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Training for Mission

IT SEEMED a simple enough task when the Editor suggested an article on books concerned with Training for Mission. But like so many things, it has not been as simple as it looked. Before we can get on to thinking about books, we have to make up our minds about two important questions. What sort of mission do we have in mind? And who is going to be trained?

The first question is important if only because it has so many possible answers, and according to the particular kind of mission you envisage your choice of books will vary, and so will your whole concept of training.

In the course of his concluding lectures as Professor of Mission at the Selly Oak Colleges, Canon Douglas Webster gave an historical review of the motive for mission from the Mediaeval Crusades down to the present time. Underneath their pageantry, the Crusades were basically political in their motivation, as were the Spanish conquests in South America with their ruthless policy of enforcing Christianity at the point of the sword. The theocratic motive was another powerful driving force, springing from the belief of many of the Popes, and of the Reformers, in the *Corpus Christianum*. A man like Leibniz saw the spreading of the Gospel as a kind of cultural benevolence, a view which was shared by Carey in his *Enquiry*, and by Wilberforce and Livingstone. And yet again, service in Christian mission has been seen as a kind of Protestant equivalent to the monastic life, as is seen in the writings of David Brainerd or Henry Martyn who wanted to "burn

out for God," or in the modern theme of T. S. Eliot's *Cocktail Party*. And to all these we could add the romantic appeal which resulted in the L.M.S. being overwhelmed with volunteers for Tahiti in the 19th century, the ecclesiological drive which inspired the S.P.G. to win back the British colonies from Nonconformity to Anglicanism, and the "rescue the perishing" approach which has been shared by Jesuits and Evangelicals alike. What a galaxy of motives! And some of them are still going strong.

But for many people today mission is understood primarily in terms of love and compassion, a concern for the whole man and a deep sense of responsibility for the underprivileged. This is true of mission at home and abroad, and has found its expression in concepts like that of the Servant Church. And it has also meant that in many cases the old idea of the magisterial church has gone and has been replaced by a realization that if Christians have distinctive things to say, they have to earn a hearing and can no longer demand it.

I say this is true for many people, but recognize it is not true for all. The mass evangelists with their high-power publicity machines still have their devotees in the Protestant ranks, and ecclesiological mission is still a reality in certain parts of Eastern Europe where the Orthodox Church is almost more hostile to Protestant minorities than is the Communist government.

So in the face of all this, what do we understand by mission? We might begin our search for a definition by reading Douglas Webster's little book *Unchanging Mission* (Hodder) in which there is an imaginative treatment of the Biblical material in the light of his own exhaustive knowledge of the subject, and in which mission's four dimensions (upwards, downwards, outwards, inwards) are used to reflect the mission of God in the Cross. This is the kind of book to use in house-groups to stimulate thought and action.

My own understanding of mission owes much to the so-called "radical" theologians who have led us to be a little less obsessed with thoughts about the Church and to be more concerned with the Kingdom. This is a healthy shift of emphasis, for the Church exists not for itself but as an instrument for the realization of the Kingdom, and can only justify itself as such. And are there not indications today that the Church can no longer assume that it is an indispensable instrument for the realization of the Kingdom, that God could in fact by-pass the Church and leave us all high and dry in our precious structures while he goes on ahead and works out his purposes in the secular world?

A brief release from the machinery of the local pastorate has enabled me to stand back and be somewhat objective about many of the things in which I used to be immersed and which I took for granted. In particular, I question very much the traditional assumption among us Bap-

tists that there is something sacrosanct about the spiritual autonomy of the local church and that this is a self-evident New Testament truth which must be guarded at all costs. This assumption seems to underlie the report *Ministry Tomorrow* and the general trend of our denominational policy which regards the local church and its ministry as the accepted norm. Anyone who takes the trouble to see what is happening in the rest of the Church and in society at large must realize that new times are producing new patterns of ministry and it would be a great pity if we were left defiantly proclaiming our precious ideas about the autonomy of the local church while history swept impatiently by!

All this is relevant when we talk about mission. *Structuring the Church for Mission* (Belton Books 1969) gives a very frank report on the condition of the Church on Tees-side. It reveals that in this industrial region of North-east England the churches are sited in the older residential areas and have not moved in any appreciable degree into the new parts where the population is increasing. Church attendance is highest where the most expensive houses are to be found and is lowest amongst the poor. All denominations contain more women than men, most congregations are politically unaware and the mission of the Church as a whole suffers from a lack of effective ecumenical planning. In short, it is a case of "local churches making a desperate struggle to survive."

