

**Selected Articles from 1998-1999 Summer issue
of Spiritual Growth Ministries Newsletter:
"The Glory of Age"**

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EDITORIAL

Our theme this newsletter is spirituality and ageing. It felt a little too close to home for me when it was raised in the Workgroup meeting as a helpful theme to work with! And it is true that we don't easily embrace the ageing process, especially as the challenging birthdays creep up on us - 40, 50, 60, 65 and beyond. Yet the process of *oldering* has been with each one of us since birth and we should not be surprised when it takes on a more immediate flavour! It can also be shunned and feared and fought. But shunning, fearing or fighting it by whatever means (claiming eternal youth or cosmetically) does nothing to slow it down. How much better to turn and face it and then look at the gift it can be and the fruitfulness of its stark as well as pleasant realities.

I had a personal insight into my own ageing in a craft market in Accra, Ghana, recently. Stall holders were pestering people who had come to look and perhaps buy - tourists, missionaries, locals and returning descendants of Ghanaian slaves. It wasn't a simple matter to escape without buying something! Yet when I said to forceful sellers "I'm not wanting to buy anything today" they backed off with a gracious, "Well, sir, when you decide to buy come and see me and I will help you". Later, I said to our guide, "How come I was able to look without having to buy?" "Ah," he replied, "It was the whiteness of your beard!"

It was a surprise in our last parish to discover how wrong we were with the cocky assumptions that the spiritually alive would be in the younger and middle years of life. Often it is in the middle years that the greatest economic, career and family pressures mount. We didn't understand that as 40 year olds, all bright eyed and bushy tailed returning from "successful" ministry in Moresby. As the years rolled on it became clear that the deepest and fastest growing (if it's possible to talk in those terms) was amongst those in their later years. "Can you teach me to journal?" asked one 75 year old. Conversation on the basis of her spiritual journal became the focus of pastoral visits. "Can we register for a seven day silent retreat?" asked others. And what a ball they had!

The glory of ageing has many sides to it, including its pain and darkness. Here is the path of deepening insight, clarifying and simplifying. Keeping us in eternal life is a challenging and creative time indeed in these years. We trust that there are encouraging comments and ideas in this issue for you.

God bless you on your journey.

Andrew Dunn

AGEING AND CONTEMPLATION by Sr Mary d'Apice

For many, the later years of life bring with them time to pause, to stand and gaze and to be caught up in the marvel of life and the beauty of the world around us.

The simple trust in the eyes of a child, the sun's rays caught in a drop of dew, the tiny flower struggling through the cracked concrete of the garden path, or a spider weaving a web of silken strands, all speak of the wonder of God's creation.



From Rembrandt's

[Detail from Rembrandt's "Philosopher in Meditation"](#)

How often have we passed by unheeding in the rush of life? To pause awe-struck can be the deepest kind of prayer - a communion with the Creator. It is here in the simplest act of contemplation that we meet Wisdom which the book of Proverbs tells us is "ever at play in God's presence, at play everywhere in God's world, delighting to be with the children of men" Proverbs 8:30-33.

The wonder and delight we feel flow gently, and perhaps wordlessly, into gratitude as our whole being is caught up in a response to the One whom Thomas Merton describes as "the God who has no voice". "Contemplation", he tells us in *Seeds of Contemplation* "is a response to a call, a call from the One who has no voice and yet who speaks in everything that is, and who, most of all, speaks in the depths of our own being, for we ourselves are words of God".

As we move into our wisdom years in the afternoon of life, the human wisdom born of life's experience melds with that sacred wisdom, which is the gift of God. This opens us to see in fresh ways, to listen deeply and to be receptive to the good. We are more fitted now to journey deep within where we can rest in silence, attentive to the Lord.

Contemplation has been spoken of as looking long and lovingly at reality, be it the radiance of a sunset or the soft glow of dawn, the strong strokes of a swimmer or the broken body of the wounded. The real is all around us waiting to be welcomed into our hearts with joy, with gentleness, just anger or compassion. It is here that we meet the God of the real and learn to live a life of contemplation. Through this long, loving look at the real we are gradually changed, transfigured by the Spirit of God, until with St. Paul we too can say "I live now no longer I...".

