

Round up of a Life

James O'Halloran SDB

All my life I have been devoted to Small Christian Communities. I am now 86 years old and what I know I have learned from experience and always in contact with the holy people of God. The Lord was at work in my life, because even as a boy, I was organising the altar boys in the Augustinian Friary, Callan, Co Kilkenny in a sort of youth club, or festive Oratory. Fr Pat Brennan OSA, a great devotee of Don Bosco, saw that I might have a Salesian vocation and guided me in that direction. I really felt attracted to the Augustinians and to being a priest, but I was an indifferent student and felt I should settle for being a religious lay brother, where there was a place for all sorts from geniuses to indifferent students like myself. Anyway Fr Brennan took me to Ballinakill, Co. Laois and Fr Pat Molloy (I'll never forget him) accepted me, and soon afterwards I got the entrance examination to Pallaskenry, Co Limerick. I felt this is the end of the road – mathematics was my bugbear. But lo and behold, I flew the examination, even passing the maths, for the first time in my life. God was on my side. I went to Pallaskenry as an aspirant to the priesthood. My mother, it seemed to me, was an ordinary woman whom, when I look back now, I realise was an extraordinary strong person. Her name was Jane O'Halloran (née O'Reilly) who prepared me to go to Pallaskenry to the Salesian Missionary College, also fondly known as Copewood. She was ably aided and abetted in this task by my Aunt Nan Hayes. My father, Martin O'Halloran, was working in England at that time. Like many an Irish person he had to go, because there was no work for him in Ireland. Two other Augustinians I should like to mention are Fr Kevin Cullen OSA and Fr Anthony Berrill OSA. I feel they were rooting for me behind the scenes. I'm not sure, yet somebody was.

It seems I was destined to becoming a priest. My mother told me much later in life that my Aunt Norah came to see her the night I was born and for no particular reason announced: 'He's going to become a priest!' That was July 12th 1932 – Orange Man's Day. My grandfather James O'Reilly always twigged me about being an Orange Man - he himself being a staunch republican! But my being called an Orange Man was, I think, prophetic in the light of what happened thereafter, as we shall see.

So there it was. I was launched on the path to the Salesian priesthood on September 13th, 1947, and was ordained on March 25th 1963 in the Basilica of Our Lady Help of Christians in Turin, Italy. The Basilica was founded by St John Bosco, a work he set about without a penny in his pocket. I got a great surprise that day. As we were milling about in the *cortile*, or courtyard, beside the Basilica following the ceremony, a Salesian priest summoned seven newly ordained, from among a total of forty-two. The seven were from the Anglo Irish Province. He introduced us to the old man he was talking to. He was a Salesian brother, one of six young lads running down a stairs near where we were standing, and they nearly bowled over the elderly Don Bosco who was on his way up. This happened eighty plus years before. Don Bosco called them back. Smilingly he said, 'What are you boys rushing for? There's no need. You're all going to live to a ripe old age.' This brother was up in his nineties and was in Turin visiting one of the others who was in hospital! I had heard this story before, but did not know if any of those boys were still living. But here he was and he was a direct link with Don Bosco on the day of our ordination. What a grace!

I spent twenty years teaching in Salesian schools in England, Ecuador, Malta and Swaziland. I was headmaster in Malta and Swaziland. Along the road, I experienced the spirituality of Don Bosco. Looking back on it, I realised that he experienced in microcosm, in a smaller way, what I learned in macrocosm, a more universal way, in my apostolate. Don Bosco had 'sodalities' in his foundations: St Aloysius Sodality for younger boys, the Blessed Sacrament for those in the middle and the Immaculate Conception for the older lads. But these 'groups' were in effect Small Christian Communities. 'Groups' whether religious or civic assemble temporarily for a purpose, such as to learn more about the Bible, or, for example, a civic group to plant trees. Not so a Small Christian

