History of the Third Order

Some snapshots

(Hugh Beach)

A Talk given at the final meeting of the Winchester Area, 30th September 2000

I have arranged this talk not by way of a connected history, but in the form of six snapshots, each only a few minutes long, of people whose stories make up a large part of that history and whose very different personalities have given the Third Order much of its direction and vitality.

James Adderley (fl. 1880-1937)

James Adderley was the fifth son of a cabinet minister in Disraeli's government (1874-78), was educated at Eton and Christ Church Oxford and then went to London to become a lawyer, an absolutely typical upper-class start in life. But like St. Francis he reacted against his upbringing and became increasingly interested in church work in the slums. He was head of Oxford House at Bethnal Green for three years and then decided to follow two of his brothers into the ministry. He was ordained in 1887, and served successively at Poplar, Barking and Plaistow. By now his heart and soul were in Christian Socialism. He lived in very Spartan conditions in the East End and got to know prominent figures in the Labour movement. In 1893 he wrote a novel called *Stephen Remarx* which quite unexpectedly became a best seller and ran to twelve editions. It was based on Adderley's own life and was full of socialist ideas. The hero Stephen founds a religious community and Adderley went on to do exactly that in the following year. With two friends, Henry Chappel (Fr. Henry) and Ernest Hardy (Fr. Andrew) he formed a community which became known as the Society of the Divine Compassion. It was to stay in existence for sixty years. It was not specifically Franciscan, but it was concerned to harness the ideals of poverty, chastity and obedience to the cause of social reform. Adderley himself, however, soon became a

disciple of a cult of St. Francis which grew up in the 1890s. He left the Society that he had founded after only three years (in 1897) and went to Mayfair to preach to the wealthy and aristocratic. In 1900 he moved on to Marylebone. While there in 1902 he published an important book called *Third Orders*. His thesis was that the Third Order in the Roman church more truly represented the spirit of St. Francis than the First and Second Orders, these being in the grip of the papacy. He had no time for Romanisers in the Church of England and looked to combine the best in Catholicism with the best in Evangelical Religion. He believed that the spirit of St. Francis had been lost when the movement, under the influence of the popes, became institutionalised. It was an important, if not exactly an original, insight. By 1908 he had moved up to the Midlands (Saltley) and wrote a life of St. Francis based on Sabatier. In 1913 he moved to Birmingham and became the first member of the Labour Party to become canon of an English Cathedral. He remained active in the Christian Socialist movement, wrote a fourth book called *Slums and Society* (1916), went back to London serving parishes in Covent Garden and Highgate and finally retired in 1937 by which time he must have been very old. In worldly terms his work in the Franciscan movement was a failure and the Society that he founded no longer exists. But his life was a sincere attempt to live out the Franciscan ideal. At the end of his book on St. Francis he wrote:

> "His is a light that no man can ever extinguish, for it is a light that derives its brightness from the glory of Him who lighteth every man that cometh into the world. May it shine with renewed brilliancy in the midst of the dimness of our own dark days, when the mockers mock and the love of many has waxed cold".

Jack Winslow (fl. 1906-62)

The story now moves to India. I have always been struck by the way in which Indian spirituality, or that of the East more generally, appeals to some of the finest Christian minds. I am thinking, for example, of Fr. Bede Griffiths and Thomas Merton in our own time. This tale is of a generation earlier. Jack Winslow was the son of a vicar in West London, related to the Charringtons a wealthy brewing family, and more distantly to one of the Pilgrim Fathers. He was sent to Eton, which