Contemplative prayer comes as a gift and in our awareness and openness we can ready ourselves for that gift. The very losses and diminishments, which age inevitably brings, can be the source, if accepted graciously, of

the "hollowing out" which Teilhard de Chardin speaks of as so necessary if we are to make adequate space for God in our lives. Times of loneliness too, can lead us to our own inner depths where God awaits us in the silent realm of solitude.

At a recent International Liturgy Assembly an Australian Aboriginal speaker, Miriam Rose Ungunmerr, described the richness of *dadirri*, a form of contemplation which combines deep inner listening, quiet still awareness and patient waiting. "There are deep springs within each one of us" she explained, "within this deep spring which is the very Spirit of God, is a sound. The sound of Deep calling to Deep. The sound is the Word of God, Jesus".

In the stillness of contemplative prayer we learn to listen to that Word uttered by the God "who speaks to us through everything that is, and who, most of all, speaks in the depths of our own being, for we ourselves are words of God".

NAMING HOW I PRAY

by Alec McGregor (Tauranga)

As an 82 year old who has followed Jesus most of his life, I would like to pass on a few thoughts on the subject of contemplative prayer from a very ordinary lay church member.

Firstly and very importantly, this is not the realm of the super spiritual, if there is such a person, but I believe is practised unawares by a number of Christians who have never heard the name and just naturally find God or are found by Him in their daily lives in this way. I never cease to be amazed at how rare discussion on prayer is and while it is assumed that everyone knows how to pray, many struggle in their prayer life and often give up or don't even start because of what they feel is something wrong with them. Just as there is no one elaborate correct pattern of behaviour to enable one to go to sleep, so there is no "right" way to pray. Each of us must find the way that suits him or herself. This is explained very well in a book by Ruth Fowkes: *Personality and Prayer*.

Some fourteen years ago I attended a one day seminar at which we were invited to listen, look, feel and share various activities and at the end were given a list of books which would be helpful. I enjoyed the day, but as a very practical male with no imagination, I was right out of my depth, I thought. However I found I had been given a yearning to find a way to come closer to God. I immersed myself in some of the books recommended and have since found when a question or a desire surfaces, I am given the answer or clue either in the Bible or am led to the right book on the subject. It took me a long time to find that what I was seeking had a name : Contemplative Prayer.

My early efforts centred round two books: *Listening to God* by Joyce Huggett, which I still keep going back to, and *The Way of the Pilgrim* which is an autobiography of a Russian peasant who seeks to find out how Paul's injunction in 1Thessalonians 5:17 to "Pray without ceasing" can be possible and finds the answer in the Jesus prayer. This latter book has an appendix of a number of extracts by the Desert Fathers of the early church and in one of these I noted that it was very presumptuous to follow the path I was on without a spiritual director (whatever that may be) to guide me. At this stage I became aware of spiritual direction. A demonstration was given by Margaret Dunn and a trainee who later became my director and never ceases to amaze me at what of myself she is able to reveal to me. I now attend any of these seminars I can and have also attended two three-day retreats at Ohope with rich results.

While I know I have only scratched the surface of my quest, I now know prayer to be not so much a presentation of a shopping list to God, as a loving relationship with my Lord and father, as often as not in complete silence, without words or conscious thought when the mind is taken down into the heart. I am sometimes asked how one can pray without words and I like to point to 1 Kings 19: 12-13 in the new RSV where we find that " after the fire a sound of sheer silence. And when Elijah heard it.....".

I continually experience wonderful evidences of God in my walk with Jesus as He leads me on the path I know He wants me to take. I often feel I am not as diligent as I should be, but then He tells me "I don't want you to do, I just want you to BE my friend and walk in the quiet as Adam did in the garden". I am richly

blessed in every way and know God is still moulding this lump of clay and working to create the fruit of the Spirit (Galations 5:22) in me, as I believe I show in some small way a love, joy, peace and patience which are not of myself.

If you have not already found it, keep seeking the right way to pray for you, because you can be sure the promise still stands: seek and you will be found - as I was.

PART OF ME TURNED 40 THIS YEAR

by Neville Emslie (Dunedin)

Part of me turned 40 this year. Or, more accurately, parts of me turned 40. Some parts have been 40 for quite a while, whilst other portions have yet to make that forbidding total.

