

**Reflections  
on  
True Life in God**

by

**Brother Andrew**

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## Introduction

From time to time Brother Andrew, a member of a contemplative monastic community in Sussex, England, posts a 'paper' on the Discussion Forum of the TLIG website. This little work brings together twenty of them and is offered to the general reader as an introduction to the spiritual treasures to be found in the True Life in God Messages.

Brother Andrew writes;

“Monasticism has always known that God does not seek the friendship of ‘pious souls’ only – vowed religious, devout churchgoers and so on – and the desert fathers frequently make the point, telling us, say, of a monk, rash enough to ask God, “How am I doing?” and being informed by Him that “There is a cobbler in Alexandria further along the road than you are.” The True Life in God Messages bear eloquent testimony to this. They show how an expatriate housewife in Bangladesh, responding to her Teacher’s voice and rejoicing in His near presence, progresses from stammering incoherence, through doubts and all manner of difficulties, (and this must be the lot of all who respond to the voice of the Bridegroom) to that unshakeable confidence which is born of friendship with God.”

and

“This is difficult theology for many ‘professional’ theologians to accept since it proposes that God approaches ordinary people who are not just outside ‘our’ church, but outside *any* church, and brings them, not merely to some sort of rudimentary, elementary knowledge of Himself and His works, but to the highest levels of contemplation possible in this world, to friendship with God Himself. Having done that, He invites them to go and “restore My Church.”

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## Contents

1. Lectio Divina for our Times
2. The Theologian as Prophet
3. A School for the Lord's Service
4. Purgatory in this Life
5. Conversation in Heaven
6. Spiritual Discernment
7. Food for Thought
8. Some Distinctive Features of TLIG
9. East and West
10. Back on the Curriculum
11. Love is the Key
12. Knowledge of God
13. Purification
14. God is Love
15. The appearing of our Lord
16. Hearts and Minds
17. Like a Scroll
18. Unseen Warfare
19. Anglicans and Unity with Rome
20. A Taste of Heaven

*Come and place your ear on My Breast My Son, and hear My heartbeats, every heartbeat is a call for a soul, a supplication for a smile, a thought ... shed your tears not on Me My son but on your brothers and sisters who are dead and decomposing, not on Me My son, not on Me ... pray for them that My Father sends them My Spirit of Understanding, how else are they to convert? (27 July 1990)*

## 1. Lectio Divina for Our Times

I thought I would discuss the True Life in God Messages with reference to Lectio Divina. Spiritual reading forms an important part of the life of prayer. A well-stocked library is a feature of every monastery. Specific times of the day are set aside for reading. The silence of the monastery and the curb on speech which it places upon even the most talkative is conducive to profitable rumination, as we go about our business, upon what is put before us in our reading. It is rare for a monk not to have a book (or two) 'on the go'. We read in refectory, and the refectory thus becomes a place where both body and spirit are nourished and renewed, food on the plate and on the bookrest in front of us. In some houses the meal is taken in silence, while one member of the community reads aloud to everyone, but in ours, each reads silently the book in front of him. 'A little reading well digested at each session,' as our Rule states, 'is the best mental diet for a monk. He should therefore discipline himself to read slowly, contemplating what is written in the light of the Holy Spirit.'

In the earlier stages of our life of prayer we select a passage from the reading material in front of us – it might be a paragraph, a phrase or even just one word, - and ruminate upon it. The Holy Spirit, who always stands ready to guide us, approaches from his side and sheds his light on what we are reading. If we will allow him, he will grant us a depth of insight into what we are reading to which we could never attain on our own. John Henry Newman speaks of 'an angel's reach of thought.' St Paul refers to the gift of 'wisdom and understanding,' and has much to say about spiritual maturity.

En route, so to speak, to this spiritual maturity, something happens. We find that we are no longer able to meditate upon our reading the way we used to, indeed whatever reading matter we might select, we find it dull, boring, lifeless, and ‘closed’. We frequently pick up texts that used to grant us refreshment and joy, and find nothing in them. If we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us through what has now become something of a desert experience as far as reading is concerned, he will lead us on to a later stage in which God, from his side, selects what we are to think about, ruminate upon, meditate on, and leads us in our thinking on the subject *he* has given us. The initiative is now on God’s side. Truly, now, ‘God proposes, man disposes.’

It is a joy when this begins to happen, the more so for its being such an unexpected turn of events. I was on my rest one summer in St David’s Hermitage. I had open on the table before me a book by Father Gilbert. I alternated my reading with manual work in the garden and as I worked, I found myself thinking along certain given lines, and enjoying it hugely. I worked and thought for some twenty minutes then went inside and sat down to my book again, and there in front of me, as if highlighted, was the matter I had just been reflecting upon, lucid, clear, ‘open’, the meaning revealed. I spent much of that sunny afternoon thus occupied – working a little, reading a little, and each time it was the same – there in front of me as I sat down to read was what I had been thinking about outside, and as I subsequently resumed my work in the garden, I was given to reflect on what I was *about* to read, before I read it. I was being led in my reading by the spirit, and not just led, but taught as well. It was a happy man who sat down to tea later that afternoon and reflected upon the words of the psalmist,

‘In the scroll of the book it is written of me, that I should do your will: oh my God, I long to do it, your law delights my heart.’ (Ps 40)

Understanding received in this way (‘illumination’), is not a conclusion arrived at after thought. It is complete as given, and this quality is immediately perceived by the recipient. It reassures, it calms, it is steady, stable, serene, it needs no verifying, it is above controversy, and the wisdom and knowledge that come with it share these characteristics. It is discrete. It does not belong in the debating chamber. It belongs, rather, in the heart of those whom the Holy Spirit has been preparing to receive it. I often think that if people would allow the Holy Spirit to teach them in this way then all the controversies over the meaning of Scripture and how it is to be interpreted would cease and they would then be able to answer the only question that really matters, namely, ‘Do you believe this?’ with a definite ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit will lead us to think along specific lines for a short period before leading us to find its verification on the page in front of us, as I have just described. At other times his leading of our thinking may last considerably longer. If he wants to prepare us to read a work such as, say, St John of the Cross’s *Dark Night of the Soul*, we might be given to think and reflect for some weeks on themes as supplied by the Holy Spirit. Then, as we begin reading the book in question, we find laid out before us by the author the very themes we have been ruminating on over the previous weeks. It will be seen here that the reading of the book does not *initiate* a period of reflection, rather it *concludes* it. Reading the book becomes a matter of recognising what we have already been given, in the spirit, to understand. Primed, expectant, we have been looking out for what we now find before us, and we accept without hesitation, this, the fulfilment of our reflections.

Sometimes, depending on what the Holy Spirit has in mind for us, the lead period is even longer and he may lead us to think and reflect along given lines for years before bringing the work to its conclusion by putting the book he intends for us into our hands - and this is what he did with me concerning the Messages. For a period of several years he gave me major themes to think about – the nature of salvation, purgatory and beyond, life in the new creation, the defeat of Satan and the ending of the Spiritual War, the transfer of the population of this world into the new creation, the raising of the shepherds needed to guide the flock into the new world, the Dark Night into which the world has been drawn in our times, the end of

that Dark Night, and the central role, in all of this, of love, the love of God our creator for his creatures, and our response, in and through the power of love, to Him. Such was my food and drink during those years. Wonderful themes! Tremendous themes! As I went about my business around the monastery I kept them in my heart and reflected upon what I was being shown with what I can only describe as a great and secret gladness. I found in these meditations all the hallmarks of divine provenance which I have been taught by experience to look for and which I mention above – steadiness, stability, serenity and so on. So I went on quietly, and as I did so, I kept an eye open for the book that would draw these great themes together. Such themes! Such themes! Who could write them down? Who could even *think* of such tremendous matters and not be shaken to pieces? I frequently found myself reflecting upon the scroll, written inside and out, that St John was given to see in the book of Revelation, (5:1) or later (10:10) where the scroll is given him to eat, and in so doing I was restored to the peace, not of this world, that only our Lord can give.

These years of meditation and reflection were brought to a new stage of fulfilment the day Father Gregory suggested I read the Messages given by our Lord to Vassula Ryden, and I embarked upon a course of spiritual instruction, the like of which I had never encountered before.

I do not intend to say much about the works themselves. As the psalmist says, and I use the phrase advisedly, ‘They are more than I am able to express’, (Ps 40) but I urge you to read them and judge for yourselves. More than in any other work of theology I have read, the Holy Spirit, who is in them, will reveal to you both himself, and the other two members of the Trinity, the Father, and the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not for me to try to describe what this is actually like when it happens, find out for yourself as you read them. The reader of these works will find his own life in them, in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the very life of everyone, and who is the author of these works. You may not want to meet him, or see your own life laid bare and revealed in the light of his truth, but he himself will grant you the wherewithal to stand in his presence when he comes in his glory, with his holy ones with him. (cf Lu 21:36, Matt 25:31, Lu 21:27, Lu 9:26) This, after all, is what our life of prayer is *for*. If you find that difficult to cope with then these works are not yet for you. I was speaking to someone recently who told me that on a recent visit to the monastery she read *nine* books in four days, and this, she admitted, was to avoid having to look up from her reading and acknowledge the presence of our Lord whom she *knew* was standing before her as she read. Here indeed is that mis-use of religion so prevalent in our own day, where religious practice itself becomes a ‘place’ in which to hide from God.

As you read these works then, reader, when he who is their author appears to you, look up from your reading and speak to him, face to face. It is what you were born for. Once you have left this world you will no longer be able to meet him in this way, so make the most of the time given you. Give ear to what he says to you, look at him, smile at him, and read as he invites you. He has much to say to you, to us, and he says it in these volumes. Tremendous themes! The nature of salvation, purgatory and beyond, life in the new creation, the defeat of Satan and the ending of the Spiritual War, the transfer of the population of this world into the new creation, the raising of the shepherds needed to guide the flock into the new world, the Dark Night into which the world has been drawn in our times, the end of that Dark Night, and the means by which he accomplished, accomplishes, all of that, through love, the love God has for all of us, and our response to that love. It is all written in these books. It will be given to you at the time to respond in appropriate fashion. Your response will be a true one, either yes or no.

The theology to which these volumes introduce us is refreshing, lively, and candid. You do not need a PhD in Theology to understand it. Accessible to all who desire it, it is direct, simple, and a joy to read. It refreshes the parts that other theologies cannot reach. It is in fact everything you do not expect theology to be. I have a hunch that those who read it and take to it will be little inclined to argue about it, or enter into the theological polemic that has so riven the separated churches over the centuries and whose fruits are becoming so manifest in our day – their inability to bring their worshippers to the perfection I have been describing. This inability is remedied in these volumes. Our Lord Himself speaks in them, and for those willing to receive him he grants renewal, refreshment, life, and peace.

