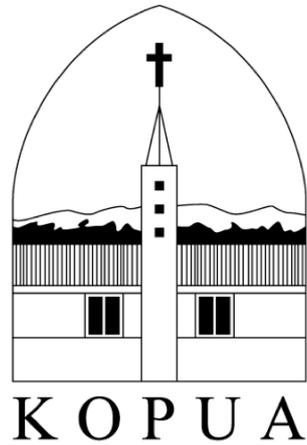


A Journey in Faith and Prayer

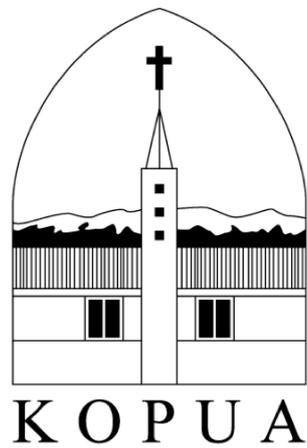


Fr. John Benedict Kelly O.C.S.O.



Fr John Kelly on his 80th Birthday May 12th 2010.

A Journey in Faith and Prayer



Fr. John Benedict Kelly O.C.S.O.

Southern Star Abbey
Kopua Road
R.D. 2. Takapau
Hawke's Bay
New Zealand 4286
www.kopuamonastery.org.nz

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INTRODUCTION

Fr. Brian Keogh, our abbot, asked me to write down my experiences of prayer in the monastery over the last 60 years. This is the year 2011 and I have been in a monastery for the past sixty-one years, having entered at the age of twenty in 1950. The reason that he gave for writing such an account was: 'People will read a personal testimony; who wants to read the theory of prayer. I would like very much if you would write it down.' His remark reminded me of a quote that I read recently from Pope Paul VI: 'People listen more readily to witnesses than to teachers and preachers'.

I realise that writing about oneself is a dangerous business. Am I doing it for God's glory, or is it an ego trip? Would it not be more humble to go to my grave and be forgotten like all the other monks that I have known in Mt Melleray and Kopua? I suppose the answer to this question depends on God's will. My abbot's request is one indication of what might be God's will. There is also the quotation in Matthew (5, 16), where Jesus says: 'Let your light shine before people so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven'. I fear that I haven't always observed this commandment. The words of Jesus remind me that in writing about myself I must not seek my own glory but that of my Father in heaven.

In my formation I have been warned repeatedly over sixty-one years of the dangers of vanity. Isn't it contrary to humility to display in public the good that I have done? I have constantly to remind myself that I haven't done one good work by my own strength in my whole life. Any good deed that seems to have come from me was initiated by God, and in addition he empowered me as I carried out the good work in question. The truth is that without God I can do nothing. Unfortunately, I very easily forget this. I forget it because I don't feel that God initiates and empowers me in the doing of any good work. Because I don't feel God's action, I easily forget that he is the principal agent in any good deed that seems to come from me.

Much of what I have written in the following pages is influenced by how I now see my past life. When I write now about what happened forty, fifty or sixty years ago, my memory and judgement can be quite fallible. Also what I write is necessarily selective. Some early experiences linger on in my memory while others, which may be more significant, are completely forgotten. Furthermore, there are many memories that I have not included for many reasons. Some were not important enough to be of interest to readers: others were too personal and I thought it better not to publicise them.

Finally, I hope that through these pages God may be glorified.

Fr John Benedict Kelly O.C.S.O.
Southern Star Abbey.
Kopua. New Zealand.
September 2011.

TIPPERARY

I was asked to write of my experience of prayer. I can see that prayer goes right back to my childhood. I didn't just start praying when I joined the monastery in 1950. The seeds of faith were sown in my heart in the bosom of my family and in Donaskeigh National School, near the town of Tipperary, in Southern Ireland.

I was born into a very Catholic society in 1930 in Tipperary town. The family lived on a farm about six miles from the town. This was quite a distance in the days before cars appeared on the roads. My parents didn't have a car; hence we seldom went to town. All this was to strongly affect my faith and my life of prayer in the years ahead. As I look back after eighty-one years, I can see how sheltered was my upbringing.

When the time came to attend school, I had to walk about a mile every day to Donaskeigh National School which I attended for more than seven years. I was only five years old when I started school and thirteen years old when I left primary school and set out for a boarding school.

My mother had a very strong influence on me. She was a highly committed Catholic. In addition to Sunday Mass she made the Nine First Fridays. She insisted that all of us went to Confession and Communion once a month. We had to say morning and evening prayers. Above all she always insisted on saying the Family Rosary every night. She died in 1958 shortly after my ordination. I don't know of a single instance during her life when she omitted the rosary. I can recall on one occasion when she insisted that we say it at 3.00am. Visitors had been with us all night and they didn't leave until 3.00am. No matter, the rosary had to be said. I have been saying the rosary daily since about 1935. We were only doing in our home what all good Catholics did in our parish in the 1930s. Attendance at Sunday mass in the parish was almost 100%.

My mother had tremendous respect for the clergy. She was convinced that they were all holy men. Her respect and reverence for them was so great that I developed a desire to be a priest at a very early age. I never seriously considered any other form of life. Doubtless my desire was uninformed and motivated by childish ambition rather than by sublime motives. Today, parents frequently don't want their children to become priests and nuns. I am grateful to God that my parents had so much respect for priests and nuns. My eldest sister became a Loreto nun; my younger sister also tried to become a nun, but had to leave the convent due to bad health.

But I never told anybody about my desire to be a priest. I kept it locked up in my heart. My mother didn't even know until the time came in 1948 to make public a desire that had been in my heart since I was a child.

As I said already, I had a very sheltered upbringing in a rural Catholic parish. I was exposed to all the Catholic beliefs of the 1930s. These beliefs were never questioned by anyone. Everyone believed in God and all had the same beliefs. I think that I can say that, before I arrived in New Zealand at the age of 36, I had only known one non-Catholic, who attended Donaskeigh National School for a few years. He was just one boy in a school of 120 pupils. I had compassion on him because he was a

‘Protestant’ and all Protestants went to hell. I believed for many years that only Catholics went to heaven. After all the official teaching at the time was ‘outside the Church there is no salvation’. Every good Catholic had no doubt that all non-Catholics went to hell. None of us wanted to go to hell, so we clung desperately to the Catholic faith.

Furthermore, it was a mortal sin to miss Mass on Sundays without a cause, and to eat meat on Fridays. Again to avoid hell we scrupulously obeyed these laws. As a young child and later in my teens I did not question any of the religious assumptions and beliefs of everyone around me.

It would be many years before I began to evaluate constructively my early formation. I was probably in my early thirties before many of my beliefs and values had to be examined and in some instances changed. My year in Rome (1961-62) and Vatican II forced me to evaluate and change many of my views and assumptions. But this was still in the future.

As I was growing up in Tipperary, I lived in a very closed society, insulated for the most part from influences outside the family, the school and the parish. Nowadays we live in a global village and we know all that is happening all around the world. In my boyhood we got the daily newspaper but only my father read it. About 1936 we bought a radio; we were one of the first in the parish to get one. We used to listen to the news every night and this served to make us more aware of the wider world. However, the news in the 1930s was mainly about events in Ireland. The communications explosion was still in its infancy. We had no phone, no fax machine, no computer, no TV and no car until about 1947. People travelled very little. Texts, Twitter and Facebook were away in the future. All this meant that religious Catholic values were able to take root deeply in my mind and heart. These values weren’t threatened by innumerable other impressions coming from the mass media, a pluralistic society, travel and other factors which surround modern children as they grow up. I am grateful to God for the providential set of circumstances that shaped me. I didn’t even have to cope with the temptations that inevitably come from living in the city.

Living in the country had its disadvantages. I was very narrow and insular since I had very little experience of life beyond the limits of Donaskeigh School and parish.

My father was older than my mother. He was quiet and did not display his religion externally as much as my mother. He was already fifty-one years old when I was born. Hence there was a big gap in age between him and me. He was faithful to his religious obligations in a quiet way. He ran the farm and looked after the money.

He and my mother cooperated very well in bringing up the family of seven children. There was never any serious quarrel between them.

There were seven of us in the family, two girls and five boys. The eldest and the youngest were girls and the other five were boys. I was number five in the family. There was one sister and three brothers ahead of me, and one brother and one sister younger than I. I have no doubt that my character was affected not only by my parents, but also by my siblings. My eldest sister, Maura, was to become a nun. There was a good deal of

sibling rivalry between the five boys. I had no option except to submit to my older brothers. They were physically stronger than I; hence I couldn't dominate them.

All these circumstances affected my growth in prayer and virtue. I cannot separate my experience of prayer from the rest of my life. I was brought up in a family where faith and religious values were highly respected. The faith was practised by all the members. All have now died except myself, and I thank God that all remained faithful to their Catholic heritage until death.

DONASKEIGH NATIONAL SCHOOL

About March 1936, I was sent to school for the first time. I was five years old when I started. I already knew the Our Father, Hail Mary and a few words of Irish. I had learned some prayers at home from my mother, and I participated in the Family Rosary from an early age. My formal education in religion served to re-enforce my family education. My first teacher, and probably the one who had the most influence on me in Donaskeigh, was Mrs. Flanagan. She was no theologian but she loved the Lord deeply, had a great sense of humour and was popular with the children. She would tell the gospel stories in a simple way that made a very deep impression on us very young children. I still remember her description of hell. 'In hell there is a big clock on the wall. Instead of tick-tock, tick-tock it says unceasingly "never, never, never" ...the body and soul will be fighting in hell for all eternity.' She certainly sowed in our hearts a deep fear of the eternal fire of hell. We, five and six year olds, drank in all she said without question. All was swallowed for better or for worse. Everyone in the school had faith.

What would have happened to me if I had grown up in a school where many of the children came from families that had no faith? The children form one another in a school. Doubtless we had our fights both at home and at school, but no one questioned the reality of God's existence, the reality of heaven and hell, or any of the Church's doctrines. I can only thank God for my primary education. Doubtless there was a strong emphasis on hell and mortal sin that generated fear in the children's hearts. However, this emphasis probably kept us on the safe and narrow road for many years.

St. Benedict doesn't hesitate to have recourse to servile fear to get us started on the road to perfect love. This is what we find in his treatment of humility. Fear of mortal sin and of hell fire was sown in my heart at a very early age and I think that it did me a lot of good. It is doubtful if very young children can be motivated to do good for higher motives. A time would come when, with God's grace, love would become the main motive underlying my choices. This occurred gradually during secondary school and especially after 1948 after I commenced priestly studies. The motive of fear never fully disappeared, however, especially in times of violent temptation. It also helps me at times when I am getting negligent about implementing my Christian and monastic obligations.

I can remember that, when I was about ten years old, being very worried because I feared that I was in mortal sin. I had been taught that we must have sorrow for our sins when we went to confession. If we had no sorrow we would be committing mortal sin. I became very worried about my sorrow. Was I really sorry because I didn't feel all that sorry? Perhaps all my confessions were bad and, as a consequence, all my communions were also bad. I was a great sinner! I decided to confess everything and get all my

problems straightened out. I confessed that I had been making bad confessions and communions for a long time. I don't recall what the priest said. But my worries were still with me after confession. In time they disappeared.

There was one big gap in my moral education. I got no help at all, either at home or in the primary school or secondary school, with understanding my sexuality. I was fifteen years old before I understood where babies came from. I was told that God made them, and that satisfied me until I was fifteen. It is almost incredible that I was so naive for so long.