he did not much like and then to Balliol College Oxford to read Classics in which he took second class honours. He went on to theological college at Wells, was ordained in 1907, served as a curate at Wimbledon and as a lecturer at the theological college at St. Augustine's Canterbury. So far his story is completely run of the mill. In 1914 he felt called to serve as a missionary in India, joined the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) and stayed with them for eight years, mainly at Ahmednagar. He loved India, wanted to become 'an Indian to the Indians' and believed that the Christian missionaries had failed to offer 'the gift of real love and equal friendship'. He was impressed by the asceticism of the Indian sages and admired their distinctive community, the *ashram*. On leave in England, on 12 August 1919 sitting quietly in a vicarage garden, he heard an 'imperious voice' telling him to set up a Christian *ashram*. And three years later, on St. Barnabas' Day (11 June) 1922, at St. Barnabas' Church (an SPG outstation), he inaugurated a new Community. It called itself the *Christa Seva Sangha* which means Christ-Service-Society. The members were Fr. Jack and five Indians. Their ideal was the development of Indian ways for the expression of Christian life and worship. One of their models was the *sannaysi*, the Indian ascetic in a saffron robe. So the *Sangha* wore a plain white robe with a saffron girdle. Their patron saint was - not surprisingly - St. Barnabas. Fr. Jack was elected head (known as the *acharya*) and their constitution was approved by Bishop Palmer of Bombay, so they were quite *pukka*. They shared their few possessions, pitched their bedding on verandahs and ate *chupattis,* green vegetables, rice, lentils, oil and clarified butter - at a cost of about $2^1/_2$ p. a day. They lived the full life of prayer (with a liturgy in Marathi and English), bible study and service to the sick, suffering and needy. One of the Indian brothers was married and lived in a tiny house nearby. They shared in the evangelistic work of the district, though this was less of a focus than the life and service. They moved house almost every year, living for a while in a Muslim tomb. After four years of this two of the brothers left and the rest went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Winslow went on to London to raise funds and volunteers, in both of which he was successful. A well-wisher gave him £1000, enough to buy land and build a permanent *ashram.* This was duly located at Poona, one of the great intellectual centres of India. And three brilliant young Oxbridge graduates went back with him in 1927, to be followed shortly afterwards by five others. One of these was William Strowan Algernon Amherst Robertson - of whom more later. Four of the new recruits were priests and four laymen. Three of each stayed and

were soon joined by more Indians. After three more years (i.e.1930) the *Sangha* was some thirty strong.

In 1928 came crucial changes. Bishop Palmer blessed the new *ashram* on Michaelmas Day. St. Francis was adopted as joint Patron Saint. And the *Sangha* was divided into a First and a Third Order. I'll tell you why these things happened in a moment. The First Order were specifically members of the Poona *ashram*, the Third Order soon took on the character of other Third Orders out in the community. One of the main works of the *Sangha* was to provide a hostel for Indian Christian students in two rented bungalows near the *ashram*. About twenty students lived there, including some Muslims and Hindus, dining together on vegetarian food and with daily prayers and eucharist in which all faiths could join. The students ran schools for poor children. There were weekly visits to a leper asylum and work in the villages, spreading knowledge of hygiene as well as of the Gospel. The importance of the life was still emphasised. Winslow wrote: "Unless the church can produce Christian Yogis, masters in the spiritual life, who are competent to direct others in the discipline and science of the mystical way, she will fail to attract the choicest spirits of Hinduism". The tradition of married brothers continued, but the original pre-Franciscan group found it difficult to fit in and after four years moved to a separate *ashram* at Aundh. They did not long survive. But the Poona community kept going, with a slightly modified name (the *Christa Prema Seva Sangha*) for another thirty years. Recently it has been revived. Only last month I met the present *acharya*, Bishop Ernest Talibuddin, a man of great charm, at a conference at Coventry.

One of Winslow's great commitments had been to Indian independence, the movement for which was rapidly gaining strength in the 1930s. He also played a part in the first discussions towards the formation of the Church of South India. A very far-sighted man. But in 1934 he resigned as *acharya* and left India for good. Some of the Third Order members of the *Sangha* were in England by then and helped to foster the vocation of tertiaries. But Fr. Jack himself became much involved with the Oxford Group movement, served a number of curacies in England, had two spells of duty as chaplain of Bryanston School and for fourteen years was the chaplain of Lee Abbey. Like the *ashram* it was run by a community of single and married people with a vision -in this case the renewal of the church. He retired in 1962. Like

Adderley, Fr. Jack founded a Community and then moved on. Like Adderley, his Community was not specifically Franciscan - at least to begin with. Like the Society of the Divine Compassion, the *Sangha* represented a fusion (some might say a confusion) of the best in the evangelical and the catholic traditions in the Episcopal church. And in the formation of Third Orders in the Church of England both played a seminal part.