The work of True Life in God has hardly begun. I have a feeling that in this initial period the Messages are being presented to the churches, that they might give the simple response, yes, or no, that they elicit. Once this initial period is over they will be presented to the population at large, and then I think astonishing, astounding things will happen, things beyond the capacity of human thinking to encompass – huge numbers of people will recognise, in the reading of them, their author, the Lord Jesus Christ. They will see his face, hear his voice, smile at him, rejoice with him, and *remember* that they know him and love him, and have done, these many years. The amnesia into which the Prince of this world, Satan, has cast them, and which the churches in their present state are unable to remedy, will thus be overcome, and they will come back to the Church, since for those who love our Lord there is nowhere else to go. Their return will transform the Church out of all recognition.

There is a historical precedent for events of such magnitude. In the fourth century the Emperor Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire and a vast influx of the population into the Church took place. In a very real sense the Church has been coping with the aftermath of that event ever since. The future events I am pointing to will be a furthering of that great work begun seventeen hundred years ago.

I think, in True Life in God, we are seeing the beginnings of great events. I suggest you read the Messages and think about them.

True Life in God Website: [www.tlig.org](http://www.tlig.org)

## 2. The Theologian as Prophet

In the early days of the Christian era theologians were those who spoke out of lived experience of God and the things of God. This made them prophets. As time went on theology became more ‘scholastic’, and theologians more ‘scholarly’, and the theologian was no longer necessarily a prophet. He was of course still divinely inspired, and working in the light of Christian revelation, but that can be said of everyone engaged in the pursuit of scientific knowledge. This “knowledge *about*”, is fundamentally different to “knowledge *of*”, as given directly by God to the recipient.

I wonder if now, at the close of the age, Vassula is ushering in the return of that “theology of lived experience” with which it began? In a sense of course it has never been entirely absent, but we could say that for some considerable time such theologians have not been *heard*, which in itself may be part of the Divine plan. In our day it seems that the return of the Christ

to gather his own is set to produce theologians who “speak of the things they have learned from the Father”, and Vassula may be the first of many such.

I was reading in Volume eleven this morning,

“I satisfied you (Vassula) and others through My Divine Message with one of My greatest and noblest Banquets...and I have granted you all to come and taste it”;

and later,

“...through my grace you become sons and daughters, heirs and heiresses of My Father as I am..”

and later,

“you can obtain the entire Godhead within you, dearest ones, Who will teach you sacred mysteries, sublime and Holy Knowledge that comes from Wisdom...”

and later,

“My loved one will then be selected as one amongst others of My collaborators who will be ruling with Me; then you could say, “I am living a true life in God, because I am participating fully in the life of the Most Holy Trinity.” (All from Message of 5 August 2000)

Human nature is triadic or Trinitarian, in the image of God, and that is what gives us the capacity to be lifted up into a *participation* in the life of the Most Holy Trinity. Without the incarnation and the completion of human being by Christ, and his taking us all with Him on his return to the Father, this would not have been possible.

This renewal in and by Christ of our human nature is what makes life *outside of* participation in God so unstable now, so prone to disintegration. It is a form of non-being which human beings are now both able (due to their having free will) and yet at the same time unable, ontologically, to choose, and it is this paradoxical and antinomic quality which for ever differentiates the dispensation of Christ from all worldly philosophies, systems of thought, and indeed religions. There is no fulfilment of our nature outside of God now; indeed, there is only wretchedness. As our Lord warned Vassula when He first approached her, “Daughter, do not let your (Godless) era destroy you”. (14 &16 December 1986) Participation in the life of God cannot mean very much to us until we have experienced it – it is something beyond anything we could imagine, other than anything we could hope for. It would never occur to us to ask for it or want it unless God from His side shows us what it is and grants us a taste of it. Once he has done that, our own desire for it does much to keep bringing our feet back onto the path that leads to life.

The theologian who is a prophet speaks and writes only of what he has seen and heard - this I think is what gives the Gospel of St John (the Theologian) its quality of serenity, its sureness of touch - although learning how to do that is a big work in itself, and we read in the Messages how God trains Vassula to tread carefully in what she says and keep to what He gives her and not embellish it from her side until she is properly established in the new life he has prepared for her, that is, in the love of God. It is a training for the rest of us too, who read, mark and inwardly digest their content as the Holy Spirit bestows the grace of understanding. A prayer manual with a difference, yet entirely suitable for our era. Hooray for True Life in God!

### 3. A School for the Lord's Service

Niels Hvidt recently made mention of Fatima, Garabandal and Medjugorjie as holy places, places of encounter with God, chosen by Him. In the case of the theology to which True Life in God introduces us, there is no specific geographical location - the chosen place is the heart of each one of us who reads the Messages.

These Conversations with Jesus constitute a written record, a verbatim transcript, of a work which God wills to undertake in every human heart – its purification, to make us fit to enter His Courts. This is of interest to me as a monk since our Rule speaks of a transformation of mind and body which we must undergo “to be fit vessels for the knowledge of his truth and the power of his love.”

Having initiated and then led Vassula along this at times “rough road” our Lord invites us to put ourselves in Vassula's place and allow Him to be *our* Teacher too. How much more than merely an exercise of the imagination this is, becomes apparent as we take up His invitation.

St Benedict described a monastery as a training “school for the Lord's service.” These “schools” were established by those inspired to discern that the church had been so drawn out into the “mindset” of the surrounding culture as to be unable to offer what was needed for a true life in God, and I would like to propose that something similar is happening today. True Life in God is, I suggest, a Spiritual Family that has been brought into being to be a “training school for the Lord's service” to meet the needs of our own times. It is a dispersed community (Diaspora) but modern electronic means of communication such as I am using to write and disseminate this piece enable us to keep in touch with one another and find fellowship with our “classmates” wherever they are in the world.

Monasticism began in a dispersed way in the fourth century with men and women living in solitude, but in time it was perceived that there was a need for monastics to live together in communities under Rule and coenobitic monasticism came into being. Who knows, perhaps there will one day be TLIG communities in places set apart for the purpose?

I was reading this morning, in Volume 12, our Lord's words to Vassula;

“...walk with me and I will school you in My rules of righteousness: I will be your Educator and no-one else. I will whisper in your ear the history of all invisible things and inaccessible yet becoming visible and accessible through the Divine teachings of your Master; the Word of Life will be offered to you, freely..... after having been schooled with righteousness I shall lift your soul to the next level; the level in which before your birth you were called...” (6 January 2002.)

I would say that this is precisely the goal and purpose of the Contemplative Monastic life. Our Rule speaks of “the opening of the heart in the Grace of Contemplation.” This is something which God does from His side. It is the goal, in the sense of ‘End’, of our life of prayer, and at the same time its proper beginning. As one of our founding Fathers writes;

“Contemplation is the appropriate possession of all who would walk with God in prayer. Contemplation is the beginning of any real intimacy with God, to which all are called in Christ. All that precedes in mental and affective prayer is the ascetic preparation.” (Fr Gilbert Shaw)

God says to Vassula, “how he will, with delight, provide you! He will found in you the Foundation I had been teaching you about; the true theology, that is the contemplation of Me your God; enraptured thus in contemplation your soul will soar in the heights contemplating Me your God in depth; My reign *then begins in you.*” (My italics) (7 August 2002)

In ‘the normal course of events’, that is, according to a human way of thinking, this self-revelation of God to the seeker, and the new life which then begins, is frequently seen as something that lies, if not at the end of the road, then at least some considerable distance along it. But that is by no means necessarily so. In the case of Vassula it happened at the beginning, and she was not even seeking Him. These are marks of authenticity.

The “rough road” quoted above comes from the Message of March 27, 2002. “my favourite friends travel by rough roads.” We may compare that with our Lord’s words in the Revelation to John; “Those whom I love I reprove and discipline”. (Rev.3:19) You may recall the story of St Teresa of Avila who, travelling on some God-given errand one day was pitched from her cart into a cold stream. On struggling to her feet she heard our Lord say, “This is how I treat my close friends.” “That, Lord,” replied the redoubtable Teresa, “is probably why you have so few of them!” I paraphrase here, and hope I have not mangled the story in the telling.

#### **4. Purgatory in this Life**

I would like to discuss True Life in God, and the theology it places before us, with reference to a work with which you may be familiar – John Henry Newman’s “Dream of Gerontius.” It begins, you will remember, with Gerontius’ death and departure from this life. Released from his physical body he finds himself in the company of his guardian angel, whose task it is to take him to the place of encounter with the Lord Jesus. As they go, he prepares Gerontius for this long-anticipated event by answering the questions he puts to him, an exchange in which Gerontius takes great delight, both for the content of the angel’s discourse upon matters that have long exercised Gerontius’ mind, and for the sound of his voice, the tones of which he could not have endured on earth.

They mount up, ever higher, until they enter the presence of our Lord. Unable to restrain his desire any more, Gerontius darts forward and throws himself at His feet. Pierced with sorrow, wounded by love, and yet filled with an ineffable delight, he is taken from the presence chamber to the place of his purgation, where his faithful guardian addresses these words to him;

“Farewell but not forever, brother dear,  
be brave and patient on thy bed of sorrow  
swiftly shall pass thy night of trial here, and I will  
come and wake thee on the morrow.”

There the Dream ends. I first came across the work here at the monastery. I was enthusing about it one day to the Superior, and he said, “Yes, it’s a lovely work, but it can suggest that purgatory is something that happens only after death. It need not wait till then, it’s much better to do your purgatory in this life.” I had never heard it put so plainly and simply, and I took his word to heart. In time, I came to realise how true it was.

How far can you get in purgatory in this world? Further than you might imagine. St John of the Cross, referring to those who have reached a certain stage of purification, writes,

“Such souls either do not enter purgatory at all (on physical death) or else spend a very short time there.” Further on in the same work he says, “The tenth and last step of this secret ladder of love causes the soul to be wholly assimilated to God, by reason of the clear and immediate (ie direct, not mediate) vision of God which it then possesses; when, having ascended in this life to the ninth step, it goes forth from the flesh. These souls, who are few, enter not into purgatory, since they have already been wholly purged by love.” (The Dark Night of the Soul)

The pains of this purgation can be used by the Lord for the benefit of others too. Love is the key; relational, reciprocal love between Creator and creature. Talking of these matters with Vassula, our Lord states,

“every drop of love is used to liberate souls from purgatory, by loving Me...you extinguish their fires, liberating them from their agony, then I the Lord can receive them finally....love assimilates the Powers of Heaven, and is the Key to freedom and Life...” (18September 1988)

St Catherine of Genoa states that purgatory begins when the departed soul is granted a vision of our Lord. In the Message of 19 August 1988 our Lord describes this pivotal moment in the life of a soul in the following way;

“I have shown them My Holy Face for just an instant and at that very instant, their eyes unveiled facing Me in My Purity and in My Light, immediately saw The Truth face to face and realized how blemished their soul is from sin, and in spite of their burning desire to fall in My open arms and follow Me, they understand that this is impossible before cleaning their soul; so with a piercing pain of sorrow, they fall back and prepare themselves to be purified; this hurts and burns them beyond words, because they cannot see Me....the cause of their greatest suffering in purgatory is My Absence.”