In those days the young weren't informed on sexual matters. I can remember how my teacher in the primary school, when teaching us about the commandments, told us that there was no need for us to study the sixth commandment yet. Even when studying moral theology in the 1950s, our teacher, who was nearly fifty years of age, was very inhibited in speaking about sexual matters. St. Paul was often quoted as saying somewhere that 'certain sins must not be even mentioned among us'. It took me many years before I could discuss sex in an uninhibited manner.

Donaskeigh School was a mixed school of boys and girls. For the most part the boys and girls were kept apart even though they met together in the class room. The girls would sit at the right and the boys at the left as the teacher taught both sexes together. They were kept apart also during the midday break hour. Although I was attracted to some girls, I never got friendly with them. In regard to young boys and girls, it is natural for the boys and girls to keep to their own sex. This meant that I was never very friendly with a girl at any point in my life. Doubtless this didn't help my ability to relate to women in later life.

As I said, I started school at the age of five. Something very significant happened to me soon after arriving at school. I developed a great affection for a small boy of my own age. This fixation was to endure for the next seven years until my primary school ended. Even though I didn't realise it at the time, this was a very significant experience in my life. I was simply obsessed by this very attractive boy. I would think of him morning, noon and night. He was always in my heart and in my thoughts, first thing in the morning and last thing at night. I was affectively obsessed with him but I was far too young to have any such insight. Eventually, after seven years I went to secondary school and in time he disappeared from my life.

However, after about one year in secondary school I developed a similar attachment to another boy, again of my own age. The whole process repeated itself. When he left the school after about four years it ended again. I was probably still too young and naive to realise that such a friendship was not healthy. But I didn't begin to understand this properly until I was about twenty years old and studying for the priesthood. God gave me the grace to see that these friendships were spiritually disastrous. I made a solemn resolution that I would never again allow myself to be ensnared by obsessive friendships. Thank God I have kept this resolution.

I should say that, in all those years there were never any physical expressions of love. There were no overt signs of affection and never anything sexual. Indeed I think that the boys that I was really attracted to hadn't the same obsessive attraction for me as I had for them.

What I didn't realise was that I would have to battle with this weakness for many years. With hindsight, I can see that overcoming this weakness was one of the longest and biggest battles in my life. The problem was never very serious after I matured into my late thirties.

One might wonder what all this has to do with my prayer. I understand prayer as the main way of nourishing my friendship with God. According to Aquinas, charity is a

kind of friendship with God. This friendship will not be authentic unless I do what pleases the friend. God must be the centre of my life. As long as I indulged in an obsessive friendship, God was not at the centre, rather one of his creatures was. I couldn't be God's true friend if I loved someone else more than God.

When I decided never again to indulge in such a friendship, I was giving God first place in my life. This made my prayer genuine. Prayer and life were in harmony.

One might wonder why I use the term 'friendship with God' to describe the purpose of my life. The reason for using this terminology is that the terms 'charity' and 'love of God' are open to much misunderstanding. When we use these words we tend to forget God's role and think only of charity and love as virtues that we ourselves practise. The term 'friendship' suggests two people, God and myself. When I perform an act of charity, it is a response to God's grace and love moving me from within. Two friends who love one another are involved, God and I. God loves me first, and I love him in return. Aquinas defines charity as a kind of friendship with God. This definition means a great deal to me.

Another great moral problem that I didn't recognise clearly for much of my life was the 'will to power'. I had a desire to dominate those around me and surpass them. At home I had three brothers older than myself. If I fought with them, they always beat me and dominated me. Secretly I probably wanted to surpass them, but they were too strong physically for me. When I went to school at five I beat up the little kids weaker than myself – I was a bully. However, I was careful to avoid rows with bigger boys. But I dominated the weaker ones and they were afraid of me.

I always wanted to be Number One in class and sport. Unfortunately for myself I was often Number One in class and a few times in games. This only fed into my disorderly ambitions. I didn't see much harm in this desire. But, with hindsight, I can see that I was as proud as the devil. Associated with my disorderly ambition was vanity and envy of those who surpassed me.

I now realise that these disorderly desires for greatness were generated in me by my family and the local culture at a very young age when I didn't realise that I was being programmed in an unchristian manner. As a child and a young boy, I accepted without question the values, good and bad, of my milieu.

I also realise now that there is a good and a bad ambition. Ambition can be according to God's will or opposed to it. It took me many years to realise that my ambitions were disorderly and that I was bound to regulate them according to right reason.

Here again there is a link with prayer. In prayer we foster friendship with God. I cannot be God's friend unless I do what pleases him. Hence, I must control desires that are contrary to his will. Disorderly ambitions are obviously contrary to his will.

SEXUALITY

As I said already, I was very naive in regard to sexuality. I was about fifteen years old before I fully realised how babies came into existence. It was a huge shock for

me to realise that they were generated and born like animals. Being brought up on a farm I had often witnessed the birth of young calves. I know, of course, that human generation far transcends that of animals, in that humans are expected to act in a free responsible manner. Nevertheless, it took me a long time to come to terms with it.

Furthermore, I had been practising masturbation for a long time. I never knew that it was considered sinful by the Church. I enjoyed the pleasure that it gave me. Finally, I woke up to the Church's teaching. I was shocked when I realised that I had been sinning for years. I decided immediately that it must stop.

From that point onward I think that my will was fairly consistently oriented to remaining chaste. However, I experienced fifty years of struggle between the spirit and the flesh. When I was in my mid-seventies, the sexual drive decreased greatly and ceased to become a problem in my life.

There were many times in my life when I wasn't certain whether or not I yielded to obsessive compulsive sexual drives. God's love and grace seems to have preserved me with the fine point of my will from deliberately consenting to sin. The flesh was often in total revolt as vivid images flashed through the imagination; yet the will struggled not to consent. Surely, despite my insanity, God was protecting me. May he be praised!

One might imagine that one would be safe from such temptations within a monastery. Indeed being in a monastery seems to set the stage for the very worst fantasies and temptations. Solitude can invite sexual temptations of the worst kind. Probably, much depends on one's temperament and one's physical constitution.

Therese of Lisieux never experienced serious sexual temptations. I have met people whose temptations were wholly mental. In their case there was no bodily arousal.

In my own case I had to struggle desperately to preserve chastity of mind and body, especially up to the age of about seventy-five. When I took a vow of chastity at the age of twenty-two I didn't really understand what I was doing. But all has worked out well in the end. Thanks be to God!

I think that my main motive for resisting unchaste temptations was in order to do God's will and thereby please God. Resisting temptation is one of the ways in which I was led by God to practise charity.

SECONDARY SCHOOL

In September 1943 my mother sent me to the secondary school in Mt Melleray. I was destined to remain there until I entered the monastery in 1950 at the age of 20. The school was run by the Cistercian monks. As well as being a secondary school, it was a minor seminary. The whole school catered for about 160 students. About thirty of these were studying for the priesthood. Some of the latter were late vocations who had first of all to study Latin, which was required by priests before Vatican II. The boys used to call these older students the 'ancients', or the 'philosophers' if they had already started

philosophy. They are worthy of mention because they helped to set a good example for the rest of the school who were predominantly young teenagers.

Going to boarding school where I lived with 160 other boys was a new experience for me. All the boys were believing Catholics, coming mainly from the South of Ireland. Some were city boys; many were country boys like me. I gradually found my niche in the school.

Probably the three main activities in the school were study, religion and sport. This would have been true of any Catholic boarding school in 1943. Here my main concern is growth in prayer and Christianity.

All the students had to rise about 6.30am. I remember that there was a certain rivalry about arriving first in the church. There was one boy who usually got there ahead of me. I was often second. I can now see that I was acting from very imperfect motives. Nevertheless, it helped me to form a habit of rising immediately the bell goes. Thank God, I still roll out of bed immediately the alarm clock rings. I think that it is a very useful discipline in the spiritual life. It is one of the practices that I always recommend to guests who are keen to grow in holiness.

Immediately after rising we were obliged to assist at mass and morning prayer. All attended; there were no exceptions. We were not free to absent ourselves. Daily prayer was imposed by the rule and the authorities. Again at night all were obliged to assist at the rosary and night prayers. We students accepted this as part of life in a Catholic boarding school. The students had no option; they were simply herded into the prescribed religious exercises, whether they liked it or not. Once a week, the spiritual director gave a spiritual talk of about ten minutes or quarter of an hour.

We had two silent retreats of three full days every year. These days were totally devoted to prayer and lectures from the director of the retreat. Redemptorists, Jesuits and others were brought in for the occasion. I remember being deeply impressed as a boy by these retreats. We teenagers of the 1940s were probably much more impressionable than our modern counterparts who would be much harder to convert than we were, because they have experienced so many diverse sensations by the time they go to secondary school.

Once a month, the spiritual director put on a Holy Hour for all the students. All of us were obliged to participate in all these religious exercises.

The students had no contact with the outside world except that they listened to the news on the radio once a day. No newspapers were allowed.

Hurling and football were the main sports, and they occupied a big place in the lives of the students. However, all the sport was kept within the school and we never competed with other schools. Perhaps this was to keep us from getting over involved in sport, and thereby taking us away from study and religion. Other Irish schools at the time used to compete in the games just mentioned.

I draw attention especially to the daily mass and rosary and the bi-annual retreats because they made a big contribution to my growth in prayer and spirituality. I probably

wasn't aware of it at the time, but with hindsight I thank God for going through a secondary school where prayer was highly esteemed and given a prominent place. It was probably also to my advantage that we were obliged to be present at religious exercises. We were too young and immature to give a prominent role to God in our lives if external pressures did not force us to conform. This raises the question: at what age is a person mature enough to exercise responsible liberty? Many adults are able to be responsible when they are given liberty. Very few teenagers would be able to resist peer pressure and consistently choose what is morally right. They need to be motivated in every way possible to choose good and reject evil. Hence a good case can be made for pressurising them to attend religious exercises.

I finished secondary school in 1948 and I had to make a decision as to what to do with my life. The question for me was not regarding the priesthood, because I had always wanted to be a priest without telling anyone about it. But I had to make a decision as to what kind of priest I would become. Eventually, I decided to apply to the Columbans at Dalgan Park near Dublin. They did not accept me, probably because there was T.B in my family. They did not say why they rejected my application. I myself think that it might have been for the reason just given.

So I wrote to Mt Melleray and asked them to enrol me in the minor seminary, for two years' philosophy. This would give me time to look at other options.

In September 1948 I commenced studies for the priesthood. I was now a 'philosopher'. This was a new stage in my life. I was 18 years old when I commenced studies for the priesthood. I was now surrounded by new classmates. All of them desired to be holy priests. This also became my ambition. We supported each other on the journey. The spiritual director gave us an extra conference every week, in addition to the one given to the general student body. We were encouraged to do spiritual reading and we were introduced to mental prayer. I was taught that mental prayer was essential for growth in holiness. Everyone believed this sixty years ago. Spiritual reading or *lectio divina* was considered as something different from mental prayer. We usually prepared for mental prayer by reading a section from the gospel or a spiritual book. We would then put the spiritual book aside and ponder over what we had read. Both exercises were very highly valued as means to holiness, and they were nearly always viewed as distinct exercises. I am convinced that it is helpful to keep them separate.

ENTRY INTO THE MONASTERY – 1950

When I had completed my two years' philosophy, I was accepted into the monastery in 1950. There were seventeen choir novices when I entered. I think that it is accurate to say that all the novices desired to become saints. This, of course, affected me and I quickly set myself the highest ideals. My desire was probably selfish in that I wanted to become a saint for my own glory, rather than to please God. In time the desire for holiness seems to have faded away and was replaced by the desire to please God and to do his will.

