TRAINING: AN ANGLICAN VIEWPOINT

By MARK SANTER

EACH OF US is the product of a particular tradition, and of particular circumstances. So I can best start by saying where I come from. I am a middle-aged Anglican, son of a parsonage, and (as they say) educated at an independent so-called public school (with daily chapel) and Cambridge. For most of the time since I was ordained I have been teaching theology, either in seminaries or in a university. For the past five years I have been a bishop in London. I am married, with a wife who has always had a profession of her own—unlike my own mother, who did not start teaching until she was in her fifties. I make this last point, because it says something important about the changing pattern of clerical life.

The tradition in which I myself was formed was typical of a certain kind of Anglicanism—neither 'high' nor 'low' but certainly 'Catholic'. It had its weaknesses but also its strengths. It can best be illustrated by a couple of quotations from Canon B. K. Cunningham who was engaged in the training of clergy for half a century (1899–1944) and for the latter part of that time was Principal of Westcott House, Cambridge. He was thus responsible for the training of many of the most notable ecclesiastical and spiritual leaders of the Church of England in the middle years of this century—and his style lived after him. Both pieces were written round about 1920:

> It is not I who do the work upon these men; it is the 'Common Life'. Our part is to be careful nurses of the 'Common Life', to keep that healthy and strong, to see that no individual is allowed to stand apart from it. It is quite amazing what power and educative value this common life possesses, given any group of men who meet with aims in common. I never understood this until I realized that 'Common Life' is only a British way of expressing the 'Fellowship of the Holy Ghost'. It is the Holy Ghost who will do the work; it is yours to make the way straight for his coming in power. Cherish the common life and watch that no ugly duckling is left in isolation. . .
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> Let the order of the growth be 'first that which is natural and

afterwards that which is spiritual'. Draw out the natural and do not determine beforehand what he is going to be. A friend, a dear saintly man, speaking about a certain theological college, remarked: 'I regard it as the place for the development of the natural man'—and the astounding fact was that he intended the remark to be not a compliment, but a criticism. . . First the making of the man, then the priest must be built on the man. Perhaps the greatest weakness of the Church of England clergy today is not that there are a few men who ought never to have been priests, but there are many priests who have never been men. Please do not begin by building the priest—begin with the man and draw out the best that is in each. Put it another way—lay emphasis on character rather than on devotional exercises, on the will rather than on the emotions. These 'devotions' come far more easily to some temperaments than to others. Suppose your men most given to prayer are not the men most marked by unselfish service, your whole house tumbles. This is one of the biggest difficulties we can be up against. In the first stages let them learn that they best serve Christ and his Church in honest work and kindly fellowship and that Christ is with them there. Let the expression of aspiration Godward be prompted from within rather than imposed from without. As regards what is provided by authority it is, I believe, better to let men hunger for more rather than to be strained by having too much. And what is given, let it be real.

Keep the common life strong: reverence individuality: work from within outward, and when we correct a man it is better, when possible, to let it be self-correction . . . You will be terrified at the extent to which these boys look to you and lean on you. You will have tremendous power; be careful not to use it. Influence, yes; but power, no.[1]

I am most eager that this place should help the men to be not indeed like one another nor like those on the staff, but to be each his own best self as God intended. I am anxious, too, that men ordained from this place, to whatever school of thought they belong, should be above all else *real* in character and belief and worship. It is, as those of us who have been chaplains know well, the strong and wholesome demand of this generation. I hope, moreover, that we shall be able to have here the minimum of discipline imposed from without together with a maximum suggested and worked out from within. For it is, I am convinced, by treating men as sons of God and English gentlemen that the best in them is called forth.[2]

One sees the weaknesses (and at points one cannot help smiling): the unconscious snobbery; the atmosphere of the gentlemen's club; the social structures of England taken for granted. One may also say that it was a style of training which was stronger on piety and good manners than it was on theology.

But one also sees the strengths: the insistence, less popular then than it is now, on the positive value of 'unity in diversity'; the humanity; the stress on the real or authentic; the space given to men to find their own way; the priority given to works of charity and goodness over expressions of devotion; the awareness of the educative value of 'common life'; the place given to the development of a mature human character.

