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MINISTERIAL TRAINING at NORTHERN COLLEGE

Since most of this article will be devoted to a modest experiment called APT (Alternative Pattern of Training), still barely three years old, let me make it clear at the outset that it is not the only pattern of training for ministry offered by the Northern College. It co-exists with two others: a more traditional and a non-residential pattern; and they will be joined by a third in the Autumn of 1981. The more traditional pattern accounts for just under half of our students. In addition we are heavily involved in lay training or adult Christian education as a sponsoring member of the Manchester Christian Institute, and in an ecumenical scheme for training the pastors of black-led churches in the city.

I will first describe the main features of the Alternative Pattern of Training. then explain the ideas behind it, and finally discuss some of the issues it has raised and the criticism levelled against it.

I. APT normally lasts for three years, never less and occasionally more. The course runs for 46 weeks of the year and it is worth noting that the time spent in training is comparable with a four year course along traditional lines. All the students admitted so far except one have been married. We expect them to have had good experience of working in Baptist churches and to have exercised already some of the leadership that ministry requires. No rigid entrance requirements are laid down as far as academic qualifications are concerned, so that those who have none learn and teach alongside fellow students with professional qualifications and degrees, including one graduate in theology. The demands made by the course rule it out as a soft option for the less able.

For much of the year the pattern of training has three main ingredients. First students are placed with Baptist congregations right from the start. The local church provides free accommodation or a housing allowance, expenses and a small living allowance supplemented either by social security payments or a local authority grant. The churches working with us are generally small and could not otherwise afford a minister, but there is increasing variety. One student is part of a team serving a group of churches; another is assistant to the minister of a large church with special responsibility for a smaller village church nearby. Students are working in the inner city, suburbia and in rural areas, not far from the college in Manchester and as far away as North Wales, Staffordshire, Derbyshire and Nottingham.

We divide the week into twenty-one 'time-blocks' (a morning, afternoon or evening). Five of these are free. Eight are spent practising ministry in the local church. This includes taking major responsibility for one service but not two on a Sunday, and making an appropriate contribution to the full range of church activities from pastoral care to evangelism and social

action. At this local level the student is supported not only by the congregation but by an experienced neighbouring Baptist minister as adviser, and a group of five lay people from the student's church.
The second and third main ingredients of APT are the University Certificate in Religious Studies and college-based work. They account for the remaining eight time-blocks in a week. Three of them are spent at home on private study. The other five bring the students to Manchester every Tuesday for 4.00 p.m. They stay overnight with staff or students on the traditional residential course and return home late on Wednesday night.

We rely on the University Certificate in Religious Studies — the second main ingredient - to provide a grounding in the basic theological disciplines. Over the first two years students take about twelve courses of fifteen teaching hours each. These are mostly evening classes on Tuesdays and Wednesdays though some take the form of residential weekends. Continuous assessment is at first year undergraduate level and is based on two pieces of written work for each course. In the third year students write a dissertation under tutorial supervision. Since the college supplies a substantial number of students for the CRS courses it is invited to take part in planning time. We have asked for courses which give students a reasonably clear map of the terrain complemented by courses which teach them how to explore and exploit for theological purposes one particular area. Thirty hours of introduction to the New Testament will be complemented by a study of a single book or the New Testament teaching about God. Fifteen hours on how to make moral decisions in general will be complemented by a thoroughgoing attempt to make a decision about a contemporary moral problem. A bold attempt to outline and give shape to the history of the church or the history of Christian thought will be complemented by a closer look at say the Reformation or the Atonement.
The CRS courses and the dissertation work (since students have to report on it to fellow students and staff) bring our students into contact with other adults involved in theological education who are not preparing for ordination. Since the Certificate is run by the Extra-Mural Department and is therefore open to all, it provides a framework within which the less academically experienced and less able students can make steady progress as well as opportunities for others to produce essays and dissertations at a more advanced level. Where a student has already graduated in theology the CRS is replaced by the Diploma or MA in Social and Pastoral Theology. This creates some timetabling difficulties and has the disadvantage of removing a student from the APT group which gains a great deal from being and growing together.