This desire has been my underlying motivation for most of my monastic life. Unfortunately, I sometimes operate from selfish motives. As I mentioned already, I consider this desire to do God's will the greatest grace that has been granted me. One

might ask, what does it mean to do God's will? How do we know his will? I have found Francis de Sales very helpful in answering this question. Basically he says that in each set of circumstances we should ask ourselves what will please God most in this situation? Then make a choice, after making a due effort to discover what is best, and implement your choice. This, he says, is God's will. He assumes that we are sincere, not acting from selfish motives and that we make a morally good choice.

I have always been grateful for my novice master, Fr. Hugh. He was enthusiastic for holiness and contemplation. He only had experience of what I call 'active contemplation'. He was a prayerful, committed monk and a great admirer of St Bernard, who belongs very much to the cataphatic school of spirituality. Above all he gave us a class every week on mental prayer. His enthusiasm for prayer inevitably rubbed off on the novices. Under his influence I developed a strong desire to grow in prayer and arrive at contemplation. I now realise how little both he and I knew about contemplation. Hugh was wholly cataphatic in his spirituality, as were all the Cistercian Fathers. Indeed I never met anyone in Mt Melleray who travelled the journey into darkness that was to be my lot in life. There were probably many in a community of 140 whose prayer life was similar to mine, but I never met them. Indeed I only discussed my prayer with a few in the community during my sixteen years in the monastery. In addition Mt Melleray was a silent community. I never spoke even once to more than half of the community during my sixteen years there.

It was taken for granted in the community that very few travelled the stages in prayer described by John of the Cross. Probably this assumption was quite wrong. If one can judge from the letters of Abbot Chapman, de Caussade and Thomas Green's books, many people gradually grow out of discursive meditation and develop a simple type of prayer in which there is very little discourse. At this stage they are called to remain lovingly and simply in God's presence. They call this type of prayer 'contemplation.' It can be more or less dark or arid. There are many degrees of darkness and aridity. I tend to think that, if people persevere in mental prayer, it will in time always become more simple. I would imagine that one who practises *lectio divina* in the strict sense will also in time be drawn to simplicity and perhaps led into darkness. Unfortunately, there is no teaching, that I know of, as to what one should do if their *lectio* becomes an arid desert.

If this happens, it could well be a sign that God is leading the reader beyond images, concepts and feelings into a simpler relationship with himself. If this is so, the reader will have to learn how to relate to the Lord in simplicity in much the same way as one who is led beyond discursive meditation. Furthermore, there is a danger that if *lectio divina* becomes arid, the reader will turn his *lectio* into an intellectual exercise since it is not feeding him affectively. If he does this, his *lectio* is no longer *lectio* in the strict sense, nor is it prayer.

Simple prayer can sound beautiful when writing about it, but when I entered into this kind of prayer rather rapidly in 1953 I had to abandon discursive meditation and try to stay simply in God's presence. But this was most difficult and accompanied by innumerable distractions. As I said before, I lost all feeling in prayer. I was mainly conscious of dropping distractions all the time. Occasionally, I made a dry act of love but it meant nothing to me. Because there was no feeling of love I tended to doubt its existence.

Fr. Hugh, my confessor, was very sympathetic but he had no experience of anyone who was travelling the same road as I was being led. He was an excellent active contemplative and this is the kind of contemplation experienced by the vast majority of people. In my case, my inability to discursively meditate and to use my imagination and feelings extended not only to mental prayer, but also in some measure to *lectio divina* and to the chanting of the Divine Office. I simply struggled along for years in the dark and nothing ever seemed to happen. With hindsight I can see that God was teaching me in the dark because I always wanted to do his will.

In those days we were obliged to go to confession every week. I usually went along in routine fashion, but nothing ever seemed to happen. However, I went along as usual on one particular occasion, expecting the usual routine advice. I wasn't paying a lot of attention but, among other things, Hugh assured me that God loved me. His remark penetrated straight to my heart, so much so that I have never since doubted God's love for me. It was a great grace in the midst of years of darkness. I often recall it and give thanks to God for it. It happened only once and the darkness returned immediately as before. But the effect of the grace was lasting.

After sixty-three years of experience of both, this is my thinking on the matter. I would define spiritual reading or *lectio divina* as follows. Reading deserves to be called 'spiritual' when it is undertaken solely to nourish charity or friendship with God. We should not call it *lectio* or 'spiritual reading' if it is not oriented to affective or effective love of God. It must motivate us to prayer and virtue. If it consists mainly of reading and reflection that moves us to practise virtue and prayer, then it is almost identical with discursive meditation as practised by beginners.

However, in practice, reading, especially if we do it rapidly, can easily become a purely intellectual exercise divorced, in varying degrees, from charity. It can become a quest for knowledge, without necessarily leading us to love. It can become an exercise in curiosity or a search for knowledge that has no relation to charity. Or our reading might only be very remotely connected with affective and effective love. Studying philosophy is not spiritual reading, even though it is remotely connected with love and divine friendship.

In modern times there is sometimes a tendency to identify *lectio divina* and prayer. I asked a seminarian recently: 'Do you have time set aside for mental prayer in the seminary?' 'No,' he said 'we are encouraged to do *lectio divina*.' I think that it is unwise to identify the two. I find that when I do *lectio* I spend a lot of time studying the text, trying to get clearly the author's meaning. My intellect is mainly occupied, whereas prayer is above an affective exercise of the will. Feeling will not always be present. Prayer is above all a relationship with God. It is not about examining the meaning of what we read. I think that it does not help to identify *lectio* with contemplation. '*Lectio*' is one of the buzz words in modern spirituality. We need to evaluate the quality of our *lectio*. Its value depends on the extent to which it helps us to love God more. Separated from love it is of little value.

ROME: 1961–1962

About 1958 Pius XI issued an instruction that required that all teachers of philosophy and theology in seminaries and religious institutes should have degrees so as to be qualified to teach. In practice this meant for us that teachers within the monastery had to be sent to the Roman universities to study. This was revolutionary for Mt Melleray and most other monasteries. Abbot Finbarr asked me to go to Rome to get the necessary qualifications in philosophy with a view to teaching in the monastery on my return. I studied philosophy at the Angelicum in Rome from 1961 to 1962.

This time out of the monastery proved to be a challenge and an entirely new experience. I had had an extremely sheltered life from my birth in 1930. In Mt Melleray I was almost completely enclosed for eleven years prior to 1961. I had lived an unchanging routine of prayer, work, study and reading during these years. In Rome I was exposed to a whole group of young monks from all over the world, and also to many other influences. They too had also been uprooted from their monasteries. This was the first time in my life that I was forced by circumstances to use my freedom responsibly.

In Rome we didn't follow the rules and structures of an organised monastery. There were ninety-four of us living at the Generalate. Quite a number of the monks were not able to use their freedom in a responsible manner. Contact with so many diverse monks alerted me for the first time to the fact that not every monastery was organised like Mt Melleray. The monks that I lived with in Rome held widely divergent views about Cistercian life. They challenged many of my assumptions. Furthermore, we had permission to talk, something that was unheard of in Mt Melleray.

Attending lectures at the universities meant that we had to travel into the city every day. Back at the Generalate much time was spent in study. Between talk, study, travel and lectures we had little time or energy to devote ourselves to contemplation. It was not easy to pursue a contemplative path while studying for a degree. Much depended on one's own sense of responsibility, if one was to preserve some semblance of the monastic vocation. I remember being surprised at how irregular many of the students were at the choral office. In Mt Melleray attendance at the Office was almost 100%. I had assumed that all other monasteries resembled my own.

Some of the students were enraptured by the artistic masterpieces in the great Roman basilicas. I was humiliated because I was insensitive to the beauty of art. It made very little impression on me. I woke up to the fact that in this area I had very little natural talent. I got very little enjoyment out of travelling around the big Roman churches. I was not able to hold a conversation with other students who delighted in artistic beauty.

After about nine months, I secured my degree and returned to Mt Melleray. It took me some time to re-adjust and get back into the rhythm of regular life in an organised monastery. The monks were watching me after my return. One of them remarked to me. 'You are not as narrow as you used to be; you have broadened out; be careful not to get too broad.'

It took me some time to assimilate the whole experience. It was the first time in my life that I had to face the challenge of living as a monk and a contemplative in a completely new environment. The challenge boiled down to the responsible

contemplative use of liberty. This was the main challenge that I would have to face after Vatican II, and indeed it is still my main challenge in the year 2011. Since many of the old structures that supported my contemplative life have disappeared, how do I live a life wholly oriented to contemplation in this new situation? How to use freedom responsibly is an ongoing challenge for all religious, monks and Christians.

During my time in Rome, I did a half hour of dry arid prayer every day. Fr Basil Morrison, the Father Master, considered that this was a great achievement in the circumstances. I always considered time spent in mental prayer as an essential practice of each day. I scarcely ever omitted it over the years even when I was out of the monastery. With God's help I have maintained this practice since 1948. Reducing it to half an hour in Rome was cutting it down to a minimum. In those days it was inconceivable that any religious would omit their daily mental prayer.

During my first year in the monastery, I rose at 3.00am instead of 2.00am because I was not yet twenty-one years old. But I was obliged to make up later in the day the mental prayer that I had missed. In those days mental prayer for the community was at 2.30am. There was also a quarter hour prescribed in the evening and a quarter hour after mass and communion. I mention this to highlight once again the importance attached by everyone to mental prayer.

VATICAN II: 1962–1965

I was 32 years old when the Council was convened. It was unquestionably the most significant event for the Church and all its members in recent centuries. It turned the Catholic Church upside down. In 2011 we are still trying to come to grips with the forces released during the Council. At the first session of the Council Pope John XXIII rose from his seat and went over in the presence of the assembled bishops and opened the window. As he did so, he explained his symbolic act. He wanted to let some fresh air into the Church. Such a rush of fresh air came in that it became an uncontrollable storm in the 1970s. All Catholics would be deeply affected in the years ahead, but at the opening of Vatican II no one foresaw all the confusion that was destined to engulf the Church in the years after the Council.

What concerns me here is the effect that it had on the Cistercian Order, and on me in particular. What remained constant with me, both before and after the Council, was the unchanging desire to discover God's will in my life and implement it in action.

One of the chief ways of discovering God's will before the Council was obedience to rules and authority. 'He who hears you hears me.' However, at the General Chapter in 1969 all the books of rules were discarded. And for the next twenty years we had no rules, only general guidelines. In 1990 the New Constitutions were approved. How does one discover God's will in the absence of rules? The discarding of rules obviously left us with a lot of freedom. How were we going to use this freedom responsibly? In my opinion this is still the major challenge for everybody who desires to lead the full Christian life and the monastic life. One of my ways of meeting the challenge is to have a personal rule of life oriented to the love of God and neighbour. I hope to deal more fully with my Rule of Life later.

In order to use freedom responsibly, I must make the most of opportunities and use time in the way that will please God most. This calls for an ongoing effort to discover God's will from moment to moment. In other words I must respond to the Sacrament of the Present Moment.

Indeed the main reason for discarding our excessive regulations was to allow each monk to respond to the Spirit in his own unique way according to opportunities and personal charisms. Excessive regulation could turn human beings into robots. It could seriously undermine total human development and smother the Holy Spirit.

During the years after Vatican II, there was constant change and experimentation in the Church. Many religious and priests were unable to respond to the new situation with the result that thousands of priests, religious and nuns abandoned their vocation. There was constant change also in the wider world. The communications explosion and constant travel presented a new challenge for priests and religious. Some mature people used the new facilities and inventions to come closer to God: others, it seems, went overboard. Indeed every area of life has changed over the last fifty years.

How did the changes affect our prayer life as monks? After much experimentation, the Divine Office was reduced to about half its former length. Gabriel Sortais pointed out that the Office was reduced, not to make life easier but to give each monk the opportunity to pray in the way that the Holy Spirit was leading him. The mass also was considerably shortened. Private masses largely disappeared as the community celebrated one Eucharist for all. The priests concelebrated.

