

Report to the Spiritual Counsel Trust : November 2001

1. A brief history of The Spiritual Counsel Trust.

Reginald Somerset Ward [1881-1962] was ordained in 1904 to a parish in south London. In 1915 he resigned as the incumbent of Chiddingfold in Sussex, following a call from God to the ministry of sd. Each year he toured 3 or 4 times seeing people in a number of centres around the country, as well as seeing people at his home. These tours were reduced in 1947, and ended in 1949. The work was funded by the Ward Fund to which people contributed. This fund was wound up at the time of his death in 1962, and its monies transferred to the Goodacre Fund. On his retirement RSW commended some of those who came to him to NWG, who himself had gone to RSW for direction in 1937.

Norman Goodacre [1907-2000] was ordained in 1933 in Liverpool. His counselling ministry began to develop in the late 1930s, and in 1945 he was offered a small country parish in Bradford Diocese, in order to be able to devote more time to it. With RSW's retirement he picked up much of the touring ministry. In 1958 he resigned his living in order to devote himself full-time to sd. His work was funded by the Goodacre Fund [later to be renamed the SCT], together initially, with a part-time chaplaincy post. He lived in Harrogate until 1976, when he retired & moved back to Liverpool.

David Smith [1935-] was ordained in 1960, and started going to see NWG in 1970. He inherited some of NWG's ministry in 1976, but was soon beset by serious health problems, and eventually stopped touring in 1987. As he had a stipend until retirement, the SCT never had to pay more than his expenses. Hence the accumulated funds in the Trust in 1998.

The Trust has been somewhat dormant since DS's retirement, partly because he had not discerned a successor as RSW & NWG had; but probably also because in the early 1980s sd courses began to sprout up around the country, and the need for a 'touring sd.' largely disappeared.

These three men are quite different, reflecting the different generations out of which they came. Each was called by God to this work. Each stepped out boldly in faith, and at considerable personal risk to themselves and their families, in response to that call. Each was an innovator, carrying the ministry forward in a new direction.

2. Report to the Trustees May 1999.

In May of 1998 the Trustees asked me to initiate a research project into what was happening in the field of spiritual direction, and in particular, the current situation of those working out of the tradition of RSW and NWG. I was asked to report back to the Trustees at their meeting in May 1999 so that they could discern whether there was a continuing role for the Trust to play, or whether it should be wound up. What follows is a summary of what my report contained.

1. There is a great hunger about for spirituality.

2. There is widespread disillusion with, and within, the institutional churches.

3. The National Retreat Association currently knows of 27 courses in spirituality / spiritual direction / prayer guidance / open door training.

Since 1981 at least one new course has started nearly every year.

Most of the courses have been based in London. There are no current courses north of Nottingham, except those in the Liverpool area, and in Glasgow. Over 50% of the courses are Ignatian based.

Most of the Anglican Diocesan courses, have had the benefit of somebody on a diocesan stipend, with a responsibility for the course as part of their job description, [i.e. lay training officer / retreat house warden / diocesan advisor / cathedral canon / city church appointment etc.]

The NRA currently organises a national conference, annually, for those leading such courses.

4. There is an increase in the number of Diocesan Spirituality Advisors

The NRA have organised conferences for Diocesan Advisors in '92, '94, & '98.

5. The current practice of sd is significantly different from the old, certainly from that of RSW. The old was priestly & linked to confession; it was authoritarian, based on short half-hourly meetings, primarily concerned with establishing a rule of life. RSW, NWG & DES travelled around the country meeting people in city centres. The new is carried on by priest and laity [especially lay women], and is rarely linked to confession; it is much more director-centred, with the director as a fellow pilgrim offering discernment, not as an authoritarian guru. Meetings are usually at least for one hour.

6. There are advantages in the present situation: the profusion of courses; the advent of Diocesan advisors; the number of women offering sd; the more flexible, less authoritarian approach.