In order to “trigger” the entry of a soul into purgatory, or the purification of the heart, before rather than after death, our Lord comes into this world and shows Himself to a person in the Spirit. His appearing has the effect of setting in train the ‘departure’ of that person from this life. As our Lord says in Scripture, “My choice of you has withdrawn you from this world.” (John 15:19). I would like to propose that in our day, our Lord has been appearing in this way to very large numbers of people, many of whom have, as yet, little or no conscious memory or understanding of this, the day of their visitation. It is an ongoing visitation, and it is taking place in the spirit. The spirit is very much higher up and rather more deeply earthed than people tend to think nowadays, and therefore inaccessible, as yet, to their waking consciousness. It cannot remain indefinitely inaccessible, however. As Fr Gilbert Shaw states,

“Through the inspiration of the Spirit brought about by the gift of contemplation, that which was at first experienced unconsciously is .... brought to the consciousness.” (The Increase of Prayer)

It is the duty of Christian theology to clarify these matters, and for teachers and preachers to put them before the people, in order to wake them up to the fact of the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ to humankind in this way in our day. The people need to have ministers working ‘from our side’, that is, in this world, who can present these things to them in simple language and so assist them to wake up to what is happening, and to call upon Him by His personal name Jesus. True Life in God, aptly described as ‘a wake-up call to humanity’, is central to this. Purification of our own heart implies and requires sharing in our Lord’s Will for the awakening and purification of all others, living and departed. It is important for those who have begun to pray, to begin to pray for those large numbers of ‘ordinary people’ in our day

who have never prayed, and have been duped into living life in this world with no reference to God, and tricked into thinking that such a 'life' is life.

Direct, accessible, couched in simple language, this Love Hymn to all humanity sung to us by God Himself, contains a special grace for such a divine work of intercession. It is after all the story of how an ordinary person, in the midst of a busy life in this world, was approached by her guardian angel, Daniel, and prepared by him for an encounter with the living God, after which her life changed out of all recognition as she was led by our Lord into a vigorous and searching purification, not at some future stage of life beyond the frontier of death, but now, in the midst of this mortal life. Vassula's story, as we put ourselves in her place and allow God to speak to us directly as we read, mark, and inwardly digest the content of the Messages, becomes our story too.

There is great hope in that for all of us. Thanks be to God for this most tremendous grace.

## **5. Conversation in Heaven**

In the monastic life we are governed by a Rule of Silence. Greater Silence extends from supper time (5.30 pm) to 9.30 next morning, and during that time we don't speak at all. Lesser Silence covers the rest of the day and throughout these hours we are asked to speak to one another – and guests – simply, and in as few words as are necessary.

Some people are better than others at governing their tongue, but even the most garrulous can never quite forget that we are all under an obligation to be careful in our speech, and to submit the way we use language to God, for its repair.

In the silence of the enclosure, speech attains to a prominence which it does not have in the world outside and in such an environment we cannot help but begin to see how disordered in our speech we have come to be. We have conversation at specified times – over lunch on a feast day, (meals are usually taken in silence), at corporate Recreation on Tuesdays, at Tea in the Library on Sunday afternoon, and it frequently happens that after such an event we find ourselves squirming with embarrassment, in the quiet of our cell, as we are reminded, with great clarity, of the silly things we said in conversation. The Holy Spirit is the one who reminds us, that we might repent, and amend our behaviour.

The Holy Spirit does not restrict this, His saving work on our behalf, to those living inside a monastic enclosure, however, and in the Message of 8 April 1989 our Lord says to Vassula,

“Be prudent, daughter, with words, with gossip, with remarks, replace all these with silence, My Silence.”

His pupil obviously took this counsel to heart and began to ponder upon these things because shortly afterwards (9 May 1989) she addresses her Teacher, in some anguish, in these words,

“My lord, I have spent hours meditating upon the fruitless conversation I had last night. I was too distraught even to approach You later on, I did not dare to face You, out of shame. What have I said on Your behalf? Nothing. I failed You...I have neither honoured You nor praised You and yet, I delight in nothing but in You my Lord.”

Our Lord replies,

“My Vassula, feel this love I have for you...My Mercy is Great and My Tenderness has overcome My anger, My Ways are Holy, daughter, so be holy for I am Holy, may your conversation be like music to My Ears; Wisdom, My child, is your Teacher and Educator, avoid empty talk, avoid useless conversations....My pupils I want perfect, so be perfect! Resent all things that pull you down, like gossip, empty talk....a pupil who is in My Hands should remain pure and listen to His Master’s Voice.”

Opportunities for useless conversations and empty talk, although not entirely eliminated, are nevertheless very much reduced in a monastic enclosure, and this is a help for those who live in or visit the monastery. But this is by no means to suggest that the work of repairing human speech is restricted to particular geographical locations set aside for the purpose. When God intends to bring a person to perfection, He creates an enclosure in that person’s heart. This is called ‘circumcision of the heart’ an operation performed, not by human hands, but by God Himself. It is perfect, and the still, quiet enclosure thus created cannot be broken into by the world with its vaunted clamour and busy-ness. This is the ‘garden enclosed’ of the Song of Songs. (4:12)

It is not easy to stand in the presence of God and a work is required to prepare the ground. In this preparatory period God invites those whom He calls to “Lower your voice so that you may hear my voice.” (19 June 1995) In the ensuing silence our spiritual hearing is restored, our blindness overcome and, seeing and hearing the Lord, our God and King in His glory, we learn, with great gladness, how to respond to Him in a way that is fitting.

Monasticism has always known that God does not seek the friendship of ‘pious souls’ only – vowed religious, devout churchgoers and so on - and the desert fathers frequently make the point, telling us, say, of a monk, rash enough to ask God “How am I doing?” and being informed by Him that “There is a cobbler in Alexandria who is further along the road than you are.”

The Volumes bear eloquent testimony to this. They show how an expatriate housewife in Bangladesh, responding to her Teacher’s voice and rejoicing in His near presence, progresses from stammering incoherence, through doubts and all manner of difficulties, (and this must be the lot of all who respond to the voice of the Bridegroom) to that unshakeable confidence which is born of friendship with God.

God sees us, not as we see ourselves, nor as others see us, nor, indeed, as we have come to be in this fallen world, but the way He first saw us in His mind when He created us, and it is to that, that this Dialogue of Love restores us, as we put ourselves in Vassula’s place and read, mark, and inwardly digest what is placed before us.

“See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.” (Hebrews 12:25)

\* \* \* \* \*

“When first I put myself to school in your service, I seemed to see a new earth and new heavens, for of a sudden you made all things new for me. I am a countryman, Lord, who comes from the country of the world. Teach me your city’s ordered ways, the courtesies and gracious manners of your court. Remove from me the likeness of the world on which I had been modelling myself, and make me like your citizens, lest in their midst I seem as one

deformed. And teach me too the language that I do not know, the language that I began to hear when I came out of Egypt, but do not understand because I had grown up in an alien land. Teach me the language you speak with your children, and they with you, and make me understand those little signs by which you give understanding hearts to know what is your good, acceptable and perfect will.”

(From The Meditations of William of St Thierry)

## 6. Spiritual Discernment

Serving police officers say that in time they develop a ‘policeman’s nose’ by which they mean the ability to intuit whether or not a person is telling them the truth. I think something similar happens to us when we acquire spiritual discernment. There is a particular quality about the spiritually genuine which is unmistakable, unassailable, and yet, quite what that quality is, is impossible to explain to others. It is learned by personal experience. We may ask the Holy Spirit to grant us the grace of discernment, and He may well begin to do that by showing us how frequently, and how easily, we get it wrong, when we were convinced we’d got it right.

I found the way to at least the beginnings of spiritual discernment in the following way – I’d go to the Father Superior and say, “Such and such an idea is presenting itself to me with some insistence. I put it to you for its verification.” So many times I found that the suggestion or idea I had been entertaining so lavishly and so pleasurably simply disappeared, and I found myself reflecting rather ruefully on how attractive, how genuine, it had appeared to be, and how silly I had been to believe in it. But I persisted in taking things to him for their verification, and things began to change, and I was no longer assailed by all sorts of ‘bright ideas’ getting in the way of prayer.

These ‘good ideas’, which are in fact baseless, are a menace to novices in the religious life. They become convinced they should be acting on them but they are just a temptation. The way to overcome it, to reveal it for the lie it is, is to put it in the hands of some member of Holy Church who has been given authority. As Fr Gregory once said to me, “If what I tell you is right, the Holy Spirit will back me, and you, up. If I am wrong, He will show you that I am wrong, but He will still support both of us – me, because my mistake is a genuine one, and you, because you have had faith in Holy Church, to which the Lord Christ left power to act on His behalf in this way.”

Initially I went to Father Gregory with all sorts of matters but as time passed, the Holy Spirit began to make Himself known as my guide, and He would show me directly, in the spirit, the genuineness or otherwise of what was being put to me, provided that I, from time to time, referred everything back to the Superior. The Holy Spirit loves to find people who will put their trust in the human structures our Lord set up on earth in Holy Church.

Good spiritual directors seem always to have been thin on the ground. St John of the Cross in his own day lamented the dearth of good priests who could lead people forward in the way that the Holy Spirit was leading them, and not get in the way.

Yes, the times are difficult, but it is possible to go forward in faith and trust and obedience. There is a way through the present darkness. Our Lord says,

“Love is near you...take My Cross and rest me...love is weary and needs rest...do not abandon Me. I shall infuse in you learnings and discernment but I want your full abandonment daily, for how else would I then activate in you My Will?” (28 November 1989)

We can have faith that God never invites us to do something which is beyond our capacity.

## 7. Food for Thought

Visitors to the monastery are often struck by how ordered our life is. Everything is time-tabled so we seldom have to ask ourselves, “What should I be doing now?” If I am on the chores list to help with the washing up after supper, that’s what I should be doing then, and if it’s 8.30 in the morning I need to be in my cell since the period between breakfast and the start of morning work at 9.30 is cell-time.