Between 1969 and 1990 they played around at the General Chapter with prescribing a fixed amount of daily mental prayer, about three quarters of an hour, I think. However, when the New Constitutions appeared in 1990, no fixed amount of time was laid down for personal prayer. The reason seems to have been that a monk should pray always; hence it is unnecessary to have a fixed amount of time. The New Constitutions mention devotion to prayer very frequently but, as I said, they prescribe no fixed amount of time for daily mental prayer. I think that most monasteries, though not all, have put aside a half hour or more for daily prayer. The general recommendations of the Constitutions are very clear. However, there is always a danger that general recommendations are not reduced to practice.

I thank God that I was given a good formation in Mt Melleray over many years on the importance of mental prayer, and that I have persevered in it faithfully, even though I have been in a dry desert most of my life. Here in Kopua Abbot Joseph was a model for the community. He spent hours daily in personal prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. But not everyone was equally committed. One man told me that he never made mental prayer. He said that he couldn't see any point in it. This man was later to abandon the monastery.

Before the Council there was a great imbalance in our prayer life. Five or six hours were set aside for common prayer. This meant that the average monk had little time or energy left for personal prayer, *lectio* and study. Even the personal prayer that we had was done in community. This prevented all creativity and spontaneity. It had to be done either kneeling or standing in the stalls. We were not allowed to sit down.

In my early years in the monastery I accepted all these restrictions as the will of God. It never occurred to me prior to 1969 that many such regulations should be changed. I presume that most of the monks thought as I did. Looking back on these days, at this point in my life I can see that those who imposed those rigid rules on the monks were acting in ignorance. Regulations are supposed to promote the common good; otherwise they should not be imposed on the community. It should be remembered that in those days most Catholics accepted without question that we should humbly obey the Church and not criticise it. 'He who hears you hears me'. However, when the Council met, many of our unquestioned assumptions and beliefs were suddenly questioned. All of us had to do some fresh thinking so as to discover what really was God's will for us, both individually and collectively.

Obedience to authority is not the only way of discovering God's will. Circumstances must also be taken into account. It should be noted also that circumstances are highly complex. Lower laws must often be put aside for the sake of higher laws. Furthermore, account must be taken of the personal conscience of each one. Over the years one of my greatest problems in community life has been to reconcile my conscience with what superiors and the community desire to do. I can remember tossing in bed all night trying to come to terms with attending the General Chapter. My conscience was worried about spending a large sum of money on the journey, plus other expenses, in a world where nearly two billion people are hungry. Abbot de Rance, as far as I know, scarcely ever attended the General Chapter. Possibly, he considered that all the other abbots were too lax to be of any help to him in his very strict lifestyle at La Trappe.

To conclude this section, I would like to say that the will of authority, coming through rules and superiors, is normally God's will, and I usually obey the rules and the wishes of superiors unless there is a sound reason for judging in a particular situation that obedience would be contrary to God's will. I believe too that I must take responsibility, both for my obedience and my failure to obey. My motive at all times must be correct, namely, that I follow the dictates of a mature conscience.

THE DIVINE OFFICE

Perhaps at this point I can share something of my experience of the Divine Office over the years. I believe that a community should pray together. Therefore, we must have a prayer form for the community. Individuals, no matter what they personally get out of it, must participate in faith in community prayer to the best of their ability. I have always believed that, as a solemnly professed monk, I should be present at the *Opus Dei* no matter what my personal difficulties with it were. I felt that I had to ignore my personal problems with the office and get on with it.

Now let us try to describe my negative experiences. The Office consists of reading and prayers. Some psalms are a mixture of both. 95% of what is read in the Office in public tends to flow off me. There is no time to digest it or ponder on it. Even if a verse makes an impression on me, this impression is obliterated by subsequent verses. I wonder how much nourishment I get from it. Some of the patristic readings were translated a century ago and the English is often very stale. My main nourishment does not come from public readings, but from personal reflection in private on the word of God and, of course, God's grace. Even the Scripture readings are often nullified by

various factors, such as noisy infants, coughing, a superabundance of points in a single reading or by a certain irrelevance of much of what is read. It might help if good Scripture readings were read several times a year, and many of the present readings cut out. It usually takes about two or three minutes to read the gospel at mass, but it takes a lifetime to personalise the message of a single gospel and put it into practice.

Nevertheless, constant exposure day after day to God's word purifies the mind and the heart, provided we exercise discipline in our exposure to secular values. If we scatter too much bad seed in the garden of our heart, the weeds will grow up and choke the word.

The psalms are quite a mixture of prayer, instruction and dialogue. Sometimes we address God directly as we would speak to a person. At other times we are talking about God. Sometimes we are addressing a third person, whoever that might be. At other times the psalmist is giving moral instruction; for example, praising the law as in psalm 119. During psalmody I have always found it almost impossible to consistently identify in my heart with what my lips are uttering. The psalmist is often worked up about events that occurred 3000 years ago. The psalms are the word of God and they should be studied, but I have always found it difficult to pray them, especially the way we do it.

Doubtless, I could write commentaries on them, and certain verses are suitable as forms of prayer, but the compatible verses are often nullified by the subsequent verses. There is no scope for personal creativity in my prayer. Everything is very formal. Yet this is part of community life, a part of living together, a dimension of prayer and of God's will for me and of life in community.

There are elements in the Office with which I can more readily identify. The hymns are usually helpful and the short readings from Scripture at the little hours are often very inspiring. I would like sometimes to go away and write a commentary on some of these readings. Unfortunately, circumstances never allow me to do this. I simply have to forget my inspirations and carry on with the work on hand. I often think that I am like a robot at the Office or a tape recorder that faithfully plays hymns and psalms when we press the correct button.

Despite all these negative criticisms I realise that we go to the Office in order to give glory to God. If God is honoured by my very poor efforts, it doesn't matter if I get nothing out of the Office. We perform the Office to please God, not to please ourselves. In assisting at the Office I carry out the role assigned to me by the Church and hopefully draw down God's blessings on the world by my stumbling performance.

Furthermore, I am a member of a community. This requires that I participate as best I can in community prayer. Jesus assures us that, where two or three are gathered together in his name, he is there in the midst of them. Even though I seldom feel God's presence at the Office, my faith assures me that he is in our midst. Fundamentally, all prayer is a question of faith in action. In prayer God is active and I am active. Even in the most unsatisfactory prayer, if I do my best, I am cooperating with the Spirit in rendering God all honour and glory. Once again John of the Cross is very helpful when he assures us that God is often most present when he seems most absent.

I must say that back in the 50s and 60s when I first entered into complete darkness and my imagination and feelings ceased to function in prayer, the Divine Office was a complete torture, causing headaches that endured more or less for many years. Over sixty years I have learned to recite it just to please God, without paying much attention to the meaning of each verse. I am busy articulating the words and this keeps me occupied and prevents my imagination from wandering too much. I no longer get headaches. I believe that meditation has cured these. Among other things meditation is an antidote to stress. I will say more about this later.

I have assisted in choir regularly for over sixty years basically because I consider that it is God's will for me. During those years I have tried to make a prayer out of the Office. Most of the time I have found it very difficult to identify with what my lips are uttering. Hopefully, I honour God by saying the words, by my desire to do his will, by dropping distractions and by not looking around too much. I could do all this if I recited the psalms in Hebrew, a language I do not understand. I read somewhere that Francis de Sales obliged the nuns to chant the Office in Latin even though none of them understood Latin. For years trying to identify with all the words and images gave me headaches. In my early years in the monastery we had twice as much psalmody as we have today. I have often wondered over the years if I ever pray the Office. I always go to it with a pure intention and there is very little complacency about my performance. Hopefully these dispositions constitute some kind of prayer.

THE EUCHARIST

What has been my experience at the Eucharist over the years? We all know that the Eucharist is of its nature a community service. All of us present unite with Jesus in the Spirit to give the Father all honour and glory. How well can I tune into this wonderful reality? I think that I can distinguish three different experiences as I celebrate the Eucharist.

1. Assisting at the Eucharist as Part of the Community

In this case I am not the principal celebrant and I have little active participation in the prayers. To a large extent I am fairly passive, observing what is going on. Even as a concelebrant I do not experience the same devotion as I would at a private mass. Merely observing and listening to the prayers does not affect me in the same way as when I actively participate in them. I can understand perfectly why some priest monks prefer to say a private mass in preference to concelebration. This is allowed but, even though it may nourish one's devotion, it seems less in accord with the nature of the mass as a community celebration. I must say that, on the odd occasion when I say a private mass, I find it a very devotional experience.

The prayers of the mass are not like the psalms. I can identify with them and make a prayer out of them. As I said above, I find it very difficult to identify with most of the psalms. Trying to read mystical meanings into them, as the Church Fathers did, I experience as unreal and unsatisfactory.

2. Presiding at the Community Eucharist

Obviously it is a privilege and an important responsibility to preside at the Eucharist. It is something we do to give God honour and glory. However, my experience of God as I stand facing many people is not always very devotional. I am tempted to wonder what all these people are thinking of me. Am I making a good impression? Am I preaching myself or Christ? Furthermore, I am in the limelight. I am the most important person at the celebration. Does this turn my head? Do I often yield to vanity? It is not so easy to be conscious of the Lord when I am in the limelight, aware that all eyes are fixed on me. In addition, facing my own community renders me more conscious that all eyes are on me. Formerly, when I had my back to the congregation, it was easier to focus on God.

When I am chief celebrant I have to deal with a different set of experiences and temptations than when I am in the middle of a crowd where no one notices me. I often wonder whether I am doing everything to please God or simply in order to impress those present by my performance and my sermon. Am I seeking God's glory or my own?

3: Celebrating the Eucharist Alone

I find celebrating alone, or with only a few present, the most devotional type of Eucharist. I very seldom celebrate alone. When there are only a few present, I can identify with the prayers more easily than when a large group is watching me. For some years past I celebrate with the community, and sometimes I am principal celebrant, but in addition to this I also celebrate mass at 11.00am. Those present at this later mass usually vary from one to ten or more. I experience greater devotion at this mass than at the main mass. There are two reasons why this is so. Firstly, there is the small number of participants. Secondly, my fellow monks are usually not present. I feel inhibited about giving free rein to my devotion when my brothers are present since they know all my sins sometimes better than I do. I can probably fool strangers to some extent but not those who rub shoulders with me every day.

Having described the three different types of experience, it is necessary to remind myself that the Eucharist is a Mystery of Faith. My personal experience is of no importance. What really matters before God is that in faith I have a constant unwavering will to do the best I can despite distractions and temptations. Francis de Sales says in speaking of prayer: 'I prefer dry fruit.' When we have to eat dry unappetising fruit during our prayer, there is probably less egoism and more unselfish love of God. I am spiritually very immature and like a child if I always want to get lollies from the Lord.

THE CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

In 1969 Dom Columban Hawkins, the retired abbot of Guadalupe in the U.S.A., visited Kopua. He was on a mission to Australia and visited New Zealand on the way. He wished, he said, 'to bring the Holy Spirit to this part of the world'. In the U.S.A. he had been baptised in the Holy Spirit, and he wished to propagate the charismatic renewal in New Zealand and especially in Australia. He was filled with enthusiasm as he told us all about the new movement in the church in the U.S.A. Indeed it was only two years earlier that the renewal had started in the Catholic Church in the U.S.A. The other Christian Churches had experienced it much earlier. Dom Columban's visit, plus

the book, 'The Cross and the Switchblade', roused my interest and that of others in the community in the new movement of the Spirit among Catholics.

