

CHRISTA SEVA SANGHA: Winslow's 'Shewing.'

Introduction:

Tertiaries are enjoined to turn regularly to the Principles on which the SSF is based; and to read the Principle for the day, reflecting upon it in prayer. Some Tertiaries do this daily as a matter of community obedience; others turn to the Principles from time to time, and re-read them thoughtfully. They are, also, often discussed within Local Groups, as members struggle to interpret particular Principles in the context of their lives and of the culture in which TSSF exists. In the short Introduction to the Principles, we read: '*The basis of what follows is the Rule of Christa Seva Sangha at Poona.*' Many Tertiaries know next to nothing about Christa Seva Sangha, and how a link was formed between SSF and an organization in India. The story is worth telling, both in itself, and for what TSSF as an Order may learn from it.

1: Beginnings

To understand the originality and radical nature of the Christa Seva Sangha, it is important to follow the Christian journey of its English founder, Jack Winslow, who was born in 1883. He attended Eton and Balliol College, Oxford, where he took part in the religious life of the university, and met for the first time people of other cultures: '*Balliol was something of a pioneer in breaking down social and racial barriers.*'¹ After graduating, he paid a short visit to India in 1905/6. He was already considering ordination, and he wondered whether his calling was to missionary work in India. In Delhi, he first met C. F. Andrews of the Cambridge Brotherhood, who was to be very influential later in his life. He impressed on Winslow respect for other religions: '*The purpose of someone from the West coming to India should be to enrich Christianity, not to persuade Hindus and Muslims that their religion could be improved.*'² This was a radical view at

¹ J C Winslow (1): *Eyelids of the Dawn, a memoir*. Hodder and Stoughton, London, (1954), p. 41.

² Rosemary Anne Sharpe: *Franciscan Values and Social Contexts: a Sociological Study of Founders of Franciscan Third Orders, 1882 – 1939*; Chapter 5: *The Ashram experiment of John Copley Winslow*, (p. 213): a doctoral thesis for the LSE. (TSSF Archive.)

the time. Winslow returned to the England, and was ordained in 1906, after theological training at Wells. He was a curate for four years at St Mary's, Wimbledon, and then moved to St Augustine's College, Canterbury as a staff member, training ordinands.

Early experience in India.

By 1914, Winslow was ready to follow his calling in India. He was licensed to the diocese of Bombay, whose Bishop Palmer had been his tutor at Balliol, and remained his mentor. The SPG appointed him as Vice-Principal of the High School in Ahmednagar. However, he was uncomfortable with a lifestyle common to the British at that time: '*There was a gulf which separated me from the Indian Christians among whom my work lay.*' Housing and food differed greatly; but most difficult for him to accept were the attitudes of the British Raj: '*We were the rulers and they were the inferior race - this spirit of racial superiority was very infectious. It was found even in Christian circles. I have known even missionaries who would never have an Indian in their homes.*'³ He felt it was hypocritical to preach a gospel of love and brotherhood under such conditions.

He also found that the Church of England had been transplanted, with no concessions to local culture: hymns were sung to English tunes, ignoring the '*lovely indigenous music of the land; the Bible readings and prayers were put into "missionary Marathi"; feet were not bared in the House of God; there were no times of quiet for silent meditation.*'⁴ Winslow was influenced by friends who argued that it was necessary for missionaries to develop a form of Christianity which was distinctively Indian.

The chief influence was again C. F. Andrews, whom he now asked to be his spiritual director. He wrote later: '*It was this man's life and writings which first kindled my desire to enter more deeply into the spirit of India and to be more closely identified with her people.*'⁵ Andrews was exploring life in the ashrams

³ Jack C. Winslow (2) : '*A Testament of Thanksgiving, a memoir.*' Hodder & Stoughton, (1974). P. 35/6

⁴ Winslow (2). p36. Marathi was the Indian language of the State of Maharashtra, where Winslow was based, and in which he became expert.

⁵ Winslow (1), p. 77.

founded both by Ghandi and Tagore, and there were questions among Westerners about his reliability as a Christian. Samuel Stokes, an American, was another influence: he set up a small Franciscan community, focused on the practice of poverty and concern for those rejected by society. Winslow was greatly moved by the life of St Francis, and Franciscan spirituality became increasingly important to him.