Fr. Algy (1894-1955)

Fr. Robertson was known to his mother as Strowan but to everyone else as Algy. He was born in Ealing in 1894, son of a liveryman of the Carpenters Company. His family were Congregationalists but at Westminster School he was confirmed in the Church of England. He went up to Queen's College, Cambridge in 1913, won the university prize for Public Reading, but failed a medical for the army so never got to the war. Instead, he went for three years as a lecturer in History and English Literature to St. Paul's College, Calcutta. This was where his great love of India began. He came back to Cambridge in 1919 to read for Holy Orders at Westcott House, was ordained in 1921 to serve as curate at Cullercoats in Northumberland, and for three years was travelling secretary for the Student Christian Movement, visiting all the theological colleges. Then came Jack Winslow's famous visit to England, one result of which was Algy's decision to join the *Christa Seva Sangha*. He was admitted as a postulant at Cambridge in 1926 and joined the *ashram* next year. His spirituality was both catholic and evangelical and he had somehow become convinced that the *Sangha* must become an order of Franciscan Friars. As we have seen, within a year St. Francis had been adopted as joint patron and the *Sangha* divided into First and Third Orders. These were great successes for Algy, as was his work at the student's hostel. But in little more than two years his health had broken down. He came back to England to be treated for sprue and then took a long convalescence at his mother's home in Ealing. For the rest of his life he struggled with ill-health and became famous for the hot-water bottles and other comforts that he carried in his habit. Still regarding himself as a member of the *Sangha* he took a living at St. Ives near Huntingdon and from 1931 to 1936 was an energetic country priest. He proceeded to build up at St. Ives an English branch of the *Sangha* consisting of himself, two fellow priests (Francis and Denis) and three laymen. They

lived as a community in the vicarage while some tertiaries helped with the chores. They had daily eucharist in the parish church, said the offices, kept the silences and fed together, to the accompaniment of readings from the *Times, Manchester Guardian and New Statesman,* which not all enjoyed. They were allowed to smoke, but not in public. What the parish made of all this, goodness knows.

As long as the *Sangha* retained its identity at Poona the group at St. Ives could remain a part of it. But when the *Sangha* divided this became difficult. It was hardly logical to be a First Order attached to a Third, as the Poona community in fact became. So the group at St. Ives became independent, calling itself the Brotherhood of the Love of Christ, though still wearing the saffron girdle and preparing English recruits for India. But within a year or so discussions had begun which led to the merger of Algy's group with two other Franciscan brotherhoods already in existence in England. These were the Brotherhood of St. Francis of Assisi under Br. Douglas Downes at Flowers Farm in Dorset (now known as Hilfield) and the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross under Father George Potter at Peckham. By 1936 it had been agreed to bring all three of these under the umbrella of a new body to be called the Society of St. Francis. They agreed on a common rule (largely drafted by Algy); a common habit (the colour to be 'nigger-brown') and a common novitiate. By far the best place for novice training was Hilfield and by far the best person to lead it was Algy. He took a year's leave of absence from St. Ives for the purpose. He then (in 1937) resigned his living and became Fr. Guardian at Hilfield. In October Douglas, Algy, George Potter and four other brothers took life vows before the Bishop of Southwark and so the society as we know it came into being. By then the Third Order was also well established, with more than fifty members, but of that more in a moment. By the time Algy died, eighteen years later, not only was the life at Hilfield consolidated but houses had been taken under the Society's wing at Cambridge (just before the war), at 84 Cable Street in London's docklands (in 1944) and at Glasshampton in Worcestershire (in 1947) which soon took over the main burden of novice training. One of Algy's most personal and most important achievements was the foundation of the Second Order in the late 1940s and their settling at Freeland near Oxford in 1949.