First to turn 40 were my eyes. It caught me unawares in my 28th year. I was sitting at the back of a Theology lecture at Baptist College and suddenly realised I could not make out the writing on the blackboard. "Strain", the optician said. "Reading Karl Barth's *Dogmatics* late at night strains more than the eyes", I replied, but my doleful humour did not correct my eyesight. The optician's spectacles did.

Next to go were my shoulders. They passed 40 about 10 years ago. The result, I reckon, of trying to be the fastest bowler in the game of cricket when I was a callow youth. My hair turned 40 about 5 years ago, the then grey fleck is fast becoming a tide (in spite of the Grecian 2000 a loving parishioner gave me on my birthday). My hearing turned 40 at least 2 years ago. Following complaints by my family that I had the TV up too loud I visited an audiologist. She said my hearing loss was probably caused by my early years working in a heavy engineering factory. Not yet, but in a few years I may need a hearing aid. At least that's what I thought she said by lip reading.

So by February 1998 what remained to turn 40? And looking back on an ordinary life what notable things had been achieved? What conquests, victories, discoveries, contributions could be listed? As I reviewed the last 40 years I could not remember all that much. It seemed that all my memories would fill about five-and-a-half pages, six if I wrote large. I blamed God. Made with 10 fingers human beings are mathematically fixed to a base-10 counting schema: decades, scores and centuries. "What if God had made humanity with 12 fingers?" I asked forlornly. Then we would count in dodecades rather than decades and the big number would be 48!

Generally an optimist I indulged in a bout of melancholy the week before the big 4-0 and I wrote a poem the day before titled 'AXLE'. XL is the Roman numeral for 40, and in AXLE XL is halfway between the beginning, A, and the end, E. The theme is the relentlessness of age, rolling on like an axle under a child's trolley and a geriatric's wheelchair.

AXLE

A distant memory recovers my first trolley
 Astride an axle of two pram wheels - once
 Carried me perhaps - but
 Later locomotion ecstatic.
 Chromè centres and chrome spoked,
 Arcing tread points the way
 Down, down
 Youngster ever searching for down.

Blackly the youth forebodes another trolley
 Astride an axle of pram wheels - to
 Carry me perhaps - oh
 Wonderful ecstasy!
 Chrome centres and spokes again, a little larger,
 Aching tread dawdles so

Blotchèd fingers can pluck the stones
 And long-forgotten scars are reviewed
 Down, down
 Memories resist the final drop.

Grey now, his life an axle
 Each wheel either side running, running
 Always down and chrome and aching -
 Grey thoughts -
 Cannot today with tomorrow burning
 I suffer melancholy, am I, can I, do I
 Need permission?
 I am a young, I am an old
 Man, man.
 I turn on the axle forever
 Each wheel turns youth and age
 Once together, running down synchrony
 Tomorrow they stop, I hope, and ask
 Across the void,
 Which way brother?

When the next day dawned the mirror revealed no new visible deterioration and a surprise birthday party converted melancholy to sanguineness. As I love poetry a soiree evening of poetry readings and song (and good victuals) offered friends opportunity to console and encourage. I didn't have the heart to inflict on them my depressing poem.

A few months on my reflection is that 40 isn't all that bad. Everyone told me that but it appears to be one of those things that you have to experience for yourself. What I am able to do now is to look ahead and not just see a number rising up before me. Now I see more clearly others who are exuberantly embracing their years as a gift. Life isn't what has gone but is being one with self, with others and with God.

Part of my problem was that I viewed February 20 1998 much like going to a funeral service. You grit your teeth to face the ordeal, a little afraid that you might be a blubbering wreck.

"But where do we get this idea?" I shout. Who has sold us this line that numbers with zeros at the end of them are grief-filled? My 40th ended up being a birthday, a celebration! By the day's end I was glad that I had made it. As I undressed for bed that night I took from my shirt the badge that my children had given me - "Yesterday I was 39". With a little smile I thought to myself, "And yesterday I was a bit silly".

Milestones are important, however. Not to describe you so much as to give occasion to give thanks that everything that has been has made me what I am now. And what I now have, most of all, is opportunity, which is the greatest spiritual gift of all.

I had hoped that a post-40 positive poem would have erupted from my soul by now. It hasn't happened yet. Maybe it's because I am so young at being 40, and youngsters do not write very good poems! Instead I close with an excerpt from one of New Zealand's finest prophet/poets, James K. Baxter, who knew more than most about the congruence of life and time. Titled *Song*, the theme concerns discipleship, following Jesus ("my love"), gladly releasing the past and embracing an uncertain future - but one that is filled with truth, love and mercy.