7. There are also areas of concern:

a) although many people have passed through courses on sd, **it is widely felt that it is just as hard as it ever was to find good directors.**

b) inappropriate aping of the counselling model: with the charging of fees; the current debate about 'accreditation' of directors; and the assumption of the need for formal supervision of directors.

c) there is no substitute for 'lived and processed experience with God' as the 'qualification' for a director. Often it feels as if 'technique' is offered instead. But **'lived experience' is time consuming, and not many have the time: few parochial clergy do.** Those who set time aside need to be funded, and supported.

d) there is a significant body of men and women for whom sd is a large part of their ministry. They nearly all work on the edge of the church. Some are retired clergy, a few are clergy or religious who have stepped out of the institution in order to be free to exercise this ministry, others are laity. Unless they are Ignatian trained, and thus part of the substantial Ignatian Support Network, they will probably minister in isolation. In my experience they are all too often overworked, tired, under-resourced, and close to breakdown. There is an urgent need for support.

The way ahead.

Option 1. Continue as now, making small grants of money to those engaged in the ministry of sd.

Option 2. Transfer the SCT's monies to another Trust[s] engaged in this work, e.g. the Trust that supports someone like Jim Cotter.

Option 3 Define a forward vision, including:

1. Continuing the study of the ministry of RSW, NWG & DS, and seeking to place them in their context. Nourishing our roots, that they may speak to our present situation.

2. Seeking to offer support and encouragement to those on the edge of the church, exercising this ministry now. They are in a very vulnerable place.

3. Providing a resource for the church, perhaps offering the wisdom of this tradition to Dioceses, especially those with little current sd provision themselves.

4. Providing a conduit back into the church for the wisdom being found on the edge.

5. Being open to the promptings of the HS as to future initiatives.

Option 4 In the past, in this little tradition, the ministry has been carried forward, not by defining a vision, but by discerning the person called by God to carry it forward, and then trusting that person, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to discover the vision.

At its meeting in May 1999, the Trustees chose options 3 & 4. They appointed me as Warden for a three year period on a part-time basis, beginning August 1999, as they felt that they had sufficient accumulated funds to cover such a length of time.

3. What have I been doing since May 1999?

1. I have continued my study of the tradition represented by RSW, NWG & DES. I have met up with Liz Carmichael in Oxford, who is preparing a book on the ministry of RSW. I have visited the Goodacres in Liverpool, and at Kathleen's request sorted through a deal of NWG's papers. I prepared a special Newsletter to mark NWG's death in December 2000, and have visited Kathleen since. I have visited DES in Lincoln on a regular basis. I have written to those on the old SCT 'list'. Most are now effectively retired, and there seems to be little call for me to do anything for them. I have been in correspondence with a number of SCT supporters about sundry matters.

I am quite close to being able to write a paper on the practice of direction within the SCT tradition.

2. I initiated the first SCT Consultation in May 2000 for those for whom direction is a major part of their ministry and who work on the margins of the institutional churches. I invited 6 others to join me for 48 hours,

including Janet Unwin an SCT trustee. This meeting was such a success that the group met again in October 2000, June 2001, and is due to meet in March 2002. SCT funded the initial meeting, but the participants have largely funded the subsequent gatherings themselves. A second Consultation, with a new group of 6, met in September 2001 and is planning to meet again in September 2002. These meetings have proceeded on the basis that those attending will be prepared to share their stories and reflect upon their work, and that we can then trust the Spirit to lead us wherever necessary [i.e. I have tried to model the meeting on the process of spiritual direction itself] They have provided opportunities for mutual sharing and support amongst peers, as well as a deepening reflection on the current practice of spiritual direction.

These groups need continuing support, and others like them could be usefully set up. Hopefully they will be largely self-financing.

3 I have been visiting Bradford Diocese for some years to lead an annual residential consultation on direction, which about 18 people attend. Since the beginning of 2000 I have also been visiting 4 times a year for 2 days each time, to be available for direction work, at the request of the Diocese. This need arose because they felt the need of someone from outside the Diocese to whom senior clergy could be referred for direction. I currently see 9 people. The Diocese pays my travel expenses and provides me with somewhere to stay and see people. Those coming are encouraged to offer financial support to SCT.