The requirements of enclosure and timetable fairly obviously place restrictions on our natural propensity to wander around as the whim takes us. What is less obvious is that the wanderings of the *mind* can be similarly brought to order, and one of the ways of accomplishing that is the weekly community conference.

This takes place on Wednesday afternoons. The Superior puts two or three questions on the notice board on Monday morning and we are invited to turn our minds to them and prepare answers. Here are some examples;

“What can we do to overcome what may seem like involuntary passions and reactions to life around us?”

“How does protecting a self-centred nature distract and dominate the common life?”

“How does being renewed in the spirit of your mind bring about, and depend upon, the indwelling and irradiating of our whole being by the Holy Spirit?”

If we are given such a seed-thought on which to meditate, the Holy Spirit will approach from his side and lead us in our thinking; teaching, illuminating and guiding us in his light. This is thrilling beyond words when it gets properly underway, although it must be said it contains great trials in the early and middle stages, and it nourishes the mind in a way and to a depth that we, working unaided, could never hope to achieve. I must say that when first given to think in this way (and it is gift) I realized that here at last was food for real thought and a right use of the mind, something which in many years of study at school and university I had never found.

Having ruminated, then, on the given subjects, we bring our written answers to the conference and we are often agreeably surprised at the extent to which we have all come to a common mind on the subject before us, albeit with different shadings according to the capacity of each.

God loves to grant knowledge of himself and his works to his creatures and when he finds a willing pupil he moves with alacrity from his side to meet us. If we will allow him, he will lead us into fields of wisdom, knowledge and understanding which are wonderful beyond all describing. The Messages testify to this.

“Follow My instructions, beloved; remain always available for Me, your God.....Wisdom? I shall instruct you freely...; Patience? I will give you Mine; Endurance for atoning for yourself and for others? You will absorb from Me. Love? I will fill your heart from Mine. Peace? My Peace is yours.”

Later in the same Message, (21 June 1989), God the Father says,

“Remember, I am Wisdom and your Educator, so depend on Me....trust Me, seek Me, obey Me, love and adore Me.....I am the Authority and Discipline that descend upon you..”

The knowledge here offered to the disciplined heart which has learned to submit to authority is very different to scientific knowledge, the fruit of human inquiry. The former is stable, the latter has all the inherent instability of everything that will pass away. It also has a superficial attractiveness which is difficult to overcome. The means of overcoming it is an attentive ear, an open ear, an ear that has been trained to listen for the word of God and obey it, and we find a very good example of that in the Message we have quoted above. The Father says,

“My child, I love you everlastingly, do not trouble your soul seeking to understand My Ways, for in doing so you only allow yourself to be drawn into winding ways that never end.”

These ‘winding ways’ are the wanderings of the mind, which, unless warned against the practice, feels free to inquire into anything and everything it comes across, according to its own lights, and on its own terms. This particular field of inquiry is limitless, but it is a desert. It promises fulfilment, but does not deliver, not so much because it cannot, more because the human heart is made for a higher knowledge – knowledge of God, without which life in this world is not true life.

When God speaks such a word of instruction to his pupil, and we hear it, agree to it, and want to do his bidding, he himself, from his side, sees to it that we do not wander into these winding ways. We no longer seek to understand what is not ours to know, rather we rejoice in his saving love and thank him for it. This is the childlike simplicity our Lord invites us to strive to acquire. If in due course God chooses to make known to us some aspect or other of his mighty works – what he does and how he does it – this he will do at the right time, but according to his will and purpose, not ours.

“If my mind has strayed into unlawful fields and insidious thoughts, come to my help and rescue my insidious nature, for I am not insensitive to your kindness Lord; I am only weak and wretched.” (5 May 2001)

## 8. Some Distinctive Features Of True Life in God

I would like to share some thoughts on True Life in God as compared to mystical writings in general since I believe that for several reasons it is somewhat in a class of its own.

The Messages are passed on to us by means of locutions. Vassula was taught by God. He approached her in the midst of a busy life in this world, broke through to where she was, and offered to teach, guide, and lead her to knowledge of Himself and His works. She agreed to this, and her training began. In the monastic life we use the term *ascesis* (adjective – ascetical) which is the Greek word for training. The aim of this *ascesis* is to bring a person to the point at which ‘the heart is opened in the grace of contemplation.’ I am quoting here from our own Monastic Rule. Human thinking, theological training manuals, books on prayer, and much church experience and expectation, would place this momentous event some distance along

the way, and the opening of the heart is seen, by and large, as the end, the goal, of the life of prayer. In fact it is not. Far from being the end, it is only the beginning. It is when the heart is opened (from God's side) that the life of prayer properly begins. This is where the real training starts – everything else up till that point has been the ascetical preparation.

What does 'the opening of the heart in the grace of contemplation' mean? What experience does it refer to? Well, Vassula gives us a description of it in her account of how it all began with her, and most of us are familiar with her account of how that day in Bangladesh, when she was compiling a shopping list, her angel 'broke in', introduced himself and announced to her that she ought to prepare herself for great events. That was where her training started. Her teacher, as she was shortly to discover, was Jesus Christ Himself. He taught her prayer. He made of her a theologian, one who knows God, one who prays truly.

In this sense TLIG can be seen as a fulfilment of Fatima and Garabandal. The visionaries of Garabandal reported faithfully, as they were asked to, everything they saw and heard, but they themselves were not led into a course of theological training, nor were they instructed to invite others to put themselves in their place and receive the same graces that they had received. They themselves did not become theologians as a result of their experiences. It is stated of Maria Valtorta, for example, that she passed on her writings to a priest 'often without understanding the things she wrote.' This is not the case with the recipient of the TLIG Messages, who was brought to an understanding of the things she wrote, an understanding, be it noted, that far surpassed that of many of the priestly authorities to whom she presented these works. As you read the Messages you will see how God progressed her, as he promised he would, granting to her the gifts of wisdom, knowledge and understanding. By the time you get to the later Volumes you will see that the Messages have become much more of a real dialogue between creature and Creator, with an increasing capacity on the part of the creature to speak to God. It is by means of this 'Holy Converse' that the creature learns to relate to God, to speak to God, face to face.

The Messages are given to the rest of us as a course of training, a set of course books, the reading of which, if we put ourselves in Vassula's place, will progress us, too, into knowledge of God. They have a distinct didactic purpose. They make up the deficiencies in scholastic, academic theology which has made of the separated churches, with their separated hierarchies, their separated theological training institutions, such a wasteland in our day. As our Lord says, "human reckonings and human doctrines made a devastating desert out of My Church." (15 November 1990)

This is difficult theology for many 'professional theologians' to accept since it proposes that God approaches ordinary people who are not just 'outside our church' but outside *any* church, and brings them, not merely to some sort of rudimentary, elementary knowledge of Himself and His works, but to the highest levels of contemplation possible in this world, to friendship with God Himself. Having done that He invites His friends to go and extend His invitation to everyone, without exception.

I hope I can make it clear that I am in no sense trying to make any higher claims for True Life in God than it warrants, nor am I wanting to decry mystical works in general, nor those who disseminate them. My aim is merely to indicate certain distinct features of True Life in God and the specific work that it is set to accomplish in today's world.

## 9. East and West

“We may study as much as we will but we shall still not come to know the Lord unless we live according to his commandments, for the Lord is not made known through learning but by the Holy Spirit. Many philosophers and scholars have arrived at a belief in the existence of God, but they have not come to know God. To believe that God exists is one thing, to know God another. Both in heaven and on earth the Lord is made known only by the Holy Spirit, and not through ordinary learning.”

These words are from the writings of Saint Silouan of Mount Athos, who died in 1937. Simple, direct, straightforward, they are unmistakably genuine. Here is a man speaking from lived experience of God. St Silouan goes on to say,

“The Saints speak of that which they have actually seen, of that which they know. They do not speak of something they have not seen. (They do not tell us, for instance, that they have seen a horse a mile long, or a steamer ten miles long, which do not exist.)”

There is such a childlike quality here that you can't help but smile. The quotations are from *The Undistorted Image*, part biography of the saint, part collection of his writings, by Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov. Father Sophrony met the monk Silouan on Mt Athos, and later came to live in the West, first in Paris, and then in England, with the express intention of publishing St Silouan's writings.

I quote his words firstly because they are so in tune with the Messages, like a song sung in the same key, and secondly, in connection with Pope Benedict's recent address. He was talking about how Western thought developed over the Christian centuries, and warning us that Western culture is now somewhat isolated from other world cultures, and needs to find once again a right relationship between faith and reason.

I wonder if the imbalance, the hostility, even, between faith and reason in Western life and thought is due to a certain weakness in theology which itself has its origin in the fact that the Church is divided? Referring to the separated churches of East and West, Pope John-Paul II said that the Church needs to learn how to breathe again with both lungs. I would suggest that she needs also to learn how to think with both halves of her brain. East and West developed over the second Christian Millennium in isolation from one other, and this separate development impoverished both, to a greater extent, I think, than either 'half' realises. Our divisions cast long shadows across the Christian mind.

The Calendar of Saints of both halves is incomplete, and I sometimes think you can hear the gaps. When a Western writer 'states his case' I find myself thinking, "You should read St Gregory Palamas on the subject", and when I hear the Orthodox pronouncing on such and such, I want to send them the complete works of St John of the Cross. They would probably not want to read them, but I wish they would. Loyalty to one's own tradition is admirable, but it can harden into a prideful disposition which asks, "What have we to learn from them?"

The Messages have been given to us in this, our time of need, to help us in the overcoming of our divisions. It has been my experience that the Messages brilliantly sum up and encapsulate the writings of the spiritual masters of both East and West, thereby overcoming our divisions, and they do this, as I frequently tell people, in language that is simple, direct, uncomplicated, colloquial. They contain 'teaching material' sufficient to take the pupil to the highest levels of contemplation a human being can reach, this side of death, and they do this in language which is accessible to everyone, on whichever side of the divide(s) they find themselves.

