

Spring 2013

50 Years a Priest: Twists and turns in a Spiritan journey

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, B. (2013). 50 Years a Priest: Twists and turns in a Spiritan journey. *Spiritan Magazine*, 37 (2). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-tc/vol37/iss2/7>

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Twists and turns in a Spiritan journey

Bernard Kelly CSSp

1952 was the year that the Big Bang Theory for the creation of the universe was first propounded.

In 1952 I was working in a Quantity Surveyor's office in Leinster Street, Dublin, looking out over Trinity College. Life was good, playing rugby on the weekend, making friends, going to dances. But I was restless, vaguely dissatisfied. I was missing something. God seemed to want to get my attention.

The message was vague, a bit like Cardinal Newman described it: "God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me, which He has not committed to another. I have my mission — I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next."

This God dimension, the Call, changed things. I was no longer struggling with a career decision, but with the answer to a call. I decided to go to the Spiritan novitiate and there things became more firm. I liked the Spiritans and I wanted to live and work with them.

Canada

After ordination and finishing theology, I came to Canada in 1963. My brief experience of teaching at Neil McNeil: happiness and exhaustion. At St. Augustine's Seminary: pressure, both from teaching and some responsibilities in formation.

1969 — doctoral Studies at the Institut Catholique, Paris, a great experience. Subsequent work in formation was rewarding, but a struggle. I adopted a whole new concept of the Call, of vocation — thanks especially to the Lay Spiritans and VICS volunteers.

1980 — Papua New Guinea: two theoretical truths became firm convictions: 1) the Holy Spirit precedes the missionary; 2) it is in evangelizing that we ourselves are evangelized.

1981 — Provincial: nine years in administration. My debt to Mike Doyle, my predecessor — Organization — Structure ... There were great moments. Tough moments too.

Dermot Doran and I were living together on Sunrise Avenue. Some evenings he would return to find me pacing the living room puffing away furiously. He would sum up the situation quickly and work to bring about some calm. Most often he succeeded. And he managed this without ever invoking John of the Cross, or The Little Flower...! He had his own methods.

I had to take a break

I remember one incident during this time when I was really down: everything seemed to be going wrong. We decided that I had to take a break, and I found peace, unexpectedly, in Nova Scotia. Ever since we had a housekeeper from Inverness at Hambly Avenue I had wanted to go to Nova Scotia. So there was this musician singing a song called



Come by the Hills. He was nothing special — he had a guitar, some electronic accompaniment and an average voice. What struck me was the last stanza of his song:

*Come by the hills, to a land where legends remain,
Where stories of old fill the heart and may yet
come again,
Where the past has been lost and the future has
still to be won,
But the cares of tomorrow must wait till this day
is done.*

Maybe it was the biblical echo: “sufficient for the day”; or the contrast between different moments in the story ... whatever ...

Anyway I returned to Toronto refreshed.

Fiftieth anniversary of ordination

There have been lots of twists and turns on the journey. There is a definite sense that I don't know where I am going. I love Thomas Merton's prayer:

*My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself
And the fact that I think I am following your will
Does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you does in
fact please you ...
I will trust you always, though I may seem to be
lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
And you will never leave me to face my perils
alone.*

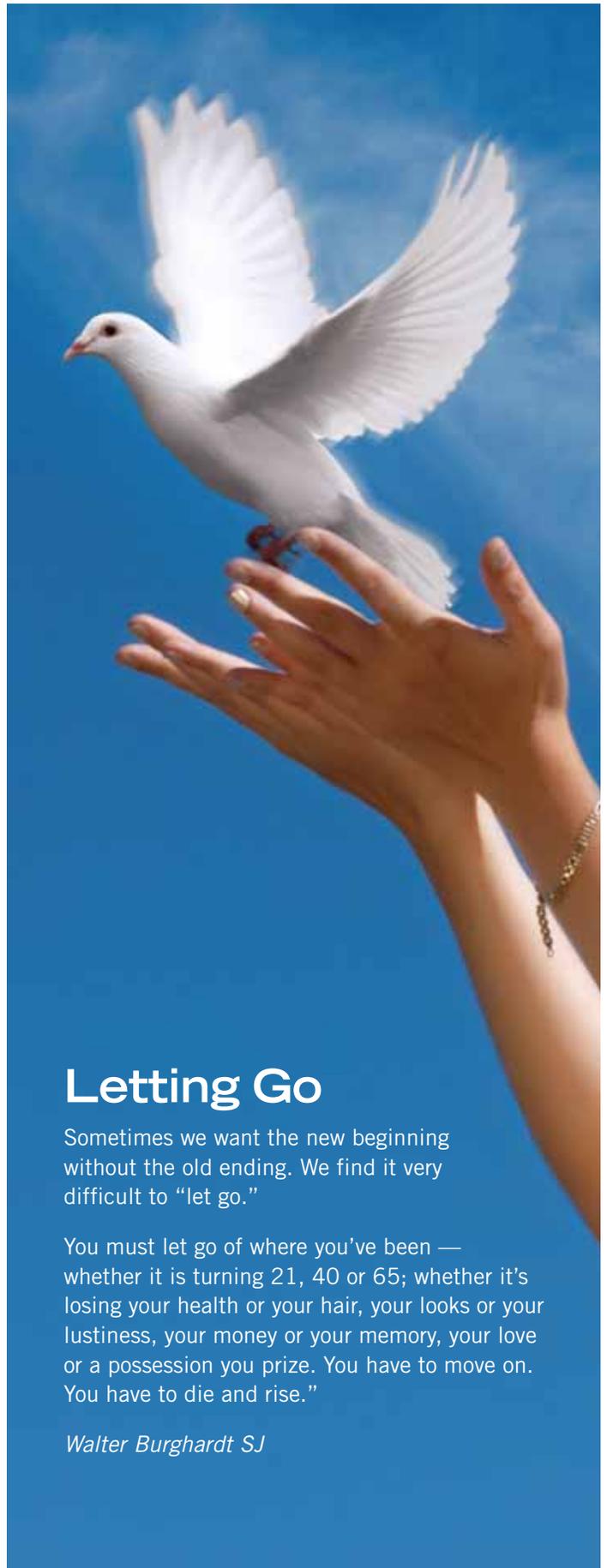
A time to give thanks

I have made some plans and I have chosen a prayer. It is taken from David Kaufmann's musical arrangement of the Magnificat:

*Behold, behold, the Mighty One has done great
things for me
Behold, behold, the Mighty One has done great
things for me
And holy is your Name
And holy is your Name
My soul exalts you, behold my Lord
Whose mercy lies on me.*

We celebrate a young man, Claude Poullart des Places, who founded our Congregation that is over 300 years old, who died at the age of 30 and whose creative act involved leaving the security of living with the Jesuits and going to live with the poor students that he had gathered around him.

Leaving the security of familiar living arrangements may sound an echo for us. May the Holy Spirit help us be creative in our time. ■



Letting Go

Sometimes we want the new beginning without the old ending. We find it very difficult to “let go.”

You must let go of where you've been — whether it is turning 21, 40 or 65; whether it's losing your health or your hair, your looks or your lustiness, your money or your memory, your love or a possession you prize. You have to move on. You have to die and rise.”

Walter Burghardt SJ