In August 2001 I began visiting Lincoln Diocese on a similar basis. This invitation was a consequence of the Diocese having more requests for directors than it could handle. I currently see 8 people in the Cathedral, which does no more than scratch the surface of the need. So I am also running an embryonic direction course for the Diocese, and a support group for those with some training but little experience, by staying for a third day on each of my 4 visits each year there. The financial arrangements are similar to those that apply in Bradford.

I had assumed that the days of the peripatetic director were over, but perhaps not. There are not many others in a position to respond to this need.

I led day conferences on direction for Lincoln, Derby and Wakefield Dioceses in 2000. I have been invited to revisit Derby and Lincoln in 2001, am currently booked to visit Manchester in 2002, and am in discussions with Ripon about ways that I might be able to help them. I was in correspondence with the Bishop of Hereford about possible ways we might be able to help his Diocese, but nothing came of it.

I led the NRA Consultation for those running direction courses in the autumn of 2000. I attended the NRA Conference in May 2000, and encouraged a party of directors from Finland to attend.

I think it probable that these invitations will continue to come in, and may increase as Dioceses respond to current needs for financial cut-backs.

I have attended the European Consultation on direction in 2000 and 2001 and am a member of the planning group for the 2002 meeting in Finland.

I feel that these meetings provide a wider perspective on the work, and would favour continuing participation.

4. I am not aware of much having been consciously achieved on the question of 'providing a conduit back into the church for the wisdom being found on the edge'. Sadly my experience is that the institution is not much interested. It often appears more concerned with reorganising itself rather than with listening to the movement of the Spirit.

Nevertheless, the provision of this conduit remains important.

5. I have been a member of a team of directors present at the Greenbelt Festival in 1999, 2000 and 2001. This initiative has been a great success, and our team has been very well used. This year a team of 8 of us offered direction to nearly 170 different people over the 3 days of the Festival. Several of us continued conversations begun last year ! We also offered 6 seminars on related subjects, which were attended by about 500 people. We prepared a prayer space, which was much used, and a browsing space. Together the team take the language and experience of direction into a place where it has not usually been found. Many of the people at the Festival are at that point in their journey where direction can be most helpful. The Trust has provided vital support funding for this initiative. This piece of ministry takes up about 10% of my allotted time: days at the Festival itself, planning meetings, the organising of a referral list etc.

This is a valuable piece of work and should be supported. It is another example of peripatetic direction. I am one of two members of the team who have been present for all 3 years, and feel that I should continue for the time being. Indeed it is worth considering if the SCT might co-sponsor this piece of ministry in a more formal way. A willingness to provide a back-up sum, which has always been refunded, on our part is making a huge difference, and if we prepared some good publicity, the Festival could be an exciting way of developing and publicising the work.

6. I continue the process of developing contacts wherever seems appropriate. Networking is an important aspect of what I can offer. For example I am convening a day meeting next spring of John Lee [the Archbishops' clergy appointments advisor], Simon Barrow [Secretary of the Churches' Commission on Mission], Stephen Lyon [Partnership Secretary at Partners for World Mission], and myself, at which we shall reflect together on our work.

7. I have attended courses on the 'Enneagram' and on 'Male Spirituality' as part of my own ongoing training. The former because significant numbers of people use its terminology, and the latter because I feel that it is an area of growing importance.

8. I think that it might be appropriate to say something briefly about my own life-style here. I was ordained in the Church of England in 1970, and worked in parishes in Southwark Diocese until 1993, when I resigned my living, set up The Annunciation Trust, and responded to what I took to be God's call to explore another way of priesthood. Since then my ministry has involved:

[1] Some small parish duty in exchange for housing.

[2] Time to pray and be.

[3] An increasing ministry of spiritual direction

[4] Space to explore.

[5] A wider ministry around the country leading retreats, consultations etc. This has been subsumed by my role as Warden of SCT.

If the Trustees wish me to continue as Warden of the SCT, then it might be appropriate to consider:

1. if the time has come for the SCT to support me in my life style [as RSW, NWG, and DES were supported] rather than pay me for a defined task?

2. and if so, what the future relationship between SCT and The Annunciation Trust should best be?

I don't personally have an answer to these questions, but I do sense that they are important questions.