We hope that the third main ingredient of APT pulls the other two together. Every week when the students come to Manchester they bring report sheets which record how they have spent their twenty-one time-blocks, what they have been doing in their churches, what issues have been thrown up by their experiences and where they have felt the need for help and training. These reports are discussed in a year group with a tutor. To some extent they are evaluated and help is given there and then, if only because it cannot always wait. Usually however a careful note is made of

training needs which are then discussed with all the students and staff and built in to a training programme on Wednesday afternoons. Training is therefore seen to arise out of the realities of trying to practise ministry; it is flexible and arranged on an ad hoc basis. From time to time, and especially at the end of the second year, a student's record is checked to see what important areas have been neglected. Some of the training is also done more systematically. For example many issues related to pastoral care will be dealt with as and when they are thrown up by pastoral practice, but an attempt is made to set out systematically some of the theories and skills associated with counselling and pastoral visiting. The same could be said of worship or preaching or community work: issues are dealt with in training session because experience demands it, and theoretical frameworks are provided to add understanding and a sense of perspective.

The evaluation of a student's ministerial practice is taken further on two occasions in each year. In the first, one and a half hours are spent on a 'major report'. It is presented to all the students and staff with the adviser present. It is divided up into seven or eight areas such as worship, evangelism, administration, pastoral work, community involvement, of which the student chooses four to deal with on any one occasion. Under each heading there are questions about what has been done in that area, what role the student has played in it, how far the student and the church are satisfied and what should be the immediate aims over the next six months. Students not only answer these questions themselves prior to making their report, but must also go over them with their group of five lay people and record their comments as well.

On the second occasion when students are assessed they meet with two members of staff, their adviser and one other student of their choice and the group looks not only at their ministerial practice but their academic work and personal formation. After both of these major reports a member of staff visits the church where a student is placed to discuss with the lay support group the goals which have now been set for the next period of training and how the group can best help the student to achieve them.

Evaluation and goal-setting is not all that different from what has been called 'praxis', namely critical reflection on committed practice with a view to discovering the next form that obedience should take. Such reflection is the heart of 'doing theology' which takes amongst other things the resources of the Christian faith, laid out for the student in the basic CRS course, and uses them to interpret, evaluate and find a sense of direction for the practice of ministry to which the same student is committed in the local congregation. Forming a person to be such a reflective theologian, rather than teaching a person a lot about theology, is what theological education is ultimately about. So in the practice of theology during weekly and major reporting sessions and on several other occasions throughout the course, the different ingredients of APT are integrated and begin to make sense of one another.

Before leaving this descriptive section I ought to mention one or two other features of the course. There are four residential weeks each year at the

college, two in September, one after Christmas and one at Easter, in addition to those required for CRS purposes; and students have a two week placement in the early Summer. One placement is with the social services, another spent working in a hospital, not just with the chaplain. There are regular course meetings when students and staff try to evaluate the course itself and make plans for the future; and visits are not only made by staff to the churches but by representatives of the churches and especially by the lay support groups to the college. Sometimes over eighty of us have shared a meal and spent an evening discussing our partnership in ministerial training when lay people have far outnumbered college based staff and students.

II. What are the ideas or ideals behind the course? I want to mention four.

First APT is an attempt to respond to the needs of married people with families. More and more applicants are of this type and on the whole this is a welcome trend. It seems more sensible to support and encourage people who have already emerged as leaders in our churches than to suppose that a course of training can make a leader for the church. But we all know that the difficulties facing married students can be almost insuperable. APT does not pretend to resolve them but, with the provision of family accommodation and a modest income, to tip the balance in favour of training as a possibility. Maybe as a denomination we have yet to learn how to accept our responsibility for the men and women whom local churches, associations, colleges and to some extent the Union agree should be trained for our ministry and then leave to the mercies of local authorities, inadequate scholarship funds and their own personal resources.

But APT can hardly be accounted for simply on these grounds. Other colleges besides our own have long supported married students in training by linking them with a local church and housing them in the manse. After that they have basically shared with residential students in existing courses; APT students do not.

This is where a second idea, that of integration becomes important. I have already discussed one aspect of it. We believe that theological education involves helping one another to become theologians, reflecting critically on our committed practice. In the past and to a considerable extent today, traditional residential patterns taught students quite a lot about other people's theologies but gave them scarcely a clue as to what to do with it all. You could not help them to put it to work even if you wanted to as long as committed practice only followed after a rather static and unusable approach to theology had been fixed in people's minds, or the experience of ministry during training was so limited or devoid of responsibility that it was more like playing games than coping with reality. In the theological workshop of APT we want to make it clear from the start that the theology of the church mapped out in the CRS course is nothing more nor less than the articulation of what Christians have made of their practice and their experience in the past, and is one of the major resources with which their ongoing practice and experiences in the present must now be tested, illuminated, understood and transformed. Theology is not just there to be learnt but to be used and integrated with practice.