Community. Its primary purposes are *relationship* and *commitment* to gospel values, such as justice and peace. 'Here we make holiness a matter of being cheerful!' would have been a mantra of these sodalities. Don Bosco organised this way of life around three pivotal realities: *reason, spirituality, and loving kindness*. His young people were always given the reasons for all his procedures. It wasn't just a human consideration that motivated him, there was always the God factor, and lastly there was the practical loving kindness, which meant so much to Bosco. This *amorevolezza, or loving kindness*, he got from the gentle Francis de Sales and employed in all his dealings with the young. He was great at adapting the thinking of others. I believe that Francis de Sales was more important for Don Bosco than we, as Salesians, have imagined. His *amorevolezza, or loving kindness*, was embedded in his methodology in what he called the *Family Spirit*. He brought his mother, Mamma Margaret, to his Oratory at Valdocco which was really significant. It was something of a red light district back then and the presence of his mother for a number of years was not only good for the young people, but also a safeguard for himself. It prevented nasty rumours. A simple straightforward woman, the motherly Mamma Margaret was not only a mother to those hapless youth, but a holy person. Like her Son, she had a great devotion to Our Lady, upon whom she modelled her own motherhood. Her cause for canonisation is now in progress.

Don Bosco was a prophet. He had a problem with Archbishop Gastaldi who, looking after his own diocese of Turin, among other things found Don Bosco nurturing vocations for a future congregation. Don Bosco had a prophetic world view which put him two hundred years ahead of his times. He was envisioning a congregation consisting of priests, religious and lay people, which even Rome did not countenance at that time. Then there was the famous incident, when Don Bosco was thought to be mad and two clerics arrived to see him off to an asylum! He insisted that they get into the carriage first, sending both swiftly away to that institution, where they had much explaining to do. Bosco acted with love and confidence that he was doing God's will.

I myself grew in my knowledge and practice of Small Christian Community through the phases of my Salesian life. That I travelled the road of the Family Spirit and the Small Christian Community vision of Don Bosco was something I achieved looking back over my years. About 40 years ago we made a Pastoral Plan in the Irish Province using *dialogue and consensus*, now so beloved by Pope Francis and our current Salesian Rector Major Don Ángel Fernández Arttime. Looking back, I can see many positives resulting from that Pastoral Plan. Above all our involvement with the poor, justice and peace and the environment. We were even aware of feminist issues. When I saw a picture of our Rector Major in a truck with some young people in Sierra Leone, I realised his heart is truly with the poor and abandoned. A little preoccupation I have is maybe we Salesians are somewhat over centralised. Pope Francis is really practising subsidiarity, that is trusting local areas to make decisions appropriate to their situations. 'Community' is a matter of *relationships*. Rules and regulations can help, but they can also strangle good community.

A Dramatic Change

That great man and theologian Cardinal Newman once said: 'To live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often'. I spent eleven happy years in Ecuador, Latin America. There I worked largely with the youth in the underprivileged south of Quito. On 1 May 1978, we marched together with the young people in silence and peacefully. We carried a banner of Pope Paul VI with his words: 'The new name for peace is justice!' It was a routine 1 May March and ended in chaos. It was a dramatic day for our young people. The story of that day is to be found in '*Giving Life Away: Memories*', by James O'Halloran, Dublin: A Little Book Company, 11 Hillsbrook Crescent, Ireland. What is relevant to this document is that I lost my visa which extended indefinitely 'to the end of my mission'. My Provincial Fr Valverde decided I should go back to Ireland and await developments. Soon after this, the military dictatorship fell and President Roldos, a good man who was determined to improve the lot of the poor was elected. He died in a dubious air crash after two short years. The CIA was suspected. While he was President, I got my visa back without any

problem from the Ecuadorian Embassy in London and was about to return to Ecuador, but to make a long story short I got various letters from bishops in Africa asking me to go and share on Small Christian Communities there. I took them to Fr Hicks the Irish Provincial and he asked me if I were needed in Latin America by those communities. I said, 'Not really I learned about them myself there.' He astonishingly replied: 'I think you should go to Africa. But we are having a meeting in Malibu with the English speaking Provincials and the General Council, let me run it by the General Council there.' I agreed to this, but realistically expected them to say NO. To Fr Hicks' amazement they said YES. At that point they were considering moving into Africa and, I believe this was a factor in that decision. I was to be the first swallow in this new summer. And it materialised. A thousand Salesian missionaries went to Africa and flourished there.