The Tees-side report illustrates, perhaps in extreme form, the malaise of British Church-life today. Secularization has out-paced us and we find ourselves isolated and irrelevant; with numbers and influence declining we think the great thing is to struggle to survive. Yet there is a warning word in the Bible that those who are concerned with nothing more than saving their own lives are very likely to lose them in the end.

What is needed is an about-turn for the Church, a looking away from concerns of survival and a looking outward to see what God is doing in the world and how his Kingdom may be recognized and furthered there. And we have to begin with the ministry. Mark Gibbs and Ralph Morton showed us in *God's Frozen People* (Fontana 1964) that the Church had become far too clerical, that all denominations suffered from a professional ministry which had been trained to lead from the front, and that the stance of the Church was looking inward to its own clericalized life rather than outward to the world. And anyone with any honesty knows how true and tragic it is.

In this situation, the new role which the Church has to play is that of God's commentator or interpreter, using her Biblical insights to point out where God is conspicuously active in society and thus introducing a new and healing factor into some of the difficult and unyielding events which occur.

The B.C.C. document *Pastoral Care and The Training of the Minis-*

try has faced the question of what this means so far as the professional minister is concerned and gives us the concept of him as the "enabler," taking his place among the many professional and voluntary helpers who make up the modern welfare state, mediating between them and using his opportunity "to reveal the implications of the Gospel where God discloses himself in new secular patterns of understanding and skill."

Some professional ministers have had training for this kind of role; far more are having to adapt themselves to it as they go along. Certainly it is a role which makes sense for many men in the ministry today, for it is one which, in the very nature of the circumstances, they cannot avoid and which at the same time offers them their greatest opportunities for effective service.

It is certain that theological education will have to be orientated in the future in the direction of preparing men to be "enablers" and one of the objections will be that the curriculum is already too full to have further subjects added to it. At this point the advice of Steven Mackie in *Patterns of Ministry* (Collins, 1969) is worthy of serious consideration, that the integrating principle of any theological syllabus for tomorrow's ministry should be the life and mission of the Church in the contemporary world. "This view," he says, "has many advantages. It allows for flexibility, the situation of the Church changes, nor is it everywhere the same. It allows for objectivity: economists, sociologists and historians can bring their insights to bear on it. It is based on Scripture: the history of salvation is concerned throughout with God's people in God's world. It demands existential involvement: it is in this situation that the Christian life has to be lived. It is an ecumenical starting-point: confessional distinctions do not divide us here. Finally, it is related to the central task of the ministry as we have defined it: the awareness, presence and service of Christians depend on their understanding of the Church's calling in the world today."

Steven Mackie's book is essential reading for anyone who is concerned with mission, and if his carefully worked-out integrating principle were generally accepted for the planning of theological education it would go far towards producing a generation of ministers whose whole life would be given to the idea of mission rather than survival. And it would not stop short at the professional ministry, but would enable ordinands to see their future role as part of the total ministry of the Church in which they and their non-ordained colleagues were meant to share together as partners.

It is by no means clear that this concept of the shared ministry within the total life of the People of God is generally accepted. Mention has already been made of *God's Frozen People*. If the appearance of this book in 1964 was meant to alert the attention of British Christians to a serious state of affairs, one can only conclude that despite all the good the book has done, many ministers and clergy still prefer to keep

their lay people in a state of refrigeration, probably because they give less trouble that way!

But any about-turn for the Church in a new understanding of mission must involve the whole question of the apostolate of the laity in the secular world. The German and Dutch Lay Academies have done splendid work in this regard, and in this country institutions like William Temple College and St. George's House, Windsor, have been making courageous beginnings. But in general terms the major denominations, our own among them, have yet to be persuaded that this is an area of concern which deserves all the money and the imagination we can put into it. Not that one wants to see a great number of denominational lay-training programmes emerging, for there is no justification for doing this on a denominational basis. But the denominations together should be stirring themselves to produce ecumenical facilities for the training of the laity for mission.

Until that day comes, how can we begin lay-training at the grass-roots? The answer surely lies with local Council of Churches. Many of these Councils, of which there are over seven hundred at the moment, do little more than organize the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January and the Christian Aid collection in May. What is needed is for local Councils to examine their own resources and organize appropriate training programmes. Perhaps there are three basic steps which every council should take:—(a) to survey the district unitedly to discover what its real needs are (b) to train unitedly for appropriate forms of mission in the light of this survey and (c) to engage unitedly in mission.