Due to the above influences, with the abbot's approval I went to Palmerston North to be prayed over for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. When nothing seemed to happen as a result of their prayers, one good lady thought that there must be a devil in me blocking the Holy Spirit. She cried out with a loud voice: 'I command you, Satan, to leave this man.' I experienced nothing before or after. I didn't feel that the devil had left me or that the Spirit had come. Possibly both happened, who knows?

Other consequences of my interest in the renewal were that we started a small prayer group at Kopua. Initially, there were only four or five of us in the group. But gradually it grew. Neighbours, Catholic and non-Catholic, began to come. Guests also sometimes participated. The group kept going and had weekly meetings for nearly twenty years. Several claimed that they were baptised in the Holy Spirit. We used to sing and pray in tongues. Initially, the group was full of life but, with the passage of time, the enthusiasm waned and people began to drop out one after another. Eventually, in 1989 only two of us were left, Barry Bayliss and me. We decided to close down since both of us had many other ways of nourishing our life of faith. It is worth noting that Abbot Joseph often came to the meetings. He did not go overboard with enthusiasm, but he was a quiet and sober presence in the group.

It should be remembered that very many Catholics were involved in the renewal in the 1970s. There were huge annual gatherings at Massey University, which I attended on a number of occasions. Nine hundred people used to gather in Auckland Cathedral for a weekly meeting. Over the years innumerable people drifted away from the movement. In 2011 there are only a few small groups of Catholic Charismatics left in the whole country. They meet every one or two months.

What did I learn from the charismatic renewal? The renewal focused mainly on prayer. Charismatics have a new way of praying together where there is room for creativity and spontaneity. Above all, they will pray for a member of the group who has a problem. An example will clarify what I mean. An Anglican minister told me that he used to attend two monthly meetings in Hastings. One was a meeting of ministers and priests from the mainline churches. Those present would sit around, smoking and drinking beer, as they discussed their problems. The other meeting was a gathering of Pentecostal pastors. The pastors spent most of their time praying for the various members who shared their problems. This reminds me that when St John of the Cross had a problem, he used to pray about it. Surely, we Catholics can learn from these examples that God and prayer must be our chief resources in problem solving.

I also learned from the Charismatics to pray spontaneously and break my dependence on formal prayers. The latter easily became routine. Furthermore, the charismatic prayer groups convinced me that there is special efficacy in group prayer. There is no doubt that God often answers the prayers of groups. Again I learned that certain conditions, if met, will often secure an answer to our prayer. Non-Catholic Christians can teach us many things that I have not encountered in our Catholic sources about the prayer of petition.

Why did the Charismatic Renewal fizzle out?

One could give a variety of reasons. Many would have left it for good reasons. Others probably left for the wrong reasons.

The main reason seems to have been lack of structure. If a group is to endure, its purpose must be clear; members must be formed so as to achieve the purpose of the group. Structures must be put in place to ensure perseverance; for example, an initial promise to stay with the group for a certain length of time, then a year's trial. Then a formal public promise could be imposed on members for three years. None of these structures were in place to preserve the various prayer groups. Hence, when participants got bored or tired, they just acted in the 'flesh', as Paul would say, and stopped coming. There was little emphasis on how to exercise tough love and take up one's cross daily and follow Jesus. Many were over dependent on their feelings and, when these dried up, they reckoned that the Spirit had left them.

Even though I am no longer part of a prayer group, I still believe that a prayer group, with a little bit of structure, could be a powerful help for growth in holiness, especially for lay people who often try to live the Christian life with very little support.

'BUSY-NESS' IN MY LIFE

With hindsight I can now see that I made a number of mistakes on my journey of prayer. I didn't fully realise my mistakes when I was making them. If I was convinced then of what I have since discovered, I would have organised my life differently. I certainly would have made a better effort to integrate the teaching of John of the Cross with the teaching of John Main and Thomas Keating. Hopefully I was acting in good faith when I made the mistake just mentioned.

I always desired to grow in charity and to live my life as fully as I could. However, I suffered from headaches for about fifty years. These lasted from 1953, when I strained myself, until about the year 2000. Then I started meditating in a regular way, morning and evening, according to John Main's method. That largely cured the headaches. From then on I had extra energy for prayer, *lectio*, study and writing. For most of my life, too much active prayer, such as the Office, mass, rosary etc. brought on headaches. I think that I was exercising my left brain too much. However, Main's form of meditation, when done regularly, gave the left brain a rest and activated the right brain. While Main's meditation was demanding, it was also relaxing and more or less a remedy for the weakness of the left brain and the headaches. I now have more energy for other monastic exercises.

I concluded from my experience that for good bodily, mental and spiritual health I needed a correct rhythm of active and passive prayer. I am still trying to discover the best rhythm. At present I do four half hours meditation daily and it seems to be going well. I have only been doing this for the past six months. I no longer say the mantra from beginning to end. I use it only to the extent that it is helpful in attaining complete inner silence. As far as I can judge, I am in tune with what is best for me at this point in my journey.

As I said, for most of my life I had difficulty with active prayer, reading and study. They tended to bring on headaches. Hence I tended to escape into excessive work. This was more relaxing than *lectio*, study and headaches. During the years 1967 until 1998, when I retired from the abbot's job, I was almost always overactive, I couldn't, or perhaps I didn't want to see, that any other course was open to me. I used to envy people who could sit for hours poring over books. Besides, I was usually running several jobs at the same time. During most of that time I worked at the dairy for seven days a week. The work was very time consuming and had to be done every day for seven days a week, except for a few months during the winter. However, it kept me busy and gave some measure of satisfaction.

On the occasions when the dairy work was reduced, from May to July every year, I didn't find it easy to use my time well since mental work gave me headaches. The dairy was unquestionably the most demanding work that I had. I worked at the dairy for about thirty years. I was also bursar for about seventeen years, after which I was abbot for nearly nine years. Another job that demanded a lot of time and attention for many years was teaching philosophy and theology. Sometimes also I had to give talks on the spiritual life to guests and others.

With all these activities and the preoccupations associated with them, there was little time or energy for a careful study of the writings of Main and Keating that would have motivated me to practise meditation in a regular way. I continued to practise meditation of some sort, either one or two hours daily, mostly two hours. But there was not a proper rhythm between active and passive prayer. I certainly needed this balance; perhaps others do not need it. I had to learn from my mistakes that, for sound health, I needed a proper balance of active and passive prayer.

Furthermore, when I was engaged in all these activities I was under the illusion that I was making a good contribution to the community. I probably could have done the abbot's job better if I had been less involved in other work, consulted the community and outsiders more, and had the leisure to listen to the deep desires of my fellow monks. I also needed a course in leadership, which I couldn't attend because I had to milk the cows! At the time, however, there didn't seem to be anyone who was willing to do the cows.

1998–2011

In 1998 I retired from the abbot's job. I informed the community that I was not available for re-election. My motives for refusing to continue in the job were mixed. Firstly, my conscience would not allow me to undertake a big building project for some of the reasons mentioned above. The Abbot General and some of the community considered that a new permanent monastery was needed. My conscience could not align itself with this thinking. Secondly, I had been in office for about nine years and I was not very successful as a leader. Possibly, if I had more leadership training and had less work to do, I could have done better. During my time as abbot, I often worked five hours a day for seven days a week on the dairy.

The system needed to be changed, but I was more of a maintenance superior than a visionary who would change the whole pattern of our monastic work. I was always very interested in the spiritual life, but I tended to neglect the nuts and bolts of

the monastery. Furthermore, I was over attached to manual work, while reading and study gave me headaches. If I had given myself in a regular way to meditation in those days, I might have had the freedom and integration needed to be a better superior and monk. But I hadn't yet discovered and been convinced of my need for meditation. Perhaps I should say that I failed to practise it in a disciplined way, not only because I was busy, but still more because I argued that other types of prayer were just as good. I think that I did between one and two hours mental prayer daily during my time as abbot, but there was not the appropriate rhythm between active and passive prayer that I needed at that time, even after I retired.

Retiring from the abbot's job and the arrival of the new abbot ushered in a whole new challenge for me. All my responsibilities suddenly disappeared. I was completely out of work. I was no longer abbot, no longer bursar, no longer in charge of the dairy, etc. The big question was: what do I do with my life? I still had good health, apart from my proneness to headaches when I gave myself excessively to vocal prayer and reading. It seemed to me that I needed manual labour so as to avoid idleness and headaches. I stayed on in the dairy and used to milk once a day from 1998 to 2000, helping the share-milker. In addition to this, I spent a lot of time grubbing thistles and spraying blackberry on the farm. The share-milker was quite happy for me to do this. Indeed this was my main work for the next ten years. I gave up milking cows about the year 2000 when Malcolm became our new share-milker. But trying to eliminate all the weeds would continue for many years.

As I said previously I had a lot of time on my hands when all my jobs disappeared. The question naturally arose, what am I going to do with my life? During all my years at Kopua, about 30 years before 1998, I had been very active although I always spent one or two hours in prayer. I did little study, reading and writing. Now in 1998, and still more after 2000, I had no jobs. This was especially true when I was no longer involved with the cows. I had difficulty initially in finding my feet in the new situation. How was I to spend my time? How was I to avoid idleness?

Luckily God was good. He had always given me a desire to search for his will and implement it at all times. This desire had been with me for more than fifty years. But what was his will for me in the new situation? I did a lot of thinking and pondering on this question.

I remember that, when I was seventy years old in the year 2000, I wrote down a vision for the years that remained to me. I didn't type it since I had not yet been initiated into the use of the computer.

In trying to work out an appropriate vision for myself that would give me a worthwhile goal towards which I could direct my energies, I first of all decided to be as good a monk as I could. But then I was faced with the question, what is a monk? Is he just one who keeps the rules of the Cistercian Order? I had done that all my life and I was still doing it. Surely being a monk meant more than the mere observance of rules.

Next I thought that I would orient my whole life to contemplation. But this goal was not very clear either. What is contemplation? I knew what Aquinas and others taught about it. I was also in touch with our Constitutions and their teaching. But they contained nothing about passive prayer, and God had led me into passive prayer away

back in 1952 and my prayer was still largely passive. Over fifty years, the Divine Office was a duty that I fulfilled so as to please God, but it never fed me spiritually. I could only pray it by reason of the ongoing intention to please God. The emphasis of the Constitutions on active contemplation was discouraging. At this stage in my life, after fifty years in the desert I was able to do a limited amount of active contemplation. However, I was not satisfied with making contemplation the goal of my life, very largely because contemplation without charity is useless. So contemplation was rejected as the purpose of my life.

I also did some study and thinking on the idea that the purpose of the monastic life is purity of heart. It was not too clear to me what is meant by 'purity of heart'. Does it mean that my motives are always right? Does it mean getting rid of selfishness? Must my life be completely centred on God? Then 'purity of heart' can seem a negative concept. Does it mean being without sin? I needed a more positive orientation. It is not sufficient to be without sin. I must also be oriented in mind and heart to God.

Eventually I found the goal I was seeking. I latched on to the words of Jesus. 'You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. And you shall love your neighbour as yourself (Mk.12, 30).' This gave me the goal for which I was searching. There and then in the year 2000 I decided to devote the rest of my life to realising this vision. Writing now in the year 2011, I think that I can say that I have laboured to pursue this goal for the last eleven years. Doubtless I have fallen short of achieving it, but with God's grace I struggle on.

The more I studied and meditated on the love of God, the more light I got. Vatican II was very helpful, when I found in the Document on the Church (Prol.N.40) the teaching that the Risen Christ gives the Holy Spirit to everyone to lead them from within to love God with their whole heart etc. Hence I could conclude that I and everyone else had the Holy Spirit to empower us on this journey to perfect love. Therefore, I and everyone else should tune in with the Holy Spirit and commit ourselves to this journey. We had no option except to obey God. It logically follows that everyone must commit themselves to this program.