Winslow's spirituality was grounded in study of the English mystics of the 14th century, especially the *Cloud of Unknowing* and the writings of Julian of Norwich, which he saw as 'complementary rather than contradictory.'⁶ In India, he began to make a study of Indian philosophy and religion, and was interested to find many similarities between Hindu and Christian mysticism. '*The Via Negativa of Dionysius and the Cloud has its parallel in the Vedanta conception of Brahma, as transcending all human thought and language; whereas the teaching of those Christian mystics who lay stress on the nearness and seeking love of God were paralleled by the Hindu school of Bhakti.*'⁷ Moreover, he saw a fairly close resemblance in training for the higher stages of the spiritual life between, for example, Teresa of Avila and the Hindu exponents of yoga, although their aims were somewhat different.

A Structure for religious life based on Indian tradition.

The organizational structure, which attracted Winslow, was the ashram, which he had discussed in depth with Andrews. He was influenced both by Tagore and by an ashram experiment by the East Syrian Orthodox church, in what is now Kerala, in South India: it was modeled on ancient Hindu ashrams and the spiritual practice of Orthodox monasteries. Flexible in structure, it had varied groupings of members in small houses for 2 or 3, plus hermitages; it was open to adherents sometimes for a short period, sometimes for life. The primary aim was the expression of devotion to God through worship.⁸

The influence of Narayan Vaman Tilak.

⁶ Winslow (2), p. 22/3.

⁷ Ibid, p. 23

⁸ Sharpe, p. 223

Winslow had so far lacked a close and influential relationship with an Indian mentor. This relationship was developed with Narayan Vaman Tilak, a poet in the *bhakti* tradition, like Tagore. Tilak lived in Ahmednagar, near Winslow, and was a Hindu convert to Christianity. The manner of his conversion was important, because it reinforced Winslow's belief that Hindus would be influenced by the person of Jesus Christ, if it were not for the western trappings of Christianity, which they found offensive. Tilak had been widely known as a Brahmin *pundit*, the equal of leading Sanskrit scholars, who had become deeply dissatisfied with Hinduism, and was searching for a religion of love. A stranger on a train gave him a copy of the New Testament and he was '*unable to turn myself away from those burning words of love and tenderness and truth.*'⁹ He was later baptized in Bombay.

Tilak became a Minister of the American Marathi Mission, an organization entirely in the hands of Indians. He was to give Winslow a foretaste of the enrichment which would come to the West if India '*were to lay the riches of her spiritual heritage at the feet of Christ.*'¹⁰ Winslow spent many evenings in Tilak's garden discussing poetry and religion. He was encouraged to take part in *kirtans* – group worship chanted rhythmically '*in combinations of music, poetry, eloquence and humour,*'¹¹ which could last far into the night.

Tilak, a Brahman, had experienced the brutality of the caste system, when he became 'outcaste' on converting to Christianity. He had circumvented this by turning his own home into an ashram, where people of every caste and race could mix freely. He had adapted the Hindu concept of the ashram for Christian purposes. Sharpe describes his views:

'An ashram was grounded on soil only because at some place a living guru directed his disciples. Its social organization and its effects extended to the places in which the disciples of the guru dispersed. Apprentices, pupils or students, married persons working to sustain and improve the

⁹ Quoted by Winslow (1), p.66.

¹⁰ Winslow (1), p. 67.

¹¹ J. C. Winslow: (3) *Narayan Vilam Tilak*, YMCA, Calcutta, (1923), p. 62.

*conditions of human existence, those who had retired from society-centred activities, and people who became solitaries in the forests or hills, were linked together in a shared life cycle, which each lived individually.*¹²

This description reminds one in many ways of the Christian community which Winslow was to develop. Tilak died in 1919, having become in his last days a contemplative, (*Sanyassi*.)

Liturgical innovation.