4. The way ahead.

It will be clear from the above that I remain convinced that there is a useful task for the SCT to address.

I suggest that our core vision be two-fold: support of the ministry of spiritual direction in the UK, and reflection upon that ministry.

Specifically I suggest that the Warden:

- 1 Complete the task of researching and writing something on the ministry of RSW / NWG / DES.
- 2 Support and develop the Consultation groups for directors.
- 3 Be open to developing a peripatetic ministry of direction.
- 4 Be available for invitations from around the country. [It would be good to look for invitations from outside the Anglican tradition]
- 5 Support the European Consultation.
- 6 Continue to be a part of the Greenbelt direction team.
- 7 Look for opportunities to feed back into the institutional church.
- 8 Stay open to the promptings of the Spirit: [several of the above were not anticipated in May1999]

There are also some ideas, which underlie and go beyond the items above, which I would like to explore.

1 My experience in direction is that most people already know most of what they need to know. They, for the most part, don't need new information. What they need is, perhaps, help to access what God has already given to them, and support & encouragement to trust it.

This is pretty much in line with the research of the Alister Hardy Research Unit into peoples' religious experience, which suggests that 2/3 of the adult population would claim to have had a 'religious experience', but that there are powerful taboos which stop people talking about it.

If this is true then the Christian church has got its mission strategy wrong. The church acts on the assumption that it has a body of knowledge about God that it has a duty to share with those outside the church who don't know God. The reality would seem to be the opposite, i.e. most people do have some experience of God; for the most part this experience is at odds with what the church appears to be talking about. What these people might value is a safe place where they can share their religious experience & be encouraged to take it seriously.

David Hay's paper 'Understanding the spirituality of people who don't go to church' quotes Brierley's 'UK Christian Handbook 'Religious Trends 1999/2000' as saying that "regular Church attendance in Britain fell from 4.74 million in 1989 to 3.71 million in 1998; a drop of more than 20% in ten years. Hay goes on to say that "these figures contrast remarkably with the dramatic changes in report of religious or spiritual experience in Britain during approximately the same period. In 1987 one of us {DH} along with Gordon Heald, at that time director of Gallup Poll in this country, published the results of a survey of reports of such experience. The figures showed that 48% of the national sample felt they were personally aware of this kind of experience in their lives.....In the recently completed 'Soul of Britain' survey we decided as far as possible to repeat our 1987 enquiries. It is therefore striking that over the past 13 years there has been almost a 60% increase in the positive response rate. The figures suggest that slightly more than 76% of the national population are now likely to admit to having had a spiritual or religious experience. The great majority of these people are of course not regular churchgoers. **There seems to me to be a powerful case for suggesting that spiritual direction is one way of pursuing mission.**

Robert Warren in his book '**Signs of Life: How goes the Decade of Evangelism**', pub 1996, makes much the same point:

"Whereas for many years the work of evangelism has been conducted within the framework of doctrine opening the door to spirituality, it is now evident that evangelism increasingly works the other way round. Spirituality now opens the door to a grasp of Christian truth." [p69]

"The Church has not yet grasped the full evangelistic potential of starting with spirituality." [p70]

"In particular, there is a great need to ensure that public worship is seen & experienced as, a primary means of engaging with the transcendent, with the mystery & wonder of God, & with the ultimate issues of life." [p80]

"The spiritual renewal & development of the prayer life, of both individuals & the whole churches, is at the heart of the life of the Church. It is this which provides the reality in a person's knowledge of God out of which they can speak with authenticity." [p86]

2 One might put this another way. The story of the resurrection of Jesus stands at the centre of Christian belief. E.P.Sanders, a leading New Testament theologian, points out that scholars often have difficulty distinguishing between the words of the historical Jesus and the words which the early church later attributed to Him. "Christians believed that Jesus had ascended into heaven and that they could address him in prayer. Sometimes he answered. These answers they attributed to 'the Lord'. We now want to know which Lord: Jesus before he was crucified or the risen Lord, resident in heaven? The Christians thought it was all the same Lord.....In other terms, the Spirit that freely communicated with Paul and other Christians could be thought of as the Spirit of the risen Lord, who was in some way or other continuous with the historical Jesus."