We may or may not have the time or inclination to explore the life and work of St Nicolas Cabasilas, or St Seraphim of Sarov, or to read the sublime writings contained in the four volumes of the Philokalia, in order to set these (and many others I could name) as a sort of ‘counterbalance’ or ‘complement’ to our understanding of the works of St Augustine, St Catherine of Sienna, or St John of the Cross, or the profound spiritual insights set down by CS Lewis in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, (I write as an Anglican!) but we have been given a great gift in the *True Life in God Messages*. To illustrate what I am saying, I would invite you to read the Message of June 19<sup>th</sup> 1995, entitled, “Ask for the 7 gifts of my Holy Spirit.” Here is a sample paragraph from it;

“Entreat, and My Holy Spirit of understanding will descend in your nothingness as a brilliant sun with healing rays in your eyes, and all things that seemed obscure and out of your reach will be unveiled and in your nothingness My Spirit of Understanding will lead you into the mystery of Divine Truth. Do not let My Spirit find you ill-disposed or unwilling, let Him enlighten your mind and in the contrast of your nothingness My Holy Spirit will be everything you lack. Companion and Friend, He will hide no mysteries from you, but will offer you teachings that no mind has understood, things beyond the mind of mankind, going into the impenetrable and into the imperishable, reaching the depths of God. So do not be like the scholars or philosophers of your time who justify their philosophy to the model of their own rationalistic spirit – flesh and blood cannot reveal what comes from the Spirit. I can offer you My Kingdom and My Spirit can lead your step into My Kingdom. Come then and inherit what lasts for ever by allowing My Spirit of Understanding to enlighten your mind and body with His Divine Light, allowing Him to animate your soul in the intimacy We desire of you, in Us.”

The *Undistorted Image* by Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov is now out of print. It has been republished by Mowbray in two volumes – *Monk of Mt Athos* and *Wisdom from Mt Athos*.

## 10. Back on the Curriculum

In the Message of 31 May 1987 we read the following;

“Daughter, were you given time to think and meditate you would please me more; you will from now on seek Me in silence, love Me in absolute silence, pray in silence, enter My Spiritual World in silence....”

“How in silence Lord?”

“In silence looking at Me, I want you to stay still, without having interferences of any sort. Seek Me in silence.”

“Without interferences at all.”

“None at all. Desire stillness.”

“Jesus, how could I possibly find stillness in a family? It is almost impossible!”

“I will give it to you.”

The gifts our Lord is offering His pupil here, silence and stillness, are necessary at a certain stage of the life of prayer, to allow us to leave behind certain modes of behaviour and thought vis-à-vis God, and move on to take up others. Stillness (or *Hesychia*, to use the Greek word) is defined in the *Philokalia* as; “a state of inner tranquillity or mental quietude and concentration which arises in conjunction with, and is deepened by, the practice of pure prayer and the guarding of the heart and intellect. Not simply silence, but an attitude of listening to God and openness towards Him.”

True Life in God is a school for the Lord's service, and the Messages are its textbooks. They are full of amazing things. People withdraw from the world and spend years labouring to live according to certain precepts, striving after this 'inner tranquillity, mental quietude, and pure prayer' which apparently are only attainable after decades of toil and striving in places set aside for the purpose, and here is our Lord saying to His pupil (who, understandably enough is expressing astonishment) "I will teach you where you are." And He does. We know that He does because as the years go by – and we see this as the Messages 'unfold' - the pupil steadily acquires the vocabulary needed to express the things of God in the form of sound words that the Church has come to see are appropriate and necessary. Vassula shares this fruit with us in an address at a True Life in God monastic retreat at Meteora, Greece, in May 2004, entitled, 'Different Ascents; Detachment, Dispassion, Impassibility.' She speaks with great assurance and simplicity on matters which, over the centuries, have come to be confined to isolated backwaters, far from 'mainstream' Christian life and prayer. "This," you find yourself thinking as you read, "is not a learned treatise, this is someone speaking out of lived experience."

Here are five aspects of the life of prayer which, you could say, are 'missing' from mainstream church life, to its great detriment;

Hesychia (Stillness)

Nepsis (Watchfulness)

Apatheia (Dispassion)

Theosis (Divinisation or Deification)

The enmity of Satan and his constant attempts to attack and molest those who go forward in the life of prayer.

If these first four still appear somewhat unfamiliar, it is of course because they come from the other side of the Great Divide between the churches – from the Orthodox East where, in silence and solitude (those great prerequisites of the life of prayer) they were quietly nurtured and developed over the centuries of separation from the West. The Orthodox Diaspora in the wake of the Russian Revolution in the early twentieth century brought the treasures of Orthodox Theology to the attention of Christians in the West, as they steadily became available in translation. If the Church is seen as a school, then alas, much of it is a school in which over the centuries many of the most interesting subjects, indeed the most vital subjects, have simply been dropped from the curriculum.

The True Life in God Messages put them back. This is their great value. This is the tremendous thing about them. They are astonishing beyond words. They fill the gaps, make good the shortcomings, bring back what has 'gone missing' without our even noticing their absence. They restore the memory, they bring us back to the fullness of life and faith and knowledge of God in Christ Jesus.

If it were not contrary to the Rule of Silence under which I have agreed to live here at the monastery I might be inclined to look up from my reading, one of these mornings in Refectory, and exclaim, "Three cheers for Vassula!"

## **11. Love is the Key**

When the Lord Jesus Christ appears before us, our own created nature will 'of itself' perform an act of adoration and homage in His honour, since it recognises its Creator. Scripture frequently alludes to this where it states, "They bowed their faces to the ground before Him."

In acting in this way our nature is doing what it is created for – namely, to bring us to knowledge of God.

After our Lord has departed from this mode of self-revelation we cannot help but turn our mind again to the divine encounter and here, too, our created nature encourages us to ‘revisit’ the experience. We for our part must be careful not to ‘embroider’ the experience from our side.

That the body, with its inherent weaknesses, its ‘drives’, its ‘movements’ – its ‘passibility’ as the Orthodox put it – should play such a key role in bringing us to God is disconcerting to some but it is nevertheless the case.

St Maximus the Confessor writes,

“If you keep your body free from disease and sensual pleasure it will help you serve what is more noble.” (Philokalia Vol 2)

I’ve been reading some of St Maximus’ writings in a little book called “On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ” and I thought I’d share some reflections with you. Paul Blowers in his Introduction to the work states,

“The most natural human drive is an appetitive longing for the Divine,” and

“most basically one needs erotic desire (epithumia) converted through love (agape) to cling ardently to God.”

This is precisely what Pope Benedict was saying in his recent Encyclical, *God is Love*, where he speaks of “descending, oblationary love – agape,” and “ascending, possessive or covetous love – eros ,” stating that they can never be completely separated. “The more the two, in their different aspects, find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love ...is realised.”

Paul Blowers goes on to say that for St Maximus “growth in the grace of the Spirit is at once a progress of disciplined reason and will, but also a transformation at the level of appetite and of the soul’s deep-seated desires. Deification in this perspective entails the ultimate alignment of the whole array of human affections with the soul’s natural desire for God. It is...the final victory of love.”

The True Life in God Messages have an astonishing capacity to speak of matters of great spiritual profundity such as we are discussing here, in language that is simple, direct, and accessible to everyone, and in the Message of October 23 1988 we read,

“Glorify Me by desiring Me.”

A footnote to the text reads,

‘To desire God is also to glorify Him. Should you not desire Him while on earth you will learn to desire Him in Purgatory: in a purgatory only for desire.’

I would like to propose that TLIG has been given to us in our day as a means by which the separated churches of East and West might ‘find one another’ again, and so overcome the differences that have arisen between them over the centuries of separation. To show you what I mean by differences, here is St Maximus again, still on the subject of purification,

“When a man’s will is constantly with God, his desire grows beyond all measure into an intense longing for God and his incensiveness is completely transformed into divine love. For by continual participation in the divine radiance his intellect becomes totally filled with light: and when it has reintegrated its passible aspect it redirects this aspect towards God as we have said, filling it with an incomprehensible and intense longing for Him and with unceasing love, thus drawing it entirely away from worldly things to the divine.” (Philokalia Vol 2)

We can see that the Orthodox use of the word ‘intellect’ differs to ours. Similarly we may be unfamiliar with what is meant by ‘incensiveness’, ‘incensive powers’, and we’d need to investigate ‘passible’, ‘passibility’ before we could proceed. These are by no means insuperable difficulties of course but they are, I think, indicative of differences of emphasis, of approach, of use of language, that have arisen due to historical circumstances of separation. The Orthodox do not subscribe to the Western doctrine of Purgatory. However, Eastern spiritual writers have much to say about the purification of the passions, intellectual and sensible, in this life. They lack a tradition of distinguishing between an ‘active’ and a ‘passive’ mode of purification, as in the writings of St John of the Cross.

I think the Messages have an important role to play in acting as a bridge between East and West. They are not, however, ‘poor man’s theology’ from which one might proceed to study the writings of the Spiritual Masters. The Messages sum up and complete the Theology of East and West. The Theology which the Messages of True Life in God places before us has a unitive quality about it which overcomes the shortcomings inherent in Theology which comes out of separation and division. It has been rightly described as medicinal. True theology is truly contemporary, that is, it speaks to the condition of the age in which it appears, it is specific to time, to place and to person(s), and these are the Hallmarks of the One Great Tradition.

Unity ‘on the ground’ between the separated churches is nevertheless on the agenda, and it is my belief that if we read, mark and inwardly digest what is placed before us in the Messages, we are thereby equipped to read, with understanding, theology from other traditions which might otherwise remain somewhat elusive, somewhat ‘closed’ to us. In that work of finding one another again after long estrangement, love is central, love is the key, and I would like to conclude by returning to His Holiness’ Encyclical, God is Love. Pope Benedict writes of two words used in the Song of Songs – ‘dodim’, “a love that is still insecure, determinate and searching,” which might correspond to ‘eros’, and ‘ahaba’ (corresponding to ‘agape’) which “by contrast...expresses the experience of a love which involves a real discovery of the other. No longer is it self-seeking: instead it seeks the good of the beloved: it becomes renunciation and it is ready, and even willing, for sacrifice.”

I wonder if, as we grow up in love, we in the West might be enabled, by Grace, to renounce our ‘claim’ on the date of Easter, and opt for the Orthodox date? In this way we would be complying with what our Lord is urgently begging of us in the Messages, that we “unify the dates of Easter.” He tells us that if we will do just that, He will do the rest.

On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ. Selected writings of St Maximus Confessor, translated from the Greek by Paul Blowers and Robert Wilken, is published by St Vladimir’s Seminary Press

## 12. Knowledge of God

“Creation, I have created you to fill your heart with my sweetness and My Divine Love; I have anointed your heart by breathing in you and have made it in such a way that it should be able to contain and maintain the sublime Love and Sweetness of Myself; for My Love is better than life itself;” (From Odes of the Holy Trinity)

The human heart is such that it can find no lasting peace in anything other than knowledge of God. Our hearts are restless till they find their home in God, says St Augustine. God has deliberately made this to be the case, as he states above.

Because this is the underlying truth of human nature, any ongoing and vigorous attempts to find lasting satisfaction anywhere else than in knowledge and love of God, is doomed to frustration, and much of the agony of human life these days is due to this pursuit of false goals which cannot satisfy. It's like people are lost in a scorching desert, in an agony of thirst, and can find nothing to quench that thirst.