The more I reflected on this vision, the more I realised that I must focus my attention on being a good Christian rather than being a good monk. Every Christian is called to the fullness of love. If I get this right I will be both a good Christian, a good monk and a good priest. But, if love is lacking, everything else is sounding brass and tinkling cymbals.

I often think that the various religious orders need to give more attention to being Christians who love God, than they normally do. It is too easily taken for granted that we are good Christians.

Over the years since Vatican II, there have been seminars on every aspect of the Christian life, the religious and monastic life. But there has been very little attention given to the inner life of love. Is there a danger in the modern Church that we are losing touch with the inner life? The interior dimension of the spiritual life is the same for all Christians. All Christians, including monks and religious, are called to faith, hope, love

and all the virtues. Great emphasis was laid on the inner life before Vatican II, while today it seems to be neglected.

Religious write scores of articles that promote their own particular brand of spirituality, Jesuit, Franciscan, Benedictine etc., but perhaps we overlook the Christianity that all spiritualities have in common, namely, the love of God.

Over the last eleven years I have tried to study every aspect of charity with a view to practising it as well as possible. This is my vision and this is what gives meaning to my life. Doubtless, I have fallen short of my own ideals

OVERVIEW OF MY WHOLE LIFE

It is well to remember that my will makes a choice in all prayer, in both vocal prayer and silent prayer. In vocal prayer the will directs me in the words that I choose to use: I make a choice. In silent prayer or passive prayer the will is also active. In this case I choose to be silent; I choose to exclude thought from my mind so as to achieve inner silence. I choose in large part to be mentally passive so that God can do his work in me in a hidden way. By my will I reduce my mind to silence, either by directly closing down mental activity or, more effectively, by practising John Main's and Keating's forms of meditation.

I started off with discursive meditation in 1948. In this meditation I reflected on the word of God so as to grow in affective and effective love of God. The goal of this meditation was charity. To some extent this type of discursive reflection will always be necessary so as to make morally correct practical decisions.

However, in my case in 1952 these reflections on the word became a hindrance to loving and praising God in prayer. Very rapidly discursive meditation, as a way to move me to love God, became impossible. It became a hindrance, so I had to abandon it. I could still reflect when making moral decisions, but reflection on the word was no longer helpful in motivating me to affective love.

I tried to follow the advice of John of the Cross and others and remain silently in God's presence. The most difficult disposition to achieve was inner silence. I didn't know it at the time, but I would never again return to discursive meditation. Yet I seemed to be failing utterly in being silent and loving before the Lord. There were no feelings that God was present. He seemed to be totally absent. Silence also seemed to escape me. Yet I remained faithful to the fixed times of prayer in the monastery. At that time we had about an hour of mental prayer each day.

But God must have been enlightening me in a hidden way because I always had a desire to seek out his will in my life and implement it, both within prayer and outside of prayer. Indeed this was the habitual motivation that drove me on. I was not scrupulous or afraid of hell. But why have I always wanted to do God's will? It seemed to me to be the only thing that mattered; it summed up everything. I was not interested in building up a heavenly bank account, but I wanted to please God in all my choices.

One of the big challenges in my life has always been to discover God's will so that I could implement it. In my early days, fidelity to all the rules was the main way in

which I chose to do God's will. Interior control of thoughts and desires has become second nature to me over my lifetime. This was just another way of carrying out God's will. Indeed every human choice, interior and exterior, should harmonise with God's will. As I said already, this attraction to love God by choosing his will habitually was a great grace, probably the greatest in my life. Unfortunately, I have not always been faithful to this call. How often I have acted naturally with imperfect motivation? How often has fear prevented me from speaking out when I should have done so? How often have I yielded to ambition and vanity?

From the end of 1952 up to 1978 my mental prayer was experienced mainly as a struggle with a very active mind: I think that I was under stress a lot of the time. I seemed not to be praying at all, just dropping distractions and gazing into the darkness. The Divine Office was and still is largely a meaningless quick succession of words and images that are impossible to assimilate. This has been my experience, especially with the psalms. But I continued to assist at the Office and mental prayer because I perceived them as God's will for me. There seemed to be no light at the end of the tunnel.

As mentioned earlier, during the 1970s I became involved in the charismatic renewal. This helped me for a number of years. But we only met once a week while I had to do mental prayer and chant the Office every day, indeed seven times every day.

During those years I suffered a lot from an overactive mind especially in the early morning. Critical thoughts about others constantly invaded my mind. I certainly had little inner silence that was necessary to practise the passive prayer to which I was being called. Mental prayer and the Office were one long struggle with distractions that often seemed to be compulsive. Looking back with hindsight I think that the whole rigour of the monastic life plus the darkness of my prayer was a source of stress. One of the symptoms of this stress was the compulsive distractions that I experienced habitually before 1978.

During all this time God was leading me secretly to search for his will and implement it. I was faithful to this grace most of the time, though not always. That fidelity of course was God's gift and for this I give thanks.

I came in contact with Transcendental Meditation and, by adapting its technique to my mental prayer, I succeeded in pacifying my mind to a large extent. I wasn't to be bothered again by compulsive distractions, to the same extent as before. This new type of meditation was certainly a remedy for stress and it improved my mental health. It helped to keep my mind relatively silent. Although my mental prayer was more peaceful, God was still hidden in a cloud of unknowing. Besides, there were still very many distractions, even though they were not as overpowering as before.

Later I was to encounter John Main's teaching, in the 1980s, I think. Lawrence Freeman visited Kopua on a number of occasions at that time, but what really influenced me was listening day after day in our refectory to John Main's tapes. The constant repetition of the same teaching for months on end, plus the authority and conviction with which he spoke, moved me deeply. The result was that I undertook to take up meditation according to his method.

I kept this up for some time but the motivation to continue in a disciplined manner, morning and evening, gradually weakened. This was due largely to the fact that I was very busy in the monastery doing many jobs. Besides, I wasn't reading the books that Main had written. I was too busy. I kept on practising meditation in Main's way but in a haphazard way. What really undermined my commitment to Main's way was that other prayer forms were becoming easier to practise, such as the rosary, and many other forms of prayer. I argued: 'It doesn't matter what prayers we say so long as we pray. What really counts is the charity with which we say our prayers, not one form rather than another'. I had no hesitation in starting off a half hour of Main's meditation and then switching in the middle of it to another form of prayer. I continued to do one or two hours prayer daily, but I did not practise Main's meditation in a disciplined way for half an hour every morning and evening.

But now I realise that there was a flaw in my reasoning about charity alone counting. It is true that the value of our prayer depends on the charity with which we pray. But charity must be orderly. If it is disorderly, it is not true charity. What I have learned from my mistakes is that I must pray in an orderly manner. There is a time for active prayer and a time for passive prayer.

True charity will inspire us to pray in many different ways. There is a time to simply love him; there is a time for silence, and a time for words, there is a time to praise and thank God, there is time for prayer of petition, a time for active prayer and a time for passive prayer. Praying the correct way at the appropriate time pertains to an integral life of prayer.

I am now convinced that, for an integral prayer life, I need a rhythm of active and passive prayer. They are two complementary ways of relating to God. My prayer in the monastery has been over-active, because of the Office, the Eucharist etc., while the passive dimension was not sufficiently catered for. This led to a certain imbalance and one consequence of this was that I experienced frequent headaches all my life.

However, since I took up John Main's meditation in a regular way, twice daily for half an hour morning and evening, the headaches that I have experienced throughout most of my life have largely disappeared. For the first time in 50 years I realised that the headaches were due largely to stress, and that meditation, besides being a prayer, was also a remedy for the stress and the headaches.

Influenced by another member of the community I only started doing Main's meditation in a regular way about eight years ago. With God's grace I have remained faithful to this. However, I never did much reading on the subject. When I started meditating four times a day about six months ago I decided that I should read and study the subject more. Hence I read all Main's books and a book by Lawrence Freeman.

When I had finished them I decided to study Centering prayer and see what I could learn from it. I read two or three books by Thomas Keating and a very clear presentation by Basil Pennington. These books were helpful and I think that they complement John Main. There is little difference between the two types of meditation except that John Main usually insists on reciting the mantra from beginning to end. As we have seen for Keating and company, the mantra is used as a means to the end of deep inner silence. When we reach silence, we drop the mantra. They expect this to

happen very soon in the practice, not just after many years as Main suggests in the piece already quoted.

The advice of the Centering Prayer authors seems to fit my experience better than that of Main. I am now following Keating's advice on the use of the mantra. His basic advice would be – use the mantra insofar as it helps us to achieve inner silence. Then drop it; take it up again insofar as it is necessary to overcome disturbing distractions.

There are two kinds of distractions that may arise after I have attained deep inner silence. There are those that barely ruffle the surface of the silence. These I simply drop and they do not surface again. Sometimes the distractions are more absorbing; in this case I return to the mantra to regain my peace. In a word I do whatever best promotes peace and silence.

Both Main and Keating assume that each meditation starts off with saying the mantra. This prepares us gradually in mind and body as the mantra becomes increasingly subtle. Slowly the body adapts itself so that we are able to slide into pure consciousness and silence. We have to learn how to slide into this state anew at each meditation.

In my experience I reach inner silence in almost every meditation. Sometimes it takes longer than other times. I must keep focused on what I am doing. As I said earlier, when I get sufficiently grounded it is relatively easy to maintain this state for the rest of the meditation. The beginning of the meditation is usually spent on focusing on the mantra and letting go of more gross levels of the mantra. Indeed letting go is an exercise that endures all through the meditation. There is also a focusing all through the meditation. Initially the focus is on saying the mantra. When we arrive at deep inner silence the focus is on maintaining the silence. This does not mean reflection on my state. If such reflection arises I must let go of it immediately.

CONSCIENCE

One of my great problems for the past forty years has been my conscience, especially since I came to New Zealand and was involved for many years with the finances of the monastery. Perhaps the problem could be stated briefly by asking a simple question. How can I live in community and support community projects when I have personal conscientious doubts about the morality of these projects? Am I faithful to my conscience and to God by being an accomplice in carrying out projects about which I have moral doubts? I accept the morality of Aquinas who teaches that every fully deliberate unreasonable choice is immoral. If I think that some choice is unreasonable, I judge it to be immoral. And hence in itself it should not be supported. Perhaps circumstances may justify my toleration of decisions whose morality I doubt. We find ourselves locked into an unjust system, and there is little we can do to change it.

I have studied Church teaching on property and also Aquinas, who cited various Church Fathers with approval. It is true that the papal documents only give principles. However, according to my reasoning the way we live in the affluent world, and this

applies not only to secular people but also to priests and religious, seems to me totally incompatible with the moral principles found in the Church's teaching.

Here are some of the principles we find in Church teaching:

The basic principle is that God gave the world to all people and all have a right to as much property as is necessary to live their vocation in life. Most of the other principles flow from this fundamental principle.

Other principles are: The rich are bound in justice to give their superfluous wealth to the poor who have a right in justice to such wealth. When we give financial help, we are usually only giving the poor what belongs to them, what they have a right to. We are exercising justice rather than charity. When two rights collide, e.g. the right of the rich to their property and the right of the poor to the necessities of life, the lesser right ceases to exist and the greater right prevails.