My love came through the city
 And they did not know him
 With his beard and his eyes and his gentle hands
 For he was a working man.

My love stood on the lakeshore
 And spoke to the people there

And the fish in the water forgot to swim
And the birds were quiet in the air.

'Truth' - he said, and - 'Love' - he said,
But his purest word was - 'Mercy' -
And the fishermen left their boats and came
To share his poverty...

My love was only a working man
And now he is God on high;
I have left my books and my bed and my house,
To follow him till I die.

'Truth' - he said, and - 'Love' - he said,
But his purest word was - 'Mercy' -
Flowers and candles I bring to him
And no man is kinder than he.

COMING TO A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

by Jean Cotter

I had not tried to meditate nor did I know what contemplation was until I went to my first retreat. In the silence I found myself before God and it was awesome. That experience changed my relationship with God dramatically. To be in communion with God was to see the world about me with new eyes.

My eyes were opened to the wonder and the beauty all about with a deepening sensitivity. I loved what was happening and that was love that I was receiving from God. The tiniest flower became a source of wonder as I looked into it and saw its star-like beauty. There have been some awesome moments since then as the living earth is full of wonder.

It has not been a simple journey because the habit of the years had to be changed. I have had to learn to stop the talking in my head, to centre myself in my heart and in the silence be open to God's loving movement within and around me.

My inner life, my relationship with God, is one of coming into God's nearer presence. I have become scared at times because it was so awesome.

The more I have claimed my quietness of being, that introverted part of me that is so strong, the deeper and closer I have moved in this loving relationship. In that quietness I allow myself to be surrounded by God's love and the love I have for God.

Savouring God's presence, savouring the Scriptures and all that God has created has created stillness within. So with the Psalmist my heart and soul sing to the living God. "How lovely is your dwelling place O Lord".

RETIREMENT & AGEING AS A CONTEMPLATIVE OPPORTUNITY

A conversation with George (G) and Neroli (N)

The Interviewer is Clarice Greenslade (I)

George & Neroli are both in their early years of retirement after really busy professional lives, George as a GP and Neroli in nurse management of a retirement home. The title for this conversation could be "Ageing and Spirituality" and the definition of spirituality is Kathleen Fischer's, "Not one compartment of life, but all life at its deepest dimension".

I. How different is life for you in retirement? What are the noticeable changes?

G. We see a lot more of each other.

I. Is that good?

G. That's very good! To be able now to really share time together is one of the very special things about this stage of life. We're able to develop our own friendship more.

I. George, when you first retired, Neroli was still working. How was that?

G. Interesting. Because I was self employed, I was able to slow down the pace at which I was working. And when I eventually retired, carry on doing locums, still partially involved. Neroli however seemed to get busier and busier, so I had lots of time just to be by myself, which was a very strange experience for me. I valued this. I used to go out for walks by myself. I particularly remember one cold winter's morning, a very hard frost, walking to a lagoon and seeing in the middle, absolutely still, a huge white swan. Everything was still, and there was mist and frost around. Quite magical, just to have that experience there quietly by myself.

It was a good opportunity to be able to support Neroli. I was able to do the things at home, and she was able to get on with her responsibilities. That was a privilege because she had done that for me in so many ways in the past.

I. And retirement for you Neroli?

N. It was a very different experience to George's, because over the last 12 months I was taking on new responsibilities with staff and administration and getting busier and busier. When I retired I found it quite an adjustment because I was enjoying the new responsibilities and learning experiences and suddenly there was nowhere to put them. George was very helpful. He had been a very efficient house husband, and so we carried on, with both of us retired, and having to learn a different way of living really.

G. This was the reverse of what is often talked about when the husband retires and the wife suddenly has this man around the house all the time. I suddenly had to get used to this woman around the house all the time!

N. Gradually the opportunities became more apparent, things we could do, walking, getting to know nature much more. I have always been particularly fond of trees, but in retirement they became very important to us, they almost became a dimension of God, and their beauty and long life, a spiritual experience really.