Algy didn't rate an obituary in *The Times* but he was the architect of the Society we know today - *si monumentum requiris circumspice*. He was a charming, paradoxical,

enigmatic man. Small and bird-like he had a genius for friendship. It was famously said that he was late for every appointment but never lost a friend. He played on his ill-health, though it was genuine enough. He kept back some money under his own sole control which he used for taxis, for rather good meals when he was on his travels and for other small luxuries - none of which he should have done. There were always people running around for him, and he could be highly inconsiderate. But he aroused in some a devotion close to idolatry. Some fifty years ago I spent Easter at the friary. Algy was in complete charge, knew who everybody was, brothers, wayfarers, visitors or whoever. He seated us all at meals, gave us little private interviews in his bedroom, and preached in an inimitable high clear voice with quick movements of the hands. One sermon was on his favourite hymns, the other on wild flowers - among the very few that I ever remember. As Fr. Denis recalled, Algy would speak of the way of the Cross as the Royal Way. 'Yes' he would say, one hand poised above his bible, 'yes'. Then the downward set of his mouth and the lines of strain and illness would be transformed by a smile of great gentleness: 'The Way of Light. *Via Crucis, Via Lucis*'.

Dorothy Swayne (1887 - 1971)

Dorothy Swayne, like all the others, came straight out of the top drawer. She was born in 1887. Her father was a clergyman who became Bishop of Lincoln. Dorothy went to Oxford to study but left to nurse a sick mother. They both suffered from a disease of the circulation that in later life made it difficult to stand. This meant she could not become a religious but she was a highly energetic church worker. During the 1920s she was working in Southwark diocese, first in Bermondsey and then in Morden. She there met a priest called Frank Dyson who had some sort of a call to the religious life. He, with Dorothy and a small group of priests and lay people pledged themselves to live on £5 a week and to give away anything they had above that to the service of God and their neighbours. In 1930 Frank Dyson broke down permanently and Dorothy sought advice from a deaconess friend who happened to be a tertiary of the *Christa Seva Sangha.* It came up that Jack Winslow, the *acharya,* was back in London. A meeting was arranged for 4 October (St. Francis' day) at Church House Westminster to which other interested people were invited. The idea was to discuss forming a Franciscan Third Order in England. It at once became

clear that a Franciscan religious would be needed to guide them. But who could that be? Algy, still convalescing at Ealing, had been invited to the meeting but was, of course, late. He arrived just as the question had been raised and as he stood in the doorway the *acharya* pointed to him and said 'Thou art the man'. And so it turned out. Algy and Dorothy next met in Algy's London Club (my guess is it was the Athenaeum) and it was there that the whole project was hatched. They devised the first edition of the Manual, based on that of the *sangha.* St. Barnabas was to be one of the patrons, indeed given priority ahead of St. Francis. The manual contained some wonderful prose. My favourite bit has always been the following:

> "Jesus the master speaks: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life loseth it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me let him follow me; and where I am there shall also my servant be. If any man serve me, him will my Father honour.*
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> In the example of his own sacrifice, the Master declares the secret of fruit-bearing. Surrendering himself to death he becomes the source of new life for myriads. Lifted up from the earth in sacrifice, he draws unto himself all those multitudes of whom the earnest and prophecy were those Greeks whose coming kindled his vision. The life that is cherished decays, but the life that is renounced is preserved unto life eternal".
> Dorothy and Algy adopted the 'Principles of the Third Order'. These included the Object: "to build up a body of those who, accepting Christ as their lord and Master, are dedicated to him in body and spirit" - the Aims: "To make our Lord known and loved everywhere; to spread the Spirit of Brotherhood; to live simply" - the Three Ways of Service: "Prayer, Study and Active Work for God's Kingdom" - and the Three Notes of the Order: "Humility, Love and Joy". It is delicious to think of this work being done by two people sitting in big leather chairs, among the huge portraits, high ceilings and spacious calm of London clubland. And note that this happened before ever Algy's First Order Community, the Brotherhood of the Love of Christ, had been established at St. Ives. One of the first tertiary novices was Algy's curate there, Henry Lovell.