A New Departure

The invitations to Africa multiplied and very soon I was on the road to Nairobi at the invitation of Cardinal Otunga. Travel and expenses paid for by Misereor, Germany, and board and lodging provided by the place that had invited me. No salary, but my order agreed to this. And so began a journey that took me to Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Gambia, Equatorial Guinea, the Ivory Coast, and Guinea Bissau. In the Pastoral Centres of Kenema, Sierra Leone, Lumko, South Africa and Gaba, Kenya I encountered students from all of Africa, particularly from Nigeria, Uganda and Sudan. I would stay in all those places usually for a month, or six weeks, and be involved in workshops from three hours to five days and countless other meetings and sessions as well. The diocesan teams conducted the workshops with me, which was important for continuity. They were fully equipped to continue the work. I returned to some of these places up to five times for follow up work. The methodology was utterly participative: input (kept to a minimum) group work, plenary sessions where the participants thoughts became apparent. I insisted that a Latin American version could not be fully brought to Africa, nor a Cape Town version to Johannesburg. Like the gospel, they applied to all parts of the world in their essentials, but each Small Christian Community had the smell of its own sheep. I usually started the workshop with a few questions: 'Did they have any experience of a group? And what were the positives and negatives of that experience? This helped me to orient the workshop. All sessions were conducted on the basis of *dialogue* and *consensus*. And this was almost four decades before Pope Francis conducted his synods using *dialogue* and *consensus*.

From January 1981, my emphasis was on Africa. Yet more and more, the African participants wanted to know what was happening in other countries. Did they too have Small Christian Communities? So my mission was enlarged into a world operation. This took me to England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Switzerland, Italy, Canada, the United States, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Australia, Thailand, India, Macau, Hong Kong and Mainland China. I spent three years in Malta, four in Swaziland, and eleven in Latin America, so I knew those places well. I visited about fifty countries on all continents – I didn't go to the Antarctic because only penguins lived there! I was travelling for thirty eight years. Looking back now I wonder how I did it. These experiences enlarged my vision and allowed me to give the African communities an international perspective. In Africa the age expectancy stood at a low 40, *so most of the participants in workshops were young people*.

I operated from Ireland, where I spent the time giving courses, mainly in the Jesuit Centre at Milltown and the Vincentians at All Hallows, to under graduates, post graduate and masters students (1993-2003). I felt the need to get a theology of community into universities. In 1989 together with Dr Ian M. Fraser and a lady who was associated with La Salle University, Philadelphia, we gave a Summer School there on the Vision and Practice of the communities. However to get back to Ireland: apart from doing workshops in other educational centres, I did them all over the country. This was done before Christmas and during the summer, when I dwelt first of all in the Salesian community in Crumlin. Then from 2005 until the present I became part of the

Staff of the Sean McDermott Street Community. From there I worked with Fr Val Collier for young people out of home (2005-2010) and Clontarf (2010-present), but more on that later. While travelling round the world, I was always conscious that if I was striving to spread small communities, I must live it myself, so I was part of Salesian communities and Small Christian Communities in Ireland and Ecuador during my years of work. I was in fact Overall Coordinator of the Pastoral Plan for the Irish Province (Ireland, Malta and South Africa) that ran from the day I suggested it to the Provincial, Fr Joseph Harrington, in 1980 until it was finalised in 1983.

Theology of Small Christian Communities

In 1980 I was engaged in a workshop, or seminar, in Nairobi and was concentrating on the *practice* of Small Christian Communities and groups. There were some prayer groups in Nairobi at that time and I was anxious to expand on these by adding the elements of the word of God and outreach to their repertoire, since there is limited value in reflecting on the word of God if there is no follow-up action. If people are hungry, the first thing they need is food. In this situation Cardinal Maurice Otunga, whose cause for canonisation has now been introduced, popped me a question: ‘Fr Jim what is the theology of these Small Christian Communities?’ This stopped me in my tracks. I scratched my head and eventually replied: ‘I don’t fully know. But I’m going to find out.’ I talked with the members and produced a series of reflections on the subject – the latest *Living Cells: Vision and Practicalities of Small Christian Communities and Groups*, The Columba Press, Dublin, 2010, my most recent thoughts on the theology, spirituality, history and practice of these communities and groups. I included ‘groups’, because of my involvement with young people. In our thinking they needed similar communities for the special needs of youth (reflection on spirituality, love, sex, drugs ...). However this did not exclude those of them who wished from being members of the adult communities. In Africa this presented problems as the youth tended to be overawed in the presence of adults. But the small communities must be open to them and encourage their participation. Having their own groups/communities also proves a good preparation for the adult communities. I recall in India in 1989, when a Salesian remarked to me that he was interested in small communities, but was busy working in schools. I spoke to him of the possibility of introducing them in schools. Schools can be an excellent place in which to initiate young people in Small Christian Communities.