I. What would you say was the hardest thing about retirement?

G. For me having to re-establish different on-going connections. When you have been in work and had responsibilities you have had lots of contacts everyday with lots of people, and suddenly I could go for a day without seeing anybody. And also the fact that I have been in a situation where there was decision making and influencing the course of things. Now I wasn't, and that took some adjustment. I began to wonder "What role do I have now?" I had to work at that. But at the same time I didn't want to go back into the rat race really, with all that responsibility again. Something I found quite irritating was people saying "Oh I suppose you are busier than ever", when they know you have retired. I would never want to be busier than ever. It would be a negation of your retirement.

I. What would be the hardest for you Neroli?

N. Oh purely practical, but the phone had been so busy in the daytime and at night, and suddenly I didn't seem to have any calls at all. George was getting them all. After two years of retirement he'd established a new structure.

I. So what's the best thing?

N. Oh, having time to listen to music, and to get to know music a little, taking time for walking, time for, I guess finding a spiritual dimension to nature. What I most enjoy really is walking through the Gardens, having time to watch, to look and enjoy them.

I. And as you said about the trees, somehow its a spiritual experience.

N. Oh, absolutely, yes, it is very much a spiritual experience, the beauty of the world around me.

I. What's best for you George?

G. I think it is time to do things that are enjoyable; sometimes in the mornings just to lie in bed, or else going to bed later if I want to and not feeling that I am going to be exhausted the next day because I am trying to cope with things. Those sort of things, the freedom just to be much more relaxed about what I am doing.

I. The lifting of pressure.

G. Yes.

I. A lot of retired people's time is taken up in engagement with their children and grandchildren.

N. It is quite a different situation for us, because our grandchildren are in Australia.

G. Yes. Most of our family is overseas so we had to establish our own structures, independent of family, and this has taken some time to do. We felt it was important to have particular activities together, and times when we do things separately.

N. We have one day a week when we make a point of doing things together, and we each have a day when we are specifically doing things separately, such as I work at the hospital one morning a week as an assistant chaplain, and I also help with an adult reading scheme.

G. I became an interviewer at the volunteer centre, and now I am there for one day every week. I enjoy that because I am meeting a totally different group of people. We have thoroughly enjoyed being involved with a walking group - a very accepting group from different backgrounds. You are not expected to be muscular trampers! We can go out and just enjoy being with them and enjoy nature.

I. One of the things people often say about ageing is that there are likely to be difficulties with health and various disabilities that may diminish quality of life. Any comment?

N. Well that is a reality. Some areas of life do diminish because of health or disability, but that gives the opportunity for wider dimension in other areas, such as being able to read more, think more, just being somehow. A term that is most meaningful for me is *creative ageing*.

I. And that's in spite of any limitations that come?

N. Well, limitations bring their own opportunities for growth and for learning, understanding other people's situations.

I. George?

G. I think we can spend too much time regretting some of the things we have had. A few years ago because of a sudden explosion I lost a lot of my hearing very suddenly. Initially my hearing was very distorted and very bad. Over the first few weeks I couldn't hear birds and I just didn't find listening to music at all enjoyable. But gradually it has settled down. I am still fairly hard of hearing, but gradually adjusted to it and started to enjoy what is still there. For instance, I used to love listening to the piano on the CD player, but I find piano is now rather distorted. However I can enjoy wood-wind instruments and violin, and so there are compensations. And there's adjusting to using a hearing aid. All those things are adjustments you simply take as a skill to be learned and a new experience. It has been salutary to lose a significant part of my hearing but I am grateful for what I have got. A few months ago I had to go suddenly into hospital and have a major operation and I found that if I just settled to it, went through it, I came out the other end! I have had to cope with a colostomy since then. We get on with most things. It is all right - just part of life now.

I. You are in your early years of retirement, but you have worked with people who are in their 80s and 90s, and for some of those people life does become really hard with the loss of spouse, quite serious physical limitations and perhaps loss of memory. How do you feel about those years coming?

N. It is a bit scary to think about it, but at the same time working with older frail people I have learned dimensions of life which I hope will be offered to me as I get older. I have noticed with older people, that those who have a sense of humour are the ones that manage best.

G. I would hate to be really dependent on people for the basic needs of life, but I have had patients who have been in that situation, and with great dignity and cheerfulness maintained their interest in other people all the time. I find that a challenge - that such people can still be reaching out - and feeling for other people. That's probably one of the big secrets. I have been amazed at the courage of some of the old, but they just get on don't they?