Alongside this is needed a continuous programme of laity education so that people may understand the nature of the new situation which C. J. Hoekendijk in *The Church Inside Out* (S.C.M. Press 1967) has described as "post Christendom." The book is as lively as its title suggests, and whilst the author makes us face the fact of "post-Christendom" as "a situation in which Christendom is no longer considered relevant for life," he makes an important distinction between this and any idea of our society being "post-Christian," which he firmly rejects. Hoekendijk's distinction is important because it suggests that the problem in modern mission is not in the Gospel but in the Church through which the Gospel is expressed and mediated. And if this indicates a crisis it could be one of hope and not of despair, if Christians were willing to part with that within Christendom which is no longer relevant and to advance into life with a Christian style of living which understood secular life and which the secular man of today from his side could recognize and respect, even if he did not embrace it.

There is a wide field of reading here. Perhaps one should begin with Harvey Cox's *The Secular City* (S.C.M. 1965) for not only is its author a Baptist, but he also gives us a serious attempt to understand how the

process of secularization has come about and to present it as an out-working of processes which are essentially Biblical. Cox sees the modern, highly sophisticated and automated complex of urban life as the crowning achievement of man and the proof of his ability to investigate nature freely and scientifically, and to change his political and economic orders so as to bring them into line with the will of the holy, righteous and loving Creator and Sustainer of all things.

The telephone exchange and the clover-leaf intersection have particular significance for Cox. With the former, modern man can preserve his anonymity while at the same time using it to contact a wide range of people whose services he may require or whose company he may from time to time wish to enjoy. The latter gives him instant access to a fascinating number of goals viz. his work, his club, the theatre, the beach and so on.

Harvey Cox needs to be taken with a pinch of salt, for in his enthusiasm for urban life he seems to overlook its loneliness and despair and similar elements which suggest not man's maturity but his adolescence. The Archbishop of Canterbury is right in saying that Harvey Cox has neglected the doctrine of grace, and this is true of a good deal of modern theology of this school.

Another critic of Harvey Cox, though an admiring one, is Leslie Paul, who describes the book as "brilliant but erratic." The same could hardly be said of Leslie Paul's own book *The Death and Resurrection of the Church* (Hodder 1968) which is an attempt, through Anglican eyes, to see what needs to happen to institutional Christianity if it is to make a worthy contribution to our secularized society. The reforms suggested are ones which others than Anglicans would recognize as long overdue and which all branches of the Church desperately need.

A similar theme is worked out in A. van den Hevval's *The Humiliation of the Church* (S.C.M. 1967). Here the author is a young Dutchman, writing from the perspective of ecumenical Geneva. He welcomes the passing of the days of the Church's *magisterium* and sees the true Christian mission in terms of self-emptying service.

Those who are anxious to know how the gulf between the Church and secular society may be bridged cannot do better than turn to Fred Brown. His book *Secular Evangelism* (S.C.M. 1970) brought him into collision with the authorities of the Salvation Army because he refused to submit it to them for official censorship. The main argument of the book is that evangelism consists in making people human rather than in making them religious.

During a period of enforced idleness following his dismissal from the Salvation Army, Fred Brown wrote a second book, *Faith Without Religion* (S.C.M. 1971) in which he recognizes that many secular men who profess no religious beliefs do in fact live by a certain intuitive faith in goodness and the worth-whileness of life. He faces the ques-

tion of communicating the Christian Gospel in which he believes to these people.

I must content myself with mentioning three more books. First, Stephen Verney's *People and Cities* (Fontana 1969). Stephen Verney was until recently a Canon of Coventry and he tells the story of the People and Cities Conference at Coventry and the continuing work of Coventry Cathedral to carry out a meaningful Christian mission to a great industrial city. Anyone who finds Harvey Cox a little too idealistic in his enthusiasm for cities will find this book more firmly rooted in the actualities of urban life!

Then because in some respects the Roman Catholics are far ahead of most of us in the matter of the lay apostolate, it is well to note a book by Joseph Cardijn, *Laymen into Action* (Geoffrey Chapman 1964). Cardijn, later to become a Cardinal, was distressed to see the great gulf between the Church and the working classes in Belgium in the days following the First World War. His answer was to found Christian Action, a movement designed to equip Catholic laity for leadership in industry and trade unions. Today the movement is world-wide and represents one of the best "grass-roots" forms of lay-training to be found anywhere.

Lastly, there is Mark Gibbs and Ralph Morton's *God's Lively People* (Fontana 1971). If their earlier volume pointed to the problem of a frozen and ineffective laity, this latest one is meant to provide the answer. The book offers positive suggestions about the nature of lay-training, the subjects that need to be covered and the way in which Christians can go about organizing their own training programmes. The book contains much of the experience gained by Mark Gibbs during his world-wide travels as Director of the Audenshaw Foundation. Perhaps a very last word should be that the Audenshaw Foundation (1 Lord Street, Denton, Manchester) issues regular papers on lay-training and that to become a regular subscriber to these would be a very useful first step for anyone who is really concerned about training for mission.

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