Another aspect of integration underlying the course has to do with the interrelation of learning and practice. There are a number of important points which we, like others, had tried to take into account in traditional training but with only limited success. Maybe they could be taken into account more successfully by a rather different approach. They included: the contribution that practice (in this case the practice of ministry and of reflection on practice) makes to learning without denying that people learn from books and lectures and arguments as well; the way we are motivated to acquire knowledge and skills by experienced needs rather than the advice of an experienced teacher; the need to test theoretical learning against practice and to develop theories not in the abstract but out of practical experience; and the way in which some areas of the course, especially certain skills, are learned more efficiently if they can be used immediately. No-one should read into all this a trendy over-emphasis on practical training even if until comparatively recently it has suffered from neglect. Nor do we want merely to correct an imbalance but to achieve a more fruitful interaction between what is done in the local church and what is done in seminar, classroom and study.

Turning to a third idea underlying APT, one hesitates to drag in the overworked concept of 'contextual training' — overworked that is in some circles where ministerial formation is discussed but still very much underdone in many places where ministerial formation is practised. A college such as ours, closely linked to a university, is an excellent context for the kind of academic learning once denied to dissenters and which we have rightly learned to prize; but is it the right context in which to prepare men and women for ministry especially when once their initial training is over most will be pitch-forked into the fray largely on their own? Isn't it all too easy in a college to get out of touch with the untidy realities of Christian mission; to give ultimate significance to the relatively unimportant (such as heated doctrinal controversies) and wish that the people in the churches could all be as well informed about these matters as we are; to decide for ourselves what kind of ministry the churches need and pay scant attention to what they say they want — however much we may disagree with them; to prepare people for a task that doesn't really exist in quite that form and leave them somewhat unprepared for the tasks they will actually have to face; to encourage ways of praying and ordering one's life that can work reasonably well in here but which will have to be fought for all over again 'out there'? Of course colleges have taken much of this to heart and have established more and more links with the ongoing life of the churches. We wondered if that was quite enough. Should the primary base or context of training be the college community using the churches as outside resources, or should the primary base be the local congregation with the college as the outside resource? Maybe the centre needs to shift.

Which brings me to a fourth and final idea behind APT and it has to do with partnership, or fellowship or colleagueship in training. Who should train people for ministry? A good deal of what we do is based on the assumption that it should be the staff of a theological college, though their qualifications are somewhat curious since hardly any of them have any training

themselves as educationalists, and many have long ceased to practise as ministers. If such folk have something to contribute there are others who seem qualified to make a different but equally important contribution. Amongst them are the members of local Christian congregations. As I have explained, through the support group we have tried to give them an active part in training which may also help to break down the wrong kind of separation between ordained and lay. If part of the distinctive task of separated ministry is to enable men and women to be the people of God, a minister cannot discover what that means without their help and candid advice. The minister does not by virtue of a college course 'know best'. Another group that needs to be given a more responsible share in the training are the students themselves. One of our central concerns is to take no major decisions about the course except in consultation with them. No longer wet behind the ears they have their own particular insights, experience, skills and expertise to share with the rest and sufficient maturity to take a large measure of control over their training. College staff do not always 'know best'. As partnership grows so the concept of a 'college' changes. It is no longer an institution of staff and students where those who know inform those who don't. It is a community of men and women preparing for ministry, practising ministry, on the receiving end of ministry, given responsibility to oversee ministerial training: Staff, students, ministers and lay people, all with something to teach and all with something to learn.

III. I have written about some of our ideas or ideals. I hasten to add that we rarely live up to them and I hope they serve to undermine rather than promote any sense of self-satisfaction. I have often criticised a student's major report for its tendency to answer 'Yes' to the question: "Are you satisfied with the contribution you have made to this particular area of the church's work?" I must try to avoid making the same mistake. So I turn finally to some of the issues raised by our tiny experiment and the criticisms levelled against it. It is much too soon to pretend that we have taken them fully into account, so I catalogue them rather briefly.

We are aware of criticism not to say hostile criticism from certain quarters on the grounds that the course lacks academic rigour and allows people to enter the ministry as collegiate candidates without really going to college! Both comments home in on important issues which I have already referred to. As a matter of fact the so-called 'academic' content of APT and certainly the teaching-contact hours spent on the basic theological disciplines compare favourably with those in other courses and very favourably indeed with those in the non-residential courses which Anglicans regard as perfectly adequate for training large numbers of their clergy. But that is not the point. We are as concerned as anyone else that training for ministry should be rigorous and thorough but our criteria may be different. If certain people's academic requirements are not met by APT they not only need to support their case on factual grounds but also show us why they should be met in every pattern of training; just as we must be prepared to argue the case for the rigours we require, which we may find sadly lacking in them.