In other words the right of the poor prevails over the right of the rich to their superfluous wealth. In extreme necessity all property is common. Those in extreme necessity can take the property of the rich so as to relieve their necessity if there is no other way of relieving this need. They are only taking what belongs to them. However, to avoid chaos in society those in extreme need should, if possible, use legal means to meet their need. All property and money have a twofold meaning; they are meant to help those who possess them to live their vocation, but are also intended for the good of all people. All are responsible for all in a spirit of solidarity. These are some of the principles of social justice; how well do we live them?

Is consumerism according to right reason and in accordance with these principles? Is it reasonable that affluent individuals and nations discard one third of the food produced in the world, (studies done have come up with this figure), in view of the fact that over a billion people are undernourished? Is it reasonable that the average person in the affluent world will spend forty times as much on themselves as the poor in the third world?

There are a billion people who lack the resources to live their human vocation, while we in the affluent world spend God's gifts on inordinate pleasure and sin. We misuse our resources, or more accurately the resources that belong to the poor, and we have no qualms of conscience about it. Is it reasonable to pull down buildings and use valuable resources to put up new ones when the old ones will last indefinitely and millions of people are living in cardboard tents? There are five million people living in the streets of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Indeed all our big cities in the East and in the West have huge numbers living on the streets. Those of us who are secure in the affluent world prefer not to think about these injustices lest our consciences be disturbed, and we have to make sacrifices of what we wrongly assume to be our property and money. In practice, it has always seemed to me that we ignore the principles found in the papal documents and also in the gospels. Even priests and religious are engulfed in the prevailing culture.

Another fact that upsets my conscience is the fact that we all bear a moral responsibility for the use of the world's resources. Many of these resources are non-

renewable and eventually they will be exhausted while we waste these resources in an extravagant manner. One environmentalist has written: 'If all people in the world lived like the people of the U.S.A. (and presumably the people of our country) we would need three planets like the earth to support them. We have a moral obligation not to waste the earth's resources so that the next generation will have the necessities of life'. This is another reason for simplifying our lifestyle. Above all Christians should be guided by the teaching and example of Jesus. 'When he was rich he chose to be poor.'

Each of us also is morally responsible to do what we can to reduce global warming. My conscience can be upset when we seem careless as individuals and as a nation about meeting this responsibility. In all cases we are unwilling collectively and individually to lower our standard of living as we continue to live immorally, ignoring the poor, wasting the planet's resources, and not doing what we can to reduce global warming. We refuse to take up the cross, forego our selfishness and greed, and follow Jesus.

Over the years, on innumerable occasions, I have worried and pondered over the issues, just mentioned. I have never had the courage to leave the community and live on my own. What justification is there to continue to cooperate with people whose consciences differ from my own? Am I sinning in a passive kind of way by cooperating with the nation's cultural practices and with community projects? My compromise position is that I continue to live in the community and do the best I can to change things from within. I haven't done this very well due to fear and lack of courage. Above all I try in running my own life and in making decisions, both big and small, not to waste food and other resources. I find it easier to put limits on my own excessive needs than to try and rein in others. Inevitably, however, when living in community I am complicit in varying degrees with decisions that my conscience finds difficult. Perhaps, the decisions may be immoral in themselves, but due to circumstances I may be justified in giving some kind of cooperation. Sometimes I do not know what is right and what is wrong in the circumstances.

All these moral problems are bound up with my prayer life of union with God. I am called to charity which I define as friendship with God. This charity must be both affective and effective; both are essential. In prayer I exercise affective love. But my prayer is inauthentic unless it flows over into effective love, which is exercised mainly by consistently acting in a morally good manner. Fidelity to my conscience is identical with fidelity to God. It is essential to charity and friendship with God. Am I faithful to my conscience in the matters, just mentioned?

In raising these issues I in no way wish to find fault with my own community. Indeed we live a far simpler life than the average person in our country. I think that we also live more simply than most other religious. However, in a global world it seems to me that we should compare our lifestyle more with that of the two billion people living in extreme need, rather than with other religious around us. In a global world we must think globally and no one, it seems to me, is justified in ignoring the plight and the rights of the two billion people living in extreme poverty.

Religious, especially, since they have a vow of poverty, are called to be prophets in our world. It is especially appropriate that they be counter cultural in their lifestyle. Our vow of poverty doesn't mean much if most of we religious are more secure

financially and more comfortable in the way we live than most of our contemporaries who often struggle to make ends meet. It has often been said that religious take a vow of poverty, but the poor practise and experience poverty.

DISTRACTIONS

At this point I would like to share my experience of dealing with distractions. As I said, I started meditation in 1948 and I have practised some form of meditation daily for 63 years.

I was instructed from the beginning never to deliberately entertain distractions during prayer. In prayer of every kind we must turn away from distractions and turn back to God. Deliberately indulging in distractions implies turning away from God. It must be obvious that this puts an end to prayer. I am no longer oriented to God and prayer but to distractions.

With God's grace I have endeavoured in all prayer to observe this essential rule. This applies to both vocal and mental prayer. Very often when I put away distractions and turn back to God, I have to orient myself to him in pure faith since he dwells in impenetrable darkness. This is especially true of silent prayer which one practices without using words. Often I have been tempted to abandon prayer since so often I seem to be doing nothing and seem to be miles from God.

When I experienced involuntary distractions over the years, I needed to assure myself repeatedly that such distractions do not destroy prayer since my will is still oriented to God. I can be sometimes consciously in relationship with God: at other times there is the ongoing unconscious choice of God that constitutes much of my union with God. Centering Prayer and Christian meditation are also incompatible with voluntary distractions. Indeed both of them lead us into silence and we need endless faith to believe that we are still oriented to God in the silence. It is easier to be sure of union with God when I use words that are meaningful such as Jesus, Father etc.

FORMULATING MY IDEAL IN WRITING

When I was seventy years old, I decided to write down my vision for the future. I still have the manuscript that I wrote for my seventieth birthday. It contains the quote from Mark's gospel on the primacy of love of God and love of neighbour. But my manuscript was only a few pages long.

After I had learned to operate the computer, I decided that I would formulate for myself a more nuanced vision for my life. I began writing what eventually turned out to be my first book, *The Monastic Vision*. I had no intention of publishing this book. I wrote it largely for my own benefit. I had done a lot of writing over the years but scarcely any of it was ever published. Indeed I never considered what I wrote worth publishing. I didn't consider myself a polished writer of English. Besides I lacked time over the years to devote myself to writing. I also feared going public lest I might be motivated by vanity.

I had written lots of notes and personal reflections simply for my own good. I threw most of what I wrote in the waste paper basket. Furthermore, I seldom re-read what I wrote so as to correct it. I saw writing as an activity that was of benefit to me personally in my growth as a Christian and a monk. That was why I wrote. Besides, reading and study tended to give me headaches, whereas writing was more relaxing.

Why then did I ever publish anything? It happened largely by chance, as a response to Fr. Carl Telford, editor of the 'Marist Messenger'. He asked Abbot Brian if he would write an article for the Messenger dealing with 'What Have I Learned about Prayer?' The abbot was busy at the time and he asked me if I would write the article. This was to be my first article in the 'Marist Messenger'. With the editor's encouragement and that of a number of readers, I continued writing short articles. At this point in time about eighty of these articles have been published. I myself was quite surprised by the positive feedback that I got from a number of readers. During my life I had never considered myself a writer. One man told me that writers need to start when they are young, not at my age.

In the meantime I had written the book, *The Monastic Vision*. I thought that I would publish it. I hope that I was not motivated by vanity and the desire to become famous. I sent it to Collegeville in the U.S.A. They rejected it on the grounds that it was twice too long. People would not read or buy such a long book. It would be expensive to publish and the publishers would have to put a high selling price on it.

Later I was to send a smaller collection of articles to St. Paul's Publishing Company in Sydney. They too were concerned about money. Since I had no profile in Australia people would not buy the book and the publishers would not recover the cost of printing it. They recommended that I publish it in New Zealand where I was better known. I made no effort to publish any book in New Zealand because I reckoned that the number of people in New Zealand who would be interested in spirituality was very small. Hence the buyers would be few.

Eventually three small booklets were published at the monastery's expense, with titles, *The Love of God*, *Personal Prayer* and *21st Century Spirituality*. These books are largely given to guests who come to the monastery.

They are all in tune with my conviction that my chief challenge in life is to become a good Christian. To put this in another way, my vocation and that of everyone else, is to tune into the Holy Spirit who is leading each one to perfect love. I am convinced that in the modern Church we need to stress far more than we do the Christian vocation and also the inner dimension of the spiritual life. What the different religious orders have in common is far more important than what differentiates them.

We live in a world of specialists. They certainly make a wonderful contribution to our world. However, there is an occupational hazard for specialists that they will develop tunnel vision. Religious can specialise so much in their own brand of spirituality that they get disconnected from Christianity. It seems to me that all religious founders were only trying to lead their followers to Christ. And spread Christ's message in the world of their time.

Having said that, I realise that there are special charisms in the Church. Not all members of the body have the same function. However, charisms that are not rooted in charity are sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. Probably, religious have to carefully monitor two dimensions of their vocation. Firstly, their whole life must be rooted in charity and virtue. Secondly, this charity must be expressed in a manner appropriate to the spirit, rules and structures of their own institute. Presumably, the Holy Spirit will guide each one to a specific form of charity. Thus they will be both good Christians and good religious. They will have no identity crisis.

As a monk I have always wanted to please God and I have chosen to be present consistently for sixty years at the Divine Office, even though it has never fed me spiritually. If God wants this from me, I am happy to do it even though I would prefer other forms of prayer. I hope that in doing this I am practising faith and charity, and not merely conforming to the conditioning I received in my early monastic life. Benedict teaches that nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God.

It was also after the year 2000 when I first learned to operate the computer, that I began to write my Sunday sermons. Up to that time I always delivered my homilies with the help of some notes. Why did I change? Firstly, I now had more time on my hands. I didn't have time to write before 1998. I also think that most of what is said in a homily is soon forgotten by most people. However, if the sermon is typed and made available they can take it home and read it. Unless people study a homily for themselves, they are likely to hear it very imperfectly. But those who are keen enough to read it will surely benefit from it. Furthermore, I keep copies of the homilies and occasionally I use them afterwards, perhaps for a different audience. A few people have asked me to put the homilies on our website. We have not put them all on, but the books, *The Love of God* and *21st Century Spirituality* are on the Kopua website (www.kopuamonastery.org.nz).

Most of what I have written over the past eleven years has never been published, nor even been put on the website. After writing *The Monastic Vision* I wrote a second book, *The Christian Vision*, and also a short book on *The School of Love*.

The Abbot also asked me to translate *Sermones de Diversis* of St. Bernard. After I had translated them in two volumes, I asked Cistercian Publications if they would publish them, only to be told that they already had a translation, awaiting publication. They didn't need a second translation.

Monks have criticised my spirituality as not being sufficiently monastic. Did I not receive a monastic formation? I certainly did. My novice master was an enthusiast for Cistercian spirituality. We had a class every week on St Bernard. His enthusiasm affected us novices and I got dug into St. Bernard. At that stage my spirituality was largely cataphatic with a positive approach to God, and all my faculties were brought into play. But this only lasted until 1952.

GUESTS

Another important formative influence on me over the last thirteen years has been my contact with guests. Now that I am reasonably free of manual work I am increasingly asked to help guests who come to the monastery in search of God.

Most of the guests, who come here, are serious retreatants who desire holiness. I think that God has used me to help some of these seekers. With others I have had less success. But on the whole it has been very satisfying and fulfilling work. Trying to help others on the spiritual path nourishes my own spiritual life. Most of them that I have met over the years will share with me their spiritual aspirations. It is most edifying to observe how the Holy Spirit is working in people living in the secular world. As they shared their stories, I became convinced that the Spirit is very much alive and active in a wide variety of ways in different people.