N. I still see quite a lot of older people in their 90s, and the courage of the majority of them, how they are coping with disabilities, is really an inspiration and a learning experience.

I. Would you care to comment specifically on spirituality at this stage of life?

G. I become less enamoured with any fixed form of doctrine or statement of faith. My spiritual journey is constant discovery of new aspects of me, and discarding some things that have been important to me in the past, and finding new things that are becoming more important. There is a greater freedom... because I am not being restricted by my view... and that is great.

I. Neroli

N. I think as I get older, I am becoming more comfortable in just resting in the love and mystery of God. What that means as far as death is concerned is irrelevant really - I don't fear death as I get on. I might fear the process though! And I find myself very much drawn to Celtic spirituality with its emphasis on nature, as that dimension of life is becoming so important to me.

HOLY MOMENT by Margaret Dunn

On a Wednesday evening about two months ago, I received a call telling me that my father was not expected to live to the weekend. I spent the next day travelling to be by his side and was so pleased to find him conscious and able to respond to our greeting. I had shared with my brother while travelling that I had a very strong sense of needing to release our Dad to the Lord. When we arrived I knew he was near death, so after our greeting I prayed what I now call a prayer of release, giving our dear father into the loving arms of the heavenly Father. While we had talked with him Dad had mostly had his eyes closed, but after we had finished praying he became alert and we could see his eyes were fixed on something (Someone?) above us that we couldn't see. I wish now that I had asked him to describe for us what was holding his attention. He stayed like that until he quietly wasn't with us any more. The three of us by his bed were acutely aware that we were on Holy Ground, and were able to rejoice at the Lord's graciousness in his peaceful but alert death, in getting us there in time and in showing us how to help him leave us. The nurses told my sister that it was so much easier caring for a dying person who was actively looking forward to death without any fear. We praise God for our father's manner of passing.

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Resurrection is always preceded by powerlessness;
it is always the miracle of being given new life.

Kathleen Fischer - Winter Grace.

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What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body there is also a spiritual body..... flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery!

St. Paul. 1 Corinthians 15: 42-44, 50-51 NRSV

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CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER AND LIFE by Ross Miller - Onehunga

The Second Vatican Council, a generation ago now, opened to the whole Christian church once again the ancient tradition of contemplative prayer and life. This is one of the miraculous gifts to faith in our terrible century.

So it is that writers such as Ruth Burrows, Joan Chittister, Thomas Keating, John Main, Basil Pennington, all of whom thirty years ago were "enclosed" in their monasteries, are now teaching people of all traditions how to be still and silent and simple before God; how to pray without images or symbols or expectations; how to "let go" of control and to be free.

Even before the Council, Thomas Merton was struggling with his call as a Trappist monk, and his call to write, voluminously in his case, about God and the world. Out of that tension has now flowered a profusion of rich, pungent teaching for many of us, on growing up in faith.

It was a high privilege for me to attend the annual John Main Seminar this year in San Francisco. Our teacher was Dom Thomas Keating. This, the conference brought together two of the contemporary approaches to contemplative life and prayer, John Main, Laurence Freeman and others (mainly Benedictines) teach "Christian meditation".

Keating, Pennington and others (Cistercians) teach "Centering Prayer". The differences in practice are certainly not crucial. What is crucial is that the seminar brought together Christians of many shades and traditions, with even Jews and Buddhists. Part of growing up is seeing these fears melt away.

A closely related gift, some would say an essential part of contemplative prayer and life is Lectio Divina, "Sacred Reading". A discipline which includes both Lectio and contemplative prayer is now being found around the world and the church to be quite possible in our busy lives, depending on our chosen priorities. It is, after all, merely restoring to the laity what was originally theirs. And once again in Christian history, the monasteries come to the rescue with teachers such as Thelma Hall and Michael Casey.

I have been asked for a reading list. But the list is huge - and a necessary caution is that no one learns to pray by reading about it! Christian bookshops and libraries can supply works of the above named authors. Another approach is to track down the websites of WCCM (the World Centre for Christian Meditation) or Contemplative Outreach (for Centering Prayer). There are some wonderful websites on Lectio Divina. Merton's writings, including his diaries, have been well edited and republished in recent years - and some of these are very important.