But to return to Cardinal Otunga’s question as to the theology of Small Christian Communities. Here is what I discovered with the help of God’s holy people.

1. Starting with the Small Christian Community, we find a group composed of separate persons (let’s say eight) who through their intimate loving and sharing become *one*.
2. The roots of this reality we find in the Trinity, where Father, Son and Holy Spirit, though distinct persons, through their intimate loving and sharing are one God, or *one* Community. I should like to emphasise the beginning and core of all this is the wonderful love of the Trinity: it is a relationship that is replicated through all of creation.
3. Hence Vatican II says the universal church is seen to be ‘a people brought into unity from the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’ (Vatican II, para 4, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*).
4. We were created as a community of brothers and sisters without divisions (Genesis 1:26-27; John 17:20-26; Galatians 3:28-29), but we sinned and marred community.
5. Jesus came to restore community, to reconcile us to God, ourselves, neighbour and environment.
6. The historic Jesus was a sacrament of the Trinity in the world, he made the three persons present among us, because where Jesus was there too were the Father and Holy Spirit.
7. The church now continues the reconciling work of Christ and makes him (and the Father and Holy Spirit) present in the world 1Corinthians 12:27.

8. The church, body of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit only becomes truly observable and tangible through reduced groups such as the Small Christian Communities. The Trinitarian love is felt there; it begins to blur at parish level. good though the parishes are. I wonder at the amalgamation of parishes because of a shortage of priests. It is putting the emphasis on the cleric, rather than on the laity and quasi community of the parish.

Summary: the theology of Small Christian Communities is, therefore, Trinitarian. They are sacraments of the Trinity. In a sacrament there is something you do see, a group that loves one another and therefore becomes one. But, of course you don't see the three Divine Persons.

From the beginnings

The Small Christian Communities were there from the earliest days of the Church. They met in homes (Acts 12:12) and on the Sabbath they went up to the courtyard of the temple or to Solomon's Gate and there formed *the communion of communities*. For more than two hundred years they had no church buildings. The people were the Church. In fact these communities were among the first steps in the Church. The Small Christian Communities were Church (ecclesial) as Pope Paul VI informed us in *The Evangelisation of Peoples*, No. 58, 1975. Are they not mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (2:44-47 and 4:32-37)? In these passages we are given an account of their characteristics: they hearkened back, orally at the outset, to the words of Jesus, broke bread together (Eucharist), were one in heart and soul, and were deeply committed in their *sharing*. The example of Barnabas, 'the son of encouragement' in acting on the word of Christ is noteworthy. He sold his house and 'laid the money at the feet of the apostles'.

This is radical commitment. The modern communities are still characterised by their spirit of *relationships* and *sharing*. Scripture and the Eucharist are also important, but still more so is putting the word of God into practice. What are we going to do about the word we have reflected upon is a serious question? And for a full experience of Church we need to be part of a Small Christian Community and also reach out to larger entities such as parish and society at large, but more of the latter anon. This 'new' vision of the Church has revived from the forties and Vatican II (1962-65).