Before the end of his first tour in India, Winslow took part in a group, both English and Indian, which set out to create a Eucharistic liturgy which would do justice to Indian spiritual culture, while preserving what was essentially Christian. The group had to prepare this in time for the Lambeth conference, which took place only every ten years. Their work was published in 1920, with the blessing of the Bishop Palmer. It was approved at Lambeth, with minor alterations, and sanctioned by the Synod of India. Later it was used both in Ceylon and South India in the development of their liturgies.¹³

2: The Birth of Christa Seva Sangha 1920 – 27.

Winslow's 'Shewing.'

During his furlough in England, on August 12th, 1919, Winslow had a moment of divine guidance, which he called a 'shewing,' using the word of the Lady Julian: '*I was given a vision of a Christian ashram, in which Indian and English Christians, of whatever caste or class origin, would live together on terms of complete equality, sharing a simple Indian life of poverty and service, and offering to God a worship rich in the traditions of the East as well as the West.*'¹⁴

¹² Sharpe: p. 227/8.

¹³ Winslow, (1), pp. 68/9. A version of this liturgy can be found in the '*Supplement to the Book of Common Prayer*,' (ISPCK), Delhi, India, (1966) ,p. 253, '*A Liturgy for India.*'

¹⁴ Winslow, (2), p. 36

When Winslow returned to India in 1920, he discussed the proposed ashram with Bishop Palmer, and received permission to make this his chosen work. His salary from SPG was transferred to an '*ashram account*', and became its main income in the early years. The Ashram was to be called Christa Seva Sangha: '*literally Christ – Service – Society, that is, the Society of the Servants belonging to Christ.*'¹⁵

Early days:

Although no European joined Winslow at the beginning of this experiment in Christian living, there was a group of Indians, known to him from his work in Ahmednagar, who were keen to join: a carpenter with his wife and children and three carpentry apprentices; there was also a Christian '*Sanyassi*', Alexander Abhane, a mendicant holy man, who had been touring the villages, preaching the Gospel, and depending on the hospitality of villagers. They reflected different stages of Christian discipleship.

There were no premises for the ashram. Initially SPG loaned the group rooms in a small house in Miri. Later, they were offered a building outside of Ahmednagar by the American Marathi Mission, which had been a Muslim tomb. They lived a common life of great simplicity, sleeping on mats on the floor, and eating very cheap vegetarian food. Their clothing was white home-spun, (apart from the Sanyassi, who wore saffron.) The first four years were a time of genuine poverty: communal life was hard, with little privacy, and often funds ran very low, but '*with faith and prayer the provision for our needs never failed.*'¹⁶

The primary aim of the ashram was devotion to Jesus Christ, expressed in communal worship and study of the scriptures. They used daily the Eucharistic rite devised by Winslow and colleagues, and approved by the Lambeth Conference, which had uniquely Indian features. Also, at dawn and dusk, known in India as *sandhya*, the 'joints' of night and day, they assembled in the open air, facing the sun as it rose and set, and prayed. They would sing: '*the beautiful Marathi lyrics of N. V. Tilak and other poets to the accompaniment of drum and*

¹⁵ Jack C. Winslow: (4) *Christa Seva Sangha*, SPG. London, (1930), p. 9.

¹⁶ Winslow, (1), p. 82.

*cymbals... Then would follow a deep silence of corporate prayer.*¹⁷ Last would come a slow chant of: '*Shanti, shanti, shanti*', (peace), following which the assembled group would retire to the building for the long silence.

In 1922, Bishop Palmer, on the Feast of St Barnabas (June 12th), dedicated the Ashram and named the group 'The Fellowship of St Barnabas.' He approved a very simple Rule and constitution, which gave parity to all: there was to be '*no Guru or Head but Jesus Christ.*'¹⁸ Having said that, Winslow became the *Acharya* or Guardian, and had primary responsibility for the enterprise – but he saw himself as a pupil, learning from Indians how to be Indian.