THYE JOYFUL MYSTERIES OF OUR LIVES

By entering into past occasions of grace and joy, we experience again the gift of God's love and healing. Biblical remembering is not simply "living in the past". The Hebrew verb "to remember" means bringing the past into the present in such a way that it influences present decisions and conduct. Memory is often an untapped reservoir of comfort and peace.

Kathleen Fischer

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INTIMACY WITH GOD IN LATER YEARS

Teilhard de Chardin

Le milieu Divin.

Collins. Great Britain 1964 Page 89

It was a joy to me O God, in the midst of the struggle, to feel that in developing myself I was increasing the hold you have upon me; it was a joy to me too, under the inward thrust of life or amid the favourable play of events, to abandon myself to your providence. Now that I have found the joy of utilising all forms of growth to make you, or to let you, grow in me, grant that I may willingly consent to this last phase of communion in the course of which I shall possess you by diminishing in you.

Grant that I may recognise you under the species of each alien and hostile force that seems bent on destroying or uprooting me. When the signs of age begin to mark my body, and still more when they touch my mind; when the ill that is to diminish me, or carry me off, strikes from without or is born within me; when the painful moment comes in which I suddenly awaken to the fact that I am ill or growing old; and above all that last moment when I feel I am losing hold of myself and am absolutely passive within the hands of the great unknown forces that have formed me; in all those dark moments O God, grant that I may understand that it is you..... who are painfully parting the fibres of my being in order to penetrate into the very marrow of my substance and bear me away with yourself.

You do not need to know precisely what is happening or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognise the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment and to embrace them in courage, faith and hope.

Thomas Merton

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An old man was asked, "What is humility?" He replied, "It is when your brother sins against you and you forgive him before he comes to ask for forgiveness".

The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers. Ed Benedicata Ward. No. 172

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THE DARK NIGHT OF THE ELDERLY

Mary d'Apice

Noon to Nightfall.

Dove Melbourne 1995 Page 237

Life's evening heralds for many the advent of darkness. "The dark night of the elderly" can be a time of rootlessness, confusion and a touching of rock bottom. Absence on the part of God is more apparent than is presence and prayer seems sterile and monotonous. The sense of uselessness which haunts the aged can be a reminder that true value lies not in what is done but in who they are. It is for them to bear witness to the beauty and satisfaction of being a person of God, the one the Creator desired in the first place.

NUNC DIMITTIS

The Pattern of Our Days

Wild Goose Pub. 1996 pp 175-176. ed Kathy Galloway

It happened that
 an old man and an old woman saw a word one day
 a word that looked familiar
 a word they thought they had seen many times before
 an insignificant word and one of many like it

that had passed in front of their eyes that day.

not a word to write home about
not even a particularly well presented word
and probably not a word you'd find in better circles
just a scruffy word wrapped up in small cloth parcel

but as they looked
a curious thing happened
they knew that this was the word
that they had been waiting all these years for
they knew that this was the word
that might fill the world with new talk
they knew that this was the word
that would make sense of all words
they didn't know how they new ...they just knew!

After they had managed
to catch their breath from surprise
the old woman rushed out to tell anyone
who cared to listen about the word she had seen
she sang a song about how this word
would change everything
the old man held the word
in his tired but trembling hands
and he also sang a song from the top of his heart

The word was brought to the temple
by Mary & Joseph
The old woman was Anna -
the prophetess in the temple
The old man was Simeon
whose song we now say/sing together

"Now, Lord, you have kept your promise,
and you may let your servant go in peace.
With my own eyes I have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared
in the presence of all peoples;
a light to reveal your will to the Gentiles
and bring glory to your people Israel"

LUKE 2:29-32 TEV.

LOVE & DREAD

Julian of Norwich: Revelations of the Divine - 74

I believe dread can take four forms. One is dread of fright that comes upon a man suddenly because he is weak. This kind does good, for it helps to purge a man as it were, just as physical sickness does, or any other pain that is not sinful. All such suffering helps a man if he takes it patiently.

The second is the dread of pain, which will stir and waken a man from the sleep of sin. He will not be able to know the gentle strength of the Holy Spirit until such times as he understands what is meant by this dread of

pain, of physical death, of spiritual enemies. It impels us to seek God's strength and mercy; and so God helps us by enabling us to be sorry for our sins through the blessed touch of the Holy Spirit.