The kingdom of God

Jesus said: '...strive *first* for the kingdom of God and his righteousness,' (Matthew 6:33). The *priority* with Christ was the kingdom of God and the Lord's righteousness, or justice. The Church is part of the kingdom, but not the whole of it. It should give powerful witness to it and be a splendid instrument for building it in the world. But again it is not the whole of it. Briefly the kingdom is wherever the goodness of God breaks through on earth. It includes all the good people in the world. I have experienced Buddhist, Muslim and people of all religions and none, who were kingdom people and part of kingdom groups. So let us not forget, Jesus said, 'But strive *first* for the kingdom.' If I might summarise my own vision in the light of the kingdom, it would go like this. I start with Small Christian Communities. If one is to reach out successfully, you must be sure of your own identity, so within my own church I would be fostering the small communities and other helpful groups. Beyond it I would encourage groups of all kinds, whether religious or civic, which are doing anything to build a better world, or the kingdom. And I would have them ALL support one another in any way they can while not neglecting their own work in so doing. This is a template for building up creation motivated by small community. Thomas Merton said that WE ARE ALL ONE in the world. Our differences of belief in our religious denominations, though not trivial, are secondary and we can work ecumenically on those. Every thing begins as small groups; relationships can take time to build. Looking back over a long life that's where I am at the moment. And I salute Don Bosco who got there about two hundred years ago. He realised that all good people, whatever their beliefs, are part of God's kingdom. Didn't Cavour, for example, give him good advice on how to devise a congregation in an Italy that looked askance at religious orders?

Spirituality: Three Dancers One Dance

Christopher Mwoleka is a community member that I must mention by name. He is now deceased but I found he gave me profound inspiration on the spirituality of Small Christian Communities. It eventually followed upon the practice and theology of the groups. He had an insight that impressed me. It is obvious, yet it is easy to miss the obvious. Mwoleka looked at his Small Christian Community in Tanzania and said, 'We are ten distinct and estimable persons here, yet through our loving and sharing we are one. We are like the Trinity: three (more than one) distinct Persons but one God or one community. God is community.' This is a straightforward insight. Nevertheless it has tremendous consequences. The consciousness of this rootedness of the Small Christian Communities in the Trinity would be the hallmark of, and key to, their *spirituality*.

Mwoleka was a bishop who lived in an Ujamaa village in the same conditions as other villagers. He was a different kind of bishop though – no palace for him, no dreaming spires. You may recall how the outstanding Julius Nyerere of Tanzania promoted Ujamaa (togetherness) villages where people could live and farm in community. Another reason for doing this was to gather people in convenient centres, where services such as health and education could be more easily be provided. If people were thinly scattered, it made this difficult. Incidentally Julius Nyerere's cause for canonisation has also been introduced.

Mwoleka thought this a worthy scheme, so he himself lived and farmed in such a village. In the evening he would sit and chat with other farmers and fellow community members. Regarding his insight that Small Christian Communities are rooted in the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I have found no one that would disagree. As Tanzanian Christians aptly put it: 'There are three dancers but only one dance.' This is the heart of their *spirituality*.

Going from this original insight, I chatted with members of Small Christian Communities in various parts of the world to explore this truth. About Christ, I understood something special. Yes they understood that they were body of Christ and that he was the bedrock of their communities. What really struck me though was the warmth of their relationship with him. He was a 'buddy', a 'mate', a 'chum', a 'soul friend' (*anam cara*), or '*compadre*', depending where you were in the world. His was the empty chair at the table. If a gleaming white dove were to fly down and land on the back of such a chair, as I saw happen in a theatrical production, you'd know it was the Spirit of Jesus.

And talking of the Spirit, there is a sensitivity to the workings of the Spirit in the small communities that would put you in mind of the Acts of the Apostles, which might as well be called the Acts of the Spirit (Acts 15:28). With the help of the Spirit the early followers of Christ made all their decisions; in the groups it tends to be the same. This is surely a welcome development. While growing up I didn't often think of the Spirit. Frankly the Spirit was a bird. And I doubt if I was unique in thinking like this.

Being rooted in the Trinity: presided over by the loving Father, embraced by Jesus and inspired by the Spirit gives participants in the groups a profound sense of being permeated by the love of God. *God who is love* (1 John 4:8). We belong to God – we are his truly adopted children. Jesus is God's Son by generation, but we are equally dear through adoption. God holds us in the palm of his hand. Even before we were born or could begin to love God, God first loved us (John 15:12). From all eternity I existed in the mind of God. And this love of God is without conditions. The Lord doesn't say: 'I will love you. but only if you are good.' Whether we are good or bad, God still loves us and works for our salvation. God being love cannot do otherwise. God's love for us is something we have to know, not just in the head but in the deep heart's core, or more graphically, in the gut.