Very many guests had a variety of problems that are often insoluble. They may be struggling with terminal illness, various kinds of addiction. Family problems of all kinds were shared as well as the agony of mothers whose kids had gone astray. I tried to lend a listening ear to all these people. I was keenly aware that in many cases only God could bring peace. If they were open to it, I would offer to pray with them and for them. Paul assures us that one of the fruits of prayer is that, in response to prayer, God will give peace that surpasses our understanding.

In many situations with guests I feel very helpless. I have no solution for their problems. This makes me realise that both the guest and I are totally dependent on the Holy Spirit. Consequently, before starting a session with anyone, I humbly pray to God to help both of us in our neediness and to draw good from our sharing. Both of us desperately need God's help. At the end of a session I try to thank God for his help. Unfortunately, sometimes I forget this.

I am quite sure that the guests have helped me just as much as I have helped them. They often bring to my attention aspects of the spiritual journey that I tend to overlook. Sometimes, others unknowingly put me on the right track. Br John's enthusiasm for meditation was used by God to move me to meditate in a regular way, for a half hour every morning and evening. I would not dream of giving that up now, since I have discovered its benefits.

Increasing my passive prayer to four hours daily has also served to solve another problem, namely, my need for manual labour so as to maintain good health. During my life I often wondered what I would do when I was no longer working four or five hours daily at the dairy. I felt at that time that I couldn't spend too much time on reading, study and *lectio* since they gave me headaches. How could I spend the time and avoid idleness if my manual work ceased?

Reading novels would be less stressful than other forms of reading but I made a resolution about the year 2000 that I would read no more novels. With God's grace I have managed to keep this resolution. I haven't read many novels during my life. But my experience with such reading was that novels tended to undermine my freedom, in the sense that the story can get so absorbing that I cannot put down the book. I used to burn with curiosity to know how the whole plot ended. Thus I was no longer free to spend my time in the way that would please God most. I was using time to feed my disorderly curiosity. This was obviously not God's will. Once I gave up all novel reading I was no longer ensnared in this trap.

However, this doesn't mean that my reading at present is above fault. Reading the magazines that come into the monastery is something that I still do. I feel that I should know something about the modern world and especially about New Zealand and the Church in this country. However, I fear that I often carry the reading of magazines and newspapers to excess. It is difficult to read them habitually in moderation. The late Abbot Joseph devoted very little time to such reading. He was in my opinion highly disciplined in the area of reading. Instead he used to spend several hours before the Blessed Sacrament.

PHILOSOPHY

The influence on my life of philosophy, especially Thomist/Aristotelian philosophy, has been in my view very positive. About 1958 I was asked to teach philosophy in the minor seminary in Mt Melleray. At the time I knew very little about it. I gradually learned what it was all about.

As I have mentioned already, in 1961 I was sent to Rome to get a licentiate in Thomist philosophy at the Angelicum. After I returned in 1962 I was teaching philosophy, among other subjects, for the next twenty-seven years.

As the years went by I began to see how helpful it was for understanding my own inner life. It helped me to get a clear understanding of the intellect, will, emotions and the imagination, and how they interacted with each other. I found this knowledge of my interior life indispensable for understanding prayer, virtue, sin and temptation. Logic, epistemology and Thomist psychology were especially helpful. What these branches of philosophy teach is perennially valid. Very often I think that it is a great mistake that they are no longer studied. It seems to me that many modern authors are not in touch with their inner life.

Most of the clients that I meet in the guesthouse have problems understanding prayer, temptation and sin, usually because they do not understand their inner life. The book *21st Century Spirituality* tried to deal with these problems. Educated people ask questions, such as: 'What is contemplation? What is charity? What do you mean by loving God?'

It is very difficult to answer such questions unless the questioner and the one who attempts to answer them are in touch with their inner lives and how the various faculties interact. If we don't know what the love of God is how can we orient our lives to it? Part of the problem is that people no longer use clearly defined words to describe their inner life. Only Thomism offers us terms that have clearly defined meanings. Words in the Bible and in the patristic writings do not have clearly defined meanings.

In our own order there is constant stress on the Cistercian Fathers. The patristic terminology that they use, their anthropology and their scriptural exegesis need to be complemented by Thomism so as to clarify much of their teaching. I think that many modern monastic writers lack clarity and precision that could be had if they complemented the monastic Fathers with Thomism.

Modern writers seldom define their terms. I am often unclear about their meaning. They do not always make distinctions that would give a clearer understanding

of what they are dealing with. Many of them talk about the inner life and I often do not understand what they are talking about, because the words that they use do not have clearly defined meanings. Perhaps I'm stupid, but I find many writers difficult to follow, at least some of the time. I hope that my own writing can be understood by most people. I am often frustrated by a lack of appreciation by monastic writers of all the great spiritual directors of recent centuries, such as Ignatius, John of the Cross, Francis de Sales and many others. All these authors, rightly used, can greatly enrich our knowledge of the inner life. Furthermore, all of them use Thomism as a basis for their teaching.

To add to the confusion modern authors use their own terminology and each writer uses different terms. Hence we end up with thousands of theologies and spiritualities. How does one synthesise all of them? If we cannot extract the essential principles of the Christian life from the various books and live by them, different books only confuse us. As I pointed out elsewhere, even the Bible has many theologies that need to be synthesised into one whole theology. St. Thomas tried to give us this synthesis and much of what he wrote is still valid. Doubtless much is also out of date.

Thomism can be complemented and needs to be complemented by modern philosophy and psychology, but we should not discard what is perennially valid.

A RULE OF LIFE

During many years at Kopua, I had always been over busy, in the dairy, teaching, being bursar and abbot. Reading was difficult since it tended to cause headaches. Hence work became a need. The various jobs filled up my day and I had very little spare time.

After I retired as abbot, I encountered a new challenge which consisted in using long hours of free time in a contemplative monastic manner. When the monks ceased to work in the dairy in the year 2000 I was out of work. How was I going to spend the time?

As I said above I committed myself to loving God as fully as I could. But an ideal like this is very much up in the air. The challenge remained of incarnating this ideal in activities appropriate to my age and circumstances.

In the average monastic day I would need about ten hours for personal needs, such as sleep, meals etc. The public prayer of the community takes about three hours daily. I was always careful to be present since I considered that this was God's will for me. But personal needs and common prayer only accounted for about thirteen hours in the day. A day has twenty-four hours. How was I to love God and do his will for the eleven hours that were left? To meet this challenge I needed to formulate a Rule of Life.

Initially, I decided that I needed a certain amount of manual labour for the sake of my health. Hence I continued killing weeds and blackberry upon the farm. This lasted until about 2007. Probably around about 2000 I decided to recite three rosaries daily.

When Pope John Paul added the Luminous Mysteries I started saying the twenty decades of the rosary daily. This meant four rosaries daily. I quietly sung a hymn

between the decades. This is still part of my Rule of Life. Each rosary takes about twenty-five minutes to recite.

Another element in my Rule of Life was initially to practise Christian Meditation twice daily for a half hour morning and evening. Over the last six months I have been doing four half hours daily. What I practise at present is much closer to Centering Prayer than to Christian Meditation. In addition I celebrate the 11.00am mass daily for guests. All these personal prayers take about four hours daily. This helps me not to waste time. I see time as an opportunity for doing good. I feel that I must use it in a responsible manner.

I would like to say something about the rosary. In recent years I have been able to practise much more active contemplation as well as passive prayer. Community prayer, especially the Divine Office, is still a challenge to my faith for a variety of reasons mentioned elsewhere.

I find the rosary very prayerful. I can say it at any time in any place. Unlike the psalms I can always identify with the words of the Our Fathers and Hail Marys. I don't tire of the repetition, even though I have been saying the rosary since 1935. It was only after I retired as abbot that I started saying the fifteen decades and later twenty decades daily. I usually recite only one rosary at the same time. It is a slight strain to say two in succession.

However, if I follow the rosary with a half hour of meditation, there is no strain, probably because another part of the brain is active. Thus I preserve a rhythm of active and passive prayer. I usually like to say the rosary walking; this keeps me awake. Since God dwells in my heart I can always turn to him in faith wherever I am. The same holds for meditation which is oriented especially to worshipping God within us. This means that the rosary and meditation can be fruitfully practised in any place. One does need a certain amount of solitude for both. I find that the Church is not always the best place to pray. It is often cold and people are walking in and out for various reasons.

Another kind of prayer that I have been trying to develop is the repetition of a short ejaculation throughout the day at various times when I am not concentrating much on what I'm doing. This is an ancient monastic practice. I have been trying to repeat the words, 'Father, Jesus, Spirit', silently when appropriate, but I'm afraid that the habit hasn't become fully developed at this point in my life.

I don't do a lot of *lectio* in the strict sense. When I read my intellect is mainly operating, trying to understand what the author is saying. Strict *lectio* is predominantly affective. My reading is predominantly intellectual, more study than *lectio*. Obviously, the intellectual and affective mingle in varying degrees. Sometimes the author may move me to affective and effective charity. In this case I am close to prayer. At other times I am doing research. This is only remotely linked to charity. At other times in my reading I may be indulging in curiosity. As I said already, for all these reasons I prefer not to identify *lectio* with prayer and contemplation. I identify prayer with an affective relationship with God.

This is not to say that study is unnecessary. Indeed study is very important provided it contributes, at least remotely, to the affective and effective love of God. If it

makes little or no contribution to charity it is little more than idle curiosity. It must not become an end in itself but a means to greater charity. Over the last six months I have studied various books on meditation by John Main, Keating, Pennington and Freeman. My purpose was to learn as much as I could so that I could practise it correctly and also to motivate myself to continue practising it. I think that reading these books gave me many new insights and the books offered many complementary approaches.

In the last couple of years I have ceased to work on the farm, partly due to age. I'm trying to use the extra time in a contemplative manner. I do a lot of writing, help at the guesthouse and see some of the guests who wish to talk about their spiritual journey. I also share with some of the Companions on spiritual topics. I don't like to call these sharings 'spiritual direction'. I only listen to people and offer some feedback on what they share. I don't direct anybody. I often tell them that the modern word for spiritual direction is 'spiritual accompaniment'. I see my role as one who encourages the good in a client and makes suggestions about how he or she might improve. People must take personal responsibility for their own spiritual growth. This means evaluating any suggestions that come from me and implementing them if they consider them appropriate, ignoring them if they are inappropriate.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing pages I have tried mainly to write on my personal prayer journey. Much of what I have written is coloured by my study of Main and Keating over the last six months. This is where I am at the time of writing in 2011. My earlier experience over sixty years is not proportionally dealt with. Much of it is now forgotten. I am still learning new things about meditation and re-learning some of what I formerly knew and had forgotten. I need to keep myself motivated anew so as to persevere.

To conclude all these reflections I would like to thank Abbot Brian. Without his encouragement I would have written none of what I have written in the past nor would I have dared to write this personal testimony. I also thank the community who do all the work and allow me to pray and write in my old age.

Finally, and above all, I thank God for the many graces he has granted me over the last 81 years. I am confident that he will continue to sustain me to the end.

Fr John Benedict Kelly O.C.S.O.

Born *Alleen Co. Tipperary. Ireland, May 12th 1930.*

Education *Donaskeigh National School 1936.*

Mt. Melleray College 1943.

Mt. Melleray Minor seminary 1948.

Entered Mt. Melleray *August 18th 1950.*

Solemn Profession *November 1st 1955.*

Ordination *April 3rd 1958.*

Kopua Monastery *February 25th 1967.*

Abbot *March 19th 1992 – March 4th 1998.*

Spiritual Writer *2000 – 2011.*

Entered Eternal Life *November 17th 2011.*