When I, with National Service and university behind me, entered that same theological college at the beginning of the sixties, the system was still running. But it was showing signs of strain. This was not, I believe, because the positive principles were at fault, but because the manner of their execution relied upon a whole network of social presuppositions which no longer obtained. The fifteen years after the war were a period of post-war restoration. But the social revolution of the sixties exposed the transient nature of all sorts of things which hitherto had been simply assumed as normal. Theologically, the publication of John Robinson's *Honest to God* was a landmark—not so much for what it said, but for what it revealed and stirred up.

As far as ministerial training was concerned, the tradition I entered was gentlemanly and male. There was little need for 'rules', because everyone knew how to behave. The social structure of the college presupposed a father figure with a handful of junior assistants, and a body of seminarians who lived together in a community of bachelors. Many expected to marry, but later, after one or two curacies. Already, immediately after the war, this pattern had come under strain with older ordinands appearing who were sometimes already married; but this was treated as a passing difficulty, and the wives relegated to the countryside for the duration of term time. The old bachelor pattern of life continued unabated. As late as the mid-sixties, when I was the junior member of staff in another seminary, I was expected to eat all my meals in college, except tea and Saturday lunch, and to leave my wife to fend for herself—on top of corporate worship, from which wives were also excluded.

But in the sixties we began to ask: what kind of a preparation was this for a ministry of married priests, whose homes were expected to be cells of corporate christian life? Just as in secular life, the old segregated gentlemen's world, with its clubs and

common rooms, was appearing increasingly indefensible, so too in the Church of England.

These social changes were not only a matter of relations between the sexes; they were also a matter of class. Patterns of life taken for granted by people from public schools, educated at Oxbridge, were not at all assumed as natural by others. The social base of the Church of England's ministry was changing. It has changed even more in the last twenty years.

Something else no longer to be taken for granted in ordinands is a general anglican, or indeed christian, upbringing and culture. In England family prayers are long since dead. But still, until comparatively recent times most ordinands would have had at least a conventional christian upbringing—baptized as infants, confirmed in their teens, regular church and school chapel. They had a general knowledge of the bible, they were brought up on the regular use of the Book of Common Prayer, they knew the shape of the Church's year. All that general culture could be taken for granted by those whose specific task it was to help them (in the old phrase) 'prepare for orders'. Ordinands now are much more varied. Some will have something of the old culture; others, recent and enthusiastic converts perhaps, none at all. A significant number have become Anglicans from other denominations, and of these some remain insouciant about liturgy and form, while others, having acquired a tradition, stick to it with the fixity of limpets.

So where are we now? I believe that the old principle of 'first the man, then the priest' still stands. Candidates for the Church's ordained ministry must be capable of developing a fair degree of self-knowledge, of how they react to other people and others to them. Part of this is the ability to face and cope with disappointment and negativity. They must be capable of developing a mature attitude to leadership and authority, for unless they can accept authority in a mature fashion they will not be able to exercise it. Perhaps the most important natural gift in an ordinand is that he should like people. So the person whose hidden motivation is that priesthood will keep him at a safe distance from others is not a good proposition. A capacity for co-operative work is also important.

Those are general human gifts and capacities. As far as specific ministerial formation is concerned, one of the chief tasks is the development of the spiritual and intellectual capacity to handle change. In days when things could be taken for granted both in the world at large and in the Church, it may have been sufficient simply to acquire a spirituality, more or less by osmosis, together with a kit of proven pastoral practice. That is no longer enough.

The future priests and ministers of today can no longer be assumed to know the Church's traditions of prayer, doctrine and life-style; and they need to know more, not less of them than their forebears, precisely in order not to be enslaved to them but to be properly free with them.

Thus the cultivation of a proper christian freedom is an essential part of ministerial formation. This involves at once a profound sense of belonging to the christian community and a readiness, in reliance on the Holy Spirit and without ever repudiating one's loyalty to the community, to form and trust one's own judgments. We are dealing here with the acquisition of that spirit of discernment which is proper to the grown-up children of God. This is required in the Church's ministers if they are to be able to use the resources of tradition creatively in response to the changing needs of the world. Without this spirit of freedom and discernment they will either be blown aside by every new fashion or else they will indiscriminately and anxiously cling to every piece of the package they have inherited, good, bad or indifferent.