My personal reflection on my own religious experiences has led me to the conclusion that they were communications from the risen Lord, and when I listen to others tell of their experiences I am usually led to the same conclusion. I am not suggesting that the religious experiences of the 76% of the population whom David Hay quotes above are all necessarily similarly experiences of the risen Lord, but I am suggesting that we ought to be willing to assume that they might be. We have to take them seriously, and at a time when the institutional churches are in decline across western Europe, we would be foolish not to be willing to listen to the voice of our risen Lord even if the words are not coming from where we might expect them! **Seeing spiritual direction as mission is therefore but one side of a two sided process. What comes back is the word of the Lord for today.**

3 In the course of my work I listen to many people, and try to help them discern the promptings of the Spirit of the risen Lord in their lives. Each person's story is different, and yet I find that some themes occur frequently. When I talk with others engaged in this ministry I find that they are hearing the same themes. **At this point it seems to me to be incumbent upon me to say 'I feel that the Spirit is saying these things to the churches and perhaps to society : spiritual direction leads into prophecy.** What are these themes?

A] The institutional churches are in decline, perhaps are dying. This appears to be a factor across much of western Europe. One consequence of this is that are many people for whom their spiritual pilgrimage is characterised by a sense of loneliness, of isolation; and a felt lack of the corporate.

B] There is a growing need to place authority within oneself rather than outside oneself. People are beginning to trust themselves, their own intuition, imagination and their own creativity. Parallel to this has been the growth of demand for spiritual direction as people seek help & support in this process.

C] There is a significant growth in the numbers feeling called to explore the solitary life, not necessarily a full-time solitary life.

D] There is a blooming of what I call 'domestic spirituality' with people opening their homes or gardens as quiet spaces for others to use. Increasing numbers are creating their own holy spaces within their own homes, and putting other than traditional religious objects within them. Hospitality is seen as very important.

E] There are numbers of people visiting historic 'holy places' such as Iona. Holy Island, Glastonbury, cathedrals etc, either by going on pilgrimage to them, or by simply spending time in them. It is as if they are seeking the ether of spirituality, often Christian spirituality, rather than the religious dogma of the Church.

F] Sometimes linked with some of the above, people are linking spirituality and 'green' issues. God is found in nature and in wild places. Spirituality and ecology are seen as integrally united.

G] The body is no longer seen as something to be controlled and subdued, but rather is increasingly seen as a way to God, with people exploring yoga, massage and dance as typical ways forward. Sexuality is inevitably seen in a much more positive light than previously; it is one way, perhaps the most powerful way, through which men and women participate in God's love for creation.

H] Ecumenical issues are no longer perceived as 'live', rather the energy has shifted both to inter-faith issues and also to an intuitive exploration of native spiritualities which are seen as pre-dating Christianity.

As I reflect on the above I notice, perhaps not surprisingly, that many of these themes are important in my own life: I have stepped out of institutional parish-based ministry, following what I perceived as the promptings of the Spirit; my wife [a Third Order Franciscan] and I seek some solitary space; and have created holy spaces in our home; we open our home in a small way and offer hospitality to those who come here; ancient holy places are important to us; my wife is a keen gardener and makes our garden a holy space, she also offers massage to those who visit us; and my exploration is certainly taking me outside the churches. [*I also suspect that some of these themes were present in the ministries of RSW and NWG*]

I am now 56 years old. I have 9 years before retirement. Currently we live in a small parish house, from which we could be given a month's notice, and financial pressures are likely to cause the parish to want to sell within the next 12 months or so. If we were able to move within that time then we would have 8 years in another place: long enough to develop stability, roots and a meaningful local ministry. And we have a vision of creating a home where we can offer hospitality, with a holy space which we can open to others, and a garden with perhaps some poustinia places for others to use, which can serve as our home and as a base for our developing ministry.

Perhaps, if the Trust decides to support my continuing life style, it might help me deliberate these plans, and search for such a place, which could then also serve as a focus for the Trust's continuing work.

Henry Morgan
October 2001