They worked during these early years in the villages around Ahmednagar, preaching Christ, instructing catechumens and receiving them into the Christian Church. Many of these catechumens were 'outcaste'¹⁹; in one village, Karanji, the whole outcaste community became Christians, and the church there became a strong base from which Christianity spread. Winslow wrote: '*It was natural that the 'untouchables' should be readiest to respond to Christian preaching. The message of a heavenly Father, with equal love for all His children, brought a new hope and a new sense of self respect into the lives of these downtrodden people.*'²⁰

3: Christa Seva Sangha: 1927/29 – expansion of the Ashram.

¹⁷ Winslow, (1), p. 80/1

¹⁸ Sister Barbara Noreen: '*A Wheat Grain sown in India,*' (1924), p. 58

¹⁹ Outcastes (ie. those outside the caste system), lived in mud hovels outside of the villages, and were not allowed to enter the village temple or drink of the village well. They were literally untouchable, and subsisted as serfs and scavengers. (Winslow, (1), p.82.) Gandhi espoused their cause, giving them the proud name of 'Harijan' (God's people). After Independence, discrimination on grounds of origin was made illegal, but old customs die hard, and there continues to be prejudice.

²⁰ Winslow, (1), p. 82/3.

In 1926, Winslow went on furlough, very worried that the Sangha might come to an end: Alexander and one of the apprentices had left, and the future was insecure. During his leave, Winslow toured England for the SPG, a striking figure in white robes. India was the subject of great interest at the time: '*The Raj had its critics The Amritsar incident, the publicity given to Gandhi's imprisonment, and the British plans to implement constitutional changes made India the subject of political discourse.*'²¹

At an SCM Conference at Swanwick, Winslow met a group of young men who were considering missionary work. One of these, William Strowan Robertson, (generally known as Fr Algy), was inspired by Winslow's message, and decided to go to India to join the Sangha. In 1927, he and 5 others ²² from England joined the Ashram community; more Indians joined too, and, within two years, there were twenty members, finely balanced between the two nationalities, and by caste and class.

A generous gift by an English donor enabled the community to purchase land on the outskirts of Poona, (now Pune)²³, and to build the Ashram at last. It was a whitewashed, Hindu-style building, facing a garden in which there was a circular space for the *sandhya* worship, and a tank for taking a dip in the heat of the day. There was a simple chapel, a refectory, where vegetarian meals were eaten on low stools, a small hall for meetings, and individual cells for each of the Sangha members.

In addition to the regular discipline of prayer, new work was undertaken by the enlarged Sangha. At least an hour a day was given to study, especially by those reading for Holy Orders. Lectures were delivered, and articles and books written. A student hostel was established for students of all religions attending colleges in Poona, which was run very successfully by Algy Robertson. There

²¹ Sharpe, p. 235.

²² The five were two priests from Oxford, Oliver Fielding Clarke and Verrier Elwin, a young layman, Hugh Davenport, who designed the Sangha building, and 2 miners from Tyneside, one of whom, George Huntley took charge of the building work

²³ Poona was, next to Bombay, the most important city in the Bombay Presidency. It had been the capital of the Marathi Empire, and still took a lead in social and political advances.

were Bible classes to be taken, and work in the garden to be done, growing fruit and vegetables for Sangha use. Many visitors came from all Indian religious groups: '*Hindus, Moslems, Jains, Buddhists, Jews, Parsees; also politicians, monks and ascetics, journalists, social reformers and academics.*'²⁴ Some came to stay and share the life of the Sangha for greater or lesser periods, and these visitors needed welcome and attention – a large task. Work in the villages continued. In 1929: for example, a party from the Sangha revisited Karanji, and a similar group toured in villages round Poona, giving advice on hygiene, sanitation and child welfare at village centres, and through *bhajans* and preaching (for those willing to listen) spreading the knowledge of Christ.²⁵

Politics and the Ashram.

The politics of India during the pre-war period has not been mentioned so far. Winslow writes: '*We were watching the travail pangs of a new India – a nation was struggling to be free.*' He adds: '*We of the Sangha were heart and soul with India in her aspirations. Half our number were Indians. The rest of us by identification had taken India to our hearts, as though she was our own motherland. We refrained from taking part in political demonstrations or activities, which were not our province; but we had no hesitation in making known where our sympathies lay..... Moreover, our contact with Indian leaders convinced us that there was no lack of men capable of understanding government and controlling the destinies of the land.*'²⁶ Winslow believed that Western imperialism was holding back the attempt to present Jesus Christ as Saviour to Indians, who too often associated Christianity with the British Raj. In contrast, Ghandi was greatly admired by Sangha members: Winslow was impressed with the spiritual quality of his life – he was a '*great soul.*'²⁷

²⁴ Winslow, (4), p. 50

²⁵ Winslow, (4), p. 54/5. A bhajan is a Hindu devotional song.

