to do in this field: in other words, an *approach* to this ministry.

The other pitfall which confronts the college which introduces the behavioural sciences into the curriculum is the danger of approaching all practical theology inductively. In an age which has lost confidence in the ability of the Bible to speak to modern issues, this has considerable appeal. We easily slide into the view that the assumptions of sociology and psychology prescribe the sphere and activity of the Holy Spirit. But just as we find it important to place the life and work of Christians under the magnifying glass of the social sciences, so we shall want to weigh that evidence from a truly biblical and theological perspective. One of the greatest privileges and responsibilities of the ministry is to make choices. It is, of course, possible to make those choices simply on the basis of the calls made upon us by the voices that shout loudest. In the pressures of a pastoral ministry these easily consume all our energy and time. The minister can, however, operate on the basis of certain selected priorities. Surely the apostolic nature of his calling demands just that. In establishing these priorities he needs clear theological perspectives which derive first and foremost from the Bible but also from the tradition and doctrine of the church.

Forgive, please, a personal illustration as I approach once again a pastoral ministry in a parish of some 30,000 people. It is important for me to try to identify some clear aims for the work which lies ahead. The ministry cannot simply respond to the calls which are made upon it, nor operate only with techniques which appear to be successful elsewhere, but must try to give direction to the church. Four aims emerged from a study of the nature and purpose of the church and the kingdom in the Bible:

1) The church exists to proclaim, by work and act, the kingdom of God and to extend its borders. In other words, the church cannot live for her own sake but engages in Christ's own mission to tell the good news beyond the boundaries of her own fellowship.
2) The life of the church is that which communicates most p. 308 effectively the challenge of the gospel. A style of life is the most powerful agent of change which the church possesses.
3) Every member of the church has a ministry to be recognized, trained and used. This understanding of ministry will take the typical parish into structural and procedural change.
4) There is a world-dimension to the Christian mission. In recent years the church in the western world, fascinated by herself, has lived in isolation from what God is doing in the rest of the world. We must correct the imbalance.

A theological reflection on ministry today has helped me to identify these four aims. They will provide a useful standard by which to evaluate what is happening now and to approach changes in the future. Reflection upon practice will hopefully stand alongside reflection upon theology, and the objective is that they will complement each other. If the pastoral educator helps the student throughout his ministry to do both, he will provide an *approach* to his work which will prove a valuable tool to last a lifetime.

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Book Reviews

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