We go haring after knowledge, and gather up myriads of bits and pieces of knowledge – knowledge about this, knowledge about that, knowledge about almost everything under the sun. You name it, people are beavering away building up knowledge of it. A glance at the Internet, with its billions of pages of information will confirm this. But these bits and pieces, enticing as they are, can never be brought to a coherent and properly satisfying whole. They become a source of torment rather than satisfaction.

Saint Maximus Confessor puts it this way;

“The scriptural Word knows of two kinds of knowledge of divine things. On the one hand there is relative knowledge, rooted only in reason and ideas, and lacking in any kind of experiential perception of what one knows through active engagement; such relative knowledge is what we use to order our affairs in the present life. On the other hand there is that truly authentic knowledge, gained only by actual experience, apart from reason and ideas, which provides a total perception of the known object through a participation by grace. By this latter knowledge we attain, in the future state, the supernatural deification (theosis) that remains unceasingly in effect.”

I mention this great saint here because one of the distinctive features of the Messages is the way our Lord repeatedly places before us the fact that knowledge of Him, and of Divine things, is of a very different order to that relative knowledge by which we ‘order our affairs in the present life’. There is nothing inherently wrong with that relative knowledge. We were given the capacity to develop that sort of knowledge precisely for the purpose of securing life in this world – but not as an end in itself. Modern man attempts to appropriate for himself the benefits of the improvements to life brought about by science and technology, and quietly writes God out of the life equation. In addition to that, he uses the same ‘methods’ to inquire into God, not realising that this is a terribly presumptuous thing to do.

“To sift Me through and through and scan Me is an abhorrent sin in My eyes.” (28 September 2000)

These ‘bits and pieces of knowledge’ may be likened to the water that seeps away from a cracked cistern, leaving it empty. True knowledge, on the other hand, that is to say, to know and be known by God, has a particular characteristic of its own – it is salutary and restorative. It is what the human mind and heart were created for. Salutary means, ‘healthy’ or ‘to do with good health’ (from the Latin ‘salus’). When we imbibe of this true knowledge, this living water which is offered to us by God, it restores the human heart to health, makes it whole, and thereby recreates its capacity to ‘collect and keep’ what God is giving us. This building up of the body, in love, is God’s work and not ours. Ours is a work of co-operation.

How can we contain Him always in our hearts? Married love shows us the answer. When a man is married, he ‘carries’ his beloved ‘on his heart’. He doesn’t need to keep reminding himself of his love for her, by, say, remembering that she is 5ft6 tall, and has brown hair and such and such features. Nor does he need to keep recalling the fact that, say, they met under

such and such circumstances, although his memory of her will include that particular act of remembering from time to time.

She's just there, in his being, part of him. Not for nothing will a man refer to 'my other half'. Children of their union, similarly, are part of his being and he carries them too on his heart. Marriage and being a father become a 'state' for him, it's just the way he is. The same thing happens with knowledge and love of God. He's there. We are one with Him, He in us, We in Him, we are becoming one person with Him, one renewed being, and given that this other person is God, knowing Him, being known by Him, has a transfiguring or deifying effect upon us. Continual prayer is much more like that than, say, a constant repetition of formal, spoken prayers.

The prayer of the heart is a constant remembrance of God, backed up and underpinned by the Chalice as it is offered. Hence the centrality of the Eucharist to the life of prayer. 'Do this in remembrance of Me,' our Lord said, in instituting the Eucharist.

Married love is not simply a metaphor, a figure, or a simile, of the relationship between God and humankind – it is a description of what human nature, restored in Christ, now is..

### 13. Purification

27 July 1987. I come with a feeling of desolation. I feel God is not so near as before.

28 July. Still with this feeling of desolation.

29 July. Still with this desolating feeling.

30 July. I am still worried; why can't I feel God as before?

Vassula, come; I will clarify your groundless fears of desolation. It is insight I am teaching you. Do not take this as abandonment from Me. I am giving you My grace to reach a higher degree of meditation, while at the same time purifying your soul for this higher attainment. Be assured, My beloved, that I am with you and never far. I am stimulating your love to Me and strengthening you. A deeper devotion and a fuller love for Me will be the result of all this.

...you must grow. Beloved, remove all shadows of doubt from your mind, shadows that distress you. I want you to progress; I want your soul to attain perfection and purity.

...this aridity and feeling of desolation which leads you to think "all is gone,; it is because I withdraw from you part of My Light. Do not fear, though; be glad you feel the difference. By withdrawing part of My Light I reinforce your desire to seek Me, and thus I infuse you with more delicate Light in your intellect. Yet...I always leave you with some Light for you to be able to see..."

A week later, on 7 August, the theme is taken up again;

Vassula, I want to clarify My message of last week. I have to purify you; learn that by purifying a soul, the soul will go through terrible fears and anguishes, but I am telling you this: that languishing for Me inclines you to be raised for this blessing...which is contemplation.

These laconic statements, "Still with this feeling of desolation," and so on, conceal great sufferings, but they are part and parcel of the life of prayer, and cannot be avoided. Our Lord assured us that we will never be given more than we can endure. We are not to worry or be

overly perplexed or frightened by them, they are the most normal thing in the world for those whom our Lord is drawing. We are led into and out of these ‘darknesses’ all our life, but our Lord is with us all the way through them, and when He has imparted to us whatever aspect of His truth He wanted to give us, then the darkness disappears, all sufferings are forgotten and we stand again in the Light, full of joy before our beloved Lord, and it is as if the darkness, the dryness, has never been. They are gone. They are no more. Now we can see Him more clearly, we can hear Him better, we know Him better, and He can share with us more of His wonderful works.

The Messages place before us the reality of these periods of darkness and suffering; the perceived presence of our Lord and the joy that we feel, His acutely felt absence, and then His return, although of course in very truth He has never been away but was always with us even when we felt most abandoned.

## 14. God is Love

God is Love. Love permits of no scientific investigation. The ground upon which we meet God, the holy ground, the good ground, is the ground of Love, and when God invites the creature onto that ground to meet Him, human nature is perturbed and perplexed, and wants to draw back, and yet at the same time is drawn, irresistibly to go on. You could say that our very created nature (and created nature is good) will bear us forward *on* that ground. Most people assume, quite wrongly, that when God calls us forward on that ground, the love that we have is so ‘pure’ as to contain no element (or at least very little) of Eros and so we have at last become ‘presentable’ to God. This is an absurdity and is quite wrong. We go forward as we are. We cannot leave Eros out of the Divine-Human equation, to do so causes disaster. The question then becomes, “If we can’t leave it out, how is it to be brought in?” I mention this aspect of life in God because its neglect is causing real difficulties in our day. Pope Benedict’s Encyclical, “God is Love” makes a good beginning in addressing the issue. Our Lord has the answer to the question I pose above, indeed He *is* the answer to the question. In response to the pupil’s perplexity regarding these things, Jesus says,

“have My Mother; I would like you to understand how wrong your thoughts are....because of your fear, have My Mother teach you how wrong you are. I will always be near you.” (10 August 1987)

“St Mary is for some time going to teach me and prove to me that my fears are wrong... Between the tenth and the fourteenth (of August) I felt St Mary close to me, talking to me...”

Mary the Mother of God occupies a special place in the prayer of the monk. This is because when the Angel of the Annunciation approached her and told her of what was to happen she said simply, “Let it be done unto me as you have said.” When the monk, faced with the prospect, indeed the ongoing requirement, of giving up all that he has, and being denied the opportunity to build for himself a life in this world according to what he might think constitutes ‘the good life’ he often suffers great fear and distress. But he remembers Mary’s ‘fiat’, which, it will be remembered, was followed by her great hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God, which we chant every evening at Vespers – the Magnificat;

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;  
my spirit rejoices in God my saviour;  
for he has looked with favour on his lowly servant...

Mary was able to say this, and mean it, from the outset. We, on the other hand, may find it impossible always to say it and mean it, but we can at least echo her ‘fiat’ and say, “Let it be done unto me as you have said,” and this is of great help to us in the periods of weakness, adversity, darkness and dryness that we have to pass through as we learn to make the words of the Magnificat our own. In the meantime we can at least say, as we have just done at the morning office of Lauds, “Teach me to do your will for you are my God.”

Monasticism has always known that the fruits of the life of prayer attainable inside a monastic enclosure are not restricted to those who take up such a life, but belong to everyone, and True Life in God, as I never tire of pointing out, is ample proof of that.

## **15. The Appearing of our Lord**

In our day our Lord is appearing to large numbers of people and one of the functions of True Life in God is to bring this to our attention.

“I have been communicating to your soul, generation, great things, but the greatest of all is the manifestation of Myself: My divine and frequent visits to you are a gift from your King displaying His faithful love.” (March/April 2001)

‘Colloquy with God’, converse between creature and Creator, is depicted iconographically by the device of placing in the top corner of the icon a representation of Christ with whom the saint is seen in conversation. One such, of St Seraphim of Sarov, hangs in our chapel. It is a fact, however, that even in those parts of the Church which admit the possibility of such friendship with God, it is seen as a rare event, reserved for the few who are called to sainthood, and this, I think, is a great pity.

Nevertheless it does not stop God from approaching us from His side and correcting certain misapprehensions that are current in modern theology and God the Father does this in the Message of 18 January 1988 when he addresses a priest in the following words;

“brother! soul! cast away for ever the theory of God approaching and elevating only souls dedicated to Me! I do not approach only devout souls; I make no difference, why, am I a God of predilection? ..... I have approached many who are out of My Church, yes – wretched souls, converting them into devout followers of mine. ... many ecclesiastical authorities overlook these works of mine and ignore them, they have never recognized these souls, they do not know about them.....If you only knew the number of souls I have approached without necessarily wearing the habit, or being devoted to me, and out of these I made saints!”

This is good news for some, but bad news, or at least difficult theology, for others. Academic, scholastic theology can make nothing of it, indeed finds it something of a threat. While there are of course academic theologians who are men of faith and the Holy Spirit and we thank God for the inspiration they give, much academic theology in our time is conducted according to precepts borrowed from the field of scientific investigation or philosophical inquiry. These methods cannot reveal God or the works of God, and this, I think, is why our Lord’s ‘divine and frequent visits’ to humankind in our day remain veiled. His appearing is not showing on the radar screens of modern theology and this is so by God’s deliberate intent.