This stress on personal responsibility requires its own disciplines. They must learn to be accountable and to look for support both publicly and privately. Their private or personal life will be a matter for regular review with a spiritual 'director' or guide, and once ordained, their work will be the subject of account to their bishops (or persons appointed by their bishops). In preparing such an account they will often find help from consultants (other priests perhaps), who perform the function of auditors. If this is to be part of ministerial life in the future, patterns of expectation must be laid down during training.

Something else that is needed is space—space for reading and thinking; space for a certain amount of solitude; space in which time can be wasted, and be discovered to have been wasted; space in which to grow and to change; space for the trainers, so that they may observe and form judgments; and the space which gives permission for someone to pull out with a good conscience. This last point is important, for the first aim of a seminary's staff must not be to turn out priests or ministers, but to help people to find their true vocation, whatever it is. Respect for the mystery of each human person is at the centre of the task.

It is now more than five years since I was directly involved in training. As a bishop I have been more concerned with what comes before and after a selection for training, and the product. Here are a few questions which have forced themselves on to my attention.

(i) Earlier on I remarked that the social base of the Church of

England's ministry has shifted. This probably corresponds with the general shift in the weight of committed Anglican Christianity, away from the monied and powerful and into suburbia. In this respect the clergy and the lay leadership of the Church correspond closely with one another. But in another aspect there is a gross mismatch between the make-up of our churches and the social background of our clergy. In the inner cities we are heavily dependent for our committed membership on the afro-caribbean community, but we have very few black clergy. This corresponds with a marked absence of black lay leadership. I do not believe that the question of black vocations to the ordained ministry can be tackled apart from the question of black leadership in Church and society as a whole.

(ii) The greatest change in the Church of England's ministry in recent years is connected with the changing role of women in society. Increasing numbers of women are offering themselves for full-time parochial ministry. In my own episcopal area, they comprise about a quarter of my candidates. They are selected by the same criteria as male candidates for the priesthood, and are trained alongside the men in the same institutions. This produces complications undreamed of only a few years ago. Here are some of them. Why should men and women, selected and trained in the same way, be divided into candidates for priesthood and diaconate respectively simply on the basis of sexual difference? And how can we make proper use of women of ability later on in their ministry, when, because they cannot be priests, there are very few posts in which they can carry substantial responsibility?

Again, our women ministers are no more debarred from matrimony than our men. This raises acute problems in the matter of that *disponibilité* which traditionally and properly goes with vocation to ordained ministry. This affects two groups—those who are married to other ministers (an inevitable by-product of joint training) and those, often older women who have offered themselves for ministry as part of their 'second journey' when their children have grown up, who are married to men with non-church jobs. The husband's employer wants to move him; what does the wife do? The same difficulty arises with male priests who are married to professional women. How can a man, who ought to move for the sake of his own ministry and for the sake of his parish, do so if he is married to the head of a large comprehensive school? It is no answer to say that he has a vocation; so has she.

(iii) The problem of *disponibilité* also arises with the spiritual yuppies who are produced in large numbers by socially successful Evangelical churches. They have been nurtured and brought to

commitment within a particular spiritual tradition, and are very difficult to employ elsewhere—and 'elsewhere' is most of the Church.

(iv) Finally, I am concerned by the number of people, both men and women, who wish to offer their lives to the Church's ministry, but who do not have the aptitudes or potential which make them suitable for ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. We lack the wide variety of ministries traditionally available in the Roman Catholic Church through membership of religious congregations. A few of these people find their way into the Church Army or, if they have the vocation, into religious communities. In any case, many of these people are already middle-aged and married. It is through the life of the parish that their sense of vocation has emerged, and it is there that it ought to find its response. How are we to recognize and affirm this vocation to local, pastoral, non-ordained ministry? Perhaps this is an area in which the Churches have gifts to share with each other.

NOTES

[1] Moorman, J. H. R.: *B. K. Cunningham* (London, 1947), pp 51f.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp 96f.