²⁶ Winslow, (1), p. 107/8

²⁷ Incidentally, one of the Sangha members, who had arrived with Fr Algy was Verrier Elwin, a brilliant young priest who later became a famed anthropologist. In 1929, when Winslow was again on furlough, he left Verrier in charge of the Sangha. Verrier, younger and more radical, hoisted the revolutionary tri-colour over the ashram, sponsored a lecture on Gandhian philosophy, and invited leaders of the Indian movement for independence to stay at the ashram. This caused a very negative response from the church, the police and the CID! Verrier Elwin: '*The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin, an autobiography*' Oxford Uni Press,

Tension and Debate: 1927-9.

During Winslow's tour of England in 1926, he had found considerable interest among Christians in Franciscan spirituality and values, and these certainly inspired Fr Algy and those brothers who joined the Sangha in 1927. Algy had a particular calling to the Franciscan life, which he saw in terms of a Western Order, with a division between a First Order of celibate brothers, taking vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and a Third Order, which could include married people, who would live separately.

Meanwhile, the central aim of the Sangha during the early period, and Winslow's personal vision, had been to present Christianity in Indian dress, introducing aspects of Indian worship and requiring Western members to live according to Indian cultural norms. The simplicity and actual poverty experienced were in tune with Hindu spirituality, as expressed by the *Sanyassi* (holy men). Although Winslow was very sympathetic to Franciscan spirituality, he had not felt called to found a western-style Franciscan Order. He wanted to encourage British and Indian members of the ashram to live together, men and women, married and single, and to learn from each other. Celibacy was not part of Indian spiritual culture and Winslow considered that it might create a barrier within the ashram. This later proved to be the case.²⁸

Rosemary Sharpe has established more fully than anyone the differences which arose at the Sangha between 1927/29.²⁹ She points out that Father Denis, (Fr Algy's biographer,) considered it was doubtful whether Jack Winslow and Algy Robertson had '*understood, worked out and resolved*' their fundamental differences before joining forces.³⁰ Sharpe writes: '*The main issue was whether the ashram was to be defined primarily according to Indian values and in*

Delhi, (1964), p. 47.

²⁸ Verrier Elwin writes: 'Marriage and children are central to Indian Life' He quotes Dr Radhakrishnan: "There is little in Hindu thought to support the view that one has to attain spiritual freedom by means of a violent rupture with ordinary life". *Tribal World*, p.304.

²⁹ Sharpe: Chapter 8 and note 85.

³⁰ Sharpe, p. 243.

*accordance with Indian patterns of organization, or whether it should be defined according to Western values and patterns of organization.*³¹

The discussions within the Sangha were prolonged and painful, although Winslow's memoirs play down the differences. Fielding Clarke, another of those who came out with Algy, '*found the strain of the discussions more than I could cope with,*' and left the Sangha.³² Winslow, who admired Algy Robertson greatly, nevertheless described his implacable determination: '*Once he had seen his course, and was convinced it was the will of God, he would pursue it with relentless ardour, and would press it upon others with a winsome and affectionate pleading which it was hard to resist.*³³ Meanwhile, Winslow was: '*trying to shed all feelings of superiority and he could not act as a general. He refused to impose his own view as a founder.*'³⁴

Reorganisation of the Sangha.