Pope Francis gives wonderful testimony to this love. He embraced the paralysed child, kissed the man whose face was covered in huge carbuncles, reached out to the hapless migrants who landed

cold and isolated on the island of Lampedusa and laid his blessed hands on a handicapped boy in Dublin's Sean McDermott Street, as his dedicated mother dissolved in tears. He is neither liberal nor conservative – he simply lives the gospel. Some of those migrant families from Lampedusa he took back to Rome and gave them succour in the Vatican.

At a session in Zimbabwe, we were sharing on John 17:20-26. Following the session a nun approached me. 'Jim,' she began, 'I was really impressed by those words of Jesus: "I pray not only for them [the apostles] but also for those who believe in me because of their message." I am among those who believe in his message because of the apostles. Jesus was praying for me at that moment. The poor soul he was going out to die and he prayed for me. I cried. I work as a chaplain in the mission hospital. Many people there are dying of AIDS ... young people ... some of them my relatives and they fear death. Now I'm going to be able to say to them, don't be afraid. Look here in the gospel Jesus prayed for you. There's no need to be afraid.' That sister grasped the great Trinitarian love for herself and her neighbour. She was imbued with the spirituality of the Small Christian Community.

I myself witnessed violence against Christians in Latin America. Six people that I worked closely with in Africa were martyred. I just happened to be in the wrong place at the right time. My sister, Alice, was told by a gay friend in London that I was 'God's protected one'. I do gratefully believe it. The love and protection the sister in Zimbabwe felt, I felt too.

When people are conscious of this love, it can change the whole way they see life. Take our human love. They will perceive its roots deep in the love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They will know that when they are given an experience of genuine love, they are been given an experience of God, because God is love and our love is a reflection of God's love. So our love as human beings is a channelling of the love of God to one another. If this is not what happens when I love Mary Jane, then that love is not true. But if I channel God's love to another, then I will always love sensitively and well. *Life is all about relationships.*

Issuing from the fact that Small Christian Communities find their inspiration in the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, here are some of the major spin-offs that came from the members from this belief:

- faith, influencing life and leading to action,
- a strong prayerful dimension embracing the Eucharist , word of God, prayer, reflection and reconciliation,
- an emergence of 'the new person' referred to in Ephesians 4:24,
- sensitivity towards, and respect for local cultures,
- the kingdom and its justice as a priority,
- a spirit of perseverance,
- a humble resistance to the showy or flamboyant,
- a hunger for knowledge of God,
- a joyful spirit.

Such are some of the spin-offs I found, in no particular order.

Present work

I am currently helping Fr Val in Don Bosco Care in Clontarf. Don Bosco Care is a complex of eight houses and provides a home for young people out of home. I am a sort of chaplain to the boys and carers, most of the latter being young lay women and men imbued with the Salesian spirit. Fr Val is an amazing man who has guided this work for thirty years. He sees the good in every one and emphasises this goodness. I have never heard him say a bad word about anyone. I admire his patience with, and understanding of, people. He carried Don Bosco Care for all of thirty years aided by an excellent staff. He is extremely wise and I have learned a lot from him. He has now been

replaced by an excellent team of people who manage the service. Besides having a wonderful head for mathematics, he did two days work in one, beginning at 7.30 a.m. and frequently finishing late in the day. And he never boasts. He is a humble man. I am glad to be a small part of Don Bosco Care, and I am especially pleased that the carers and the young people for whom they work meet in small communities to share ideas and sort out problems. The young people find their voice and learn to communicate in those community meetings. This is a continuation of my life's work. Besides I am still a member of a Small Christian Community in Our Lady of Lourdes parish, Sean McDermott Street. The carers are all of them kingdom people and are devoted to the ethos of Don Bosco, above all to his *amorevolezza* (loving kindness). Fr Val also took an interest in after care for young people, who were often adrift after leaving care homes. I feel that Fr Val, because he so low key, is grossly underestimated by us Salesians. But I suppose this is the purpose of being low key in the first place.