“again I will say ‘happy the pure in heart, they shall see God.’ I give sight to those who do not see but I prevent the wise and clever from entering through the door of knowledge; entering through this door (that is, Christ) one receives light and an understanding of all my sayings and at the same time an acknowledgement of My Presence...but the man who glories in his own glory remains outside this door, he remains in the dark.” (March/April 2001)

Scientific progress is not the great achievement it is sometimes held to be, and this is because creation readily yields her secrets to man. She does this in obedience to the Will of God – God having given humankind dominion over all the earth. It is man who is disobeying God by not referring everything, including, (one might even say, particularly) scientific investigation, to God, so as to keep it within the sound parameters established for these very endeavours. It was never intended that we should lay waste the world in the way we are doing, nor glory in ‘achievements’ which are no achievements at all.

Human thought, acting according to its own lights, cannot make much of the Works of such a God as our God, and yet Wisdom acts in this way, and in doing so brings many to perfection in the course of frequent visits spread over many years of life in this world. This hiddenness gives God the freedom to act upon whomever He chooses, in whichever way He chooses, and for as long as He chooses. It has the effect of lifting the study of the approach of God to man beyond the reach of scientific investigation and placing it squarely in the realm of revelation. This, in turn, means that reporting on these matters belongs properly in the realm of Prophecy rather than Theology, and Vassula is no stranger to that ‘trickle of amused laughter and arrogance accompanied by resentment and deafness’ (12 February 2000) which is the lot of prophets when they speak as God asks them to.

Yet many have cause to be deeply grateful to Vassula for the work she has undertaken in obedience to God, and we in this monastic community salute her.

## **16. Hearts and Minds**

In the Message of 17 July 1996, the Holy Spirit says;

“I will come upon those who never sought Me, yet their hearts remained those of children; I will reveal My power to those who never even consulted Me, I will go where I am not banned.”

The reader might ask, “Banned? By whom?” to which we could reply, “By the spirit of scientific rationalism.”

Fr Gregory, our Superior, recently wrote that in the modern world, “any thought or mention of God, the Creator, Provider, and Sustainer of all that exists, has been removed from the ordinary discourse of life. It has become socially incorrect to mention the Name of God in conversation; and any affirmation of Him as the Source of reconciliation and healing of the human person, and of his family and social relationships, has been banned from the field of the social sciences. Accordingly, education for life in our day is unlikely to include any mention of God and His eternal purpose for us all, even though He continues to be the most fundamental ‘component’ of our daily life and the true cause of our existence.”

He goes on to state that “God has created the material world in such a way that science and its practical application in technology can be taught and understood without reference to Himself as Creator. Apparently it is consistent with His plan for creation that the scientific project

should be allowed to go ahead on its own terms for the sake of feeding, clothing and housing the great multitude of His children; for the Heavenly Father knows that they need all these things. Nevertheless it continues to be His will that all should come to know Him in His Tripersonal Being...”

It strikes me that if the only knowledge available to human beings were ‘head knowledge’, that is, if we could only ‘know’ with our brains, then our surrender to the spirit of rationalism would indeed set up an insuperable barrier between us and God. But everyone has a heart. Hearts which remain ‘as those of children’ will retain their responsiveness to God. When a person has been drawn far out into the ways of this world there is a work he needs to undertake, in ‘uncovering’ the heart again and keeping it open to the approach of the Divine. In our day, and again I’d like to quote Fr Gregory, “What is required ... of any Christian is a re-awakening and a retraining of the underdeveloped spiritual levels of the mind and the heart, so as to receive again the gift of faith, and grow again into the obedience of faith.”

This, I think, is where the Messages are so important, since they have an innate capacity to speak directly to the heart of the reader and so sneak past the sentries (CS Lewis calls them ‘watchful dragons’) with which the mind, educated to be suspicious, if not downright hostile to matters divine, tries to guard against the things of God. Although it appears that at the moment we can choose whether or not to respond to the Lord Jesus in His approach to us, there will nevertheless come a day when He comes and presents Himself to everyone without exception, regardless of their capacity, (or incapacity) to cope with Him, and He warns us to prepare ourselves, and others, for that great and terrible Day.

“rejoice and exult all of you who are faithful to Me! Woe for the unfaithful, for My Word will come upon them like a sword striking them, destroying all their false wisdom, wisdom which inspired My creation to fall into Satan’s nets, transforming My lambs into Godless, fearless, immoral people.” (26 October 1987)

I know of no spiritual writings in which this capacity to speak directly to the heart is more highly developed than the Messages of True Life in God. To put that another way, I know of no author who reveals Himself more clearly in His work, than God!

## 17. Like a Scroll

“The Night is almost over. The world of today will pass away like a scroll.” This is the title of the Message of 11 February 1992.

The world of today has already ‘rolled away like a scroll’ for us, who have met the risen Lord. His ‘choice’ of us removes us from the world and the light that illumines it because we see in Him the new light, His light, which is already shining. Although a good beginning has been made, the creature needs to work, and work quite hard, at establishing himself in the new life our Lord would bring him into. That is the life’s work of those who have been approached by Him and have seen Him.

It is a case of ‘already’, and at the same time, ‘not yet.’ The event has happened but needs to be brought to a completion. This bringing to fullness, or fulfilment, is the work that is laid upon us in this mortal life. Christians are said to be citizens of the ‘eschaton’ (Greek ‘eschatos’ = ‘last’) from which is derived the noun ‘eschatology’ meaning ‘last things.’ The adjective is ‘eschatological’. Logic, reason, acting on their own, might tend to exclaim with a certain impatience, “Look here, it has either happened or it has not yet happened! One or the other, it can’t be both at the same time. It all sounds a bit strange to me.” And yet the

dispensation of Christ, the joining of things eternal and things ‘terrestrial’ opens up that whole ‘strange’ (in the sense of ‘new’) area to humankind, and ushers us all into it. In the tenth chapter of the Book of Revelation we read how the seer was offered the scroll from which to eat. It tasted sweet initially but subsequently turned bitter in his stomach and that’s a good illustration, I think, of the ‘strangeness’ of the new thing offered to us by Christ. It is unlike anything we have encountered before, and yet our nature will prompt us to accept what is offered, and go on accepting it for the duration of our life in this world, if we give our will to it. It is our entry into the Kingdom of Heaven. It is all encapsulated and summed up in the Eucharist, the Cup we drink and the Bread we eat at the Holy Table, and that is why the Eucharist is so central to the following of our Lord.

It follows, therefore, that those who would enter the Kingdom need to change their ideas, their disposition, and adopt a rather different mindset to the one that life in this world has inculcated into them for the purpose of building up life in this passing world. It is not easy to do that but it is by no means beyond the capacity of humankind. God would never ask us to do anything which is beyond our capacity. And yet, and here is a paradox – it *is* beyond our capacity. It is not something that we ourselves can do, or plan. We can only do it in our Lord.

There is no limit to the fullness to which the dispensation of Christ can be brought. The limiting is all on our side. We are the ones who say, “I’ve done enough.” Or “Well, that looks a bit tricky to me, I’m not going to take the risk.”

We are talking here of three things;

- a change of heart (metanoia),
- paradox – something sufficiently contradictory in itself to cause the mind to look at it with a certain puzzlement, and
- the need to depend upon others to bring us to the new life and keep us in the way.

These three, and we have hardly started in our deliberations, are sufficient to show the magnitude of the venture upon which we are embarked, and perhaps we can already see how the this-worldly mindset, established, settled in its ways, and intent upon doing what it has become ‘good at’, can easily miss the opportunity our Lord places before us to enter into knowledge of Him and His Kingdom. So, too, it must be said, can the mind which has ‘overdeveloped’ its piety, its religious practice, its faith, along legalistic, rationalistic lines, as if the following of our Lord were just another life skill to be acquired, something else to be ‘good at.’ But there is a great mystery here, I think. Although it is undoubtedly the case that large numbers of people in our day appear to be unable or unwilling to take up the invitation our Lord extends to humanity, that is by no means to say that these people have no knowledge of Him, or of His mighty works. I think many know Him better than they realise, and this is because He approaches us in childhood and takes us into His friendship. When we ‘grow up’ and enter this world ‘properly’, we forget Him and our friendship with Him. I think that one day many will be brought to remember that they knew our Lord at one time, and that their friendship with Him laid foundations deep in their very being, which can be built upon at a later date, even, I dare to hope, if that ‘later date’ needs to be on the other side of physical death.

We’ve been talking about ‘last things’. Well, I think there are last things, and ‘laster things’ beyond these, and ‘lastest things’ even further on, things more ‘ultimate’ than any of the things we can imagine, or hope for. St Paul, who always spoke out of lived experience of the greatness of God, is very good at talking of these things. This is not to say that everyone will accept our Lord and ask of Him pardon and new life –we are informed that there are those who will reject Him. But I think that many more than a tired world is now able to imagine will one day be brought, wonderingly, into the new creation, by ways and means which are

the prerogative of God, of Love, ways and means which He devised and set up for just such difficult days as our own, so that as many as possible might be delivered from the enemy.

These ways and means are well represented in True Life in God. Regular reading and reflection will place them before us. The messages are designed to stir people's memories of the 'distant' days when they knew Him and knew that they knew Him. They wake us up to a reality which is a fact, even if obscured by present darkness. Daily reading of the Messages supplies light to the understanding, to the memory, and to the will, so that, whatever else we are doing, it is always good to read the Message of the Day from the Website and derive nourishment thereby, food for true thought, food for the journey home.

[www.tlig.org](http://www.tlig.org)

## 18. Unseen Warfare

I found Vassula's article on the Jezebel spirit interesting since it touches on an important aspect of the life of prayer, namely, the Spiritual Conflict. It's a difficult area and it isn't always easy to find sound counsel on the subject so it is good to hear someone talking about it in such a level-headed way.

Readers of this newsletter might be interested to hear of an excellent book which deals with the whole question of the conflict with Satan. It is called Unseen Warfare, and it has a unique 'pedigree' which will be of interest to True Life in God. Professor Albert Hodges, an Anglican layman, wrote a very fine introduction to the book. It is noteworthy that Hodges' prophetic view of the unity to come, and also the means of attaining it, is typical of some Anglican writings of the time, and is consistent with the TLIG Messages too. Here are some excerpts from his introduction, in which he relates this point of view to the history of Unseen Warfare:

"The work which is here offered to the English reader has a striking history, and occupies a peculiar position in the world of Christian spiritual literature. In its original form it is the work of a Roman Catholic priest who lived and worked in Italy in the sixteenth century. The 'Spiritual Combat' of Lorenzo Scupoli was first published in 1589, and was afterwards enlarged by the author himself to many times its original size. It is a book whose merits have commanded a constant public in every age since it first appeared.

In the eighteenth century a copy of Scupoli's work fell into the hands of a monk named Nicodemus, an inhabitant of the famous Orthodox monastic settlement on Mount Athos. Nicodemus translated it into Greek, giving it the title of 'Unseen Warfare.' The 'Unseen warfare' in Nicodemus' version was a success. It won for itself a place in the spiritual life of the Greek Church, and at the present day it is held in high esteem on Mount Athos.