By the end of 1929, there had been sufficient agreement to reorganize the Sangha, although basic concerns were by no means resolved. Winslow, and the group who supported him, grieved for a vision which had not had time to develop fully. The '*Churchmen,*' as Sharpe describes Fr Algy's supporters, interpreted their actions as '*crowning a vision with sound organization.*³⁵

First, St Francis was made joint Patron Saint with St Barnabas. Then the Constitution and Rule were revised. A Rule for Three Orders was written: the First Order for celibate men, the Second Order for celibate women - of whom there were none at that time. Vows in these two Orders could be made for a fixed period or for life, but were only made following a novitiate. Winslow comments that '*it has proved difficult as yet to find many Indian Christians drawn to the*

³¹ Sharpe, p. 239.

³² Oliver Fielding Clarke: *Unfinished conflict, an autobiography.*(1979), p. 81.

³³ Winslow, (2), p. 38.

³⁴ Sharpe, p.243.

³⁵ Sharpe. p. 243.

vocation of celibacy,' which inevitably altered the racial balance within the Order. Nevertheless, the aim for the Sangha continued to be '*a truly Indian Community.*' Ceremonies, customs, modes of worship were to be '*local in origin and suited to India.*'³⁶

The Third Order was to be '*a bonding together of men and women living in the world*' and its members would keep '*such a measure of the promises as is congruous with the obligations of family life*'. By 1931, the Third Order moved away, by agreement, to a village ashram in Aundh, 4 miles from Poona, where '*under leadership of an Indian priest, they resumed evangelical and medical work in the villages.*'³⁷ However, the Third Order had already been developed to provide a wider association. Winslow writes: '*Before long we greatly enlarged the scope of it, so as to include men and women in occupations of all kinds who shared our vision and would try, both by word and life, to promote the spread of the knowledge of Christ, simplicity of living and the brotherhood of all mankind.*'³⁸ These 'Tertiaries' were not all gathered in one place. One of them, Carol Graham, a Deaconess, working with Bishop Azariah in the diocese of Dornakal, was to have a vital influence on the future of Franciscan life in England.

After the Rule and Constitution were completed, Jack Winslow went on retreat, and drafted an Introduction which he called '*the Principles of Christa Seva Sangha.*' They expressed a spirituality, both Franciscan and Indian, and were the result of reflections over many years, originating in his deep discussions with the poet, Tilak. The Principles were '*applicable to all,*' and point (as we know well) the way to God in prayer, study and service. Sharpe tell us that the '*whole Sabha, as the assembled members of the Sangha called themselves, willingly subscribed to them.*'³⁹

In 1930, Winslow went on furlough, and wrote, at the request of SPG the little book, *Christa Seva Sangha*, which mentions none of the stresses of previous years, but is a loving account for young people of the Christian ashram

³⁶ Sister Barbara Noreen, p. 59/61.

³⁷ Winslow, (1), p. 99.

³⁸ Winslow, (1), p. 100.

³⁹ Sharpe, p. 245.

which he had founded. It contains perhaps the only photographs which remain of the ashram and of the early brothers.

4: the Spread to England.

One of many Christians attracted to Franciscan spirituality in England in the late 1920s was a woman named Dorothy Swayne. The daughter of a Bishop, she was undertaking community work in the Diocese of Southwark, where she met Frank Dyson, the Diocesan Missioner. He shared her passionate concern for the poor and Franciscan ideal of evangelical poverty. In 1928, Dyson, Swayne and a group of priests pledged to live on £3 per week, (the living wage,) and to give any surplus income to those in financial need. Dorothy was said to have '*exercised a most efficient ministry in Bermondsey through her actual poverty.*'⁴⁰ In 1930, sadly, Dyson suffered a mental breakdown from which he was not to recover.

At sea, spiritually, without her mentor, Dorothy Swayne wrote to her friend, Carol Graham, (mentioned earlier), who was a Tertiary of Christa Seva Sangha, doing missionary work in India, and asked advice. Carol Graham encouraged the idea of founding a Franciscan Third Order in Britain, and sent Dorothy the CSS Manual, with its Rule and Principles. Dorothy Swayne was a member of the Fellowship of the Way, an umbrella body for Franciscan associates, which was active between 1927 and 1933, and was described by a contemporary as '*a tremendous tertiary movement throughout the Church of England with several Franciscan Communities in co-ordinated support.*'⁴¹ When Jack Winslow was next on furlough in 1930, a meeting was arranged with these Franciscan Associates, who invited him to set up an English branch of the Third Order, CSS.