We are all one

To quote Prospero from Shakespeare's *Tempest*: 'Our revels [joys] are now ended'. I feel optimistic about the future of the Church and the world, because they are God's creation and in the words of Julian of Norwich: *All will be well*. We live in times of rapid change and, above all, we ought to strive to be open and immeasurably flexible. I should like before I finish to revert to Thomas Merton's astonishing insight that '*We are all one!*' Incidentally, even before Merton, the Muslim Turks manifested the same awareness when they erected a statue in Istanbul to Pope Benedict XV, who struggled for a just peace during World War One. The inscription on the monument reads to, 'the great pope of the world tragedy ... the benefactor of all people, irrespective of nationality or religion' (J.N.D. Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, Oxford University Press, p.316). All the good people in this world belong to God's kingdom. Jesus died for all. Our missionaries went all over the world to bring God and Christ to all peoples. But Jesus and God were already there. How are they there? Perhaps we need a whole new theology to look at this. And, as Hans Kung so rightly suggests, we need it to be written in language that ordinary people find accessible. If the people are involved they will supply the language. Surely also we need to explore how we can all become one, remembering that it is not just a matter of saying we should become one, but of walking the walk and doing things that bring us all together. Earlier in this document I recalled how my grandfather, James O'Reilly, used to twig me about being an Orange Man (Protestant) and it was prophetic and true insofar as I feel part of all humanity whatever their nationality or creed.

The church belongs to that kingdom. It is a part not the whole of it. Hopefully it will become *a community of communities* and thus implement the clear vision of Vatican Council II. It will not be seen as clergy and laity, but as God's holy people whose decisions are communitarian; that is they will be made by the people of God through *dialogue and consensus*. If the church were to resemble the vision inspired by Vatican Council II, I feel it would be satisfactory. Some of the great signs that this Church is coming into being will be *leadership as service* and *community decisions*. The kingdom of God turns things on their head.

Christ died for all. All are equally dear to him. The future lies with the kingdom of God. - it is Christ's *priority*. Again: '... strive *first* for the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.'

Conclusion

Raymond Carver was a great American secular poet who somehow seemed to grasp that in the end it is *all about relationships*. He divines 'the burthen of the mystery' in a short poem entitled *Late Fragment*. In it he writes:

And did you get what
You wanted from life even so?

I did.
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
Beloved on the earth.

Carver, who died young, had endured a difficult life, but at the end he found a satisfying love. And then there was Hilaire Belloc, undoubtedly Catholic but not ostensibly spiritual, who expressed the point with equal eloquence in his *Dedicatory Ode*:

From quiet homes and first beginning,
Out to the undiscovered ends,
There's nothing worth the wear of winning,
But laughter and the love of friends.

Amen to that. It has guided me in life.

Jim O'Halloran SDB
September 8th (Feast of Our Lady), 2018.

SHORT RESPONSE TO JIM'S ARTICLE

A lovely piece of writing Jim. Many thanks indeed. I really enjoyed it and the opportunity to visit in my imagination the many, varied and colourful places and people to whom you brought the light of your personality and your faith in a loving Father.

I admire the way you managed to concentrate a whole lifetime into such a small space with a light touch. Your early years of finding your way are tender and a match for descriptions by Don Bosco of the youthful, holy youngsters of his day. You capture those years so well and give praise where it is due - to your mother who nurtured with sensitivity your early enthusiasms and those who helped you find the right path. Once you had found it, you were up and running and haven't stopped since.

The providential turn of events that led to you going to Africa are startling. And it seems as if the timing was just right for the seeds of small Christian community to find fertile soil there. It is remarkable that you were the one to help plant that vision and support how the practice of it was to be realised.

Your further reflection on the theology underpinning these cells is delicately expressed. Three dancers and one dance captures it well, the dance of life at the heart of community, and how community breeds community and all at the service of the kingdom. A wonderful vision, universal and down to earth which is what we mean by incarnation; love in action.

You give great and deserved praise to Val Collier, a great leader and enabler, who works so effectively behind the scenes and with an admirable modesty. It is important for us not to overlook holiness in our midst. And let it be said, that you have given him great support in the last decade and more as together you have strengthened the community of Don Bosco Care in Clontarf.

Fr Hugh O'Donnell SDB

Your story is very inspirational, Jim, and not in the least self-serving. If stories of the early Salesians had not been written up in their time our family story would be the poorer for it. As Patrick Kavanagh said in a quote I like; 'You should tell the truth even if it's in favour of yourself!'

Again many thanks. And may the story started so long ago which has borne so much fruit continue to do so.

In friendship, Hugh O'Donnell SDB.