



CNI

Comment - Models of Evangelism

I was delighted to see that there was a reunion of a group of C of I clerics who were celebrating a mere forty years since their ordination. One was the Archbishop of Armagh who in the photograph looked as though he had just come out of the cricket nets.

You do need to 'keep your eye in' as a bishop and ensure that your repertoire of strokes both defensive and attacking are well honed. I recalled that Archbishop Richard served his time with a cricketing rector, the late Archdeacon Eric Barber of Holywood, and he would know the difference between a square-cut and a forward drive.

I didn't need the explanation in the caption that the Community of the Resurrection was an Order of Anglican monks. It was good to see Father John Gribben, CR, present. My memory may be creaky but I think he completed post - graduate studies together with the Archbishop at Kings.

When Father John was curate-assistant in Dunmurry we got to know each other. In the words of Sylvia Ellis, an astute rector's wife, herself daughter of the rectory and sister of two rectors, "John introduced the parish to saints we didn't know we had..."

My first encounter with the Community of the Resurrection was due to Canon Jack Hawkins who was our rector in my teenage years. He hosted a meeting in the parish hall in Antrim. The visiting speaker was non-other than Father Trevor Huddleson, CR, one of the most influential voices in the fight against apartheid in South Africa.

“Naught for Your Comfort”, his book published in 1956 on the political and social scenarios of his ministry, impacted upon me and on thousands of other Christians around the world. It indelibly marked places like Sophiatown and Soweto on my mind map.

Such was Father Trevor’s impact that in 1995 the then Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, wrote, "He was an enormous thorn in the side of the apartheid regime and was effectively the real spokesman for the anti-apartheid movement for a considerable period. No one did more to keep apartheid on the world's agenda than he.”

Sad to say that the basis of apartheid was undergirded with a determinedly, scholarly, biblical interpretation, provided by the Dutch Reformed Church which was the spiritual home of the majority of the Dutch-speaking, ruling party. It is one of the best examples of a Christian community mis-reading the Bible to support their mindset status-quo. But you don’t have to travel out of Ireland to encounter that

type of Biblical abuse. Apartheid takes many forms other than racial.

Father Trevor's book informed the English speaking world of the sad reality of life for most black South Africans. It had impact upon several countries in their revision of their foreign policy in relation to the South African state. Such revision led to a UN embargo.

Important as that contribution was, in my opinion it was not Father Trevor's major contribution to South Africa, even though that also includes his influence on leaders of the ANC and many former inmates of Robben Island.

Rather it was his influence on Desmond Tutu.

I had the good fortune of meeting Archbishop Tutu on a couple of occasions. The first was when I interviewed him for BBC Radio in a black episcopal parish in Harlem. The US administration eventually had managed to bring enough pressure on the South African government to have Desmond released for a

visit to the States. I also met him many years later in Belfast Cathedral when unheralded and unannounced, he simply turned up for the Sunday morning eucharist and modestly sat in the congregation.

Even though Father Huddleson had visited a young Tutu who was in hospital with TB, Desmond relates how he did not take the church really seriously until one day he saw a white man raise his hat in respect to his mother. It was the first time he had ever seen a white man so act. That man was Father Trevor. Without that gesture, the contribution of Archbishop Tutu as a Christian leader and his worldwide influence may not have happened.

Evangelism can happen without a word being uttered.

Evangelism mercifully is not the monopoly of protestantism. In Belfast each year I have watched the growth of the novena at Clonard Monastery where the Redemptorists have extended the Christian hospitality of their pulpit

to Church of Ireland and various reformed church ministers, and that in this major highlight of their church's witness in the city and dioceses.

I was really delighted to read of the massive numerical and spiritual response to the novena in Limerick (See today's CNI news).

Evangelism does not have to compromise either tradition or ethos. It can be as simple as good manners. It can be one to one, and it can be in thousands at a novena or other focus drawn from the riches of a particular Christian tradition.

Evangelism does not need to be imported inter-continental. It does not need gimmicks or self-inclusive and self-defining cliques. *Au contraire*. The *ruach*, the spirit of God, will blow where it wills. She seems to prefer centring on humble hearts.

Houston McKelvey