As it happened, Algy Robertson had been invalided back to England in 1930, suffering from a tropical illness from which he never fully recovered. He

⁴⁰ Barrie Williams: *the Franciscan Revival in the Anglican Communion*, Darton Longman and Todd, (1982), p, 187.

⁴¹ Peta Dunstan: *This Poor Sort, a history of the European Province of the Society of St Francis*. Darton, Longman and Todd, London (1997) , p.72.

was unable to return to India, and became a parish priest in St Ives, Huntingdon. There he had started a small English branch of the First Order of Christa Seva Sangha. As the meeting of the Franciscan associates with Jack Winslow progressed, Fr Algy, (always late,) walked into the room. “*Thou art the Man,*’ cried Father Winslow;’⁴² Fr Algy willingly agreed to guide the formation of a Third Order, to be attached to the new English branch of the CSS. He and Dorothy Swayne met and adapted the Rule of Christa Seva Sangha for this Third Order, which came into being officially in January 1931.

In 1933, the Fellowship of the Way dissolved itself, and created a Society of St Francis Council, another umbrella body, which included several first Order Franciscan groups, plus the CSS Third Order and some Franciscan associates. Meetings followed, at which merger between Franciscan groups was discussed. An eventual decision was made in 1937 by the Brotherhood of St Francis (based in Dorset, now Hilfield Friary,) and the CPSS⁴³ (at St Ives) - along with its Third Order - to form a united Order, the Society of St Francis. Thus the SSF as we know it came into being.

5. And After.

When Winslow returned to the ashram in 1931, he had decided to stay for another 3 years only. He still regretted the changes that had been made, and the fact that the original Indian members had become members of the Third Order, living at some distance away. Peta Dunstan indicates that he had doubts about his vocation as a friar, so that he was somewhat reluctant to renew his vows. Also, he was leading a community which no longer enshrined his original vision.⁴⁴ When he shared his thoughts and decision to leave, it caused the Community

⁴² Quoted by Dorothy Swayne in her unpublished paper : *The Story of the Early Days of the Third Order*. TSSF archive.

⁴³ The First Order of Christa Seva Sangha had become known as Christa Prima Seva Sangha, following a split after the retirement of Jack Winslow in 1934.

⁴⁴ Dunstan, p. 78.

much distress. Before leaving in 1934, he wrote in the Sangha Newsheet: '*It now seems quite plain that the Sangha is to develop as a Religious community, and I have not and never have had a call to that life.*'⁴⁵

Winslow was influenced partly by his new adherence to the evangelical Oxford Group, which led him to see his future back in England. The actual return was much harder than he expected, and he had a serious depression which lasted 2 years,⁴⁶ during which he held a curacy in his brother-in-law's parish. Eventually he found his feet again, and latterly was involved in the foundation of Lee Abbey in Devon, an important Christian Centre, where he served as Chaplain for many years, and found great happiness.

Meanwhile in 1934, following Winslow's departure, CSS '*decided to split.*' The larger part, still called Christa Seva Sangha, based at Aundh, returned to the 1922 Rule. A new Acharya, Bill Lash, led a group of five Brothers, living as celibate Franciscans in Poona, now calling themselves Christa *Prima* Seva Sangha, and using the 1928 Rule.⁴⁷ A decision was made by CSS/St Ives to sever the link with India, as plans moved forward towards the Franciscan merger in England.

All this is complicated and sad, but as Williams reminds us: '*Christa Seva Sangha was the grain of wheat that fell to the ground and perished only to bear much fruit.*'⁴⁸ In India, the Sangha continued over the years in various manifestations. It was also the inspiration for the foundation of other Christian ashrams in India, 20 in number by 1974.⁴⁹ The strong development of the Society of St Francis in Britain, under the leadership of Fr Algy and Br Douglas, with a large and lively Third Order, also emerged partly from that wheat grain sown in India. The Principles, written by Winslow for Christa Seva Sangha, were taken over almost unchanged into the Rule of SSF, and are still at the heart of its spiritual life as a Religious Community.