He drew up a service for the Manual which formed the basis for the Tertiary Office for some sixty years.

The Third Order was for many years closely dependent on the First and received its inspiration from there - or so they thought. The Guardian, Chaplain-General and other officers were friars. The novice master and mistress were also appointed by the First Order. When the Society of St. Francis formed in 1937 the Third Order became that of the whole Society. But Dorothy Swayne remained the outstanding personality. She became Assistant Guardian and Senior Novice Mistress, overseeing the recruitment of women into the order who formed the great majority. Algy was the leading recruiter of men which he did by personal invitation. Most of them were priests; laymen being rare for many years. Reticence was an unspoken keynote. Algy was elected Priest-Guardian in 1941 and the Constitution of the Third Order was worked out by him and Dorothy, together with Fr. Charles (the Chaplain-General) during the war. By 1949 there were about three hundred tertiaries and it was in that year that ill-health compelled Dorothy to give up her formal offices, but not her influence.

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It was in that year that I left Cambridge and was invited by Algy to join the Third Order. The first meeting I attended was in South London (Peckham Rye) and a young woman medical student who had just been professed introduced herself. Her name was Estelle. We travelled back by bus to Waterloo together. Two years later we became engaged and were sent to Dorothy Swayne for vetting. She was living in a comfortable, albeit tiny, house in Wokingham and received us on a settee under a huge portrait of her brother, Sir John Swayne, in the uniform of a full General. I was then a captain and felt very small - which was part of the idea. She was every inch the *grande dame* albeit gracious to a fault. But apparently we passed muster and soon became the first two tertiaries to get married. (Michael and Judy Walker were the next two and I was his best man). Dorothy lived another 22 years and was a presence until the end. Only gradually was the Third Order able to detach itself from the First. It was not until two years after Dorothy's death that a tertiary became Guardian for the first time, The Chaplain continued to be a friar until Bishop John Dennis was appointed in the 1980s. Slowly the aura of secrecy fell away

and more open recruitment became accepted. That said, it would be wrong not to acknowledge that Dorothy Swayne was not only the foundress (along with Algy) but also the great builder of the Third Order for at least the first twenty years.

Fr. Lothian (1901-1970)

Lothian Sumner was a member of the famous family who had provided the Church of England with several bishops, an archbishop of Canterbury in the nineteenth century and the founder of the Mothers' Union. But Lothian did not talk about that. He was the very reverse of grand. A Cambridge man by education he was fond of Rugby football and an expert field botanist. After more than ten years as a priest he joined the First Order in 1941, already forty years old. He found Algy's disorganised schedule and general air of surrounding fuss bothersome and was wisely sent, while still a novice, to the friary at Cambridge. Six years later and much against his will he was put in charge of the Cambridge friary and became vicar of St. Bene't's church. He was to remain in that post for nearly 22 years. His importance to us is that, while at St. Bene't's, he became first the Chaplain-General and then the Guardian of the Third Order. There could not have been a better choice.

Lothian was a quiet, understated man, diffident to a fault. 'I think' he once said 'that I could just bring myself to say I believed in God'. Misuse of the English language caused him great pain. He also was devoted to St. Barnabas, son of consolation. His sense of humour was dry. He developed a ministry especially among women. His combination of humility and unobtrusive support was well brought out by a letter from one of his flock:

> "He somehow has the art of letting people grow in the way that God wants them to without intruding his personality. It is a rare gift in a Director. I think one of my greatest joys in Cambridge was to see the blossoming of people who went to him. Of course he thinks he is no good though!"