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The point about not going to college has about it a touch of resentment which I understand; the justification for it however is not 'we had to spend three or four years in a residential institution so why shouldn't everyone else?' but 'why shouldn't more of us have the opportunity to prepare ourselves for ministry in a rather more satisfactory and attractive way'. Any suspicion that APT students have an easier time of it than the rest can easily be dispelled, though of course there would be nothing intrinsically wrong if they did!

Four issues bother me far more than the two just mentioned. First, when the main base for training is moved from the residential institution to the local church it is an open invitation to the church to make its presence felt and one which it quite rightly accepts. This is not all gain, and I am not here thinking only of the demands the church makes on the student, which have constantly to be watched and kept in check. I am thinking of how parochial rather than local the context of training can become. At worst a student can be theologising about and equipping himself or herself to deal with a relatively trivial agenda.

A second and related point is that APT can easily become over preoccupied with the church simply because so many churches are over preoccupied with themselves. If one is convinced, as I am, that Christian mission is fundamentally about the Kingdom and not the church, about social change and human development not church growth, it is an uphill struggle to save students from being wholly immersed in church affairs and turn their own minds and the minds of their churches to the task of transforming the communities of which they are a part, local, national and international into something nearer to what we believe God's Kingdom is like.

Third it is one thing to talk about theological reflection, drawing on the resources of faith to interpret and give direction to practical obedience; it is another thing to do it. Very few people appear to have a natural (or supernatural) flair for making fruitful connections between the issues which arise out of mission and ministry and the Christian tradition. It seems to require poetic and prophetic gifts which are in short supply. But I find it hard to accept that the crucial business of critical and creative reflection on practice is a no-go area for the vast majority. We work hard therefore at standard procedures which anyone can use to get their theologising off the ground. We are not always successful but it is not often that, once applied in a disciplined way, they do not enrich our consideration of what we are doing and what ought to be done next.

And fourth I am bothered by the fact that we may be getting no further with APT than an improved way of training people for existing patterns of ministry. It could merely reinforce where we need change. I suspect that whereas every Christian congregation needs a leader, the leadership of most Christian congregations, including many which now have full-time ministers, is not a full-time job. To make it into one encourages the church to use its limited financial and personal resources in a rather selfish way and encourages ministers to fill their time with activities that are not as easily

justified as we tend to assume. Men and women who are trained on APT are forced into full-time ministry since having given up their jobs to go to 'college' they cannot easily return. We need an alternative pattern of training for an alternative pattern of ministry and it is this concern that has spurred us on to prepare a new course for Christian leadership which will help people to train whilst remaining in their jobs and continuing as leaders in their churches.

Finally let me re-iterate what I said at the start. APT is not the only pattern of training we are committed to at Northern. It is the one I was asked to write about. We believe that this and the residential pattern can co-exist. Better than co-existing, they can fruitfully interact. We have for example already transformed the style of the fourth year of residential training into something very similar to APT; and we would like to discover how to make APT as effective in opening people up to new ways of believing and worshippping as is residential training. In the end any sharp division between the two may be difficult to maintain. We would certainly not complain if students could enjoy the best of both and we could as it were have our residential cake and eat it on an APT picnic or our APT sandwiches and consume them at a residential feast. Meanwhile we are enjoying our search for even better patterns of training and the growing company of churches, lay folk, ministers and ordinands that we keep.

Michael H Taylor

MINISTRY TO THE UNEMPLOYED

As I look up from my study table, I have ahead of me on the wall a glimpse into Lowry's Salford with the smoking chimneys of its many workplaces. As I turn to the left I look out through the window across the Swansea Bay to the industrial town of Port Talbot and see very little smoke at all. No doubt this has much to do with changed patterns of industry, and perhaps it also has something to do with an increasing awareness and concern about the effects of pollution. But for me, the contrast of these scenes has become a symbol. It points me to the large and growing number of people who are not working.

When the unemployed are at least metaphorically on the other side of the world it is possible to turn a blind eye, but when they or their families are in your congregation, the problem will not go away. However, how to react to it is not immediately clear. We are accustomed to minister to the sick, the lonely and the bereaved among others, but for many of us the unemployed are beginning to pose a particular problem.

For one thing, whether or not we are always as busy as we think we are, we do as minsters keep fairly well occupied and find it difficult to imagine having no work to do. For the most part, we have a secure job which makes it hard for us to understand the perpetual fear of redundancy with which so many live. We can do our best to alleviate the frustration, boredom and