Fr Algy's legacy.

⁴⁵ Sharpe: p. 249.

⁴⁶ Winslow (2): p. 59.

⁴⁷ Dunstan: p. 78/9

⁴⁸ Williams, p. 128.

⁴⁹ Winslow (2): p. 40.

This reconstruction of the Christa Seva Sangha story is written primarily from Jack Winslow's point of view, but it is important to be just to Fr Algy, who was to become one of the founders of SSF and first Guardian of its Third Order. The changes in CSS initiated by the 'Young Pretender', Algy Robertson, saw the project lose its original aim of integration of British and Indian members. Was Fr Algy's determination to impose his own views the result of inexperience and lack of understanding of Indian culture? It seems not. His time at CSS was not his first experience of India, for he had done a tour in India from 1917 – 19; nor was he particularly young – at the time of arrival at CSS, he was already thirty three, and he knew his own mind.

The biography by Fr Denis is an important source. Fr Denis is clear that Fr Algy was always a man of resolute determination, and a dominant force in any undertaking. For example, Denis writes: '*When Br Douglas was elected Father Minister of SSF in 1937, he immediately appointed Fr Algy as his Assistant [Minister]. In doing so, he welcomed for the friars in England what Fr Winslow had endured in India, and what Fr Potter⁵⁰ at last rejected: the takeover by Algy of a cherished foundation, and its moulding by him to another pattern. All three resisted Algy's pressure upon themselves to become other than they could ever believe it right that they should be.*'⁵¹ After Fr Algy established himself at Cerne Abbas, Br Douglas never lived there again, although he would visit occasionally, and was able to pursue his option for the poor equally effectively elsewhere.

Algy, meanwhile, built up SSF and gave it a necessary stability, with serious attention to the training of novices, and to the central pattern of worship within the Friary. He might be autocratic, but he was greatly loved, and had 'a *genius for friendship.*' It was the '*inward and spiritual magnetism of Algy, his love born out of his profound love of our Lord, which really caught and held us.*'⁵² He worked for the Order unstintingly until his death, in spite of a chronic illness which

⁵⁰ Fr George Potter of the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross, (BHC), in Peckham, seriously considered merging his Order with CPSS and BSFA, but opposed the united novitiate at Cerne Abbas, wanting to keep relative autonomy at Peckham. He withdrew from the initiative finally in 1940.

⁵¹ Father Denis: p. 176.

⁵² Ibid: p. 61/2.

resulted in constant pain. His determination to build a Franciscan Order in the Western model thus came into being, and was appropriate for the time and culture in which it was developed.

A Final Thought.

There is one aspect of the Sangha's original aims, in addition to those expressed in the Principles, which may be relevant for consideration within TSSF today: that is its belief in inclusivity. If God calls us Tertiaries to his service in this Order, why is the call not being heard by more young people, or people from minority ethnic groups? Could it be that our Order is simply unknown to most devout Christians; or that the passing on the word is through those we know best – people of a like mind?

It is indicated in the results of a small questionnaire circulated to four areas of TSSF in 2009⁵³, that many Tertiaries of long standing were drawn to the Franciscan life through the influence of First Order Brothers, known in many congregations through Parish Missions; there are less of these opportunities today. In addition, Br Edward, during his long association with TSSF, was well known to spread the word about the Order, which grew fast under his tutelage. There is surely a subtle but important difference between 'recruitment', which is clearly not appropriate to a religious order, and making known the existence of that Order and the opportunities it may offer for spiritual growth and a particular kind of service to our Lord.

At present the somewhat cautious approach in providing information about the Order in Anglican parishes and youth groups is effectively blocking significant groups within our society from any consideration of applying to join. Of course, the entry of people of a younger age, or those of a different culture, would provide challenges – as they did in CSS, and as they do within Anglican church congregations. If Christa Seva Sangha set out to meet such challenges in the time of the Raj in India – and praise God for the courage of that initiative – then why are we not taking up those challenges today?

⁵³ Denise Mumford: Research for an MA dissertation (2009), available on TSSF web-site, and in the Archive..

Denise Mumford, (TSSF).
(2010.)

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