The last point is undoubtedly true. It must have been a great surprise and mystery to him when in 1956 he was appointed Assistant Minister to the First Order. But he was

a calm person and it didn't really change him. I owe him a huge personal debt of gratitude. He was Estelle's spiritual director well before I knew her. He told us once that he had been praying for us together long before we became engaged. 'I didn't think it would give her a very exciting life' he once said 'but I thought she would probably finish as Lady Beach'.

Br. Edward (1921 -)

The other notable chaplain to the Third Order was Edward Lees-Smith. His father was a prominent labour politician who served in Churchill's Cabinet during the War as Postmaster General and Minister of Education. He was Leader of the Opposition and might well have become Prime Minister in 1945 had he not died prematurely. Edward was educated at Westminster School and Corpus Christi College Oxford. He joined the Territorial Army in the South Nottinghamshire Hussars just before the beginning of the war, was commissioned almost immediately and rose on the staff to become a very young Lieutenant Colonel. After seven years in the army he went to theological college at Cuddesddon and spent six months as a labourer in a steel works before ordination in 1950. He promptly joined the First Order and became a curate in the parish of St. Luke's Pallion in Northumberland. In 1961 the First Order decided to found a new Friary in Northumberland and eventually found a beautiful country house by the sea at Alnmouth. Br. Michael was the first guardian, with Edward as his assistant, and when Michael left five years later Edward took over from him. Edward had been unfailingly loyal to Michael, never posing a threat and was richly rewarded by getting the job he loved most. But by 1974 the Third Order needed a new Guardian and almost casually Michael asked Edward to take it on. Again it was an inspired choice. During the next twenty years he was successively Guardian, Chaplain-General, Chaplain and finally assistant Chaplain - a series of demotions which was the direct result of promoting tertiaries into all the positions once held by friars.

Edward is another man with a genius for friendship. It is as though the celibate vocation sets him free to love everybody. Certainly he has foibles. His mother, by then Lady Uvedale, used to visit him at Alnmouth in a Rolls Royce, which occasioned some amusement. But that was not Edward's fault. He is mildly ridiculed for calling

everyone 'my dear', but of course he means it. His family used to pay for a car and in this he toured the country continually, expanding the numbers of tertiaries by his talent for making friends. At his instance the order became the very opposite of reclusive. He knew everybody, was interested in everything and enormous fun. When he took over, the strength of the Third Order had been stuck for two decades at 400, mostly women. Under his influence a period of growth began which has apparently become self-sustaining. The tertiaries now number around 2000. It is an astonishing achievement and is largely Edward's. He is now back at Alnmouth, no longer officially connected with the Third Order, and still going strong. I visit him every year and count him among my very best friends.

Some final thoughts

One interesting thing to come out of these stories is the way in which tertiaries from a society based in India but already living in England, joined with those from the St. Ives Community and Hilfield to become the Third Order as we have it today - just as the Third Order in England has since spread, not only in the British Isles but also to Sweden, other parts of Europe and Africa.

A second obvious point is that all the seminal figures I have came not from the middle class but from the very top drawer. Two were the offspring of cabinet ministers, two of senior bishops, two of wealthy families in the City. The same applies, of course, to St. Francis so there is nothing to be surprised at; where else would you expect to find leadership if not from the top families? Where else to found a Third Order but in the Athenaeum? But it is a little unfair, in the next breath, to criticise the Order for being too middle class.

It is also worth noting how often it is expressly said that the spiritual roots of the founders were both catholic and evangelical, combining the strengths of both. I hope that is equally true today.

A final point is the way in which, both in India as well as England, the founding of a Third Order came first and led the way. Again this is not surprising. What is odd, perhaps, is the way in which the Third Order chose to place itself for decades under

the close control and supervision of the Friars. Autonomy has been one of the great developments of the last 25 years. If it is true, as it may sadly be, that the First Order of the European Province is in decline while the Third Order continues to grow, perhaps Fr. Adderley's insight will take firmer shape, with the Third Order carrying the main burden into the future. This would make our vocation as an Order all the more important.

Sources

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