From there, in turn, it made its way to Russia in the nineteenth century. Bishop Theophan the Recluse, a director of souls and an ascetic theologian of note, who was acquainted with Nicodemus' writings, was moved by his admiration of them to translate the 'Unseen Warfare' from Greek into Russian. The resulting version, supported by the double authority of Nicodemus and Theophan, took an assured place in the spiritual literature of the Russian church.

It is not only for its intrinsic value that this translation (*from the Russian*) of the 'Unseen Warfare' deserves to be studied, but also as a document illustrating the play and counterplay of influences between East and West in this vitally important sphere of ascetic theology. For that growing number of people who take to heart the scandal of schism, and of that mutual ignorance and estrangement which is both cause and effect of schism, and who work and pray for a better understanding between the Christians of East and West, the lessons which this

book can teach are of no small moment. It is not in the sphere of ecclesiastical organisation, of canon law and church government, that unity will be discovered and union achieved. Nor is it in the sphere of dogmatic discussion, severed as that so often is from the actual life of the Christian community and reduced to a battle of abstractions. It is where we fight and pray together, in the same spiritual combat against the same unseen enemies, that we shall find ourselves to be one army – not become one army, but discover that we are one. It is as material for reflection on this theme, on the points of identity and difference between East and West in their conduct of the unseen warfare, that this book is offered to the Christians of this country.”

H.A.Hodges, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Reading, wrote that introduction to the English translation of *Unseen Warfare* published in 1952. The work was translated by E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer, and published by Faber and Faber, London.

*Unseen Warfare* has been reprinted by St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York.

*Spiritual Combat*, the 'original' work as first written by Lorenzo Scupoli, is now published by TAN Books & Publishers, of Rockford, Illinois.

## 19. Anglicans and Unity with Rome

I hope you'll permit me as an Anglican to say a few words about the way things are in the Anglican Communion. There is a feeling in our church these days that we have muddled on about as far as we can now, and that decision time, or crunch time, is coming. We are waiting to see what provision is to be made for those within the Communion who will not accept women bishops. (Provision was made some years ago for those who do not accept women priests.) If that provision is insufficient, then a sizeable chunk of the church, so it is said, can see no option but to leave the Anglican Communion and seek admission, as a group, to the Roman Church.

I can't really say how many Anglicans would want to take such a course. Some would be all for it, others wouldn't countenance such a move.

The Church of England is in many ways a reflection of England itself, or rather, of the English themselves. We don't have revolutions here, we don't massacre huge numbers of our own citizens; our history is not marked by outbursts of appalling violence and inhumanity. Tyrannical political systems with numberless victims are not part of the way we do things here. We muddle through, we muddle along, we compromise, we leave things unspoken, we leave things unexpressed, we live and let live, we try to do the decent thing, the right thing.

“Hanging on in quiet desperation is the English way,” in the words of a song I remember from my youth! Some would say we go on too long before we take action.

I say 'we' although I should perhaps say 'they' because I am a Scot, and the Scots, like the Irish and the Welsh, are not quite the same as the English. But we all, as British people, benefit from Englishness. It must be said that the English, at times, are terribly exasperating. “Do something!” one wants to shout. “Say something! Be a bit more expressive! Smash a few plates! Lose your temper when things go badly! Be like everyone else!”

It must also be said that the modern world being what it is, Englishness, and these particular characteristics of English (British) society, are not as marked as they were. Things are changing. Sometime fairly soon we shall know how the land lies, and then I think pretty major changes will come about. All sorts of difficulties will arise. Who keeps the cathedrals? What happens to the Church of England Pension Fund? How will we divide up the assets of

the Church? How to cope with the grief that such events will cause? These things are exercising the minds of many in our church these days.

I can only speak of these things in the most general terms because they don't exercise my mind or energies. This is not selfishness on my part, but I am a monk living the enclosed life of contemplative prayer and I live the life that is in front of me here, inside the enclosure. By grace I keep to the work given to me and am not lured out into the storm (and it really is a tempest at times) of anxiety, of anguish, of fear, of tension, that these issues whip up in the mind of some, and which so robs them of their peace. It would serve no purpose at all for me to be drawn out into all of that.

Some of us read with great interest the True Life in God Messages, and our Lord's plea for Unity, and the centrality of the Chair of Peter to that unity, and we take note of utterances coming from Rome on the subject. Our Superior, in a recent publication, (Unity, Tradition and Contemplation) expresses our interest in these things as follows;

“From the vantage point of the Anglican Church, where since the 16<sup>th</sup> century there has been a long tradition of studying the Eastern as well as the Western Fathers, we can readily warm to the appeal of the two Popes (John-Paul II and Benedict XVI) for the Church to learn to ‘breathe again with both of her lungs.’ These words convey a profound message of humility, to be assimilated by us all, for they suggest that the Popes of the great Roman Church see her as needing to receive a strengthening of her spiritual life from the contribution of the Eastern Churches.

“These words... were accompanied by a request from the last Pope for help to see how his own particular ministry of unity – he being the contemporary holder of the leadership of the apostolic ministry initially exercised by St Peter – could be extended to serve the needs of Churches other than those already within the Roman Catholic Communion.

“If we look around at our own and other Churches, we can readily see the need for such a renewed and extended Petrine ministry of unity, and also of the grace of love and humility required for fruitful acceptance of this ministry. For example, it is impossible to conceive of how the Orthodox Churches could resolve their worsening problems of jurisdiction, particularly as between the two principal patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow, without some external help...

“Or again, how could the Churches of the Anglican Communion...set for themselves those necessary ‘boundaries’ such as derive from the Law of Christ, in matters of Scriptural interpretation, of creedal Faith, of ministerial and general sacramental integrity, and of sexual and other moral concerns, without the help of the Pope?

“We cannot stop short at a patched-up unity of the Anglican Communion, for it could never hold firm unless it had been pursued within the wider context of the will of God for the restoration and unity of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church as a whole, beginning with the major immediate concern for the unity of the Churches of east and West.” (Fr Gregory CSWG)

Keep us in your prayers please, at this difficult time, and let us all keep hoping and working patiently for the Unity that our Lord speaks of.

## 20. A Taste of Heaven

I came across a passage in a recent Message of the Day which so exemplified the incomparable riches of True Life in God that I could hardly wait to put pen to paper.

“Find your happiness in the tyranny they inflict upon you, I will not allow them to give you more than is necessary, the Almighty who is all-seeing will note every one of your steps: and if they wrong-do you more than your portion My Father and I will relieve you, bringing you into your inheritance.” (30 January 1996)

It might appear unlikely that happiness can be found under tyranny. In this world, happiness depends largely on external circumstances, which is perhaps why we spend so much time and energy doing what we can to ensure that conditions are favourable to us, usually at someone else’s expense. However as Christians we learn that God-given happiness is of a different order and does not depend on what’s going on around us.

“the tyranny they inflict upon you ... ” Lived experience of the life of prayer teaches us that ‘they’ are just as likely to be our friends as our ‘enemies’ – which makes it all the harder to bear. As the psalmist laments somewhere, “It was not an enemy that treated me so shamefully, or I might have borne it, but it was you, a man like myself, my companion and my familiar friend. Together we enjoyed sweet fellowship in the house of the Lord.”

In our perplexity at this particular aspect of Christian society we hear our Lord’s words of comfort and reassurance; “I will not allow them to give you more than is necessary.” We find as we go along that the promise holds true - since the one who promises is God – that we will never be tested more than we can endure. “The Almighty who is all-seeing will note every one of your steps.” This is good to know. God knows where we are, what we are, how we are, and he knows how to dole out ‘our portion’ as and when required. That being the case we know that we need not be too long-winded in our prayer and supplication to him. On the other hand he does require of us that we articulate our situation to him at times, when making our Confession for example, or in reciting the Creed with our fellow Christians, and so forth.

“If they wrong-do you...My Father and I will relieve you, bringing you into your inheritance.” This, I think, is the most wonderful part of all. What Jesus is saying here is this; If you are badly wounded in the fray which is life in this world, (and it is inevitable that you will be), we will come to you in your distress, lift you up, and take you to the place I have prepared for you in the new world, and there we will give you a taste, now in the time of this mortal life, of that new life – and that will heal you.

A new country, and the new life that awaits us there, is our inheritance. But it is not waiting for our arrival to be real, it already is a functioning reality. In His great Mercy, when He sees us suffering, He takes us there and we are restored to health.

This is the eschatological dimension to the Kingdom. ‘Already’, and at the same time, ‘not yet’. Not yet, because we are still ‘in via’, already, because in Him that good ground is already a reality towards which He is shepherding us, and onto which He can rapidly take us when we are in need of rest and recuperation. These ‘visits’ to our new home are a feature of the life of contemplation, sometimes referred to as the angelic life, and they are the means by which God ensures that when we finally reach our homeland beyond physical death, we will not be strangers to that place, or to the life that is lived there.

St Augustine puts it this way;

“The Church recognises two kinds of life as having been commended to her by God. One is a life of faith, the other a life of vision; one is a life passed on pilgrimage in time, the other in a dwelling place in eternity; one is a life of toil, the other of repose; one is spent on the road, the other in our homeland; one is active, involving labour, the other is contemplative, the reward of labour.

The first kind of life is symbolised by the apostle Peter, the second by John. All of the first life is lived in this world and it will come to an end with this world. The second life will be imperfect till the end of this world, but it will have no end in the next world.”

‘Back in this world’, refreshed and renewed, we treasure in our hearts the memories of what we have seen and heard ‘at home’. The troubles and accidents of life in this world can never entirely efface remembrance of God – his goodness, his generosity, his beauty, his love. As the Holy Spirit says, “To converse with Me will leave on you unforgettable memories.” (13 September 2002) As time goes by these memories of home take the place of memories of earlier incidents in our life in this world, and in this way the memory itself - I mean the human faculty of memory - is ‘re-stocked’ and transformed as it is progressively re-orientated towards the life of the world to come.

The works of God are wonderful indeed, as the messages reveal. Thanks be to God for His great gift!

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*I manifest Myself, in a most ineffable manner, to My prophets, yes, while they are still here on earth, and they are aware of this grace; I array them with Myself, ... adorning them with Myself, and they know it, they are conscious of My Divine Presence during contemplation; ... I Myself instruct My chosen ones and I become their spiritual director, to teach them the way to go; I for My part celebrate My benevolence for bringing rescue to those I love, and they, in turn, sing with joy the psalms of David in the shadow of My wings. (12 February 2000)*