The third is the dread which doubts. These doubts tend towards despair God will have turned into love through our knowledge of His love. In other words, the bitterness of doubt is turned to sweet and kindly love by grace. It never pleases our Lord that his servants should doubt his goodness!

The fourth is the dread born of reverence. No dread but this really pleases God. It is so gentle; the greater it is, the less it is felt because its love is correspondingly sweeter.

Love and dread are brothers. They are rooted in us by the goodness of our Maker, and they will never be taken from us. We love by nature, and we love too, by grace. We dread by nature, and again, we dread by grace. It is right for the lordship and fatherhood of God to be feared, just as it is right for his goodness to be loved...

All forms of dread other than the reverent one are not really holy though they sometimes seem to be. We can distinguish them in this way; the dread which makes us fly to our Lord from all that is not good (the child to his Mother's bosom), and fly with our whole heart; the same dread which knows our weakness and our need, and which knows too his everlasting, blessed love and goodness; the dread which finds its salvation in him alone, and clings to him in sure trust - the dread which does all that for us is kind and gracious, good and true...

The effects which in this life naturally stem from reverent dread become, through the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, in heaven and before God, gentle, courteous and delightful. There, through our love for him, we shall be near God and really at home; at the same time, through our dread, we shall be gentle before him, and courteous. Love and dread are both one in the end. It is our desire to fear our Lord God with all reverence, to love him in all humility, and to trust him with all our strength.

JESUS SAID:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for my reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

MATTHEW 5: 3-12

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THE JOYFUL MYSTERIES OF OUR LIVES

By entering into past occasions of grace and joy, we experience again the gift of God's love and healing. Biblical remembering is not simply "living in the past". The Hebrew verb "to remember" means bringing the past into the present in such a way that it influences present decisions and conduct. Memory is often an

untapped reservoir of comfort and peace.

Kathleen Fischer

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You do not need to know precisely what is happening or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognise the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment and to embrace them in courage, faith and hope.

Thomas Merton

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For God beholds
with merciful eyes
not what you are,
nor what you have been -
but what you would be.

The Cloud of Unknowing

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What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body there is also a spiritual body..... flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery!

St. Paul. 1 Corinthians 15: 42-44, 50-51 NRSV

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Resurrection is always preceded by powerlessness;
it is always the miracle of being given new life.

Kathleen Fischer - Winter Grace.

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THE SENSE OF SIXTY

What do you say at sixty
Though the years roll by
just one by one
each one keeps adding one
until a sunny January day
you wake up sixty!
Then what do you say!

The trite and usual?
That "I don't feel sixty"
"Life moves so fast"
"The older the violin
the sweeter the music"
Not that.

(You detect a certain note
of care in many greetings
caution least offence
as if they weren't quite sure
you met the day in a positive way)
Oh, you could have hushed

the whole thing up
as many do, and kept
the world from knowing

Not me.
I simply feel too celebrative, too full of gratitude
of life and joy
to miss a chance to shout
my praise to God
for all His boundless gifts
exactly how do I experience
my life: as gift,
as providence directed)
The holy hand of heaven
has shaped my destiny
far different from my own design
and far superior.
At sixty I am wise enough
to know I am not wise
and likely would have grown
far less had my design prevailed.

The sense of sixty is exquisite;
I savour moments
relish situations
celebrate the serving life
rejoice in small accomplishments
see simplicity as essence
and quickly put behind me
what I am powerless to change.

There comes an economy of focus:
one's closer to the heart of matters.
And even while my time
is running rapidly behind,
the goodness of the moment
overshadows any threat
of final shelving.

And overwhelmingly
the feel of movement, journey,
pilgrimage; how life has moved!
In retrospect, how present
God has been
at every bend, therefore,
will be with me each tomorrow,
to bless again, to lead,
to take away the fear,
to bring again another home
along the way to Home.
The sense of sixty
is of momentary pause
for thanks to God. Then moving on!

Wallace E. Chappell
Adapted from Alive Now

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BRIGHT DARKNESS DANCING

The dark night is
when the lights go out
and I lose my way.....
....only to find
after groping in the dark
the contours of my beloved's face;
a face I cannot see
but know by feeling.
And so I uncover
my beloved
under cover of darkness.
Far from sight
and the light of day
I discover my beloved
is the dark night
and the way.
I surprise
bright darkness dancing!
Anonymous

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