

George Lovell Memorial Service – 28 February 2019

Harvesting the experience: Consultancy for Ministry and Mission

George said of his first meeting with Reg Batten, his mentor in the non-directive approach:

Within no time we were working things out together, not just talking about them... *No one had ever talked to me about my work like that before.* I knew I had stumbled on a treasure. I needed and wanted the ways of thinking and working I had just experience and I was prepared to sell everything to have it for myself. As I write, I experience again the deep feelings of excitement and joy I had then.

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To teach alongside George was to experience moments of grace. His calm methodical approach and his real expectation that every student had something interesting to say, led to moments that were transformative for students and teachers alike. To teach in this way was to do a hard day's work and so we would climb the hill at Cliff College from the classroom to the dining room with hunger and anticipation. And of course, the conversations of the classroom flowed over into the conversations over the meal table generating an ecumenical sacramentality.

So much of what George and Catherine had done in their work was designed into the course. It was truly ecumenical, it was truly a partnership between lay and ordained people; it began with the student and their work and so challenged academic conventions of starting with the curriculum and its assessment.

The course had its genesis in George's time as a Research Fellow at the School of Theology at Westminster College in Oxford. With colleagues there, he

identified a need to train consultants and so plans for a post-graduate diploma were drawn up and a first cohort recruited.

It was then necessary for the course to move. George credits Heather Walton with building the necessary bridges. Howard Mellor offered hospitality at Cliff College where the course developed into the MA in Consultancy for Ministry and Mission from 1999 to 2005. The stimulation of the course led George to write two further books: *Consultancy, Ministry and Mission* in 2000 followed by *Consultancy Modes and Models* in 2005. These books reflected the development in George's thinking as non-directive consultancy was initially taught as the model of consultancy but then became the means by which students were encouraged to develop their own models of consultancy. Having written down as much as he could and trained tutors to take the course onwards, George stepped down. As one of those asked to take the course forward alongside David Dadswell and Ian Johnson, I felt a pearl of great price had been entrusted to us.

Changes at Cliff College led the course to look for a new home with a welcome from Richard Andrews at the York Institute for Community Theology at York St John University in 2006. That Institute closed in 2014. The course has now evolved into a module at Durham University being delivered to both Masters students and those seeking training in consultancy by David Dadswell.

The hymn we have just sung was often chosen by students leading worship in the chapel at York St John. They found that through the co-consultancies they were offering each other companionship on the road and a bearing of each other's burdens that led beyond mutual sympathy to renewed action. This gave them both the confidence to tell of their joys and sorrows but also the humility to receive from each other. The testament to the course lies in the lives of the people they went on to work with.

It was both a mystery and a source of frustration to George that the denominational structures of the churches could not embrace and institutionalise the non-directive approach.

It seems at the moment that the institutional church is most keenly occupied with *what* it should be doing rather than *how* it should be doing it. Of course, the treasure which George uncovered and spent his life sharing is that a non-directive 'how', produces a more faithful 'what'.

George's passion for action research is being sustained in a project at Roehampton University looking at how Catholics and Methodists collaborate in social action.

The AVEC Resources Trust continues to oversee both the course and the archive, watchful for those who will in the future stumble across buried treasure.

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